



### “Physical anthropology, health and society in contemporary groups.” 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH)<sup>1</sup>, Mexico City

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Mexico’s first graduate program in Physical Anthropology was created in 1996 at ENAH. Ten years later it remains the only such program in the country. The graduate program is organized into areas of research interest with specific emphases in student education.

One of these research lines is “Physical anthropology, health and society in contemporary groups” ([www.geocities.com/propaf2004](http://www.geocities.com/propaf2004)). This field shares with social medicine the theoretical perspective that “human biology” is part of the dynamics of social structure, culture, and the real actions and decisions of individuals. It is cause and consequence of the interplay these influences. It conditions how human lives are tailored and how human beings develop.

Physical anthropology studies the recursive relationships between human “biological” vital processes, social and cultural dynamics, and human decisions

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and actions. Thus conception, birth, physical growth and development, illness and its trajectories, food, nutrition, corporal representations, environment-society relationships, deaths, etc., are seen as complex phenomena that can not be comprehended by reducing them to clinical explanations or cause-effect models. This line of research looks to “human biology” as cause and result of the biology of the species, cultural patterns, social dynamics and social representations in which it takes place.

From this multidimensional perspective, today’s social inequalities and their impact in generating human diversity have a strong influence in the way human life develops. Human diversity is the recognized “object of study” of physical anthropology. However, the mainstream perspective is to study diversity without linking it with social dynamics and relationships and cultural contexts. By contrast in Mexico, this line of research, as in social medicine, studies collective groups with a culture and social relationships between them. It does not deal with isolated individuals to be measured and analyzed as anthropometric parameters with statistical tools, as it is prevalent in physical anthropology worldwide.

Physical anthropology makes it possible to understand how soci-

ety makes human lives vulnerable, even in the absence of sickness, illness or death. This is an advantage of the discipline in comparison with medical approaches. In the world today, it is important to be able to see and highlight whose “biology” have been altered because social relationships have affected them negatively, even in absence of clinical pathologies.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this research line was celebrated with a Colloquium held in Mexico City from September 11<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Entitled “Physical anthropology, health and society in contemporary groups” the discussion was organized in seven panels:

1. Epistemology and history of physical anthropology
2. Theories and methodologies to research health from the perspective of physical anthropology
3. Diabetes mellitus and physical anthropology
4. Living conditions, disabilities, family contexts, health and disease
5. Addictions as an anthropological problem
6. Food, health and culture
7. Physical anthropology and specific diseases

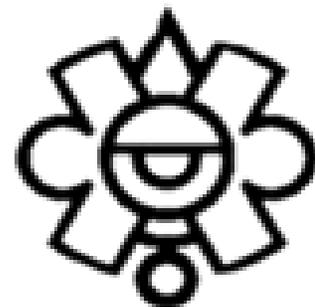
The participants were current

students (who were very active promoters and organizers of this academic event), former students (90% attendance), professors and teachers of this research line. In all, 41 papers were presented by 67 different authors. A book with these contributions is now being prepared.

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