

Cultural Anthropology

Three short responses to readings due weeks 12-14

A. Culture

- a. Interpretations of the unfamiliar of other cultures
- b. Ba's (professor's grandmother) encountered TV (Mehtar's orchestration as mistakes)
- c. Ba made sense of a practice as a way of understanding (orchestra – wedding band)

Opening story of Ba and Zubin Mehta to introduce the theme of an encounter across cultural difference

B. Culture from "cultura" to cultivate

- a. Agriculture, Sericulture, Cultured Beads
- b. We are all "cultured" beings
- c. Small-scale communities would be studied by anthropologist; large-scale societies were studied by sociologists
- d. EX: agriculture, sericulture, cultured pearl, "a cultured person"

C. First influential use of culture by anthropologist

- a. Edward Tylor, British
- b. *Primitive Culture*, 1871
- c. "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

D. What is culture?

- a. Way of life of a people
- b. What is learned, shared and transmitted
- c. "Body of learned symbolic behavior that's transmitted across generations and is infinitely expandable"
- d. An encounter with different culture can help us understand what it is to be human

E. Culture has...

- a. **Cognitive consequences**
- b. **Behavioral consequences**
- c. **Material consequences**
- d. Ethnocentrism – judging other from one's own cultural perspective
 - i. Can dismiss and belittle others
- e. **Cultural Relativism** – accepting that all cultures are likely to have different perspectives and taken-for-granted ways of behavior.

Emphasizes that we need to understand people and practices in the context of their cultural meaning.

- i. Can justify inhumane cultural practices, ignore human rights

F. The Emic-Etic Relationship

a. **Emic**

- i. Seeing, something from a native's point of view
- ii. The viewpoint and understanding of an insider

b. **Etic**

- i. Seeing something from a non-native point of view
- ii. The viewpoint and understanding of an outsider

G. Ethnography

- a. "**ethno**" from way of life
- b. "**graphy**" from "*inscribing*," "*writing*," or "*recording*"
- c. Both a research method and written product
- d. Method: long term fieldwork, participant observation, seeking insider point of view
- e. "*Ethnographic*" can be applied to other media too
- f. "*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*"
 - i. (1922) by Bronislaw Malinowski, who made the argument for seeking "the native's point of view"; image of him in dialogue with Trobriand Islanders

H. Ethnography always involves...

- a. *Selection*: Choosing materials
- b. *Emphasis*: Background and foreground
- c. *Perspective*: A standpoint, with associated distortions
- d. Will always:
 - i. Partial (not too biased)
 - ii. Positioned (Point of view)
 - iii. Provisional (written at a certain time, will become dated, but to be used in larger context)

...and based on dialogue (between outsider and native)

Narrative is a form of understanding that ethnographers may draw on, both in terms of the stories that people tell and the ways that ethnographers present what they learned.

I. Stories used as teachings

- a. **Narrative** – from Latin "*narrare*" to relate, to tell, to know
- b. **Story** – from Latin "*historia*" / Greek "*istoria*" – learning new inquiry, investigation

- c. **Storytelling** – A way of making sense of events; arranging them in a sequence, selecting, sorting
 - i. Usually involves movement, change
 - ii. Emotionally moving too
 - iii. Entertain, instruct, and more
 - iv. Carry cultural themes

Images from Kirin Narayan's research: in India, on storytelling as religious teaching, and on women's oral traditions; and also on ethnographic work of Anton Chekhov, the Russian writer of short stories and plays of the nineteenth century. He was formerly a doctor and he was also a storyteller.

Introduction to First Contact, a film that powerfully documents a first encounter across cultural difference, as the Leahy brothers (three Australian brothers) arrive in the New Guinea Highlands in quest of gold.