

# PERSPECTIVES: AN OPEN INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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## THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL IDEAS

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify the central concepts of cultural anthropology and describe how each of these concepts contributed to the development of the discipline.
- Describe the role anthropologists play in examining cultural assumptions and explain how the anthropological perspective differs from both ethnocentrism and American exceptionalism.
- Explain the relationship between early anthropology and colonialism and assess the ways in which the demise of colonialism changed the practice of anthropology.
- Evaluate the topical or thematic specializations that exist within contemporary anthropology as examples of the range of questions and concerns anthropologists address.

Anthropology is the study of humankind, otherwise known as *Homo sapiens*, the wise primate. It is about our history, our prehistory before written records, our biology, our language, our distribution of peoples all over the planet, and the cultural and social aspects of our existence. The methods we use on this journey are varied and eclectic—an unusual discipline. What is perhaps unique about anthropology is its global quality, its comparative potential, and its integrative possibilities, which result from its examination of histories, biologies, languages, and socio-cultural variations. As a discipline, it is unusual because it is both soft and hard, including science as well as the humanities, between nature and culture, the past and the present, searching for new ways to understand the human condition. We are an academic discipline with porous boundaries that has refused to specialize and as a result can claim to have

made enormous contributions to understanding what it means to be human. Anthropology is a young discipline, in only its fourth generation, one of the first of the new sciences along with ecology.

In the nineteenth century, archaeology challenged short chronologies of biblical origin with longer time depth, while biological and cultural anthropology questioned stereotyped thinking about race and ethnicity. Socio-cultural anthropology moved from armchair theorizing to first-hand fieldwork and, with the concept of cultural relativism, challenged predominant theories of the day, including scientific theories. We know that science is created by humans so it is bound to have human limitations, human error, human ignorance. Such realizations made us think about how knowledge is created and challenge the idea that western ways of thinking are the only source of truth. Early climate predictions were available in Peru before the arrival of European colonizers.

## CENTRAL CONCEPTS

### Culture

A central concept in our discipline is the idea of culture, a concept that changed how we explain human differences. Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) was an English Quaker who, because of religious prejudice, could not enroll in any English universities and so went to work in his father's business. However, in his mid-twenties he became ill, and his doctor recommended rest and travel. Tylor traveled first to Cuba and then to Mexico for six months. While the idea of culture was not new, Tylor used the concept to make sense of what he learned from his travels. In his 1871 book, *Primitive Culture*, he defined the idea: "Culture or civilization, taken in its ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>1</sup> We are all human, something that Columbus was not so sure about in 1492 when he first encountered the Caribs or, more generally, the Amerindians. Before Tylor, differences were explained as due to climate differences or even as God's choice, wrong-headed ideas about difference. Tylor's cross-cultural approach opened new vistas in nineteenth-century anthropology.

In North America, Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881), a lawyer who had grown up amid the Iroquois, wrote *League of the Iroquois* in 1851. He noticed that their terms for kinfolk were not classified in the same way as English terms. Terminology for cousins was different depending on whether the maternal or fraternal line was credited. As a lawyer for the New York Central Railroad, he had noticed other differences among speakers of other languages as well. Morgan began to collect kinship terminologies from all over the world, and in 1871 he published his master work, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, which would influence French anthropologist Claude Lévi -Strauss.

New questions arose. Could terminology be a key to understanding the social organization of small societies? The Iroquois were matrilineal; membership in a clan was determined by female links only, and one's father and his sisters and brothers belonged to a different clan. Without going into further detail, it should be clear that the invention of the concept of culture paved the way for explaining differences among peoples. Culture differentiates peoples, but in the process, we need to remember we are all members of the same species. We might identify others according to their color, but all peoples everywhere share the need to survive disease. Every society has primary groups, such as families, whose primary function is to have and raise children.

## Holism

Another important founding father of American anthropology was German-born Franz Boas (1858–1942), a scholar originally trained in physics. He turned to anthropology after a year-long expedition to Baffin Island, land of the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. He began to study their language. He came to the United States, where he is recognized as the father of cultural anthropology. More than anyone, Boas framed the discipline around the concept of **holism**: taking a broad view of the historical and cultural foundations of behavior rather than attributing differences to biology dismantling the concept of race. Although he stressed cultural differences, he explained such differences in terms of the historical development of each culture. In his book *Race, Language, and Culture* (1940), he stressed the idea that there is *no necessary correlation* between race, language, and culture, that one's physical appearance does not determine one's culture or ability to learn any language.

Boas is also noted for his development of the concepts of **cultural relativism** and **cultural determinism**—that all behavioral differences among peoples result from cultural, not racial or genetic causes. It was Boas who grounded the discipline in four fields and founded the American Anthropological Association. The four fields—archeological, cultural, linguistic, and physical anthropology—defined most departments in the United States until more recently when four became five with medical anthropology. Throughout the development of anthropology in the United States, there was a fear of fragmentation for holistic thinkers. As Boas noted in 1905, “there are indications of [anthropology] breaking up. The biologic, linguistic, and ethnologic-archeological methods are so distinct.”<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that Boas trained many women anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, knowing that diversifying fieldworkers by including people of all genders was important to successful fieldwork.

## Plasticity

Talking about biologically superior and inferior races was common to colonialists who carried the notion of the “white man’s burden,” in which it was their mission to civilize the savages or, among some groups, to classify groups according to their perceived slots, as for example, the idea that some “races” were thought to be biologically intended to be solely servants! The scientific study of race has often floundered in confusion and misunderstanding over the past 200 years even though anthropologists have repeatedly stressed the observation that people can be equally endowed without being alike. In spite of our efforts, race bigots are alive and well. It is apparently comforting to believe that “we” are the best, a belief that is not restricted to Euro-Americans. After all, Navajo means people and many groups think they are superior to others. Thus, Boas’ assessment was that all healthy individuals of the *Homo sapiens* species had the capacity to learn any language or culture, that **plasticity** is part of our species.

In the contemporary world, difference is treated as if it were a problem. Why? Some say the movement of cheap labor, debates over racism and tolerance in the midst of refugee crises, the power of the Islamic “scarf.” In other words, to colonialist language in modern garb, state management of diversity and far-right politics, institutionalized racism, and the primacy of difference, especially in the context of Europe and the United States. In early 2001, a volume by historian Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn was published. *Race Experts, Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* examined the racial-problem industry and racial-solution industry that have flourished and have had difficulty acknowledging that any differences between people may be superficial compared with what they have in common. The concept of race also avoid discussion of class and inequality associated with

poverty. Such social- engineering is deeply interested in difference as a problem. The pursuit of homogeneity by state structures is something that has been observed all over Europe and the western worlds, especially at the contemporary moment when refugees are pouring into western countries from North Africa and the Middle East.

## Participant Observation

With European colonization of peoples around the globe, more anthropological research around the planet began to happen. Better data collection came to be referred to as **participant observation** meaning that the ethnographers participated in the daily lives of the people they studied, learned their languages, and became immersed in the ordinary workings of others' societies. A Polish anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), is often credited with setting the standard for ethnography with wide-angled vision. Malinowski had studied in London, and during World War I, he found himself in the Trobriand Islands, then a British dependency. Although he was a Pole, he was allowed to remain in the Trobriands. He had to learn the language—had to because the local people were his only companions. He moved among native people, speaking to them in their language. He studied their gardens, magic, science, law—all with the tools of participant observing. Malinowski wrote a number of ethnographies based on his work there: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) on trade and the economy involving multiple sites, *The Sexual Life of the Savages* (1929) about kinship and sexuality, *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935) on gardens and farming, and *Crime and Custom in a Savage Society* (1926) dealt with problems of law and social order. Malinowski set a very high standard for participatory ethnographic fieldwork that stands to this day, a standard in which ethnography was theory, not mere description. The ethnography itself, as well as its explanatory uses, is a theoretical endeavor, a combination of loose and strict thinking.<sup>3</sup>

The invention of new technologies facilitates new frontiers of ethnography. In linguistic anthropology, the appearance of the cassette tape recorder and “shotgun” microphones in the early 1970s, of video cameras in the early 1980s, and of the internet and other electronic inventions in the past 25 years has allowed people to seek connections hitherto unnoticed. Similarly, geographic information systems, so important to archeologists and ecological anthropologists, are also used to locate the people we study. In the process, fieldworkers have lost the possibility of immersion in other cultures with little contact from home sites. Technological innovations connect us all, for better or for worse.

## Area Studies and Beyond

By the mid-twentieth century, the major concepts were in place for the discipline—*culture, comparison,* and ethnography as participation *fieldwork*. The organizing concept is **area studies**. Anthropology departments commonly organize their curriculums around area studies courses taught about Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, China, Latin America, Europe, and so forth. Students learn about the geography and history and delve into specific topics such as religion, kinship, minorities, and language—subjects that equip them for a general understanding of a particular geographic area. Area specialties are useful for gaining funding, job searching, and hires especially in large departments.

In more recent times, critical research has investigated the origins of area studies in museums and in association with the military. It was American imperialist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who first called the area between Europe and India the Middle East. Area studies are useful, but they can cause intellectual

blindness that limits the anthropological analysis and imagination. At times, those who go beyond the boundaries of a region have been censored, raising the question: Can we be both area scholars and comparativists searching for similarities and differences between cultures, or even diffusionists who study the spread of cultural ideas from one area to another. The study of the colonized and not the colonizers still haunts our work. In 1989, Sir Edmund Leach had to reiterate that social systems are open, not bounded. We live in a globalized world, and, as Sidney Mintz reminded us in his 1996 distinguished lecture to the American Anthropological Association, we have been globalized for a very long time.<sup>4</sup>

The subject matter of anthropological research was expanding from isolated locales to the urban ethnography of cities such as S. F. Nadel's ethnography of urban Nigeria in *A Black Byzantium* (1942) and Cora Du Bois' investigation of the link between culture and personality and Euro-American colonialism in *The People of Alor* (1944). In 1949, Clyde Kluckhohn published *Mirror for Man – The Relation of Anthropology to Modern Life*. It was time to use the study of others to examine their own cultures and to test assumptions that might be ethnocentric. Margaret Mead had already published *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) in which she examined the adolescence problem as originating in culture, not as a physical and inevitable result of hormones as commonly thought in the United States at the time. Thus, through the comparative method we may learn that while human populations face some common problems, such as growing up, each addresses those problems in different ways. Mead's findings were considered controversial by some; thus, it is not surprising that some years later John and Beatrice Whiting carried out a controlled comparison of *Six Cultures: Studies of Child Rearing* (1963) one of which was in New England.

Gradually, anthropology was no longer the study of "savages" or "primitives;" it became the study of all human cultures. As Ruth Benedict pointed out in her bestselling *Patterns of Culture* (1934), people of different cultures interpret life differently. Her observation implied that one cannot judge one culture as superior to another. Both Boas and Malinowski elaborated on cultural relativism. Boas in particular pushed hard against the common tendency to judge others by one's own culture rather than by the basic assumptions of the culture being studied. He was fighting the phenomenon called **ethnocentrism**, seeing the world through one's own glasses. Ethnocentrism allowed people to see or categorize others as somehow less than or inferior, as "primitive" and in need of aid or development.<sup>5</sup>

## Examining Cultural Assumptions

The fight against ethnocentrism—what in the United States today is sometimes called exceptionalism (we are always better)—is what motivates anthropologists to examine assumptions commonly used by Americans for example, or even embedded in the work of anthropologists themselves. Indeed, as fieldworkers, anthropologists must understand themselves, understand the eyes doing the recording of others. Does an anthropologist's gender influence what he or she "sees"? Does an aversion to conflict affect the record, the choice of research interests? Do the bilingual or bicultural characteristics of anthropologists increase sensitivity in the field? The ethnographies that we produce are, in the final analysis, the theory of what we do and why, and what the people we study do and why: a *Mirror for Man*.

A frequently cited example of analyzing the underlying premises is E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973), a British anthropologist who published *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (1937), a work of ethnography as theory. His study of the Azande of the southern Sudan was meant to indicate why and how Azande beliefs in magic and witchcraft made perfect sense according to Azande premises (and to many peoples everywhere who wanted to understand human ills such as disease and death). He avoided ethnocentric notions like "they are ignorant primitives." His point was that their

beliefs made sense given their premises, and that they were as logical as any other people. The main reason the Azande work is so much cited is that the main discovery is that we are all caught in our premises, our unchallenged assumptions. This idea applies to any thought including western science, as for example, the “nuclear religion”—the belief that President Eisenhower’s atoms for peace made up for dropping nuclear bombs on Japan during World War II, in spite of scientists’ inability to deal with nuclear waste and other associated problems. In Evans-Pritchard’s case, he was writing not merely about the Azande or, later, about the Nuer herdsmen; he was also writing about how a particular ethnography is theoretically comparative, raising issues about our ingrained premises.

By mid-century, ethnographies had begun to include power as with *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* by Sir Edmund Leach (1954). Although there was general agreement in anthropology, scholars in academia were hesitant to deal with the phenomenon of power in anything but abstract terms. Also around the same time, Gregory Bateson’s *Naven* was reissued (1958) and ethnographers began to understand the many different lenses useful for interpreting the lives and rituals of people under study. By the 1960s, the unease in American academia began to be affected by the Civil Rights Movement, the war in Vietnam, the American Indian Movement, and sexual and gender liberations.

Dell Hymes edited a book (1972) called *Reinventing Anthropology* which called anthropologists to a revised or reinvented anthropology, one that took into consideration race, newly independent states, and what might be called the vertical slice. Laura Nader wrote “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up,” a thought piece about the need to study up, down, and sideways as a way to liberate anthropologists from narrow concerns and exclusions. For example, she argued for studying the colonizers as well as the colonized, for understanding poverty and ghettos in connection with bank’s redlining practices, which were essentially illegal, for understanding the enormous role corporations play in raising our children through the foods they prepare or the technologies required of children as part of their normal schooling. Today, some anthropologists study up while others study up, down, and sideways simultaneously.<sup>6</sup>

Moving into the twenty-first century, anthropologists had major intellectual interests in political economy, gender, representation, the Cold War, the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the anthropology of science, colonialism, tourism and more. The story of how the study of humankind advanced over a century does not move in steady progression. Science is prickly and contentious, and anthropology, more than most disciplines, is not only contentious but also self-reflexive. Indeed, the self-critical tradition has helped us adapt to the incoherent conditions of accelerated history and the new technologies that have come with it. So one might conclude that what changed least was what scholars in 1929 called “the anthropological attitude,” which values both detachment and involvement as a mode of rethinking assumptions, while the changed relationship between those who study and those being studied forced anthropologists to reconsider the conditions under which their knowledge had been acquired. In addition, anthropology has increasingly become a worldwide discipline.

## THE FALL OF COLONIALISM AND THE RISE OF NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES

About 500 years ago, the first major colonization movements by western Europeans were a result of Portugal, Spain, and England looking for new resources. Colonies were implanted in Africa, Asia, and the New World. A second major colonial movement arose after the Industrial Revolution, motivated in part by a search for cheap labor and resources. By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain,



France, Belgium, and Germany had divided up Africa, and Britain, France, and the United States were acquiring territories in the Pacific. Especially in Britain and France, ethnographic research was encouraged as a function of colonialism. Thus, well into the 1950s, anthropologists were employed by colonial offices. The demise of colonialism and emergence of new independent states gave rise to issues such as plundering of resources, and the new nations produced their own ethnographers whose approaches to anthropology were different from the approaches used by the Euro-American colonial powers. Anthropologists from Mexico, Brazil, and the Indian subcontinent primarily studied their own people. Only the travelers from these former colonial countries thought about the colonialists as their “other.” In part, these post-colonial anthropologists set about correcting previously set anthropological agendas. More or less quiet debates are now occurring as to what a “global anthropology” should entail.

Colleagues outside of the Anglo-American world have criticized our biases and ethnocentrism. Their polite admonishments underscored the need for self-awareness and the calibration of the instrument—in this instance, the anthropologist. Anthropologists in France, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and elsewhere are pointing to Anglo-Americans’ difficulty in coming to terms with power. The French fieldwork tradition sees research as inherently fraught with power relations. Our foreign colleagues are raising questions about scientific validity. The small social groups that classical anthropologists examined as stable or static units are now recognized as part of larger worlds that reconstitute them and are reconstituted in turn: The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and trade deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and trade deals with Europe and the Asian-Pacific.

Akbar Ahmed, an anthropologist from Pakistan who trained in Britain, indicates what new dimensions can be gleaned by non-Anglo-American anthropologists in *The Thistle and the Drone: How American’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Islam* (2013). Ahmed’s work, the third in a trilogy, combines ethnographic analysis with history and comparison and uses his wide-ranging experience, which includes work as a Pakistani government agent and later as ambassador to Waziristan. Ahmed is also a poet, a playwright, a film producer, and an inexhaustible public speaker. He is presently the Ibn Khaldun chair for Islamic Studies at the American University of Washington, D.C. He is what some call a public anthropologist—someone whose work is accessible to anthropologists as well as to the public in general.

In his book, Ahmed includes the tribal peoples, the state, the American empire, and technology to understand the problems that began with European colonization and continued through the post-colonial period of nation-building, when the periphery became attached or connected to a state that gave them few rights. Ahmed’s book reflects a paradigm shift in the twenty-first century—contemporary analyses of states and empires as well as the tribes, which were the traditional subject for ethnography. Thus, he includes not only the tribes, but also Osama bin Laden, the president of Pakistan, the president of the American empire, and the agonies of the anthropologist who discovers the horrors and hurts. Ahmed is a humanist anthropologist arguing for mutual respect and co-existence. Perhaps he can be thought of as an Islamic anthropologist in contrast to a Christian or Jewish anthropologist: he is objective and subjective and includes “us” and “them.” The book discusses 40 examples of peripheral Islamic groups and their relations with state authorities to illustrate the relationship between center and periphery from Waziristan to Yemen Somalia and across North Africa to Indonesia and the Philippines. Ahmed concludes that drone strikes and cruel invasions by the central government will not work towards peace and mutual respect given that brutal revenge attacks from the periphery will continue in reaction to state and empire aggressions. Experts on terrorism ignore both culture and historical context. When anthropologists have dealt with the periphery, we have too often supported state assimilation, maneuvered the creation of reservations, and sometimes closed our eyes to mass killings.

The new dimensions mentioned above must not detract from the solid contributions of anthropolo-

gists of the British **functionalist** schools to our understanding of political and social processes in Africa, New Guinea, Burma, and elsewhere. In Africa, they were the first to address problems of order in societies of tens of thousands of people with no government, no police, and no constabulary—places where social control was achieved by means of social relationships. The concept of cross-linkage was used to understand African modes of maintaining peace through feuding, another piece of the picture of order in stateless societies that might be useful to the United Nations. The British focus was more on the concept of social organization than culture, on the colonized rather than the colonizers.

## SPECIALIZATION – A WIDE RANGE

In the mid-twentieth century, Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1928–2016) challenged the British school's work on Africa and their position that social systems transcended individual actors. On the contrary, Barth argued that political systems were generated by individual actors seeking to maximize their positions. In his ethnography on the Swat Pathans in northern Pakistan, Barth (1959) was moving away from the functionalist equilibrium analysis toward examinations of processes of change. Others followed suit in their arguments. According to Talal Asad, the notion that individuals strategize to maximize power is a distortion of history. In *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973), Asad notes that Barth's conclusions were accelerated by British colonial practices in India and the northern frontier. Asad's critique made a critical point: the political system must be seen as part of a wider system that is based on a historical perspective that also includes class as an important variable but does not nullify individual choices. Control is both political and economic. The conversations about Barth's work were to continue later in the work of Pakistani anthropologist Akbar Ahmed. Anthropology can now be said to be a cosmopolitan dialogue.

As the number of anthropologists expanded so did the number of specialties, especially in large departments. Indeed the small departments are most likely to teach anthropology from a generalist point of view. While kinship and religion were the major specialties more than half a century ago, we now find professors specialized in fields like tourism, political economics, law, gender, folklore, as well as areas such as the Middle East, for example, or southern Africa, or Mexico (previously meso-America), and so forth. In addition, there are many kinds of anthropology, such as applied and practicing. These specializations are found in dedicated journals for cognitive anthropology, law and politics, and musicology while general reports may be found in the British journal *Anthropology Today* or in *Anthropology News* in the United States, and in journals such as *American Anthropologist* or *JRAI*, the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute. The following examples give some insight into the general range of questions being addressed.

### Political Economy

A political economy approach contextualizes the world as an open system, as process not stasis. To understand how power works in the world today requires comparison, paying attention to the intersection of power and culture. One example of this approach is found in the work of Ashraf Ghani, whose research focused on the history of power, particularly in Afghanistan, and who later became president of Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> To understand how power works requires attention to disintegration as well as integration, on a local and global levels, which are then compared in terms of process, not essentialized societies. Work in this area has brought radical changes to traditional ethnography. An economic sys-

tem such as corporate capitalism is treated as a type of economy that may change in particular context, such as contemporary China, in direct contrast to **world system theorists** who track the distribution of a system across the globe. There are many kinds of capitalism—penny capitalism, regional capitalism, and corporate capitalism. In *Worked Over: The Corporate Sabotage of an American Community*, for example, Dimitra Doukas (2003) covered dramatic changes in northern New York mill towns in the Mohawk River Valley with the move from regional to corporate or global capitalism. She documented the impact of hit-and-run corporate capitalism on the American workers on whose back American industry was built. Over 100 years, these vibrant industrial centers had become impoverished deindustrialized communities. Earlier still, Anthony F. C. Wallace, in his underappreciated book *Rockdale* (1978) wrote the story of Rockdale: “An account of the coming of the machines, the making of a new way of life in the mill hamlets, the triumph of evangelical capitalists over socialists and infidels, and the transformation of the workers into Christian soldiers in a cotton-manufacturing district in Pennsylvania in the years before and during the Civil War.”

## Power and Politics

Continuing examination of power centered on control as the dynamic of power. Laura Nader’s early study, “Controlling Processes” (1997), focused on means of exercising power, a catalyst for analyzing the role of free will in power relations in American society. Examples were taken from the alternative dispute-resolution movement in U.S. law, which diminished the civil justice system in the United States and then went global, the standardization of definitions of beauty, which has spread globally, or the content of museum exhibits, or examining how marketing firms influence teenagers’ perceptions of parental authority. The study of controlling processes enabled readers to understand control as indirect means to power and to recognize the fragility of both culture and its human carriers. In *Buddha is Hiding – Refugees, Citizenship, The New America*, Aihwa Ong (2003) followed the everyday lives of Cambodian refugees in California as they dealt with American values that contradicted Cambodian values in a story of Cambodian Americans experiencing American citizenship, a bottom up study about the impact of U.S. medical, social welfare, judicial, religious, and economic institutions of citizen making. This ethnography is about Cambodian Americans and about the types of controls operating across American institutions seeking to mold a certain type of citizen and the book is a tour-de-force examination of the reconfiguring of citizenship in a world of wars and movements.

World events are critical to academic pursuits, and anthropology had successes in World War II because of previous anthropological work in areas that became war zones. The Cold War following World War II also wrought critical changes. The number of anthropologists expanded, as did funding, and access to military technology revolutionized our methodologies in all fields, although differently. For sociocultural anthropologists, the Cold War raised issues of race, war, genocide, counterinsurgency, and natural resources. We realized that anthropology was not an autonomous pursuit; instead, all of academia was embedded in politics. Anthropologists such as Hugh Gusterson (1996) and Joseph Masco (2006) began to write about nuclear laboratory cultures.<sup>8</sup>

During a decade in which nuclear and alternative energy systems have played critical roles in world events, a wide-angled anthropology was a requirement. Anthropology has integrated holism, appreciation of history and the depth of time, and the consequences arising from how language frames thought. The discourse of energy specialists, for example, was rooted in models of growth that assumed an unlimited supply of natural resources and undervalued ecosystems. The idea that energy experts might be part of the problem was novel, as was the idea that energy problems have human dimensions, a theme

explored in works such as *The Energy Reader* (Nader 2010), *Cultures of Energy: Power, Practices, and Technologies* (Strauss, Rupp and Love 2013), and “Energopolitics and the Anthropology of Energy” (Boyer 2011). All of us were influenced by campus struggles in the 1960 and 1970s over militarism, multinational capitalism, scientific racism, and the politics of gender. But a larger question remains: What makes people human?

## Subdividing and Specializing

Expanded funding in the four basic fields and in medical anthropology led to specializations and topical expertise. In sociocultural anthropology, these include specializations in the law, politics, the economy, religion, ecology, medical issues, art, and education. Anthropologist Eric Wolf (1923–1999) was critical of the tendency to specialize: “We subdivide and subdivide and call it anthropology.”<sup>9</sup> The history of anthropology now goes far beyond disciplinary boundaries to include the impact of national policies, militarism, and priorities in funding. Credit goes to David Price, who singlehandedly examined the history of anthropology in its widest context in his book *Anthropological Intelligence: The Deployment and Neglect of American Anthropology in the Second World War* (2008). After all, our nationalities are reflected in the work we do. However, as anthropologists specialized, the concept of culture spread beyond the discipline to sociology, psychology, business schools, law schools, and beyond. Culture as a concept was loose on the streets! We now have cultural sociology, cultural psychology, cultural geography, cultural law. Changes in the field, which included fascination with French philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida and French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, stimulated vigorous critiques. Others used the changes to enrich ethnography. People built on June Nash’s ethnography of a Bolivian tin mine, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1979), which followed industrial mining that came with Spanish conquest, still causing internal problems today since controls continue to operate on Bolivia from beyond its borders. Some call this global development theory.

Because of all of this intellectual ferment, we now realize that anthropology has much to say about our own lives. Our ethnographies are written about the Shanghai stock market and the invention of derivatives on Wall Street.<sup>10</sup> Examinations of law and finance have moved from the earlier intersections of anthropology and law primarily associated with resolution of disputes in small locales to connecting legal knowledge (that is, state-level knowledge) to global financial markets and their legal and regulatory practices in which traders deal with probabilities and legal fictions.<sup>11</sup> Also in the vein of banking is the interest in Islamic banking. Though Islam forbids collecting interest, Islamic financial concerns operate in some 70 countries and have assets in the range of \$200 billion.<sup>12</sup> Studies of the alternative currencies of Islamic banks are part and parcel of law, economics, and finance and the anthropologist’s subject goes beyond the tribe, village, state, and even geographic region. The anthropology of policy worlds is an emerging field that covers the politics of financialization, the rise of audit cultures and their impacts on culture and society, and the spread of diseases such as cholera epidemics.<sup>13</sup> In *Global Assemblages, Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (2005), Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier integrate issues that are globalizing, including concern with ethics. Anthropologists are asking, for example, why some informants waste time with anthropologists and what exactly the collaborative engagement of anthropologists and subjects is in terms of ethics.

New concerns with dichotomies of nature and culture led to studies of mythologies of menopause in Japan and North America and the pharmaceutical business. Can menopause really be a disease if it happens to all women? Similar questions are asked of aging in India.<sup>14</sup> The examination of energy use in culture and society is rapidly expanding along with studies of emerging industrial businesses that

use bio-power for commercial and regulatory purposes.<sup>15</sup> Thus, anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loïc Wacquant, are studying the buying, selling, and theft of human body parts, the significance of the concept of “brain dead,” and who owns the body in books like *Commodifying Bodies* (2002). Building on ethics and human rights issues are decades of research by Nancy Scheper-Hughes. In *Death without Weeping* (1992), she addressed violence in everyday life and how violence and even death become normal and routine. She has made her work public by sharing with journalists wherever possible, testifying in court regarding crimes against humanity, and working hand in hand with Israeli colleagues. The work is multi-sited, sometimes conducting research undercover while examining criminal networks and transplant tourism. Though power need not be the central theme for all anthropology, it is critical for understanding central dogmas.

## Audiences for Anthropology

Our audiences are unpredictable. Anthropologists who speak to a public wider than members of the discipline often have a greater immediate impact outside the discipline than in it. When I began writing and speaking about **coercive harmony**, interest among anthropologists was slow to develop (for reasons I examine elsewhere) while those who had felt the sting of being coercively harmonized—our public—quickly recognized its power in the workplace with quality circles, with “facilitators” in environmental movements at loggerheads with Clinton-style negotiation, and on Native American reservations when dealing with negotiations over nuclear waste. Grade schools regularly taught **harmony ideology** dispute-resolution and in global arenas lawyers were up against new international negotiators selling psychology rather than the rule of law.<sup>16</sup> And in the 2016 presidential election, the Republican candidate used language that would be considered uncivil under the harmony model but received positive responses from voters.

If we remain ignorant of debates outside of academia, we will increasingly find ourselves talking mainly to each other, trapped in a diminished space and working in cramped quarters.<sup>17</sup> It took an anthropologist, David Graeber, to notice that debt was on the mind of many, especially economically insecure Americans and the young who were in heavy debt for their costs in higher education.<sup>18</sup> Graeber’s book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011) was an instant bestseller worldwide. Debt is a problem that affects all societies that employ money. His analysis helps us understand the present economic situation by means of a long-term perspective. In similar critical efforts, Graeber has moved to other issues on people’s minds. In 2001, he published *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001) and more recently he explored political ideologies and exotic practices by self-destructive tribes in *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (2015). Though Graeber is thought of as a specialist in studies of the Occupy Wall Street movement, his initial fieldwork was conducted in Madagascar.

Some of the most distinguished anthropologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were effective spokespeople for the demarcation of science from other forms of knowledge such as magic and religion. As represented by Boas and Malinowski, who were trained in physics and mathematics, anthropological work in the late twentieth century work was grounded in the ethnographic study of the practice of science, which did not always privilege western science. Modern scientists are crossing paths with indigenous peoples; biologists are side by side with indigenous peoples whose ecological knowledge they covet. Rapid globalization makes considerations of intermingling of knowledge systems inevitable. There is power in juxtaposing how traditional knowledge is produced in very different cultures, such as comparing our own culture with that of the Inuit or with peoples of the Amazon. We study not only Amazonians’ indigenous plants and Pacific marine biology (and their appropriation

of that knowledge) but physics and biotechnology laboratories and immunologists as well. Malinowski wrote about magic, science, and religion among the Trobrianders; we (following Leach's advice) examine magic, science, and religion in national laboratories.

## Science

Emerging ethnographies of science are having as powerful an effect on contemporary anthropology as earlier studies of political economy and colonialism. Comparison of American high-energy physicists with Japanese high-energy physicists or Japanese and American primatologists show that science is not free of culture but, rather, is full of it.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, anthropologists working in African agriculture have noted the devastating effects of a cultural preference for universal explanations that override ecological particularism and site-specific knowledge.<sup>20</sup> It sounds counterintuitive, but “based on measures of energy expended per calorie of food produced, industrial agriculture is the most inefficient form of food production in the history and prehistory of humankind.”<sup>21</sup> The principles of a physical model may not be true at all times or in all places since, even in Europe, there are many scientific traditions. When western approaches and technologies are transferred elsewhere, there can be downsides. In *Naked Science – Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge* (1996), Laura Nader discusses the power of western science over other sciences around the world, revealing a cultural framework for understanding “what science is really like.” Ethno-science and techno-science are examined comparatively rather than hierarchically.

Even the science of race has changed dramatically in the past 50 years. During the post-Civil Rights movement, many scholars and scientists thought of race as nothing more than a social construction. By the twenty-first century, race as a social, legal, and medical category had been explored as a result of the Human Genome Project. Degrees of variation came to be debated. One example is Ian Whitmarsh and David Jones' *What's the Use of Race – Modern Governance and the Biology of Difference* (2010), which examines the uses of race in the courtroom, law enforcement, and scientific views in attempts to address human diversity in relation to inequities in health and disease without using race as a basis for discrimination. Matters of race are not settled yet. Forensics, ancestry, testing, and medicine are hopefully innovating pathways to better medical treatments and health outcomes—and simultaneously advancing our conversations about “race” as a useful category.

Anthropological contributions to science debates can be critical in relocating and rethinking the future of western science traditions for variations exist there as well. The issues relate to the function of western science, its cultural ascendancy, its ethnocentricity, and its universality as they pertain to the charting of more-productive science paradigms.<sup>22</sup> As previously mentioned, anthropologists working in African agriculture have observed the devastating effects of a scientific preference for universal explanations that override ecological particularisms and site-specific subsistence knowledge. The assumption that western science functions autonomously is contradicted by findings in archaeology and ethnology, such as the observation that science does not develop independent of the influence of non-scientists. Is the anthropology of science a scientific effort or a humanistic one? Does it matter since “humanistic” and “scientific” are adjectives of convenience that are not mutually exclusive? The notion that people in a particular political context could consciously construct a cultural tradition should be important to the structurally minded, along with conscious linguistic code-switching for those interested in the consequences of differences in school settings.

## Violence and War

The search for explanations for violence—especially the kind of intercommunal violence seen in places like Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Israel, Sri Lanka, and the former Yugoslavia and now seen throughout the Islamic world in the Middle East—involves the understanding of a holistic ethnography. Does it relate to competition for scarce resources, such as oil in the 2003 U.S. war on Iraq, or to dislocation of colonial legacies as seen in Waziristan in northern Pakistan? How do such forces translate into violence? Some scholars have invoked identity politics as a prerequisite to intercommunal violence, the implication being that it depends on identity formation that contrasts with another group. An alternative approach might be to examine the role of the international arms industry and of regimes that encourage hostilities. What kept Iraq together under Saddam Hussein? In a word, nationalism. When Saddam Hussein was at war with Iran, all Iraqi citizens—Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, and Christian fought together as one Iraqi people. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, American forces used the old colonial technique of divide and conquer by pitting Shia against Sunni. A decade later, we have seen the rise of an Islamic Caliphate (ISIS) waging war on Iraq and Syria. Gillian Tett refers to the peril of expertise as *The Silo Effect* (2015)—an inability to “connect the dots” as one consequence of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq.

Certainly, no agreement has been reached among anthropologists on issues of violence and aggression, especially between those who stress biological origins of aggressive behavior and those who note that humans are not uniformly aggressive and warlike. Human populations can be peaceful or almost continuously engaged in aggressive encounters. The violence between East and West Germany, for example, is explained not by old antagonisms but by new phenomena—the ideologies associated with the Cold War and the Soviet Union. A nation can change from warlike to peaceful in a remarkably short period. Consider Sweden, which, particularly under Gustavus Adolphus, was the scourge of Europe but now has been largely peaceful for many decades. France under Napoleon was the most feared country in Europe, but a century later, the aggressive position had shifted to Germany. On the other hand, however, humans can also learn to be aggressive, as the record of feuds, raids, tortures, and wars amply testifies. There is no empirical evidence that individuals in warlike nations are genetically more aggressive than individuals in peaceful nations, and the complex institutions of war, which depend on uniquely human organizations, cannot be understood in terms of individual aggression (although conflicts in animal societies can be so understood). Only human animals make war, and only human animals kill themselves.

The current violence in the Middle East cannot be explained without implicating states and history. Afghanistan was invaded first by the British Empire, then by the Soviets, and by the Americans in 2001. All three stated that they wanted to bring development to the Afghans, a better life. What followed instead was violence continuing to this day in the case of American invasion. Thousands have died and sectarian violence has erupted. The word jihad is commonly used in reference to the Islamic state and is sometimes translated as holy war. Perhaps all of the contemporary wars in the Middle East from Afghanistan to Somalia are holy wars—Islamic, Christian, and Jewish—all monotheistic religions emanating from the Middle East. What we may be experiencing in the early twenty-first century are religious wars posing as secular for Christians and Jews and as jihad holy wars for Muslims.

It behooves anthropologists to unveil the contemporary scene that has been appropriated by politicians and pundits because the consequences of failing to do so are so great in terms of mass killings and destruction. For some Arabs, Israel is a western beachhead in the Middle East; for some Israelis, it is a return and compensation for the Nazi killings of Jews in World War II. In 2001, President George

W. Bush referred to a “crusade” against terrorism. Terrorism is a general word, not specific, but used in carrying out American drone strikes in Waziristan, Somalia, Yemen, and Palestinian Gaza. Explanations such as resource wars have been generally avoided, except in joking that if Iraq grew broccoli instead of having oil we would not have invaded. As comparatists, anthropologists are well-equipped to contribute to the public’s understanding of these issues by connecting the dots.<sup>23</sup>

## Law

In the 1960s, anthropological research on law and anthropology involved ethnographies of particular peoples such as the Barotse, Tiv, and Arusha in Africa, the Cheyenne in the United States, the Trobrianders in Melanesia, and the Ifugao in the Philippines. The first generation of scholars—Bronislaw Malinowski, Max Gluckman, Paul Bohannan, Philip Gulliver, Karl Llewellyn, and E. Adamson Hoebel—had a local world view. They examined the functions of law, its presence or absence, processes of negotiation, mediation, adjudication, or retaliation. The generation that followed wanted to increase the number of quality ethnographies and local ethnographies such as those on the Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico, or the Zinacantan of Chiapas, Mexico, and new locales from Africa to New Guinea and Hawaii.<sup>24</sup> Variation was examined within these places but, when teaching anthropology of law in the early years, the central core was ethnography in place.<sup>25</sup>

However, as peoples who had been colonized by European powers gained independence, the number of new states worldwide increased rapidly, and those states were incorporating the local people into state law. Attention turned to globalization, the diffusion of legal ideologies such as the rule of law to new states and law and modernization. Research and teaching changed and by the latter part of the twentieth century and particularly after the end of the Cold War, students were eager to learn about the new states, legal imperialism, military law, and legal rights. The war on terror was also on their minds after the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in terms of due process, fairness, and imposition of foreign laws. Thus, teaching law and anthropology in 2016 bore little resemblance to such teachings in the 1960s although documentary films such as *Little Injustices* (1981) and *Losing Knowledge* (2012), give students a sense of how much has changed with the loss of local sovereignty. Assigned readings have also changed. One of the favorites is Leach’s *Custom, Law, and Terrorist Violence* ((1977).

One anthropologist who has tried to analyze the fantasy sources of terror wars is Joseba Zulaika, a Basque anthropologist, author of many books on terrorism. His most recent is *Terrorism – the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* (2009). Well into his argument about counter-terrorism producing terrorism, Zulaika refers to a medieval component of U.S. policy. He invokes the fear of witches prevalent historically in Europe to understand current counter-terrorism behavior and a premodern type of thinking that denies contrary evidence and sees all as either black or white, as good or evil. Zulaika refers to Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (1937) to help us understand the belief in the mystical power of some individuals to harm others. Finally, he notes that what was normal and unquestionable in medieval Europe gave way to skepticism.

Wherever anthropologists have studied witchcraft and witch-hunting, fear is present—fear of sickness fear of violence.<sup>26</sup> In contemporary Africa, according to Elizabeth Colson, witchcraft accusations have increased along with apparently unexplainable HIV deaths.<sup>27</sup> Questions of “Why me? Why us?” must be answered. In explaining the fear of “terrorism” in the United States, some have argued that connecting those dots may be a new challenge for anthropologists working in the West. Witch-hunting in more-complex settings require broader contexts than that of pre-literate societies in which witchcraft



may be taken for granted. In complex societies such as the United States, beliefs based on irrational or illogical thinking are not accepted as part of being modern, or so it is said.

## Urban Anthropology

The interest in violence and war might be connected to the growing interest in urban spaces. The proportion of the world's population living in urban areas has been increasing over the past 200 years, starting, some would say, with the Industrial Revolution. In 1800, only about 3 percent of all humans lived in cities. By 1900, 13 percent lived in urban areas. A mere 80 years later, the proportion had risen to 40 percent, and today it stands at more than 50 percent. The percentages of urban dwellers are highest in highly developed societies. One source suggests that in 1900 the world had only 16 cities with more than a million inhabitants, while by 2015, the number had grown to over 300 such cities and still increasing. New cities are being built as in Brasilia.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that there has been comparable growth in urban anthropology. A stunning find in urban archaeology is that of Cahokia, a city of 83 hectares at the convergence of the Missouri, Mississippi, and Illinois rivers, a city once occupied by some 20,000 people, larger in the eleventh and twelfth centuries than London and Paris.<sup>29</sup>

Urban anthropology has both theoretical and applied dimensions and the topics range from immigration, poverty, class, ethnicity, drugs, and urban violence and investigates societies in Canada, the United States, Africa, Brazil and other locales. The work is comparative as well as deeply ethnographic and documents the bringing of rural customs to cities and urban traits to rural areas. For instance, Erik Harms' *Saigon's Edge – On the Margins of Ho Chi Min City* (2011) shows how people live in zones of urban-rural divides in the wasteland of urban industrial expansion, between worlds and transformations linked to global markets. Los Angeles has the largest Samoan immigrant population anywhere outside of the Pacific region. Different customs influence questions of law, such as individuals who commit crimes when *In Search of Respect*, the title of an ethnography of crack dealers in Harlem, New York, by Philippe Bourgois (1995). Gangs and gang violence make headlines and inspire applied anthropologists, as do new interests in drug and sex trafficking and widespread stress caused by debt and inequalities.

## Health and Medicine

As the reader can see, all behaviors, institutions, and ideas related to human populations are of interest. For example, all societies construct beliefs about the causes of illnesses and systems for preserving health. The sub-specialty of medical anthropology includes anthropologists from all sub fields. In many areas of the world colonialism, warfare, diseases, and changes in diet contribute to health problems. Hunter-gatherer societies have been relatively isolated from other groups and have not suffer from the epidemics of infectious diseases that have affected agrarian and urban societies, especially in this age of widespread travel. The spread of malaria, for example, has been linked to population growth and changes associated with food production. Obesity and diabetes have spread with economic development and globalization, and diseases such as HIV infections appear more in Africa than in other parts of the world.<sup>30</sup> Cultural factors enter as HIV spreads more often among men who are circumcised than those who are not. Then there are emotional diseases such as *susto*, an illness caused by anxiety or fright, or widespread stress caused by debt and inequalities. Underlying explanations of human behavior are based on unstated assumptions.

## CONCLUSION

What is anthropology? The question can be answered in many ways depending on the particular anthropologist-author. A linguistic anthropologist might start with a reference to Boas' student, Edward Sapir, whose work on *Language* (1921) is as good today as it was when he wrote it. Sapir's work spanned the subjects of Amerindian languages and their connections and distributions as they pertain to anthropology, the interdisciplinary nature of the study of language from earliest times to the contemporary use of speech. Language and culture studies encompass both technical aspects of language and socio-linguistics—the study of language in context.<sup>31</sup> The founding of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the 1930s also played an important role in educating anthropologists of all stripes in the techniques of linguistic study whether we were specialists or not. Such broad education would include folklorists for whom language is key. Forever forward-thinking, Alan Dundes demonstrated the important but disputed point that folklore is not necessarily transmitted and expressed orally, particularly folklore of the electronic age.<sup>32</sup>

For all of anthropologists' divergences and disagreements, we share the “anthropological attitude,” which values both detachment and involvement as modes of rethinking existing assumptions. Such shared values have not changed much since the nineteenth century, nor have the social prejudices that anthropologists have challenged: ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, and inadequate measures of human worth. What has changed is the world around us, a world that affects who we are, what we study, and what consequences result, forcing us to question why we take the stands we do. Factors external to the profession that have been a critical part of doing anthropology in the United States are still with us and merit remembering. Anthropology, more than any other discipline, has the capacity to generate the kind of introspection that can influence the future role of human beings on earth—to impart the lessons of history, the experience of *Homo sapiens* on the planet.

### Discussion Questions

1. Laura Nader explains that examining cultural assumptions is the main motivation for anthropologists. Why is this kind of examination important? What does she mean when she says that anthropologists should study “up, down, and sideways”?
2. This chapter describes several specializations, or areas of expertise, that have developed in anthropology, including investigations of both science and law. In what ways can science and law be analyzed as products of culture?
3. In the conclusion, Laura Nader writes that anthropology “values both detachment and engagement.” Why is this particularly challenging in a profession that relies on participant observation research?

## GLOSSARY

**Area studies:** a way of organizing research and academic programs around world regions such as Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, China, Latin America, and Europe.

**Coercive harmony:** an approach to dispute resolution that emphasizes compromise and consensus rather than confrontation and results in the marginalization of dissent (**harmony ideology**) and the repression of demands for justice.

**Cultural determinism:** the idea that behavioral differences are a result of cultural, not racial or genetic causes.

**Cultural relativism:** the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their own culture and not our own.

**Ethnocentrism:** the tendency to view one's own culture as most important and correct and as the stick by which to measure all other cultures.

**Functionalism:** an approach developed in British anthropology that emphasized the ways that the parts of a society work together to support the functioning of the whole.

**Holism:** taking a broad view of the historical, environmental, and cultural foundations of behavior.

**Participant observation:** a type of observation in which the anthropologist observes while participating in the same activities in which her informants are engaged.

**Plasticity:** refers to the human capacity to learn any language or culture.

**World Systems Theory:** an approach to social science and history that involves examination of the development and functioning of the world economic system.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Nader is a Professor of sociocultural anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Nader's current work focuses on how central dogmas are made and how they work in law, energy science, and anthropology. She has published several books on conflict resolution and the law including *Harmony Ideology: Justice and Control in a Mountain Zapotec Village* (1990) and *The Life of the Law: Anthropological Projects* (2002). She has also conducted research in the anthropology of science, with a particular focus on energy. Her books *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge* (1996) and *The Energy Reader* (2010) are two examples of her work on these topics. She has also produced ethnographic films, including the 2012 film *Losing Knowledge: 50 Years of Change*, which explores the ways in which indigenous knowledge is vanishing. Dr. Nader is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has received numerous awards and honors including the CoGEA Award from the American Anthropological Association and the Harry J. Kalven, Jr. award from the Law and Society Association.

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## Notes

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