

# 6.1 Critique of Eurocentrism

Reading and Doing Ethnography  
Social Anthropology 314

All culture is critique

Meta is everywhere.

Culture isn't just *behavior*, it's *reflective practice*.  
Anthropology isn't just behavioral observation; it's self-  
critical.

# Review of culture theory thus far

- » To be a person is to be a social actor moving through a series of cultural encounters (Week 1).
- » These cultural encounters are full of ideology (rationalization, strategic simplification, mystification), which people are somewhat aware of (Week 2).
- » Cultural encounters are also inscrutable, full of intimacies and dialogues that need interpretation (Week 3).
- » Social actors have an inner life: they often display ambivalence, antagonisms (of race or class or gender), distaste for the norms (Week 4).
- » Social actors also have social strategies for getting things done in their encounters with others. These strategies have patterns and rhythms (Week 5).
- » Cultural situations are organized around critique and controversy. This includes anthropology and its colonial and racial legacy (Week 6).

# Arowosegbe's critique of Eurocentrism in African Studies

- >> Ambivalence about Western Enlightenment.
- >> Area studies has served Western geopolitical interests.
- >> Universals are to be reinvented "from an appreciation of one's context, experience and history."
- >> Africa should be a subject not an object; should produce codes of interpretation rather than mere data.

# Differends

*A form of dispute utterly irresoluble through consensus as the parties involved speak radically contradictory and heterogeneous languages.*  
(309)

# Critique of Enlightenment

*While much of what has been best about the Western cultural legacy to the global culture derives largely from the Enlightenment and while some of the most admirable principles of Western culture – such as the global advocacy of democracy and human rights – can be traced to the Enlightenment, Europeans' treatment of non-Europeans and their warfare against each other in this era, together with their continuing humiliation of non-metropolitan societies during the colonial and postcolonial periods, have all belied the very principles of the Enlightenment. (311)*

# Eurocentrism in anthropology

- » It remains the case that the majority of anthropologists are Euro-American and they retain symbolic dominance in the profession.
- » The canon of anthropological theories remains dominated by this tradition, in spite of having been opened up considerably since the 1970s.
- » The field remains organized by geopolitically defined (and ultimately incoherent) regions.
- » NB this class has not done as much to critique Eurocentrism as it should.



Let's practice writing critiques

Describe a moment where  
someone did something  
inconsistent with their professed  
values.

Describe a moment where you felt  
powerless in the face of an  
institutional situation.

Describe a moment where you saw  
criticism have a real impact.