

ANTH2301 - Intro to Cultural Anthropology

1. Ethnocentrism is the belief that your culture is better than another. Being ethnocentric prevents us from expanding our horizons and learning about other cultures. This means that we often misjudge other cultures in a negative light when in fact many of the times they are not. This can be shown by the ethnocentric comment made in the movie Babel as the children were entering Mexico assuming that it is a dangerous place.

2. Nonverbal communication, as we learned from the lectures, is any communication, intentional or unintentional, without words. We can see that the means of which cultures encode and decode these expressive behaviors are different in a variety of times throughout the movie Babel. The most obvious example from the film would be how Chieko Wataya, the rebellious teenage girl in Japan, is deaf. A second example would be how Richard Jones' reacts to his wife, Susan, being shot and interacting with the veterinarian, the closest individual to a doctor that they could find. With a lack of ability to speak in their native tongue he had to find other expressive ways to convey his message without speaking, to which he turns to hand motions.

3. The use of modern technology in Japan shapes the way humans adapt to their environment. The young girls interact heavily with technology, often video chatting each other throughout the film. Even in our own lives we can see how the adoption of technology, specifically technology that can fit in the palm of our hands, can reduce the

face-to-face contact we receive on a daily basis. The Moroccan tribe doesn't have these luxuries and because of that they heavily rely on face-to-face communication. What we might view as a simple request, such as a telephone, is a nearly foreign concept to most of them in the film Babel. This causes great delay in getting Susan Jones the medical attention she so desperately needed.

4. We learned from our lectures that pastoralism means keeping domesticated animals and using their products as a major food source. There are two types of pastoral movement patterns, transhumance and nomadism. Transhumance is, generally speaking, such as when the shepherd travels with his sheep. On the contrary nomadism is when the whole group travels with animals. The Moroccan village falls under a transhumance pastoralist society. The village itself is rooted in its location but the families/shepherds travel with their sheep as they grow and complete the food chain. Pastoralism is key to the Moroccan villages' success because they lack the ability to have a sustainable lifestyle if changed due to the lack of ability to grow agriculture.

5. Balanced reciprocity is the exchange of goods and services of equivalent value. At the beginning of the film there is an exchange between Abdullah, a goat herder, and Hassan Ibrahim of money and a goat for a .270 Winchester M70 rifle and a box of ammunition. At the beginning of the transaction they were not at market equilibrium and so Hassan Ibrahim wasn't willing to trade the rifle for the original offer of cash – but only cash plus the goat. This system of economic exchange is a viable fit for this environment because

that's how bartering works, they end up being equal (or merely slightly ahead/behind) with both parties being satisfied.

6. Food has a major impact on societies. The film Babel offers insight on a variety of different cultures and the social role of food. Chieko Wataya and the Moroccan tribe both have rice-heavy diets but one culture views it as socially acceptable at all social classes whereas the other views it for the lower class. In Japan with rice being a staple food Wataya, her friends, father, and bystanders enjoy rice numerous times throughout the film. This sharply contrasts the Moroccan village where the social role of food means that you're of a lower class if rice is a major part of your diet.

7. Kinship is a cultural universal. The film Babel has a variety of types but I will focus on two that were most apparent in the film – fictive kinship and nuclear families. Richard and Susan have a Mexican nanny, Amelia, who takes the children to Mexico. Amelias' nephew, Santiago, call the Jones' children, Debbie and Mike, nephews although there are no blood ties. This demonstrates a fictive kinship as learned in class. In many ways this is the same as a nuclear family except for the fact that the nuclear family, Richard, Susan, and their children Debbie and Mike are a nuclear family connected by blood. These two forms of kinship both call each other by familial names such as brother, sister, mother, etc.

8. Egalitarianism is where everyone is viewed as equal, where no single person is in charge of the others. Stratified societies have a form of classes, the more complex or the two. Egalitarian societies are going to be smaller in numbers and tend to be focused on hunter-gatherers, pastoralist societies, and the like of food-gathering techniques. The Moroccan tribe practices egalitarianism by having no formal structure of power. The Japanese and American families live in societies where there is a stratified form of classes. This can be demonstrated by the fact that you have a divergence of individuals based on wealth and power (police vs. non-police).

9. Every society must develop a set of customs and procedures for making and enforcing decisions, resolving disputes, and regulating the behavior of its members. Political organizations are a set of customary procedures that accomplish decision-making conflict-resolution and social control. We can see that the Moroccan tribe is a band society, much like the Inuit in Alaska as we learned in class, where they are characterized by a small number of individuals with little concept of individual property ownership with a high value on sharing, cooperation, and reciprocity. There is also little role in specialization, whereby meaning its highly egalitarian. The Japanese have a state society political organization where they have a complex and formal role of organization (government) and are technologically advanced. These societies tend to be larger in size, which is also shown by the large population that Japan has.

10. Social control, a cultural universal, is any means to maintain behavioral norm and regulate conflict. There is a loosely fitting approach to maintaining behavioral norms and regulate conflict in the Moroccan village, starkly contrasting that of the United States in the film. Near the beginning of the film when Susan Jones was being operated on by the veterinarian who was sewing shut her wound her husband, Richard, had to exert power and convince the other American tourists to wait despite their lack of comfort due to no air conditioning. We can see a more formalized approach to social control with how Border Control detained the Jones's nanny, Amelia, for sneaking the Jones's children into Mexico. This causes her to be deported back to Mexico despite her long history of working in the United States.

11. Human diversity is affected by and implicated in wider networks in our now globalized world. The simplest of decisions can be life changing for a culture, such as how Yasujiro Wataya gave Hassan Ibrahim his rifle as a kind gesture after a hunting expedition. Hassan, as we learn, ends up selling that rifle to Abdullah, whose children then wound Susan Jones and cause a conflict that is far and wide reaching. This example of globalization stresses the relationship between foreign countries, such that the US government held the idea that the shooting was a terrorist act.

12. There are numerous anthropological principals that help solve social problems in the world. Anthropologists must practice cultural relativism, which is the idea that cultural traits are best understood when viewed within the cultural context of which they

are a part. We must focus on walking a mile in the other's shoes, as this will prevent being ethnocentric, the view that your culture is better. Anthropologists must also be holistic, consider every part of a culture in relation to every other part and to the whole. Anthropology involves both the biological and sociocultural aspects of humanity, providing a means to understanding our globalized world and appreciating what all makes us different while all the while still the same.

It can be dangerous to introduce new things to a society and one saying that Anthropologists live by is to do no harm. By Yasujiro giving Hassan the rifle, it introduced a deadly weapon that ended up causing an inter-cultural conflict that spanned far and wide.

We must understand that through participant-observation we have the best way to learn about a society and its culture is to live in it as an active participant rather than an observer. This means that we also shouldn't intervene simply because our society views it as a taboo, as those are different culture to culture. Just as we saw in an in-class film, just because we eat peanut butter here in the United States doesn't mean that those in Great Britain should scold us for liking something they view as disgusting. Relating this to Babel the American children are caught off-guard when Santiago decapitates the Chicken.