Culture: Contemporary Views

Richard A Shweder and Les Beldo, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

Abstract

In 1952 A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn formulated a definition of 'culture' that became a mantra for a generation of cultural anthropologists who came of scholarly age in the middle of the twentieth century. Little did Kroeber and Kluckhohn know that for the next 50 years the idea of 'culture,' in its anthropological sense, would be frequently debated, doubted, distrusted, and scorned and associated with a variety of sins. Nor could they have anticipated that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the idea of 'culture' would be a key concept in many of the social sciences, while cultural anthropology would remain a scene for various kinds of 'anticultural' or 'postcultural' critiques. Nevertheless, a concept of 'culture' very much like the one recommended by Kroeber and Kluckhohn remains useful in social science research today. The concept of 'culture' not only survives; it thrives, and for good reason.

Introduction: Kroeber's and Kluckhohn's Prediction

"…few intellectuals will challenge the statement that the idea of culture, in the technical anthropological sense, is one of the key notions in contemporary American thought." That prediction was made in 1952 by the American anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in the introduction to their monumental book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952). Kroeber and Kluckhohn even began their famous treatise proclaiming the idea of culture comparable in explanatory importance to the idea of gravity in physics, disease in medicine, and evolution in biology. They ended by adducing a unified (albeit ponderous) definition that became the mantra for cultural anthropologists who came of scholarly age in mid-century. "Culture," they wrote, "consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action" (1952, p. 357).

Kroeber and Kluckhohn were students of intellectual history and brilliant culture theorists, but they were not prophets. Little did they know that during the 50 years following the publication of their book the idea of 'culture,' in its mid-century anthropological sense, would be frequently debated, doubted, distrusted, and scorned, that the discipline of cultural anthropology itself would be 'rethought,' 'remade,' 'recaptured,' and 'reinvented' time and time again. They did not foretell the many types of humanists and social scientists (cognitive revolutionaries, structuralists, poststructuralists, sociobiologists, feminists, skeptical postmodernists, post-colonialists, subalterns, globalization theorists) who would associate the concept of 'culture' with a variety of supposed sins. Sins such as 'essentialism,' 'primordialism,' 'representationalism,' 'monumentalism,' 'reification,' 'idealism,' 'positivism,' 'functionalism,' 'relativism,' 'sexism,' 'racism,' 'ethnic conflict,' 'colonialism,' 'Orientalism,' and just plain old-fashioned stereotyping (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1991; Asad, 1973; Borofsky, 1994; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1996; Fox, 1991; Freeman, 1983; Hymes, 1972; Kuper, 1999; Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Rabinow, 1983; Reyna, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989; Said, 1978; Sangren, 1988; Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Spiro, 1986; Wikan, 1995).

Nor did Kroeber and Kluckhohn anticipate the ironic fate of the concept of 'culture' at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The irony is that today the idea of culture is once again a key concept in many of the social science disciplines, yet is viewed with great suspicion in some quarters of cultural anthropology. The irony is that after being reviled, pummeled, and rejected by one new wave intellectual movement after another an idea of 'culture' very much like the one recommended by Kroeber and Kluckhohn in 1952 remains useful and defensible in social science research and public policy debates. The concept not only survives, it thrives (see for example, Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Huntington, 1996; Landes, 1998; Prentice and Miller, 1999; Kitayama and Markus, 1994; Wierzbicka, 1997).

It is noteworthy that even in Kroeber and Kluckhohn's time anthropologists outside of the American tradition were skeptical of the concept of culture. The British social anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown once remarked that he found 'culture' to be a 'vague abstraction' not particularly useful in the study of social life. Continuing in that tradition Adam Kuper has argued that institutions and other 'elements' of society should be studied separately rather than "bound together into a single bundle labeled culture" (Kuper, 1999). But many social anthropologists, including some who have deeply criticized the culture concept or its uses, have nonetheless recognized the importance of attending to the 'ideas and values' or 'cultural content' associated with institutionalized social relationships (see e.g., Beattie, 1964; Malinowski, 1944). Attention to 'cultural' kinds of knowledge and processes allows one to comprehend certain prevalent ideas or values as more than just the particular products of particular institutions.

In this latter sense, 'culture' is not regarded as equivalent to or parallel to other dimensions of social life like economics or politics but as something more basic and pervasive – as a set of

understandings that gives sense and meaning even to, say, acts which might on the surface appear entirely economic or political in character (see Geertz, 1973; Peacock, 2005, p. 54, Rosaldo, 1989; Sahlins, 1976; Sewell, 2005). Roy D'Andrade, for example, has discussed the concept of 'institutionalized values': the values (such as obedience, in-group loyalty, and patriotism) that people in a society agree are important in enacting some role (such as a soldier in the army) and are consensually used to evaluate specific role performance (D'Andrade, 2008). D'Andrade points out that cultural differences seem greatest when one takes 'institutional values' as the unit of analysis in cross-cultural investigations.

The contemporary discipline of anthropology continues to be a scene for various kinds of 'anticultural' or 'postcultural' critiques. Nevertheless, many social scientists rehearse and recite some definition of culture and make good use of it in their scholarship (see, e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; D'Andrade, 1984; Dumont, 1970; Geertz, 1973; Kronenfeld et al., 2011; LeVine et al., 1994; Peacock, 2005; Sahlins, 1995, 1999; Sewell, 2005; Shore, 1996; Shweder, 1991; Shweder and LeVine, 1984). It remains to be seen whether and just how soon the concept regains its former popularity in anthropology.

The 'Standard View' of Culture in North American Anthropology

In the narrower 'humanistic' sense of the term, 'culture' refers to the control of elementary human impulses through the refinement of judgment, taste, and intellect and, by extension, to those activities believed to express and sustain that sophistication (like art or other 'high productions of mind'). What one might call the standard anthropological view of 'culture' is much broader, encompassing, as Renato Rosaldo writes: "the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Neither high nor low, culture [in the anthropological sense] is all-pervasive" (1989).

But just how broad should the anthropological definition of culture be? Kroeber and Kluckhohn's formulation was cumbersome in part because it was so inclusive. It called on anthropologists to study not just other people's beliefs (their ideas of what the world is like) but also other people's normative standards (their ideas of what is good and what is right). It called on anthropologists to study not just the explicit 'ethnosciences' and doctrinal moral and religious codes of the members of a community but their tacit, implicit, or intuitive understandings as well.

Anthropologists have long disagreed about whether patterns of behavior should be considered a part of 'culture.' Margaret Mead employed a definition that centered around a 'complex of behavior.' David Schneider, on the other hand, went so far as to suggest that even norms for behavior should be excluded from cultural analysis. As Schneider put it: "norms tell the actor how to play the scene, culture tells the actor how the scene is set and what it all means" (1968).

With their definition, Kroeber and Kluckhohn sought a middle course between the *Scylla* of a purely behavioral definition of culture and the *Charybdis* of a purely ideational one. On the one hand, Kroeber and Kluckhohn suggest that culture is more than just social habits or "patterns of behavior that are learned and passed on from generation to generation." On the other hand, it is not just a system of categories, doctrines, propositions, or symbols per se. Thus in the 1952 definition, culture is defined as the ideational side of social action or social practice, and anthropologists are called upon to view cultural analysis as the interpretative study of behavior, although rather little is said about what particular theory of interpretation should guide the analysis.

Useful definitions deserve to be expressed in elegant terms, and Kroeber's and Kluckhohn's definition of culture is cumbersome, to say the least. But it is not the only expression of the standard view. The most exquisite and straightforward formulation is Robert Redfield's definition: "conventional understandings manifest in act and artifact" (Redfield, 1941, p. 133). Another variation, perhaps the most famous definition of culture since the 1950s, is the one proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 89). He puts it this way: "…the culture concept…denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."

The definitions proposed by Kroeber and Kluckhohn, Redfield, and Geertz call out for specification and clarification. Nevertheless, those definitions are a good reference point for understanding current debates about the values and dangers associated with the very idea of 'culture.' One can summarize the standard view by saying that 'culture' refers to community-specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be 'cultural' those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary. To be 'cultural' those socially inherited and customary ideas must be embodied and/or enacted meanings; they must actually be constitutive of (and thereby revealed in) a way of life. Alternatively stated, the standard North American anthropological view of 'culture' refers to what the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1976) called "goals, values and pictures of the world" that are made manifest in the speech, laws, and routine practices of some self-monitoring and self-perpetuating group. These 'goals, values and pictures of the world' or 'ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient' are sometimes referred to as 'cultural models' (D'Andrade, 1995a; Holland and Quinn, 1987; Shore, 1996).

Fault Lines in Contemporary Anthropology

The 'standard' North American anthropological view of culture was synthesized and defined by Kroeber and Kluckhohn before the discipline went through a series of revolutions and movements that fractured the field and divided it on the basis of somewhat different visions of its mission. Contemporary views of 'culture' reflect those divisions to some extent. Thus, while it may be hazardous to propose a map of the current intellectual camps within cultural anthropology, such a map may also be helpful in understanding the various types of anticultural, postcultural, and procultural positions that have emerged within anthropology over the past 50 years.

It is fair to say that contemporary cultural anthropology is divided into at least these four conceptions of the field.

Identity Politics

The first is a conception of anthropology as a platform for moral activism in the battles against racism, sexism, homophobia, and neocolonialism and as a forum for identity politics in the fight against exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. Advocates of this conception of anthropology have several concerns about the idea of 'culture.' They argue that the idea of culture is an excuse for the maintenance of authoritarian power structures and permits despots and patriarchs around the world to deflect criticism of their practices by saying 'that is our custom' or 'that is the way we do things in our culture' (see Abu-Lughod, 1991; Said, 1978; Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Wikan, 1995). The claim by liberal 'first-world' feminists that 'multiculturalism is bad for women' (Okin, 1999) is an expression of this view, which tends to associate 'culture' with the idea of patriarchal domination (Haynes and Prakash, 1991; Raheja and Gold, 1994). This conception of the mission of anthropology is closely allied with a global human rights movement that has promoted the notion of 'harmful traditional practices' and has a firm sense of what is objectively and universally right and wrong (see Sabatello, 2009).

However, not all moral activists in anthropology want to dump the idea of culture. Some have found ways to put the idea to work in the service of their own political aims. Anthropologists who are active in the identity politics movement find the idea of culture politically and strategically convenient in their egalitarian battles on behalf of 'oppressed peoples.' There are generally three ways to mitigate invidious comparisons between groups (as in, group comparisons of wealth, occupational attainment and success, or school performance): (1) deny that any real differences exist, (2) attribute all differences to a history of oppression or discrimination, or (3) celebrate the differences as 'cultural.' In the identity politics movement, 'culture' has become something of a code word for 'race' and ethnic minority status.

Skeptical Postmodernism

The second conception of the mission of anthropology is a conception of the field as a deconstructive discipline and as an arena for skeptical postmodern critiques of all ethnographic representations and so-called 'objective' knowledge (see for example, Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1973; Rosenau, 1992). Advocates of this conception of anthropology call for a deeply skeptical reading of all anthropological representations of 'others,' especially of those accounts that make claims about some 'primordial' or essential or core cultural identity which members of some group are supposed to share. The skeptical postmodernists raise doubts about the reality and existence of identifiable cultural groups. They are critical of all attempts to draw a portrait of 'others' that represents them with any characteristic face. They are suspicious of the very idea of boundaries and borders and loyalties to one's historical ethical in-group or 'tribe.' They

view the idea of a 'culture' as a fiction, the goal of objective representation as misguided, and the products of ethnography as largely 'made up' or constructed in the service of domination.

One of the many ironies of contemporary anthropology is that for a while members of the first two camps of anthropology (the identity politics/moral activists and the skeptical postmodern/deconstructivists) thought they were allies. Indeed, they had an imagined common enemy: the hegemonic heterosexual 'first-world' white males, such as Kroeber, Kluckhohn, Redfield, and Geertz, who historically had defined the mission of cultural anthropology.

For the most part, the alliance was short-lived. Identity politics requires a robust notion of 'identity' and group membership. Moral activism requires a good deal of conviction about the existence of an objective moral charter (such as inalienable human rights) and is typically motivated by the view that some cultural customs or social norms are 'objectively wrong'. Skeptical postmodernism is intellectually incapable of lending support to either of those metaphysical notions and is readily put to use deconstructing the 'woman' of 'Women's Studies,' the imagined common identity of the ethnic group, and all supposed objective moral foundations for any political cause. Paradoxically, continued attempts to reconcile identity politics with postmodern skepticism (e.g., Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Abu-Lughod, 1991) produce a moralizing model in which all forms of generalization and representation are doubted and distrusted *except* for domination and oppression, which are privileged as a priori objective truths or categories of moral condemnation (D'Andrade, 1995b).

Neo-Positivism

A third conception of the mission of anthropology is a conception of the field as a pure 'positive' science (see for example, D'Andrade, 1995a,b, 2008; Kronenfeld et al., 2011; Sperber, 1985; Romney et al., 1986). The positive scientists view anthropology as a value-neutral and nonmoralizing discipline. Their preferred aims for the discipline are to reliably and validly represent the law-like patterns in the world and to develop universal explanatory theories and test specific hypotheses about objectively observable regularities in social and mental life. Advocates of this conception want to protect anthropology from identity politics and skeptical postmodern critique by accurately recording rather than judging and condemning other peoples' practices, and by developing objective or scientific standards for evaluating the truth of ethnographic evidence. This is a laudable aim, although one that has been contested by skeptical postmodernists, and there has been much useful work in neopositivist fields such as 'cognitive anthropology' representing the content, structure, and degree of sharing of 'cultural models' (see, e.g., D'Andrade, 1995a; Holland and Quinn, 1987; Kronenfeld et al., 2011; Romney et al., 1986). Nevertheless, the positive scientists in anthropology thereby tend to beg a critical question close to the heart of all great social theorists. Is this or that social order really a moral order? Is this or that social order a way of living that might appeal to a rational and morally sensitive person, and if not

how can we make it become so? When it comes to evaluating what is truly desirable or really 'good' in social life the neopositivists are very much like the skeptical postmodernists – both turn radically subjective or relativistic and believe there is no scientific or objective foundation for the value judgments made in different traditions of value or historical ethical communities, aside from reporting their potential adaptive value in promoting group cohesiveness and survival.

Romantic Pluralism

A fourth conception of the mission of anthropology is a conception of the field as a romantic discipline designed to test the limits of pluralism. Pluralism is the idea that things can be different but equal, and that diversity can be good. It is a measure of some of the tensions within contemporary anthropology that while the 'ethnography of difference' is viewed with suspicion by some of the anticulturalists, it is universally embraced by romantic pluralists. Anticulturalists worry that any description of cultural difference merely sows the seeds of invidious comparison and ethnic conflict, and thus should be disavowed. For the romantic pluralists, however, the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences is one of the major aims of ethnography in particular and cultural anthropology in general.

The intellectual inheritance of the 'romantic' tradition most relevant to this camp of anthropology is a conception of culture as an extension of the creative imagination of agents who possess the capacity to initiate actions and evaluate their consequences with respect to some conception of what is dignified, divine, moral, or 'good,' which many anthropologists believe are distinctive intellectual capacities of human beings (see Geertz, 1973; Sapir, 1963; Sahlins, 1995; Shweder and LeVine, 1984; Shweder, 1991). According to romantic pluralists, a culture is an historical moral community whose social norms and customs make manifest and give expression to metaphysical notions about what is true and ideas about which values and forms of social organization are of greater value. Those notions and ideas provide members of the moral community with good reasons for action within their own terms, although they are not strictly dictated by logic and do not arise directly from (meaning-free) experience. According to this romantic pluralist conception of culture, there is plenty of room within the limits of logic and experience for cultural variety, and for the historical creation of different lived conceptions of what it means to be a rational and moral human being. According to this view, social and cultural realities are neither logically deduced nor simply found in direct experience but are rather constructed by, and for, more or less rational agents. The human creative imagination has the capacity to fill in, and give definition to, a vast discretionary space that stretches in between the necessary truths of formal logic and the uninterpreted evidence of the senses. Advocates of this conception of anthropology are dedicated not only to the project of accurate ethnographic representation but also to the cognitive and moral defense of different ways of life, frames of reference, and points of view. They write books or articles about Azande Witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1937) or Balinese conceptions of the 'person' (Geertz, 1973) or Oriya Hindu

family life and gender relations (Menon and Shweder, 1998) or Egyptian Muslim female conceptions of piety and 'the feminist subject' (Mahmood, 2005) which portray the ideas and practices of others as different but equal to our own, in the sense that such ideas and practices are represented as meaningful and imaginative yet supportable within the broad limits of scientific, practical, and moral reason (see also Haidt, 2012).

A Fifth Camp within Anthropology? The Return of Cultural Developmentalism and the 'First-World's' Burden

Increasingly these days, as the world 'globalizes,' the concept of 'culture' gets used to explain differences in the economic, social, political, educational, and moral accomplishments of nations, groups, or peoples. An 'evolutionary' or 'developmental' view of culture has returned to the intellectual scene. Along with it comes the claim that some groups have the wrong models, the wrong values, the wrong patterns of behavior, and that is the reason that their economies are poor, their governments corrupt, and their people unhealthy, unhappy, and oppressed. The cultural developmental view of cultural differences was quite popular at the very beginning of the twentieth century, and is associated with the 'civilizing project' or the 'white man's burden' to uplift those who are ignorant, superstitious, primitive, savage, and poor. Quite remarkably, the cultural developmental view is increasingly popular at the beginning of the twenty-first century as well, especially outside of anthropology, for example, in economics and political science (Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Landes, 1998; see Shweder, 2011, 2012). For some economists, reference to social and cultural 'capital' provides the basis for a less atomistic methodological individualism still grounded in rational choice theory but sensitive to the role of 'social structures' in everyday decision-making (Coleman, 1988). In development economics, however (e.g., at the World Bank), the view that 'culture counts' or that 'culture matters' is now popular in part because it is a discreet way of telling 'underdeveloped' nations (either rightly or wrongly) that the 'Westernization' of their cultures is a necessary condition for economic growth. Cultural developmentalists want to convert others to some preferred superior way of living. Their aim is to eliminate or at least minimize the differences between peoples rather than tolerate or appreciate them as products of the creative imagination. This viewpoint has returned, at least implicitly, in anthropology as well, especially among moral activists.

Relatively few anthropologists would actually describe themselves as cultural developmentalists. Nevertheless, that stance is far more common in anthropology than many admit, especially when the topic concerns gender relations and family life practices, for example, polygamy, purdah, arranged marriage, burqas, bride-price, female circumcision, and the association of femininity with domesticity and the production of children. So along with the international human rights movement and other agents and agencies promoting Western-style globalization, there are anthropologists these days who now take an interest in other

cultures mainly as objects of moral scorn. The up-from-barbarism theme of (certain versions of) Western liberalism has once again become fashionable on the anthropological scene (see Boddy, 2007; Sabatello, 2009; Thomas, 2003).

Multiculturalism and the Problem of 'Difference'

One tension inherent in all anthropological interpretation is the problem of 'difference,' what to make of it and what to do about it. This is also called the problem of the 'other,' although the term 'other' is used variously in the anthropological literature. It is sometimes used to connote difference per se without any initial judgment of relative worth. It is sometimes used to connote unbridgeable differences. It is sometimes used to connote a solipsistic gap between self-knowledge and a mysterious or 'spectral other' whose identity can never be truly inscribed. It is sometimes used to connote the representation of 'others' as so different as to be less than or other than human, or as different in ways that condemn them to inferior status and/or justify their domination. Here we use the term to connote difference per se.

The problem of 'difference' inherent in anthropological interpretation is not just a problem for anthropology. It arises whenever members of different groups (e.g., Jesuit missionaries and Native North American Indians; British traders and Hindu Brahmans; Western feminist human rights activists and Islamic fundamentalist women) or members of different social categories (e.g., gay men and heterosexual men) encounter each other. Someone finds the encounter disturbing, puzzling, strange, or astonishing because of some apparent difference between self and 'other' and wants to know what to make of it and (if they have the power) what (if anything) to do about it.

In the history of anthropology, the apparent differences mostly concerned differences in the ideas and practices of members of different groups. But in recent decades, globalization and large-scale immigration have intensified the challenge of cultural diversity within liberal democracies (Hechter, 2000). In this context, the term 'multiculturalism' has become a slogan for many rather different and even contradictory sorts of educational and social movements and public policy agendas.

There are multiculturalists who value group differences and want to preserve them. There are other multiculturalists who think group differences are the product of vicious discrimination. There are multiculturalists who think that the word 'multiculturalism' means being a hybrid and actively promoting the erosion of borders or boundaries between groups. There are other multiculturalists who think the word implies autonomy, in-group solidarity, the power to remain separate or pure, and the capacity to maintain boundaries or restore a distinctive way of life.

There are multiculturalists who use the word in an almost ironic sense to commend and promote the mainstreaming, assimilation, integration, or inclusion of people of different colors or ancestries into the society and shared subculture of the American elite; and there are others who use the term to call on the mainstream elite to accommodate themselves to minority-group differences in customs, values, and beliefs.

One suspects that in each of these cases there is a slightly different concept of 'culture' at work. But we cannot avoid the question, what form does and should multiculturalism take in our emerging postmodern society? (see Shweder et al., 2002; Minow et al., 2008; Shweder, 2011).

Globalization

The narrowest definition of 'globalization' refers to the linking of the world's economies (e.g., free trade across borders) with the aim of promoting aggregate wealth and economic growth. Yet it readily expands so that a new cosmopolitan economic order gets imagined, which consists entirely of global economic organizations (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank), multinational corporations, and multicultural states with open borders. According to this rather utopian vision of a 'borderless capitalism', goods, capital, and labor ought to be freely marketed on a world-wide scale for the sake of global prosperity. For those who adopt such a perspective any desire for an ancestral homeland or for a national identity based on religion, ethnicity, 'race,' or 'tribe' with associated restrictions on residence, affiliation, and trade is viewed as 'illiberal' and disparaged as a form of retrograde or irrational 'apartheid' or 'ethnonationalism.'

Fully expanded, however, the idea of 'globalization' actually becomes a hypothesis about human nature and an imperial call for 'enlightened' moral interventions into other ways of life in order to free them of their supposed 'barbarisms,' 'superstitions,' and 'irrationalities.' This expansive 'globalization hypothesis' makes three related claims: (1) that Western-like aspirations, tastes, and ideas are objectively the best aspirations, tastes, and ideas in the world; (2) that Western-like aspirations, tastes, and ideas will be fired up or freed up by economic globalization; and (3) that the world will/already has and/or ought to become 'Westernized.' Western-like aspirations include the desire for liberal democracy, free enterprise, private property, autonomy, individualism, equality, and the protection of 'natural' or universal 'rights.' They include the modernist notion that all social distinctions based on collective identities (ethnicity, religion, gender) are invidious. They include as well the notion that 'individuals' should transcend their 'tradition-bound' commitments and experience the quality of their lives solely in secular and ecumenical terms, for example, as measured by, wealth, health, or years of life.

The picture of a cosmopolitan world of individuals without groups, in which meanings are detached or abstracted from communities and traded on a free market of ideas, has influenced the thinking of some postcultural theorists. Whether that picture is realistic remains to be seen. It is quite possible that other cultures and civilizations do not need to become just like the United States to materially benefit from participation in an emergent global economy. Modern economic institutions such as private property seem to have effectively served many interests, including the interests of communitarians as well as religious and ethnic groups all over the world (Stolzenberg, 2004). As Comaroff and Comaroff have pointed out, even the outright commercialization of cultural identity – be it in the form of tangible commodities (e.g., souvenirs and

'indigenous crafts'), collective business ventures (e.g., Native American 'tribal' casinos), or 'cultural tourism' – does not necessarily erode genuine difference, but can instead provide a mode of reaffirming and refashioning ethnic identity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009).

The true connection between 'globalization' narrowly conceived ('free trade') and 'globalization' expansively conceived (Western values, 'culture', and institutions taking over the world) has yet to be firmly established (see Shweder, 2011). Is this truly the 'end of history' as Francis Fukuyama (1989) once proposed? Or, as in Samuel Huntington's thesis, will great divisions among humankind inevitably spring up along 'cultural fault lines' and lead to a clash of civilizations? (Huntington, 1996). Huntington's description of those fateful cultural differences – 'fundamental,' intractable, the 'product of centuries' – bears striking resemblance to Clifford Geertz's description of 'primordial sentiments' (Geertz, 1963), seen here stubbornly resisting the onslaught of globalizing and 'westernizing' forces. Nevertheless, the idea that the rich nations of North America and Northern Europe have an obligation to use their economic and military power to civilize and develop the world is no less popular today than it was 100 years ago when the empire was British rather than 'neo-liberal' or American.

'Culture': Popular Objections and Common Misattributions

Within anthropology many reasons have been advanced for doubting the usefulness of the culture concept. But are they persuasive or decisive reasons? Those who continue to embrace some variety of the Kroeber and Kluckhohn definition of culture tend to believe that their idea of culture does not carry most of the implications that are the supposed grounds for various anticultural or postcultural critiques.

For example, the Kroeber and Kluckhohn definition of culture does not really imply that 'whatever is, is okay,' nor does it necessarily share in the view expressed by some moral relativists that morality is just a convenient term for socially approved habits (e.g., Benedict, 1934). It is important to recognize that valid social criticism and questions of moral justification are not ruled out by the standard anthropological view of 'culture.' Nothing in the Kroeber and Kluckhohn formulation suggests that the things that other peoples desire are in fact truly desirable or that the things that other peoples think are of value are actually of value. Consensus does not add up to moral truth. In other words, a definition of culture per se is not a theory of the 'good.' From a moral point of view one need not throw out the idea of culture just because some tyrant puts the word 'culture' to some misuse, or because at times some ethnic groups enter into geopolitical conflict (see Shweder, 2012).

The idea of culture also does not imply passive acceptance of received practice or that human beings lack 'agency,' a common claim among anticulture theorists. Indeed, many proculture theorists find it astonishing to see the idea of 'agency' or 'intentionality' used as synonyms for 'resistance to culture' in the discourse of 'anticulture' theorists. Even fully rational, fully empowered, fully 'agentic' human beings discover that membership in some particular tradition of meanings and values is an essential condition for personal identity and individual happiness. Human beings who are 'liberationists' are no more agentic than 'fundamentalists,' and neither stands outside some tradition of meaning and value.

The idea of culture also does not imply the absence of debate, contestation, or dispute among members of a group. Nor does it necessarily imply the existence of within-group homogeneity in knowledge, belief, or practice. Every cultural system has experts and novices; one does not stop being a member of a common culture just because cultural knowledge is distributed and someone knows much more than you do about, for example, how to conduct a funeral or apply for a mortgage. One does not stop being a member of a common culture just because there are factions in the community. The claim that there are between-group cultural differences never has implied the absence of within-group differentiation. The idea of culture does not imply that every item of culture is in the possession or consciousness of every member of that culture. The idea of culture merely directs our attention to those ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient that are acquired by virtue of membership in some group. Members of a cultural community do not always agree about this or that, but they do take an interest in each other's ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient because those ideas (and related practices) have a bearing on the perpetuation of their way of life, and what they share is that collective inheritance. Since the standard view does not assume that a culture is a well-bounded, fixed, and homogeneous block, the critique of the concept of 'culture' that starts with the observation of internal variation and ends 'therefore there is no cultural system' should have been a nonstarter.

In its noun form, 'culture' can either be countable (as in *a* culture or 'Japanese culture') or uncountable (denoting culture in the abstract sense as a domain of knowledge or inquiry). The conflation of the two senses is one of the main sources of confusion and misattribution in critiques of the idea of culture. Often, critics purport to take aim at the broader concept of 'culture' while fashioning arguments relevant only to its particular usage in the plural form ('cultures'). The historian of anthropology George Stocking identified the popularization of the plural use of 'cultures' by Franz Boas and his students in the 1930s and 1940s as a crucial turning point, after which the problematic modern notion of cultures as static, bounded entities gained traction. Anticipating contemporary critiques, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) defended the practice of speaking of 'cultures' in the plural as a useful abstraction, pointing out that one could speak at the same time of a Tokyo or a Japanese or an East Asian culture without implying that any of them represented a homogeneous or totalizing way of life.

Just as relevant to contemporary anthropologists' feelings about the concept of 'culture,' however, is the manner of the term's deployment in ordinary language. 'Culture,' as William Sewell tells us, "has escaped all possibility of control by anthropologists" (2005, p. 155). It has become 'compromised' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). More and more, everyone from policymakers to activists, educators to demagogues seem intent to (affectionately) portray 'cultures' as bounded, uniform, unchanging, and primordial. Such connotations are enough to send cautious anthropologists into flight.

Faced with this misappropriation of what was once their term, anthropologists have generally responded in one of two ways: (1) by substituting terms like 'discourse' or 'habitus' for 'culture' in the hopes of avoiding some of the latter's unsavory connotations (it is never clear if this 'lexical avoidance behavior' avoids the supposed sins of 'culture' or merely reproduces them in a new guise); or (2) by restricting themselves to the adjectival use of the term: instead of 'culture' or worse yet, 'cultures,' anthropologists speak of 'cultural tradition,' cultural practice, 'cultural capital,' and so on (see Appadurai, 1996; Brightman, 1995). The latter tactic is best summed up in the title of Michael Silverstein's (2005) essay, which also does a good job of capturing both the ambivalence and the urgency of contemporary anthropologists' attitudes toward 'culture': "Languages/cultures are dead!" Silverstein exclaims, "Long live the linguistic-cultural!" Nevertheless, many social scientists and public policy analysts continue to look to anthropology for a useful concept of culture and not for no concept of culture at all.

See also: Cultural Psychology; Cultural Relativism, Anthropology of; Culture and the Self: Implications for Psychological Theory; Deconstruction; Ethnography; Globalization and World Culture; Identity Movements; Identity in Anthropology; Pluralism; Positivism, Sociological; Postmodernism: Philosophical Aspects.

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