

# Introduction to antropology

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



People making an assumption or saying something cruel towards someone else's culture is purely about a lack of knowledge and respect for other people's culture because culture cannot be defined into one single definition we can say that culture is not something, but rather a way of living. " This has been an important step for anthropologists---to recognize the necessity of achieving a mutual, coeval exchange to the endeavour of understanding other perspectives on ways of living". (The catch-22 Heller 1961)

Even though culture does not just have one definition we still need to have an understanding in terms how to explain culture, it is " the abilities, notions and forms of behaviour persons have enquired as members of society." (Erikson 2001). One of the many definitions in explaining culture. There are a lot of reasons why being unpleasant towards someone's culture is immoral.

We as a country have such a wide range of cultures and we have to learn to respect each other's culture. As the people of our country grow together they " become more cultivated as they progressed over time intellectually, spiritually and aesthetically" (De Certeau 1994: 103). We might think that some cultures are strange or disrespecting towards our own cultures, but that does not give us the right to judge them or their acts.

We as people are the only ones who are allowed to have something to say about our own culture in its context (Boas 1886). Culture is also a very complex idea that consist of a lot of aspects, for example your standards, beliefs, practices, symbols, morals, art, knowledge and the way we do things (Edward B Tyler 1871) and that is why I think people do not fully understand the concept because there is no way someone can understand all these

different aspects of culture unless they actually practice and live in the context of these different aspects.

Culture is created within three moments. The first moment was named after one of our famous anthropologists called Franz Boas. He believed that just because we look biologically the same that our cultures still differ from each other and that our cultures are the reasons for our behaviour, the fact that we should not think of culture as backwards by thinking one culture is superior or more developed than the other and the idea of culture relativism which means that when we look at different cultures we should see them through the eyes of the people experiencing these cultures and we should not try and understand them through the eyes of our own.

The fact is that culture is a learned behaviour, it is not something we are born with and there are many versions of culture. Our culture is adapted from the history of our ancestors which has developed over many years and also it has been partly created by each generation and passed on to the next one.

We may think that cultures are very different, but in actual fact our culture all intertwine in one way or the other and have effects on us in ways we might not even notice (Boas 1889) for example giving us knowledge about our countries history and helping us experience things we might have never experienced by living in our small bubble containing only one culture. This also shows us that culture is pluralistic in terms of age, gender and hierarchy. (Lecture)

The second moment is called Geertz. In this the moment, the anthropologist called Clifford Geertz explains to us how symbols and culture interlink and a shift is made in anthropology using a " shared system of symbols and meanings " and how we use symbols to interpret the world.

He believed that symbols are only to be understood in a certain context of culture and in order for people all over the world to understand these symbols they need to be shared. Sometimes these symbols can be misunderstood once again for our lack of knowledge and this can create controversy and can leave people feeling offended ( ' Hendry Symbols, 2016) and that could be the reason that follows why people are being cruel towards others because they felt offended by these unknown symbols because it is used outside of specific contexts and in public. Then last, but not least we have the Postmodern moment. During this moment the question of " Does culture exist?" came to our attention.

Here we have an anthropologist called James Clifford, he explained to us that culture is not an object, but is created or invented by the people of a certain area and also through anthropologist writing and sharing their views on culture to the public and in this way we could say that we are also being misled by anthropologists because we do not know what is behind the curtains, we only know what they are willing to reveal to us and what information is being published, he also explained that culture is ' partial ' and what this means is that it is difficult to help people understand the concept of culture or anthropology if they do not study these disciplines, so for us to try and explain these concepts to them could be pointless (Lecture) unless

you are open-minded, interested and willing to learn and understand the works of anthropologists.

It is said that culture has caused a lot of controversies. " Culture and difference have become the most powerful political paradigms fueling political action in the modern world." (cf. Eller 1997). The political world also uses race in connotation to culture, as it is a concept of race. (Abu-Lughod 1999: 13)

Therefore people judged people according to their difference in race and their minds are being clouded by the fact that race and culture are in some ways the same because a lot of people in the same racial group share the same culture, but in some ways, they are still very different concepts. This also causes peoples lack understanding why it is unacceptable to say or do anything unkind towards someone ells. In doing so you are actually showing your lack of knowledge to the people around you.

All these observations that were made by anthropologists and myself have led me to my main conclusion and that is that culture is a unique concept because it makes us different and it is an honour and a privilege to be a part of a country like South Africa where so many different cultures are being represented. It would be remarkable to see our country come together and embrace our unique differences instead of being ignorant.

## **References:**

- Hendry, J. 2016. Society: A Set of Symbols. An Introduction to SocialAnthropology. London: UK: Palgrave. 102 - 122

- Rapport, N. and J. Overing. 2001. Culture. Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts. New York and London: Routledge. 92 - 102
- Week three Lecture one and two. Dr Claudia Gastrow