

Essay on anthropological perspective of religion

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



4-1

Anthropology has done much for religion by comparing religious opinions and cultural practices across social organizations, concluding that religion is created by human society that practice it.

Assumption of modern anthropology holds that religion is in continuity with magical thinking (Cassirer 1944: 122).

God is an imaginative projection of humans as it has been observed that images of gods worshiped by communities resemble such communities. For instance,

Xenophanes a Greek writer observed that Thracian gods were blue eyed and blond while those of

the Ethiopians are flat nosed and black (Harvey, Van A. 1997). If gods are like the people

worshiping them, then the society is worshiping itself in the disguise of religion- this argument

has not been validated by all anthropologists. But this may make much sense if ' Emile

Durkheim's views were to be considered. He defines religion as “ projection of social values of a

society”(Durkheim 1963: 266) The 20th century anthropologists are side laying the cultural anthropology that was very much aligned to cultural evolution to economic, social and political function of religious beliefs.

Defining religion in a generally acceptable anthropological perspective is quite impossible.

Religious beliefs have not been universal to all cultures. Some cultures are monotheistic, some polytheistic. Some believed in ghosts some divination. Ritual performance, such as sacrificing and praying is a uniform element and aimed at influencing the outcome of events. But rituality alone cannot exhaustively define religion.

As per Geertz's definition, " religion is a body of symbols used to create powerful, all-

encompassing and long-lasting moods and inspirations in men through the development of outsets of a general order of perpetuality and depicting such ideas in a realistic way" (Geertz

1966: 302). This definition, as has been the subject of debate and most anthropologists are

invalidating the Geertz definition on grounds of cross culture uniformity of the way religion is perceived and practiced. Moral codes are not necessary elements of religion.

Psychological and social functions of religion

Religion has no elements that out do spirituality. Religion as a whole is made of socially developed believes. Communities from the ancient time have had their

communal values

reflected in the religious practiced. Even the images of the gods looked like the people practicing

such religion and this shows how greatly social issues has influence elements of religion.

The fact that religion is a product of social matters has influenced the creation of religion may

not necessarily rule out the impact of religion on social matters. Religion has influenced people collectively and individually.

Education was supposed to change our thinking and may be eventually replace our religious

faith with scientific explanation, but today there are still metaphysical questions that cannot be answered (there is no possibility that all questions will be answered eventually). Education is changing the human social nature, but to contrast it with religion, science proves even that contradict religion cannot completely uproot the societies from the comfort of religion.

Societies have learned to elect or appoint leaders based on religious thoughts- some believe

leaders are God given and other god incarnates. This way the societies have had and respected

leaders (Lee 1993: 89).

Psychological function:

- ▣ Accepting harsh and unjust realities
- ▣ Denial of the realities of this world like dead is no end
- ▣ Improved self-image or portraying one has just rights

Sociological function:

- ▣ Promoting compliance to group values
- ▣ Increase one's willingness to risk or even sacrifice life for a course
- ▣ Establishing a common ground for tribal or regional factions.

Animism verses animalism

Animism holds that there is no possible separation between the contemporary world and the

spiritual one and non humans like animals, plants and rocks some geographical feature also have

souls and spirits. Animism believes have been criticized by some anthropologist's like a Sir

Edward, tailor as childish and reflection of cognitive underdevelopment.

Animals, on the other hand is a theory trying to explain personal identity as a property of a person. Unlike animism

animals is the development and rationally believe in the eyes of most scientists. There are people

that are not animals like the aliens, deities and angels- this fact makes animals not uniformity of

all people. This concept is to the anthropological field and now getting much attention.

Rights of intensification and rights of passage

Rights of intensifications are communal right held to mark a crisis in a group like war, upon the

death of someone, to make changes in season, rituals of influencing the nature and to reaffirm

group's commitment to certain course. Such activities were aimed at keeping people together

during times of hardship. Examples include the celebration of Christmas and anniversaries.

On the other hand, rites of passage are associated with persons change in status. It is usually

marked by a process that separates transits and reintegrates an individual.

Example of rites of

passage includes birth, marriage and death. Some societies practice property ceremonies for

boys.

Ju/'hence religious believes.

The Ju/'honestly believe in many Gods. There are however two famous gods the Big god and the

small god. The origin of myths held by this group cannot be dressed. Some

sources contradict

each about the roles of the two gods. Some say the bigger god is all good

and the smaller god is

evil. Human sinfulness is the cause of human suffering.

The community close to its religious practices and origin myth and religious practices is relayed

upon even when solving illness matters. Healing dances are performed. They

got many spells to

rid one of diseases like herbs, magic and dances.

There is no possibility that such spells work for deaths caused by conventional curable diseases

have been witnessed.

4-2

Non-ethnocentric definition of art

Most of has has the tendency of viewing things not just art in respect to our ethnicity. Art itself

has received much interest in the field of anthropology. Anthropologists have been studying art

in different communities. Art in a non-centric terms are diverse human activities and products of

such activities. Such activities focus on the creation of artistic objects, for instance the visual art

that include paintings, architecture and decoration. Such products have their ultimate usefulness

in addition to their decoration Music, theatre, music, dance and performance also fall into the definition of art.

There is also an imaginative art that includes epic poetry, comedy and tragedy, each variation in object.

Art may therefore non centrally refer to the following:

- ☛ Use of creative skill to produce or communicate.
- ☛ Product of creativity like the fine arts, sculpture and more
- ☛ Study of art related skill
- ☛ Stage performances (include poetry, music and dance)

Verbal arts

Anthropologists refer verbal art as a folklore (though there are contradiction of statements). It is

part of all societies. Reasons around verbal art revolve around economic, religious, social and

geographical. Such arts are performed in a way the audience will appreciate.

Verbal art may

include dance, performance, songs and poetry. The the an example of the Dobe community of

Tswana, the /Xai /Xai dances did not invent something new to present at the cultural

competition by played what was in the culture already- it was like a demonstration of how

verbal art is part of the society. Verbal art is either entertaining or statement of alienation to certain group. In more ancient times and in some communities today they are part of ceremonies and rituals.

Body Arts

Body art is an example, visual language. The impulse of creating art is the nature of humanity and has lasted as long as the human civilization itself. The human body as recently been the intentions. Body art cannot be the only topic revolving human body. The body is instances where performers use (or abuse their bodies) to make statements. It is the category of performance art.

As a result of technological advances and design, body art has spread across cultures. The

following are examples of body arts. Body arts are designed as per the cultural ideals. The motive and reason for body art is dissolving in the emotion and diversity of the cultures. For instance, those wearing tattoos may not even know what the images they carry meaning.

- Totes-original meanings of tattoos have been lost despite the large number of people who wear it. People admire such body arts and wear them eventually.

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Reasons why

tattoos differs as the wearer's perception. They were worn for quite spiritual purposes in

the ancient Borneo were one to guide the person's soul after death while in New York it

is a sign of rebellion. The origin tattoos is not clear as it was practiced across culture

geographically apart. Unproven speculation state Japan as the origin where it was used

- Scarification: this is a more permanent body art and involves etching, scratching,

branding or cutting images or picture on the skin. It has been used for ritual purposes

and to communicate identities or mark important stages in life as in West Africa. There

are various methods of scarification depending on the society and the technology

available.

- Head shaping: this is an art where the shape of the cranium is altered especially for the

infants. The practice begun one month after birth and ends in six months.

This art was

widely performed and motives are likely to symbolize certain ethnic alienation or show

social status. Anthropological evidence shows that this art was common in

India and

southern Europe. This practice is still practiced this date, but be few individuals.

Body arts were both spiritual and social signals and those who practiced doing it so that

they may achieve what they consider important like social status, after dead guidance and spirituality.

The /Gwihaba Dancers were school kids from /Xai /Xai school. Before 1986 schools

were less and not taken seriously by a progressive head teacher was posted to one of the

local schools- /Xai /Xai, he blended Dobe culture with school curriculum and the school

won regional and national traditional competition and finally performing at the

Botswana's 20th Independence Day in 1986. The Dobe community is living in a remote

area and the work of the /Gwihaba Dancers attracted the attention of the government. The

Community members were also influenced to go to formal school.

The accomplishment the /Xai /Xai dancers should the community across the world.

4-3

Modernization

Modernization is a progressive transition from traditional to modern. The pro modernization

population believes developing countries can come to the same level as the modern society if

modernization variables were to be identified and acted upon. Modernization has led to

abandonment of some transitions including rituals and religious beliefs. The emergence of

society based religion that is well organized, has regrouped the population to fewer religious

believes like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism.

Developed countries tend to have more power and its citizens live a high quality life. This is a

motivation for underdeveloped countries. Contrary to traditional organizations, countries

undergoing modernization have governments with concrete and abstract principles and

provisions to guide relationships between citizens and their government.

Kent Joan.

Urbanization and industrialization contribute to modernization. As modernization come in,

individuals become more important and societal groups lose value.

Impacts of modernization on Skolt Lapps, shaur Indians and women in developing countries

Impacts of modernization on populations that are embracing development models are obvious.

Modernization will eventually delete tradition and replace it with rational governance that is

universal.

The Skolt Lapps: the oldest inhabitants of Finland. They are distantly related to finish and spoke

speak a closely related dialect of Finno-Ugric family. They were nomads and practiced slash and

burn agriculture. During the agrarian revolution in their farming methods changed and did not

explore new territories. The major migration was in 1944 where they moved to the west 600

miles. Religion changed to 85% Orthodox and 25 Lutherans. Today only 5% of the Lapps have

more than 250 heard of animals. There have been an outcry to the authorities to safeguard the

finish Laaps' culture. This culture is fading fast as the society modernizes.

The government has

led campaigns to prevent people from modernizing.

Modernization first brought in religion and eventually threatened to wipe out the entire

traditional practice (Chengdan 200: 7-24)

Shaur Indians: the Shaur people are part of Jivaroan who is the Amazonians. They are

indigenous to Ecuador and Peru. Before encountering the westerners

(Europeans), they were

semi nomadic and lived in the rain forests. They had no political leadership

(Steel, Daniel 1999 " Trade Goods and Jívaro Warfare: The Shuar 1850-1957,

and the Achuar, 1940-1978," in Ethnohistory 46(4): 745-776). Following

missionization, they abandoned their lifestyle of dispersing across the forest

and started to live in controls to facilitate missionary activities of the Catholic

Church. Catholicism contradicted shamanism that latter faded as the church

introduced other rituals and beliefs. The Catholic missionaries were quite

successful in the acculturation process. They were given authority by the

government to take charge of the oil reserve. The change managed to

discourage the making of shrunken heads and puppetry rites and instate

pursue economic activities.

The tradition shaur faded and they have since gotten involved in education, ran in polls and

many series now serve in the Ecuador army.

Women in the developing world: modernization is the endeavor to scraping traditions and

introducing ideas that bring about economic and social empowerment. With

modernization, the

position of women in undeveloped societies is shifting. Women in cultural background were commonly seen as lesser in authority and a woman cannot equal man. With modernization the element of gender equality is becoming realistic. Women are sitting around with men in the decisions making tables contrary to ancient societies. In some countries, women are persistently empowered to the point that they are taking the family leadership role. Like northern India.

Structural violence:

Structural violence is closely linked to social injustice. It is avoidable and therefore termed as “impairment of human rights” (Galtung 199: 167-169). This is where some social structure prevents prevents people from obtaining their needs. The results of this kind of violence are disability and premature death to those occupying the lowest rank in the community.

Structural violence can be three fold:

- Cultural violence- this is the most common. According Galtung, cultural violence makes direct infringement of rights seem fine. They are legitimized and are surprisingly acceptable in the society. They at times take the disguise of

progressive policies.

- International structural violence- developing countries are victims of this violence. They are starving, but organizations that claim to practice global citizenship are absent in action. International policies of developed nations like

US are complex and opaque.

- Race- this violence is dropping gradually because recent campaigns have tried to sensitize people from different racial backgrounds to move in together. In earlier times black people were given last priorities in jobs and health care.

Changes and challenges facing Ju/'hoansi in the 21st century.

The Dobe community is culturally rich but with modernization come bigger problems; marginalization and scoff. The Dobe during the transition (not unique to them) suffered dispossession, war and ethnocide. The Dobe community is sometimes regarded even by fellow

Africans as social outcasts (Kent 1997: 338). Their economic activities like nomadic

have been repressed and even met with war in some places. Progressive changes that are occurring today are all based on education which was not available for the

Dobe. Integration

into the developed society is gradual but the fact that progression exists means that even the cultural practices are also fading away.

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