

16th October 2023

What we will do today?

Introduction to the concepts of
“ethnocentrism”, “cultural relativism”, and
their epistemological and ethical dimensions



Image: Ethnocentrism (source: <https://gogomagazine.in/ethnocentrism/>)

What are we talking about?

From the previous week:
Ethnic identity as the result of “contacts”, so to be observed in the borders

Etymology of “ethnocentrism”:
ἔθνος (ethnos: people, nation) + κέντρον (kéntron: centre)

Controversy on the origin of the concept:
Gumplowicz (1883)* vs. Sumner (1906)**

*Gumplowicz, L. (1883). *Der Rassenkampf: Sociologische Untersuchungen* [The racial struggle: Sociological studies]. Innsbruck, Austria: Wagner'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung.

**Sumner, W. G. (1906). *Folkways: A study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*. Boston, MA: Ginn and Company.

“... subjective need of human beings to glorify their own and nearest and at the same time humiliate and sully what is foreign and distant”
(Gumplowicz, 1883)*

“view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner, 1906)**

*Gumplowicz, L. (1883). *Der Rassenkampf: Sociologische Untersuchungen* [The racial struggle: Sociological studies]. Innsbruck, Austria: Wagner'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung.

**Sumner, W. G. (1906). *Folkways: A study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*. Boston, MA: Ginn and Company.



Image: Czech Republic (source:

<https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-funny-facts-about-Czech-Republic-its-people-and-culture>)

Pojďme si hrát

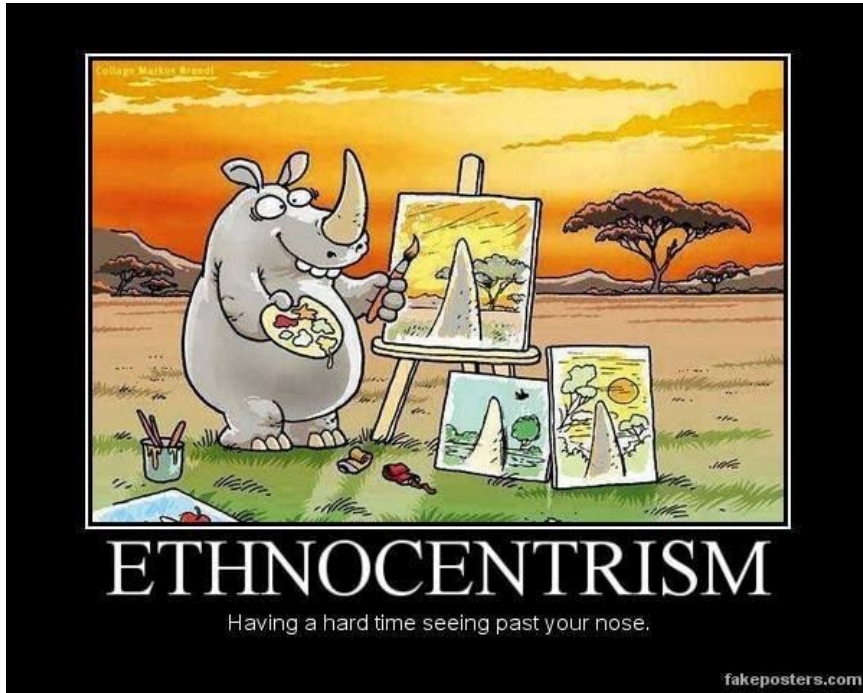


Image: Ethnocentrism (source:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ethnocentrism-gabriel-udjung>)

1. Divide in groups according with the nationality
2. Discuss among yourselves separately what are the most boring characteristics of your country
3. Present these characteristics to the others and convince them your in the most boring country...

Reading required for today:

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1973. Race and History. In Structural anthropology. Vol. 2, pp. 324-362. New York: Basic Books.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

1908-2009

Fieldwork in Amazon (and elsewhere)

College de France

The most famous anthropologist of the last century

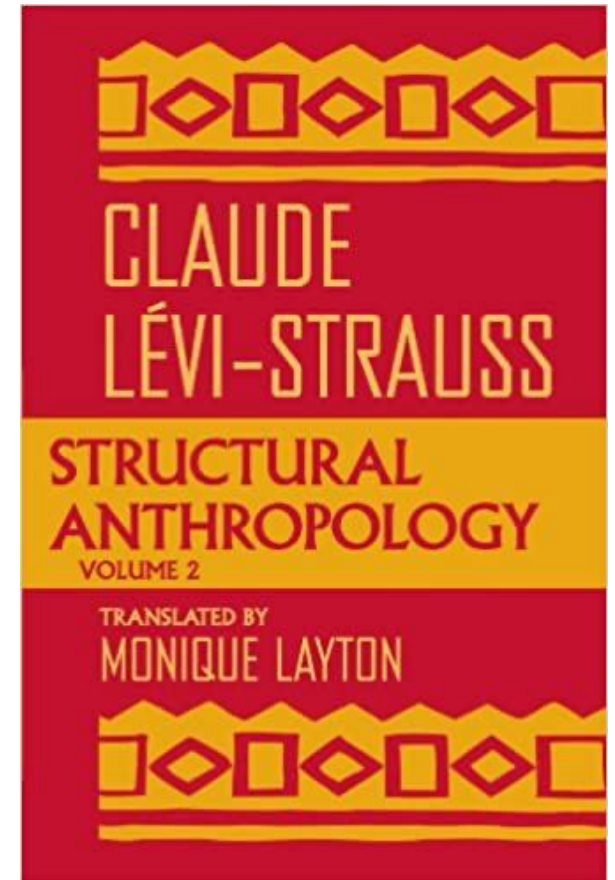
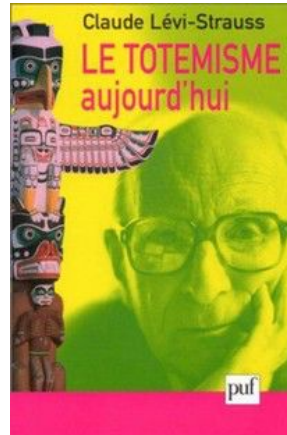
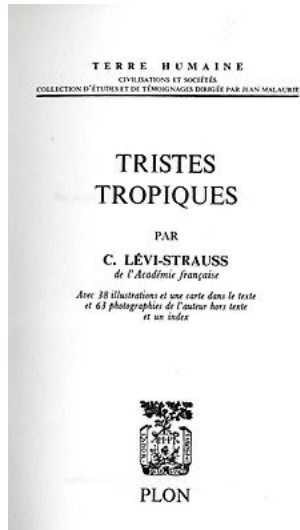


Image: Structural Anthropology 2 (source: <https://www.amazon.com/Structural-Anthropology-2-Claude-Lévi-Strauss/dp/0226474917>)

PřF: Bi7851 Anthropology of Ethnicity (Autumn 2023)

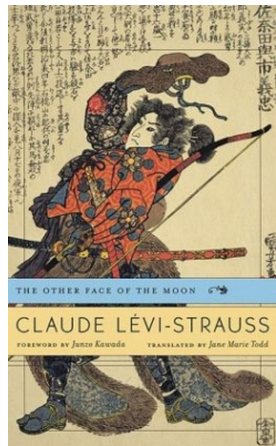


Background:

Structural anthropology (which relations underline the concrete socio-cultural phenomena)

Cultural relativism (each society is different and its socio-culture is related with its specificities)

Anti-anthropocentrism: “*The world began without man [sic], and it will complete itself without him*”*



Images: books by Claude Lévi-Strauss (source: various)

*Lévi-Strauss, C. (1955). *Tristes tropiques*. Paris: Plon.

“When attempting to characterize the biological races by specific psychological properties, one strays just as much from scientific truth in defining them positively as negatively” (pp. 324-325)

Critique to the theories of de Gobineau*

-3 races (white, black and yellow)

-each one with specific traits

-association between biological and social traits

-“problem” of mixigenation

[Gobineau’s influences on following debates (i.e. Lombroso**, Nina Rodrigues***, and racist theories)]

*de Gobineau, A. (1853) *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*.

** Lombroso, C. (1897) *L'uomo delinquente in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie*. Torino: Atlante.

***Rodrigues, N.R. (1894) *As raças humanas e a responsabilidade penal no Brasil*. Bahia: Imprensa Popular.

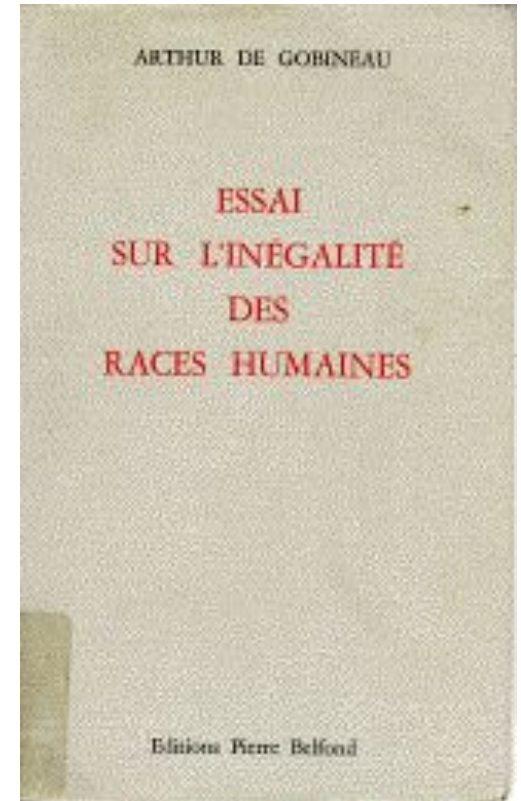


Image: de Gobineau, A. (1853) *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*.



“This intellectual, aesthetic, sociological diversity is not linked by any cause-and-effect relation to the biological diversity” (p. 325)

“we must ask ourselves what makes this diversity, at the risk of seeing racial prejudices, barely extracted from their biological roots, reshaping themselves on another plane” (p. 326)

Attention to do not reintroduce socio-cultural hierarchies once deconstructed biological ones!

Image: human diversity (source:
<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/2015/10/01/human-diversity-racial-identity-core-revelations-of-human-genome-project/>)

If differences are not “biological” we should ask how they are originated

“human cultures do not differ among themselves in the same ways, nor on the same levels” (p. 326)

“The diversity of human cultures is (de facto for the present, de facto and also de jure for the past) much greater and much richer than we shall ever be able to know” (p. 327)

“diversity occurs not only with regard to cultures considered in their reciprocal relationships; it also exists within each society, and in all the groups that constitute it” (p. 328)

“Diversity is less a function of the isolation of groups than of the relationships which unite them” (p. 329)



Image: Amerindians and Europeans (source:
<https://www.pinterest.com/purporchid09/taino-indians-native-americans-of-the-caribbean/>
)

Ethnocentrism: others as “barbarians” or “not-humans”

“In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards sent out investigating commissions to ascertain whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter were engaged in the drowning of white prisoners in order to verify, through prolonged watching, whether or not their corpses were subject to putrefaction” (p. 330)

“The barbarian is first of all the man who believes in barbarism” (p.331)

Sameness of humanity:

- obscures the diversity
- evolutionary progression
- the “part” for the “whole”

Mistake of assuming contemporary non-western societies as representing previous western “stages”

“all human societies have behind them a past which is probably of the same order of magnitude” (p. 336)



Image: Rock arts on the bacaja River (source: Kataprove Xikrin, 2022)

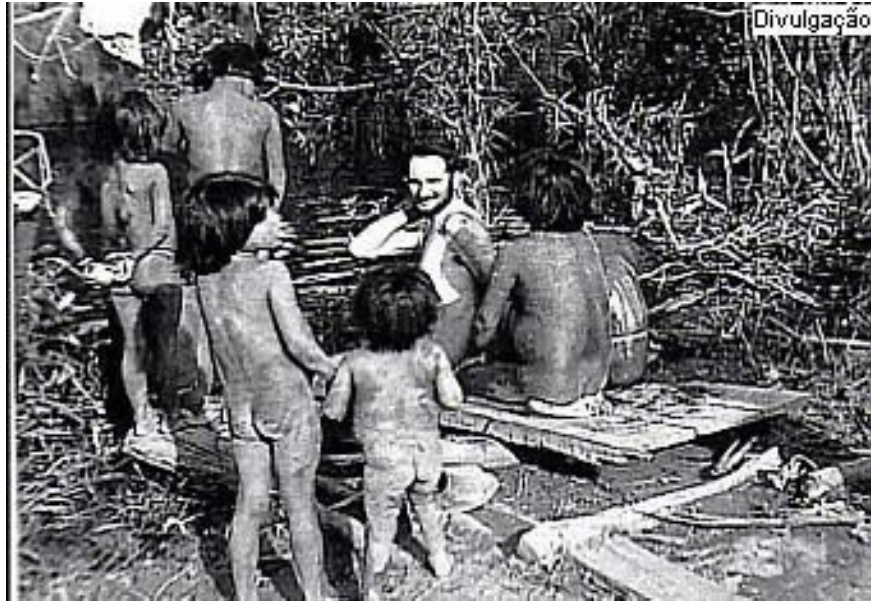


Image: Lévi-Strauss among the Nambikwara (source: <http://www.altinomachado.com.br/2006/06/claude-lvi-strauss.html>)

“peoples without history” (p. 336) =
unknown history and not with no history!

Different societies made different uses of
their “past times”

“Progress” not as a cumulative
succession but as a game (roulette):

*“What one wins on one throw is always
liable to be lost on another”* (p. 339)

Static history vs. cumulative history

“does the distinction between the two forms of history depend on the intrinsic nature of cultures to which it is applied, or does it not result from the ethnocentric perspective in which we always put ourselves to evaluate a different culture?” (p. 340)

“Each time we tend to classify a human culture as inert or static, we must ask ourselves if this apparent lack of mobility does not result from our ignorance of its true interests, conscious or unconscious; and if, possessing criteria different from our own, this culture is not-as far as we are concerned—victim of the same illusion” (p. 342)

Technology: Europeans
Adaptation: Eskimos and Bedouins
Philosophy and religion: Indians
Psychology: Chinese
Mathematics: Mayas
Etc. etc.

“The originality of each culture consists rather in its specific application to the solving of problems” (p. 345)



Image: Maya calendar (source:
<https://www.chichenitza.com/mayan-calendar/>)



Image: Pre-columbian wheel (source: Cheesman, P.R.(1969)
The Wheel in Ancient America. *Brigham Young University
Studies* 9(2): 185-197)

What about Western hegemony?

“from the point of view of technical inventions (and of the scientific thought which makes them possible), Western civilization has proved to be more cumulative than others” (p. 351)

“It is always in coalition with other cultures, and this is what enables it to build cumulative sequences” (p. 335)

“The exclusive fatality, the unique fault which can afflict a human group and prevent it from completely fulfilling its nature, is to be alone” (p. 357)

“Humanity is constantly struggling with two contradictory processes. One of these tends to promote unification, while the other aims at maintaining or reestablishing diversification” (p. 361)

“The diversity of human cultures is behind us, around us, and ahead of us” (p. 363)



Image: Czech folklore (source: <https://all-czech.com/learnmore/the-culture-of-czech-republic/>)



Image: Kids at Mrötidjam (source: Paride Bollettin, 2019)

Resuming, ethnocentrism as:

A characteristic of societies to evaluate
“others” and “self”

Produced by alternative priorities
societies emphasise

Necessity of cooperation among
societies

So: how to work with ethnocentrism?

Cultural relativism

Anthropology as catching the “native’s point of view”*

The meaning of every behaviour is to be searched inside the social specificities**

Ethnocentrism vs relativism

Universalism vs relativism

*Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

**Boas, F., (1940) *Race, language, culture*. New York: Mac Millan.

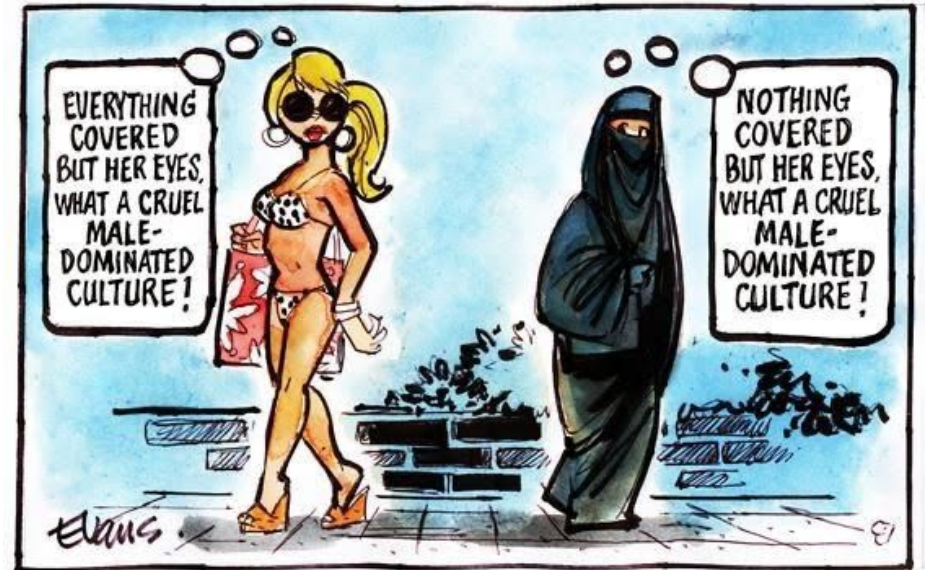


Image: cultural relativism and human rights (source: <https://sites.google.com/a/isb.be/isbglobalpolitics/unit-human-rights/cultural-relativism-and-universal-human-rights>)



Images: burials in Pacific region
(source Whincup 2011*)



Different burials and memories

1. Kiribati and Kourabi bones
2. Australia and car accidents
3. South Tarawa and father's bones

Whincup (2011)*: burials as tools for memory

*Whincup, T. (2011). Bridging the Gap. *Memory Connection Journal*. 1 (1) 59-74.



Images: Palestinian women and Amerindian women (sources: <https://jordantimes.com/news/region/%E2%80%98spirit-resistance%E2%80%99-arab-support-palestinians-swells>; <https://select.art.br/entre-o-coracao-e-as-trevas-de-brasil/>)

Ethnocentrism and ethics

Are our categories of classification adequate for describing the others?

Are we entitled to talk about specific topics sensible for other people?

“Critical ethnocentrism”: simultaneously being open to others’ perspectives and “critically” to ours own**

Ethical commitment in anthropology vs anthropological commitment to ethics

** De Martino E. (1961) *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud*, Milan, Italy: Il Saggiatore.

Captain Cook went several times to Hawaii, received as the God Lono, on the last travel, in 1779, he was dead by local people

Sahlins*: Cook was dead because of the identification with Lono and the associated ritualistic calendar

Obeyesekere**: Cook was dead accidentally and Europeans associated him with a God and his “apotheosis”

Is anthropology “ethnocentric”?

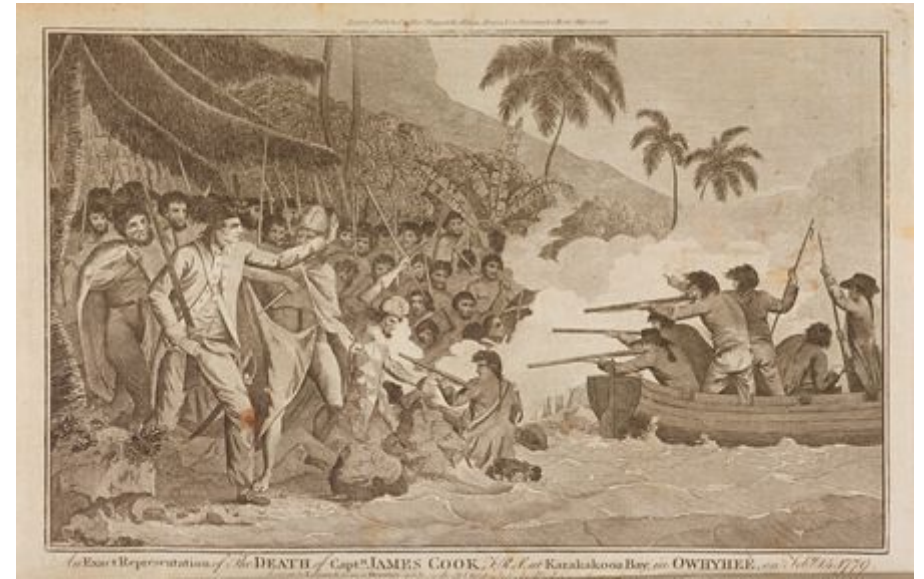


Image: The death of Captain Cook (source: <https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=8224>)

*Sahlins, M. (1995) *How “natives” think: About Captain Cook, for example*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Obeyesekere, G. 1992. *The apotheosis of Captain Cook: European myth-making in the Pacific*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



Ethnocentrism and egocentrism

Ethno-: collective

Ego-: individual

Egocentric vs sociocentric approach to bio-socio-cultural phenomena

Which eyes are looking to a specific phenomenon?

Intersectionality

Symmetric and asymmetric descriptions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzQuuoKXVq0>

PřF: Bi7851 Anthropology of Ethnicity (Autumn 2022)

For the next week

Please read:

Dagnosław Demski and Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska. 2010. Introduction. Encountering Images of the Other. In Dagnosław Demski and Kamila Baraniecka (Eds.). *Images of the Other in Ethnic Caricatures of Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 11–27. Warsaw: Polish Acad. of Sciences.

We will receive our first guest of the semester:
Julia Secklehner from the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University

For any doubt, question, suggestion, critique and praise:

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Enjoy the rest of the week!