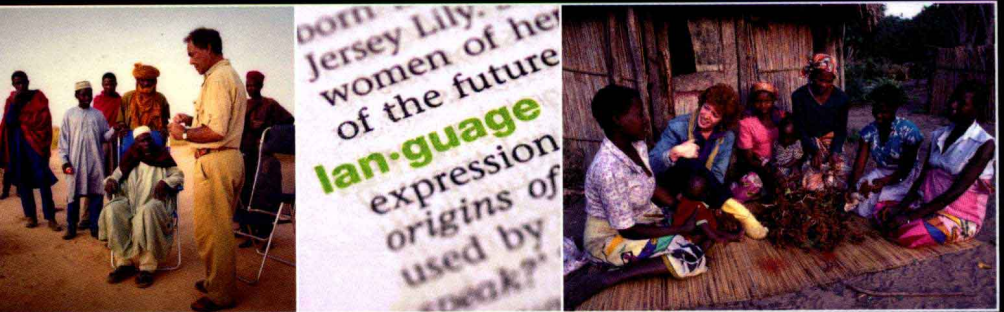


M I K E M O R R I S



CONCISE DICTIONARY OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Concise Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology

Mike Morris



 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2012
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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007.
Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical,
and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex,
PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Morris, Mike (Michael Ashley)

Concise dictionary of social and cultural anthropology / Mike Morris. – 1st ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4443-3209-4 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-4443-6698-3 (paperback)

1. Ethnology—Dictionaries. I. Title.

GN307.M67 2012

301.03—dc23

2011036442

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Sabon by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed in Singapore by Ho Printing Singapore Pte Ltd

Concise Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology

To Matthew

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank the following people for their various contributions towards making this dictionary.

Rosalie Robertson and Julia Kirk at Wiley-Blackwell, and the several reviewers whose helpful comments they supplied, as well as Hazel Harris for copy-editing. Stephanie Ogeneski and Daisy Njoku at the Smithsonian for help with pictures.

In Oxford: David Zeitlyn at ISCA, for his suggestions and comments on the draft (errors and omissions remain mine). Nadine Beckmann for supplying fieldwork photos and advice. Mark Dickerson of the Pitt Rivers Museum, for assistance with references and sources. Margaret Robb, formerly Social Sciences Librarian, for encouraging me to complete this book, and Louise Clarke, her successor, for further support. The staff of the Oxford Kidney Unit, Churchill Hospital, who have worked hard to keep me alive and functional for many years. Vicky Dean at ISCA, for patient and loyal friendship. Louise Trevelyan and Matthew Morris, for providing a life away from work.

Lastly, I acknowledge Meg Douglas, who died when this book was in its earliest stages, and whose kindness, intelligence, and compassion enlightened her many friends.

Introduction

Anthropology is a relatively young discipline with a complex history. In a world that is increasingly accessible and globalized, the new student needs a quick guide to help them even begin to untangle the web of allusions that academic anthropology may often evoke. Having come to the subject unprepared myself, many years ago, I empathize with readers struggling to make sense of what should be a vital and vibrant area of study.

I hope this text provides the beginner with a starting point for comprehension; in addition to the necessarily brief definitions of terms (which chiefly focus on concepts rather than particular peoples or places), I provide bibliographical references to a mixture of anthropological classics, related works from outside the field, and current ethnology, for both background reading and further research.

Terms referred to in the text that have their own separate entries are shown in SMALL CAPITALS.

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A

AAA. See **AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.**

Aboriginal. The earliest known occupant (or feature) of a region; often (capitalized) specifying **INDIGENOUS** peoples of Australia. “Aborigine” is often considered offensive. Early anthropologists and sociologists such as **RADCLIFFE-BROWN** and **DURKHEIM** were greatly interested in Australian Aboriginal societies. These have been examined by specialists such as B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen; and, more recently, by such writers as Howard Morphy and Ian Keen.

Abu Sunbul (Egypt). See **BURCKHARDT.**

acculturation. A process by which one group of people’s **IDENTITY** is modified by meeting another: one **CULTURE** introduces elements that are accepted or resisted by the other, leading to the weaker group remaining partially autonomous, the **ASSIMILATION** of the weaker group into the stronger unit, or occasionally a merged culture. Members of the dominant culture may be physically present or act on the other remotely. Even when acculturated, the weaker group may not totally assimilate. In general use, acculturation and assimilation may be used synonymously. See also **SYNCRETISM**, the adoption of elements of one religion into another.

acephalous. Having no head; of a **STATE** or people, having no formal leader (as in foraging cultures—see **HUNTER-GATHERER**).

achievement/ascription. A distinction made by **PARSONS**, one of five such **PATTERN VARIABLES**, or sets of alternative social strategies. Achieved **STATUS** derives from competition with one’s peers; ascribed status comes through

2 *acquisition*

one's birth. While it may be claimed that "traditional" (see TRADITION) societies ascribe status and "MODERN" societies favor achievement, certain areas (e.g. GENDER roles) may be more complicated.

acquisition. See LANGUAGE ACQUISITION.

act. To perform a deed, or the deed itself. The definition of an "act" has been much discussed in SOCIOLOGY. See also AGENCY (the ability to act), BROKER, COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE, ROLE, SPEECH ACT. In common use, of course, "acting" often implies theatrical ROLE-playing.

Further reading: Hastrup (2004).

action anthropology. A form of APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY in which the anthropologist works for the interests of a minority CULTURE that is in difficulty of some kind, facilitating that culture's decisions. Pioneered by Sol TAX from the 1930s onward.

actor/network theory (ANT). A sociological approach associated with Bruno Latour, John Law, Michel Callon, and others that has influenced several SOCIAL SCIENCES. It stresses the *performative* nature of networks, and, controversially, can be said to ascribe AGENCY, the ability to act, to non-human elements of a network—people and the things they use interact to perpetuate the network. Critics have argued that ANT underplays the real political and POWER relations involved in its area of study. ANT is a branch of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES.

Further reading: Latour (2005).

adaptation. In biology and anthropology, the response of a population or INDIVIDUAL to new environmental (see ENVIRONMENT) factors. Individuals develop physically in differing ways according to local conditions; over a longer period populations evolve (see EVOLUTION). Adaptation also operates at various cultural levels, through behavior and SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.

adat. Customary law in Islamic (see ISLAM) South-East Asia, as distinct from religious law, or SHARI'A.

Further reading: Davidson & Henley (2007).

address terms. Relationship terms used directly with their subject, to talk *to* them. May be employed more loosely than REFERENCE TERMS (terms used to talk *about* others), as when calling an older COUSIN "uncle."

adelphic polyandry. A form of POLYANDRY—marriage to multiple husbands—in which the husbands are brothers (or are regarded as such). From Greek, *adelphi* ("brothers").

adivasi. A member of the ABORIGINAL tribal peoples of India. From Sanskrit, "original inhabitant."

adolescence. See YOUTH.

adoption. The voluntary extension of KINSHIP ties to people outside one's immediate biological FAMILY, most often involving adults adopting children. It may be mainly understood as a legal commitment, a more permanent step than fostering.

Legal adoption derives from ancient Rome; the Romans distinguished between beneficial "changes" of parent and cases in which birth parents had died. In NON-WESTERN societies the anthropologist may find such distinctions less useful, as a fluid range of practices and attitudes may present themselves. One area of interest is transnational adoption (see TRANSNATIONALISM), with issues such as questions of ETHNICITY and IDENTITY.

Further reading: Bowie (2004).

Adorno, Theodor (1903–69). German philosopher, influenced by MARX; member of the Frankfurt School (see CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY). He adopted a critical stance toward the mass MEDIA and POSITIVISM, attacking the "culture industry" on the grounds that it twisted art to its own repressive ends, and toward spurious rationalism. His works include *Minima moralia* (1974 [German 1951]), *Prisms* (1967 [German 1955]), and *Negative dialectics* (1973 [1966]). See also HABERMAS.

advocacy. The PRACTICE of speaking for another (the Latin root means "called to [support]"). The notion of advocacy in the SOCIAL SCIENCES and the ethical questions surrounding it have become issues in areas such as APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS, and particularly ACTION ANTHROPOLOGY.

aesthetics. A term originally taken from the Greek for "things perceptible," the precise meaning of which was contested by Alexander Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. Its English use encompasses both the THEORY of sense PERCEPTION and the investigation of the principles of beauty in the arts (see ART). For anthropologists, key questions include what criteria are valid in the study of art of NON-WESTERN cultures (see CULTURE), what the function of art is, and what it may mean.

Further reading: Weiner (1994).

affect. Generally used as a verb; as a noun, "affect" refers in psychology to emotional response to stimuli or thoughts. Its consideration is an issue in anthropology of the BODY.

affiliation. Used generally to describe ADOPTION (literally or metaphorically), affiliation also has two meanings in anthropology. It describes the relationship of a child to its parents, and hence to lines of DESCENT

(the relationship to the parent *alone* being known as FILIATION), and also covers voluntary social ASSOCIATION between wider groups.

affine. See AFFINITY.

affinity. KINSHIP held through MARRIAGE (e.g. “in-laws”) as opposed to BIRTH (CONSANGUINITY). Those connected by affinity are termed “affines.”

affluent society. See ORIGINAL AFFLUENT SOCIETY.

afterology. A term adopted by Marshall D. SAHLINS (from a phrase by Jacqueline Mraz) to describe disparagingly POST-MODERNISM, POST-STRUCTURALISM, and similar phenomena.

Further reading: Sahlins (1999).

Agamben, Giorgio (1942–). See SOVEREIGNTY.

agamy. A MARRIAGE CUSTOM whereby people are free to marry members of their own group as well as members of another group. Compare the narrower expectations involved in ENDOGAMY and EXOGAMY.

age-class system or age system. A means of organizing men (seldom WOMEN) into groups based on common age and ROLE (“age sets” passing through the same “age grades” together), typically in East Africa or the Americas. The most common distinction is the separation of young men from their ELDERS.

ageing. The last stages of physical maturity; later adulthood. A folksy image of the kinds of peoples studied by anthropologists would involve revered ELDERS dispensing wisdom to the young, but this is not necessarily accurate. In some ways people are just as constrained by societal expectations (and factors such as GENDER) in old age as in YOUTH. It is certainly true, however, that in industrialized societies people quite often regard the elderly as a burden, requiring expensive medical and personal care. A further aspect of ageing is the occasional emergence of a GERONTOCRACY.

Further reading: Myerhoff (1978).

agency. The ability of an INDIVIDUAL (“agent”) or group to ACT of their own volition, without constraint by STRUCTURE. Certain schools of social thought stress agency (see POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY). Contrast CULTURAL DETERMINISM.

Further reading: Wisniewski (2008).

aggression. Of particular interest in psychology (see PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY). Anthropologists have uncovered a wide range of aggressive practice, including conventions regarding who is likely to be a victim, and under what circumstances. Aggression may result in full-blown VIOLENCE or

the capitulation (or flight) of the target. It is often studied in relation to young males (see **YOUTH**), in relation to children, and in relation to situations that provoke aggression.

A lot of work has been done on aggressive behavior among other **ANIMALS**, for instance **PRIMATES**. The theories of the Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who regarded aggression as inbuilt, were popular in the 1960s but have latterly been rejected in favor of more culturally nuanced explanations.

agnate. See **AGNATIC**.

agnatic. In **KINSHIP**, a term for relation by **DESCENT** from the father's side of the family; a person so related is an "agnate." The mother's-side equivalent terms are **ENATE** and **UTERINE**; see also **COGNATIC**, **PATRILINEALITY**.

agricultural involution. See **INVOLUTION**.

agriculture. Literally, the cultivation of the soil (for **FOOD** and so on), but usually understood to include wider **PRACTICES** such as raising livestock. Studied particularly by anthropologists interested in **DEVELOPMENT** issues (e.g. **RURAL** politics and economics) but issues also include large-scale land use in technologically sophisticated ways.

agronomy. The study of land management, **RURAL** economy and related areas.

AIDS. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, which develops from the human immunodeficiency virus (**HIV**) to allow infection, was first identified around 1982 and has had major impacts around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where mortality rates remain high. As the **PANDEMIC** developed, judgmental attitudes toward some early victims hampered efforts to treat and prevent it. See also **DISEASE**, **RISK**, **SEX**.

Further reading: ten Brummelhuis & Herdt (1995); Fassin (2007).

alcheringa. See **DREAMING**.

alcohol. The general name for a number of chemical compounds with assorted uses (for example ethanol) produced naturally or artificially. Ethanol is the basis of "alcoholic" **DRINKS**. Naturally fermented drinks have a long history of recreational use, use in **RITUAL**, and use other contexts, in many **CULTURES**, although not everywhere: for instance, they are forbidden according to Islamic (see **ISLAM**) and Sikh **CUSTOM**. Even in the US, Prohibition in the 1920s criminalized alcohol.

Alcohol works on the **BRAIN** to alter mood and lower inhibitions, which can create social problems (such as **CRIME** and **VIOLENCE**), **ILLNESS**, and long-term dependency. Many social scientists have investigated methods of treatment and rehabilitation for alcohol abusers.

Further reading: Wilson (2005).

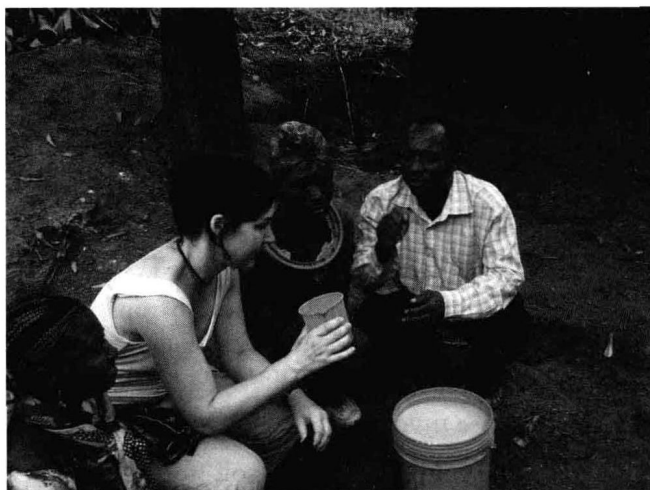


Figure 1 Alcohol. Anthropologist Nadine Beckmann tasting *pombe*, a local beer, Ulugura mountains, Tanzania. Photo copyright: N. Beckmann.

Ali ibn Abi Talib, Caliph (c. 600–661). See SHIA.

alliance. A relationship created by MARRIAGE, not just between the spouses but encompassing “in-laws.” From the French scholarly TRADITION as elaborated in LÉVI-STRAUSS’ classic work on ELEMENTARY STRUCTURES. “Alliance systems” may involve SYMMETRICAL ALLIANCE or ASYMMETRICAL ALLIANCE (that is, differing forms of MARRIAGE exchange); “alliance theory” stresses these connections and their social importance rather than, as in some anthropological writings, viewing connections of DESCENT as being central to social cohesion (see DESCENT THEORY). As with much THEORY, alliance theory tends to describe ARCHETYPES that do not always appear so neatly in reality. See also CROSS-COUSIN.

Further reading: Lévi-Strauss (1969[b]); Héritier-Augé & Copet-Rougier (1990–4).

alliance systems. See ALLIANCE.

alliance theory. See ALLIANCE.

allograph. In LINGUISTICS, either a particular written form of a given letter-SYMBOL (GRAPHEME) or one of a number of letters or combined letters representing a PHONEME.

allometry. In biology, the study of relative growth rates among parts of a BODY, human or otherwise, especially where one feature appears out of proportion with what may be expected (e.g. where a human baby’s head develops faster than other parts). From Greek, “other” and “measure.”