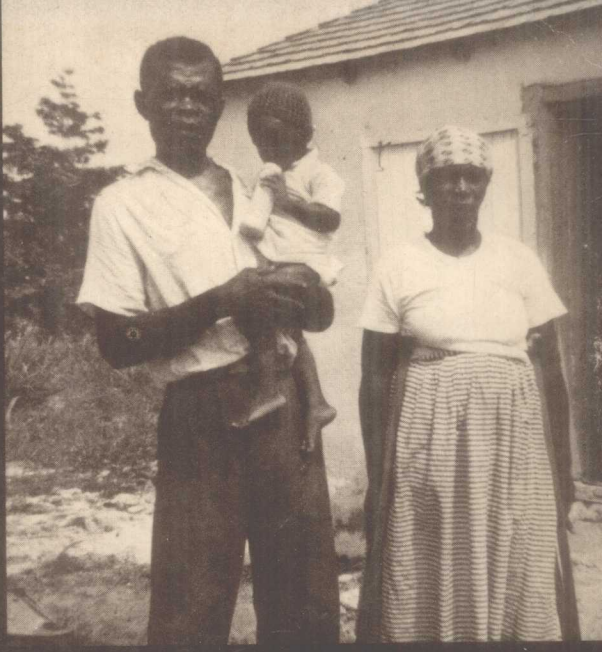
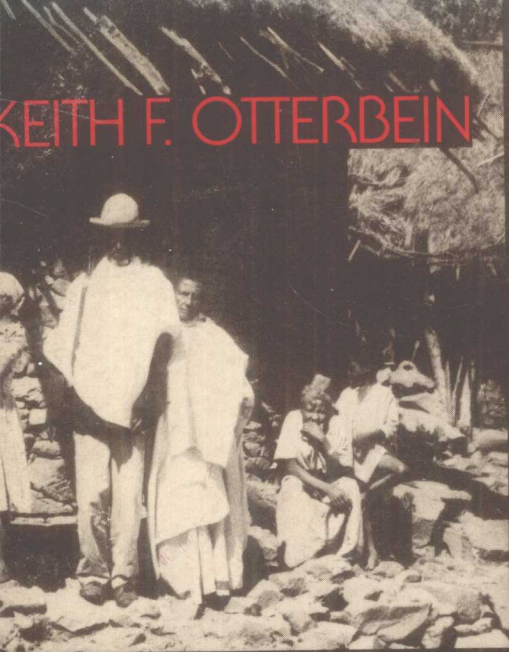


KEITH F. OTTERBEIN



# COMPARATIVE CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Second  
edition

An Introduction to Anthropology



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# COMPARATIVE CULTURAL ANALYSIS

## AN INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY

Second Edition

KEITH F. OTTERBEIN

State University of New York at Buffalo

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON

New York Chicago San Francisco Atlanta Dallas Montreal Toronto London Sydney

## To My Wife

Extracts and photographs from *The Andros Islanders: A Study of Family Organization in the Bahamas* by Keith F. Otterbein.

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# PREFACE

Basically what this book does is to lay out systematically the important topics and key concepts of cultural anthropology. The topics and concepts are discussed in detail in the following chapters, and they are summarized on a data sheet at the end of this book. This set of concepts is fundamental to all research in anthropology. It is the conceptual order that, so to speak, underlies the anthropological subculture. Mastery of this order is a *sine qua non* for becoming a professional anthropologist. Thus it is necessary for students—both those wishing only an introductory knowledge of anthropology and those wishing to become competent professionals—to learn the important concepts of cultural anthropology. This book (and it is the only one of its kind) provides a technique which makes it possible for students in a classroom situation to simultaneously learn many key concepts while becoming familiar with a few of the cultures which have been studied by anthropologists. Students learn to analyze a cultural system, as presented in an ethnography, in the same manner that an ethnographer analyzes the way of life of the particular people among whom he is conducting fieldwork.

This textbook is based upon a teaching technique which I developed ten years ago for use in an introductory cultural anthropology course. The technique consisted of reducing many of the important topics in anthropology to a set of questions which incorporated, as answers to the questions, many of the key concepts of the discipline. A data sheet listed twenty-five questions and the

accompanying concepts. The sheet contained no definitions of the concepts, since these were provided through classroom lectures. The first week of the course (it was a six-week summer course) consisted of lectures in which I discussed the topics and defined the concepts. For the remainder of the course the students read four different ethnographies and, using copies of the data sheet, recorded passages which provided information on the twenty-five topics. They also tried to identify the concepts which correctly described the passages which they had recorded. Methodologically the concepts represented the culture traits, processes, or activities which were described in the ethnographies. Throughout most of the course the students and I discussed the reasons for classifying the different ethnographic statements as examples of the various concepts. Then during the last week of the course we recorded on a chart the concepts which pertained to each culture. We were thus able to compare our four cultures in terms of the twenty-five topics and to draw inferences as to what topics might be functionally related. That is, we attempted to make intelligent guesses as to what culture traits and processes are related in the real world. For example, population density might be related to the type of subsistence technology practiced. Specifically, it was found that a low population density was associated with a hunting and gathering technology, and a high population density was associated with agriculture.

This technique was developed in response to what I believe is a major defect in most anthropology textbooks. The ethnographic examples used in the textbooks are drawn from a large number of cultures—seldom do more than several examples come from any one culture. Often the examples are either extreme, rare, or atypical cases. In response, many instructors of anthropology, including myself, have found it easier to teach using ethnographic case studies, such as those published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, than using a standard textbook. This allows us to illustrate concepts with examples from a limited number of cultures and to devote our time to discussions of functional interrelationships between culture traits and processes within specific cultures. The reading of these case studies shows a student how the different aspects of a cultural system are interrelated in each of a small number of cultures. Thus emphasis is not placed upon atypical examples taken out of context. Nor is the student confused by dozens of exotic examples from dozens of cultures.

In a volume titled *The Teaching of Anthropology* (Mandelbaum, Lasker, and Albert 1963), David Mandelbaum has expressed a similar viewpoint in this way (1963:52–53):



Good ethnographic monographs . . . make fine reading for undergraduates. I have found it effective to have students read one or two brief monographs in the first few weeks of introductory cultural anthropology. Even in a few weeks they can acquire some of the leading concepts which they can apply to the data in the monographs. The analytic, problem-tackling, frontier-exploring qualities of anthropology can be brought in usefully in these early stages, so that the student is not simply reading about quaint customs and discovering that he too has customs and culture, but is also encouraged to set his mind to seeing some order, themes, and linkages within a culture.

Four pedagogical purposes are also served by developing the above technique into an introductory anthropology textbook: (1) The book provides a succinct list of the major topics and concepts in cultural anthropology. Thus it can be used as a reference or as a glossary of terms. (2) The book assists students in learning the fundamental concepts of cultural anthropology by requiring them to find examples in ethnographic case studies which correctly illustrate the concepts. Most instructors and most textbooks do this for the student; however, if the student is asked to do it for himself, the learning process becomes active rather than remaining passive. (3) By reading and rereading portions of the textbook and by applying the concepts, the students develop a "set" which will make ethnographically important facts (that is, the data pertaining to theoretically important topics) readily apparent while the case studies are being read. (4) The book furnishes a systematic outline which can be used to record ethnographic data. Once the descriptions found in a particular case study have been classified as to what concepts they illustrate, the completed outline can be used by students in reviewing for examinations. Once two or more outlines have been completed, the cultures which have been succinctly described can be compared. Such comparisons can be used by the instructor to demonstrate the possible existence of functional relationships between culture traits and processes, and the outlines can be used by students in doing research projects and in writing term papers.

A new edition of *Comparative Cultural Analysis* has been prepared in order to make it easier for students and instructors to analyze nonprimitive cultures with the technique developed in the first edition. While many colleagues and former students seem satisfied in general with the technique, they have in particular felt that its utility could be enhanced if I broadened the scope of the book to explicitly cover such groups of peoples as modern nations and

peasant communities. This I believe I have done by adding new sections and a new set of examples from an additional ethnography.

Five new sections have been added, three of which—The People, Language, and History—have formed the nucleus of a new chapter titled “Land and People.” The introductory section of this chapter describes the scope of ethnographic research, as it once was and as it is today. The background information provided permits delineation of the kind of group the anthropologist studied, whether it be a state (primitive, preindustrial, or modern), a primitive culture, a dependent native people, a peasant community, or an ethnic group. Two new sections—House Form and Stratification—have been added to the chapter on “Technology and Economy.” Nearly all the sections have been revised, the main purpose being to increase clarity. Two sections have been combined—Local Economy and Economy of the Culture are now Economy. The section on Political Communities has been incorporated into the Political System section. One section has been dropped—Subsistence Participation. In some sections the discussion and the question have been simplified (for example, Kindreds); in other sections new material has been added to clarify (for example, Descent Groups). Where appropriate recent empirical studies are reviewed.

The new set of examples is taken from my own ethnography dealing with the family organization of the inhabitants of Andros Island in the Bahamas. The Andros Islanders were chosen primarily because they are an English-speaking people whose culture is similar, in terms of the concepts and culture traits described in this book, to the culture of many Americans. By first presenting an example, for each topic discussed, which is similar to the beliefs and practices of many readers, it is hoped that the student will begin to realize that we are all—not just so-called primitive peoples—participants in cultural systems. In other words, the student will be introduced to the familiar first, rather than to the unfamiliar and exotic, as was the case in the first edition. Furthermore, since the fishing and farming communities of the Andros Islanders are in a modern nation, the student is first introduced to a nonprimitive culture. This will show the applicability of the technique to the kinds of groups of people found frequently in the modern world.

Also new to this edition are the Study Guide Questions at the end of each chapter as well as the Case Study Questions on seven published case studies which are at the end of this text.

*Comparative Cultural Analysis* has been and can be used in the following kinds of courses. In introductory anthropology courses it can be used in conjunction with two or three ethnographies and

two other small books, one dealing with archaeology and the other physical anthropology. In a general cultural anthropology course it can be used with several ethnographies and a collection of articles or reprints which deal in greater depth with the topics covered in the textbook. It can be used in area courses along with a general work on the area, plus several ethnographies. It can be used as a supplementary book in methods courses, whether a course on field methods or comparative methods. And, in graduate level survey courses it can be assigned if a basic reference work is desired.

*Buffalo, N. Y.*  
*December 1976*

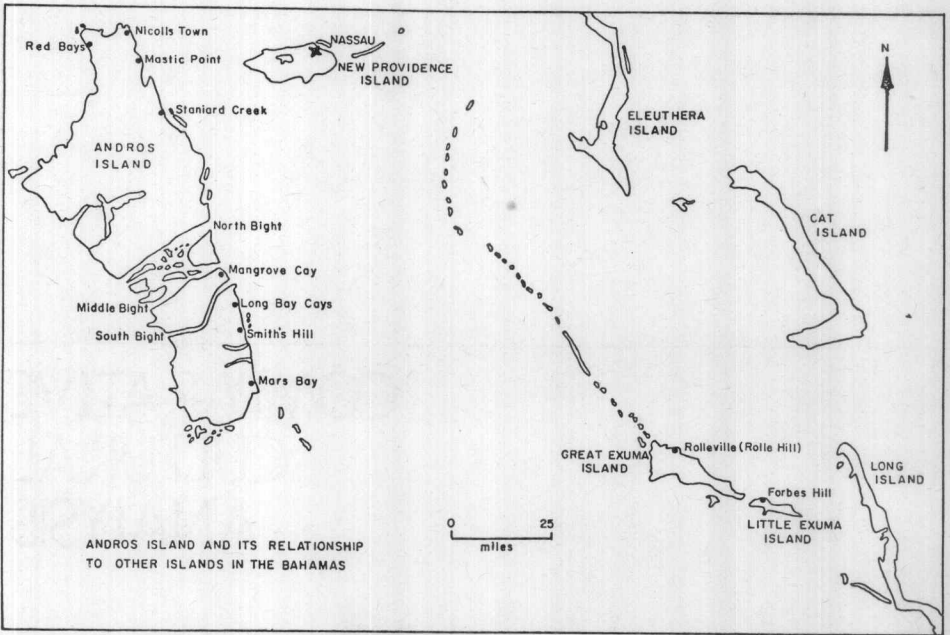
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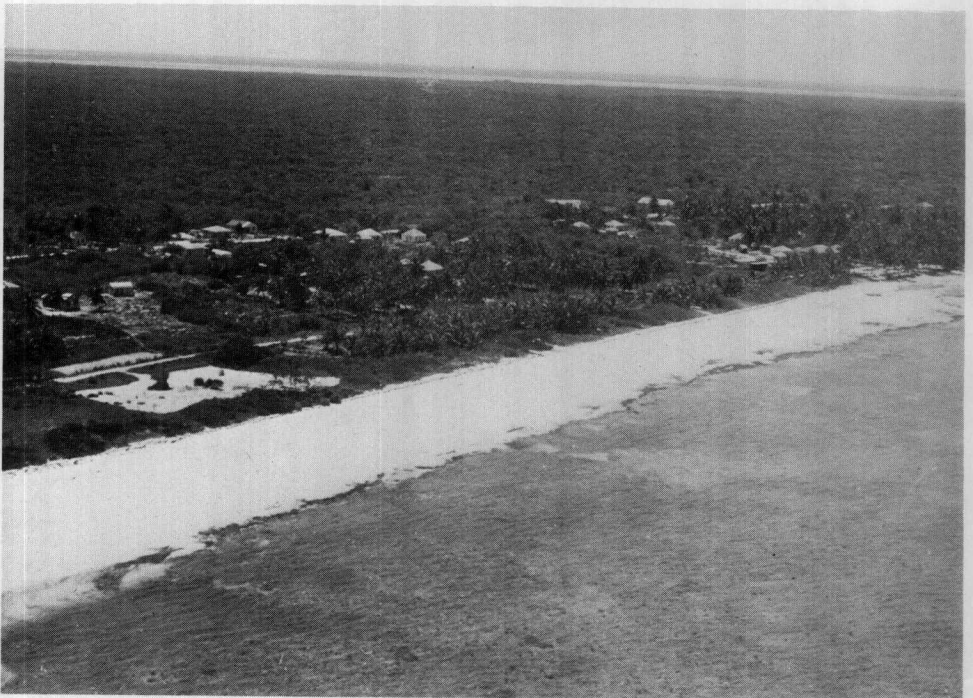
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Aerial view of Long Bay Cays, Andros Island, Bahamas.



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# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

**Basic Concepts  
Anthropological Research  
How to Use This Book**

When I was an undergraduate I told my father that I wanted to become an anthropologist. He asked me what I was going to do with it. I knew that his question meant: How are you going to earn a living? But at that time I did not care if I ever earned a living. I told him that an anthropologist studies people. I then went on to say that I wanted to be a cultural anthropologist and that cultural anthropology is the study of the way different groups of people live. He looked puzzled, so I told him that I wanted to go to a tropical island and study the sex life of the natives. That ended the conversation. Several years later I did go to a tropical island. The study resulting from this trip is a detailed description of the way of life of the people who



live on Andros Island in the Bahamas (see map on facing p. 1), and focuses on courtship, marriage, and the family (Otterbein 1966).

This introductory chapter describes, in more precise terms than I told my father, what cultural anthropologists study and how they conduct their research. A few basic concepts are defined, and instructions are provided for using this book.

## BASIC CONCEPTS

The primary concept employed by anthropologists is *culture*. It is used in two senses. First, culture refers to the way of life of a particular group of people. It is everything that a group of people thinks, and says, and does, and makes. Culture is learned: it is transmitted from generation to generation. When anthropologists refer to the culture of a people, they are referring to a large and diverse number of topics which include technological pursuits, marriage customs, military practices, and religious beliefs. All the topics discussed in the next five chapters, with the exception of physical environment, are aspects of the culture or way of life of a people. Second, if the article *a* precedes the term culture, it refers to the particular group of people themselves. If the term *culture* is used in the plural, it refers to different groups of people. Anthropologists have no difficulty in shifting from one usage of the term *culture* to the other; in fact, they often speak of the culture of a culture. For example, it is as easy to speak of the culture of the Andros Islanders as it is to say that the Andros Islanders are a Caribbean culture. (The way of life of the Andros Islanders, of the Yanomamö Indians of South America, and of the Qemant of Ethiopia will be used throughout this book to illustrate many aspects of culture.)

Although there is not complete agreement among anthropologists, perhaps the most satisfactory way of distinguishing one group of people—one culture—from another is to use two criteria: language distinctness and geographic separation (Ember 1963: 235–236). Language distinctness is an appropriate criterion because not only is it an important aspect of culture, but it is also the major means by which culture is transmitted or taught to the young. If two groups of people speak different languages, they are different cultures. Languages are different if the speaker of one language cannot understand the speaker of the other language. (The criterion of language distinctness is difficult to apply in those few regions of the world where there are “linguistic continuums” or “language chains.” For example, the German-Dutch dialects spoken along the Rhine

River constitute a linguistic continuum. Naroll [1968: 248-249] has proposed a technique for dividing these continuums into "chain links," each link of which can be considered a culture.) Geographic separation, the second criterion, permits the delineation into separate cultures those peoples who, though not living contiguously, speak the same language. For example, the various English-speaking peoples throughout the world who are geographically separate from each other constitute different cultures. On the other hand, English-speaking North Americans whether they live in Canada or the United States are one culture since they speak one language and are geographically contiguous. Using these two criteria, a culture can be defined as "a continuously distributed population whose members speak a common language . . ." (Ember 1963:236).

The use of the term *culture* to refer both to a group of people and to their way of life entered the vocabulary of anthropologists after 1900, due primarily to the efforts of Franz Boas and many of his students. Until his death in 1941, Boas was the major figure in American anthropology. Prior to 1900 the term culture was used in a different sense—it referred to the "progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity: art, science, knowledge, refinement . . ." (Stocking 1966:870). Different groups of people could have a greater or a lesser amount of culture. Thus Edward B. Tylor, one of the founders of anthropology, could state in 1888 that "among peoples of low culture . . ." (this passage is quoted in its entirety in the section dealing with cousin marriage). Tylor's definition of culture (1958:1; orig. 1871) as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" is ambiguous since it does not state that culture is acquired by men as members of particular cultures, nor does it make explicit that only creative, rational capacities were considered culture at that time (Stocking 1966).

Since the days of Franz Boas, the concept of culture has undergone modification and elaboration. The major direction in which these changes have occurred is toward a position which views a culture as an entity composed, on one hand, of beliefs, symbols, and values, sets of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting, cultural traditions, or jural rules, and, on the other hand, of interactive behavior, social interaction, and social structure, a material-behavioral system of interacting people and things, relationships between human beings, or statistical norms. Thus a culture is viewed as consisting of rules (that is, statements of ideal behavior) and behavior (whether the behavior corresponds to the rules or not).

Some anthropologists speak of the rules as being culture per se and the behavior as forming a social system; then the entity composed of rules and behavior together is termed a society, a sociocultural system, or for short, a cultural system. This distinction is important, for it forces the anthropologist to take cognizance of the ideals which motivate people and at the same time to examine the frequency with which a people conform to the rules. Attention is paid to this distinction in this book, particularly in the chapter titled "Family and Kinship."

For convenience and because most anthropologists—in conversation at least—still employ the term culture in its two senses, the dual usage of Boas will be maintained throughout this book. Thus, the entire way of life of a group of people is referred to as their culture, while at the same time the group of people themselves is referred to as a culture. Moreover, although some anthropologists use the term *society* in referring to a particular culture, cultures such as the Andros Islanders will not be referred to as societies, nor will the term *societies* be used as synonymous with the plural form of culture—cultures.

Cultures can be viewed as systems composed of overlapping subsystems. Four subsystems are usually distinguished (Beals 1967: 250–251): economic, social, political, and belief systems. An economic system consists of the means by which the physical environment is exploited technologically and the means by which the products of this endeavor are differentially allocated to the members of the culture. A social system is composed of the relationships between kinsmen and the groups formed by kinsmen as well as voluntary groups formed from kinsmen and/or nonkinsmen. A political system consists of power-oriented organizational units, their leaders, the relationships which leaders have with members of their units, and relationships between units. And finally, a belief system is composed of the knowledge which people have of the world around them and the practices and customs by which people utilize that knowledge. Each subsystem forms a complete system in the sense that it is not possible to understand any aspect of that subsystem without knowing something about the other aspects of the subsystem. For example, in the economic system it is not possible to understand how products are differentially allocated until one knows how each product is produced, who produces it, how scarce it is, and what materials from the physical environment are utilized in its production. By the same token, each subsystem can only be completely understood when something is known about the other three subsystems, because in reality the four subsystems are interdependent.