

THE TAPESTRY OF CULTURE

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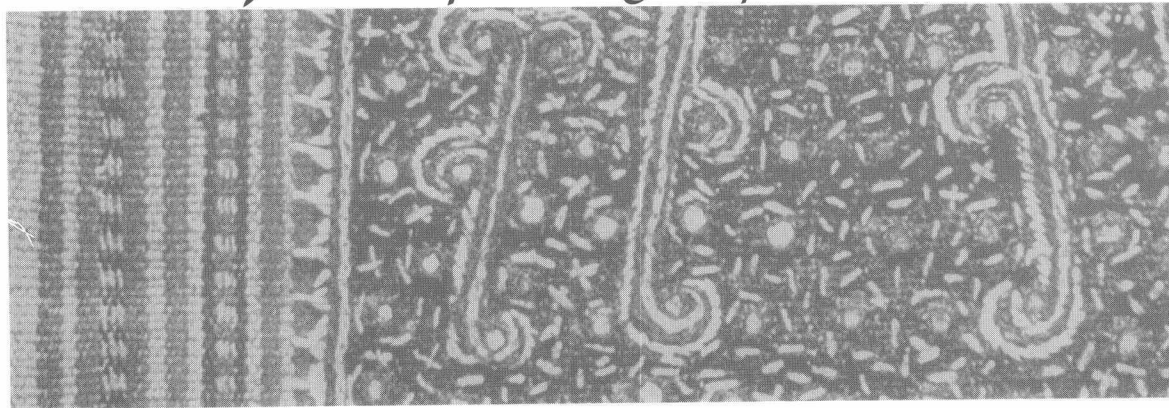
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ABRAHAM ROSMAN · PAULA G. RUBEL

The Tapestry of Culture



An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

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The Tapestry of Culture An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

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About the Authors

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Paula G. Rubel has a Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University. She carried out fieldwork on the Kalmyk Mongol refugees who settled in New Jersey and Philadelphia in 1950. Her doctoral dissertation was published as *The Kalmyk Mongols: A Study in Continuity and Change*. She taught at Barnard College, Columbia University, where she is now professor emerita.

Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel began their collaboration in 1971 when they published *Feasting with Mine Enemy*, a comparative study of the potlatch in six Northwest Coast societies. They have done fieldwork together in Iran, Afghanistan, and Papua New Guinea, and in 1978 they published *Your Own Pigs You May Not Eat: A Comparative Study of New Guinea Societies*. They have also published many articles on their fieldwork and comparative research. Their later fieldwork in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, and their research on the nineteenth-century collecting of ethnographic artifacts there have been the basis for several recent articles.

Preface

In the past decade, the lives of people scattered over the world have undergone enormous change. At the same time, American anthropology has also changed drastically, responding to scholarly and political influences as well as changing generations. These influences, referred to as postmodernism, have created an anthropology much more contested and fragmented than that of 30 years ago. It is unfair to introduce students to a field of study like anthropology, which is inherently very appealing, by pointing out its disjointed, fragmented character. Yet it would be equally unfair to imply that a unified, agreed-upon approach exists. *The Tapestry of Culture* adopts a distinctive approach to anthropology, which attempts to accommodate the various viewpoints. It examines cultural differences but also seeks to establish cultural similarities that emerge as a result of comparative study. The approach also emphasizes the interpretation of symbols and the meaning of things. The task is to translate the behavior and ideas of other cultures into our culture's terms. Today the trend is to see every ethnography as a description of a unique society, not comparable to any other. However, beyond each society's uniqueness, the presence of cultural similarities is clear. From its inception, anthropology has always been comparative, enabling generalizations to be made about human behavior. At present, such generalizations may deal, for example, with the nature of ethnic group behavior and the role religion plays in many instances of ethnic conflict, whereas anthropologists formerly generalized about the nature of rules of residence and kinship terminology. In *The Tapestry of Culture* we discuss many different kinds of generalizations.

Postmodernists pay particular attention to the nature of ethnographic texts, and anthropologists today still consider ethnographies, that is, descriptions of unique societies based on field research, the heart of the discipline. One of the best ways for students to be introduced to anthropology is by reading ethnographies so that they can feel the electricity of a first-rate fieldworker engaged in his or her work. Seeing the Trobriand Islands through Bronislaw Malinowski's eyes as he describes them in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* conveys to the students Malinowski's feeling of being a castaway on a strange shore and his sense of adventure and discovery, in addition to informing them about Trobriand culture as it was at the turn of the twentieth century. However, students must be provided with the concepts and theories that anthropologists use in order to understand and appreciate ethnographies. Students need a framework for the critical evaluation of ethnographies such as Malinowski's. *The Tapestry of Culture* provides a concise and up-to-date conceptual framework with which to understand not only classic ethnographies but also the ethnographies being written today. In teaching introductory anthropology, we ourselves have used studies of groups like the Yanomamo of the South American tropical forest, a small-scale society being forced to adapt to the modern world, as well as those describing aspects of industrialized societies, such as the multiethnic neighborhoods of Philadelphia. *The Tapestry of Culture* is organized so that it can be used with the particular ethnographies that suit the instructor's interests.

The title of our book refers to culture metaphorically as a tapestry, composed of many interconnected threads, in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Standing back from the tapestry, one no longer sees the individual threads, but an overall design. The anthropologist does not see "culture," the overall design of the tapestry, while doing fieldwork. Rather, he or she converses with individuals and observes their actions; this is the equivalent of the threads. From this, the anthropologist, in collaboration with members of the culture, creates a picture of that culture, which results in the ethnography. Culture is therefore an analytical concept, an abstraction from reality. Like a tapestry, each culture has an overall design, even though we do take it apart and study it, by employing categories such as kinship, economics, and religion, and then examine the interconnections between the parts.

The Seventh Edition

Today we have passed into a new millennium and are in the twenty-first century. During the past century, the world changed more than it had in the previous 5000 years. Anthropology, as the study of humans and their ways of life, has the task of dealing with and trying to understand these changes. Ethnicity and ethnic identity are crucial issues in the world today. Nation-states and empires have fractured. People of different ethnic groups who lived together in one state and even intermarried are now fiercely at war with one another. Technological advances in many fields have brought about great changes in industrial societies like our own. Automation has made many earlier types of employment obsolete, and not everyone controls the skills to ride the information superhighway. These changes have required the rethinking of the economic organization of modern industrial societies. Technology has even overtaken and transformed human reproduction and required new ways of thinking about motherhood and parenting. Ideas about gender and gender role are being reformulated, with significant consequences for family organization. Anthropology today has had to come to grips with these various issues, as have we in this seventh edition of *The Tapestry of Culture*. Though some issues have been with us since the beginnings of the discipline, contemporary commentators and critics within and outside anthropology have compelled us to confront them anew.

In this seventh edition, as is our usual practice, we have made discussions and examples in every chapter more current, in accord with present-day thinking in the anthropological literature. In this Preface, we will discuss only the major changes to the text to be found in the seventh edition.

We have reorganized Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1, "The Anthropological Perspective," now presents an extended discussion of the concept of culture and related concepts, such as cultural rules, cultural universals, and cultural change. Postmodernism continues to have an influence on contemporary anthropology, and Chapter 1 discusses the present state of anthropological theory and the degree to which postmodernism still has an influence. We have completely reorganized Chapter 2, which is now entitled "The Anthropological Method." It begins with a discussion of participant observation and the various aspects of fieldwork in small-scale as well as complex societies. After describing the beginnings of fieldwork and the role played by Franz Boas, we present

an ethnographic description of a Kwakiutl marriage from Boas's corpus of ethnographic material on the Kwakiutl. Research in complex societies is then illustrated by a description of an American marriage. Lastly, to illuminate the comparative approach, we discuss the similarities and differences between these two ethnographic examples.

We have changed the order of chapters; the chapter on symbolic systems is now Chapter 5. The new Chapter 4, entitled "Learning Language and Learning Culture: Culture and the Individual," places much greater emphasis on language acquisition and cultural acquisition. Chapter 6 is now entitled "Marriage, Family, and Kinship." The discussion of kinship in the modern world is no longer a separate section; the information has been included in the appropriate sections. Chapter 7, on gender and age, has been expanded to include a discussion of retirement communities in Japan as well as the United States. The discussion of genital mutilation has been expanded into a new section entitled "Genital Mutilation—A Human Rights Issue."

In Chapter 10, "Religion and the Supernatural," we have expanded our discussion of religious experiences in modern Western society to highlight the comparison of Wicca and shamanism in modern society with the same phenomena in small-scale societies. In Chapter 11, "Myths, Legends, and Folktales," the discussion of legends and folktales in American culture has been enlarged to include a discussion of the *Star Wars* epic. There are now separate sections on music and dance in Chapter 12, "The Artistic Dimension," and both sections include a great deal of new material.

The title of Chapter 13 has been changed to "The Colonial and Postcolonial Periods: Globalization, Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism," to reflect a much greater emphasis on these phenomena, which characterize the present period in world history. There is now a separate section entitled "Internal Migration, Transmigration, and Diasporas." The section "Missionaries and Cultural Change" has been expanded to include information on the missionaries themselves and their relationship to their converts. Chapter 14 has been retitled "Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism: Anthropology for the Twenty-first Century" and continues the discussions of *ethnogenesis*, ethnicity, race, and transnationalism, among other related topics, begun in Chapter 13. Chapter 14 also contains a discussion of the relationship between the concept of ethnocentrism, introduced in Chapter 1, and ethnic identity and ethnonationalism. A totally new Epilogue has been written for this edition, which reiterates the central themes of the book.

There are now brief summaries at the end of each chapter, and we have added new photographs to illuminate the new textual material.

Supplements

As a full-service publisher of quality educational products, McGraw-Hill does much more than just sell textbooks. We create and publish an extensive array of supplements for students and instructors. This edition of *The Tapestry of Culture* is accompanied by the following instructor supplements:

- Instructor's Manual/Testbank—chapter outlines, key terms, lecture notes, discussion questions, a complete testbank, and more.
- Computerized Testbank—easy-to-use computerized testing program for both Windows and Macintosh computers.

All of these supplements are provided free of charge to instructors. Orders of new (versus used) textbooks help us defray the substantial cost of developing such supplements. Please contact your local McGraw-Hill representative for more information on any of the above supplements.

Acknowledgments

This new edition could not have been written without assistance from many people. First of all, we would like to thank the many students in our introductory anthropology classes who, over the years, have asked us many penetrating questions. We have always learned from our students and are continuously in their debt. We are especially grateful to the professors who have continued to use *The Tapestry of Culture* in their introductory anthropology courses and have given us their pithy comments and observations. To these individuals and all the others who have helped us in the past, we owe a debt of gratitude for raising questions that have contributed to a significant improvement in the organization and clarity of this book. We would like to especially thank our friend and fellow anthropologist Aram A. Yengoyan for his thoughtful comments and many suggestions. We must also mention the following reviewers, who offered many valuable comments and suggestions:

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Abraham Rosman
Paula G. Rubel

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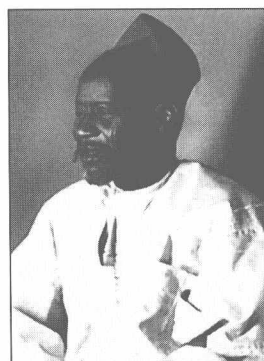
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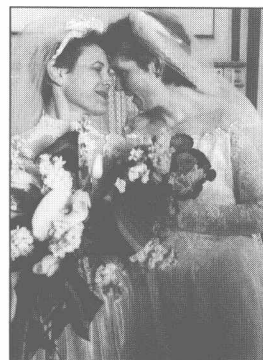


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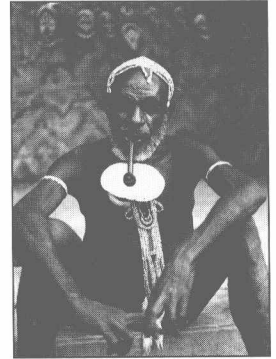
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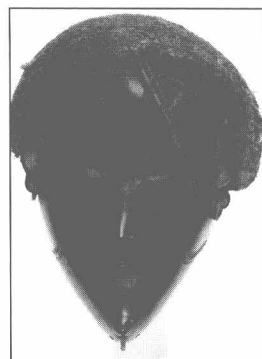
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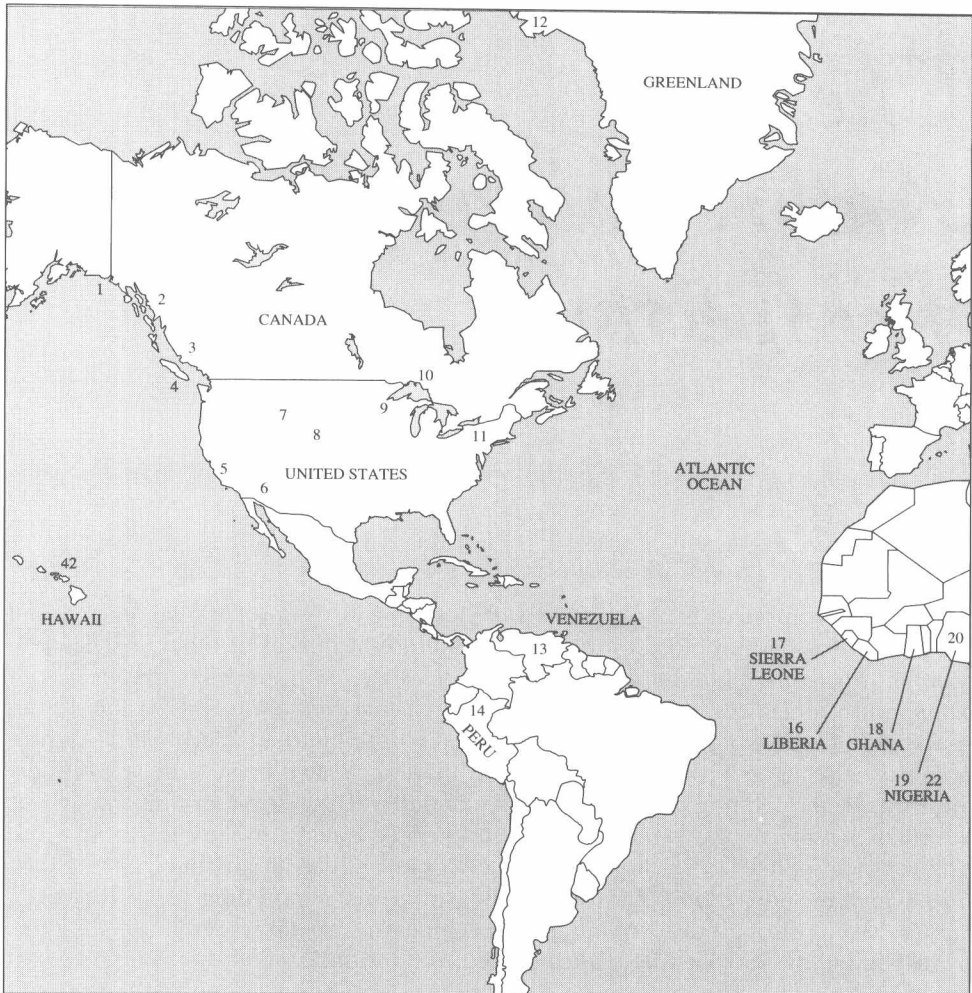
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Chapter One

The Anthropological Perspective

Anthropology informs us about other peoples, and in the process we learn about ourselves. The anthropologist's method is different from that of other social scientists, and that difference influences the nature of the discipline—its theories, concepts, and procedures. Anthropological research involves a journey—a journey in space, a journey through time, a psychological journey into an alien world. Anthropological investigation of a way of life other than one's own may seem at first like a trip through the looking glass into Alice's wonderland, into another universe where the rules may be turned on their heads and people behave in very different ways. Anthropologists refer to the way of life of a people, with all its variation, as their *culture*, which includes their behavior, the things they make, and their ideas. However, like the world through the looking glass, each culture has an underlying logic of its own. The behavior of people makes sense once we understand the basic premises by which they live. The anthropologist's task is to translate cultures and their premises into something that we can comprehend.

From the beginning, human beings have always moved or traveled beyond the borders of the area they called home. This was the means by which *Homo sapiens* eventually peopled most of the earth. When they became literate, writers from Herodotus to Marco Polo wrote about the others they encountered. Though today, the process of globalization has brought Pepsi Cola and the menus of McDonald's to the most remote parts of the world, a traveler to distant places will still be impressed with differences between cultures. Chinese people eat dogs and sea cucumbers, but Americans do not consider such creatures to be food. People in every culture think that what they eat is "the right stuff." The belief that one's own culture represents the best way to do things is known as *ethnocentrism*. Ethnocentrism emphasizes the pride a group has in its cultural accomplishments, its historical achievements, the supremacy of its religious beliefs, and the god-given virtues of its sexual and



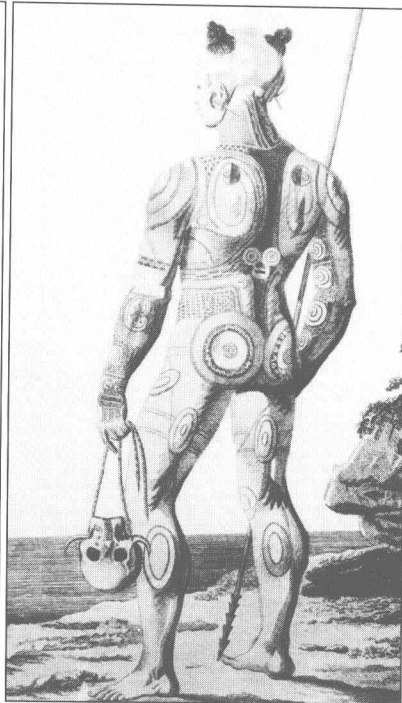
culinary practices. Ethnocentrism also includes the idea that other peoples' (often one's closest neighbors') beliefs, customs, and practices are like those of "animals." At the root of ethnic conflict and ethnonationalism, so prevalent in the world today, is ethnocentrism.

Anthropology is the study of the world of cultural differences. It examines cultural practices in their cultural contexts. *Cultural relativism* is the idea that each culture is unique and distinctive but none are superior. This is in sharp contrast to the ethnocentric point of view that one's own culture is superior to all others. However, the question of morality, what is right and wrong, presents a problem for proponents of cultural relativism. On the one hand, for example, are those who believe



that killing another human being should be universally condemned. On the other hand are those who point to killing within ceremonial or ritual contexts, as in head-hunting and cannibalism, which has, in the past, been a core feature of the societies in which it occurred. The Marquesans were cannibals and took trophy heads, as illustrated. Should those killings be condemned on the basis of a universal morality? Under this rubric, the rights of the individual are emphasized over those of the community. This is the position taken by advocates of universal human rights. Community-supported genital mutilation and arranged marriage are said, by those supporting universal rights, to be violations of the rights of the individual. Many citizens of the United States feel that the death penalty in their country, a

Tattooed Marquesan youth holding a trophy head taken from an enemy, depicted in the account of Langsdorff's voyages published in 1804.



practice renounced by most other Western countries, is also a violation of the universal moral principle against the taking of a human life by the state. Today there is an ongoing debate between supporters of a universal morality and supporters of moral relativism. Though universal human rights as an idea is widely accepted, what should be included as a universal human right is subject to continuing discussion.

The study of cultural differences by anthropologists also reveals what cultures have in common. Utilizing the comparative approach, anthropologists compare cultures to identify similarities of cultural patterning. For example, until World War II, the Rwala Bedouin of the Saudi Arabian desert depended primarily on their camel herds for subsistence. Until the early twentieth century, the Kazaks of what is now Kazakhstan relied on their herds of horses in the grassland steppe environment where they lived. Despite the fact that the environments they inhabited were totally different, the Rwala Bedouin and the Kazaks shared a number of cultural features. They both moved with their animals from place to place over fixed migration routes during the year in order to provide pasture for them. They lived in similar sorts of communities—nomadic encampments consisting of several related groups of people, each with its own tent. In each case, the nomads depended on exchanging the products of their herds (such as milk, butter, cheese, and hides) with townspeople for commodities, such as flour and tea, that they could not provide for themselves. Be-

cause of the basic similarities in the ways of life of the Rwala Bedouin and the Kazaks, anthropologists characterize them both as a type of society called nomadic pastoralist. However, cultural differences existed between the Rwala and the Kazak. They spoke totally different languages belonging to unrelated language families, and had different beliefs and practices. But, in a more general sense, as nomadic pastoralists, both groups had lifestyles and community structures similarly constructed around a cycle of movement with their herds.

■ Culture

The central concept of anthropology is culture. Other disciplines study the different kinds of human activities in all societies, but each discipline studies a specific sector of this activity. Thus, economists study economy, political scientists study government, art historians study art, musicologists study music, and religion specialists study religion. Each discipline focuses on particular activities of humans as if those activities were largely autonomous. The anthropologist investigates all these fields, but the emphasis is on their interrelationship. Anthropology's holistic approach, which focuses on culture as an organizing concept, stresses the relationship among economics, politics, art, religion, and other activities.

Today, many individuals live their lives in a world of overlapping cultures. The Navajo, studied by generations of anthropologists, still retain their Navajo identity even though they are part of a much larger complex culture, American culture, participating in the larger American economy and political system. Many individuals are bilingual, speaking the Navajo language and English, and retain elements of Navajo religion and beliefs. Within the large Navajo population, there is considerable cultural variation among individuals, between communities, and between regions. Navajo people have always been very receptive to new cultural ideas. The practice of herding sheep, the weaving of blankets, and the manufacture of silver, so central to Navajo culture today, were introduced by the Spanish at the time of their conquest of the New World. Though the Navajo adopted silver working and weaving from the Spanish, the styles embodied in these arts are distinctively Navajo. However, earlier they chose not to adopt the horticulture of their neighbors, the Hopi and Zuni. What emerges from the Navajo experience is an awareness that culture as a concept exists at many levels—the individual, the community, the subculture, and the larger society or political entity. Cultures do not exist with fixed boundaries; they blend into one another. Changes are constantly taking place in culture. Lastly, individuals are not simply recipients of culture; they are active participants involved in reworking their cultures.

If the first thing one notices is that there are cultural differences, the second is that all cultures have a certain degree of internal consistency. We have called this book *The Tapestry of Culture* because the imagery of a tapestry aptly conveys the integrated nature of culture. Many strands, many colors, many patterns contribute to the overall design of a tapestry, just as many items of behavior and many customs form patterns that, in turn, compose a culture. However, patterns and regularities of culture do not