

Cultures of Africa
Prof. Grinker
Summer 2013

Books Required:

- Grinker, Lubkemann, and Steiner. *Perspectives on Africa*.

Articles: Available on main class Blackboard and italicized in schedule.

Grading	Due Date
Short Paper 25%	October 1
Mid-Term Exam 25%	October 22
Class/Section Participation 20%	
Final Exam 30%	TBD

Learning Goals (specific):

By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- understand the human capacity to create culture and social organization.
- show how different aspects of social life, such as economy, religion, and politics, are related to each other in specific cultures (e.g., the Azande, the Lele, the Bedouin).
- use broad anthropological concepts such as culture, society, structure, function, and process to interpret social categories such as race, gender, and class.
- use anthropological concepts to understand their own social worlds and cultural biases.

Learning Goals (general): Critical Thinking and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

This course will contribute to student mastery of:

- critical thinking skills, where critical thinking is defined as analyzing and engaging with the concepts that underlie an argument.
- the ability to demonstrate critical thinking through written communication skills, which will be evaluated in the short paper, quiz, and exams; oral communication skills will be evaluated through “class participation,” though oral communication skills will not necessarily be a primary focus.
- cross-cultural perspectives, through which students critically analyze cultural difference as a fundamental aspect of human nature.

Academic Integrity

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use *the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must:* 1) identify direct quotations with quotation marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas

that are not your own by using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes from this class, or the use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

*The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you commit a breach of academic integrity in any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be **clearly** notified by the instructor in person OR by email before the Council is informed.*

Special Needs

Please let me or your TA know **right away** if you have any special needs with respect to how this course will be conducted. **Don't wait to do this.** *If you need extra time for exams, you must register with DSS; please let us know if you need to do this, and don't wait.* The web site for Disability Support Services is as follows:

<http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

Readings: ***"Electronic Reserves"***

References in italics are on Blackboard under

May	20	Introduction Geertz. Chapter 2.
May	21	The Contours of the Discipline Geertz. Chapter 3.
May	22	What is Society? <i>Durkheim.</i> Begin Mauss
May	23	The Gift Finish Mauss. Film: "Kawelka"
May	27	MEMORIAL DAY. NO CLASS. Functionalism and Structural Functionalism <i>Evans-Pritchard</i> (Nuer)
May	28	Structuralism

Geertz, Chapter 13
Skim both of the following: *Levi-Strauss*, “The Effectiveness of Symbols” or *Levi-Strauss*, “The Structural Study of Myth.”

May	29	Economic Anthropology <i>Douglas</i>
May	30	Rationality and Ritual <i>Evans-Pritchard</i> (Azande) Geertz Chapter 4.
June	3	The Interpretive Framework Geertz, Chapter 1.
June	4	Culture as Text Geertz, Chapter 15
June	5	Language and Ideology Abu-Lughod, Chapters 1-2
June	6	Film: “Dadi’s Family” Abu-Lughod chapters 3-4.
June	10	Resistance or the Affirmation of Hierarchy? Abu-Lughod, Finish the Book.
June	11	Post-Structuralism. <i>Halperin</i>
June	12	MID-TERM EXAM
June	13	Medical Anthropology; Autism Read Murphy; Grinker,
June	17	Autism Grinker
June	18	Finish Grinker. Film: TBA
June	19	Structural Violence 1. Scheper-Hughes
June	20	Structural Violence 2. Farmer
June	24	Capitalism and Resistance. Taussig.

June	25	Presentations
June	26	The Anthropology of Contemporary Social Problems Film: "In and Out of Africa."

Mid-Term Explanation

This mid-term is designed to test the extent to which you are meeting the course goals stated on the first page of the syllabus.

The mid-term therefore tests three domains:

1. your knowledge of how humans create culture and cultural difference.
2. your ability to think critically from a cross-cultural perspective.
3. your ability to communicate critical thinking effectively through writing.

The mid-term consists of two "**Concepts, Processes, and People**" questions which you must complete in 50 minutes.

These questions ask you to identify and state the significance of important material from the course. You are required to:

- a. select the most important details about the person, process, or concept. This requires both **identification** and *judgment* on your part. You must be able to decide what is important about a given thing, and what is unimportant. I require a great deal of detail, but it must be detail that is important to the arguments of the course. You will be given 16 points out of 25 for identification.
- b. Then, you must be able to say *why* those details are **significant**. Why do they matter, and why have you selected them? You might choose to say how a given ethnographer, such as Evans-Pritchard, provided new ways of thinking about culture that other anthropologists might use, or you might explain how a given concept will lead to future concepts. You might also say how this person's ideas are *related* to the broader course goals and themes. You will be given 9 points out of 25 for significance.

What is important for you to realize is that this is not just a test of your ability to master information – though I *do* require a high level of detail. Rather, this is a test of your ability to select the *most important* information, tell my *why* it is important, and then communicate all of this quickly and clearly.

How to Study

Use your lecture notes, the outlines I hand out in class, and your class/section discussions as a guide for going back over your readings. I will NOT ask you something obscure from the readings. These questions will be derived from

concepts, people, and processes that *recur*, usually in both the readings AND the lectures and discussions.

What this means is that I will ask you only about topics that are important for the unfolding of the course and its core ideas. I will not ask you trivial details about what happened on a particular page of a reading.

This doesn't mean that details aren't important. As you'll see in the sample answer below, details are tremendously important. But the details that count are to be marshaled in the service of an overall argument about why something is important to the course.

Structure

I will give you three (3) questions. Select two (2), for 25 pts each. For each question, sixteen (16) points will be awarded for identification, and nine (9) points for significance.

Example

Evans-Pritchard: A British cultural anthropologist, most active between 1930-1960, who conducted fieldwork among several societies, including the Nuer and the Azande of Sudan. Unlike most of his colleagues, who studied political organizations with obvious structures and hierarchies (e.g., kingships, chiefdoms), Evans-Pritchard was interested in how societies without any obvious political structure could be coherent. He showed that the "acephalous" Nuer political system was organized according to kinship and political alliances that changed depending on context. The Nuer's "segmentary lineage system" was defined by complementary and opposition: your friend in one particular conflict might be your foe in another one. His essential notion was, not unlike Radcliffe-Brown's, "structural-functionalist," meaning that all societies are structures which function through the complex interrelationships of its parts. His work with the Azande explored the logic of witchcraft beliefs. Whereas most scholars thought witchcraft was irrational, Evans-Pritchard showed that Azande thought makes sense in the context of Azande culture. In trying to adopt Zande thinking for himself, he suggests that Zande thought can be reasonable even for the scientifically trained European. He does not think witches really exist, but he understand completely why the Zande believe the exist. (16 pts. for definition)

Significance: Despite the fact that Evans-Pritchard was studying only one specific semi-nomadic group, the Nuer, he showed anthropologists that most African societies were organized politically in terms of descent and lineage, and this focus on kinship influenced all subsequent anthropology on the continent. The Nuer, he showed, held a model of society in their minds that organized and made sense of concepts of time, space, and social distance. One of the theoretical outcomes of his

work on the Nuer was to move anthropology away from strict empiricism and toward the study of more abstract organizing principles. In his work on the Azande, he helped anthropologists understand the problem of representing the modes of thought and action of other societies in a scholarly language. He also humbled scientists, showing them that the assumption that only science is “rational” is faulty. If we understand the cultural premises and social contexts of people’s thoughts, beliefs about supernatural causation no longer seem irrational. Evans-Pritchard’s work gave the belief systems of non-western societies more integrity than they had ever had in the eyes of European scholars, and also launched an important debate