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Odysseus Wandered for 10, I Wondered for 50 Years

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Odysseus Wandered for 10, I Wondered for 50 Years

The title of this paper is highly individualistic: It uses "I" and it is very competitive! Yet I was raised in Greece when it was a collectivist culture, as is clear from Triandis (1972). I started as an allocentric and ended up as idiocentric person. In January 1948, at age 21, I came to Canada, to study at McGill University, because the Technical University (Polytechnion) where I was studying in Athens was not in good shape



just after the war (e.g., poor labs). I found the contrast between Athens and Montreal as great in temperature (leaving in 50 degree weather and finding -10 F) as well as in social relationships. Montreal had an individualist culture, with people having many, but relatively superficial relationships, and that contrasted with Athens collectivism where one had few but deep relationships. In Montreal my friends talked to their parents once a month, while if I could have afforded it I would have talked to my parents every day. In Montreal social relations were fluid and quick-changing, in Athens they were stable and more or less unchanged. Traces of allocentrism remain, so that when I go back to Athens, each year, I spend time with my old friends, even 50 years after leaving. The contrast between Canada and Greece started me thinking about cultural comparisons.

But I had little trouble adjusting to Canada, because I was already more of an idiocentric than most Greeks. That was because I was not especially ethnocentric, having been exposed to German governesses and a French high school, and having discovered for myself at age 16 that all religions are systems of self-deception. Religion is an important aspect of Greek culture.

After studying engineering, and working as an engineer in Canada for three years, I discovered psychology and was so fascinated that I abandoned engineering for graduate work at Cornell University in social psychology. When I went back to Greece after my first year in graduate school I collected cross-cultural data (Triandis & Osgood, 1958; Triandis and Lambert, 1958). But mainstream psychology was not interested in culture. Culture was quaint, curious, stimulating, but most psychologists claimed that "what we found are the eternal, invariant laws of behavior." But there were exceptions. Brewster Smith, then editor of the most important social psychology journal, favored cross-cultural work, and he published my two cross-cultural papers.

In the early years of my career as a psychologist I worked mostly on attitudes and on industrial psychology. These were "mainstream fields." I received tenure three years after starting in Illinois, and then I started thinking that I could do cross-cultural studies, even if these were not "respected" as much as my other activities. For good measure I wrote a book on attitudes (Triandis, 1971), but my real love was cross-cultural work.

I was encouraged in the cross-cultural direction when Len Berkowitz asked me to do a chapter on culture and cognition, which appeared as the first chapter of his series of *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Triandis, 1964). Before writing that chapter

I came across Pike's work on emics and etics, and structured the chapter around such concepts.

In the early 1960s the U. S. Navy approached Fred Fiedler with a request that he develop a team to study how "every sailor can become an ambassador," a goal that Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt had set as Chief of Naval Operations. Fiedler asked me to be part of the team, which also included Osgood and Stolurow. We divided the job as follows: I would identify what elements of culture are relevant. Osgood would use those elements to improve the communication of Navy personnel with their hosts; Fiedler would use those elements to improve the leadership behavior of Navy personnel; Stolurow would use these elements to teach people who are going to another culture to perceive social behavior according to their own culture as well as the host culture. It was in that context that we came up with the idea of developing culture assimilators (Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis, 1971).

In order to find out what elements of culture were needed for the project I worked on the "analysis of subjective culture." I went around the world on my sabbatical, spending significant time in Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Iran, Israel, Greece, Germany, France, and Belgium, talking with potential collaborators of the project. The data finally came from Japan, India, Greece and the USA (Triandis, 1972).

The analysis of subjective culture included aspects of what is now called cultural psychology, such as the analysis of the meaning of emic concepts, changes in the meanings of concepts, and examining one culture in detail, and cross-cultural psychology, such as equivalence of measurement of etic constructs, examination of universals of meaning, and examining many cultures in one study.

An important event in my intellectual development was a conference that took place in Ibadan, Nigeria, over the New Year holidays of 1966-67. It was in that conference that I became convinced that one must avoid intellectual colonialism, which includes the study of a culture without indigenous collaborators, and without giving credit and co-authorship to local social scientists. This resulted in the inclusion of a section on the ethics of cross-cultural research in *The Analysis of Subjective Culture* (Triandis, 1972), and collaboration with a group of psychologists in the development of a code of ethics for cross-cultural research (Tapp, Kelman, Triandis, Wrightsman, & Coelho, 1974). When I was President of IACCP in 1976, I tried to "sell" that code to the membership, but many members felt that the code was too restrictive and demanding, and therefore limited the options of members. Consequently, it was never adopted.

In Ibadan we also discussed the need for a newsletter that would keep people with intercultural interests aware of the activities of others doing cross-cultural work. I agreed to edit that small publication, which we named the *Cross-Cultural Social Psychology Newsletter*. It started as a simple mimeographed publication and was distributed free to those who were interested (the Navy agreed to pay for the postage). It has since become the quarterly *Cross-Cultural Psychology Bulletin* of IACCP. Another important conference was held in Hong Kong, in 1972, when IACCP was formed.

In the 1970s I became President of Divisions 8 (Personality and Social Psychology) and 9 (Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues) of the American Psychological

Association, and tried to introduce some emphases on cross-cultural research. Then in the 1980s I became President of the Interamerican Society of Psychology and also got very much involved in the International Association of Applied Psychology, serving at its President in 1990-94. Most of these jobs were related to providing a context within which psychologists can meet, and develop collaborative relationships which improve the chances of doing cross-cultural work.

In the late 1970s I reviewed the manuscript of Geert Hofstede's 1980 book, *Culture's consequences*. I was enthusiastic, and recommended its publication. I also started working on individualism and collectivism, which corresponded with the contrast between Americans and traditional Greeks that I had reported in the *Analysis of subjective culture* (Triandis, 1972).

In the 1980s I worked with and for Hispanics in an effort to understand aspects of their culture. The concept of collectivism fit very well with our findings (Marin & Triandis, 1985). We identified the *simpatia* script (Triandis, Marin, Lisansky & Betancourt, 1984), which is certainly an element of collectivism.

Thus my main focus became the study of this cultural syndrome (Triandis, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1996). In the beginning I was not sure I was right in stimulating Harry Hui to work for his dissertation on the development and validation of a method for the measurement of the construct. What if no one was interested in it? I would have pushed him into a dead-end. Fortunately, it was not a dead-end. In fact, by 1993 I was able to spend my sabbatical at the East-West Center summarizing what was known about that construct, and there was already quite a lot that was known (Triandis, 1995). It has since become even more central, so that in August 1998, Hazel Markus and Michael Morris organized a conference of 50 researchers at Stanford University who talked mostly about aspects of this construct.

I think the future of cross-cultural psychology is going to be bright. I think that culture and social behavior are so strongly interrelated (Triandis, 1994) that no social psychology can be meaningful if it is not cross-cultural.

I want to mention the construct of "cultural syndromes," and their importance. They consist of shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values found among those who speak a particular language dialect, in a specific geographic region, during a particular historic period. The shared elements of subjective culture are organized around a theme, such as complexity, or the importance of the collective. Cultural syndromes provide a focus, so that we can get out of the fuzzy construct of "culture" and into a construct that we can probe systematically. Following are examples of such syndromes:

Cultural complexity, e.g., hunters and gatherers versus information societies. The size of settlements is one of the best ways to index cultural complexity (Chick, 1997).

Tightness. Tight cultures have many rules, norms, and ideas about what is correct behavior in different kinds of situations; loose cultures have fewer rules and norms. In the former cultures also, people become quite upset when others do not follow the norms of the society, and may even kill those who do not behave as is expected, while in the latter cultures people are tolerant of most deviations from normative behaviors. In Japan, which is a tight culture, people are sometimes criticized for minor deviations from norms, such as

having too much of a sun tan, or having curly hair (Kidder, 1992). Most Japanese live in fear that they will not act properly (Iwao, 1993).

Individualism and collectivism. Triandis (1994) has suggested that individualism emerges in societies that are both complex and loose; collectivism in societies that are both simple and tight. For example, theocracies or monasteries are both tight and relatively poor; Hollywood stars live in a culture that is both complex and loose. This speculation has not been tested rigorously, but the data seem to hang together reasonably well so that it may be the case that, for instance, Japan that is now quite complex is less collectivist than the Japan of the 19th century.

Vertical and horizontal cultures. Vertical cultures accept hierarchy as a given. People are different from each other. Hierarchy is a natural state. Those at the top "naturally" have more power and privileges than those of the bottom of the hierarchy. Horizontal cultures accept equality as a given. People are basically similar, and if one is to divide any resource it should be done equally.

Active-passive cultures. In active cultures individuals try to change the environment to fit them; in passive cultures people change themselves to fit into the environment. Active cultures are more competitive, action-oriented, and emphasize self-fulfillment; those characterized as more passive are more cooperative, emphasize the experience of living, and are especially concerned with getting along with others.

Universalism-particularism. In universalist cultures people try to treat others on the basis of universal criteria (e.g., all competent persons regardless of who they are in sex, age, race, etc. are acceptable employees); in particularist cultures people treat others on the basis of who the other person is (e.g., I know Joe Blow and he is a good person, so he will be a good employee).

Diffuse-specific. Diffuse cultures respond to the environment in a holistic manner (e.g., I do not like your report means I do not like you). Specific cultures discriminate different aspects of the stimulus complex. (e.g., I do not like your report says nothing about how much I like you).

Ascription-achievement. People can judge others on the basis of ascribed attributes, such as sex, race, family membership, etc. These are attributes people are born with. By contrast, people might judge others in terms of achieved attributes, such as skill, publications, awards.

Instrumental-expressive. People may sample more heavily attributes that are instrumental (e.g., get the job done) or expressive (e.g., enjoy the social relationship).

Emotional expression or suppression. People may express their emotions freely, no matter what the consequences, or they may control the expression of emotion.

One can identify many more syndromes, such as those reflected in the Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) value orientations, the culture of honor (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), and others. It should be noted that cultural syndromes are probably correlated. That would be an important research topic for the next generation of cross-cultural psychologists.

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1 To preserve space most references were dropped. However, interested readers will find most of them in: Triandis, H. C. (1994). *Culture and social behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill. References not found in Triandis (1994) appear below.