

Lecture 2

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“Cultures & Histories in Conflict Formation, Maintenance, and Resolution”

Thank you very much. it is difficult to follow such an important talk in discussing such disturbing issues but again that is why we have come together to try to think more fundamentally about conflict and cultures, so we were presented just now with a very dramatic and sad case and I think it's a useful reminder for us. My talk of course will be a transition into the more abstract study of these issues, but I want us all to recall that the reason we are exploring the abstract ideas is in order to solve some very real practical problems. So you have a text of the talk that I have added a few more things and deleted a few more things as usual, and it seems difficult to put the PowerPoint on the screen. So, forgive me for speaking quickly about some things that you do not have the text.

Firstly, I wanted to thank Mr. Kurokawa, who very kindly introduced me. And I wanted to also thank him for writing the document that inspired this workshop. Please read these documents he prepared, describing the purpose of this workshop; they were included in the materials you received today.

As he defined the topic, it's the relationship of cultures and conflicts and of course these meetings have many, many meanings and uses. And it is important to try to remember them in various languages.

Of course, some very conservative people use the word culture to describe behavior they want everyone to use. Sometimes they justify their beliefs by claiming that everyone has a specific cultural essence that is biologically and socially determined. Examples of essentializing cultures can be found in ideas such as Americanism, or *Nihonjinron*. Such, essentializing definitions of culture are often used to justify extreme social control and to mobilize people for conflict. We need to think about how these ideas of culture are manifested but to bring this back again to the abstractions that are being

studied by so many academic researchers, in anthropology we have of course in one field that's studying culture for many, many decades and we might say that defining culture is the basic question for cultural anthropology and cultural history.

Traditionally, these specialists have described cultures by answering four sets of questions: one is around the area of ecology. How do we make a living? How do we find food, shelter and other resources? What tools do we use to do that work? The tools, material tools, conceptual tools, social tools, what resource are available in our environment?

The second set of questions are around what we call social organization: What kind of differences do we make among ourselves? How do we divide our labor? How do we allocate knowledge amongst ourselves? How do we allocate scarce resources? This was mentioned already, how do we make decisions together? How do we deal with foreign disputes and how do we maintain our disputes as well as resolve them.

This third set of questions are around what we call developmental cycles, so the stages of a life: What is the inappropriate and appropriate ways we display knowledge and emotion at each stage of life? How do we transmit and acquire all the knowledge we need? And the last set of questions are called cosmology, whether are our knowledge and belief systems and practices? What are our models of argument, our are conceptual strategies, our styles of enquiry, our aesthetic differences?

So, these are the four general abstract questions that cultural anthropologists and cultural historians have been asking for many decades. We generally want to know how do people learn to enact and understand our cultures. How do we all learn and understand multiple cultures? Because we all do, we do not live in isolated cultural abodes. We have family cultures, we have work cultures, we have regional cultures, we have gender and ethnic and class cultures and all of these cultures change and resist change.

Of course, the other part of our vocabulary to consider is what are conflicts? They range obviously from minor disagreements in daily life to world wars lasting years. What are our cultural resources for engaging in all of these kinds of conflict and how are they related to each other? How do we learn

to engage in conflict? How do we escalate disagreements into more serious ones of comfort like war and terror? How do we reverse that process? How do we learn the honorable and dishonorable ways of disagreeing?

Personally, I come from a regional culture that places very high value on personal honor. Honor has many definitions in my first culture. In that culture, there are also many, many ways to insult somebody, of course. Even after spending many years in many places in the world, and I've spent about a third of my adult life outside the United States, I still find it difficult to accept behavior that my first culture regarded as insulting to my sense of honor, I always have to think about this.

I come from a culture that requires the same level of respect for all people, so I am still very uncomfortable showing different levels of respect to people sharing the same space.

Each culture includes many ways of showing respect and various strategies for insulting and engaging in conflict with people. Every culture makes much of certain kinds of conflict and we learn to ignore other conflicts. We want to know so much more about all these processes I have just described and I think that's the purpose of these workshops that we are beginning to hold.

Now, in cultural anthropology, we understand that we are studying differences as well as sameness. So, we are very interested in how engaging in conflict also means engaging in practices of difference and sameness. So, I think that we can learn a lot from cultural anthropology and cultural history, about how people all over the world have understood differences and made meanings about our differences and how we use these ideas. It is important I think to remember that although culturally sometimes we try to define each other as opposites, and to say that this is natural or biological or even physical, scientists usually do not find opposites in the world. They find spectra, ranges; they study variation and the range of variation.

Concepts of opposites are human-made, many researches have shown that humans use differences to perceive and to think. My teacher Gregory Bateson and many others have shown that humans also work together to create

differences and identify differences that make a difference. We use these to create our classifications and we achieve stabilities in our classifications and tools for generating them and transforming them. We develop aesthetic preferences for these processes. Simplicities or complexities, stabilities or instabilities, uniformities or variation, taxonomies or transformation, regularities or irregularities, the students I teach have these different aesthetic preferences already when they are undergraduates.

Our project, I think, will be strengthened by learning, about these different approaches to what makes the difference and what kinds of difference will make a difference. I have been over the last several years very interested in how certain stories are made in different cultures, so of course when I learnt in Japan about *kishotenketsu*, and its rule also applies in Korea and China, I was very interested and also how that relates to another four-fold structured formula of metaphor, metonymies and irony. You might think that quite a different step the conflict does learning how people make stories could tell us.

I think it is very important to realize that when they are in conflict, we are telling stories about ourselves and about other people and sometimes it is very difficult for us to understand why the other groups are telling the stories they are, and especially why they are telling the way they are. Even as in a story when you set up the model in a story and then you set up a problem and when you set up a model of how to solve the problem. Usually, the kinds of stories that we learn even as children, I think it is very important for us to understand the structures of how we establish meaning and problems and resolution in the most elementary parts of our daily lives. And also how these are different, what looks like a resolution of a problem in one story, one set of cultures does not look like a resolution in another set of cultures, and forth.

Well, I think because of the time I want to skip a few things, our previous speaker talked about the difficulties in allocation of resources. I just want to briefly mention that of course, anthropologists have stories that focused on this issue of scarce resources; the unequal distribution of resources for a long time. For nearly decades now and we know that when certain forces are present, revolutions usually occur. Three conditions: rising expectations, people have to be believing that things are getting better and then

suddenly that's thwarted, it stopped; there is an increasing gap between resources available to different social groups; and third, there is a wide perception of this difference. Under these circumstances, we will see revolutions. Whether that's in the United States or France or Russia or China, these same issues have occurred.

It should not surprise us that now that we are in a global world that when these differences, these rising expectations and the gap between resources and the perceptions are different and the frustrations of the rising expectation occur, they can happen all over the world in all sorts of different groups that might not have been so closely engaged with each other in the past.

Well, most of our social and cultural research of the last 150 years has centered on nation states, probably because most of the funding for researchers come from nation states.

However, for about the last 25 years, many of the researchers in the world have come to see that the world of nation states should be examined rather than assumed. If we only think about research on conflict and conflict resolutions instead of nation states, we are losing out on how to understand a great deal of conflict and its resolution.

Well, I think I will again move along here. I want to just say a few of the difficulties in studying cultures and actions and meanings. Of course, in studying cultures, all of this have every day concepts and practices about nature, human nature, common sense, normal life, social order, social disorder, kinship, conflict, justice, food, sex, death, war. This is all part of everybody's vocabulary and yet they are also concepts that we analyze as researchers. So, it creates a lot of difficulty using this to study concepts that everybody is using. In my fields of cultural anthropology and cultural history, also we are looking usually for specificity, we are looking at human variation. We are looking at how we can be so similar and yet so different. And our related field of socio-biology, they are usually seeking in universal level. We have some shared problems that also face different difficulties.

Well, as I have just mentioned all of these ideas, these ideas that we all share: human nature, gender, body, social class, violence, we could call all

of these beliefs common sense. A famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz once said that "Common sense is very easy to recognize because of the maddening air of certainty with which it is always uttered". Everybody believes that their common sense is commonly shared around the world and that if you do research on this, or just live life, I think you will understand that there are many forms of common sense in the world, probably in this room. It is very difficult to learn to accept or tolerate other people's forms of common sense, much less respect them.

We have to think about what is normal and abnormal variation among human acts and human cultures. Very often we like to think of what we do as normal and what everybody else does as abnormal. These are of course serious problems when we are trying to resolve conflicts. I had more to say about this in the text that is circulated for you.

We also have some problems in our research, some of the ideas in our research, like ideas about race or gender or ethnicity, entered into popular discussion, also became the basis for a lot of social decision-making by governments. Now that a lot of those, our earlier ideas about race and ethnicity and gender have been refuted, scientifically by researchers, they are still in wide circulation among people all over the world and including in this room, I am sure. So we have to be very careful in our fields about how our ideas, the lifetime of our ideas and how they end up shaping the world in very serious ways.

And perhaps I hope that you all know that the idea of race has been scientifically refuted for about 20 years now and you have to think about the ways that it generates conflict around the world, very deadly conflicts. And there is of course more to say about that. We have the whole issue of research ethics too. In my field, we should do no harm. If we are studying people, we don't want our very studies to generate harm for them. It's a problem that's emerged from anthropology because so many of our ideas from anthropology have been our government supporting the basic research, have wanted to use our basic research and apply it for their own uses, including conflict.

To just give three examples, many imperial governments over the last hundreds of years have manipulated traditional differences among cultural

groups in order to divide and rule. Three classic cases are the actions of colonial governance in India, South Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Anthropological knowledge was used to accomplish that divide and rule goal, which of course we are still living with.

In another example, the US government supported anthropological research in South East Asia to determine how to recruit various ethnic groups to support the US military actions. Similar examples can be found in anthropological studies from France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan and so forth. So we have a lot to think about in terms of how our ideas can be applied to deadly effect.

As I said, in anthropology we try to teach the next generation to do no harm. This is similar to the resolution by the Japanese Physical Society that their knowledge should only be used for peaceful purposes. Unfortunately, in anthropology and in physics, it is very difficult to control the uses of our knowledge. Still, to be successful in our resolutions, we must always teach them and practice them and I think including during this workshop.

So, to try to get back on time, I want to just conclude to say that we hope this workshop provides us with some new questions and some new resources for answering our questions about culture and conflicts.

As we were planning this workshop, many people from around the world said that they were eager to join our discussions and only a few have been able to join us this time. We hope that conversations begun at this workshop will continue and grow and we hope that this conversation will continue including people from different communities concerned with conflict and cultures, diplomacy, academia, governance, industries and various civil society organizations. We are delighted to see you here and look forward to our emerging conversations. Thank you.