

Second Reflection ¹

Today, August 31, 2017, is a day of Hajj. It is an appropriate day for discussion about divergent cultures and understanding their divergence. Hajj is a cultural event for Muslims. During Hajj, the Muslims from around the world are encouraged to participate in the ritual of Hajj. The ritual encourages disregard of class distinction, race distinctions, and nationalities. A precept of Islam holds we are *all* children of the first man. We are all human, and all is the creation of the supreme will. There is an ayah, in the Qur'an, which states, the purpose of the division of humanity, by Allah, into different tribes, nations, and languages, is that we may come to know one another. That is one of the purposes of Intercultural communications. The philosophy of both, Islam and Intercultural Communications.

In the previous writings, given to us for reading, there is reference to the writings of a number of authors, for provisional resources, of a "fresh perspective on communication" (Carey). One author mentioned is Clifford Geertz. Carey's understanding of Geertz, provides the "quality of symbols: their ability to be both representations "of" and "for" reality", as the impetus we use to construct reality. Accordingly, our reality, now, finds construction material, from the readings of Geertz's Essays, provided by our instructor, professor Cynthia Wang; specifically "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" and "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight".

Geertz continues to emphasize the control man has over his concepts of culture. In 'Thick', he positions himself looking at culture as semiotic in concept. Given, if you are studying anthropology, you will need to decipher the signs and symbols, in use by the subjects, in order to get a better grasp of the collective perspectives of the subjects. However, beware you do not infer your own meanings to the signs, symbols, gestures and behaviors witnessed when studying others.

Geertz does not appear able to be objective in his reports of observations. Failure to be objective leads to skews of definitions, or results, from observations. It is rather true, you cannot know what a person is thinking, even if you ask and they give you an answer. You can only trust their response, and compare the response to their behavior versus your expectations. This is true even when you are a recognized member of a particular culture. Trust becomes important. Concepts and context are temporal functions. It is the trust you have in yourself and the subject(s) observed which allows you to accept the manner the subjects accept you. Understanding the temporal circumstances affords better communication between you and the observation subject(s). Still, you must wonder, just as the question, in quantum physics, about the 'Cat in the box', how your observing changes the event.

The question of effect, of the observer, comes to mind when reading the 'Deep'. In this essay, Geertz speaks of his experiences at the cockfights in Bali. Having been involved in somewhat less than legal enterprises, I am aware how the presence of an unknown person changes the interaction of those common to the event. Then, even after numerous regular episodes of participation, by the 'unknown' (or 'new') variable, as acknowledgement of their presence continues, and is expected, the procedures of engagement change to accommodate the previous 'new' body. I propose, irrespective of the statistics gathered, and statements made by the 'informants', about the cockfights in Bali, the mere fact of the participation by the 'outsider' – Geertz and company – influenced some degree of the event. For instance, if he bet, or not, effected the dynamics of the fight.

Chapter Two, of our textbook – Experiencing Intercultural Communication – speaks of four building blocks of interpersonal communications: power, context, communication, and culture. Power expresses itself in the essays of Geertz, where he associates the penis and masculine dominance with the cockfight scenarios and exhibitions. Context displays when Geertz writes of how acknowledgment of him, as more than a non-entity in Bali, affect his ability to gather information from the indigenous folk. Communication shows up when Geertz discusses the interpersonal exchanges relative to the betting schemes at the cockfight, and the effect of one word on the odds before the fight. Culture is the representation, by Geertz, of the significance of cockfighting in Bali. I can think of other countries where cockfighting occurs – Mexico, Africa (Nigeria, Zululand, Botswana), Jamaica, The Virgin Islands, Hawaii, Japan, rural areas and prisons in continental America – and wonder if an outside observer would place as much emphasis on the event, in relation to the culture of Americans or the members of these other countries.

This goes to prove the statement, "we create our realities" (Carey). We do create our realities because of our interpretations of observations and our personal exposures to conditions, which precede what we observe.

The textbook conveys the importance of knowing the hidden layers of culture – attitudes, belief, and values – and the effects of these hidden layers on the behavior of the observed phenomena. The anthropologist must beware of the temptation to stereotype people after exposure to what they determine to be cultural behaviors. Here I agree with the philosopher Kwame Appiah, who professes "we must all become cosmopolitans (Martin / Nakayama, Chapter One).

I recall a writing named "Lord of the Flies", by W. Golding, which was a fictional account of survival in an isolated environment, by culturally untrained individuals (European Youths) after a shipwreck. However, the more I experience life, the more I question the fictional behavior of the novel's characters. If culture is a learned account, then it is possible to project a reality similar to that of the novel where, absent direction from elders, indigenous life forms behave according to the prescriptions for survival and dominance within a group. Prison evidences similar circumstances.

We, today, teach that Hammurabi established the first civilization upon the 'etching in stone' his Laws, and placing of the Laws of his domain at the entrance of his kingdom. Since we, "civilized people", allegedly, follow the laws (of our respective countries) will it be appropriate to classify us, all, as of the learned culture of Hammurabi?

¹ It should be noted the information presented in the essays by Geertz, has the format of support, including statistics, and the form of presentation given in the arguments / rhetoric classes. Except I cannot determine if the citation format is MLA or APA.

References

- Carey, James W.**, *“Communication as Culture – Essays on Media and Society”* (1989), Unwin Hyman, Boston (Chapter 1, pp. 13-36)
- Geertz, Clifford.** *“The Interpretation of Cultures –Selected Essays”* (1973) Basic Books, Inc. NY. (Chapters 1 and 15 / (1) *‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’*, and (15) *‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’*)
- Martin, Judith N. & Nakayama, Thomas K.**, *“Experiencing Intercultural Communication – An Introduction”*, Sixth Edition, (“Copyright @ 2018”), McGraw-Hill, NY.