

Anth 201: Video Prompts

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First Contact

First Contact alternates between first person accounts as told by PNG natives and the Leahy brothers, gold prospectors from Australia. Were you surprised by the way first contact is remembered and talked about now by either the Hagen mountain peoples or the Leahy brothers? Why?

There is an interesting contrast between the value systems in the Australians' quest for gold (which the local people did not value) and the Hagen peoples willingness to work for seashells (which the Australians did not value). What are the consequences for the Mt. Hagen people for this difference in evaluation?

In the closing sequence, contemporary Mt. Hagen people watch the film taken of first contact in the 1930's. Elderly Hagen women remember Mick Leahy with fondness. An elderly man, dressed in modern Western garb (including necktie!) seems genuinely pleased that this record of earlier Hagen life exists and many of the people seem amused at their own appearance/behavior at the time of contact. Does this reaction surprise you? Why or why not?

Do you think the Leahy brothers acted with integrity in their dealings with the people of Mt. Hagen? Why or why not?

What does this video suggest to you about the notion of "cultural relativism"?

Killing Us Softly III

Jean Kilbourne notes that when she speaks to people around the country about the gendered messages in American advertising that most people feel personally exempt from being influenced. Obviously, this cannot be the case! In this case you may write a personal reflection about how you think advertising DOES affect you -- positively or negatively.

OR

Find a print ad that you want to deconstruct in light of the video. Cut it out and tape it to a piece of typing paper and include it with your paper in which you consider the "hidden" messages in the ad.

OR

Perhaps you want to disagree with Kilbourne. Construct your own argument about the effects of advertising on our expectations of men and women.

N'ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman

In this video we see a very surprising trajectory in the life story of N'ai who was born into the !Kung foraging society in the Kalahari desert. Her childhood was typical of foragers and there was little contact with non !Kung persons. (Note, however, that there was a white anthropologist on hand to make videos of N'ai as a child.) The documentary makes use of this early footage to contrast it with N'ai's life as a senior !Kung women in a settled village, coping with TB. Along the way, she had a major role in a Western movie (*The Gods Must Be Crazy*). She acquired some Western style "wealth".

Possible essay topics:

Discuss the breakdown of a way of life and a sense of community for the settled !Kung and what the effects of this breakdown have been for social cohesion.

Discuss the notion of "human agency" in N'ai's relationship with her husband.

What kind of ethnocentric ideas/behavior did you observe in the white settlers? In the !Kung? Is there a way to decide who's right? Does it matter?

How would YOU determine whether someone who previously lived as a forager was "better off" in a settled village? In other words, develop a set of criteria for being "better off."

Masai Women

Bear in mind as you watch this video and write this essay that the topics for the week are modes of production and modes of consumption and exchange and systems of kinship. This will help direct your analysis. (also spelled Maasai)

What do you make of the women's ritual of taunting and teasing a new bride upon her arrival in her new husband's village? Why do you think it is a FEMALE ritual rather than something done by both males and females?

Childhood's end for girls is elaborately marked: head shaving, name change, loss of personal decoration, and circumcision. It is joyfully celebrated by parents and the community while the young woman herself recovers from the surgery. What do these practices suggest to you about Masai notions of "family"?

Masai mothers play important roles in the ritual and economic lives of their sons. Explain how these cultural practices lead to general social cohesion AND how these practices produce differentiated outcomes for women's life trajectories. What right/practice do women have that can influence these outcomes?

While the video is titled "Masai Women" we got a lot of information about the lives of Masai men as well. Compare/contrast the gender roles of the women and the men. What conclusions can you reach about bonds of affection between men and women both between and among generations? What might you speculate about the relative hierarchies among women? among men? How does the Masai mode of production -- pastoralism -- affect shape the culture of the Masai? Is their particular cultural formation DICTATED by their mode of production or might some other, very different, culture have been equally appropriate?

The Holy Ghost People

The Holy Ghost People documents the religious practices and beliefs of a small community of worshipers in rural Appalachia. Many similar independent congregations are scattered throughout the region. Their practices are a variation of evangelical Christianity otherwise known as "charismatic" or, perjoratively, as "holy rollers" (because they enter altered states of consciousness during which they speak in tongues, move erratically including rolling on the floor). The practices most at odds with "mainstream" Christianity are snake handling and ingesting poison as part of religious expression.

In the lectures and readings this week you were given different "models" of understanding the role of religion in human life. Use Spiro, Durkheim or Marx models to theorize the appeal of the Holy Ghost churches to their members. Use data from the video to support your position.

Remember, this is an exercise in anthropology. You are not being asked to critique their theology or religious practice but rather to analyse it. This is hardest to do when one is looking at a subculture "at home." So, for example, it is not appropriate in this context to try and "refute" their reading of sacred text with an interpretation of your own. That is beside the point in anthropological analysis.

Please don't use the phrase "Holy Rollers" either. It is used as a slam.

Advertising Missionaries

The response prompts for this video is simple: why (using your best anthropological reasoning) is

this both a comedy and a tragedy? Some of the approaches you might take:
--the change from independent, cashless subsistence living to the need for cash
--the "benefit" of adding Coke (liquid candy bar) to the Mt. Hagen diet
--replacing yams with rice
--putting "Omo" (detergent) into pristine streams

Another approach would be to consider WHY the foragers, horticulturalist, and pastoralists who are still practicing their tradition modes of production are feeling increasing pressure to join the cash economics of the industrialized world. Who benefits from their change? who suffers? You might approach this from either a materialist or a symbolic theoretical position.

Becoming a Woman in Okrika

In this video we see the rites of passage from girlhood to womanhood among the Orika people of Nigeria. Rites are a specialized form of symbolic communication which 1. teach the initiates something about the status that they are being inducted into 2. symbolizes deeply held cultural values and 3. actually confers a new status on the initiates.

Possible response topics:

What rites of passage do we have in the US? Can you make parallels between American and Okrika practices?

The video depicts several practices of the Okrika people. What information is transmitted to the initiates-- about themselves? about their culture?

What effect would you speculate the rituals might have on the young women for how they conduct the rest of their lives?

How does the "outside" world impinge on their cultural practices? What do you think will happen to such rites in the future?

Thanksgiving Analysis

This is a one-time-special offer. Rather than analyze a video, this week you may analyze your Thanksgiving rituals. You may approach this from any anthropological perspective that seems right for your gathering such as division of labor, gender roles, kinship dynamics, rite-of-passage rituals, intergenerational transmission of cultural expectations, symbolic importance of food(s), tradition vs change or ????

Have fun but think carefully about what you have learned and how it applies to real life!

These observations will be made Nov. 22nd and the paper due on Nov. 26th.

The War of the Children

The War of the Children highlighted TaTa's story of capture and reintegration from Joseph Kony's guerilla army in Northern Uganda among the Acholi people. The following are some of the anthropological lines you might want to consider in your paper and, as always, you are free to invent your own.

--Why child soldiers are particularly difficult for regular armies to deal with?
--How the terror of having their children stolen disrupts village life -- and what that may mean for the future.
--The ramifications for future political stability when a generation has known nothing but conflict.
--The bind that female abductees face in dealing with their captors.
--An opinion paper on what you think could or should be done -- and by whom -- to end the practice (you may argue non-interference also, give your warrant for argumentation).
--What role might tradition spiritual beliefs play in healing the social fabric in this conflict? What role adopted religions?
--From what you know about social bonds and village life, consider what the future for the child

soldiers might be as adults in social life and as citizens.

The Sultan's Burden

The Sultan's Burden, filmed in 1992, captures the life of Sultan Issa Maigari of the northern Cameroon province of Adamawa (an area the size of England). The sultan is beset with problems. Since liberation from colonial rule in the 1960's, sultans no longer have the power to tax -- that belongs to the federal government. People's expectations of a sultan, however, are generosity as demonstrated by gifts. To make matters worse, the Sultan's people practice Islam; the national president and power structure is Christian. Any accommodation to the Federal officials is seen as a betrayal of Islam by the fundamentalists. Then there are cross-cutting tribal affiliations in Adamawa between the Fulani and the Mboum people. The Sultan's own Praise Singer sings a diatribe against the Sultan. If it were not for the palace, the harem, and the many descendents, it wouldn't be a job worth having.

My challenge to you is this: what type of a political leader is the Sultan? (In other words, is he a headman, a chief or what?) What is his warrant for leadership? Does he have influence, authority, and power? What happens when two political systems are at work concurrently? Do you think this sultan's predicament is unique?