

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Key questions applying theories, concepts
and issues in Cultural Anthropology



Historicism or Cultural Relativism

Franz Boas on the right with the Kwakiutl in British Columbia 1894

Boas proposed that each culture had its own particular historical context and should be judged by that and not be compared to or judged by a different standard or context.

That information is gained through interviews and participant observation

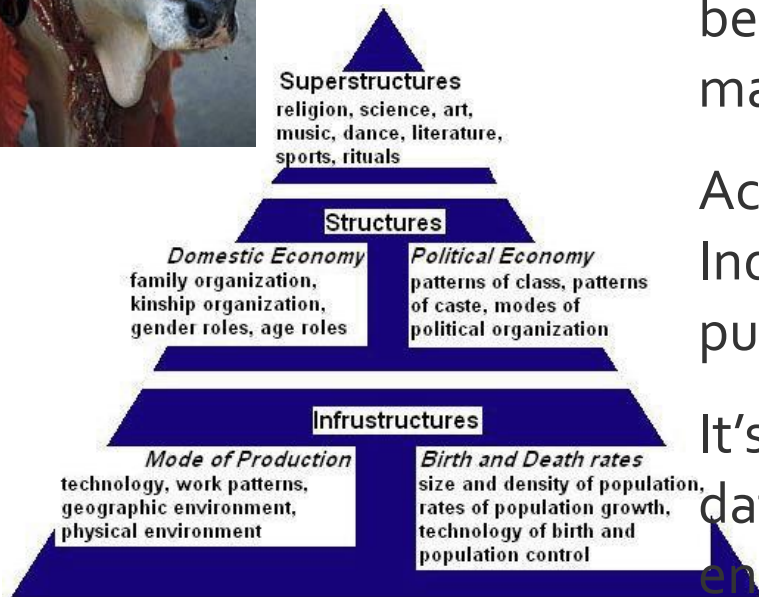
Cultural Materialism

a theory proposed by Marvin Harris, is about understanding a culture based on what a culture produces.

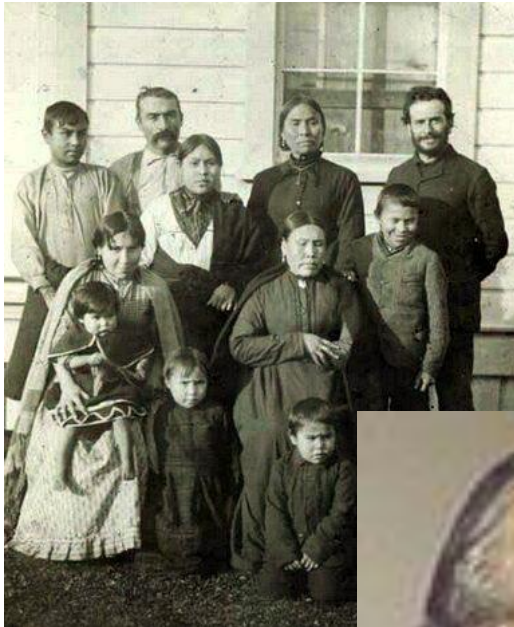
The belief is that society is shaped by what they produce (infrastructure) and that everything connected to the culture (structure and superstructure) sticks around because it is connected to the production or maintenance of some product or economy.

According to this theory, cows are sacred in India to the Hindu because they serve a purpose connected to the economy.

It's a theory connected to looking at material data, and the scientific method is encouraged. Information should be drawn from data not interviews.



Comparing Theories



- What are some examples of cultural relativism?
- What are some examples of cultural materialism?
- How are they similar?
- How are they different?

Comparing Theories

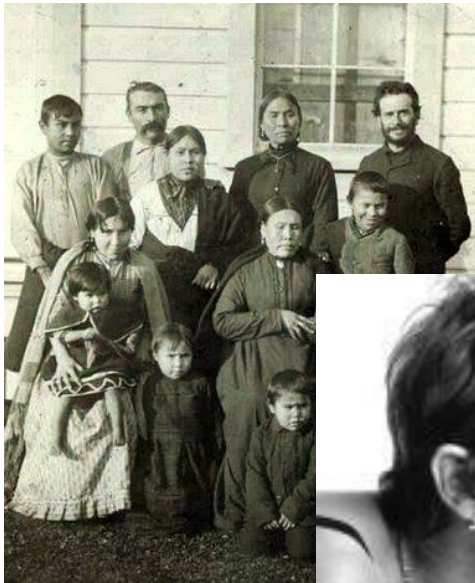


- Look at the table division of labour by Gender chart from Bangladesh.
- How would a functionalist theorist explain this?
- How would a feminist anthropologist explain this?
- How are they similar?
- How are they different?

Bangladesh Gender Division Chart

	Women	Men	Both
Private Domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Child care ○ Domestic tasks ○ Livestock and poultry rearing ○ Homestead gardening ○ Post-harvest tasks ○ Seed preservation ○ Subsistence agricultural tasks ○ Collection of biomass within homestead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Building the house ○ Preparation for strengthening the house before the potential rain/cyclone periods ○ Fishing in adjacent ponds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Water fetching ○ Weaving ○ Fish processing ○ Domestic management during disasters
Public Domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collecting cow dung and other biomass ○ Domestic maids ○ School teaching ○ Egg selling by children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Farming ○ Fishing ○ Trading ○ Day labor ○ Rickshaw pulling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Day labor ○ Industrial labor ○ Agricultural labor ○ Small trading ○ Fish selling at market ○ Commercial vegetable production ○ Milk selling services

Comparing Theories



Look at your notes on Post Modernism and on Historicism or Cultural Relativism.

- Briefly define each.
- How are they similar?
- How are they different?



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Post Modernist Anthropology

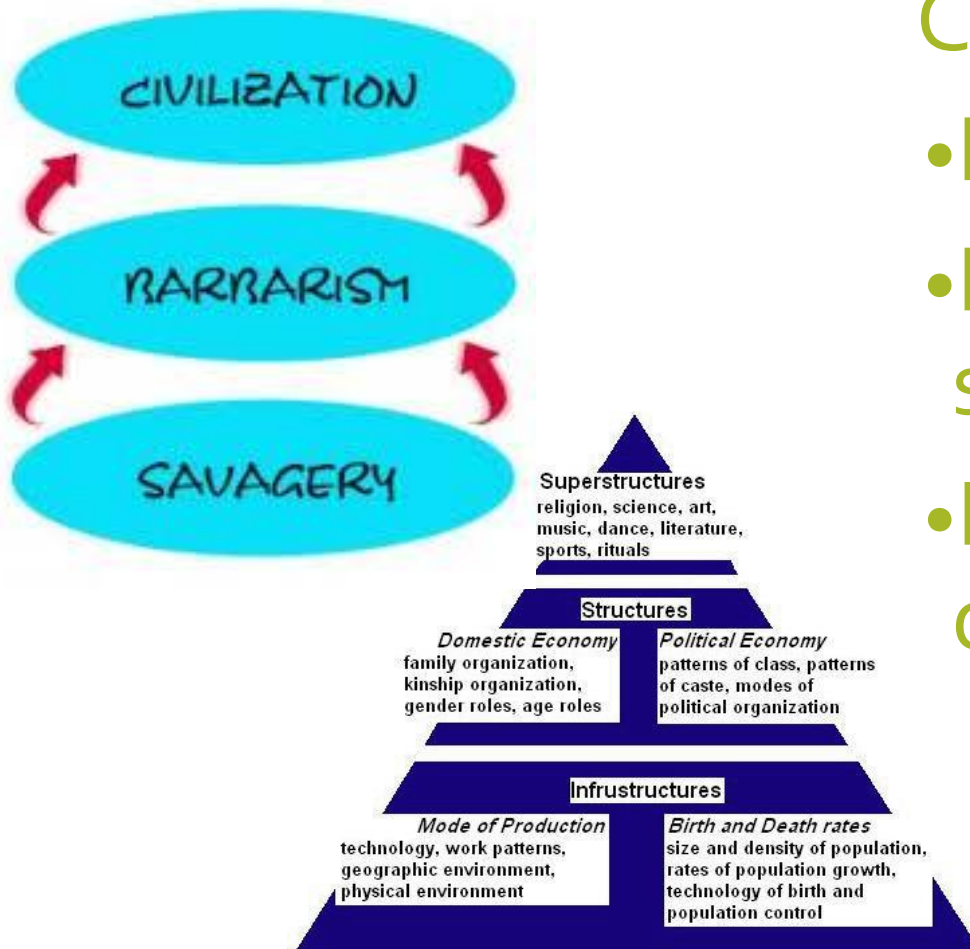
- They are concerned with being objective and not subjective
- They ask - Can an anthropologist speak and or write on behalf of someone else's culture?
 - They solve this by saying all writing by any person is completed from one standpoint - writing about others living in a different standpoint.
 - Anthropologists are essentially culture agents or brokers.



Main points...

- It is important to include the opinions of the people being studied
- Recognizing the idea of cultural relativism is important
- Rejection of science and scientific "methods"
- Rejection of big, universal theories which explain cultures

Comparing Theories



Now compare Social Evolutionism and Cultural Materialism.

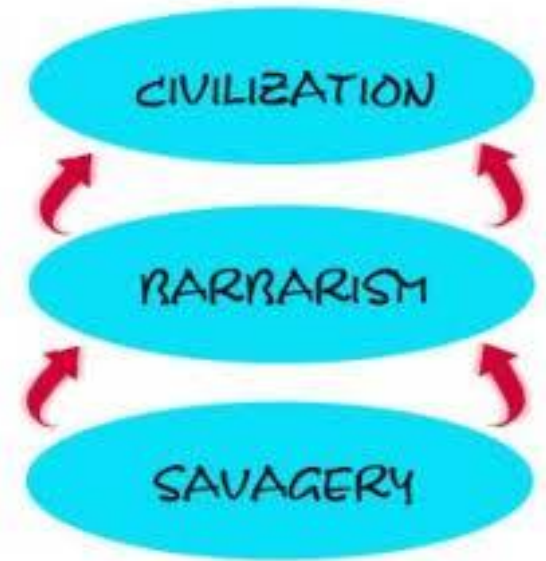
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Social or Cultural Evolutionism

The idea that cultures evolved in a progressive manner, from simple to complex

E B Tylor felt this happened in 3 stages

1. Savagery
2. Barbarism
3. Civilization



Lewis Henry Morgan felt it took 6 stages

This allowed for greater cultural diversity between groups

Cultural Materialism

a theory proposed by Marvin Harris, is about understanding a culture based on what a culture produces.

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