

Midterm Study Guide

Living in a Pluralistic World: Anthro 340, Spring 2007

The midterm exam will be on Thursday, March 22, in class, for the full class period. It is worth 20% of the possible points in the course (200 of 1000), and it covers the course through the end of *West of Kabul, East of New York*. Bring a blue book (or two) and any writing instrument you prefer. The midterm calls for four essays. Your first two should be perhaps a paragraph or two in length, addressing any two questions you pick from a list of three. The second two should be longer, probably quite a few paragraphs. For each of these, you will have your choice of either of two questions. All of the questions are fairly open-ended. While most could be answered minimally in just a few sentences, higher grades will go to essays that cover more material and discuss more angles; that are more creative or insightful; that are more logical, clear, and fully explained; that are better illustrated with examples; and generally that show greater mastery of the course material and thought about its implications.

Some concepts to be clear on:

culture	cultural relativism	arbitrary social construct	naïve realism
society	ethical relativism	emic point of view	ethnography
culture shock	multiculturalism	etic point of view	ideal culture
ethnocentrism	participant observation	comparative approach	real culture

Some of the questions on the midterm may come from the list below. These do not cover everything, but they should give you a sense of the kinds of things I hope you have been thinking about. Some do overlap a bit.

1. Explain Middleton's three approaches to understanding other cultures. Suggest an explanation of each type for practices or beliefs described in the course readings.
2. What is naive realism? Explain and illustrate with an example from the course readings or discussion. Why might it be useful to be aware of the phenomenon of naive realism, both in yourself and in others?
3. Imagine that three people are discussing a news article that claims that recent immigrants from Cambodia eat dogs. Ethan takes an ethnocentric point of view. Carrie takes a cultural relativist point of view. Mark takes a multiculturalist point of view. Summarize what each one might say.
4. What is meant by an "arbitrary cultural construct"? Your explanation should touch on all three words. Illustrate by comparing a belief or practice from a foreign culture in the readings to the analogous belief or practice in the predominant US culture. How might your understanding of the concept of arbitrary cultural construction affect how you view and respond to beliefs and practices in your own culture and in others?
5. In what senses can we learn about our own culture by comparing it to others? As an example, compare some aspects of the culture of El Nahra or the various beliefs and practices discussed by Ansary with our own. Does this comparison suggest anything about our culture that you might not have thought about otherwise?

6. Why was that news article about the Shi'ite ritual of cutting children's foreheads so irritating to anthropologists and not a few anthropology students in this class? Why might anthropologists argue that articles like this one are counterproductive?
7. The pilgrimage to Karbala - the same one you read about in *Guests of the Sheik* - was going on this year during the past few weeks. Several large bombings killed many pilgrims. Many people insisted that this would not deter them, and huge crowds did come and participate over many days. What is this pilgrimage about? Why is it so important? Why might people insist on going, despite the danger? Why were they a particular target for the bombings? What effect might these events have on attitudes and future developments in Iraq?
8. What are some likely reasons why some female Muslim students in France and England say they want to wear headscarves at school? What might headscarves mean to them? What broad historical, economic, or other factors might be involved in encouraging women to wear headscarves?
9. What are Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims? What is the historical basis of the division between them?
10. Based on what you have read for this course, what would you say (politely and persuasively) to the British Member of Parliament Jack Straw in response to his request that female constituents who visit him remove their niqab (a kind of hijab that covers everything but the eyes)?
11. According to Ansary, why do extremely conservative Muslims oppose much of what the modern West stands for?
12. What insights can you glean from the course material concerning recent and current events in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the "war on terror"? This a broad question that you could approach successfully in many different ways. I will be looking for anthropological concepts and thinking, and clear connections to the readings.
13. If you could ask Ansary to explain why conservative Islam seems to have been gaining popularity in the last 25-plus years, what do you think he would say? Explain both what you think he would say, and why you think so, having read his book.
14. Militant Muslims opposed both the Soviet Union and its ideological opposite, the United States. What is the logic behind this seemingly self-contradictory position?
15. Imagine that your friend's Army Reserve unit is about to go to Iraq, and they have had almost no training in Iraqi culture. She asks you to give a talk to her unit about anything from this class that you think they should know, from attitudes and concepts to specific details. What might you tell them?
16. The Taliban is regaining control of parts of Afghanistan. Suggest some factors that might be contributing to this, referring to what you read in *West of Kabul, East of New York*.