ETHNOCENTRISIM. CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS
ETHNOCENTRISM

• Definition
• The tendency to view one’s own culture as superior and apply one’s own cultural values to judging the behavior and beliefs of people raised in other cultures
• Everybody is a little ethnocentric
• We hear ethnocentric statements all the time
PATRIOTISM VS ETHNOCENTRISM

• Patriotism is love of one’s culture.
• Can be patriotic without being ethnocentric
ETHNOCENTRIC IF

• You judge the behavior and beliefs of people who are different from you
• You believe that there are primitive cultures, especially if their life ways are different than your own
• You believe that some cultures are backward if they lack the technology and consumerism of your own culture
NOT TRUE

• No such thing as primitive or backward cultures. All cultures provide their members with the means for meeting all human needs.
• Ethnocentrism has to be taught. You have to be taught that your culture is superior and all other cultures are inferior
• Stop ethnocentric behavior you must stop judging others who are different from you
CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOCENTRISM

• Contributes to Social Solidarity, a sense of value and community among people who share a cultural tradition
• People everywhere think that the familiar expectations, and their opinions and customs are right, true, proper, natural and moral
• Regard different behavior as strange, unnatural, immoral and savage
THINK

• Can you think of examples of ethnocentrism you have encountered?
• What is your opinion of Iran and Iranians?
• In Trans-Fly region of Papua New Guinea, homosexuality is valued over heterosexuality.
• Men of the Etoro tribe favor homosexuality while their neighbors encourage men to engage in anal sex.
OPPOSING ETHNOCENTRISM

• Cultural Relativism is a viewpoint & position
• That behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture, i.e., values and standards of one’s own culture
• That the values and standards of culture differ and deserve respect
HUMAN RIGHTS

• Challenge some aspects of Cultural Relativism
• Some cultures in Africa and Middle East practice female genital modification
• CLITORIDECTOMY is the removal of the clitoris & INFIBULATION involves the sewing of the lips of the vagina.
• Both procedures reduce female sexual pleasure & is a way that men control female sexuality
Why?

• Cultures are male dominate and patrilineal.
• Property, resources and wealth passed from father to sons
• Need to assure father that son is of father’s bloodline
• Fear of the likelihood of female adultery
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

• Oppose such practices
• Such practices infringe on basic human right—control over one’s body and one’s sexuality
• Some African nations have banned such practices
• What about infant male circumcision?
• Distinguish between moral and methodological relativism
METHODOLOGICAL RELATIVISM

• In anthropology, cultural relativism is not a moral position but a methodological position
• To understand another culture fully, you must try to see how the people in that culture see things
• What motivates them—what are they thinking—when they do those things?
METHODOLOGICAL RELATIVISM IS A STANCE

• Cultural Relativism as Methodological relativism does not preclude making a moral judgment or taking action

• When faced with Nazi atrocities, a cultural/methodological relativist would have a moral obligation to stop being an anthropologist and take action to intervene
HUMAN RIGHTS AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

• Human rights invokes a realm of justice and morality that is beyond and superior to the laws and customs of particular countries
• Unlike Human Rights Cultural Rights are vested not in individuals but in groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities and in indigenous societies
• CR include the right to preserve its culture, to raise its children in their cultural traditions, to continue its language and have economic rights
POSSIBLE CONFLICTS

• Idea of cultural rights is related to the idea of cultural relativism
• What does one do about cultural rights that interfere with human rights?
• Anthropologist main task is to understand another culture
• Anthropologist does not have to approve its practices
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

• Most ethnographers (anthropologist who do fieldwork) strive to be objective, accurate and sensitive in their studies of other cultures.

• However, objectivity, sensitivity and a cross-cultural perspective don’t mean that anthropologists have to ignore international standards of justice and morality.

• What do you think?