This class session covers a few new concepts, but much of the reading is review
- Robbins pp. 2-15 reiterates some of the essential concepts we have already covered
- the ideas are important, and Robbins gives them to you in a different voice, which I hope may be clearer or more convincing
- but I will only comment on a few parts of this reading

- Robbins reviews (and so should you):
  - **ethnocentrism** (or the **ethnocentric fallacy**)
    - example: American tourists’ responses to vertical furrows in the Andean highlands
  - **cultural relativism**
    - the working assumption that people’s beliefs and actions make sense to them in their cultural context
    - that we get the best understanding of people by understanding them relative to their culture, not relative to our own culture, as if that were some absolute standard
  - **ethical relativism** (sometimes called the **relativistic fallacy**)
    - the idea that morality (right and wrong) are defined relative to each culture

- Robbins also brings up some ethical dilemmas involved in being a cultural relativist
  - Should we judge the beliefs or practices of other cultures?
    - Should we try to change practices we feel are wrong?
  - Examples of ethical dilemmas of relativism:
    - Virginity testing in Turkey
      - also done by doctors and nurses by examination
      - still an issue; “compulsory” virginity testing was banned by decree only in 2002, and it is still done with women’s “consent”
      - explanation: semen is considered to be like seeds; may germinate at any time after planting. So virginity before marriage (and tight control after) is the only guarantee of paternity
      - Is this immoral?
      - Is it immoral if it is done by trained doctors and nurses who surely understand reproduction in the way we do?
    - Do we allow divorce for infidelity? Why?
      - Why would some people say that DNA paternity testing OK, but virginity testing not?
    - Wari’ eating their own dead
      - (no longer practiced since the 1960s)
      - also burn the deceased person’s house, possessions, even favored places
      - eliminates the memory, reduces the pain
      - also, the ground is considered unclean
      - so they find burying the dead in the filthy earth to be repugnant
    - Point: does understanding make it OK?
    - claims of cannibalism have justified oppression by Europeans
even though they used human blood and parts in “medicine” that was eaten or drunk

Point: the fact that Europeans recognized other cultures’ actions as cannibalism, but not their own, should make us worry that other moral judgments of other cultures might be similarly hypocritical and self-serving

Sati in India (burning the widow on her deceased husband’s pyre)

now illegal, very rare, effectively eliminated, but still occurs: one case in 1987, one in 2002, two in 2006, one in 2008; other attempts stopped by police

is objecting imperialist?

what if the widow does it voluntarily, convinced that it is her honorable duty?

what if the motive is really materialistic?

– to ensure that the land and possessions that the husband inherited from his parents…
– do not go to the widow (who is not related to the parents),
– but instead go to his brothers, who should have more claim to their parents’ wealth than the widow does?

Elzbieta Zechenter: tolerance of moral wrongs is itself ethnocentric!

valuing relativism over morality is a cultural construct in itself

refusing to judge, letting our cultural rule about relativism outweigh our outrage or morality is just as arbitrary and ethnocentric as using our cultural rules about morality would be

it is impossible to think outside of any culture…

– (thinking requires categorizing and naming things, and applying ideas about how things relate to each other, which are mostly learned culture)
– since we cannot avoid thinking in some culture’s terms, we might as well apply some morality
– rather than being paralyzed and condoning injustice

problem: where do you draw the line?

– if you can insist that sati or torture is wrong and must be stopped,
– why can’t you insist that the Islamic law allowing a man to have four wives is wrong and must be stopped?
– who gets to decide what matters are OK to interfere with?
– using what culture’s criteria?

**Emic vs. etic perspective/approach/point of view**

The terms come from linguistics; don’t worry about their origin now

Anthropologists use “emic” and “etic” to describe ways of explaining features of cultures

– insider (member of the culture) vs. outsider viewpoint

– *emic* (insider or Member; eMic): how members of the culture would explain what they do
  – Uses terms and concepts meaningful to insiders
  – “Christians pray in order to get help from God’
  – An emic approach is used to understand their point of view

– *etic* (ouT sider; eTic): how an outside observer might explain what they do
  – Uses outsiders’ terms and concepts that insiders might not understand or might disagree with
“Christians pray because it gives them psychological benefits: verbalizing problems releases tensions, and requesting help gives them a sense of control in their lives”

An etic approach is used to explain an aspect of culture in scientific, cross-cultural terms
- trying to avoid bias of our own culture, of course…
- although that may never be fully possible

Anthropologists use both perspectives
- an anthropologist or outsider can express an insider’s emic point of view
- what matters is not who says it, but whose cultural framework it reflects

Neither is more right or wrong
- Both can be valid and correct, even when they are very different
- They simply address different aspects of understanding what is going on
- a good understanding often requires both

*Guests of the Sheik*
- The two chapters you read for today are full of illustrations of understanding (or not understanding) others, and especially of judging others
- good illustrations of culture shock, ethnocentrism, naïve realism

Chapter 6, Housekeeping in El Nahra
- BJ getting nowhere with the women after two months
- thinks they are talking about her, giggling at her, but can’t be sure, so can’t respond
  - classic paranoia of culture shock
  - even if it was true
- Bob to be gone two days; Sheik Hamid sends servant Amina to stay overnight
- neither looking forward to it
- finally, at bedtime, she asks “Is your husband kind to you?”, cries, launches into life story
  - at 15, married to a 65 year old man (she was one of 12 children, poor)
  - almost died with stillbirth
  - husband dies, leaving nothing
  - husband’s family mostly dead, remainder don’t want her
  - Hamid buys her, gives her to Selma
  - now gets all the food she wants, Selma gives her cigarettes, Hamid is wonderful...
  - hasn’t seen family in seven years
  - Amina: get a lot of gold jewelry from your husband while you are young!
- next day, the Sheik’s women visit
  - they ignore her, refuse her tea
  - BJ points this out sharply: shocked silence.
  - Selma makes excuses and takes some tea
  - all then accept cigarettes
  - why doesn’t she do laundry with them at the canal?
  - we never see much laundry hanging... BJ must be lazy...
- she cooks - brings out Western bread to try
  - Sheddir spits it out
– claims she can’t cook rice, so Bob eats at the mudhif
– BJ admits that she can’t cook this rice; it is different from American rice
– “Rice? Rice is the same everywhere” ... “I was obviously slow-witted as well as lazy”
– notice any naïve realism here?
– Fine for the anthropologist to be a cultural relativist, but what if no one else is?
– “I would not have believed that I could be so upset at being accused of laziness and incompetence by a group of illiterate tribal ladies... it was a real and very terrible snub now...”
– BJ feels indignant, “they are nothing but a group of curiosity seekers”
– Of course, what are BJ and Bob?
– next morning, Laila and two others come teach her how to cook rice
– “We don’t want your husband to beat you... After all, you are here alone without your mother.”
– What are the assumptions here?
– Would BJ have thought of herself this way?
– that afternoon, visits Sheik’s family, accidentally unannounced (Mohammed forgot)
– sees Selma in daily clothes, making Sheik Hamid’s bed
– Samira (Kulthum’s daughter) asks if she embroiders, suggests she embroider Bob some pillowcases
– Laila to lend patterns
– BJ has been sitting on the floor, like the other women - not a chair, as in previous visit
– Selma too busy to think about entertaining her
– Selma: the Sheik wants to meet you; here or your place?
– “I must ask my husband” - the right answer!
– Purdah = Seclusion of women
– Chapter 7, Problems of Purdah [Sheik Hamza]
– embroidery is working for BJ
– Laila traced pattern
– BJ brings it everywhere
– “the women all remarked on it” [apparently not quite typical behavior] but then forget her strangeness and talk freely
– BJ doesn’t have to talk constantly
– could pick things up by listening
– Hamza had invited Bob to visit him through Jabbar; repeats, inviting BJ to his harem
– Hamza’s 3-story “palace” (p. 85)
– Hamza takes a large share from his fellahin (sharecroppers or serfs), so they are poorest in the area
– Jabbar: he has to go when the revolution comes, as expected in the countryside - but not by diplomats in Baghdad
– Ethnography is actually a good way to learn what is going on
– Lynn Maners, grad student studying traditional dance in Yugoslavia: predicted the war in Bosnia based on changes he saw in the dancing
– US consulate staff in Lima not allowed to leave a few neighborhoods of the capital, clueless about the country
– Hamza has sent his women away to Karbala, they have no choice but to go in with BJ
– “Trying to be as dignified as possible with two menservants, Hamza and his teenage son standing by goggling, I took off my abayah...” p. 87
– BJ has really internalized the modesty rules in just a few months
– BJ refuses liquor, asks for tea
– excruciating decor... “vulgar”
  – petrified pastries, canned cookies, weak tea with condensed milk
  – plaster cake!
– beautiful gardens and view; Hamza unmoved, says he is bored and will leave soon
– “Mambo Italiano” and Elvis Presley
– gives them four armed guards as they drive two hours to next tiny town - Hamza is not too popular...
– is anyone being ethnocentric here?
– What standards is BJ applying to Hamza? Is this fair?

– This has been plenty of grounding about culture and the anthropological approach.
– next time we will start getting more specific, looking at how anthropologists actually do research