

# Distinctiveness of Anthropology as a Science of Humanity

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- **Holism**  
biology, psychology, history & prehistory, ecology, & geography
- **Comparative**  
not restricted in time or space (even primate societies)
- **Participant observation**  
direct observation & community living
- **Tribal or ethnic groups**  
people that other sciences ignore

# Definition of Culture

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...that **complex whole** which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other **capabilities** and **habits** acquired by man as a **member** of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, is so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human **thought** and **action**

Edward B. Tylor 1871

# Culture as Learned Behavior

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- knowledge and habits are learned and passed through generations: our extra-somatic means of adaptation
- cultural transmission is more efficient than trial and error learning
- new knowledge is able to spread rapidly in horizontal and vertical modes
- our possession of language is critical to culture

# A Troublesome Distinction: is culture unique to humanity?

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In humans culture is an **extrasomatic** means of adaptation while genes are the **somatic** means of adaptation in animals, however:

- animals have "culture" (chimp & orang examples) ▶
- humans have learning biases which means they are “prepared” to rapidly learn certain things:
  - fear of snakes, spiders & bees and wasps (but not insects in general\*)
  - language learning
- the content of culture is not arbitrary (color terms)
- humans are not “blank slates”

\*Gerdes et al., 2009

# More on primate culture: chimpanzee cultural variation

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- It appears that chimpanzees either have culture or something that closely approximates culture
- For example, different chimp troops have different:
  - Tools
  - Designs for the same tools
  - Techniques for using the same tools
  - Meanings behind the same communicative acts
- In short, there is cultural variation among chimps

# Basic Cultural Anthropological Concepts

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- **Ethnocentrism** The belief that your culture or way of doing things is superior to all others - cultural pride, a universal attribute of all cultures. A key feature of ethnocentric concepts is that they are evaluative.
- **Xenophobia**: Ranges from a mild lack of trust to fear or hatred of people of different cultures – again, common to all cultures
- **Cultural Relativism** (2 meanings):
  - methodological relativism**: cultural practices should be understood relative to the culture in which they exist (e.g., is Yanomamö endocannibalism nutritional or religious?).
  - ethical relativism**: there is no basis to judge whether a particular cultural practice is good or bad. That is, all cultures and cultural values are equally valid, of equal worth, and equal dignity. Therefore, we should have tolerance and respect for any cultural practice. **This is a non-scientific proposition** because it prescribes what one should do or believe in the domain of morality. Whether or not you believe a practice is good, bad, idiotic, harmful, immoral, ideal, etc. depends on your own moral system which, of course, is strongly affected by your culture.

# Emics & Etics

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- **Emic**: insider's view and understanding of a culture from the perspective of a participant. It only makes sense in the context of a **specific** cultural frame of reference.
- **Etic**: scientific or outsider's view. The frame of reference is scientific and **general**. Requirements of description and explanation focus on intersubjective verification, empirical description, and theoretical logic.

# Ethnic names

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- An ethnonym is the name applied to a given ethnic group. Ethnonyms can be divided into two categories: exonyms (where the name of the ethnic group has been created by another group of people) and autonyms or endonyms (self-designation; where the name is created and used by the ethnic group itself).
- Inuit: the people
- Inupiat the real people (North Slope of Alaska)
- Inuvialuit the real authentic people (MacKenzie Delta only)
- Inuit people of (such as Netsilingmiut “people of the place with seals)
- Eskimo may mean “snowshoe wearer” or “eaters of raw meat” in Montagnais (Innu-aimun speakers) or Cree, respectively
- Cheyenne real name: Só'taeo'o and the Tsétsêhéstâhese

# Exploring ethnocentrism and relativism: Operations, Cosmetics, or Mutilations?

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## Culturally approved body modification

- Body part enlargement or reduction
- Body piercing, tooth filing & removal, & scarification
- Tanning, coloration, & tattooing
- Genital procedures:
  - Clitoridectomy & infibulation
  - Circumcision and subincision
- Bodily adornment
- Hair styles
- Body hair

# Explorations in Ethnocentrism: Female Genital Mutilation or Operation?

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- Mutilation is defined as:
  - To deprive of a limb or an essential part; cripple.
  - To disfigure [tattooing?] by damaging irreparably
  - To make imperfect by excising or altering parts

The term mutilation is clearly judgmental because it declares the practice good or bad based on a particular cultural or ethical perspective. Such judgments are non-scientific.

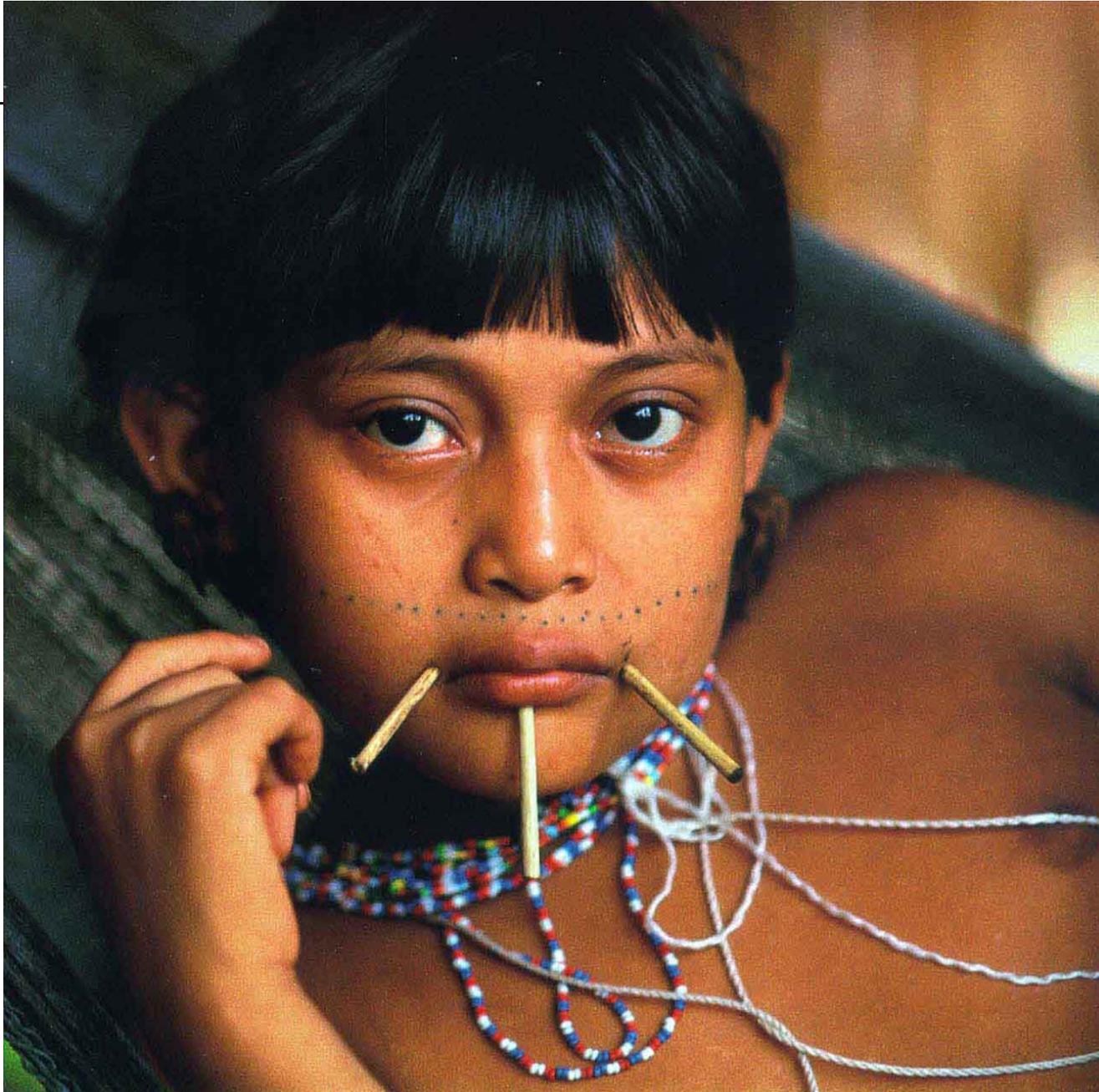


# Some ethnocentric descriptors

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- Superstitious
- Progressive, Civilized, or Uncivilized
- Disgusting
- Foolish
- Weird
- Childish
- Savage
- Depraved

# Yanomamo Girl



## Yanomamo Sisters



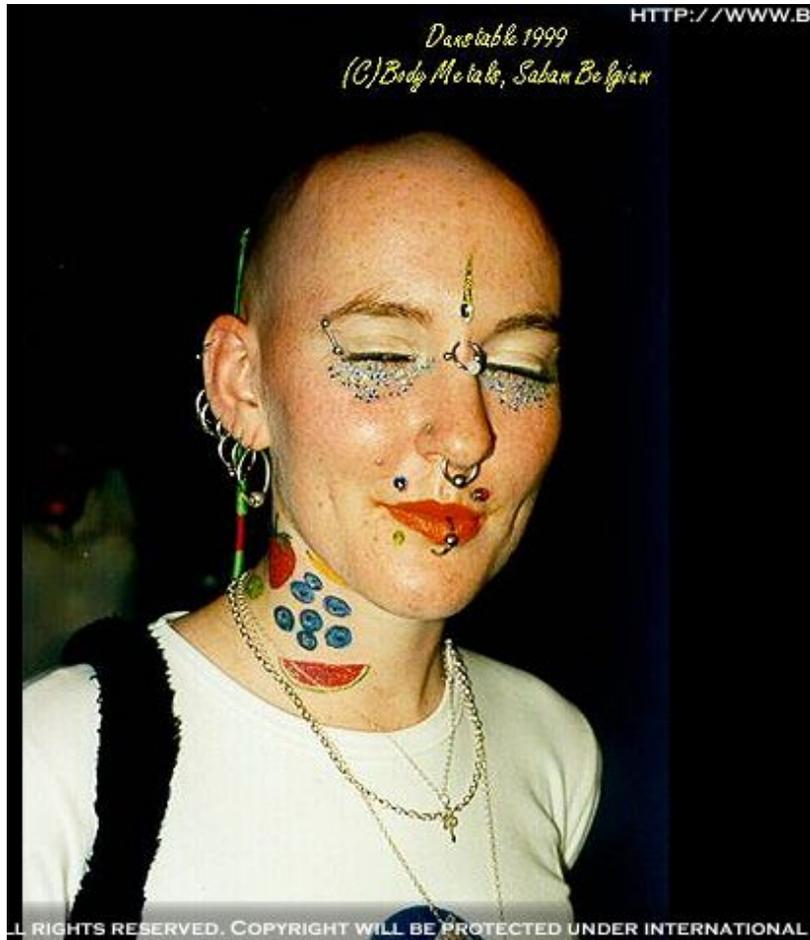
# Methodological relativism: Religious Ritual or Recreational Drug Use?

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# Contemporary Urban North American Natives

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# Examples of bodily modifications, cosmetics & dress: Highland New Guinea Males

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Examples of bodily  
modifications, tattooing:  
Cree Indian



# Distinctive Males

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# Examples of bodily modifications, tattooing: North American with traditional Celtic tattoo

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Examples of bodily  
modifications,  
tattooing: Maori men



# Urban USA Operations

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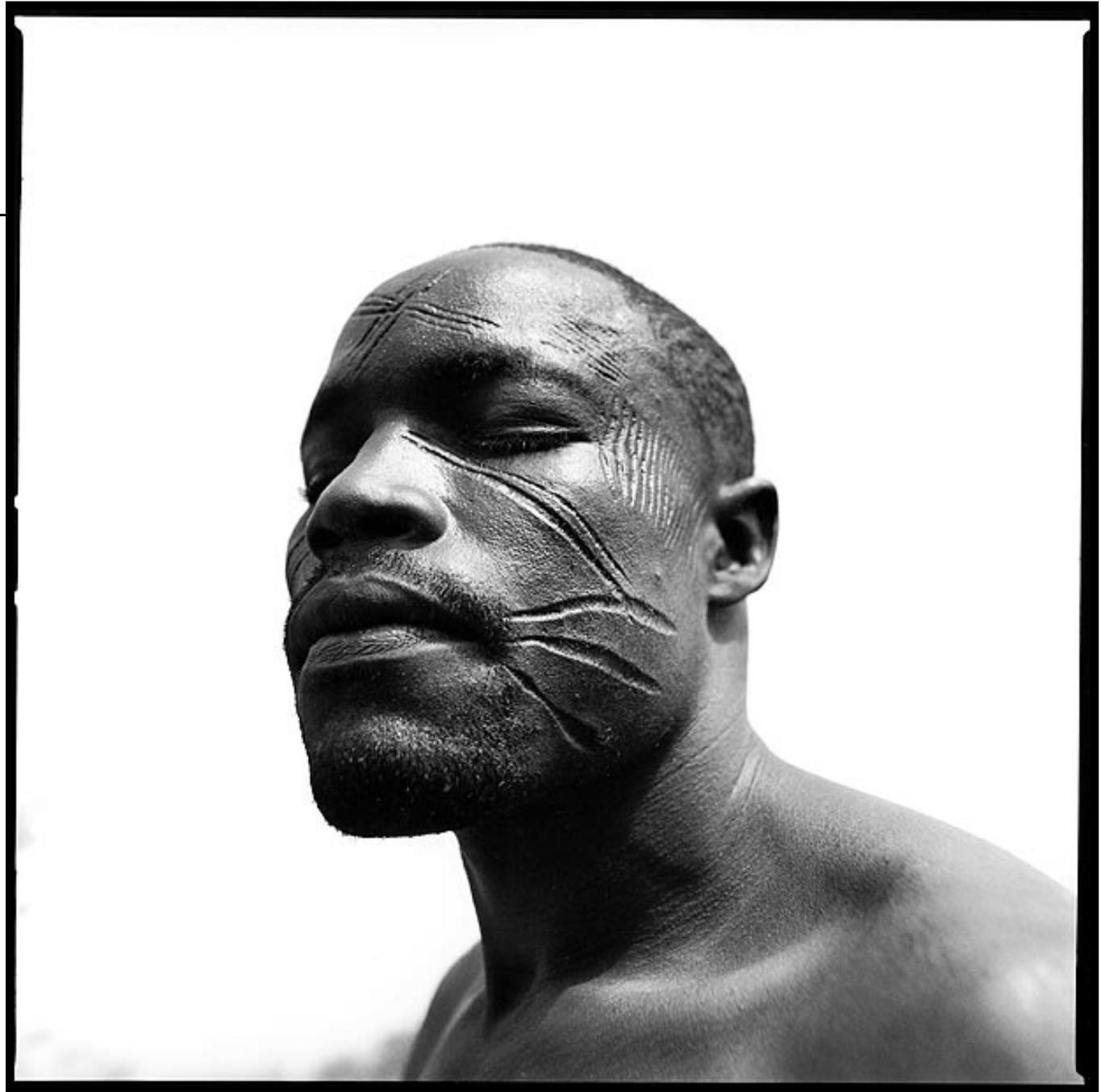


# Scarification:

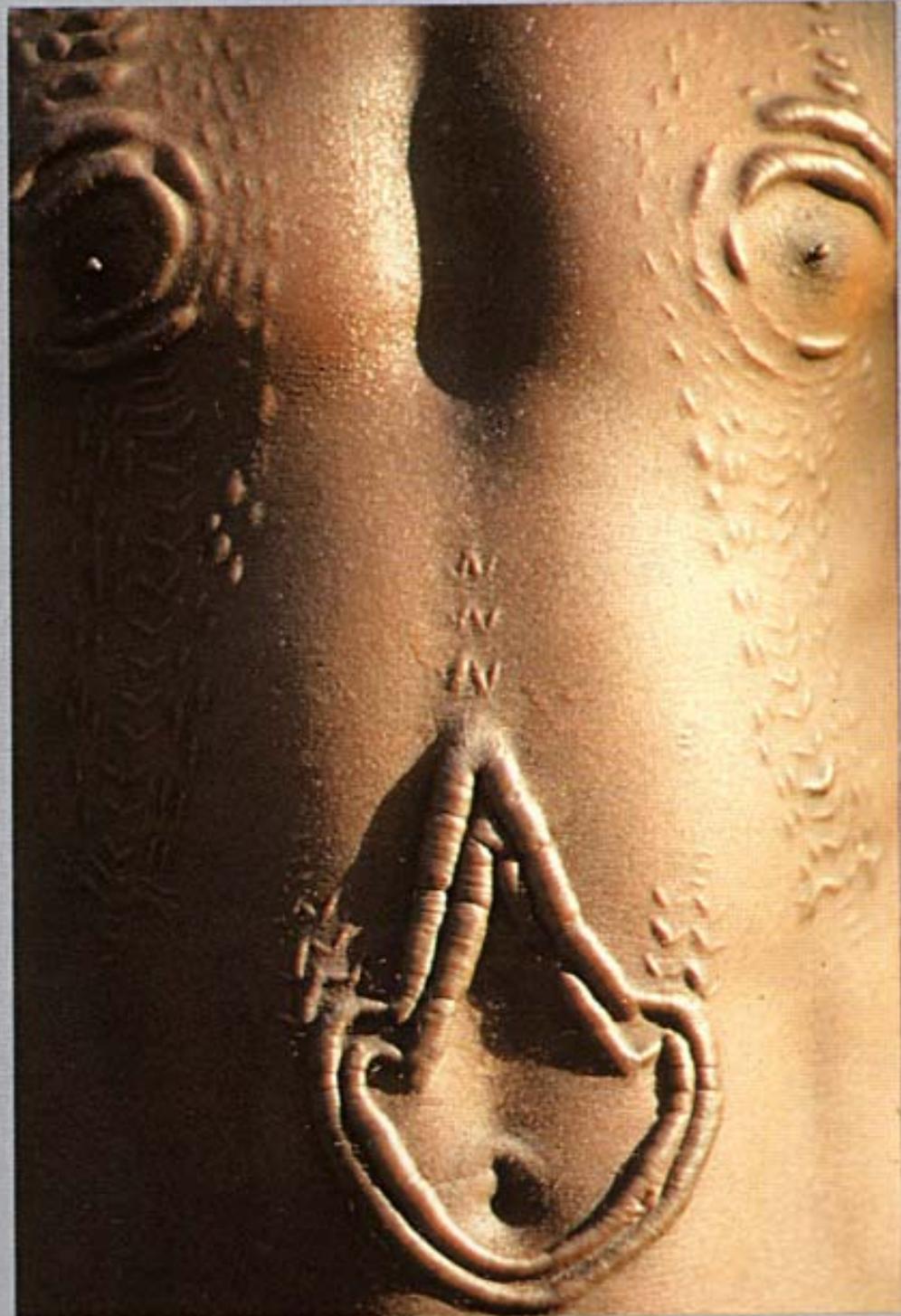
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## **Burkina Faso Man:**

**For many men in West Africa, scarring is a form of tribal initiation and a sign of bravery. Done with razor blades, the painful process starts at puberty and continues into adulthood. Each tribe has distinctive tattoo designs; this man's markings indicate his village and his clan and include magical symbols to keep away evil spirits**



Sawos  
Scarification  
(A Papuan New  
Guinea people)



# Culinary ethnocentrism: tabooed foods

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# Culinary Ethnocentrism

は 鯨大和煮 T-G-K Whale Meat  
赤肉 SEASONED

は

大和漁業株式会社  
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# Orangutan eating *Neesia* fruit



**Inside are seeds that the orangutans love, but they are surrounded by fiberglass-like hairs that “hurt like hell.” A *Neesia*-eating orangutan will select a five-inch stick, strip off its bark, and then carefully collect the hairs with it. Once the fruit is safe, the ape pops the seeds out with the stick or its fingers. (Zimmer, 1995:95)**

