UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

Introductory to Social Science and Culture
Amika Wardana, Ph.D.
a.wardana@uny.ac.id

CONTENT:

• Origin of the term: Culture
• What’s Culture?
• Culture and Social Action
• Culture and Materialism
• Cultural Stratification
• Cultural Reproduction
• Sub-Culture
ORIGIN OF THE TERM: CULTURE

- Latin: Cultura, literally Cultivation (cultivation of the soul)
- The betterment or refinement of individuals, especially through Education
- The common reference points of whole peoples, and discussion of the term was often connected to national aspiration or ideals
- A universal human capacity to develop and overcome natural/social challenges

WHAT’S CULTURE?

- In American Anthropology:
  1. the evolved human capacity to classify and represent experiences with symbols, and to act imaginatively and creatively; and
  2. the distinct ways that people living differently classified and represented their experiences, and acted creatively
... CULTURE? (CONT)

• Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts;

• The essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values;


... CULTURE? (CONT)

• Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action

• Part of culture consists in norms for or standards of behaviour

• Part of culture consists of ideologies justifying or rationalising certain selected ways of behaviour

• Every culture includes broad general principles of selectivity and ordering in life of its people.

CULTURE AND SOCIAL ACTION

• The socio-cultural realm is not a tangible material force, nor a reflection of such materiality; it resides in action, choice and value, all of which are subjective, intersubjective and volatile – but real, tangible and material in their consequences

(Jenks, 2005)

… SOCIAL ACTION (CONT)

• First: Culture is transmitted (through socialisation), it constitutes a heritage or a social tradition;

• Second: Culture is learned (through internalisation), it is not a manifestation, in particular content, of man’s genetic constitution; and

• Third: Culture is shared by and belonged to all members of the society

• Culture: product of; and determinant of, systems of human social interaction.

Parsons, 1951: 15)
CULTURE AND MATERIALISM

• The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.
• Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.
• Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and existence of men in their actual-life process.
• Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life

(Marx and Engels, 1970: 47)

CULTURAL STRATIFICATION

• High culture vs Popular culture? Elites vs Mass?
• Cultural Conquest or Invasion: Americasation, Arabisation, Japanisation, Indonesisation?
• Mass Culture and Culture Industry in the capitalist society
• Popular Culture and Cultural Pluralism
CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

• Considering Power and Hegemony? State, Religious Elites, Public Figures
• The Role of Education: family, community, school
• Critics and Challenges: Evaluating and Modifying Culture
• Chaos or Anomie: the state of cultural transition

SUB-CULTURE

• Examining the Social Class of the Society
• Sub-culture as Cultural variants displayed by different segments of the society
• Positive/negative; upper/lower class; old/young; male/female; ethnicity/race/religion
• Long-term/temporal; local/national; etc