

Introduction

UNIT B0.1

'CULTURE' AND 'COMMUNITY' IN EVERYDAY DISCOURSE



Task B0.1.1

The word 'culture' is used in many different ways (often in combination with other words) and with a variety of different meanings.

LAYERS OF CULTURE

People even within the same culture carry several layers of mental programming within themselves. Different layers of culture exist at the following levels:

- The national level: Associated with the nation as a whole.
- The regional level: Associated with ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level: Associated with gender differences (female vs. male)
- The generation level: Associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level: Associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation.
- The corporate level: Associated with the particular culture of an organization. Applicable to those who are employed.

CULTURAL DETERMINISM

- The position that the ideas, meanings, beliefs and values people learn as members of society determines human nature.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

- Different cultural groups think, feel, and act differently. Do not judge other cultures using your culture as 'the norm'

CULTURAL ETHNOCENTRISM

- Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is superior to that of other cultures.

TEXT B0.1.1
U. Hannerz

**Hannerz, U. (1999) 'Reflections of Varieties of Culturespeak',
European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2:3 pp. 393–407 (extracts)**

A sunny morning a few years ago, at my summer house in southern Sweden, with a national election season approaching, I found a leaflet in my mail box. In blue letters against a yellow background (the colors of the Swedish flag), an extremist group in a nearby town argued that the country had turned from a folkhem, a 'home of the people', into a 'multicultural inferno'.

One could reflect that this suggests two things about the place of the culture concept in contemporary discourse. One is that 'culture' is no longer a notion occurring mostly among the well-educated, within the confines of their scholarly, intellectual, and esthetic preoccupations. Increasingly it, and other concepts deriving from it, seem to be just about everywhere, from public commentary and political agitation through organizational consultancy to commerce and advertising. And there are no real barriers separating different uses and different users. Researchers and policy makers now share the term 'multiculturalism' with ethnic minority

politicians, as well as with the xenophobia activists claiming to represent a silent majority. One has to be sensitive, consequently, to those refractions of meaning which may occur as a vocabulary of culture moves between contexts.

The other thing to note, with regard to that suggestion of a 'multicultural inferno', is that while 'culture' in the past was probably a term with mostly consensual and positive overtones, it now very often shows up in contexts of discord – 'culture clash', 'culture conflict', 'culture wars'; and perhaps also, at a different level, 'culture shock'. A major reason for this, no doubt, is that culturespeak now very often draws our attention to what are taken to be the interfaces between cultures; a tendency which in its turn has much to do with that polymorphous global interconnectedness through which such interfaces become increasingly prominent in human experience.

Deconstruction-

'culture' no longer used only by the educated.

'culture' is being used where 'cultures' come into contact

Often used in negative contexts= cultural, clash, culture shock, culture wars....

Culturespeak is everywhere.

Scrutinizing culturespeak

. . . Cultural study is not only a summarizing label for all those inquiries we conduct into the wide range of things we consider cultural, but also (not least in the present period) a study of popular theories, prototheories and quasitheories of culture.

Cultural fundamentalism is only one of these. They may develop in different contexts, shaping themselves to meet different requirements, and they need not all be malignant. I mentioned above the concept of 'culture shock', diffusing widely in the late 20th century as a way of referring to the kind of emotional and intellectual unease that sometimes occurs in encounters with unfamiliar meanings and practices. Rather facetiously, I have also occasionally referred to the growth of a 'culture shock prevention industry'. The proper term for its practitioners, I should quickly note, is 'interculturalists' – a new profession of people working commercially as trainers and consultants, trying to teach sensitivity toward cultural diversity to various audiences through lectures, simulation games, videos, practical handbooks and some variety of other means.

Deconstruction:

'culture' is sometimes used in a negative context (connotation)

Intercultural communication- interculturalists. Sensitivity towards cultural diversity.

From higher education > laypersons

From an academic vantage point one may be critical of certain of the efforts – they may seem a bit trite, somewhat inclined toward stereotyping, occasionally given to exaggerating cultural differences perhaps as a way of positioning the interculturalists themselves as an indispensable profession.

. . . It would seem helpful to make more continuously visible how both persistence and change in culture depend on human activity; and how in contemporary, complex social life, the combined cultural process, and the overall habitat of meanings and practices in which we dwell, is the outcome of the variously deliberate pursuit by a variety of actors of their own agendas, with different power and different social and spatial reach, and with foreseen or unanticipated consequences. Such an approach to

cultural process would be a challenge to each of us, layperson or scholar, to try and work out what ingredients go into situations that may puzzle us or annoy us. . . .

Culturespeak sometimes becomes culturalism.

The attention to processes and people may also help unpack the assumption of the unitary, integrated culture which may not be unique to cultural fundamentalism but which goes well with it. We have an old habit of speaking about 'cultures', in the plural form, as if it were self-evident that such entities exist side by side as neat packages, each of us identified with only one of them – this is indeed a time-worn implication of at least one 'anthropological culture concept'. And the notion of 'cultural identity' often goes with it. It may well be that some considerable number of people really live encapsulated among others who share most of the same experiences, ideas, beliefs, values, habits, and tastes. Nonetheless, it appears increasingly likely that many people have biographies entailing various cross-cutting allegiances – they share different parts of their personal cultural repertoires with different collections of people.

In general English when people refer to the term 'culture' (ex. Italian, American, Russian)

That's why they use 'cultures'

Essentialist view of culture, because they don't see the complexity of reality. (you can belong to several cultures)

And if there is an 'integrated whole', it may be a quite individual thing. Under such circumstances, people may well value some parts of these personal repertoires more highly than others, identify

U. Hannerz

themselves particularly in terms of them, and identify in collective terms more strongly with those other people with whom they share them. It could also be, on the other hand, that they may resist attempts to categorize them unidimensionally in terms of any single cultural characteristic.

. . . and the point here must be that whatever is most enduring is not necessarily also at any one time most central to people's cultural preoccupations, and to their sense of who they are. There are now surely many different ways of being more or less Christian, more or less Muslim, more or less Confucian; and of being at the same time some number of other things. Most significantly, finally, an emphasis on process may entail a subversion of a kind of mystique of cultural difference which seems to be an important part of cultural fundamentalism.

Deconstruction: one may belong to several cultures. Reality is more complex than what we see.

Deconstruction-

'culture' no longer used only by the educated.

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That's why they use 'cultures'

Essentialist view of culture, because they don't see the complexity of reality. (you can belong to several cultures)

Deconstruction: one may belong to several cultures. Reality is more complex than what we see.

Deconstruction: culture is not just what you learn at school.



Task B0.1.3

In the text Hannerz also writes that 'it would seem helpful to make more continuously visible . . . how in contemporary, complex social life, the combined cultural process, and the overall habitat of meanings and practices in which we dwell, is the outcome of the variously deliberate pursuit by a variety of actors of their own agendas.. '

➤ What 'actors' and 'agendas' do you think Hannerz is thinking of?