

NOTES ON CULTURE AND RACISM by Christine Herzog

I. Culture

A. Definitions

1. Manners - rules of behaviour, customs
Morals - values
Arts - performing, visual, etc
Tradition - myths, history
2. Symbols - all things which are taught (not the same as all that is learned);
ways of thinking, feeling, behaving that are passed on from generation before
3. Filter (coloured glasses) through which we see and understand "reality"
 - a. Related to "wave" concept
 - b. easier to identify someone else's culture than one's own
 - 1) Can start to recognise one's own by comparing it to others
 - c. Can't take glasses off
 - 1) When learning a new culture it is like putting a different colour of glasses on top of the existing ones

B. Some ideas about culture

1. Culture does not cause action, it is reflected in action
2. Any one person is a member of many different cultural groups based on their race, age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, etc.
 - a. There may be conflicting expectations, values among the different cultural groups a person belongs to causing personal distress
3. Sub-cultures exist as smaller groups which are somewhat but not fundamentally different from the main culture
4. Each culture is changing all the time
 - a. Culture is the product of conflict between competing symbols (ideas of the rulers become the ruling ideas)
 - b. The dominant patterns are always under challenge while powerful forces are operating to constantly legitimate the status quo

C. Concepts related to that of culture

1. Nationality - defined by political boundaries, a place (on a map)
 - a. May relate to place of birth, residence, citizenship
2. Race - biological description based on skin color, hair texture, bone structure
 - a. Often used to refer to culture which is common to people of one race biologically
3. Religion - system of beliefs, symbols, values, and practices focused on questions of ultimate meaning (of life)
4. Ethnicity - cultural groups defined by religion and/or race, nationality

II. Racism, etc.

A. Definitions

1. Stereotype - an exaggerated idea, image or belief associated with some group
 - a. It assumes that the characteristics apply to all members of the group, doesn't recognise that all members of group aren't alike
2. Prejudice - a fixed set of negative ideas and feelings toward members of a group, usually based on stereotypes
 - a. It is an attitude, state of mind
 - b. It presumes that one is better than the group prejudged
3. Ethnocentrism - prejudice against other ethnic groups, presumption that one's own ethnic group is at the centre of things and that others are inferior (different is bad)

4. Racism - two definitions with important difference
 - a. Usual, common one is that racism is prejudice against other racial groups; presumption that one's own racial group is superior
 - b. Political definition increasingly used is that racism is prejudice by the dominant group in society that it is racially superior
 - 1) Thus only pakehas could be racist in Aotearoa because they are the dominant group
 - 2) Dominant group isn't necessarily racist but usually is ethnocentric
 - 3) This definition is used by those concerned with redistributing power (that is, it doesn't matter to them whether Samoans feel superior to Chinese or to pakeha because they don't have the power to do anything about it)
 - c. Both definitions often refer to "race" in the cultural sense rather than the biological one
 5. Discrimination - action by which people of a group are given different and unfavourable treatment on the basis of their membership in that group (which is usually involuntary such as racial, age, gender, cultural, sexual orientation)
 - a. May be de jure (by law) or de facto (in fact but no law); which is worse?
 - b. May be by individuals (requires attitude change?) or institutions
 - 1) May be based on insensitivity, lack of awareness, historical accident or may be intentional
- B. Can different cultural/racial groups co-exist with self-determination?
1. No good examples (Singapore requires dictator, Switzerland is really sub-cultures); has it ever happened
 2. Seems to be segregation with oppression (e.g. apartheid) without oppression (e.g. Switzerland)
 - co-existence through assimilation (secondary groups accepted by dominant group if and only if they become the same as them)
 - through integration (the dominant group chooses to adopt some of secondary groups culture for itself but otherwise secondary must conform with dominant)
 - a. Is multi-cultural society possible (different cultural groups co-existing by right, not by privilege given by dominant group)
 - 1) Can dominant, that is powerful, group give power away or must it be taken
- C. Strategies
1. Affirmative action (all else being equal oppressed get the "goody")
 - a. Reverse discrimination - oppressed get extra points toward "goody"
 2. Community development
 - a. Oppressed use analysis to identify strategies for change
 - b. Dominant groups be aware of how they benefit from system, not block change, be part of the solution instead of part of the problem