

# Cultural Understandings

# Culture Defined

- A way of life underpinned by particular values and traditions
  - The expression of those values and traditions through writing, music, visual and performing arts, or through rituals, festivals and the like.
  - The intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development that distinguish humans from animals

# Interest of Culture to Geography

- Examines culture of particular groups and their distributions
  - How culture is practiced
  - How culture is captured and reflected materially and symbolically
    - Artifacts
    - Landscapes

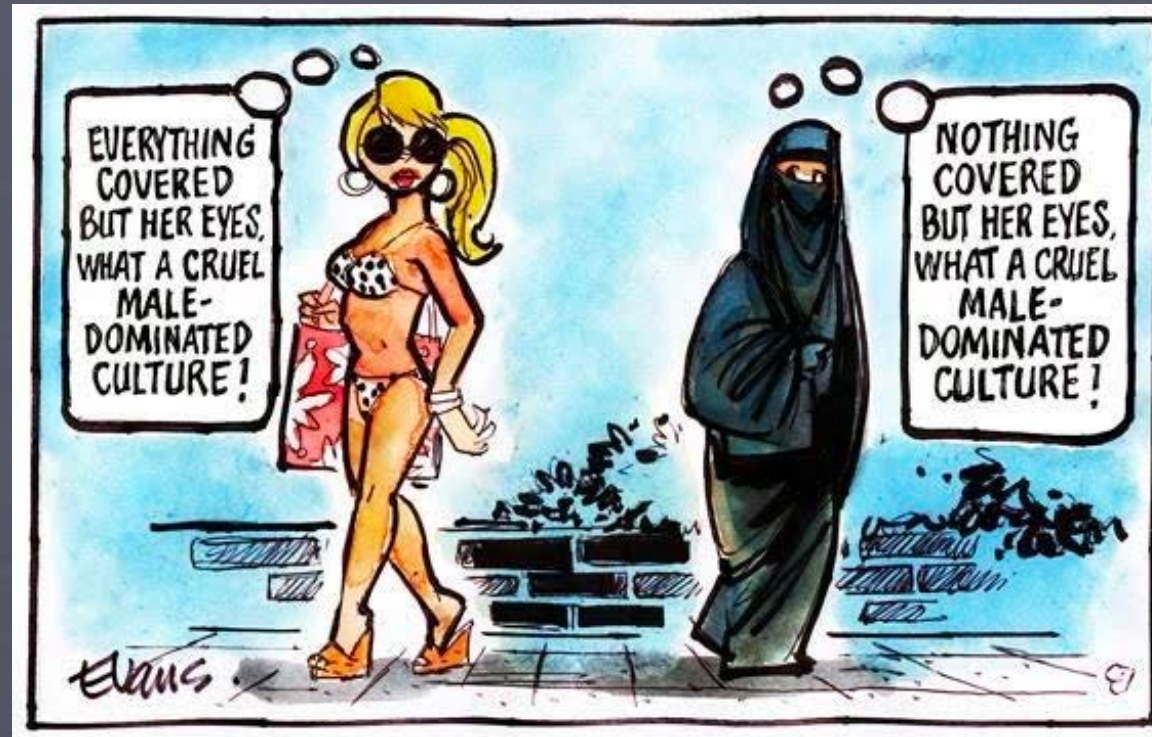
# Customs, Practices, Values, and Beliefs

- Custom - A traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place, or time.
  - Ex. Japanese Collectivism
- Practice – Things that people do that is a reflection of culture. Practices are actual manifestations of culture
  - Ex. Muslims fasting during religious festivals
- Values – What a group holds to be important
  - Ex. Western value of hard-work and money
- Beliefs – Intangible thought process and ideas as connected to a culture.
  - Ex. Buddhist belief of Non-violence



# Cultural Relativism

- The principle of valuing the practices of another culture from their own point of view, free from feelings of ethnocentrism



# Reflections of Culture

## Material Culture

- clothing
- buildings
- farming patterns
- technology

## Non-Material Culture

- Language
- Religion
- Political organization
- Customs or traditions



# Defining Folk and Popular Culture

- **Folk Culture:** Traditionally practiced by groups in homogeneous, rural, isolated areas.
- **Popular Culture:** Found in large, heterogeneous societies that share certain habits even if there is much diversity.



# Folk Culture Characteristics

- Stable and close knit communities
  - Usually a rural community
  - Clustered in isolated areas
    - Allows for unique characteristics tied to physical landscape
- Traditional controls
  - Resistant to change
    - Few changes over time
  - Culture spreads slowly via migration diffusion





# Human-Environment Interaction of Folk Cultures

- Clothing is made from available materials to meet environmental needs
- Diets based on available agriculture and social norms
- Housing styles are initially a result of the natural world.



# Case Study: Mongolian Herders

- Nomadic Herders on the Mongolian Steppe
  - Live far out away from large cities
  - Reliant on large herds of animals
- Have to rely on the land primarily for their livelihoods
  - Eat animal products
  - Make clothing from animal skins
  - Travel using horses
    - Terrain too difficult and lack of infrastructure for most vehicles
  - Houses (Gers) able to easily be moved to follow herds



# Cultural Isolation

- Spatial location makes contact with popular culture difficult
  - Located in high mountains, forests, deserts, or arctic regions
  - Prevents sharing of cultural traits
    - Once group comes into contact with outside cultures their culture begins to change

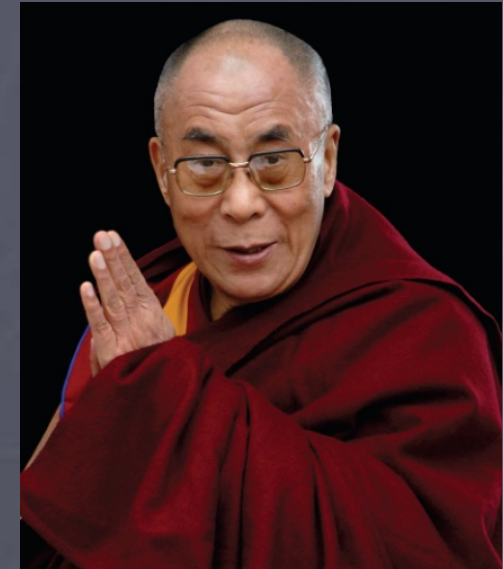


*A tribe in the Amazon jungle that had previously been un-contacted reacts to a helicopter flying above*



# Threats to Folk Culture

- Loss of traditional values
  - Change in food, shelter, and clothing preferences because of exposure to popular culture
- Changes in culture can lead to controversy, especially in very religious places.
  - Ex. [State Religious Affairs Bureau Order 5](#)



# Case Study: United States

- Boarding Schools used in the United States from late 19<sup>th</sup> century into early 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - Native American children taken from their homes on the reservations and sent to schools to be given a western education
  - Goal of the schools was to assimilate the children into United States society
    - Motto of the schools was “Kill the Indian, Save the man”



*Tom Torlino (Navajo), pictured 1882 (left), and three years later (right), Carlisle Indian School*



# Defining Popular Culture

- Culture found in a large, heterogeneous society that shares certain habits despite differences in other personal characteristics.



# Effects of Popular Culture: Globalization

- The process by which people, places, regions, and countries become more interlinked and more interdependent at a planetary scale



# Effects of Popular Culture: Destruction of Folk Cultures

- Folk traditions and values are often replaced by main-stream concepts
  - Sometimes preserved as museum pieces or “tourists traps”



*Actors portray traditional Korean culture in Seoul, South Korea*



# Effects of Popular Culture: Cultural Imperialism

- Media/Commercial hegemony by British, American, and Japanese companies
  - Transition of focus to MDCs
    - Ex. Few news stories about LDCs
  - Worldwide glorification of violence, sexuality, and consumerism



*McDonalds in Beijing*



*Marlboro man in Egypt*

# Cultural Manifestations

- Made up of different customs, practices, traits, and beliefs

**Education**

**Government**

**Agriculture**

**Economy**

**Sport**

**Grooming**

**Values**

**Work ethic**

**Etiquette**

**Courtship**

**Recreation**

**Gestures**

**Dance**

**Sports**

**Medicine**

**Dress**

**Gender roles**

**Law**

**Religion**

**Language**

**Architecture**

**Cuisine**

**Technology**

**Music**



# Language and Gestures

- The verbal, and non-verbal ways that people communicate
  - Gestures are body movements and hand signals with specific meanings
- Strong connections to identity through language and even accent
  - Accents are regional variations in languages
    - Ex. The New York accent vs. the Boston Accent
  - Can be nationalistic
    - Ex. French people speak French



# Religion

- The belief in and worship of a superhuman God (monotheistic) or Gods (polytheistic) with controlling power
  - Has an attached belief of an Afterlife
  - Typically combined with a moral code
    - Ideas of right and wrong



# Government

- The series of rules and beliefs towards leadership which governs the people of a society
  - Laws – Systems of rules enforced by the government
- Different societies have different views about how the country should be governed and the traditions attached to it



# Economy

- The different ways that a culture regulates and controls the exchange of goods and services
  - Ex. Traditional barter based economy vs. money based economy





# Education

- Education is the methods in which a culture prepares its members to participate in the society by teaching them the necessary skills.
  - Series of formal and informal lessons teaching the necessary skills and knowledge
    - Sometimes left up to families to provide
  - Ex. Germany offering technical educations to students





# Agriculture and Cuisine

## Agriculture

- The farming practices a culture uses in order to feed members of its society
  - Ex. Western use of machinery and traditional family farms



## Cuisine

- The different foods a cultural group eats, often with national connections to regional variations
  - Ex. Korean Kimchi



# Sport/Sports and Recreation

- Sport/Sports – Physical activities or games either for fun or competition
  - Ex. Texas Football vs. Minnesota Hockey
- Recreation – Physical activities that are done for their enjoyment
  - Ex. Boating
- Used as a way to build bonds within a culture





# Dance and Music

- Cultures differ in their connections to which music they listen to and how connected it is to dance
  - Ex. Dancing is a very large part of South American Culture
  - Ex. The connection between Country Music and rural areas of North America



# Festivals/Holidays

- A day fixed by law or custom on which ordinary business is suspended in commemoration of some event or in honor of some person from a culture
  - Connected to religious or national origins





# Etiquette

- The expected behaviors for someone living within the culture
  - Behaviors are actions and the reasons for doing them
    - Ex. Giving a bus seat to an elderly person out of respect





# Architecture

- A particular way in which a society designs their buildings. Can be cultural expression or practicality
  - Ex. Japanese “efficient” architecture vs. American “space” architecture for hotels



# Work Ethic

- Societies differ on the value of how hard individuals within the society should be working. Some societies value a “hard day’s work” which can be described as individuals living to work, while others take move the viewpoint that individuals are working to live
  - Ex. Spanish siesta mid-day breaks vs. Japanese Dawn to Dusk work ethics



# Gender Roles and Courtship

## Gender Roles

- The perceived set of standards and actions for a male and a female within a society
  - Ex. Male Machismo in Latin America



## Courtship

- The methods in which a member of a culture goes about in finding a mate
  - Ex. Practice of arranged marriages in India





# Medicine

- The methods that different cultures use to heal their sick and wounded. Some cultures rely on modern technology and medicines to heal, while others use traditional methods such as prayer and rituals
  - Ex. Jehovah's Witnesses refusal to accept blood transfusions because of religious beliefs





# Grooming and Dress

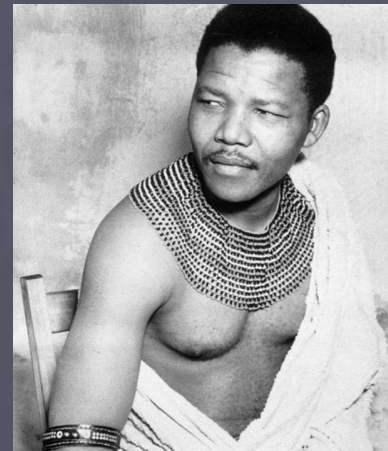
## Grooming

- Cultural standards for cleanliness (bathing) and personal care (shaving, trimming, etc...)
  - Ex. Western women expected to shave legs



## Dress

- The different clothes that people wear as connected to identity. Can be used as a type of cultural variation or conformity.
  - Ex. Traditional vs. Modern Dress



# Technology

- Societies differ in how much they embrace new technologies or if they hold on to traditional methods. Some view foreign technologies as a burden and prefer a more simple life, while others embrace it as a helpful tool
  - Ex. The Amish rejection of most modern technologies

