

Culture, Power and Globalization

Trobriand Cricket: Who's colonizing whom?

Lecture 2

September 16, 2003

A brief history of culture

- Concept of culture from 20th century anthropology
 - Boas: culture as autonomous from biological/racial determination of features
 - Culture as a system of meaning that belongs to "a people," "a tribe" or "a nation"

Culture as "a system of meaning"

- Semiotic system to be deciphered (Sahlins)
- A text to be read (Geertz)
- I.e., an integrated totality, a universe with its own holistic logic

Clifford Geertz analyzed the Balinese cockfight as "deep play"

Culture as order

- Functionalist glue making social cohesion possible (solidarity, Durkheim)
- Domain of shared, intersubjective meanings to make sense of symbolic social action (Weber; Geertz)
 - Note: all emphasize the shared, the agreed upon, the orderly

Critique (1)

But not a universe unto itself

- Political economic approaches
 - Regional and global forms of connectedness
 - Wallerstein (1974), Wolf (1982), Mintz (1985)
 - Wolf: a division of "a totality of interconnected processes" into discrete, homogeneous "billiard balls" (e.g., cultures, societies, nations) "threatens to turn names into things" (1982: 3, 6)

"Modern Times"

Critique (2)

Many voices, partial representation

- Critique of representation as "bounded, whole" as opposed to a "polyphony of voices" (Marcus 1989)
- Writing culture: partial yet presented as objective; not "I" but "they"

Pablo Picasso with
a Picasso

1960s - 70s Critique: Culture and Power

- Marxist revisions:
rethink culture in terms
of class (false
consciousness,
domination)
- Feminist revisions:
rethink culture in terms
of gender inequalities
(public/private culture,
etc.)

*Sebastio Salgado The End of
Manual Labor (Bangladesh)*

Consequences for globalization

- Culture is a dimension of human activity that tells us about the workings of power in political and economic realms.
- Active practices of social agents who reinterpret and appropriate culture (Bourdieu; de Certeau)
- Focus on the partiality, incompleteness of hegemony; the cultural as a contested, contingent political field (Gramsci, Williams, Hall)