

Rethinking EurAsia Lecture Series 2020

Socially Constructing EurAsia

Meeting 1

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Can we play – I know for a fact

- About Asia(ns) and Europe(ans)
- I call on one student and the student finish my sentence.
- The student then calls another student to finish her/his sentence.

I know for a fact that Indonesians are

What's ideal beauty among Asians?



Social Constructionism

- A theoretical framework
- Questioning how a social reality comes into being

Standard of beauty is a social reality. But who set(s) it? Is it even only one way to be beautiful/handsome? Do we understand beauty the same way across cultures and history?

Lotus Feet



- Foot binding
- Popular in China, esp among the upper class 10-20th C
- Now considered as violence against women

So.. When I say..

- I know for a fact that Park Bo Gum is super handsome.



Beauty is a social reality.



The way we understand it is historically and culturally specific.



Social constructionism is a theoretical framework which allows us to question how a physical quality like that represented by Park Bo Gum becomes a standard of beauty for men these days – many men aspire to be like him, many women want to date guys like him.

Or when I say ...

- I know for a fact that Germany is a developed country and Indonesia is a developing country.



- The categories are social realities based on certain standards set up and agreed upon by certain interest groups.
- The standards may champion certain countries and subordinate others.
- We cannot take for granted the process of knowledge production about these categories and how the knowledge is sustained through social actions.

What was before Social Constructionism?

- **Medieval (5-16th C)** → centring on the role of religious institutions, i.e. church, and distancing individual person, not affiliated to Church, from discovering truth
- **Enlightenment (17-18th C)** → acknowledging the role of individual person in the search for the objective truth, true nature of reality using reason and rationality, but still seek of THE TRUTH.

(The truth is out there!)

Post Enlightenment (19 C – present)

Post-structuralism

- rejection of singular truth,
- rejection of underlying monolithic structure, lurking beneath the surface of the world,
- rejection of a belief in a right way of doing things.

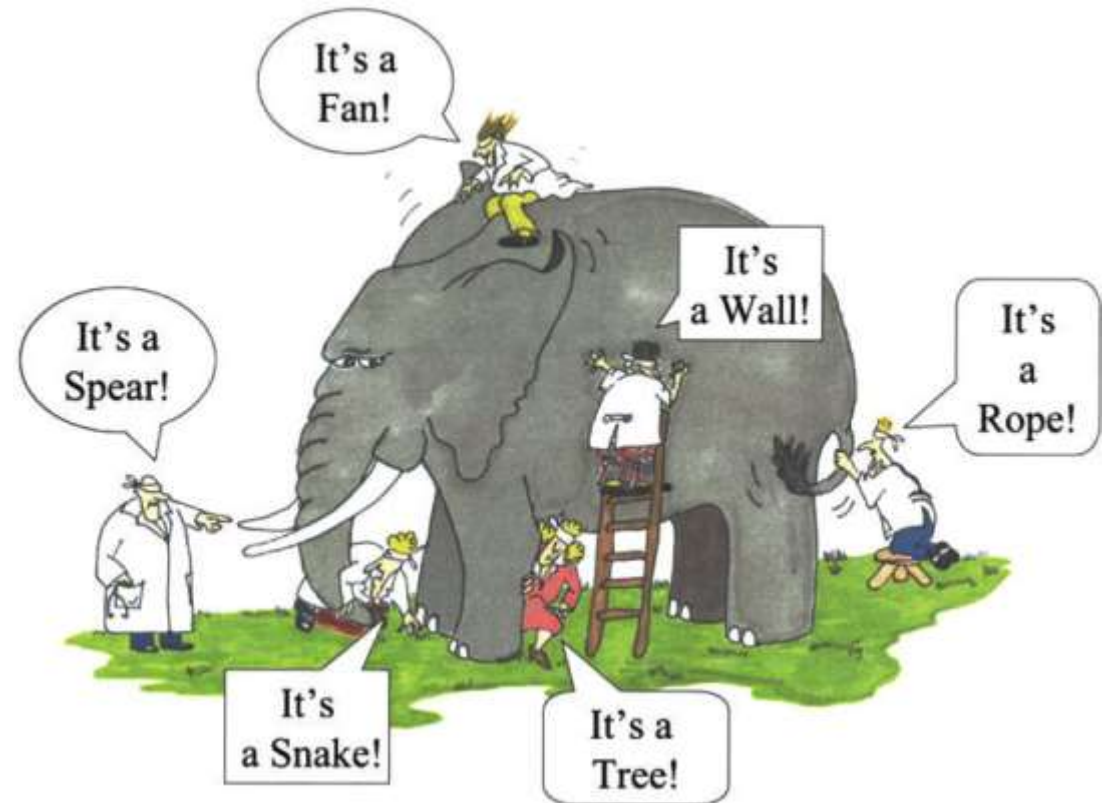


4 Kernels of Social Constructionism

Formulated by V. Burr

1. Questioning Objective Truth

- Critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge
- Our observations of the world are never free from bias



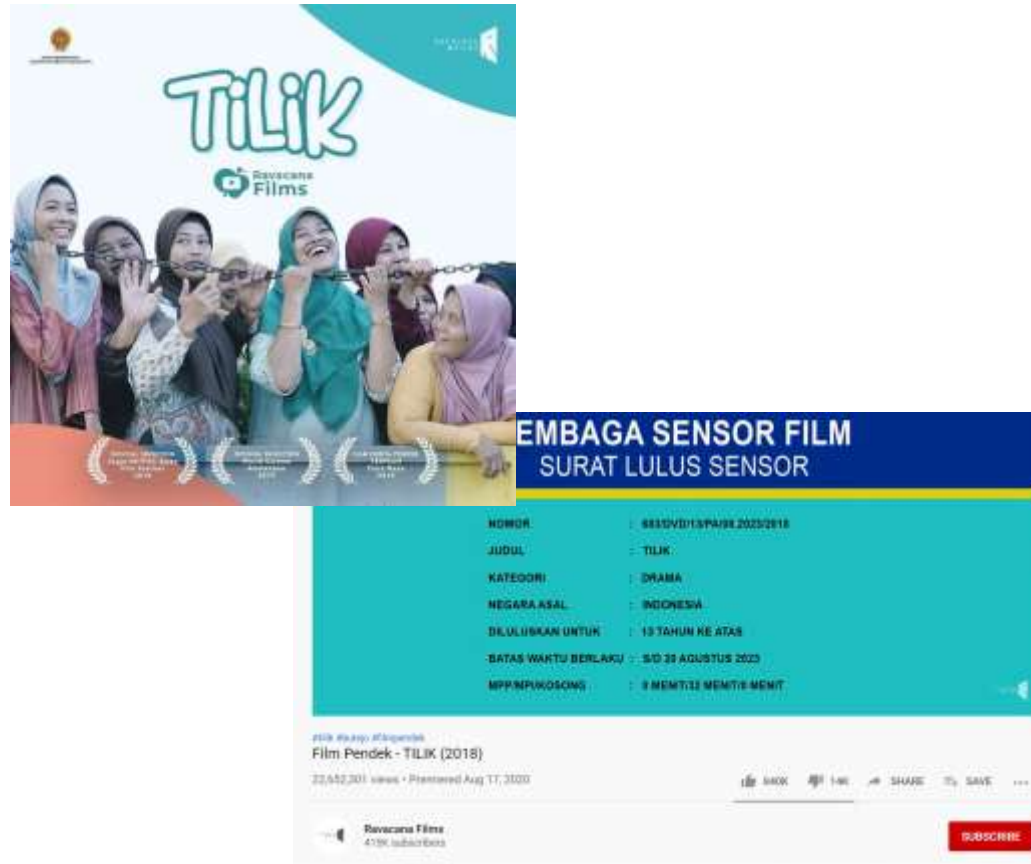
2. Historical and Cultural Specificity

- What's a good music? Do we understand good music today the same way as the people in 1980s?



- Question the uniqueness – historically and culturally
 - They are specific to particular cultures and periods of history
 - They are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time.

3. Knowledge is sustained by social processes.



- Knowledge of the world is constructed and sustained through social interactions between people.
- Social interactions of all kinds, particularly language, is of great interest among social constructionists. – discourse analysis, content analysis etc.

<https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/tilik-and-the-gender-order-crisis/>

4. Knowledge and Social Action go together.

- Each different construction brings with it, or invited, a different kind of actions from human beings. (theft → criminalization and imprisonment; marriage → congratulations)
- What reactions you get if you are a woman still single at the age of 35 years in Indonesia?



If we have to characterize social constructionism:

1. Anti essentialism
2. Anti realism
3. Historical and cultural specificity of knowledge
4. Language as pre-condition for thought
5. Language as a form of social action
6. A focus on interaction and social practices
7. A focus on processes

Issues for Social Constructionism

Some questions for discussion:

- Where do these specificities end and commonalities begin?
- In the case of gender, where does biology end and social construction begin?

Conclusion

- Let's generate some conclusions together.
- Finish my sentence:

The ways in which we see Asia and Europe, as well as their respective cultures and people,

