



CULTURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN RELA(C)TION

EMILIANA MANGONE
& GIOVANNA RUSSO

A VOLUME IN
INNOVATIONS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion

A Volume in Innovations in Qualitative Research

Series Editor

Luca Tateo

University of Oslo (Norway) and Federal University of Bahia (Brazil)

Innovations in Qualitative Research

Luca Tateo, Series Editor

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion (2025)

by Emiliana Mangone and Giovanna Russo

Ethical Considerations for Research and Practice in the Human Sciences (2025)

edited by Mila Tuli and Bhavna Negi

Qualitative Research and Social Intervention:

Transformative Methodologies for Collective Contexts (2021)

edited by Vera Lucia Trevisan de Souza and Guilherme Siqueira Arinelli

Cultures and Materialities of Imagination:

New Drug Practices and Engagements in a Digital World (2020)

by Stephan S. Sieland

Decolonizing Qualitative Approaches for and by the Caribbea (2020)

edited by Saran Stewart

The Method of Imagination (2018)

edited by Sheldon Brown and Luca Tateo

Gender and Sexuality in the Migration Trajectories:

Studies between the Northern and Southern Mediterranean Shores (2017)

edited by Emiliana Mangone, Giuseppe Masullo, and Mar Gallego

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion

by

Emiliana Mangone
University of Salerno (Italy)

Giovanna Russo
*Alma Mater Studiorum University
of Bologna (Italy)*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan –
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1
4DL

First edition 2025

Copyright © 2025 Emiliana Mangone and Giovanna Russo.
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service
Contact: www.copyright.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83708-515-6 (Print paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-514-9 (Print hardback)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-516-3 (Ebook)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-517-0 (EPUB)

DEDICATION

To Fausto Colombo, a rigorous and thoughtful scholar as well as a “gentle soul” to whom we owe much.

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Series Editor's Preface
Luca Tateo *xi*

Introduction *xiii*

PART I: THEORIES, NEW PERSPECTIVES, AND METHODS

1. The Concept of Culture in the Contemporary World **3**
From the Birth of the Concept of Culture to “Cultures” 3
Dimensions, Levels, and Components of Culture 9
Culture, Glocalization, and Social Reality 15
References 22

2. Culture, Socialization, and Communication **25**
Socialization as the Conjugation of Action and Culture 25
Communication Between the Cultural and Digital Revolution 30
Narrative as a Cultural Product 35
References 39

3. Culture, Everyday Life, and Rela(c)tion **43**
Culture, Everyday Life, and Rela(c)tion 43
Life World and the Construction of Social Reality 47
Interaction in Everyday Life 52
Interpretation and Semantics of Action 59
References 63

4. Culture, Power, and Politics	67
Praxis, Possible Worlds, and Capability Approach	67
Rethinking the Cultural Paradigms of Modernity	72
Jacques Maritain's Integral Humanism	72
Freedom and Plurality in Hannah Arendt	75
The "Dialogic Cultural Action" of Paulo Freire.....	78
Contemporary Political Subcultures: Cancel, Call-Out, and Woke Culture.....	82
Radical Cultural Democracy: Towards a New Paradigm?.....	91
References	98
5. Doing Research on the Cultural Field: New Issues Between Epistemology and Methodology	103
For A New "Imagination" of Sociological Knowledge	104
Epistemology, Methodology, and Metatheory	110
From Autoethnography to Digital Research Methods	114
References	120

PART II: EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND FORMS OF CULTURE

6. The Challenge of Culture	125
The Social Experience of Culture	126
The Cultural Turn: Towards a New Relationship Between Culture and Society	132
For a Cultural Oriented Discipline	138
References	144
7. Producing Culture, Consuming Culture	147
The Sociology of Culture Between Cultural Industries and Everyday Life	147
The Production Culture School: A New Perspective for Studying Cultural Goods	152
In the Circuit of Culture: New Cultural Models in Comparison.....	162
References	172
8. Beyond the Sociology of Culture: Towards an Autonomous Culture Role	175
The Agenda of a Contemporary Sociology of Culture: What Autonomy for Culture?	176
Values and Meanings as Horizons for Social Action: J. C. Alexander's Proposal	182

The Idea of a “Strong Program” for Cultural Sociology.....	187
References	194
9. Cultural Dimension as a Project for a “Good Life”:	
Imaginary, Practices, Participation	197
Global Cultures “On the Move”	198
Cultural Skills, Imagination, Participation: A Bridge Between Everyday Life and the Future	205
The Social Value of Culture Between Innovation, Sustainability, and the Good Life	211
References	217
About the Authors	221

This page intentionally left blank

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

WHO NEEDS CULTURE?

Luca Tateo

University of Oslo and Federal University of Bahia

Do we still need the concept of culture in social sciences? As many other umbrella terms such as identity, self, function, the concept of culture has been the object of an overproduction of heterogeneous definitions, often based on other polysemic and everyday terms which contribute to the vagueness of the concept. Among the hundreds of definitions, Emiliana Mangone and Giovanna Russo engage with the sociological knowledge to work with a relational, practical, ethical, processual, and bottom-up idea of cultural practices in everyday life. Of course, any definition of culture cannot leave aside the problem of methodology. Hence, the importance of this volume in the series *Innovation in Qualitative Research*, which is aimed at establishing a constant theoretical reflection about the ways social science develops to understand the human phenomena. A methodology is an overall epistemic, theoretical, and practical perspective on the world that results in a selective definition and understanding of the phenomenon. The definition and operative delimitation of the concept of culture cannot prescind from the reference system used to study it. We live indeed in difficult and troubled times, whereas human beings have cultivated peculiar collective and individual ways to cope with the existential phenomena that have characterized human life since its inception. Wars, pandemics, migrations, exploitation, slavery, dogmatism, and future uncertainty have always troubled human groups, but it seems that the contemporary crisis achieved a peak due to the unprecedented self-destructive and ecological impact of the artifact developed within certain cultural contexts. Some cultural

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion, pages xi–xii

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com

Copyright © 2025 by Emerald Publishing

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

products—such as religions, science, politics—which apparently provided humankind with a status of exceptionalism have now become a sort of self-destructive and world-destructive devices that place human beings as a new planetary self-consuming disease. Besides, there is a part of the world population who believes that there will be a salvation only for those who are strong, powerful, orthodox, and philistine enough to survive the vast majority. Hence, violence and oppression come back as forms of regulating interpersonal, national, and international relationships. As the authors of this volume remind us, after the 20th century's carnages, questions were asked by many scholars about the nature of human beings and their relationship with evil, responsibility, oppression. After a while, neoliberal social sciences gave up asking those questions and focused on short-range theories that did avoid political consequences. The results are visible: scholars were unprepared to understand and face the raise of phenomena such as the post-reality, the identity politics, the alt-right, the autocracies, the new imperialism, the new white supremacism, the negationism, and so on. Brute force, oppression, egoism, ethnocentrism, polarization seem the most common forms of relationship and we wonder how they can be even claimed as features of our mythicized glorious Western "tradition." In the name of those disvalues, identitarian and conservative authoritarian democracies are cultivating hatred and discrimination of neocolonialist flavor. The Atlantic culture born after the World War II on the principles of Ventotene's manifesto is now presented as a dangerous threat to an imagined traditional white, Christian identity. This is also part of the work of culture, though. The nine chapters of the present volume discuss the history of the concept, the processes that characterize cultural dynamics and their relationships, for the good and for the bad. Yet, it eventually opens to a potential overcoming of the culture's discontents through the construction of a new sociological imagination, a relational epistemology, theory, and methodology that can help to capture the positive signs of cultural change.

Oslo, June 9, 2024

INTRODUCTION

In a society that is still experiencing the crisis generated by the pandemic due to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, aggravated by the conflict in Ukraine and the conflict in the occupied territories of Palestine, it is necessary to rethink the concept of culture, which needs to be declined in its factual reality of daily life as the cultural system and its elements not only producing relationships (meaningful interactions) but also individual and collective social action. Hence the use of the term “rela(c)tion” in the title of the book that finds its explanation in Chapter 3 (“Culture, Everyday Life, and Rela(c)tion.”

In this book, the theme of culture and cultural processes has been approached along a line of reflection that takes into account the changes that have occurred in recent years in society contemporary to us. Think of the renewed interest in processes that promote social justice, particularly in the Global South (Guadarrama González & Picarella, 2022) and the sustainability strongly demanded by the younger generations (Svensson & Wahlström, 2023). These are just two examples. In this logic, theoretical insights necessary for the understanding of the transformation of this concept have not been left out, outlining its domains, dimensions and cultural processes that influence the dynamics of everyday life and that in turn influence culture itself.

The choice was made to construct a reflection on culture that would go beyond the individual definitions of this concept (Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952; Spencer-Oatey, 2021) and allow for the exploration of the processes that take place in today’s society on different planes (individual, social, and cultural) in the unfolding of individuals’ daily lives. The goal to be pursued

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion, pages xiii–xx

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com

Copyright © 2025 by Emerald Publishing

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

was to provide a picture of the dynamics, but at the same time of the future challenges to be faced by different cultural systems in constant change, without neglecting to highlight what may be the innovative orientations and/or models (sustainability, social justice, democratic culture, etc.) that should be pursued for the construction of a cultural system that fosters the peaceful and cohesive existence of differences. The latter aspect constitutes the basis of what is affirmed today as cultural relativism, which, in addition to being a concept of the anthropological and sociological sciences, is—in its application—a principle of method according to which, in order to escape ethnocentrism, the study of a phenomenon must be approached by recognizing the fact that each culture has its own validity and coherence and cannot be judged from the prevailing criteria of the culture with which we are most familiar. It is precisely on the cultural aspects that we focus our reflections on the identification and recognition that are first involved in the process of integration of individuals, which, never more than in today's society (characterized by large migratory flows) is fundamental for cohesion and civil coexistence. This leads to imagining a new conception of the “society system” that manages to configure a new dimension of social space (Martini et al., 2024). It is transformed from a “container” into an “arena,” within which individuals experience their daily living and construct social reality and their own “life world” (Lebenswelt) defined as a “kingdom of original evidence” (Husserl, 1961/1970), that is, an expression of the totality of the social life of human beings that is characterized by its collective and cultural dimensions. Despite this, cultural determinism is not confirmed, rather it is argued that culture is the fundamental component that occurs situational and temporal for the actions of individuals. Every social practice depends on and is related to meanings. Culture is one of the constitutive conditions of the existence of such practices. Every social practice has its own cultural dimension (Hall, 1997).

Culture is an inescapable dimension of daily life, and as such, it becomes necessary to understand it in relation to different situations in the social world. It is only through this kind of analysis that paths can be hypothesized for improving the relationships and forms of expression of interactions among individuals and between them and other elements of society. For these reasons, this book has discussed the concept of culture from a sociological perspective that does not forego aspects of interdisciplinarity in order to define an overview of the possibilities of interconnection between the elements of the sociocultural dimension and the actors involved in them in the different processes that take place in everyday life.

To make it easier to read, the book is divided into two parts each with its own specificity, but both follow the same thread that led to the fulfilment of the objectives specified through the definitions of objects, dynamics and challenges affecting the cultural universe and its processes.

The first part, Theories, New Perspectives, and Methods, edited by Emiliana Mangone and consisting of the first five chapters takes the form of the foundations of the second in that in it, in addition to theoretical reflections on the emergence, the application in everyday life of the concept of culture (aspects of an introductory nature), the social aspects (e.g., socialization, communication, narrative, etc.) that turn out to be decisive with respect to changes in society and interactions in the daily lives of individuals, and, therefore, also in the everyday practices and forms of expression of culture that are dealt with in the second part. Also addressed in this part, there are the new orientations involving transformations in cultural systems that are also posed as political orientations such as, for example, cancel culture (or boycott culture) or radical cultural democracy that is spreading as a model in Latin America. Finally, also addressed and discussed in this part, there are the methodological challenges that new communication technologies pose to researchers in the field of cultural process studies.

The second part, Everyday Practices and Forms of Culture, edited by Giovanna Russo for the remaining chapters of the book, focused, on the other hand, on the evolution of the sociology of culture from the “expressions, practical and concrete as well as everyday manifestations of cultural life” as it appears in the changing social context. From this perspective, it gave voice to systems of signification, representations and new cultural practices that are the result of processes of participation in which saying is combined with doing, thinking with belonging. This has meant emphasizing how culture makes a difference as “capital.” In other words, it becomes a crucial resource not only interpretative of social change but also economic and political in the strictest sense. Capable of operating as a factor in the production of meanings, new creativity, and forms of citizenship capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

Specifically, the content of the individual chapters can be summarized as follows. In Chapter 1, attention was paid to culture from its emergence as a scientific concept and its different declinations. The starting point was a reflection on the definitional problem (Spencer-Oatey, 2021), and then continued with the analysis of the levels and components of culture by highlighting the role they play in the construction of social reality. Looking at the perspective of change, this reflection took into account the (often antithetical) effects produced by the processes of globalization such as the global-local dichotomies (Robertson, 1992) or globalized diffusion *versus* localized appropriation (Thompson, 1995). The reflection continues (Chapter 2) focusing on certain cultural processes (socialization, communication, storytelling, etc.) that turn out to be significant and decisive with respect to changes in society and the interactions of individuals’ daily lives by going on to influence their sociality. It is always through the interweaving and integration of these processes that the relationship between the

individual and the social system is founded, from which springs the construction of social reality that conditions both individual and collective action of individuals. Chapter 3, “Culture, Everyday Life, and Rela(c)tion,” constitutes the central focus of the reflection of the first part of the book as it aims at understanding in greater detail the relationship of culture/interactions in everyday life through an overview of the theories (phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, etc.) that have addressed in their epistemological and methodological developments this relationship. This was necessary because, with modernity, individuals and their actions have been placed at the center of many reflections that have focused on aspects of the everyday life of individuals embedded within cultural contexts. Thus, the need to understand how different theories have attempted to understand meaning and significance of everyday action. The relationship between culture, power and politics, on the other hand, is addressed in Chapter 4 through the analysis of key concepts that define it (e.g., ethnocentrism, integration and multiculturalism, and social justice). This reflection is proposed through a rereading of the ideas (or at least their theory of *praxis*) of European (Jacques Maritain and Hannah Arendt) and Latin American (Paulo Freire) thinkers who, in the development of their theorizing, have brought out the need for a new philosophical anthropology by bringing the individual and the culture within which they are embedded back to the centre of interest. There is no shortage, however, of further insights into this relationship (see the aspects related to social justice) until we reach the recent trends of *cancel culture* or *boycott culture* (Clark, 2020) and *woke culture* (Madrid Gil, 2023) that are spreading more and more and not only through social media, or radical cultural democracy (Picarella, 2022) as a model of democratic society based on a culture of participation so much so that it is configured as a new political-cultural paradigm that is spreading in Latin America. The first part closes with Chapter 5, “Doing Research on Cultural Field: New Issues between Epistemology and Methodology,” which addresses methodological issues with respect to sociological knowledge as a tool for reading social and cultural systems, and the processes related to them. In this logic, sociology (in particular) and the other sciences of society and humanity (in general), make their own an integrated research methodology that is oriented, however, to qualitative methods (e.g., ethnography, narrative analysis, etc.) due to the peculiarity of culture and the processes related to it, without disdaining the very recent digital research methods (Rogers, 2013) whose application becomes necessary in view of the development of the so-called platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018). However, for this kind of knowledge to also become a promoter of building connections in the living environments of individuals and among individuals by overcoming the “social physics” of Comtian memory, it must become a reflective knowledge. Therefore, we

can no longer speak of a contrast between theory and operativity but of a continuum of interdependencies from theory to operativity.

The second part of the book opens with a perspective toward the future. Chapter 6 “The Challenge of Culture”—starting from the *cultural turn* of the 1960s–70s, which characterizes the emergence of the sociology of culture as a discipline capable of giving voice to noninstitutional forms of collective action (spontaneous and with new actors on the scene)—addresses as its object of study the cultural resources that circulate new content, symbols, slogans, irony, creativity, and so forth. All tools for claiming identity, languages, belonging and a new community feeling. This chapter discusses the topic of cultural studies (Anglo-Saxon and American) by giving voice to the main theoretical positions that have developed—for example, Bourdieu (1985) with “culture as practice” or Swilder (1986) with “culture in action.”

Chapter 7, “Producing Culture, Consuming Culture” discusses the production of cultural goods and their consumption, with the focus on the debate that highlights the role of organizations, producers and receivers of cultural artifacts and objects within the economic market (pragmatic paradigm of the *Production Culture School*) to understand the relationships of cultural objects (Griswold, 1994) with the practices that social actors enact. This reflection is accomplished by critically revisiting some of the best-known models of analysis from the perspective of cultural production. An actualized reinterpretation of the cultural circuit is proposed (Du Gay et al., 1997, 2013) as the process dimension of culture increasingly merges with that of progress inherent in the system of diffuse creativity in contemporary cultural industries. The last two chapters, 8 and 9, address issues related to the autonomous role of culture and new cultural processes and collective imaginaries, respectively. Specifically, Chapter 8 “Beyond the Sociology of Culture: Toward An Autonomous Culture Role” critically analyzes the proposal for “a strong programme” for cultural sociology as outlined by Jeffrey Alexander (1990, 1993, 2003, 2006) one of the most interesting voices in this regard. This is presented as an attempt to reconcile the symbolic and pragmatic dimensions of culture (material and symbolic factors) through the concept of *performance*, a useful observational lens for understanding the wide range of social practices that define what is social.

Chapter 9, “Cultural Dimension as a Project for a ‘Good Life’: Imaginary, Practices, Participation” on the other hand, in the context of the debate on global culture, delves into some of the cultural environments that have become common narrative structures “discourses of civil society” and at the same time “ecosystems of innovation” aimed at ensuring the centrality of the individual toward positive and lasting changes. This is because, in today’s aesthetic arena, culture is increasingly conceived as a true collective imaginary, in which symbolic production assumes a central

role in the construction of cultural meanings. Reference in particular is made to the following dimensions: social innovation and cultural sustainability. Common to these reflections, there is the theme of cultural action and capacity (Sen, 1999) that underlies all processes of social and cultural innovation, in which generative action emerges and culture is a crucial element of change. The chapter, in summary, describes the innovative processes and practices of culture that play a role in constructing the imaginaries of the near future, aspiring to a project of a better quality of life.

For all nine chapters, an attempt has been made to fulfill the general objective set when this book was still only a publishing project. To provide an overview of the dynamics and challenges posed by the characteristic elements of cultural systems and processes that are evolving relentlessly due to the continuous changes in society. The idea was, therefore, on the one hand, to construct a reflection on culture, which beyond the individual declinations of this concept still constitutes a fundamental element for reading the fragmented society contemporary to us, in order to allow for the exploration of the processes that take place on different planes (individual and collective) when individuals interact within a cultural system. While on the other, to highlight how culture can also guide individual and collective actions.

Finally, it is not for the two authors to say whether or not this goal has been achieved. The hope is that they have succeeded in unhinging some of the common sense ideas that have arisen around the concept of culture and cultural processes.

A side note to this introduction concerns the authorship of the texts. The concepts in this book are the fruit of an intense and constructive dialogue between the two authors. However, the authorial responsibilities for Chapters 1–5 are attributable to Emiliana Mangone and for Chapters 6–9 to Giovanna Russo. The introduction was edited by both authors.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, J. C. (1990). Analytic debates: Understanding the relative autonomy of culture. In J. C. Alexander & S. Seidman (Eds.), *Culture and society: Contemporary debates* (pp. 1–29). Cambridge University Press.
- Alexander, J. C. (1993). The promise of a cultural sociology. Technological discourse and the sacred and profane information machine. In N. J. Smelser & R. Munch (Eds.), *Theory of culture* (pp. 293–323). University of California Press.

- Alexander, J. C. (2003). *The meanings of social life. A cultural sociology*. Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, J. C. (2006). *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics and ritual*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste (R. Nice, Trans.). Routledge and Keagan Paul. (Original work published 1979)
- Clark, D. M. (2020). Drag them: A brief etymology of so-called “Cancel Culture.” *Communication and the Public*, 5(3–4), 88–92.
- du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Madsen, A. K., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman*. SAGE.
- du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Madsen, A. K., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (Eds.). (2013). *Doing cultural studies: the story of the Sony Walkman*. SAGE, in association with The Open University.
- Griswold, W. (1994). *Culture and societies in a changing world*. Pine Forge Press.
- Guadarrama González, P., & Picarella, L. (Eds.). (2022). *Libertad y justicia social para el cambio social. Teoría y conceptos* [Freedom and social justice for social change. Theory and concepts]. NaSC Free Press (University of Salerno). <https://dx.doi.org/10.14273/unisa-4077>
- Hall, S. (1997). The centrality of culture: Notes on the cultural revolutions of our time. In K. A. Thompson (Ed.), *Media e Cultural Regulation* (pp. 207–238). SAGE.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1961)
- Kluckhohn, C., & Kroeber, A. L. (1952). *Culture. A critical review of concepts and definitions*. The Museum.
- Madrid Gil, S. (2023). Woke culture and the history of America: From colonisation to depersonalisation. *Church, Communication and Culture*, 8(1), 18–42. <http://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2023.2174890>
- Martini, E., Picarella, L., & Mangone, E. (2024). Le crisi che ridefiniscono i confini dello spazio sociale: lo “stato d’eccezione” che diventa “stato d’eccezione sociale” [The crises that redefine the boundaries of social space: The “state of exception” becoming a “social state of exception”]. In E. Martini, F. Pergola, & R. De Luca Picione (Eds.), *Confini, liminalità e metamorfosi. La complessità del confine nell’esperienza dell’umano*. MImesis.
- Picarella, L. (2022). Società e mutamento: verso il nuovo paradigma della democrazia culturale radicale [Society and change: Towards the new paradigm of radical cultural democracy]. *Quaderni di teoria sociale*, 1(1), 79–106.
- Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social theory and global culture*. SAGE.
- Rogers, R. (2013). *Digital methods*. MIT Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Knopf.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2021). What is culture? A compilation of quotations for the intercultural field. *GPC Core Concept Compilations*. Global People Consulting. <https://globalpeopleconsulting.com/what-is-culture>
- Svensson, A., & Wahlström, M. (2023). Climate change or what? Prognostic framing by Fridays for Future protesters. *Social Movement Studies*, 22(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2021.1988913>

- Swilder, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 273–286.
- Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity. A social theory of the Media*. Polity.
- van Dijck, J., Poell T., & de Waal M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press.

PART I

THEORIES, NEW PERSPECTIVES, AND METHODS

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

ABSTRACT

Culture is a fundamental dimension of everyday life and as such it is necessary to focus on this very concept, starting from its emergence as a scientific concept and its different declinations. The starting point, therefore, will be a reflection on the problem of definition, considering the countless transformations taking place in contemporary society, and then continuing with an analysis of the levels and components of culture, highlighting the role they play in the construction of social reality. This analysis will also be carried out taking into account the often antithetical changes produced by globalization processes such as the global-local dichotomies (glocalization) or global diffusion of information/local appropriation (globalized diffusion *vs* localized appropriation).

Keywords: concept of culture, values, globalization, social reality, subcultures

FROM THE BIRTH OF THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE TO “CULTURES”

In the social sciences, there are concepts that much more than others have given rise to debates starting from their definition, and among these is the concept of culture, which, over the centuries, ever since the first attempt at a definition by the anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871), has produced reflections and discussions in more than one disciplinary sphere. In its form as a

Culture and Everyday Life in Rela(c)tion, pages 3–24

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com

Copyright © 2025 by Emerald Publishing

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

scientific concept, “culture” has perhaps been the word that has gathered more definitions in the social sciences—since its birth as a scientific concept between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century—which have also been differentiated on the basis of its declination in the singular or plural (we will return to this later). An attempt to systematize the definitions was made by Kluckhohn and Kroeber (1952) who identified 164 of them, classifying them into seven different groups of categories on the basis of the distinctive elements of each definition: (a) *descriptive* (general definitions with an emphasis on the enumeration of components); (b) *historical* (definitions with an emphasis on the importance of social inheritance or tradition); (c) *normative* (definitions with an emphasis on rules, values but also behavior) (d) *psychological* (definitions with an emphasis on culture as a tool for learning and problem-solving, as well as on the habitual aspects of everyday life); (e) structural (definitions with an emphasis on the patterns and organization of culture); (f) *genetic* (definitions with an emphasis on the idea that culture is a product of life that places importance on ideas and symbols); and, finally, (g) *incomplete definitions*. Bearing in mind this multiplicity of definitions, we cannot, however, fail to recall the first definition of the scientific concept of culture even if, today, in the light of the countless transformations of society, Tylor’s (1871) definition is no longer valid except for the history of culture studies. It is characterized by a descriptive logic (and it is in this category that Kluckhohn and Kroeber place it), in the sense that Tylor, in proposing his definition, had mainly focused on declining the list of components of this concept:

Culture, taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. (p. 1)

As argued, therefore, by Spencer-Oatey (2021), “Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define” (p. 1), There is no single definition of culture or a single, univocal approach to analysis, and for this reason this book will not provide a new definition but rather will decline the characteristics as they support the proposed reflections. This difficulty is not only related to the multiple conceptual and semantic meanings of culture, but “All of the usages and understandings come attached to, or can be attached to, different political or ideological agendas that, in one form or another, still resonate today” (Avruch, 1998, p. 7), as will also be seen in the following pages. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that, in the history of thought of different disciplines (sociology, anthropology and psychology),

different interpretations, explanations and interpretations based on the typical epistemological structure of each discipline have been proposed.

The different definitions produced over the decades have not achieved a clarity of the concept, which still remains particularly ambiguous since it has a high degree of relativity, especially linked to some aspects. Among these, on the one hand, the processes and common forms of human sociability emerge, while on the other, their typically constant and repeated functional correlations in social space-time. Following the definition by Spencer-Oatey (2021), the latter which considers both “contents” and “representations and cognitive frames,” the culture:

[Is] a complex set of meaning systems that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, schemas, norms, and symbols, that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a social group and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the “meaning” of other people’s behaviour. (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021, p. 4)

From this point of view, it clearly emerges that culture is influential but not deterministic. This is a peculiarity that culture always assumes and, in all societies, today we can no longer speak of “culture” (understood as one) but “of cultures” (understood as multiple even within the same society).

It is clear that all the definitions—whether they are more or less exhaustive in content—vary according to whether greater attention is paid to the subjective dimension (values, behavioral models and internalized norms) or to the objective dimension (collective memory and tradition), but also to the descriptive dimension (images of the world, construction of social reality that explain and interpret individual and/or collective identity, and social phenomena) or the prescriptive dimension (values and norms that indicate the way in which individuals and the collective must orient themselves in their behavior). This double dichotomous pair (subjective/objective and descriptive/prescriptive) must always be understood as correlated and present in the definitions of culture since one is linked to the other and, in particular, the terms of the descriptive/prescriptive dichotomy can never consider each other separate since one (the prescription) finds justification in the other (the description) and *vice versa*.

Originally, the term culture, and until the mid-18th century when it was declined in the singular, referred mainly to the process of education and training of the individual (from the Greek *Paideia* and the German *Bildung*). Through the learning of socially and appropriately transmitted knowledge and values, the individual internalized what then became personal qualities (and the individual was called “cultured”). Subsequently, the term underwent a further broadening of its meaning and, particularly declined in the plural (cultures), it encompasses the heritage of knowledge and values that have been built up over the years in the history of mankind

or of individual peoples. This is also the historical moment when, in French society, the terms *civilité/civilization* [civility/civilization] were affirmed, which were originally connected with the Latin term *civilis* that indicated the status of the citizen as opposed to *barbarus*, so much so that it first took on the meaning of “government of a community” and then went on to indicate the lifestyle (the “good manners”) of those living in a society. In this way, the terms are increasingly moving away from the political-institutional dimension and towards the social dimension, to the extent that the term *civilité* [civility] includes membership of the human species itself. With the Enlightenment, which was to influence most of the systems of thought and ideas that were to spread in Europe once the theological aura had been definitively abandoned, on the basis of the evolutionary perspective of human history, the term *civilisation/civilization* was to establish itself first in France and then in England, partly in contrast to the term *Kultur*, which was to spread in Germany. The reason why these two terms (*Kultur/civilization*) from simply being different due to a question of language became antithetical is linked to the development of the nationalistic movements that were spreading across Europe at that time. This debate over time pitted the school of the French tradition and the school of the German tradition against each other, as described at length by Cuche (1996) and Elias (1938), the salient elements of which we report here. This antithesis, which brings the focus back to the political-institutional dimension, contrasts the universalist conception of French Enlightenment thought regarding the notion of *civilité/civilization* [civility/civilization] with the particularist and nationalist conception of the German notion of *Kultur*. Elias (1938) attributes the success of the concept of *Kultur*, in his analysis of the social genesis of this antithesis, to the appropriation of the term by German bourgeois intellectuals. The latter, being at odds with the systems of thought and lifestyles of the court aristocracy, which was very close to the idea of *civilisation* [civilization], rejected this idea since it was considered superficial and ephemeral. German intellectuals had attributed to the term *Kultur* a character of depth and authenticity that constituted the form of legitimization of this social class excluded from politics and positions of power. This antithesis thus initially arose on the terrain of the social clash of legitimization and representation of one social stratum (the intellectual bourgeoisie) over another (the court aristocracy)—within the German world—and then became an international antithesis (the contrast between the German and French schools).

There are two key elements that emerge in the early stages of the development of the scientific concept of culture: the first, is the transformation that the concept underwent in the 18th century from defining the formation of the personality (subjective dimension) to defining, in a historical evolution, the common heritage of a community (objective dimension),

and, the second, stemming from the awareness of the historical-relative nature of cultural forms and configurations, which differentiates these on the basis of different eras and societies.

This latter aspect forms the basis of what is now affirmed as *cultural relativism*, which, in addition to being a concept of the anthropological and sociological sciences, is—in its application—a principle of method according to which, in order to escape ethnocentrism, the study of a phenomenon must be approached by recognizing the fact that each culture has its own validity and coherence and cannot be judged on the basis of the prevailing criteria of the culture with which we are most familiar. Ethnocultural pluralism (Savidan, 2009) in human history is therefore not new. It is precisely on cultural aspects that we focus our reflections on identification and recognition that are first involved in the process of integrating individuals, which, never before as in contemporary society (characterized by large migration flows), are fundamental for cohesion and civil coexistence. The debate on multiculturalism (Baumann, 1999; Taylor, 1992)—which began at the end of the last century—as a new way of conceiving culture and its dynamics that is realized through cultural integration, is still relevant today. The idea of multiculturalism, however, in many countries, has generated negative effects such as the further fragmentation of society and a cultural relativism that pushes for a separation between different cultures, shifting the debate towards overcoming multiculturalism (Donati, 2009; Prato, 2016). The discussion on cultural relativism is therefore based on the search for a new way of life that can guarantee justice and equality to all groups (diverse in terms of race, gender, religion, etc.) even if some of them could be defined, according to common sense, as belonging to a “different culture” from the one in which they live. Culture is the combination of various elements that enable the strengthening of the sense of belonging to the group and identity, but the latter is not possible without recognition. It should be made clear here that the reference to the recognition process does not refer to the “politics of recognition” as proposed by Taylor (1992) since, if we were to analyze this conceptualization, its limitation would unequivocally emerge. The multiculturalism from which interculturality derives cannot be based on attributing equal dignity and value only to “selected cultures” that have been recognized for a long time, but such dignity and value must be attributed to all cultures, otherwise we would fall into more refined and intellectualized forms of ethnocentrism, but which in substance are no different from the classic forms of ethnocentrism with which we tend to judge the cultures of other epochs or other populations on the basis of the peculiar aspects of the culture to which they belong. The debate on interculturality and multiculturalism is therefore about the challenge that societies face with difficulty (and that they will increasingly have to face), namely, whether their configuration should be characterized as closed

(unwelcoming) systems or open (welcoming) systems towards “other cultures.” What Baumann (1999) has called the “multicultural riddle.” Culture is not an absolute, just as identity is. Both are in constant motion: the benefits of having a culture depend on the process of remaking that culture, and the dominant discourse of culture as immutable inheritance is only a (often conservative) subcomponent of this process. From this it emerges that multiculturalism is a new way of conceiving of cultural dynamics: the concept of multiculturalism does not indicate the concept of culture multiplied by the number of “other cultures” present in a defined territory, but rather a new way of dealing with the simultaneous presence of cultural diversities (Hannerz, 1996) in everyday life (Hannerz, 1996), of which subjects/actors from other territories are bearers. Donati, in this regard, recalls the need for a “new” multiculturalism for a modern citizenship that is based on a “relational culture” capable of being able to connect individuals, lifestyles, belongings and different citizenships, without reproducing their separations or making them clash with each other.

We need a new vision of human existence to manage the cultural borders in such a way as to preserve the differences while taking care of what links them and can be shared by them. This amounts to find out a new “relational culture,” i.e. a culture of social relations that can be able to see and deal with the “enigma” of the borders themselves. (Donati, 2016, p. 25)

In the relational perspective (Donati & Archer, 2015), the social relationship does not pose itself as a constraint for the individual, rather it is the element that fosters the self-determination of the subject on the basis of reflexivity (May & Perry, 2017), which becomes the sphere in which both the distance and the integration of individuals are defined. It depends on this reality (the social relationship in which the subject finds himself) whether and in what form, extent and quality the individual can detach or involve himself with respect to other more or less close subjects, institutions and in general with respect to the dynamics of social life.

The question that needs to be answered, or at least attempted to be answered, given the cultural diversity, is whether a concrete cultural integration is conceivable and feasible. In order to attempt to answer this question, it is necessary to attach equal importance to the two terms (integration and culture), which makes it possible to delineate cultural integration as a *multidimensional* process that is temporally and spatially contextualized and aimed at the civilized coexistence of populations or groups of them, basing its foundations on respect for cultural diversity. From this, it emerges that we are not faced with a phenomenon that has a beginning and an end. It is an ongoing process that must necessarily come to terms, on the one hand, with the sense of belonging that has gone from being local (particularistic) to transnational (universalistic) without succeeding in