Chapter 2
Understanding Cultural Diversity. Culture, Cultural Traits and Cultural Changes Between Global and Local Scales

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2.1 Conceptualizing Culture: From the Simple to the Complex

A special epistemological tension characterizes anthropological knowledge. It has the same roots as the discipline and has been discussed many times by many scholars throughout its history. It gives cultural anthropology its peculiarity within a western academic context. Cultural anthropological understanding, indeed, as a unique case, implies an endless enlargement of concepts, methods, theories and achievements since they have been defined in one particular cultural context but have to fit and work in another. It is an epistemological strength that gives this discipline endless problematic and critical drives. There are no other fields of knowledge that, like cultural anthropology, see their concepts, their theories, their research methods so deconstructed, so criticized, and so continuously revised.

Regarding this tension, there are opposing views: some, such as Antony Giddens, think that it is a small and clear sign of theoretical blurring. Others, such as Clifford Geertz, think that it is a sign of great capability to anticipate social and cultural transformations and to fit in with them. Still others, like Roger Keesing, think that, from an ideological point of view, the intellectual project of anthropology, since its origin, has consisted of the invention and claim of radical cultural alterity, so that anthropological discourse has to continuously remake itself – depending on political positions and identities – to be able to attend to its basic function of framing diversity. In this scope, the West needs the classical concept of culture as a delimited universe of shared uses and values.[1]

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[1] **Connection**: Section 14.3 and Chap. 12 discuss values as cultural traits in the context of organizations.

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Nevertheless, the doubt remains that despite the progress of reflection and the extent of empirical research, cultural anthropology is weaker today than it was in the last century (Hannerz 2010).[2]

Of course, as is its nature, an intellectual project that draws its basic *raison d' etre* from the need to understand the other – without looking into the question of whether this alterity exists or if it is something invented by the same anthropologists (Said 1973; Wagner 1981; Keesing 1994; Kilani 1994) – cannot but accept its deeply historical and cultural being, or the fugacity of its theoretical models, the evanescence of its knowledge, or the total lack of solidity. Cultural anthropology, in this sense, is made of the same cultural material that it studies, even though many scholars have proposed – some very convincingly (e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss), others less so (e.g. Dan Sperber) – concepts made of another kind of material, very strong and unchangeable, to find a secure point, no longer a cultural one but a logical or natural one, from which to study cultural variations.[3] We know well that scientific knowledge continues in "revolutions", by sudden changes of paradigms (Khun 1969), but it is probably a peculiarity of anthropologists to make experiences from a theoretical "rarefaction". The longer the study proceeds, with new achievements and with new perspectives, the narrower the path along which it goes becomes. As Clifford Geertz put it:

> Nevertheless, pulled in opposed directions by technical advances in allied disciplines,
> divided within itself along accidental ill-drawn lines, besieged from one side by resurgent

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[2] For example, the public image of the discipline is today very far from clear and understandable. Given that it was, from a certain point on, a no more politically and intellectually sustainable specific discipline for that part of humanity said "primitive", or "simple" or, in general, "non western", as anthropology was intended at its origin. The discipline moved (or tried to move) itself towards a study concerned with all of humanity. Anyway, this move still appears to be incomplete today, and the image of anthropology, both internal and public, is rather blurred. As Ulf Hannerz puts it, there are some questions to be answered or at least debated, which are crucial for the future of the discipline: "What, in these times, is anthropology for? What is its place in the world? How do we go about our work? Who should work where? How do we want to be understood, and how do we not want to be seen? For whom do we write, and whom should we read?" (Hannerz 2010: 2).

[3] It is of course impossible to face exhaustively here such a complex question concerning the history of anthropological ideas. I have just hinted at the position of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a strongly rationalist one, which considers the structures of human thought to be the same everywhere, and the matrix that generates human cultural systems – the principle of binary opposition – as a deep, innate and though universal structure underlying superficial (and observed) facts, eventually different in cultural contents (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1966). A similar rationalist position is the one of several scholars in cognitive anthropology, that claim a "culture as knowledge" definition, and study both the organization of cognitive classifications (see Berlin (1992)) and/or the mental representations of cultural practices and their widespread, in certain cases as a sort of epidemiology of ideas (Sperber 1985, 1996; Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004; see also Shore (1998)). Universal perceptual and cognitive disposals, or a sort of universal "hidden nature" are usually at the basis of their ways to explain Culture, as intrinsically linked to the human mind, and in ultimate analysis without any kind of mediation by cultural practices. The essential point here is the emphasis on the rules, or on the logic principles underlying any cultural system that enables comparison and a general theory of Culture (Miller 2003). For a recent return to more relativistic issues, indeed within the cognitive frame, see Levinson (2003).

scientism and from the other by an advanced form of hand-wringing, and progressively deprived of its original subject matter, its research isolation, and its master-of-all-I-Survey authority, the field seems not only to stay reasonably intact but, what is more important, to extend the sway of the cast of mind that defines it over wider and wider areas of contemporary thought. We have turned out to be rather good at waddling in. In our confusion is our strength. (Geertz 2000: 97)

It is something like this "waddling in" that marks the analysis of Culture.

The analysis of Culture, indeed, has been going on in cultural anthropology – the discipline that has most studied it – following a proceeding consisting in progressive substitutions of simple images with complex ones. While it is usually common opinion that scientific knowledge consists of the transformation from the complex into the simple, from chaos to order, from the unintelligible to the understandable, sometimes the opposite – as in anthropology with regards to "culture" – happens:

> The rise of a scientific concept of culture amounted to, or at least was connected with, the overthrow of the view of human nature dominant in the Enlightenment – a view that, whatever else may be said for or against it, was both clear and simple – and its replacement by a view not only more complicated but enormously less clear. The attempt to clarify it, to reconstruct an intelligible account of what man is, has underlain scientific thinking about culture ever since. Having sought complexity and, on a scale grander than they ever imagined, found it, anthropologists became entangled in a tortuous effort to order it. And the end is not yet in sight. (Geertz 1973: 34)

Forty years have passed since 1973, and still "the end is not yet in sight". However, there are some paths in sight that we can follow by trying to understand the complex, elusive, only sometimes analyzed, but always discussed concept of culture.

From an epistemological point of view, these paths are not all on the same level. Some of them, as we will see, are more or less clearly linked to our main characteristics as human beings. Others, however, are direct consequences of our – anthropological – gaze on human beings. Following these paths we will also find that our objective, the concept of culture, is a changing one, depending on how we observe it.

2.1.1   An Unfinished Animal

The first of these lines of reasoning, the one from which I would like to start, is directly linked to the first part of the title of this paper, "Understanding cultural diversity". It derives, perhaps, from the main peculiarity of human beings as a biological species: its *incompleteness*. Man is an incomplete, unfinished animal, as most of philosophical anthropology has argued (Gehlen 1940), and as Clifford Geertz (1973) has underlined when presenting his view of culture as the software man needs in order to live in a meaningful way, and as the condition for gaining full mankind:

[…] there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. Men without culture […] would be unworkable monstrosities with very few useful instincts, fewer recognizable sentiments, and no intellect; mental basket cases. (Geertz 1973: 49)

Because of his incompleteness, man cannot do anything but produce culture, which is, according to Geertz's computer science metaphor, a "control mechanism" we need to operate. In different contexts, under different conditions and circumstances, human beings interact differently and produce different cultures, thus, we can face the extraordinary diversity man is imbued with thinking of in terms of cultural diversity.[4]

2.1.2   Empirical Evidence

An *extraordinary differentiation* is the second trait of the human species which is useful for our excursus along culture concept anthropological conceptualizations. It brings us to our second line of reasoning; human diversity is an empirical trait, an evident one even at a very superficial glance, which we continuously experience both in a direct way, during our daily life, and in an indirect way, through any kind of image or representation. A large amount of literature exists about human diversity. Different languages, different physical traits, different beliefs and values, different

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[4] The problem of the relationship between nature and culture is a huge one, not only in anthropology. Of course, within the vast landscape of environmental studies, biology and cognitive psychology, nature can no longer be seen as a simple and inert background for the great unfolding of "human culture". In particular, the ethnographic knowledge of sites and peoples – starting from ethnobotanic research until the more recent ecological approaches of Tim Ingold, who is the key contemporary theorist of a biologically-minded based anthropology (see, for example, Kull et al. 2003) – enables these theorists to do away with the nature/culture dualism that has been so central to anthropology. Within this framework, Philipe Descola argues for a new anthropological epistemology *beyond nature and culture*, in which the nature/culture dualism is definitively replaced with a fully monistic framework. At the heart of his book *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Descola 2013) Descola not only attempts to describe some more deep-lying 'schemas' – which, he claims can account for the appearance of naturalism – but also some different ways of identifying things in the world, and of forming relations with them. The position of Clifford Geertz and of his "control mechanism" conception of culture still appears as not fully beyond this dualism, even though he refuses to make a sharp division between human nature and human culture. In any case, it is not evident which anthropologists are (or were) so committed to the division of nature and culture. Perhaps they are the classic scholars such as Levi-Strauss, of course, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and Marshal Sahlins? The point is maybe more complex than it appears, given that it is impossible to state where exactly anthropology, both currently and in its history, sits in regard to this division. The post-structuralist concept of culture insists on "what people hold in their minds" (like the Geertzian semiotic notion). In classical symbolic anthropology, the universe of relations – out of which cultures are condensed – was conceptualised as a web of meanings (Geertz 1973) and were seen to be established only between groups of real social actors. In the *beyond nature/culture* conception, the web that establishes culture is not just a web of meanings, it is also real and very material. The communities that form out of these condensed relations, at once mental and material, contain semantic, social connections between people as well as things, objects, technologies and non-humans (Latour 1993; Ingold 1998, 2004).

ways of acting and thinking present a real Babel, which makes our world essentially an opaque place. Human beings, members of the human species, express and perceive this incredible amount of diversity in multiple ways, so that the world we live in, the world of man, is opaque, of course, but not uniform. Under certain conditions opacity is more dense, becoming dark, and this makes us afraid. Other times it seems to dissipate, and this makes us feel safer. Understanding another person, grasping their point of view, or their thinking and acting is exalting. This positive effect is stronger whenever our capacity to understand and to predict works not just for a single individual, but also for a community; whenever, in other words, we are able to enlarge our understanding, and to make the world transparent, as cultural anthropology analysis, ultimately, should do (Hannerz 2010). How is this collective understanding possible? How can we make the world transparent? By making an effort to realize that what makes the world an opaque place is nothing but cultural phenomena that we are able to read, to interpret, to explain, and to make clear.

2.1.3 The Repetition: The Heart of Cultural Production

Indeed, at the basis of our acting and thinking, there is a very simple mechanism: *repetition* (plus improvisation, in the sense that the word takes in artistic performances, see Halam and Ingold 2007). This is the third line of reasoning to follow in search of some understanding of culture. The mechanism of repetition *plus improvisation* – a certain degree of controlled variation around the same theme, like in jazz music – is at the real core of our daily life, and of our everyday activity as part of a meaningful existence. It is also at the very heart of linguistic and communicative production, and for this reason could be theoretically conceptualized by the notion of *performance*, as underlined by Alessandro Duranti.

To be a fluent speaker of a language means being able to enter any conversation in ways that are seen as appropriate and not disruptive. Such conversational skills, which we usually take for granted (until we find someone who does not have them or ignores their social implications) are not too different from the ways in which a skilled jazz musician can enter someone else's composition, by embellishing it, playing around with its main motive, emphasizing some elements of the melody over others, quoting other renditions of the same piece by other musicians, and trying out different harmonic connections, without losing track of what everyone else in the band is doing (Duranti 1997: 16–17).

Where we cannot find repetition, we cannot find sense, at least not at first glance.[5] Because of this, we find difficulties in understanding the way in which other people

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[5] Differently from a computer processor, the human brain is able to grasp the sense of what is going on (linguistic acts, speech acts, actions and so on), although it always occurs with a certain amount of variation. This is the principle of "vague boundaries" (Andersen 1975; Labov 1973; Cardona 1985) by which human beings are able to recognize as the same occurrence – the same word – different acts of speech (performed by different speakers, for example, or by the same speaker in

act and think. Their acting and thinking are different from our own in the sense that they diverge from our usual patterns, those patterns we are used to repeating every day. The mechanism of repetition is the first step of culture making and of *cultural trait* patterning. In one of the most important books of the last century, *Reality as Social Construction* (Berger and Luckman 1967), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman explained how the mechanism of repetition is placed at the heart of cultural production. Starting from their perspective, it emerges that a culture is a set of points of reference – or points of invariance – that remain relatively fixed or that do not change, whereas all the rest is changing. Ways of acting, ways of doing things, ways of thinking, and even values have gained a sort of invariance (relative invariance, of course) throughout the course of time. We, as human beings, are immersed in temporality, as Martin Heidegger claimed. Our existence bears the marks of time, as we are biological organisms that are born, grow up, become old, and die. So, we are organisms that change with and by time and we live embedded in a world that changes incessantly (as the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said in his famous fragment *Panta Rei*). Because of the character of flow of our primary experience, we need to establish, and we are able to do it only in a totally arbitrary way, that some elements cannot change (or do not have to change). If not, we would be unable to recognize, to understand, or to make sense of our lives. Our life, to be a meaningful life, needs order, direction, and stability, which can be obtained only by repetition. Of course, social and cultural order, direction, and stability, are all hard to achieve and are not all granted and established by a timeless "structure". In other words, "making things go together is something we at least have to work on" (Hannerz 1996: 8).

From this perspective, a philosophical one if we like, culture is a flexible, historical structure of repetition, completely arbitrary, immersed in the flux of temporality, or of transformation.[6] This means that in making up our arbitrary culture by

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different occasions) as mere repetitions. We can extend, I argue, this principle, which has been attested to in the realm of language and communication, to the realm of Culture as well. Of course, beyond a certain degree, variation becomes unrecognizable, so the world becomes an opaque place.

[6] This is probably the reason why the first generation of fieldwork anthropologists after Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski were to a certain extent entangled with the idea that a culture is a highly integrated totality. Only during the second half of the Nineteenth century did some scholars (e.g. Max Gluckman, Fredrich Barth, Sigfried Nadel, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Marshal Sahlins) begin to express their doubts about it, underlining for example that a culture has of course something to be integrated, but it is probably for the most part a question of degree. As Ulf Hannerz recalls, the concrete lives of human beings indeed imply a relevant part of "[…] contradictions, ambiguities, misunderstandings and conflicts; making things go together is something we at least have to work on" (Hannerz 1996: 8). Here, there is a significant connection with the crucial idea in conversational analysis and in anthropology of language that in social practices of communication social actors have to constantly gain their reciprocal understandings, agreements, making things go in the right directions and so on. This is why linguistic acts are performances, in a dramatic sense (Duranti 1997). There is nothing certain, in social (communicative) interactions. We have the chance to do the right thing, and so doing we achieve acknowledgement and approval from our interlocutors, but we can also do the wrong thing, and so be blamed and damaged in our face (Goffman 1959, 1967).

repetition, we also make up our diversity, or, from an inverted perspective, that we can explain our diversity in terms of our cultural, arbitrary diversity. How are we able to establish that structure (a soft one) of invariance (contingent invariance) that is our culture?

2.1.4 The Creature Who Makes Sense

The fourth line of reasoning we are going to follow in our partial attempt to depict the concept of culture is connected to another crucial trait of human beings, and in a special way of *Homo sapiens*, which is *the capacity to make sense*. We are producers of meanings, as Ulf Hannerz has claimed with regard to his idea of culture.

Homo sapiens is the creature who "makes sense". She literally produces sense through her experience, interpretation, contemplation, and imagination, and she cannot live in the world without it. The importance of this sense-making in human life is reflected in a crowded conceptual field: ideas, meaning, information, wisdom, understanding, intelligence, sensibility, learning, fantasy, opinion, knowledge, belief, myth, and tradition. Amongst these words, another also belongs, dear to anthropologists: culture. There have been times when they have used it to stand for much more, but in the recent period, culture has been taken to be above all a matter of meaning. To study culture is to study ideas, experiences, and feelings, as well as the external forms that such internalities take as they are made public, available to the senses and thus, truly social. For culture, in the anthropological view, it is the meanings which people create, and which create people, as members of societies (Hannerz 1992: 3).

To make sense is the only resource we as human beings, as biological, but incomplete organisms (without any concrete set of natural disposals – once we could have said "instincts" – to grant survival), who at the mercy of time, both biological and cultural, have to gain a partial anchorage for our existence, otherwise we are condemned to chaos. So, we produce sense, in a public dimension, during and through the complex game of social interactions. This sense is always, in a more or less rigid way, distributed inside a formal frame, as webs of meanings. As Clifford Geertz put it in his exemplary essay *Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973: 5)

2.1.5 Memory

There is one more line of reasoning, the fifth. Indeed, both the sense-making process and the need for repetition require another capability, which is the capability to retain traces of our experiences and to recall them, – *the faculty of memory*. In

another very important book, the egyptologist Jan Assmann (1992) explained the crucial role memory – as a cultural and social construction – plays in our life. Thanks to our memory we are able to recall and to repeat (and to forget, of course); to recall our meaningful experiences and to repeat them in appropriate ways and under appropriate circumstances. In other words, thanks to our memory, we are able to make up our culture – the sense we produce during experiences and the webs of meaning that envelope our world – which is still alive every day.

So, to sum up, when speaking about culture we are able to state that it is a complex concept, that it is directly linked to our basic mechanisms – as human beings: incompleteness, differentiation, production of sense, repetition, and faculty of memory – which are all essential ingredients to make our existential horizon a meaningful one. Furthermore, we know that culture is made of meanings, of webs of meanings, and that it is the primary source of human diversity. At this point, I present a hypothesis: if, as we have seen, culture is made of meanings, and if, as we are going to see, the smallest units of culture are cultural traits, then we could possibly conceptualize cultural traits in terms of meanings that are socially produced and diffused, socially transmitted and acquired (and interpreted) by individuals. Within this hypothesis, there is also room for culture mixing, hybridization, or creolization as a quality or an "added value" of migrations (in general, of mobility) and the media in contemporary global cultural diffusion (Appadurai 1996; Herzfeld 2001; Lewellen 2002; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). I will return to this hypothesis later.

2.2   Culture and Cultures

I would like to point out, at this stage of our short review of a scholarly culture concept, that we can almost face the concept of culture on two different levels. One is the level of Culture (with a capital C), as a direct response to some basic characteristics and processes of human beings, the incompleteness, the differentiation, the making of sense, the mechanism of repetition, and the faculty of memory, as we has seen. It is evident that these basic conditions have to be the same wherever we observe them. I do not think that this claim entails any engagement with any sort of positivism, universalism, or anti-relativist scientific epistemology.

On another level we face the concept of culture by studying the materials single cultures are made of, those particular and localized webs of meanings that, starting from the claim of Geertz (1973: 52) that "what men are, above all other things, is various", become the main target of any "real" anthropologist, or, better, ethnographer.[7]

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[7] According to Clifford Geertz there are no differences between anthropology and ethnography or, in other terms, beyond ethnography there is nothing for anthropologists left to do (Ingold 2007). There are several quotes from Geertz where it is possible to find this vision of the discipline. The Geertzian manifest, for example, *Toward an Interpretive theory of culture* (Geertz 1973), beyond its most common suggestions on the semiotic vision of culture, and on the textual metaphor of

If we look at the history of the discipline and at the main anthropological ways to conceptualize "culture", it becomes easy enough to underline that anthropological scholarship on culture has faced the concept on one or the other of these two levels, depending on the intellectual, but also the political and social circumstances of its historical collocation (see Hannerz (1996) and Fisher (2007)).

We can understand the passage from Culture, in the singular, to cultures, in the plural, thanks to the dimension of the social distribution and organization of cultural meanings, in the following (theoretical) terms. As we have seen, human beings produce sense in the social dimension of their lives. They shape and acquire Culture as meanings – they make up webs or "habits" of meanings – and finally, they arrange (or try "hard" to arrange) cultural meanings into coherent cultural patterns. As they go about their lives, Culture, in some ways, becomes socially organized and distributed into and along the more or less coherent "packages" anthropologists have called (and still call) "cultures". These cultures are the mirror images of societies. Indeed, it is in the plural.

This insight about "cultures" presupposes that human beings live, or should live, to maintain a "pure" culture and a strong identity, within closed and separate social units. It presupposes, furthermore, that human communities should be semantic monads, closed universes. Apart from the doubt, if any, that anthropologists have never really accepted such a rigid idea of their research object,[8] there is another point to underline here.

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cultural analysis as "trying to read – […] – a manuscript-foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations […]" presents in its final paragraphs an articulate reasoning just on this issue. We do not yet have a really deep and textual analysis of the complete implications of Geertz's writings, for both the actual ethnographic practices and the theory of culture. I would just like to underline three critical points of the Geertzian anthropology *is* ethnography program. First, the anthropological model: it is probably true that "The locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods …); they study *in* villages" (ivi 1973: 22). But it is probably also true that most anthropologists have been trapped *in* the villages they have been studying (see, for example, Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Amit 2000). Second, the methodological problem: "It is to be resolved" – says Geertz – "or, anyway, decently kept at bay – by realizing that social actions are comments on more than themselves; that where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go. Small facts speak to large issues, winks to epistemology, or sheep raids to revolution, […]" (ivi 1973: 23). As a matter of evidence, however, anthropologists failed to adequately and definitively solve the problems which the microscopic nature of ethnography presents, given that to really hear small facts speaking to large issues anthropologists should need a "resonance disposal", that in an anthropology *is* ethnography frame is not compelled (see, for example, Hastrup 2004; Wikan 2013). Third, the conditions of cultural theory, that: "the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible […]" (ivi 1973: 26), and that "[…] it is not predictive" (ivi 1973: 27). These conditions are against both one basic principle of human meaningful acting – regularity indeed – and the major promise of anthropological knowledge, its ability to depict credible or at least possible scenarios (see Hannerz 2003a, 2010; Fisher 2007).

[8] But see for example Ulf Hannerz when he affirms: "The idea of an organic relationship between a population, a territory, a form as well as a unit of political organization, and one of those organized packages of meanings and meaningful forms which we refers to as cultures has for a long time been an enormously successful one, spreading throughout the world even to fairly unlikely places, at least as a guiding principles. Perhaps anthropologists, studying human life even in places

Since human beings involve themselves more and more with global intercon-
nectedness, as is happening in the contemporary world, an important question
emerges: under which circumstances does Culture take on, eventually, other kinds
of organization than the neatly arranged packages (or webs) of meanings we have
been (and still are) used to defining as "cultures" and to study ethnographically?

2.3   Tylor's Definition of Culture

Indeed, since its origin, the anthropological study of Culture has been understood in
many different ways, both before and after its first definition. The term, nowadays,
shows a plurality of connotations that in one way or another are indexes of the dense
stratification of meanings that have covered it. Within the general idea of Culture
many divergent and alternative insights coexist indeed, which attack the same
conception of man. The first anthropological concept of culture, defined by Edward
Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1871), despite its strongly evolutionist
(and of course ethnocentric) matrix has been a useful intellectual instrument –
almost in the illuminated vision of its author – to free "savage people" from the
"natural" condition where they were firmly collocated by western imagery, and to
recognize their full manhood. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and during
the first decades of the twentieth century anthropologists studied Culture as the
product (not casual but systematic) of a universal faculty of human beings as mem-
bers of a society to produce material and intellectual objects and ideas.[9] There are
no human beings living in a natural condition, because all humans produce Culture
and in so doing mark a distance, both a symbolic and a material one, from Nature.
Anyway, within the ideological frame of evolutionism, Nature takes its revenge on
Culture in so far as it is just Nature that determines the evolution of Culture with its

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where states have not existed, should have been a bit more wary of the construct. But with the
personal experience of citizenship surrounding them in their own lives, facing the classical condi-
tions of local fieldwork, and under the influence of a natural history tradition in which cultures are
seen more or less as taxonomically analogous with biological species, they have hardly been
inclined than anyone else to scrutinize the assumptions linking at least people, place, culture"
(Hannerz 1996: 20). Indeed, several scholars during the history of anthropology have been "a bit
more wary of the construct", a handful of them in the first half of the last century, (see, for example,
Bateson (1936), Leach (1959), and, also, on the USA side, Speck (1935); Hallowell (1960)), when
mainstream anthropology was positivist and essentialist, some more in the course of the second
half, such as Fredrik Barth, Max Gluckman, James C. Mitchell and the Manchester School,
G. Balandier, C. Meillassoux and the French Marxist Anthropologists, Marshal Sahlins, until cul-
tures and societies were definitively unbounded (Barth 1969, 1989; Clifford and Marcus 1986;
Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Appadurai 1996).

[9] Of course to define the concept of culture was the favourite anthropological task until the last part
of the twentieth century, and it is not possible here to face the huge amount of work created on the
culture concept in its entirety. It could be enough at least to mention that Kroeber and Kluckhohn
(1952) collected well over 150 definitions of culture. For a more recent analysis of the concept see
Borofsky (1994), Hannerz (1992, 1996), and Fisher (2007).

evolutionary (and universal) rule. Each people has a specific culture that is nothing but the expression of one precise step along the path of Cultural Evolution, from primitive culture to civilization. Tylor's "theory of culture" had one essential premise: Culture, the new object of a new academic discipline, cultural anthropology, is universal. Anthropologists are thus able to rank all human societies by their different levels of cultural achievements. In other words: local facts are relevant not in themselves, but because they are indexes of something else.

From this perspective, a very interesting notion for our purposes is the one of *survival*, within Tylor's theory of culture a local cultural phenomena (both material and symbolic) that outlives the set of conditions under which it developed. In Tylor's terms, survivals are evidence of a basic principal of Tylor anthropology, the psychic unity of mankind: all human beings are ruled by the same mental processes and, faced with similar circumstances, will respond similarly. The principal of psychic unity explained the appearance of similar cultural traits in widely disparate societies. Thanks to the notion of survivals, local cultural traits became powerful indexes (epistemologically speaking) to connect all human societies in a chain of temporal sequences, within a theory of cultural change. Survivals were useful in establishing sequences of development from the simple to the complex, from homogeneity to heterogeneity and from uncertainty to certainty. Survivals are cultural phenomena that can be characterized as follows:

> Among evidence aiding us to trace the course which the civilization of the world has actually followed, is that great class of facts to denote which I have found it convenient to introduce the term "survivals". These are processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved. (Tylor 1871:16–17)

So, if we look at survivals, according to Tylor's insights and definitions, we cannot help but notice the similarity with another notion of the same period in the history of anthropology, that of *cultural trait*, as it emerged explicitly within Diffusionism. The cultural theory of diffusionism was intended in quite different ways. We count an extreme and a moderate diffusionism, depending on how many centres of origins and spreads of culture were indentified. Some thought that there was just one centre, from where the totality of human culture spread. Others thought that the plurality of centres was evident for spreading cultural facts. Anyway, cultural traits are, in diffusionist terms, the smallest units of a culture, single elements or, in more methodological terms, "units of analysis" for observing a specific culture. If we agree that each culture is a more or less integrated system of learned behavior patterns typical of (most of) the members of a society – the strongest and most accepted conception of culture that was stated in mainstream cultural anthropology in the last century (see, for example, Benedict (1934), Kroeber (1952), Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), and Hannerz (1998, 2001)) – then a cultural trait is an irreducible unit of learned behavior (a cluster of meanings, maybe). Each culture is made up of thousands of cultural traits, possibly grouped in cultural complexes of

"larger clusters of traits organized about some nuclear point of reference" (Wissler 1929; Hoebel 1958), finally converging to form cultural patterns, a number of cultural complexes interrelated by their social function or value.

> The components of culture are cultural traits, culture complexes, and institutions. […] the elements and complexes of a culture are functional in that each part tends to be related to the others in ways that contribute to the operation of the whole culture. The differing ways in which variant culture traits are related to each other lend to each culture its unique overall quality, or configuration. It is through culture that each society develops a way of life that enables it to cope with the wresting of sustenance and shelter from the physical world and of managing the relations of human beings one to another. (Hoebels 1958: 172–173)

The point at stake here is the "systematic" view of culture as something characterized as having a very high level of integration. This point derives from Tylor's culture concept as a "complex whole" and has persisted within cultural theory until very recent times. For Tylor, the "systematic" nature of culture does not exclude that one or more cultural traits could be "survivals", mere evidence of precedent evolutionary stages, without any meaning under the present conditions.

Other scholars held that a cultural element could change in its function but remain integrated with the rest of culture. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, refused to accept that any part of a culture could be disconnected from the rest of the cultural system because it no longer had any function (Malinowski 1944).

To summarize, the notion of *cultural trait* is the architrave of Diffusionism, just as the one of *survivals* is for Evolutionism. Both are theoretically useful for their capacity to offer an account of what happens to local cultural facts from the field in which they are observed and collected. Fieldwork, indeed, is nothing more than a short break from a much longer time, a past, a present, and a future, and is nothing more than a delimited spot of a much larger space, regional, national, international, and global. Specific cultures are connected to the wider world beyond the local. Wider in terms of time, as local cultural facts are imbued with the past and memory. Wider in terms of space, as local cultural facts bring us elsewhere. In Tylor's theory of culture, indeed, cultural phenomena are of course localized but are not isolated in separate contexts, for they are part of temporal chains, sequences or phases that link their present condition to their preceding evolutionary steps and to the future of their successive evolution. In the same terms as a cultural change theory, cultural traits, complexes and patterns are parts of circles or areas that link their present collocation to their spread or centres of origin, as attested to by other cultural phenomena expressed by other people elsewhere.

As we will see, if one accepts the premise that continuity, in time and/or in space, is the logic from which to observe cultural change, then there is continuity and not discontinuity in the cultural and social realm. Thus, going "beyond the cultures" becomes a clear (but not simple) methodological matter (or imperative).

2.4 Sliding from Culture Toward Cultures

Franz Boas marked the progressive slide of anthropology from Culture toward cultures. Boas rejected large scale comparative analysis between cultures and societies and argued for cultural pluralism, for "cultures" in the plural. With him the shift in anthropological thought from the "Culture of all Humanity" to the particular theory of cultures that characterized twentieth-century anthropological thought started.

When anthropological mainstream theory – also thanks to Boas' new particularistic insights about cultures – turned towards an emphasis on delimited, intense fieldwork, of course local cultural facts began to become more and more relevant for themselves, and no longer relevant for fostering anthropological theories of Culture (Evolutionism or Diffusionism).

After Boas' emphasis on the plurality of cultures and on cultural relativism, and after Geertz's claims ("Other fields", the Javanese say, "other grasshoppers") why have anthropologists revealed themselves to be so inclined to interpret human diversity as the product of local cultures, and to (partly) abandon a generalist vision of cultural process? In part, of course, to emphasize that human diversity is just a cultural matter, a means to struggle against racism. But there are also more epistemological reasons, rooted in the local nature of ethnographic epistemology itself.

> In part, I would argue, it has to do with the characteristics of the classic field sites, where much of anthropological thinking about culture has remained rooted: little communities of enduring face-to-face relationships and a very limited division of labour. In such places a large proportion of knowledge and experience may quite naturally come to be extensively shared – that is, uniformly distributed. Ongoing life is so redundant that much of the reproduction of culture occurs without much deliberate effort, more or less as a by-product of the daily round of activity and commentary. Field workers may well take their leave of such places, the task accomplished, with much ethnography, yet little specific concern with the nature of cultural process. (Hannerz 1996: 37)

If we observe what has happened in the last two decades with the concept of culture in the plural, we can do nothing but agree that the shift from the first to the second level of cultural analysis could have been, for cultural anthropology, a passage to a dead end. A great amount of effort has been put into analyzing the content of specific cultures, expressed by a plurality of single societies, while just marginal effort has been put into studying "the Culture of all humanity" and a theory of cultural change. Nowadays, given that much of anthropological thinking about culture has remained rooted in the "field sites", anthropologists know a great deal about invented (maybe) and local cultures, but do not know much more than 30 years ago about Culture, about how Culture works, and about how Culture changes in the wider world beyond the local.

That ethnographic research that focused on local, delimited and specific social and cultural contexts is of course of capital importance. We need to decode and interpret the content of specific cultures, those specific webs of meanings which a certain people produce in a certain environment, to grasp the sense of living on that spot, and to make that world less opaque and more transparent to their gaze. Even if, despite the difficulties of intense, prolonged engaged ethnography, we achieve a

partially complete and detailed understanding of some (small) portion of local culture or of local cultural phenomena, it is scarcely or not useful to improve our knowledge of Culture because, for the most part, our local insights lack connections with the wider world. Field periods are limited, indeed, and fragmented. Local cultures are not fixed, as recent critiques of the making of anthropological texts have pointed out, but changing "objects", embedded into wider temporal and spatial frames.

"Facts," said many years ago by Adamson E. Hoebel (1958), "are not enough. All phenomena have their meanings, but they never speak for themselves" (ivi 1958: xi). Cultural phenomena are indexes of wider frames, and of more general processes, and these frames and processes are decisive for an anthropological knowledge with all its fullness of meaning. If not, anthropology runs the risk of becoming a fragmented, inconclusive and marginal plurality of ethnographic details and peculiarities without consistent epistemological and political openness (Ingold 2007; see also Gellner 2012). As Alfred Kroeber stated:

> […] while any national or tribal culture may and must for certain purposes be viewed and analyzed by itself […] any such culture is necessarily in some degree an artificial unit segregated off for expediency […] the ultimate natural unit for ethnologists is "the culture of all humanity at all periods and in all places". (Kroeber 1945: 9)

Post-modern anthropology has clearly unbounded cultures (see Clifford and Marcus (1986), Clifford (1988), and Hannerz (1996)). Post-modern anthropology has also emphasized the misuses and abuses and the ideological representations and the misunderstandings of a concept of culture which is essentialized and popularized (Markowitz 2004). Several anthropologists have shown that a certain kind of talk involves a sort of reification of cultures, viewed as real objects with an autonomous existence and, furthermore, as compact, coherent, systematic, uniform entities.[10]

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[10] See, for an example of cultural essentialism, Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilization*. His use of the concept of "culture" as an essence, within a rigid and deterministic frame concerning cultural and historical processes (Huntington 1994) has been scrutinized by Ulf Hannerz (2003b). See also Marshall Sahlins (1999) for another useful analysis of the abuses of an "essential" vision of culture as an instrument to revenge identities, and of the significance of the use of this concept among the people anthropologists study. Also, Fran Markowitz (2004) presents an analysis of the double binary the talks on culture go along. The anthropologists recognize its fragmented, invented and historicized nature, and reject the reification of culture. Searching for alternative ways to express cultural process and human creativity, for a couple of decades anthropologists have underlined a conceptual shift from understanding cultures as holistic, coherent and homogeneous to accounting for multiplicity, fragmentation, and internal contradictions (Friedman 1994; Wright 1998; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1992, 1996; Werbner 1997, 2002). With regards to global cultural flows, the liquidity and hybridity of late modernity, they remind us that discretely packaged cultures are more the scholarly result of demands for closure than empirical reality, and that the reification of the past and its popularization have caused more harm than good (Stolcke 1995; Trouillot 2000). On the other hand, people all over the world have been embracing culture (Dunn 1998; Hannerz 1996; Keesing 1994). For many people, culture is a thing – or a package of traditions – that defines individuals and groups of individuals, and an agent that shapes them in certain and predictable ways.

The same epistemological existence of cultures (both in the singular and in the plural) has been discussed, in anthropological debate, a number of times:

> Anthropology is the study of man "as if" there were culture. It is brought into being by the invention of culture, both in the general sense, as a concept, and in the specific sense, through the invention of specific cultures. (Wagner 1981: 10)

We are of course not obliged to abandon the concept of culture, to refuse it like an invention, as Wagner argued (see, among many others, Abu-Lughod (1991), Ingold (1993), Hannerz (1996, 2010), Bruman (1999), Sahlins (1999), Markowitz (2004), Wikan (1992, 2013), and Fisher (2007)). We have many good reasons – as we have seen – to accept (a) that such a "thing" we name "Culture" is socially acquired and organized, that it is the software needed for programming the biologically given hardware of human beings. We can also accept that (b) it is somehow integrated, even if the passage of Culture to integration is a "soft" one. "Integration" in other words is a matter of degree. But we are not (any longer) held to accept the assumption that it is uniformly distributed within communities, that it is something packaged, strongly connected to different human groups, and that as a normal state of things these groups are localized in territories. As a matter of fact, in the contemporary global world, people have a plurality of belongings made up of both material and imaginary plural (or maybe creole?) identities as well as people of the same "group" who probably count very different experiences and very complex biographies.

Today the world is no longer (as it admittedly once was) made of a multitude of separate and static local webs of meaning, as it is crossed by dense flows of meaning. If it is valid to conceptualize cultural traits as units of learned and repeated ways of thinking and acts, it could be useful to rethink those cultural theories of the past (see Hannerz (2010) about "the past that can be used") that have at their centres the idea that cultural facts are indexes of something else, spatial and temporal chains, for example.

Today the equation one place = one people = one culture is less strong than in the past. To grasp what is going on with regards to both the cultural dimension and the identity making processes, the notion of cultural "repertoire" could be relevant for an individualistic way to culture (Hannerz 1969; Swidler 1986). From this perspective, cultural dimension appears to be a "tool kit" from which people select different pieces – just as Lévi-Strauss' "bricoleur" (see Matera (2013a)) – according to special strategies, or lines of action, or particular models or images they aspire to

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A very interesting analysis, based on an intense and clever ethnography that goes beyond the local context toward wider theoretical frames is that of Joel Kuipers (1997) about the changes in ritual speaking and in traditional cultural traits among the communities of Sumba Island (Indonesia). The process of "essentialization" of a linguistic trait, for Kuipers, is a process "whereby a linguistic feature that indexed a social group or category comes to be seen as essentially or naturally linked to it" (ivi 1997: 152). Through the same process a cultural trait, or a cultural complex or also a cultural pattern, as well as a linguistic one, becomes "natural" and part of the "essence" of the savage, or primitive, or backward condition, or, on the contrary, of the identity of a certain people, group, social category and so on.

realize such as special cultural traits or patterns, special education processes, special experiences, and special knowledge.[11] People change their residence, their job, or choose consumer styles even if this does not occur everywhere.

> […] the distribution of cultural meanings over people all over the world is really complicated, to the point that any social units we work with presents relevant epistemological problems, with regard to its cultural uniformity. The idea of cultures in the plural is problematic; maybe it can be considered little more than a limited analytical device. At the same time, the idea of culture in the singular, encompassing – as Kroeber claimed – the entire more or less organized diversity of meanings and ideas and expressions, may become more important than it has been, as we explore the way humanity inhabits the global ecumene. (Hannerz 1996: 23)

Within this theoretical framework, again with the idea of Culture in the singular at the real centre, as a global flow encompassing the whole, more or less organized diversity of meanings and ideas,[12] the match between particular peoples and particular cultural traits and global cultural processes is a problematic one. "To explore the ways humanity inhabits the global ecumene" means to look at how local people, as they face global flows, try to make sense of their lives, produce meanings, and *create and recreate their cultures*. Anthropologists, trying to make sense of the lives of others, have disconnected these processes from the timeless cultural traits and complexes that have usually been defined by the word culture in the plural (Boas 1948; Benedict 1934; Geertz 1973). Thus, while contemporary anthropology (and social theory in general) as a theoretical narrative claims the spread and flexibility of cultural traits and their consequent mixture, and underlines "cultural hybridity" as the key to reading contemporary cultural processes, in public and political talks about culture and cultures (and multiculturalism and identities) hybridity finds no space or any kind of appreciation.

Despite the advantages of globalization that appear in the Great Narrative (globalization as a "natural stream", the world as a unique huge social and cultural setting, and all humans as having equal opportunities and rights and so on) and despite the efforts of numerous international organizations that commit to making this Narrative real, the nation-states still maintain (or try to maintain) their control over borders, and over people's rights, belongings, identities and opportunities. All the talk about post-national models of citizenship are still academic. Indeed, several scholars suggest that, as they are invoked to support claims for rights and recognition and to push against global homogenizing tendencies, local cultures are going to solidify (see Sayad (1999), Benhabib (2004), and Markowitz (2004)).

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[11] **Connection**: This "toolkit view" of culture is similar to the approach used, for example, by economists to define culture and work with it in a framework in which the focus is on the single agents rather than the groups, as can be seen in Sect. 12.2. A somehow related perspective is found in the concept of *individual trait* used in Chap. 5 and defined in Sect. 5.1. On the opposite, Sect. 10.3 defines culture and cultural traits emphasizing a collective point of view, and Chap. 14 talks in this sense about generational, organizational and national cultures. Chapter 7 analyzes the availability of multiple "cultural syndromes" and their activation by multicultural individuals.

[12] Marshal Sahlins conceptualized this idea as a sort of "indigenization of modernity", as a "World system as Culture of cultures" (Sahlins 1994: 377–394).

On one hand, globalization's key image of flows of money, media, ideas, people and things (Appadurai 1996), encourages "[…] the imagination of almost endless possibilities for creating plural identities, shaping selves and sharing in a common humanity in an open world […]" (Markowitz 2004). On the other hand, all the flexibility and fluidity that it evokes are impeded by tough economic and political policies. Again, cultural anthropologists are seeking to replace "culture" in the plural with something else. But people out on the streets want their bounded, reified culture and their solid identity (Bruman 1999). As Fran Markowitz puts it:

> Just as it was important in the 1980s to crack the discipline's self-satisfied acceptance of an ethnographic genre and a culture concept that did not quite work, it may now be equally crucial to rethink anthropology's rejection of culture in the contemporary context of global- ization, nation-states and human rights and understand why, despite a surfeit of proof as to its partiality and constructedness, "having a culture" matters so greatly to so many people. […] Of course, this makes all culture(s) ideology. But is that the point? If it were possible in less than a century to dislodge the 'truth' that people's abilities come with their race and consider instead 'the impact of the concept of culture on the concept of man' (Geertz 1973: 33), then perhaps the 21st century offers hope that we can 'improve upon the idea that cul- ture exists exclusively in localized national and ethnic units – separate but equal in aesthetic value and human worth' (Gilroy 2000: 247–8). A starting point for this endeavor is to reinsert culture into anthropological theory (Brumann 1999; Ortner (1999), Yengoyan 1986), understand its genealogy and its use as a saliently politicized cultural symbol embroiled in the increasingly universal globalization and human rights discourses, and then perhaps find a way to move beyond it. (Markowitz 2004: 344)

To reinsert culture into anthropological theory I find some notions and perspec- tives from linguistics useful for many aspects. For Kuipers (1997), the linguistic changes in Sumba – as well as in contemporary Indonesia, and, enlarging the scale, in every local place where the "local" has been factored into the "national", or the "transnational" (see Hannerz (1996)) or the "global" – cannot be reduced to "politi- cal coercion, economic necessity, or religious commitments". They are the outcome of shifting communicative ideologies. With reference to ideology one can explain how ritual speech and other traits of local language have moved from the centre to the margins of the communicative world of local people. I argue, in my conclusion, that an analogous ideological mediation is also the interpretive key of cultural changes. In the sense that, if seen as the result of shifting ideologies, "[…] cultural and social change becomes not a matter of culture contact and articulation" – as it was in the old diffusionist theory – "but one of rethinking difference *through* con- tact" (Ferguson and Gupta 1992: 35). Cultures, as well as languages, are not "natu- rally disconnected", but always "hierarchically interconnected".

Languages do not just "up and die". They do not grow old, wear out, get sick, decay or rot. Yet, it is true that we speak of language mixing, borrowing, and code- switching, terms which seem to imply images of purity and pollution, wholeness and partiality, completeness and fragmentation. However, languages are not organ- isms with lives of their own, separate from the actors who use them. "[…] languages differentiate, change, grow, decline, and expand not because of "natural" life cycles but because of the way that linguistic ideologies, held by interested actors and

speakers and those who hold power over them, mediate between features of linguistic structure and socioeconomic relations" (Kuipers 1997: 149).

Thus, whenever those who hold power over a certain area promote a pressure (from a centre to a periphery), they could provoke a transformation of ideas about local linguistic and cultural traits and structures, once seen as central and complete in virtue of their relation to a locality, that comes to be viewed as part of a larger grouping and then marginal and backward.

2.5 Cultural Creolizations

In this frame, the sociolinguistic notion of creolization plays a relevant role, as much as it enables a way to underline that languages (and cultures as well) do not exist in isolation. They are constantly changing, due to both internal forces, because of conflicts among groups, and external forces, because of mobility (of people, ideas, values, cultural meanings, linguistic traits, and so on) and, more recently, due to global flows of cultural meanings.[13]

According to sociolinguistic definitions, a creole language is a pidgin language that has become nativized as a first language, after significant elaboration in both its functions and its structure (Foley 1997). This "significant elaboration" is close to the real core of cultural creativity, or, in other terms, is the matrix of the spring of "new orders of difference" (Clifford 1993: 15) according to James Clifford's vision of the Lévi-Strauss metaphor of western culture as "our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind" (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 38):

> The filth that an expansive West, according to the disillusioned traveller of *Tristes tropiques* (p. 38), has thrown in the face of the world's societies appears as raw material, compost for new orders of difference. (Clifford 1993: 15)

A creole culture is the complex, always partial and changing result of processes of rethinking difference through contact situations – usually asymmetrical – and ideologically mediated. Such situations occur when some parts – traits? complexes? patterns? – of a culture, typically those of the politically and economically dominant group (the superstrate culture), undergo radical simplification and are adopted as a culture of wider identity by members of the groups in subordinate position (the substrate culture). They are unable to learn the totality of the dominant culture – for some sociocultural reasons its full models are withheld from the substrate people – and the creole culture develops instead. The linguistic parallel is useful: starting from a linguistic contact situation, pidgin and (eventually) creole languages have arisen

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[13] **Connection**: This concept of cultural creolization can be applied to various specific cases. As a matter of example we can refer to the process of new language creation, as in Chap. 18. Speaking about musical language, we can think about the birth of jazz as in Chap. 8. Chapter 13 describes the interaction and hybridization between different cultures in international cooperation.

The superstrate language provides the bulk of the pidgin's lexicon, with some admixture from the substrate language. […] pidgins have arisen […] always in cases where there is a clear asymmetry in power and status between the speakers of the languages involved. Pidgins are strictly simple … normally little valued by their speakers. They are second languages for all speakers, unless they become creole language. (Foley 1997: 392)

From linguistic contact situations, partial results could also emerge as code- and mode-switching phenomena, linguistic borrowings, slides along the linguistic continuum (with the standard dominant language at one point and the creole language at the other), and many other linguistic indexes of mixed and hybrid processes. Arguing that something similar occurs in situations of rethinking cultural difference through contact, I resume here the hypothesis that cultural traits are socially produced, transmitted, acquired and interpreted meanings, finally arranged into webs or into more or less coherent and more or less integrated cultural patterns. I also think that the linguistic metaphor is the best one we can use to understand how cultural mixtures occur, since cultures are travelling (Clifford 1999) or, better, cultural meanings are travelling (because of people mobility or because of other kinds of global interconnections), and flows of cultural meanings with no territories or origins match and create creolizations. As in Creole languages, the ultimate site where the cultural/linguistic mixture actually occurs is the mind of speakers (or social actors), which, as we have seen, resist some patterns and accept some others, eventually with some admixture from the local language. In this sense, I propose cultural creolization as the key to grasping cultural change, like "a combination of diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation, in the context of global center-periphery relationships" (Hannerz 1996: 67).

The global cultural dimension is, from this perspective, a creole-continuum, made of flows of cultural meanings that are arranged in very complex ways by very different actors at very different scales and degrees of reification or fluidity.

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