

Culture, Values, and Identities

Cultures, Values, and Identities: What Are the Issues?

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INTRODUCTION

This article reviews the state of the social sciences with respect to the study of culture and cultures. It also examines the closely related concepts of values and identities. It does not attempt to be comprehensive—a task that would be daunting given the diverse and rich literatures that quickly come into focus. Rather, the purpose is to highlight a limited number of issues central to moving an international, comparative, and interdisciplinary agenda forward, in the hope that *Global Perspectives* will become a recognized and central address for current and future research in this field.

Even limiting oneself to key issues is no easy task, as various disciplines regard culture as their terrain. Anthropology, economics, political science, sociology, history, and the humanities, including cultural studies and the arts themselves, all lay some claim to the topic. Diverse and dispersed literatures complicate matters. Frequently divided by methodology and a split between quantitative and qualitative approaches, disciplines function too much as closely guarded silos, discouraging inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue of the kind that *Global Perspectives* encourages.

Moreover, there are strikingly contrasting presuppositions within the social sciences toward culture: Too often, culture is treated as a residual once the "hard" economic, political, and sociological factors are considered. Alternatively, it can become the all-encompassing construct that supposedly explains everything. Similarly, culture is seen as something that either prohibits or accelerates progress, or it becomes a politically innocent reference category to paint over increasingly absent shared values and common narratives.

There are also deeply rooted clashes of national cultural interest that have been set in motion as globalization has advanced. Is the world moving toward cultural uniformity or toward tensions and conflicts? Or are there signs of an alternative set of outcomes rooted in a more polycentric system of cultures in terms of meaning and identity, production or consumption? What is the meaning and validity of a Western or an Asian "cultural imperialism" thesis, or a "clash of civilizations" between East and West?

In contemporary society, there is a deepening intersection between the economic and the cultural, as Singh (2011, 2017) demonstrated in his analysis of globalized art markets and North-South trade relations. The media presents one dramatic illustration of this intersection: that is, commercially produced cultural artifacts. At the same time, culture has come to be seen as an instrument of economic development and urban revitalization—a view encapsulated in

terms like *creative class*, *creative cities*, and the *creative economy*.

Yet culture is also about the arts. Notions of *l'art pour l'art*, or "art for art's sake," in the sense that culture is first and foremost about creative expression, are challenged by the deepening intersection of culture with economics and politics. Interpretative frames for what counts as art, what can be regarded as cultural innovations, and who "owns" or represents art imply many changes for how works of art are appreciated, collected, presented, bought and sold, and preserved.

The concepts of culture, value, and identity are as intricate and multifaceted as their relationships are to each other. Anheier and Isar (2007, 3) write in their introduction to the five-volume Cultures and Globalization Series "that globalization has a profound impact on culture, and that cultures shape globalization may seem like a truism. Yet the two-way interaction involves some of the most vexed and at the same time taken-for-granted questions of our time." This interaction challenges previously more stable cultural systems, forms of everyday life, and identities, and it does so in very uneven and diverse ways. The triangle of collective heritage, identity, and memory, long assumed a foundation of societies, has become uncertain and is being transformed (Anheier and Isar 2011).

Globalization is both a process and an outcome that involves economic supply and distribution chains, financial flows and investments, international law and institutions, and communication and mobility. Castells (1996, 1997) uses the apt imagery of "decentralized concentration" to describe this phenomenon. He argues that a multiplicity of interconnected tasks that take place in different sites results in people and organizations forming a metanetwork at the transnational level. Held (2002) argues that the 1990s globalization spurt reached an extensity and intensity that went beyond previous phases, and with greater impact on different cultures and societies.

ISSUE 1: THE LONG HISTORY OF GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

Globalization evolved over time and continues to change, as Baldwin (2019) demonstrates. The "old" globalization, driven by the Industrial Revolution, involved two phases: from the early nineteenth century to the start of World War I, and from World War II to the fall of the Soviet Union. The "new" globalization had a first phase, fueled by financial deregulation, transnational supply chains, and information technologies, and lasted until the global financial crisis of

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2008–9. It was in this phase that countries outside the northern industrial sphere—namely, China and other Asian countries—joined the globalized core. The second phase, still emerging, is based on digitization and is likely to expand the extensity and intensity of global networks further.

Each globalization phase brought societies into contact with each other, be it through trade, colonization, proselytizing religions, or domination. It was often an unequal contact. Not all cultures survived, as some merged and new ones emerged. The important point is that for centuries, most of the world's cultures have been in contact in some form or another, and increasingly so over time. They have been in contact, and continue to be, in a context characterized by mutual understandings and misunderstandings, cooperation and conflict, domination and submission, and affection and aversion. The current globalization phase, given its reach and impact, certainly adds another layer to the complex web of intra- and intercultural relations, bringing about value changes and challenges to collective and individual identities.

Globalization can retreat, as it did after the Great Depression; it can accelerate and slow down, as it did before and after the 2008–9 global financial crisis. To put it another way, since about 1820, the world has known only a few episodes of "non-globalization." This means that the world's diverse cultures, peoples' values, and their identities have been exposed to the "other," as have collective memory, cultural heritage, and forms of cultural expression. Cultures past and present are the co-production of "domestic" content and developments and exposures to (and interactions with) other societies and their respective cultures.

Therefore, the first issue is to get a better historical understanding of how cultures interacted in the context of globalization phases, what the drivers of cultural flows were, and how values and identities changed over time. Historical perspectives are as important as contemporary analyses.

ISSUE 2: THE LEGACY OF METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

Envisioning cultures, values, and identities as the product of past exposures and interactions also means that the notion of national cultures and national society is historically highly questionable. Yet the social sciences, which emerged during the end of the "old" globalization phase—when the nation-state was naturalized—engaged in an epistemological framing of cultures, values, and identities close to the notion of the nation-state. This framing was sometimes explicit: an early example is Aaron's influential book on German sociology (1935); much later examples include Lipset's *American Exceptionalism* (1996) or Huntington's *Who Are We?* (2004). But mostly the framing was implicit, almost taken for granted in the sense that students of the social sciences in the United States read and studied American society just as the British or the French did theirs. For a long time, anthropology developed along a different path, with its emphasis on the "other"—that is, non-Western, nonstate societies and cultures.

The nation-state framing is still dominant today, referred to as methodological nationalism. This term refers to the intellectual orientation fortified within each social science discipline that treats the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis and the primary reference point, ascribing agency to it as the given container for social processes. For Wimmer and Schiller (2002), methodological nationalism is built on the assumption that the nation-state is the seem-

ingly natural social and political form of the modern world.

The implied reification of nation-states as actors sui generis in a transnational cultural space can be very misleading. For example, the United States does not "act" in a cultural sense, organizations and people do. It is US corporations like Microsoft, Facebook, Google, or the Walt Disney Company, missionary societies, art museums, and the people who work there that act, as do artists, activists, and robots. Of course, the nation-state plays an important role, but when studying culture in a globalizing and changing world, it cannot be the assumed primary unit of analysis (see Anheier 2007, 336). The upshot is that the social sciences have to overcome the twentieth-century legacy of methodological nationalism if we want to get a fuller understanding of culture, cultural flows, and developments.

ISSUE 3: THE OVERLY COMPLEX AND EASILY CONTESTED CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Most definitions are neither true nor false; they are ultimately judged by their fruitfulness in advancing our understanding of a phenomenon. Following Deutsch (1963), a fruitful definition must be parsimonious and focus on the truly critical characteristics of the phenomenon. It also must have organizing power in the sense that it helps to establish relations with other concepts and adds value overall. Parsimony and added value, however, never seemed to have much currency among students of culture, who proudly point to the many attempts to define what culture is, and they reference Kroeber and Kluckhohn, who identified 281 definitions in their 1952 book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Kroeber and Kluckhohn then organized these diverse concepts of culture into eight categories, including topical (the cultural economy), historical (heritage, tradition), behavioral (learned human behavior, a way of life), normative (values, norms), mental (ideas), and structural (symbols).

Yet none of these categorizations, or others that followed, made much progress in bringing greater clarity in terms of parsimony and value added. The classical nineteenth-century definition of *culture* by anthropologist E. B. Tylor is still being referenced ("that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired" (Tylor 1920, 1). The same is true of UNESCO's definition of *culture* in the [Preamble to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity](#) as the "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group... it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

In the face of such general statements, most analysts define culture in a broad and a narrow sense. Broadly, culture is a system of meaning, its social construction, articulation, and reception, including religion, ideologies, value systems, and collective identity. More narrowly, it refers to the arts—that is, what artists create and what is regarded, preserved, exchanged, and consumed as cultural artifacts. Straddling both notions are concepts such as cultural diversity, cultural expression, and the creative or cultural economy.

So it is no wonder that in his seminal *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1976) famously stated that *culture* is one of the most complex words in the English language. The same statement could be made today. Why are we holding on to an imprecise term, especially as it is being deeply implicated in diverse and contested disciplinary discourses in the social sciences today? Yet the word does hold some mean-

ing. Appadurai (1996) and Crawford (2007), among others, have observed how culture is being mobilized in a politics of recognition and representations. The divisive debates about migration worldwide and fundamentalist reassertions in all major world religions are just two examples that show the instrumentalization of culture. Achieving greater clarity and precision in terms of definition and classifications is a major challenge ahead.

ISSUE 4: VALUES AS SYSTEMS AND IMPRINTS

Like culture, the concept of values carries different meanings and is used rather loosely. For individuals, values act as an internal moral compass and are "evaluative beliefs that synthesize affective and cognitive elements to orient people to the world in which they live" (Marini 2000, 2828; see also Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, 360). Values typically form a value system as a relatively consistent orienting framework. Ideologies are relatively constant sets of beliefs that explain the world, usually in terms of cause-and-effect relationships.

Even though values are unobservable directly and often conflated with other phenomena such as norms or attitudes, much progress has been made in recent decades to measure value systems cross-nationally and over time. The most prominent effort to do so is the World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). The resulting Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map plots countries along two major dimensions: traditional versus secular values and survival versus self-expression. Of course, here we encounter the unit-of-analysis problem we confronted above, and innovative approaches are needed to show how and when what values matter, change, and the like.

Yet who has agency in such maps? They offer useful markers and reveal persistent patterns as well as shifts over time. But a larger question looms regarding how the values they present are produced and reproduced. Of course, psychology and sociology have answers, mostly at the micro level, through socialization processes. Emphasizing the link between value systems and ideologies, social institutions and organizations, and groups and individuals, however, could offer one way forward to accommodate agency. We live in societies made up of institutions and organizations, as Perrow (1986) pointed out long ago, and as North et al. (2009) pointed out: institutions are the rules of the game and hence the embodiment of value systems, whereas organizations are the tools of enactment.

In sociology, Stinchcombe (1965) introduced the concept of "imprinting," whereby the institutional conditions prevalent in the founding environments of organizations continue to have lasting effects on organizational culture and behavior. Following up on this suggestion, Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) use the term "value imprinting" to describe how the values of founders or equivalents implicitly or explicitly shape the organization and its culture. With a focus on organizational culture and values, including professional value systems, one could at least partially circumvent the limitations of methodological nationalism. This focus would link organizational and management studies to the study of cultural values, and the history of business to the history of values and ideologies.

Such an approach could rekindle the kind of macro-meso-micro studies that characterize some of the seminal works on the interplay between value systems, institutions, and organizations and individuals. Max Weber's ([1904] 2016) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a study of the interaction between religion and economic be-

havior. In response to Marx, Weber argues that the world of ideas has its own logic, independent of material interests and property relations. In Elias's (1997) seminal work on the process of civilization, he analyzes behavioral transformation in the sixteenth century as a reaction to demands for greater political and communicative stability as commerce expanded. Bourdieu's (1979) analysis of the French class structure and the link between culture and habitus is also a particularly illuminating work. We need more such studies.

ISSUE 5: THE TRIAD OF IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND HERITAGE

Sociologically, identity is a person's learned notion of self, combined with a sense of belonging expressed and experienced through values, ethnicity, language, nationality, locale, and the like, and is closely related to a sense of "wenness." There is a striking disconnect in research on identity: empirical studies based on population surveys show that identities are remarkably stable over time, as the European Commission (2012) found when it summarized the results of several large-scale research projects on the relationship between regional, national, and European identities. Hoelscher and Anheier (2011, 364–86) reviewed different facets of identity (geographical, cyber, citizenship, cultural, economic, and religious) and reached a similar conclusion.

This stability contrasts with two other strands of inquiry: the nuanced debate about the relationship between identity, collective memory, and heritage, on the one hand, and the vehemence of the political meaning of the term (in particular regarding identity politics), on the other. As to the first, Isar et al. (2011) suggest that in the process of globalization, the "triangle" of identity, heritage, and memory has become more unstable and, in some parts of the world, even unhinged. Contradictory developments are taking place: there is a trend whereby cultural heritage assumes a "museal sensibility" (Huysen 1995, 14), supported by international conventions (Isar 2011, 39–52) and by a cultural heritage industry (Winter 2011). There are also powerful economic forces that undermine cultural heritage by eliminating entire peasant cultures and traditional crafts and skills.

The "cult of heritage" comes with a certain "memory boom," as Isar et al. (2011, 5) put it. Collective memory is "remembrance of the past grounded on more durable carriers of external symbols and representations" (Assmann 2008, 55). It is an archival memory constructed through a discourse that relies heavily on media institutions and communication (Huysen 1995, 6). This memory discourse makes it vulnerable to political and cultural entrepreneurs, and Assmann (2008, 54) calls for "critical vigilance and develop[ing] criteria for probing the quality of the memory constructions, distinguishing more 'malign' from more 'benign' memories—that is, memories that perpetuate resentment, hatred and violence from those that have a therapeutic and ethical value."

Yet, irrespective of the quality of collective memories, they are implicated in how we think about identity and how identity politics comes about. The cultural responses to globalization open opportunities for groups and individuals to deploy the notions and resources of heritage and memory in certifying identity. It is a way of coping with the uncertainties about the "us versus them" attitude that globalization frequently brings with it (Appadurai 2006, 6).

Next to scholarly attention to the nexus of heritage, memory, and identity, there is a highly contested debate

that links identity to the fate of Western civilization. Four books illustrate the depth of the disputes. First, Huntington's 2004 book *Who Are We?: America's Great Debate* explores the nature of American identity, taking issue with the idea that the United States is a "nation of immigrants." Instead, Huntington observes that the founders were settlers who brought with them the cultural kernels of what became the American creed, a unique creation of a dissenting Protestant culture based on the principles of liberty, equality, individualism, representative government, and private property. He argues that American identity began to erode beginning in the 1960s, as a result of, among other factors, the rise of globalization, explicit political appeals to specific identity groups, and changing immigration patterns.

Contradicting Huntington, particularly his civilization thesis, Sen's 2006 *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* argues that the false notion of a unique identity sustains conflict and violence. He criticizes "solitarist" theories that ignore shifting and multiple identities. In his view, identity is changing and multifaceted; there is no fixed identity, and people comprise many identities related to ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, and the like. By better understanding identity, societal rifts can be alleviated, resulting in a more peaceful society and world.

Fukuyama's 2018 book *Identity* argues that people have clung to identity as a result of economic and social dislocation—for example, job losses due to globalization, economic crisis, or the relative status decline of white males. This focus on identity results in conflict and political dysfunction. Ultimately, Fukuyama views identity politics as a threat to the foundations of liberal democracy and a distraction from real issues. Focus on identity politics has become a convenient and effective substitute for a more in-depth analysis of how to address the trend toward greater socioeconomic inequality in most liberal democracies.

Appiah's 2018 *The Lies that Bind* argues that people and their leaders keep making the same mistakes when it comes to the main Cs of identity: creed (religion as a set of immutable beliefs instead of as mutable practices and communities), country (suggesting a forced choice between globalism and patriotism), color (race is constructed, not biological), class (entitlement and resentment, rather than greater equality of opportunities), and culture. As for the latter, he proposes a greater openness and no longer equating individualism, liberal democracy, tolerance, rationality, and science with Western civilization as such.

Clearly, these and other works make for rich opportunities to debate assumptions; to challenge hypotheses, data, and their analysis; and, above all, to bring better and especially comparative evidence to bear.

ISSUE 6: CULTURE AND THE ECONOMY

The relationship between the economic and the cultural has a long history, from Adam Smith's moral sentiments, Marx's dichotomy of structure and superstructure, Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption, and Baumol and Bowen's (1966) cost disease theorem to today's discourse about the creative city and the cultural economy. Cunningham et al. (2008) propose four models for the relationship between the wider and the cultural economy, defined as a system for the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods and services through market as well as nonmarket mechanisms, or, in the words of Scott (2008), as all forms of economic activity that produce outputs with significant aesthetic or semiotic content or symbolic outputs.

The negative model assumes that cultural activities are

either public or semipublic goods and therefore inherently deficit making. They rely on public subsidies, voluntary contributions, and philanthropy to compensate for lacking revenue. The negative model views the culture economy as a "welfare case." The competitive model treats it as just "another industry," yet one with high demand uncertainty and cost disease tendencies. Alternatively, the positive or growth model highlights the capacity of the creative segments of the cultural economy to initiate growth in the aggregate economy. Finally, the emergent or innovation model views culture as an innovation system that infiltrates the entire economy, promoting "creative disruption" to established practices in business and society at large.

These models are propositions well worth exploring, and they provide a frame for Landry's "creative city" concept (2000, 2012) as well as for Florida's "creative class" (2005, 2018). For Landry, cultural resources are the raw materials of the city and its value base. He emphasizes both the "hardware" (physical infrastructure) and the "software" (relationships and atmosphere) for designing successful cities. Florida popularized the concept that cities exhibiting a higher level of economic development tend to be those that attract members of the creative class. Florida's work gained a great degree of attention due to its simple and catchy argumentation and methodology. The "three Ts" (talent, technology, and tolerance) as the key to economic development were supported by especially designed indicators (e.g., a "bohemian index").

Florida has been criticized (Glaeser 2005; Peck 2005) for elitism by separating the world into "creatives" and "noncreatives." Methodologically, scholars have challenged Florida's indices and quantification of causal factors (Glaeser 2005). The argument that creativity begets growth has been identified as circular. Furthermore, Florida and Landry's focus on creativity as a path to economic growth has been criticized for operating within "neoliberal" development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption, and place marketing (Peck 2005).

Despite such criticism, there are clearly important insights here, which are also supported by sociologists studying the relationship between innovation and diversity. Globalization creates more diverse networks among people and organizations and generates many more changes for weak-tie configurations to materialize. Exposure to multiple and heterogeneous contacts and circles encourages creativity and opens new opportunities. This is one reason that geographers like Scott (2008) argue that globalization is leading less and less to cultural uniformity. Markedly more polycentric systems of cultural creativity and production are emerging, suggesting that conventional cultural imperialism arguments seem to be losing some of their force. Yet these are propositions in need of further reflections and, especially, empirical tests to find out if the world is indeed becoming more diverse, even eclectic, in its modes of cultural production and consumption.

Central here is the role of the artist as creator. Within the Western canon, the cult of the artist as the "seer," the genius who is both inside (and understands) and outside (and questions) a given community or society, is still strong, stemming from Enlightenment notions of individual achievements. Yet how does this notion of the artist, which ties creativity to individuality, fit into the globalized opportunity structure? Will the precarious economic position of many artists change? How can it match non-Western constructions (e.g., of art as expressions of communal creativity and imprinting), and how can it relate to the concept of

art whose recognition and legitimacy enhances rather than breaks traditions? Do global art markets, and the speculation that increasingly drives them, favor Western notions over others, or play on some sort of speculative arbitrage? Likewise, are major art exhibitions like Documenta, Frieze, or Art Basel mostly about market making or about art appreciation, or perhaps both?

ISSUE 7: CULTURAL POLICY AND SOFT POWER

The final issue is that of cultural policy and the role of governments and international organizations like UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and increasingly also the European Union. Traditionally, the main purpose of cultural policy was to support the arts and appreciation thereof, as well as heritage. In recent years, the creative economy has become a new focus, as have the issues of creativity and innovation more generally. These trends are in line with the fourth model that Cunningham et al. (2008) propose.

Yet countries differ widely with respect to how broadly and in what manner they engage with culture and the arts. The United States shows a very limited involvement throughout, and most activities are at the local and state levels. Other efforts are largely left to private philanthropy and nonprofit organizations. By contrast, cultural policy in France is very much a matter of the central government and public budgets, whereas in Germany a decentralized system prevails that mixes public and private funds under a pattern of cooperative cultural federalism. The United Kingdom is somewhere in between, using arm's-length institutions with a growing focus on the cultural or creative economy.

The outcomes of different policy approaches are also different dynamics and possibilities for artistic potential, creativity, and economic growth in terms of the models Cunningham et al. (2008) have outlined. It remains an open question how emerging market economies and autocratic regimes position themselves in this triad of cultural policy options (a minimal role of government, a pronounced and

centralized role, and a devolved one). Most likely, forms of control will be a critical element, putting cultural policy under state tutelage.

Finally, cultural policy is also foreign policy in the context of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Hard power refers to military power and coercive capacity in terms of deterrence and potential for inflicting violence (Nye 2004). By contrast, soft power is the ability to persuade others to do what a country wants without relying on force or coercion. Soft power is based on attraction, created by a country's policies and political ideas. Cultural policy as a tool of soft power is becoming more relevant in a geopolitical sense. Language programs, student exchanges, book tours, exhibitions, and media are examples of the ways in which countries use external cultural policy to wield soft power abroad. With the partial retreat of the United States from cultural diplomacy, countries as different as France, China, Russia, Qatar, and Turkey have taken increasingly prominent positions in this field. With substantial investments, they combine cultural and economic—and increasingly also security-related—objectives. Again, this avenue of study is a wide-open field for research.

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