

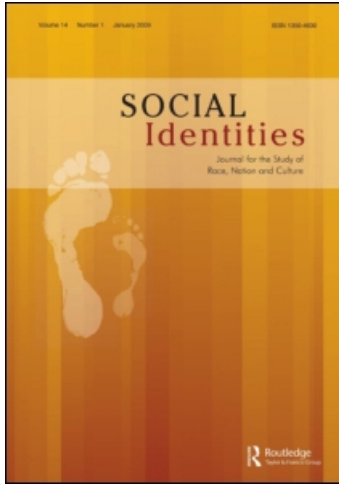
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Alejandro Grimson ^a

^a Universidad Nacional de San Martín y CONICET, Argentina

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Culture and identity: two different notions

Alejandro Grimson*

Universidad Nacional de San Martín y CONICET, Argentina

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A clear, precise conceptual distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ is an essential precondition for analyzing social processes. The anthropological concept of ‘identity’ has been built up over time and enriched by studies on interethnic relationships, ethnic borders and ethnicity. The objective of this essay is to add to an already well-defined concept of culture by incorporating decisive contributions from theories on the nation. Culture and nation are not only highly complex theoretical notions with a long history; they both deal with heterogeneous and conflictive entities. The essay asserts that culture and identity allude to analytically different aspects of social processes. No relationship between the two can be presupposed or generalized to fit all cases. It is necessary to analyze cultural and identity aspects separately.

Keywords: culture; identity; nation; anthropology

The history of anthropology can be conceived as a series of always fascinating, attempts to construct native and theoretical concepts that help us better understand viewpoints different from our own, to work on the meaning and practices of difference, and to comprehend and explain diversity. Might differences and diversity be mere fictions? Can they be reduced to discursive effects or arbitrary, ephemeral inventions? Are all cultural differences nothing more than the illusory effects of constructed identities? For answers to these questions in the field of anthropology, the key lies in adequately distinguishing between two apparently overlapping notions that have become confusingly inextricable in the ongoing debate in the social sciences and cultural studies. The notions in question are, of course, culture and identity.

A clear, precise conceptual distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ is an essential precondition for analyzing social processes. The anthropological concept of ‘identity’ has been built up over time and enriched by studies on interethnic relationships, ethnic borders and ethnicity. The objective of this essay is to add to an already well-defined concept of culture by incorporating decisive contributions from theories on the nation. Culture and nation are not only highly complex theoretical notions with a long history; they both deal with heterogeneous and conflictive entities.

*Email: agrimson@fibertel.com.ar

Culture and identity

In the 1940s Evans-Pritchard made a distinction between physical and structural distance. He saw the latter as the distance between groups 'expressed in terms of values,' and 'the distance between groups of people in social structure' (1977). In other words, two groups that are physically very close to each other can be extremely distant symbolically and vice versa.

This distinction has enormous relevance today when autonomy between territorial and identity spheres is clear: a person in either group can feel symbolically close to someone on the other side of the planet and extremely distant from his/her neighbor. Although differences were at one time associated with distance, albeit erroneously, this assumption is no longer viable. Foreigners not only live on the other side of a border; they have crossed our borders and are now found living among us. And today we become foreigners when we arrive 'someplace else' that is another symbolic spatiality, and not necessarily a physically distant place.

As these contacts are both routine and obviously constitutive, a new distinction has become necessary. Two fully autonomous dimensions (or that at least lack causal or pre-ordained links) have been condensed: the difference between cultural and identity distance has disappeared.

When studying 'the idea of death in Mexico' (Lomnitz, 2006), observe nationalisms, discuss '*voce sabe com quem estão falando*' (Da Matta, 1979), depict the suffering incurred by civil war, we are required to question what interpretative work can be carried out with the (polysemous and confusing) notions of culture and identity. This also occurs when we analyze the re-ethnicization of indigenous groups; or when we attempt to understand the circulation of Carnivals and Afro-religions in border zones, or what is happening with mapunkies and mapurbes,¹ or the vision of subaltern movements appropriating the latest technology.

Both terms are needed to comprehend the contemporary world. But evoking them to accomplish such disparate, contradictory interpretative tasks has made it difficult to know just how culture and identity are being used at the present time. Part of the confusion is a result of their being used interchangeably at times (Vila, 2000). This overlapping can become an obstacle when trying to answer key questions about symbolic social processes such as: what are the borders delimiting culture and identity? How have they shifted, when do they coincide, when do they overlap, and when do they complement each other?

In this paper I take a roundabout approach to draw the extraordinarily complicated line needed to distinguish between culture and identity, so that we know what we mean when we use these terms. However, before confronting these twists and turns, it is necessary briefly to state the basic differences between the two concepts.

Human beings do not choose our first language; we simply learn the structures and words we hear all around us. Although bilingual and trilingual individuals do exist (who nonetheless remain ignorant of the remaining 5,000 languages extant in the world today), most people speak a single language. Kinesthetic and proxemic communication codes are learned as well. By the same token, we don't choose the food our family eats, or whether or not we live in a city. Nor do we choose the country we live in, or the continent we live on. Later, when we do begin to choose, we do so on the basis of stable meanings and categories of classification. The societies in

which we grow up can be characterized by racism and/or class and gender inequality, or they may be more egalitarian in nature. Political regimes can differ as well. In the course of a lifetime each human being incorporates his/her own network of practices, rituals, beliefs, meanings and modes of experiencing, suffering and imagining. Just as with languages, there are always many more cultures and meanings than our own, that we are neither aware of, nor able to comprehend. Additionally, also like languages, we always have the possibility to learn another culture and make it our own, although this becomes increasingly difficult throughout our lifetime, due to the fact that each person is made up of his or her own culture and those in which they come into contact. As Todorov says (1991), the possibility of rejecting our own cultural determinations always exists, but the truth is that most human beings live within these confines rather than breaking with them.

All human beings feel a sense of belonging to a collective, village or city, country and region of the world, as well as to a particular age group, social class, gender, generation, and certain cultural and social movements. To some extent, these identity categories and the ways we relate to them come inscribed in a culture. Similarly, each of us chooses which groups to identify with, which to perceive as 'other', and what meanings and feelings each of these categories elicits in us.

A first distinction would therefore be that while culture alludes to our routine of strongly sedimented practices, beliefs and meanings; identity refers to our feelings of belonging to a collective. The empirically verifiable fact that cultural borders do not always coincide with those of identity, however, signals a theoretical problem: cultural homogeneity does not necessarily exist in a social group to which all of its members feel they belong. The distinction between culture and identity being developed here is, of course, more complex than this preliminary formulation, as are the notions themselves. Nevertheless, the obligatory point of departure is the basic distinction between networks of practices and meanings on the one hand, and categories of belonging on the other.

A Spaniard can address a woman as '*¡hombre!*' while an Argentine uses '*che,*' a Chilean '*huevoón,*' and a Mexican '*güey.*' Yet the number of times a Chilean says '*huevoón*' gives no hint of his level of patriotism, and when an Argentine utters the commonplace, '*Che, what a crappy country,*' no conclusion can be drawn regarding his/her identity nationalism.

It might be assumed that practices and rituals with greater semiotic density such as the tango, the *chamamé* and the *forró* are both cultural and identity indicators. But the fact that an inhabitant of Buenos Aires dances the tango tells us nothing about his/her feelings for that city. The point is that two different issues that elicit different responses from the same information are at stake. The supposition that 'dancing tango' or 'eating barbecued meat' are metonyms for a particular identity appears even more patently absurd when considering how the tango has traveled abroad, become intertwined with other networks of meaning, and is now danced by Japanese and French.

Yet it is true that in certain contexts, culture and identity can combine into a single practice, ritual or expression. Some time ago I showed how Bolivian immigrants living in Buenos Aires had taken up certain Andean regional dances, incorporating them into a communitarian ritual which had brought into being and nourished a specific identity (Grimson, 1999). In this case, as in many others, cultural elements are selected, utilized and projected into identity processes. The

relationship crafted in such cases, however, cannot be extrapolated beyond the specific context that gives it meaning, since the link joining the two terms can only be discovered empirically.

Authors commonly use culture and identity – whether Nuer, Puerto Rican or *Carioca* – indiscriminately. This intermixing of routine activities, beliefs and rituals, and the intensity of feelings of belonging, leads to the conclusion that a reduction in the strength or extent of national feeling indicates fading cultural values. Contrary to this, an essentialist approach postulates that all cultural appropriation and hybridization represents a loss of identity. Clearly, treating the two terms as synonyms or as automatically interdependent is a real problem.

If culture is in any way related to habitus, routine practices, modes of perception and meaning; and if identifications are linked to a sense of belonging, then the cultural differences between any two given groups are not necessarily equivalent to the mutually perceived distance perceived in terms of belonging. Indeed, for many contextual reasons, limited cultural differences often require a subjective increase in identity distance. Examples abound in the contemporary world: in the territory formerly comprising Yugoslavia and in the Palestine-Israeli context, comparatively subtle cultural differences appear to have turned into insurmountable identity barriers. Another example is Mexican-Americans who actively oppose migration from Mexico to the United States (Vila, 2000).

Essentialism and deconstructivism

The concepts of culture and identity have been at the center of theoretical debates in the field of anthropology and the social sciences for some time now. Criticizing essentialism has become almost cliché. However, how the essentialist perspective conceptualizes culture and identity, and precisely what is being criticized is not always easy to discern.

In the interest of clarity, I would like to briefly outline two prevailing perspectives on culture and identity. From the viewpoint of essentialism, any number of different, relatively homogeneous cultures, each with clearly defined borders and its own identity, are found scattered around the globe. The notions of territory, society, community, culture and identity are inextricably intertwined in this school of thought, with the main objective being to increase the amount of knowledge and understanding of this diversity. Given the fixed nature of essentialism's conception of borders, human groups within them are treated as things, which presupposes the existence of a cultural essence, thus reifying processes that are historical in nature. From this perspective, which I call classical culturalism, identity is simply an outgrowth of culture: cultural and identity borders lie side by side, the former implying the latter.

A marked shift in the study of anthropology took place in the course of the twentieth century. The classical school dedicated its efforts to rescuing 'surviving cultural experiences' that had existed prior to contact with the West in order to record and save differences under threat from extinction. The methodological implication was the practice of studying non-Western human groups *as if* they were not in the process of being colonized. It is no accident that missionaries, colonial administrators and other such figures are extremely hard to find in classical ethnographic texts. The emphasis on telling the story as if that world were not in

contact with our own, not only eliminates the possibility of analyzing processes of interaction; it also produces ahistorical images and gives an unrealistic idea of how great cultural distances really are.

The hypervisibilization of migratory processes, the result not of quantitative population growth but of the movement of formerly colonized peoples to the United States and Europe, and the spatial-temporal compression of the planet (Harvey, 1998) brought on by advances in communication technology, have made it even more implausible to act *as if* the distance between cultural worlds were real. A critical current of thought arising in the 1980s has placed emphasis on circulation, the permeability and blurring of borders, and the hybrid nature of cultures. Homogeneous nation-oriented narratives have been discredited, not only by globalization processes, but also by indigenous, afro, mestizo and regional dynamics, reaffirming the distance between the traditional notion of juridical and cultural territory on the one hand, and identities on the other.

These tendencies led to a trend that was strongly critical of the anthropological concept of culture; it began by asking whether territory, community and identity correspond to each other, and ended by questioning whether the concept of culture has any meaning at all. Within this second school of thought, generally referred to as post-modern, some critics have argued that reification was not a result of mapping diversity without taking into account interaction and conflict. In their view, alterity and border drawing are implicit in the concept of 'culture' itself. They then began studying interconnections *as if* they only existed among individuals in the absence of any specific mediating factors or cultural frames (Abu Lughod, 1999). Other currents proposed turning culture into an adjective and talking about 'cultural dimensions', but not 'culture' per se (Appadurai, 2001). When social actors did happen to use culture as a noun, differences were mobilized, and an overlapping with 'identity' was said to have occurred.

The concept of identity has undergone something similar, becoming a wildcard in the process. Brubaker and Cooper have identified *hard* and *soft* versions of identity (2001). The notion 'tends to mean too much (when understood in the strong sense), too little (when understood in the weak sense), or nothing at all (owing to utter ambiguity).' *Hard* concepts 'preserve the common sense meaning of the term (emphasis on equivalence over time or among persons),' as is the case in most political identities. Parting company with this practical use of the term, *soft* concepts have become entangled in a 'constructionist cliché' that, abounding in adjectives like multiple, contingent, negotiated and the like, oblige us to ask – if *identity* is so weak – why is the concept being used at all?

Three key aspects are constantly found intermingled in any allusion to 'identity': social attributes, interpersonal relations, and feelings of belonging (see Brubaker & Cooper, 2001). A common presupposition is that whenever attributes, relationships or feelings of belonging are shared by individuals, identity is as well. However, it is important to take into account that in this regard no causal connections necessarily link the terms.

When 'attributes' are viewed from an objectivist perspective, the Marxist distinction between class in itself (common attribute) and class for itself (feeling of belonging) comes into play. But when taken to mean, not objective positions, but rather 'social classifications' in the sense of being 'poor,' 'black,' 'Indian,' 'white,' or 'marginal,' then attributes vary greatly from one society to another, and no causal

relationship necessarily exists between persons socially considered indigenous and any particular feeling of belonging. Although it is generally assumed that an 'attribute' is prior to a 'feeling,' examples linked to the notion of 'youth' and 'race' indicate that feelings can intervene in the construction and classification of attributes (Hall, 2003).

The absence of any causal connection between attributes and identity is even clearer in the case of connectivity within a group. As Barth (1976) has shown, individuals with different attributes communicate with each other all the time, which can generate common identifications and also exacerbate distinctive ones. For his part, Anderson has demonstrated that persons lacking any direct contact with one another can imagine themselves belonging to the same community or going to war together. It might be argued that, by engendering daily homogeneous communication, *print capitalism* has been a vehicle for this kind of imagination. However, studies on nationhood in different countries (even ones with a high illiteracy rate and no mass media) indicate that other factors and agents intervene decisively in the construction of these feelings (Elías, 1997; Chatterjee, 2007; Chakrabarty, 2000; Grimson 2007).

In response to deconstructionist and post-modern arguments that point to societies in which people believe in different gods and eat animals cooked in different ways, two ways of recovering the concept of culture have been proposed. Briefly stated, since the subject will be taken up again below, according to the distributional viewpoint, although groups do not share completely homogeneous cultural features, neither can it be said that these characteristics are distributed randomly around the world. Heterogeneity and singularity do exist, but within the confines of a relatively coherent distribution of cultural characteristics. This being the case, distributionists favor eliminating erroneous usage (exoticizing, homogenizing, reifying) from the concept of culture, while maintaining 'optimum uses' (Brumann, 1999).

Cultural diasporas

The diasporic perspective developed by Clifford (2002) among others, dismantles the 'culture'/territory' model with the notion of a 'traveling culture.' However, by generalizing the idea of diaspora, a common thread in many contemporary studies, these authors run the risk of reestablishing the same essentialist perspective that they set out to avoid. If all migrant groups can be considered diasporic, then different processes are being confused.

The great majority of the inhabitants of the world we live in stay put, and there is no good reason to think they want to migrate. Most migrants themselves are motivated to migrate not by desire but by the lack of a viable alternative. Only a tiny minority constitutes the highly qualified nomad groups conceptualized by Lins Ribeiro using the native reference, '*bichos de obra*' because they go for example, from Mongolia to Argentina and different parts of Africa to construct hydroelectric dams.

So any reference to an alleged nomadic world must be viewed with caution. Sustained empirical testing of new notions is required to weed out fashionable trends favoring jargon over comprehension. The fact that not all migrants from the same country and social group interrelate and have a strong sense of belonging means that a diasporic identity is only one particular form of migration. Since the existence of other migrations lacking these characteristics cannot be ruled out, granting them all a diasporic identity must be considered an example of essentialization.

In the opinion of many authors, the number and proportion of migrants is increasing, and there are even those who see migration as a characteristic of our times. However, this is simply not the case: there have always been migrations, on occasion proportionally larger than at the present time. Present-day migration is not numerically greater than in former times; the differences are political and cultural. Currently involving different destinations, practices and senses of territoriality, the meaning of migration has been transformed in the contemporary world.

Transnationalism is the term applied by certain authors to this unprecedented process of interweaving relationships between zones of origin and destination. Interconnections include physical means of air and land transportation; significant 'ethnic' and cultural markets for food products, clothes, handicrafts and the like, and virtual communication by phone and Internet, video exchange and telematics. This fluid intercommunication network now constitutes a scenario in which distinctions between physical, cultural and identity distances are being processed on a daily basis.

The theoretical problem is determining precisely *when* a phenomenon is diasporic, who makes it so and why. When the term is invoked by academics indiscriminately mixing migration, culture and identity, we are in trouble. Some guidelines are offered by empirical research. Gordon (1998) analyzed different cultural constructions of 'race,' color and nation on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. The *creoles* saw themselves as part of 'different diasporas,' negotiating and naturalizing practices and ideas that correspond to what Gordon calls 'Creole common sense,' without automatically accepting concepts of racialized negritude.

In this case 'culture' and 'identity' do not appear neatly nested. Gordon and Anderson (1999) themselves distinguish between diaspora as a conceptual tool referring to a group of individuals, and diaspora in reference to identity formation. Once again the need arises to ask if subjects are in fact agents of ethnographically or historically analyzable processes of diasporic identification.

Yelvington (2003) has criticized those arguments that consider the African diaspora evidence of an indisputable negritude or a 'secret Africa.' According to him, 'we must locate the diaspora in time and space, but dislocate it from 'racialized' bodies and places from which it supposedly irradiates' (p. 559). In his view, indications offered by subjects must be studied ethnographically and historically in order to be able to answer questions on the *when*, *where* and *who* of a particular diaspora. Yelvington's position is homologous to my own proposal: the notion that a common skin color or place of origin invariably points to a shared culture and identity must be denaturalized. It is necessary to detach each one of these aspects and separate an analysis of the actors from the categories used to characterize them.

Differences

Despite a common place of origin or skin color, visible cultural distances are created by generational change, often at a dizzying rate. This is a key factor, since social science analyses have yet to counter assumptions on the part of adults, at times comical, dramatic at others, that acts and messages will be interpreted according to the code in which they were sent. Relevant in this regard is a scene from the film *Babel*: a rifle, given as a gift by a grateful Japanese tourist to a Moroccan peasant farmer who had served as a guide to this transnational hunter, is sold to another

Moroccan, who, in turn, gives it to his two sons so they can go hunting. The father imagines that the object will be used solely to perform the function he has defined for it from his own experience. But his sons, avid consumers of other Hollywood shoot 'em up texts, take aim, in fun, at a bus full of American tourists, gravely wounding a woman. Their act is reinterpreted by adult society as a terrorist attack. As is only to be expected, *Babel* offers various lines of interpretation. For our part, we would like to proffer a suggestion: it may be that, behind acts – including tragic ones – that we tend to classify hastily and definitively, only Babels are to be found, unless we are willing to take up and think through the uncharted languages comprising the cultural difference in question.

It is no accident that an analogy to the above proposal has appeared in a film made by 11 directors from different parts of the globe entitled *11-09-01*. A poverty-stricken group of teenagers from Burkina Faso sees on the front page of a newspaper that a reward is being offered for the capture of Bin Laden. Minutes later they see Bin Laden walking down the street and decide to follow him in order to collect the reward. The fanciful pursuit of the body, identified by the youngsters as Bin Laden, precisely represents the intersection where imagination meets the mass media, terrorism and interculturality. The same basic deglobalizing point is made even more dramatically in the Iranian film about Afghan refugees: how does a teacher make children, who were born in, live in, and know nothing else other than adobe houses, understand the attack on the Twin Towers.

To the degree that culture is thought of as belonging to a territorial community, cultural diversity has been imagined as distributed spatially. Discerning the heterogeneities in each society, thinking through juridical feelings of belonging as opposed to cultural ones, and citizens' rights dissociated from a sense of identification makes it possible to understand the forms diversity takes in each space. Many times subjects are foreigners in the sense that they are people who lack access to strategic tools. Culturalized differences in power distribution can also be a factor in cases in which the resulting inequities have become attached to characteristics arising from educational level, national origin, age group, ethnicity, gender or whatever. In still others, actual foreigners can be involved who do not understand local or hegemonic languages – English, Spanish, digital – and these cultural differences become politicized, especially when sedimentation and persistent typologies come into play.

These variations of foreignness are intertwined. Some people don't speak the local language because they have been structurally confined to a ghetto, and they aren't in a position to learn other languages. They never discover that, despite scant resources that make them speak strangely and be stigmatized socially, they have been aestheticized in academic *best sellers* as polyglots or multicultural incarnations. If allowed to choose, they might prefer to be ignored by the essayists who objectify them, and who do have the resources required to access other cultural universes.

Lineages and metaphors

Since the late 1950s anthropological theories on identity have been inspired in and grown out of a single primary process: ethnicity and interethnic relations. I don't mean to suggest that juvenile and national identities, and those emerging from social movements, were viewed as functions of ethnic identities. Rather, conceptualizations

based on an interethnic model made causally related extrapolations and generalizations possible. It may be difficult for non-anthropologists to comprehend this line of reasoning that relates ethnicity to non-ethnic social movements. However, the fog clears somewhat when the question of identity is phrased differently: it deals with interrelated perspectives on instrumentality, an assumed essentiality, the links between identity, communication and social organization, as well as border and contrastive processes. Although in drastically changed form, all of the foregoing, which were forged in relation to ethnicity, can still be useful for comprehending other processes.

In Latin America a key chapter in constructing the field of anthropology has been carried out on the basis of interethnic relations, strongly influenced by the 'theory of interethnic friction.' Cardoso de Oliveira has defined interethnic friction as 'the situation of contact between two dialectically unified populations through diametrically opposed, although interdependent, interests' (1992, pp. 127–128). From this perspective, which sought to specify interethnic conflict by relating it to class conflict, the historic and relational identity of a collective is defined by interests. The culturalist preconception that identities emerge from particular world perspectives does not contribute to an understanding of the rationale behind group interests.

Detaching culture from identity was the great contribution made by the 'theory of interethnic friction'. To the extent that identities are conceived as constructed, invented, and manipulatable, the existence of cultural frontiers that are not always empirically verifiable can be *postulated*. An obvious example of this was the type of nationalism, in which the demand for cultural homogeneity draws borders that even incipient anthropologists would judge empirically undefendable. This same rationale was then extended to include different dimensions of ethnic groups, taking the Barthian viewpoint to extremes.

In general, identities are seen as the result of interests and political processes (at times embedded within economic ones). While it is true that this perspective has contributed to desubstantializing identities and unhooking them from culture, in recent decades it has become clear that this was accomplished at the cost of underestimating the role played by culture. The emphasis on politics, conflict and interests has extended this anti-cultural approach to the breaking point, resulting in yet another frustrated chapter on the subject of the relationship between culture and politics.²

In Latin America this same process has been approached from other perspectives and in critical dialogue with Marxism, giving rise to lineages more closely associated with Gramsci, Bourdieu and Williams (see, for example, García Canclini, 2001; Martín-Barbero, 1987). Clearly, in order to advance in the understanding of contemporary frontiers, especially cultural and identity ones, contributions from both of the traditions outlined above are needed.

In my view, rethinking the notion of culture requires a metaphorical operation involving the concept of nation. The nation has been the object of intense debate and analysis in the fields of anthropology and history over the last three decades. Since the nineteenth century, the nation has been conceptualized from essentialist, constructivist, deconstructivist, nationalist, internationalist and global perspectives. At the same time, this highly complex unit of thought is also empirically peculiar in that some sort of heterogeneity is present in all of its many definitions. In short, the

nation just may be the single unit of thought containing the maximum amount of heterogeneity. The specific nature of 'unit' and 'heterogeneity' must now be clarified.

Thinking metaphorically, we will now set out to explore the relationship between culture and nation. Homogeneity was taken for granted in the traditional concepts of culture and nation: in both, people believed in a god, spoke a language, cooked certain animals and not others, and practised certain rituals. Clearly, nations as we know them today do not correspond to this stereotype. A great many are multilingual, plurireligious, pluriethnic, etc. But curiously enough, an attempt has been made to maintain the concept of culture as homogeneous unit intact, leading to the idea that 'all nations are multicultural.' Thus, culture has become synonymous with ethnic group, making 'multicultural' and 'multiethnic' interchangeable. But this formulation is problematic because it excludes many other forms of heterogeneity. If identity was able to benefit from notions of ethnicity, it is now time that culture does the same with the contemporary concept of nation.

The main problem with the notion of culture as representative of homogeneous units is that upon closer observation these same units are obviously heterogeneous. Intergenerational distance has increased the world over; gender differences are processed in new ways; migration has made the third world a visible, everyday experience in central countries, and mediatic connections project new translocal landscapes. These different modes of interconnection have also fomented group heterogeneity.

It was at this point that an alternative emerged to simplify matters: discard all specific units and frames and issue an across-the-board decree that borders no longer exist. The world then becomes a porous place where people are bound together by a series of interconnections.

This seems to me like unconditional surrender in the face of complexity: in a heterogeneous, complex and dynamic world, we simply declare that classifications, units and frames are anthropological fictions, thus throwing the baby out with the bath water. This would appear to go too far. The world is complicated, but the first language of Japanese children is Japanese and not French or Russian, and in childhood, Mexicans do not hear Rumanian music or consider it 'natural' to eat lamb cooked Algerian style.

There are exceptions, of course, but the point is not to lose sight of the big picture in this debate. Most people don't migrate, are not bilingual, and do not have full access to telematic technology; ergo, first languages and geographical location are relevant at the present time, and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future.

The world has undoubtedly changed, but our task as anthropologists is still to understand human beings who, employing a great diversity of resources, live their lives in different parts of the world and communicate with each other in different ways.

It might be a good idea to focus a little less on academic trends and a little more on how real people experience the phenomena under discussion. A small, quantitatively irrelevant minority consider themselves to be 'citizens of the world.' The vast majority however feels that they live in and are part of one particular place, in a particular country and culture, and think 'classically,' or in other words, 'ethnocentrically' about 'others.' When the so-called citizens of the world ignore, or claim to not understand, this basic fact, they too are thinking and acting ethnocentrically.

In the debate on whether cultures are coextensive with national borders, the distinction between a commonly perceived cultural heterogeneity and a relatively strong feeling of belonging becomes extremely relevant.³ If this were not so, we would end up with a general anthropological law affirming that all multilingual, multiethnic societies have a weaker national sense of belonging than monolingual societies with homogeneous ethnic characteristics. In other words, greater uniformity would imply stronger identity and vice versa. If this were so, how much simpler things would be!

Yet we know that this is not the case, and that national societies are both diverse and complex. It is also true that culture and identification are imperfectly articulated in (at least) some ethnic groups. The point here is not to introduce an individualistic approach that always seems to ask, are not there at least some distinct members within a group? This is obvious; no group is without a multitude of differences. Nevertheless, speaking in terms of culture is an attempt at discussing how each group has its own way of giving meaning to, evaluating and prioritizing differences. It is possible to find just as many relevant differences in relatively small groups as in, for example, ethnic groups that are part of a specific migratory process.

Just as a certain cultural heterogeneity can exist within identity borders instituted by political agencies, the opposite can also be true (Grimson, 2006). While the latter is frequently the case in Latin America, in certain areas in Europe and on the Spanish-French border, for example, groups speaking the same language celebrate the same holidays and dress similarly. In sum, groups with some semblance of cultural similarity can end up ascribing to nationalities that come into conflict. From both the nationalist and the romantic populist perspective, any disarticulation between culture and identification is an anomaly that must be corrected. Classic nationalists require populations not only to identify with their country, but also to adopt its 'cultural patterns.' Multiculturalism and heterogeneity are viewed as obstacles to national interests. For their part, romantic populists view ethnic identification as Marxists do social class: in and for itself, culture is an objectively existing ethnic class, and the absence of political ethnicity is an indication of 'false consciousness.' Ethnic consciousness is a categorical imperative that, even when unexpressed, either exists invisibly or will unflinchingly appear in the future. In any case, there will be no anomalies in the future: in this utopia, culture and identity will sooner or later be reconciled.

Categories, sense of belonging and configurations

In light of the critical observations and dilemmas outlined above, an attempt will now be made to spell out what distinguishes identity from culture.

As we understand it, the meanings attributed to identity should be limited to social group classifications and feelings of belonging to a specific collective. As Durkheim (1968) and Mauss have argued, each society produces a number of classifications. At the most basic level, these classifications refer to a particular society's own divisions and groupings, as well as those of neighboring countries and other significant groups. In the course of a society's history; social, political, territorial, ideological, aesthetic, ethnic, gender and generational classifications emerge, become more or less relevant, and stable. Categories such as a resident of the city of Buenos Aires or of the province of Tucumán or Corrientes; Federalist;

Peronist; gorila; Communist; hippie; rocker; punk; Mapuche, or Bolivian all mean something in present-day Argentina. Thus it can be said that within the historical context of a given society, a set of readily available classifications exists that offers a society's members an *identitary toolbox* for categorizing him/herself and others. Some categories are old and others are still in the process of emerging; some have been manufactured domestically, and others have been imported from abroad.

The features contained in this identitary toolbox offer a bird's-eye view of how a society is seen by its members and how the latter interact. The social relevance of available categories varies; they must be both linguistically comprehensible and possess identificatory power. For example, the words 'mulatto' and 'mestizo' exist in the Spanish spoken in Argentina, but neither term has the classificatory relevance that the former does in the 'Brazilian toolbox' or the latter in the Mexican or Peruvian one. These classifications are rooted in a particular social, cultural and political history that has been incorporated into a society's store of common meaning. By the same token, while the word '*gorila*' refers only to an animal in other Spanish-speaking countries, in Argentina it has acquired a political dimension and means 'anti-Peronist'.

Also, a society's classifications are shared to a greater extent than the meanings behind the classifications. Thus, '*porteño*' or 'Bolivian' can have positive or negative connotations, depending on who is using the term and to whom it refers. As anthropological research has shown, negative meanings can be broken down and classified under headings such as racism, classism, and cultural fundamentalism, among others. This is why a decisive aspect of any social conflict is the dispute over categories of meaning. There are social and cultural movements that seek to invert stigmatizing meanings, a well-known example being 'black is beautiful.' In other contexts, movements may find pejorative meanings so sedimented that the signifier itself is questioned; replacing 'black' with 'Afro' is a case in point.

Furthermore, it would seem advisable to reserve the notion of identification for referring exclusively to the sense of belonging linking people to a particular collective, which can always be crystallized in pre-existing categories. As highlighted above, there is no causal relation between social attributes and interpersonal relations on the one hand, and a person's sense of belonging on the other. From this perspective, it is the social actors who will always define and decide particular forms of identification. In other words, categories of identification are not the product of a researcher's objective conclusions.

Of course, identitary categories not only help to indicate an individual's description of a given society and his/her sense of belonging to it; they are also used to refer to other social actors/individuals, and as such, are a key factor in discerning recognition, acceptance or rejection. Since how people see themselves is frequently different from how they are seen by others, it is a good idea to reserve the notion of interpellation for how individuals, groups or institutions refer to their alterities. With the contents of the identitary toolbox, a person identifies him/herself and is interpellated and interpellates others. He/she affiliates, disaffiliates, stigmatizes, is stigmatized and counterstigmatizes.

In the course of this circulation of social categories and classifications, meanings, inequalities and hierarchies are placed in dispute. These disputes are possible because categories are shared and signifiers are tied to a meaning that is not necessarily the same for everyone.

And it is within this shared territory populated by diversity and conflict that history becomes linked to the notion of culture. Remaining within the confines of the two schools of thought analyzed above, the first which sees all cultures as homogeneous and the second which argues that said homogeneity is unverifiable, and therefore disregards the notion of culture altogether, one is hard-pressed to account for the fact that 'chapco,' 'paisa,' and 'boricua' have meaning in one social space and not in another. A concept is also needed to account for two additional phenomena: a) that in all societies main categories are polysemantic and elicit responses, and b) disputes tend to differ from one society to another, and even when they don't, the form taken will be different from one society to another, as is the case with 'mestizo,' 'mulato,' and 'gorila.'

Although formally absent from classic anthropological definitions, heterogeneity, conflict and historicity play a constructive role in all cultures. In response to post-modern theorists, Brumann (1999), among others, has shown that classic authors did not explicitly deny the existence of these characteristics. Nevertheless, neither terms nor concepts are to be found in their analyses of societies studied. A list of exceptions to the rule could be drawn up, but rather than searching classic texts for ready-made answers, our idea here is to attempt an updating along the lines of what Leach (1977) accomplished in *Political Systems of Highland Burma*.

What concepts can historical and anthropological theories regarding the 'nation' offer us in order to think about culture? My perception is that the fact that all communities are imagined has expanded to include the way we think about identity. At the same time, the historical nature of social processes has been incorporated into all dimensions of theory. The fact that nations and cultures are historical only means that they are human products. The problem is not cultural change, but rather the eventual borrowings, appropriations and hybrids that follow these transformations after they are introduced into society.

To my way of thinking, the greatest challenge we face is that cultures, like nations, if they do in fact exist, are by nature highly complex. Indeed, this complexity becomes self-evident when observing the multiple curative practices, contrasting conceptions of youth, different uses of technology, invocations to changing gods, love or hate for pork or horsemeat, and dissimilar views of the future of humanity found in even the most remote parts of the world.

So the question is where to draw the lines, not only for demarcating borders where a sense of belonging begins and ends, but also for defining frontiers in real or virtual places where shifts have occurred in the meaning ascribed to a particular saint or virgin; skin color; men kissing; or a distinctive style of dress or way of walking, for example. Do borders exist that separate not only meaning, but also regimes for articulating meaning? If so, then diversity does exist within cultural frames. But this heterogeneity, in turn, obeys some sort of contingent system of organization; otherwise, the notion of cultural frames would make no sense.

It is at this crucial juncture that theories on the 'nation' have made decisive contributions. Chatterjee (1993) holds that although the nation is projected as a utopia, it has heterogeneous temporalities, and is therefore a heterotopy. For her part, Segato (2007) has constructed the notion of formations of national diversity in which the historical modalities operating in each national space determine the interrelationships between each part.

In line with Segato's idea, the relevance of ethnic, social and political criteria may vary from one nation to another, the product of individual nation-building processes and/or how the sense of identity and alterities were constructed. In a similar vein, Briones (2005) set forth the notion of national alterity formations serving as political rationales for inequality and heterogeneity.

The point is that heterogeneity and diversity exist in both cultures and nations, and so does a rationale that links these parts. This, in turn, implies some notion of what and what doesn't constitute a 'part.' In a recent research project comparing Argentina with Brazil, more than 200 sociocultural mediators from six Argentine and six Brazilian cities were asked how people were divided up in their country (Grimson, 2007). We not only found different ways of classifying parts, but also contrasting meanings for what 'divide' means in the two countries. Briefly, in Brazil divisions exist in order to integrate each part where it belongs, while in Argentina similar divisions are linked to confrontation (Semán & Merenson, 2007).

Social conflicts generally tend to develop in this shared language, often through identity categories that are constructed in relation to subject positions that are either authorized or encouraged. Additionally, there are social conflicts that question the very logic of existing interrelationships, often generating unforeseen positions. In this case, movements work at the borders: not only in relation to the significance of a particular identity or position, but also to the culture as a whole and the significance of the interrelationships.

The heterogeneities articulated should not be understood unilaterally or primarily as identities, and even less so as ethnicities. In his criticism of cultural abolitionists, Brumann holds that cultural characteristics are neither homogeneous in one group in contrast to others, nor is their random distribution; if the latter were true, someone born in Bali would be able to speak Japanese, dance the tango, practice *umbanda* and defend the sovereignty of Andean indigenous people. But even if a person fitting this description could be found, viewing the contemporary world through such a lens is absurd. Brumann favors a distributive perspective on culture, pointing out that an individual may lack a particular characteristic – there are Argentines who are vegetarians and Brazilians who detest Carnival – but this feature is not randomly acquired.

Some relevant factors remain to be mentioned. A shared symbolic language implies that eating beef in Argentina is not the same as eating it in other parts of the world because, having incorporated the status of beef in the set of daily practices where he/she lives, the vegetarian knows what it means. 'Fleeing Carnival' in Río and in Buenos Aires (no one flees a lesser phenomenon) means two totally different things. There is no doubt about this in the minds of practitioners or upper-class sectors that, at times, take pleasure in differentiating themselves from 'the masses,' which in no way resemble their Parisian counterpart. That is the first point; different people who inhabit a culture and yet who do not necessarily share one or more common features with others from the same culture may assign different meanings to these features. Nevertheless, these differences within a culture can still be distinguished from the meaning assigned by someone who inhabits another culture. In other words, borders do exist.

Second, a possible misinterpretation of Brumann's viewpoint is that cultures are the sum total of differences. Rather, they are different combinations, specific

articulations, and structures (contingent, historical) of elements that have acquired meaning as part of a relational network (Ortner, 1999).

This is why a television set or laptop appearing among a tribe of native people, a Donald Duck figure among offerings to the Virgen de Urkupiña, or any such process in which a symbol, practice or concrete element has been incorporated from other real or virtual locations, acquires a different meaning in this particular relational set (Grimson, 1999). Some sort of shift has occurred in the articulation of parts, involving a greater or lesser cultural change. Calling the articulation of the same sign in different relational sets homogenization makes sense only if cultures are defined as the sum total of characteristics with transcontextual meaning, which, in turn, implies the non-existence of frames for articulating heterogeneities.

Conclusion: Some problems to consider

A culture is a configuration that is made up of countless diverse elements that are complementarily, oppositionally and hierarchically interrelated. As a sense of belonging, an identity associated with a particular category is a key element in a culture. The relationship between cultural configuration and identity categories is extremely complex.

Before closing, we want to briefly touch on two problems this complexity brings in its wake. Both culture and identity are categories applied to practices and used for analysis. Because categories are conventional, resolving this situation nominally is not an option. Our approach is dual. First, our perspective might be better served by referring to cultural configurations and not to culture per se; to a sense of belonging and other identity categories and not to identity alone. But in the end we have opted for maintaining traditional terminology, specifying what is meant in case of doubt.

Second, while not causally linked and capable of differentiation, culture and identity are very closely intertwined in any number of scenarios and relevant processes. One example of this is the degree to which social leaders associate belonging to a particular category that is part of a series of daily rules and rituals. Thus, the above should in no way be taken to mean that cultural changes do not imply marked shifts in identity and vice versa. Taking an extreme example, a human group that is subjugated and obliged to abandon its language may resist to a greater or lesser degree, but once again there will be changes at both the cultural and the identity level.

The key point we want to make here is that the borders between these two concepts do not always coincide despite the claims made by identity discourses that argue the opposite. Only in certain contexts a category may appear to coincide with an existing or projected configuration. When constructing the hegemonic meaning of this identity category, actors explore polysemic elements present in the cultural configuration in order to associate them directly with the meaning they seek to grant that identity. Some elements have historical associations, while others that make up the configuration have become so naturalized that, although capable of distinguishing a group contextually, they can be invisible or may even be denied.

Culture and identity allude to analytically different aspects of social processes. No relationship between the two can be presupposed or generalized to fit all cases. At times, the cultural and identity borders of a group can grow or shrink together,

but this does not rule out the presence of any and all possible combinations between these two extremes. As such, it is necessary to analyze cultural and identity aspects separately, under the assumption that each empirical case will yield its own set of answers.

Notes

1. Briones (2005) says: the mapunkies, mapuheavies and mapurbes 'are young, very young people that have found in the aesthetic images of a guluche poet like David Añiñir the possibility of expressing themselves and feeling themselves expressed. To be mapunky refers to being able to feel Mapuche and anarcho-punk at the same time, or of being a Mapuche Punk. To be mapuheavy implies being Mapuche and Heavy Metal at the same time, or to be a Mapuche Heavy Metal. To be mapurbe speaks of the experience and possibility of being an urban Mapuche, despite the dictates of overriding common sense.'
2. Seeking to overcome this anticulturalism, for example, Pacheco de Oliveira – trained in the current critique of culturalism – attempted to analyze the 'mixed Indians' in the Brazilian northeast in 1998, exploring theoretical dialogues with Hannerz and García Canclini.
3. Although it can only be mentioned in passing here, one of the most interesting debates on this issue has taken place in the field of Brazilian anthropology between Joao Pacheco de Oliveira (2004) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1999).

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