Middle East – Topics & Arguments

#07 – 2017

Culture

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EDITORIAL

Concepts of Culture in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Pierre Hecker and Igor Johannsen

Introducing the seventh issue of META, this editorial discusses prevalent concepts of culture in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. Different conceptualizations of culture that explicitly or implicitly contain qualitative differentiations between cultures are revisited and discussed. Bearing considerable weight in the respective disciplines, the Islam-and-the-West paradigm, the delineation of diverging cultures along ethnic lines, the equation of culture with art or religion, and the culture-as-civilization paradigm are being scrutinized. Serving as an example for the confusion and lack of clarity regarding the concept of "culture," the book *The Culture of Ambiguity* by the German scholar of Islamic Studies Thomas Bauer is analyzed regarding its use of the term.

Keywords: Islamic Culture; Islamic Civilization; Islam and the West; Culture and Religion; Culture and Art

The Confusion about Culture

The idea for a META special issue on "culture" was born from an indefinite feeling of discomfort which regularly creeps up on us when it comes to the usage of the term "culture" in the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. "Culture" is still widely treated as a universal, commonly understood concept that requires no further explanation. Even though the idea of culture as a closed, coherent, and clearly distinct system, as advocated by Orientalist authors such as G.E. Grunebaum, Bernard Lewis, Samuel P. Huntington, or André Miquel, has long been dismissed as pejorative, essentialist, and unscientific, we still stick with the all-dominant classification of "Islam" and "the West," which implies the existence of two distinct cultural entities that either battle against or coexist separately from each other. The Islam-and-the-West paradigm is still so dominant in academic texts that its theoretical implications and, subsequently, its impact on the production of knowledge commonly go unchallenged, if not unnoticed.

The resilience of this paradigm is further augmented by the common usage of the term culture as a means to classify humankind into different ethnic, national, or religious communities that are supposedly bound together by shared cultural traits,

which are equated with linguistic, religious, or historic commonalities. In the recently published *Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture*, Dwight F. Reynolds, for instance, assumes that the Arab world is "bound together by certain shared cultural ties," which are based on the Arabic language, and "the larger shared history of the region," which is "in essence, what makes Arabs Arab" (1). Although Reynolds acknowledges the existence of "distinctive" local identities within the Arab world, it remains far from clear what, aside from language, makes Arab culture—as represented in the aforementioned book through separate chapters on law, music, art, theater, or architecture—distinct from, for instance, "Berber culture," "Coptic culture," or "Kurdish culture." The usage of culture as a means of ethnic or national classification, therefore, remains highly problematic, even though today the majority of authors show sensitivity toward avoiding any form of previously common characterizations that would imply cultural superiority or inferiority respectively (e.g. clichés of the "hardworking Protestant," the "fatalist Muslim," the "belligerent, aggressive Turk"). Ever since Edward Said's *Orientalism*, it should be obvious that culture is by no means a neutral category. Cultural classification is indeed prone to ideological abuse and closely related to questions of power and dominance.

Another problem we have come upon in the past is the *confusion between culture and art*. It is no rare phenomenon that both terms are used indiscriminately. An author may speak of "culture" when actually meaning "art" or even restrict his or her study of culture to artistic production only. Accordingly, "Islamic culture" or "Arabic culture" are frequently associated with and exclusively defined through specific forms of cultural production that would usually be assigned to the realm of art. This includes performing arts such as music, dance, or theatre; visual arts such as film, painting, or calligraphy; applied arts, with a special focus on architecture; and, perhaps most importantly, literature. What these various forms of cultural production have in common is a creative impetus that intends to express particular ideas, emotions, or experiences. Artistic production is, furthermore, widely assumed to require particular sets of advanced skills that need to be learned and trained beforehand. This professionalization of cultural skills consequently excludes a considerable part of the population from participating in artistic production. Cultural activities classified as art thus stand for an elitist notion of ("high") culture, in contrast to what is labelled as "low," "profane," or "popular" culture. Artistic production, especially with regard to nation-building processes or the endeavor to establish and maintain cultural hegemony over a society or societal group, is also assigned an educational task in terms of "civilizing" or forming a society in accordance with particular ideals. The latter necessarily includes an institutional level that is needed to implement dominant cultural policies. What is definitely not included in the idea of art is the ordinary or, differently speaking, the everyday cultural life and practices of ordinary people. The idea of *culture as a whole way of life*, which is said to determine the anthropological perspective on culture, stands diametrically opposed to the notion of *culture as art*. The concept of art is meant to mark a distinct sphere of social life (similar to sports, work, politics, etc.) that is concerned with aesthetics, creative impulse, self-expression, and the striving for perfection and excellence. In this sense, art can be considered a subdivision of culture.

The idea of understanding humankind as being composed of different cultures (Arab culture, Alevi culture, Turkish culture, hip hop culture, working class culture, etc.) is based on the assumption that different ethnic, religious, national, or societal groups can be clearly distinguished from

each other along objective criteria. Culture, in this sense, is meant to provide a model of comparison or, as Stuart Hall put it: "It allows us to compare to what extent different societies resemble, or differ from, one another" (186). This means that culture, on the one hand, is treated as an *analytical category* that allows us to study and compare human communities; on the other hand, it is perceived as a *system of practices and beliefs* that constitutes the "essence" of a particular group of human beings. This brings us to another common phenomenon in the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies: the usage of *culture as a variable to explain human behavior* on an individual and collective level.

In the past, this has not only led to judgmental conclusions regarding cultural differences but, moreover, to a *confusion between culture and religion*. G.E. Grunebaum, who conceptualized culture as a closed system, assumed that value judgements convey coherence and provide the rules of conduct for interaction among the members of a particular culture (19). Religion, argued Grunebaum in *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity*, has the power to revise and even replace the value judgement of the cultural system, as happened in the case of Arab civilization that was transformed by Islam (20-22). Islam thus constitutes the organizing principle of the cultural system. It sets the rules of life and determines human behavior in all spheres of the social world, on a personal and communal level. On a related note, Grunebaum perceived Islamic civilization as an isolated cultural unit that is insusceptible to change initiated from outside. We could now continue and point to the ideological abuse of culture in Grunebaum's work, such as when he pictures Islam as an anti-humanist civilization, or the resemblance of his argument to modern notions of racism, especially when he speaks of cultural superiority and inferiority and foreign, "genetically non-Arab" ideas and aspirations (25). However, in our opinion, it is not explicit racism we have to be most attentive to, but rather the implicit equation of culture and religion or, more precisely, culture and Islam, which plays a crucial role in the writings of many contemporary authors. The confusion between culture and Islam has been particularly popularized by Samuel P. Huntington's incredibly influential claim of an inevitable clash of civilizations. Similar to Grunebaum, Huntington assumed religion to be the dominant variable that determines human behavior and constitutes cultural entities as represented through a fixed number of seven (or possibly eight) world civilizations. Another popular example for the confusion of culture and religion and the usage of culture as a variable to explain human behavior is David Landes' book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, in which he seeks to explain why some are rich and some poor. It is his contention that culture, which is mostly defined through religion, provides the determining factor for economic success or failure. Islam is accordingly used as an example to portray the "losing side" in the global economy (392-418).

The aforementioned feeling of discomfort is caused by the conceptual confusion surrounding the term "culture." Culture has indeed been frequently described as one of the most difficult scholarly terms to define. Different academic discourses have yielded such a wide array of meanings and concepts that one might express serious doubt about the analytical usefulness of the term in the human and social sciences. In 19th-century European thought, "culture" was not only meant to represent the "best that has been thought and said in the world," as suggested by Matthew Arnold (5), but also to describe differences among mankind, thus resulting in "culture" increasingly becoming associated with the concept of the nation, as for instance in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder. Theorizing culture in the plural laid the foundation for what became known as the already mentioned *culture-*

as-civilization paradigm, a highly normative concept, which claimed the world to be "naturally" divided into chunks of culture whose specific ways of life might evolve to a state of excellency that would then be called civilization. Edward Said, on a related note, identified culture as an effective means of European imperial domination and highlighted the central role of the concept in the imperialist effort to rule distant lands on the premise of bringing civilization to the primitive and thus inferior peoples around the world. The culture-as-civilization paradigm was finally challenged by what came to be known as the "cultural turn" in the human and social sciences. Pioneering thinkers such as Raymond Williams, who described culture as "a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior" (*The Long Revolution* 57), seemed to put an end to the old "high culture-low culture" dichotomy and opened the way for "reading" culture as a text or primarily regarding it as a means of symbolic communication (Clifford Geertz) or resistance toward political dominance (Stuart Hall).

Ambiguities and Essentialism

A good example to illustrate the level of conceptual confusion resulting from the different theoretical approaches and the efficacy of the aforementioned pitfalls and paradigms is Thomas Bauer's highly acknowledged book *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* ("The Culture of Ambiguity: A Different History of Islam"). *The Culture of Ambiguity*, which was published in 2011, has probably been the most influential book in German-speaking Islamic studies over the past decade. Bauer's self-declared purpose was to write an incomplete cultural history of Islam. In this, he follows an approach that in German-speaking academia is referred to as *kulturhistorischer* or *kulturwissenschaftlicher Ansatz*. *Kulturhistorisch* stands for a particular scholarly tradition in German academia and, therefore, lacks a direct translation into English. The essence of the term may be best described as "concerning the history of civilizations." Accordingly, an artifact can be regarded as either *kulturhistorisch wertvoll* or *unbedeutend*, which means that, in terms of historical progress and cultural achievements, a cultural product can be classified as either valuable or negligible. This theoretical approach favored by Bauer is still quite common in German-speaking Islamic studies.

Bauer contends that early Islam, unlike today, was characterized by a high level of cultural ambiguity and tolerance toward pluralism and dissent. Ambiguity, he asserts, was not just tolerated, but was an integral feature of "Islamic culture" (31). This Islamic culture of ambiguity was altered only in modern times under the influence of Western imperial rule. On a related note, he blames "Western Orientalist discourse" not only for ignoring and consciously denying the cultural ambiguity of Islam, but, moreover, for portraying Islamic society as completely permeated by religion. This, says Bauer, resulted in the common prejudice that Islam does not know a distinction between the spheres of the religious and the secular and, therefore, must be considered incompatible with modernity (192). Bauer refutes this claim by arguing that "religion-free spheres" have always existed in Islamic culture (193). Substantiating his claim, he points to the coexistence of clearly distinguishable "academic" and "pious" discourses of medicine in Islamic history. The academic medical discourse, Bauer argues, is free from religious influence, while the pious discourse is solely based on religious sources and arguments. With regard to the latter, he refers to the Arabic expression *aṭ-ṭibb an-nabawī* ("The medicine of the Prophet"), which, as he points out, represents a distinct field of medicine exclusively attributed to the sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohammed (195).

In order to further assess the "Western Orientalist" discourse on Islam, Bauer introduces the term "Islamization of Islam," with which he intends to subsume the discursive strategy of Western Orientalists to render Islam's culture of ambiguity invisible. Based on this argument, he identifies five interrelated mechanisms: first, the common practice of adding the label "Islamic" to all spheres of social life (e.g. "Islamic art," "Islamic medicine," "Islamic literature") even though they might be completely free from, or at least not directly influenced by, religion; second, the practice of either ignoring non-religious discourses entirely or declaring them as non-representative and irrelevant; third, the practice of preferring those discourses, whose notions of religion are closest to Western concepts, over others; fourth, the practice of considering religious discourses to represent the dominant norm, even in cases in which a coexistence of religious and non-religious discourses can be observed; and fifth, the practice of regarding the "most conservative" and "orthodox" religious discourses as the dominant norm, even if several religious discourses coexist equally alongside each other. As a consequence, Bauer sums up, the Islamic world is bereaved of its cultural ambiguities and pluralities and (re)constructed as a monolithic, "Islamic-religious culture" that is meant to represent an antithesis to "modern Western culture" (222-23).

Bauer's intentions in *The Culture of Ambiguity* are clear. Delving deep into literary, theological, and philosophical sources that were written by Arabic-speaking scholars between the 10th and 15th century A.D., he aims to write against and disprove what he identifies as the dominant Western Orientalist discourse on Islam. As an alternative, he offers a more differentiated perspective that emphasizes the heterogeneity and plurality of the Islamic world. This becomes particularly evident when he vehemently criticizes essentialist perspectives á la G.E. Grunebaum by dismissing them as a "Fantasy-Islam," which only applies to the lifeworlds of radical Salafis and the imagination of Western Orientalists (202). Despite its anti-essentialist intent, Bauer's argument does, however, fail to completely break away from the essentialist spirits of the past. This, as we see it, is mostly due to a great deal of confusion regarding the term "culture" in his work.

Bauer defines culture as "the sum of all cultural activities of its members" (17). This, however, does not provide sufficient conceptual clarity, especially when we look at how the term culture implicitly takes on different meanings in his text. To begin with, Bauer's definition, which regards culture as constituted by "all cultural activities of its members," apparently assumes that only certain human activities are to be considered "cultural" while others are not. Culture consequently appears to be conceptualized as autonomous from other spheres of life, such as the political, social, or economic spheres. This idea becomes further evident when we look at the empirical sources of Bauer's study. In his attempt to provide proof for the ambiguous nature of Islamic culture, he exclusively draws on intellectual sources from the fields of literature, poetry, philosophy, and theology. Seen from this angle, Bauer's idea of culture resembles the Arnoldian concept of culture and thus at first glance could be taken to mean (in analogy to Arnold) "the best that has been thought and said in the Muslim world." Placing exalted intellectual achievements at the center of what is conceptualized as Islamic culture, moreover, stands in contrast to the equally influential concept of *culture as a whole way of life*—an idea that has been formative not only for anthropology but also for cultural studies; in the latter case, after being complemented by Raymond Williams with a focus on popular culture (cinema, TV, etc.) and the trivial but significant statement that "Culture is Ordinary." Bauer's notion of culture has little to do with the daily lives of

ordinary people who, with regard to the pre-modern period that he concentrates on, mostly did not know how to read or write and thus were unlikely to have access to the intellectual sources which he assumes to constitute Islamic culture.

Having said this, it appears safe to conclude that Bauer's notion of culture—at least as far as the empirical sources of his study are concerned—relates to the realm of intellectual excellence and not to the realm of the ordinary. Yet, in his overall argument, he uses the term differently—in a way that links culture to the realm of modern identity formations—as a collective whole that, although it is characterized by various differences, is held together by what appears to be shared customs or habits of behavior. When he speaks of "Islamic culture" or "the culture of Islam," Bauer appears to imagine culture in a similar way as Samuel P. Huntington conceptualizes "civilization." That is, as "the highest cultural grouping of people" (Huntington 24) or, differently phrased, as a superordinate cultural entity, which, although it may consist of a variety of distinct cultures at a local, regional, or national level, is held together by a set of dominant, commonly shared cultural traits that determine people's identities. Correspondingly, "the culture of Islam" consists of different "Islamic cultures," as implicitly mentioned by Bauer when he specifically refers to the "Arab-Islamic culture" as distinct from other Islamic cultures. "Islamic culture," in its function as a superordinate category, however, is moreover conceptualized by Bauer as distinct from "Western culture." With this, he not only adopts the idea of culture as civilization but, moreover, refrains from challenging the aforementioned paradigm of Islam-and-the-West. Bauer criticizes the undifferentiated, demeaning way in which Western Orientalist discourse used to portray Islam. Yet he does not question the categories of the discourse and its theoretical implications in itself.

A central point to Bauer's argument of the "Islamization of Islam" is the finding that the term "Islam," in Western Orientalist thought, commonly takes on a double meaning. Islam, he observes, either signifies the realm of religious norms or the realm of culture. In a religious sense, Islam accordingly relates to questions of personal belief and theological debate, while, in a cultural sense, it involves Muslims and non-Muslims alike as "the culture of Islam has also been the culture of many members of other religions [who are living in the Muslim world]" (193). With this, Bauer's observation corresponds to the aforementioned confusion of culture and religion, though he confines himself to the critique that the coexistence of religious and non-religious discourses has not been properly recognized and acknowledged in the past. Apparently, he intends to solve this problem by speaking of "Islamic culture" only when referring to Islam in a cultural sense.

Consequentially, Bauer neither succeeds in breaking away from the concept of culture as civilization, nor does he give up on the Islam-and-the-West paradigm, which leaves us with the idea of the world as being divided into clearly distinguishable, perhaps competing, or even hostile cultural entities. Simply by retaining the term "Islamic culture," he considerably weakens his central argument, or, to put it another way, the very same author who so aptly criticizes the Islamization of Islam actually contributes to reproducing the "Western Orientalist discourse" by himself subsuming every "thing"—discourses on medicine, art, literature, science, etc.—under the term "Islamic" or, more precisely, "Islamic culture" (222-23).

This criticism does not intend to devalue the outcome of Bauer's study, and it should not obscure the fact that *The Culture of Ambiguity* succeeds in reducing formerly dominant Orientalist discourses to absurdity. Bauer does in fact convincingly demonstrate that religious sources have been interpreted differently at any

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time, wherefore Islam by no means represents a totalitarian or monolithic system. We have chosen Bauer due to the importance of his work within German-speaking Islamic studies and because we see the usage of the term "Islamic culture" in his work as symptomatic of a field that needs to reflect more on the usage of the term "culture" and the impact that this usage can have on the production of knowledge.

Engaging Semantic Disorder

The point we want to make against the backdrop of these introductory reflections is that the different theoretical approaches to culture have created significant semantic disorder in an academic field in which analytical clarity is desperately needed. The term "culture" is frequently used without any clarification or sufficient reflection about the theoretical implications of its usage. Sometimes authors use and even mix up different concepts of culture without even noticing. Moreover, there are strong indications that different authors are not talking about the same "thing" when speaking of culture. In the light of the foregoing, it is our contention that there is an urgent need to seriously reflect on the question of whether we should give up on the very idea of "Islamic culture" or "Islamic civilization" completely—in particular as it turns out that "Islamic culture" neither functions as an explanatory variable nor as a proper analytical tool. The usage of this term tells us something about the theoretical or ideological perspective of the person who uses it. Yet it does not tell us anything about the object of investigation itself.

Even if the term "Islamic culture" is used in a very broad sense and meant to not only include Muslims but basically every person who happens to be socialized in the Muslim world (i.e. in those regions of the world that have been dominated by Islam for a long period of time), an answer has to be provided to the question of what it is that finally makes Islamic culture "Islamic"—especially if we want to maintain the aforementioned critique of Grunebaum's claim of religious norms being the organizing principle of the cultural system. If we cannot provide a precise answer to this question, why then would it make sense to speak of "Islamic culture" at all?

The editors' approach to culture relies in great part on the tradition of British Cultural Studies. Culture is thus understood as dynamic, fragmented, and constantly changing. Culture is furthermore seen as closely linked to communication, the crafting of practices, the ritualization of community life, and the institutionalization of normative orders as well as the resistance towards them. Culture, especially in the latter sense, represents a terrain of political and ideological struggle in which social conventions, norms, and values are constantly being contested and (re)negotiated. In short, the cultural is perceived as the realm of the continuous struggle of humans to make sense of themselves and what surrounds them, in a way that involves social and political interaction with other humans in the shared habitat.

The present META issue aims to critically engage with the various, often contradictory concepts of culture as used in the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. In the following contributions, authors from different academic disciplines envisage a dialogue between the theoretical and the empirical dimension of research on culture. The cases studies of the FOCUS section accordingly not only elaborate on the specific theoretical understanding of culture, but also on its analytical applicability in different national and political contexts. The contributions of the META and CLOSE UP sections complement these empirical case studies by reflecting on the theoretical side of culture. **John Storey**'s contribution on "The Politics of Culture" provides an overview over the evolution of thinking about "culture" in the work of Raymond Williams. He outlines how culture, under the influence of Antonio Gramsci's contested meanings,

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and how cultural studies, on the basis of this redefinition by Williams, was able to delineate culture as the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings that become embodied and embedded in social practice. Storey's article is followed by two CLOSE UPs: one on the concept of culture in the work of Stuart Hall written by **Johanna Fernández Castro** and a second by **Olaf Miemic** on the evolution of the term culture in Terry Eagleton's writings. META's ANTI/THESIS section, this time, has been filled by the editors themselves, "battling" each other over the conceptualization and relevance of the term "popular culture."

The FOCUS section features five case studies. The discussion begins with two contributions both dealing with the politics of culture in contemporary Turkey. The political relevance of culture in a Turkish context has not only become obvious since the so called Gezi Park protests in 2013. Over the past decade, Turkey's cultural politics have been determined by the political dominance of the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and its attempt to consolidate its power through establishing cultural hegemony over the Turkish society. Today, more than ever before, culture must be seen as a site of ideological struggle and a terrain of incorporation and resistance, in which different worldviews and normative orders compete with each other. We are happy to have found two authors who, despite all political odds, were ready to share their perspectives on the politics of culture in present-day Turkey with us. **Ayça Ince**, the former Vice-President of the Center for Cultural Policies and Management at Istanbul Bilgi University, investigates the politics of cultural isomorphism on the level of Istanbul's district municipalities, thereby taking into account the context of national cultural policies, while **Oliver Kontny** in his contribution on the "Cultural Politics of Difference in Turkey" highlights the articulations of dissensus from among the vivid community of cultural producers with regard to the present *Kulturkampf* in Turkey.

Thomas Serres and **Tristan Leperlier** take us to Algeria to study representations of the Algerian population as promoted by francophone intellectuals in a context of longstanding crisis and uncertainty. In this endeavor, the authors draw on Robert Reich's category of "symbolic analysts." Serres and Leperlier claim that the political and intellectual commitments of these symbolic analysts can be interpreted through the triad concept of "Naming, Blaming, Claiming."

Nadja von Maltzahn's contribution explores the contexts and dynamics of cultural policy making in Lebanon. Based on three case studies—the National Library, Beirut Municipality and Beit Beirut—she examines how cultural policies are shaped and implemented by different actors in the Lebanese cultural scene. Contradicting the widespread notion of Lebanon as a state without any cultural policy, the author uses the concept of explicit and implicit cultural policies as a framework to show that these forms of institutional actions do exist in various settings. On a final note, Maltzahn discusses issues of cultural censorship in Lebanon.

In his article on "Arabic Rap and the Re-Creation of Hip Hop's Founding Myth," **Igor Johannsen** describes how decisive features of the founding myth and narrative of the global hip hop community are actualized and re-presented in the context of the so-called "Arab Spring." Performing and using specific cultural symbols, signs, and practices whose genesis is connected to specific social communities and whose place of origin is decidedly US-American should not be understood as mere appropriation or imitation, the author claims. Rather, the respective performances and lyrical references have to be seen as conscious and deliberate re-creations of hip hop's practices and its historiography.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6491

META

The Politics of Culture

John Storey

This article provides an overview over the evolution of thinking about "culture" in the work of Raymond Williams. With the introduction of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony culture came to be understood as consisting of not only shared, but contested meanings as well. On the basis of this redefinition by Williams, cultural studies was able to delineate culture as the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings that become embodied and embedded in social practice

Keywords: Raymond Williams; Cultural Studies; Meaning and Social Practice; Signification and Power

Raymond Williams once described culture as one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. Cultural studies, mainly with the help of Williams himself, has gradually come to define culture as a material practice, what Williams eventually called a "realized signifying system." In order to explain this I will outline the shift in his thinking about culture, from seeing it as a network of shared meanings, to seeing it as consisting of both shared and contested meanings. The latter position, I will argue, is a result of the introduction in the 1970s of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony into his thinking on culture. It is the coming together of Williams' concept of culture and Gramsci's concept of hegemony that situates realized signification and power as the central object of study in cultural studies.

In all his definitions of culture (see especially Williams, *The Long Revolution*; *Culture*; *Keywords*), Williams works with an inclusive definition of culture. Writing in 1961, he proposed what he called the social definition of culture, in which culture is defined as

> "a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a defini-

> tion, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture ... the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate." ("Analysis of Culture" 32)

This definition is crucial to the development of cultural studies for three reasons. First, Williams' definition "democratically" broadens the then dominant Leavisite definition of culture (Storey, *Cultural Theory*), producing a more inclusive definition, in which instead of culture being defined as a body of only "elite" texts and practices, ballet, opera, the novel, poetry, for example, it is redefined to include as culture television, cinema, pop music, sport, for example. Second, culture as a particular way of life further broadens the definition of culture. So, for example, rather than culture being media as text, culture is embodied in the particular way of life that is involved in, say, the production, circulation, and consumption of media. These two aspects of Williams' definition are usually noted and the discussion ends there. However, there is a third element in Williams' definition, one I think that is far more important for the intellectual formation of cultural studies than the other two: this is the connection he makes between culture and signification. The importance of a particular way of life is that it "expresses certain meanings." Furthermore, cultural analysis from the perspective of this definition of culture "is the clarification of the meanings … implicit in a particular way of life." (The Long Revolution 57) In other words, in Williams' social definition, cultures are networks of meanings that are embodied, performed and made concrete in particular ways of life.

In *Culture* he further clarifies his position and redefines culture as "a realized signifying system" (12), arguing that it is fundamental to the shaping and holding together of all ways of life. This is not to reduce everything to culture as a realized signifying system, but it is to insist that culture defined in this way should be seen "as essentially involved in all forms of social activity" (13). As he further explains, "the social organisation of culture, as a realized signifying system, is embedded in a whole range of activities, relations and institutions, of which some are manifestly 'cultural'" (209). While there is more to everyday life than signifying systems, it is nevertheless the case that "it would … be wrong to suppose that we can ever usefully discuss a social system without including, as a central part of its practice, its signifying systems, on which, as a system, it fundamentally depends" (207). In other words, signification is fundamental to all human activities. Nevertheless, while culture as a realized signifying system is "deeply present" in all social activities, it remains the case that "other quite different human needs and actions are substantially and irreducibly present." Moreover, in certain human activities signification becomes dissolved into what he calls "other needs and actions" (209). To dissolve can mean two quite different things: to disappear or to become liquid and form part of a solution. For example, if a parliament is dissolved it ceases to exist. However, when we dissolve sugar in tea, the sugar does not dis- appear; rather it becomes an invisible but fundamental part of the drink. It is the second meaning of dissolve that best captures Williams' intention. So, to be clear, signification is fundamental to all human activities, but sometimes it is obscured by other needs and actions.

Culture, therefore, as defined by Williams, is not something restricted to the arts or to different forms of intellectual production, it is an aspect of all human activities. For example, if I pass a business card to someone in China, the polite way to do it is with two hands. If I pass it with one hand I may cause offence. This is clearly a matter of culture. However, the culture is not simply in the social act, nor in the materiality of the card, nor in the meaning of the card and act–it is in the entanglement of meaning, materiality and social practice. More-

over, the passing and/or receiving of a business card in China is not simply a symbolic performance in which meaning is represented, it is a performative event in which meaning is enacted and realized. Similarly, as Marx observes, "one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king" (*Capital* 55). This relationship works because they share a culture in which such relations are meaningful. Outside such a culture, this relationship would have no meaning. Being a king, therefore, is not a gift of nature (or of a god), but something constructed in culture; it is culture and not nature or a god that gives these relations meaning: makes them signify, and, moreover, by signifying in a particular way they materially organize social practice. Therefore, as Williams insists, "Signification, the social creation of meanings … is … a practical material activity" (*Marxism and Literature* 34). It is a social practice that requires human agency and human interaction. It is not something abstract; it is always something embedded in human action and interaction. To share a culture, therefore, according to this preliminary definition, is to interpret the world, make it meaningful and experience it as meaningful in recognizably similar ways. So-called "culture shock" happens when we encounter radically different networks of meaning; that is, when our "natural" or "common sense" is confronted by someone else's "natural" or "common sense."

So far I have focused on culture as a system of shared meanings. This is more or less how culture tends to be presented in Williams' early work. Although I started with a quotation from *The Long Revolution*, the idea of culture as a realized signifying system is in fact first suggested in his essay "Culture Is Ordinary." The formulation is quite similar to that found in *The Long Revolution*, "A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people" ("Culture Is Ordinary" 8). Ten years after "Culture is Ordinary," in "The Idea of a Common Culture," he is even more explicit about the ordinariness of the making of meanings, "culture is ordinary ... there is not a special class, or group of men, who are involved in the creation of meanings and values, either in a general sense or in specific art and belief" (34). When Williams said that "culture is ordinary," he was drawing attention to the fact that meaning making is not the privileged activity of the few, but something in which we are all involved. However, this does not of course mean that we are all involved in it in the same way; meaning-making, like all other social activities, is always entangled in relations of power. While we may all be involved in the making of meanings, it is also the case that some meanings and the people who make them have more power than other people and other meanings. Having said this, Williams' early work is not totally unaware that power features in the embodying and social embedding of meanings. For example, in "The Idea of a Common Culture" he observes,

> "If it is at all true that the creation of meanings is an activity which engages all men, then one is bound to be shocked by any society which, in its most explicit culture, either suppresses the meanings and values of whole groups, or which fails to extend to these groups the possibility of articulating and communicating those meanings." (35)

In fact it would be very unfair to Williams to suggest that even in this early work he is simply unaware of power. The essay "Communications and Community" makes this absolutely clear:

> "For in fact all of us, as individuals, grow up within a society, within the rules of a society, and these rules cut very deep, and include certain ways of seeing the world, certain ways of talking about the world. All the time people are being born into a society, shown what to see, shown how to talk about it." (21-22)

What is the case, however, is that he had not yet found a fully adequate way of articulating the relations between signification and power. In *The Long Revolution*, for example, he is still able to claim that culture is "the sharing of common meanings … [in] which meanings that are valued by the community are shared and made active" (55). Contrary to this, and to put it very simply, most meanings are not of our own making, they are generated by dominant groups and dominant institutions. Moreover, these meanings tend to operate in the interests of dominant groups and dominant institutions. It is not until "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *Marxism and Literature* and *Culture* that Williams really insists that signifying systems consist of both shared and contested meanings. As he consistently argues from 1973 onwards, cultures are where we share and contest meanings of ourselves, of each other and of the social worlds in which we live. For instance, to return to an example given earlier, people may recognize the meaning of the relations of kingship but reject and struggle against these relations. Such rejections and acts of struggle are part of the processes Gramsci calls hegemony. After the introduction of hegemony into Williams' work in the 1970s, culture as a realized signifying system is always understood as consisting of both shared and contested meanings. Moreover, it is when Williams embraces Gramsci's concept of hegemony that he locates culture and power as the object of study in cultural studies.

Gramsci uses hegemony to describe processes of power in which a dominant group does not merely rule by force but leads by consent: it exerts "intellectual and moral leadership" ("Hegemony" 75). Hegemony involves a specific kind of consensus, a consensus in which a social group presents its own particular interests as the general interests of the society as a whole; it turns the particular into the general. Hegemony works by the transformation of potential antagonism into simple difference. This works in part through the circulation of signification that reinforces dominance and subordination by seeking to fix the meaning of social relations. As Williams explains,

> "It [hegemony] is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people … It is … in the strongest sense a 'culture' [understood as a realized signifying system], but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes." (*Marxism and Literature* 110)

If we substitute the word culture for hegemony we are very close to Williams' social definition of culture. The difference being that the definition now includes relations of dominance and subordination.

Hegemony involves the attempt to saturate the social with meanings that support the prevailing structures of power. In a hegemonic situation subordinate groups appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, etc., which incorporate them into the prevailing structures of power: relations of dominance and subordination. However, hegemony, as Williams observes, "does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged" (112). Therefore, although hegemony is characterized by high levels of consensus, it is never without conflict; that is, there is always resistance. However, hegemony seeks to arrest the proliferation of meanings; it seeks to reduce signification to meanings that can be controlled. For it to remain successful conflict and resistance must always be channelled and contained—re-articulated in the interests of the dominant.

There are two conclusions we can draw from Williams' concept of culture as a realized signifying system. First, although the world exists in all its enabling and constraining materiality outside culture, it is only in culture that the world can be made to mean. In other words, signification has a "performative effect" (Austin, *How to Do Things*; Butler *Bodies That Matter*; *Gender Trouble*); it helps construct the realities it appears only to describe. As Gramsci points out,

> "It is obvious that East and West are arbitrary and conventional (historical) constructions, since every spot on the earth is simultaneously East and West. Japan is probably the Far East not only for the European but also for the American from California and even for the Japanese himself, who, through English political culture might call Egypt the Near East ... Yet these references are real, they correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea and to arrive at the predetermined destination." (*Prison Notebooks* 176)

Moreover, as Gramsci continues, "East and West … never cease to be 'objectively real' even though when analysed they turn out to be nothing more than a 'historical' or 'conventional construct'" (175). In other words, East and West are historical constructions, directly connected to the imperial power of the West. However, they are also forms of signification that have been realized and embedded in social practice. Cultural constructs they may be, but they do designate real geographic locations and guide real human movement and organize real political perceptions of the world. As Gramsci's example makes clear, meanings inform and organize social action. To argue that culture is best understood as a realized signifying system is not, therefore, a denial that the material world exists in all its constraining and enabling reality outside signification. As Williams makes very clear, "the natural world exists whether anyone signifies it or not" (*Politics and Letters* 67). But what is also absolutely the case is that the material (or the natural) world exists for us—and only ever exists for us—layered and articulated in signification. And how it is made to signify helps organize our relations with it. He had been aware of this since as early as 1961:

> "It is impossible for us to assume that there is any reality experienced by man into which man's own observations and interpretations do not enter ... Yet equally, the facts of perception in no way lead us to a late form of idealism; they do not require us to suppose that there is no kind of reality outside the human mind; they point rather to the insistence that all human experience is an interpretation of the non-human reality ... We have to think ... of human experience as both objective and subjective, in one inseparable process ... We create our human world." (*The Long Revolution* 36, 54)

The second conclusion we can draw from seeing culture as a realized signifying system concerns the potential for struggle over meaning. Given that different meanings can be ascribed to the same "sign" (that is, anything that can be made to signify) meaning-making is always a potential site of struggle. The making of meaning is always confronted by what Valentin Volosinov identifies as the "multiaccentuality" of the sign (*Marxism* 23). Rather than being inscribed with a single meaning, a sign can be articulated with different "accents;" that is, it can be made to mean different things in different contexts, with different effects of power. The sign, therefore, is always a potential site of "differently oriented social interests," and is often in practice "an arena of ... struggle." Those with power seek "to make the sign uni-accentual" (23): they seek to make what is multiaccentual appear as if it could only ever be uni-accentual. In other words, a "sign" is not the issuing source of meaning but a site where the articulation of meaning (variable meanings) can be produced

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as it is re-articulated in specific contexts. We continually acknowledge the multi-accentuality of the sign when we describe an interpretation as, for example, a feminist reading, a queer reading, a post-colonial reading, or a Marxist reading. In such instances, we implicitly acknowledge that the text in question has been made to mean from the critical perspective of a particular reading practice. This is not simply an issue of semantic difference, a simple question of interpreting the world differently. The different ways of making something signify are not an innocent game of semantics, they are a significant part of a power struggle over what might be regarded as "normal" or "correct"—an example of the politics of signification. It is about who can claim the power and authority to define social reality to make the world (and the things in it) mean in particular ways and with particular effects of power. Therefore, rather than engage in a fruitless quest for the true or essential meaning of something, cultural studies at its best fixes its critical gaze on how particular meanings acquire their authority and legitimacy. This makes culture and power the primary object of study in cultural studies. As Hall explains,

> "Meanings [i.e. culture as a realized signifying system] ... regulate and organize our conduct and practices—they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed. They are ... therefore, what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape." ("Introduction" 4)

Meanings have a "material" existence in that they help organize practice and they establish norms of behaviour. My examples of the passing of name cards in China and the relations of kingship are instances of signification organizing practice. Moreover, as Hall indicates, those with power often seek to regulate the impact of meanings on practice. In other words, dominant modes of making the world meaningful are a fundamental aspect of the processes of hegemony. As Hall makes clear, "The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created—and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized" ("The Rediscovery" 123). On the basis of Williams' redefinition of culture, cultural studies has gradually come to define culture as the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings that become embodied and embedded in social practice. To paraphrase what Williams said about communication systems in "Communications and Community" (22-23), we cannot think of culture as a realized signifying system as something which happens after reality has occurred, because it is through culture, as a realized signifying system, that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our everyday lives, is constituted and contested—and always entangled in relations of power.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6330

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Stuart Hall: An Organic Intellectual

Johanna Fernández Castro

Stuart Hall (3 February 1932 – 10 February 2014) is acknowledged as one of the founding figures of British Cultural Studies. His extensive academic work on topics such as race, ethnicity and identity reflects his own position as a diasporic intellectual. His contribution to the study of popular culture is determined by the importance of his political character in every social act, his non-deterministic view of Marxism, and is especially determined by his insistence on playing an active role beyond academia in order to contribute to the transformation of hegemonic structures. The following biography aims to give a focused view of his personal history and its direct influence on his key theoretical reflections.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, Organic Intellectual; Race; Ethnicity; Neoliberalism

An Organic Intellectual

Racial, ethnic and class struggles played a significant role for Stuart Hall beyond his academic life. Not only the fact that he was born in a British colony, but also the mixed heritage of his family, influenced the processes of identification that would last throughout his lifetime. Stuart McPhail Hall was born in 1932 in Kingston, Jamaica. In his family, class and color were represented by the different origins of his parents. His father, a black employee of the United Fruit Company, belonged to the "coloured lower-middle-class" (Hall, *Diasporic Intellectual* 486); whereas his mother, who identified herself with England, belonged to the "lighter-skinned English-oriented" (ibid.) middle-class. His family, as with many middle-class Jamaican families, was a mix of colors, but Hall was perceived as the "blackest" (Hall, *Diasporic Intellectual* 487) member, and this role was significant in creating his perception of himself as an outsider. This would characterize his identification as a displaced subject and his interest in topics such as race, ethnicity and identity, as well as his interest in social exclusion, politics of difference, and the negotiation of power throughout his extensive collection of academic work.

Feeling displaced within his own family, and identifying neither with the colonized

nor with the empire, Hall thought of himself as an independent Jamaican boy. He was enthusiastic about the Jamaican Independence Movement and the changes that the future would bring to the country. Despite this, he did not remain in the country to witness Jamaica's independence, and instead, emigrated to England in 1951, where he studied English at the Merton College in Oxford. Although he had always wanted to study in England, the main reason for his decision to emigrate was his tense relationship with his family. His sister's nervous breakdown, a result of a confrontation with her parents based upon their disapproval of her relationship with a black medical student, exacerbated his contradictory view of colonial life in Jamaica. From then onward, the conflictive relationship with his family deteriorated even further. Thus, personal and social struggles in Jamaica contributed to his decision to save himself and leave (Hall, *Diasporic Intellectual* 491). His career at Oxford was successful, though he could never fully identify himself with the pinnacle of the English Academia. In fact, after having realized that he would never live in Jamaica again, he considered England his home, but stressed that he would never consider himself British.[1]

In the middle of the 1950s, Hall was an enthusiastic activist of the New Left. He was one of the founders of the *Universities and Left Review*, which was later merged with the *New Reasoner*, resulting in the *New Left Review*, where Hall became a full-time editor in 1958. After finishing his studies, Hall began a PhD project on the classic American novelist Henry James. However, since this form of literary analysis did not serve to resolve the cultural questions he was exploring, Hall abandoned the project. After having worked as a teacher of media, film and popular culture at Chelsea College, University of London in 1961, he published *The Popular Arts* together with Paddy Whannel in 1964. This was the first handbook for the study of mass media that was directed towards school and university teachers. In the same year, Hall joined the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, at the request of its founder Richard Hoggart, and became director of the center in 1968. By the end of the 1970's the feminist fraction at the CCCS emerged and Hall found himself in a contradictory position where he was both a feminist supporter of the feminist fraction but was also a "symbol of male authority" (Procter 53). In 1979, this contradiction was one of the reasons for Hall's resignation from the CCCS and for the start of his tenure at Open University, where he remained until his retirement in 1997 as a teacher of sociology. To him, Open University represented a place where he could work on cultural practices and social realities beyond the traditional academic frame; his aim was to reach a wider audience, people who did not have access to the traditional academic system. In the years after his retirement, Hall continued his activities as a committed public intellectual, for instance, working on post-neoliberal politics[2] until his final days. He passed away on February 10, 2014.

Cultural Studies and Marxism

Although Stuart Hall did not want to be acknowledged as the founding father of British Cultural Studies, his name remains attached to the history and development of the discipline, as it currently exists. What is known today as Cultural Studies began as a project that focused on popular culture as a field of study and which aimed to analyze power relations and asymmetries between social groups. In the beginning, the goal of the project was not to establish a master discourse, but rather an alternative for the analysis of cultural phenomena within social groups. The relevance of this approach lies in the political role of every social act, which is unavoidably determined by culture. In the beginning, the CCCS focused on working-class cultures and mass

media; they were interested not only in the social and economic aspects, but also in the more symbolic side: culture, ideology, and language (Hall, "Cultural Studies" 36). Questions about power and power relationships were also significant in Cultural Studies at that time. Although empirical studies at the Center predominated over theoretical work, which, at the time, was more generally thought of as "theoretical noise" (35), theory was still considered relevant. Reflecting on the CCCS history and the development of Cultural Studies in Britain, Hall recalls the "politics of theory" and nevertheless stresses its important role, not as "the will to truth […] but as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges. […] as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference" (44).

Understood as just one of many discursive formations regarding the study of culture, Cultural Studies in Britain has, since its beginnings, had a strong Marxist influence, and this can be directly related to Hall's career in the New Left and his later work on the *New Left Review*. While questions of power, class and exploitation, were pivotal in the field of cultural studies, Hall's understanding of Marxism was a critical one, known as *Marxism without guarantees*.[3] Instead of the traditional deterministic understanding of Marxism it was about "draw[ing] upon Marx while always seeking to question and move beyond him" (Procter 44). In the context of the New Left, the deterministic view of Marxism was considered "as a problem, as trouble, as danger, not as [a] solution" (Hall, "Cultural Studies" 36). Hall was a revisionist of Marxism and interested in cultural studies because he did not believe that lives were determined only by economics. He was a critic of the Eurocentric Marxist notion of capitalism that ignores its dependent relationship with the rest of the world, as well as its very nature that results from conquest and colonization.

This critical attitude towards Marxism is evident in the predominant influences found in Hall's academic production, such as Volosivov,[4] Laclau,[5] and Gramsci,[6] all of whom he primarily adopted in order to challenge essentialist ideas of class in relation to popular culture. Volosinov's concept of 'multi-accentuality,' for instance, was used by Hall to explain how meaning and value are "constantly being reproduced as signs are articulated, dis-articulated and re-accented by different social groups at different historical moments" (Procter 31). Laclau's notion of *articulation*, in concordance to Gramsci, has influenced Hall's work, not only regarding his revision of the relationship between ideology and class, but also as a theoretical practice in Hall's writing, "linking two or more different theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the limits of either framework on its own" (54).

It is especially Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which will play an extensive role in Hall's reflections on culture. Gramsci's revision of Marxism offered answers to questions that were not (or not sufficiently) addressed in traditional Marxism. Among these are historical specificity and ideological and political aspects in the analysis of social formations. Gramsci's contribution to the study of popular culture can be grasped from his interest in "the character of different types of political regimes, the importance of cultural and national-popular questions, and the role of civil society in the shifting balance of relations between different social forces in society" (Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance" 415). Hall appropriated some of Gramsci's concepts in his reflections on cultural phenomena, such as the notion of the *ruling bloc*, the *conjunctural*, the practice of articulation and the role of the *organic intellectual*. In his criticism of postmodern intellectuals, Hall points out the lack of reflection from some authors (e.g. Habermas and Lyotard), who ignored the presence of other realities (outside central Europe and North America) and who took for granted the univer-

sality of their own theoretical assumptions. It is in this context where he argues for the notion of the organic intellectuals—someone who is "at the forefront of intellectual theoretical work" and who is responsible for "transmitting those ideas, that knowledge" (Hall, "Cultural Studies" 281) beyond academia and thereby contributing to the transformation of hegemonic structures.

One of these movements beyond theoretical frameworks was his analysis of the traditional linear model "Sender-Message-Receiver," giving way to the "Encoding/Decoding" (Hall "Encoding and Decoding") approach toward communication; this was one of his most significant contributions to mass media analysis in cultural studies. In this context, meanings and messages are considered as products embedded in a dominant discursive form. In the linear traditional communication model, the audience was homogenized, thought to have a passive role, and was understood as a passive recipient of information. In Hall's model there are the different kinds of audiences, who are not considered anymore as passive receivers or consumers but as active producers of meaning. In addition to that, mass media are not considered only as instruments of the dominant hegemony in order to transmit a determinate ideology, but as the very site of ideological struggle. Through this approach Hall positioned his work beyond the culturalistic and structuralistic views that predominated in cultural studies at that time (Procter 57-72). This sort of conceptual appropriation and transformation had a significant effect on Hall's analysis of issues of race, identity, and ethnicity. The 'mugging' incidents in the beginning of the 1970's and the following reactions of British society appear to have been a catalyst that motivated CCCS's work with "moral panics" and their relation with race and youth crime. The concept of "moral panics," introduced by the British sociologist Stanley Cohen,[7] was employed to analyze how the mugging incidents were instrumentalized by the media and how this lead to the stigmatization of youth subcultures and black people. The publication *Policing the Crisis: 'Mugging', the State and Law and Order* aims to understand the social causes behind muggings and their extreme counter-reactions.[8] From the appearance of this work forward,[9] Hall's criticism against the conservative British social politics, especially during the Thatcher era (1979-1990), would increase considerably. This pattern would then manifest in his published work, which, following Morley and Chen, "is deeply rooted in the history and politics of the international flow of labour and migration, and subsequently in the reconfiguration of British society under and after Thatcherism" (Morley and Chen 12).

The Sugar at the Bottom of the English Cup of Tea

Stuart Hall could never identify himself with Jamaica or with Britain. In many interviews and articles, he expressed his own feelings of displacement. His multiple identities as an immigrant, scholar, and political activist were especially intertwined during his editorial work on the *New Left Review*. As a diaspora scholar, an emigrant and an immigrant in England, Hall's work stressed the need for the reflection of one's social and academic position. Reflecting on his own identity and the idea of a *British* identity, he recalled the roots of what is known as *British* culture, its colonial past, and its negation through history:

> "I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English identity – I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an

English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea? Where does it come from? Ceylon Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history." (Hall "Old and New Identities" 48-49)

This passage condenses his position towards the unstable character of identity and the dislocation of the subject, always positioned within a specific historical and social situation. Because of his own history and the social formations of Britain in the 1970s, Hall's interest in race became central to his academic production. Taking into account the historical conjuncture in Britain in the middle of the seventies, Hall reflects on racism as the result of the denial of British colonial history.[10] In this context, Gramsci's influence is again significant, and it can be especially seen in the notion that historical specificity helps to undermine the idea of racism as a homogeneous and omnipresent practice, that is to say the clarification that there are many historical forms of racism depending on the social formations in which they appear, and that it does not occur in "all sectors of the social formation" (Hall „Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" 436). Understanding social formations, class and class-subject in a "non-homogeneous" way is, as Gramsci shows by questioning the idea of unity, central to a non-reductionist approach to understanding the relationship between class and race.

The same applies to the idea of subject, which in Gramscian terms, is understood as contradictory and as a social construction. In this line of thought, and in concordance with postmodernism, Hall rejects the traditional and essentialist understanding of identity, and conceives of it as unstable, fragmented and non-unified. In his analysis of black culture and black politics in Britain, he introduces the term of ethnicity as an anti-essentialist concept. This *sous rature* movement enables him to disentangle the notion of ethnicity from referents such as nation and race. Thus ethnicity undermines the idea of difference as racial or genetic and instead "acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge contextual" (Hall "New Ethnicities" 447).[11] Ethnicity thus helps to elaborate on the concept of *black* "within the British context at a significant historical conjuncture as an identity formation that is presently shifting from one position or context to another" (Procter 122).

After Neoliberalism

Hall witnessed the consequences of thirty years of neoliberal politics and was attentive to manifestations of resistance against it and to ways of articulation that could serve as solutions for the neoliberal crisis until his last days. During his final years, as a founding editor of the *Soundings* magazine, Hall continued to reflect on neoliberalism and post-neoliberal politics. His criticism of the neoliberal hegemony had already begun in the late 1970's, and continued throughout the 1980's with his analysis of what he coined *Thatcherism*. The neoliberal hegemony demonstrates how a given ideology can permeate all classes as it influences and determines all fields of social life, not only with the taken-for-granted nature of the market and the stress placed on competitive individualism, but also with the well-known premise of the preservation of old values, such as tradition, family and nation.

The uprising of opposition and protest, especially after the banking crisis of 2007, shows not only the despair of the *poor* against neoliberalism and against the indifference of those busy with their self-improvement and self-sufficiency. Rather, these movements also represent the reaction to a crisis that is not only economic, but also political and social. For Hall this "moment of potential change" is a con-

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juncture, a period "when social, political, economic and ideological contradictions […] come together producing a crisis of some kind" (Hall and Massey 55). In this line of reasoning, alternative ways of opposition, which represent disenchanted social formations, can destabilize even strong hegemonies, showing that these "are never totally secure" (Hall, Massey and Rustin). However, even if the successful neoliberal hegemony is not free of contingency, this does not mean that it can be easily defeated. As Hall reminds us, neoliberalism is a "hegemonic project," (Hall, "Neoliberal Revolution" 25) a continuous process that is never complete but rather constantly negotiated. The role of the excluded in this negotiation would then be to continue destabilizing the dominant hegemony and in doing so, thereby open spaces for new emancipative projects.

Notes

[1] The movie *The Stuart Hall Project* directed by John Akomfrah (2013) provides an outstanding portrait of Stuart Hall, in which the character of his hybrid identity is shown in concordance with his academic reflections and his public life.

[2] See Hall, Massey, and Rustin, After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto.

[3] See Hall, "The Problem of Ideology. Marxism without Guarantees."

[4] See Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.

[5] See Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory.

[6] See Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks.

[7] See Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers.

[8] See Hall et al. Policing the Crisis: 'Mugging', the State and Law and Order.

[9] The book appears one year before the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister.

[10] See Hall, Racism and Reaction

[11] See also Hall, What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.5134

Ideas, Ideology, and Interests: On Terry Eagleton's Approach to Culture

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The British literary theorist Terry Eagleton has significantly influenced contemporary debates on culture. This essay provides a reading of his book *The Idea of Culture* (2000), in which Eagleton discusses historical, philosophical and political contexts of notions of "culture" thereby unveiling the political interests inherent to such conceptual constructions. The essay highlights Eagleton's complex understanding of relations between nature and culture as well as his own materialist approach to culture.

Keywords: Culture; History of Ideas; German Idealism; Critical Theory; Ideology

Ideas, Ideology, and Interests: On Terry Eagleton's Approach to Culture

This essay examines some aspects of Terry Eagleton's intellectual engagement with the term "culture." In doing so, the challenge is that Eagleton is by no means interested in conceptualizing a particular notion of culture in a way we are used to defining concepts and elaborate theories. Instead, with *The Idea of Culture* (2000) he provides commentaries on various historical notions of culture as well as on culture theories developed by different authors. Eagleton's aim is to unveil the political interests inherent to such conceptual constructions or mirrored by them, respectively. Yet, the close relationship between notions of culture and ideological phenomena is an issue that has been preoccupying the Marxist thinker, Eagleton, for many years as is reflected in a great part of his oeuvre.[1]

Reading *The Idea of Culture* presupposes profound knowledge of the theoreticians and debates on culture and society throughout the last three hundred years. For a better understanding, Eagleton repeatedly summarizes the ideas as outlined by the individual thinkers, which he seeks to critically discuss. This methodological approach makes his argument more transparent, while it simultaneously facilitates a critical reading of his own

thoughts. However, the purpose of the present article is neither to give a critical interpretation of Eagleton's argument (such an effort would require the precise and lengthy reconstruction of the theories that Eagleton comments on), nor is it to outline a critique of his approach to culture. Indeed, I do support Eagleton's approach—at least regarding two significant points. The first one is related to his argument when addressing the culturalization of nature through work. Here, Aristotle's theory of causality helps to clarify what Eagleton means when stating that "the natural" holds the potential for "the cultural." Secondly, I support Eagleton in his discussion of the notions of "culture" as elaborated in German Idealism. Yet, as we will see, Eagleton is in this regard a bit "too fast," and therefore, I will take recourse to Hegel in order to make Eagleton's argument more plausible.

Indeed, the many lines of Eagleton's comments on the particular theories of culture generate a net of thoughts that deepens our understanding of the term "culture" which, all too often, is used in a rather careless manner. In the following, I will restrict my reading of Eagleton to the first chapter of his book *The Idea of Culture*, entitled "Versions of Culture." In this part, he presents the materialist core of his conceptual approach to culture; the following chapters merely contain exercises.

Nature and Culture, Work and Discipline

Ever since Greek antiquity and Aristotle's causality theory, we tend to conceive of nature as the part of the world based on the principle of motion (or change), whereas culture is understood as everything based on the principle of motion (or change) in the realm of human objects and purposes. A tree grows straight or crooked, either way, it will never become a table; to become a table, a human (agent) has to cut the tree and work upon the wood accordingly.[2] In so far, nature and culture seem to be two clearly distinguishable things. Yet, the word "clear" invites further reflections.

Water is as much a natural material as are gold and wood, but it is not a material suitable for creating a ring or a table. Only some materials hold the proper characteristics for certain (human) purposes. Therefore, it could be said that nature holds the potential for culture; it seems as if nature seeks to go beyond itself, or, in Eagleton's words: "Nature itself produces the means of its own transcendence" (*Culture* 3-4). Obviously, nature and culture refer to one another. Eagleton, at this point, reminds us of Jacques Derrida's notion of "supplement" (*Culture* 4). However, the deconstruction of the binary established between nature and culture does not necessarily lead to the complete disappearance of that opposition; cultural history is not natural history. Thus, it is more important to stress that the deconstruction of the opposition between nature and culture indicates its constant recurrence.

In the first instance, the opposition between nature and culture recurs as we are the "cultivators" of the nature surrounding us. Both the individual and collective needs and drives "call" for satisfaction and require purpose-oriented work upon nature. Yet, work involves time, attention and energy, all of them often directed at other purposes than the immediate satisfaction of particular needs and drives. And this is so because work requires cooperation. In order to avoid any destabilization of cooperative structures, the needs and drives have to be postponed and repressed. Nevertheless, even here we recognize that our own nature seeks transcendence; we would not be able to discipline ourselves if our human nature would not be endowed with the respective potential and ability to do so. At first glance, it might sound confusing when we hear Eagleton's remarks that the word "culture" conceals a theology (*Culture* 6). What he means, to my understanding, is that human nature's

aspiration and ambition toward transcendence involves a kind of desire for salvation. What sounds, in turn, perfectly clear is Eagleton's statement on notions of "culture" as always containing history and politics (ibid.). The establishment, stabilization and transformation of disciplinary regimes results from historical processes and shapes these processes at the same time, and are by that measure necessarily political. Eventually, the process of human cultivation is related to an "ethical pedagogy" (*Culture* 6-7). The purpose of such pedagogy is to avoid coercion. It aims, instead, for the activation of voluntariness.

Culture and the State

Eagleton discusses a second recurrence of the binary opposition of nature and culture in terms of the state. In doing so, he makes reference, among others, to Schiller. The German poet and philosopher contrasts the factual human being with the idea of human perfectibility, which is represented through the ideal state. In Schiller's view, every human being holds, simultaneously, the disposition to perfectibility. The duty of the state is to merge all the diverse courses of human action in order to create a pure and perfect human being (Schiller 10-11). Schiller's notion of *Bildung* refers to a dialectical relationship between an aesthetic education, in the sense of the individual internalization of moral and ethical values on the one hand, and the modalities of shaping society on the other. Indeed, it is an interesting question in how far ideas of the ideal state, as constructed in the tradition of German Idealism, prove to be "proper", and if not, in how far they correlate with Schiller's notion of culture or *Bildung* (*Culture* 6-7). Alternatively, this issue could be discussed by the aid of Hegel.

Like other thinkers of German Idealism, Hegel assumed the following structural basic characteristic of modernity: As a result of the differentiation of state and society into two different and self-regulating systems of action, notions of nature and of culture appear in new forms. Nature is located within the subject of the "civil society" (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft)* and in everyone's individual norms, goals and purposes of action in order to satisfy egoistic needs. The bourgeois subject considers the enlightened self as the only valid category. At the beginning, it is the state which "cultivates" the subjects in so far as it performs control and regulates the spontaneity resulting from needs and interests and from the actions needed to satisfy them. In Hegel's thinking, law and morality are means of cultivation. This does not mean that institutions for regulating law and morality would have been absent before the emergence of capitalist modernity. They were not. However, for Hegel and the German Idealism, those forms of socialization, with their legal-analogue ideas and institutions taken as "culture," were to be considered "pre-forms" and "pre-modern" – an issue that was enthusiastically debated in philosophy of history at that time.

According to Hegel, the understanding of the state as an institution to control and regulate implies that people are capable of going beyond particular needs and interests. This disposition to transcendence constitutes a prerequisite for recognizing ourselves as real human beings and for acknowledging that the human community is organized and ruled by the state and is a necessary condition for real freedom. Only as citizens do we own the capability of reasonable judgment in terms of needs and interests on the one hand, and law, morality, habit and custom, or: *Sittlichkeit* (ethicality/ethical order/ethical life) on the other (Hegel 286-91). The "normal" subject is requested to understand and likewise to accept that, for example, economic competition is much "better" with rather than without a legal framework, considering that unregulated competition tends to endanger lives. For the bourgeois subject, relations to others are predominantly perceived as a neces-

sary precondition to satisfy one's own needs (Hegel 349). However, in so far as such relations are considered to be necessary, it seems again as if nature seeks to transcend itself.

What Hegel can tell us is a history of the cultivation of the bourgeois subject who strives towards an ethical order. Simultaneously, and by the aid of disciplinary power, ethicality organizes the cultivation of the bourgeois subject. To relate back to Eagleton, theology, pedagogy and politics are intertwined in this process. However, Eagleton's choice to exemplify this relationship with Schiller might be grounded in the fact that wherever Hegel speaks of *Sittlichkeit,* Schiller uses the word *Kultur* (culture).

At the end of this argumentative line of notions of culture/ethicality in German Idealism, Eagleton puts a big question mark. To his understanding, the idealistic view might be plausible and justifiable, but, at the same time it is closely entangled with ideology; the state is conceived of as a sphere in which conflicts have been settled without ever politicizing these conflicts. One of the most problematic points in this regard is the idea of relating maturity and temperance to culture, and of rendering cultivation a prerequisite to political participation and decision-making. Subordinating politics to the bourgeois-liberal notions of "culture" and "humanity" has the tendency to disparage certain forms of politics, in particular, those forms developed to challenge the paternalism resulting from this subordination. One may recall the European colonial rhetoric, which denied the oppressed people in the colonies the right to self-determination as long as these people were not "civilized" sufficiently.

Likewise, women and (other) dispossessed people were denied the right to vote for a long time, a policy which was justified by the argument that these "groups" lack proper cultural capabilities. Against this background, any rhetoric privileging culture to politics must be interpreted as a means of power and political interests, however, it is these political interests that produce "humanity" (*Culture* 7). Eagleton's critical commentary on notions of "culture" and "humanity" echoes Marx's critique of idealistic notions of the political state. Yet, it is remarkable that in the tradition of German Idealism "culture is neither dissociated from society nor wholly at one with it," rather, culture is both "a critique of social life" and "complicit with it" (*Culture* 8). For Eagleton, culture functions like what today would be labeled, hegemony:

> "[a mechanism] molding human subjects to the needs of a new kind of polity, remodeling them from the ground up into docile, moderate, high-minded, peace-loving, uncontentious, disinterested agents of that political order." (ibid.)

Culture operates as if it was a form of critique, "occupying an unregenerate society from within to break down its resistance to the motions of the spirit" (ibid.). To sum up, in line with German Idealism, it is still possible to understand culture in a double sense: Namely, as both a critique as well as an integrative power.

To clarify the logical status of the argument outlined so far: Any epistemological reflection on conceptual tensions and developments tends to appear as rough and as oversimplifying complex historical transformations. Yet, the development from work to self-discipline, and the stabilization of disciplinary regimes in the modern state represent a logical process. But what is Eagleton trying to tell us with this? German Idealism constructed a notion of culture that leaves room for both the critique of power relations and a simultaneous conciliation. However, the more dissonances arose between the German Idealism's conceptualization of state and society on the one hand, and the material reality of state and society on the other, the more obvious the idealistic side of "culture" became. As a result, the moments

of critique and integration began to separate from each another.

Cultivation through Civilization, and Culture as Critique of Modernity

In French and English Enlightenment the term "cultured" referred to a set of pleasing manners and customs as well as morality. This relationship was conceptualized as "civilization," a term borrowed from French language. Civilization was not conceived of as a privilege of a particular nation, but rather as something all human beings are intrinsically capable of learning. At the same time, the notion of civilization was connected to relations of improvement and moving forward to a bourgeois-enlightened world.

This understanding of "cultured"/civilization holds a descriptive element. Manners and customs can be described without outlining normative explanations on how and why individuals and collectives are to follow them. Thus, it is, for example, not a crime but simply a source for disgust and anger if someone belches in public. However, civilization also holds a normative and compulsory element. Rules to regulate human behavior make a sharp distinction between what is proper and what is not, and they are simply justified in so far as their absence would mean barbarism. In addition, proponents of the Enlightenment made a close linkage between civilized sociality and socialization. An individual cannot civilize the self on his/her own terms but needs social interaction. Somehow, there is an imperceptible shift in the notion of culture from the "cultured" or "cultivated" individual to politics and society as agents of cultivation. Both the understanding of civilization as transcending one nation's space and the normativity inherent to the notion of "civil" render the Enlightenment's view an universalistic approach (*Culture* 9).

However, modernity underwent changes, from the pre- and early era of industrialization to colonialism and imperialism. In these transformative processes "civilization" lost its innocent touch—because now it was the "civilized subject," who conquered other territories and subjugated the people of the colonies under the rule of slavery, oppression and exploitation. In other words, the notion of civilization with its normative content lost the power to convince. In order to bolster those normative contents, there was another word needed. "Culture" seemed to be a suitable notion whenever it was necessary to denote a difference from civilization.

Eagleton refers to two specific versions of a critique of civilization that made use of "culture" in the 19th century. One of these versions is the romantic pre-Marxist critique of industrial capitalism, while the other version is cultural pessimism. As for the latter, its proponents, such as Oswald Spengler, interpreted civilization as increasingly morally and normatively questionable as these transformations resulted in the devaluation of traditions and in degradation and brutalization. "Culture" was conceptualized as an opposition to the materialism inherent to occidental civilization and modernity. At the same time, cultural pessimism rendered culture to be the privilege of those who had not surrendered to the materialist *Zeitgeist*. The individuals were to be distinguished between those who "have culture" and those who "have not." In this way, culture was perceived in terms of individual ownership and became functionalized in sharp opposition to society and the negative course of social change. In this sense, however, culture was de-entangled from national society and politics. Paradoxically, this notion of "culture" is situated very closely with the notions of "cultured" and "civilization" as circulated during the early Enlightenment.

In the very moment when culture became a discursive weapon against modernity (be it embedded in normative-critical statements or be it as any kind of aristocratic refuge from the world), an additional tension arose. Civilization as the process

of permanent modernization holds the promise of an universal answer; civilization can reach everywhere and can be everywhere. "Culture" in contrast, is opposed to civilization and entails the powerful meaning of representing "the particular." Consequently, culture can be pluralized. Eagleton considers Herder as having invented the plural of culture (*Kulturen*). This linguistic creation resulted from some kind of "anti-colonialist penchant for suppressed 'exotic' societies" (*Culture* 12). The paradigm of equality between different nations and their specific cultures (whereby the value of a culture is simply to be a culture) appears to be a refusal of the universalist idea of the Enlightenment, which positioned one's own culture as being superior to those of the oppressed peoples (*Culture* 12-13). From this perspective, Herder opened a door for the romantic idealization of different cultures. In being suspicious of one's own modern culture, with its misguiding universalistic claims and its destructive power, Romantic thought molded the desire for an organic and intact society through projections and specific imaginations of "the other."

However, we know that such acts of projection can be twofold: on the one hand, they are connected to sympathizing with the "noble savages," whereas they serve, on the other hand, to justify political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural dispossession of the so-called "primitives;" sometimes, both discursive strategies are combined with each other. This twofold character of "culture," again, results from the fact that the notion provides both a cipher for criticisms and for legitimatizing or even veiling interests. In this regard, one more time we encounter the unity of the descriptive and normative elements of culture. Without any doubt, we can describe a particular culture as a whole and closed system; in the 19th century, cultures in plural were related (roughly) to (traditional) "ways of life." However, notions of tradition, community, solidarity, etc. which are not eliminable from "way of life" descriptions, embrace normative content. We may approve such content, especially if there is no reason to consider tradition, community or solidarity as essentially "bad." The apparent cultural relativism, which is often ascribed to postmodern thinking, obviously results from the ambiguities of modernity and the pluralization of the notion of culture.

It could be assumed that the pluralization of culture serves the purpose of avoiding cultural discrimination. However, Eagleton seems to see the danger in pluralizing cultures and warns of too much enthusiasm regarding difference. Tolerance comes at a price. Thus, it may be possible to find a culture that attracts us due to its fine social order, and there could be other cultures with social orders that do not harm our taste and political views, and so we deem them acceptable. But "generous pluralism," Eagleton argues, becomes extremely difficult when extended to any "police canteen culture" or to the historically "rich diversity of cultures of torture" (*Culture* 15). In short, to Eagleton's understanding, the pluralization of culture is nothing but formalism. At the same time, pluralization constitutes a contradiction of any positive and normative saturation of "culture."

Specialization: Culture and Art

Apart from both tendencies of culture, as a means of anti-capitalist critique and culture in plural, Eagleton discusses a third approach to culture, which is interesting in any endeavor to understand society: the tendency toward the specialization and narrowing of the notion of culture to mean art (*Culture* 15-16). In the era of Enlightenment, men and women of the bourgeois middle class saw it as compulsory to engage in music, painting and literature; these things were considered "imaginative pursuits" of the enlightened mind, and at the same time, a proof of belonging to those "cultured" persons. But, there was something more than these three fields. In the salon as more or less gen-

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dered space, the bourgeois public or "civil society" debated on what happened in the spheres of religion, science, philosophy, economy and politics, as well as art. However, especially music, painting, literature and other art forms were rendered as criteria for defining whether someone "has culture" or not. From my perspective, Eagleton's remark on the persistence of equating culture with arts is more than necessary. Just looking at terms such as "cultural politician" (Kulturpolitiker) or "minister for cultural affairs" we see that these agents are responsible for public funding and the regulation of art production and circulation. They do not care for philosophers and economists, for weavers, tailors and florists, nor do they pursue debates on the meaning of "culture." What preoccupies Eagleton, are the following questions: If the meaning of culture, "lost," for example, philosophy and science, what does this say about philosophy and science? And if "culture" is stripped of a wide range of fields, and is at the end only confined to a "tiny proportion of men and women" engaging in art activities and thus "producing culture", what does this say about our society? (*Culture* 16)
It seems as if Eagleton is walking the path of the dialectic of Enlightenment. We do have a capitalist economy with obvious destructive effects, and we own the natural sciences and technical disciplines that not only serve to improve the human condition, but are also responsible for the tremendous ecological devastation, the invention of weapons of mass destruction and surveillance technologies. The value of the state of law and of democratic institutions cannot obstruct the view of the rule of bureaucracy and technocracy that has mantled politics. The professionalization that science and philosophy underwent within the process of academic division of labor, as well as the increasing market-based utilization of knowledge production in these fields, lead to a "drying-out" of the channels that connected them to public interests.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment's notion of culture, in the sense of cultivation through civilization in a movement towards progress, clashes with the realities of capitalist modernity based on economic exploitation, colonialism and imperialism. Likewise, the alternative notions of "culture" fail: On the one hand, notions considering "culture" as a critique of modernity entail the risk of undermining the relationship between culture and society. On the other hand, the pluralization of "culture" tends to lose the normative momentum of the notion. This specialization eventually makes "culture" the privilege of "creative" minds. From this perspective, German Idealism has provided a way for reconciling these different notions, as it conceived of "culture" as both a critical and an integrative power. However, this option also fails because idealist imaginations of the political state stand in harsh contrast to the materialization of the state.
What Eagleton teaches us is that we cannot think of "culture" without considering and addressing its conceptual contradictions. This conclusion is, however, not a justification of any kind of intellectual poverty. Rather, it recognizes that the various and contesting notions of culture, as constructed in modernity, represent the material contradictions inherent to capitalist society. Eagleton's offer is a *materialist idea of culture*, which is based on consciousness in terms of those aforementioned contradictions and the reasons supporting them. At the same time, a *materialist cultural theory* also tends to formulate, explicitly or implicitly, a social utopia in so far as the contradictions of "culture" give rise to hope—more precisely, the hope that contradictions can be translated into an impulse for the radical reconfiguration of society (*Culture* 27-28).

Notes

[1] *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991), and *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996).

[2] The difference between nature and culture can be exemplified by the aid of Aristotle's theory of causality. Whereas, for example, the production of artifacts involves the efficient or moving cause (agent) and is clearly separated from the formal cause, in natural processes, both principles of causation coincide.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6332

FOCUS

Isomorphism in Provision of Culture: The Case of Municipalities in Istanbul and Their Cultural Centers[1]

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Regardless of the diminishing budgets for culture in Europe, Turkey has reinforced its investment in the cultural sphere, especially at the municipality level. Since 2000, 61 cultural centers have been opened in Istanbul alone. In spite of the growing cultural and artistic diversity and Turkish society's various demands in cultural services, the programs of Istanbul's cultural centers seem to converge. The apparent homogenization of Turkish cultural policies on a local, city, and national level serves as a starting point for investigating how isomorphism transpires to the provision of cultural services on the level of Istanbul's district municipalities. This study not only explains the role of district municipalities in the cultural field of Istanbul, but also argues that three interconnected concepts—democratization, professionalization, and marketization—promote cultural convergence.

Keywords: Cultural Policy; New Public Management; Municipalities; Cultural Centers; Istanbul; Turkey

Introduction

During the 2010 International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR), "Insomniac Isomorphia?," a paper about the increasing homogenization of Finnish cultural policy by Kangas et al., greatly captured my interest. At that time, I had recently detected the first isomorphic features in the provision of culture at the level of Istanbul's district municipalities in spite of the city's social, cultural, political and geographic diversity. Seeing similar isomorphism mechanisms operating in Finland and Turkey, encouraged me to scrutinize the incentives and processes that make organizations, even countries, converge. In this paper, which puts a special focus on the mechanisms that lead to isomorphism, I will argue that it is the three interconnected concepts of democratization, professionalization and marketization that promote cultural convergence at the local level of district municipalities.

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary, crosscutting and relational approach in order to understand and explain why and how isomorphism transpires to the provision of cultural services at the level of Istanbul's district municipalities. It benefits from "(new) institutional theory," which is at the intersection of sociology and organizational science, and draws from "isomorphism

theories" (DiMaggio and Powel) to explain the resemblance and the transformation of organizational structures within municipalities.

The article begins by conceptualizing democratization, marketization, and professionalization as the primary political, economic and social processes that dominate cultural policy making in Turkey. The subsequent section explains the role of district municipalities in Istanbul's cultural field, before proceeding with a case study that illustrates the isomorphism in the provision of culture by the 39 district municipalities of Istanbul. The article then attempts to connect the local level (district municipalities) with the city (the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality–IMM) and the national level (the Justice and Development Party Government–AKP) with reference to the cultural policy discourse and practices under the three mechanisms that create isomorphism. The article concludes by discussing the alternate role of legitimacy and competition as incentives behind isomorphism.

This contribution builds on empirical data gathered for my doctoral thesis and was mainly obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews and a cultural management formation training program (shortly Formation Program). The Formation Program, whose curricula I developed myself in connection with the Istanbul 2010 European Cultural Capital (ECC) program, involved the participation of 90 cultural administrators from Istanbul's district municipalities. I participated as a trainer and coordinator.

Overarching Processes: Democratization, Marketization and Professionalization

Cultural policy discourses and practices usually emerge in Turkey under the umbrella of *marketization*. On the local level of district municipalities, they range from the privatization of cultural services to putting cultural management of the centers out to tender. On the city level of the IMM, they span from the implementation of the "new public management" (NPM)[2] concept to massive urban reconstruction with the aim of establishing Istanbul as a global center. Finally on the national level of the present AKP government, these discourses and practices largely take the form of provisions designed to encourage private investment in the cultural sphere on the basis of incentive and sponsorship laws.

Professionalization emerges as both the requirement and consequence of cultural policy practices. Organizational structures, which must become standardized, at least to a certain extent, in order to compete with the private sector and even with themselves, have found legitimacy by adopting the practices of management science under the pretext of increasing efficiency and productivity. Practices aimed at implementing the NPM and the "good governance" approach, which is recommended by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have gone into effect with the reforms of metropolitan and district municipality legislation in Turkey. In doing so, they have also affected the supply of cultural services. As a result of these shifts, professionalization in cultural services has also been placed on the agenda of Istanbul district municipalities.

"Access to culture," "cultural rights" and "participation for all" are central issues of the *democratization* of culture, which only can be realized through national cultural policy and is therefore, first and foremost, the responsibility of the central government and other public institutions. Prerequisites for democratization, as outlined in numerous international treaties and charters signed by Turkey, include the empowerment of local governments and the transfer of certain cultural services. The AKP, unlike previous governments, clearly declared that its cultural polices will fit within the context of the aforementioned good governance principle and grant access to culture for everyone. However, democratization has been sidelined next

to privatization and marketization throughout its term in office.

New Player: District Municipalities in the Cultural Field of Istanbul

The AKP's cultural policies could be interpreted as "demoting the state's role in the cultural sector, from being the main producer and distributer to being a facilitator" (Aksoy, "The Atatürk Cultural Centre" 197), especially where it favors private enterprise. However, in the case of Istanbul, another public institution, the collection of municipalities, has taken over the state's role with great support by the government. Before discussing this further, it is important to remember three facts: Firstly, the cultural sector in Turkey has never been subsidized, aside from state institutions, such as the State Opera, Ballet and Orchestra. Secondly, the state still continues to invest in building cultural spaces as a continuation of the (modernist) tradition of building monuments in the form of sculptures or cultural centers. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has built 147 spaces for culture all around the country, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has opened 20 Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers abroad as new Turkish Institutes of Culture (Ince, "Isomorphism"). Thirdly, Istanbul holds a special place on the political agenda of the AKP, as the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the former Istanbul Metropolitan Municipalities' (IMM) mayor from 1994 to 1998. Thus, the relations and coordination between the IMM and national government improved operationally.

Throughout the history of municipalities in Turkey, the intertwined state of relations between the central government and the local administration has always been an area of conflict. Thus, with the aim of enabling its supporters to win the local municipal elections, ruling parties tend to introduce clientelist investments and changes. In the history of the AKP, the reverse has been true. The party won confidence and increased their local votes through a social practice that was termed "social municipalism," which has included free municipal aid packages, in-kind or in-cash donations to the poor, soup kitchens, etc. After becoming the ruling party in 2002, the AKP expanded the authority and responsibility of municipalities by issuing new laws and making other laws more effective in various fields including culture. This restructuring has been implemented via a series of transformative laws, such as the Financial Administration and Control Law No. 5018, the Special Provincial Administrations Law No. 5302, the Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 and the Municipality Law No. 5393. These transformative laws have been justified by referring to the increasing and diversifying demands of Turkish society due to its profound development from an industrial society to an information-based society. This appears to be the rationale behind an extensive reconstruction of public administration that is centered on increasing effectiveness and participation, but also on retaining the AKP's power at the local level. This is supported by "the transformation of the economy and administration" (globalization), "the competitive structure of the private sector and its achievements" (privatization), and "social criticism and the development of civil society" (de-etatization) in addition to Turkey's democratization goals on the way to its EU accession (Ince, "Cultural Policies" 238).

In addition to international-focused reasoning, other internal problems relating to Turkey's administrative structure are listed in the rationale section (B.02.0.KKG.0.10/101-751/5767) of the 2003 NPM package as "improper division of labor between the central administration and local administrations; inadequate financial resources, organizational and staff-related problems; unnecessary tutelage practices on the part of the central administration, insufficient transparency and participation; and excessive dependency on the central administra-

tion." As a solution to a highly centralized and bulky administrative structure, the AKP has used NPM tools, such as strategic planning, annual activity plans and budget, performance indicators, and the collection of statistics.

Due to these competition and NPM-driven changes, municipalities have become proactive, flexible and entrepreneurial. They began to cooperate with large investors, developers and consortiums of private firms (Uzun). They have also initiated and led large-scale urban development projects, such as the renewal of historic sites (Dincer). However, as Harvey (15) underlines during the shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism, "new forms or paths of capital accumulation have to be explored" to secure a continuous capital flow in order to mark the city as global. In the case of Istanbul, several attempts have been made including the pursuit of becoming the economic, touristic or congressional capital of the world.

Over the last decade, culture has been identified as the new path. The designation of Istanbul by the European Union as the European Capital of Culture (ECC) 2010, which underlined the accumulated cultural and artistic supply in the city, fostered increasing private sector investment and great interest in reappraising the city's historical and industrial heritage. The ECC 2010 Agency suggested a collaborative urban management style with new projects and furthermore sought to open the discussion about the "culture-led urban regeneration" ideal. However, in such a competitive environment, the city's cultural potential that had been unified under the stimulating effects of ECC 2010, was taken as a unique opportunity by the public authorities and resulted in an "instrumentalization and exploitation" of the project by the government and the IMM "for the purposes of city marketing, tourism and gentrification" (Aksoy, "Riding the Storm" 95). Continuous efforts to position Istanbul as a culture/tourism/congress center in the race among global cities have redefined the city's relationship with district municipalities on the local level, as well as its national position.

As of today, there are 39 district municipalities in Istanbul, all of which are diverse in terms of their demographic, geographic, economic and even ideological characteristics. During the last local elections in 2014, the AKP won 25 district municipalities, followed by the Republican People's Party (CHP), which secured control over 14 municipalities. Presently, 32 of the 39 district municipalities have at least one cultural center. The total number of cultural centers in Istanbul is 74, 61 of which were built after 2000.

Those cultural centers are mostly designed as multi-purpose complexes that exhibit theatre, film screenings, concerts, talks and conferences and even educational programs. Considering that municipalities are traditionally concerned with the infrastructural needs of its inhabitants as well as with the growing economy of construction in Turkey, it is not surprising that new cultural venues are built. These cultural centers, in fact, welcome 4.4 million visitors per year and answer to the cultural needs of the 15 million inhabitants of Istanbul (Aksoy and Enlil). However, when looking more closely and comparatively at the cultural provision in those cultural centers, it is surprising to find that their (monthly/yearly) programs converge. Despite Istanbul's cultural and artistic diversity and the multiple-demands of the inhabitants of the districts, the programs are nearly identical.

Isomorphic Cultural Centers

Isomorphism as a concept refers to "the process of homogenization" and is widely used in new institutional theory to define increasing convergence between institutions or organizations. DiMaggio and Powel (148, 150) explain similarity among organizational forms and practices with three "isomorphism mechanisms:" coercive, mimetic and normative. They look at

the organizational fields, which are constituted by producers, suppliers, resource and product consumers and regulatory agencies in aggregate, and they argue that institutions become similar as they compete not only for resources and customers but also for political power and institutional legitimacy.

For private institutions, which operate under the market conditions that stipulate competitiveness, the rules of competition require convergence. For public institutions, despite being bureaucratic structures, their status of legitimacy has become a driving force as they have also become marketized. Thus, the state of isomorphism at municipality cultural centers stems from both the conditions of competition and the need to ensure legitimacy. The following section will explore these three mechanisms that create isomorphism regarding organizational structures, norms, staff, cultural management models and strategic plans under the NPM reform.

1. Social Municipalism Under NPM

"*Coercive isomorphism* [emphasis added] results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other institutions upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function." (DiMaggio and Powel 150). The district cultural centers are tied to the legal and organizational structure of the municipalities.

The Municipality Law and NPM are the basic formal constraints that shape the provision of culture at municipalities. The Law No. 5393 defines the organizational structure of the municipalities and places cultural services under the local Directorate of Social and Cultural Affairs. Each directorate has to act in accordance with the five-year-period-strategic-plan prepared by the district municipalities. The budget, personnel law and, most importantly, the political ideology usually professed by the mayor are other factors that create limitations. These directorates must prepare annual performance programs and activity reports, so that tasks and the approximate budget of each activity, including measurable outcomes, can be identified from the outset.

One of the requirements of the NPM, starting from 2005 onward, states that all public institutions including the municipalities must prepare a strategic plan. Those strategic reports then must be published on the municipal websites for the sake of "transparency." The activity reports depicting the performance of all municipality departments are published online or in print at the end of each year. So it is expected that the implementation of the plans, each constituting a political document, can be assessed by means of the activity and performance reports prepared at the end of the year. However, these documents are more likely to act as a new means of communication (a.k.a. as a propaganda tool).

Conforming to NPM practices, construction and administration decisions regarding cultural centers are made in-line with the objectives declared in the municipality's strategic plan. The importance that district municipalities assign to culture can be discerned from the goals outlined in the strategic plan, as well as from their actual investments and accomplished operations. At this point, the cultural centers stand out as the municipalities' "visible" and significant investment.

District municipalities incorporate culture into their visions, missions or strategies with a variety of objectives. Culture is associated with objectives such as urban or social transformation or improved quality of life and communication. In almost every municipality, cultural services are accentuated by image and are used as tools for promotion, competition or diversification. However, activities geared towards increasing the district's cultural wealth and the production of culture, which may be called "culture for the sake of culture," are limited.

Coercive isomorphism also stems from organizations complying with the cultural expectations of the society within which they operate. Their strategic plans have the potential to serve the democratization of policymaking. As these plans are intended to constitute the public administrations' core products, all public administration units as well as all relevant stakeholders are expected to be involved in the preparation processes. In the context of municipal cultural services, locality and cultural rights are the key indicators that help to determine and involve all relevant parties. At this point, it is important to note that the concept of locality has been revised in the new Municipal Law No. 5393. Locality, which was previously defined in this way: "everybody is a citizen of the province where he or she originates from [registered to]," has now been changed to "everybody is a citizen of the province he or she inhabits."

However, looking at the programs of cultural centers that were established in order to meet the cultural needs of the local population, it becomes apparent that the events and services offered do not pay special attention to the above-mentioned needs and demands. The cultural services are secondary among all other services, thus the abovementioned indicators of democratization of culture act as informal pressures only if the cultural manager of a certain district municipality pays special attention to those pressures. Unfortunately, the fieldwork shows that most of the municipalities do not undertake any professional research to identify the citizens' expectations. Instead, they tend to act based on their personal observation and generalizations. The participatory approach is a must when making a strategic plan. In order to engage every segment of the district, the cultural managers are expected to involve each stakeholder. However, most of them seem to be selectively choosing only fellow townspeople associations (*hemşehri dernekleri*) while leaving out the demands and needs of ethnicity, gender, right/issue based associations. That is to say, rather than complying with everyone's cultural rights as an obligation of democracy, cultural expectations of the majority are identified or presumed in order to ensure a legitimacy without taking any risk. Consequently, the outcome of the cultural programs is rather isomorphic with generic (theatre, cinema, music) performances and traditional representation of localities, which have little to do with the true current identity of the district.

Another structural factor that leads to coercive isomorphism is the organization of cultural services. Both cultural and social services are provided under the same division and are usually administered by one and the same manager. They therefore share a budget. Despite the qualitative differences between the two types of services, cultural services are often confused with social services. Most of the activities performed under the name of cultural services, most noticeably, are undertaken with a social objective that fits in the AKP's "social municipalism" ideal. Cultural services appear to be less important. Many cultural operators have underlined that cultural needs will only be addressed once social needs are met. As a result of this approach, public relations and publicity packages are formed by municipalities, which then present cultural services together with social services. Thus, cultural centers become multipurpose in the sense that they supply a combination of social and cultural services.

2. Bad Mimesis in Program and Operations

The *mimetic isomorphism* mostly occurs as a response to uncertainty. It designates the process when an organization imitates similar organizations in order to be more legitimate and successful (DiMaggio and Powel 151). In a city like Istanbul, where the cultural sphere is becoming richer each day through an increasing number of

companies, foundations, associations and cooperatives working in the cultural sector, as well as through the virtue of a critical mass of artistic and creative people, it seems that there are many possible models for organizations to follow. However, looking at the cultural programs of municipal cultural centers, a generic range of activities and a conventional selection of events and content manifests itself despite the diversity of artistic supply and also despite new and/or contemporary artistic production.

Considering the structure and conditions of the district municipalities' cultural divisions, this genericism and convention is not surprising. Their cultural centers are more limited than independent art initiatives and private companies. As in all municipal service procurement, cultural services are also subject to tender. Cultural departments schedule the proposed activities according to their strategic and performance plans in the event calendar. An administrative or service procurement, technical terms of reference (TOR), is drafted for relevant activities at least 70 days in advance and announced to the public. The applicant who finally wins the tender and who is commissioned to undertake the given cultural services is selected on the basis of "the most advantageous offer economically, solely on the basis of the quoted price" (Atmaca). In short, for cultural services there are no binding or distinctive criteria save for these aforementioned technical TORs. The municipality can procure a piano in the same manner as it buys construction equipment or can put to tender the management of cultural centers just as it opens a fixed marketplace management to tender. The subcontracting of expert services, which goes as far as hiring artists by tender, is criticized.

Municipalities regard their cultural centers as an extension of their jurisdiction and apply whatever procedure they employ for managing other activities. The municipality's cultural services department presents its annual program and budget in the framework of a five-year-strategic-plan for approval every year. When it is approved, they start to develop the content and identify the appropriate companies, etc. for each year. At the same time, the municipal cultural centers' mandate to balance the supply in the cultural sphere with the demands of the local population imparts increasing responsibility on the staff of these institutions. In this respect, there are three cultural management models used for provision of cultural services. The most common is the centralized model according to which all cultural services are provided within the organizational structure of the municipality. As there is no expert staff position for cultural management in these municipalities, one of the members of the staff is appointed as cultural operator/manager and is expected to apply the above-mentioned tender procedure.

A second option, the privatization of cultural services, has also been applied to some degree. For example, two municipalities have established municipal enterprises to procure cultural services, while another prefers to privatize only the management of its cultural centers through a subcontractor system. Only one municipality has privatized the provision of all of its cultural services. Since 2004, municipalities have been drafting an annual cultural service procurement technical TOR, which involves the recruitment of administrative staff for the cultural centers as well as consultants. With this model, the municipality aims for harmony and collaboration among its staff, which includes both public administrators and private persons who have been hired through tenders. Municipal administrators create and control the budget while private staff run the operation.

The third model is only applied by one municipality. Here, the programs of the cultural centers are determined by an advisory art council that is comprised of

the managers of its cultural centers, the cultural directorate, representatives of private companies, and two artistic (music and theatre) consultants. This model is the most autonomous in the sense that the municipal administration only superintends the company and does not intervene in the content and programing of its cultural services. Finally, a few municipalities try to fill the gap in expertise by recruiting specialists, usually as consultants to the mayors.

The lack of cultural management expertise is usually masked by imitating similar institutions. Most of the municipalities, which choose to follow the centralized model, tend to draft their programs after more congruent counterparts, especially the IMM. The IMM sets an example for most district municipalities and meets a higher standard in terms of cultural service supply due to its accumulated experience via the directorate of culture and Culture Co. (Istanbul Cultural and Artistic Products Corporation –*Kültür A.Ş.*) that was founded in 1989.

District municipalities and Culture Co. collaborate on a program-level at the cultural centers built and operated by the latter. These programs are sometimes circulated as "readymade packages" at municipal level. There are currently nine district municipality cultural centers that are operated by Culture Co. Still, some municipalities complain that they cannot exert proper authority over cultural centers operated by the IMM, and they aim to take more control with time. But as the IMM cultural director underlines, they are only able to develop programs based on their own capacity or the knowledge and propriety of the district mayor. This in turn implies that they feature events of less cultural/artistic quality as compared to the programs under the management of the metropolitan municipality.

It can also be observed that only a few municipalities follow the model of private cultural centers. Given the objective of wide accessibility, budgetary restrictions and high ticket prices are the major obstacles to privatization. These similarities in conception and operation result in isomorphic outputs.

Municipalities seldom attempt to make use of every local emerging cultural representation; however, they like to privilege populist demands that epitomize masses. Yet, this does not explain the conventionality of the selection of cultural content. For example, there is actually no difference between the "Commemoration Ceremony for the National Hero Atatürk" organized by the republican CHP and a "Holy Birth Week for the Prophet Muhammad" organized by the conservative AKP. Despite different political orientations, the relevant organizational and political conditions yield similar results. As DiMaggio and Powell point out, even though there is a serious quest to distinguish oneself from others, in effect, organizations only have a limited selection to choose from. Therefore, new organizations often end up modeling themselves on their predecessors. As the case of the Istanbul district municipalities shows, some districts tend to imitate the IMM or other district municipalities, preferably from the same political party. They do so rather than taking any risks of being potentially perceived as controversial. Certain districts, which claim to represent Istanbul's cultural heritage, praise and distinguish their own district from others and adopt an entrepreneurial municipal administration approach in order to transcend the boundaries of their own district. Their mayors assert the districts' significance for Istanbul (even in an international sense). This rhetoric and implicit competition is due to the public relations and publicity aspects of cultural events. The visibility of such activities can pave a longterm path towards parliament and can thereby serve a mayor's career. In the decision-making stages of programs on similar scales, patronage and favoritism may also lead to isomorphism.

These cited examples show that efficiency and performance as well as patronage and favoritism have become prominent in the centers' cultural management. On the one hand, the needs and desires of the local population are bypassed in the decision-making processes. On the other hand, the supply of rich and new cultural and artistic elements in the city have been ignored due to the cultural operators' lack of curiosity or artistic expertise.

3. Vocational Solidarity as Opposed to Expertise

The *normative isomorphism* originates from professionalism in two ways: firstly, from the need for formal education or a training to qualify for an occupation; secondly, from the development of professional collaborations among the members of occupations pursuing professional autonomy, which may in turn facilitate the rapid spread of new models. Besides these normative pressures, increasing job competition leads to the recruitment of similar individuals for certain positions or to the selection of staff members based on certain occupational criteria (DiMaggio and Powel 152).

Cultural management, which emerged as a field of expertise in Turkey in the early 2000s (Ada) has been applied by municipal staff based on knowledge and skills that were accumulated over years of experience and observation. The Formation Program—mentioned in the introductory section—was the first example of its kind. It was specially designed to introduce recent cultural management theory and practices with references to private and civil examples taken from the cultural scene.

The Formation Program brought together 90 cultural managers from different districts and public institutions in Istanbul, including the IMM, Culture Co., the Istanbul Metropolitan Planning Center, the IMM City Theatre, Arts and Vocational Training Courses of the IMM, in addition to the 78 staff members working at related departments in the 36 district municipalities. Most of these cultural managers have a background in social sciences, literature or communication, which has prepared them for the organization of cultural activities. Over the course of 18 weeks, the Formation Program enabled them to meet and discuss the various aspects and problems of the cultural sector and cultural management and allowed them to establish a network of enduring partnerships.

Subsequent observations show that the district municipality cultural managers, most of them participants in the Formation Program, continue to meet about the commonalities among their vocations and their responsibilities (Rotahaber). However, all the participants were members of the same political party in addition to the IMM cultural director. Considering that the IMM cultural director represents the city level, this once again validates the hypotheses about the mimetic relationship between these levels. Furthermore, it indicates that having the same ideological background has a role in such solidarity consolidation. Whether this collaboration can prevent the shortcuts and imitation arising from vocational solidarity remains an unanswered question.

As the case-study shows, the cultural operators of district municipalities place emphasis on developing their managerial and entrepreneurial skills over diversifying the content of their cultural programs. They furthermore do not open themselves to new companies and are not innovative in terms of new artistic productions. This is the result of the changing definition of professionalism as a consequence of NPM, which defines professionalism as "the capacity to execute their profession as an expertise" i.e. to complete the job effectively and productively. The bureaucracy-based rationality in organizations has been replaced by a market-based one. Most of the staff of these public institutions have become experts (bureaucrats) in their fields through years of expe-

rience. Recalling Weber's definition of bureaucratic organizations as "knowing but unable to learn," it will take these staff members some time to adapt to their new situation (Weber).

Conclusion: Interplay Between Levels

Over the last decade, Istanbul's district municipalities have contributed to the momentum of urban transformation through the establishment of cultural centers. Among isomorphic mechanisms, imitation is the most frequently employed method in Istanbul. The coercive and normative forms of isomorphism follow mimetic isomorphism. District municipality cultural managers share particular approaches due to the vocational collaborations they have formed and by virtue of using the same supply pool. Even though cultural supply in Istanbul is rich and multidimensional, limitations in provision arise from regulations, budgets, the tandem acts that district municipalities have to abide by, as well as the intermediary institution or the cultural management model they have chosen and, finally, the experience of their staff.

The present study shows that the use of cultural supply throughout the various districts bears great similarity. This convergence between different district municipality administrations, even if dominated by different political parties, runs counter to the different local economic and socio-cultural conditions as well as to the growing and diversifying cultural production and demand in Istanbul.

This investigation also confirms that legitimization and competition are two incentives driving isomorphism, as DiMaggio and Powel noted in the 1980s. In Turkey, where marketization and professionalization together with NPM are changing cultural policy practices, competition becomes more important than legitimization. Legitimization in Turkish cultural policies usually refers to democratization processes, which are limited to discourse.

The interplay between different levels of cultural policy occurs as a result of a duty-authority relationship between the district municipalities, which on a larger scale, bonds the IMM and the national government. In the case of Istanbul, this relationship forms a monolithic whole, since all levels of government are under the control of the same political party. This unity manifests itself as a "power block" particularly in the cultural sphere, which is characterized by a strong harmony and collaboration between the government, the IMM and the AKP district municipalities. However, this ideological factor is not the sole reason for the isomorphism. Indeed, CHP municipalities also succumb to the same isomorphic structures. Including political, economic and social processes within the perspective, I have explored the phenomenon of isomorphism in relation to democratization, marketization and professionalization. Choices and decisions relevant for the cultural sphere are linked to democratization, marketization and professionalization. The imitation and integration of these, albeit with certain variations at every level, leads to isomorphism. To summarize these processes and the accompanying transformations in the cultural sphere: The cultural centers managed by municipalities highlight the democratization process as they are the most immediate local governance unit and are therefore most relevant for cultural rights and cultural democracy as foreseen by supranational and international treaties. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the last decade has seen democratization being linked, at least discursively by the state, to access to culture for all and to decentralization in the field of cultural policy.

In practice, however, marketization has been more readily realized by the state and other public actors than democratization and professionalization. The alteration of public administration in accordance with market conditions leads to an NPM

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model. This then promotes the professionalization of public personnel in line with criteria such as strategy, performance, productivity, effectiveness. Those who work in the cultural field are under pressure to excel in public management as well as to professionalize vocationally in order to remain competitive amidst the increasing supply and demand dynamic of the cultural sphere and the increasing number of private cultural centers and public district centers. The proliferation of cultural management programs at undergraduate and graduate levels in Turkey and special programs targeting relevant professional groups is also an indicator of this situation. This research reveals that, in the context of a broad consensus among all levels of public authorities and private enterprises regarding the intended globalization of Istanbul, such benchmarks as a financial capital, a congressional city, a tourism center, etc., show that culture is gradually gaining in significance.

Notes

[1] This article is the shortened version of a paper presented by the author in 2012. Altough four years have passed, not much has changed. The provision of culture in Istanbul's cultural centers still lacks diversity and the above-mentioned mechanisms of isomorphism remain in place. Cultural provision has indeed become even more homogenized due to the increasing ideologic pressure from the AKP.

[2] *New public management* (NPM), *management* techniques and practices drawn mainly from the private sector, are increasingly seen as a global phenomenon. NPM reforms shift the emphasis from traditional public administration to public management.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6331

From Dissensus to Conviviality: Cultural Politics of Difference in Turkey

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Political developments in Turkey have sparked unprecedented international media attention after the failed coup d'état in July 2016. Coverage tends to focus on the draconic crackdown and restrictions that include academic work and cultural production. This article highlights articulations of dissensus from among the vivid community of cultural producers and takes a look at the uneasy relation between cultural politics, cultural policies and *Kulturkampf*. Drawing on work by Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, Jacques Rancière and Cornel West, I attempt to discuss the theoretical dimensions of a new cultural politics of difference in Turkey that seeks to negotiate alterity and work towards a culture of conviviality in the face of ever-increasing adversities.

Keywords: Cultural Politics; Conviviality; Alterity; Dissensus; Turkey

Troubled Attempts: Writing About Culture in the Face of a Witch-Hunt

The following article is the result of a troubled attempt to discuss the concept of culture in the context of contemporary Turkey. During the months I have been drafting the original article for this journal, the situation in Turkey has been deteriorating rapidly in front of my eyes. While a number of cities in the Kurdish East were literally razed to the ground in the course of a military campaign (DW,18 May 2016),[1] reckless suicide bomb attacks have repeatedly hit the heart of the major urban centres of Western Turkey. The elected parliament has largely been bypassed by the ubiquitous president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has relentlessly orchestrated crackdowns on opponents and dissidents, inculding Kurds, the left, secularists and the followers of his former ally, the preacher Fethullah Gülen. The German political analyst Burak Çopur argues that present-day Turkey must be classified as a full-fledged dictatorship (Spiegel, 21 July 2016). Novelist Orhan Pamuk wrote in an article for *La Reppublica* that "freedom of thought no longer exists. We are moving from the rule of law towards a regime of terror at a rapid pace" (Zeit,11 Sept. 2016). In September 2016, the central administration appointed 'trustees' to replace the elected mayors of twenty-eight munici-

palities and act on behalf of the central government (Reuters, 11 Sept. 2016). Can Dündar, a senior news editor and publicist now living in exile, warned in an opinion piece in the *Guardian* less than a week after the government's concerted reaction to the attempted coup on 15 July 2016 that the mass dismissals, suspensions and arrests of civil servants amounted to "the biggest witch-hunt in the history of the republic" (Guardian, 22 July 2016).

Dündar's seeming hyperbole was in fact well-founded and can now be thoroughly backed by figures. More than 100,000 civil servants have been suspended or permanently dismissed (BBC, 2. Sept. 2016). Among them are at least 2,346 university staff, including forty-four who signed a petition for the resumption of peace talks between the government and the Kurdish guerrilla forces half a year before the failed coup (BBC Türkçe, 2 Sept. 2016). The first wave of purges focused on individuals accused of affiliation with Fethullah Gülen's vast network, or *cemaat*. In a second wave, 11,500 school teachers were suspended in the wake of Erdoğan's "largest operation against Kurds" (DW, 8 Sept. 2016). Among this latter group range notable writers like the Kurdish poet Lal Laleş, the award-winning storywriter Murat Özyaşar, Kemal Varol, author of acclaimed graphic novels, and the prominent novelist Yavuz Ekinci (KültürServisi, 12 Sept. 2016; Gazeteduvar 9 Sept. 2016). Özyaşar was held in detention on fuzzy terror charges for one week (Hürriyet, 7 Oct. 2016).

Doubtlessly, many readers of this journal will personally know people affected by the purges. As we receive news on a daily basis about colleagues, friends and esteemed public figures who have been prevented from leaving the country or forced into exile, removed from their positions or imprisoned, it becomes increasingly impossible to write about cultural production, cultural policies or cultural politics in the ordinary sense. I have therefore decided to change the focus of my article and look at the stance that some prominent scholars and culture practitioners have been taking in their respective fields, which are increasingly defined by resistance and repression. Scholars who look at the cultural production of Turkey through the lens of Cultural Studies are thus invited to take a leap from reading and critiquing works of art or scholarship for their political implications towards reading and critiquing, and where possible supporting, very mundane and concrete acts of political defiance for what they also and perhaps essentially are: vibrant and volatile expressions of *cultural practice*. Departing from a discussion of a functional concept of culture, I will try to contextualize Paul Gilroy's 'culture of conviviality' within present-day Turkey. I will then have a look at articulations of cultural practitioners against the backdrop of Rancière's concept of 'dissensus' and finally read the position some prominent and incriminated public intellectuals in Turkey have taken within the framework of Cornel West's 'new cultural politics of difference.'

Doing Culture, Doing Democracy: The Functional Approach

Cultural Studies paradoxically offers no handy definition of culture. Prominent authors in the field mostly discuss the extension and intension of the concept of 'culture' in its relation with other concepts such as ideology, identity or power. Accordingly, I have focused on a selection of juxtapositions, namely *convivial culture*, *cultural production*, *cultural policy* and *cultural politics* that all place 'culture' in the context of the recent political conflict in Turkey. I shall suggest that 'culture' can be regarded, to adopt some terminology coined by the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer in 1910, not as a *Substanzbegriff* (a concept describing the essence of its object) but as a *Funktionsbegriff* (a concept that seeks to describe objects in their relations with each other). Cassirer, departing from a discussion of

numbers, was drawing attention to the fact "that there is a system of ideal objects whose content is exhausted in their mutual relations," and the "'essence' of the numbers is completely expressed in their positions" (60).

As a case in point, the popular politician Selahattin Demirtaş, head of a group of controversially impeached representatives of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, HDP), gave a lecture at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin about "Democracy in Turkey in the Wake of the EU's Refugee Deal" on 13 April 2016. He authoritatively condemned the human rights violations committed by the Turkish security forces. He answered an audience question about his position on human rights violations perpetrated by the Kurdish guerrilla movement Kurdistan Workers's Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) by referring to a 'culture of democracy' or 'democratic culture' that all political players, including the Kurdish movement, would have to adopt so that human rights violations diminish and the conflict could eventually be resolved through peaceful means.

While he qualified that both formal and non-formal education would have to commit themselves to building this culture of democracy, thus locating 'culture' chiefly in the ambit of arts and education, it is obvious that in his reading, an armed political conflict can hinge on a specific kind of shared *culture* that various sections of Turkish and Kurdish society commonly partake in across existing boundaries: either a culture of hatred and *othering* that would perpetuate the conflict, or a culture of understanding and confidence-building that might help put an end to the conflict. I did not get the chance to ask him what exactly he meant by 'democratic culture'. But I can only surmise that the exact quality of 'democratic culture' would likely be defined, in its turn, through its functional capacity to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution and instil mutual respect for the human rights of the Other. I posit that this requirement, however, does not necessarily amount to an instrumentalist view of 'culture,' subordinating it to political strategies and vested interests, but rather opens up to a functional reading of what culture is and what culture does (or how one does culture)[2] through its multiple relations with intersectional social issues such as ethnicity and race, gender, class, religious diversity, sexual minority rights, etc. All these are on the HDP's agenda since it established itself as a platform with a gender quota of 40%, on which, next to liberationist Kurdish politicians, LGBTTI activists and ethnic Armenian, Syriac, Greek and Roma representatives got elected into Turkish parliament. The functional approach can be opposed to an essentialist notion of what "Turkish culture" or "Kurdish culture" should normatively be, or can be employed as an alternative to the widespread invocation of a performative such as "our common Islamic culture." It corresponds with the anthropological interest in "the ongoing creation of new forms in the modern world Culture of cultures" as expressed by Marshall Sahlins (Sahlins xx), "with cultures disappearing just as we are learning how to perceive them, and then reappearing in ways we had never imagined." (Sahlins xxi)

Building the Present in the Future: Conviviality as Proleptic Movement

Demirtaş's particular mention of 'democratic culture' as a priority task for policy makers and grassroots activists seems to correspond with the idea of *convivial culture*, as suggested by the renowned Black British Cultural Studies writer Paul Gilroy as an antidote to what he diagnosed as *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005): the failure of Great Britain to mourn the loss of its empire, resulting in a condition that reproduces in the present an imperial impulse directed against immigrants. British postcolonial melancholia, to be sure, cannot

be equated with the overt nationalist aggression and religious zeal that have been unleashed in Turkey since the renewed escalation of the armed conflict between government forces and the PKK in summer 2015 and the unprecedented frequency of terrorist attacks on civilians that are rapidly destroying the prospects of living together. But at the heart of both phenomena lies an unwillingness to accept a fundamental reality: that historical power relations render the desired homogeneity of imagined communities impossible and turn into an existential imperative the day-to-day negotiation of alterity.[3] The concept of conviviality refers to "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (Gilroy, *Melancholia* xv). Gilroy describes 'convivial culture' as a conscious way of building upon everyday practices ordinary people have, in the past, been employing to negotiate alterity and solve interpersonal conflicts in diverse neighbourhoods for decades. The idea of convivial culture is rooted in acknowledging

> "the fact of that kind of creative and intuitive capacity among ordinary people, who manage those tensions", in other words "the fact that there were spontaneous ways in which many of these problems, the problems that we're now told are inevitable features of a clash of civilisations, cultures and outlooks, that those same problems melted away in the face of a kind of clankingly obvious sense of human sameness." (Gilroy, *Crimes* 6)

On the other hand, the project of convivial culture must be rooted in acknowledging that the *denial* of structural racism at work can sometimes be a bigger problem than the racism itself, because people can find spontaneous ways to deal with its consequences for interpersonal relations *unless* they choose to explain it away (6).

This seemingly vernacular definition contains a number of noteworthy aspects: (1) Convivial culture is nurtured by memories and positive experiences that "ordinary people" have already made with negotiating alterity. Unlike some government-devised diversity programs, it does not come as a novel policy superimposed on clueless segments of society. (2) Convivial culture is not exhaustively constituted by existing (or remembered) practices; it is not a revival of tradition, but a project oriented towards a more liveable future that must be built around conscious decisions. (3) Convivial culture, while putting emphasis on the successful elements of conviviality in a given society and cherishing the "creative and intuitive capacity" of humans to celebrate a "sense of human sameness" vis-á-vis differences and alterities, rejects romanticist notions of sameness, which might downplay or obliterate actual structures that oppress, exclude and discriminate against certain social groups irrespective of what might be called the realm of good intentions.

Gilroy's usage of 'culture' as a set of everyday practices and resources that ordinary people have access to reverberates with Richard Hoggart's famous description of culture as "the whole way of life of a society" (Hoggart 3)—a phrase that was seminal for British Cultural Studies—and yet leads towards a complex philosophical issue. Gilroy's 'culture' is not a mere set of givens, but an aspirational project pursued as a future solution to presently emerging conflicts (very much like Demirtaş' 'democratic culture'). In both cases, the project hinges on the concrete struggle of a disenfranchised minority group that seeks recognition for their aspiration of rights. In the case of Gilroy's postcolonial Britain, it is the people of colour that co-constitute a post-migrant society after the demise of the Empire, and in the case of Demirtaş' multi-ethnic Turkey, it is the Kurds and other minority groups demanding equality in the face of an aggressively expanding hegemony of the Turkish-Islamic religious right.

In his recent discussion of recognition (e.g. of the rights of a minority), Harvard philosopher Homi M. Bhabha asserts that "the aspiration of rights" on the part of "a group that seeks to empower its new collective identity […] should be read as a proleptic movement" (4). The proleptic is a rhetorical figure that basically posits as established something (a set of rights) that will yet have to be realized (fought for and granted) in the future.

> "It is the power of the proleptic to 'retrieve' into the 'present' what has been excised, excluded or oppressed—the heterogeneity of harm—as if it ensured and protected the 'future' of those whose pasts have been traumatised or terrorised. In this heuristic and humanistic act, rights are ideally one step ahead of their legal or instrumental efficacy." (4)

Consequently, the project of *culture*—as in convivial or democratic culture—can be claimed for a 'proleptic movement' centred around 'the aspiration of rights' of all disenfranchised groups, which builds on "what has been excised, excluded or oppressed" as much as it can draw on everyday practices ordinary people have already been employing in the past. If we follow Bhabha's argument, an articulation on the part of dissenting individuals that has 'democracy,' 'peace' or the 'fraternity of peoples' for a point of reference may employ the rhetorical figure of the proleptic rather than pinpointing positive law in Turkey or 'European standards.' Such a speech act in itself is a performative[4] that, by virtue of its being uttered in public, contributes to building the kind of ‚culture' it desires and reinstating experiences, memories and narrations that have been excised or suppressed.

This may at first sound convoluted, and the verbosity of contemporary theoretical prose might lead us to believe that it is rather remote from the working concepts of culture employed by field researchers. However, I contend that it corresponds with the view eminent anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has propounded in his article *What Is Anthropological Enlightenment?* (1999). Discussing the decrease in cultural diversity in the face of homogenizing globalization, Sahlins draws attention to the ever-emerging new forms of culture within the modern world Culture. In lieu of proposing a new anthropological model of cultural diversity, Sahlins quotes Paulin Hountondji, the Béninese philosopher who holds that "culture is not only a heritage, it's a project," and Abdou Touré, the Ivorian sociologist and diplomat who regards (local and regional) "Culture as a philosophy of life, and as an inexhaustible reservoir of responses to the world's challenges." On the perusal of the standard textbooks of Cultural Studies, you might not come across any definition that comes closer to the 'essence' of 'culture' than this; instead, you will learn about the history of the discipline of Cultural Studies and the various, changing contexts in which they have employed words that contain the component parts 'culture' or 'cultural', often motivated by their expressed desire to contribute to "the production of critical knowledge as a practice" (Hall, *Legacies* 264), and one must add here: a *cultural practice*.

Voicing Dissent, Ostracizing Dissent: Cultural Politics Versus Cultural Policies

The very concern of producing and circulating critical knowledge as a *cultural practice* has often been voiced by members of Turkey's beleaguered academia and cultural practitioners. The urgent desire to revive and care for a convivial culture in Turkey and work towards a novel culture of democracy has manifested itself in a variety of practices adopted by scholars and public intellectuals over the last years. There can be no doubt that the production of scholarly articles, films, novels and theatre plays along with the vibrant output of the contemporary fine arts community must all be grouped among these practices and deserve far more interna-

tional attention than they have received. But not only is the reach of these cultural expressions often limited; the very conditions of producing them are being progressively eroded by the political and social circumstances. I therefore suggest that we look at contemporary Turkish 'culture' neither in terms of lore and traditions, nor simply in terms of commodified output (novels, films, music, etc.), but as a Hoggartian 'whole way of life' of cultural producers, including their public visibility and moral choices vis-á-vis governmental cultural policies.

One rewarding example for this outlook in the field of popular culture is the pop singer Sıla Gençoğlu, who refused to perform at the AKP's mass orchestration of the national community under the moniker Democracy and Martyrs Rally (Pamuk/Tattersall) and critiqued the event as a cheap spectacle ("şov") (BirGün, 11 Aug. 2016). Not only was she exposed to massive digital hate speech, but her upcoming shows in several cities were cancelled by both municipal venues and private event organizers. As a reaction, she made available some of her music on the platform YouTube, thus sparking viral patterns of content sharing among oppositional young people (CNN, 9 Sept. 2016). It is not so much the content of her songs or the semiotics of her stage performance that are of interest here for a critical and scholarly reading, but the attitude she displayed by first refusing to be enlisted for the mass orchestration of the sovereign and then defying political pressure.

Two weeks after the failed coup, seven accomplished actors were removed from the ensemble of the İstanbul Şehir Tiyatroları, the long-standing publicly funded theatres of the city of Istanbul. Sevinç Erbulak, whose performance history spans over twenty- five years, dryly commented that "art is no vocation for cowards" (Haber7, 3. Aug. 2016).[5] Theatre producer Hakan Silahsızoğlu points out that everyone in the theatre crowd is certain that the removed actors had nothing to do with the allegedly Gülenist generals who plotted to overthrow the government. On top of that, twenty artists working on temporary contracts for the theatre were fired without any reason. As a result, most productions from the current repertoires can no longer be shown. Silahsızoğlu draws a connection between the dismissals and the government's plans to morph the de-centralized administration of publicly funded theatre, opera and ballet houses, and symphony orchestras into one central decision-making body dubbed the *Turkish Arts Council* (*TÜSAK*). According to a draft bill, the new Arts Council's eleven members would be directly appointed by the cabinet, liable to the president's approval, and act as the sole authority to take decisions concerning any of the publicly funded cultural institutions. They could close down theatres and dismantle orchestras, pick and reject every single artistic position in any publicly funded house (Diken, 30 Jan. 2014) and take decisions on the funding of individual projects (Çuhadar). The draft was leaked in 2014 and swiftly opposed by a number of directors of production houses, including the Turkish State Theatres' director general Mustafa Kurt, who resigned in protest—even though he had been appointed by the government eighteen months earlier to replace his unruly predecessor. The move to concentrate all authority over cultural production in one body under the ultimate authority of the president came after Erdoğan stated his intention to cut public funding and privatize all theatres, which in turn was his reaction to the public protest of over 5,000 theatre and cinema professionals demanding "a theatre free of fear" and an end to political interventions in programming, writes theatre critic Bahar Çuhadar. On 10 September 2016, director Ragıp Yavuz was removed from the Şehir Tiyatroları on the grounds that he had used social media to fuel political conflict about the theatre issue (Cumhuriyet).

The whole situation reflects the intricate interplay between *kulturkampf*, cultural policies and cultural politics. The hegemonic religious right increasingly interferes with the content of cultural production, and the vivid protest of professionals prompted the president to declare that "the State should not feed people who raise their voices against it" (Çuhadar). While this polemic attack in itself cannot qualify as an expression of cultural policy, it did set the tone for a reform bill that swiftly redefined the long-standing principles of public funding for cultural institutions and, pending its discussion in parliament, levels the field for a gradual rollback against administrative and artistic staff who voice dissent. On 5 September 2016, the Çanakkale Biennial was cancelled less than three weeks into its opening after the curator Beral Madra laid down her duties as director (Perlson). She had been singled out by AKP deputy Bülent Turan, who happens to be from Çanakkale, for tweets on her personal social media account that were critical of the government's orchestration of national unity after the thwarted coup. In Turan's reading, these utterances amounted to expressions of sympathy for the putschist Gülenists and at the same time betrayed signs of support for the (still legal) HDP. Turan's outraged tweets mobilized a plethora of hateful messages from people who had probably never heard of the Biennial before but wanted to make sure that they would tolerate no event curated by a traitor (Diken, 5 Sept. 2016). Ironically, the theme of the Biennial was migration and the curatorial thread aimed at rendering more visible the plight "of all the people who have been expelled from their homelands." (Çanakkale Bienali)

It is at this point that we cannot fail but notice a sharp conflict between the *cultural politics* pursued by professionals and activists with the aim of critically raising issues that deeply affect the social fabric of Turkey with its over three million Syrian refugees, and the *cultural policies* pursued by the government with the aim of removing these same professionals from any positions from which they can speak.

Dissensus as a Way of Avoiding the Police—Dissensus as a Way of Attracting the Police

So has resistance, under these circumstances, become futile? Political theorist Jacques Rancière points out that "it is the public activity that counteracts the tendency of every State to monopolize and depoliticize the public sphere." (Rancière, *Democracy* 71) Dissensus is indispensable for democracy; it is "the essence of politics," the effort on the part of marginalized groups of getting heard and "making visible the fact that they belong to a shared world the other does not see" (Rancière, *Theses* 24), while "Consensus is the reduction of politics to the police" (32). Police, in the terminology of Rancière, is not specifically an executive institution but rather "a symbolic constitution of the social" or "'partition of the sensible' [*le partage du sensible*]" (20) thereby defining who is authorized to take part in the public sphere and speak, and who will be excluded, not only from rights, but from positions from which to raise their voice. For him, politics is "an intervention upon the visible and the sayable," establishing the agency of subjects who were not meant to be 'partners' in communicative action (24).

> "The principal function of politics is the configuration of its proper space. It is to disclose the world of its subjects and its operations. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one." (21)

Given the oppressive presence of actual police in the public sphere in Turkey, and their crackdowns on cultural producers and other citizens, it might be difficult to follow Rancière's lofty theses. In my submission, however, his thoughts on consensus and dissensus can be instrumental in reading the acts of cultural practice of precisely those artists and scholars who clash with the police. Rancière's understanding

of (cultural) politics is reflected in the petition that 1,128 academics launched under the title "We will not be party to this crime"—referring to the documented war crimes committed by the Turkish security forces in the process of the full-scale destruction of Kurdish cities during the operations against an uprising of armed Kurdish youths starting in late 2015. They were supported by hundreds of cinema artists, theatre artists, musicians and fine arts professionals, and even a group of 'White Collar Workers for Peace,' thus creating a momentum that clearly amounts to the "configuration of [the] proper space" of politics, "making visible the fact that they belong to a shared world the other does not see" (Rancière, *Theses* 24). Again, it was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who personally unleashed a harsh campaign against the scholars' criticism of his government's war effort, branding the signees as sinister terrorists who should not be on the State's payroll (HRW; Balyan). Basically, he confirmed the Ranciérian contention that contrary to Habermas' optimism, university staff are not a partner in communicative action, have no right to speak in the public sphere and when they do should be handed over to the police (not the Rancièrian, though, but the *Türk Polisi*). Dismissals, investigations and persecution went hand in hand with waves of threatening messages by loyalist social media users. Many hundreds of the scholars who signed the declaration had to pay dire consequences for simply calling to mind that Turkey was bound by the provisions of international humanitarian law and human rights conventions and that one of the public functions of academics *qua their position as civil servants* is to defend the Rule of Law and criticize impunity. But they have also enjoyed the solidarity of their colleagues abroad and, in September 2016, the initiative was awarded the Aachen Peace Prize (WDR).

The internationally acclaimed novelist Aslı Erdoğan went one step further when she accepted a position on the advisory board of the incriminated, and now banned, newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, an outlet in the long tradition of pro-Kurdish media that has always been the target of security forces for publishing information unavailable in other outlets. She also contributed regular op-ed pieces, thus voicing her own, personal opinion in the often partisan editorial pages of the paper. Aslı Erdoğan arguably left her mark on the changing scene of Turkish prose in the 1990s and 2000s. Her landmark style combined the rational observations of the trained nuclear physicist she was with an expressly female narrator's perspective, interlacing vulnerability with cold-bloodedness and preferring subjects that undermine stereotypical expectations of what Turkish women should write about, such as the diary of a long solitude stay in Rio de Janeiro or an account of the dismal inter-human relations at CERN. Apart from her prose, Aslı Erdoğan has always published essays and op-ed pieces and used her position as a public intellectual for interventions in political debates. She helped form a network of Turkish journalists and publicists who would take turns in symbolically acting as editor-in-chief of *Özgür Gündem* for one day each when the actual editor-in-chief (the famed human rights lawyer Eren Keskin) was imprisoned. Among those who stood in was Can Dündar, the editor-in-chief of *Cumhuriyet*, the grand old secularist daily that traditionally dismissed any Kurdish aspiration of rights as separatist upheaval. As soon as *Özgür Gündem* was closed down in August 2016, Aslı Erdoğan was arrested along with a sizeable group of journalists and intellectuals. On 19 August 2016, an Istanbul court ruled that she remain imprisoned pending trial on charges of membership of an armed terrorist organization (BBC Türkçe, 24 Aug. 2016). Among the evidence the chief prosecutor has presented are four perfectly legal books out of her private library of 3000 tomes, and a number of articles she

had published earlier without precipitating any judicial reaction. While Aslı Erdoğan herself points out that during the court hearing, she understood that the trial was not about her writings at all but intended as retribution for her public support of a dissident media outlet (Avşar), it must be noted that what formally stands on trial here is nonetheless "the production of critical knowledge as a practice" in the precise sense Stuart Hall is postulating. In the first message she was able to pass on to her lawyers, Aslı Erdoğan reconfirms that she had consistently been championing non-violence and saw her pieces for *Özgür Gündem* as a "peace bridge" (Özgür Gündem, 21 Aug. 2016). While the metaphor of the bridge may sound hackneyed to readers of English, it does convey, to readers of Turkish, both a sense of the nearly insurmountable divide between the Turkish and the Kurdish people who are being pitted against each other in a climate of remorseless nationalism, and of the existential necessity to build mutual access to the Other. Nothing else is meant by Gilroy's *conviviality*: We have to acknowledge the divide of structural racism and build points of access to the othered people we are sharing our everyday lives with. It is just that the conditions in Turkey, at present, are a trifle harder. What has caused novelist Aslı Erdoğan to stand trial on charges of terrorism, then, is nothing other than her cultural practice of building bridges towards conviviality.

Trashing the Monolithic: The New Cultural Politics of Difference in Turkey

Aslı Erdoğan's clear position is rife with traits of what the African-American cultural theorist Cornel West has termed *the new cultural politics of difference*:

"Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity" (West 119) (which she does by championing ethnic diversity and raising her distinct female voice) and to generate "creative responses to the precise circumstances of our precise moment" (ibid.), which comes as a sarcastic description of the cultural practice of going to jail for serving a day on the editorial board of a media outlet under attack. What struck me about her peculiar relationship with the paper that many Turkish intellectuals shun as a Kurdish partisan publication is that it

> "embraces the distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality." (120)

I might be hard-pressed to call the Kurds of Turkey 'demobilized' and 'depoliticized' people, but the focus of West's argument is on the 'desire to align' oneself as a *privileged* contributor to culture with people who need empowerment and by this alignment or synergy 'enable social action.' Chances are that Aslı Erdoğan will never 'enlist collective insurgency' on the part of the disenfranchised Turkish population, neither through her novels nor through her brave stance in the face of devastating prison conditions. But she did inspire a vociferous vigil outside the Bakırköy Women's Penitentiary, where fellow novelists Murathan Mungan, Sema Kaygusuz and Vivet Kanetti spoke alongside Kıvanç Ersoy of the Academics for Peace, Erol Önderoğlu of Reporters Without Borders, and a number of other activists of a civil society that has not yet doubled back on the effort to build a culture of conviviality (BiaNet, 22 Aug. 2016).

Murathan Mungan, whose work emerged in the culturally troubled 1990's, has interwoven queer themes with a penchant for the narrative lore of (non-Turkish) Mesopotamia to make for a very Turkey-ish brand of postmodernity, where the interchangeable encounters in urban gay bars are just

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one step away from the breathtaking subterranean palace of the mythical queen of snakes, Şahmerân, and both settings frame the eternal conundrum of encountering the Other. In his capacity as award presenter at the Screenwriters' Union (SIYAD) award ceremonies in March 2016, Mungan delivered a searing speech that drives home all the points about conviviality, difference and dissensus:

> "When did we become so alien to one another's lives and stories? Why are those who were owning the stories of Gezi so alien to the stories of Sur, of Cizre, of Amed, of the area called Kurdistan? […] The freedom of speech we're demanding is meant for everyone. The right to live, to exist, is a right we demand for everyone. […] I hope that from now on, cinema and indeed all art forms will open up for us more and better opportunities to cohabitate, to live in fraternity, and to touch each other's hearts, minds, souls and stories. If we do touch one another's stories, we might arrive at a better understanding of our [own and mutual] realities." (Cumhuriyet, 3. Mar. 2016)

Conclusion

While the highly volatile situation in Turkey in autumn 2016 jeopardizes any attempt at writing about cultural production, cultural policies or cultural politics, a closer look at the actions and utterances of a number of important cultural practitioners and public intellectuals shows that defiant articulations of dissensus in everyday life contribute to the production of critical knowledge and allow us to outline a project of 'democratic' or 'convivial' culture in the making. Both carefully worded statements and symbolic actions function as performative acts that define and reinforce the new cultural politics of difference, which seeks to build an alliance between privileged (and often threatened) contributors to culture and the various segments of society that should, in a culture of conviviality, be the government's partners in communicative action.

Notes

[1] This article was submitted on 16 Sep 2016.

[2] Hörning and Reuter understand *Doing Culture* as a catch-all phrase for the 'thicket' of pragmatic usages of culture: doing gender, doing knowledge, doing identity or doing ethnicity. They advocate analysing the practical application of culture instead of its prefabricated cognitive structures of meaning.

[3] See for a discussion of imagined communities Benedict Anderson and for a discussion of negotiating alterities see Oliver Kontny.

[4] While the discussion of performative speech acts has many dimensions, I follow Judith Butler's creative—and now seminal—reading of Austin as expounded in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).

[5] All originally Turkish sources are given in my English translation.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6024

Are the People Backward? Algerian Symbolic Analysts and the Culture of the Masses

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This article studies representations of the Algerian population promoted by francophone intellectuals in a context of longstanding crisis and uncertainty. Borrowing the category of symbolic analysts from Robert Reich, it looks at the way in which novelists, scholars and journalists try to make sense of a critical situation by diagnosing the culture of the Algerian population as deviant or backward. Aiming to encourage social and political reform, these actors try to understand the characteristics of their "people," often by pointing to their so-called pre-modern or passive behaviors. This article analyzes two aspects of this activity: first, attempts to determine who is responsible for the ongoing crisis, and second, the reproduction of cultural prejudices in a context of increased transnationalization. Moreover, it argues that one can interpret the political and intellectual commitments of these analysts by drawing on the triad concept of "Naming, Blaming, Claiming," which has been used to study the publicization of disputes.

Keywords: Algeria; Culture; Crisis; Postcolonialism; Symbolic Analysts

Introduction

Between the end of March and the beginning of May 2016, the Algerian journalist Kamal Guerroua published a series of articles in the French-speaking daily newspaper *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, in which he complained about the difficulty of changing the mentality of the Algerian people. Faced with what he described as a pathetic, fatalist and passive society, he asked successively: "Why can't we change?," "Are our youth really lazy?," "Who must change … and how?" and finally "But why are we like this?"[1,2] While Guerroua is presented alternately as a scholar, a journalist or a novelist, he illustrates the activity of a composite social category that participates in diagnosing the Algerian population. Aiming at a social and political reform, these actors try to understand the characteristics of their "people," often by pointing to their so-called pre-modern or passive behaviors.

This paper investigates the representations of the Algerian population promoted by francophone intellectuals in a context of longstanding crisis and uncertainty. Borrowing the category of symbolic analysts from Robert Reich, it looks at the way in which novelists, scholars and journalists try to make sense of a critical situation, sometimes by diagnosing the culture of their fellow citizens as deviant or inher-

ently backward. For Reich, symbolic analysts are those who identify problems and solve them by manipulating symbols. In Algeria, these actors are trying to solve the problem of a persistent political and social instability in the aftermath of the civil war (1992-1999). In order to do so, they manipulate notions such as "the people" or the "Algerian culture" to understand the causes of the crisis and propose their own solutions. In the following pages, we study two aspects of this activity: first, attempts to determine who is responsible for the ongoing crisis, and second, the reproduction of cultural prejudices in the postcolony given a context of increased transnationalization. Subsequently, we will see how this discursive activity can be understood through the prism of the process of "Naming, Blaming, Claiming" (Abel, Felstiner, and Sarat), a triad concept that explains the production of public disputes.

As Guerroua's case illustrates, the limits between the literary, academic and media fields can be especially blurry, since all of these fields are subsumed in the broader field of intellectual production. In this article, our main symbolic analysts are a novelist, an academic and a journalist. They have all reached a level of national and international recognition that allow them to intervene regularly in public discussions in Algeria and beyond. The article will be divided into four sections. The first part presents the context of the civil war that introduced the idea of a historical break and an increasing gap between secular intellectuals and the rest of the society. The award-winning author Rachid Boudjedra serves to illustrate this point. The second section focuses on the role of social scientists in the production of culturalist explanations for the absence of a democratic transition. Here, some of the writings of Lahouari Addi allow us to study the production of a diagnosis that insists on national political culture to explain the absence of democracy. The following part shows that a commitment in favor of political change also leads some analysts to call for a disciplinary project directed at the Algerian population in order to correct its backward behavior. To illustrate this point, the paper invokes recent articles from journalist Kamel Daoud, published after the Arab Spring. Finally, the last section looks at the consequences of the transnationalization of these figures, as their analyses are appropriated and instrumentalized outside of Algeria.

The 1990s as a Historical Break

To understand the production of diagnosis of the Algerian people by our symbolic analysts, one must start by looking at the historical context. Commentators have often described the gap between the utopian expectations that followed independence in 1962 and the realities of daily life, which was increasingly marked by pervasive hardship. After the end of French occupation, the revolutionary elites embodied the hope of colonized peoples beyond Algeria, as they were committed to fulfilling national independence, achieving economic prosperity and redefining the global balance of power (Carlier 311-16). During the rule of Houari Boumédiène (1965-1978), an authoritarian developmental state was in charge of organizing the economy and planning the country's evolution. Internationally, Algerian diplomacy was at its zenith, as its spokesmen advocated the forgiveness of Third-World debt and the nationalization of resources. Yet, disillusions and woes soon followed this early period of hope and ambition. A drop in oil prices and the subsequent economic crisis fed the disenchantment of workers and students, resulting in a succession of strikes and riots at end of the 1980s and an uprising in October 1988 (Chikhi, "Algérie"). The latter marked a clear break in regard to the dominant conceptions of historical progress espoused by intellectuals from revolutionary or reformist backgrounds. The following years saw the constant

degradation of the political situation and the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS) as the main political party in the country. The interruption of the electoral process by the army in January 1992 exacerbated the tensions, and the country fell into a spiral of political violence, leading to the disaggregation of the national community. At the same time, Algeria faced a structural adjustment program, the dismantlement of public services and an economic liberalization that benefited crony capitalists (Brahimi El Mili).

This historical context allows us to better grasp the position of our social category. Once belonging to the elite, these actors were suddenly confronted with increased competition in the intellectual field (notably by Islamist figures), a growing precariousness resulting from structural adjustment, and Jihadi violence against secular figures. Some of them left the country because of the war. While they had been trained to become a vanguard leading the way to social and intellectual advancement, they were brutally confronted with the crisis experienced by the country during the 1980s-1990s (El Kenz). Consequently, the subsequent diagnoses concerning the culture of the Algerian people are a way of understanding this apparent historical failure, rather than a form of disdain for the masses.

During the civil war, Algeria witnessed the development of a descriptive literature that analyzes the mental state of the population and the supposed illnesses of the country (corruption, violence, fundamentalism). This tendency was highlighted by the rise of a new generation of authors, such as Yasmina Khadra and Boualem Sansal, who excelled in the genre of the crime novel—a kind of writing that is well-suited to describing psychological and cultural deviance. In their works published at the end of the 1990s, both of these writers described a society tortured by paranoia, intolerance, historical confusion and cynicism (Khadra; Sansal). While very different in style, both Khadra and Sansal were products of the developmental state's elite schools in the 1970s; Khadra was trained in Cherchell's military academy, and Sansal graduated from the Polytechnic School of Algiers. As such, they were confronted with the gap between official promises and the reality of crisis. While they described a pathological and morbid society, they also remembered a lost normalcy, thus laying a potential foundation on which to rebuild the polity (Naudillon).

When participating in public debates, our symbolic analysts assume their own responsibility as intellectuals and, at the same time, they search to attribute blame at the national level in terms of finding those whose moral and political failures have brought the country to crisis (Milstein). This investment in politics is especially evident for a novelist such as Rachid Boudjedra. A former nationalist militant during the war of independence, the novelist born in 1941 was ostracized by the regime for a few years in the 1960s before returning to Algeria. Writing both in French and in Arabic, he became a major figure in the national literary field and a close counselor of many ministers situated to the left of the ruling coalition. Yet, the victory of the FIS during the legislative elections of December 1991 endangered him both as an individual associated with the governing elite and as a secular intellectual. In 1992, a few months after the military coup, Boudjedra published a pamphlet entitled "FIS de la haine," in which he moved away from his position as a novelist to offer a stylized but nonetheless virulent account of the country's political situation. As a communist, Boudjedra had often criticized the conservatism of Algerian society. Yet, with the fall of the USSR and the rise of Islamism, he abandoned his prior investment in the dichotomy between progress and archaism for a new understanding that counterposed modernity to

archaism (Chikhi, "Islamisme"). This conceptual break implied a shift toward a more inquisitorial tone. In his pamphlet, he pointed to three kinds of responsibility in order to understand the Algerian crisis. First, he accused a neocolonial "francophony" of erasing the diversity and singularity of Algerian culture and promoting the FIS on its satellite TVs (Boudjedra, 23-27). Second, he blamed a corrupted state for bringing a "culture of laziness and inertia" to the people (67). These politics made possible the rise of Algerian neofundamentalists, described by Boudjedra as a minority of mentally defective fascists whose political program was limited to violence and regression (16, 111). In other words, our symbolic analyst identified those who led a large part of the population to endorse what he understood as a backward politico-religious program.

Culture and Politics

The protean crisis experienced by Algeria from the 1980s onward stimulated the activity of the symbolic analysts, as they were also compelled to find new ways to speak of the community. In order to study the trajectory of the country after Boumédiène's death in 1978, they sought to develop a new understanding of the world that would move away from Third-Worldist dogma. Their attempt to explain and reconceptualize the country's situation brings us back to the first etymology of the notion of crisis, the Greek *krisis* which refers to a moment of judgment, of distinction, of construction of the criteria useful in order to allow a renewed understanding of the situation (Cristias 7). In other terms, the troubled period of the 1980s and 1990s fed the demand for a paradigm shift.

At the end of the 1990s, a dominant conceptual toolkit was available for whomever wanted to think about political upheavals. The narrative of democratization based on the global expansion of an Anglo-Saxon liberal model was widely propagated during the period of the so-called "third wave." In fact, in Algeria the period of extreme violence followed a political opening that partially matched this model. At the end of the Black Decade, some longstanding specialists of the region remained hopeful that the erosion of the authoritarian model could give birth to a genuine democratic transition (Quandt; Leveau). Yet, a few years later, the persisting influence of the military, the violent repression of the Kabyle uprising of 2001 and the struggles at the top of the state between the new president Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his prime minister Ali Benflis demonstrated the inadequacy of this wishful thinking. Rather, Algerian scholars underlined the continuation of the "political, security and economic crisis" after the end of the civil war (Bennadji).

This "failed" transition, coupled with the memory of the civil war, led certain social scientists to develop an analysis blaming a "patriarchal culture," which was unsuited to the rule of law and perpetuated "traditional segmental structures," for the behavior of the ruling elite and the population (Remaoun). Slowly but surely, interpretations based on a form of cultural evolutionism began to flourish in the academic field. The example of Lahouari Addi is particularly interesting in this regard—precisely because of his intellectual commitment to anti-essentialist approaches. Primarily trained as a sociologist of rural societies, Addi later moved his field of interest to the political sphere, as he prepared his *doctorat d'état* in France at the École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales.[3] Working notably on questions of populism and power in Algeria, he became a commentator on the country's latest political events, and his informed opinion continues to regularly appear in Algerian newspapers.[4]

Addi's interest in anthropologists studying the Maghreb—such as Gellner and Geertz—allows him to reflect the refutation of essentialist analysis regarding the role of

Islam in contemporary Muslim society and to advocate for a socio-historical approach (*Deux antrophologues*). At the same time, he focuses on the development of an Algerian political culture, at the crossroads of traditional structures, the war of independence and French modernist influence. According to him, this culture produces specific representations of the state and explains the rise of the FIS as well as persisting populism and political violence. While refusing an approach that would disqualify a reified Islam or Arab culture, he develops an analysis based on various myths associated with liberal democracy (sovereignty of the voters, openness of electoral competition, empty space of power). Conversely, he opposes this ideal system based on representation and rule of law to a disorganized Algerian society prone to rioting where political power is privatized and cannot fully emancipate itself from a medieval form of religious control ("Les partis politiques"). Addi is certainly not the only political analyst to take for granted this mythology of the "good democratic system." Nevertheless, what is especially telling is that his refutation of essential difference leads to an analysis based on cultural evolutionism:

> "State power in Algeria is vacant because there are no ideological mechanisms to return it to its owner: society. This is the reason for the failure of the regime, *which is not because of the wrong model or the wrong-headed implementation of a more or less coherent economic policy* [emphasis added]. It is about political representations where the individual, as a subject of law, does not exist, and where the group is sublimated by a discourse of the leader, who enjoys an external authority. This is like the old traditional political order that negates the political and considers the leader as a man who rights the wrong rather than someone who protects individual freedom. *We must overcome a culture based on justice and replace it with a culture based on freedom* [emphasis added]." (*L'Algérie d'hier* 74-75)

This excerpt illustrates a change in the diagnosis proposed by symbolic analysts. While Boudjedra focused on the external and internal actors responsible for the backwardness of the population, Addi suggests that cultural reform is necessary in order to solve the country's issues and encourage a transition towards modern political behavior. Yet, there is a distinction to be made between academics and other analysts, thus introducing a nuance in our meta-category. While Addi's writings are too careful to employ orientalist clichés, many of his contemporaries are less cautious. Thus, observers in the daily press often propose anthropological readings of politics in Bouteflika's Algeria that point to "local mentalities" and their so-called pathological consequences (violence, superstition, corruption, submission to the leader).[5]

Changing the Regime and the People

Cultural evolutionism is common in Algerian public debates. By promoting a vision where the characteristics of the "people" explain the persisting corrupt, paternalistic and violent nature of the political order, symbolic analysts reproduce the older notion of "colonizability." Malek Bennabi, a sociologist and philosopher born in Constantine who notably studied the relationship between Islamic culture and modernity, coined this term in the 1970s. His idea of colonizability explains underdevelopment and colonization by invoking a backward understanding of religion and social inertia. Consequently, he also advocated for cultural and religious reform in order to promote a Muslim renewal in Algeria (Bennabi). Bennabi's reflection displaces responsibility for the colonial occupation from the imperial power, France, to the occupied people. The philosopher remained influential after his death in 1973. Not only was Bennabi a reference for the *djaz'ara*, an elitist Islamist

trend inside of the FIS (Labat 75-78), he was also an inspiration for a political and cultural movement launched by Noureddine Boukrouh at the end of the 1980s. His heirs are still currently active, most notably in the liberal political party *Jil Jadid* ("New Generation"). During Boukrouh's political career, he experimented with various strategies in order to promote socio-political reform. After joining Bouteflika's early governments as a minister, he subsequently returned to his first love: writing critical analysis of Algerian politics. One of his last essays has an eloquent title: "Reforming People and Power" (*Réformer peuple et pouvoir*, 2013). Indeed, the idea that in order to end the political deadlock, one has to change the people first, remains a widely shared trope among Algerian intellectual elites.

This last point brings us to our third symbolic analyst, renowned editorial writer (and novelist) Kamel Daoud, who was born in 1970. Since beginning his career in the middle of the 1990s, the journalist from Oran has been a vocal critic of the Algerian regime. His daily column, published in the *Quotidien d'Oran* under the title *Raïna Raïkum* ("Our opinion, your opinion"), has allowed him to denounce the corruption and the violence of the ruling elite, and the general absurdity of the political order. In 2013, he publicly questioned the anarchic depiction of the people proposed by minister of Interior Dahou Ould Kabia, accusing him of acting in a colonial fashion. The following year, he published a short paper addressed to Bouteflika predicting that the president would be lynched by his own people if he ran for a fourth term.[6]

A firm opponent of the regime, Daoud participated in the protests of January 2011, in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution. Yet, despite his commitment in favor of democracy (or precisely because of it), Daoud's editorials have become more and more directed at the Algerian population. In his daily column, he started to cast the people as guilty for the political deadlock. After initially calling for the fall of the regime, he then regarded the victory of the Islamists in the first elections in Tunisia and in Egypt with hostility, going so far as to ask if "Arabs (were) ready for democracy?"[7] From this perspective, he demonstrates the contradiction of a liberal discourse on democracy that considers conservative or progressive liberalism as the only rightful form of democratic government. Undoubtedly, his personal experiences as a former Islamist sympathizer as well as a journalist who has directly faced the consequences of Jihadi violence must be taken into account. His criticism regarding the inability of Algerians and Arabs to act as "real democrats" draws on his denunciation of a social conservatism that he perceives to be one of the main ills afflicting the country. Moreover, in addition to his critique of Islam and his defense of women's rights, he also depicts a population unfit for a modern economy, uncivil and dirty. In an editorial published in May 2014, just after Bouteflika's reelection, he rejected what he labeled a form of "angelism" and "emotional populism" and advocated for a reform of the population:

> "*Many find their happiness in submission, in devouring and in corruption* [emphasis added]. Few are those who think about future generations or collective interests. This is the equation that must be changed, this is the responsibility that we have to accept and demonstrate. Speaking continuously of a people who are victims and "treacherous intellectuals" has now become an annoyingly easy option. *What must be changed is this people, these individuals* [emphasis added]. We must explain what is a resignation and what is a constitution. We must demonstrate that creating jobs is better than building more mosques. That work is a duty. That effort is glory. That public spirit is not naivety." ("Oui, il faut changer")

This editorial illustrates Daoud's belief that public discussions must now be reori-

ented given the failed attempts to change the political order. Defending the right of intellectuals to be critical of the population, he advocates for a social-cultural *aggiornamento* in order to instill civic values into the social body. In so doing, he echoes a widely shared position among Algerian symbolic analysts in favor of a reform of the education system. At the same time, he endorses the idea that one should teach the values of modern market economy to the masses, since they are desperately lazy. In short, he proposes a disciplinary undertaking in order to correct popular backwardness.

A Postcolonial and Transnational Configuration

In addition to the various difficulties that these intellectuals faced during the 1990s, one must also consider the history of their political commitments to understand their critical relationship to the "people." For example, writers have faced the moral, religious or linguistic criteria imposed by the authoritarian state. In response, their political fight has favored a moral and political liberalism rather than a commitment to democracy (Leperlier). At the same time, to fully grasp the consequences of these narratives on the Algerian people, it is useful to look at the postcolonial and transnational dimensions of this phenomenon. When Daoud describes the Algerian people as "three-quarters ignorant, careless of the land that will be handed down [to the next generation], bigoted, dirty, uncivil" ("Pourquoi les Algériens"), one is immediately struck by the similarity with the vocabulary once used to describe the colonized masses. In his afterword to the *Wretched of the Earth*, the nationalist militant and historian Mohamed Harbi underlines the persisting prejudice regarding the apathetic and anarchic masses after independence, this time held not by French colonists, but Algerian revolutionaries (308). This dualist imagery counterposing a reformist elite to a backward population reproduces a fiction of "modernization from above" that was colonial in origin (Pitt), before becoming a marker of postcoloniality.

These narratives of backwardness also rely on the rejection of the Islamist model and a commitment to a liberal ideal, which invokes rationality, civility, and efficiency, as a superior form of modernity. The rejection of an allegedly pre-modern political culture can be traced back to the ethnocentrism underlying liberal thought (Abdel-Nour). From this perspective, the development of an approach based on cultural evolutionism is certainly related to a—sometimes forced—insertion in a globalized space where this normative model is largely promoted. Working in contact with European or American environments, our symbolic analysts appropriate and transform some of the values that are often viewed as so-called benchmarks of Western modernity, such as secularism or gender mixity. It is especially noticeable for French-speaking intellectuals, who are more easily inserted in the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Tellingly, Kamel Daoud publishes his op-eds in renowned Western newspapers such as *La Repubblica*, *Le Monde* and the *New York Times*. After teaching in France, Lahouari Addi also spent a couple of years in the United States, in prestigious universities such as Princeton and Georgetown. Even the novelist Rachid Boudjedra, who belongs to an older generation and remained a fervent communist, was forced to find refuge in France in the 1960s. For linguistic, political and professional reasons, French-speaking symbolic analysts are exposed to the normative claims that come with an ethnocentric mythology of modernity. Subsequently, they further reinterpret these principles according to their own political agendas and social strategies.

The coupling of the postcolonial and transnational aspects of this configuration is evident when we look at the way in which some of our actors have been welcomed in France. For French-speaking

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Algerian writers, the former imperial power remains the place for international recognition, where prominent novelists such as Boudjedra, Khadra or Sansal have been awarded various prizes. Nevertheless, when reproduced in a different space, their discourses change in meaning. For example, in the Algerian context, Boudjedra criticized not only the Islamists, but also the regime and French neo-colonialism. Yet in the French context, he appeared as a spokesman for the critique of the Muslim religion, a faith associated with fundamentalist threats and with the sensitive issue of the veil, while all but ignoring his criticism of the West.[8] After the publication of his pamphlet, Boudjedra became an epitome of resistance to Islamic fanaticism and was compared to Zola and Voltaire. His criticism of Islam and appropriation of modernist values allowed French journalists to portray him as a promoter of Enlightenment ideas in a country doomed by backward forces. In other terms, the discourse was reinterpreted from the vantage point of the former métropole; while initially produced in a predominantly Muslim society, it was then appropriated in a French context of national anxieties and racial prejudice.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the recent Daoud polemic. In 2013, the journalist published his first novel, a narration of *L'Etranger* told from the perspective of the brother of the Arab killed by Meursault, Camus' hero. This novel was warmly welcomed in France, where Daoud was praised as a "new Camus," an aura that was reinforced when an Algerian Salafist imam launched a fatwa against the journalist in late 2014. While the preacher was later sentenced to jail, these threats revived the memories of the civil war and reinforced Daoud's position as a leading figure of the Algerian "democratic" intelligentsia. At the beginning of 2016, following the events in Cologne,[9] he published a series of articles in the international press in which he proposed his diagnostic on the pathological relationship to sex existing in the "world of Allah" before suggesting that one should change the soul of the migrants ("Cologne, lieu de fantasmes"). Though the author analyzed an event that occurred in Europe and was directed at a Western audience, his prose was nonetheless marked by his own political commitment against puritanical forces in Algeria. While the article sparked some criticism, it was also met with wide support in the French press, in which Daoud was portrayed as a free spirit advocating for reform in a backward environment. In this context, it is worth noting that another of our symbolic analysts, Lahouari Addi, underlined the risks associated with this transnational configuration. In a text published for the French news website *Mediapart*, he suggested that despite his accurate depiction of the situation in Muslim countries, Daoud had transgressed a "methodological border" by applying the same analytical frame for Muslims in Europe, thus providing ideological fodder for the European far right ("L'Ecrivain-journaliste"). Indeed, while the critique produced by our analysts in Algeria aims at changing the political and social order, it can be appropriated in France in order to promote Islamophobic agendas. In the former *métropole*, their Algerian origin serves to legitimize preexisting racial prejudice, as they become what Vincent Geisser labeled as "alibi Muslim intellectuals."

Conclusion: Naming, Blaming, Claiming in the Postcolony

This paper has studied how symbolic analysts explain the political situation in Algeria in the aftermath of the civil war of the 1990s and given the persistent corruption and authoritarianism under Bouteflika. In offering a diagnosis of the Algerian people, they participate in public discussions and attempt to remedy the longstanding political and economic crisis faced by the polity. In order to better grasp the changes of their diagnosis over time, one can look

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at their political and intellectual commitment through an analytical frame used for studying the publicization of disputes, based on the triad concept of "Naming, Blaming, Claiming" (Abel, Felstiner, and Sarat). The first term, "naming," indicates the need to identify the problem and to frame it as a matter of public interest. From this perspective, we can see that the country's issues are increasingly framed in cultural rather than economic or political terms. As culture becomes the main causal factor for the crisis, the second discursive function of the dispute sees the redirection of the blame from dominant powers (the regime, the neo-colonial West) or specific groups (the Islamists) to the general population. Our symbolic analysts invoke the childish or pathological behavior of the masses in order to explain corruption, violence, economic inefficiency or lack of democracy. Finally, they claim that changing the people's culture is crucial to ending the political deadlock; they advocate social reform rather than revolution, and view the latter as dangerous given the unpreparedness of the masses. Unsurprisingly, they uphold education and culture as two areas of priority for public policies, in order to shape a modern population.

This call for social reform is different from attempts at cultural renewal that occurred at the end of the colonial period. Instead of invoking "indigenous" traits (Islam, Berber or Arab identity), it draws inspiration from liberal standards of reform and echoes prejudices against a local culture that now appears to be unfit for a modern polity. It goes without saying that a long-standing crisis is reflected in certain cultural habits that merit analysis, but it is important not to view the symptoms as if they were the cause. Yet, we have seen that our symbolic analysts can also reproduce a fiction of cultural exception and social backwardness. In so doing, they legitimize both local and foreign interventions aimed at correcting the masses and improving the country's "human capital." Focusing on the population's behaviors and beliefs not only echoes persistent racial prejudices inside and outside of the postcolony. It also erases the geopolitical and historical factors as well as the global economic structures that explain the Algerian configuration. Finally, limiting the causes of social, economic and political imbalances to local cultural factors indirectly legitimizes the transformative dynamics associated with neoliberal restructuring.

Notes

[1] All quotes in this article have been translated to English by the authors.

[2] See the articles published by Kamal Guerroua in *Le Quotidien d'Oran*.

[3] A doctorat d'état is a degree coming after the PhD for advanced professors.

[4] See the interviews where he comments on the opposition to Bouteflika's fourth reelection ("L'Opposition de Médiène") or the replacement of the head of the secret services ("Bouteflika").

[5] On the culture of violence, see for example articles from Salaheddine Menia or Arezki Ighemat, both holding a PhD.

[6] See respectively "La Civilisation et l'anarchie" and "Honte à toi."

[7] See "Les Arabes sont-il mûrs."

[8] See for example Eibel or Pautard

[9] On New Year's Eve, an unprecedented wave of aggressions—some of them sexual in nature—struck Germany and especially Cologne. Many of the identified suspects were of North-African origin, others were refugees.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.5131

"What Cultural Policies?" Explicit and Implicit Cultural Policies in Lebanon

Nadia von Maltzahn

Cultural policies define a vision for culture, and provide frameworks for institutional practice to translate this vision on the ground. A 1981 study on Lebanese cultural policy reached the conclusion that one cannot speak of cultural policies in Lebanon if one refers to state laws, regulations and plans. However, if cultural policy was understood as the method of a state to give its citizens the space to develop themselves in a way that they could create culture, one could certainly speak of cultural policies in Lebanon (Abou Rizk). In cultural policy research, there is a distinction between explicit and implicit cultural policy (Ahearne). In this article, the concept of explicit and implicit cultural policy is applied to the case of Lebanon. The two terms are extended so that the former does not only include cultural policies designated as such by the state, but also those created by civil society actors, and that the latter does not only include political strategies, but also practices that in the end determine cultural policies. Drawing on empirical research conducted in the context of a larger study on the role of cultural institutions in the public sphere, the power struggles between different actors involved in cultural policy making will be highlighted and the concept of cultural policy defined in the Lebanese context, which in turn will be positioned within the regional context.

Keywords: Explicit and Implicit Cultural Policies; Lebanon; Cultural Institutions; Beirut Municipality; Lebanese National Library

Introduction

"What cultural policies? There are no cultural policies in Lebanon!" This is the initial reaction you receive when mentioning to anyone in Lebanon that you are studying cultural policies in the country. People's first thought goes to the Ministry of Culture and its perceived lack of action in the field of culture. However, cultural policies do not only pertain to the work of ministries of culture, but rather are determined and negotiated by a variety of actors and actions. Cultural policies define a vision for culture and provide frameworks for institutional practices for translating that vision to reality on the ground. Cultural policy is not only about the administration of the arts in a narrow sense, but it is also about the "politics of culture in the most general sense: it is about the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meaning" (McGuigan, *Culture and Public* 1). According to cultural policy researcher Jeremy Ahearne, in cultural policy research, we "explore those areas where policies (strategic courses of action) and cultures (embodied systems of attitudes and values) collide and intersect" (151). In this paper, the term culture is understood, along the lines of Ahearne and McGuigan, as the production of meaning and the cre-

ation of values, including letters and the arts, heritage and education, but also as encompassing the constant negotiating of often competing value systems. I agree with the editors of this volume in their understanding of culture as "dynamic, fragmented and constantly changing;" it is not a static entity. Cultural policies are those strategies and actions that direct the course of culture and guide cultural production. Ahearne developed a distinction between explicit and implicit cultural policies. In his article on the topic, explicit cultural policies are those that are "explicitly labelled as 'cultural'" (141), in particular by governments; they belong to what a government "proclaims that it is doing for culture through its official administration" (144). Implicit cultural policies, on the other hand, are those that are not labelled as such, but work "to prescribe or shape cultural attitudes and habits over given territories" (141). Implicit cultural policy is "the effective impact on the nation's culture of its action as a whole, including educational, media, industrial, foreign policy, etc." (144).

One definition of cultural policy describes it as a "deliberate action in the cultural field undertaken by governments but also including business operators and civil society campaigns around the conditions and consequences of culture" (McGuigan, *Rethinking* 144). Here the actors involved are related to the state, the economy/the market and civil society. It is important to add that these can also be actors devising policies and strategies to be implemented in another country, falling under the realm of foreign cultural policies or cultural diplomacy, or even soft power as coined by Joseph Nye. As Ahearne suggests, soft power in turn is related to implicit cultural policy if the latter is understood as "the endeavour by strategists to shape cultural attitudes and practices over their territory or that of their adversaries" (146), although the term adversary here may imply an unnecessary antagonism. One of the interesting aspects of soft power is that it is difficult to control and often gains its attractiveness by not being connected to government policies—at least not explicitly (Nye, ch. 4). Mistrust of the government is not only an issue when dealing with foreign cultural policy. In fact, together with the lack of cooperation between state institutions and the independent sector, it was one of the problems identified as cross-cutting throughout the region by members of a network on cultural policies in the Arab region (*Cultural Policy in the Arab Region*), which would suggest that implicit cultural policies could be more effective.

In the following, I will apply the concept of explicit and implicit cultural policy to the case of Lebanon, and extend the terms so that the former does not only include cultural policies designated as such by the state, but also those created by civil society and other non-state actors, and that the latter does not only include political strategies, but also encompasses practices that, in the end, determine cultural policies. By looking at different ways to talk about cultural policies in Lebanon, the paper aims to show the power struggles between multiple actors involved in culture and seeks to broaden our understanding not only of cultural policies, but also of the dynamics of state-society relations more generally. I argue that cultural frameworks are negotiated by a multitude of actors on the basis of both explicit and implicit policies, but also unwritten laws and practices. After a brief introduction to the prevalent notion of cultural policy in Lebanon, three case studies will be introduced to highlight different aspects of what determines cultural policies in practice. The first gives the example of the Lebanese National Library under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. The second focuses on the Beirut Municipality and two of its projects—Assabil municipal libraries and Beit Beirut. The third case deals with Solidere and its role in shaping

cultural life in the capital's city center. Finally, the paper will finish with a brief discussion of censorship in Lebanon.

Cultural Policies in Lebanon

A UNESCO study on Lebanese cultural policy starts off with a quote of an unnamed expert who stated in a report that "in Lebanon, there is no actual cultural policy, even though culture constitutes an undeniable reality in this country," to which the author is quick to respond that such a reality could not be created without any political conception, however implicit (Abou Rizk 9). The study reached the conclusion that one cannot speak of a cultural policy in Lebanon if one refers to state laws, regulations and plans. However, if cultural policy was understood as the method adopted by a state in order to give its citizens the space to develop themselves in a way that they could create culture, one could certainly speak of cultural policies in Lebanon (79). By placing weight on the space given to actors to be creative rather than on explicit policies, Abou Rizk, in fact, himself distinguishes between implicit and explicit cultural policies. Although it was not published until 1981, Abou Rizk, head of the Fine Arts department of the Lebanese Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts, wrote the study in the mid-1970s just before the outbreak of the civil war (1975-1990). It was thus written at the end of the "golden era" from the 1950s to the 1970s in which Beirut played a central role in the region's cultural production. His conclusion still holds true today, however, even if it might be more appropriate to speak of a laissez faire attitude rather than a method of the state as such.

The widespread impression that Lebanon had no cultural policy is undoubtedly also related to its position vis-à-vis other countries in the region, in particular neighboring Syria as well as Egypt, both of which have had dominating ministries of culture. While many countries have effective cultural policies without having central ministries of culture—such as the United States, Great Britain (the latter's current government department for culture was only created in 1997) or Germany (where the federal states have cultural autonomy)—, the regional situation where the state often played a principal role in cultural production and dissemination of culture led to the perception that only a strong ministry of culture could create cultural policies. Regarding non-regional cultural policy frameworks, the French cultural policy model—again with a dominant ministry of culture—was the most familiar one in Lebanon, reinforcing the existing notion about cultural policies. In 2009, the regional NGO *al-Mawred al-Thaqafy* (Culture Resource) launched a project in cooperation with the European Cultural Foundation to research the state of cultural policies in a number of Arab countries with the aim of improving existing policies and creating awareness about cultural policies. The study on Lebanon emphasized the differences over what constituted Lebanese identity, which in turn result in competing visions for cultural policies. It also emphasized that cultural activities were not based on a cultural policy as such, but rather underlined the role of civil institutions in cultural production (Azar, Hamadi, and Merhi 5). Regarding outside intervention, Hanan Toukan makes the case for how cultural production in Lebanon is not merely a domain of contestation at home. She argues that in line with Lebanon's geopolitical position, "outside players make themselves felt via their funding, their visions, and their discourses and like local players assert themselves, directly or indirectly, through an intricate confluence of sect, class and geopolitics" (125).

In light of the above, let us attempt to give some examples of explicit and implicit cultural policies in Lebanon in order to further explore the notion of this distinction, and what it means to talk about cultural policies in Lebanon.

The Ministry of Culture and the Lebanese National Library

The classical organ for explicit cultural policies, the Ministry of Culture, is a young institution in Lebanon. Evolving from the Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts, the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education was established in 1993, and became the Ministry of Culture (independent of education) in 2000. It was not until 2008 that a law was passed to restructure the ministry and redefine its organizational structure. Paragraph 2 of Law Nr. 35 (2008) on the organization of the ministry clearly lays out its responsibility for "drawing up a general cultural policy and coordinating its implementation." Despite this stipulation, there is neither an overarching cultural policy devised by the ministry, nor a detailed long-term plan or vision. What is more, the ministry has a minimal annual budget, confining its activities to a limited arena. Among the main responsibilities of the ministry are the three public institutions under its umbrella, the Directorate of Museums—in charge of the National Museum—, the National Higher Conservatory of Music, and the Lebanese National Library. We will briefly look at the case of the latter to highlight some of the characteristics of the cultural sector in Lebanon.

The Lebanese National Library (LNL) was established as a private collection in 1919, becoming a public institution in late 1921—officially opening in 1922 as the Great Library of Beirut—attached to the General Directorate of Education. In 1924, a law was passed that decreed that two copies of all publications printed in Lebanon had to be deposited at the Great Library (Law of Legal Deposit, reinstated in 2008) (Muʿawwad and Wahiba 13; *Lebanese National Library*). Following the beginning of the civil war, the activities of the library were frozen in 1979 and the collections stored in various locations. Starting in the 1990s, after the end of the civil war and the creation of the Ministry of Culture, several plans were put into place to restore the collection and re-open the library, supported first by the French and then the European Union. Qatar has financed the transformation (restoration and equipment) of the former Ottoman School of Trade and Arts in the Sanaya quarter of Beirut to host the new National Library. While building works have been completed, the administrative infrastructure is not yet in place. The opening date continues to be postponed. The case of the National Library showcases some of the struggles around cultural policies, including the reliance on foreign expertise and funding, the lack of clearly allocated funds, the difficulty in passing a law that regulates the status and work of cultural institutions, the competition between different ministries (such as the competition between the Ministries of Culture and the Interior over the Sanaya building), the reliance on private foundations, and finally, the lack of long-term planning, some of which will be discussed in the following.

The involvement of a French expert mission of the French Bibliothèque Nationale—which in 1994 undertook a survey of the state of the library's collection and of potential locations for a reinstatement of the library, and submitted recommendations—and subsequent expert missions were financed by the European Union (Perrin 69) and fell under the strategic cooperation policies of the EU and member states with what the EU terms the "European Neighbourhood."[1] Qatar's motivation to finance the building of the new library should be understood as a part of its regional soft power initiative, in particular in the knowledge sector, and part of its implicit cultural policies aiming to impact "Arab" culture. In terms of cultural legislation, the law that defined the library as a public institution under the ministry of culture (*Qānūn raqam 36*) was only passed in 2008, although it had been drafted and presented to parliament under Ghassan Salamé (Minister of Culture from 2000 to 2003) several years earlier. Part of the ministry's explicit cultural

policies, it outlines the legal foundation of the library (and the other two public institutions under the ministry), and includes stipulations for the institution such as "to participate in putting general steps for a cultural policy" (*Qānūn raqam 36*, par. 4). While this sounds positive in theory, in practice the fact that the library still lacks an administrative infrastructure—beyond a limited number of short-term contracts—prevents it from playing a role in contributing to a national cultural policy.

The reliance on private foundations can be considered one of the major implicit cultural policies in Lebanon. Within the region, Lebanon provides perhaps the most enabling environment for civil society organizations. The relatively liberal Ottoman Law on Associations, enforced in Lebanon since 1909, allows associations to form as long as they notify the government directly after they are created. While there are minimal public funds available, there are no barriers to either international contact or resources. Civil associations, while "vulnerable to becoming dependent on private funders and utilized for political or sectarian purposes" ("Civic Freedom Monitor"), in fact determine the bulk of Lebanon's cultural life.[2] While not part of an explicitly labelled cultural policy, cultural associations are the result of implicit cultural policies. Even one of the main governmental projects on the cultural front, the Lebanese National Library, relies on an association—the Lebanese National Library Foundation, set up in 2000—to communicate the project and raise funds. According to the scientific advisor to the library project, Maud Stephan, one of the reasons why a foundation apparently had to be created was that the Ministry of Culture, as a governmental body, was not allowed to rent a building for use as a temporary office and storage facility.

Beirut Municipality

Other institutions of public administration concerned with cultural policies are the municipalities, that can have a strong impact on local cultural production by providing an environment that is either enabling or disabling, for example through the provision of public funds. Beirut Municipality for instance is involved in a number of large-scale cultural projects, including the Sursock Museum, Beit Beirut and municipal public libraries. The latter are again a clear example of the importance of civil associations in Lebanon's cultural life. Beirut Municipality commissioned Assabil—an NGO established in 1997—to manage and operate its public libraries in the city (*ASSABIL*). The driving force behind determining the strategic courses of action for the municipal libraries is thus an NGO in cooperation with a public body. One of the main partners and funding bodies of the project is the French region Île-de-France. The French national commission for decentralized cooperation (CNCD) describes the project *Lire et écrire dans les espaces publics au Liban* ("To read and write in public spaces in Beirut") as follows:

> "To promote access to culture and information to the largest number of people, the Region Île-de-France has accompanied Beirut's municipality for a dozen years in elaborating and implementing local development policies for public reading. The association ASSABIL is our historic partner in Lebanon, acting as the technical arm of the municipal institution for the development, management and animation of the network of public reading of the Lebanese capital." (Commission Nationale de la Coopération Decentralisée, trans. by the author)

The project is not only part of French cultural cooperation policies, but also of the French linguistic union project, L'Union de la Francophonie. As the excerpt above demonstrates, Assabil was fully recognized as the operating actor. This brief example highlights the net of local official, civil as well as foreign actors involved

in the shaping of cultural policies aspects in Lebanon. Explicit cultural policy making is not confined to governmental actors alone, but can be formulated by civil society players to then be endorsed by public authorities.

The continued presence of former colonial power France in Lebanon's cultural arena is also evident in another project of Beirut's municipality, Beit Beirut, a joint project with the City of Paris. Initiated in 2008 following a cooperation agreement between the two cities, Beit Beirut—a building located on the former demarcation line between East and West Beirut—is to be turned into a museum, a cultural center including an archive for the research and study of the city of Beirut and should also serve as an urban planning office for the City of Beirut (*Beit Beirut*). Expropriated by the Beirut Municipality in 2003 after a civil society campaign to protect the building from destruction, Beit Beirut has also become a symbol of successful activism in heritage policies, one aspect of cultural policies.[3] The municipality only started to appropriate the building and express a vested interest in the property after activists lobbied extensively against its demolition, for example through such associations as the *Association pour la Protection des Sites et des Anciennes Demeures* (APSAD). Although some legal frameworks for the preservation of architectural heritage sites exist, they are often ignored or circumvented. Establishing a public interest in a building and publicizing it is in some ways a prerequisite for its preservation and a necessary means of raising the awareness level of the authorities (Brones 144-46; Haidar and Rayess). In her study of the Beit Beirut project, Brones shows how the process of first preserving the building and then turning it into a museum "constitutes a site for the negotiation of knowledge and ideas between various local and foreign actors" (140), and how both "collective and individual strategies" of the actors involved in the project "illustrate the tensions which exist between the official, but nevertheless inefficient public powers and the non-governmental associations in which those persons are engaged" (147). According to Brones, the decision of Beirut's municipality to expropriate and thus preserve Beit Beirut can also be "partially explained by the positive influence of Ghassan Salamé, the Minister of Culture of that period, and by the good relations of Mona Hallak [one of the main activists] with Yacoub Sarraf, Beirut's former governor" (148). It was also an opportunity for the municipality to raise its profile, which was weakened by the loss of the city center to Solidere (148). Varying levels of commitment—and agreement—of the involved parties has led to some delays in the project, and it has not yet been opened to the public. This case shows to what extent the implementation of cultural policies in practice can be determined by contextual circumstances and the personal will of involved actors, and it furthermore highlights some of the processes' intrinsic struggles and negotiations along the way.

Solidere

Staying within the city of Beirut and its urban context, it is interesting to include another player in the cultural scene when thinking about cultural policies: the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District, in short Solidere, which was incorporated as a Lebanese joint-stock company in May 1994. Solidere's reconstruction of Beirut's city center faced extraordinary opposition by intellectuals and cultural players in the 1990s because it was considered to be a project to abolish the memory of the civil war (and by erasing the memory it was renewing the civil war, according to Elias Khoury in a panel discussion at Ashkal Alwan on 23 November 2015). Having largely erased the traces of the war and then having rebuilt the city center, Solidere continues to control it. Since it dominates a large area of land at the heart of

the capital city and engages in a variety of cultural activities, it has a significant impact on Beirut's image and is involved in cultural policies, both explicit and implicit. Considering its conception of a number of high-profile cultural projects, such as the establishment of Beirut Exhibition Center, the branding of Saifi Village—one of the quarters in the Central District—as Quartier des Arts, the design of a heritage trail throughout the city center, and its ongoing project of establishing a City History Museum, it is surprising that Solidere has no unified cultural strategy. Its Events and Public Relations Department is working on ideas like the branding of Saifi Village, whereas the Urban Planning Department has been working on strategies for the heritage trail and the museum (al-Solh). While Solidere might thus have no explicit cultural policies, it is certainly implicitly shaping cultural policies in the area under its supervision.

By filtering and selecting which events to hold in downtown Beirut, for instance, Solidere determines the cultural life of the city center. Solidere is driven by economic and market considerations, which are then reflected in their choice of which events they hold and which artists they work with. In the words of one cultural manager who worked with Solidere, "they love everything that is foreign and established, everything that makes money and looks good," while not being interested in the experimental, unfinished, or messy. There was no space in Solidere for the latter. Solidere also has implicit cultural policies in their rules and regulations of what is or is not allowed in the central district, which directly affects the face of the city center. Visitors to Zaitunay Bay, for instance, will find an extensive range of instructions on what not to do, including cycling or shouting, walking a dog, eating food or using a transistor radio or water pipe. While everyone is technically allowed in the Beirut Central District, the presence of security guards throughout the area and instructions such as those posted at the entrance to Zaitunay Bay make some individuals feel unwelcome. The case of Solidere underlines the interplay of urban and cultural policies and further shows that provided infrastructure must be coupled with programming in order to create a vibrant cultural scene. Controlling the area leaves little space for surprise or organic growth.

Censorship

This last point regarding control brings me to a short discussion of censorship. Censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression are a major component of policies concerning culture. Censorship can be wielded on many different levels: on the level of the individual (self-censorship) or a social group, on the level of an institution, or on the level of the state. In Lebanon, it is usually executed through the General Security (Ministry of Interior). As becomes clear in a study on censorship in Lebanon, explicit policies concerning censorship, as manifested through laws that have been formulated in order to ensure the exercise of freedom of expression, are often undermined by implicit policies or practices that "give influential parties and individuals the power to interfere and restrict" this freedom. The study further concludes that the "General Security's decision-making process is partially influenced by the opinions of religious institutions and political groups" (Saghieh, Geagea, and Saghieh 7-8). Arbitrary judgments without legal foundations are, apparently, not the exception. While Lebanon enjoys greater freedom of expression than most countries in the region, many unwritten rules and effective power-centers impact the exercise of creative output in the country. Thus books, plays, events, music and other cultural forms are regularly censored. Here, the work of artists and civil society initiatives play an important role in highlighting and informing the public about cases of censorship in Lebanon. The NGO *March*, for instance, founded in 2011, fights

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for freedom of expression and against censorship. It has created The Virtual Museum of Censorship to this end, where a list of works censored in Lebanon can be found (*The Virtual Museum of Censorship*). The idea is to raise awareness amongst the public in order to create a base to "hold the government accountable for its actions and decisions" (*March Lebanon*). The arbitrariness of censorship is well illustrated in writer Lucien Bourjeily's play *Will It Pass or Not?*, in which he ridicules the decision-making process at the General Security. In the play, a young filmmaker is applying for permission to produce his first film and has his script cut apart by the official in charge, rendering it meaningless, only to then be granted permission after the official's assistant discovers that the young filmmaker is related to an important figure in the censorship directorate (Index on Censorship). The play reflects the reality that many cultural players must negotiate when applying for permissions, and it further highlights some of the subjects considered sensitive in Lebanon. It is a clear (and humorous) example of how policies and laws become secondary when other power dynamics are at play.

Conclusion

The use of the terms explicit and implicit cultural policy is not fixed, but is flexible. As Ahearne asserts, "if we preserve permutational flexibility in our use of the terms, it allows us to pick up more shapes and nuances in the messy and always rather 'improper' realities of culture and politics" (145). In this vein, the terms have been used to add depth to our understanding of cultural policies in Lebanon without any normative implications. The line between explicit and implicit can be fluid, but the distinction helps us to widen our scope when thinking about strategies and struggles for culture. The examples have been Beirut-focused, but conclusions can be applied to other governorates. The aim of this paper was not to be comprehensive, but to give some punctual examples of areas of cultural policy making and some of the actors involved, in order to start a debate on the re-conceptualization of cultural policies in Lebanon. I also hope to have shown that the conditions created for culture implicitly, such as the liberal law of associations, are a crucial part of the country's cultural policies, whereas some of the explicit policies—such as putting legislation in place—can be ineffective if practices are in reality determined by other imperatives.

→ ## Notes

[1] "Through its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU works with its southern and eastern neighbors to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration. This goal builds on common interests and values—democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion. The ENP is a key part of the European Union's foreign policy." ("European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP))"

[2] Prominent associations include theaters like Beirut Theater or the Sunflower Theater in Beirut or the Istanbouli Theater in Tyre; Assabil Friends of Public Libraries; the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts (Ashkal Alwan); the Arab Image Foundation; Zico House; UMAM Documentation and Research; the Safadi Cultural Center in Tripoli; festival associations like the Committee of the Baalbeck International Festival, and movements like the Antelias Cultural Movement, to name but a few.

[3] According to Brones, architect Jad Tabet suggests exactly the opposite: namely, that the project in fact reflected the failure of activists to protect the city's architectural heritage, since the Barakat building (Beit Beirut) was only one of many other buildings that could have been preserved (151).

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.5088

Keepin' It Real: Arabic Rap and the Re-Creation of Hip Hop's Founding Myth

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In the context of the so called Arab Spring, the role and function of "popular culture" generally, and hip hop specifically, have been scrutinized by a row of scholars and journalists. Connecting the respective cultural practices and products with the founding myth of hip hop as it materialized in the USA, Arabic rap is not only able to authenticate its products and performances, but it additionally sustains the relevance of social, political, and economic marginality for these respective cultural practices. This article explores a selection of decisive features of the founding myth of hip hop that are actualized through their representation in the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords: Hip Hop; Cultural Heritage; Popular Culture; Arab Spring; Cultural Practice

Intro

Hip means to know,
It's a form of intelligence,
To be hip is to be update and relevant.
Hop is a form of movement.
You can't just observe a hop,
You gotta hop up and do it.

KRS One ft. Marley Marl, "Hip Hop Lives (I Come Back)" 2007

In the course of the uprisings and revolutions of 2011, Arabic rap became more aware of its social and political potential. The events and discourses of the so called Arab Spring were conducive to, on the one hand, the freedom to produce cultural products and commodities in an environment freed from direct censorship and, on the other hand, the possibility for rappers to relate to a revolutionary setting and contribute to the accompanying discourses. The cultural production of the Arab hip hop-community today is vast. Thousands of MCs are disseminating their voice to local, regional and global audiences. By way of its founding myth and narrative, hip hop-culture provides significant tools to artists and local hip hop-communities in respective societies through the structure of its practices and its ability to equip would-be revolutionaries with signs, symbols and codes. This is the frame

for the discussion attempted in this article about the performance and re-creation of the narrative and myth of hip hop-culture's founding era in an Arabic and Middle Eastern context.

Thus, I explore the founding myth of hip hop-culture and the preservation of decisive features of its cultural heritage—understood as intangible and consisting of social norms, aesthetic beliefs, traditions and the oral history of hip hop—in the Middle East and North Africa. In this endeavor, "myth" is not understood as a fictitious tale, rather, it is understood as "lived reality" creating a normative thrust, whose authenticity is created through repetitive performance (Klein and Friedrich 62). Concomitantly, I understand the "heritage" of hip hop as a constructed narrative that is realized through a concentration on specific aspects of the structure of the culture and a selected historiography of its recorded lyrical material. Claiming to represent "real" hip hop and being true to its credentials involves the "authentic" performance of the practices of the culture. "Real" and "authentic," however, must be understood as floating signifiers, who adjust their meaning to coincide with altered spatiality—both socially as well as geographical—and changed temporality. The reification of a specific intangible cultural heritage through the use of cultural practices is, congruously, a deeply social and cultural endeavor with no claims to objectivity or factual, measurable truth. Instead of questioning claims of objectivity or authenticity, I will thus present examples of conscious identity constructions that are able to tap into a widely diffused and believed myth of the ability of hip hop to "speak truth to power."

In what way and to what effect, then, is the myth and narrative of the hip hop-generation[1] connected to the struggles of contemporary Arabic societies, whose hip hop-communities are now at the forefront of representing one of the more recent examples of the global spread of hip hop-practices and aesthetics? What artistic content is being produced, and how does the "cultural heritage" of hip hop manifest itself in and through these cultural products? In answering these questions, I will, on the one hand, compare the signification of socio-economic, political and societal factors that are deemed constitutive for the hip hop-generation of the USA with those of the Arabic hip hop-community. On the other hand, lyrical and aesthetic aspects of hip hop-practices in the Arabic context shall serve as examples for the reification of hip hop as a means for providing a voice to the voiceless, spreading knowledge and for preserving the revolutionary zeal in the Middle East and North Africa after 2011. The first part of this paper is concerned with the political legacy of hip hop and with its potential revolutionary quality and rebellious posture. In the second part, the prominence of "the local" in hip hop-culture will be assessed as a crucial aspect for authenticating and, by that measure, validating cultural practices. Hip hop-culture is conventionally understood as being comprised of four elements: DJing, MCing or rapping, graffiti and breakdance. To these four some add a fifth, knowledge or "overstanding,"[2] as the one element that holds the other together and that is crucial for being perceived as "authentic." Here, I will concentrate specifically on the cultural practice of rapping. The rapper epitomizes the orator, lyricist and historicist of hip hop-communities across the globe. In understanding the Arabic-speaking hip hop-community as one tribe of the Global Hip Hop Nation (GHHN), I will not include in my discussion any other linguistic identifications. I am, however, aware of their existence in the respective societies. Additionally, my treatment of the issues presented is in no way exhaustive; rather, by presenting select examples, my aim is to highlight transregional modes of re-creation of cultural practices along with a set of presumed, or performed, normative implications.

Revolution and Rebellion in Hip Hop

> My people wake up, why you sleepin?
> Don't give up, not that easy!
> Not for Morsy, not for Sisi,
> None of them really cares if you're eatin.
>
> MC Amin feat. Sphinx, "Batel" ("Deception") 2013[3]

In several societies experiencing uprisings, revolutions and civil unrest in the so called Arab Spring, practitioners used the cultural practices of hip hop to formulate critique, describe the socio-economic hardships that led to the widely felt discontent and add their voice to the discourses concerned with the reasons for and the events around the uprisings and revolutions. In doing so, the hip hop-communities in the Middle East and North Africa were able to connect their activities to the founding myth and narrative of global hip hop-culture. From its beginning in the urban ghettos of the USA, hip hop provided artistic means to engage in public deliberation about the social, political and economic situation of its practitioners, which initially consisted of mostly African American youth of New York in the 1970s (Rose 2).

More than a decade after the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1960s, the African American population in the USA was still confronted with rampant racism and the labeling of the "Black male" as the archetypal criminal. After the end of segregation, incarceration had become the new model for the subjugation of African Americans. The inner city, where crime and drug abuse had fused with everyday violence, came to be seen as an arena for harsh containment policies by state security institutions. The setting was characterized by an immense and expanding proportion of young African Americans who were governed by comparatively old, white people (Chang 387). The socio-economic situation was dire, with poor housing and infrastructure, economic deprivation, and scarcity of job opportunities. In the words of hip hop-historian Jeff Chang: "If blues culture had developed under conditions of oppressive, forced labor, hip hop-culture would arise from the conditions of no work" (13).

According to its founding myth, hip hop provided means to confront these harsh conditions of life in the postindustrial city as an ethnic minority, excluded from economic growth and ignored by state institutions and services (Taylor 116-18). The cultural practices contained in hip hop-culture enabled communities to gain agency and a voice, tackling issues directly relating to their personal and communal life-worlds (Mikos 66-67). They fostered artistic creativity and were able to create a form of competitiveness on the basis of lyrical, musical, or artistic skills instead of physical or material power. Competing with one another by way of these practices has been delineated since their genesis according to their perceived authenticity, the ability to perform a viable representation of social, political, and/or religious/spiritual experiences or life-worlds relevant to the respective hip hop-community. Being a recurrent term in hip hop-culture, I understand "[r]epresentation [a]s the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" (Hall 17). The practice of rapping is, understood in this way, a quest for meaning, for overstanding. This pertains especially to the local—the "hood" or "street" and its people—but also to the wider political or religious perspective and the connections between the local and the global as well as between the particular and the universal. Accordingly, the rapper functions as a conjunction between the world—or his/her representation of it—and his/her community, epitomizing a form of "organic intellectual" (Abrams).

Accordingly, and as with all culture, the signs and symbols, codes and aesthetics as well as the language employed in hip hop are quintessentially about making

sense of oneself and the world. Language, as the central tool in the practice of the orators and lyricists of hip hop, is combined with beats and samples of prerecorded music to generate a thrust that is cognitively relevant as well as rhythmically or musically appealing. The lyrics, delivered in rhyme-schemes of sometimes astonishing complexity, are designed to not only appeal to the audience or community, but additionally, to create an aesthetic experience through the "flow" achieved by the combination of language and rhythm.

With the "fifth Element" of hip hop—knowledge—rap was acquiring the function of "Black America's CNN," according to the rapper and member of the famous group Public Enemy, Chuck D (Chang 251). Rapping made it possible "[…] to express what the official language of politics […] [was] incapable of translating" (Daulatzai xxvi) and to spread knowledge about the circumstances of the community through an independent media network, i.e. the "streets." The famous hip hop-proverb "each one teach one" has carried the revolutionary idea of self-esteem and self-reliance of the African American community in the USA since the 1970s. Rap and hip hop by that measure, constitute an excellent example of the claim that

> "[m]usic has provided an affective form of communication that has not simply been subjective, intuitive and irrational, but which has been used to produce forms of 'counter-rationality' which in turn have created affiliations, alliances and understanding amongst dispersed and diverse groups of people." (Negus 222)

Some of the features that are conducive to the emergence and relevance of hip hop in the US are comparable to the situation of large parts of the population in the Middle East and North Africa: The scarcity of jobs, the demographics of an overwhelmingly young population and the conditions of living under the scrutiny of security institutions and the police in an environment of socioeconomic despair (Dhillon and Yousef). Against this background, the founding myth of hip hop was able to provide a connection to a revolutionary outlook and the respective vocabulary. Hip hop's cultural practices could provide a stage for the unheard, a home for the displaced, and a social community. Facing the powers that were, hip hop offered a language of empowerment, self-reliance, pride, and meaning. Putting the immediate social surrounding in the center and reflecting on its economic, political and religious/spiritual situation and discourse, rap was a way to artistically encounter the "real world," and in doing so, empower oneself and one's community. This rebellious attitude, which is inherent in the founding myth and history of hip hop, is a defining appeal for its adherents and was preserved when the culture spread globally:

> "Although hip hop originated among African American communities in the United States of America as an expression of their struggle against racial oppression and economic disparity, rap music and hip hop-culture is combined with linguistic, musical and political contexts to become a vehicle for youth protest and resistance around the world." (Williams 67)

Standing out in the early debates about the dangers of rap music in the US, the song "Fuck tha Police" by the group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitudes) sparked controversy in the late 1980s. Accusing the group and its song for glorifying violence against police and motivating listeners to defy the authority of state security, the FBI wrote a concerned letter to Ruthless Records, the publisher. Additionally, the group was banned from performing on several occasions and even arrested off stage after defying police restrictions regarding the performance of this song. In spite of radio stations banning their album *Straight Outta Compton*, it went triple platinum and is now among the most influential hip

hop-albums ever made. Tapping into this legacy and referencing the Tunisian security institutions, the rapper Weld El 15 claimed in a 2013 production that policemen are dogs ("Boulicia Kleb"). The reaction by the state was even harsher in this instance: The rapper was charged and imprisoned and only released after the application of extensive public pressure (Amara; Wandler). Other songs and videos, for example "Prisoner" by the Arabian Knightz or "Kazeboon" ("Liars") by Revolution Records, share this critical perspective on state security by showing street clashes and violence perpetrated by uniformed state employees. Thereby, a core theme of the hip hop-narrative was easily appropriated by the Arab hip hop-community, who could directly identify with the view of the police as being "just another gang" and an active agent in the "War against Youth" (Chang 387-89).

In December 2010, the Tunisian rapper Hamada Ben Amor, better known by his stage name El General, released his song "Rais LeBled" ("Head of State") on the video-platform YouTube. In this song, he accuses former president Ben Ali of ignoring the miserable situation of the Tunisian people. He speaks about hunger, death, and poverty and holds the head of state accountable for this misery, addressing him in direct speech. In the course of the events of 2011 and the overthrow of the regime of President Ben Ali, this song was part of the "revolutionary soundtrack" and resounded throughout the entire region. In academia and European and North American media, the rapper was deemed a decisive driving force behind the events with *Time Magazine* adding him to the list of the 100 most influential people of 2011 ("The 2011 Time 100").

By addressing the head of state directly in his lyrics, El General not only represents himself as a speaker for his fellow Tunisians, but he also simultaneously cites a prominent theme of hip hop-culture: the depiction of political and social problems by using the lyrical form of an open letter to the government or the head of state. In collaboration with The Outlawz, the song "Dear Mr. President" by the hip hop-icon 2Pac was released posthumously in 1999. LL Cool J and Wyclef Jean added the international perspective in 2008. In their song "Dear Mr. President," again written like an open letter, they connected the struggles of the poor and neglected parts of the population of the USA with the hardships of people in the Middle East in the time of the "War on Terror" as well as with the conditions of immigrants trying to reach the USA.

The "blackness" of hip hop's formative period, signifying the marginality that is crucial to understand its founding myth and narrative, is replaced with "Arabness" (Zein) through the artistic and performative alignment of the respective social and political sphere. While the effects of economic constrains, lack of resources and police violence can be compared more or less directly between African American New Yorkers in the 1970s and the young generation of many Arab societies, the issue of marginality is additionally perceived through a global perspective. Being part of the ethnic and linguistic majority in society, Arabic rap is still able to point to the legacy of colonialism and poor governance in order to argue that "Arab" and "Arabic" indicate a form of global marginality.

The Local in the Global and the Globally Local

> And still I see no changes; can't a brother get a little peace?
> There's war on the streets and war in the Middle East.
> Instead of war on poverty
> They got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.
>
> 2Pac, "Changes" 1998

With hip hop, we witness a global culture, where certain products, codes, practices,

words and styles are visible throughout different local hip hop-communities, and which are often combined with strong references to the founding generation and the idols of hip hop in the US. The work of the Wu Tang Clan, Nas, NWA or 2Pac[4] are supposedly known to every hip hop-adherent; additionally, certain figures of speech and a given set of vocabulary is used globally (Androutsopoulos 56-59). The founders of hip hop and the principles circumscribing its practices since its genesis are appreciated, embraced and cited in hip hop-communities the world over thus enabling us to speak of a shared cultural heritage. All of these communities together constitute the global network, the "imagined community" (Anderson) of the "Global Hip Hop Nation" (Alim 3).

The decisive local character of the cultural practices was instrumental for their global diffusion. This element has enabled local scenes to not only become part of a global cultural community with its codes and conventions but to also do so by connecting respective codes and conventions to the local sphere and society (Pennycook and Mitchell 30-35). Among other things, "[h]ip hop was shaping a language that allowed young people to negotiate a political voice *for themselves in their societies*" (Fernandes, *Close to the Edge* 4, emphasis added). Some allude to Ronald Robertson and speak of the inherently "glocal" quality of hip hop (Klein and Friedrich 10), others hint at the rather fluid and changing relationship between the global and the local. The global and the local in this context are not to be understood as fixed entities but rather as references to the widespread diffusion of the cultural practices and the representation of physical places (nation, town, neighborhood etc.) in and through these practices (Negus 183).

The embedding of one's own artistic performance into a local context in meaningful ways is indispensable for gaining respect in that respective hip hop-community (Klein and Friedrich 23). The rapper performs a representation of the "hood" or "street" in his/her rhymes by referencing the living conditions or life-worlds of the social, economic and political environment in his immediate surroundings. The spatial dimension functions concurrently with the social dimension in hip hop-culture. The Egyptian rapper Deeb takes up this theme in his song "Masrah Deeb" ("Deeb's Stage"), in which he describes the urban setting in Cairo as his material and social stage. In the same manner, the MC Sphinx of the Arabian Knightz, another Egyptian crew, embraces his city by rapping: "Unlike anyone else I live what I write - still got the streets of Cairo up under my Nikes" in the song "Fokkak" ("Relax", or "Loosen Up"). Connecting the geographical dimension with an immediate social and political twist, the Egyptian MC Amin, in his song "El Thawra Mustamera" ("The Revolution Continues"), describes the fans of the football team Al Ahly from Cairo as his family, denouncing their alleged role in the riots around a match against El Masry in Port Said leaving at least 73 killed (Kirkpatrick).

This locality, signifying spatial rootedness and social embeddedness, can itself be conducive to specific inter-regional connections or points of reference. A central theme elaborated on in hip hop-culture in the USA concerns the history of African American movements for equal rights and a positive identity construction. The principles and teachings of the Nation of Islam[5] and the speeches of Malcolm X ranked prominently in these references,[6] exemplifying not only the connection between the hip hop-generation and Black Nationalism together with the Islamic faith, but also the linking of the struggles of African Americans in the US with their ancestral homeland in Africa and Asia (Daulatzai 41-44). Hip hop by that measure contributed to a discourse, in which the fight against state racism was only one battlefield in the fight against the global supremacy of the white man, epito-

mized especially by the European colonization of Africa and the Middle East and the reverberations thereof. The understanding of racism as qualitatively equivalent, both inside the US and abroad, allowed for a more comprehensive critique and the possibility to position oneself outside of the national consensus that was so replete with assuring white, male dominance (Daulatzai 7, 29, 37). Instead of being a national minority, African Americans could claim to represent the global majority.

Additionally, the influences of the Black Power movement led many hip hoppers of the founding generation to embrace the religion of Islam or a form of religiosity associated with Islam. "[…] hip hop culture […] became a space in which Black radicalism, Islam, and the politics of the Muslim Third World have had a powerful impact on the lyrical imaginations, sonic landscapes and political visions […]" (xxviii). With religion, especially Islam, figuring prominently in the political discourses around the events of 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa, this aspect of the hip hop-myth resonated through the cultural practices of local hip hop-communities; albeit in a way that responded to local public discourses and the connected political agendas like the rise of Islamist parties in several countries and the inter-regional discourse between the "West" and the "East."

As most of the Arab rappers see themselves as Muslims and use this identity marker in their artistic production, this feature of the heritage of hip hop-culture is quite naturally appropriated by a considerable portion of Arabic rap. In the Middle East and North Africa, we find a host of artists engaged in reflecting on their religious credentials through their lyrics. The aforementioned El General, through his revolutionary anthem heralded in Europe as a speaker of his generation, released the track "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great") shortly after the revolution in which he describes his wish to fight and die for Islam. The Syrian group Black Bannerz refers in its name to the banners of the Abbasids reminiscent of a period in history where the Caliphate represented prowess and progress; the members of the group call themselves Holy War and S.O.T.A (Slave Of The Almighty). Furthermore, the ascent to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2012 motivated the production of the song "Makshoufeen" ("The Exposed") by the MCs Rush and MC Amin from Cairo and Mansoura respectively. In it, the rappers accuse those groups of abusing Islam for petty political goals instead of honoring its true credentials.

Conclusion: Arab Rap Representin'

> Hip hop ain't dead!
> It never died!
> It just moved to the Middle East
> where the struggle is still alive
>
> Arabian Knightz, "Uknighted" 2012

The above quote refers to the song and album *Hip Hop is Dead* by the US-artist Nas from 2006. The lyrics of the song harshly criticize the state of hip hop-culture in the USA during the time of its release. Referencing artists and ideals connected to the formative period of hip hop, Nas laments the commercialization and standardization of rap music. The loss of the artistic and cultural core of the practices of hip hop in this environment leads him to the conclusion that hip hop died. In effect, then, Arabian Knightz and the other 26 artists featured on the song "Uknighted," who in great majority live in or originate from Arabic countries, reclaim hip hop and perform a re-animation of its lost heritage. The quote indirectly approves of Nas' diagnosis and concludes by revealing the reason for the perceived "death" of hip hop in the USA: The essential ingredient for "real" hip hop and cause for its re-location to the "Middle East" is "the struggle." For hip hop to live, its prac-

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titioners must be involved in some kind of social or political "struggle."
Through their inclusion in a sizeable community and the contents of their lyrics, the Arabic hip hop-community is changing the face of the GHHN, and is compellingly stressing the revolutionary core of its practices and values once again. The actualization of the founding myth of hip hop has thus been accomplished compellingly in Arabic-speaking contexts since 2011. The uprisings and revolutions had the effect of propelling the artistic production and political content onto history's stage, and thereby, making the work of the artists visible to a larger audience and their lyrics more relevant to their political and societal setting. Stressing this role of Arabic rap "re-presenting" hip hop, Sujatha Fernandes, Professor of Political Economy and Sociology at the University of Sidney, refers to Arabic as being the new "lingua franca" of the GHHN ("Mixtape").

Notes

[1] According to journalist and activist Bakari Kitwana, this hip-hop-generation is constituted of Afro-Americans born between 1965 and 1984 (Chang 2).

[2] "Overstanding" alludes to a form of deeper understanding, of being able to sufficiently comprehend one's social and material surroundings.

[3] All artists and songs in this article are indicated by names only. This is done due to the availability of these songs via platforms like YouTube, Soundcloud, Facebook or MySpace and their appearances on several platforms and compilations. Additionally, Arabic rap is often distributed independently via the internet and consequently without a publisher and a corresponding single or album release. The transliteration follows the spelling used by the artists themselves and do not correspond to the usual transliteration rules. If no translator is indicated, the English version is the original.

[4] All of these MCs and groups are icons for the global hip hop-nation and are, or were, decisive driving forces for hip hop-culture in general. Wu Tang Clan and Nas are still very much active in representing their art.

[5] The Nation of Islam is an African American religious community and political movement that was founded in 1930 in Detroit by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad.

[6] The speeches of Malcolm X were sampled in hip hop-productions numerous times. One prominent example is the song "Who's Gonna Take the Weight" by Gang Starr on their Album *Step in the Arena* (1990). In the song and the accompanied video, the rapper assures his identity as Muslim and the connection between racism in the USA and the struggles of the Blacks in South Africa and the colonized and war-torn peoples of the Muslim Third World. Another example is Public Enemy, who featured samples of Malcolm X's speeches in several productions and who show their own emblem beside a picture of Malcolm X in the video for their famous song "Fight the Power," in which they themselves are depicted as leaders of a political movement.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6329

ANTI/THESIS

ANTI-THESIS

Islam and the Alleged Incompatibility with Popular Culture

Pierre Hecker

This paper critically reflects upon the alleged incompatibility of Islam and popular culture, the antipathy toward the study of popular culture in the field of Islamic Studies, and the question of what it is that puts "the popular" into culture.

Keywords: Popular; Islamic Culture; Resistance; Cultural Theory

Islam and Popular Culture

When preparing the present META issue, Igor Johannsen and I realized that, in the overall discourse on culture, particular attention has to be devoted to the issue of "popular culture." Having done research on heavy metal and hip hop in the Middle East, it seemed inevitable to us to address this highly ambiguous concept, especially since both fields, metal and hip hop studies alike, are commonly assigned to the realm of popular culture. Furthermore, academic attention in the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies has increasingly shifted toward issues of popular culture in recent years, but only after this particular area of research had been widely neglected for a long period of time.

At the time I began working on my PhD dissertation on *Heavy Metal in a Muslim Context* over a decade ago, I usually received astonished, sometimes disdainful looks from friends and colleagues when I first told them about the subject of my research. Not only did many of them consider the topic to be "exotic," but, even worse, academically irrelevant. People were either surprised about the very existence of metal culture in the Muslim world or regarded the phenomenon not to be worth investigating, as they refused to classify it as a serious research topic. Back then, the field of metal studies was

still to be established. Yet, from today's perspective, I see these reactions as a result of the dominant discourse on "Islamic culture," rather than a lack of academic research on metal (for more details on the debate on "Islamic culture" see the editorial of this issue).

Islam, from an essentialist perspective á la G.E. Grunebaum, Bernard Lewis, or Samuel P. Huntington, is still widely seen as the organizing principle of Muslim-dominated societies. Islam purportedly not only provides the rules of personal conduct and belief, but, moreover, the essence of a superordinate, collective identity. The efficacy of this highly problematic understanding of culture as a coherent and more or less closed system entails that the appropriation of cultural resources from outside the system must be perceived as "unnatural," non-representative (of "Islamic culture") and, therefore, irrelevant in the long term. Heavy metal in a Muslim context, viewed from this perspective, must be equally seen as something foreign or alien or possibly even considered a matter of cultural imperialism. The visible presence of a subculture that originates from the working-class districts of Birmingham in England is something that should not exist in Muslim societies, in the first place, and, if it nevertheless does, is to be considered a highly exceptional phenomenon. With regard to the results of my own research, I dare claim that the presence of heavy metal is by no means an exceptional phenomenon in the Muslim world. I, moreover, assume that for most metalheads in Turkey, for instance, it would seem odd to consider heavy metal as something foreign or alien, as they were socialized into this culture in similar ways as fellow metalheads in Germany, Japan, the US or elsewhere—though the societal meaning of doing metal in Turkey admittedly has to be considered differently from other social or political contexts (Hecker). The globalization of cultural resources and the formation of hybrid identities in various contexts all over the world have long rendered essentialist assertions by Orientalist writers untenable. The persistence of the Islam-and-the-West paradigm, however, still fosters the widespread idea of the inherently "Western nature" of popular culture, making it therefore incompatible with Islam or "Islamic culture."

Another obstacle to the study of popular culture has been the persistence of particular academic traditions in the field of Islamic studies. The German Council of Science and Humanities only a few years ago came to the conclusion that "the field of Islamic Studies in Germany remains deep in the tradition of Oriental studies" (35), which in essence means that, as an academic discipline, German Islamic Studies are rooted in a philological tradition of studying religious, philosophical, and historical texts from the past. This may no longer hold true for the entire discipline, especially with regard to the vast number of rather recent studies on contemporary Islamic movements in Germany. The study of popular culture, however, is still widely seen as lying beyond the research interests of Islamic studies. The primary purpose of Islamic studies appears to remain in the study of the "major languages of Islam" (i.e. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) and the analysis of written texts that are somehow related to religion. Popular cultural phenomena such as heavy metal, hip hop, fashion, comic books, soap operas, or the like have been widely neglected until recently, even when seen from a perspective of conveying or contesting Islamic traditions and values.

What is Popular Culture?

Despite all reservations, recent years have seen the publication of several edited volumes on popular culture in the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. In 2011, Andrew N. Weintraub edited the volume *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* which was followed by Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman's *Popular Culture in the Middle East and*

North Africa in 2013 and Karin van Nieuwkerk, Mark Levine, and Martin Stokes' *Islam and Popular Culture* in 2016. All three volumes underline the significance of popular culture, not only in the everyday lives of ordinary people, but also with regard to politics. The study of popular culture is therefore of considerable academic relevance.

What the books of El Hamamsy/Soliman and Nieuwkerk/Levine/Stokes have in common is a neo-Gramscian approach, which originally evolved in British Cultural Studies in the 1970s (see also John Storey's contribution in this issue). Popular culture is thus seen by the authors as a means of resistance and containment. It is a site of political struggle and functions to either contest or consolidate the political power of the ruling elite. The authors explicitly relate this definition to the uprisings of the so-called "Arab Spring," during which graffiti, street theater, hip-hop, rai, and other forms of cultural production played a crucial role in the process of political mobilization. Popular culture, in this sense, is defined through meaning rather than form.

This, however, poses serious challenges to the observer. To conceptualize popular culture as representations of resistance and containment requires to closely study the production of meaning in the particular research context. Only if it is possible to determine the dominant representations that are being contested and contained as well as the signifiers that represent resistance will it be possible to classify particular cultural phenomena as popular culture. In other words, the question of what popular culture is depends on the particular research context. For instance, the depiction of penguins in graffiti and street art would most probably not be interpreted as a challenge to the political system in the UK, in Turkey's post-Gezi Park era, however, penguins signify resistance toward the present government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The penguin attained its iconic meaning during the so-called Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013. While the cable news channel *CNN International*, at the height of the protests, provided live coverage of the political events, its Turkish affiliate *CNN Türk* broadcasted a documentary on penguins instead. The protesters regarded *CNN Türk*'s decision as an act of censorship and, accordingly, incorporated the penguin as a symbolic icon into their protest movement. Even today the image of the penguin is used as a symbol of defiance and remembrance of the democratic protests that were violently suppressed by the government. Consequentially, it is not graffiti and street art in itself that makes it popular culture, but its relational meaning in a particular socio-political context. Penguins depicted by graffiti artists in the streets of London can therefore not be classified as popular culture—based on the assumption that graffiti and street art are no longer *per se* considered as a deviant art form by the authorities and the British public.

Needless to say, there are various ways of conceptualizing popular culture, and the aforementioned neo-Gramscian approach, due to its specific focus on resistance and containment, is clearly limited. John Storey in his highly acclaimed book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* stresses the ambiguous nature of the term by arguing that "popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (1). Nevertheless, he also argues that the study of popular culture has been determined by a collection of six different approaches that, although they are partly overlapping, can be clearly identified. Namely, these are popular culture as widely favored or well-liked by many; as inferior culture (in contrast to high culture); as mass culture (mass-produced for mass consumption); as folk culture (the culture that originates from "the people"); as a site of struggle between

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subordinate and dominant groups (see above); as postmodern culture (6-13). Storey therefore would most probably argue that meaning alone does not put the "popular" into culture. He stresses, for instance, that popular culture must include a quantitative dimension (6). This idea of popular culture as something that is favored or well-liked by a huge number of people can, however, at least occasionally conflict with the previously outlined approach of popular culture as a site of resistance: The internationally renowned song "Şıkıdım" ("Shake") by Turkish pop singer Tarkan may be popular in terms of numbers (music downloads, record sales, radio airplay, clicks on *YouTube*, etc.), but not in terms of resistance. By the same token, the "resistance factor" in Murder King's Gezi-related song "Demokrasi" ("Democracy") is certainly high, its "popularity" due the relatively small number of Turkish-speaking (metal) listeners, however, is low. In the context of this short essay, it would not make sense to repeat and discuss every single concept of popular culture as outlined by Storey. It must be clear, however, that "the popular" in popular culture needs to be defined precisely if there is to be any point to its usage. Without a clear definition, "popular culture" could not be distinguished from the similarly ambiguous term "culture" (see the editorial of the present META issue).

Popular Culture in Islamic Studies

Having said this, I would now like to come back to the difficult relationship between Islamic studies and popular culture. Andrew N. Weintraub's *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* provides an inspiring new perspective that might help to overcome the antipathy to popular culture in Islamic studies. By comprehending popular culture "as a site of struggle over what counts as Islam" (2), Weintraub combines a neo-Gramscian approach with some of the traditional research interests of Islamic studies. The sites in which the struggle over the meaning of Islam takes place are identified by Weintraub as sermon-filled soap operas, veils on rock stars, Prophet cartoons and other contemporary cultural phenomena through which religious meanings are not only being conveyed but (re)negotiated. The purpose of studying representations of Islam in popular culture thus promises to produce much needed knowledge on contemporary religiosities in the Muslim world and the (re)interpretation of Islam's holy scriptures in the era of social media and modern communication technologies. With this in mind, any thought about the alleged incompatibility of Islam with popular culture appears obsolete.

What distinguishes the study of popular culture from traditional approaches to culture in Islamic studies, in my opinion, is that popular culture must be conceived as a product of modernity, while "Islamic culture" is traditionally conceptualized as originating from the early days of Islam, the theological interpretations of religious scriptures, and the intellectual discourses of pre-modern thinkers (see the debate on Thomas Bauer's concept of "Islamic culture" in the editorial). Popular culture, however, is the result of modern means of cultural production and therefore closely linked to the processes of industrialization, digitalization, medialization, and globalization. Moreover, it is important to stress the spectacular nature of popular culture. Popular culture, especially when seen as a site of controversy and struggle, requires public display. Having said this, I think it is important to continue to use the term "popular culture" and to further reflect upon its relational usage in the aforementioned contexts of contemporary representations of Islam and the politics of culture as related to the resistance toward authoritarian regimes.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6490

ANTI-THESIS

"Popular Culture" and the Academy

Igor Johannsen

The term "popular culture" is mostly used to describe either cultural practices or products that are widespread and available for mass consumption or those practices that belong to the cultural sphere of "ordinary" people. The use of this concept in scholarly research and debate, however, is far from concise and often lacks the analytical clarity needed for sound and convincing knowledge production. Lacking a precise and viable definition for this concept, this essay argues for abolishing it in favor of the concept of "culture," which in itself can be operationalized so as to accommodate all forms and practices that can be perceived as cultural. The central argument consists of a critique of the inherent classifications of culture through respective adjectives that inevitably lead to normative assumptions and presuppose specific research questions or methods.

Keywords: Popular Culture; Ordinary People; Academia and Culture; Hip Hop

The Residue of Culture

Researching culture incorporates the complex question of classifications, either implicitly or explicitly, of what kind of culture it is, to which part of the spheres of human existence it relates to, where it is situated in society. Mostly the respective practices of, e.g. hip hop, craftsmanship or club-culture, are viewed as being part of the realm of "popular culture," as commodities for (mass-) consumption or as the practices and aesthetics of "ordinary" people. This perspective is problematic in a myriad of ways and leads to a row of difficult questions to properly situate the analysis of cultures that are perceived as "popular," some of which I will address in this essay. First: What is it that makes a culture "popular" and how is this different than a culture being just that, without the adjective "popular"? By using the concept of "popular culture" one strengthens the notion of it being a residual category that can be placed in opposition to something most often called "high culture;" this, in turn, incorporates specific claims regarding the assumed "complexity," "depth," and "relevance" of certain cultural practices as opposed to others. Second: Is the Differentiation analytically viable? In scholarly treatments of the "popular" or, in connection, "the ordinary," the use of these adjectives is often poorly reflected upon

and their meaning taken for granted, which eventually leads to a weakening of the respective argument.

In these cases, "popular culture" is a term adding rather than subtracting problems to research on specific cultural practices as it assumes some sort of normative disposition and general "quality." On these grounds, my argument is to instead use the term "culture" and apply it to any situation or discourse that is concerned with ways and means of creating and sustaining shared meanings and concepts in a form that is social and quintessentially normative, but never temporally or spatially fixed.

> In other words: "Culture […] is involved in all those practices […] which carry meaning and value for us, which need to be *meaningfully interpreted* by others, or which *depend on meaning* for their effective operation. Culture, in this sense, permeates all society." (Hall 3)

Thus, the very concept of culture seems broad, but can be put to use in quite specific ways. On the one hand, by understanding the concept of culture as incorporating all forms and manifestations of cultural activity on disparate levels and in all segments of society, cultural practices can be analyzed while being unconstrained by perceived qualifications and categories with inherent normative assumptions. Deconstructing those presumptive frames and discourses, the observer is enabling him– or herself to engage with cultural practices on their own terms; to ask what a specific practice or belief entails for the practitioner and why. Rather than assuming that the respective practices and beliefs are already located in a certain segment of society and discourse and by that, consequently, in need of some specific theoretical approach and methodological set of tools.

Ordinary

In his much hailed book *Life as Politics*, Asef Bayat sets out to describe how "ordinary people change the Middle East" in ways not hitherto covered by the theoretical approaches and concepts of social movement theory. Lacking organizational structures, an ideology or political program, and institutional foundations as well as acceptance by the state, people in the Middle East, Bayat claims, engage in a sort of activism on an everyday-basis in their daily conduct. What the author is trying to do is to describe these forms of contesting material realities by silently circumventing them in new terms. "Social nonmovement," then, serves as the category to grasp the activities and practices of an unorganized collective in society while the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" is introduced as a concept to think about political, social, and economic gains and liberties achieved by those "ordinary" people in their quest for a secure and dignified existence despite heavy constrains by their socio-economic conditions and the state. Published little more than a year before the eruptions of the uprisings in several Arabic states in 2011, commonly framed as "Arab Spring," Bayat's book seemed almost prophetic as it delivered perspectives on aspects of the society in the Middle East that could seemingly partially explain the reasons leading to the uprisings.

In some ways, Bayat's book contains questionable concepts and implicit romanticism in its depiction of the "ordinary," a category not delineated in a clear and concise manner, which as a result places the analytical clarity of the book in doubt. Additionally, while Bayat sketches out valuable information about the political and social conduct of disadvantaged segments and individuals in the Middle Eastern society, his treatment lacks the acknowledgment that those strategies are not reserved for the marginalized. On the contrary, just as James Scott makes clear in his book *Weapons of the Weak*:

> "It would be a grave mistake, as it is with peasant rebellions, to overly ro-

manticize the 'weapons of the weak.' They are unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation that peasants confront. Furthermore, the peasantry has no monopoly on these weapons, as anyone can easily attest who has observed officials and landlords resisting and disrupting state policies that are to their disadvantage." (30)

So, while insisting on the fact that the strategies of so called "ordinary" people and their quest for liberties in a state with a repressive government do matter, one should be acutely aware of the dangers of romanticizing these strategies as something only the marginalized populace can employ. Given the efficiency and the availability of instruments and means for circumventing the intended functioning of the state's regulations, one is tempted to rather speak of "the quiet encroachment of the privileged" if the concept would not be lacking analytical merit in itself. From the beginning, the strategies described by Bayat are far from "quiet" in the sense that they cannot be heard or make no sonic impression, but rather they occasionally include the deliberate and loud proclamation of discontent. Furthermore, the term "encroachment" suggests gradual territorial or discursive gains while throughout the book, and in reality, this impression clearly does not materialize.

In *Life as Politics* the "ordinary" becomes a residual category to refer generally to people—women, youth, unemployed, workers, the poor—instead of institutions, agencies, parties or movements. On the one hand, this category is rather heterogeneous and broad. On the other hand, however, it is concise enough to suggest a dichotomy in society, a differentiation between the "ordinary" and the "not-so-ordinary," where the "ordinary" lacks the level of organization, institutionalization and influence of its counterpart. Representing the institution of university, or at least its idea of knowledge production, scholars repeatedly and continuously ask questions concerning the "ordinary man/woman on the street" and his/her beliefs and actions. While these questions are vital for a viable understanding of society and the human being, the term "ordinary" at the same time signifies a form of "othering" and the amalgamation of diverse spheres of society into a single catchphrase.

Academic Myths

In its (re-)discovery of the "ordinary" the discourses around the events of 2011 share significant similarities with discourses around what is commonly referred to as "popular culture" in academia. In most cases, it is not quite clear what exactly determines the identification of subjects or groups as belonging to the sphere of the "ordinary" or which practices are deemed a part of "popular culture." The usage of these categories in academic writing and debating resembles many aspects of what Edward Said termed "Orientalism" in the 1970s, referring to the relation between Western academics and the mostly Arab countries and societies in the Middle East and North Africa that figured as their area of interest. This relation, Said argued, is deeply flawed and problematic through the ways in which the "West" employs material and discursive agendas to stylize the "Orient" as the principal "other," making it at once a source of sensory indulgence and fear. Attempting to research cultural practices and communities deemed "popular," or "ordinary," from the perspective of the university contains similar dangers and dynamics. It produces claims to power and agency in the respective discourses, thereby establishing discursive power-relations where the "popular" often figures as the "other" to academia, which serves as the location of the production of "proper," "scientific" knowledge.

These power-relations can be observed through a use of language that reveals a

specific understanding of the worth of either of these realms. During a conference on hip hop at the University of Cambridge in 2016, for example, the view was expressed that adherents of hip hop-culture should feel honored that academics see it as an object of study, ennobling hip hop through their time and attention. This argument can only be made regarding cultural forms deemed "popular," or practices of "ordinary" people. It is difficult to imagine that scholars would demand this kind of gratitude, theoretically, from Goethe or Mozart, Elias Khoury or Daniel Barenboim. Consequentially, this perspective carries implicit qualifications regarding different cultural practices, their worth, relevance, or complexity, without ever clarifying that difference in an analytically sound and convincing manner. The conviction that an object of inquiry is elevated and made more relevant by being subject to scholarly scrutiny comes with implicit forms of discrimination that discredit the academic endeavor considerably as it unmasks qualitative assumptions regarding the object as well as the subject of research.

Considerably adding to these problems, the understanding of the life-world of "academia" is poorly reflected upon while the object(s) of inquiry are deemed as requiring heavy scrutinizing. The university passes unchallenged as a place of "higher learning" and "high culture," home of the greatest thinkers and philosophers and constructive agents in the development of state and society. To my knowledge, there was never any meaningful attempt to scientifically engage in an analysis of the "culture" of academic institutions. Nonetheless, this culture does exist and it prefigures discourses and individual speech acts; it is involved in judging a research-question as significant or superfluous; it guides professional interaction and personal conduct like every other cultural sphere. Rituals and practices are as much part of the everyday conduct of scholars in university settings as it is part of the life of tribesmen in the Sahel, or, for that matter, of the local hip hop-community in Beirut or Hong Kong. Realizing differences between these practices should not lead us to deem the one precious and the other worthless, rather, in a quest for real apprehension, we should try to understand these rituals and practices as tools, as means and not as ends in themselves. While the latter could be reduced to a common human quest to make sense of life and the world, the means of doing so may vary without some inherent qualification as to the perceived usefulness. Indeed, the claim of superiority in the pursuit of knowledge must itself be understood as cultural, as a ritualistic practice of institutions for "higher" education aiming to increase the relevance of their practices. In academia, this is tightly bound to the myth of objective knowledge production, which leads to the claim that this specific form and structure of the "scientific" pursuit of knowledge is more efficient than other forms or structures.

Popularity and Resistance

This brings me back to the concept of "popular culture," a concept quite *en vogue* in academic debates concerned with the societies of states in the Middle East after 2011. One possibility for understanding "popular culture" seems especially likely in this context: popular culture as "resistance," as the arena for "speaking truth to power," the realm of the "average citizen" to create divergent truths and histories in the face of the hegemonic state apparatus. This reading places emphasis on the content and attitude of cultural practices and narratives and excludes other defining criteria like the popularity of those practices in society themselves. Instead of seeing "high culture" as the antagonist concept, it places the "hegemonic bloc" on the other side of the cultural divide. While this definition of popular culture seems attractive and sufficient in some contexts, and although it could be sufficiently rationalized for analysis, it still

reiterates some basic flaws concerning the persistent but vague antagonisms inherent in the concept itself. Also, the aesthetics of "rebellion" might be used and employed by the "hegemonic bloc" in its quest for the stabilization of its own rule. The researcher may be tempted to view such practices as belonging to the realm of popular culture—as resistance—while a closer look might reveal that the codes and signs employed already work to disseminate the meanings furthered by the hegemonic bloc.

Other than merely an institution of higher education occupied with the production of verifiable knowledge, the university itself offers excellent opportunities for political activism that use language and discourse as weapons of choice. This might be done deliberately or happen rather unconsciously. The same, in flipping the coin, is true about the cultural sphere most often referred to with the adjective "popular." It can be the site of cultural resistance and opposition to something which can be called "hegemonic" culture (which most probably is, among others, situated or produced in university). However, it might as well be a site for the deliberate or subconscious confirmation of hegemonic discourse and culture. In hip hop, for example, the founding myth is strongly connected to the situation of being denied a voice in society and consequently finding avenues to express discontent and alternative conceptions of life through cultural practices and language as well as appropriating the physical surrounding through art and movement (graffiti and breakdance). Nonetheless, the commodification of hip hop and the unparalleled success of its products in the music industry has led renowned and pioneering scholar of hip hop, Tricia Rose, to the conclusion that "American mainstream hip hop serves as the cultural arm of predatory capitalism"[1] and is consequently not challenging but rather reinforcing the central paradigms of hegemonic discourse in the US today.

By appropriating and diverting formerly rebellious subcultures to fit into a slightly adjusted hegemonic discourse, it is possible to divert the thrust coming from these divergent readings and interpretations of reality. When the rebel himself is being commodified, the rebellion has become part of the very system it rebels against. The rebellious posture inherent in the founding myth of hip hop-culture could in this way be made to lose much of its impact. The threat of a challenging discourse with wide appeal and potential to unmask iniquitous aspects of the hegemonic discourse are thus neutralized by appropriation. What is claimed to exemplify the cultural power for disrupting hegemonic notions and discourses can, thus, be appropriated and altered to fit the so called "mainstream" or the hegemony. This, of course, is congruent with the concept of culture itself, where signs, symbols, practices and myths delineate and configure a cultural sphere which is by definition neither stable nor fixed nor easily confined and put to use.

"Culture" is comprised of the very practices that are in themselves arbitrary and dependent on the spatial, social, economic, and political context. A practice judged as defective and useless by some might become the very cornerstone of another group's identity; a practice considered as outright rebellious by some can be rather conformist for others or that very same practice could be deemed central in the preservation of power by the hegemonic bloc in a different geographical or social environment (see also the contribution by John Story in this issue). Understanding this dimension of culture as crucial for every cultural practice and discourse makes the differentiation between "popular" and "high" redundant. This leaves us with the problem of properly and sufficiently understanding the concept of "culture" itself in order to give it practical application through a sound

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and well defined analysis of anything "cultural," whether it be punkrock or Beethoven, fashion or eating habits, gossip or opera, or the cultural practices on construction sites or those at academic conferences.

Notes

[1] „Versus Hip Hop on Trial Debate." *YouTube*. 27.06.2012. Web. The quote in question can be found at about 35:00.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6379

REVIEW

David M. Faris and Babak Rami (eds.): "Social Media in Iran. Politics and Society after 2009"

Ariane Sadjed

Book Reviewed
Albany: SUNY Press; 2012; pp. 334; ISBN 978-1-4384-5883-0 (hardcover)

The edited volume contains fourteen contributions from various disciplines and covers the complex questions of whether, and under which circumstances, social media can promote democratization. The contributions are divided into the sections "Societal," "Politics," and "Culture." In Iran, the internet can contribute to undermining the authoritarian elite, but at the same time, censorship is strong and prevents online organization. The introduction offers a promising conceptualization of the ambivalence inherent in the use of social media, namely the potential to offer alternative spaces while simultaneously contributing to or reproducing inequalities. As Faris and Rahimi rightly remark, the internet is not an equal space and voices are amplified in different ways. It is a space stratified by age, gender, income, etc., much like the 'real' world.

However, regarding Iran, misconceptions and generalizations, which depict the political landscape as a closed system flowing from top to bottom, are widespread. In Western media and in popular and academic writing, the internet in Iran tends to be romanticized as a venue for rebellion, democratization, and subversion. This also occurred, in particular, during and after the presidential elections in 2009, a topic many of the contributions explore.

The theoretical framework covers the role of social media in mobilizing collective action in authoritarian societies. For example, it has been shown that individuals are more likely to act if large numbers of others within their networks do so as well. Trust and social capital have thus been found to be crucial elements in the use of social media.

The dominance that Western discourses also tend to exert in online spaces—as some contributions show—, needs to be carefully analyzed in order to avoid reproducing dichotomies between the 'West' and 'Islam,' or between freedom and oppression. It is important in studies about societies such as Iran, who has a conflicting history with Western intervention and who therefore has been trying to autonomously shape its identity, to take into account these power imbalances and the articulations that formed in reaction to them.

This latter aspect is well explored in chapter three on gay Iranians. The author is critical of the marginalizing effects of western definitions and identities: "Social media have disciplined the manner in which gay individuals interact with each other and have produced gay bodies that look no different from Western gay individuals"(65). At the same time, it points to the internet as a source of information and

exchange that would otherwise not be available.

Chapter four on disabled Iranians shows that there is little awareness about disability rights and great self-consciousness even among the communities themselves. Discrimination is—if not promoted—at least reproduced in online forums.

Other chapters, however, are much less differentiated in their regard to the ambivalence of online spaces. For example, chapter two on gender roles offers some questionable dichotomies between 'women' and 'clerics' and draws a rather simplistic conclusion that discourses and practices, which resort from Western lifestyle influences, are presented per se as a challenge to gender roles in Iran (49).

The chapters covering online journalism and blogs describe them as additions to a fractured political landscape. The role of *Facebook*, for example, in the presidential elections of 2009 is said to have had displacing properties for established arrangements of power. On the one hand, it reinforced social relations that were less established but *Facebook* simultaneously undermined the cohesion of the Green Movement.

Similarly, the social media site *Balatarin* was founded by an idealistic desire to create a dynamic Iranian public sphere and to bridge differences among various segments of the society. But, over time, the site became a reflection of the polarization of the online community because gatekeepers censored and dismissed views that were not in favor of a particular strand of the Green Movement. This chapter by Babak Rahimi and Nima Rassooli is an insightful description of the struggles within grassroots movements in Iran. Instead of idealizing the social media users as promoters of democracy against the regime, it carefully points out the difficulties in maintaining pluralism and diverging views in a 'short-term society.'

> This latter term was coined by Homa Katouzian (1998) to describe how "Long-term development of society, in the form of progress toward collective prosperity, has been neglected in all societal and governmental facets […] because social actors in the Iranian context pursue short-term interests as they become increasingly dependent on the whims of the state" (194).

Another chapter describes the formation of online political memory with the example of 'Neda,' a female protester who was shot during the peaceful demonstrations after the presidential election in 2009. The author argues that forms of re-memorialization in social media shifted the fabric of political memory and cultural identity. Chapter thirteen on Iranian cinema is quite specialized and does blend with the book's other discussions about social media's potential to transform authoritarianism. The last chapter by Staci Gem Sheiwiller about Iranian avant-garde video art provides the reader with a very clear overview of the scene itself and details the possibilities and restrictions of online activism.

In conclusion, the volume offers some important nuances regarding the question: In which particular setting does the internet contribute to democratization and under which circumstances does it undermine plurality and mobilization? However, some of the chapters remain overly descriptive. The theoretical framework regarding social, political, and cultural contexts in Iran is a bit thin, making generalizations beyond this specific Iranian case difficult. In particular, one would like to know more about what the status quo of social media usage in Iran really is (i.e. not only selected venues such as *Facebook*). How has it shaped ideas and practices of civil society vis-a-vis the state? What do we know about public and private discourses in Iran that contribute to democratization and/or authoritarianism? Finally, how can we conceptualize social change in Iran apart from dichotomies

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such as 'Western' and 'Islamic' or even 'religious' and 'secular'?
Many chapters briefly repeat the history of the internet and blogging in Iran, but an overarching conclusion about the questions posed in the introduction is missing. For edited volumes with chapters not as tightly knitted, a conclusion, in which the different aspects touched upon are brought together and discussed in a more abstract sense, would be especially helpful.
Nevertheless, for scholars interested in Iran or in the use of social media in authoritarian societies, the book does offer a plethora of new insights.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.7.6354

IMPRINT

Issue
Middle East – Topics and Arguments
#07 (January 2017)

Published by
Philipps-Universität Marburg
Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies
Deutschhausstraße 12
35032 Marburg
Germany

Editorial Team
Pierre Hecker
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Copyeditors
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Graphic Design
Via Grafik Gestaltungsbüro

www.meta-journal.net

DFG

This online journal is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).