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Vincent Hirtzel, Anath Ariel de Vidas

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Vincent Hirtzel, Anath Ariel de Vidas. Introduction: The Terms of Culture: Idioms of Reflexivity Among Indigenous Peoples in Latin America. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 2022, The Terms of Culture, 95 (3), pp.513-532. 10.1353/anq.2022.0030 . hal-03908820

HAL Id: hal-03908820

<https://hal.science/hal-03908820>

Submitted on 30 Dec 2022

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Introduction

for the Special Collection in *Anthropological Quarterly*

“The Terms of Culture: Idioms of reflexivity among Indigenous Peoples in Latin America”

V. Hirtzel, A. Ariel de Vidas, editors

(June 2022, preliminar version)

From the mid-1980s, indigenous groups in Latin America began gradually using the expression “our culture” in general reference to the practices, skills, or artefacts particular to them. In so doing, they were mirroring the parallel expression “your culture” that served to designate them from an outside perspective. Initially used in the national languages (Spanish or Portuguese), these possessive expressions, in the first or second person, correlated and dialogical, constituted a new phenomenon that emerged from a closely interconnected institutional, national, and international context, passing into mainstream discourse, and even, in some cases, into indigenous languages themselves, with the help of two successive “boosts”. The first of these came in the 1980s, in the political and legal domains: driven by indigenous political activism, the emergence of these expressions benefitted from the normative impact resulting from the work of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in regard to “indigenous and tribal” peoples, particularly through the enactment of Convention 169 (1989).¹ Whether in Mexico, Brazil, or Bolivia (where the case studies in this *Special Collection* are taken from), this first phase also coincided with constitutional recognition by these States of their pluricultural makeup.² This shift was further encouraged, in the background, by the not insignificant support of the Catholic Church (historically a major player in relations with indigenous groups in Latin America) following the “culturalist turn” advanced by the missionary commitments of the Second Vatican Council.³

The propagation of “our/your culture” dialogical regime entered a second, more recent phase in the 21st century, correlating with the developing notion of culture as heritage, and the adoption of the highly influential 2003 UNESCO convention on “intangible cultural heritage” (ICH).⁴ UNESCO has been largely responsible for spreading the idea of culture as a “good” to be viewed within a framework of transmissible property; but also as “wealth”, an aspect that is consubstantial with that of heritage, but accentuated by the label of “heritage of humanity” ascribed to cultural products based on their unique and original character.⁵ The national impact of these programs is clear, with every Latin American country having supported heritage initiatives that require the necessary participation of communities, as well as political institutions.

Thus, within the last half-century, indigenous culture has significantly increased its profile through the growing number of promotional initiatives established in support of it, and the mobilization of local populations and their leaders working together with NGOs and State agencies. This culture, publicly exhibited and “practiced”, has given rise, predominantly through areas of bilingual intercultural education and heritage protection, often funded through international development aid, to processes of commodification (ethnic tourism, artisanry, performances), becoming a key component in demands and justifications for certain differential rights, particularly in matters of access to land, development projects, or justice. By becoming aligned with the recognition demands of Amerindian ethno-political movements, the explicit mobilization of culture has become a vehicle for civil rights, while continuing to fuel political struggles, especially in conflicts surrounding megaprojects that impact indigenous lands (exploitation of natural resources, hydroelectric dams, etc.), in a battle between the right to difference, framed in terms of culture, and the “general interest” advanced by the State (see Nahum-Claudel 2018, Ødegaard and Rivera Andía eds. 2019).

The proliferation of the term “culture” or the “our/your culture” dialogical regime included in a possessive framework among indigenous populations in Latin America provides an outline for the historical context that serves as a necessary backdrop to the articles of this Special collection. If the hyper-visibility of the “culture” label is now a well-known phenomenon that can be analyzed as the result from a globalized process of identity essentialization and commodification of difference, does this line of analysis exhaust the phenomenon? Without contesting the pervasiveness of a globalized cultural idiom, bound to a transnational technocracy, State agencies and NGOs, political and heritage concerns, the articles here presented show that not all indigenous groups speak this idiom in the same way and are not committed monolithically to the dialogical regime of “our/your culture”. To put it in another way, these papers propose to approach this question beyond the perspective of the “loss of authenticity” and/or strategic essentialism.

To achieve this step aside, the authors of this Special collection have given strategic attention to the interfaces and terminological interferences between top-bottom institutional cultural labelling and vernacular language resources semantically related to culture or the cultural as used by some Latin American indigenous groups on a daily basis. More specifically, they are interested in the concrete use that is made, that is not made, or is made in certain circumstances and/or with particular interlocutors of the term “culture” (*cultura* in Spanish and Portuguese). While the “our/your culture” dialogical regime tend to be channeled through discourse relating to activism, identity, rights or heritage, they determine, through precise, localized studies, both the practical extent of this discursive regime, as well as its “internal” pertinence, *a fortiori*, when groups speak among themselves in their native languages. In this way, they highlighted the richness and complexity of these groups own linguistic-conceptual imaginations, and the ways in which they speak the national languages that have also become their own.

The word “culture” has developed in step with the aims and expectations of multicultural governance over the past few decades, but this novelty is rooted in a much older historical context of social and linguistic relationships. For many groups in Latin America, of course, contact between languages and the spread of bilingualism dates back much further than the late 1980s. Which words, then, in this older context, were equivalent to “culture”? This Special Collection shows that the intersection of the adoption of this last term with others and particularly its more important historical predecessor *costumbre* (custom), were of paramount importance in Hispanic America, as it has also been in Oceania (*kastom*). In comparing the imported category of “culture” with local categories, the articles gathered in this Special Collection also examine the conceptual criticism of this notion by Amerindian groups themselves. This internal reflection is done through the lens of their own resources, based, for example, on specific ontological premises or it is fed by distinct socio-cosmic regimes, anchored in each case in Amerindian own experiences and historicities.

The title of this special collection, “The terms of Culture”, is intended to make it clear from the outset that the analysis is not confined to a study of vocabulary. Less clear cut an expression than it may seem, it requires nevertheless some explanation. In its primary sense, it refers of course to the “culture” terms used in the *linguas francas* of Latin America (Spanish and Portuguese), as well as the native words or grammatical devices that exist in indigenous languages to (more or less) translate them. But beyond these linguistic equivalences – and the interplay that exists between them – this *Special Collection* title also evokes, in a secondary sense, the conditions or limitations (historical, sociological or linguistic) that govern or shape their use: in this sense, “terms” should be understood as in the expression “the terms of a problem”. This Special collection does thus not pretend to speak about culture “per se”, nor to come back on past debates now closed on the anthropological concept. Starting from a term whose uses are clarified in the

light of alternative terminological options, it explores rather a variety of interconnected and entangled idioms of reflexivity.

Culture In, Culture Out

As use of the term “culture” was gaining momentum among indigenous populations during the 1980s, anthropology was closing the chapter on its own voluntary relationship with it. The concept of culture has long been the subject of intense debate, particularly in the United States, to the point that it became the marker (or “label”) of the discipline’s specificity (*cf.* Comaroff 2010): culture in for some; culture out for others. This volume’s thematic orientation makes it necessary to revisit this separation, not only to dispel the notion that our central theme should be the anthropological concept itself; but also because the “disinterest” felt by anthropologists for it is arguably the result of its success “beyond the walls”. Within anthropology, the end of culture as a pivotal disciplinary concept is well known, thanks to the combined effect of colonial and post-colonial studies, feminist approaches, and, more generally, a new openness on behalf of anthropologists for philosophical ideas and critical theory (post-structuralism, Frankfurt School). During the 1980s, it was increasingly seen as ingenuous (to put it mildly) to consider the generation of anthropological knowledge without taking into account the broader socio-political context in which it occurred, and in particular the colonial power structures that made its acquisition in the field possible. The more or less implicit collusion of the concept of culture with the exoticization of others; the concealment of fundamentally racialized differences; the exclusion of others from world history; the questioning of ethnographic authority: all this lay the ground for a (sometimes heated) debate that sparked such influential works as those of Éric Wolf (1982), Johannes Fabian (1983), or James Clifford and George Marcus in their *Writing cultures* collection (1986). Against this background, Lila Abu-Lughold

(1991), to take an illustrative example, entitled her polemical essay *Writing against culture*, in which she described culture as little more than an “essential tool for making other”. More or less radical stances denounced the use of “cultures” in the plural, or combined with ethnonyms and “nations” (e.g. Balinese culture, Hopi culture, Andean culture), noting how the concept only served to isolate others in their own worlds, thus advancing the fiction of reified, homogenous, and timeless units, and diminishing the social agency of the members of the studied populations, at times reducing them to “cultural dopes” lacking any reflexivity.⁶ And during the early 1990s, the growing power of the term “in the field”, both near and far, became an ever more frequent observation in specialized ethnographic literature.

It was then that anthropologists came to realize that the term “culture” was not just a concept or analytical term used to produce texts *about* others, but that the term had also passed into the discourse of the “actors”/the “public”/the “people” in reference to themselves. “Suddenly people seem to agree with us anthropologists; culture is everywhere. Immigrants have it, business corporations have it, young people have it, women have it, even ordinary middle-aged men may have it, all in their own versions” (Hannerz 1993, 95). The possibility of culture existing within a framework of possession (“they have it”, “we have it”) by blending it with identity issues posed an epistemological problem of convergence: how to reconcile a corporate boss’s bold assertion of “*his* company culture” and an anthropologist studying another’s culture “over the shoulder” (to borrow the Geertzian metaphor)? On one level, this discrepancy could be resolved by arguing that the explicit, stated culture of one group should not be conflated with the implicit, latent culture of another, as suggested by Marilyn Strathern (1995). Yet this notional separation, between “instrumentalized” (and self-conscious) culture and “spontaneous” culture (not constructed as such) became too complex to implement empirically precisely because of the

accelerated pace of globalization, of which the rapid emergence of the term “culture” among indigenous populations was symptomatic.

Marshall Sahlins was one of the main figures in anthropology to insist on this novelty in places formerly described as “exotic”: “ ‘Culture’ – the word itself, or some local equivalent, is on everyone’s lips. Tibetans and Hawaiians, Ojibway, Kwakiutl, and Eskimo, Kazakhs and Mongols, native Australians, Balines, Kashmiris, and New Zealand Maori: all discover they have a ‘culture’ ” (Sahlins 1993, 3). But while Sahlins assumed the role of defender of the concept – by proposing that this new “world order” of the “culture of cultures” (*ibid*, 19) should be the subject of anthropological study itself (see also Sahlins 1999) – the proliferation of the term was seen more as the result of the trivialization of the anthropological concept, and another sign that it had run its course. Caught between exoticism and nativism, disputed from every angle as a result of its exposure, the concept of culture still had its defenders, such as Christoph Brumann, who responded to Abu-Lughold with his own essay *Writing for culture* (1999). But a decade later the “abolitionist” camp had overtaken the “reformers” (Hannerz 1999, 18): “the concept of culture, while emblematic of what the discipline is interested in, is no longer viable analytically and has been appropriated everywhere and by everybody” (Marcus 2008, 3).⁷ The situation was perceived negatively by some, between nostalgia and frustration, as a rejection of their heritage; and positively by others, who saw it as a vital challenge needed to reinvent the discipline; in any case, the vast majority of anthropologists felt obliged to leave the theorization of culture to *cultural studies* in the broader sense, contenting themselves going forward to refer to the term indirectly as a quality.⁸ In this respect, the transition from noun form (culture) to adjective (cultural), first proposed by Roger Keesing (1994), is a revealing grammatical phenomenon. For anthropologists, “culture”, invoked in the first person, is of little value, insofar as it drives an essentialism tied up in social and political projects that historically they have fought against (including particularly

conservative forms of communitarianism that lend themselves to discrimination and exclusion). Presenting itself as a universal political/identity “solution”, this “ready-to-wear”, “ID-ology” dependent culture (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) is dismissed by anthropologists who have no intention of supporting it; though this does not necessarily preclude their awkward, paradoxical feelings in the field when faced with the expectations of certain indigenous groups.

Whether we like it or not, identity and culture, and their representation, are self-declared priority issues for most indigenous people. [...] Do we lecture them about the error of their ways, telling them that they are duped, and that the identity that they constitute for themselves is of dubious substance and merit, a legacy of colonialism? That it is an obsolete and discredited residue of Western academic cultural theory? (Guenther 2006, 18)

Theorizing Vernacular Uses Of The Term “Culture”

The question surrounding the complexity of local uses of “culture” terms, which this Special Collection will explore, has until now garnered little attention, likely due to the unease expressed by Guenther and many others. Nonetheless, a few seminal texts have emerged on Amerindian appropriation of the term *cultura* in the context of Latin America. Key among them are the works of Terrence Turner (1991) and Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (2009), which raise a number of issues that the articles in this volume will seek to address.

In his study on the Kayapo of Brazil – the first to mention the adoption of the term *cultura* by South American Indians – Terrence Turner (1991) seeks to theorize the phenomenon by linking it to the indigenous political activism of the 1980s, viewing it as the result of a historical dialectic regarding a shift in Kayapo “self-consciousness”, coinciding precisely with the implementation of ILO Convention 169.⁹ When Turner first encountered the Kayapo in the

1960s, a few decades after their “pacification”, the group was marked by an evident fragility which could easily be described in terms of “acculturation” and “assimilation”. But, by the 1980s, they had grown in self-confidence, somewhat ironically, *thanks to* their integration “into the polyethnic society of Brazil” (Turner 1991, 296). This change in attitude and restoration of “pride” was made possible, for Turner, through a radical conceptual transformation, whereby the group had moved from a self-centered view of themselves (as prototypical humans), shaped by their own mythology and cosmology, to a “secularized”, even “racialized” conception of themselves as “Indians”, culminating in the acquisition of a “cultural self-consciousness” caused by their adoption of the term *cultura*. The term began to be used in Kayapo conversation, by monolingual speakers, to evoke “their mode of material subsistence, their natural environment as essential to it, and their traditional social institutions and ceremonial system” (*ibid.*, 304). Turner claims that cultural self-consciousness goes hand in glove with political struggle to the extent that the form of consciousness that he advances can be interpreted as a variant of Marxist “class consciousness”. And yet, though Turner’s thesis is not without merit, something is lacking: what links should be made between this new, borrowed term and the corresponding Kayapo categories that might also translate it? Turner addresses the issue in passing only, noting that naturally the Kayapo have paired *cultura* with one of their own terms: “Their most inclusive term for their traditional corpus of cultural forms, ceremonial patterns, and social institutions was *kukradja*, ‘something that takes a long time [to tell]’” (*ibid.*, 296). Yet he refuses to build on this association, claiming that, before they came to adopt *cultura*, the Kayapo lacked any “notion that their assemblage of received customs, ritual practices, social values, and institutions constituted a ‘culture’” (*ibid.*, 294). For Turner, the appropriation of the term *cultura* is thus clearly an appropriation of the anthropological concept of culture; and if a “cultural self-consciousness” does emerge, it can only be beyond “traditional culture”.

This is not a perspective shared by Carneiro da Cunha (2009). In her essay, which deals with the author's experiences as both an observer inside international commissions of intergovernmental organizations, and a field ethnographer among the Kraho group (related to the Kayapo), Carneiro da Cunha assumes the task of an anthropology of the "culture of cultures" as proposed by Sahlins. For her, social struggles are replaced by conflicts over "intellectual property", in line with the continuing proliferation today of UNESCO's ICH. She opens with an original thought: the use of *cultura*, or some slightly modified version of it in an indigenous language, is equivalent to wrapping the word "culture" typographically in quotation marks when used to signal its metalanguage status: they are "vernacular terms" that are used reflexively by people to speak about themselves or more precisely about their spontaneously lived culture. "People are—more often than one tends to admit—aware of their "culture" or something resembling it, as much as living in culture" (*ibid.* 74).

For Carneiro da Cunha, as for Turner, what permit indigenous people to "be aware" of their "culture" or *cultura* derive from an "interethnic system", though without being structured around the racial concept of Indian, acting instead as a marker of contrasting identities. As such, the adoption of the term does not correspond to the emergence of a "consciousness" in step with a history overdetermined by colonization. But whereas Turner emphasizes the subjective figure of the "cultural consciousness", Carneiro da Cunha insists on the other face of the same process, that is, precisely the "objectification of culture." She argues that this "objectification" constitute a generic property of interethnic systems, particularly through differential relationships based on "intellectual property" that develop between groups. She supports her argument with various ethnographic examples drawn from the works of Simon Harrison (2000) on New Guinea, as well as Margaret Mead on the Arapesh (1938), that attest to the fact that concrete or clearly defined cultural elements (such as dances or ritual incantations) belonging to specific groups can be

exchanged, gifted, or sold, and then circulated on among different groups now “authorized” to recreate and transmit them for themselves¹⁰. Carneiro da Cunha claims that the use of “culture” as a metacultural term should in a sense be considered as a transformation of totemism as Claude Lévi-Strauss conceived it (1962), one that is susceptible to the vagaries of history (*ibid.* 70) . Instead of an internal differentiation of groups into clans based on divergence between “natural” species, a single, unifying, metacultural term, is used to mark external differentiation between groups in relation to one another.

But like Turner’s, this approach has also its blind spots. With no explicit thought given to native terms relating to the domain of culture, like *kukradja* in Kayapo, in regard to *cultura* (do they overlap? are they interchangeable?), the author also refuses to consider the exogenous, non-indigenous origin of *cultura*. This is particularly notable in her comparison between the appropriation of the term *cultura* by Amerindians in Brazil, and the significance of the (also metacultural) term *kastom*, used in the Vanuatu archipelago of Melanesia. These islands, inhabited by multiple groups speaking (more than one hundred) very different languages, saw the development of a pidgin during the 20th century, in which *kastom*, derived from the English *custom*, has a fundamental role, both politically and in relation to identity (see, among other examples, Keesing 1982 and Tabani 1999). For Carneiro da Cunha, both cases are comparable: a similar “interethnic” context facilitated the development of processes of differentiation and also mutual exchanges, and the expansion of metacultural terms like *cultura* or *kastom*. Yet, in Brazil like in Vanuatu, the metacultural terms that prevailed derived from the colonial languages of Portugal and Britain respectively. While we can agree with Carneiro da Cunha, insofar as the objectification of culture or the existence of metacultural terms are not *de jure* phenomena that resulted from Western expansion, it does seem difficult to ignore the broader colonial process (and its corresponding power dynamics) with regard to the adoption of such terms. Moreover,

while there may be a “family resemblance” in how *cultura* and *kastom* have proliferated in their respective environments, this could depend on ethnographic reasons, and because the “interethnic systems” concerned are also historically singulars. The Melanesian or the Alto Xingu cases (studied by Fausto 2011) presents forms of social integration that made them difficult to compare with other more open social spaces like Mesoamerica or the Andes (where the State has, by the way, a non-Western history, *cf.* for example, the Mexicas and the Incas). Moreover, if in certain cases the “family resemblance” in *cultura* and *kastom* is undeniable, this should not mean that there is nothing to distinguish them in other cases. This is particularly relevant when we consider a phenomenon that Carneiro da Cunha overlooks: the indigenous adoption of the term *costumbre* in Latin America.

In contrast to Brazil, the Spanish-speaking parts of the continent have seen the word *costumbre* (“custom”) being translated, used, and even appropriated by indigenous groups as far back as the colonial era. However, while the appropriation of *costumbre* relates to the integration of indigenous populations into a higher social order, it should be viewed as more than just the outcome of various factors within an “interethnic system” in which all parties are equal, precisely because of the colonial situation. As Edward Thompson (1991) made clear – although in a very different European context, the English working classes–, customs are not just a mode of designating “ancestral practices”: they form the basis of rights and prerogatives (including political ones), which, in highly hierarchical contexts, produce friction, resistance, or compromise. This idea is important to bear in mind when examining old interactions with the European colonial order, but also whatever kind of State expansion or imperialist politics. In light of such remarks, the comparison with Levi-Straussian totemism, even “open to history”, becomes difficult to credit. Such a context requires an anthropology that is sensitive to the facts of interface and interference between State integration policies – a crucial factor ignored by

Carneiro de Cunha – and the indigenous groups impacted by them. And although the term *costumbre* can indeed be conceived as a “metacultural” term, it does carry its own specific implications that cannot be dissociated from the socio-political and historical contexts that made its adoption possible. The same applies for “culture.”¹¹

Terms Of Culture In Perspective

The research for the articles in this volume was carried out as part of a collective project: Fabriq’am – *La fabrique des “patrimoines”: mémoires, savoirs et politique en Amérique indienne aujourd’hui* (The making of “cultural heritage”: remembrance, knowledge and politics in today’s Indigenous America)¹². The project was based around a few simple questions: the participants – some of whose works can be found here – agreed to seek out and record, in their respective fields, uses of vernacular terms in Spanish or Portuguese for the term “culture”, as well as those for “tradition”, “customs”, and “heritage” ideally with the constitution of corpus of spontaneous uses rather than out of context elicitation work. This investigation follows on from the works of Bondaz *et al.* (2014) that sought to “relocalize the terms of heritage”. The aim of Fabriq’am’s contributors has been to study a wider field of terminology. By tracing the word “culture” and its uses (and the other terms: custom, tradition, heritage), their aim was to discover approximate counterparts in the native languages that may or may not translate them. As such, the project was not only driven by the anthropological questions that might emerge from this data; it also benefitted from the linguistic abilities of its researchers, some of whom were already familiar with the lines of enquiry and methods involved in linguistic anthropology.

The first contribution of this Special collection, proposed by Marie Chosson, presents a wide variety of terms and metacultural expressions from modern Tzeltal (a Maya language of Mexico), and the terminology used by the same speakers in Spanish-language conversations.

Significantly, Tzeltal does not appear to use the term *cultura*. But beyond this noteworthy “omission”, the primary focus of this article relates more closely to the subject itself: two separate translations in Tzeltal from two distinct sources of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This demonstrates the linguistic creativity of the translators in rendering international law into their language, and their desire to avoid any exogenous loanwords, such as *costumbre* (custom), thus leading them to invent “expert” indigenous phrases of their own. This article invites us to reflect on the specific implications of culture in both written and spoken language.

Meanwhile, Anath Ariel de Vidas and Vincent Hirtzel trace the Spanish word *costumbre* by comparing two examples of its use from two very different contexts – Mesoamerica (among the Nahua people of Mexico) and the Amazon region (the Yuracaré of Bolivia) – which attests to the axiological significance of this term. They highlight the key role that evangelization played in the adoption of this term, by its distinction between “paganism” and “Christianity” (Nahua) on the one hand, or “barbarism” and “civilization” (Yuracaré) on the other. While demonstrating the extent to which uses of *costumbre* draw their meaning from the colonial order and social dynamics of former times, the authors also reveal how far the use of *cultura*, in contrast, correlates to the universalization of the pluralist democratic State model and policies of multicultural governance across Latin America.

Finally, Valentina Vapnarsky, Cédric Yvinec and Cédric Becquey offer an in-depth counter-analysis of the notional field of culture from a grammatical perspective, urging us away from conventional hermeneutics focused on nouns and substantives. Out of the languages that they survey (Chol and Yucatec, Maya languages from Mexico; and Suruí from the Brazilian Amazon) not one contains a single loanword relating to the terms “culture”, “tradition”, or “heritage”, nor any corresponding native terms, apart from one Suruí lexeme. Their grammars,

however, contain a multitude of syntactic devices able to unlock a kaleidoscope of “properties” relative to a mainstream use of “culture”. In particular, these grammatical constructions operate through aspect and tense, epistemic modality, evidentiality, or the expression of actancy and person, calling into question the different forms of reflexivity and typification that grammatical or lexical encoding carry.

The three articles in this volume each tackle a specific theme, using either case studies rooted in a specific context (Chosson), or comparative analysis (Ariel de Vidas & Hirtzel; Vapnarsky, Yvinec & Becquey). Between them, they cover historical dynamics dating far back into the continent’s colonial history (Ariel de Vidas & Hirtzel), and the subtle problems of translation (Chosson) or conceptualization that require us to abandon the analytical prism of vocabulary in favor of grammar (Vapnarsky, Yvinec & Becquey). Taken together, they offer the reader new material with which to understand the general questions attached to the terms of culture in this rare dialog between ethnographic cases spanning Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin America (Mexico and Bolivia; Brazil), Mesoamerica, and the Amazon.

In documenting the possible uses of terms in their respective fields that could relate *a priori* to culture, tradition, custom, and heritage in Amerindian contexts – respectively Chol, Yucatec Maya, Nahuatl, Suruí, and Yuracaré (in Bolivia, Brazil, and Mexico) – the authors of these three articles were faced with a two-sided question. On the one hand, are these terms used within the studied group, and if so, in which language – national or local (as borrowed forms)? On the other, which equivalent terms exist in their vernacular language, or more broadly speaking, how do the members of the group talk spontaneously among themselves about recurring practices that from outside might be categorized as “cultural”?

Taken from a continental perspective to better differentiate between uses of “culture” terms in national and vernacular languages, this approach posed three main challenges. First, historical evolutions in the use of these terms in national languages had to be taken into account. Indeed, the fact that “culture” as a term carries such weight today is not for nothing; it attests to a history and specific context. And such a context must be considered in terms of the processes and social configurations that define it as well as preceded it; namely, the changing dynamics over time between Amerindian groups and the Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking populations that have lived alongside them, and the corresponding phases, shifts, ruptures, and thresholds along the way. It goes without saying that what is applicable to “culture” can also be applied to our other terms.

The second challenge relates to the first. In studying these terms, the specificity of the sociolinguistic situation of the populations that use them must be considered and examined. Indeed, bi- or multilingualism in Latin America is a deep-rooted historical phenomenon, meaning that these terms require closer analysis than a cursory examination of “scholarly” translations or individual glosses may allow. The issue of translation can certainly be considered, on the understanding that this occurs “day-to-day”, in practice, within linguistic communities, whose borders exceed those of a particular vernacular language. In each of our case studies, the indigenous populations are, to a greater or lesser degree, part of wider communities, in which they interact through a local or regional variant of the national language. The presence of South American and Mesoamerican indigenous groups in these linguistic communities is itself rooted in how historically they have related to “otherness” in their own environments, and the different sectors that have constituted these, over centuries or in short phases. One example, the Suruí of the Brazilian Amazon studied by Yvinec (this volume), concerns a group that remained in

voluntary isolation until the second half of the 20th century. In such cases, the majority of exchanges are evidently held till today in the vernacular language; and yet a narrow form of bilingualism is still essential. Among most of our case groups, Portuguese and Spanish are readily understood and used, sometimes even supplanting the indigenous languages, which are subsequently abandoned. Of course, this aspect cannot be ignored when examining the use of “exogenous” terms; some who claim “indigenous” status may in fact have Spanish or Portuguese as their mother tongue (such as the most recent Nahua and Yurakaré generations studied by Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel, this volume).

The third challenge is one that is often overlooked, albeit quite essential. To study the vernacular equivalents approximating the field perceived as culture, a two-way approach is needed. First, by identifying “nouns” or “linguistic units” within the local vocabulary, from which can be deduced that certain practices, insofar as they are named, are “substantiated”, that is, “objectified”. Digging deeper, however, it is clear that a group may refer to their practices without names or nouns, and by extension, without necessarily “objectifying” them in their own language. It means that this process of objectification only emerge when they spoke with others in a language were this kind of objectification is possible and in a pertinent context. To reach this level of analysis, we need more than a “list of words” and rather compile new corpuses of occurrences and uses. With these, statements can thus be examined in context, providing greater value than evidence drawn from decontextualized translations. All three articles in this volume present this kind of data, making it possible (alongside other evidence acquired through the collaborative project in which the authors participated) to present a generalized overview of the phenomenon across indigenous Latin America. ¹³

A few general characteristics stand out from these analyses:

1. The use of exogenous terms (“culture”, “custom”, “tradition”, and “heritage”) is not random, with both recurrent and isolated cases apparent. *Cultura* is frequently heard in Brazil, where it is also used in certain indigenous languages. In that sense it is not a complete surprise that the more theoretical work of Turner, Carneiro da Cunha or Fausto about “culture”, developed in a Brazilian context. It is far less common (but growing) in Spanish-speaking parts of the continent, however, where the term *costumbre* is generally more prevalent. In Mexico, *costumbre* has even been borrowed into native languages (Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel, this volume); “tradition”, meanwhile, is usually a secondary term, while “heritage” is rarely mentioned (except occasionally in Brazil).

2. There are functional equivalent terms in (almost) all the Amerindian languages studied for those listed above, each with their own variants. As well as local terms that are better analyzed on a case-by-case basis, we find widespread use of highly generic (often noun) forms like “ways of being”, “ways of acting”, or “inherent behavior”. Within this range of terms, we also find some loanwords: Tzeltal (a Maya language of Mexico) has borrowed two Spanish terms for such a purpose: *modo* (mode) and *razón* (reason). Thus, “they have lost the custom” is said “they have lost the ‘reason’” (Chosson, this volume).

3. Finally, there is a wide range of grammatical constructions that can be used in reference to recurring practices that draw from different registers (Vapnarsky, Yvinec and Becquey this volume).

By way of general problematization of our three articles, which present these various elements in detail, we wish to highlight below the way in which they articulate as a whole.

First, although they can be used synonymously, the terms “culture” (*cultura*) and “custom” (*costumbre*) are metacultural terms that are not sociologically or politically neutral In

view of the history that they carry, they are clearly sociological markers of power dynamics and modes of integration with the State (Chosson, this volume, for *cultura*; Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel, this volume, for *costumbre*). These terms, which cannot be dissociated from the social structures underpinning them, make it possible to identify the registers used to bring indigenous collectives into line with said structures. As such, the modern State serves as a sociopolitical backdrop to “culture”: a democratic State that (ideally) should lead the fight in Latin America against exclusion, seek to strengthen and deepen democracy, and aim for greater equality and “participation”, with particular regard for indigenous groups. Within this framework, the alterity of Indian groups is accepted and even praised, highlighting as it does “minoritized” and historically marginalized groups. However, such policies do have their limits: unable, for instance, to support practices that contravene their own laws.

The term *costumbre*, on the other hand, is a terminological marker leftover from colonial-era indigenous policy that endured – beyond independence – into the mid-20th century (Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel). This rule of “custom”, as it were, relates to the way in which the practices of others were discussed (and sidelined) by a State still coupled to an ecclesiastical machine yet to be “separated”, which together viewed their indigenous others as both “unbelievers” and “barbarians”. Evidently, these kinds of categorizations had crucial implications in terms of power relationships and dynamics. Behind the term “custom” lurks a vertical, hierarchical, and religious State: first, in its original monarchical form during the establishment of the colonial State; then, in its transformation during the 19th and 20th centuries (and still in some ways to this day) into a State presiding over a social order built on racial hierarchy.

While the study of *cultura* and *costumbre* attests to the introduction of categories through State power, and shows that many Amerindian groups have “played along”, the crucial analysis of the forms of vernacular linguistic expressions takes it one step further. The abundance of terms

for “modes of being” uncovered in our respective fields, occasionally serving as functional equivalents for “culture”, demonstrate how these terms – highly generic in meaning – generally exceed the notion of culture while also including it as a particular case. These terms, insofar as they refer to “ways of being or acting”, “modes of behavior”, make it possible to distinguish discontinuities between groups in the same way that terms like “culture” or “customs” do. Yet a practice that falls under a “way of being” goes beyond the limits of the notion of culture too.

Indeed, viewing practices in metacultural terms highlights the fact that they are not acts of nature but rather conventions devised by humans. By indiscriminately applying animal ethograms or a specific object’s functionalities, terms for ways of being, to human practices, this conventional character is suspended in favor of simple typification to express that which every being or every thing is “in itself” or “as is”. These catch-all language resources acquire only a derived metacultural function, which is that a conformity with a idealized prototype, be the prototype a human group, an animal species, or a technical device.

Culture, tradition, or customs, insofar as we can speak of or dispute these terms among Amerindian populations, reveal a domain that far exceeds the spontaneous expectations drilled into us by our own linguistic practices (and disciplinary ideas). Independent of institutional or commercial considerations, “culture” (are the quotation marks even still necessary?) sees itself scattered across and reflected in all manner of unexpected grammatical constructions. With an invitation to look beyond the lexical surface to the subtleties of the study of morphemes and particles that codify specific abstract relations, the article by Vapnarsky, Yvinec and Becquey that closes this volume also opens it up to new perspectives.

Endnotes

¹ The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 (ILO 1989) requires its signatories to promote “the full realization of the social, economic and cultural rights of these peoples with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs and traditions and their institutions” (Article 2.2.b). This convention achieved broad consensus across Latin America; it has been ratified by a significant majority of the countries in the region, which represent a considerable proportion of the few states in the world to have formally acknowledged the cultural rights of their indigenous populations (15 out of the 23 member states are in Latin America). For a historical and legal analysis of indigenous law in the ILO, see Rodríguez-Piñero (2005); for its importance in Brazilian indigenist policy, see Carneiro da Cunha ed. (1987).

² Through their ratification of Convention 169, many states were forced to bring their constitutions up to date, officially laying the ground for multicultural governance in the 1990s. Constitutional recognition of “indigenous cultures” was introduced by neoliberal governments (implementing the economic recommendations of the IMF and WB), starting with the ratification of the 1988 constitution in Brazil; the constitutional amendment of 1992 in Mexico; and the constitutional reform of 1995 in Bolivia.

³ The Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) led to a “culturalist” vision of religious conversion with the concept of inculturation summarized by Pope John Paul II as bringing “the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures” (1979). During the early 1980s, pastoral programs aimed at indigenous peoples (*pastoral indígena*) expanded on this theory of inculturation through an “Indian theology” (Tomichá 2013). Elsewhere, institutions without any evangelizing intent emerged in support of indigenous populations, such as the *Consejo Indígena*

Misionero (CIMI), established in 1972 in Brazil to play a key role in organizing indigenous activism (Albert 2004 [1997]).

⁴ For an example of early heritage policy in Mexico related to the pluricultural recognition of the nation, see Ariel de Vidas (1994).

⁵ For more background on this convention, see Berliner and Bortolloto (2013).

⁶ The expression “cultural dope” was coined by Harold Garfinkel (1967, 68), who, within the context of social action theory, had already begun to dispute the application of culturalist models.

⁷ Marcus’s observation should of course be qualified; the non-pertinence of the concept of culture is not universally accepted by all sectors of anthropology, particularly among those who favor a naturalist or cognitivist approach. For a recent essay on the concept of culture from a socio-cognitive approach, see de Munck and Bennardo 2019.

⁸ For an illustration of this tendency, particularly prevalent in North American academia, see Yúdice (2003), Baldwin *et al.* (2006), Hegeman (2012), among others.

⁹ Hannerz and Sahlins, both of whom observed the global proliferation of the term “culture” (*cf.* this text), have each widely remarked on this study and drawn similar conclusions about the ideas that Turner identified (Hannerz 1996, 51-52; Sahlins 1993, 3-4).

¹⁰ Carneiro da Cunha does not propose any specifically Amerindian examples of “objectification of culture” similar to these Melanesian examples. There is, however, one example, quite unique in Brazil today: the multi-ethnic and multilingual polity of Alto Xingu, based, among other things, on the sharing among its different members of an important inter-village ceremonialism (including songs, dances, music, mythological narrations). Carlos Fausto (2011) offers an analysis of this social ensemble and its adoption of the term *cultura*, which is inspired by and clearly illustrates Carneiro da Cunha’s theoretical proposals.

¹¹ In the case of Brazil see for example the pregnancy of the image of an “hyperreal Indian” pinpointed by Alcida Ramos (1994) or its prefiguration noted long ago in the Xingu area by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1979).

¹² ANR-12-CULT-005 (2013-2016). See: <http://fabriqam.hypotheses.org/>

¹³ Project Fabriq’am: *La fabrique des “patrimoines” – mémoires, savoirs et politique en Amérique indienne aujourd’hui* (ANR-12-CULT-005 -[2013-2016](#)), see: <http://fabriqam.hypotheses.org/>

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