

Lecture 01: Defining concepts

‘Culture’ and ‘civilisation’ are two concepts that intrigued¹ the interest of many researchers from different disciplines and fields. Both ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ have been used to refer to various aspects and referents. Indeed, they are polymorphous² terms and the debate on a compromise³ definition of those concepts still exists in recent research.

I/ Culture

Culture is perceived as the blueprint⁴ that portrays all life aspects of a given group of people. It is tightly related to its language. That is, it is very unlikely to understand a language without inquiring into the elements that found its culture. “What is culture?”, “What are its elements and characteristics?” are questions that look for urgent responses.

I.1. The meaning of culture:

Culture is one of the terms that has been used in various contexts, to refer to different semantic⁵ conceptions⁶. The following table highlights some definitions provided by various researchers:

Definition	Reference
<i>“Culture is an all inclusive system which incorporates the biological and the technical behaviour of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behaviour.”</i>	Trinovich, 1980, p.550

¹ **Intrigue** :arouse the interest of , to fascinate

² **Polymorphous**: having several forms

³ **Compromise**: a mutual agreement on an objectionable issue

⁴ **Blueprint**: a detailed plan

⁵ **Semantic** :relating to the meaning of words

⁶ **Conceptions**: an image, idea or notion formed in the mind

<i>“Culture is a membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space, history and common imagining.”</i>	Kramsch, 1998, p.10)
<i>“Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientation to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence but do not determine each members behaviour and his/her interpretations of the meaning of other people’s behaviour.”</i>	Spencer Oatey, 2008, p. 3
<i>Culture is the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of group or category of people from another.”</i>	Hofstede, 1994, p.5

From the aforementioned definitions the one could understand that:

- Culture is a “complex whole” that encompasses⁷ all details that govern the way of life of a given group or community.
- Culture is a way of thinking.
- Culture includes practices, products and perspectives transmitted from one generation to another.
- Culture comprises assumption⁸, beliefs, values, customs, traditions, norms and artefacts like foods, the way of clothing and behaviour conventions.
- Culture orients its adherents’ behaviour.

⁷ **Encompass** : include within its scope

⁸ **Assumption**: the act of supposing a thing without proof

- Culture shapes its members' perception and conceptualisation of the world.
- Culture is the **emblem**⁹ that distinguishes one group from another.

I.2. Key elements of culture:

- *Artefacts* refer to all audible and visible practices and products. They are the tangible objects like behaviours, rituals, the way of dressing and how do people address and treat each other. Additionally, traditions, customs, dance, music, intellectual and artistic products and food are good examples of artefacts.
- *Values* are the moderator and the core engine that generates the individual's beliefs, attitudes and even behaviours. They refer to the fundamental beliefs and representations that regulate, direct and control the individual behaviour.
- *Norms* are rules that organise the society. They provide the individual with the scope that guarantees the limits that should not be exceeded. Therefore, they dictate, to the adherent of a given society, what should be done and what should be forbidden.
- *Language* is the means of communication. It refers to the complex system of signs and sounds arranged in a specific way to communicate a specific idea. It is the vehicle that could transmit culture elements from one generation to another.
- *Symbols* are **tokens**¹⁰ that represent and means something else.

I.3. Characteristics of culture:

The following are the universal features of culture:

- Culture is not biologically transmitted.
- Culture is acquired and learned through **socialisation**¹¹, interaction and communication.
- Culture is social and shared between its adherents.

⁹ Emblem: representative symbol

¹⁰ Token : a sign or something serving as an expression of something else.

¹¹ **Socialisation**: the process of learning how to live in a way acceptable to one's own society

- Culture is transmitted from one generation to another.
- Culture is **dynamic**¹². It involves **innovations**¹³ and transformations as immediate responses to external and internal factors and causes. Hence, it is **accumulative**¹⁴ and **integrated**¹⁵.
- Culture is reserved to one group or society and varies from one group to another.

I.4. Individualist Vs Collectivist cultures:

Individualism and collectivism are two main **trends**¹⁶ that form fundamentals that frame and **model**¹⁷ the self-conception of members of a given culture. Hence, they result in diversified conceptualizations of the self, cognition, motivation, behaviour and the world. The following table **juxtaposes**¹⁸ the main differences between these types of culture.

Individualist culture	Collectivist culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Low -context culture ➤ based on the individuality of the individual. ➤ estimates¹⁹ the freedom and the independence of the individual. ➤ is self -dependent. ➤ Individualists construct their self-image through auto self-examination and introspection²⁰. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High- context culture ➤ is conformist²⁴ and highly cohesive²⁵ ➤ values the culture of the group ➤ is interdependent – self ➤ collectivist' self-image is extremely influenced by others' evaluations and comments. ➤ encourages flexibility and

¹² Dynamic: changing and active

¹³ Innovation: the introduction of something new

¹⁴ Accumulative: cumulative and additional

¹⁵ Integrated: composed organised to form a whole

¹⁶ Trend: a tendency,

¹⁷ Model: create something from a substance

¹⁸ Juxtapose: place side by side for contrast and comparison

¹⁹ **Estimate**: appraise and set a value

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ They overestimate themselves and always concentrates on self- consistency²¹ and self-enhancement. ➤ Their objectives are to ameliorate the self-status and reach more achievements and accomplishments. ➤ They display a total rejection to group integration and they demonstrate an inability to remain coherent²² with the group. ➤ They use analytical thinking²³. ➤ They utilise logical rules. ➤ They focus on clear meanings to solve problems or to reach conclusions. ➤ They are very autonomous, self-contained, and motivated to improvement and growth. 	<p>malleability²⁶ of the self to achieve the group's goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The interdependent-self avoids change and finds it more comfortable to adapt and adjust himself to the environment rather than initiating change and modification. ➤ The collectivist individual tends to be passive²⁷ and his emotional reactions are greatly influenced by interpersonal relationships. ➤ His sense of initiative is likely to be inhibited²⁸ by group's perception and evaluation. ➤ He uses a holistic mode of thinking²⁹. ➤ He tends to rely more on what is implied, not on what is directly expressed, to take decisions and
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²⁰ **Introspection:** looking inward, self-examination

²⁴ **Conformist:** conforming, or acting in accordance with the established customs

²⁵ **Cohesive:** having cohesion or state of working together

²¹ **Consistency:** coherence and compatibility

²² **Coherent:** unified and sticking together

²³ **Analytical thinking:** is mode of thinking through which a whole is abstractly separated to study the relationship between its components

²⁶ **Malleability:** flexibility and liability to change

²⁷ **Passive:** taking no action

²⁸ **Inhibit:** to hinder, restrain

²⁹ **Holistic mode of thinking:** involves understanding a system by sensing its large-scale patterns and reacting to them.

	make choices.
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II/ Civilisation

‘Civilisation’ originated from the Latin word ‘*civitas*’ which means ‘city’. It requires a **rudimentary**³⁰ organisation. The term ‘civilisation’ has been used to refer to those advanced and developed societies. Although researchers still debate this definition and criticise its **subjectivity**³¹, **irrationality**³² and **ambiguity**³³, it is widely accepted that ‘civilisation’ implies complexity and high level of development, achievement and prosperity of a given society.

II.1. Defining civilisation

According to Huntington (1993), civilisation is “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from each other”. Hence, civilisation is linked to its culture. Also, it necessitates and requires a well- developed intellect that could entail progress and flourishing in all domains (Schweitzern, 1987). Indeed, the element of progress and development while defining civilisation is fervently emphasised. Civilisation, then, could simply be defined as an advanced state of human society (Oxford Dictionary).

II.2 Elements and characteristics of civilisation:

The following are the core components of civilisation:

³⁰ **Rudimentary**: basic, necessary.

³¹ **Subjectivity**: the state of being subjective, forming an opinion based on person’s feeling or intuition

³² **Irrationality**: unreason, absurdity.

³³ **Ambiguity**: something open to more than one interpretation

- **Urbanism³⁴** and **settlement³⁵**.
- Types of livelihood.
- Agriculture.
- Language.
- **Social stratification³⁶**.
- Religion.
- Government.
- Economic system.
- Education .
- Political structure.
- Technology.
- Culture.
- Medicine.

III. Culture Vs Civilisation:

‘Culture’ and ‘civilisation’ have been used **interchangeably³⁷** as synonymous terms. In fact, there exist a difference between the two. Complexity and organisation are the key elements of civilisation. Whereas, culture refers to the way of life of a given society. The table below emphasises the main differences between culture and civilisation:

<i>Culture</i>	<i>Civilisation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A way of life of a given society. • Transmitted from one generation to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advanced state of society. • Ensued³⁹ by man’s wisdom.

³⁴ **Urbanism**:the way of life of people who live in cities

³⁵ **Settlement**: a community of people living together

³⁶ **Stratification**: categorisation

³⁷ **Interchangeably**: the ability of being changed, swapped or exchanged

another. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is continuous and eternal³⁸.• Can exist alone.• Culture comprises tangible and intangible elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can vanish⁴⁰ and disappear⁴¹.• Can not exist without culture.• Civilisation is tangible.
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Suggested homework 1:

- Describe the Algerian Culture.
- Mention some tokens of the Algerian culture.
- Mention some examples of civilisations around the world and identify the level of complexity and advancement that permitted them to be civilisations.
- What do you know about the British culture and civilisation?

Further readings:

What is culture? A compilation of quotations, written by Spencer Oatey . Available at Global PAD

Open House [http:// go. Warwick.ac.uk/ globalpadintercultural](http://go.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural)

³⁹ **Enssue**: to occur as a result

³⁸ **Eternal**: immortal, lasting forever

⁴⁰ **Vanish**: to become invisible

⁴¹ **Disappear** : to vanish