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From Culture to Cultural: Explaining the Transformation of Academic Discourses Through Herderian Notions

Alexandru Casian^{1*}

¹University of Paris 8, France.

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Abstract

The adjective “cultural” cumulates all the complexity of today’s world. It has become a widely used qualifier in social and human sciences. The morphological transformation from adjective to noun motivates substantial research and conceptual developments. In this difficult conjuncture, historical epistemology creates the conditions for a true dialogue between cultural, sociolinguistic and scientific realities. Adjectivization can be seen as a direct consequence of relativization and personalization of culture. Largely attributed to Herder and Boas, the relativization process has exponentially increased and diversified the use of the concept of culture. The ongoing conceptual pluralization can be traced back to Herder. By creating the plural term “cultures”, Herder facilitated the gradual transformation of the noun into an adjective and brought to light its heterogeneous nature. The intense psychologization during twentieth and twenty-first centuries elevated the Herderian concept of culture to the status of a central instrument in the humanities and reinforced its pluralization through an increased focus on individual determinants.

Keywords: Herder; Boas; culture; adjectivization; historical epistemology.

*Corresponding author: alex1992university@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of a growing globalization and internationalization of knowledge, the noun “culture” and the derived adjective “cultural” have achieved an incontestable power and the status of jokers in daily lives. Contemporary scholars prefer the adjective “cultural” over the noun “culture” (Tampos-Cabazares & Cabazares, 2016). The morphological shift from adjective to noun activates interpretative debates. By changing its word class, the term “culture” became even more plural and acquired an increasingly interdisciplinary dimension.

The Boasians created a completely new conceptual reality of culture. Franz Boas took an ordinary English word and employed it as a versatile theoretical construct in new academic discourses. Without adding pedantic definitions, he encouraged a more free and democratic use of this construct. The Boasians gave culture a fresh emphasis, stable definitions and the status of the central tool of anthropology. They had a determinant role in the construction of the dominant concept of culture. Boas and his students popularized and developed cultural relativism (Brown, 2008). By crediting Herder for creating the concept of culture (Boas, 1904), the founder of American Anthropology reinforced German intellectual influences. What we often forget is that Herder opened the debates on the link between mental processes and cultural behaviors (Bronner, 2021).

In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, he traced a universal history of culture and cultural origins of human beings. In Herder’s anthropology, all cultures of the world participate in global historical processes. He attempted to distance himself from radicalized Eurocentric perspectives by positioning the difference and diversity as the main laws of history. It is true that Herder did not use the adjective “cultural” in foundational works such as *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. The adjectivization process started much later during the twentieth century. However, I argue that it was Herder who prepared the soil for this process by creating a holistic perspective on cultural dynamics. His plural concept provided a powerful versatile tool in American anthropology in which the adjective “cultural” became a central conceptual pillar and a major symbol of democratization of a once elitist notion.

The increasingly complex conception of culture penetrated a wide range of topics from environmental management to spiritual inspiration and cultural identity. Contemporary definitions tend to approach culture as an adjective or qualifier rather than a simple noun. An apparently simple conceptual shift produces major changes in the main dimensions of culture that include not only assets and institutions but also symbols and beliefs (Satz et al., 2013). We need to undertake a careful analysis of this tendency because it affects the core of our existence and social practices. Anthropologists cannot allow themselves the luxury of dismissing the concept of culture solely on the grounds of its inadequate public use. Excluding it from anthropological theories and practices may distort our understanding of human behavioral and cognitive structures (Andrade, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For more than a century, anthropologists have debated on the concept of culture (Pröpper & Haupts, 2014; Kwon, 2005; Satz et al., 2013). Numerous definitions of culture coexist in anthropology and other sciences. Conventionally accepted definitions turn around the idea of a common set of norms, ideas, values and attitudes shared by a specific group of people. These definitions touch virtually all sides of a society from technology, politics and economics to our everyday lives. Consequently, culture influences the way we think, act and see the surrounding world (Haukelid, 2008).

The definitions of culture benefited from an increasingly rich intellectual panorama of the twentieth century. For example, the academic discipline of cultural studies expands and strengthens the (re)negotiation of meanings while recognizing possible conflicts and limitations (Bhatt, 2020). The Boasians had an essential contribution not only to the establishment of this discipline but also to the popularization of cultural relativism (Brown, 2008). The relativization of culture went along with the focalization on new dimensions. Cultural conceptions gradually lost their society-wide definitions and acquired new meanings containing the idea of lifestyle and its numerous components from specific norms to individual values (Peterson, 1979).

Over the last century, the concept of culture suffered major representational changes. As a foundational element in Western thought, it became widely used by academics and practitioners (Scupin, 2018). Andrade (2020) observes a recent tendency to move beyond culture as a mere analytical tool for anthropological theories. The interdisciplinary expansion assumes a considerable magnitude. Culture became a central argument in the debates between psychology and biology. According to De Vos (2011), the dichotomy between psychology and biology that exists in the contemporary academia risks de-valorizing human lives. Despite the overwhelming claim for academic diversity, the contemporary range of strategies and theories for understanding the psychological dimensions of the scientific objects of study has been gradually reduced to three dominant models: (1) cognitive-behavioral, (2) neurobiological and (3) evolutionary. Paradoxically, this trend did limit the development of interdisciplinary links.

In the hands of psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists and political scientists., the noun “culture” and the adjective “cultural” became a powerful tool. They started to attach the adjective “cultural” to an unlimited number of existing notions. Treating culture as an adjective rather than a noun implies a shift from mere objects to interactive processes that stimulates a more balanced symbiosis between environmental and cultural services (Satz et al., 2013). There is a transdisciplinary tendency towards dynamic meanings. In their analysis of the future of anthropology, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) manifest a strong preference for culture as adjective rather than noun. Following a similar line of thinking, Pröpper and Haupts (2014) examine the dynamic evolution of ecological economics and define culture as a process rather than a category, a continuous movement that takes places between environments and human beings for the entire period of their lives. As a result, the adjectivization process is far more than a simple grammatical shift. It implies a deep change of meanings that need to be considered from an historical and epistemological point of view.

3. METHODOLOGY

Historical epistemology draws the biography of concepts. By examining their relevance, functionality, evolution and coherence with other concepts, this methodology can be applied in natural and social sciences. For historical epistemologists, meanings change throughout time and conceptual models. Historical epistemology describes cognitive, emotional and rhetorical structures of concepts as a strategy to investigate their tailor-made functionality (Berrios & Marková, 2021).

The concept of culture came to be one of the main achievements of anthropology (Scupin, 2018). An epistemological position sees this construct as complex webs of diverse theoretical positions (Haukelid, 2008). Treating culture as an adjective rather than a noun modifies its multiple dimensions: (1) cultural worldviews and epistemes; (2) cultural symbols; (3) cultural assets; (4) cultural institutions and practices. The adjective “cultural” marks the shift from a substance to a

process. Explanatory logics and knowledge systems have an enormous impact on the meanings of this concept (Satterfield et al., 2013).

Historical epistemology has never sought to discover the past. It is about understanding knowledge histories through comprehensive reconstructions of their making, resonance, context and time (Refaat, 2015). Applying this methodological approach implies the idea that one cannot separate culture from its historical contexts and major theorists. The creator of the anthropological concept of culture, Franz Boas, used texts as a hidden entry into the thought-world (Verdon, 2007). Heavily dependent on psychological factors, the Herderian-Boasian vision of culture includes an interdisciplinary mix. From the perspective of philosophy of history, Herder's ideas evolved to reflect complex conceptual transitions (Chrostowska, 2021). A relatively recent transition represents the shift from a noun to an adjective. Using the adjective "cultural" produces significant changes in our worldviews and epistemes. The apparently simple adjectivization process directly impacts explanatory logics and knowledge systems by modifying the metaphysical and spiritual properties of all animate and inanimate objects surrounding us (Satz et al., 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Because of its mass consumption, the concept of culture has become a key referent for formulating personal, social and political agendas. Fleeing anthropological vocabularies and scientific uses, this concept undergoes a permanent process of deconstruction by numerous actors in different contexts and domains. The social hierarchies, conflicts and complicities related to the use of the notion of culture reveals the importance of power structures in the creation and evolution anthropological theories (Andrade, 2020). The process of adjectivization followed an interesting pattern. Treating culture as an adjective rather than a noun modifies its numerous dimensions including symbolic expressions, belief systems, identified assets and institutions (Satz et al., 2013).

The Boasian-Herderian concept of culture needs a careful historical and epistemological consideration. For Herder, concepts, meanings, and inner thoughts were mediated and completely dependent on languages and cultural dynamics (Scupin, 2018). More concerned with identifying plural cultures than a singular human civilization, Herder produced a new concept of culture that seeped into anthropology through its epistemological multi-functionality and conceptual openness. The Boasian school of anthropology popularized this concept not only in social studies but also in our social consciousness (Webster, 1997). The international and interdisciplinary transfers played a crucial role. Through his numerous scientific productions, Boas achieved a symbiosis between the political and the personal illuminated by the context in which he lived and worked (Wilner, 2013).

Associating the concept of culture with cross-disciplinary practices and structures of power calls for a close analysis of the processes through which people tend to appropriate cultural resources and give meaning to their feelings and experiences (Andrade, 2020). Approaching culture as an adjective may be considered as a step towards its further relativization and dynamization. For scholars such as Pröpper and Haupts (2014), culture is never completely static or absolute because there is a continuous dialectic interplay between transmutation and stability.

4.1. Understanding the Role of Vocabularies, Models and Signifiers

Concepts have an impressive power that may produce not only productive outcomes but also dangerous misinterpretations. For example, stereotypes express a negligent and perverted use

of the concept of culture that denies its internal diversity, historically situated contents, fluid and often contradictory nature. Defining culture in static terms leads to serious misconceptions. The continuous selection of traits that supposedly incarnate one's own identity and the other's image often produces twisted understandings of social and cultural differences. Therefore, stereotypes forge synthetic, ready-made, rigid conceptual repertoires. Simple clear-cut classifications enable the circulation of stereotypes in all social and public spheres. It is essential to analyze central elements that have a great social and emotional importance to a determined cultural group. By targeting highly sensitive issues, socio-political uses of the concept of culture sustain or contest the existing forms of power (Andrade, 2020).

The interplay between science and society does not escape the overwhelming power of the concept of culture. During the twentieth century, a massive fusion of anthropological and psychological research generated influential notions, theories and models. The psychologized language, more particularly, its special concepts and modes of articulating feelings, encapsulates the interiority of the person (Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021). Through the gradual interiorization of culture, American anthropology produced powerful conceptual frameworks. The Boasians are responsible for promoting a more conscious use of concepts. On the academic side, Edward Sapir promoted the personalization of the way in which professionals understand and use concepts, as expressions of their own values and beliefs, not as expressions of an unachievable objective certitude (Preston, 1966). The process of psychologization of culture and science has influenced the use of signifiers in the study of social realities and discursive schemes (De Vos, 2011). Moreover, psychoanalytic vocabularies infiltrated not only into the highly psychologized accounts of the human being but also into the social activities of everyday life (Parker, 2010).

Limiting ourselves to a single definition of culture will not be fruitful. Researchers should not isolate culture from social networks, practices, technologies and power structures. Any adequate anthropological analysis must consider the plural nature of the concept of culture by illustrating it as an intersection between these subsystems (Haukelid, 2008).

4.2. Adjectivization

León-Palencia et al. (2017) identified three important processes in the analysis of historical and epistemological contexts: (1) the adjectivization of the concepts; (2) the demands for conceptualization; and (3) the need for a clearer distinction between concepts. As we can see, the process of adjectivization has tight links with conceptual rigor. Its study needs a careful appreciation and thoughtful consideration of linguistic specificities.

“Adjectivization is a transformational process of converting a lexical item in a language into an adjectival form” (Ajala & Onyemakonor, 2023, p. 1). Pröpper and Haupts (2014) associate the adjectivization of culture with the transition of meanings, more particularly, from object to process. However, this process is not simple. It has social, practical and bodily-physical dimensions related to socialization and negotiation of shared meanings. The use of culture as an adjective serves to describe multiple commonalities among differentially situated and relationally configured social formations as they are always defined by concrete individual actors (Andrade, 2020).

Anthropology employs the noun “culture” and the derived adjective “cultural” to conceptualize belief systems, collective ways of behaving, customs or practices. The term “sub-culture” is used nowadays in a similar way (Sekules, 2017). The adjectivization process can be tightly linked with the pluralization of the noun “culture”. This process has the potential to eradicate homogeneous and static notions (de Munck, 2008). For Boas, dynamism was fundamental to human existence (Wilner, 2013). In his groundbreaking book “The Mind of

Primitive Man”, Boas (1938) emphasized the importance of cultural values and behaviors. As a matter of fact, American anthropology has put the adjective “cultural” at the center of conceptual frameworks. Today most anthropologists tend to speak about plural cultural processes rather than culture, and culture as an adjective rather than a noun (Haukelid, 2008). Kwon (2005) establishes strong conceptual links between the adjective “cultural” and the plural noun “cultures”. The pluralizing effect of adjectivization (Badiou, 2017) creates favorable conditions for theoretical and conceptual renewal.

4.3. Forging New Concepts with the Adjective “Cultural”

Boas and his students triggered the adjectivization of culture by coining numerous terms containing the word “cultural”. The transformation of Herder’s *Kultur* into the adjective “cultural” has deep historical ramifications. As a German Jewish immigrant, Franz Boas undertook a great personal and academic journey to become one of the most influential anthropologists in the United States (Briggs, 2005). To answer the need of combining multiples cultural perspectives, Boas coined the hallmark of American anthropology, the concept of cultural relativism (Haeberle, 2020; McLeod, 2021). Boas educated his students to systematically examine what they inherited through a rational consciousness and critical lens (Briggs, 2005). As a consequence, in a constant search for adequate theoretical instruments, the Boasians created many new other concepts: Ruth Benedict - “cultural studies” (Stassinis, 1998) and “cultural shock” (Guitel, 2006); Melville Herskovits - “cultural imponderables” (Iheanacho, 2021); Julian Steward - “cultural ecology” (Barth, 2007) and “cultural adaptation” (Lawrence, 2022); and Marvin Harris - “cultural materialism” (Mekunda, 2019), among many others. This fountain of new concepts and reasoning refreshed the scientific attractiveness and gave a specific charisma to American anthropology.

The concepts containing the word “cultural”, that the Boasians developed, were remarkably diverse. Besides broadening the analysis of cultural traditions to material and verbal arts, Boas connected the notions of culture and folklore to the problem of the individual psychology. He started to examine utilitarian actions, such as crafts and foodways, from the perspective of cultural studies. His interest in individuals as tradition bearers and motivational factors strengthened the bridge between psychological and anthropological analyses (Bronner, 2021).

The theoretical discussions on the concept of culture and its ramification play an essential role for conceptual renovation. For Boas, science and abstract philosophy became the gold standard for distinguishing rationality from tradition (Briggs, 2005). In American anthropology, the concept of culture and its derived adjective emerged as a guiding vector and strategic tool. “The social historian cannot avoid speculating on the factors which created a hospitable climate for culture in the United States. The new concepts supported the transformation of a multiracial republic into a self-consciously multicultural society” (Degler, 1989, p. 25).

The noun “culture” and the adjective “cultural” acquired a triple signification: (1) ethnological; (2) political; and (3) descriptive of identity. These words came to signify the entire set of material and symbolic components that forge identity and allow human groups to survive. Initially used in restrict academic groups, the terms “culture” and “cultural” became key words for identifying, analyzing and understanding oneself and the surrounding world (Audinet, 2004).

4.4. Cultural Relativism as a Conceptual Frame

Boas and his successors, such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Melville Herskovits, developed cultural relativism (Wilner, 2013). They assumed a non-chauvinistic position by

affirming that “we have failed to understand the relativity of cultural habits, and we remain debarred from much profit and enjoyment in our human relations with peoples of different standards, and untrustworthy in our dealings with them” (Benedict, 1934, p. 25). Cultural relativism remains an important feature of postmodernism (Tehrani, 1998). The viral tendency to spread and to expand, that the relativistic thinking has developed, may explain its omnipresent substance. The Boasians greatly contributed to the liberalization of relativistic thinking. Over the decades, scholars have introduced a dizzying number of varieties and subvarieties of relativism (Brown, 2008).

In his 1928 book “Anthropology and Modern Life”, Franz Boas coined the term “cultural relativism”. He conceived all cultures as progressive adaptations to their unique sets of circumstances. Moreover, Boas vigorously rejected any hierarchy between cultures (McAuliffe et al., 2012). He gave a special attention to historical factors and their intersections.

It is more than questionable whether it is justifiable to construct from a mere static examination of cultural forms the world over an historical sequence that would express laws of cultural development. Every culture is a complex growth and, on account of the intimate, early associations of people inhabiting large areas, it is not admissible to assume that the accidental causes that modify the course of development will cancel one another and that the great mass of evidence will give us a picture of a law of the growth of culture. (Boas, 1928, p. 209)

Historical epistemology allows us to dig deeper and to analyze the complex networks of knowledge. From this perspective, Boas did not come up with his relativist models out of nowhere. His German background had a major influence in the construction of new theoretical models. It is essential to note that Herder was a fierce proponent of relativism (Chrostowska, 2021). The Boasian anthropology marked a silent revival of Herder’s concept of culture. Many notions developed by Herder acquired shape in American anthropology. The origins of cultural relativism are dominantly attributed to Herder whose writings accentuated the significance of cultural differences:

The culture of the Greeks, particularly at Athens, proceeded on the maximum of sensible beauty, both in arts and manners, in science and in political institutions. In Sparta, and in Rome, men emulated the virtues of the patriot and hero; in each, however, in a very different mode. Now as in all these most depended on time and place, the ancients will scarcely admit of being compared with each other in the most distinguished features of national. (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 395)

Herder displayed a remarkable innovative cultural relativism that went beyond the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism (Young, 1995). This approach emphasized the particularity of each culture (Scupin, 2018). He never used the term “cultural relativism”. As shown in the previous sub-chapter, it was Boas who coined the term “cultural relativism”. Historians credit Boas for founding cultural relativism as a theoretical construct and as a major anthropological tool. Based on a Herderian tradition that used the concept of *Kultur* and *Volksgeist* to explain the differences between different groups of people, Boas developed a new influential theorization of culture. This cultural perspective focused on the dynamic interactions between individuals and groups to explain the great diversity that exists in the world (Wilner, 2013).

4.5. Rethinking Herderian Notions

For Pröpper and Haupts (2014), treating culture as an adjective rather than a noun involves approaching it as a complex set of experiences. Adjectivization pushes the concept of culture towards a more inclusive and realistic picture of human experiences. It is essential to state that “Herder certainly introduced the notion of culture as a particular way of life” (Young, 1995, p. 42). His approach gave a special importance to arts and literature as full expressions of culture. He did not underestimate the value of folk cultures and their authenticity. Herder created a scission in the concept of culture itself by defining it as an inherently hybrid formation (Young, 1995). The essence of the Herderian perspective contrasts with essentializing definitions by strengthening the idea of diversity of cultures and the value of each cultural group (Kroeber, 1992).

Herder argued that concepts and ideas did not make sense separated from the cultural worlds of which they were a part. Despite not explicitly using the adjective “cultural” in foundational works such as *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, he acknowledged the plural nature of the word “culture” by attaching to it other adjectives in notions such as “moral culture”, “general culture”, “political culture”, “internal culture”, “human culture” and “intellectual culture”. Most of these expressions did not lose their relevance in the contemporary era. Herder’s impressive ability to employ the conceptual frameworks of culture shows the complexity and innovation of his work. Following the same logic, the Boasians created similar, yet more distinctive notions. For example, Ruth Benedict coined the anthropological terms “shame culture” and “guilt culture” (Matthews, 2014), which facilitated the emergence of more recent formations in our vocabularies such as “cancel culture”.

In addition to creating the plural term “cultures”, Herder showed that culture can take different forms according to national manifestations or the numerous dimensions of the human life, including politics, morality and religion. “As the most ancient moral culture of all the nations upon the Earth proceeded chiefly from their religion, so did that of the Greeks, and it continued long in this track”. Herder did not invent the word “cultural”. However, as shown in the previous chapters, the pluralization and the adjectivization processes go hand in hand. The Herderian legacy consists of opening the notion of culture to new realities and to the needs of increasingly complex conceptual networks.

From the point of view of historical epistemology, Herder assumed a very critical and well-established position. “Every kind of human knowledge has its particular circle, that is its particular nature, time, place, and periods of life”. In line with the Enlightenment views, Herder argued that individuals and the character of nations develop in relation to the local climate. He also fixed his attention on local popular traditions and cultural manifestations as major determinants in the individual and collective development. For Herder, the emotional dimension was an essential requirement for the full realization of humanity. Since the Herderian approach conceptualized psychological factors as the basis of action, scholars started to believe that feelings could open the doors to human liberation.

The distinction between German *Kultur* and French *civilisation* reflects the dichotomy between plurality and singularity in the idea of culture. Herder did not forget to provide a notion that would help all scholars to unify the multiple cultures that coexist in the world, a feature that is transversal to all the nations. In his writings, Herder used abundantly the adjective “human” - *menschlich*. “Now if we look back and observe how everything behind us seems to travel onward to the human form”. This word is an authentic hallmark of his models. For him, we all share a common *Humanität*. In the twentieth century, the adjective “human” was gradually and partially

replaced by the word “cultural”. The American anthropology secured a long-lasting hegemony of the Herderian notions and worldviews.

Following Herder, Boas suggested that reality can be subjectively perceived through language and other cultural processes (Weaver & Peterson, 2021). He inherited German traditions from his academic background. His mentor, Adolf Bastian, employed actively Herder’s concept of *Kultur*. This complex theoretical construction was used to explain how distinct groups of people can think or relate. The difference became a question of identity. In other words, we are all equally human but virtually divided by the invisible boundaries of identity (Wilner, 2013). Despite explicit differences, the words “human” and “cultural” became almost inseparably linked through semantic and historical relations.

4.6. Relativization and Psychologization of Academic Discourses

Herder introduced the plural word “cultures” to add a more relativistic anthropological sense and to denote the rich diversity both between and within nations. He implicitly set up the opposition between environmental conditions and human factors, such as migration, intermixture and education. As a consequence, he simultaneously used diffusionist and isolationist models that became the two dominant theories in nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropology. Boas, on the other hand, made a major shift from historical diffusionism to the psychological study of the individual and cultural phenomena, making anthropological research even more attractive and multidimensional (Stocking, 1989).

Herder articulated complex global pictures of historical phenomena but did not dismiss the importance of individual areas of human endeavor (Chrostowska, 2021). The Boasians followed a similar pattern. There was a transition from nationalization to personalization. In order to explain individual practices that diverge from the customary behavior, Boas and his followers turned to psychological models (Bronner, 2021). They examined different possibilities, situations and diverse individual backgrounds and came to the conclusion that “behavior characteristic of nationalities shows complete reversals when the individual is exposed to a new social environment” (Boas, 1937. p. 230).

The Boasian perspective never underestimated the role of language and conceptual rigor. As a matter of fact, Boas made major linguistic discoveries and created systematizing descriptions of distinct linguistic/cultural groups of small indigenous populations in North America that had an impressive effect on academic community (Kroeber, 1992). To explore the essence of cultural phenomena, Boas plunged deep beneath the group to its nuclear constituents—the individuals. In interpersonal interactions, Boas saw a rich source of insights on how the individuals reshape themselves continuously. He was captivated by the ability to develop as a power all human beings hold in common (Wilner, 2013). “Boas himself had expressed an interest in the relationship between culture and the individuals who, he felt, served as both its carriers and innovators”. His students inherited these ideas. For example, Sapir’s scientific ethos presents a highly holistic, yet personalistic thinking. Looking at the individual as the true locus of culture opened new possibilities. Sapir aimed to build an innovative personalistic science of the human being (Preston, 1966).

The relativization and personalization of culture evolved into new perspectives and approaches. The culture of self-improvement and the psycho-managerial style have changed our way to look at the surrounding world. In the generalized quest for the inner self, the psychological way of thinking and talking have infiltrated into popular discourses and everyday culture (Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021). The field of psychology has been heavily influenced by Euro-American assumptions on culture and the construction of self (Kwon, 2005). A highly relativized and

appreciative sense of culture puts a completely different spin on individual psychology. Through the Herderian-Boasian conceptual frameworks, anthropology and psychology absorbed the scientific and epistemological trends of the twentieth century.

In every field of science, it is necessary to stress the laws and sequences that most adequately explain the situations under observation and nevertheless to insist that other elements are present, though they can be shown not to have had crucial importance in the final result. To point out, therefore, that the biological bases of cultural behaviour in mankind are for the most part irrelevant is not to deny that they are present. It is merely to stress the fact that the historical factors are dynamic. Experimental psychology has been forced to a similar emphasis even in studies dealing with our own culture. Recent important experiments dealing with personality traits have shown that social determinants are crucial even in the traits of honesty and leadership. (Benedict, 1934, p. 206)

The Boasian students, such as Benedict, invested much of their efforts in defining and understanding cultural behaviors. The relativized plural noun “cultures” has mutated into the adjective “cultural” to embrace the growing complexity of interdisciplinary academic fields of anthropology and psychology. In the contemporary era, “anthropology has tended to emphasise culture as an adjective and thus an aspect of behaviour”. Therefore, the popularity of expressions such as “cultural competence” or “cultural sensitivity” should not surprise us. The new vocabularies mirror a combination of past *epistemes* and newly designed theoretical tools.

5. CONCLUSION

Cultures can neither emerge nor operate in a vacuum. There is a constant negotiation of meanings and representations. The dialogue with the political, sociological and economic realities of human life reinforces this process. Consequently, culture overcame its status of a mere abstract entity. Today it can be defined as a way of life built by individuals in a continuous (re)negotiation and (re)interpretation of the surrounding world (Bhatt, 2020). The need to attach the adjective “cultural” to existing notions and ideas reveals complex historical and epistemological factors. In the twenty-first century, the noun “culture” and its derived adjective has actively catalyzed the process of psychologization in which terms such as “cultural competence”, “cultural awareness”, “cultural identity” and “cultural intelligence” have become increasingly popular. This interdisciplinary process aims to reconstitute all spheres of the individual life (Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021). It is true that psychologization of subjectivity has great scientific and epistemological advantages (De Vos, 2011). However, we need to use conceptual frameworks in a critical and conscious way. Through a multifaceted analysis of the origins of fundamental notions, historical epistemology opens new intellectual horizons and improves the transparency of knowledge production.

More research is required to refine our understanding of contemporary vocabularies. The vastness of the concept of culture does not allow us to limit its study to two personalities. What the Herderian-Boasian perspective has to offer is a comprehensive explanation of conceptual pluralization. Herder gave us the plural term “cultures” to understand the great diversity that exists in our world. For centuries, we have carried his rich legacy. Today, scholars, such as Kwon (2005), use the adjective “cultural” and the plural noun “cultures” as a strategy to avoid static and homogeneous notions of culture. Inspired by the Herderian ideas, the father of American

anthropology, Franz Boas. prioritized individuals over groups, dynamism over statism, and diversity over difference (Wilner, 2013).

Anthropology has gradually established itself as holistic discipline that combines scientific explanations of human life with highly humanistic considerations on complex individual meanings (O'Meara, 1999). Grounded on a personalized insight into the social and psychological reality of culture, the Boasians were able to efficiently theorize the vital relationship between human nature and culture (Preston, 1966). The adjectivization process can be seen as an attempt to open the word "culture" to the plurality of today's world and to make it more multi-functional. Without falling into dangerous ambiguities, anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines should fully embrace of the potential of possible discursive ramifications. The relativizing and pluralizing effect of the adjective "cultural" brings powerful prospects in developing new conceptual frameworks and activating disciplinary fusions in contemporary science.

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