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Cultural Diversity!? A Roundtable
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A Roundtable

ABSTRACT: In the context of a roundtable held at the international conference ›Diversity Affects – Troubling Institutions‹ organized by the CRC Affective Societies in May 2021 at Freie Universität Berlin four social and cultural scientists critically discussed the meaningfulness of the term ›cultural diversity‹ and debated about the question whether the term ›culture‹ has transfigured into a leftover-category that lumps together the conceptually uncanny, politically uncomfortable, and empirically enigmatic. This article is the edited and revised transcript of this thought-provoking conversation.

KEYWORDS: cultural diversity, notions of culture, superdiversity, multicultural bodies, moral affects, culturalism

In contemporary social and cultural anthropologies one can identify a tendency towards an adjectival usage of the term ›culture‹. This term, which is not only a central concept in anthropology, but also in social and cultural sciences in general, increasingly appears only in collocations like ›cultural plurality/multiplicity/variety‹, ›cultural diversity‹, ›cultural heterogeneity‹, or ›multiplicity of cultural orientations‹, ›diversity of social and cultural backgrounds‹, ›plurality of cultural norms and practices‹, or the like.

The well-attended roundtable on ›Cultural Diversity!?‹ provided an interdisciplinary platform to reflect on the origins of adjectivising culture and discuss what these adjectival collocations might actually denote. Held at the Biennial Conference of the Collaborative Research Center 1171 »Affective Societies«, titled ›Diversity Affects – Troubling Institutions‹ on May 29, 2021, the Center's spokesperson Birgitt Röttger-Rössler asked three colleagues with disciplinary backgrounds in migration sociology, historical anthropology, and social and cultural anthropology, whether the term ›culture‹ has transfigured into a leftover-category that lumps together the conceptually uncanny, politically uncomfortable, and empirically enigmatic. Monique Scheer, Boris Nieswand, Thomas Stodulka, and Birgitt Röttger-Rössler critically debated the analytical value of the terms ›culture‹ and ›diversity‹.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this roundtable session. We will address an old but nevertheless pressing question, namely, what is culture and what do we mean precisely when we talk about cultural diversity? Fur-

thermore, we will talk about the affective dimension of living cultural diversity and of researching it. I am glad to have highly distinguished guests for this roundtable discussion, whom I want to introduce now very quickly. First, a warm welcome to Monique Scheer, who is professor of historical and cultural anthropology at the University of Tübingen, where she currently also serves as vice rector for international affairs and diversity. Among her research interests are religion, secularity, and cultural diversity in contemporary Germany, the history of emotions and cultural theory. A warm welcome also to Boris Nieswand, who is a professor at the Department of Sociology, likewise at the University of Tübingen. His research focuses on migration, diversity, morality and cities. In one of his recent research projects, which is part of the CRC »Threatened Order« at the University of Tübingen, he investigates social relationships in ethnically and socially heterogeneous contexts, more specifically in highly diverse urban districts in Santiago de Chile and Johannesburg. His methodological approach may be characterised as reflexive and ethnographic. Last but not least, a very warm welcome to my dear colleague Thomas Stodulka, who is junior professor for psychological anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin and co-founder of a European Network for Psychological Anthropology. His work focuses on affect, emotion, childhood and youth, social inequality, marginality and mental health, datafication, as well as methods. He is specialised on Indonesia, where he conducted long-term field work; he also acted as co-director of the interdisciplinary project ›Researchers' Affects‹, which investigated the impact of affects and emotion on the research process.

More than 20 years ago, the social anthropologist Adam Kuper stated that social anthropologists normally get highly nervous when it comes to discussing the concept of culture. With this remark he pointed to the fact that any contestations about the definition of culture provoked deep irritations and feelings of uncertainty among scholars of social and cultural anthropology, but also of related disciplines. In my opinion, this anthropological nervousness not only still exists, but has increased considerably during the last 20 years. Anthropologists still have a highly ambivalent relation to the core concept of the discipline. In contemporary writings one can identify a tendency to use the term ›culture‹ primarily as an adjective in word compositions such as ›cultural plurality‹, ›cultural variety‹, ›cultural diversity‹, ›cultural heterogeneity‹ or ›diversity of social and cultural backgrounds‹, and so on and so forth. On the one hand, this linguistic practice of, as I call it, ›culture denominalisation‹ can be read as an expression of insecurity, which originates from the justified criticism of an essentialising understanding of culture as a territorially bound, homogenous and rather stable entity. On the other hand, it is associated with the growing usage of the term ›diversity‹ which has occurred as a distinct category to describe processes of inner social differentiation and plurality in the context of migration. Studies of diversity argue that it is necessary to look at a variety of criteria in order to grasp the increasing diversity of the so-called ›superdiversity‹, a term coined by Steven Vertovec, of contemporary societies.

One of the concept's variables besides age, gender, legal status, path of migration, education, ethnicity, language, religion, is subsumed as ›cultural norms and orientations‹. But what exactly do these categories mean? What do categories like cultural norms and orientations comprise? What do they denote precisely? In other words, culture as an adjective becomes transfigured into a kind of leftover category that lumps together the conceptually uncanny. So in my opinion, it is time to reflect once again about our usage of the term ›culture‹ in social anthropology as well as in sociology and cultural studies. Accordingly, we will, in the first discussion round, talk about the meaning and analytical value of the term ›culture‹ and then, in a second round, turn to the affective dimension of cultural diversity and discuss questions like what does it mean emotionally to live or work in culturally diverse settings?

Let us start with Boris Nieswand. Boris, you stated in one of your writings that it is impossible within the field of migration studies to discuss culture without getting enmeshed in discourses about discrimination and exclusion. So what does culture refer to from the perspective of a sociologist who works particularly on migration, and why is the term so contested in migration studies?

Boris Nieswand: Thank you very much, Birgitt, for inviting me and also for giving me the opportunity to say something on culture. I would first like to answer your question as a sociologist. Following Andreas Reckwitz (2015), it can be said that the concept of culture first of all opens up a contingency perspective on social life. It enables us to see that everything – even what appears to us as mere fact or self-evidently true – must be viewed as result of processes of meaning-making and understanding. Regardless of how we understand or represent something, it can always be understood and represented differently, by another person, in another place, at another time. Evidently, this concerns also us as researchers. To become reflexive means in regard to our own practice to incorporate the knowledge of the contingency of our own knowledge into the process of knowledge production. Somehow ironically, it seems that within the process of becoming more reflexive, the concept of culture becomes the means of its own abolition. Reflecting on the consequences of the contingency perspective leads us to realise that the concept of culture itself is contingent. If we use it in the Reckwitzian way, we don't use it in the Herderian way, we don't use it in the Bourdieusian way. Recognising that the employment of the term ›culture‹ is not sufficient to specify what it means or what it instructs us to do, we are prompted to look for more concrete aspects of social life or social fields that can be seen as expressions or indicators of culture: meanings of words and gestures, habitualised and embodied practices, the materiality of social life, cosmological views, discourses, gender or kin relations, myths and other iconic stories, rituals, arts and museums, patterns of interaction and so forth. However, specifying culture might at the end make us realise that we don't need the word ›culture‹ itself to address these more specific issues. Especially, if we are recognising that these other concepts seem to be less contested and mobilise less resistance. If we understand culture

as a ›facilitator‹ of a perspective of contingency, it is perhaps a Wittgensteinian ›ladder‹, a tool that we don't need anymore when it has increased reflexivity about the contingency of knowledge and its consequences for our own professional practice. But why does the use of culture appear to be more controversial than other concepts? I would like to answer this question from my position as a migration scholar. The problematic relationship of migration studies is related to its potential to be used as a political means of ›othering‹, excluding and devaluing migrants and their descendants. Verena Stolcke (1995) wrote already in the early 1990s that culture has replaced the concept of race within the political right as a key concept. The reference to the right of collective cultural self-determination is used to protect nativist privilege and assign migrants an inferior symbolic and material position within the nation-state. Looking at the Identitarian movement, the AFD or PEGIDA and their anti-Muslim discourse, it becomes evident that Stolcke's analysis is still valid: culture is still a key concept of political right-wing extremism and right-wing populism. One might object that scholars should defend their concepts against political appropriation, that the phenomena which an anthropological concept of culture addresses will not disappear if we don't use the word anymore and that culture, properly used, challenges rather than reproduces racism and xenophobia. I think these arguments are valid, but would object that, once such a suspicion is in the world, it takes constant effort and justification to defend one's analytical language. And then the question is: do I want to deal with this suspicion or are there conceptual alternatives that work for me? You quoted Adam Kuper at the beginning, who argued that it might be better to use more specific terms than culture. I would add, it also helps to avoid intellectually unproductive debates whether the term itself is problematic or only some of its political instrumentalisations. And perhaps the 21st century no longer needs a concept of culture like the 19th and 20th centuries.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: OK, thank you very much, Boris. Let me try to wrap up your argument: you say that the notion of culture might be useful to reflect on the contingency of all knowledge, but that we do not need the term anymore. We can go on with using culture just as an adjective or not even this. You are proposing that instead of talking of a group's culture we should better speak of the group's particular knowledge, values, lifestyles, beliefs and behaviour conventions. In the second part of your answer it became clear that your unease with the term has a lot to do with its current misuse by certain political actors like the Identitarian movement and others. But is the essentialist use of the concept of culture by certain ideologically guided actors sufficient to abandon the concept even within social and cultural sciences?

Thomas, may I pass this ball to you? Do you agree with Boris? What does culture mean from the perspective of a social and cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on social inequality and marginality?

Thomas Stodulka: Thank you. Well, first of all, thank you very much for the invitation, it is great talking about culture, and thank you for this wonderful introduction. I will try to contradict you, Boris, although I am aware of all the difficulties of the culture concept. First, defining culture as relational is crucial, meaning that the very term itself is related to the audiences that we speak to. When talking about culture in an interdisciplinary collaboration with psychology, for example, I self-identify as a scepticist that resists cultural essentialism. Although these audiences and arenas are different, I am still the same person, so I would like to give an integrated answer first. There are lots of reasons for culture theorists and anthropologists, particularly from a postcolonial theory perspective, to dump the concept due to its stereotypical essentialisation and its potentialities for the discrimination of ways of life, persons and communities based on their phenomenological appearance as assumed ethnicities, gender, sexual orientation or age, to name just a few that, once charged with nationalist public rhetoric. They are played out rhetorically as ›culturally different‹ in a negative way and instead of understanding diversification as enrichment to thriving societies, we realise as scholars that culture seems more frequently operationalised negatively, pointing to a deficient lack instead of an empowering abundance of something. So, the concept of culture is inherently paradoxical, as it seems both loved and hated in different social sciences and cultural studies.

Interestingly, it was precisely in the 1990s, when anthropology lost interest in further discussions of culture as a concept, that it re-emerged in related disciplines such as cultural psychology and cultural studies. Social and cultural anthropologists have preferred to avoid the term for decades, particularly since the prevailing entity of culture and ethno-locality have been deconstructed in the face of globalisation and mobility phenomena and theories. The discipline's shift from villages, communities, and neighborhoods as primary units of analysis towards activities, imaginations, connectivities and multi-localities has countered essentialism and ethnocentrism, but it has left the culture concept theoretically orphaned; even worse, we have surrendered and left the culture concept to right-wing intellectuals so that it could grow into this ›xenophobic monster‹. When using the term ›culture‹, and I can already anticipate resistance in the audience today. If we debate culture as a concept at all, we do so on affective battlefields laden with moralised arguments on why culture is ›anachronistic‹ and such a ›bad‹ and ›outdated‹ concept, or perspective to look at contemporary worlds; why and how it is essentialising heterogeneous and diverse human experience, behavior and speech, promoting ethnocentrism that at best leads to a social and political hierarchisation of persons and communities, but actually only redefines historicised stereotypes based on colonial, racial and ethnic descriptions that lead to discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation. I feel this theorisation redefines the arguments of ultra-conservative and rightwing movements, who promote the same meta-narrative and operationalise it for racist and discriminating political agendas. Many colleagues

have argued that there are only cultural particularities, or that the culture concept cannot be used any longer to account for the subjectivities, historicity and intersectionality of contemporary conviviality. I am inclined to advocate the opposite. Like power, as Foucault has illustrated, I want to argue that culture might best be understood from its resistance, not only in epistemic terms, as to why politically engaged scholars reject the culture concept altogether with its theoretical potentialities. More importantly, contesting the centralised public and political abstractions of ethno-localised and racialised culture conceptions, the concept of culture itself is a powerful political and epistemic tool to ask very precise and concrete questions. So, what notion of culture is it exactly that is juxtaposed at the intersection of belonging and not belonging? Which phenomena are activated by nationalists and which are neglected and hidden from public debate? What is the culture that is used by not only right-wing parties in their attempts to establish hegemonic narratives based on blood and soil rhetoric? I feel that it is precisely due to this contested quality of culture that I am inclined to argue that the concept of culture can provide a significant anthropological arena of political engagement. It should not be left to radical nationalists to drive their wooden horses filled with xenophobia and racism into Troja. Through the contestation of cultural lenses, we can see fundamental societal arenas of power struggles over citizenship, appropriation, exclusion, exploitation, and violence to name just a few. We need discursive spaces of culture and cultural diversity so we can not only identify political currents of radicalisation, austerity, othering, and discrimination, but collaboratively write, work and speak up against them from diversified positionalities, from multiple, and contingent perspectives.

Secondly, relating to previous long-term fieldwork with street communities in Indonesia, I would like to highlight that writing with culture, but against xenophobia and exploitation might work best if done in diversified writing and research teams. Over almost fifteen years, I have engaged with communities at the urban margins in teams, never alone. In Indonesia, this ethnographic teamwork managed to counter the politicised public discourse that has for decades constructed the social elites of the Javanese aristocracy as the culturally hegemonic representation of good and primordial citizens. Through a team of diversified collaborators, we took on Javanese anthropology that had for decades idealised the values and ideas of elitist interlocutors during fieldwork in modern anthropology. As wonderful as Clifford Geertz' contributions to anthropological theory are, the protagonist of interpretive anthropology has discursively contributed to the othering of marginalised communities who did not match with these privileged accounts of being ›a good Javanese‹. We took a different perspective and shed light on the perspectives of subaltern and marginalised communities instead of cultural and political elites. We argued that stigmatised and marginalised persons and communities are not deviant per se, but they are first and foremost Javanese and Indonesian. We highlighted that they are also cultural beings, and not so much society's

shameful other that needed to be eradicated. So, final sentence to a very long answer: Working through and diversifying the public discourse on culture became a powerful strategy of resistance for stigmatised communities living at the urban margins when they started claiming culture and humanity for themselves publicly.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: Thank you very much, Thomas. I think it is very important that you pointed to the potency of resistance to hegemonic discourses via the concept of culture. In my own current work with migrants from Vietnam, I have often observed that they try to resist expectations of assimilation by emphasising their cultural otherness. They insist that ›their culture‹ is very different from what they perceive as the ›German culture‹. Belonging and non-belonging is, as you said, often negotiated by various actors through the concept of culture. We may come back to this point later.

But first, I would like to ask Monique about her opinion. Monique, you emphasise in your work a practice-theoretical approach as well as the bodily dimension of the social. And culture, you argue, is a dimension of the social and becomes embodied during the socialisation process. This adds not only the cultural or cultured body to our discussion, but also points to the complex relation between culture and society. In my opinion this is a very important and interesting aspect. So, what is culture from your practice-oriented perspective?

Monique Scheer: Thank you for your question, and thank you for the invitation, thank you to the two previous speakers for their fascinating comments. You know, it occurred to me that I do not really write all that much about the culture concept, per se. I have not really given it all that much attention in my research. But I do think about it a lot for my teaching. So, I thought I would talk about it from the perspective of how I teach this concept. And to begin with, I would like to point out that, long before there was any talk of getting rid of the culture concept and feeling awkward and uncomfortable about the word ›culture‹, we were already discussing the term ›Ethnologie‹ in Germany as being problematic in the cultural anthropological disciplines of ›Völkerkunde‹ and ›Volkskunde‹. And, you know, at least in my field in Tübingen, we changed the name of ›Volkskunde‹ to ›Empirische Kulturwissenschaft‹ because we liked the term ›culture‹. We thought it was better than ›Volk‹. And so, I've found that in my teaching I try to discuss this term ›culture‹, the pros and cons. Our fields have a long history of struggling with nationalism, with racism, with social conservativism, since they were tasked with producing a picture of ›the way things used to be‹. The struggle against reactionary forces is, therefore, still very high on our agenda, of course. And so we are very careful to minimise any possibility that, when we are talking about culture, it could be used or instrumentalised in any sort of nationalist way. Thus, we teach our students about this from the very beginning, from the first day of class. We are also struggling against everyday public uses of the word ›culture‹, so we have to teach our students what we, as anthropologists, mean when we talk about culture as opposed to what they have been saying up to now or what they are used to reading in the news-

paper. We teach them from the very beginning that there is no such thing as Britishness or Swedishness or Germanness. We teach them that culture is a dimension of the social, not a thing in itself. Wherever there is sociality, wherever there are at least two people communicating and interacting, culture is happening. Culture as a dimension of the social means that it is constantly in flux. It is constantly becoming and changing: culture is a process. It is moving forward and backward and sideways and up and down. The link between the social and the cultural can also be understood in terms of ›symbolic behaviors‹, and its changing quality is that of rules being established and contested or misunderstood. And of course, there is a general understanding of culture as expressions that go beyond the everyday, artistic expression which deepens and/or heightens our understanding of ourselves and our relations with others. And so, you can sort of build a bridge between everyday life and the arts or ›high culture‹. Culture does have something to do with tradition – we still have this concept of tradition in the background, and it does have something to do with tradition in the sense that it is learned, it is passed down. But it is also constantly shifting and changing and trans-forming. This concept, this process-oriented and open concept of culture might seem to contradict a notion of multiculturalism, of more or less clearly defined cultures (in the plural) existing side by side, of cultural diversity. Our students often ask, ›How can that be if culture is constantly moving and shifting and mixing and changing? How can anybody make a claim to cultural ownership and, by virtue of that, make a complaint about cultural appropriation, for example? How does that work?‹ This is why I think that it is very important to keep the link between the social and the cultural very much in the foreground, because then it always means that culture is happening in social relations where there is a flow of power and you have to consider the power relations. Another common understanding of culture that students bring to the classroom is that it is the opposite of nature. But we teach them that it is not enough to say that culture provides humans with everything that nature does not give them. Because when it comes down to it, of course, culture is naturalised, is transformed into ›nature‹ all the time. And nature is obviously shaped by culture. Our bodies are not natural at all. There is hardly anything of significance about our bodies that could be considered natural. Anything that we have in our bodies and on our bodies has been shaped and accen-tuated, built up or maybe repressed and atrophied, forgotten about through cultural practices. So, something that seems to be as closely tied to the body as, for example, gender is the result of cultural practice. This is a contribution of practice theory, because of course, from that point of view, gender is more or less nothing but practice. And also, the notion of race as a social construct is, I think, very much linked to this kind of thinking of these supposedly bodily features being actually the product of doing, of performing a social and cultural practice. So, an understanding of how culture sort of gets under your skin until it feels natural, as Marcel Mauss (1973) would say, means that

you cannot study cultural diversity without looking at bodies and emotions and affects and gestures and comportments and postures and that sort of thing.

So, my last point is about how I have gotten really used to thinking of culture as just being habit. And it is not just because I am interested in the habitus concept. I have been reading a lot of William James in the course of my work on emotions. And he also talks about habit in the *Principles of Psychology* (1910). He discusses the way that humans are creatures of habit, whereas animals are creatures of instinct. And the difference, he says, between humans and animals is that having habits mean you can change them. Even though, of course, it is hard to do so. James also acknowledges that habituation can run very deep, and it can actually enter the materiality of the body and of the brain. One hundred years before modern neuroscience was beginning, James was talking about the plasticity of the brain and how its very materiality is shaped by repetitive behaviors. So culture and cultural practice get under your skin, get into your brain, and feel biological. And therefore it is very hard to tell the difference between behaviors that might be viewed by some psychologists as hardwired or genetically transmitted and those that are habituated to the point of being automated. This is what culture, I think, delivers. It delivers a great deal of these sorts of habits you do not realise that you have. This is what anthropologists find out about people, the habits of behavior and work that they have never thought about before, until they are asked. ›You know, this is how we do this. It is always done this way.‹ There are also habits of thought and feeling. This has been the focus of my work in the history of emotions, to think of emotions as habits and therefore as cultural practices. That might mean you think of a certain person as such and such, because that is just the way the world is. You are just used to thinking of it and feeling about it that way. And because it is in your body, it is not easy to lose this habit, you cannot just willingly stop it happening. Which means, in a sense, it is not really you anyway. Thinking and feeling and doing these things is your habit working through you. It is the culture sort of flowing through you. So, when a group changes their habits of interaction, that is when we start talking about cultural change. And you know, if you can change culture, if you can change habits, then they are not carved in stone. They are the subject of negotiation, they become subject to evaluation. Because then you start thinking: Is this the culture we want to have, or is this something that we should be trying to change? Also thinking about my work at the university, trying to push forward some sort of diversity politics, this becomes an incredibly difficult question. How do you change a culture? We do not have a grip on that, because we do not know that much about how to change habits. But I think it is an important thing to think about when you are trying to achieve certain political goals that involve cultural change. So that is my statement on the topic of culture. I guess I am in between the two of you. I am not against it. I am not particularly in love with it, but I am thinking of it more in terms of ›habits‹ than anything else.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: Thank you, Monique, for your comments. I find it very helpful that you have focused attention on how we explain the concept of culture in teaching. We can't just remain vague, we have to be concrete. I myself like to work with a cognitive anthropological concept of culture, according to which culture is defined as knowledge that is learned and shared and that people use to generate behavior and interpret experience. However, this shared knowledge is by no means only explicit knowledge to which individuals have conscious access; rather, a large part of this shared knowledge is of an implicit nature, such as body knowledge, bodylects, all the everyday routines or habits that people acquire in the course of their socialisation. What is important in this understanding of culture as knowledge is to realise that knowledge is shared in multiple and variously complex ways and that no-one ever knows everything – think only of expert knowledge – but that there is a pool of shared knowledge components that allows those who have access to this pool to interact with each other as matter of course. This concept also implies a highly dynamic understanding of culture: knowledge is flexible, it is constantly changing, being expanded, forgotten, useless, and so on. In my opinion, this concept of culture could prove particularly fruitful in relation to heterogeneous, superdiverse social contexts. I wonder what you think of this rather classical concept?

Thomas Stodulka: We talked about culture as an adjective, and it has been around for about 100 plus years as a noun. But actually, we all know it is a verb, right? Culture is relating, practicing, contesting, and imagining, to mention but a few verbs.

Boris Nieswand: The struggle over certain terms can lead astray. In my opinion, it would be intellectualist foolishness to assume that the phenomena addressed by the anthropological concept of culture that you, Birgitt and Thomas, have identified are not important. Of course, there are more or less shared repertoires of knowledge and these, along with the complications you mention, can be subsumed under a processual concept of culture. With my initial reference to Reckwitz I even wanted to indicate that most of us are culturalists in one way or the other. However, if the debates about the political implication of a term, which I have mentioned before, make it more difficult to communicate because the term evokes resistances, I see little use in holding on to it if there are alternatives. These alternatives will probably also be deconstructed and discredited after a while and academics will move on to other concepts. But maybe it is our culture after all, to consume concepts and throw them overboard after a while… In any case it remains important to distinguish between concepts of analysis and concepts of practice, as Rogers Brubaker (2002) calls them. If the people who are in the focus of our research use the concept of culture and when it's relevant to them, it has to be addressed, independent of how I personally think about it. However, this is a different discussion than the question of whether scholars need an analytical concept or a theory of culture. It is possible to study other people's understandings of culture without affirming the concept myself.

Monique Scheer: I fully agree that we have to make this distinction, and this is why I was talking about how you discuss this with students because for them, you have to make a distinction between the way the word ›culture‹ is being used in the world and the way that we are using it in our scholarship. As Boris said, perhaps, you know, as experts on ›culture‹, it would be very wrong not to attend to the ways that the term ›culture‹ is implemented in the real world. And what Thomas pointed out was the way that the term ›culture‹ can become a resource. It can really become a powerful resource for marginalised communities to make a claim that has to be recognised because we have the sense that there's this sort of general consensus that culture is supposed to be respected. I think it's for the same reason that culture and religion get mixed together very often in everyday language: We definitely have a strong, deeply rooted sense that in liberal democratic societies, there must be respect of people's right to religion. And that sort of spills over into their right to ›have a culture‹. And so, if you can say something is your culture, then that is a resource because you can claim it is your human right, and it gives you access to power in negotiations.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: My next question goes to Monique because she, in one of her most recent writings, addressed a very important question. Namely, how diversity as a characteristic of society enters into bodies and how it gets incorporated. In other words, Monique asks, I quote her again, »Is there a multicultural body? If so, what might its signature affects and emotions be?«

Monique Scheer: The article you are referring to was really just a little think piece with the title »How does diversity make us feel?« (2020), which was purposefully stated in an ambivalent sense, because I did want to explore whether there might be something like an emotional regime of multicultural societies. Cities that have populations from all over the world moving around sort of put demands on people, and there is an implicit sort of understanding of how you are supposed to feel about it. You're expected to acquire a ›multicultural body‹ in the sense that the demand of this multicultural society is to adapt your affects and your reflexes to being very relaxed about difference, which I called ›multicultural cool‹ in the article. For example, you learn not to stare at someone's hijab while they are talking to you. You learn not to feel annoyed because someone is speaking with a foreign accent. You are being asked to learn these things. And that was the point of the article, which, of course, is totally up for debate. It might be very controversial to make this sort of observation.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: Thank you, Monique, these are really important considerations, but doesn't the notion of a multicultural body on the other hand imply that there exists a culturally homogeneous body, which might have particular problems living in culturally diverse settings?

However, this point relates to my second question to Thomas. Thomas, you did classical ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observations in Indonesia; long periods of empirical research in mostly unknown or unfamiliar surroundings and in

close daily contact to local people is the trademark of our discipline, and fieldworkers very often characterise their fieldstays as a form of ›second socialization‹. Would you say that emotional repertoires, as well as the sensory capacities of ethnographers, change during fieldwork? Do ethnographers develop multicultural bodies or multi-cultural emotion repertoires?

Thomas Stodulka: Actually, I do think that. In fieldwork, you do not have all of that embodied, cultural and emotional repertoire advice of attuning to initially unfamiliar lifeworlds provided to you by a textbook or field manual. And I think getting out of your comfort zone in a responsible way can be an important social and political experience because it diversifies your perspectives on what you consider ›normal‹, because you have that scientific aim to ultimately relate to and understand the culturally unfamiliar. And understanding does not work without feeling. In fieldwork you have to learn to position your body differently in order to approach people and places and make friends, it is this harmonising utopia where you put every effort into just ›blending in‹. And until you feel that you can blend into unfamiliar situations, it is a hell of an effort, emotion-wise. It takes quite an emotional effort to not make mistakes all the time. As a consequence, when I returned from Indonesia after five years of intermittent fieldwork, I think my body posture changed because you are not supposed to stand taller or sit higher than someone else. I probably also adjusted my voice very differently in order not to offend anyone. Hanging yourself out in unfamiliar places does something to both body and mind, and everything in-between. And I am not talking about experienced violence or sexual harassment that is often experienced by women anthropologists, my examples refer to very mundane situations and the effects of everyday habituations.

Birgitt Röttger-Rössler: Thank you, Thomas. I think it is important to keep in mind that understanding and knowledge are always connected to our body, are always a bodily practice, particularly when it comes to what we call deep understanding. And understanding never goes without emotions and affects. Our emotions in certain social situations deeply impact how we perceive, interpret and react to what is going on and how we later describe and document it in our anthropological textbooks. In other words, emotions are always evaluative, they often constitute moral assessments in relation to particular social events.

This leads over to my last question to Boris. Boris, in a recent paper, you propose an analytical framework for studying and theorising moral dimensions of representations of migrants and migration in the social sciences (Nieswand 2021). And you argue that it is necessary to critically reflect the often implicit moral attitudes within the writings of migration sociologists. You point to the fact that for many social scientists, integration is positively connoted and constitutes a kind of ›hyper-good‹ as you frame it. They are always emotionally charged. So, in my opinion, you address here also the researchers' affects without saying it, don't you?

Boris Nieswand: Yes, I certainly do. And I also have my own moral agenda when I argue like this. I am concerned, as probably others are, about how the polarisation along issues of migration and diversity will play out in the longer run and how we should deal with it. At least since Trump, I have realised that academia does not hold an ideologically neutral position. It is ultimately committed to a liberal discourse ethic that affirms, for example, pluralism of opinion and is based on the hope that good arguments can prevail over bad ones. In the darkening social atmosphere, in which authoritarianism seems to be on the rise even in countries that thought themselves immune to it, these axioms no longer seem self-evident. I think that polarisation reinforces authoritarian tendencies and thus threatens the social foundations of academic discourse. Some believe that we can counter polarisation through more and better information and political education. I am skeptical in this regard. When it comes to moral affects and moral ways of reasoning, people, myself included, tend to resist information that suggests something other than what we feel is right. Civic education does not work when somebody has the impression that I am not the problem, but the society around me is. Perhaps, and this is my suggestion, what we need is not more facts and more efforts to ›educate the ignorant‹, but rather a reflexive moral sociology of migration and diversity that helps us better understand the social dynamics of different moral ways of feeling and thinking about diversity. Such an endeavor, however, can only be credible if it distances itself from a moral critique that attributes morality to the dumb and uneducated and represents itself as the voice of reason, ethics and enlightenment. In my opinion, such an enterprise can only work if it is relativistic and includes the moral positioning of researchers into its reflexive considerations.

Monique Scheer: I absolutely agree, and this is precisely why I think it is important that we also consider the theory of emotions that underpin our moral sense. If emotions are cultural practices or habits, then some of them can be really stupid, can support very questionable moral positions. And it is important to acknowledge that and try to change them. But we also have a deeply ingrained ideology, which partly comes from science, that emotions are not just habits, but that they are hardwired, that they are natural, and that there is therefore something ›truthy‹ about them. And this is, I think, the source of a lot of the emotional upheaval that we are experiencing: people are taught to listen to their emotions, to pay attention to them, to believe they are saying something true. A lot of people said about right-wing populists: this is just how they feel, we have to take their fears seriously and so on. And I think that we need to take a stand and say emotions are just as cultural as everything else, and they can be just as wrong as a lot of other cultural things. And we should consider what we want to change about them, number one, and secondly, to be less polemic and more anthropological. We could take this stance that Boris was referring to, to reflect on different moral habits of feeling, including our own as scholars, to take all of our schooling in getting to understand the logic of the emotional practices that we are confronted with without assenting to them,

without saying they are somehow true or right. I think that our fields are very good at that and can provide tools for this kind of analysis, hopefully instigating change.

Röttger-Rössler: Thank you very much for this thought-provoking conversation. We have addressed numerous aspects that are highly relevant when it comes to sharpening our understanding of the concept of culture. It's particularly telling that emotional and affective factors played a big role in our debate; whether it's Monique's argument that we should think of emotions as habits, that is as the product of cultural practices or the question she raises about the emotional regimes of multicultural societies; be it the discomfort Boris expresses about the concept of culture and the moral affects he mentions, which play an important role in popular as well as academic discourses on migration and diversity; be it the affective efforts Thomas refers to, which are connected with the adaptation of field researchers, but – I would add here – also of migrants to unfamiliar life-worlds and emotional regimes. All this nicely confirms the motto of this conference ›Diversity Affects‹ and is thus able to trouble institutions – as well as our disciplines and their core concepts.

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