

# What Does Captain Cook Have to Tell Us About Culture? Contributions for a Structural and Historical Approach to Culture and Organizations

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**ABSTRACT** Current approaches to culture and organizations fail to define culture dynamics as inextricably wrapped up with the dynamics of cultural resources. Pursuing this goal, this paper aims to further develop the available theoretical anchoring of organizational culture dynamics. We delineate theoretical contributions and methodological implications of a structural and historical approach to culture and organizations. According to this approach, capturing culture dynamics implies studying culture as history and analyzing it as a process of social realization of cultural resources. Drawing upon Marshall Sahlins' classical interpretation of Captain Cook landing in Hawaii and on ethnographic and historic research findings in Rio Pardo, Brazil, we show how interested subjects creatively used their pre-existing cultural categories and schemes of practice as they committed to culturally grounded action strategies, enhancing their particular positions in relation to resources made available, while imposing contradictions to other interested groups that eventually had to be incorporated into cultural order.

**KEY WORDS** • Captain Cook • Marshall Sahlins • organizational culture • organizational culture dynamics • structural–historical anthropology

Organizational culture has been a topic of academic and practical interest for at least three decades. Although scholars often recognize culture as being historically built (Schein, 2004), traditional frameworks conceptualize culture as structure (Staber, 2006): a set of exogenous constraints shaping individuals' feelings and behaviour (Hofstede,

2003) or a set of values or meanings that inform organizational members' behaviour (Boyacigiller et al., 1996; Martin, 2002). Alternative approaches are developed by authors who claim the necessity of emphasizing the dynamic dimension of culture, assuming it to be a dynamic set of concepts and understandings resulting from human action and interaction (Brannen and Salk, 2000; Hansen, 2003; Hatch, 1993; Hatch, 2004; Meyerson and Martin, 1987). Within cross-culture management studies, research on intercultural interactions often focus upon bicultural settings, capturing and interpreting processes and practices along which culture is produced and reproduced through the action of individuals (Brannen and Salk, 2000; Kleinberg, 1994; Kleinberg, 1998). Studies on intercultural interaction have shown that, assuming that individuals are embedded in culture, their judgments and behaviour are influenced by culture; the opposite is also true, since behaviour actually influences culture. Focusing upon these latter phenomena, history and agency are incorporated into research designs, and findings may contribute to academics and practitioners better understanding mechanisms of culture production.

Pursuing this latter goal, several authors have offered more systematic models of organizational culture dynamics (Brannen, 1992; Gagliardi, 1986; Hatch, 1993; Schein, 2004). For example, Brannen and Salk's (2000) work on intercultural interaction conceptualizes culture as emergent and historically situated patterns of meanings and practices, produced through the negotiation among individuals of different cultural affiliations and with unequal access to power. While studying international joint ventures, the authors conclude that the national cultural origins of organizational team members are the source of values upon which they operate in bicultural settings. However, cultural interpretations may be reformulated, recombined or modified over time, as individuals and groups interact and negotiate when facing events

within processes whose course is a priori undetermined and of unexpected development. In line with these ideas, we argue that not only structural but also historical concepts to culture can add to this debate; they address overlooked issues, such as the interested engagement of organizational agents around cultural resources as being intrinsic to culture dynamics. This way, structural and historical concepts could further develop the available theoretical anchoring of organizational culture dynamics.

This article aims to offer a structural and historical theoretical framework to studies on culture and organizations, delineating potential contributions and research implications. Current approaches to organizational culture dynamics fail to define culture in terms of pragmatic resources marked and deployed by individuals facing everyday events (for an exception, see Staber, 2006). According to this view, culture dynamics is inextricably wrapped up with the dynamics of cultural resources. Interested subjects creatively use their pre-existing cultural categories and schemes of practice as they commit to culturally grounded action strategies, while enhancing their particular positions in relation to resources made available and imposing to other interested groups contradictions that may be incorporated into cultural order. American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins innovatively articulated these issues in his seminal work on cross-culture contact, proposing a structural and historical approach to culture as facing the challenge of discussing not only how events are ordered by culture (such as assumed by culture-as-structure approaches) but how, within historical processes, culture is reproduced and transformed (Sahlins, 1981).

We first introduce central theoretical concepts to a structural-historical approach to culture and organizations, illustrating them with a classical interpretation of a cross-culture contact (Sahlins, 1981; Sahlins, 1990). Drawing upon historian research

methods, Sahlins interpreted the events of European Captain James Cook visiting the Hawaiian Islands in the late eighteenth century, thus leading to simultaneous and intertwined processes of culture reproduction and change. These concepts are then further illustrated with ethnographic and historic data of research held in Rio Pardo, a municipality located in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Finally, drawing upon both research findings, we deepen the discussion of central theoretical concepts and mechanisms of culture production by delineating a structural and historical approach to culture and organizations, and suggesting theoretical and methodological contributions and implications. We argue that capturing culture dynamics implies studying culture as history (Sahlins, 2004). Within a structural and historical approach, culture dynamics is analyzed as a process of social realization of cultural resources, requiring longitudinal studies capable of incorporating events, resources, contradictions, and interests as features of culture.

### 'A Possible Theory of History'

Sahlins' structural-historical anthropology has been pioneering material for debating a central tension in social theory, namely the difficulties of integrating continuity to change in social-anthropological approaches (Ortner, 1984; Schwarcz, 2001). His historical analysis, as well as his 'possible theory of history' (Sahlins, 1985: 138), were developed along a series of writings from 1980 to the mid-1990s, to be criticized, praised, and further developed by anthropologists such as Obeyesekere (1992) and historians such as Sewell (2005), Windschuttle (1996), and Burke (1987). Within history, Sewell (2005) further elaborated upon Sahlins' theory as he enthusiastically recognized its usefulness: 'Sahlins' theory is, in my opinion, brilliant, elegant, widely generalizable, and eminently useful for historians' (Sewell,

2005: 198). In line with classical anthropologists (Malinowski, 1945; Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936) and contemporary organizational theorists (Hatch, 1993; Hatch, 2004), Sahlins suggests that culture dynamics simultaneously embraces culture reproduction and change. His theory of history constitutes a general approach to culture dynamics, focusing upon the relations between structure and event. The author recasts the opposition between these two concepts as traditional in social sciences ('structure' refers to the permanent, ordered, and pervasive aspects of social reality, while 'events' incorporate multiplicity and chaos), articulating them into a more balanced relation. In doing so, Sahlins adopts a processual view of culture, integrating interpretive traditions to a latter tendency in social theory highlighting the action of social agents upon the world (Dupuis, 1996).

Although directly deriving his concept of structure from Saussurian linguistics and Lévi-Straussian anthropology, Sahlins deviates from these traditions, as he emphasizes what Giddens calls the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984; Lévi-Strauss, 1970). Structure not only constrains people, being the source of social conduct, it also enables creative action, being transformed as a consequence of social practice. Sahlins summarizes that structural contents are altered in the course of events in such a way that the 'transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction' (1985: 138). This is because *events* are to be considered happenings capable of transforming structures; however, they are recognizable as such just from within structures. Structures define how events will be interpreted and will run their course, being ultimately the cumulative outcome of past events (Sewell, 2005: 199). Thus, the event incorporated within a structure is, simultaneously, an innovative and conservative process that can be understood as *history*.

When building his argument in favour of merging cultural reproduction and transformation so as to understand history or culture

dynamics, Sahlins proposes the concepts of *structure of conjuncture* and *functional reevaluation*. The first can be defined as a synthesis of culture and conjuncture, emphasizing the inseparability of history and structure, and expressing the way a culture reacts to an event through the dialogue between existing cultural categories and immediate contingencies. A structure of conjuncture can be analyzed in terms of processes of reinterpretation of structural content (we now come to the idea of functional reevaluation), as new historical conjectures can put traditional meanings at risk, and since interested historical agents reevaluate culture concepts as they face historical contingencies that pose both threats and opportunities. For these situations, a 'possible theory of history' should recognize that culture dynamics is inextricably wrapped up with the dynamics of material and non-material resources that people mark and deploy when faced with events.

Sahlins interpreted the eighteenth century-odyssey of Captain Cook to the Hawaiian Islands as the structure of conjuncture, so as to delineate his 'possible theory of history'. Others further elaborated upon this (Sewell, 2005). A structure of conjuncture is 'a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context' (Sahlins, 1990: 160). Sahlins shows why Cook was taken as local god Lono (culture reproduction), culminating in his death as a tragic unfolding of events that were interpreted according to local worldviews, while Cook and his sailors started a fruitful exchange of unprecedented goods that rearranged local interests and alliances, thus leading to reinterpretation of culture concepts (functional reevaluation and culture change). Therefore, *structures* can be defined as 'mutually reinforcing sets of cultural schemas and resources' (Sewell, 2005: 205), culture can be understood as a synthesis of past and present, and culture dynamics is analyzed in terms of meaningful practices of historical agents, the

way they manifest themselves in a specific structure of conjuncture. In the highly differentiated, ethnically diverse, multi-religious and mobile contemporary world, subjectivities are formed within multiple cultural structures, which are 'spheres or arenas of social practice of varying scope that intertwine, overlap, and interpenetrate in space and time' (Sewell, 2005: 206).

In the following sections, we further explore these ideas based upon two examples that emphasize, for didactic reasons, each of the theoretical concepts introduced in this section. We will first explore Sahlins' analysis of the events following Cook's arrival in the Sandwich Islands<sup>1</sup> with an emphasis on the concept of *structure of conjuncture*. Secondly, we will discuss research findings in the Cedejor project in Rio Pardo, Brazil, by placing an emphasis upon the concept of functional reevaluation. In the final sections, we recover both historical interpretations to further build our understanding of a structural and historical approach to culture, and discuss implications for studies on culture and organizations.

### **Structure of Conjuncture: Captain James Cook in Hawaii**

In this section, we further discuss and illustrate the concept of *structure of conjuncture*, which expresses the way a culture reacts to events through the dialogue between existing cultural categories and historical contingencies. In his highly influential work, Sahlins (1990) shows how the arrival of the British reproduced Hawaiian culture, which culminated in Cook's death, and that also led to Hawaiian (not to mention European) culture being transformed upon the engagement of interested nobles and ordinary people around cultural resources that were made available. Let us begin with a short description of mythological conceptions (that define structure) in Hawaii at the time the British arrived

in those lands. In the following paragraphs, we will recover Sahlins' analysis of the events following Cook's arrival on the islands, which eventually led to culture change.<sup>2</sup> We will also introduce Sahlins' theoretical assumptions on culture production mechanisms that operate within a structure of conjuncture.

In terms of Polynesian mythological conceptions about the human condition, men are at times obliged to defeat the gods in order to guarantee survival. Kahiki is the invisible home of the gods, and the kingdom of the holy monarch of Kahiki is founded through the usurpation of the governing dynasty. According to Hawaiian myths, the king's supremacy is annually reinforced as he replaces Lono (the original god) by defeating him in a ritual sequence of events that take place around the islands during Makahiki, eventually ensuring fertility and economic prosperity. Makahiki is the New Year's festival when the Hawaiians ritually celebrate the annual return of Lono, who renews the fertility of the land and reclaims it as his own. As the image of Lono appears on the beach, human activities are suspended (the taboo of Lono is imposed) and the god begins a ritual circumnavigation that lasts 23 days; ritual fights take place at each visited district, which eventually suspend the taboo of Lono and allow the now fertilized land to be sowed once again. The peak of Makahiki happens with the *Kali'i*, which means 'to play or act the king'. The king dies in a ritual battle with Lono, but later manages to win, thus, ensuring life for the people and supremacy for him. This battle happens as the king, followed by his warriors, comes from the sea and reaches the original temple (in an allusion to the origin of the dynasty). The warriors of Lono are there waiting for him. The death of the king is actually the prelude of his victory: killed as a foreigner, arriving from the sea, the king is reborn as king, incorporating divine attributes and emerging as the protector of the people. In the following days, the taboos are suspended and normal life is restored.

One can discuss Sahlins' ideas in terms of two main assertions. First, the author reinforces a long anthropological tradition stating that the Seeing Eye is the organ of tradition (Sahlins, 1990). In this sense, culture is contextual constraint upon thought and behaviour. Culture is a type of lens through which we order historical processes and events, if it is seen as a system of meanings. This first assertion allows for the cultural comprehension of the events following Captain Cook and his sailors' arrival in the Sandwich Islands in December 1778, and again in December 1779. Captain James Cook arrived in Hawaii during the festivities of Makahiki. As Cook visited the islands for the second time, the local prophets interpreted and reified the event as the arrival of Lono, with James Cook being Lono himself, and imposing worship procedures to the people. In fact, the arrival of Captain Cook and his troop during the Makahiki was followed by an impressive series of coincidences, thus leading to this interpretation. The captain circumnavigated the islands on a trip that lasted just a few days more than the prescribed 23, as the ritual stipulated. The captain was led to the temple upon his arrival, where he was worshiped as Lono. Cook did not deny the title, as he wished to establish good relations; instead, he implemented an interesting exchange of goods. The Hawaiians supplied the British with food and other necessities, while the British offered iron tools in exchange. Diverging interests and postures were crystallized with the arrival of the British, since the power of the king is based upon the usurpation of the divine attributes of the god; while the prophets worshiped Lono (Cook), the nobles and the king immediately established an ambiguous relationship with him, showing respect and fear while continuously promoting thefts in the ships, which annoyed the European. The rituals of Makahiki were, indeed, based upon the idea that the warrior king aggressively confiscated Lono's divine gifts.

Normal life would be restored with the departure of Cook (which almost coincided with the end of Makahiki) and after the god's gifts were usurped (including what items had been stolen and which tools were exchanged). However, history would have reserved him a tragic end. A storm stroked the ships and forced Cook and his men to return to the islands only days after the original departure. The captain wished to have the ship fixed; however, the nobles interpreted their return as a threat to the re-established supremacy of the king. Cook would again make explicit the diverging interests and postures of both the nobles and prophets. Angry and curious to know the reason for his return, the nobles and the king would come to meet Cook days after his arrival. Regardless of whether or not the event was a contradiction to everything that happened before, it soon turned out to be the reverse script of Kali'i: the final battle when the king reinforces his supremacy and defeats Lono. As the cutter of one of Cook's ships was stolen, he decided to take the king hostage for the return of his property. As he approached the beach with his boat to capture the king, news arrived that the warriors of the gods (the British) had murdered a chief. At that moment, ritual roles seemed to be inverted: that a foreigner arriving from the sea could kill the king. The king's wife and the nobles asked him not to board, and one of the king's closest warriors ultimately killed Cook.

The Hawaiians did not premeditate Cook's death; rather, it was Makahiki in a historical form: a symptom of Hawaiian culture being reproduced as a consequence of a logical contradiction of mythical realities. However, this is only one part of the whole story. We now arrive at Sahlins' second assertion: If the history of a group is culturally ordered according to its cultural categories (culture reproduction), the opposite is simultaneously true: cultural categories are historically altered within the context of human practice. This is known as culture change (Sahlins, 1981). Although events are inter-

preted according to previous cultural categories, these very processes put these categories at risk. Culture may be transformed as a consequence of reinterpretations (functional revaluations) that alter meanings and their relations. Let us see how this happened in this classical episode of cross-culture contact.

As Captain Cook arrived on the Sandwich Islands, the exchange of goods between the Europeans and the native people rearranged traditional interests, thus opposing normal people and the nobility according to the resources that were available. As a counterpart to the system of heroic domination in Hawaii, normal women engaged in interested sexual relations with the foreigners, wishing to establish connections with the divine; this allowed for claims of social ascension in the face of the powers-that-be. Normal men engaged simultaneously in exchanging tools, and soon their wives' 'sexual services' allowed economic interests to merge. According to Hawaiian culture, human reproduction merges the objectives of men and women. For men, this means struggling to pull out the substance of humanity in the form of food. For women, children would be the substance of humanity. Although Cook imposed a sexual taboo upon the men, with the hope of stopping the spread of venereal disease, the insistence of the native women and the willingness of the foreigners allowed the emergence of a marginal system of erotic trade, as the sailors kindly rewarded the 'sexual favours' with iron tools and feminine bracelets. The reproduction of this emerging system put traditional meanings at risk, as old taboos were systematically transgressed. Assuming their own conceptions of domestic tranquillity, the sailors ate with the women, thus ignoring social rules that imposed the primacy of the nobles in their relationships with the gods and the segregation of men and women during meals.

According to local culture, society is founded through important social cleavages. The principle of the king's primacy states that

all the political functioning of society mirrors the projects of the nobles. Simultaneously, the taboo made the opposition of gender sacred: men ate in communion with the gods; their food was in and of itself sacrificial offerings, from which women were prohibited. In fact, social structure imposed a cleavage between the nobles and the people, as well as between the men and the women. These cleavages would become manifest with the arrival of the British. As men and women assumed their interested relationships with the foreigners, they expressed an opposition in face of the king's projects. In the following decades of cross-cultural contact, the nobles intensified the exchange of goods, progressively adopting new European articles as signs of class identity, thus segregating normal people from the material exchanges. The nobles, who extended ritual purposes for the domain of regulating commercial intercourse, manipulated the meanings originally associated to the taboos: of things left apart for the gods. Within a process of *functional revaluation*, taboos were progressively used in identifying material and property rights. The commercial use of taboos suggested the fact that, what originally guaranteed the people's survival and prosperity was now in opposition to their interests. The reaction of men and women was of hidden protests and the reproduction of interested sexual relations. As men and women's commercial interests merged, the sacred status of men in relation to women ceased. The social cleavages progressively emphasized class opposition at the expense of gender oppositions, which was a significant culture change.

### **Functional Revaluation: The Cedejor Project in Rio Pardo, Brazil**

Let us now briefly present ethnographic and historic research findings to further illustrate structural and historical assertions and ideas on culture dynamics. We specifically empha-

size the concept of *functional revaluation*, or the reinterpretation of culture content led by historical agents within structures of conjuncture. The research in question was conducted between 2004 and 2006 in the rural area of Rio Pardo, a municipality located in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This region has been historically dependent upon the tobacco monoculture, developed in small- to medium-sized family properties and within exclusive and vertical relationships with big tobacco dealers.

The structure of conjuncture interpreted was established after the arrival of the Cedejor project (or the 'Centre of Development of the Rural Youth'): a proposal of social change promoted and sponsored by a corporate responsibility institute in Rio de Janeiro. As the formerly prosperous cycle of tobacco monoculture showed clear signs of debility, families were increasingly aware of the need for diversification of productive activities, as promoted by the local media and community leaders. Hence, Cedejor was a non-governmental project that aimed to foster local development by considering young people potential protagonists of social innovations. By proposing the diversification of the families' activities, the intent of the project would be to foster a reformulation of local culture in a way that is consistent with new economic strategies. After modules of basic knowledge, the youth were supposed to develop a business plan for diversification of rural activities. Based upon a French methodology, these educational proposals were thought to help the families overcome the current cultural situation of low cooperation and incipient community organization, limited technical and managerial competencies available, economic dependence due to debts and duties with tobacco dealers and, consequently, a lack of alternatives for the future generations.

Sponsors and local leaders agreed upon a mission for the project, which the latter were supposed to implement. They were to develop social and human capital within initiatives

in order to increase the level of attractiveness of the territory for its residents and to stimulate the permanence of new generations, thus reducing migrations. However, some very relevant and traditional cultural meanings and expectations were inconsistent with the project's mission and proposals. This led to conflicts and intertwined processes of reinterpretation and, eventually, culture change. Since the business of agriculture has been traditionally family taught within the home, the very few opportunities of complementary education, such as those offered by Cedejor, have historically been considered strategies for leaving the rural environment, since these prospects make a young person's CV more attractive for urban jobs, which are considered to be more interesting.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, candidates and families raised other issues, obstacles to joining the program, such as a family's tight budget, commitment to the properties and to the families, as well as established expectations of temporary work processing tobacco. In fact, these meanings and expectations explained much of the turbulence during the program: some youths were only interested in joining the program in order to add value to their CV, while others required objective advantages in order to join the program and overcome its inconsistencies.

As an event transforming structure, the arrival of Cedejor promoted the interplay of external worldviews and material resources (such as the sponsors' views and investments in the project) to traditional cultural expectations and action strategies that local leaders, families, and the project's participants adopted. In Rio Pardo, priorities and worldviews of leaders in charge of the project were embedded in local culture, suggesting personal and group interests related to alternative possibilities of social ascension in a region threatened by economic decadence. Sahlins' assertions allow us make sense of the events that followed the arrival of Cedejor in the region. Initially, the staff and candidates functionally reevaluated the externally born

original proposals of culture change through education in a way that was coherent to local culture; this led to serious deviations from the project's original mission. This phenomenon could be seen with recruitment, when staff had to waive the objective advantages for participating in the program since the educational proposals seemed potentially promising but, given the families' everyday needs and restrictions, had little appeal. Offering free business plan financing for joining the program in an attempt to solve issues that families had raised, and guarantee a successful assemblage of a youth group in the sponsors' eyes, was not rooted in the project's original philosophy or real possibilities; rather it stemmed from cultural expectations.

In a region of scarce resources and opportunities, the families interpreted joining Cedejor as a strategy for change; however, the project's philosophy was not central. Rather, candidates were inclined to join mostly because of financing promises or because Cedejor allowed for a more attractive urban CV. Later, investments in a new and permanent building for Cedejor were so significant that it became the region's most sophisticated infrastructure, thus attracting other investments for the neighbourhoods and the attention of local inhabitants and leaders to the project's coordinator, whose interests involved economical and political goals, rather than just pedagogical ones. There was a sudden increase for both the coordinator and his group in the limited alternatives to professions that the region offered other than those that involved tobacco (the coordinator himself was an ex-producer). The project's coordinator progressively introduced an organizational model that was in line with emerging aspirations, thus outlining the reformulated mission and vision for the project for the rest of the staff. During three years, the project suffered with the precarious systematization of pedagogic processes and the negligence of educational goals (due to a policy of being unaware of the chil-



dren's lack of discipline). Meanwhile, the coordinator offered permanent assistance to local residents through simple services, which were lacking resources. By allowing unlimited freedom and emphasizing leisure and future financial advantages in exchange for cohesion and loyalty, the coordinator could keep youths in the group who were not initially interested in educational activities. By doing so, he pretended to absent sponsors homogeneous development and success and guaranteed further investments; however, this led to routine conflicts and a continuous lack of discipline that seriously threatened the interests of those participants who had a vested interest in developing.

The functional reevaluation of Cedejor's proposals that the coordinator and participants led was a process that reproduced local culture. The coordinator assumed a very traditional political strategy in the region, promoting infrastructure investments; however, it undermined human development goals, which increased local dependence. By attracting investments, managing resources, promising to finance business plans and supplying necessary services, the coordinator acted as a politician and gained regional visibility; this garnered him invitations to join established political forces. Simultaneously, Cedejor's proposals were attractive for the youths only if they guaranteed more money for the family, either by free financing or by leveraging employability. However, although the arrival of Cedejor was coherently reinterpreted according to previous cultural categories and priorities, implementing the project put these very categories and expectations at risk. Since the project's original proposals were broadly reinterpreted in terms of traditional concepts, priorities and interests (for example, families required objective advantages for joining, youths participated with the purpose of enhancing their CVs, and leaders reformulated the project's mission), conflicts were unforeseen consequences potentially transforming these concepts.

As the youths' development was obstructed, those who were interested in Cedejor's original mission saw themselves totally unprepared in spite of the coordinator's insistent demands to elaborate the business plans, which was the sponsor's criterion for evaluating the project in its third year. However, due to a strategic repositioning, the sponsors were no longer absent at the time, and the deviations and reinterpretations that the coordinator led were finally noticed. Dishonest proposals made in order to have the plans delivered on time, and the later denial of financing these projects, instilled great anger among families and participants, who were suddenly left frustrated and unassisted. As these youths saw themselves unprepared for being financed, they wanted to be reintegrated into the project, since the staff had been replaced and a second youth group had begun activities. Along this process, these interested youths promoted a new reevaluation of Cedejor's proposals. They now rejected considering the project instrumental in favour of a new understanding that assumed the need of more proactive and effective roles to increase the alternatives for living in the region. It was then clear that the youths would not have achieved their diversification goals, since cultural expectations denied this possibility (such as the meanings assigned to complementary educational opportunities and the short-term focus on free financing, leisure, and freedom).

If leaders, participants, and families initiated the educational process reproducing culture, it is possible to suggest that this later reevaluation had implications on the youths' worldviews, and this new understanding would alter relations between cultural categories. For those willing to remain in the rural area, the new emphasis on Cedejor suggested the relevance of complementary educational opportunities in order to increase career alternative in non-urban areas. Developing alternative activities in family properties required wider approaches to education and

competence building than was traditionally assumed. As a requisite for implementing Cedejor's original mission, this was actually an incipient, yet very important, cultural innovation.

### **Culture Dynamics within a Structural and Historical Approach**

Within a structural and historical approach, culture change is a phenomenon dependent upon culture, taking place in an intractable world that may deny cultural concepts and expectations as interested social agents pursue their interests. In this balky world, meaningful action is driven by cultural expectations, but novel phenomena can deny these expectations as meanings can be contradicted along historical course (Sahlins, 1990; Sewell, 2005). Cook was taken as Lono by the Hawaiians; however, his and his goods' spectacular arrival impelled nobles and ordinary people to new alliances and calculations, so as to domesticate the foreigner, eventually transforming local culture. Cedejor's coordinator and participants coherently interpreted the project as a possible strategy for change. However, as social agents assumed their own culturally grounded action strategies to pursue their goals, they faced unforeseen consequences as history denied actors' intentions and concepts, and social agents were impelled to revise their cultural categories.

Within structures of conjuncture, culture change is triggered by interested reinterpretations or discontinuities between consolidated culture concepts and intentional values attributed to them by social agents living events (*functional revaluation*). In Rio Pardo, resources and educational proposals that Cedejor brought mobilized local agents in pursuit of their interests. Project implementation was a process that led to successive functional revaluations, reproducing as well as reinterpreting cultural contents, and altering relations of cultural categories. Interested

youths participating at Cedejor revised their original understandings of the project's proposals (and, on a broader scale, altered the role of learning and education in advancing rural activities) as they realized its relevance in order to pursue their immediate goals. When used in action, cultural categories are subject to processes of human intelligence: capable of analysis, manipulations, and recombination from which unforeseen meanings arise, thus imposing contradictions to the historical agents that may be incorporated into the cultural system (Sahlins, 1990). In Hawaii, the interested engagement of nobles and normal people in the emerging commercial system unexpectedly made traditional social divisions manifest, opposing the projects of the two groups. As nobles functionally reevaluated the taboos – using them as a sign of property and material right – their interests were seen as being in opposition to those of normal people. This contradiction was incorporated into the cultural system, as social cleavages progressively emphasized class oppositions at the expense of traditional gender oppositions.

Given these concepts, culture dynamics entails reciprocal processes of 'practice of structure' and 'structure of practice' (Sahlins, 1981) taking place within and between structural orders. This means that pragmatic events are interpreted based upon previous cultural categories (practice of structure) within processes that might unpredictably change the cultural system (structure of practice). Although the two cases analyzed are cross-cultural episodes, these concepts are valid for any culture context: not being restricted to this kind of conjuncture. Within a structural–historical approach, culture change depends neither upon conflicts and struggle (as with Marxism-inspired social change approaches), nor upon people having radically different views of the world (although these may be important elements of cultural dynamics). Rather, culture change might simply happen when people try to enhance their particular positions as oppor-

tunities arise, deploying traditional action strategies to new phenomena, which do not respond in traditional ways, so that change may be understood as an unintended consequence of human action (Ortner, 1984). This was the case with Cedejor, as the coordinator implemented educational proposals in a way that was consistent with local political strategies, and faced unforeseen effects that led to the reformulation of the youths' worldviews.

### **A Structural–Historical Approach to Culture and Organizations: Theoretical Contributions and Methodological Implications**

A structural and historical approach to culture and organizations complements the emphasis upon culture as contextual constraint by addressing questions such as 'how is culture produced and reproduced?' The events related to Cook landing in Hawaii and to Cedejor arriving in Rio Pardo can inform us about structural–historical suppositions about culture, thus suggesting a set of theoretical and methodological implications for advancing research on culture and organizations.

First of all, culture cannot be theoretically understood as an entity separate from history. Rather than a virtual entity to be interpreted as researchers experience 'the field', or as an objective entity to be mapped as researchers hand out questionnaires in search of differences and similarities, culture is real as it manifests itself concretely within events – that is to say, in the course of history. Methodologically speaking, we should frame the study of culture dynamics in order to emphasize the interpretation of structures of conjuncture when taking culture for history. This shift suggests the relevance of longitudinal and historical studies of how cultures overlap and evolve. As culture as history embraces continuity and change simultaneously, culture dynamics could be

analyzed in terms of simultaneous and intertwined historical processes that promote the reproduction (continuity) and transformation (change) of cultural contents. These were the cases of Hawaii and Rio Pardo: cultures in transformation that can only be understood as dynamic interplay of traditional concepts and external influences as they were manifested within those structures of conjuncture.

Secondly, focusing upon culture as history enables a more theoretically realistic and useful framing of organizational cultural phenomena through delineating mechanisms of culture production. As culture-as-constraint approaches often depict culture as an aggregate of shared values, researchers and practitioners find themselves rich in stereotypes and operationally poor when understanding how culture dimensions meet their contexts. Differently, emphasizing culture dynamics allows for the recognition of multiple cultural identities and affiliations interacting and producing culture, as typical of today's organizational settings of rising complexity and diversity (Sackmann and Phillips, 2004). Methodologically speaking, traditional premises and modes of analysis for studying culture cannot be justified if we assume structural–historical proposals. If major issues organizational researchers debated included whether or not considering ambiguity and material dimensions as being inherent to culture (for example, Martin, 2002), we may now presuppose the centrality of ambiguity, contradictions, resources and interests, as they are manifested and embedded in cultural dynamics. Within a structural–historical approach, these would be essential phenomena to effectively understand culture and organizations, so that searching for consensus, permanence, and convergence appears as an effort that results in cultural complexity being ignored.

Third, a structural and historical approach theoretically enables recognizing the fact that culture dynamics is intimately related

to the dynamics of resources. More broadly, issues such as the emergence, change, and the negotiation of meanings are inextricably related to the dynamics of cultural resources – material or non-material. In Rio Pardo, the recent decadence of tobacco monoculture, which dropped the levels of profit that the families made, was the conjuncture giving Cedejor project a sense of urgency. However, culture change was related to pursuing diversified interests that emerged and surrounded the resources available, as investments in the communities attracted the attention of local inhabitants. It is true that cultural values of material resources are given by pre-existing cultural schemas; however, dynamics other than only cultural categorization govern the marking and deployment of resources in real life (Sewell, 2005: 216–17). Pre-existing Hawaiian cultural schemas determined cultural values of Cook as Lono and of the goods he brought. However, these goods were of unprecedented types, implicated in the emerging capitalist system, and could not be governed solely by Hawaiian cultural schemas. In fact, unexpected flows of resources may transform cultural schemas (as happened in Hawaii and in Brazil), which suggest the dynamic and dialectical relationship between cultural schemas and resources. Methodologically speaking, researchers engaged in interpreting a structure of conjuncture should investigate the practical realization of cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested actions of historic agents around cultural resources, including the micro-sociology of their interaction (Sahlins, 1990: 15). As we consider resources a dimension of culture, this investigative effort assumes history as the social realization of the effective resources that individuals mark and deploy, which requires a careful eye to world phenomena denying, contradicting, and reformulating cultural concepts and expectations.

Fourth and finally, culture as history theoretically comprises meanings as well as inter-

ests, which would be embedded in culture dynamics (Young, 1989). This means, in praxis, historical agents associate cultural contents to their projects, revising these contents according to their interests, and suggesting specific functional values that may be objectified, transforming culture (functional revaluations). Within a structural and historical approach to culture and organizations, this is a major mechanism that drives culture dynamics. The exchange of goods that the British inaugurated provoked rearranged interests to emerge; normal people who wished to have privileged contact with the divine transgressed taboos, which were functionally revaluated by the nobles, whose interests included keeping people away from their new signs of social differentiation. Culture changed as these revaluations became objectified. According to Sahlins (1981: 68), ‘interest’ and ‘meaning’ are two sides of the same coin: the cultural category. Meanings are submitted to risks as socially enabled people assume their interests and bend these meanings to their own ends within their immediate action contexts (Sahlins, 1990; Sewell, 2005).

Methodologically speaking, the analysis of processes of *functional revaluation* implies the investigation of cultural ambivalence, or the ‘clash of cultural understandings’ (Sahlins, 1981: 68). Culture should not be understood only as contextual constraint on thought and behaviour (Sahlins’ assertion number 1); it should also be considered the source of pragmatic action strategies that individuals and groups engaged in their projects deploy (Sahlins’ assertion number 2). This means investigating culture as history implies not only looking for structural meanings but also considering how people engage these meanings as they face historical contexts that suggest possibilities of strategic action. Moreover, if culture change is triggered by functional revaluations, these processes are based upon culture. Revaluations depend upon the possibilities that culture offers, since individuals cannot rename things around them, if not

based on culture (unless by becoming unintelligible and incommunicable). Within processes of functional revaluation, cultural concepts assume specific intentional values derived from their conceptual values, depending upon historical circumstances and the agents' objectives. In Rio Pardo, investigating culture dynamics imposed a double methodological focus. Capturing culture required the interpretation of traditional local concepts and meanings (the lens through which individuals implemented the project), including how these concepts became the source of people's projects and priorities, given the opportunities that Cedejor brought.

## Conclusion

In this article we have suggested that, although organizational culture has been a topic of academic and practical interest for at least three decades, the available theoretical anchoring of culture dynamics needs further developing. Studies on culture dynamics not only avoid well-known shortcomings of traditional culture-as-structure approaches (e.g. cultures being reified and 'frozen'); they have also set up paths to contextually richer and theoretically more useful views of culture through delineating the underlying processes along which culture is produced. Pursuing this goal, this article has aimed to delineate a structural and historical theoretical framework to studies on culture and organizations, suggesting theoretical contributions and methodological implications. According to this approach, culture cannot be understood as an entity separate from history, and culture dynamics is wrapped up with the dynamics of cultural resources. We have highlighted the relevance of longitudinal studies of how cultures evolve and overlap, suggesting the centrality of contradictions, resources and interests, as they are manifested within events and embedded in cultural dynamics.

Drawing upon Sahlins' seminal work on cross-culture contact, we have defined and

discussed four main structural-historical concepts: *history*, *structure*, *functional revaluation*, and *structure of conjuncture*. We have illustrated them with Sahlins' classical interpretation of Captain Cook landing in Hawaii in late eighteenth century, and with the Cedejor Project arriving in Rio Pardo, Brazil. We have shown how, in both historical processes, external influences have triggered culture reproduction (since they have been interpreted according to consolidated cultural categories) as well as culture change: these novel phenomena have rearranged local interests as historical agents assumed culturally grounded action strategies in order to enhance their particular positions in relation to the resources made available, thus, imposing contradictions to other interested groups that eventually had to be incorporated into cultural order.

## Notes

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- 1 Sandwich Islands was the name given by Captain James Cook to the Hawaiian Islands on his discovery of the islands in 1778. This name fell into disuse during the late nineteenth century.
- 2 Within anthropology, Sahlins' interpretation of Cook in Hawaii launched a decade-long hot debate as Obeyesekere (1992), a Sri Lankan anthropologist, sharply attempted, in his *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*, to discredit Sahlins' thesis, questioning what he claimed was a perpetuation of imperialist European myths as western social scientists speak in the name of natives. Obeyesekere's arguments were densely and effectively responded to by Sahlins (1995). Although this scholarly duel has been very relevant for the issues it has brought, Obeyesekere (1992) does not question Sahlins' arguments on the relations between structure and event, which are the focus of this paper.
- 3 These latter interpretations are consistent with other studies (interpretive and non-

interpretive) on the realities of rural populations in South America. See, for example, Abramovay (1998), Abramovay and Camarano (1999), Durston (1996), and Stropasolas (2006).

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## Résumé

### **Qu'est-ce que le Capitaine Cook nous dit de la culture ? Contributions à une approche structurelle et historique de la culture et des organisations (André Ofenhejm Mascarenhas et Flávio Carvalho de Vasconcelos)**

Les approches actuelles de la culture et des organisations omettent de définir la dynamique culturelle comme étant liée de façon inextricable à la dynamique des ressources culturelles. Dans la poursuite de cet objectif, cet article vise à développer plus encore l'ancrage théorique de la dynamique de la culture organisationnelle. Nous définissons les contributions théoriques et les implications méthodologiques d'une approche structurelle et historique de la culture et des organisations. Selon cette approche, la saisie d'une dynamique culturelle implique qu'il faille étudier la culture en tant qu'histoire et l'analyser comme processus de la réalisation sociale des ressources culturelles. Nous appuyant sur l'interprétation célèbre que Marshall Sahlins fit de l'arrivée du Capitaine Cook à Hawaï et sur les résultats d'une recherche ethnographique et historique menée à Rio Pardo au Brésil, nous montrons comment des sujets intéressés ont utilisé leurs catégories culturelles préexistantes et leurs schémas de pratique par rapport à des stratégies d'action fondées sur leur culture, améliorant ainsi leurs positions par rapport aux ressources disponibles et ce, tout en imposant des contradictions à d'autres groupes intéressés et qui éventuellement ont dû être intégrées à l'ordre culturel.

## 摘要

库克船长的文化寓意是什么？对文化与组织的结构和历史性方法的贡献

André Ofenhejm Mascarenhas and Flávio Carvalho de Vasconcelos

当前，文化与组织的方法都因其与文化资源力纠缠不清的关系而无法给出文化动力的定义。为了实现这一目标，本文旨在进一步发展现有的组织文化动力的理论参照。我们描述了文化与组织的结构和历史性方法的理论贡献和方法论意义。根据此方法，获取文化动力意味着将文化当作历史来研究，并将其作为文化资源的一个社会实现的过程来进行分析。依据Marshall

Sahlins对库克船长登陆夏威夷的经典解释，以及在巴西Rio

Pardo的民族志学和历史研究的发现，我们说明了利益相关主体在致力于扎根文化的行动战略时如何创造性地使用他们先前存在的文化类别和实践计划，来提高他们与可利用资源相关的特定地位，同时还其他利益相关群体进行驳斥，最终将其融入文化秩序中。