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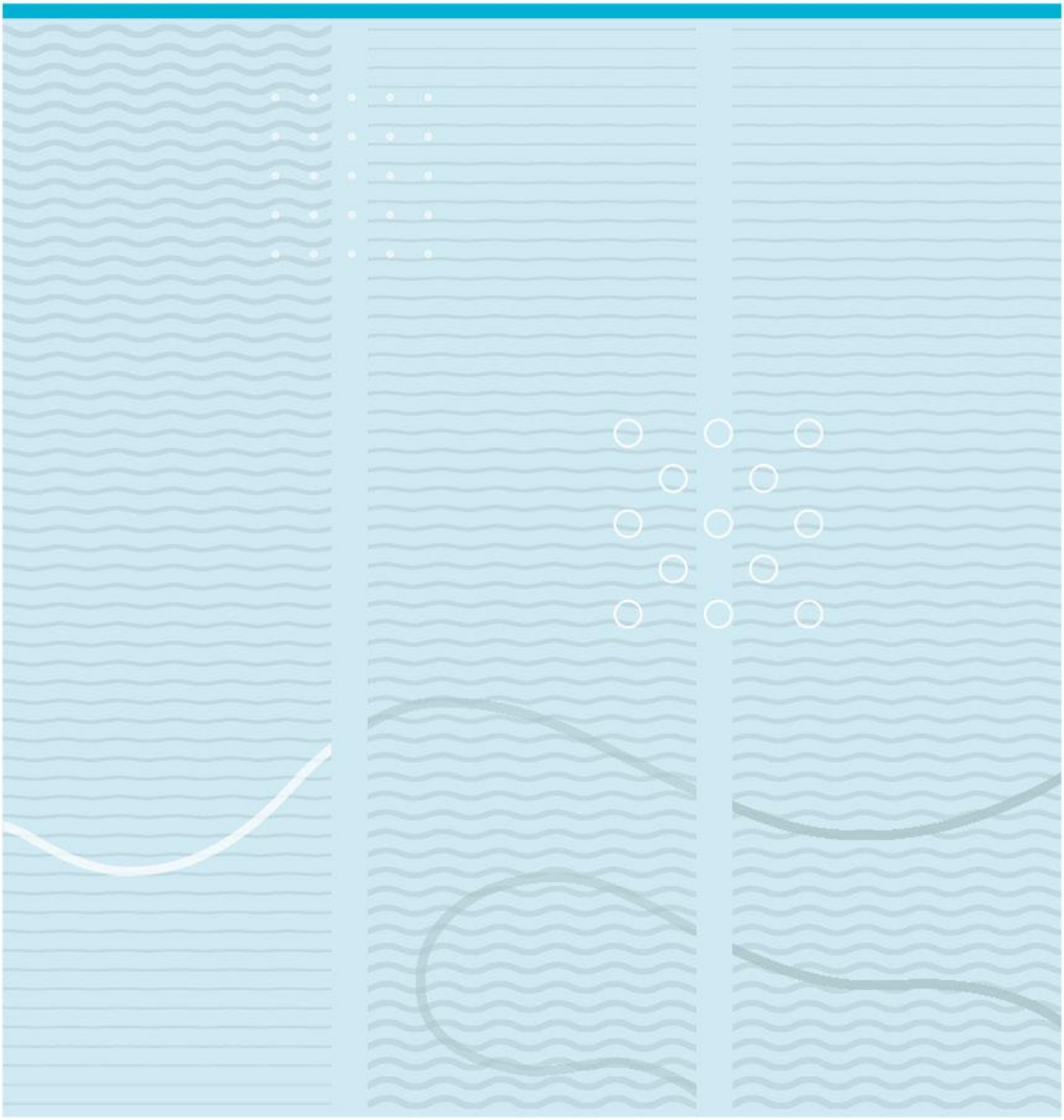
A Constructionist Approach Towards Culture

Ways of Analytically studying and Understanding Culture as a Process of Meaning-Making Practices



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This thesis is worth 45 study points.

Abstract

Culture is said to be one of the most perplexing concepts in human and social sciences to understand and define. In more traditional conceptualizations, culture is held as a complex whole depicting the totality of a "communities way of life." However, when considering the post-immigration world of pluralistic societies, the conventional conceptualization of culture becomes problematic. Further problematizing this conceptualization is the absence of human agency, where people are treated as dopes under the deterministic forces of culture. Addressing these issues, the main objective of this thesis is two-fold. First, the overall objective is to analytically conceptualize how to study and examine what culture is and how it comes about, making this thesis primarily theoretical in nature. Accordingly, this thesis offers nuanced ways of conceptualizing culture as a dynamic process consisting of an arrangement of social practices in which meanings are constructed and exchanged. It provides a framework for understanding and analyzing the construction of culture and offers a method for conducting empirical research that is both theoretically sound and methodologically rigorous. Second, in not divorcing my thesis from the empirical, I seek to exemplify the above conceptualization of culture through empirical evidence, implementing the contended for analytical framework and methodology. In doing research, a constructionist ethnographic approach examines the socially situated interactions of people from diverse backgrounds in a Language Café. The data demonstrates that although culture is a social process of interpretive, meaning-making practices it is experienced and conveyed by the participants as something real that exist apart from their interpretations of it. In this sense, culture is a socially constructed social entity, an arrangement of social conventions, agreements, understandings, and meanings seen in the conceptual maps of typification schemes, collective memories, social representations, common-sense knowledge, and taken-for-granted actions. I contend that as a social entity, culture does not exist apart from those who grant it its ontological status; however, it is not reducible to those individuals. In this sense, culture is a co-constitution of agents and structures. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the nature of culture and how it is constructed and offers insights that can be applied to a wide range of fields, including anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies.
Keywords: social constructionism, culture, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, Foucault, and social interaction.

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"Culture is, assuredly, a perplexing phenomenon- ubiquitous in presence, complex in detail, and as such overwhelming and incomprehensible in its totality and in its intricacy. Any attempts to grasp it all in analysis will, therefore, be frustrated from beginning to end. Social scientists are compelled from the outset either to explore one or several facets of culture carefully or to attempt to construct a theoretical scaffolding which endeavors to comprehend the essential elements of the whole. It is not always clear whether the few who attempt the latter are wise or foolish" (Wuthnow et al., 1986, p.71).

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Abbreviations

CA- Conversation Analysis

DA- Discourse Analysis

EM- Ethnomethodology

MC- Multiculturalism

NSD- Norwegian Center for Research Data

USA- United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

Culture is one of the most difficult concepts to understand and define given the myriad of ways the term has come to be used. As a social scientific concept, culture has been a matter of extensive academic examination and debate, describing a vast array of phenomena. Within social sciences culture often refers to the distinctive features of a group's 'way of life,' encapsulating a community's shared values, behaviors, beliefs, and artifacts. Regardless of its ubiquity in social research, the nature and origins of culture remain highly contested. Some theorists strongly contend that culture is a product of human biology, an exogenous social entity possessing an organic form in which it socially determines the outcomes of people. More recent modified views of this position hold culture as a system of symbolic representations which once created form an objective reality. Still yet, there are others who argue that culture is a process of social construct practices, a resource, and a product that is used in, through, and for making sense of our interactions and social worlds. Despite a scientific lack of consensus on the concept, there is little contention over the immense impact culture has on human beings when considering culture as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is deeply embedded in our social lives. Accordingly, the discourse over culture's ontological and epistemological status has momentous, far-reaching implications for our understanding of human existence, its activities, and the way it is ordered. As such, it is vital to examine and bring forth a deep understanding of this complex phenomenon. This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore how to analytical conceptualize and understand what culture is and how it comes about.

In setting out to examine culture as a complex phenomenon, it is first necessary to expound on some of the theoretical underpinnings, methodological implications, and analytical propositions on culture, which problematizes the concept, -what culture is and how to analyze it. In this chapter, I begin by giving an account of what I consider a 'conventional view' of culture. This (1) provides the background for my thesis, in which I (2) describe why my research is relevant by, (3) accounting for some existing literature, and (4) identify some gaps that my thesis can contribute to narrowing. In detailing how my research can contribute to the study of culture I present the relevancy and motives for my thesis. Thereafter, I account for the objectives of my research, which primarily revolves around how to analytical conceptualization the concept of culture. I contend that culture can be analytically conceptualized as a social process of

interpretive and social construction practices entailing the actualization of people's socio-cognitive structures. Consequently, I take culture primarily as people's sense-making and meaning-making mental schemas which only exist as far as they are practiced and cannot be made 'real' apart from those who perform, construct, and give culture its ontological status. In this manner, I take culture to be a social construction of conceptual maps that gives sense to people's social interactions and intersubjective worlds by providing them with meaning.

I argue that culture is not a thing people possess, but a process in which they partake in, a set of performances and practices that are enacted and constructed by human agents in specific contexts. Culture as such mainly pertains to the symbolic realm of humanity but is manifested as a social process in which culture is used as a resource. Subsequently, I contend for a constructionist analytics of interpretive practices and ethnographic methodological approach, to examine culture as such. In doing so I describe how my objective is to provide a framework and methodology that focuses on social relations and interactions in observing the social processes of construction and interpretive practices. In this sense, the objective of my thesis is theoretical in nature which presents some issues and concerns on how to relate such grand theories in empirical research. I thus set out to detail the final objective of my thesis, which is to put such conceptualizations, methodologies, and analytics to practice by implementing them in a research project. In expounding on my objectives, I account for the scope of my thesis. Moreover, in attempting to achieve these objectives I set forth my research questions which guide my social inquiry and detail how my thesis seeks to contribute ways of understanding culture as a complex and nuanced social process and phenomenon. Lastly, I discuss my intended audiences and some presuppositions before concluding this chapter. In providing this contextual setting, I correspondingly outline the various chapters and structures of my thesis and give my reasoning on what, how, and why culture is being studied through my selected framework.

Before proceeding a few caveats are in order. What is articulated in the following thesis is a partial depiction of how to analytically conceptualize what culture is and how it comes about from my incomplete, limited comprehension on the topic. Such an articulation is far from the only, final, or best approach and understanding of culture, considering its complexity. My representation is just one among many understandings in which my thesis is a social construct. As with all constructs, there are great levels of selectivity in my thesis, entailing a specific perspective, which, reflects certain values and intentions, in attempting to achieve distinctive

purposes (Clifford, 1988; Cox, 1983). Tacit in this understanding is the notion of multiplicity, diversity, relationality, and (inter)subjectivity in which I dialectally construct the re-presentations of lived experiences into a written, structured text to be read and analyzed. As such I take this thesis not as an isolated, finished, or complete product, but rather an unfinished, and to some degree an ongoing, social achievement involving a profuse amount of interpretation and reinterpretation from a plethora of actors including the participants, interlocutors, myself, and now you, the reader. With this in mind, I now present my research.

1.1 Problematizing Culture

1.1.1 A traditional view of Culture

The most pervasive understanding of culture is the conventional conceptualization which often depicts it as a complex whole of socially inherited meanings, practices, and artifacts passed down from generation to generation. From this perspective, culture is a stable, bound, and homogeneous entity, socially dictating actions and behaviors (Parsons, 2017; Tylor, 1871). While this approach has created valuable insights into the workings of the social cohesion of small integrated societies, it tends to overlook the fluid, developing aspects of culture (Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1988; Friedman, 1994). Additionally, conventional discourses on culture tend to diminish and ignore the role of human agency in how culture comes about and is transformed in its performance or practice (Bauman, 1999; Brumann,1999). Conversely, a social constructionist approach proposes an alternative discourse on culture, emphasizing its dynamic, dialectic, and ongoing processes of interpretation and negotiation that give rise to culture's actualization; the sense-making processes that assign collective meanings and understandings (Baumann, 2015; Hall, 1997; Wicker, 2017). From this perspective, culture is not a fixed inheritance, but a constantly evolving construct formed by the social interactions and interpretive practices of people within a specified social context. This approach recognizes the multiplicity of meanings and the complex interplay of social structures and human agency that underline culture's (re)construction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013; Giddens, 1984).

In chapter two of this thesis, I expound on such premises of culture, articulating how recent, modified views from interpretivism and hermeneutic-phenomenological traditions still hold culture as a static, self-governing structure or system, organized by its self-contained,

internal logic. Thus, although recognizing culture is socially constructed, once it is actualized culture becomes a reified self-maintaining entity (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Schutz, 1970a; Geertz, 2017). However, the constructionist conceptualization and approach to culture proposes an alternative discourse to more conventional ways of analyzing culture by making the topic of inquiry, culture itself, thereby problematizing it. This suggests that culture is fundamentally problematic since as a social construct it is dependent on its participants meaningfully interpreting and using culture as sets of meanings to understand each other. Conventional views assume culture is a 'given,' existing in the social domain in some objective form, independent from interpretations of it. As such, research often attempts to discover culture or meanings thereof, and explain, by means of rich descriptions, what goes on in and around this entity strictly from participants' points of view. Conversely, culture as socio-cognitive structures of meanings for sense-making problematizes the experiential reality of culture. Furthermore, the constructionist conceptualization of culture as procedural does not nullify the conventional, essentialist view of culture. On the contrary. Since the conventional view is still widely accepted, it becomes an analytical problem: how does culture become an objective reality?

Further problematizing the conventional notion of culture is the current sociohistorical impacts of globalization. While widely understood globalization can be taken as the broadening, deepening, and expediting of worldwide interrelatedness and interdependency (Baylis et al., 2020). As such the process of globalization creates new perceptions, social spaces, historical contexts, through the diverse and complex movements of people (Colomer, 2017). Consequently, migration is one of the defining features of the 21st century, causing momentous social ramifications that transcends borders in the constituting of culturally blended societies (Miller and Castles, 2009). Inevitably, these sociohistorical changes contest the conventional framework of homogenous national, ethnic cultures and calls for new theoretical frameworks for analyzing the transnational movement and creation of culture (Clifford, 1997, 2008; Marcus, 1995).

It would be disingenuous to think that progress in this area has not been made. Multiculturalist (MC) theorists in particular have moved away from static, traditional nation-state models of culture grounded in essentialism and have offered the notion of hybridity (Hall, 1990,1996,2006; Brubaker, 2015; Modood and Werbner 2015). While proponents of hybridity do provide new frameworks on culture, they do so from a political perspective, mainly addressing theories of cultural inclusion and group rights and do little to define the concept itself.

Most of the MC theorist in the hybridity camp, often contend on replacing the term culture with identity and groups (Bhabha, 2015; Modood, 2013; Taylor, 1994) or discourses and identification (Baumann, 2015). There are of course exceptions, such as Phillips (2007) work, *Multiculturalism without Culture*. Although her critique and account of the conventional view of culture is strong, she is ambiguous on redefining the term, claiming a more inclusiveness notion of the concept is needed and as such should be excluded from MC theory. In other cases when culture is descriptively conceptualized it usually takes on a thick, conventional form.

Some of the strongest proponents of MC hold to a more fixed notion of culture. Parekh (2000) for example sees culture as a historically created system of beliefs and practices that develops and changes slowly over long periods of time and which is intrinsically linked to religion, another static system (p.143ff). For Kymlicka (2001), a "societal culture" is a common language, a set of social structures, institutions, norms, customs, and relationships located in a defined territory (p.18). This connotes culture with a bounded place and people. Although both Parekh and Kymlicka leave room for cultural change, there is a lot to be desired regarding the blending and (re)making of cultures in post-immigration communities. Moreover, MC theorists give little, if any, account for how to analytically and methodologically study the process of culture and cultural hybridity. Thus, despite great strides over the past decades there persist a call for more robust frameworks and approaches.

1.1.2 methodological and analytical implications

While Chapter Two does account for various relevant theoretical perspectives on what culture is and how it comes about, I do not expand on the methodological and analytical implications of the conventional or hermeneutic-phenomenological view of culture. However, in problematizing culture and contending for the relevance of my thesis, it is vital to articulate how the conventional view of culture presents both methodological and analytical problems; particularly from a qualitative research perspective in which culture is a static system of symbols and meanings. Such views typically take a naturalistic approach, examining culture as an objective, fixed entity. From this perspective, researchers often attempt to describe and explain what goes on in and around culture instead of how culture comes about and is transfigured into seemingly 'natural' concrete experiences. The naturalistic approach in social research, or naturalism, is an analytical model and is currently the predominant orientation of qualitative

researchers in social sciences. This corresponds with the conventional view of culture as the most pervasive framework for understanding culture since naturalism is said to be grounded in the interpretive and hermeneutic-phenomenological traditions (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Silverman, 2017; Seale, 2019). According to Silverman (2015), although such traditions are grounded in constructionism, they often reflect realist and positivist positions. Such claims are better understood with a closer examination of naturalism in which my rationale for making certain methodological choices also becomes clear.

As an analytical approach, the goal of naturalism is to research social reality 'on its own terms' to determine 'what is really going on' in social phenomena. In this model profound concern is given to 'discovering' social meanings by 'getting inside the heads' of participants and 'seeing through their eyes.' Naturalist models stress 'emic' perspectives whereby researchers can extract 'realty' from 'within' subjectivities. In 'taking on the position' of participants, researchers are said to become insiders of their 'perceptions,' 'feelings,' and 'thoughts.' Similarly, Silverman (2017) asserts naturalists believe they can 'step into the minds' of people, to see and 'experience' reality as they do, by using certain qualitative methods of inquiry (see also Atkinson and Silverman 1997 on qualitative interviewing). Elsewhere, Silverman (2015, 2017) states that as an analytical model, naturalism focuses on the 'factual characteristics' of social phenomenon, attempting to apprehend individual 'beliefs,' 'attitudes,' and 'motives' for behavior. He contends that when qualitative researchers chase some 'essential object' deep within people's minds, they treat these subjectivities as 'accurate' depictions or facts.

Such descriptions of naturalism are reflected in Bryman's (2012) views that one of the main preoccupations of qualitative strategies is "seeing through the eyes of the people being studied." He claims many qualitative researchers believe social reality must be "interpreted" from the "perspective" of participants by giving "thick" descriptions. Where through "empathy" researchers "participate" in the minds of others and "take on their views." In appearing to agree with such naturalistic tendencies, Bryman uses examples of qualitative researchers who "ground" their studies in participants' "experiences," "privileging their subjective views. From such empathetic insider stances, researchers "reproduce" accounts of "telling what it was like for them," the participants so that outsiders can understand people's ideas and sentiments (pp.399-401). However, in claiming to see through the eyes of others, researchers make numerous assumptions.

Tacit in the naturalist model is the belief that researchers can hold a neutral position in discovering social meanings so that the knowledge extracted through qualitative methods is presented as directly reflecting people's experiential reality. In taking to task such views, Spivak (1988) claims that by representing the 'experiences' of others as 'knowing' 'what actually' takes place, intellectuals become 'transparent relays' of an objective truth. Brinkmann (2007) echoes these sentiments when contending against naturalistic perspectives in qualitative strategies, stating: "In doxastic interviews that focus on experiences, opinions, and attitudes, knowing the experiencing self is seen as presupposed in knowing as such" (p.1121). Accordingly, such naturalistic beliefs reflect the notion that every action must have a motive, a reason, and significance that is linked to a cognitive process of rationality and causality (Silverman, 2015). From this perspective, people can account for their every action in a linear fashion of cause and effect, where social actions are the causality of motive or reason, suggesting that individuals are in full control of their own conduct. Moreover, attempting to directly tap into individual's reality introduces the notion of sovereign subjects, the sole bearers, and sources of meanings. From this position, people are held as the authentic authors of their life events, autonomous beings with rational consciousness and free will, who can create events and processes on their own (Hall, 1997; Potter and Hepburn 2012; Silverman, 2015).

According to Silverman (2015), the belief that it is possible for researchers to "authentically gaze into the soul" of participants is greatly misplaced in the rhetoric of naturalism (p.182). Celebrating "lived experiences," which are typically couched in highly individualistic expressions, promotes the notion that in social research "there is only interpretation" (Denzin, 1989). This is particularly true in the study of culture where symbolic anthropologists such as Geertz (2017) contend that the analysis of culture is solely "an interpretive one [science] in search of meaning" (p.5). Although not promoted on objective truth, "the appeal to subjectivity and lived experience gives the (qualitative) interview an altered valency than that accorded it in modernist or positivist discourse" (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). Consequently, the naturalistic model, while recognizing the social construction of reality, reflects positivism, replacing 'objective' facts with 'subjective' lived experiences and the 'neutral' positions of researchers to abstract an untouched reality from participants. This is not to nullify or say that positivism nor naturalism is not a legitimate approach in social sciences. Rather, quite the opposite. Naturalism as a qualitative analytical model has been and is continually being used to

gain invaluable insight. However, it is, like all models, not without its limitations. To overcome this limitation, I propose a constructionist analytics of interpretive practice that incorporates a form of naturalism which is later expounded on in my objectives.

1.2 Relevancy and Motive

When considering the overwhelming focus of qualitative research in the study of culture, there appears to be a gap or lack of research that focuses on both the form of culture and the processes that construct, actualize, and make it real. As Stuart Hall (1997) has duly noted: "Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part. In a sense, this is the most privileged, though often the most neglected, site of culture and meaning" (p.3). This neglect of the form and processes of culture is particularly evident in the study of conventional views of culture, which often dismisses such an analytical focus as frivolous or unworthy of serious academic attention. To the best of my knowledge, there is little social research in Norway attending to the analysis of culture as presented in this thesis. However, as Hall suggests, it is precisely in these every-day, mundane practices that the most significant meanings are produced and negotiated. The use of language, gestures, and other symbolic forms in interpersonal communication is a crucial site of cultural (re)production, negotiation, contestation, maintenance, and distribution. Culture is not a passive entity, but rather an active engagement in the social conventions, values, and beliefs that shape our identities and worldviews, and demands serious consideration. Therefore, any comprehensive analysis of culture must attend to both the content and process of culture in understanding how they shape and reflect social reality. Although such a need for research in this specific area is a motivational factor, there are additional reasons to consider.

Being the child of parents who were born in Mexico and later migrated to the United States (USA), I found myself intrigued by what it meant for me 'to be an American.' Concurrently, my fascination was also intertwined with a certain level of confusion on who I 'really am.' This led to an academic interest in the formation of culture, which is closely linked, if not at times identical to, the notion of identity. My academic interest and overall fascination with culture were compounded and intensified with the birth of my children. Both of my children were born in Norway to a Mexican-American father and a Norwegian mother. In communicating

to them who I am as a cultural being, I found myself asking questions on the nature of where I 'really' come from and what they should 'actually' consider themselves as. Such questions lead me to the social inquiry on what culture is and how it comes about, attempting to understand on a profound level, who people are and how they are formed. These social circumstances, when combined with the social context of problematizing culture, make the overall objective of my thesis manifold.

1.3 Objectives

My first objective is to present a constructionist approach to the study of culture that highlights the role of interpretive practices in the constitution of culture. That is, I seek to establish the view of culture as an open theoretical label in which it is analytically conceptualized as a socially constructed entity constituted in large part through interpretive practices. I aim at answering this objective in Chapter two where I contend that culture is not objectively meaningful, taking on no substantive forms of a specific ideal. Rather, culture is an ever-constituting process, taking on its defining characteristics somewhere, somehow, in a real and specific place through the interpretive activities of social interactions. This implies that while culture does hold some structural form and does endure, it nevertheless transforms in every social transaction in which it takes place since no practice or interaction is ever identical. By this I suggest that culture is not static nor a thing that people merely possess, rather it is something that people use and create. Put differently, culture is a product of interactions, which is later used in interactions to produce more culture. In Chapters Two and Three, I detail how to consider and analyze culture as a multifaceted process involving the complex aspects of human interactions.

Second, my objective is to present a constructionist analytics of interpretive practices in the study and examination of culture as a process of meaning-making, sense-making practices. My goal in achieving this objective is to present ways for analyzing and understanding the complex processes on the (re)construction, negotiation, maintenance, and distribution of culture. To overcome the limitation of naturalistic approaches, I propose a constructionist analytics of interpretive practice that cautiously incorporates a form of naturalism. In Chapter Three, I describe this constructionist approach or analytical framework, that considers the concrete, mundane, and situated production of everyday practices along with the meaningful resources

used in the sense-making, interactions of people. In other words, the preoccupation of this framework is with analyzing 'naturally occurring' data. It is significant to note that by 'naturally occurring' I mean two things. On the one hand, I take naturally occurring data to mean data that is not generated for the sole purpose of this study. On the other, I take this to mean how certain aspects within the data sets of social interactions are taken as 'natural.' Thus, interest lies in documenting the naturalizing processes and production of everyday performances, mundane practices, and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life since it is here that culture takes its 'form' and is sustained as reality. In this sense, I advocate for analytics that examines the social conditions in which interactions are taking place which can be thought of as the embeddedness of social construction processes. This suggests that the mundane, day-to-day, taken-for-granted activities of members are treatable as natural and native, although they are socially produced constructs (Gubrium and Holstein, 2013). Accordingly, I suggest a cautious form of naturalism, holding culture as the product or achievements of social interactions which in turn is used in those same interactions to shape how culture is used and practiced. In using a form of naturalism along with my constructionist approach focused on social actions and practices, I combine the analytical *hows* and *whats* of culture construction.

Third, my objective is to present a methodology for studying culture as a socially constructed phenomenon. To analyze the construction of culture from the above perspective, I advocate for a qualitative strategy that employs an ethnographic designed in combination with a constructionist analytical framework. This is detailed in Chapter Four, where I contend, that this methodology provides a deep exploration of how culture, as a social process, is constructed and disseminated through social interactions. I suggest researchers can gain a rich understanding of the context and process in which interpretive practices are performed by conducting participant observations; whereby researchers are able generate, record, and examine how social practices shape and are shaped by culture itself. In using ethnography, I extend the analytical purview to not only include observations, but also unstructured/informal interviews and documents.

Taking the above together, the overall objective of my thesis is to analytically conceptualize how to study and examine what culture is and how it comes about. In this sense, my thesis is theoretical in nature since the above objectives are mainly occupied with the ontology and epistemology of culture, the *hows* and *whats* of this social phenomenon rather than explaining the why's. As such, my thesis concerns how culture, including theories of it, may

exist and the possibility of knowing those outcomes (Adler, 1997; Barnett, 2020; Holstein and Gubrium, 2013). Consequently, my thesis on culture can be taken by some as operating on a more general and abstract level, unable to be deployed directly into empirical research (Anfara and Mertz, 2014; Bryman, 2012; Seale et al., 2004). This raises concerns with the utility of my constructionist conceptualization and approach towards culture. Taking these concerns seriously, I address this issue by empirically employing my conceptualization, analytics, and methodologies in a study of culture. This leads me to my final objective.

Fourth and lastly, my objective is to exemplify the above conceptualization of culture through empirical evidence. In doing so I aim to demonstrate how culture, as the actualization of cognitive schemes in the form of collective symbols, images, and meanings, are the rationalized, social accomplishments of social relations and their interactions. This involves exploring the everyday practices of members within a shared social space, analyzing how they employ culture as a resource to make sense of their social setting and negotiate meanings such as their positions within that social context. By examining the ways in which social interactions engage in meaning-making processes, this approach challenges deterministic views of culture as a monolithic social force or natural biological entity. In obtaining this objective I begin in Chapter Four to describe how I put to work a constructionist ethnography. Here, I illustrate how to conduct research by doing it, applying the methodologies and concepts previously expanded on in carrying out fieldwork research. In doing so, I describe how I selected, generated, recorded, and accounted for the empirical material of my analysis. I then proceed in Chapter five to re-present my data, its interpretation, and analytical findings.

In conducting my ethnographic research, one particular social event became critically significant in understanding, applying, and exemplifying the conceptualization of culture as a process of interpretive, meaning-making practices. Thus, I focus this chapter on an example in a Language Café which is set in a diverse cultural setting and demonstrate how culture is a context, toolkit, and resource used in the interpretive practices of the interlocuters of that social setting and the interactions therein. In this example I discuss how the various approaches to understanding culture represented in Chapter Two are exemplified and expound on the notion of culture as a process of constructive and interpretive practices in the giving-and-taking of meanings. I further expand my discussion on how the various conceptualizations of culture can be understood in my empirical work later in this chapter. Here I give examples from my research

on the function and meaning of culture, using my ethnographic approach in which I implement a broad semiotic analysis.

1.4 Research Questions and Contributions

When considering my constructionist position, and in the context of a globalized world of pluralistic societies, the following research questions are central to my social inquiry.

1. In a post-immigration world of competing interpretations, how can culture be theoretically conceptualized? What analytical models and methodological approaches can be implemented to study culture in the practical lives of people?

2. How can a constructionist ethnographic analysis be exemplified in the study of a diverse cultural setting?

This thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of culture as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon by addressing these questions. Moreover, I aspire to contribute in an academic manner- analytically, methodologically, and theoretically- a multidisciplinary approach to culture. In doing so, I seek to challenge conventional perspectives on culture and offer new insights into the complex, multifaceted processes underpinning cultural (re)construction and (ex)change. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of culture and its dynamic nature, emphasizing the importance of social structures, human agency, and social interaction in the ongoing process of cultural (re)production.

1.5 Target Audience

In understanding the scope of my thesis through my objectives, it is significant to understand my target audience. Given my aim at contributing academically to a deep understanding of culture, my target audiences are graduate-level students and intellectuals studying and theorizing on the philosophy and practice of culture. As such, I presume there is no need to clarify or qualify statements that are generally understood in the social and human sciences. However, taking both a pragmatic and academic view of culture from a

multidisciplinary perspective, there are some concepts that require explaining. Thus, in what follows I present my conceptual, analytical, and methodological framework in which I detail their specific tenets.

Chapter 2: Ways of Understanding What Culture is and How it Comes About.

The following chapter expounds on my conceptual framework which is a foundational and vital aspect for obtaining the overall goal of this thesis: understanding what culture is and how it is (re)constructed. Having previously stated my utilization of social constructionism as the overall approach of my social inquiry; the proceeding chapter expounds on the specific tenets of my conceptual framework on culture which, in conjunction with my analytical framework, act as sensitizing concepts. By this, I mean my conceptual framework is a structure of terms, principles, definitions, procedures, and values that actively inform all facets of my research. As such a framework provides rationale, cohesiveness, and coherency to the various processes and components of this thesis (Anfara and Mertz, 2014). In this sense, a framework is comparable to a lens for seeing social phenomena, or a way of approaching the empirical by setting the limits and honing my analytical purview. Tacit in this understanding of framework, as a selective structure of various components, is the notion that it itself is a social construct. What is articulated in the following framework is a partial depiction of how to analytically conceptualize culture from my incomplete and limited comprehension.

While the notion of partiality, incompleteness, and limitations are underlying principles that guide my overall research, I particularly emphasize this here since culture is a broad, complex, and multifaceted concept entailing many, if not, all aspects of human life. Consequently, defining culture is no small task. Given the plethora of ways of understanding the term, along with considering the scope and objective of this thesis, I have selected a few paradigms in my conceptual framework of culture. This chapter aims to describe various perspectives on how to analytically understand what culture is and how it comes about.

In attempting to achieve this goal, I divide the following chapter into three main sections: a conventional view of culture, a modified view of culture, and a constructionist approach to analyzing culture. I begin section one by giving a succinct account of the inception of culture as an analytical term or label and link that to early conceptions of the term in anthropology as a complex whole depicting the totality of communities. In moving away from such notions of culture, I detail a modified view of culture. Here I describe two distinct conceptualizations of culture: culture as a system of meanings, and culture as practice. While both are valuable in my conceptualization of culture, they have their limitations. Thus, in my final section, I contend for a

constructionist approach to analyzing culture, holding it be a process of constructionist and interpretive practices.

2.1 A Conventional View of Culture

2.1.1mCulture as an analytical label

Alongside ethnography, European anthropologists invented the concept of culture. Both ethnography and culture emerged as a means for studying and explaining human distinctness. In this way, culture was to account for the collective expressions of human diversity. As such, the concept was an analytical tool for theorists to depict, classify, and articulate the peculiar socially inherited behaviors of distant 'natives' (Clifford, 1988). Thus, the term was initially constructed for 'studying' and 'scientifically' categorizing small, strongly integrated societies with unique social structures such as systems of beliefs (Wicker, 2015; Said, 1978). As a descriptive category, culture was to substitute the overly general classification of race and civilization. Two concepts developed into totalizing entities based on biologically inherited properties that were grounded in evolutionary theories of human development. However, as Clifford (1980) notes, for all the supposed relativism in the conceptualization of culture, it remained no different than the concepts it substituted except for its plurality (p.221).

Such a view holds culture as a ladder-like advancement, moving from 'primitive' towards 'civilized' societies, in a unilinear progression. This is evident when culture is equated to civilization. According to Tylor's (1871) early and classical definition: "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1). Here culture is tantamount to civilization, as an all-encompassing complex whole entailing the totality of a bounded community. Although highly problematic, such notions of culture continue to permeate its widest understanding, often referring to the distinctive features of a group's 'way of life.' From this perspective, the concept of culture encapsulates all the socially inherited characteristics of a community, including its shared values, behaviors, beliefs, and artifacts.

Despite such contentions with the concept, culture continues to be a part of the vernacular of modern societies. Not only can the term not be done away with, but it also appears to have

developed into a variety of meanings. Nevertheless, and for all its (mis)appropriations, Gerd Baumann (2015) claims: "Ethnographers' uses of the word 'Culture' have established one essential point of consensus: 'Culture' is not a real thing, but an abstract and purely analytical notion […] a heuristic means towards explaining how people understand and act upon the world" (p. 211). In this manner, culture is a deliberate abstraction for conceptualizing the evolving 'complex whole' through which individuals engage in accounting for their actions and perceptions of the world. Vital in establishing the concept of culture as a scientific means for explaining human behavior was the function of culture.

2.1.2 The analytics of functions and the complex whole

Key in the initial conceptualization of culture were the notions of functionalism, context, and a view of the social whole (holism). These intertwined elements provided a theoretical basis for scientifically explaining the peculiar socially 'inherited' practices of distant 'natives' and their 'strange tribal life.' By examining the function or purpose of social structures (patterns of behavior) within their social settings, ethnographers were able to make 'sense' of the 'backward' 'irrational' practices of 'primitive, uncivilized societies' (Mitchell, 2011). Similarly, context was vital in demonstrating how 'all' social functions could be explained, regardless of how 'strange' these 'unique' practices appeared. Context here often refers to the wider social systems and structures in which culture is embedded. As Malinowski (1922) stated: "If you want to understand magic, you must go outside magic, and study economic ritual within the context of those practical activities in which it is really embedded" (p. 324 my emphasis). It is significant to note that culture, in its earliest instances as seen above, is an element of the social realm that is distinct from other elements such as political or economic. Yet, culture was held not as an individual component but as a complex whole that included all aspects of the social. While culture was an analytical tool to capture abstract structures of beliefs, such as 'magic,' it, nevertheless, depicted the totality of a community's life. Such conceptualizations of culture were rationalized through the notion of holism.

While functionalism and a focus on social contexts provided relativist notions of culture, holism enabled ethnographers to detach such locally functional structures from their specific contexts to create a totalizing understanding of social members and their practices. Holism, the notion that the sum is greater and irreducible to its individual components, allows for

'generalizing' specific social actions as the 'totality' of 'native life.' This allowed for a holistic understanding of culture as an organic system, a complex whole, comprising a 'way of life' (Clifford, 1980). This conceptualization of culture reflects an essentialist view of culture, believing the term to represent certain fundamental aspects, such as the inherent and fixed characteristics of a group. From this position culture is a natural phenomenon; a bounded, unchanging entity that is socially inherited, or passed down in an unaltered fashion from generation to generation (Wicker, 2015). As such, culture took the form of certain structures like patterns of behavior and beliefs. Building on this notion of functionalism, the concept of culture began was further conceptualized in a structuralist form.

2.1.3 Structural-functionalism

In further developing the notion of culture, anthropologists and sociologists viewed culture from a structural-functionalism position. Incorporating holism, a structuralist position holds that culture is not simply the collection of isolated, individual actions, but instead is a complex system of interconnected components that are organized according to a structure of underlying rules. From this perspective, the components of culture are not random but are constructed by universal, ahistorical, asocial, essential structural elements that are deeply seated in all societies or groups of people (Sewell, 1999). In this sense, culture is an exogenous social entity, capturing an objective truth and essential reality that underlies all of humanity. Underlying social structures, such as economic, religious, and kinship systems, were believed to be fundamental to the well-functioning of society by shaping commonly shared social institutions, beliefs, and practices. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) likened social structures to the organs of a body, each performing a crucial function, working together to create stability and harmony. In the same manner, culture as an organic system of integrated social structures functions to create social coherence, order, and solidarity. According to this approach, culture is a system of interrelated components that function as a closed system to create and maintain social equilibrium, equating to the smooth functioning of society. Consequently, culture becomes an independent, self-governing, self-determining, and self-regulating system operating according to its own internal logic and function (Clifford, 1980, 1986,1988).

As an independent system, culture promotes social integration and cohesion by acting upon agents to socially control and constrain their behavior and relations; thereby creating and

maintaining the necessary social institutions for social order. As such, culture functions as a means for dictating social exchanges, and is the prerequisite for social stability. These features of culture are universal structures and therefore provide the framework for social interactions. From this perspective, in functioning as an exogenous system of structural stability, culture changes slowly over time, adjusting to new external circumstances while maintaining social equilibrium (Parsons, 2017). While the structural-functionalist approach has been highly instrumental in the conceptualization of culture, it is not without its critiques. Some hold that this codified notion of culture “obscures a good deal more than it reveals" (Geertz, 2017, p.4). Opponents thus claim that such a theory of culture tends to neglect the subjective meanings and interpretations of culture from within individuals and groups, leading to a symbolic preoccupation where culture is held as a system of meanings.

2.2 A Modified View of Culture

2.2.1 Culture as a System of Meanings

More recent conceptualizations build on the abstract notion of culture, which refers to the realm of social life concerning meanings. More narrowly and consequentially defined, culture is held as a system of symbols and meanings that pertain to human relations. This is what Geertz (2017) refers to as a "cultural system," where "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun", taking "culture to be those webs" (p.5). For him, "the concept culture […] is essentially a semiotic one" and the analytics of culture is an interpretive endeavor (ibid). Here, culture refers to an organized ideational system, consisting of the beliefs of people in structuring their experiences in, and knowledge of, the world. Accordingly, from this view, culture is perceived to regulate social actions and frame the understanding of people's interactions (Keesing and Strathern, 1998, p.16). This reflects Geertz's (1963) earlier notion of culture as a toolkit that provides people with the cognitive and behavioral means for navigating through their social worlds in a meaningful way. Moving away from the more abstract nature of culture as merely a theoretical label, Geertz emphasizes culture as a symbolic system that grounds reality. Here culture is more than a useful analytical construct, it is a toolkit, a resource for everyday living.

Geertz's notion of culture moves beyond rules and regulations and emphasizes interpretation and meanings. According to Geertz (2017): "As an interworked system of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly- that is, thickly-described" (p.15). Here culture is a social setting, a background for the underlying observable practices 'within which' those actions are described. Culture in this regard functions as a resource from which individuals can draw to make sense of their social environments and engage in meaningful actions. Toolkit as a metaphor for culture also implies that there are various tools for various tasks. As such culture is a repertoire of viable options for interpretation and action. Moreover, this highlights the fluidity of culture, emphasizing that culture is not just an abstract set of ideas but a set of practical resources. Nevertheless, in the Geertz notion of culture as a system or tool people possess, it becomes an abstraction of social relations. Culture is thus detached from the concrete actions of people and is often contrasted against other social systems. This is evident in his view that the concept of culture is 'essentially a semiotic one.'

Culture as a semiotic system of symbols and meanings reflects a 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences where the interpretation of culture was based on a philological model of textual reading (Clifford, 1983, p.130). As a prerequisite to interpretation, culture must first be textualized which is the process of transforming unwritten actions, believes, and traditions into a meaningful collection of texts or corpus that are divorced from its performative context. Thus, in the instant of textualization this collection of written texts or meaningful corpus takes on a stable relation to the context it is now place in. The act of textualization allows for the depiction of culture as a complex whole when it is thought that people’s social worlds cannot be comprehended directly, they could only be examined and understood based on its parts and these part must be conceptually and perceptually separated from the fluctuation of experience (ibid). This way meanings are not open and continual, rather stable, closed within a context. Thus, in a circular motion, textualization comes full circle to create a bounded reality that first isolates then (re)contextualizes events, ideas, and actions into a documented reality that is now set in a bounded and stable context and is perceived as something that existed in isolation as it is recorded. This suggests that although the analytical focus in symbolic anthropology shifted from functions to symbols, there remains structuralist undertones in the symbolic approach to culture.

This allows meanings to not be confined to the setting of their realization and can migrate from context to context. In textualizing culture, symbolic anthropologists contend the systematic nature of culture is an autonomous social form, irreducible to individuals or other aspects of the social (Sewell, 1999, p.44). Thus, while culture is the "webs of significance man has spun," once created culture appears to take a life of its own.

Although claiming to be subjective in nature, this view of culture holds it as a system of set meanings, consisting of rules, regulations of operation, and social patterns of 'doing' things, instead of the subjective codes of individuals. While useful in many ways, the above depicts culture as a stable entity, a coherent system of meanings that individuals can tap into. Since culture is a system that is beyond the individual, all who are members of it share similar if not identical ways of thinking about the world. From this perspective, culture is analyzed as a system of interconnected components that are structured according to patterns that underlie all human activity and ways of thinking. The analytical focus is given to the structures in which these ideas are communicated such as patterns of rules that dictate language. These underlying patterns form the way meanings are constructed, maintained, and distributed; thereby providing a framework for understanding the way beliefs (culture) and practices (social) may relate to each other. As such, structuralists contend that culture can be analyzed as a coherent system of meaning. In this sense, culture is more of a social fact.

Social facts, as devised by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), refers to a specific social phenomenon; the patterns of human behaviors which are external to individuals, existing independently of their consciousness, and exerting social control on individuals. As such, social facts are held as objective and constraining, a sort of social force dictating the attitudes and actions of people (Seale, 2019, pp.12-3). Culture is often studied as a social fact in explaining how it influences people and groups; how it constrains individuals; how it shapes structures; and how it enacts social change. As is with social facts from a Durkheim perspective, culture is considered external to individuals and exists independently of their perceptions of it. Similarly, for Geertz culture forms a unitary organic whole, a reality waiting to be discovered of symbolic expression captured in the interpretation of thick descriptions (Clifford, 1980, 1983). As Hall claims (1997): “In the semiotic approach, representation was understood on the basis of the way words functioned as signs within language. But, for a start, in a culture, meaning often depends on larger units of analysis […] Semiotics seemed to confine the process of

representation to language, and to treat it as a closed, rather static system […] in the semiotic approach, the subject was displaced from the center of language" (p.42). This paradigm reflects the structural-functionalist notions of culture as a 'complex whole' and neglects the aspects of culture as a matter of diversity, contestation, negotiation, human agency, and agentic processes. Thus, in the same manner early conceptions of culture were meant to displace the concepts of civilization but did not, so it is with culture as a system of meanings. Such neglect has led to redefining culture as practice.

2.2.2 Culture as Practice

Culture as practice refers to the tangible and observable qualities of culture, the enactments, and the embodiment of communal or intersubjective beliefs through the everyday actions of group members. It involves how people engage in specific social activities that are shared and collectively practiced. In holding to the view that culture concerns the symbolic realm and meanings of people, proponents of culture as practice contend against the 'nature' of meanings being fixed within a stable and bound system that exists outside human influence. According to Bauman (1999), culture is not a static set of norms and values, nor is it a bounded system of representation. Instead, culture is a liquid and flexible arrangement of meanings open to interpretation and reinterpretation. From this perspective culture is far from a coherent, uniform structural whole, depicting a social group's logical and natural way of life. As a practice, there is an emphasis on the performative aspect of culture which emerges and develops through social interactions. Thus far from being universal, culture is context-specific, varying from one social setting to another. This position refutes the notion that culture somehow exists in isolation, as a passive entity free from human influence. Rather, culture is held as an active and dynamic practice, involving people actively engaging in constructing it (ibid; Hall, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 1999). This implies that culture is constantly changing and adapting in response to historical, social, and contextual aspects. Accordingly, culture is not a thing people possess but rather an activity people do. From this perspective, culture is performative, entangled in the living experience and instances of its enactment (Butler, 1988, 2010). Thus, people are active agents in the (re)production of culture. Such views of culture are congenial with postmodernism and post-structuralism which emphasize the dynamic aspect of culture.

2.2.3 Postmodernism and post-structuralism

While postmodernism is a broad philosophy, it contests the idea of an objective reality or truth and emphasizes how reality is constructed through social interactions and practices. Postmodernism questions the notion of culture as a monolithic, fixed, and essentialist entity, tending to reject the idea of universal truths or grand narratives that claim to explain or define culture and societies as bounded wholes (Abu-Lughod, 1996). A postmodern position on culture thus stresses the fragmentation, plurality, and ambiguity of meanings and the social processes they entail (Marcus, 1998, pp.181-189). When considering culture as a practice from postmodernism, there is an emphasis on the fluidity, contingent, and multiplicity of meaning-making practices of people (Wicker, 2015). Similarly, post-structuralism is a theoretical approach that challenges fixed meanings and emphasizes the role of discourse in shaping people's understanding of reality.

When pertaining to culture, from a post-structuralist position, the notion of a single, objective meaning is rejected, focusing instead on the multiplicity of interpretations of meanings. It is argued that discourses, which include social actions, are not merely tools for communicating culture. Rather, discourse constructs culture which shapes people's social reality (Clifford, 1983, 1988, 1997). Moreover, there tends to be a focus on the manner power relations shape culture and its practice. Culture is thus not an independent system of meaning, since it cannot be reduced to a set of underlying structures. In this sense, culture is unstable, the site of ongoing contestation. Many post-structuralist theorists take culture as a complex heterogeneous field of discourses and power relations which includes the performances of certain social practices (Hall, 1997). From this perspective culture is a multifaceted aspect of the social realm, constantly being produced and reproduced through the ongoing contestation and negotiation of meanings. It is therefore held that culture is a disputed terrain of meaning, a site of (re)production and transmission. While postmodernism and post-structuralism are distinct frameworks they overlap in numerous ways, mainly in holding to what I consider a social constructionist position. That is, both paradigms see culture as constructed through social relations.

2.3 A Constructionist Approach to Analyzing Culture

Before detailing the tenants of what culture is and how it comes about from a constructionist position it is imperative to detail what is meant by a social constructionist approach. Social constructionism is a framework for understanding how reality is constituted. At its most basic level, I take constructs as cognitive realizations. They are mental processes that 'make-real' abstractions, the actualizing of ideas that give substance to our worlds and constitute reality (Lincoln and Guba, 2013; Schutz, 1970b,1972). Constructs are therefore considered products of our minds which relay our perceptions of the world, thereby forming it. I take the concept of 'social constructs' to mean socio-cognitive accomplishments, the performance or actualization of people's ideal or mental structures through social interactions. Although social constructions are formed through experiences (social interactions), they likewise inform those same experiences, thereby forming intersubjectivities (Heritage, 2014, pp.54-9). By intersubjective, I mean the actively negotiated, shared agreements or collective understandings of social meanings (Cooper-White, 2014). Thus, the interactions of people produce social products in the form of collective-knowledge, what I take as common-sense, or taken-for-granted understandings of what people 'know' to be 'real' about the world. In this sense, social constructs form and display our social understanding of the world and help us to make sense of the interactions therein, providing the substance of our social reality. From this perspective social constructs are sense-making processes that 'make-real' member's abstract collective ideas; the socially organized mental schemas that give substance to our experiences, making them meaningful and constituting our social worlds and reality (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 2016). Hence the term social reality. When considering what culture is and how it comes about, constructionists claim culture is a social construct.

2.3.1 Culture as a social construct

From a constructionist approach, culture is primarily an abstraction or a configuration of symbolic meanings. In this sense, culture is not an entity with a tangible or concrete form, it is instead a set of cognitive structures, categorizing our social knowledge of the world, what we know or take as real. Such mental abstractions are formed to make sense of our experiences and give meaning to our social worlds. Cultures can thus be seen as sets of arranged mental shortcuts

or typification schemas used to understand and organize the complex phenomena of our daily interactions. While such a definition may be perceived as ideas stuck inside people's heads, culture only exists insofar as it is performed and is dependent on its participants for its ontological status (Baumann, 2015; Berger and Luckman, 1967; Holstein and Gubrium, 1999). In this manner, culture is a social construct, needing to be performed for its realization which is primarily used as a means of social interaction. As a social construct, the performance of culture actualizes the social-cognitive structures of people, forming intersubjective meanings, collective representations, and the social conventions of people. This suggests that culture provides the ability to construct reciprocal symbolic relations and to produce, form, and arrange meanings through those interactions.

2.3.2 Culture as the process of interpretive practices

Culture is thus not so much about things, as it is about a set of interpretive practices regarding the symbolic world of meanings. As Stuart Hall (1997) puts it: "To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other" (p.2). This implies culture is the process concerned with the exchange of meanings, the 'giving and taking of meanings,' entailing the sense-making, meaning-making practices of people. As a social process entailing the construction practices of people, culture depends on its performers to meaningfully interpret their social context and make sense of that social setting in widely the same way. This is accomplished by using our mental structures or performing our cognitive schemas, the conceptual maps of people for navigating through our social worlds (Schutz, 1972). Accordingly, culture as the process of meaning-making has a 'reality' to them in that they have real consequential properties, exemplified in their practical effects (Hall, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2007). It is through using and performing culture, as a system of representation and a meaning-making process, that culture is (re)produced.

In stating culture has consequential properties, I do not suggest that this is a unilinear cause and effect, where culture determines outcomes. In line with Geertz (2017) and other symbolic anthropologists and cultural sociologists, culture is a toolkit: a repertoire of strategies of actions (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, 2008c, 2013; Sewell, 1999). This suggests that culture is a set of available and viable options that individuals can draw upon to navigate through their

social interactions. In this regard, culture is not a social force, determining ends. Rather, culture provides the resources for strategies of action, by helping us to organize our inter-actions. To say that culture is, 'the way action is organized' is an attempt to understand how actions are interconnected with each other and with our ideas (Swidler, 1986, 2003). This implies that actions are not necessarily taken one at a time but are intertwined. A linear causal effect is thus dismissed for strategies, hence culture as repertoire 'ways of organizing actions,' instead of determining actions. Additionally, this presumes that members do not build culture or strategies of actions from the ground up with every encounter or interaction but instead, they use some prefabricated typification schema (Holstein and Gubrium, 1999). However, for culture to be 'real' in having some form existing outside of our minds, it must be perceived by others. Culture thus needs to be actualized in a specific location or context, enacted, or performed through social interactions (Baumann, 2015). Moreover, this suggests that culture is changing in its practice, thereby making it a process.

Implicit in the perspective that culture is a process in which culture is changing in its practice, is the notion that culture is reflexive. By this I mean culture is a co-constituted process entailing agentic practices and social structures. Culture is both a product (forming mental and social structures) and a process (entailing constructive and interpretive practices), thereby making culture a product in continual process. Here culture is both a resource and an activity in which the performance of culture is drawing from culture itself (Holstein and Gubrium, 2007). This suggests culture is not a complete whole or static system since no performance is ever identical. Similarly, this implies that culture is a fluid process, fluctuating in every social exchange. Culture can be seen as an interpretive practice based on experiences, knowledge, and social contexts in which such interpretations also construct the meanings and practices themselves. Consequently, culture shapes how we perceive, interpret, and interact in and with our social surroundings. As a social construct, culture requires interpretation and is dependent on its participants for it to effectively operate (Hall, 1997). Although primarily an abstraction that helps us to organize and make sense of the world, culture does not have an independent existence beyond the way that we use it to understand our experiences. In this sense, culture is about the inter-subjectivities of members, forming the taken-for-granted stocks of knowledge of people in their day-to-day experiences (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Schultz, 1972).

Analytically, the concept of culture is primarily a useful tool for analysis and understanding, rather than a concrete reality, existing outside those who construct it. In its broadest form, I take culture as a process consisting of an arrangement of social practices in which meanings are constructed and exchanged (Hall, 1997; Thwaites, Davis, and Mules, 2002). From this perspective, culture concerns not only meanings but the sense-making and meaning-making practices of people. This includes two main systems. The first is our cognitive systems, our symbolic conceptual maps and the second is our representational system which includes our expression and interpretation of those symbols to create meaning and sense. That is, culture is a process entailing our thoughts and the interpretive exercises of meanings along with the transactional performances of those meanings in the social interactions of people. Culture thus gives significance to our social worlds and makes them meaningful, by helping us to understand and make sense of our social experiences. As a meaning-making process, culture infiltrates every area where social meanings are shared and constructed. Thus, instead of being a separate aspect of social life, I take culture as the most pervasive and central aspect of the social realm (Hall, 1997; Thwaites, Davis, and Mules, 2002). As such culture entails an enormous number of aspects. While interpretive practices are one aspect of culture as a social process, I take them to be key in both the nature and construction of culture.

From a constructionist approach to analyzing culture, there is an emphasis on social action and agency, which is actualized in multivarious forms. Through the actions and choices of people, the manifestations of culture can be expressed in infinite ways. However, it is mainly articulated in people's everyday lives through social actions and intersubjectivities including symbolic language expression (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013). This puts a strong emphasis on how culture is used or enacted since participation in culture, or the performance thereof, is how meanings are assigned and distributed. This implies culture is a social signifying practice: the interpreting, enacting, and/or participating in and of common-knowledge. That is, the objects and subjects that inhabit our daily lives or social worlds are made meaningful by how we use and integrate them into our daily practices. Thus, we in part provide things meanings by how we represent those 'things' through our social interactions: the way we speak of them, the images we produce of them, the emotions we associate with them, the values we give them, our classification of them, and the concepts we attach to them (Hall,1997). As such culture is not genetically or merely socially inherited, rather, it is socially constructed through interactions.

While culture plays a vital aspect in these processes, it is not the only influence. However, when culture is seen as the process of constructing meanings and their reality, culture is one of the main aspects in which social practices create and distribute meanings.

With such a complex and wide definition of culture, its analysis is an arduous task that requires a robust analytical framework. Having established and addressed my first objective, analytically conceptualizing what culture is and how it comes about, I now seek to answer my second objective: presenting a constructionist analytics of interpretive practices for the study and examination of culture as a process of meaning-making, sense-making practices. Choosing an interdisciplinary approach grounded in constructionism, the following chapter details an analytical framework on how to examine culture. In what follows I lay out the specifics of how to analyze culture as a process of interpretive, meaning-making practices.

Chapter 3: Constructionist Analytics of Interpretive Practices

Having established an analytical conceptualization of culture, I now proceed to detail an analytical framework for interpreting culture as such. Within social research, there has been a stark increase in the constructed nature of social phenomena. Much of the focus revolves around the interactional constitution of social structures and cultural institutions, the conventions that make up the everyday lives of people. This presumes that the social world is not just 'there' waiting to be discovered. Rather, members of shared social spaces construct their reality through various means of interaction. This understanding, of realizing the social world through inter-actions, is the basis for social constructionism, the theoretical and methodological approach that forms my theoretical framework. While social constructionism takes many forms in human and social sciences, I particularly propose the work of Holstein and Gubrium (1997, 2003, 2008c, 2013), who have developed a specific variant of constructionist inquiry known as '*The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice*.' Holstein and Gubrium bring together various elements of constructionism "to constitute a recognizable, vibrant research program," centering on the interactional construction of people's experiential reality within observable contexts (2013, p.254). As such, their program is attentive to the structural influences in the agentic processes that socially construct, manage, and maintain aspects of culture. Such a program allows for a comprehensive analysis that locates and grounds socially constructed reality in people's concrete, practical, and lived experiences.

As an 'analytics' Holstein and Gubrium's approach provides an understanding of construction processes through using distinctive analytical concepts, capturing both the practices and circumstances involved. Such analytics is conceptualized as sparse enough to not dominate the empirical while being vigorous enough to display phenomena's' constructivist characteristics and form. The focus of inquiry is on the 'interpretive practices' of social members. That is the assemblages of "procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life" (2003, p. 215). Taken together, this analytics mirrors a systematic theoretical framework of 'sensitizing concepts' while concurrently connoting an 'approach' to social inquiry. The latter parallels the function of a qualitative strategy; however, this constructionist framework can be taken as a 'mode' for conducting research. By this I mean, it is a way of carrying out research; from selecting and interpreting data

in the field to influencing recording techniques, transcription, and findings. While this approach is minimalist in its conceptual core, it is unambiguously theoretical. It is therefore significant to elaborate on its specific tenets.

In what follows I expound on the particularities of this framework, beginning with its theoretical underpinnings. This is followed by detailing the *hows* of interpretive practice that construct social reality. Here I elaborate on ethnomethodology's (EM) analytics. Next, I address the *whats*, expounding on Foucauldian inspirations on discourse. After presenting the *hows* and *whats* in turn, I proceed to show how they come together to constitute a robust approach. In doing so I depict the practice of analytical bracketing. Concluding this chapter are some concerns with using this constructivist approach and how they can be addressed.

Before proceeding, it is significant to account for why this analytical approach was chosen. In holding firmly to the presupposition that social phenomenon is a constructed reality, I find this program a plausible analytical model for exploring and examining the various aspects of what culture is and how it comes about. This approach is particularly apt in attempting to understand how culture is constructed and manifested into 'something real.' Such an understanding is grounded in my analytical conception of culture as a social process entailing the constructive and interpretive practices of people. It should also be noted that Gubrium and Holstein's approach is grounded in sociology and draws heavily from phenomenology. Their analytical model as such is mainly used to study the formation of social structures in producing social order. However, when considering my analytical conceptualization and the methodological/analytical problems with studying culture I find their model conducive for addressing those issues. Let us now examine how a version of their constructionism aids in reaching the objective of how to analytically study culture.

3.1 Theoretical underpinnings

Gubrium and Holstein's (2003, 2008c, 2013, 2019) understanding of 'interpretive practices,' holds that people, as agents, are actively constructing their social worlds through and in the use of their everyday, practical reasoning. However, members do not do so entirely on their own accord, free from external influences. This belief presupposes that knowledge is actively informed by experiences which in turn informs experiences. As such, their approach

considers the consequential contexts in construction practices, believing that socio-cultural structures and practices inform and shape the processes of social accomplishments. These accomplishments are, among other things, those same social structures and cultural institutions that guide social actions and arrange people's social worlds. This understanding of members' achievements forms the conceptualization of interpretative practices which are both processes and products, dynamically informing and shaping each other. Such an understanding suggests that culture, as interpretive practices, is co-constituted by agents and structures, where the agentic process includes drawing from the social product of culture in its (re)production. This makes culture the site of sense-making, a resource in guiding sense-making, the process of sense-making, and a product of sense-making. Culture, as such is a complex phenomenon that begs the question: how can one analytically understand and examine it? In answering this question, I set out to propose a version of a *constructionist analytics of interpretive practices*.

In holding interpretive practices as the process of reality constructions, the main preoccupation of this analytics is on the '*hows'* (processes and content) and substantive '*whats'* (products and context) that socially construct people's reality. More clearly stated, the *hows* refers to the process that is taking place during and in the social interactions of accomplishing things. The *hows* then refer to the process of social accomplishments. Here it is assumed that social objects and entities, such as culture, do not just exist, they need to be accomplished. While this program is developed from various traditions, it is distinctly shaped by ethnomethodological and Foucauldian impulses.

EM is particularly apt in documenting how social worlds are constructed through social interactions, concentrating on the social actions in which members classify aspects of social reality or their lived experiences. Such analytics attempts to identify and establish connections between these classifications and actions, thereby documenting members' practices and understanding their social processes (Miller and Fox, 2004; ten Haven, 2016). Foucauldian inspirations are key in developing the *whats*, concentrating on the social setting of interactions. That is the location, social actors, sociocultural structures, institutions, resources, and conditions that influence social practices and construction processes. Such analytics is attentive to what is being performed for attaining, comprehending, coordinating, and expressing social reality. Constructionist researchers focusing on the *hows* of social practices often neglect the consequential *whats* in this process (Atkinson and Delamont, 2004; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003;

Silverman, 2015). This makes the *constructionist analytics of interpretive practice* distinct from other approaches, seeking to retain interactional insights while broadening its scope to the constitutive *whats* that constructs members' daily lived realities.

3.2 The *hows*, ethnomethodology sensibilities

In focusing on the *hows*, Gubrium and Holstein (2013) claim EM 'sensibilities,' are the quintessential analytical enterprise in qualitative research. EM's main preoccupation is on documenting how social worlds are constructed and manifested as something real by detailing the practical 'mechanisms' or 'methods' of members for arranging their social worlds. These mechanisms, in part, constitute people's everyday 'interpretive practices,' on how to comprehend and interact with their social environments. As such, there is an analytical interest in how members 'do' social life, such as the 'doing of culture' with a paramount concern for the tangible taken-for-granted actions that give the unchallenged perception of stable realities. From a constructionist perspective, taken-for-granted social practices objectify social objects and entities, giving them the appearance of an exogenous existence, which in turn are perceived as taken-for-granted realities (Berger and Luckman, 1970; Miller and Fox, 2004; Schutz, 1970). Thus, social reality is constructed in part by members' interactive processes or for EM, people's interpretive practices. In EM social practices are reflexive processes that also (re)construct and sustain social realities in and through members' interactions. In this context reflexivity refers to the way members' actions reciprocally construct their social world, using practices and understandings which concurrently form and reshape those understandings (Bryman, 2012). For Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2003, 2013), interpretive practices are thus social construction processes in which social reality is the 'ongoing achievements' of members that change in and through reflexive interpretive practices.

EM's focus on the mundane, day-to-day practices of members makes such analytics keenly attuned to naturally occurring data, specifically to members' discourse or talk-in-interaction. Concurrently, there is an awareness of the immediate setting from which social interactions emerge from, thereby locating the setting or immediate context with the constitution of practical realities (ten Haven 2016). Such social inquiry situates the content of actions with how it is mediated by local knowledge and practices (culture). This produces highly descriptive,

rich data, capturing conversational extracts that account for members' social exchanges. That is, the mechanism members use to express the methodical production of social phenomenon. Gubrium and Holstein (2013) name such analytics as "*discursive practices*"- the activity and dynamics of talk in interactions that employs the sense-making methods in interpretive actions. The analysis of talk in relation to social interactions and their context or 'discursive practices,' is often performed through non-Foucauldian discourse approaches, which can include semiotics and conversational analysis (CA) among many others. The analytics of discursive practices should critically position talk in the process that organizes interactions, focusing on the content of interactive practices. Taken together, discursive practices focus on the *hows*, the content of interactions in socially constructing reality which although quintessential is not without its flaws.

Gubrium and Holstein (2013) contend that EM's attention to members' real-time interactions neglects the broader substantive perspective of the constitutive resources, possibilities, and scope in construction processes. Although social settings are considered in EM, social practices are reduced to the momentary local setting, the immediate descriptions of how social actions are enacted in a situated place. They note that in EM the institutional and social structural conditions, influences, and consequences of social processes are mostly absent. Thus, while detailing the *hows*, EM analytics speak extraordinarily little of the considerable resources that are employed in and guide the functions of social actions. Such contentions also speak of an omission of the sources used in social interactions which set the parameters or possibilities of potential outcomes, meaning there is no critical understanding of the choices in, and products of, social construction practices. Put differently Gubrium and Holstein (2003, 2008, 2013) argue, there is little account of members' intersubjectivity that transcends local common-sense understandings. As such, there is a lack of consideration for the wider social structures and cultural institutions that members invoke, which constrain and constitute social interactions, and influence certain social achievements over others. This implies that the implications, outcomes, or consequences of what is being socially achieved are either disregarded or overlooked, which are significant aspects of discursive practices that constitute culture. Accordingly, they suggest formulating a constructionist project that derives an understanding of the *whats* in the *hows* of social constructionism. From their perspective, hybridized analytics of reality construction is required, positioned at the crossroads of institutions, culture, and social interaction.

3.3 The *whats*- Foucauldian inspirations

In expanding the analytical scope and repertoire of constructionist endeavors, Holstein and Gubrium (2008) propose examining the institutional and cultural *whats* in social interactions. They appeal to a "cautious naturalism" that considers the concrete and situated production of everyday practices, claiming this provides a significant basis for moving beyond descriptions to more importantly, critically attending to social actions (2013). Their work, therefore, seeks to provide, or at minimum propose, hypotheses on explanatory factors for social action. In other words, by examining the *whats*, we have a better understanding of the *hows*. That is, the interpretive practices of members recover their reasoning for accomplishing certain social actions, depicting local social *processes* or interactive *practices* since forms of speech and social actions incorporate our ways of thinking. In cautiously employing naturalism (the *whats*) while still being attentive to constructionist sensibilities (the *hows*), Holstein and Gubrium (1999, 2003) suggest a Foucauldian approach. In considering the *whats*, a few clarifications are in order.

In the constructionist analytics of interpretive practices, Gubrium and Holstein (2003, 2008, 2013, 2019) refer to the *'whats'* as constructive actions-in-context. An analytical focus on the *whats*, centers on the intersubjectivity that come into play and are constitutive influence in constructive processes. The *whats* then concern: *what* is being achieved, using *what* resources or by *what* means, and under *what* conditions. In short, the whats are the interpretive repertoires of members and their circumstances with a particular focus on the wider social setting. With such a focus on the circumstances that bring about and shape interpretive practices, the *whats* provide a fuller understanding of construction processes. To examine these aspects, Gubrium and Holstein explicitly draw from Foucault, using discourse to encapsulate the meaningful *whats*.

According to Foucault (1972), discourses are cultural and sociohistorical systems or regimes of knowledge and power. This is commonly taken to mean that discourses are not merely the intersection of words with things or symbolic representations. For Foucault, this means discourses are things in themselves actively constituting people's 'reality.' Foucault (1972) conceptualized discourses as a wide range of social practices that methodically construct the subjects and the objects they are articulating. However, as a point of departure Gubrium and Holstein (2013) state:

> "If he [Foucault] offers a vision of subjects and objects constituted through discourse, he also allows for an unwittingly active subject who simultaneously shapes and puts discourse to work in constructing our inner lives and social worlds" (p.260).

Here, discourses are reflexive practices that simultaneously construct and meaningfully depict social worlds and the people who inhabit them. Thus, for Gubrium and Holstein, discourses are agentic processes actively used within interpretive practices and thereby entail various levels of inter-subjectivities.

Foucault's discourse analytics was preoccupied with the social locations, institutional sites, and historical developments that stipulate or regulate discourse procedures. Such institutional regulation is taken by Gubrium and Holstein as reifying discursive processes of knowledge. They claim that in positioning discourses within social settings and locating their sociohistorical grounds, Foucault identifies certain inter-subjectivities and links them with the construction of empirical reality. With a particular concern with social settings, Foucault's analytical interest is thought to be on the constitutive quality of discourses; the constitution, function, and implications of systems of power/knowledge. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) name Foucault analytics as '*discourse-in-practice,*' a concept that aptly depicts their view that discourses are known or enacted in concrete places and times. By this, I take them to mean that discourse-in-practice are structures of understanding or sets of knowledge (Schutz, 1972). As such, discourse-in-practice specifies and depicts social perspectives or intersubjectivities since subjectivities (knowledge) are always previously embedded and embodied in the discursive conventions that orient social practices or discursive processes. Thus, within the constructionist analytics of interpretive practices, Foucauldian inspirations bring awareness to the conditions that frame possibilities. This implies that discourses do not determine social outcomes since for Gubrium and Holstein (2013), neither discourse-in-practice nor discursive practice is caused nor explained by deterministic, exterior social forces or pure internal motivations.

For Gubrium and Holstein, discourse-in-practice considers the broader cultural, socio-historical, and institutional contexts. This addresses the *whats* in social processes, the meaning-making resources, and circumstances constituting the social order that organizes members' shared social worlds and makes meaningful their everyday experiences. While Foucauldian inspirations account for *what* is being socially accomplished, the concern with institutional sites and social locations limits his analytics. Consequently, for Holstein and Gubrium (2003)

although Foucault connects specific discourse of how subjects and objects are constituted with how members construct their lived experiences, he gave little concern to members or their real-time interactions and dialogue. Moreover, they contend that despite recognizing the fluidity of the social world, Foucault expounds on the broad dynamics of systems (regimes), where his analytics mostly operates on a historical register. Foucault, therefore, claimed to provide little insight into how social change comes about or how discourses practically function in constituting everyday life. The *hows* and *whats* are therefore vital aspects requiring analytical attention.

3.4 Combining the *hows* and *whats*

For Gubrium and Holstein (2013) EM addresses the manner members organize their lived worlds of social interactions and shared experiences. While Foucault shows the sociohistorical settings that frame the possibilities and outcomes of social interactions. Drawing from these approaches, the analytical concern is on the social context and content of member's situated interpretive practices. That is, the focus is on the interactions, locations, and discourses that constitute members' social construction processes of reality. While this may seem to address macro-micro issues, they contend their project is not merely another attempt to bridge this divide. Gubrium and Holstein (2003, 2008, 2013) claim such debates on these issues typically revolve around theorizing the relationship between preexisting larger social systems with smaller social practices. The underlying assumption is that macro and micro forms are distinctive categories separately distinguishable. Holstein and Gubrium claim (2004) "In the practice of everyday life, at least two primary sources of context- talk-in-interaction [discursive practice] and culture and institutions [discourse-in-practice]- are always at play" (p, 270). Therefore, instead of linking macro and micro theories to give a totalizing view of social organization, their main objective is to detail how the social construction process is shaped by various aspects.

Although contending adamantly for constructionist efforts to consider both the *hows* and *whats*, Gubrium and Holstein (2013) claim that this is an 'analytically risky business' without a sound, robust research program. They state: "Asking *how* questions without having an integral way of getting an analytical handle on *what* questions renders concerns with the *whats* rather arbitrary" (p.263). In their view, research endeavors that take a synthesis approach to both the content and context without specifying the analytical process, often detail one aspect of

construction practices to the exclusion of the other. Similarly, Holstein and Gubrium (2008) contend that integrating the analytics of 'discursive practice' and 'discourse-in-practice' into one project diminishes their empirical work and lessens their beneficial contributions to each other. They, therefore, contend for a synthesis analytics in which the two are parallel projects informing each other rather than blending the two into one seamless project.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003, 2011, 2013) propose a research program that focuses on the interplay between the *hows* and *whats* of taken-for-granted realities. They state: "In doing so, this analytics assiduously avoids theorizing social forms, lest the discursive practices associated with the construction of these forms be taken for granted" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2013, p.264). Put differently, I take them to mean that by analytically centering on the taken-for-granted realities of people, the social entities articulated by them are considered topics of investigation rather than sources of an objective reality. As such, taken-for-granted realities are not seen as a direct source of what 'is really happening,' instead becoming analytical topics or themes of investigation. Consequently, their analytics cautiously employs naturalism (the *whats*) by circumventing the ontological concerns of objective entities while still being firmly grounded in, and attentive to, constructionist sensibilities (the *hows*).

Moreover, Gubrium and Holstein (2013) contend that interplay implies a dynamic relationship between the *hows* and *whats* in constructing social reality. From this perspective the *hows* and *whats* are not a tension needing solving, thereby nullifying the notion of bridging top and bottom approaches. As such, the accent on the interplay of taken-for-granted realities enriches the analytical impulses of discursive practice and discourse-in-practice. Accordingly, capturing these constructive interchanges requires a flexible yet thoughtful approach. This implies that the analytical process should not be a rigid procedure of scripted formulas. Instead, it should be seen as a careful practice of locating the intersections between the content (hows) and context (whats) of social interactions and its implication in everyday life. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) liken the alternating focus of interplays to a skillful juggling act, a technique of 'oscillating indifference' they term 'analytical bracketing.'

3.5 Analytical bracketing

A difficulty in this approach is how to concurrently account for both the *whats* and *hows* of construction processes. To address this issues Holstein and Gubrium propose a methodological technique for alternating focus between the *hows* and *whats* of social interactions. Analytical bracketing aims to weave back and forth between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, deferring one while not forgetting the other. What this means is that in some instances, researchers temporarily suspend prior assumptions in, or become momentarily indifferent to, the *whats* to record the *hows*. This allows researchers to identify and document the observable and practical accounts of social action. The focus is on the local, real-time, *in situ* interactions. In another instance, bracketing of social actions is set aside to locate the substantive *whats* in social construction practices. Emphasis is on the resources and discourses being employed. In this sense, analytical bracketing is a procedure that captures and records the parallels of interpretive practices: the constructive processes, and the contexts of resources, influences, and their continual practice in everyday life. As such, analytical bracketing mirrors the interplay between social interactions (*hows*) and the social setting (*whats*) from which they emerge, as they happen *in situ.* Each in turn is detailed, recording their influence on each other and their role in the constitutive process.

Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2003, 2013) claim that analytical bracketing prevents reifying certain components in the construction and analytical process. While they claim privileging certain aspects of either the *hows* or *whats* can occur depending on the social inquiry of a project, neither discursive practice nor discourse-in-practice should predetermine the reproduction of the other. For them, analytical bracketing is a reminder to resist totalizing either approach or level of analysis. Similarly, accenting interplay through analytical bracketing serves as a reminder not to inappropriately apply either analytics (the *hows* and *whats*) naively or recklessly. Both the content and context of construction processes and interpretive practices should be considered since they offer a deeper understanding of members' intersubjectivity and how they are realized. Furthermore, analytical bracketing is thought to promote and cultivate reflective social research practices. By temporarily suspending culture's substantive reality aside to render its production visible, researchers are making a conscious effort to distinguish between the participants and their own presuppositions. While this produces a rich amount of data, it must

be interpreted and transformed into a written presentation. This leads us to the imperative question of how to practically present such an analysis; what are the methods for generating, recording, interpreting, and presenting data? In the following I propose using ethnography for such purposes.

3.6 A pragmatic, Contextual Constructionist Approach

In addressing some of the concerns regarding constructionism being a meta or grand theory with little relevance in empirical research, I contextualize my analytics with a pragmatic approach. In taking a pragmatic approach I propose taking a contextual constructionist position. That is, holding to the main principles and presuppositions of constructionism while analytically objectifying social entities. In doing so, I presume that a thoughtful analysis of culture must objectify culture as existing apart from my analyzing and interpreting so that it is observable and documentable. This is particularly the case when examining cultural representations since for the most part this follows a form of objectifying entities. This is evident when individuals are represented as right holders, stake claimers, and possess inherent capabilities to reason and follow rules. Such 'actors' or 'agents' are marked by distinct socioeconomic, historic, ethnic, and cultural aspects. Similarly, social institutions, organizations, and structures possess an agency that allocates things, distributes knowledge, governs people, and regulates practices. Consequently, this suggests that any analysis of such representations, institutions, and the group that inhabits them requires objectifying.

Some have criticized such a position as 'lapsing into realism,' or 'ontological gerrymandering.' This is taken as being highly selective, theoretically inconsistent, and contradicting constructionist principles (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985). However, in taking a contextual rather than a 'strict constructionist' position, objectifying culture requires only a methodological not ontological move via analytical bracketing (Best, 2008; Holstein and Gubrium, 2008; Werbner, 2015; Wicker, 2015). As the name suggests, analytical bracketing is a methodological, reflexive technique, that attempts to locate the various subjectivities at play in social processes instead of denying them. Moreover, in avoiding "ontological gerrymandering," I take social actions, practices, and processes along with the participants' descriptions, as the objects of my analytical data, thus avoiding to theoretical define and take them as closed analytical labels. Thus, for pragmatic rather than theoretical reasons, culture must be objectified,

brought about by using analytical bracketing. This divorces social agency from social entities, and social practices from subjectivity. In the words of Best (2008) this is a 'necessary evil' for obtaining substantive research results that are not merely descriptive, stereotypical, or commonsensical (p.49ff).

Moreover, a contextual constructionist position is contrary to what Best (2008) calls 'vulgar constructionism,' where the term 'social construct' is purposely used to either cast doubt, question the existence of all things, and/or discredit certain beliefs (p.45ff) As such I do not hold an extreme relativist position, denying all objectivity. I distinguish the natural from the social world, acknowledging the former exists independently of people. However, this distinction does not always have clear-cut lines. From my perspective there are overlaps, mixtures, and blends between idealism (abstract) and materialism (concrete); realism and constructionism; and between objectivity, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity.

3.7 Analyzing Interpretive Practice Through Ethnography

When considering the above, analyzing the interpretive and constructive practices of members in everyday life is a complex endeavor involving a plethora of components. Such a task not only demands flexible yet robust analytics, but it equally calls for a symmetrical methodology. Given Gubrium and Holstein's (2008, 2013) focus on discourses, they propose a 'narrative ethnography,' a methodological approach tailored to address the *hows* and *whats* of discourses. However, their methodological approach is highly ambiguous with minute details on the methods for "fieldwork" research. Moreover, they give little details to the inscriptive practices of presenting research results which is key in ethnography. As Tedlock (2013) states of Gubrium and Holstein's narrative ethnography; "the ethnographic act and end product are collapsed into a single, highly abstract rhetorical field and reified as 'an emergent method,' combining epistemological, methodological, and analytical sensibilities [..] the written genre is nearly erased" (p.243). Her contentions appear to be with their methodology and not with the analytical approach per se. Nevertheless, as analytics focusing on discursive practice and discourse-in-practice, their methodological approach is mostly limited to Conversation Analysis (CA), which is intricately linked to EM. To the best of my knowledge, they give little to no

attention to the practical application of a Foucauldian approach. With a focus on discourses, it is thus vital to elaborate on CA.

In its most basic form CA is a method for examining both the process and structure of social interactions. The primary focus of this method is to qualitatively study real-time, in-situ, consecutive ordering actions (Perakyla and Ruusuvuroi, 2018). This consist of examining the rules, patterns, and structures in relationship with social actions (Silverman, 2015). In this sense, CA is an empirical rather than a theoretical enterprise. However, it should be noted that although this empirical enterprise does mostly take an inductive approach, there is a theoretical body of knowledge that has been stocked on the organizational structure of conversations. Thus, CA holds numerous presumptions in their approach.

First, talk is action. As such the focus is on the aspects that make any action possible in the context of its organization Second, action is structurally organized. This implies that in the organization of actions there are rules and structures that influence those actions. In this sense, there are no single actions, rather, they are part of larger sequences. The most fundamental and significant of these sequences is an adjacency pair which is a sequence of two actions. The first pair part is the first performance of an interlocuter which invites a particular type of second action performed by a responding interlocuter, the second pair part. In its most basic form adjacency pairs are evident in question-answer, greeting-greeting, request-approval/refusal, and so forth. Third and consequently, talk constructs and maintains intersubjective reality (Perakyla and Ruusuvuroi, 2018).

In CA talk and interactions are examined as the site where intersubjectivities are formed and maintained. In this manner, CA allows for the documentation of the construction of meanings in real time where the methods of people or their "vehicles" of this process is inseparable from what is being constructed (Heritage, 1984). While this does display meanings, the analytical focus is on interaction, the transactional exchanges of people in conversations. As such, CA remains "agnostic" to people's inner-cognitive "experiential reality" (ibid). Within the framework of understanding intersubjectivities, in which further intersubjectivities are created, are the formations and recognition of actions in sequences. This implies that at the basis of interpersonal comprehension - the foundation upon which all other forms of mutual understanding are built - lies in the ability to decipher or interpret the preceding turn articulated by the current speaker.

CA posits that every spoken exchange within the context of a conversation is contingent upon the preceding turn and, as such, conveys the speaker's perception of that turn. As a result, when a speaker responds to a turn that was spoken in the form of a question, they inadvertently exhibit their understanding of it as such. In certain situations, these responses can carry significant weight in the progression of the interaction and the interpersonal dynamic of the participants involved (Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 48). The social interactions within a conversation thereby exemplify the intersubjective process where actions are intersubjectively recognized. This is overwhelmingly evident in the sequential organization of social interactions, that is in adjacency pairs.

While CA is conducive, it is also limited by only examining talk *in-situ*, the specific sequential structural features of speech or 'conversational machinery in a certain location. Such analytics focuses on the sequential, utterance-by-utterance explanation of communicative structures and practices and tends to neglect the wider context which may lend to understanding the interpretation of meanings. Conversely, Foucauldian-inspired analytics may be more congenial, however, Holstein and Gubrium's methodology is vague. Consequently, I propose an ethnographic methodology based on the work of Paul Atkinson who's approach I find congenial with my analytical conception on what culture is and how it comes about. Moreover, in studying Gubrium and Holstein's analytical model, it is evident that they implicitly and explicitly draw from other theorists in line with these analytics, such as Atkinson's semiotic approach and Potter's discourse analysis (DA). Atkinson uses a wider ethnographic approach that addresses both the *hows* and *whats* of cultural construction, using similar concepts as Potter. I thus draw from Atkinson's methodological approach in which ethnography is a research design and use a version of Gubrium and Holstein constructionist analytics as my qualitative research strategy and analytical model. This methodological approach, along with Atkinson's semiotic analytics, are detailed in the proceeding chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology- A Qualitative, Constructionist Ethnography

The following chapter elaborates on a vital aspect in the study of culture, the methodological procedures on how to generate, record, analyze and present data and its results. Detailing the methodological procedures is vital for achieving any research goals and objectives. Moreover, giving an account for how and why social inquiry is conducted lends to strengthening the overall quality of a research. This makes the nuances of a methodology paramount. My overall aim in this chapter is to detail accounts for how to use qualitative ethnography in the study of culture by describing what it is and demonstrating how to use it. In this way, I divided the chapter into two main units, a theoretical overview, and its practical application. I begin the first unit by depicting an overall strategy which details the use of a qualitative approach. Next, I expound on a methodological design, detailing certain ethnographic elements that are relevant for examining culture. This is followed by the second main unit of this chapter, a practical application of how to conduct research. I begin this section by giving an account of sampling techniques which includes data generating methods. Subsequently, I detail how I use the above in my example of examining culture as the social processes of interpretive practices, describing my analytical focus in using participant observations, along with how documents were selected and how I conducted my ethnographic interviews. This leads me to describe the interpretation of my data in the following section. Here I account for how I recorded, transcribed, and interpreted certain interactional data and some of the issues I faced in doing so. Lastly, I address some ethical concerns and issues.

Before proceeding it is vital to note that although this is the Methodology Chapter of my thesis, I do not account for the previous objectives of my research which are theoretical in nature. I have previously mentioned in my introduction, as well as in the previous two chapters, how I went about presenting my response to those objectives. Having extensively detailed the process of explaining how, what, and why such approaches are contended for, I presuppose that this will suffice, and no further explanation is needed. For now, it is significant to note that the previous two chapters are a main aspect of my thesis. My methodology and empirical fieldwork are just a part, although a vital one of the overall objective of this thesis. Nevertheless, I now turn my attention on how to methodologically study and carry out an examination of culture as a social process.

4.1 Research Strategy

In attempting to better understand the nature and substance of culture I suggest a constructionist qualitative strategy. I believe this to be the optimal choice for ascertaining a deep analysis of cultural phenomena, given its distinct methods and focus on social research. What makes this strategy distinct is the underlying principle that people's social worlds and their pertaining phenomena are constructed through human activity rather than exogenously existing as a natural 'given.' That is, social phenomena are the empirical evidence of events and influences which are socially produced through relationships and interactions (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Silverman, 2015). Accordingly, a qualitative strategy provides an orientation for studying culture based on constructionist and interpretive presuppositions. From an interpretivist perspective grounded in constructionism, people's meanings form multiple perspectives and are evident in the form of intersubjectivities (Silverman, 2015). Thus, when considering these theoretical underpinnings, a qualitative research project is preoccupied with understanding the social nature, intersubjective meanings, and interactive outcomes of culture as a social phenomenon. As such, there is an emphasis on in-depth inquiry and contextualization with the aim of producing discursive knowledge about people and their relationships (Clifford 1983). This is accomplished by analyzing social members' situated interactions and connecting this with broader discourses and/or social theories (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Seale, 2019).

I take a qualitative strategy as conducive to understanding social processes, practices, and structures. The goal in using such a strategy is to generate theoretical generalizations where abductive reasoning and sensitizing concepts are used to make inferences on the best conclusion. From a constructionist position, recognizing that theoretical concepts are embedded in all social actors and their activities, abductive reasoning seeks to go outside the data and situate it in explanatory and/or interpretive frameworks (Atkinson and Delamont, 2008). Thus, in using abductive reasoning, general sensitizing concepts are deduced and theoretically refined through inductive processes and situated into larger social structures or discourses. In such a process sensitizing concepts are used as open, non-imposing labels or social categories which provide a general sense of reference to approaching empirical instances (Blumer, 1954; Bryman, 2012). Consequently, this allows for theories to be drawn from the generalizable inferences of

qualitative inquiry. Such an aim makes theoretical generalization a key marker of the quality of any research and exhibits the theoretical logic employed within this strategy.

Taking the above together, I hold a qualitative strategy as a broad orientation to social inquiry, dealing with issues of ontology (the nature of social phenomenon), epistemology (ways of knowing social phenomenon and the quality of that knowledge), and the relationship between theory and research (abductive reasoning). While an overall strategy is necessary for robust research, a vital aspect of any strategy is a methodological design. Although closely related to a qualitative strategy, I take a design more specifically as a framework of methods for collecting, recording, and presenting data and its findings (Bryman, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In the study of culture, I suggest an ethnography methodological design which is often used by qualitative researchers for generating, collecting, and examining various empirical sources and processes.

4.2 Methodological design

While defining ethnography is complex, I take qualitative ethnography as a set of informative, concrete practices that renders social phenomena visible in distinctive analytical ways, turning social representations into coherent data, in the social construction of knowledge (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). As a set of research practices, ethnography entails certain 'techniques' and 'methods' for gathering, detailing, analyzing, and representing the social meanings and practices of people. Chief among these methods is the notion of participatory observation. Conventionally understood, observations are held as a data-generating process consisting of certain techniques where researchers use their natural senses, direct knowledge, and own judgments to document the social beliefs and practices of people (Angrosino, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Walsh and Seale, 2019). As such, researchers are the primary instrument of social inquiry, thereby making ethnography limited to a small number of cases or just one case in detail. This leads to a rigorous study of social phenomena where through proximity researchers participate in the social context under investigation (Silverman, 2015).

As a research design committed to intensive analysis, this design attempts to generate as much data as possible. This allows for a deeper understanding of social phenomena by situating

it in a more meaningful context (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016). Thus, in combination with observations, researchers often generate and use interviews, documents, and other cultural artifacts to produce social knowledge in the form of an 'ethnographic text.' That is, ethnography is a 'textual enterprise' seeking to record fieldwork procedures, and their results, into an analytically written account (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Hence, ethnography as the writing (graph) of folks (ethnos) (Silverman, 2015), the transcribing of culture (Harrison, 2018), or 'the science' committed to detailing ways of life (Vidich and Lyman, 1994). As such, I take ethnography to be a process and product, the means, and the end of social inquiry in the interpretive and inscriptive practices of constructing social knowledge in the form of a written account (Atkinson et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012).

Considering ethnography's preoccupation with generating a form of knowledge, there is a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of social phenomena over testing hypotheses about them. This begins with 'foreshadowing problems,' the identifying and selecting of a particular area of analytical interest, typically concerning an aspect of social life in its natural occurrence (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Foreshadowed problems help focus and develop a set of open, reflective areas for initial investigation. 'Problem' in this sense does not refer to a problem that seeks to be resolved or solved. It refers to a research problem that entails a topic to be explored, investigated, or better understood. Foreshadowing depicts a purposive sampling technique that begins with a topical research problem often stemming from personal interest and theoretical inspirations (Coffey, 2018). This however does not mean that theories drive research, rather there is often a tendency to work with 'unstructured' data and methods. Here, I refer to unstructured data as 'raw' analytical material that does not yet constitute, nor is arranged into, a predefined closed, theoretical classification or label. Thus, although there is a general theoretical orientation in ethnography designs, there tend to be no fixed procedures or analytically closed interpretive categories (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Instead, using sensitizing concepts, categories are generated, expounded upon, and/or modified during the analytical process. This leads to research interests, topics, themes, and questions being refined and transformed. As Coffey (2018) states: "We do not enter a setting with an empty mind, but rather an open mind" (p.19). Consequently, sampling strategies are a work in progress with adjustments to data collection and sample sizes being made on the field.

While using unstructured data and methods displays the open-ended nature of ethnography, it concurrently exemplifies its 'funneling structure.' Within ethnography 'funneling' refers to a methodological procedure in which research is progressively focused and entails analytically narrowing down foreshadowing problems. Such procedures lead to more precise data selection which is analytical or theoretically refined (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This funneling procedure is part of an iterative process in which the various research stages intersect. In ethnography, there is a weaving between data selection, creation, and recording. Thus, ethnography is said to have no distinctive stages between collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and theorizing data. This implies that ethnography is not a logical sequential research design with a prescriptive linear process. Ethnography is an iterative process that involves prominent levels of analytical reflection (Walsh and Seale, 2019). Such practices include reflexively recording field notes which are strongly advocated for when using observations and are often employed by ethnographers for producing 'high-quality' data (Delamont, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Silverman, 2015).

The above understanding of ethnography demonstrates one of its main strengths; its exploratory and open nature which allows strategically crafting research according to any analytical focus. While many consider its openness and flexibility a strength (Bryman, 2012; Atkinson, 2014), some see this as a challenge that leads to questions of validity and reliability (Atkinson et al., 2007). It is, therefore, necessary to give a deeper account of how ethnography is specifically used. To do this I give an example of how I used the above strategy and design in empirically demonstrating my analytical conception of what culture is and how it comes about. In what follows I exemplify, practically how to combine a constructionist analytics of interpretive practice with qualitative ethnography. This is significant given the reflective nature and degrees of interpretation that take place throughout the ethnographic process.

4.3 A constructionist ethnography

In tailoring my methodological strategy and design, I combine it with my analytical framework to take a constructionist ethnographic approach that focuses on agentic processes and social contexts. This forms a synthesis, a blending, and borrowing of certain constructionist sensibilities and ethnographic methodologies, conceptually working in tandem to theoretically

ground and analytically guide research. In following a form of constructionist analytics of interpretive practices, the main preoccupation is on the '*hows'* and substantive '*whats'* that captures what culture is and how it comes about. Within this constructionist analytical framework, significance is given to naturally occurring talk and social interactions. Concurrently there is an awareness of the social setting from which these social interactions emerge from. The dual focus is on the content and context of cultural reality, detailing the unfolding of events, the social settings, and the interactions between members and their social environment. In demonstrating how this can be applied, I provide an example of how to conduct research by doing research.

4.3.1 Sampling

In qualitative strategies, selecting data is often based on its relevance. Purposive sampling is a commonly deployed technique that depicts a procedure for choosing sets of data based on their significance to the research project and/or demonstrates some features of interest (Bryman, 2012). This makes such samples non-random or purposeful (Silverman, 2015). In my preliminary probing of a research topic and in conjunction with purposively foreshadowing techniques, I examined the 2018-2019 Norwegian White Paper, The Power of Culture: Cultural Policy for the Future, for a research topic of interest. Within the White paper libraries are said to be key institutions in constituting and disseminating Norwegian culture. This made libraries critical sites for social theory and the target of my social inquiry. Having identified a general area of analytical interest, I took to selecting a site for my observations, using criterion non-random sampling techniques. This sampling procedure entailed an initial analysis of the aforementioned White Paper where I explicitly looked for theoretically defined concepts of interest. I identified cultural protection, plural representation, and social inclusion, which made diversity and equality key themes regarding libraries. My focus then turned to locating a sample that fits the 'culturally diverse' category, a social classification theoretically defined and employed throughout the White Paper.

During this sampling process, I recalled an experience in which I found my local library in Tøyen to be a peculiar and intriguing place. Coming from the USA, I was accustomed to libraries being quiet zones, where unobtrusive behavior is a widely accepted and reinforced cultural norm. In my naïve assumption, I presumed Norwegian libraries held similar, if not identical, institutional practices. I thus found it strange and irritating that this public library was

mostly used as a social gathering place instead of an academic space. As an 'outsider' looking in, the social practices of members stood out to me, highlighting the distinctive institutional beliefs and practices of people in the local community. Recalling this situation sparked my interest in studying this location, and the culture therein, which is situated in a multi-cultural community. Tøyen is commonly known for its plurality, often typified as a multicultural neighborhood. This is exemplified in the 2020-2023 National Strategy for Libraries, which states: "The library is an important 'third place' and has a valuable function, especially in districts such as Tøyen, which has challenges related to density, overcrowding, language, cultural differences, and integration" (Ministry of Culture, 2019, p.21). Thus, Tøyen Library met my sampling criteria and was purposely chosen as my sample case. This, however, was just the beginning of my sampling process. Having chosen a 'case' or field for which my data was to be collected and studied, I was now left with what to focus my observations on.

4.3.3 Participant observation

While the term 'cases' or 'field' typically refers to specific groups or concrete places, I use these terms as the choices for what is studied. That is, I take them as analytical units or levels of analysis including social processes and practices, institutional organizations, and members' interactional encounters (Atkinson and Delamont, 2008; Coffey, 2018; Silverman, 2015). As such, my analytical unit was focused on social relations rather than communities or locations per se. Thus, although my ethnographic work mostly took place at the library it was not on that specific location or milieu. In this sense, my analytical focus is primarily on agentic processes and social contexts with a preoccupation on how process and events unfold (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013; Silverman, 2015). Nevertheless, having selected a field of inquiry, I continued this initial stage of pre-field work by conducting preliminary observations, where I 'staked' out the library (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, I collected relevant documents about the library to provide insight into the social context and setting. During this phase, I observed at the library a host of events targeting 'immigrants' which aligned with the 'realities' that were represented in the documents I examined.

Furthermore, considering the social setting of Tøyen Library, specifically the diverse cultural community in which it is located, led me to focus on participants who classified as 'immigrants.' Targeting such data sets allowed me to easily identify and document local culture

since as ‘outsiders’ (immigrants) they tended to question certain taken-for-granted aspects of Norwegian culture. Consequently, this allowed me to easily observe, record, and analyze interactions of interest since such interactional data was easily accessible and discernable, providing both a straightforward and deep analysis (Gobo, 2008). Having established a sampling criterion, I funneled my analytical focus on the social activities, arrangements, and events where such participants could be found.

Although I observed numerous events, activities, and arrangements, I found the Library’s Language Café of particular interest since there was a focus on the social actions entailed in conversations. Having established a target group or sample unit, I funneled my analytical focus on my theoretical interest in how Norwegian culture is (re)constructed, contested, negotiated, displayed, received, and disseminated. In aiming to obtain quality data, I employed analytical bracketing to record the hows of social interactions. In doing so I wrote down the *in situ* social interactions in the greatest detail as possible. It is significant to note that such data are what I consider to be re-presentations of what took place. That is my transcribed observations are not presentation of an objective reality that were caught or collected. Rather, such data was generated by me. While such data is highly dependent on my interpretation and selectivity, I have in the above and in Chapter Five, attempted to document why and how I selected my data.

It is significant to note that in preferring naturally occurring data, I did not find it necessary to participate in all social activities. However, I do believe that all modes of observation are participatory since studying social phenomena is impossible without being a part of it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Holstein and Gubrium, 2008; Silverman, 2015). In this sense, I take participatory observation as what Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) describe as a ‘mode of being in the world’ (p.249), a reflective practice involving participating in the social setting under observation and reflecting on the effects and products of participating. As such, in most cases, I conducted participatory observations in a non-conventional manner, using participatory as a figure of speech to locate myself and the participants in the research process. That is, I did not interact with the participants in all their social activities, rather I was close enough to the phenomena to document it, thereby ‘interacting’ in the social setting. There were however instances in which I directly engaged and interacted with participants, such as when I performed my ethnographic interviewing, and thus it is important to note such instances when presenting data. Doing so demonstrates a reflexive stance and addresses some ethical concerns,

particularly with issues of transparency in presenting findings. Thus, although I consider such data to be naturally occurring, it is simultaneously crafted through research practices, making data a co-product.

4.3.4 Documents and ethnographic interviews

As part of my ethnography design in which I attempted to situate particular social interactions and dialogues into a deeper, more meaningful context, I also incorporated the use of documents and interviews. When referring to documents, I mean a set of data consisting of words and/or images documented apart from a researcher's intervention. While documents play a significant role in my research example, the limitations of my thesis did not allow for a deep or broad selection and analysis of documents. Consequently, I have selected two documents, of which have been previously mentioned in selecting my case study. Using targeting sampling, these documents were chosen for their relevance, availability, and points of interest regarding my foreshadowing problem. Within such datasets, I focused on the content of certain discourses and their pertinence in understanding or creating the social settings of my observations and in displaying how such data produce a "documentary reality" (Atkinson and Coffey, 2006).

In conducting ethnographic interviews, I used an unstructured or informal format in which participants were purposively selected. In this sense, ethnographic interviewing was a conversation with a purpose, where I inquired about information in the context of conducting participant observations (Coffey, 2018). As such, my samples were non-random and included a wide range of participants in the Library and Language Café. My criteria for conducting unstructured interviews were on topics of interest that I observed. However, there were times when participants would casually start a conversation with me, asking me personal questions or questions regarding my research which allowed me the opportunity to ask them questions in return. At other times I would approach participants because of some relevant information I needed. Most if not all the interviews took an informal, conversational mode with questions being adapted to the context or situation at hand.

4.4 Data interpretation

While a good portion of my data interpretation is addressed in my analytical framework and previous sections of this chapter, there are a few points that require further elaboration. It is significant to note that there is not a distinctive analytical phase in ethnographic design, as is evident in my pre-fieldwork and observations. The iterative process of weaving between the various aspects of generating, recording, transcribing, interpreting, analyzing, and observing all took place concurrently. Nevertheless, regarding my research design, it is significant to account for the techniques and strategy that enabled me to systematically analyze my data. Considering my constructionist approach that emphasized dialogue and discourses, I audio-recorded conversations during my observation. In this I practiced analytical bracketing, first writing down the *hows*, then latter examining the *whats* in relation to each other. My audio recordings were of the conversations that took place in the public arena of the Language Café. In funneling my data, I honed my analysis and transcribed only certain portions of my field data. While this produced high-quality data the transcribing process did not come without issues.

One of the difficulties I faced in transcribing these raw datasets was the quality of the audio recordings. In some instances, it was difficult to capture and hear what was being communicated given the public arena in which the conversations took place. Of greater concern was the issue of language and translation. Apart from documents and field notes, most of my data was in Norwegian. It should be noted that my Norwegian language skills are at level B2 which was sufficient to translate most of my data without difficulties considering my target group. However, there were times when it was difficult for me to understand or make sense of what people were trying to communicate since such a target group often was limited in their language skills. Moreover, those who spoke Norwegian at a higher level often spoke in a basic manner to those who could not. In the cases where Norwegian was the expected language of communication, audio recording my conversations allowed me to better understand what was being said, however, the transcribing took a lot longer, and at times I needed assistance understanding certain phrases. While this may be considered a weakness, I attempted to turn this into a strength within my research by using such phrases as topics of investigation and to be understand meanings.

Lastly, it is significant to account for how I interpret data. The constructionist analytics of interpretive practices makes up a substantial part of how I interpret my data. This includes both EM and Foucauldian sensibilities. However, I incorporate a general semiotic approach in extending my analytical purview to include documents and discourses-in-practice. In taking documents as social constructs producing social facts, I approach them as embedded with cultural representations, which through their distinctive forms are accomplishing work. My analytics aims at answering what kind of reality documents are constructing, and how are they accomplishing this (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011).

Moreover, in interpreting my fieldwork observations, I seek to understand how signs perform or express meanings in specific contexts with a focus on the specialized use of vocabularies and domains, or how members use ordinary language in distinctive ways. Focusing on these areas addresses issues of organizational structure, intent and function, its semantic mode, and the context it is situated in (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.83ff). This speaks of the forms and functions of symbolic representations by connecting the relationship between social actions and social outcomes. I aim at highlighting symbolic practices and processes through which meanings operate (Atkinson and Delamont, 2008). While there are various semantic devices used in constructing meanings, a commonly used one is metaphorical imagery.

In my approach to culture using semiotics, I focus on how language is figuratively used in metaphors. Metaphors are representational terminologies expressing an understanding and/or experience in terms of another, demonstrating a (un)likeness of two concepts (Atkinson and Coffey, 1996, p.82). I use metaphors in a general sense to refer to figurative and comparative imagery. As such, metaphors are rhetorical devices as well as representations in which meanings are exchanged and produced. As symbolic representations, metaphors are constructs of socially shared understandings, as well as social practices. Thus, certain metaphors help locate cultural domains, member's intersubjectivities on values, beliefs, common-sense knowledge, and ideas. Metaphors expressing these situated taken-for-granted meanings are often articulated in descriptions of social relations. When applying metaphors to a broader context that transcends textual structures, analysis can extend to way they are used and understood. In doing an examination takes place on metaphors' intent or function, its semantic mode, and the cultural context it is situated in. Analytical questions are on what is trying to be expressed through metaphors and how, what information is attempting to be circulated and how, and how are

interest being accomplished through them. This speaks of the outcomes or consequences of symbolic representations.

Furthermore, in following Atkinson and Coffey's (1996) suggestion, I include speech acts in my analytics of interpretive practices. Such analytics presumes speech is a form of action, thus, speech acts are how language is used or performed in accomplishing work. I considered how vocabularies are used as rhetorical devices for rational and plausible accounts of social actions. My analytical focus is on how accounts, as vocabularies of motives, made meaningful conversations (p.100ff). Likewise, mitigation strategies for face-threatening acts, act as accounts for social actions by either justifying, excusing, or legitimizing it. From this perspective, accounts are actively used to arrange and construct social order, thereby producing coherent and meaningful social worlds. In this sense accounts are part of daily life when members make sense of experiences and articulate it. Thus, accounts are thought to have certain structural features and examining those features gives insight into the culture those practices are embedded in (ibid).

4.5 Ethical concerns

When considering ethical issues regarding this methodology it is significant to address being covert and overt while conducting observations. Given my conceptualization of participatory observations and my reflexive stance, I found it necessary to be as open and transparent as possible about my research. This meant, I disclosed who I was and what I was doing to all those involved, asking for their consent in using what I observed in my research and offering them a written document that provided information about my research. While conducting informal interviews, I specifically asked for permission to use our discussions in my research and at times received a signed consent form. However, given the numerous settings of my observations, particularly in the public sphere with large crowds, there were times when I was not able to get consent or disclose what I was doing to all people. In registering my research and following the rules and regulations of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD), I was able to record my observations without consent if they were conducted in a public place, and no personal data of the participants was revealed in my thesis. According to NSD "personal data is any information relating to identifying people" (NSD, 2022). Although the recording of my data was in public, I do not present any personal data in my thesis unless consented to do so. In the

following chapter, I present my example of data in a general manner. What is significant in using general data is its purpose in unmistakably identifying participants. In such situations, where special categories came into play, I was able to get consent from the participants. Finally, in addressing ethical concerns there is the issue of how I stored my data. In following the data plan of NSD and USN, I stored my data in a secure site and will delete it after my thesis is complete.

Chapter 5: Analyzing Culture as a Process of Interpretive, Meaning-Making Practices

5.1Introduction

The present chapter delves into the analysis of culture from a constructionist perspective, employing qualitative ethnography as the primary research method. This chapter aims to demonstrate how culture is a social process of interpretive practices, focusing on examples of how 'discourses-in-practice' and 'discursive practices,' the *whats* and *hows* in social construction processes, create meanings. Utilizing constructionist analytics of interpretive practices to analyze my ethnographic data, I examine the production of culture and explore how it is experienced in people's everyday lives as something real. My goal in this chapter is to document how culture, as the actualization of people's conceptual maps in the form of symbols, images, and meanings, is the rationalized accomplishment of social interactions. This involves exploring the everyday practices of members within a shared social space, analyzing how they employ culture as a resource to produce or make sense of their social setting, and negotiating meanings within that social context. This process in turn (re)constructs culture.

At the center of my analysis is the social interaction that took place over the discourse on the term "Lucky Pig" or "heldiggris." This chapter provides a deep and nuanced understanding of the constructionist analytics of culture and its implications for the study of this social phenomenon. Through observations, unstructured/informal interviews, and examining documents, rich data is generated, enabling me to examine the intricate ways in which culture is produced, negotiated, and experienced by individuals within a shared social space. Moreover, in analyzing documents a nuanced understanding of the function of culture is given. I thus examine documents along with my ethnographic work to provide a richer comprehension of what culture is and how it comes about in the lives of people and their social setting.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: first, I provide an overview of my constructionist ethnographic approach that focuses on agentic processes and social contexts. Here I present my analytical approach on the *hows* and *whats*. Next, I present my findings, which are organized into three main segments: the social context of the Library and Language Café; the conversation or discourse at the Language Café on Lucky Pig in which I later discuss culture as a

process of interpretive, meaning-making practices; and the documentary reality portrayed in the Norwegian state's White Paper on culture in which I discuss how culture as a natural outcome.

5.2 Constructionist Ethnographic Approach

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed and detailed my analytics and methodology for attempting to answer how culture is constructed. In chapter two I have detailed a constructionist analytics of interpretive practices in which I expound on how such a framework acts as sensitizing concepts, a way for approaching the empirical. Within this framework, my analytical focus examines the mundane, taken-for-granted social actions of members. I take such taken-for-granted social actions as the topics of my analytical inquiry, instead of holding them as resources of objective truth. This, however, does not mean that I am void of theory. Rather, in using the technique of analytical bracketing in which I refrain from theoretically defining the empirical with closed theoretical labels, I use members' predefined theoretical categories and labels as the topics of my social inquiry.

Furthermore, through analytical bracketing, a temporary suspension of culture's substantive reality is set aside to render its production visible. In this sense, I temporarily put on hold prior theoretical notions of culture, as best as possible, to get a clearer understanding of how culture is being accomplished. Analytical bracketing makes visible the construction process by which culture is given its social ontological status as being something 'real,' or is a 'reality,' and allows me to record when culture is actualized, performed, or being done. Employing such a technique, while holding to the constructionist presumption that all social actors are embedded with experiential social knowledge, displays how I practice the abductive reasoning expounded on in my methodology chapter. My constructionist framework thus allows for a general theoretical orientation to create the topics of my analytical interest and refine them using ethnographic funneling methods.

In analyzing culture, it is significant to give a working definition of culture. In chapter two on my conceptual framework, I depict various approaches to culture which describe what culture is and how it comes about. From these various positions, I construct an analytical conception of culture as a process. That is, for analytical purposes, I take culture as a wide arrangement of social processes entailing the practices of people in which meanings are

constructed and exchanged. It is significant to note, given this broad conceptualization, that in referring to specific aspects or areas of culture, I use the term as an adjective, as in cultural. Nevertheless, a key element in these complex social processes is the interpretive practices of people. I thus take culture as an open analytical label in which I analyze culture as an interpretive practice, recording members' interactions, dialogues, engagements, exchanges, and participation in social events (Silverman, 2015). Here I am attentive to the manner and performances of social actions in the production; contestation, negotiation, and/or sustenance; and dissemination of social meanings. Moreover, my preoccupation is with the enactment or contestation of cultural institutions (Bryman, 2012; Gobo and Marciniak, 2016). In concentrating on the procedural aspect of culture or the *hows* of constructive and interpretive practices, my analytical preference is on examining how inter-actions create the orderly, distinguishable, and noteworthy features of culture.

My goal is to understand when and how people describe and categorize things, which also emphasizes the social actions of conversations, discourses, and speech acts. This seeks to identify the apparatus or conceptual tools needed for a particular activity in accomplishing certain goals. Equally, I am concerned with the '*whats*.' The '*whats'* here does not refer to interpreting culture from within the minds of people, as in 'what is really happening.' Rather, the '*whats'* concern (1) what is being produced and/or what is accomplished through the social interactions of members. (2) What resources or tools are being used, referring to the discourses being implemented, and from where. That is, are the discourses used by people, local, organizational, institutional, national, or transnational? Moreover, as part of this 'toolkit,' resources include such things as social: institutions, norms, and rules, as well as typification schemes and symbolic codes. (3) Under what circumstances, depicting the occasions or time, location, social actors, organizations, and/or events under which the social interactions take place? (4) What was the intended outcome, meaning to what end, and for what purpose or function? A dual interest in both the *whats* and *hows* makes visible the parameters of construction processes (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013).

5.3 Language Café

I begin my analysis with a focus on the *whats*, particularly describing the social setting where my observations took place. The Language Café is an event or arrangement organized by

a larger social institution, Tøyen Library. According to National Strategy for Libraries 2020–2023- *A space for democracy and self-cultivation:* public libraries are held as "relevant cultural arenas," acting as learning and meeting spaces for 'enlightenment.' They are said to "offer a haven with access to knowledge and culture" in which "libraries play a key role in integration and training" (p.3). As a cultural arena, geographically located in a multicultural area, facing "challenges related to density, overcrowding, language, cultural differences, and integration;" Tøyen Library is focused on creating a sense of social cohesion (ibid., p.21). While this is accomplished in numerous ways, a key manner is through the learning and practicing of language, where the "mastery of Norwegian is necessary in order to function in society" which in turn produces a well-functioning society (White Paper, 2019, p.42). Consequently, in the wider social context of creating social solidarity, the Language Café functions as a cultural structure, socializing outsiders to Norwegian language, customs, conventions, and values. This is evident on the library's website, where many of the social events or "cultural offerings" are targeted toward "immigrants." In this sense, culture is produced and reproduced through social processes such as socialization, which is the process by which individuals learn and internalize the norms, values, and beliefs of their social group. Moreover, culture from this perspective takes on the structural-functionalism form, holding culture as a social force acting on people to conform to Norwegian social institutions and practices for creating social stability.

Nevertheless, as a social structure, the Language Café consisted of socially constructed institutions, roles, values, norms, rules, practices, beliefs, and goals which are evident in its program's organizational structure. While fully detailing this structure is outside the scope of this thesis, what is significant for us now is the way the organizational structure frames the social relations and to some degree regulates the interactions therein. This is evident in the requirement for entering the social setting or event known as the Language Café. Before attending and participating in the Language Café, people were required to register electronically, giving some basic information including the 'level' of Norwegian they spoke. While this was done for practical reasons (accounting for space, volunteers, materials, etc.), it also established a sense of formality, regularity, and authority, producing a sense of social order in controlling the number of participants. By meeting the requirement of a ticket, individuals were granted access to the social space and its offering, becoming participants of the now-created social event.

This form of admission begins to frame the social relations within the socially constructed setting. For those entering with a ticket, you were considered and categorized as a participant-learner. For those entering without a ticket, you were categorized as a volunteer, acting as a learning-facilitator. Upon being allowed to enter the established social setting, the participants sat in certain arrangements, according to their self-assigned category of Norwegian, scaled from A1 to B2. Such categorizations and rules of admission strengthened the social structure of the institution and its legitimacy, constructing a social structure in which it is perceived and experienced as something real. In this sense, we see that although the Language Café is a socially constructed cultural structure, it is perceived to go beyond the personal level, not reducible to individuals' notion of it, nor is it reliant on one person. Adding to this sense of legitimacy as something real, from which its ontological status is given, is the programs' organizational structure.

The Language Café had a program that was a pattern or framework that was habitually followed. At the beginning of every language café session, the leader would 'play a game,' asking the group of around 50 participants to guess how many countries are represented. Although most of the attendees were regular participants, the leader would routinely state the rules and procedures of the game. The rules were simple, in guessing how many countries were represented the participants were asked to raise their hands and not speak over each other or shout out their guesses. Such rules acted as social norms, which the participants were expected to comply with in creating an orderly process and making sense of their social interactions. After people guessed, the leader would ask the group to take turns stating their names and 'where they were from.' This turn-taking sequence, similarly, acts as a set of rules for governing social interactions. While this introduction or beginning may seem benign or insignificant, it created a meaningful framework from which the participants could interpret their social relations. Consequently, this rule/game framework creates a social setting in which people are organized into certain classifications, the self-assigned categories of "where they are from" which signifies culture.

In stating where people were from, all participants were socially categorized by their self-employed labels, such as person X from Pakistan or Y the Russian. In this manner, participating in the social event produces a new context of meanings from which the participants can interpret and make sense of their social setting and its interactions. Similarly, the discursive practices of

the interlocutors create a discourse-in-practice that constructs and assigns meanings. This is evident in creating the subjects and social objects that inhabit their shared world. 'Where you are from' refers to a physical geographical location that is inhabited by beings possessing material bodies. While recognizing these brute elements, they are only made meaningful through the ideas that interlocutors collectively assign to them (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Adler, 1997; Hall, 1997). Thus, through the social accomplishment of the participants, the physical things external to individuals obtain social representation, forming the social entities that become part of their collective knowledge. In this way, the participants refer to Norway, India, Nigeria, and so forth as possessing an observable footprint, existing externally from their ideas of those social forms, which act as agents in the world and are therefore taken as something real. However, such entities are social constructs, existing only through collective recognition.

What the above rule/game framework demonstrates is how culture is constructed through, and as, a social process by creating a framework from which the participants could interpret their social relations and interact with each other in a meaningful way. As a social process, culture refers to the ongoing practices of social interactions, entailing the way people relate to and with their environments including the objects and subjects that inhabit those environments. Likewise, a social process refers to the ongoing arrangements in which people relate to the various social structures and institutions that guide and shape those interactions. This implies that culture involves how people communicate and interact with each other and their social settings. Overall, social processes are the dynamic activities and interactions that occur within a society, creating the social practices that are the observable regularities or arrangements that emerge from those social processes. Social processes are the actions and behaviors that drive social practices, while social practices are the outcomes or results of social processes. Thus, social practices can be seen as the manifestations or expressions of social processes, providing insights into the underlying dynamics and structures of social lives. This perspective accentuates the idea that culture is not fixed or static, but constantly evolving and changing in response to various social, historical, and political factors. In this sense, culture can be held as a co-constitution of agents and structures.

While the above provides some evidence of culture as such, this is better demonstrated through the social interactions and exchanges of the interlocutors, who in the constructed social space of Language Cage, construct the context (*whats*) and content (*hows*) of culture. This is most evident through their interpretive practices which exemplify how culture can be understood

as a social process. Thus, having provided a social context, describing the social setting that informs, regulates, and organizes the participants' social interactions; let us take a deeper look at the interplay between the *hows*, the discursive practices of members, and the *whats*, their discourses-in-practice. The dialectic process between these two aspects is clear in the discourse at the language Café on "Lucky Pig" or "heldiggris." It is thus significant to locate the many discourses at play here or the discourses-in-practice which show how such discourses are used to construct meanings. Instead of seeing discursive practice and discourses-in-practice in isolation or as one cohesive practice, it is best to account for the dialectic interplay between these two aspects which displays the contours of how culture is a socially constructed process of interpretive practices and social structures. In what follows we see how culture (as a social product) is used to create more culture (as a social process), exemplifying culture as product-in-process.

5.4 "Lucky Pig" or "Heldiggris"

Concerning the *hows*, EM, CA, DA, and semiotic inspirations are insightful in analyzing the interactive meanings of discursive practices: the speech acts of interlocutors. Such an analysis revolves around (a) the type of speech acts being performed, (b) the linguistic and non-linguistic cues that signal speech acts, (c) how speech acts are received and responded to, and (d) how such speech acts fit into the broader context of their performance. This makes for a rich and nuanced way to understand how meanings are produced and interpreted in real-world interactions. It emphasizes the importance of context and situatedness in shaping culture and can be used to uncover the subtle ways in which people use discursive practices to achieve social goals and negotiate meanings and relationships. In this sense, discursive practice considers the situated talk with local meaning-making practices (Atkinson and Delamont, 2008; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, 2008b, 2013).

During a Language Café session about Easter in Norway, a 'Norwegian' volunteer asks a group of 'immigrants' learning language what their plans were for Easter. A Ukrainian man replied, "I will travel abroad." The Norwegian said in passing, "You lucky pig." Both the Norwegian and Ukrainian laughed. After a few seconds of silence, the Norwegian continued to speak while at the same time, an Iranian man attempted to interrupt him with a question by

beginning to speak but suddenly stopping. After making eye contact the Norwegian acknowledged the Iranian with a nod and continued talking. While the Norwegian was speaking the Iranian again attempted to interrupt, raising his hand, and saying, “I have a question; you said lucky pig.” Both replied with a typical Scandinavian humming of ‘*mhm*.’ The Iranian man continued: “For example in Iran, we have the same thing, but we say lucky donkey not lucky pig.” Turning to the rest of the group, the Iranian hesitantly asked nervously, “Does anyone have any examples from your country of Lucky Pig?” In a relieved manner, he looks at the others quickly and then looks downwards. After a few seconds of silence, the Norwegian man says: “you mean using animals?” A Brazilian man looked at the Norwegian and said, “I don’t understand what you mean when you say lucky pig?” The Norwegian responds: “It means you have a lot of luck; you are lucky.” Taking a few seconds pause and thinking he continued “It is very strange because pigs or pork have gotten a lot of meanings. When you say ‘piggy’ (grisette) it means you are messy and fat even though pigs are clean animals. Umm you drive pig-fast, you drive like a pig- (kjøre som et svin) that means you drive ugly, too fast. The pig gets blamed for a lot of strangeness, but we also say lucky pig. Where that comes from, I don’t know.” After a second of silence a Brazilian looked at me saying: “don’t you guys in America say luck cow?” I responded: “I don’t know, maybe lucky duck.” An Egyptian then asked the Iranian what he said and repeated the phrase ‘lucky donkey.’ In quick succession the Norwegian says: “it could be that farmers had a lot of pigs but now there is not much because there are big pig factories. Pigs are used both for bad and good. It’s used in common sayings here but maybe I will start using lucky donkey.” The group burst out in laughter while smiling.

In analyzing this interaction, we see how the Norwegian initiates the conversation with the speech act of asking a question. This interactive practice creates an adjacency pair, which helps to structure the conversation and maintain coherence by establishing expectations for how participants should respond to each other's utterances (Peräkylä, 2008). Here the adjacency pair: Questions-Answers is used to elicit a specific response. As such, the speech act of asking a question is used to accomplish certain goals. The question: “What are your plans for Easter?” encourages the interlocutors to provide a detailed reply. However, the Ukrainian’s response is brief: “I will travel abroad.” This demonstrates that although there is a conversational structure that guides their interactions, the conversation itself is governed by the interlocutors. Moreover, what is evident is how the interlocutors understand the various exchanges of meanings which are

evident in the way they interpret and respond to each other. Conversational responses, however, do not always need to be communicated linguistically as is evident in the next sequence.

In reaction to the Ukrainian's answer, the Norwegian calls him a "Lucky Pig." This is interpreted by the Ukrainian as a compliment, which is exemplified in his non-linguistic cue, the act of laughing. This creates the adjacency pair of Compliment-Response which serves to maintain positive social relations between the interlocutors, recognizing each other's contributions to the conversation and demonstrating mutual appreciation. In this context, the adjacency pair displays how the interlocutors understand each other's actions. In positively interpreting the term Lucky Pig, the second part of the adjacency pair is an expected positive response. This exchange can be seen as a successful instance of the Compliment-Response adjacency pair, where the compliment serves as the first part of the pair and the response serves as the second part. This displays the intersubjective understandings of the interlocutors, which in this instant shows how meanings are being conveyed, interpreted, understood, and disseminated.

Although laughing is a non-verbal expression of emotion that does not involve the use of language, it is likewise a communicative act that conveys meaning in this interaction. This non-linguistic social mechanism helps to facilitate information exchange and demonstrate the participants' understanding of each other's contributions to the conversation. As such non-linguistic cues, or social actions and performances, are vital aspects in the constructive and interpretive practices in which meanings are understood and disseminated. Such actions are often taken-for-granted aspects in facilitating the giving and taking of meanings. Ironically, silences, the lack of social actions, are similarly significant in constructing and conveying meanings.

Silences can play a significant role in conversational interaction and can convey various meanings depending on the context. In the above conversation, we see that after the mutual laughing by the Norwegian and Ukrainian, there were seconds of silence, preceded by the Norwegian continuing to speak. Such silence can be interpreted as a moment of uncertainty, where the Norwegian is assessing the turn-taking sequence of whether to proceed or if another would add to the initial speech act, "What are your plans for Easter." The Norwegian's discernment to proceed may have been premature since the turn-taking sequence is quickly interrupted when the Iranian attempts to interject by beginning to speak but suddenly stopping. This stop-and-go act can have multiple meanings.

When taking the wider social context and institutional setting (the *whats*), we can infer that the Iranian man's delay in asking his question is both a strategic move to establish his participation and engagement in the conversation, while also demonstrating his deference to the Norwegian as the primary speaker in the interaction and his institutional role. Regarding the latter, it is significant to account for the social institutional structure of the Language Café. Here the *whats* refer to the social setting and its framework for social relations, the socially constructed classifications of participant-learner and learning-facilitator. Regarding his strategic move to participate, the Iranian's action signifies a turn-taking mechanism to interact. His delay can thus be seen as an example of a "presequence," which is a succession of utterances that precedes the initiation of a main adjacency pair (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990). In this case, the Iranian man's initial attempts to interrupt the Norwegian serve as a presequence to his eventual question. This non-verbal prompt can be interpreted as an act of claiming a turn to speak, which is recognized by the Norwegian when mutual eye contact is made, and a nod is given.

In giving a nod, a mutually taken-for-granted is exchanged. Here the Norwegian gave a signal that required no further explanation and was interpreted and understood by the Iranian as an acknowledgment. However, in continuing to speak the Norwegian signals a reluctance to cede the floor, displaying his desire to continue speaking uninterrupted. This led the Iranian to enact the cultural-institutional rule or social norm of raising their hand and waiting for permission to speak, displaying how social rules and cultural norms are locally used and understood as a means for producing social order. While this social rule and norm display a structure for social interactions, the interlocutors must interpret and actualize its social conventions. In this interaction instead of waiting for consent to speak, the Iranian claims his turn, stating: "I have a question; you said lucky pig." In raising his hand, yet not waiting for his turn but rather immediately speaking, the Iranian demonstrates how the meanings of social institutions are used and negotiated, thereby modifying the meanings of this institution through its practice. This demonstrates *what* is being accomplished through their social interactions. That is the social accomplishment of enacting and negotiating meanings. However, in further interpreting this statement there are several ways of understanding this speech act.

On one hand, the Iranian could be asking a clarifying question that interprets his statement as "What do you mean by Lucky Pig?" From this perspective, the discursive practice of the Iranian seeks to confirm or clarify the understanding of the phrase "Lucky pig." In this

case, the Iranian is interpreting that there is unclearness or ambiguity in the group on the term since the participants may have different understandings or interpretations of certain words or phrases. That is, there may be various conceptual maps, and socio-cognitive structures of typification schemes, since "where they are from" are from various locations. When both the Iranian and Norwegian give the non-verbal cue of "hmh," the Norwegian is signally a recognition and approval to proceed with the topic. In stating: "In Iran, we have the same thing, but we say Lucky Donkey, not Lucky Pig," the Iranian is seeking confirmation of his interpretation and may indicate that he is trying to establish common ground in drawing a comparison between Iran and Norway. Here, "where you are from" signifies your culture, or conceptual maps as ways of interpreting and thinking. Bringing this up after his clarification act suggests he is interested in exploring the similarities and differences between these two groups and their cultures. This is established when he turns to the rest of the group and asks, "Does anyone have any examples from your country of Lucky Pig?" In this sense, the Iranian's question is one of inquiry and intrigue.

On the other hand, his statement "I have a question; you said lucky pig" can be interpreted as a challenge. Although he states to have a question, he does not ask one. Instead, he refers to something the Norwegian said, Lucky Pig. By providing this brief reference, the Iranian prefaces his intended speech act of enacting the social institutions of disagreement and disapproval (Rapley, 2018). He does this not by asking a question but rather in questioning what the Norwegian said. This displays a preface sequence in which the Iranian refers to or introduces his intended talk and actions, signaling that he is about to change topics and shift the conversational focus to the term Lucky Pig (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990). The Iranian's actions thus function as a divergent mechanism, a type of questioning that encourages participants to generate multiple perspectives, ideas, options, or divergent thinking on the symbolic representations of luck. In this manner, the Iranian is contesting the collective appropriateness of the meaning, Lucky Pig.

In using a form of abductive reasoning, it is highly probable that this interpretation is appropriate. In presuming so it is crucial to step outside the conversation and again examine the *whats.* First, let us consider the institutional framework (*whats*) that guides social relations in conjunction with the discursive practice (*hows*) of face-threatening acts. The social institution of disagreements and disapprovals is actualized in the notion of face-threatening acts, where face

refers to the positive social value that individuals claim for themselves in interaction while face-threatening actions threaten the positive claims of the speaker. When considering the relations, roles, and norms of the institutional structure of the Café, the statement: "I have a question; you said Lucky Pig" is a form of mitigating face-threatening acts when advocating disapproval or contesting social institutions and practices. In expressing his disapproval of the term, the Iranian performs several mitigation strategies (Rapley, 2018).

First, the Iranian uses another preface to introduce his point and hedge his disapproval. This begins with an identity-prefacing sequence in which he provides personal information, using the descriptive label of Iran to categorize himself as part of a group, seen in the statement "For example in Iran, 'we'… say Lucky Donkey." In doing so the Iranian is not merely providing valuable, relevant information, he is constructing a social context from which he draws from for the upcoming interactions. In this way, the Iranian is establishing an understanding of his actions which is grounded in his culture, or "where he is from." This helps others understand and interpret "where he is coming from" when he contests the symbolic representation of Lucky Pig. Accordingly, his statement "in Iran 'we' say," is an indicator that he is drawing from the conceptual maps of his self-identified group, Iran. Here culture has a strong influence over his interpretation and decision-making space which is formed by his experiences and collective knowledge of the way things are done in his country. In this case, culture is a tool or resource (*what* is being used) from which he draws to contest and negotiate symbolic understandings, which in turn is employed in the process of negotiating meanings. This demonstrates culture as a social process where the *hows* and *whats* are dialectically informing and shaping each other through the inter-actions of the interlocutors.

Furthermore, in stating and using where he is from, the Iranian builds common ground with the other interlocutors, acknowledging potential differences in perspectives and knowledge sets since the interlocutors have self-identified themselves in distinct categories of understandings or "where they are from." Similarly, these prefacing performances produce a display sequence that involves him providing a justification and rationalization for his proceeding speech acts (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990). In this manner, he is qualifying and accounting for his act of disapproval since the way "we" do things is different from the way things are done here. Here he uses "we" to mark symbolic boundaries of differences. In this way "Iran" and "we" mark a group, depicting a way of understanding that is different from what we

are not. Overall, these preface sequences are important aspects of conversational interaction, as they help to establish the interlocutors' goals and provide a context for the upcoming interaction.

Second, following the prefacing sequence the Iranian displays his disagreement and disapproval by offering a counterexample, which indirectly challenges the Norwegian's use of the phrase "Lucky Pig." In employing the hedging language of "in Iran, we have the same thing, but...", the Iranian softens the force of his disagreement and continues to mitigate the face-threatening social institutions (Fraser, 2010). Such hedging actions also express an "agreement with reservations" on the meaning of the collective symbolic representation of Lucky Pig. In stating "but" the Iranian expresses the limitations to their agreement, recognizing the symbolic meaning but not agreeing with the social representation of a pig. Similarly, when the Norwegian responds with an "mhm" this can be interpreted as a non-committal cue, in which he does not fully endorse the upcoming, prefaced actions, but rather recognized the statement. By using this minimal response, the Norwegian avoids taking a strong stance, allowing the conversation to continue without escalating or stopping the disagreement or disapproval acts, the questioning of the term Luck Pig. Moreover, the counterexample of the Iranian demonstrates that he understands the phrase, by articulating its symbolic representation in the phrase Lucky Donkey, which detracts from the interpretation that the statement “I have a question; you said Lucky Pig” is a clarifying question.

Third, the delay and hesitation in the Iranian’s speech (“hesitantly asking nervously” and “in a relieved manner looking at the others then quickly looking down”) suggest that he is uneasy or unsure about how to express his disagreement. This hesitation can be seen as a form of mitigation, attempting to alleviate the force of his disagreement by expressing it hesitantly and uncertainly (Rapley, 2018). Similarly, this is displayed when the Iranian turns to the rest of the group and asks for their input, rather than confronting the Norwegian directly. Examining the non-linguistic cues around asking, “Does anyone have any examples from your country of Lucky Pig”, indicates the Iranian was attempting to deflect and shift the conversation away from himself. By asking the rest of the group for examples of Lucky Pigs from their countries, this question acts as an account-giving strategy. Here he is attempting to justify his disagreement and show that his perspective is not unique or unusual, since there were people in the group from similar regions sharing similar cultures or conceptual maps.

Contrary to the divergent act, this type of question can be interpreted as a convergent mechanism because it aims to bring the participants' responses together, towards the discourse of symbolic meanings and understandings. In posing a question the Iranian seeks to engage and solicit participation from the rest of the group, showing how his preface sequences and mitigation strategies were used to accomplish certain goals. These actions suggest that the Iranian is aware of the potentially face-threatening nature of his disagreement. While his mitigation strategies appeared successful, his speech act of posing a question/answer adjacency pair did not achieve its intended outcome, instead, his question was met with silence.

Such silences can be interpreted as a breakdown in the conversation. This breakdown suggests the Iranian's question was unexpected and/or difficult to answer. The Norwegian's response is telling of his interpreting the silence as such when he attempts to clarify any ambiguities and/or misunderstandings by expounding on the Iranian's question. This is exemplified in his statement: "Do you *mean* using animals?", which suggests the Norwegian interpreted the silence as a breakdown or gap in the conversation and attempts to repair it by giving a clarification question (Bernard and Ryan, 2010 p.225-7). The Norwegian interprets the silence correctly when the Brazilian looks at him saying, "I don't understand what you *mean* when you say Lucky Pig." This statement expresses confusion, signifying that the Brazilian could not make sense of the symbolic representation or the contextual setting of the interactions regarding the discourse at hand. This may be since in his culture, or the conceptual maps of "where he is from," there is no use of animals as collective representations for luck. Accordingly, having no collective knowledge to draw from or taken-for-granted social representations to compare (*what* resources), prevents him from meaningfully interacting with the other interlocutors. In this sense, he cannot draw from culture to interpret and make sense of his present situation.

In attempting to clarify and restore the Brazilian's participation in the discourse, the Norwegian enacts a form of style-switching (Atkison, et al., 2000 p. 289), stating: "It means you have a lot of luck; you are lucky." In interpreting a need to accommodate the Brazilian's self-described B1 language level, the Norwegian adjusts his language registers to match the Brazilian's level of understanding. He thus deciphers the symbolic connotations of the term Lucky Pig for the Brazilian. In doing so the Norwegian uses the simplest way to communicate the localized meaning of this collective representation, explaining the sign by giving the local

understanding (signified) of a collectively recognized symbol (signifier). This is signified when he states, “It means” and before expounding on his response, the Norwegian pauses for a couple of seconds, exercising a form of turn-taking management by allowing himself time to formulate his proceedings actions. This can also be seen as a form of hesitation, suggesting that he is interpreting the given social setting and attempting to address the question appropriately to mitigate any further potential disagreement or disapproval.

Continuing the Norwegian states: “It is very strange because pigs or pork have gotten a lot of meanings. When you say ‘piggy’ (grisette) it means you are messy and fat even though pigs are clean animals. Umm you drive pig-fast, you drive like a pig- (kjøre som et svin) that means you drive ugly, too fast. The pig gets blamed for a lot of strangeness, but we also say Lucky Pig. Where that comes from, I don’t know.” Having already answered the meaning of Lucky Pig, the Norwegian provides an unprompted account of other symbolic representations of pigs. This may indicate that he interprets a need to account for his social actions and the cultural practices of his self-identified group, Norwegians.

His statements display an explanation or justification for the challenges presented by both the Iranian’s contestation and the Brazilian’s question. By acknowledging that the use of pigs in the Norwegian language is strange or unusual, the Norwegian is potentially signaling that he understands the Brazilian's confusion and is attempting to empathize with his perspective. This prompts the Norwegian to give an account of justifying and defending the use of "Lucky Pig" in his language and culture. By providing a rationale for why the phrase might be used, the Norwegian uses his own mitigation strategies and implicitly addresses the Iranian. In this way, the Norwegian is drawing from culture to construct more culture, using meanings to negotiate and maintain meanings. The assumption that he addresses the Iranian in his response is better understood through interdiscursivity and helps understand both the contestation of the Iranian and the account of the Norwegian.

Interdiscursivity refers to the interplay of multiple discourses within a single interaction, where discourses are the frameworks or resources (the *whats*) that shape social relations (Wodak, 2015). In the Norwegian’s statement, we see a discourse at play, the symbolic use of pigs, which connects to the wider context, or discourse, of religious beliefs in Iran. In his preface sequence the Iranian self-identifies himself with a people in a particular geographical location represented by the social construct of a Nation-State. Iran is an Islamic republic in which its legal and social

systems are based on Sharia law. Having interacted with this Iranian several times in my ethnographic fieldwork using informal interviews, I am familiar that he engages in a range of practices, beliefs, and rituals associated with Islam. During my observation, I became familiar with many Muslims and was able to interact with, as well as observe, discourses on pigs and pork. These experiences confirm the common knowledge that pigs are considered impure animals and are forbidden to be eaten or touched by Muslims. This prohibition is rooted in Islamic discourses on cleanliness and hygiene, in which pigs are considered dirty animals.

The discourse on pigs in Islam suggests that pigs are associated with negative connotations such as spiritual impurity, and negative moral qualities, such as greed, gluttony, and selfishness. Moreover, such connotations are grounded in the belief that pigs are voracious eaters that will consume anything, including their feces and other animals' carcasses. As such, pigs are classified as "Najis," which refers to things that are considered ritually impure or unclean in Islam due to their nature to potentially carry harmful bacteria, diseases, and parasites. Consequently, pigs are considered symbolically impure. Furthermore, pigs are often contrasted with other animals that are considered pure and noble in Islam. It is worth noting that donkeys have a special status in Islamic tradition as they are believed to have been used by several prophets and are often used as a symbol of humility and service in Islamic teachings (Sindawi, 2006; Mitchell, 2018).

When considering this context, it is highly plausible that the Iranian is contesting the collective representation of a pig as a symbol of luck. Therefore, rather than seeing the phrase Lucky Pig as a compliment, as did the Ukrainian, the Iranian takes it as the opposite, seeing it as offensive. This, however, does not imply that he does not understand the meaning of the phrase but instead only disapproves of what it signifies. While such views of pigs are held in Iran, they are also shared in Norway. This is evident when the Norwegian gives numerous examples where pigs are commonly associated with the negative connotations of being messy, unclean, strange, and ugly. However, in drawing from his stocks of knowledge and typifications, the Norwegian interprets the Iranian's contention and directly addresses the issue, claiming “pigs or pork” as “clean.” In this manner, he is indirectly addressing the Iranian’s issue of using Lucky Donkey instead of Lucky Pig, giving an account and justifying how it is used in Norway or his culture.

After giving various contextual uses of the symbolic representations of pig there were a few seconds of silence followed by the Brazilian asking me: “Don’t you guys in America say

luck cow?" Thus, the gap in the conversation or silence was repaired by the Brazilian claiming a turn, the act of asking a question. This demonstrates that after the repair initiations of the Norwegian, the Brazilian now similarly interprets the symbolic meaning of Lucky Pig, enabling him to meaningfully interact with the other interlocutors in constructing this discourse. This demonstrates how the discursive practices of the interlocutors construct a framework from which the present conversation now makes sense and allows for social interactions. In this sense, a form of culture is being constructed by the interlocutors with the establishment, exchanging, negotiating, and dissemination of meanings that creates a context (the whats) for understanding and making-sense of their social interactions. Moreover, this demonstrates how culture is being constructed when the Brazilian can now incorporate the taken-for-granted meaning of Lucky Pig into his stocks of knowledge, which in turn can be used in future situations to bring a sense of familiarity when the term is employed. Likewise, this demonstrates how culture is both a product and process when culture is made real through the actualizing of our conceptual maps in the interpretive, meaning-making practices of the interlocutors.

In response to the Brazilian's question to me, I state: "I don't know, maybe Lucky Duck." Here, it is significant to note that although I was not actively engaging in the conversation, I became an active interlocutor when asked a question. I have previously stated that I consider all observations participatory when through proximity researchers become part of the social setting and context. At the beginning of this Language Café session, I informed all the participants in this group that I was conducting research for my thesis and observing their conversations and interactions. In directly asking me a question, it demonstrates how through proximity researchers are participating and influencing the social interactions and interpretations of the participants no matter how neutral they claim to be. What is noteworthy is how I am active in constructing both the context and content (*whats* and *hows*) of their observations and research. Here the Brazilian recognizes my presence and invites me to interact as an interlocutor. In doing so his speech act is achieving certain results whether intended or not. Accordingly, this demonstrates that not all actions have or are produced by personal motivations, intentions, or desires. This was evident throughout this conversation when the interlocutors are interpreting and responding to each other, which, is further exemplified in the next sequence.

After I responded, an Egyptian asked the Iranian what he said, he repeated the phrase "Lucky Donkey." In quick succession, the Norwegian says: "It could be that farmers had a lot of

pigs but now there are few because there are big pig factories. Pigs are used both as bad and good. It's used in common sayings here but maybe I will start using Lucky Donkey." This demonstrates that while the conversation continued the Norwegian was still interpreting his response. His use of the term "it could be" in this sequence shows that he presents a hypothetical possibility rather than declaring a fact. This implies that he is uncertain about the source of the expression "Lucky Pig" and is speculating about one explanation, demonstrating that there is a multiplicity of understandings. By using the phrase "it could be," he is not committing to a definitive answer and is open to other interpretations or ideas. Similarly, this expression also suggests that he is aware of the limits of his knowledge and is not claiming to be an expert on the topic. Nevertheless, his statement "it could be " exhibits his sensible, practical everyday methods for explaining and understanding the collective meaning of Lucky Pig and shows how, for him, it is a taken-for-granted, common saying. In doing so, he demonstrates how he uses his typification schemas of old Norwegian ways of life which likewise draws on collective memories that are situated in a historical place and time. Accordingly, spatial and temporal elements are significant in the construction of culture. This is evident when the Norwegian accounts for the use of the term pig by stating that it is a common saying 'here,' and using temporal elements in comparing the past with how things are done 'now.' Similarly, the Iranian states ‘in Iran’ using this geographical reference to depict a specific spatial location and sets the people who inhabit it in the temporal period when the conversation took place.

In concluding this conversation, the Norwegian demonstrates his openness and willingness to change which was brought about through interacting with the interlocutors on the exchanging of meanings. The use of the term "but maybe" in this sequence suggests that the Norwegian is open to the possibility of change, displaying modesty and acknowledging the potential for different interpretations, understandings, and the fluidity of meanings. Furthermore, this can be interpreted as a mechanism for dealing with disagreement and disapproval of terms, and his mitigation strategy to save face while avoiding strong confrontations. Lastly, his speech is an act of expressing his beliefs, opinion, and suggestions is received with laughter and smiles, signifying a shared understanding of what is meant, and that the other participants are positively interpreting his speech act.

5.5 Culture as a Process of Interpretive, Meaning-Making Practices

The above conversation demonstrates the constructionist approach to culture by showing how culture is constructed through social interaction and discourse along with the use of social structures such as the conversational mechanisms employed. Thus, the constructionist analytics of interpretive practice highlights that culture is not something that exists in isolation but rather is co-constituted by agents and structures. Likewise, this demonstrates that culture is not just a tool for conveying information, but also a means for social interaction. Here, culture can be seen as a category of experiences which in turn is used to categorize experiences. In this manner, culture is constructed through new contexts of relationality for relationality in which it is a product-in-process.

When seen in this light culture is the ability to construct reciprocal, representational relations, and form meanings through interactions. Culture as such can be held as sets of dispositions, arrangements of knowledge or tendencies entailed in social practices which are attained and constructed by members in the process of living and interacting with each other. Culture allows for the intersubjective formation of meaningful action and permits members to make significant their experiences. In this sense, culture provides the means for members to interact and constructs collective representations, social conventions, cultural institutions, and so on. This however does not mean that culture is responsible for the results of such social processes. Culture is not solely responsible for the emergence of social categories or the binding of social worlds. Culture merely provides the possibility for the construction of social categories and brings or makes significant members shared social worlds. This implies that culture is the site from where meanings are produced, not that culture itself produces those meanings.

Although meanings are produced in a social context, they are never fully determined by that context. Consequently, meanings are never securely fixed nor are they universal, holding one objective truth. While some meanings may endure prolonged periods of stability, other meanings may be extremely volatile. What makes meanings dynamic are the social meaning-making processes in which meanings migrate from context to context and therefore are never exact duplicates. In this sense, meanings are contextual, relational, and relative, and are dependent on their interpretation and use. This makes observing the social meaning-making practices of members significant.

Although the above portrays culture as a site of fragmentation, plurality, and ambiguity where meanings are highly fluid, contingent, and hold a multiplicity of understandings; culture is also depicted as holding some stability and continuity with a structural form in organizing our knowledge, practices, and relationships. While this is evident in the conversational structure or the form of culture, it is better understood when examining the various discourses-in-practices that the State employs in their official government reports or White Papers. Thus, in taking a constructionist ethnography which expands the analytical purview, I concisely demonstrate how culture is understood as a theoretical and biologically closed category, an exogenous entity acting upon social agents. Doing so also makes clear how culture is perceived and used by the participants when "where you are from" acts as code for ethnic-national culture.

5.6 Culture as a natural outcome

In a Norwegian White paper entitled: *The Power of Culture* (2019), culture is conveyed as an entity possessing omnipotent power. Culture is said to enlighten, educate, and school people by providing peace and reflection, creating values and society, fostering trust and respect, uniting people, controlling social interactions, dictating behaviors, and constructing social groups (pp. 7,8,13). Consequently, "When culture works this way, it can civilize people and prevent fragmentation" (p.14). Culture as such is a social force, an entity that socially engineers people in an evolutionary and unilinear ladder-like progression. When culture is tantamount to civilization, it becomes an all-encompassing complex whole entailing the totality of a bounded community. Functioning as a social force for the well-functioning of society, the authors of the White Paper claim Norwegian culture must be "safeguarded," "protected," "secured" and "preserved" (pp. 8,17,37). Thus, culture is a "thing" people possess and are members of, comprising an "inheritance" of "tangible structures and intangible traditions, values and practices" (p.13).

This conceptualization of culture posits it as a heritage passed down, unfettered from social interactions, which in turn collectively marks a group. As a social marker, culture forms the identity of not only individuals but of complex wholes. As such, the social categories of groups, such as Norwegians, Iranians, Americans, etc., are based on the assumption that these "communities" share the same "culture." Similarly, 'where I am from' such as Norway, Pakistan, Brazil, and so forth, functions as a conceptual bridge, connecting culture with the ethnos of a

nation-state, or the ethnic groups of a geographical location. In this sense, both ethnicity and nation-state concepts not only become the basis for culture but are conceptual substitutions for the term culture (Gilroy,1992, p.53). From this perspective, the concept of culture refers to the distinctive features of a group's "way of life," so that "where you are from" encapsulates all the socially inherited characteristics of that community, including its shared values, behaviors, beliefs, and artifacts. This naturalistic view of culture reifies it as an entity that merges the world of cultural institutions with a natural order of physical traits (Berger and Luckman, 1967 p.108).

According to Berger and Luckman (1967), reification is the process that strips away collective agency from social constructs, establishing them as independent, despite being the product of human achievements (p.88). Once formed and shared, these constructs become stable entities. Although culture is a social construct, it is apprehended as an external force of nature when people give this entity the ontological status of an agent that is something other than a human product. Thus, “the reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world” (ibid). Consequently, there is little humanity in human reality. In this manner, ethnic categories are authenticated as referring to “actual, real” ethnic communities, and these communities are described with reference to a homogenous and genuine culture they are assumed to biologically share. As if by a stroke of validation, ethnic categories are elevated to signify genuine ethnic groups, each delineated by an assumed cohesive and distinct culture they, by default, purportedly embody (Baumann, 2015). This gives “ethnic, national culture” the appearance of a universal natural law, the necessary consequences of biological and organic forces. Culture as an analytical abstract label for conceptualizing the meaning-making processes of people, is thereby replaced by a reified entity that has a definitive essence and assumes the ontological status of a thing that people possess, are members of, or belong to. Such a view of culture is not only demonstrated in the White Paper but also by how the participants use the phrase “where they are from.”

In biologically reducing culture to ethnic groups, it designates the social category of Norwegians, Americans, Somalis, etc., as an objective truth or biological fact. Norwegians, like all others, are thus not seen as a socially constructed reality but rather a natural biological outcome, something that is inherited and naturally occurring (Berger and Luckman, 1967). This naturalizing process gives culture an exogenous, organic form, reifying a social construct into a self-contained, self-generating, homogenous entity with deterministic causal force. When ethnos are attached to culture, and people are seen as cultural beings that are biologically made, culture

is associated with the same natural cleavages as the natural ones of ethnicity (Baumann, 1999). This suggests that cultural differences are grounded in natural biological ones, as if being a Norwegian, Mexican, Pakistani, and so forth, are naturally given at birth. Culture thus takes the form of structural wholes like patterns of behavior and beliefs. As such, cultures form distinct binary groups where people are set into either, or, social categories defining 'us' (whatever us is) and 'them' (whatever 'we' are not). Such a view serves the purpose of biologically reducing culture and forming the discursive closure of this social category. People are marked by and categorized into ethnic groups, forming natural cultural communities.

The discourses-in-practice and discursive practices of socially constructing people by their ethnic group or forming a culture comes full circle to complete a closed-off social category based on biological essences. As Baumann (2015) points out, this allows for the oversimplified equation where culture=community=ethnic identity=nature=culture (p.214). Thus "where I am from" forms a community based on that region's reified ethnic culture which in turn gives the appearance that their culture is reified since they are part of the same community. In categorizing and naming cultures as biological categories, the social label of culture appears to function as code for race, ethnicity, and national identity (ibid; Gilroy, 1992, p. 53).

Ironically, the reified view of culture is also evident when people are caught between two cultures as if people are cultureless and in between two fixed objects. So, while being naturally endowed with culture, as something inherited rather than constructed, people can lose or be lost, attempting to find a culture. This was evident throughout my observations, when people born and raised in Norway, would consider themselves as non-Norwegian when in Norway, while identifying themselves as Norwegian when outside of Norway. What this demonstrates is that people interpreted their social context of belonging in either or categories rather than with blended, hyphenated labels such as Mexican-American, Somali-Norwegian, Pakistani-British. Overall, such totalizing notions of culture as a complex whole entailing a group's essence is highly problematic. Such notions of culture suggest essentialism, uniformity, coherence, stability, and timelessness. As Appadurai (1996) contends, culture as such is a noun that privileges conformity and sameness rather than contention and diversity. This conceptualization makes culture to be a 'thing' in itself, either physical or metaphysical.

The conventional view of culture thus tends to emphasize shared patterns over internal diversity, contentions, and complexity. As such culture is perceived as static, where there are

authentic aspects that characterize a whole group's shared way of life. In this sense, culture is traditional, enduring, a heritage, all of which are seen as mere reflections of a structural process of ordering rather than being contingent and disruptive (Clifford 1988). This leads Friedman (1994) to argue that "the most-dangerously misleading quality of the notion of culture is it literally flattens out the extremely varied ways in which the production of meaning occurs in the contested field of social existence" (p.207). In such a conceptualization, culture is utilized as a tool where diversity is transformed into essence so that culture produces an essentialization of our social worlds. Thus, despite its non-essentialists intent, the culture abstraction tends to 'freeze' difference into a structure of inherited properties without examining the social processes that (re)produce it (Abu-Lughod 1996; Friedman, 1994).

Moreover, when culture is conceived of in objectifying notions, there is no need for an active subject. Instead, people are mere carriers of culture in which individuals simply are the expressions of their cultures. Here culture is seen as fixed social structures, patterns, stencils, or filters (Wicker, 2015; Baumann, 2015). Within such a view of culture, change comes about as a slow development from external forces, so culture is a living organism body that lives and dies (Clifford 1988). Considering these issues calls for vigorous frameworks for conceptualizing, analyzing, and studying culture in pluralistic societies.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how a constructionist ethnographic analysis can be exemplified in the study of a diverse cultural setting. In doing so we see that culture is the actualization of people's conceptual maps in the form of symbols, images, and meanings, which is the rationalized accomplishment of social interactions. This involved exploring the everyday practices of members within the shared and constructed social space of the Language Café, analyzing how interlocutors employ culture as a resource to produce or make sense of their social setting, and negotiate meanings within that social context. This demonstrates that culture is a social process of interpretive, meaning-making practices. Concurrently, through a wider constructionist ethnography, we see how the documentary reality of the White Paper reifies culture as the natural force of biological outcomes where culture is equated to ethnic-nationality. Such perceptions of culture are also held by many of the participants in referring to culture as

"where I am from" which acts as a conceptual bridge linking ethnos with socio-cultural institutions. In this sense, the concept of culture refers to the distinctive features of a group's "way of life," where people are set into either, or social categories defining 'us' (whatever us is) and 'them' (whatever 'we' are not).

In taking the above together we can infer that culture is a socially constructed entity. While the concept entity connotes the existence of a thing as itself, independent and distinct, constructionist hold *social* entities to be the products of actors and relative to the contexts from which these constructs arise. As such constructionists contend social entities are not exogenous 'givens' formed in a vacuum, free from internal influence. Nor can they exist outside of the people who inhabit them, to possess an external reality from the minds of those considering them (Bryman, 2012). Rather, social entities are matters of conventions. They are constructs of intersubjective meanings, the collective agreements on representations, concepts, and definitions, irreducible to the individuals who constitute and practice them (Lincoln and Guba, 2016). As socio-cognitive realizations, social entities are relativistic, existing in intangible forms and contingent on those granting them ontological status (ibid.; Sealey, 2019). Accordingly, the data provides an understanding of culture as such.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Culture is a notoriously problematic concept to define. The everyday use of the term has an enormously wide use and understanding, which mirrors the lack of social scientific agreement on the concept. Despite this lack of consensus, by most current accounts, culture reflects its earliest understanding as an all-encompassing complex whole of various social components, entailing all the socially acquired skills and characteristics of a society. While varying widely, culture from this perspective is held as an exogenous social organism, a reified, essentialized, and homogenous entity; dictating the thoughts and behaviors of people (Bauman, 1999; Modood, 2010; Parekh, 2000; Phillips, 2007; Wicker, 2015). Consequently, culture is held as a self-sustaining, self-generating, social force, acting as an agent in determining the social outcomes of human societies. When conceptualized in such a manner, culture depicts the totality of a group bounded in space and time. As such, culture is a closed social category, frozen in history, and passed down from generation-to-generation, functioning as a civilizing project in which it needs to be preserved, protected, and safeguarded for its survival and the well-functioning of society. In this sense, culture is a stencil, a copy machine, turning out identical patterns of people and is a prerequisite for a civilized group of people. While such a concept of culture may have been useful in examining and depicting strongly integrated "communities," it is not adequate for understanding people in pluralistic societies. This makes the concept of culture highly problematic.

Moreover, when problematizing the concept of culture, its methodological and analytical implications likewise become problematic. This is evident when culture is often studied as an objective reality and truth, attempting to examine what goes on in and around culture, rather than exploring how culture comes about and analyzing the concept itself. In taking the above together there appears to be a need to reconceptualize a framework for understanding and examining culture. In responding to this need, I have set out in this thesis to propose **an** approach, one among many. That is, I propose an ontological and epistemological scaffolding on ways to analytically conceptualize what culture is and how it comes about. In this sense, the overall objective of my thesis is pre-theoretical, concerned with *how* culture may exist and *what* the possibility of knowing those outcomes are, instead of explaining the whys of culture. Central to this part of my social inquiry are the following questions:

In a post-immigration world of competing interpretations, how can culture be theoretically conceptualized? What analytical models and methodological approaches can be implemented to study culture in the practical lives of people?

In achieving my objective and answering the first question, I have in Chapter Two depicted various discourses on culture. I contend for an analytical conceptualization of culture as a dynamic, dialectic, and ongoing social process entailing the interpretive and construction practices that give rise and actualizes the sense-making, meaning-making mental structures of people (Bauman, 1999; Baumann, 2015; Hall, 1997; Wicker, 2017). As such culture is only made real in its performance, making it a constantly evolving construct formed by the social interactions of people within a specified social context but not confined to that location. This approach recognizes the multiplicity of meanings and the complex interplay of social structures and human agency that underline culture's (re)construction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013; Giddens, 1984). Tacit in this understanding is culture as a co-constituted, product-in-process.

In answering the second question I begin in Chapter Three to detail an analytical framework, a constructionist analytics of interpretive practices which focuses on the *hows* and *whats* of interpreting and understanding culture. Here I present a case for EM tendencies and Foucauldian inspirations which accentuates the interplay between culture as processual with culture as structural. My focus on the *hows* concentrates on the social actions and positions of people, pertaining in part to the discursive practices of interlocutors. Equally, the *whats* concerned the meaningful resources, circumstances, and contexts that frame and guide social interactions and the possibility and significance of those outcomes which is encapsulated by the notion of discourses-in-practice. Thus, if social interactions are achieved through discursive practices, they are only made meaningful and substantial through discourses-in-practice. In capturing the interplay between the two, analytical bracketing is a useful technique. Here researchers can focus on one aspect without neglecting the other in attempting to account for and momentarily set aside preconceived theoretical assumptions involved in the analytical process. Lastly, I suggest a flexible approach that employs various analytics such as CA, DA, and semiotics to interpret meanings. By this I do not mean getting inside the heads of people, rather, I refer to the intersubjectivities of people conveyed through social actions, which display their mutual understandings, conventions, and interpretations of the world.

In answering the second half of question two I contend for a qualitative strategy and ethnographic design in which constructionism is used as an analytical model or mode for doing research. I depict such an approach as a set of informative, concrete practices that render social phenomena visible in distinctive analytical ways, turning social representations into coherent data. As a set of research practices, I contend for the use of participant observations, documents, and unstructured/informal interviews along with the utilization of sensitizing concepts and inductive reasoning in the social construction of knowledge. As such I propose a flexible yet structural methodological approach, using foreshadowing and funneling techniques to hone the analytical purview of researchers. Although my thesis can be conceived of as mainly a theoretical construct, I do not divorce it from practice. Instead, I attempt to include the empirical by carrying out and doing a qualitative, constructionist ethnography, analyzing culture as a process of interpretive, meaning-making practices. Central to this part of my social inquiry and objective is the question:

> How can a constructionist ethnographic analysis be exemplified in the study of a diverse cultural setting?

In attempting to obtain this goal, I begin in Chapter Four to depict my methodological strategy, design, and analytical model. Here I detail how I go about selecting, generating, and recording data, along with the methodological issues and ethical concerns I encountered along the way. I continue to answer this research question by analyzing and presenting my data results in Chapter Five. In this chapter I exemplify the *hows* and *whats* in action, re-presenting an instant that depicts how culture is socially constructed, contested, negotiated, maintained, and distributed in the diverse cultural setting of a Language Café. This case revolves around the discursive practices and discourses-in-practice surrounding the social representation of the metaphor Lucky Pig. The data demonstrates that although culture is a social process of interpretive, meaning-making practices it is experienced and conveyed by participants as something real, existing apart from their interpretations of it. In this sense, culture is a socially constructed social entity, an arrangement of social conventions, agreements, understandings, and meanings seen in the conceptual maps of typification schemes, collective memories, social representations, common-sense knowledge, and taken-for-granted actions. As a social entity, culture does not exist apart from those who grant it its ontological status as something real. This

suggests that through the interactions of interlocutors in which their inter-subjectivities are on display, the contour and substance of culture are manifested.

Thus, having obtained the objectives of this thesis, it is noteworthy to articulate some of the implications of my study, particularly concerning any practical and academic contributions it can make. Similarly, it is significant to specify the limitations and challenges encountered along the way. Such information is critical for suggesting further research which is critical for refining the conceptualization and frameworks of culture as a process of interpretive, meaning-making practices.

6.1Contributions, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Having achieved my thesis's objectives contributes to academically building more robust analytical conceptualizations, frameworks, and methodologies in the study of culture as a process for understanding complex, plural societies. My interdisciplinary approach draws from numerous research traditions, schools of thought, and social scientific fields, giving a profound yet practical way of comprehending and studying culture. As such my thesis contributes to narrowing the gap between theory and practice, and the lack of ways to practically carry out research in MC studies on the ongoing dialogue about the nature of culture and how it is constructed as a social process. Ultimately, my thesis provides a challenge to more traditional, conventional understandings and offers insights that can be applied to a wide range of fields, including anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. However, given the many nuances of culture as a complex process that is dialectically co-constituted, there are strong limitations to my thesis.

First, is the scope of my thesis. Being limited by space and time, I was not able to thoroughly investigate and expound on all the desired theoretical perspectives in depth. Nor was my theoretical perspective broad so as to incorporate more understandings of culture from a Neo-Marxist, Feminist, Critical Theory, or Postcolonial perspective. These are but a few other paradigms that could strengthen the vigor of my analytical conceptualization and framework. Second and closely related, is the issue of design. In my methodology chapter I spoke of theoretical generalizations as a marker of quality in research in which abductive reasoning is used to set the analytical findings into wider social structures or broader discourses and social theories. Given my limited space, I was not able to do so in this thesis. Nor was I able to draw

more widely from my fieldwork. While only focusing on one specific instant in my analysis may be considered by some as a strong limitation, I attempted to turn this into an advantage, giving rich descriptions of the nuances in this specific case. Third was the difficulty of tackling such a task at a master's degree level with little understanding of how to go about building conceptualizations and frameworks or conducting ethnography. This made for an arduous journey filled with many long days buried in books and conducting research. I was reminded many times of how ambitious and lofty such goals were. However, rather than giving into despair or seeing this as a weakness, I was able to press through and turn this into a strength, learning and growing a lot in the process. In the end, I am a better student for it although it came with the cost of many gray hairs. Nonetheless, in further refining the objectives of this research and making greater contributions by seeing them come to greater fruition, it is paramount to suggest and carry out further research.

My suggestion for further research is twofold. First, on the level of abstraction, I recommend considering other perspectives such as those mentioned above. This would help fill in the gaps from a critical perspective, focusing on issues of power in both the relationships and the hierarchies of social structures that influence and are influenced by culture. In broadening the depth of a constructionist position on culture I would delve deeper into Giddens's (1984) structuration theory and the social ontology of knowledge. Second, on a practical level, I propose conducting a more polished constructionist ethnography, focusing on social actions in accomplishing certain goals such as the process of naturalizing, hybridity, identification, reification, globalization, and so forth, on culture. By this, I mean focusing on one of these areas at a time and in-depth, not concerned with the theoretical but more with the empirical. In further carrying out these suggestions' new possibilities, insights, critiques, and developments should aid in a deeper understanding of culture.

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