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Culture in Intellectual Discourse: An Analytical Reading of the Conceptions of Thinkers and Theorists				
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Abstract Culture is considered one of the central concepts in the study of the human being and society; however, it remains among the most problematic concepts due to the multiplicity of its dimensions and the diversity of its theoretical approaches. Thinkers and theorists have addressed the concept of culture from different intellectual frameworks, resulting in multiple definitions and divergent views regarding its functions. This study aims to analyze the most prominent theoretical conceptions of culture and to uncover the points of convergence and divergence among them. It proceeds from the hypothesis that these conceptions, despite their differences, converge in viewing culture as a complex system of values, meanings, and practices that contribute to shaping human consciousness and social behavior, while differing in how its nature and function are defined.				
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Introduction:

Culture is one of the fundamental concepts associated with the study of the human being and society, playing a pivotal role in shaping values, behavioral patterns, and the construction of collective identity. It is among the most problematic concepts in human thought, as it is difficult to subject it to a single, comprehensive definition due to the multiplicity of its dimensions and the intertwinement of its cognitive, symbolic, and social components. For this reason, the concept of culture has received considerable attention in intellectual discourse among thinkers and theorists, leading to a wide range of definitions and approaches that vary according to historical contexts and philosophical and sociological frameworks. While some have viewed culture as a social system of values and norms, others have approached it from a critical

perspective linking it to power and ideology. This has produced a diverse intellectual corpus that reflects the complexity of the cultural phenomenon.

In light of this theoretical diversity, the main problem of this study emerges in the following question: How have thinkers and theorists addressed the concept of culture? And what are the points of divergence and convergence among their conceptions, given their diverse intellectual frameworks?

Research Hypothesis: Despite the differences in the intellectual and philosophical frameworks from which thinkers and theorists have approached the concept of culture—anthropological, sociological, philosophical, Marxist, structuralist, and others—their conceptions converge in viewing culture as a complex system of values, meanings, and practices that shape human consciousness and social behavior. The divergence appears primarily in defining the nature and function of this system: some view culture as a historical social product, while others see it as an instrument of domination, a space of symbols and interpretation, or a means of liberation and the production of meaning.

Significance of the Study: The significance of this research lies in its attempt to contribute to clarifying the conceptual framework of culture and revealing its intellectual and social dimensions, in addition to highlighting the role culture plays in building societies and guiding individual behavior. Its importance also stems from offering a comparative analytical reading of the conceptions of Western and Arab thinkers, thereby contributing to a deeper critical understanding of contemporary cultural discourse.

Objectives of the Study: This study aims to analyze the concept of culture as presented in the writings of a number of thinkers and theorists, to trace the development of this concept across different intellectual contexts, to highlight Arab and Algerian intellectual contributions in this field, and to reveal the impact of social theories on shaping the contemporary understanding of culture.

Research Methodology: With regard to methodology, this study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach by presenting and analyzing various intellectual conceptions of culture, alongside a comparative approach to highlight points of similarity and difference among these conceptions. This is done through reliance on a range of intellectual, philosophical, and sociological sources and references relevant to the subject of the research.

David Bidney, Professor of Philosophical Anthropology, emphasizes that the existing اختلف (disagreement) surrounding the concept of culture is primarily due to two orientations that clarify the aspects of divergence in how scholars view culture. These two orientations are:

- **The Realist Orientation:** Proponents of this view maintain that the domain of culture is social human behavior, and that defining culture does not extend beyond language, customs, acquired traditions, rules of convention, and all social systems. From this perspective, culture cannot be isolated or separated from the real social life of society and its members.
- **The Idealist Orientation:** In contrast to the realist orientation, its advocates argue that the concept of culture should be understood in light of abstract ideals. Their argument is that culture consists of perceptions, ideas, values, and orientations in the minds of individuals. In other words, culture is linked to abstract rather than concrete behavior. Some have even emphasized that culture is formed exclusively of immaterial components based on ideas, opinions, and mental processes associated with performance.

From our own standpoint, we argue that culture is the outcome of both orientations—idealistic and realist. Culture is an amalgamation of ideas, opinions, methods, inclinations, and orientations formed in the minds of individuals and translated into human behavior and practices according to values, customs, rules, traditions, and all social systems. This ensures a complete harmony between abstract conceptions of culture and lived reality. From here, we can arrive at a general view of sociologists' perspectives on the concept of culture, both Western and Arab.

1. Culture in the Thought of Western Thinkers

In this context, we will address Western thinkers' views of the concept of culture, focusing on the pioneers of the social approach, such as Edward Tylor and Émile Durkheim on the one hand, and the pioneers of the critical approach, such as T. S. Eliot and the Frankfurt School, on the other.

A. The Social Approach

Edward Tylor: The world owes the British anthropologist Edward Tylor the first definition of the anthropological concept of culture. He sought to clarify the relationship between culture and anthropology to the extent that it became impossible to address cultural issues without referring to anthropology, which provided one of the most robust definitions of culture. In fact, this definition helped anthropology strengthen its position among the other social sciences. Despite the multiplicity of uses of the concept of culture with different connotations and meanings, Tylor was among the scholars who employed the term in its broadest sense. There is near-unanimous agreement among researchers that social and cultural anthropology constitutes the primary and foundational cognitive field in which the contemporary meanings of the concept of culture emerged.

Tylor's definition (previously mentioned in the definition of culture) was carefully formulated to be purely descriptive and objective rather than normative. In it, culture expresses the totality of human social life in its collective and cultural dimensions. Culture, according to Tylor, is acquired rather than biologically inherited. The problem he sought to resolve in his study of culture was reconciling cultural evolution with its universality within a single explanatory framework, an issue he addressed in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), in which he questioned the origins of culture and the mechanisms of its development.

Tylor was indeed the first to approach cultural phenomena from a general and systemic perspective. He was keen to study culture in societies in all its forms and manifestations—material, symbolic, and bodily. He examined distinct cultures using the comparative method in anthropology in order to establish comparisons among them, thereby confronting those who advocated a rupture between “primitive” and “civilized” humans. He emphasized the essential connection between them, asserting that there is no difference in nature between primitive and civilized peoples, but rather a difference in the degree of advancement through culture. For this reason, Tylor relied in some cases on diffusionist hypotheses, stating that “the mere similarity between two cultural traits attributed to two different cultures is not sufficient, in itself, to prove that they occupy the same position on the ladder of cultural evolution.”

Despite the importance and status that Tylor's definition achieved in shaping the concept of culture, it faced a number of criticisms. Among these is that while it enumerates certain human phenomena that may be considered cultural—such as knowledge, belief, art, morality, and customs—it omits what is arguably the most fundamental element of all: language. Language is considered the constitutive element of the entire cultural system and the backbone of human culture. This omission helps explain the absence of culture, in its broad and complex human sense, among other living species. This consideration necessitates the legitimacy of placing language at the forefront of the elements constituting the concept of human culture within this definition.

Émile Durkheim: The French philosopher and sociologist Émile Durkheim is considered one of the founders of modern sociology. He established a specific methodology for this discipline based on observation and experimentation and contributed to the foundation of French anthropology by publishing and presenting numerous works and topics concerned with theorizing social reality.

Durkheim viewed the term *culture* as synonymous with *civilization*, arguing that culture is not confined to humanity or its destiny, nor is it restricted to any particular concept. In this regard, Denis Cuche notes that “social phenomena that are not tied to a specific social structure extend across domains that transcend any national territory or encompass temporal stages that exceed the history of a single society.” Accordingly, Durkheim focused, in his conception of culture, on defining the nature of the social bond. He argued that “civilizations, that is, cultures, are complex systems based on cultural relativity and on the relative normativity of each society and its level of development, as expressed through the collective consciousness formed by shared ideals, values, and customs among all members of society.”

Durkheim's ideas were shaped through his study of so-called primitive societies, where the division of labor exists at its lowest level. He focused particularly on the religious and cultural aspects of these societies, through which the fundamental and general features of societies as a whole can be understood. The central idea in Durkheim's book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is that religious ideas, morals, and values constitute the cornerstone of all societies and are the most important element of any social system, rather than material factors. Accordingly, Durkheim viewed religion as a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred, functioning to unify individuals and achieve moral integration. Through this, collective participation in beliefs is realized, since the primary function of religion is to achieve, reinforce, and preserve social solidarity.

Although the main idea in Durkheim's early works was that culture is produced by society, he rejected a strict separation between factors such as morality and religious beliefs and more material social and economic factors such as the division of labor. In his later works, however, he shifted from this position to adopt the view that culture shapes society, rather than the reverse.

B. The Critical Approach

Thomas Stearns Eliot: Thomas Stearns Eliot is considered one of the most distinguished literary figures and critics. He was a poet, playwright, and literary critic who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948. An American by nationality, he was born in the United States and moved to the United Kingdom in 1914 (London), later becoming a British citizen in 1927. Despite his close association with poetry and literary criticism, Eliot succeeded in leaving a distinctive mark on the development of the concept of culture through his 1948 book *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. In this work, he expressed his ideas through preliminary approaches to defining culture and determining its relationship to religion, politics, and elites. The book was translated into Arabic by Shukri Muhammad Ayyad under the title *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

Shukri Muhammad Ayyad discusses in this book Eliot's perspective on the construction and establishment of a refined culture in societies. Rather than proposing a systematic theory of culture, Eliot sought to reveal the causes behind the growth and decline of culture. He attributed these causes, first, to the idea of unity and diversity of patterns—meaning that there is a general culture that guides people and organizes their lives, while at the same time there are local cultures that distinguish societies from one another. The second cause is the close relationship between culture and religion. The third idea is that culture has a significant unconscious dimension based on the transmission of culture across generations, which entails broadening the concept of culture to signify a way of life through which human behavior and activity can be understood.

Shukri Ayyad clarifies that Eliot adopts a cautious stance in presenting his views. In fact, he does not claim to offer a theory of culture, nor does he even propose a definitive definition of it; rather, his work consists of *notes towards a definition of culture*. His aim is to articulate a central question: Are there fixed conditions whose absence makes it impossible to expect the emergence of a refined culture? In other words, he seeks to uncover the reasons behind the growth and decline of high culture, deliberately avoiding the use of terms such as *cultural factors* or *cultural forces*, replacing them instead with the notion of *fixed conditions*. These conditions indicate that while the presence of certain conditions does not necessarily guarantee the emergence of a given phenomenon, their absence inevitably leads to its nonexistence. This stands in contrast to the use of the terms *forces* or *factors*, which presuppose the existence of a definite effect. Shukri Ayyad further notes that Eliot's choice of the word "Notes" in the title signifies several points:

- That culture, in Eliot's view, is not an inevitable product of forces or factors.
- That he is not attempting to provide solutions to already existing cultural problems, but rather to sketch an image of refined culture as he envisions it.
- That he intends to critique certain ideas about culture that do not accord with this image or fail to meet those conditions.

In his book, Eliot discusses a key idea centered on his treatment of unity and diversity in cultural patterns. He employs the term "*a culture orbiting around another culture*," meaning that every society should possess its own distinctive culture that remains harmonious with the cultures of neighboring societies, without leading to dissolution, assimilation, or the loss of cultural identity. This serves to indicate that cultures are interconnected through relationships stemming from geographical and non-geographical factors, as well as from the influence exerted by nations with stronger cultures over those with weaker ones.

In summary, Eliot presents in his book general ideas aimed at embodying his vision and answering his question regarding the establishment of a refined social culture. He links this issue to religion, politics, and elites, stating:

1. **Religion and social stratification** are among the most important components of culture, provided that they are not artificial or imposed by a particular authority, but are instead recognized as natural components. Attempts to reform culture according to a specific plan or preconceived vision may lead to improvement in one area while causing corruption in another. Eliot also argues that in many cultures the factor of religion cannot be ignored or marginalized, as culture cannot emerge or develop without being connected to religion. Culture, in his view, is a result of religion. Hence, the duality of culture and religion occupies a prominent place in Eliot's thought, reflecting the deeply rooted relationship between religion and culture based on the moral and value dimensions upon which Christianity in Europe was founded.
2. Eliot also addresses the relationship between class, elites, and culture, considering the class whose members inherit wealth and influence to be essential for the flourishing of culture. Culture, therefore, is inherited and transmitted from one generation to another. He discusses scholarly views on elites, which distinguish among various types of elites—political, administrative, intellectual, artistic, moral, and religious, among others. While political and administrative elites aim to integrate a large number of individual wills, the role of intellectual, artistic, moral, and religious elites transcends this by drawing upon spiritual energies that society does not exhaust in its daily struggle for survival.
3. Regarding culture and politics, Eliot examines two distinct ideas. The first concerns the relationship between the political elite and other elites, whereby culture is viewed as a tool used by politicians to regulate relationships, and through which the state addresses major social issues that pose serious threats to political systems. This explains why politicians seek to intertwine politics and culture, mobilizing material and financial resources to achieve this goal. The second idea concerns the impact of colonialism on the cultures of colonized peoples, as colonial powers endeavor to erase national and religious cultures and eliminate the personal identity of colonized societies, thereby keeping them in a perpetual state of dependence and subjugation.

The Frankfurt School

The critical school is considered one of the most prominent contemporary Western philosophical and social schools. It emerged under political, social, economic, and intellectual conditions that prevailed in Germany during the 1920s, which constituted key factors in its formation. Its pioneers were among the earliest thinkers to focus on the study and analysis of emerging cultural, social, and intellectual issues of the twentieth century. Critical theory is associated with the Frankfurt School, which was founded in 1923 at the Institute for Social Research in Germany. Its leading figures emigrated to Geneva in 1933 with the rise of Nazism, then to the United States during the Second World War, before returning to Germany in the early 1950s.

The multiplicity of names used to refer to this school has led to some terminological ambiguity, prompting a preference for labels that best reflect its essence. Among these are *critical theory*, referring to the group of German intellectuals who adopted critical philosophy as their worldview; *European Marxism*, distinguishing their thought; and *the Frankfurt School*, the name they adopted after returning from exile. The latter is the most widely used designation for this group of thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas, who produced significant shared theoretical works.

What most distinguishes this school is its adoption of critique as a methodological foundation, engaging in a radical critical practice of Western civilization with the aim of reexamining its foundations and outcomes in light of the major transformations brought about by Western modernity. It also played an important role in diagnosing the various pathological symptoms that characterized contemporary Western societies. Cultural critique within critical theory is based on the premise that capitalist societies are capable of disseminating their ideological beliefs without resorting to force, as ideology is transmitted at the level of ideas just as much as through economic pressures. Art and media are regarded as key instruments in this process. This endowed critical theory with the momentum to analyze ideology in all its manifestations, leading later structural Marxist movements to further develop these ideas. Consequently, many critics began to question how one might escape the grip of domination, especially given its apparent success in maintaining the existing political order and suppressing dissent at its source.

The exclusion of the human, reflective, and ethical dimensions from research and analysis led Frankfurt School thinkers to believe that positivist tradition tends to view human beings as powerless entities in the face of society. This is evident in Durkheim's assertion that the individual confronts society as a superior force to which one must submit, as well as in Max Weber's view that the individual in bureaucratic societies—whether capitalist or socialist—is merely a cog in a vast machine. In contrast, critical theory argues that this condition stems from the inner depth of the human being. Accordingly, it emphasizes the dialectical relationship between the individual and society as independent, non-subjugated subjects reflecting aspects of total reality.

On this basis, critical theory appears primarily as a critique of consumer capitalist society, with its exaggerated scientism, rationalism, and dominant ideologies. Its Marxist roots led it to adopt historical materialism, granting a central role to human agency in making history and effecting social change by equipping the proletariat with critical, transformative thought and enlightened class consciousness, promoting culture in all its forms, and emphasizing the individual as the center of thought and action, with a degree of attention given to individual psychology and psychoanalytic analysis.

Thus, in its later stages, critical theory distanced itself from the Marxism from which it initially emerged, eventually declaring its own failure when its pioneers openly acknowledged this. Herbert Marcuse admitted that critical theory lacked the concepts necessary to bridge the gap between the present and the future.

2. Culture in the Thought of Arab and Algerian Thinkers

Just as Western sociologists and thinkers played a significant role in articulating the concept of culture and defining its various meanings, representations, and epistemological implications, Arab thinkers—and Algerian thinkers in particular—also made substantial contributions to analyzing and studying the concept of culture within its specific social and environmental contexts. They compared it with the Western environment and examined the mutual influences between the two. In this context, we focus on thinkers whose intellectual contributions and studies left a profound impact on the analysis of Arab social and cultural reality and offered interpretations and solutions to many cultural issues, such as Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, Malik Bennabi, Nasr Muhammad Arif, and Muhammad Abed al-Jabri.

Culture in the Thought of Ibn Khaldun: When discussing the cultural life of Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, it is impossible to separate his scholarly achievements from the cultural, intellectual, and political milieu in which he lived—an environment that shaped his thought and intellectual formation. The stages of his life and education profoundly influenced his social and cultural outlook and his perception of his era. His Arab-Tunisian birth, memorization of the Qur'an with proper recitation, apprenticeship under religious scholars, and acquisition of knowledge; his assumption of high administrative and political offices while moving between the Maghreb and al-Andalus; his later dedication to writing and authorship on social and political realities and systems of governance; and his work in teaching, the judiciary, and even modest professions—all enabled him to engage with the everyday social realities of ordinary people while also interacting with centers of power and authority. Thus, he embodied a unique personality that combined multiple roles: author, scholar, historian, philosopher, politician, judge, and teacher. He represented, in his person, a unity of scientific and cultural life encompassing the Arab-Islamic world, and in his thought, an embodiment of the philosophy of Islamic history. He also reflected the condition of Arab-Islamic culture during its final period of brilliance, living at a time when Arabs and Muslims still led humanity toward progress and advancement.

Although the term *culture* does not explicitly appear in Ibn Khaldun's writings, he associated this concept with those of civilization and urban life. It has been established that Ibn Khaldun was among the first to draw attention to the concept of culture, addressing it through terms such as civilization (*haḍāra*), urbanization (*'umrān*), and sedentarization (*tahaddūr*). He focused on civilization and urban development, explaining their causes and manifestations, as well as the reasons for their decline, degeneration, and regression—an analysis clearly articulated in his famous *Muqaddimah* through the events and conditions he experienced in his life.

With regard to the concept of civilization, Ibn Khaldun's use of the term aligns with the roots of the European concept. Arab researchers have therefore examined the meanings he attributed to it, even though he was not addressing civilization in its modern, comprehensive sense. Rather, he referred to settled life as opposed to nomadism and to urban development. The term *urbanization* in Ibn Khaldun's thought carried political connotations related to systems of governance, the inheritance of power, and the succession of rulers. In the *Muqaddimah*, he devoted particular attention to "crafts and means of livelihood," which reach perfection with the completion of urban development. He also discussed differences among nations in their mastery of crafts, including agriculture, construction, trade, tailoring, midwifery, medicine, and others.

Here, it is useful to refer to Western definitions that emerged after Ibn Khaldun. Franz Boas, for example, defined civilization as "the integrated total of mental and physical activities that characterize the collective and individual behavior of individuals forming a social group in relation to their natural environment." Clyde Kluckhohn defined it as "a patterned or customary historical process that includes rules, laws, ideals, knowledge, customs, as well as tools, instruments, ideas, and symbols."

It is evident from these definitions that all elements constituting civilization are, in their origin, socio-cultural in nature. This reinforces the view that Ibn Khaldun was a pioneer in discussing culture in his studies, and that subsequent discussions of culture or civilization largely draw upon Ibn Khaldun's foundational insights.

Travel literature is among the most important heritage legacies that contributed to the building of an Arab civilization and culture. Many Moroccan and Andalusian travelers traversed North Africa far and wide, describing for us the political, cultural, economic, social, and urban conditions. The journey for pilgrimage and the journey in pursuit of knowledge are considered especially valuable because of their benefits. In this regard, Ibn Khaldun states: "Travel is indispensable in seeking knowledge, for it enables one to acquire benefits and attain perfection through meeting shaykhs and engaging directly with men." These were among the most significant journeys that left their mark on travelers, through which they conveyed what they encountered and described of routes and realms, scenes and monuments, landmarks and festivities, special occasions, holidays, customs and traditions, natural landscapes, and other matters that fell within the scope of their movement and within their hearing and sight—each according to his formation, aims, habits, and temperament.

Alongside scholarly journeys, there were also economic journeys, as commercial economic activity was among the most widespread in the Maghreb. Trade caravans crossed the vast deserts of these lands. Ibn Battuta refers to Ibn Khaldun on more than one occasion, noting that he traveled in caravans accompanied by merchants, especially to the lands of the Maghreb, which he described as the cheapest of countries, the richest in goods, and the greatest in benefits. Beyond trade, there was also extensive agricultural activity in the far Maghreb: Ibn Battuta and Ibn al-Hajj al-Numayri describe the Moroccan city of Meknes and its surrounding orchards and lush greenery, especially the olive groves that encircle it on all sides. Investing land in agriculture yielded good returns. This agricultural prosperity was reflected in the standard and quality of life in those regions, which also experienced a major urban renaissance. Travelers' accounts highlighted its most prominent features. This urban renaissance was not limited to palaces, but also included many land and sea routes that facilitated movement from one place to another.

Ibn Khaldun also discussed the collapse of civilizations and the ruin of urban development and their causes—matters that are linked to and comparable with the construction of culture and its decline. Civilization, in his view, is the opposite of nomadism; it represents the culmination of urban development, yet it also signals its decay and contains the seeds of its corruption. In his *Muqaddimah*, he maintained that "states have lifespans, just as individuals have lifespans, not

exceeding one hundred and twenty years, and they pass through three generations: roughness and valor in glory; luxury, breaking, and weakening of group solidarity; and luxury, incapacity to defend, and the extinction of the state.”

From all of this, we can say that Ibn Khaldun was among the first to offer a definition of culture—one that approximates, to some extent, the meaning of the term as used today—two centuries before the word “culture” appeared in Germany. Ibn Khaldun distinguished between two cultures: the culture of nomadism and the culture of cities, considering the latter more refined than the former due to ease of living and wealth. Thus, culture in Ibn Khaldun’s definition is “people’s manners and refined conduct in their conditions of livelihood, such as urban life, crafts, arts, and practical knowledge in the fields of daily life; and people’s manners are formed through education, acquisition, and the exercise of thought.”

Finally, based on this presentation, it can be said that Ibn Khaldun used the term *culture* as a comprehensive, overarching concept encompassing various elements such as knowledge and education, occupations and crafts, through which human beings seek to adapt nature to their needs and harness its resources and givens. Within the scope of culture for Ibn Khaldun falls everything that develops the mind and refines human experience; he included among these the acquisition of linguistic competence, the craft of poetry, the manner of learning it, and the cultivation of aesthetic taste.

Culture According to Nasr Muhammad Arif

Professor Nasr Muhammad Arif, an Egyptian national and professor at Cairo University’s Faculty of Economics and Political Science, is among the contemporary Arab thinkers who have been concerned with studying the problem of culture and civilization in Arab and Islamic societies. In his analysis, he linked the cultural problem to the translation movement that, in his view, began with early intellectual and epistemic contact that occurred during the period of decline of the Islamic world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As he states, “a broad translation movement took place in which Arabic words were chosen and stripped from their roots and context to express foreign terms that then arrived with all their connotations, roots, and their visible and invisible aspects, displacing the Arabic meaning and replacing it entirely, leaving nothing of it but the external vessel (the word).” In other words, translation into Arabic did not occur in accordance with the original semantic meanings of Arabic terms; rather, it proceeded according to an outward lexical equivalent in common usage, which led to obscuring the genuine meaning in Arabic and substituting Western European meanings and connotations. Consequently, it is not surprising that Arab thinkers, in attempting to ground the concept of culture, often return to foreign meanings and sources.

This is also what Malik Bennabi discussed in his study of the problem of culture and civilization. Although the word *thaqāfa* is Arabic, the intended meanings and connotations behind it are identical to the Western concept of *culture*. In his book *The Problem of Culture*, he notes: “It is as though this foreign concept has copied all the Arabic meanings of culture or replaced them. More than that, the same problem we previously presented between the concepts of culture and civilization in the West will be transferred to the Arab and Islamic world.” This suggests that there is indeed a problem with the concept of culture: the lexical meaning in Arabic points to one thing, while the conceptual-semantic meaning points to another, in ways that do not align in their applications across the Arab and Western environments.

This is precisely the problem Arif sought to address in his study of culture. He argues that we often find ourselves faced with a kind of confusion, distortion, and even obfuscation in meanings. The same concept of the word *culture* has been translated into two non-synonymous Arabic terms with different meanings: it has been rendered at times as *thaqāfa* (culture), at other times as *hadāra* (civilization), and at a third time as both together—culture and civilization.

Arif maintains that in grounding the concept of culture in Arabic, one must return to old Arabic dictionaries and lexicons so that the concept is given its authentic Arabic due, rather than remaining a hybrid term bearing Western meanings and connotations. He observes that many definitions begin from the authentic Arabic linguistic root and then suddenly shift toward European meanings without analyzing the original Arabic significations and what can be derived from them. This often appears as an attempt to absolve the “Arab concept,” or as a kind of self-deception in our language to convince ourselves that we are not moving directly from the Arab concept to the Western one, or as a deliberate effort to cover the cultural split experienced by some thinkers and researchers as they attempt to justify and legitimize Western meanings and connotations.

Arif concludes, in his study of the grounding of the concept of culture and its problems, that “the epistemic content of the concept of culture in Arabic stems from the human self and is not planted in it from the outside. Rather, it works to purify and refine human nature, straighten its distortions, and then stimulate it to generate the latent subsidiary meanings within it, unleashing its energies to produce the knowledge human beings need according to the circumstances of their environment and society, so that human existence itself may be set right and given value.” He argues that rebuilding concepts, grounding them, and localizing them requires five epistemic procedures, as follows:

- Searching for the meanings of the concept in its original language in which it was coined and carried its connotations, then arriving at an abstraction of the concept that expresses its truth, essence, and nature, free from confusion with experiences or later connotations attached to it in its development.
- Tracing the development of the concept in its original environment: how it moved from linguistic meanings to particular terminological meanings, and whether there is consistency between the two, or whether the concept moved entirely beyond linguistic meanings and adopted other connotations.
- Focusing on the fact of translation and the choice of an Arabic equivalent: whether translation conveyed the meanings and connotations, or merely the word in its outward sense—by abstracting the term’s meanings in its original language, abstracting the Arabic meanings of the chosen equivalent, and comparing the two in their abstract forms, away from definitions and validations.
- Tracing the development of the concept in subsequent Arab thought after its translation, and the extent of change that affected the word: did the Arabic term preserve the foreign concept’s connotations, preserve the original Arabic connotations, or become a mixture of both?
- Returning to the authentic Arabic meanings of the Arabic term adopted as an equivalent to the foreign concept, clarifying its true meanings and comparing them with the contemporary meanings of this concept—which are essentially the meanings of the foreign concept—preparatory to redefining the Arabic concept or purifying it of the foreign conceptual shadows that attached to it, so as to reach the authentic meanings and connotations of the Arabic concept.

In conclusion, it can be said that Muhammad Arif succeeded to a considerable extent in rebuilding and re-grounding the concept of culture. He begins with classical Arabic dictionaries and lexicons to identify its linguistic synonyms—such as mastery, understanding, **ضبط** (precision/discipline), attaining something, perceptiveness, intelligence, stable knowledge, refinement, correction, and straightening after crookedness—then he proceeds to explore the distinctive epistemic significations of the concept. In treating the cultural problem, he arrives at an important and realistic fact—not only about the concept of culture but about many concepts that reach us through importing notions that are alien to us and not compatible with our society, customs, and values. This makes their meanings incapable of conveying an accurate picture of the social and cultural problems experienced by Arab society. Quite frankly, we do not aim to impose what we receive from Western culture onto our Arab societies; rather, we work to refine and scrutinize what can be refined so that it accords with the culture and principles of our Arab-Muslim society.

Culture According to Muhammad Abed al-Jabri

Dr. Muhammad Abed al-Jabri is among the most prominent Arab thinkers concerned with contemporary intellectual issues. He is a Moroccan thinker and philosopher who engaged with questions of culture, **العقل** (reason), conceptions, and Arab cultural issues. He produced numerous works, among the most notable of which are *The Cultural Question in the Arab Homeland* and the series *Critique of Arab Reason*, through which he analyzed Arab reason by studying cultural and linguistic components and structures beginning with the era of **تدوين** (codification). He then moved to the study of political reason and then moral reason, and he coined the term “the resigned reason” (*al-‘aql al-niustaqīl*), referring to the kind of reason that withdraws from debating major civilizational issues. At the end of that series, he concludes that “Arab reason today is in need of reinvention.” UNESCO honored him for his distinctive approach to dialogue.

Al-Jabri addressed the topic of Arab culture from the standpoint of rational thinking, which reflects intellectual production arising from engagement with the social and cultural environment and their role in shaping the specificity of Arab thought. Thus, he states in his writing that it is “not only because it is conceptions, opinions, and theories that reflect Arab reality or express it in one form of expression, but also because it is the result of a method or style of thinking shaped by a set of givens, including Arab reality itself with all its distinctive features.” In other words, al-Jabri granted thinking and reason a status and mechanism reinforced by the Arab environmental culture among those who belong to it, enabling them to adapt and practice life in its various paths.

Al-Jabri also discussed, in his book *The Formation of Arab Reason*, the concept of *cultural time*. He points to this when he says that culture is what remains after forgetting everything—namely, the fixed elements that do not change with time or place and remain rooted in the thought and mind of the Arab individual as a result of formation and contact with the Arab environment. Thus, *cultural time* does not mean time and events, but rather the change that occurs in an individual’s culture in terms of what is fixed and what is variable. For this reason, al-Jabri notes that cultural time “is not subject to the measure of time and natural, political, or social timing, because it has its own measures.”

From this intellectual conception of al-Jabri, we note that he expresses cultural time as the coexistence of multiple, diverse cultures within a particular mind, in a way resembling the coexistence of desires and repressions in the unconscious. That is, all the cultural acquisitions of the Arab individual—formed according to Arab environment and upbringing—are arranged by reason and thinking according to need: what a person needs remains present and stable, while what is not needed is stored and changes, yet is neither forgotten nor erased; when needed, the individual retrieves it to express positions toward matters in life, and thus cultural time...

Al-Jabri also spoke about the relationship between reason and culture, arguing that Arab reason is deeply rooted in the mental structure of Arab culture. Accordingly, he believes that Arab reason must review its mechanisms of thinking and knowledge production. This, in his view, requires borrowing a set of Western concepts and methodologies and attempting to integrate, localize, and adapt them so that they align with our culture and Arab reality—especially its heritage-based and doctrinal dimensions. For this reason, the dialectic of reason and culture is one of the important dialectics in al-Jabri’s philosophical thought. Through it, he received many criticisms from Arab thinkers and philosophers who challenged his conception of Arab culture, describing it as stagnant and suggesting the possibility of transforming it by integrating it with Western cultural concepts compatible with the Arab and Islamic environment.

Culture According to Malik Bennabi

Malik Bennabi states in *The Problem of Culture and Civilization*: “The problem of every people is, in its essence, the problem of its civilization; and no people can understand or solve its problem unless it elevates its idea to the level of human events and delves deeply into understanding the factors that build civilizations or destroy them.” This means that confronting any crisis or problem requires a diagnostic study—plunging into the depths of the issue rather than being satisfied with a superficial description of its symptoms and manifestations.

The problem of culture occupied Bennabi’s thought and remained present in most of his intellectual production and contributions, since it constituted the core of the civilizational crisis experienced by the Islamic world. He therefore sought to understand it and propose solutions from the moment he wrote his first book addressing culture, *The Conditions of the Renaissance*. He states that “answering the nature of the crisis in which the Islamic world is floundering requires a diagnostic study that penetrates the depths of the problem, identifies its causes and reasons, and does not settle for a superficial description of its manifestations and symptoms—just as a physician diagnosing an organic disease does not suffice with knowing its symptoms, but searches for the causes that brought it into existence.” Here, Bennabi lays down principles for studying social problems and crises: diving into the problem itself, clarifying its causes, and analyzing it realistically in order to derive methods of treatment that correspond to the nature of society.

In his writings—particularly *The Conditions of the Renaissance*—Bennabi approached the study of culture on the premise that every reflection on the problem of the human being is ultimately a reflection on the problem of civilization. On this basis, he analyzes the issue through three primary problems: “the problem of the human being, the problem of soil

(land), and the problem of time.” He thus links the rise of civilization to the human being and his existence, ties it to the presence of a geographic locus upon which civilization is established, and to a temporal moment in which cultural forms are produced that build that civilization. Consequently, thinking about the problem of civilization is, in essence, thinking about the problem of culture.

A close reading of Bennabi’s thought and his engagement with the idea and problem of civilization and culture shows that he attempted to reflect the social condition of society and its intellectual and cultural developments, clarifying the intellectual pattern of the human being in harmony with the pattern of the social environment in which he lives. In this regard, he says: “One cannot define, understand, or solve the problem of culture unless we view it from two angles: the first in light of our lived present condition, which is negative and separates us from the residues of the past; and the second as determined by our destiny, which is positive and connects us to the requirements of the future.” That is, we cannot understand the present without returning to the remnants of the past, which represent the social and cultural heritage of accumulated human life over time and constitute the totality of experiences from which individuals draw solutions to the problems they face. Nor can we understand the future without examining the meanings of the present, its aspirations, and what it expresses in terms of changes in the direction of human life. In this way, social and cultural problems that human beings may encounter can be addressed.

This led Bennabi to distinguish two interrelated meanings essential to building any civilization and developing it—namely, two processes: demolition and construction. “If the first is connected to a backward cultural legacy, then it must be demolished and the inherited situation from eras of decline must be shattered; society’s habits, traditions, and moral framework must be purged of destructive factors and negative accumulation. For purging dead ideas and cleansing deadly ideas constitute the first foundation of any true renaissance. The second, however, is connected to the necessity of construction by determining the content of culture and its essential elements that link a society aspiring to progress with the requirements of the future.” In other words, it is impossible to build a sound and strong culture grounded in the consolidation of collective values and the embodiment of a community’s principles without a civilizational renaissance that corrects distorted social concepts and dismantles the inherited ideas and legacies that keep human beings captive to backwardness and reaction. This must be accompanied by aspiration toward constructing a strong civilizational cultural model based on the new concepts of urban societies.

Bennabi also sought to interpret and analyze culture, approaching it from two main perspectives in social analysis of roles and functions: an individual perspective centered on culture’s functional relationship to individuals, and a collective perspective viewing culture’s functional relationship to the group. From an educational standpoint, Bennabi sees both perspectives as encompassing a general idea of culture without specifying its content, which is open to divergent interpretations. Therefore, he “deems it necessary to establish a close link between culture and civilization; only then can culture be discussed as a theory of behavior more than as a theory of knowledge.” That is, one cannot rely on or conceive a definition of culture purely from a theoretical cognitive angle; it must be supplemented by the practical dimension that touches culture and embodies it in behavioral and educational dimensions for individuals and groups.

Our reading of Malik Bennabi’s thought, and the integration and balance that characterize his method, leads to the conclusion that the problem of underdevelopment experienced by the Arab and Islamic world is a civilizational problem. Thinking about the problems of underdevelopment is thinking about the problem of civilization and culture. On the basis of this vision—which prioritizes cultural change—development projects should be planned at both the individual and societal levels. The cultural problem as posed by Bennabi can be specified at three levels: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. The cognitive level goes beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge and science toward construction; the behavioral level entails consolidating a culture of prioritizing duties over demanding rights and identifying effective behaviors that achieve harmony between individual conduct and the community’s way of life; and the affective level relates to aesthetic taste and the ethical embodiment of building the human being, which contributes to forming culture and building civilization.

3. Culture Among Theorists

Given the large number and diversity of definitions of culture—so extensive that they are difficult to enumerate—we encounter a similar situation when identifying its theories. Many theories have been concerned with studying the concept of culture, in accordance with the number of theoretical entry points that address this topic. Therefore, we will examine certain models that are among the most widespread and distinctive in defining the concept of culture, including (without limitation) the following:

A. Structural-Functional Theory

Structural-functional theory is among the most well-known social theories closely aligned with social reality, and it is among the most prevalent and widely used in sociology. Sociologists and anthropologists have employed this theory to study the relationship between the small society (the family) and the larger society (the broader society) of which it is a part, within the framework of other social systems. Functionalism views “a social phenomenon or event as the product of other parts or structures, and its emergence as having a social function directly or indirectly connected to the functions of other phenomena derived from other components of the social structure.” This theory initially emerged in England with the British sociologist Herbert Spencer, then moved to America where it was developed by Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Hans Gerth, and others.

The functionalist school is among the most important schools concerned with the subject of culture; indeed, it is a pioneering school in this field through the works of its founders and students. Its pioneers emphasized that if we know the function of a system, we can explain and understand it. Function is thus used to refer to basic needs or requirements that must be satisfied for the group to continue to exist. Through function, we can understand that systems are established as patterns of behavior that conform to specific norms and values. In this sense, systems include not only the technical equipment used in society for daily life, but also all spiritual ideas that characterize its morality, religion, and laws, through which thought and behavior are organized.

This is addressed in some detail in the writings of Bronislaw Malinowski, in his book *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944) and his book *The Dynamics of Change* (1945). He argues that “every living culture is an integrated functional whole, akin to a living organism, and we cannot understand any part of it except in light of its relationship to the whole. The functional performance of a cultural element within the overall cultural system is what explains that element and reveals its true identity. Culture is studied as it actually exists, at a single temporal level, rather than in light of its historical and evolutionary growth.”

Accordingly, Malinowski views culture as “that whole which includes tools, materials of consumption, legal charters that organize various social groupings, ideas, arts, beliefs, and customs—whether we conceive of it as simple or complex and developed.” That is, Malinowski connects culture, in all its aspects, to human needs. There is a relationship between the requirements of the human being as a biological entity and the methods of satisfying those requirements, which can apply generally to humanity as a whole. The most distinctive feature of his view is his use of the concept of functionalism and his emphasis on a non-historical approach to understanding cultural phenomena.

Among the criticisms directed at functional analysis is that it “cannot explain the differences we observe between the socio-cultural systems of different societies; functionalism is also criticized for focusing heavily on stability and continuity, while downplaying the importance of conflict, internal contradictions, and dysfunction—i.e., pathological cultural phenomena.”

However, by emphasizing fieldwork, functionalism succeeded in moving anthropology away from a method of reconstructing history based on intuition and speculative interpretation, and bringing it into the domain of description and analysis of the present and reality, which require observation and comparison. Under functionalism, the researcher came to play the role of observer and theorist at the same time, after previously analyzing only what travelers and missionaries presented.

B. Marxist Theory

Marxist theory is named after its founder Karl Marx, one of the communist theorists who built his thought on the necessity of socialism as a historical inevitability in human development according to dialectical logic. Marxism emerged based on economic and social conditions aimed at liberating society from forms of class exploitation, which Marxists maintain can only be achieved through revolutionary change of society as a whole.

Marxist theory is considered evolutionary in that it views culture as developing from one stage to another, transitioning as a result of contradictions that occur within the social and cultural system of the previous stage. This transformation and change, according to Marxism, occurs under the influence of the forces of production or the material economic factor.

There is no doubt that Marx's ideas—highlighting class divergence in capitalist society and the difference between the reality of the working class and that of the capitalist class—contributed to dividing culture into a general culture that expresses the interests of the capitalist class and a particular culture that expresses the working class and other lower classes. Moreover, Marxism's articulation of the idea of struggle and its revolutionary character led to strong resistance from conservative capitalists; however, they also showed a concealed acceptance aimed at understanding Marxism and grounding resistance to its spread. This formed the basis for studying the divergence and conflict between capitalist culture and working-class culture.

In other words, the forces of production—represented by the tools of production and labor—determine the economic structure of society, which in turn determines the superstructure of society, which is culture. In this respect, Marxist theory differs from other cultural theories in its explanation of cultural development; yet it does not differ from them in identifying the function of culture within society. Culture works to stabilize society and the dominance of its economic, political, and social systems; and, in the revolutionary Marxist perspective, it naturally plays a negative role in the process of development. Accordingly, Marxists argue that “the class that possesses the means of material production at its disposal also controls the means of mental production, so that, in general, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.”

This means that the materially dominant class projects its mental outlook onto the poor, dependent class. Hence, dependency is not limited to material economic dimensions; it also extends to thought and ideology as a result of the need to meet economic requirements—something clearly observed in our present time, especially in many Third World countries.

Like any human social theory, Marxism has faced criticisms that do not diminish its value and contribution so much as they point to shortcomings that subsequent theories may address. Among these criticisms are:

- i. Its focus on the internal structure of a single society, based on the belief that fundamental transformations begin from that society's internal contradictions.
- ii. Marxism does not separate domestic policy from foreign policy within a single society; therefore, when it studies a society with all its internal contradictions, this does not mean that it ignores the society's external environment.
- iii. The economic factor is considered the *محور* (central axis) of Marxism's attention and its explanation of social phenomena.
- iv. Marxism does not encompass all international phenomena, limiting itself to explaining imperialism and class struggle and treating them as two fundamental variables in its analysis—by considering class as the actor and imperialism as the motivating force.
- v. Marxism emphasizes that conflict is not an international conflict between states within the framework of relations; rather, it is a class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It is also an economic-ideological conflict between two different ideologies: capitalism and socialism.

In conclusion, it can be said that through its treatment of social issues, Marxist theory supports a revolutionary social culture founded on adopting a socialist system through the influence of the working class and its control over the production process, as it is the driving hand of an economic system built on achieving shared benefit. Thus, Marxism, as a cultural-intellectual project, has social dimensions that support social equality to ensure a dignified life. This is what

led it to receive strong support from many societies, especially European ones, since they were living under a domineering capitalist system and because these societies largely consisted of a laboring and poor class that found in Marx's ideas—and his call for liberation—an outlet and a promise of emancipation.

C. Evolutionary Theory

Discussing evolutionary theory leads us inevitably to Darwin's evolutionary theory, through which he presented a book on *The Origin of Species*, in which he explains how cultural change occurs and the evolutionary stages it passes through across generations. He elaborated on the idea of evolution among organic beings. This vision was later transferred to the human sciences and applied specifically to culture and to the development of societies' ways of life in general, giving rise to the basic idea that "cultural elements and traits evolve just as the elements of this universe evolve."

Many theories later addressed this idea, to the point that evolutionism became a comprehensive school comprising a vast number of theories rather than a single theory. These theories developed an overarching view of cultural evolution based on an emphasis on the model of cultural gradation. Evolutionism holds that the human mind everywhere is capable of invention and achieving cultural accomplishments; however, nature provides suitable conditions for some and not others. This diversity in natural conditions led to تفاوت (variation) in economic levels among different peoples.

Many anthropologists and those concerned with cultural affairs have discussed the evolution that affected human culture and its stages. Sir Henry Maine, for instance, proposed in his book *Ancient Law* a distinction between two different forms of culture: a primitive form based on status and social rank, and a modern form based on reason and thinking. He thus compares two models of culture—primitive and modern. Marriage, for example, serves to illustrate differences between the two: in primitive marriage, the wife is considered the husband's private property, like his other possessions; whereas in the modern form, the wife becomes liberated from the man's constraints.

Herbert Spencer also addressed evolutionism in culture through his conception of primitive society as one dominated by an egoistic and simultaneously militaristic character. He presented a law of evolution asserting that social life tends toward increasing differentiation, difference, or heterogeneity, and thus toward altruistic morality and a social-organizational orientation.

Durkheim agrees with Spencer regarding the evolutionary tendency toward greater heterogeneity and differentiation, but differs with him regarding the egoism of primitive society. Durkheim argues that the primitive man is characterized by excessive altruism or by a strong and intense collective conscience that predominates over individual consciences, whereas modern society, in contrast, moves entirely away from altruistic traits.

Tylor, who focused primarily on religious elements and their stages of development, presented his theory of animism, which he regarded as the starting point for the evolution of religious beliefs. Animism, in this sense, involves attributing *روح* (spirit) to nature—that is, ascribing a spirit or soul to elements of nature such as plants, animals, places, and objects that appear strange or dangerous. Tylor's evolutionary idea begins from a basic principle: the duality of body and soul. He argues that early humans saw things in their dreams, which inspired the notion of a dual life. This idea then developed from believing that a person has a double or counterpart, to belief in the dead and ancestors, then to nature—meaning that every natural phenomenon has an unseen or spiritual dimension—then to the emergence of the idea of gods (a god of rain, a god of wind, and so on), and finally to the idea of monotheism. From his secular standpoint, Tylor considered the single God to be the final endpoint of human religious thinking over the ages, and therefore not the result of divine revelation.

Subsequently, further evolutionary studies emerged to deepen the evolutionary principle in culture. The evolutionists' views in interpreting culture can be summarized in several key principles, (most important of which) are:

- i. There are universal laws governing human culture, and it passes through inevitable, distinct evolutionary stages; the culture of any society develops along a single path through specific stages.
- ii. Acceptance of cultural change and attributing it to differences in the evolutionary stages of human cultures; stability and change are fundamental features distinguishing different cultures.

- iii. The acquisition or inheritance of cultural traits depends on human cognitive capacities, linked to the unity of human physiological constitution.
- iv. Cultural elements and components are capable of being borrowed and transferred from one culture to another.
- v. Factors of cultural change grow organically and appear with the emergence of the evolutionary stage regardless of time and place.
- vi. Cultures evolve organically and move from one stage to another merely with the appearance of sufficient factors and conditions for that stage to emerge.
- vii. Belief in the psychological unity of the human species.

D. Diffusionist Theory

This theory emerged from a critique of evolutionism, which maintains that one should study the history of a given society in order to understand its current characteristics. Diffusionism holds that these characteristics are largely borrowed from other cultures. Evolutionism considers that the presence of two similar cultural traits in two different cultures implies two different and parallel evolutionary lines. The diffusionist school, however, argues that this phenomenon indicates a direct or indirect borrowing from one culture to another, since the structure of culture and civilization suggests that there are cultural centers from which specific cultural elements spread.

In other words, supporters of this approach assume that contact between different peoples produces a distinct culture and a diffusion process of certain cultural traits. This explains cultural variation among peoples. Advocates of diffusionism start from the assumption that diffusion begins from a specific cultural center and then spreads over time to different geographic areas through contact among peoples. This leads us to uncover the hidden *حلفات* (links) connecting peoples through cultures formed together as a result of their geographic, temporal, and historical interaction.

As for the schools that adopted diffusionism, there are two different European schools. The first is the German geographical school, led by Friedrich Ratzel, who adopted a historical-geographical method and focused on the importance of cultural contacts and relations among peoples and the role of those relations in cultural growth. Ratzel grounded his view particularly in agriculture, which depended either on the hoe or the plow, thereby explaining differences among agricultural cultures. Hahn, a specialist in human geography, followed him in this by discussing animal domestication and plow agriculture that followed the discovery of hoe-based agriculture—developments that all took place in the ancient Near East and then spread to the rest of the world. Heinrich Schurtz highlighted the idea of cultural relations between the Old World and the New World (the Americas). Leo Frobenius developed the idea of cultures crossing oceans by introducing the concept of the “cultural circle” (*Le cercle culturel*) in ethnology. This concept was further developed by Graebner in advancing the idea of the “single origin of human culture,” while also assuming the existence of several basic cultural centers in different parts of the world. Through cultural encounters, cultural circles emerged, processes of fusion occurred, and different formations appeared—explaining the visible differences among basic cultures.

The second school is the Vienna School, where Wilhelm Schmidt summarized the views of its pioneers and affirmed the existence of primordial cultures representing the oldest types among contemporary cultural groups. These primordial cultures constituted the first cultural circle, while the second circle consisted of pastoral cultures in regions of Siberia and Central Asia.

Diffusionist theory believes that the spread of cultural traits among both distant and neighboring cultures helps create the conditions necessary for cultural change and transition from one stage to another. It thus highlights the importance of cultural contact or interaction among groups and the transfer of cultural traits from one society to another. The diffusionist school holds that the distinctive features of a given culture first emerged in a specific geographic cultural center and then spread to other regions. It posits a primary center of civilization and multiple cultural circles or civilizational foci/centers that share certain cultural traits; the closer a group is to the center, the stronger and denser these traits become.

The most important viewpoints of the diffusionist school are summarized by what Coopers presented in his study on “Diffusionism: Transmission and Reception,” portions of which were translated by Muhammad Riyadh in his book *Man: A Study in Species and Civilization*, as follows:

- i. Culture and the human being are simultaneous from the beginning, and history across all its periods confirms this.
- ii. Cultural diffusion and the degree of its transmission is a social fact and reality that no researcher—old or modern—can deny.
- iii. Diffusionism is an important principle in ethnological studies and prehistoric studies. Due to the lack of written documents, the matter requires comparative studies of cultural traits in order to obtain spatial, temporal, and causal factors.
- iv. Diffusionists should use the measures of form and number known in the historical method; however, this method will not produce a history identical to what we find in scientific historical writings.
- v. Cultural diffusion does not represent all events of history. The study of cultural elements does not replace historical documents, but provides important additions in the historical direction; and where historical documentation is lacking—as in the study of prehistory and primitive groups—it is unreasonable to refrain from interpreting facts in ethnology and archaeology.
- vi. Diffusionist studies are based on cultural similarities. Even when we cannot confirm connections between similarities, asserting that two similar phenomena arose independently becomes unacceptable, because it assumes something harder to establish than prior connections.
- vii. Diffusion, transmission, and reception do not all proceed according to fixed rules; there are always multiple possibilities of acceptance or modification, reflecting a degree of free choice among most groups.
- viii. Accordingly, each instance of cultural diffusion must be treated on its own and in light of its circumstances.

In conclusion, it can be said that the diffusionist school constructed a distinctive theoretical entity for itself, producing a set of concepts and meanings such as the cultural circle, the cultural region, and cultural geography, among other concepts that reflect the intellectual, methodological issues and contents of this theory.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the concept of culture is among the most complex and controversial concepts in social and human thought, given the multiplicity of theoretical frameworks that have addressed it and the differences in the historical and epistemological contexts that shaped its conceptions. The analysis shows that these conceptions—despite diverging in how they define the nature and functions of culture—converge in viewing it as a complex system of values, meanings, symbols, and practices that plays a fundamental role in shaping human consciousness and organizing social behavior. The study also demonstrates that differences in approaches do not necessarily reflect contradiction so much as a theoretical richness that enables a deeper understanding of culture as a dynamic and changing phenomenon—one that is influenced by social and historical structures and influences them at the same time. Accordingly, absorbing this theoretical plurality constitutes a necessary entry point for understanding contemporary cultural transformations and for analyzing the problems of identity and meaning in human societies. On this basis, the study offers the following recommendations:

- i. The study recommends adopting an integrative approach in the study of culture that brings together social, anthropological, and philosophical dimensions, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural phenomenon.

- ii. Encouraging comparative studies that analyze the concept of culture across different civilizational contexts, given their role in highlighting cultural particularities and points of interaction among them.
- iii. Paying attention to studying cultural transformations in the context of globalization and digital technology, given the new challenges they pose concerning identity, values, and meaning.
- iv. Integrating the cultural dimension more deeply into social and educational research, given its pivotal role in interpreting human behavior and building collective consciousness.
- v. Calling for the development of modern concepts and analytical tools capable of capturing the dynamism of culture and the multiplicity of its manifestations in contemporary reality.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based on theoretical analysis and critical interpretation of existing intellectual and philosophical literature. It does not involve human participants, personal data, fieldwork, experiments, interviews, or surveys. Consequently, ethical approval was not required. The author confirms adherence to internationally recognized principles of academic integrity, including originality, proper citation, and responsible use of sources, in accordance with ethical standards for scholarly research.

Author Contributions

Dr. Chikhaoui Mahmoud is the sole author of this manuscript and was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, literature review, analytical framework, interpretation of theoretical perspectives, and final drafting and revision of the manuscript. The author has read and approved the final version of the paper and accepts full responsibility for its content.

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Conflict of Interest

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