



ROUTLEDGE



# Social and Cultural Anthropology

## *The Key Concepts*

THIRD EDITION

**Nigel Rapport**

ROUTLEDGE



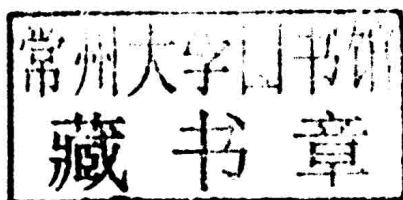
KEY GUIDES

# SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The Key Concepts

Third Edition

*Nigel Rapport*



First edition published 1999  
by Routledge

Second edition published 2007  
by Routledge

Third edition published 2014  
by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and published by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1999, 2007 Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing; © 2014 Nigel Rapport

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Rapport, Nigel, 1956–

Social and cultural anthropology: the key concepts / Nigel Rapport. -- Third edition.  
pages cm. -- (Routledge key guides)

1. Ethnology. I. Title.

GN316.R37 2014

305.8--dc23

2014000938

ISBN13: 978-0-415-83452-0 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-83451-3 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-1-315-76656-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by Taylor & Francis Books



Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

*Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* is an easy to use A–Z guide to the central concepts that students are likely to encounter in this field.

Now fully updated, this third edition includes entries on:

- Materiality
- Environment
- Human rights
- Hybridity
- Alterity
- Cosmopolitanism
- Ethnomethodology
- Applied anthropology
- Gender
- Cybernetics

With full cross-referencing and further reading to point students towards the latest writings in social and cultural anthropology, this is a superb reference resource for anyone studying or teaching in this area.

**Nigel Rapport** is Professor of Anthropological and Philosophical Studies at the University of St Andrews, where he directs the Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies; he has also held the Canada Research Chair in Globalization, Citizenship and Justice, at Concordia University of Montreal. He is the author of a number of books on anthropological theory and of ethnography, including *I am Dynamite: An Alternative Anthropology of Power* (Routledge, 2003), *Of Orderlies and Men: Hospital Porters Achieving Wellness at Work* (Carolina Academic, 2008), and *Anyone: The Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology* (Berghahn, 2012).

The world of external objects and of psychic experiences appears to be in a continuous flux. ( ... ) The fact that we give names to things that are in flux implies inevitably a certain stabilization. ( ... ) It excludes other configurational organizations of the data which tend in different directions.

Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*

## PREFACE

This is a book of 57 essays each of which deals with an important term in the toolbox of contemporary anthropological studies. The aim is to provide a concise repository of explanatory statements covering a number of the major concepts that professional anthropologists might use.

'Explanatory statements' here includes argumentation concerning the diversity of ways in which anthropologists have understood the key concepts of their discipline; also the way these have changed over time and might be expected to change in future. The volume is both overview and polemic, intended as a study guide as well as a research tool for original writing.

The 'cultural anthropological' tradition originating in North America and the 'social anthropological' tradition of Europe are combined in the book, reflecting the growing similarity of what is taught in university courses around the world. Furthermore, *Key Concepts* sets out to write anthropology into a changing environment of academic disciplines – their changing interrelations, methodologies and epistemologies – in the light of the current ('post-modern', 'reflexive') blurring of generic divisions and challenge to established verities. The volume draws on a range of disciplinary sources (including philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, literary criticism and linguistics), so situating anthropology within a broadly conceived notion of the humanities.

The 57 entries range in length from approximately 1,500 words to 5,500 words, as the significance of the concepts varies and as they give on to discussions of variable complexity. The concepts also cover a range of types: ontological ('Agent and agency', 'Consciousness', 'Gender'), epistemological ('Cybernetics', 'Myth', 'World-view'), methodological ('Culture', 'Literariness', 'Methodological individualism and holism'), theoretical ('Community', 'Kinship', 'Urbanism') and ethnographic ('Conversation', 'Home and homelessness', 'Tourism'). The essay format is intended to give sufficient space for the history of

usage of the concept to be addressed and the argumentation surrounding it, also the way that conceptual meanings change over time and according to author and context.

Besides the labelled concept entries there is also a detailed *Index* to this book which can be used to enquire more immediately of precise features in the discipline's discursive landscape. Finally, there is an extensive *Bibliography* of sources which directs the reader to further, specialized readings.

A book of key anthropological concepts is something of a departure. There are many introductions to anthropology (*Other Cultures* [Beattie 1964], *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* [Hendry 2008], *Small Places, Large Issues* [Eriksen 2010]); also dictionaries (*The Dictionary of Anthropology* [Barfield 1997], *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* [Seymour-Smith 1986]); encyclopaedias (*Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* [Levinson and Ember 1996], *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* [Barnard and Spencer 2002]); and a *Companion* (Ingold 1998a); but there have not been many attempts to distil 'anthropological wisdom', theoretical, methodological, analytical and ethnographic, by way of key concepts.

Within the three most comparable volumes, Robert Winthrop's *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (1991), *South African Keywords* edited by Emile Boonzaier and John Sharp (1988), and *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* by Robert Lavenda and Emily Schultz (2009), a narrower focus is chosen than in this book. Winthrop's particular emphasis on 'cultural anthropology' translates as the description and interpretation of 'culturally patterned thought and behavior' (Winthrop 1991: ix); between the 80 concepts he highlights and those selected here, there are few overlaps: 'community', 'interpretation', 'network', 'urbanism', 'world-view'. Lavenda and Schultz provide an annotated bibliography of the concepts that a student might need in order to 'read ethnography more effectively'; there are 12 chapters, introducing standard terms such as 'Culture', 'Language', 'Religion', 'Politics' and 'Marriage'. Boonzaier and Sharp, meanwhile, analyse 13 key words both by anthropologists and politicians, which they take to be instrumental in the construction, representation, objectification and interpretation of South African apartheid.

While less focused on a particular ethnographic area than is Boonzaier and Sharp's volume, the present book might be said to look similarly askance at the 'culture and society' of anthropology as an academic discipline, and to relate its conceptual tools to wider philosophical and folk discourses. It echoes Boonzaier and Sharp too in claiming kinship

with, and drawing inspiration from, an original project of the literary critic and theorist of culture, Raymond Williams. In 1976, Williams produced a book of *Keywords* in which he attempted to isolate certain significant landmarks in Western social and cultural discourse. The approach had been made famous in Germany, since the Second World War, under the title, *Begriffsgeschichte* [conceptual history]; shifts and discontinuities in conceptual formation, it was argued, were an index of wider socio-cultural change as well as being instrumental in the shaping of such change. Through an assemblage of 'keywords', Williams explained (1976: 13), he sought to delineate and detail a complex and broad landscape of the Western imagination. Here were 131 words which, he suggested, forced themselves on his attention because of their general socio-cultural import: their indicativeness of certain abiding values or forms of thought, and their connection to certain fundamental activities.

The key concepts signalled in this book are to be regarded in a comparable way; they are discursive nodes from which a broader, interconnected landscape of anthropological work and understanding should become apparent.

The dictionary defines 'concepts' as 'things formed through the power of the mind', also 'general notions, fancies, thoughts and plans' (Chambers 1996). More technically, one might wish to identify by 'concepts' the specific things that human beings think about, the meaning(s) of those things at particular moments, and the relations between those things and various other things in a classificatory array (cf. McInnis 1991: vii). Each concept entry in this book sets out to define an aspect of anthropological thought, therefore, to describe something of the range of a concept's meaning-in-use, and to offer pointers towards other entries with which the concept can be seen to connect. To an extent, the titles of the entries ('Contradiction', 'Epistemological pluralism', 'Ontology' and 'Rural idyll') remain flags of convenience, the significant issue being not the titles as such but the disciplinary landscape that they can signal and the area they allow the essays to cover.

This is the third edition of this book. It is instructive to consider how the editions have altered: besides the revising and updating, the entries that have been withdrawn and the new ones that have taken their place. To an extent this is a matter of space; but it also reflects a disciplinary process of changing analytical terrain. Between the first edition and the second, 'Dialogics and analogics', 'Non-places', 'Situation and context' and 'Thick description' were removed, while



'Body', 'Cosmopolitanism', 'Power' and 'State' were inserted. Between the second edition and the third, 'Applied anthropology' has been added, also 'Environment', 'Fieldwork' and 'Materiality'. To make way for these, 'Gossip', 'Reading', 'Stereotypes', 'Transaction' and 'World-making' have been removed.

When Raymond Williams described himself in his *Keywords* as charting a landscape of 'Western sociocultural discourse', he admitted that any such exercise was inevitably partial. It must also be subjective, partisan and programmatic; for at the same time as it sought simply to chart, *Keywords* also *created* a landscape: Williams was delivering an argument as much as an encyclopaedic lexicon. And yet the project remained an essentially open-ended one, because Williams is not prescriptive and because the development of concepts does not cease; in endeavouring to encompass a vocabulary, *Keywords* succeeded above all in extending it, and generating further discussion.

This book would offer no more and no less than that. It is imbued with the perspective of its author; it is the landscape of anthropology primarily as he sees and interprets it. But then the notion of an academic discipline (as with any other institution) whose workings and use are intrinsically perspectival, contingent, subjective and situational matters, and in that sense anti-disciplinary, might in itself be said to be an inherently 'anthropological' notion.

Certain entries in the first edition were written by Joanna Overing, namely: 'Alterity', 'Culture', 'Gender', 'Kinship', 'Myth', 'Society' and 'The Unhomely'. I am grateful to her for her original contribution. At Routledge I would like to thank Siobhán Poole and Rebecca Shillabeer for their editorial support, and for copy-editing Pat Baxter.

NJR  
St Andrews, 2014

## LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

Agent and agency	3
Alterity	11
Applied anthropology	19
Auto-anthropology	24
Body	35
Children	44
Classification	49
Code	57
Cognition	68
Common sense	75
Community	78
Consciousness	83
Contradiction	98
Conversation	107
Cosmopolitanism	110
Culture	120
Cybernetics	130
Discourse	143
Environment	152
Epistemological pluralism	162
Ethnomethodology	167
Feminism	174
Fieldwork	177
Form and content	188
Gender	193
Home and homelessness	204
Human rights	212
Humanism	222
Hybridity	229
Individualism	238
Interpretation	246
Kinship	251

Liminality	263
Literariness	270
Materiality	279
Methodological individualism and holism	287
Movement	296
Myth	305
Narrative	317
Network	325
Ontology	328
Post-modernism	340
Power	349
Qualitative and quantitative methodologies	357
Reflexivity	364
Rural idyll	370
Science	377
Social interaction	388
Society	399
State	410
Time	416
Tourism	421
Urbanism	429
Violence	435
Visuality	442
World-view	447
Writing	457

# CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>List of Key Concepts</i>	xi
KEY CONCEPTS	1
<i>Bibliography</i>	464
<i>Index</i>	523

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY**



## AGENT AND AGENCY

The concepts of agent and agency, perhaps related most closely to that of power, are usually deployed in debates over the relationship between individuals and social structure. They also pertain, however, to the nature of individual consciousness, its ability to constitute and reconstitute itself, and, ultimately, the extent of its freedom from exterior determination.

### *Agency and structure*

Agents act, and agency is the capability, the power, to be the source and originator of acts; agents are the subjects of action. Weber suggested that acts be distinguished from mere (animal) behaviour on the basis of acts being seen to entail a number of features of human rationality: consciousness, reflection, intention, purpose and meaning. He felt that social science should be an interpretive study of the meanings of human action and the choices behind them. G. H. Mead sought to clarify the Weberian notion of meaning, and its social-scientific understanding (*verstehung*), by differentiating acts into impulses, definitions of situations and consummations.

From a Durkheimian view, however, what was crucial for an appreciation of human action were the conditions under which, and means by which, it took place; also the norms in terms of which choices between acts were guided. Over and against action, therefore, were certain structures which implied constraint, even coercion, and which existed and endured over and above the actions of particular individuals, lending to individuals' acts a certain social and cultural regularity. What social science should study, therefore, was how such formal structures were created and how precisely they determined individual behaviour. To the extent that 'agency' existed, in short, it was a quality that derived from, and resided in, certain collective representations: in the social fact of a *conscience collective*; only in their pre-socialized, animal nature (a pathological state within a socio-cultural milieu) were individuals able to initiate action which was not predetermined in this way.

Much of the literature on agency since the time of Weber and Durkheim has sought to resolve their opposition, and explore the limits on individual capacities to act independently of structural constraints. Despite attempts at compromise, moreover, the division does not prove an easy one to overcome. Either, in more individualistic or liberal vein, one argues that structures are an abstraction which

individuals create and which cannot be said to determine, willy-nilly, the action of their makers. Or else, in more collectivist and communitarian vein, one argues that structures are in fact *sui generis* and determine the very nature of individual consciousness and character; so that individuals' 'acts' are merely the manifestation of an institutional reality, and a set of structural relations.

Nonetheless, numerous claims to compromise have been put forward, most famously by Parsons (the theory of social action and pattern variables [e.g. 1977]); by Berger and Luckmann (the theory of the social construction of reality [1966]); by Giddens (structuration theory [1984]); and by Bourdieu (the theory of practice and the *habitus* [1977]). In each case, however, the theorist can be seen to end by privileging one or other of the above options; the compromise is hard to sustain. Hence, a division between social structure and individual agency is collapsed in favour of either a liberal or a communitarian world-view – and more usually (certainly regarding the above claimants) the latter (Rapport 1990).

For example, for Bourdieu, to escape from vulgarly mechanistic models of sociocultural determinism is not to deny the objectivity of prior conditions and means of action and so reduce acts' meaning and origin to the conscious intentions and deliberations of individuals. What is called for is a more subtle approach to consciousness where, in place of a simple binary distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, one recognizes a continuum. One also recognizes that the greater part of human experience lies between the two poles, and may be called the domain of habit: most consciousness is 'habitual'. It is here that socialization and early learning put down their deepest roots; it is here that culture becomes encoded on the individual body, and the body becomes a mnemonic device for the communication and expression of cultural codes (of dress and gender; of propriety and normalcy; of control and domination). Competency in social interaction is also to be found in the habitual domain between the two poles: individuals act properly by not thinking about it. In short, the wide provenance of habit in human behaviour is a conduit for the potency of processes of exterior determination and institutionalization. Objective social structures produce the '*habitus*': a system of durable, transposable dispositions that function as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified, social practices. Such dispositions and practices may together be glossed as 'culture', an acquired system of habitual behaviour that generates (determines) individuals' schemes of action. In short, social structures produce culture, which in turn generates practices, which, finally, reproduce social structures.



In this way, the ‘compromise’ that Bourdieu provides ends up being a structurally causal model based on reified abstractions and materialist determinations. While claiming to transcend the dualism between structure and agency Bourdieu remains firmly rooted in a communitarian objectivism. While claiming to reject deterministic logic which eschews individual action, what there is of the latter (the ‘intentionless invention of regulated improvisation’ [Bourdieu 1977: 79]) is merely a medium and expression of social-structural replication; what (habitual) subjectivity is allowed for in Bourdieu’s portrayal is heavily over-determined by social process. Agency is reduced to a seemingly passive power of reacting (habitually) to social-structural prerequisites (Jenkins 1992).

### *Creativity and imagination*

What social science often effects when faced with irresolvable opposition is a change in the terms of the debate. Thus, fresh purchase is gained on the relationship between social structure and individual agency when ‘creativity’ is introduced: the creativity of an individual agent in relation to the structures of a sociocultural milieu.

Extrapolating from processes of fission and fusion (of ‘schismogenesis’) among the New Guinean Iatmul, Bateson concluded that each human individual should be conceived of as an ‘energy source’ (1973: 126). For here was something fuelled by its own processes (metabolic, cognitive and other) rather than by external stimuli, and which was capable of, and prone to, engagement in its own acts. Furthermore, this energy then imposed itself on the world, energizing certain events, causing certain relations and giving rise to an interaction between things organic and inorganic, which were then perceived to be ‘orderly’ or ‘disorderly’.

Human individuals were active participants in the world, in short. Indeed, inasmuch as their energy determined the nature of certain relations and objects in the world, individuals could be said to be creators of worlds. For what could be understood by ‘order’ or ‘disorder’ were certain relationships between certain objects which individuals came to see as normal and normative or as abnormal and pathological; here were some from an infinite number of possible permutations of objects and relations in the world, whose classification and evaluation were dependent on the eye of the perceiver. But there was nothing necessary, objective or absolute about either designation; ‘disorder’ and ‘order’ were statements as construed by individual, purposive, perceiving entities and determined by individuals’ states of