

## Social Representation Theory meets Cultural Studies in Indonesia: Seeking new possibilities to accommodate emerging studies on culture<sup>1</sup>

*A Teoria das Representações Sociais encontra os Estudos Culturais na Indonésia: Buscando novas possibilidades para acomodar estudos emergentes sobre cultura*

*La teoría de la representación social se encuentra con los estudios culturales en Indonesia: Buscando nuevas posibilidades para dar cabida a los estudios emergentes sobre la cultura*

*La théorie de la représentation sociale rencontre les études culturelles en Indonésie : à la recherche de nouvelles possibilités pour accueillir les études émergentes sur la culture*

Risa Permanadeli

Director of Center of Social Representations Studies  
(Pusat Kajian Representasi Sosial)

[permana@sr-indonesia.org](mailto:permana@sr-indonesia.org)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6334-878X>

### ABSTRACT

Knowledge production is always contextualized according to local culture. This article discusses emerging studies on culture in Indonesia in the late 20th century, connected to national history. It highlights a movement against the previous trend of adopting Western approaches in the name of modernization, ignoring culture and history. The article emphasizes Social Representations Theory and Cultural Studies, emphasizing how representations contribute to identity formation and shape social perceptions. It explores the interconnection of these approaches and the need for a methodological strategy adapted to cultural and historical context.

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**Keywords:** Cultural Studies. Social Representations. Locality. Knowledge Productions. Indigenous Perspectives.

## RESUMO

*A produção de conhecimento é sempre contextualizada de acordo com a cultura local. Este artigo aborda os estudos emergentes sobre cultura na Indonésia no final do século XX, conectados à história nacional. Ele destaca um movimento contrário à tendência anterior de adotar abordagens ocidentais em nome da modernização, ignorando cultura e história. O artigo destaca a Teoria das Representações Sociais e os Estudos Culturais, enfatizando como as representações contribuem para a formação da identidade e moldam percepções sociais. Ele explora a interconexão dessas abordagens e a necessidade de uma estratégia metodológica adaptada ao contexto cultural e histórico.*

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos Culturais. Representações Sociais. Localidade. Produções de Conhecimento. Perspectivas Indígenas

## RESUMEN

*La producción de conocimiento siempre se contextualiza según la cultura local. Este artículo aborda los estudios emergentes sobre la cultura en Indonesia a finales del siglo XX, vinculados a la historia nacional. Destaca un movimiento en contra de la tendencia anterior de adoptar enfoques occidentales en nombre de la modernización, ignorando así la cultura y la historia. El artículo enfatiza la teoría de las representaciones sociales y los estudios culturales, resaltando cómo las representaciones contribuyen a la formación de la identidad y moldean las percepciones sociales. Explora la interconexión de estos enfoques y la necesidad de una estrategia metodológica adaptada al contexto cultural e histórico.*

**Palabras clave:** Estudios Culturales. Representaciones Sociales. Localidad. Producciones de Conocimiento. Perspectivas Indígenas.

## RÉSUMÉ

*La production de connaissance est toujours contextualisée selon la culture locale. Cet article aborde les études émergentes sur la culture en Indonésie à la fin du XXe siècle, liées à l'histoire nationale. Il met en lumière un mouvement à l'encontre de la tendance précédente d'adopter des approches occidentales au nom de la modernisation, ignorant ainsi la culture et l'histoire. L'article met l'accent sur la théorie des représentations sociales et les études culturelles, soulignant comment les représentations contribuent à la formation de l'identité et façonnent les perceptions sociales. Il explore l'interconnexion de ces approches et la nécessité d'une stratégie méthodologique adaptée au contexte culturel et historique.*

**Mots-clé:** Études Culturelles. Représentations Sociales. Localité. Productions de Connaissance. Perspectives Autochtones.

## 1. Knowledge production in Indonesia

The implementation of the Social Representation Theory in the Indonesian context is closely linked to the influence of colonisation on knowledge production, both in Indonesia and in other Asian countries. This colonial legacy influences the way Indonesia approaches and appropriates various types of knowledge that generally come from the West<sup>2</sup>. It is within this context that Social Representation Theory meets the dominant perspective of Cultural Studies<sup>3</sup>.

Social Representation Theory entered Indonesia when the dominant stream of the academic world relied intensively on local perspectives expressed through culture to understand existing social realities. This fact then allowed Social Representation Theory studies to meet head-on with Cultural Studies as the dominant current of thought. It also offers a reason for the development of Social Representation Theory studies as a contemporary model that allows for a reinvention of culture from a specifically Indonesian point of view.

What should be noted is that the two arrived on the academic scene at the same time: after the end of the Cold War. Political oppression during the Cold War period, whose effects lasted in Indonesia up to 1998, influenced many forms of knowledge

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<sup>2</sup> At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a movement to raise the awareness in Asia to question the legacy of Western domination in academic settings. This movement is in accordance with the emergence of studies conducted by literature critics particularly, that identify how non-Westerns appropriated and interiorized the Western gaze on them, and ended up acting according to that gaze (Said, 1978). Amongst Asian scholars, Syed Farid Alatas (2006), a Malaysian sociologist, voiced the need to redefine Asia. In psychology, similar trends appeared and are being articulated as the new spirit that fuels the movement of Indigenous Psychology (Permanadeli, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Cultural Studies is a perspective that originated from Great Britain in the Birmingham School at the beginning of 60s at the 20<sup>th</sup> century. is an It interdisciplinary field concerned with the role of social institutions in the shaping of culture. Cultural studies emerged in Britain in the late 1950s and subsequently spread internationally, notably to the United States and Australia. Originally identified with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (founded 1964) and with such scholars as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams, cultural studies later became a well-established field in many academic institutions, and it has since had broad influence in sociology, anthropology, historiography, literary criticism, philosophy, and art criticism. Among its central concerns are the place of race or ethnicity, class, and gender in the production of cultural knowledge [<https://www.britannica.com/topic/cultural-studies>]

production, particularly in social sciences<sup>4</sup>. The social sciences were tightly controlled by the government and had to follow the politics of development in general, which once again came from “modern” Western science. The wave of modernisation through this period of development was also simultaneously accompanied by an influx of other Western sciences at the university level. This included psychology (Permanadeli, 2012). The goal that the State was banking on in order to benefit from this development trajectory was to transform Indonesia from a traditional/poor/underdeveloped nation into a modern nation. Ongoing political repression, due to the need to keep Indonesia away from communism, was also to be tolerated in the name of political stability (Schwartz, 1990/1994). These two factors were considered a guarantee of economic growth that would lead Indonesia to prosperity as a modern nation. This was considered a justification for allowing the State to control knowledge production in universities.

What then was neglected in this development model? Culture associated with local or tradition was always seen as a negative factor. Culture appeared as a burden hindering progress. Or even worse, culture was associated with the “stigma” of backwardness (*kampung*<sup>5</sup>), that of a colonised nation. Therefore, studies related to culture in the social sciences have always been marginalised or even ignored.

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<sup>4</sup> The climate of political oppression did not only originate in the New Order regime. During the colonial period for instance, the Dutch were constantly repressing opposition movements. In each historical period, the culture of oppression emanated from different sources (ideology, colonial interest, struggle for independence, etc.) and took different forms (physical torture, imprisonment, exile, social isolation, etc.). Riklefs (2005) has compared the culture of repression in Indonesia during the colonial period to the actual government (p.559) and found similarities on both power practices.

<sup>5</sup> It is a pejorative term to address the local people and their culture in opposite of the modern and “Westernized population” that was initially educated by the Dutch in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The origin of the term is *kampung*, a dwelling area where the indigenous people resided in Batavia, the old name of Jakarta during the colonial period. Usually all the images of poverty, dirty, backwardness, ignorance, lazy, superstitious, uneducated, ...are attached to illustrate the opposition with the idealization images of the Westerners (the Dutch and the Europeans). This term is still widely used in every day conversation to address all traits associated with rural lives.

The academic climate became accepted when the economy began to grow and people started to enjoy the fruits of development. But this rapidly growing situation did not last forever. The global financial crisis that hit the country in 1998, and the reform movement designed to replace a government that had been in power for more than thirty years finally forced political and economic changes, resulting in the end of the former regime and a new context for knowledge production.

## 2. The return of Culture through the meeting of Cultural Studies and Social Representation Theory

The need to bring culture back into the academic scene was part of new currents spreading throughout Asia after the end of the last century's crises. With the financial crisis, inflation was sky-high and the magic numbers in the economic sector all collapsed. The changing political scene changed the stage of power – with sudden shifts from authoritarian rule to democracy, from militarism to civil society, from centralised government to decentralisation, and at the same time from local to global, **from place to space**, etc. At a time when all these changes were happening so brutally because the country's political economy had also collapsed, new findings about culture as an instrument that is resistant to collapse were discovered.

What, in fact, happened? During the development period when the economy was supposedly growing, this growth seldom touched the daily lives of the people. The majority of the population continued to live according to the rhythm of life of their ancestors. With traditional agricultural landscapes that actually remained a pillar of the country's economy, people remained connected to traditional economic systems that are particularly dependent on nature, and which have never been an integral part of the national economy. The impressive statistics supposedly resulting from the rapid growth of the national economy, only centered on certain areas (Java, and especially the larger cities), or on certain economic sectors (oil and other mineral production) which unfortunately are generally not directly connected to people's lives. In other words, development only revived a limited number of areas and only helped a small number of people. Therefore, when the crisis hit, the people living in

this traditional bubble were safe. Tradition and culture - that remained rooted but usually denied - were in fact the elements that created a safety net in the life of the nation.

This unavoidable truth forced the academic world to appreciate culture as a house that must be saved. It was within this framework that various questions about culture were revisited, such as the nature of power, sources of power, the relationship between citizens and power, how power is maintained and accumulated in everyday life, and the role played by culture in the construction of power. Within this context, Cultural Studies and Social Representation Theory were introduced.

### **3. The meeting between Social Representation Theory and Cultural Studies in the Indonesian academic world.**

The link between Social Representation Theory and Cultural Studies lies in the perspective of an understanding of the ways in which culture and society are constructed and reproduced through social practices and discourse. Social Representation Theory offers a theoretical framework that seeks to understand how individuals and groups interpret their social world through the production and circulation of meanings, which are then represented in various forms of attitudes, actions, discourses, imaginations, etc. (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Jodelet, 1998, 1998-b, ; Abric, 1994; Markova, 2003). This theory by itself emphasises the role of culture and communication in shaping our understanding of social reality. At the same time, Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary perspective that explores the ways in which cultural practices and discourse shape and are shaped by the jostling of social, political, and economic forces. It offers a critical perspective on how reality is produced and how that reality reflects the social power relations that exist in society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947/2002; Hall, 1980,1993; Fanon, 1967; William, 1983, 2014; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Foucault, 1990).

Cultural Studies originated in the UK, in Birmingham, and then spread to the United States during the 70s, where it gave a new face to social studies and left behind

classical disciplines such as economics, politics, and sociology. The changes that occurred in the world during the final two decades of the 20th century, due to the breakdown of Cold War ideology, gave rise to a new enthusiasm for understanding what is happening in modern contemporary society. This perspective easily became a new wave in America, and moved to Canada, Australia, and Hong Kong, which have become references for the social sciences in Asia. It was during this period that many Asian scholars (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia) studied in the US, Australia or Canada. They brought back a new awareness about how to live as a nation and State without left-right political ideology, while at the same time trying to find a new formula about how culture influences our mental activity, and how, through a cultural lens we can see the power relations that shape the contemporary life of Asian society. It was a new beginning for Asian scholars when they found new approaches to understanding Asia from their own perspective (Nandy, 1983, 1987; Spivak, 1988, 1990, 1999; Norholt, 2004; Alatas, 2006; Budianta, 2010; Haryanto, 2006, 2014; Kuan-Hsing, 2010; Norholt, 2004; Acharya, 2014).

One of the main contributions of Cultural Studies to social science has been the recognition that culture and power are inherently interrelated. Therefore, Cultural Studies emphasises the identification of traces of power based on race (du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1967; Hall, 1980, 1993, 1997; Hooks, 1992; McIntosch, 1988), class (Freire, 1968/1970; Bourdieu, 1997; Frow, 1995; Harris, 1992), gender and sexuality (Beauvoir, 1949/1961; Butler, 1990), nationality (Said, 1978, 1994; Spivak, 1990, 1998; Cohn, 1996), etc. What cannot be denied from the findings of Cultural Studies is the fact that besides seeking and identifying traces of power, it also seeks out spaces where, and reasons why, power is challenged, changed, or transformed (Bourdieu, 1984, 1987; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Foucault, 1979; Frow, 1993, 1995; Nandy, 1983, 1987, 2002;). Cultural Studies particularly emphasises the importance of studying popular culture and everyday life as a means to understand the complex dynamics of contemporary society (William, 1958; Barthes, 1957/1972; Debord, 1967/1970; Du Guy et al, 1997; Bourdieu, 1996; Hall, 1980; Frow, 1995,

Walkerdine, 1996; Featherstone, 1991; Bocoock, 1993; Gans, 1999). It therefore regards popular and everyday culture as a space for power struggles that allows marginalised groups to formulate resistance, as well as to claim their own identity and their own forms of representation.

What is interesting is that Cultural Studies uses the notion of representation in a similar way to Social Representation Theory. Both approaches examine how meaning is created, disseminated, and received, and how representation contributes to the formation of identity, social cognition, social norms, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, etc. Both approaches also emphasise the dynamic process of representing an object, and at the same time accept that representation is an active and influential factor in shaping perceptions, values, social judgments, and beliefs, rather than simply reflecting objective reality as a way to explain existing social reality.

Essentially, the postulate of power is seen as a determining factor that also determines the product of the studies on representation in Cultural Studies, while on the other hand, Social Representation Theory places more emphasis on how cognitive processes are involved in the formation and distribution of representations in a social group or society. Power certainly is one of the elements that influence the production of representations, but power is considered according to this theory as a form of knowledge that orients the position taken by the Subject toward social objects and can be articulated in any form of representation.

The difference in focus between these observations can be understood if we trace the origins of the disciplines from which the two perspectives originate. Cultural Studies, because of its interdisciplinary nature, easily embraces sociology (Bourdieu, 1984, 1992, 1996, 1998-b; Beaudrillard, 1968/1996; Giddens, 1991, 1992) political science and literary criticism (Said, 1995; William, 1977), semiotics (Barthes, 1977) and economics (Laclau & Mouffle, 1985; Lupton, 2000), as well as media studies (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; Williams, 1981; Beaudrillard, 1968/1996; Chomsky, 2005/2006). However, no theoretical framework grows out of this perspective, because Cultural Studies embraces the theories developed in each discipline, and

uses them in order to understand the struggle for power in contemporary society. This means that from the outset, Cultural Studies consciously examines contemporary phenomena as focus of study and read the phenomena according to the principles of power relation.

Social Representation Theory, meanwhile, grew from social psychology, with a need to understand modern society which is assumed too one-dimensional as it is only explained by the mainstream - using behaviourism. Social Representation Theory went a step further in explaining the complexities of modern society by tracing how an individual's mental functions are connected to society. This focus on early traces then explains why Social Representation Theory intersects more with the elements that constitute mental life such as anthropology, history, linguistics, the unconscious, collective memory, etc. Serge Moscovici, who coined the term 'Social Representation Theory' in 1961, showed how the relationship between individuals and society is an important space that always allows the production of meaning and symbols to occur, specifically through communication which has a cognitive mechanism (Moscovici, 1961/1976, 2012; Jodelet, 1989, 1998, 2010, 2012; Wagner, ; Markova, 2003). This mechanism regulates how each member of society accepts, understands, redistributes meaning, as well as confirms his or her place as a member of society, in order to understand the social world that he or she has to face. Or in other words, the connectedness between individuals and society through communicative exchange, ultimately determines how interactions, as well as social behaviour, are formed.

Although theoretically the two approaches offer different frameworks, basically they share the same interest in understanding the complex interactions between culture, society and power. More importantly, they both offer valuable insights into the ways in which cultural practices and discourse shape our understanding of social reality.

The fact that Social Representation Theory studies behaviour and social interaction explains why in Asia this theory has limited appeal in the field of psychology (social

psychology). On the other hand, Cultural Studies, because it questions contemporaneity, has the flexibility to cover a variety of disciplines. In Indonesia, we can easily find Cultural Studies teaching in social science faculties (sociology, political studies, communication studies, media studies, feminism and gender studies, etc.), in the humanities - literary studies and literary criticism, arts and urban studies, etc., and even in architecture.

For this reason, we can then identify differences in how research is carried out. From the beginning, studies on representation in Cultural Studies have focused on identifying social forces and understanding how hegemony, or conversely marginalisation, emerges from contact between each power. It is therefore, research on representation focuses on social hierarchies, ideology, or inequality, which is usually assumed to stem from the power of race, class, sexuality/gender, or even nationality.

With a social psychology foundation, the main goal of research on Social Representation is to investigate the collective processes by which meaning is constructed and shared within social groups/societies. Social Representation studies attempts to understand the ways in which individuals and groups create and share common understandings of reality, with a focus on the cognitive and social processes involved in the formation of representations, and the communication involved in producing them (Duveen & Lyoid, 1991; Wagner, Duveen, Themel, Verma, 1999; Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Moscovici, Jodelet, 1998). This makes it possible for Social Representation Theory to observe how representation contributes to social cohesion, the creation of social norms, and the management of social conflict (Jodelet, 1998, 1998-b, 2010; Moscovici, 1976, 2012, 2012-b).

The relationship between the objects of representation, the individual as the subject that produces the representation, and the presence of other individuals in society (others) as an intermediate process from which object meanings are shared and communicated, are the basic elements of this kind of study on both approaches.

Individual is not an isolated being. He or she is in constant interaction. Both perspectives recognise the importance of the place of the Other, which organises knowledge to generate and give meaning to object representations. This knowledge governs the process of sharing and the choice of channels through which to distribute meanings, be they social, political, cultural, historical, or religious practices or discourses, etc. It is important to note that it is through these channels that the Subject, or individual, transforms the objective object into a particular contextual reality object. It is the inclusion of other people as representatives of society in the production of representations which brings Social Representation Theory side by side with Cultural Studies. The convergence between Cultural Studies and Social Representation Theory thus lies in a realm that depends on the presence of Others (Hall, 1997; Moscovici, 1961/1976, 2012; Foucault, 1975, 1986). Hence, both perspectives recognise the complexity of representation and the role of culture as a determining factor in its production.

Within the currents of Cultural Studies developing in Asia, the ending of the cold war at the end of the 20th century was a historical turning point that forced Asia to find new currents of thought and reinvent itself from its own historical trajectory<sup>6</sup>. The fact that the study of Cultural Studies representation relates intentionally to a reading of the hierarchy of power that prevails in society, easily raises awareness of inequality, differences, inequalities, and a range of social problems that remain a reality that cannot be denied in Indonesian society. By tracing the wider arena of

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<sup>6</sup> The Vietnam war was a historical landscape for witnessing how the ideological conflict in West was transported in Asia and caused a scar in the memory of the people. It was in the same period, when Indonesia confronted indirectly with the West and had to follow the stake of the West. The PKI or the Indonesian Communist Party was accused of a *coup d'État* and the assassination of 10 military general on September 1965. This accusation was able to justify the humanitarian tragedy that causes the disappears of more than one million life of citizen done by the Indonesians with the support of military forces. The PKI was banned, and all associated with the Left or Marxism, was prohibited. The next government regime (New Order) that was in power in 1967 was completely backed up by the West that represented the Rightism. To up hold and guaranty that Indonesia would not affiliated with the Left power, a rigid control of power was applied at all sector of life. When the regime was fallen down, the need to question the past history and how it is regulated and represented in contemporary life was the gate to welcome all the studies on Culture.

power, Cultural Studies inevitably implies a reading of the dominion of Western power, which in turn becomes a new trend as a post-colonial study.

This perspective has attracted Indonesians to study and conduct Cultural Studies research since it liberates their understanding from past academic oppression, which they consider to be too Western. In the Indonesian context, Cultural Studies in particular has played an important role in understanding the impact of the New Order (the regime in power from 1967 to 1998) on Indonesian society and culture (Sen & Hill, 2000; Santikarma, 2004; Budianta, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009; Heryanto, 2006, 2014; Kusno, 2000, 2010; Missbach, 2014; Herlambang, 2014). Scholars have explored and dedicated their research to the ways in which the former regime's authoritarian policies and practices were reflected and strengthened through cultural practices and discourse. For example, Cultural Studies has extensively researched how regimes use propaganda, censorship, and the media, to shape public opinion and suppress dissent. They also analyse the ways in which cultural practices such as art and popular culture are used to promote the regime's ideology and suppress alternative perspectives that might exist to represent citizens (Taal, 2002; Budianta, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2016; Heryanto, 2006; Nilan & Mansfield, 2013; Herlambang, 2014).

The problem is that Indonesian culture, at least at the time when this theory was introduced, was no longer a traditional society that could be approached from a classical anthropological perspective as it was during the colonial period. Neither was it a modern society as imagined through a modern anthropological approach. Indonesian society has become more complex, and its complexity provides a rationale to approach and use Social Representation theory in accordance with this complexity.

#### **4. Implications of cultural insights gained when conducting Social Representation Studies research in Indonesia**

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with 17,000 islands, 1,340 ethnic groups, and more than 731 different languages<sup>7</sup>. In other words, there is variability in just about everything: language, values, norms, practices, beliefs, etc. Indonesia was under Dutch occupation for more than three centuries and 3.5 years under the Japanese one. Each period of colonialism added its own collective and social memories to those that existed before the arrival of Europeans and other foreign nations.

From the beginning when using to study contemporary issues such as consumerism, I was aware of this complexity without being able to clearly articulate and decode it. I began to study Social Representation Theory when I completed my doctorate with Jodelet in Paris in 2000. I researched ideas of modernity and the representation of modern Javanese women through consumerist culture<sup>8</sup>. The decision to tackle the issue of consumerism came about because one of the most difficult complexities to understand, for Indonesians, is the relationship between money and consumer goods. The problem of consumerism is not only related to purchasing power, as it is always explained in economy or sociology. The complexity of the ex-colonial society, the desire to look modern, the ease of consumerism via various facilities, and at the same time the attacks from the mass media, flooding the public with advertisements, have made consumerism one of the gateways to understanding how society defines itself. Culture is certainly present in each of the streams of the aforementioned elements and its presence appears in unexpected forms, such as in language, for example.

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<sup>7</sup> BPS (Biro Pusat Statistik), Susenas Maret 2023

<sup>8</sup> Since the middle of the 1970s, Indonesia was considered as a new Asian tiger after Japan and Singapore for its economic growth as a result of an intensive development program. I was part, at that time, of the second generation who graduated from University after the independence. I was urbanized in the sense of being exposed to Western objects of consumption, but at the same time was still strongly attached to my own culture, since my everyday life was still heavily organized according to my own Javanese culture (speaking Javanese, eating traditional food, following all the rites and custom, etc.). At that time, the consumption of Western objects was still restricted to tertiary needs, such as fashion, electrical appliances, cosmetics, etc. However, the attraction of consuming imported goods, as a colonial heritage, was still strongly present. This explained why the selling strategy was to persuade public to buy imported goods rather than the locals one.

Long before independence in 1945, Indonesia had from as early as 1928 decided on Bahasa Indonesia as a national language. It was thought that this would unite the nation, and therefore after the independence, this language was made the compulsory in schools. The problem is that in everyday life, everyone continued to use their mother tongue and only used Indonesian at school. Even if interviews were conducted in Indonesian, very often the logic used to speak remained attached to the logic of the mother tongue or local language, which was more psychologically real as a feature of daily life. In fact, all language norms attached to the local language are also applied to Indonesian. As a result, when conducting research in various parts of Indonesia, it is very important to understand the local language<sup>9</sup>.

For my first study, I interviewed respondents who were all Javanese, living in Yogyakarta and Jakarta (Permanadeli, 2015). My first interview was conducted in Yogyakarta, which is known as the centre of Javanese civilisation and culture. According to Javanese cultural manners, if you know that you are talking to a Javanese, it is natural to speak Javanese. More importantly, however, one needs to know to whom one is talking to, and how one should present oneself to the interlocutor. The notion that everyone has a place and speaks from that place, is a semantic rule that must be respected. The place determines one's position as a subject, which, unfortunately is not defined in the subject pronouns "I", "you", "he/she", or "they". The place of the subject is determined by the verb that confirms the meaning of the place. Therefore, to describe an action with a verb, in a different subject position, the verb can also be different. And the verb is not determined by the position of the first person, but by the second or third person, depending on the verb used. This means that the subject is never static. The subject's place depends on his relation to the other person with whom he is talking. Indeed, I encountered

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<sup>9</sup> The everyday life of people in this archipelago is organized according to local languages. They are not just dialects, but can be considered as languages with their own syntaxes and semantics. To travel to another village, town, or region with another language, means travelling to a foreign place within Indonesia. This also applies to food, customs, culture, etc.

all these principles in the Javanese language when I conducted interviews with informants in Jakarta, even though all interviews were conducted in Indonesian.

I grew up with Javanese as my mother tongue, and the semantic rules are different as a rule when I learn Indonesian, English or French. Being aware of these different semantic traits makes me fully attentive to the language aspect. I am no longer subject to grammatical linguistic truths to make analysis. On the other hand, I am fully subject to semantic rules, which, once again, can lead to overly subjective research.

A particularly interesting example I experienced of language structure transferred to another language, actually from Javanese to French, occurred when I had the occasion to consult with my research director, Jodelet. I had translated the transcript of my interview into French consciously so as to follow the scientific conventions of the language. In translation, in order to make the conversation easy to understand, I was forced to follow the structure of the French language where the subject-verb-object principle must be followed. The shifting of the Subject's place from "second person" or "third person" to "first person", and the rule that the verb behaves as a property of "Subject" to define "Object", completely changed the meaning and content of the interview. All of my sources ceased to be Javanese. They became French Cartesian beings, and I was 'Lost in Translation'! I lost my sense of Javaneseness in translation, together with my ability to understand content and meaning. Most importantly, I lost the knowledge of my culture. I not only had to return to the original transcriptions in the local languages (Javanese and Bahasa Indonesia) as my primary data, but I also had to reconsider the logic of these languages to understand the methods and content of their representations.

This initial study emphasised the need for attention and sensitivity to aspects of language in conducting research if one is to understand the production of representations. After more than 15 years of working with Javanese culture (focusing on power, gender and imagination), in 2012 I did research on *I la Galigo*

in Sulawesi<sup>10</sup>. The experience of collecting data through interviews and dealing with a local language that is completely different from all the languages I knew, forced me to stick to seeing the contents of the mental world of the people of South Sulawesi based on how they elaborate their social world using their own language.

My experience of 20 years of conducting research on the culture of the people of Java and Sulawesi has taught me that I must pay great attention to developing my "listening" capacity when dealing with another cultural unit that represents a social reality different from my own. Listening requires paying attention to what the source actually wants to tell on their language and certainly on their logic. This means that my position as a researcher always has a double character, as a researcher, or a foreigner/other, and at the same time as a member of a particular community.

The back and forth listening process as described above means converting what I have heard into what I know (based on the repertoire of knowledge I have as a researcher), and then returning that knowledge to the local context, and this is a most enriching experience when using language as a study tool. I discover, not only another culture, but another worldview, or another social reality of language. At the same time, I re-discover myself, my own culture and my own worldview. This heuristic fact means that I acknowledge my subjectivity, and in research the implication is that I consciously limit it rather than impose the logic of Javanese and Indonesian (or even French/English as the logic of the scientific language which I use to study social science as a researcher) in order to analyse data from cultural

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<sup>10</sup> *I la Galigo* is an epic of the seafaring Bugis people which relates the story of the genesis of life. It is said to be as old as human civilization. No historical evidence of such a claim exists. Academic sources however say it must have dated from a time long before the arrival of Islam (before the 16<sup>th</sup> century) because no indication of Islamic influence appears. The local people for their part hold that *I la Galigo* is an epic about the origins of the Buginese. This epic was scattered in the form of written manuscripts in local alphabet and on palm leaves. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the order of Dutch authority, the epic was reunited and written by Colliq Pujie. The manuscript is composed of 6000 pages and became the longest literature text in the world. In 2012 the epic was recognized by UNESCO as part of the Memory of the World program.

spheres originating from different social realities. It is within this framework that the word "listen" finds its true meaning in doing research in other culture.

This kind of fieldwork made me understand language not simply as a means of communication. I did all the data collection through unstructured interviews, living with and immersing myself with the locals, and accepting that I have to be sensitive to the flow of local life. Accepting this kind of flexibility ultimately forced me to broaden my research horizons and to embrace other perspectives such as anthropology, sociology, geography and history - as it is suggested by Moscovici when he placed his theory as the Metatheory, all of which ultimately made me confirm that language is a paradigm of thinking (Moscovici, 2012). Through language we can reach, feel or touch unexplored and unseen realms of thought such as mythology, belief systems, imagination, dreams, contemplation, the unconscious, collective memory, unspoken history, or even expressions of everyday life that normally define identity and/or social prejudice - two social realities that often form the basis of Indonesian national conflicts. To resume, we can always refer to Moscovici (2012) when he confirmed that "*une culture, une rationalité*" for saying that there is a rationality in every single culture.

Language also explains and makes it easier to understand various cultural phenomena that tend to be missing from globalisation discourse, which often ignores the pluralistic reality that remains strong in Indonesia (Permanadeli & Tadie, 2014; Permanadeli, ). Modern ideas, for example, are conceptualised and elaborated differently in everyday life, in every place and in every culture. For example, to understand the phenomenon of consumerism, which is always assumed to be a constant, regardless of place, it turns out that by reasoning in language, we can see that every object has a semantic meaning which is strongly influenced by the social and cultural reality where the object is located. With language we see how the same object is connected semantically with different objects in different societies, or vice versa. This in turn forces us as researchers to accept and understand that there are

networks of meaning that do not just disappear due to globalisation, and that language is the best cultural detection tool to explain this fact.

## **5. Following the direction of Social Representation Theory using a socio-genetic approach**

This insight from language led me to approach a socio-genetic perspective with regard to research into Social Representation. This perspective made me explore data and contextualise it according to the local history of the people: how this history shapes their mentality and influences their way of viewing reality, how history creates a semantic world from their daily reality, and at the same time how history makes people loyal users of language as a safeguard of their socio-cultural identity. Apart from local history, it cannot be denied that society is also inseparable from history in a larger framework, both national and global, which produces contemporary realities.

The main problem for a society like Indonesia is that historical traces are never as clear as those in Western society. A lack of documentation, both official and unofficial, has - in the Indonesian context - made of language the home where history lives - and is lived - by every member of society. At the same time, contemporary history is often easily blinkered into seeing only contemporary realities. The phenomenon of consumerism, for example, is very deceptive for researchers insofar as they find the same objects of consumerism everywhere, in particular mobile phones and the Internet - two items from contemporary life that are easily encountered yet often misunderstood. In a telephone call, who is being called, what was the conversation during the call, and what language was used when making the call, what linguistic expressions were used for special objects, with whom these expressions were used, etc - all tell of a multi-layered history that is often ignored and relatively unexplored in research. The telephone is not merely a piece of communication equipment or gadget that is an object of consumerism in modern society. The telephone can also represent pieces of history, connect them, or possibly even negate part of history.

However, it must be admitted that localisation is not completely hermetic. It is not only limited to surrounding conditions. This means that 'locality', which is present in language, is at the same time influenced by the evolution of society in general, in which new elements are continually brought into our lives and new meanings are ascribed to their existence. The problem is that new things do not simply replace existing things. The novelty just piles up and exists hand in hand with the old. Or in other words, the history of society is like a layered cake, because reality is similarly layered.

Precisely because of the realisation that the 'Contemporary' always has layers that can lead to understanding of the true meaning of reality, so does Social Representations research, with a socio-genetic approach, naturally give an archaeological character to the way data collection and analysis works (Permanadeli, 2015; Permanadeli & Sundararajan, 2021).

In their work, researchers must explore the meanings that are stored and scattered throughout all walks of everyday life. These meanings, for various reasons, following the evolution of society, often go unnoticed because they are either forgotten or have become inactive. Meanings often pile up on top of other meanings, without discarding whatever is at the bottom of the pile. Or, more often, we only see that the meaning used is the most basic meaning, but that the expression of this meaning comes from a contemporary historical period which can actually contradict or even linguistically negate the true meaning (Permanadeli & Sundararajan, 2021). The problem is that society actually moves mentally with meanings that originally were left undetected. Language anarchism, or the chaotic situation that is created by language, easily goes unnoticed by researchers. So either way, research has to dig into multiple sources of meaning.

If meaning is a platform for the production of representations, then we must accept that this platform in the Indonesian context is multi-layered. It has layers of history, culture, language, daily life practices, images, belief systems, superstitions, social memory, etc. The problem is that to produce an understanding of reality, each layer

needs to be seen as interconnected - either actively or passively, or intentionally or unintentionally. As a result, the interconnections that necessarily facilitate anchoring to produce representations are not always well-defined, linear, clear, recorded, or perfect. Occasionally they are clear, but mostly they are sporadic, chaotic or anarchic. This confirms the findings of Kusno (2006), a Cultural Studies researcher who has studied space and contemporary architectural issues in Indonesia. He shows that there is a gap in reality. According to him, any phenomenon in Indonesia, to be understood, must always be seen in terms of a two layered reality: that which is seen (regime of seeing) and what actually happened (regime of truth).

For Indonesia, where research work is more formally recognised as an academic task rather than the need to understand reality, the research task of both Social Representation Theory and Cultural Studies is to produce knowledge. Therefore, tracking any form of interconnection that exists is a methodological requirement that cannot be avoided. It is this methodological complexity that requires the study of Social Representation in Indonesia, with a focus on a socio-genetic perspective, attempt to explain the contribution of the period of colonisation. This contribution is not only because colonisation is part of national history, but also because colonisation represents a single layer of history that builds upon the complexity of the various local elements above it. This meeting of historical elements originating from the colonisation period finally brings together the journey of Social Representation Theory and Cultural Studies.

In the context of this encounter, culture then finds a broader spectrum than has been formulated by previous cultural studies. Also within this spectrum, Social Representation Theory encounters an expansive Asian current called Indigenous Psychology, which is an attempt to identify and to reinvent the detached forms and models of its theoretical thinking from Western paradigm. It is within this cultural spectrum that the presence of Brazilian researchers, or researchers from other South American countries, is important in opening a dialogue for the development

of Social Representation Theory with the current of social studies in Asia. To borrow the Jodelet's statement (2012), it will allow a dialogue with other disciplines which will result in progress and mutual enrichment.

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