

# 7

# GEOGRAPHIES OF CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

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## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The concepts of culture and society are intimately related.
- Culture is understood as the human ability to accumulate experiences, develop ideas from these experiences, and subsequently act on them.
- Society is defined by the interrelationships that connect members of a culture. Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, laws, and other habits formed by the individuals within a society.
- Human geographers perceive variations in culture spatially.
- Different civilizations have resulted in different cultural regions.
- Regions and their characterizing landscapes are not simply locations; they are also places in the sense that they convey meaning.
- Geographers have tried to explain the global distribution of culture and civilizations, both past and present.
- Two factors that define culture are language and religion.
  - Language interests human geographers as a cultural variable that reflects a culture's accumulation of experience in different landscapes.
  - Religion is a reflection of culture, religion consists of a shared set of beliefs that are displayed through behaviour, text, habits, symbols, and landscapes.
- Globalization and migration have blurred many boundaries of language and religion.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- recall how culture, society, and civilization are defined and differentiated;
- recognize and comprehend the role of culture as a divider across the globe;
- understand how geographers characterize cultural regions and landscapes;
- understand the relationship of language to culture and nationalism;

- describe the main world religions and the history of their global distribution; and
- understand the relationships of religion and culture, religion and society, and how religion is associated with sacredness and the contestation of space.

## KEY TERMS

**Animism** A general name for beliefs that attribute a spirit or soul to natural phenomena and inanimate objects. (p. 243)

**Caste** A social rank, based solely on birth, to which an individual belongs for life and that limits interaction with members of other castes. (p. 244)

**Creole** A pidgin language that assumes the status of a mother tongue for a group. (p. 237)

**Cultural adaptation** Changes in technology, organization, and ideology that permit sound relationships to develop between humans and their physical environment. (p. 224)

**Cultural regions** Areas in which there is a degree of homogeneity in cultural characteristics; areas with similar landscapes. (p. 214)

**Culture** A complex term that typically refers to the way of life of the members of a society. Also usefully understood as referring to our ability first to analyze and then to change the physical environments that we encounter. (p. 214)

**Exonym** A name given to people (or a place) by a group other than the people to which the name refers (or who are not native to the territory within which the place is situated). (p. 240)

**First effective settlement** A concept based on the likely importance of the initial occupancy of an area in determining later landscapes. (p. 216)

**Gemeinschaft** A term introduced by Tönnies; a form of human association based on loyalty, informality, and personal contact, assumed to be characteristic of traditional village communities.

**Homeland** A cultural region especially closely associated with a particular cultural group; the term usually suggests a strong emotional attachment to place. (p. 217)

**Lingua franca** An existing language used as a common means of communication between different language groups. (p. 237)

**Minority language** A language spoken by a minority group in a state in which the majority of the population speaks some other language; may or may not be an official language. (p. 236)

**Multilingual state** A state in which the population includes at least one linguistic minority. (p. 236)

**Nationalism** The political expression of nationhood or aspiring nationhood; reflects a consciousness of belonging to a nation. (p. 235)

**Pidgin** A new language designed to serve the purposes of commerce between different language groups; typically has a limited vocabulary. (p. 237)

**Simulation** Representation of a real-world process in an abstract form for purposes of experimentation. (p. 227)

**Toponym** Place name; evidence provided by place names can be crucial in a historical study of movement and settlement if other sources of information are unavailable. (p. 238)

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the cultural landscape where you were born? Research and describe the history of language and religious beliefs in your hometown.
2. Do human geographers view cultural globalization as a positive or negative phenomenon in the world?
3. How does language relate to culture? Can cultures exist without language? Does culture change when new languages appear in a region?
4. When religion views space as sacred there can be both positive and negative outcomes. What are these? Use examples to support your discussion.
5. Describe the relationship of language to landscape. How is landscape understood through language?

## LINKS OF INTEREST

- The Canadian Encyclopedia  
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadas-first-english-settlement-feature/>
- Creative City Network Canada  
<http://www.creativecity.ca/research-hub/municipal-cultural-mapping.php>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
<http://www.unesco.org>
- Atlas of Canada People and Society  
<http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/maps/peopleandsociety>
- World Atlas of Language Structures  
<http://wals.info/>
- North American Religion Atlas

<http://www.religionatlas.org/>

- Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative  
<http://www.ecai.org/culturalatlasportal/CAB-RegionQdisplay.asp>

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Harrison, K. D. 2007. *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.

A careful consideration of the threats posed by language loss, described as a catastrophe of cultural forgetting.

Jordan-Bychkov, T. G., and B. Bychkova Jordan. 2002. *The European Culture Area: A Systematic Geography*, 4th edn. London: Rowman and Butterfield.

An excellent book. One of the few cultural geographies of a major world region; includes a highly original synthesis and analysis of language, religion, and other cultural traits.

Meinig, D. W. 1969. *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

One of several fine regional studies by this author; includes several original approaches to region and landscape analysis.

## YOUTUBE VIDEOS

- TEDx Talks. 2015. “The myth of globalisation | Peter Alfandary | TEDxAix.” YouTube video, 13:53. Posted June 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUYNB4a8d2U>
  1. How is “global village” explained as an oxymoron?
    - The speaker begins by telling a couple different stories based on his own interactions around the world. The cab or the Japanese business stories are all examples of how, while we may share common languages, food, even beliefs, there are huge differences that are largely cultural. The idea that we live in a global village, is incorrect based on this argument.
  2. How is the relationship between cultural variability and context described in the video?
    - The speaker explains how we communicate but that is not “contact.” We are relying on data too much. Cultural shock was used to describe disorientation when an expat went to another country. Now, cultural shock is invisible. It is virtual and hidden behind technology.