

Editorial

Culture(s) on the Margins: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Sociologists and those working in related disciplines have often found more of interest on the margins than in the centre. It is where innovation takes place, where the new replaces the outmoded, where ‘outsider’ or heterodox voices challenge the orthodoxy, and where culture creators are most able to follow the laws inherent to their specific region of the cultural field. The margins are where you will find ‘underground’ or ‘cutting edge’ scenes. Moreover, ethnographic traditions in sociological research have produced fine-grained accounts of cultures of subaltern, subcultural, diasporic groups, and the ways in which these groups and individuals engage in counter-hegemonic practices. At the same time, sociologists have also drawn attention to how those occupying the margins of societal fields are characterised in terms of lack: dominated individuals and groups lack the requisite cultural capital or social connections to get on in life. This special issue, which derives from discussions held at the Culture(s) on the Margins mid-term Sociology of Culture Research Network (European Sociological Association) conference at University of Portsmouth in the summer of 2022, contributes to debates on the relatively underexplored topic of culture(s) on the margins through several conceptual and empirical interventions. In doing so, it focuses on three interrelated aspects of marginality: first, marginality as a site of domination; second, marginality as opening up spaces of resistance; and third, marginality as enabling different ways of seeing and thinking.

Keywords: culture, margins, marginality, sociology, cultural sociology

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists and those working in related disciplines have often found more of interest on the margins than in the centre. It is where innovation takes place, where the new replaces the outmoded, where ‘outsider’ or heterodox voices challenge the orthodoxy, and where culture creators are most able to follow the laws inherent to their specific region of the cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). The margins are where you will find ‘underground’ or ‘cutting edge’ scenes. Moreover, ethnographic traditions in sociological research have produced fine-grained accounts of cultures of subaltern, subcultural, diasporic groups, and the ways in which these groups and individuals engage in counter-hegemonic practices (e.g. Anderson, 2003 [1976]; Becker, 1991 [1963]; Hebdige, 1979).

At the same time, sociologists have also drawn attention to how those occupying the margins of societal fields are characterised in terms of lack: dominated individuals and groups lack the requisite cultural capital or social connections to get on in life; they are ‘failed consumers’ or they make the wrong choices; they lack the time and resources with which to develop and deploy an aesthetic disposition; and they lack the social power to confer

legitimacy on their practices or representations. Those 'beyond the pale' are rendered abject, considered to be 'matter out of place' (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2020). Among the social types identified on the margins, there is the Simmelian figure of the stranger who 'comes today and stays tomorrow', who is invisibilized and ignored, or hypervisibilised and racialised (Simmel, 1971 [1908]; Stewart and Sanders, 2023). Strangers are part of the group and yet do not fully belong. They are set apart from the group with an objectifying distance, and during times of crises, they are the ones blamed when things go wrong. As Beverley Skeggs (2004) points out, cultures of the dominated are nevertheless 'propertized' by the dominant who, occupying more mobile position are able to plunder the edgy associations and most exciting bits while leaving behind that which is deemed to be 'the constitutive limit' and that which has no cultural value.

This special issue, which derives from discussions held at the Culture(s) on the Margins mid-term Sociology of Culture Research Network (European Sociological Association) conference at University of Portsmouth in the summer of 2022, asks which perspectives, methodologies and methods might help sociologists better understand and make sense of culture(s) on the margins. Marginality is relatively under-utilised as a concept in cultural sociological research. How might academics examine marginality and challenge power imbalances within the field of culture and other societal fields but also within cultural sociological practice? How can academics (the dominated dominant) research the margins without silencing the voices that they seek to hear, and avoiding the position of the researcher or activist who silently assumes that there is 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself' (hooks, 1989: 22)? As Elísio Macamo (2021: x) observes, the moment that the scholar enters the field to conduct research, they make the ethically problematic assumption that they have the right to change people's lives whether the people like it or not. Confronting these ethical issues is at least a starting point in ways of thinking about researching marginality. The articles in this special issue address some of these questions and thorny issues but also serve as a means of opening up debates. With reference to sociological debates on culture, we focus on three interrelated aspects of marginality: first, marginality as a site of domination; second, marginality as opening up spaces of resistance; third, marginality as enabling different ways of seeing and thinking.

MARGINALITY

Marginality can be conceptualised as a site of domination imposed by those with a greater array of resources at their disposal and who may have plundered these resources, at some stage, from those in a dominated position, and may continue to do so. Those in a dominant societal position have the ability to legitimise and consecrate their acts and pronouncements, and the spaces they occupy (Bourdieu, 1984). The dominated, in contrast, do not possess the economic capital to buy the time for culture or the cultural capital with which to bestow prestige on their activities (Bourdieu, 1986). Marginality is thus an experience of isolation and exclusion from the dominant culture. Marginality, as Loic Wacquant (2008: 2) observes, needs to be considered in relation to the specific historical context, or matrix (of class, race, state, etc.) in which it is situated. For example, he notes that 'despite similar morphological tendencies and kindred lived experiences, the French working-class periphery and the African-American ghetto remain two sharply *distinct sociospatial constellations*' (p. 231). However, there are also emergent conditions of advanced marginality in both these contexts that involve socio-spatial relegation and various forms of closure, in a Weberian sense, which mean that individuals and groups are denied access to resources or the competition for resources. Advanced marginality involves insecure wage labour, disconnection from macroeconomic trends, territorial stigmatisation, the dissolution of a sense of 'place', the loss of hinterland, and social fragmentation (Wacquant, 2008).

But marginality is more than this. Occupying a position of marginality also has the potential to open up a space of resistance that is generative of experiences and critical ways of envisaging the world (hooks, 1989, 2015 [1984]). As bell hooks (1989: 21) notes, 'that space of refusal, where one can say no to the coloniser, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins'. Understanding marginality as a space of resistance opens up possibilities for what hooks (1989) terms spaces of radical openness. These are spaces where criticality, agency and creativity can be asserted, individually and collectively. In this special issue, we see examples of these spaces in Tremlett's article on Roma artists' work that asserts agency through space and presence and in Manstatten's article on the interview situation, which explores the dynamic interplay between the researcher and the research participant. Spaces of radical openness are sites where society can be reimagined and where communities of resistance can form. But what are such spaces? According to hooks (1989: 23), 'spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice'. In this sense, culture, whether expressed in people's stories and sense of agency, or in their creative mode of music and literature, is an agent of social change. This view of culture works against its role as a homeostatic device, as Zygmunt Bauman (2011) envisaged it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when it served as a means of normative regulation and social reproduction. It also differs from culture's previous role as an agent of change

through the proselytising call of Enlightenment and colonial conquest, or, more recently, its role in a consumer society where its central role is as stimulant for desires and seductions (Bauman, 2007, 2011).

Marginality also enables different ways of seeing and thinking. Culture(s) on the margins are linked to hierarchies and power relations. They are part of the whole even if outside of the main body (hooks, 1989). Georg Simmel's (1971[1908]) social type of the stranger offers insights here: the stranger's social position is characterised by mobility in relation to a bounded group; a combination of nearness and remoteness; and, most significantly, a sense of objectivity, inasmuch as the stranger is not considered an integral part of the group and its partisan attitudes. The stranger is an organic member of the group, one who stays within the boundaries of the group and yet, ultimately, is 'inorganically appended to it' (Simmel, 1971: 149). As a marginal figure, the stranger is in a unique position to view and see things in an alternative way and gain dispassionate insights into the workings of the society and consider how it might be different. Many of those who have been at the margins have gained insights from their movement to and from the centre. hooks (1989: 22) relates how she was not listened to when on the margins. Instead, she says, 'they met me at the centre'. Cultural and artistic creations of communities on the margins are attractive to cultural industries when they can be envisaged as fresh commodities for voracious markets. Those on the margins may be invited to the centre and the boundaries seem blurred but the cultural hierarchies and economic inequalities remain. Nevertheless, marginality can be something one holds onto, even when moving to the centre, as a means of envisaging alternative worlds, alternative ways of doing things. The insights gained in the margins can be utilised in the centre. This is because of the different ways of seeing enabled by the position of marginality.

Reflecting on the experiences of African Americans in the USA, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903: 2) wrote about the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'. A couple of decades later, Robert E. Park (1928: 893) wrote about the figure of the migrant as the exemplary 'marginal man' whose mind, in adapting to a new environment, in transition from the old, experiences a kind of productive turmoil 'where the changes and fusions of culture are going on'. More recently, Abdumalek Sayad (2004) writes about the sense of identity of French Algerians who are made to feel that their presence is temporary and their cultural identity is in flux despite having been born in France. As one respondent puts it:

I am Algerian despite my French papers; I am French despite my Algerian appearance. I am French ... as French as anyone else. I was born here, grew up here, was made here, for here, to live here; I feel at home here, have French habits and French ideas ... But, deep inside me, I feel myself to be Algerian despite it all'. (Sayad, 2004: 251)

THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

In contributing to sociological debates on marginality, the articles in this special issue offer insights into the relatively underexplored topic of *culture(s) on the margins*. As such, the special issue features several contributions to debates about marginality in relation to culture by means of various conceptual and empirical interventions. Annabel Tremlett's contribution highlights how artists from a minoritised background *assert agency through space and presence*, and in doing so, disrupt the 'object domain' of 'Gypsy' and 'Roma', opening up new modes of representation and ways of seeing the world. Paula Guerra's article draws attention to the assertion of agency through her analysis of three *sites of subaltern cultural production that combine art and politics*. Here we see cultural production in marginal zones of the cultural field asserted as a kind of practical utopia. It might be a struggle to make ends meet but the belief in the value of the game nourishes the radical habitus of the culture creators and producers Guerra engages with in Brazil and Portugal.

With its analysis of media representations of the tragic Lampedusa shipwreck disaster of 2013, where more than 400 migrants drowned, Guido Nicolosi's article provides a key intervention on *memory, marginality and culture*, focusing on two forms of memory that could not be more contrasting: on the one hand, the public memory expressed by the Italian media that dematerialised the deaths and depersonalised the victims; on the other hand, the collective memory of the people of Lampedusa that was articulated through painful and evocative reflections on the materiality of death and the physical presence of the migrants' corpses. In Pedro Menezes's article, a crucial point is made about the *orientation to culture for those on the margins*: culture is not simply a luxury that is only open to those with the requisite levels of cultural and economic capital. It can be accessed by anyone willing to participate, whether as core members of the music collective, who enjoy music as an extension of work, or for those who get involved in order to experience a heightened sense of creativity and escape.

With an historical sociological perspective, Mathias Berek relates the situation of the nineteenth century thinker Moritz Lazarus as a story of *marginality in the centre*, where Lazarus's social position as a marginal man in the centre of German society, allowed him a period of prominence and political influence, and a space from within which to formulate an approach to culture that has proven to be - and has the potential to be again - highly influential in

academic circles despite the fact that Lazarus himself disappeared back into the margins, both in the German society of his later years, and in relation to the sociological canon. Andrea Lombardinilo offers unique insights into *contrapuntuality, media and memory*. He focuses on representations of the Holocaust in media and film, which utilise contrapuntal narratives of good and evil, memory and forgetting, transgression and redemption in order to come to terms with the burdens of the past. Lombardinilo argues that this approach also helps to understand the representations of contemporary traumas such as those experienced by refugees.

Ruth Manstatten probes the thorny issue of *researching culture(s) on the margins through the interview situation*. Her article articulates the complexities of dialogue between the interviewer and the unemployed research participant through which interviewees adopt a range of subject positions in relation to the interviewer and, more generally, the wage labour norm. They adopt the positions, for example, of critical appropriation of negative classifications, and embarrassed subordination. Pınar Gümüő Mantu's article reflects on *assertions of critical belonging in relation to cultural identity and forms of Othering*. She draws attention to the ways in which her research participants cultivate a critical outlook through which they are able to contest and rebut cultural stereotypes of the oppressed Muslim woman and envisage ways of further improving their situation through education.

Let us now consider the insights offered in the articles of this special issue in greater detail.

Even during times of increasing awareness of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, Roma people remain subjected to degrading and stereotypical representations based on tropes associated with 'the Gypsies'. Scholars in this field of enquiry have long sought to deconstruct these images, whether those with negative or Orientalist connotations relating to criminality, fortune-telling, tricksterism, deviance, and 'Otherness', or the more 'positive' connotations of romanticism, exoticism, bohemian freedom and musical prowess. Tremlett's article deploys visual analysis to extend the reach of academic critique of these representations beyond deconstruction. Her article examines visual art and activism produced by Roma artists that denaturalises Gypsy stereotypes and destabilises their meanings. Tremlett is inspired by Stuart Hall's observation that 'art is a kind of thinking', and makes some key observations about the work produced by Roma artists: she draws attention to techniques of seriating, which involves utilising material objects associated with the trope of the Gypsy in ways that disrupt and undermine these representations and instead enable recognition of Roma people. She highlights how Roma artists are creating 'new spaces out of old places' and thus opening up new modes of presence, expression and agency. A further body of art uses visibility and materiality to destroy and then reclaim the 'object domain' of what it is to be Roma or 'Gypsy'. In sum, Tremlett argues that the images considered 'do not just challenge stereotypes through deconstructing them, but use practices of denaturalisation, exposing an ideological system that is so frequently hegemonic, ubiquitous and taken-for-granted'.

Guerra's article delves into the underground artistic and creative scenes in Portugal and Brazil and her analysis of peripheral contexts in relation to the commercial logic of global cultural industries problematises the distinction between the art of resistance and the art of existence in creative collectives. Based on three empirical cases - PWR Records and *padê editorial* in Brazil, and Príncipe Discos in Portugal - the author offers an in-depth analysis of the dynamic identities of these creative scenes in the context of the structural processes of marginalisation that shape the relationship between the global North and South, with relations of domination and subalternity rooted in colonial and capitalist history and also expressed in the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. PWR Records is located in the Northeast of Brazil, a peripheral and disadvantaged region, and supports women musicians, encouraging their participation in the national and international music scene, providing training and releasing their creations. An independent book publisher founded by two women, *padê editorial*, publishes DIY books by authors from social, racial and sexual minorities who are often ignored or rejected by mainstream publishing houses. Situating themselves in opposition to heteronomous and standardised cultural production, *padê editorial* produces handcrafted books guided by principles of production control and mutual aid. The third case is Príncipe Discos, a record label based in Lisbon since 2011. It functions as a cooperative and is dedicated to novel and hybrid forms of musical expression that have flourished in the city's peripheral and racialised neighbourhoods, home to populations mainly from Portuguese-speaking African countries. In response to the commodified logic of the mainstream culture industries, these artistic and creative collectives position themselves within the do-it-yourself/ourselves culture and express a radical habitus, cultivated in response to new experiences and through which these culture creators develop liberating micro-utopias through activist praxis. Based on the analysis of these three creative sites, the article argues that the 'choice of poverty' can be a choice of freedom, a strategy for averting the injustices of hegemonic culture, with its colonial and capitalist logic, and a way of putting forth the alternative visions of marginalised groups.

Nicolosi's article focuses on one of the most terrible and shocking events of our time: the shipwrecks of boats packed with migrants trying to reach the northern shores of the Mediterranean. He does so through the eyes of the inhabitants of Lampedusa, who have witnessed and dealt with the consequences of several of these disasters, in particular the tragic one that occurred on the 3rd October 2013, when more than 400 people drowned. The article discusses the dissonance between the social memory and public memory of this catastrophe. Indeed, the

representations of the shipwrecked migrants' deaths differ significantly depending on the point of view. The Italian media representations aseptically sanitise the death of migrants by means of de-individualisation and dematerialisation, and reveal death metaphorically (objects instead of bodies), obliterating its bodily concreteness. For the community of Lampedusa, the memory of the events is excruciatingly material and tangible. The cries and pleading hands of those calling for help, the bodies swallowed up by the sea, the smell of decomposing corpses, the refusal to eat fish that may have fed on human corpses, are among the concrete memories of the people who came to the rescue of those condemned to risk their lives in search of a better life. Collective memory was thus formed out of the real experience of the death of unknown strangers, who were acknowledged as human beings in urgent need of help for the living and respect for the dead, in contrast to the impersonal representations and the 'self-absolving and consolatory interpretative framework' of the media, which contribute to reinforcing and legitimising the marginalisation and Otherness of migrants.

Menezes's article draws attention to a cultural scene on the margins of Brazilian society, and even more so in relation to the globalised and commodified world of popular music. Situated in the North-East of Brazil in Fortaleza, a city of 2.6 million people, The Lado B music collective has set up an adiabatic circuit involving each member of the collective. This type of circuit has antecedents, ranging from the interactions characteristic of the relatively autonomous literary scenes of Paris, as depicted in Bourdieu's (1993) analysis of the nineteenth century field of cultural production in France, to the workings of post-punk scenes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Lado B adiabatic circuit involves a rotation of all the key roles that enable a festival to happen. For example, the member of the collective who was performing on the stage at the previous festival is now in charge of the lighting for the current event. Central to Menezes's analysis is a distinction between musicians for whom music is intimately connected to the routine of everyday life and as such can be considered as a second job, a task to be accomplished rationally, and musicians unwilling to commit to the adiabatic circuit and who consider their practice of music as fundamentally separate from their everyday existence. Music is, for them, a pure leisure activity, a mechanism through which they seek pleasure and escape. It is only those who view music as work, as a second job, that are willing to commit to the rigours and responsibilities of the adiabatic circuit. Moreover, Menezes notes that the position-taking of music as work or as escape is taken both by those with and without economic and cultural capital at their disposal. Money, while important, is not the most important variable in participation in the festival. Those without resources, situated on the margins of Fortaleza, do not seek out culture any less than do those with resources. For them, participation in the festival can be a rationally considered line of work, a potential income source, or it might be a chance to experience the hedonistic and poetic pleasures of the city.

As sociologists, research on marginalised groups and theorising about the relationship between the centre and the margins (and the symbolic definition of their boundaries) is at the heart of our discipline. It is less common to reflect on marginalisation within the academic field of sociology itself. This is precisely the subject of Berek's article. He analyses the biographical, academic and public career of Moritz Lazarus, a German Jewish philosopher of great renown in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lazarus was at the centre of society, with considerable influence in shaping the project of the German nation, and yet he found himself marginalised, eventually losing favour as anti-semitic sentiments increasingly found expression in German society. Lazarus laid the foundations of social psychology and worked on fundamental concepts of sociology. He established the notion of *Völkerpsychologie*, the 'psychology of peoples', which was later hijacked by proponents of socio-biological perspectives. He also proposed a sociological conception of the Hegelian notion of the 'objective spirit', which informed Simmel's influential discussions of objective culture as the accrual of human creations such as scientific knowledge, technology, language, literature, music and artistic innovation, religious doctrines and social customs. Objective culture, Simmel went on to argue, appears to have a life of its own that stands above and beyond the subjective culture of individuals. More generally, Lazarus's input informed sociological theorisations of the concept of culture. Berek argues that being 'a marginal man in the centre of German society' was crucial in shaping Lazarus's social analysis, giving him the intellectual insight to conceptualise culture as a pluralistic endeavour with belonging to a society or nation as a manifestation of agency, with the bond between individuals built collectively. This is a very different interpretation of culture when compared to the substantialist-biological approach to *Völkerpsychologie* that became more prominent as Lazarus was forced back to the margins of German society.

In his article, Lombardinilo presents a theoretical reflection on media representations of the Holocaust based on the contrapuntal analysis proposed by Roger Silverstone. Following Bauman's idea that the Holocaust was not a pathological deviation of modernity, but, on the contrary, the rationalising order of modernity was a necessary condition for the organisational apparatus and industrial scale of Nazi extermination, Lombardinilo analyses contemporary rhetorical devices concerning this defining event of the twentieth century. The author shows that mediascapes and the public sphere are imbued with a contrapuntal tension that results in the Holocaust being discursively presented in a simultaneously polarised and balanced interplay between good and evil. Faced with the mass extermination of peoples categorised as marginal to humanity according to the criteria of Nazi racism, an unintelligible and unbearable event in the post-Holocaust era, public and published discourse finds moral relief in

contrapuntality. Between good and evil, remembering and forgetting, contemporary European societies deal with the dreadful burden of the past (colonialism, war, genocide) through narratives of redemption and overcoming. As Lombardinilo notes, ‘resistance, opposition, resilience, aggregation, solidarity, courage, are some of the keywords that seem to inspire this contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust’. The article also draws attention to contemporary representations of the excluded, the potential victims of dehumanisation, most notably migrants from the global South. As Baudrillard, whose theoretical perspective is an important framework for this article, says, the ‘removal of the Otherness’ is something that continues apace.

In her analysis of marginality, Manstatten’s article focuses on the research process itself as a source of insight into the ways in which unemployed interviewees position themselves in relation to the interviewer and in doing so, challenge, accept, or critique the norm of wage labour. Critique from the margins, she concludes, is heterogeneous and often contradictory. Analysis of the dynamic interplay and self-positionings that take place in the interaction between the researcher as someone conforming to the labour norm as a university-employed researcher and the interviewee as a ‘deviant’ in relation to this norm produces key insights that contribute to a wider sociology of inequalities. The interview situation becomes a site of critique and Manstatten’s attention to the mutual forms of address that occur reveals that the interviewees take up various positions. For example, Bärbel expresses a sense of *embarrassed subordination*, trying to avoid the gaze of others and contrasting what she perceives to be her self-inflicted failures in life with the interviewer’s successful career. There is no hint of a critique in her approach to the wage labour norm. In contrast, Said adopts a position of *critical appropriation of negative classifications*, drawing attention to injustices associated with immigration law preventing him from gaining access to the labour market. In identifying subtle differences between six types of self-positioning, Manstatten deploys situational analysis, which involves mapping the various elements present in a situation, e.g. individuals, objects, discourse, and analysing the relations and hierarchies between them. She also utilises subjectivation analysis to examine the ways in which subjects position themselves in relation to the normative order, i.e. the wage labour norm.

Mantu’s contribution to the special issue focuses on the sense of ‘critical belonging’ expressed by young women from families of Turkish origin residing in Germany. The research participants, women aged between 21 and 31, are members of the third or fourth generation descended from those who came to Germany as part of the guest worker programme that commenced in the late 1950s. These women demonstrate high levels of awareness of the racialised and gendered forms of stigmatisation that they face as a minoritised ethnic group and seek to protect themselves from these forms of Othering. At the centre of Mantu’s argument is a critique of integration-centred approaches to migration which perpetuate racialised binaries such as ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘native’ and ‘migrant’, modern and traditional, and which focus ideologically on the figure of the Muslim. In this model, failure among migrants to participate in the labour force and educational system is perceived in gendered and racialised terms as a problem with roots in migrants’ culture. Mantu’s research respondents feel the brunt of these attitudes: on the one hand, they are ‘perfectly integrated’ members of German society but, on the other, they are consistently Othered as a consequence of their outward appearance. They are regularly confronted with questions such as ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘When will you go back to Turkey?’ They are viewed in relation to cultural stereotypes of oppressed Turkish women and their choices are interpreted in this light, e.g. ‘Are you able to choose who you marry?’ In response to seeing their mothers marginalised in social situations, many of Mantu’s respondents discussed how they actively sought to transform their situation through education so that they are able to take up a stronger position.

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