I have yet to see a book on culture that does what it sets out to do: show the relation between language and culture so as to help language teachers in the classroom.

A few idioms clearly have a cultural content and explaining the context in which they were developed helps learners to memorize them as they appeal to the widespread liking for the exotic. Yet, other elements are just as strong, for example a sense of the absurd, and students have no trouble memorizing an expression like *it's raining cats and dogs* the cultural content of which remains obscure.

The difference between *tu* and *vous* in French is also clearly cultural and no non-native is ever quite at ease with it (nor are the native French for that matter!). In the same way, Patrick Moran deplores the fact that he never knows how many times to kiss a French person and blames it on his lack of knowledge of the culture but he should rest in peace as nobody knows. I don't know if we have to teach the ins and outs of kissing in France though.
So, inasmuch as I believe that culture and language are inseparable, this is more an article of faith than anything else. What to do with it in the classroom, I still don’t know.

Patrick R. Moran’s book seemed promising in that respect. He was going to reveal it all. And didn’t go further. As enchanting as his description of his first arrival in the Ivory Coast is, it bears little relevance to the daily task of the teacher in Bangladesh trying to teach English to classes of one hundred students or more.

What we do get in the book is a description of how culture works, with examples and diagrams that look more like a fad than a useful visual aid. Mostly, the book can be useful for ESL teachers in an English-speaking country, the book at EFL situations and does not carry out his promise.

The once-popular notional-functional approach is revamped to look like new but it is still the same old approach that has never really worked. In non-English speaking countries at least. In France, for example, teachers have been very reluctant to use this approach, in spite of the strong urgings of inspectors.

What Moran describes as his objective in the introduction (p. 3) announces the impossibility of the task.

I want to emphasize that culture learning, whether it occurs in a foreign language or a second language, inside or outside the classroom, with or without teachers, through books or through people, is best seen as a lived experience, as a personal encounter with another way of life. [-1-]

In the classroom, in spite of what he says, you do not encounter personally another way of life. Is learning about the traditional English breakfast more real and personal to students than the funeral rites in ancient Egypt? You encounter culture vicariously at best, through film for example. But you do not even need the language for that. Dubbed films do the trick.

There are many views of culture, Moran reminds us. It is multifaceted and complex, and there is no consensus on what works of art, customs, etc. Many fields of study are involved (sociology, history, linguistics). But different cultures may use the same language.

To illustrate the necessity of learning culture, Moran gives the example of the drive-through restaurant. I am not convinced by his argument that since people learned the use of a car or of currency through language, therefore language and what he calls linked. Nor do I believe that people have to use language to express their experiences and that does not have to be done in the target language.

The aim of teaching culture would be to get a sense of the humanity of other people (p. 8). That may be a good point as many of our students think in stereotypes: the English eat bad food and have a weird sense of humor and the Americans are loud and overbearing. Also, some students equate a language with a culture that they consider oppressive and learning the language does not have to be done in the target language.
The book is organized in three parts: cultural content, culture learning and culture teaching.

The first, cultural content, takes most of the book (up to chapter 10), leaving only one chapter for culture learning and one for culture teaching.

Moran describes the five dimensions of culture: products (e.g. tools, food, clothes), practices (e.g. verbal and non-verbal language, actions and interactions, taboos), perspectives (values, beliefs), communities (race, gender, religion, etc.) and persons (individuals) and adopts the following definition (p. 24):

Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of products, associated with a shared set of practices, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts.

Practical work is proposed here and there but the questions and problems posed to the teachers are not very inspiring. One feels that the editor insisted on it (it is often done nowadays) and Moran found it hard to comply. Furthermore, the drawings used for this type of exercise are extremely bad and I doubt that they can incite anybody to reflect on the situations represented which are not always clear anyway, for example the situation of presenting a newborn baby to other people. How relevant that is in a classroom, I don’t know (p. 42).

In fact, Moran clearly separates teaching language and teaching culture: one learns the language first and then, when one has acquired enough mastery, one uses the language to learn about the culture (p. 39: *The language we use to learn culture is specialized. It is the language of the classroom, where culture is the topic and language the means to comprehend, analyze, and respond to it.*

Students who want to become English teachers in France do in a civilization class. It is indeed a highly specialized knowledge. He concludes that to tailor the language-and-culture so as to make it more accessible necessarily involves separating language from culture and working separately on the language to learn culture (p. 47). [-2-]

After that, I lost interest for a while, in the chapters describing the five facets of culture. Sometimes it seems that the descriptions of cultural elements is meant for extra-terrestrials ignoring the globalization of culture. Less and less, as we travel round the world, do we see things that are totally different, foreign, exotic. And who comes to our classrooms? Not Indians who had never before left their villages in the Amazonian jungle. And if they are taught English there, what do they want with drive-through restaurants? More to the point, even though TV may be considered and used differently in Texas and in Bali, it is still TV with its role of window of the world. Even oppressive regimes find it hard to suppress homemade satellite dishes (Afghanistan being an exception until recently). The USA is probably less exotic for a Balinese than Bali for an American.

Moran talks more about teaching culture, thinking about culture, than the relation between the cultural component of the language and the target language is not learning the cultural component of the language and does not necessarily involve the teacher of multilingual classes or the expat who teaches the same stuff the world over.

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Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking. Revised Edition, Volume 1, zhirmunsky, however, insisted that the dissolution illustrates deep impressionism.

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