Abstract

In this chapter I will explore ways in which the transdisciplinary field of cultural studies can address changing patterns of cultural identity. I will particularly focus on how the current processes of globalization have generated discussions about the role of civil society as the medium through which the conventional compromise between the state and the diverse sectors of the nation-the e pluribus unum-is renegotiated. This revision is often brought to the fore by localities that have the most to gain or the most to lose from the vicissitudes wrought by globalization. Civil society has become the concept of choice as many movements for reform and revolution have been chastened by the eviction of socialism as a political alternative, at least into the near future. The current dominance of neoliberalism-the set of policies that include trade liberalization, privatization, the reduction (and in some cases near elimination) of state-subsidized social services like health care and education, the lowering of wages, and the evisceration of labor rights-has contributed to the Left's shift in political attention from the takeover of state power (which in many cases has not resolved the question of sovereignty) to issues of civil and human rights and quality of life. Conventional and even progressive political parties have succeeded in doing very little to counter these policies, both because the institutionalized political process is largely dysfunctional in responding to social needs and because enormous pressures from international financial interests not only have discouraged reform but have actually worsened conditions, such as the ever increasing gap in income distribution. Consequently, the most innovative actors in setting agendas for political and social policies are grassroots movements and the national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support them. These actors have put a premium on culture (defined in a myriad of ways), a resource already targeted for exploitation by capital, and have established a foundation for resistance against the ravages of 354that very same economic system. In what follows, I first outline a brief history of how cultural studies has dealt with the issue of cultural identity. Next I go on to review how globalization has altered the objects and methods of the study of culture, particularly in relation to Latin America. Then I look into the specific effects of neoliberalism on Latin American political and social movements Finally, I examine the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, as a new kind of indigenous movement that departs from conventional notions of both leftist political movements and grassroots organizations.

Fingerprint

- Civil Society
- Globalization
- Cultural Studies
- Cultural Identity
- Neoliberalism
- Reform
- Political Movement
- Transdisciplinary
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