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Repositioning the discussion on culture and cultural studies

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Abstract

Why is it important to revisit the concept of culture and cultural studies? Today we find everywhere many meanings of cultures speaking in plural. Culture is blurring and its study has fallen into epistemological disorder. The interest of this article is to offer a critical look at the uses of culture. Culture cannot be dissociated from the nation-state and this turns out to be an institution with a complex trajectory because it has had to first confront, and then negotiate with, the vitality of ethnicities. Ethnicity and culture have shared features, but in opposition and mean different fields of operation. To carry out this critical look, the article is divided into three parts. The first refers to the cultural industries and artifacts coined by the schools of Frankfurt and Great Britain; the second, to the emergence of a new paradigm based on the policies of recognition that the nation-states have initiated since the last decades of the twentieth century; finally, we will Re-visit the concept of identities that is indispensable to the approach of cultures in the nation-states of the global era.

Keywords: Culture. Ethnicity. Identity. Nation-states. Recognition.

Reposicionar la discusión sobre la cultura y los estudios culturales

Resumen

¿Por qué es importante revisar el concepto de cultura y estudios culturales? Hoy en día encontramos en todas partes muchos significados de culturas que hablan en plural. La cultura se está desdibujando y su estudio ha caído en el trastorno epistemológico. El interés de este artículo es ofrecer una mirada crítica a los usos de la cultura. La cultura no se puede disociar del Estado-nación y esto resulta ser una institución con una trayectoria compleja porque primero ha tenido que confrontar, y luego negociar con, la vitalidad de las etnias. La etnia y la cultura han compartido características, pero en oposición y significan diferentes campos de operación. Para llevar a cabo este aspecto crítico, el artículo se divide en tres partes. El primero se refiere a las industrias culturales y artefactos acuñados por las escuelas de Frankfurt y Gran Bretaña; el segundo, al surgimiento de un nuevo paradigma basado en las políticas de reconocimiento que los Estados-nación han iniciado desde las últimas décadas del siglo XX; por último, volveremos a visitar el concepto de identidades que es indispensable para el enfoque de las culturas en los estados-nación de la era global.

Palabras clave: Cultura. origen étnico. Identidad. Estados-nación. Reconocimiento.

Reposicionando a discussão sobre cultura e os estudos culturais

Resumo

Por que é importante revisitar o conceito de cultura e estudos culturais? Hoje encontramos em todos os lugares muitos significados de culturas falando no plural. A cultura está embaçada e seu estudo caiu em desordem epistemológica. O interesse deste artigo é oferecer um olhar crítico sobre os usos da cultura. A cultura não pode ser dissociada do estado-nação e isso acaba por ser uma instituição com uma trajetória complexa porque teve que primeiro confrontar, e depois negociar com a vitalidade das etnias. Etnia e cultura têm características compartilhadas, mas em oposição e significam diferentes campos de atuação. Para realizar esse olhar crítico, o artigo é dividido em três partes. O primeiro refere-se às indústrias culturais e artefatos cunhados pelas escolas de Frankfurt e da Grã-Bretanha; o segundo, ao surgimento de um novo paradigma baseado nas políticas de reconhecimento que os estados-nação iniciaram desde as últimas décadas do século XX; finalmente, visitaremos o conceito de identidades indispensáveis à abordagem das culturas nos estados-nação da era global.

Palavras-chave: Cultura. Etnia. Identidade. Estados-nação. Reconhecimento.

1 Introduction

Why reposition the discussion on culture and cultural studies? It seems to me that there is a need to revive the debate on the study of culture.

For three decades, from the seventies to the late eighties, there was a boom in cultural studies leading the debate, the so-called Frankfurt School, and the British Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, mainly. However, much has happened since then. For this reason, the Turkish-born feminist Seyla Benhabib (2006) was pessimistic about the fact that culture today is a disconcerting phenomenon, because in the globalized world in which we live we are overcome by uncertainty, hybridization, fluidity and controversy.

To that disconcerting state in which culture is located today, I would add two more angles. First. There is quite a lot of methodological and epistemological disorder. In other words, there is much more to add after half a century, and this aggregation has not only been generating chaos in the form of approach, but also the study of culture had been fading until recently. The other angle, and because of the above, is that it is not very fruitful to try to arrive at a single definition of culture that tries to explain everything that culture is today, it is like trying to start talking about something that has not been sufficiently understood. Even so, we need a starting point, and, by culture, we understand, consequently with Benhabib, the human practices imbued with complexity in meaning, representation, and organization.

I have just mentioned that the study of culture is in a mess, it is very disorganized, so we are going to dedicate the first part of this article to establish an order in three sections. 1. The cultural industries and artifacts coined by the schools of Frankfurt and of Great Britain; 2. The emergence of a new paradigm based on the policies of recognition that have been initiated by the nation-states since the last

decades of the twentieth century; 3. The revisiting of concepts that help to address the complexity of cultures.

2. The industries and cultural artifacts coined by the schools of Frankfurt and of Great Britain

The emphasis of cultural studies has been to unravel what mass culture is, and what its role has been in the integration of the working class into capitalism and, with it, the phenomenal take-off of a new style of mass consumption. In that lens, both the Frankfurt school (Adorno, Habermas, 1993; Marcuse) and the British school (Hoggart, 2013; Hall, 1992; Gilroy, 1997), observed that culture, as a mode of ideological reproduction, was to put culture on the same plane as ideology, but through two different models: the British have valued the potential of the working class and subcultures (the youth) as groups of resistance to the hegemonic forms of capitalist domination. These subcultures will be in permanent character of resistance and will adopt new forms of self-identification by embracing new forms of dress, body decoration styles, musical tastes and political affiliations or sympathies with left or environmentalist tendencies. All of this shows a challenge to the conventional. Today we see that these cultural constructions included a repertoire of forms and styles from punk, rasta, and, importantly, indigenous movements with airs of emancipation or autonomy such as the Zapatistas or environmentalist groups. But also, here the new musical expressions of young indigenous people who have used the genre of rock, rap, to adapt within their own terms to global musical trends and thus avoid their self-exclusion.

For its part, the Frankfurt school coined the term "cultural industries", meaning the process of industrialization of the production of mass culture and its commercialization, whose main function is the legitimization of capitalism. The mass consumption that attracted the interest of Néstor García Canclini, has been a very fruitful field of study, since it adapted to the masses without problems, fast food, American television series that narrate the family dilemmas in urban contexts, shopping malls that delimit public spaces establishing more social hierarchies based on differentiation and economic inequalities.

Both schools have insisted that culture must be studied within a system of social relations where culture is produced and consumed. Moreover, it is worth remembering that culture is an intrinsically human and collective product and therefore is intimately rooted in society, politics, and the economy.

But there is another transcendental moment that refers to the construction of the nation by the state, that is to say, the forging of culture and national identity, a process that began in the twentieth century and, that could well be said, is also a mass culture because it is a broad process of national integration, focused on

building mono-cultural nations with a single language, at the expense of the integration and assimilation of minority ethnic groups (indigenous peoples, immigrants). To explain this monumental process under the leadership of the twentieth century state, the British historical-culturalist (Smith, 1986) and modernist (Gellner, 1986) schools, have contributed in investigating how to make social cohesion, how to get the masses "to have and share something in common". It is not only to legitimize capitalism but to build homogeneity. And the repertoire of this process of building national culture includes civic education, the inculcation of myths of national integration and unity, the appropriation of an ethnic past. Examples of this are: the myths of mestizaje, the Aztec cult of past glories, and the exaltation of the pre-Hispanic past as attributes of originality, legitimacy and authenticity sought by each nation (Brading, 1973; Smith, 1998; Gutiérrez, 2012). The executor of this massive process of integration and acculturation is the state.

The national culture, instilled from the public school and standardized, from the museums, the monuments, the official history and calendar, coexists with the massification of culture and, a central place of it, is occupied by the television, the cinema, the popular music and its numerous styles, the fast food, the shopping malls to mention some examples (García Canclini, 2009; Hall, 1997). Thus, between national culture and the massification of culture, a new intersection is added (Bhabha, 2004; Dube and Banerjee, 2006) that is still being explored: the new media, social networks and technologies that are inserted today with national identity, ideology, politics, and daily life, as well as with individual experiences of religious conversion, as is the case among some Mexican women of Catholic origin in the north of the country who are adopting Islam as a way of life (Personal communication with Ruth García, May 2017). We believe that we would fail if we tried to make at least a quantitative catalogue of the countless expressions of cultures in the globalized world.

From both the Frankfurt school and the British school, we rescued two very useful concepts: 1. The idea of resistance and the criticism of subgroups that oppose the centrality and domination of the establishment and, 2. The emancipatory potential of the oppressed peoples in spite of massification or national integration.

With these banners: resistance and emancipatory potential as forms of struggle against oppression, domination, masculinization and massification, we now turn to the other field, which this article seeks to explain: the politics of recognition (Fraser, 2004; Young, 2011; Taylor, 1993; Bourdieu, 1993).

3. The emergence of a new paradigm based on the recognition policies that have been initiated by nation-states since the last decades of the twentieth century

In order to contextualize the era of recognition, we must situate ourselves in the last decades of the twentieth century, which continue to give real expression to multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, or interculturality, as the transformations faced by the continent's nation-states. Special attention should be paid to the emergence of mobilizations that have incorporated the "indigenous" in their claims: The overthrow of two governments and the resignation of non-indigenous presidents, led by the indigenous Pachakutik movement in Ecuador and, later, the presidency, with several re-elections, of an Aymara Indian in Bolivia, which has implied the constitutional refoundation of the state into a plurinational one. And, therefore, the gradual work of an international diplomacy already in the twenty-first century, which opens the doors for the states to become aware of their original populations and initiate a process of constitutional multiculturalism. Thus, with the Declaration of indigenous and tribal peoples in the United Nations forum in 2007, under the mandate of Rodolfo Stavenhagen (2001 - 2008), a window of opportunity was opened, paving the way together with local and national mobilizations, dialogues, agreements (not always respected) to influence various transformations in the national constitutions of Latin America, Mexico among them. Donna Van Lee Cott (2000) coined the term, "constitutional multiculturalism" to give an account of this unprecedented process in the constitutions that today contain a range of rights for indigenous and tribal peoples, which are sufficient on the spectrum of guaranteeing the right to autonomy and free-determination, but there is a profound institutional vacuum on the part of the state to make the second article of the Mexican constitution a reality.

Thus, other issues of great importance that have generated an abundance of literature are being positioned: social justice, redistribution, rights, strategies to relocate privileges to build equal societies. These processes that move away from integration and homogenization have not been easy to materialize, and so states have incurred in innovative ways by adopting the principles of diversity and plurality in multicultural or intercultural policies.

Now, it can be said that this enormous intellectual effort for recognition, is prior to 2007, and feminism, has made great contributions to make visible and "give voice" to women (Spivak and Guha, 1988) and from there extend it to ethnicities (native and migrant minorities) to communities with LGBTTTIQ+ sexual diversity and, recently, to afro-descendants. Feminism, a movement for women's rights and equality, has many angles and there are many notable European and North American authors and intellectuals (Fraser, 2004; bell hooks, 1993, Amorós, 2005, Yuval-Davis, 1983) but there are also prominent Latin American women, some well-known examples: Marta Lamas (2002, 2007), Sueli Carneiro (2015), Rita Segato (2016), Gloria Anzaldúa (1995).

With the sustained visibility of this growing diversity, these voiceless groups have been building, or reinventing, their identities to mark differences, to coin originality, they are identities in resistance and with emancipatory potential. Here,

of course, it becomes necessary to establish another methodological order to pose what is identity, although we require help, first, from two interrelated but not interchangeable concepts: ethnicity and nation.

Nation is a fundamental concept for understanding modern life. It is a community of citizens (Schnapper, 2001), but what makes it complex is that the citizens have "something in common", that is, they have the capacity to communicate among themselves, to recognize themselves and be recognized by others, they manage to exercise social cohesion and have delimited their cultural and symbolic borders. The nation is not "something" natural but is part of the engineering of the state through standardized education and the media, mainly. To put it another way, it is the state that builds the nation, a process that is delineated with more institutional precision, with the extension and unification of the educational system put in place since the second half of the twentieth century.

In the nation occurs the integration of the working class to capitalism, said the followers of the Frankfurt School and the University of Birmingham, but in reality, is the integration of all classes and ethnicities, therefore, in the national context we will find institutions and policies to forge uniformity and standardization, necessary for communication and social cohesion. In the nation as well, a dominant discourse, an official history, becomes preponderant, in addition to encouraging mass consumption and mass culture. Finally, the nation is unthinkable without its identity and the fine arts, which are actively linked to high culture, so they are cultivated, encouraged, and praised.

Now, let us review what is ethnicity. Of course, as in the culture of the nation, they are human practices imbued with subjectivity. The ethnicity or ethnic group, are also communities of people with the ability to have "something in common" such as culture, language, history, they have a powerful symbolic attribute, the ethnic past from which ethnocentrism is forged as a hard core of identity. However, in spite of evoking a prestigious cultural past with mythological richness (pre-Hispanic times), the ethnicity that is reproduced in modernity is fragmented, it is dispersed, often romanticized as a unit, natural, real, eternal, stable and static (Sollors, 1989). Also, it is often a demographic minority, and, because of its prolonged exclusion, it is marginal, and poverty prevails. If culture and ethnicity can then be equated because both are representations and subjectivities, of communities of people, there is a profound difference, the nation has its own state and thus reproduces national culture, while ethnicity has no state, no institutions, because it does not control education or communication. The nation has culture, ethnic minorities have ethnicity and, because of their minority status, are easily exposed to assimilation, acculturation, or resistance. Ethnic or indigenous peoples play a double role. They should be integrated into the nation, according to the indigenist policy since 1940 (Oehmichen, 1999), and preserve their traditions and customs, since this is what sustains the great pillar of the Mexican nation,

mestizaje, with its nationalist aesthetic and the selective appropriation of cultural artifacts that shapes mestizaje.

Ethnicity, despite its subordination, is not negligible, the state makes good use of it. In principle, the romanticism assigned to the glorious past, to the traditions of the peoples, are rich sources in originality, authenticity and legitimacy, it is therefore, the popular consumerism of folklore and its preservation in museum collections that show the "diversity" of the peoples, their traditions, languages, habitat.

In the chart below (see chart 1), we find a synthetic effort to find the differences and similarities between both concepts.

Table 1 Nation and ethnic group differences

Nation	Ethnic group
Culture	Ethnicity
State	Autonomy
Hegemony	Subordination
Sovereignty	Internal Colonialism
Standardization	Particularism
National Identity	Ethnic Identity
Development	Poverty
Progress	Backwardness
Control strategies (education, media)	No control strategies

Source: own elaboration based on Natividad Gutiérrez Chong (2005) "Nación, pueblo y etnia: un debate actual" *Nación y movimiento en América Latina. Debate Latinoamericano* (4) Millán Margara, Salcido Patricia y Cadena Jorge (compiladores) Siglo XXI, FCPyS.

We have already explained what ethnicity and culture is in a national context, it is now time to define what identity is. There is an abundant literature on different approaches (Elliott, 2014), this area of knowledge has been nourished precisely because of the process of recognizing "voiceless" groups. More and more groups need to differentiate themselves, because to the extent that they manage to be different, unique, and original, to that extent they can also demand differentiation and rights. Identity is first of all a complex information system, which each individual acquires from early socialization, in the family, the community and, never ceases, since one will always be in contact with the nation, with globalization and so on (Dieckhoff and Gutiérrez, 2001). Nor is identity natural, it is instilled,

learned, routinely, and day by day, a Nahua girl learns to be Nahua, just as Mexicanity is learned from primary school and in daily life. Although it is obvious, we must say that both the Nahua and the Zapotec of Oaxaca, as well as the Mexican, have an identity, that is, they have an information system. In Mexico, questions of origin, which are the basis of Anthony Smith's "mythomoteur" (2000), give weight to identity. For example, the myth that narrates the beginning of the Zapotec group, are the *binnigula'sa* ancestors, who live in the clouds, for the Mexicans, are the mestizos, descendants of the idyllic founding couple of the Mexican nation, Malinche and Hernán Cortés. No one can prove the veracity of such a myth, but it has undoubtedly been very effective in providing the nation with an answer regarding its origin. Who are we? Where do we come from? Since 1960, the Mexican generations that have been building their citizenship around the nation can easily answer these questions.

4. The revisiting of concepts that help to address the complexity of cultures

It is innovative the transgression that groups that build identity to be visible and recognized do. They act at a political level, committed to their identity, and are involved in struggles for redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 2003).

How are indigenous peoples inventing or adapting or recombining their identities? It is worth saying that there is no pure culture or identity or that they that do not change.

How is the indigenusness invented from migration, from urbanization, from mass consumption?

What cultural artifacts do identities in resistance produce?

Due to these questions and, surely there will be and there are many more, it becomes urgent to put back the study of culture in the centre of the debate, with a view to the construction of multiculturalism or interculturalism. We cannot study cultures today, with the theoretical instruments of the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools, nor with the theories of cultural change that gave prestige to Mexican anthropology. Furthermore, there is a need to profile modern ethnicities more specifically. And this is not resolved by appealing to hybridization, or consumerism, or the inculcation of national identity and patriotic love.

Today we see the rich intellectual and artistic participation of indigenous people, women, and men, with Mayan or Zapotec or Nahuatl identities. Fortunately for the cultures of the world, there are poets, writers, actors, actresses, novelists who think and work in their own languages. There are intellectuals who have visions of inclusive futures. There are political scientists who claim spaces in modern democracies, based on their experiences of organization, uses and customs, or the

second article of the Mexican constitution. There is an enormous capital for negotiation, for politics, for mobilization and for reaching agreements. Although there is a lot of cultural and intellectual production by indigenous people, unfortunately they are very little considered by mainstream society.

This is precisely where we must focus our efforts to theorize and study these cultures in resistance or emancipation, as well as the production they generate. In our opinion, more concepts need to be coined (or revisited) with their respective systems of explanation. There are, on the other hand, categories that have been revisited to show the complexity of symbolic borders and that, therefore, exploitation and oppression are tripled or quadrupled. Intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Lutz and Herrera, 2011) is the combination of gender, ethnicity, race, generation, and even sexuality that makes young indigenous women and girls face the last link in a social chain of oppression, or intersectionality can also serve to explain why there are privileges for non-indigenous women (skin colour counts) and this pays off in labour and emotional success.

Intersectionality is a tool that helps to analyse, due to its multiple lens, the interrelationship of different social divisions, such as social classes, pigmentation (hierarchy based on skin colour and phenotype) (Quijano, 2005), ethnicity (prestigious ethnic past or subordinated culture), sexuality (LGBTTTIQ+), age, place of residence. We insist that the intersectional analysis demands to study the specificity of each division, this means that attention must be paid to the contexts, the causes, the relationships of subordination, the multiple ways of expressing each social division. It is important to explain, insists Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011), that we should not create just chains such as female-indigenous-poor or female-black-working-class chains or female-white-rich. It is not only a question of a one-dimensional differentiation between the dominant and the dominated, but also of seeking to know the others more deeply. By studying poor indigenous women we are adding to the study of ethnicity, just as if we study privileged white women, we are building another lens to look more deeply at economic inequalities using indicators such as, ethnicity, race, class, place of residence, among others.

Far from being immersed in hegemonic, standardized and normative cultures and ethnicities "wrapped in cellophane paper", today we face a repertoire of phenomena and processes of hybrid, complex, chaotic, multiple, plural cultures, in the process of gestation or maturation, in decline or in the process of invention, of appropriation, of search in contexts favourable to negotiation and dialogue

Despite the standardization of the nation-state and the hegemony of capitalism, cultures will never cease to be unpredictable, they are constantly reinventing themselves because that is our human characteristic. Finding ways of ordering and theorizing to explain and understand are our challenges.

Finally, what is new today in the study of culture that seeks accommodation within the existing state? That a culture through its identity seeks to build its own

state is another discussion, for the case, helps to keep in mind, the return for the desire for independence of Catalonia and its range of shades of gray colour, as the sociologist Salvador Martí i Puig (May, 2017) says, which is required to understand with humanistic spirit, why autonomy for some Catalan communities is already insufficient.

There are innumerable cultures, many of them with constructed identities, and in establishing demarcations, there is a demand for visibility and recognition, rights, and distribution of resources that the state administers. Without these resources, there is no way for a culture to be preserved, protected, and reproduced. Identity, when politicized, involves the state and that makes the meaning of culture change because culture needs power to exist.

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