SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY: CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

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Synopsis

Cultural globalization is commonly understood to denote the expanded movement of goods, technology, images, ideas and people around the world that has been made possible by processes of economic globalization since the 1970s. It has been the subject of considerable moral angst in popular and academic venues alike, as observers variously celebrate the cultural mixings or lament the cultural destruction that are commonly understood to accompany globalizing processes. This article presents three epistemological framings that trouble such popular representations and reflect different approaches within geography and related fields to representing ‘the cultural’ and ‘globalization’, as well as the normative implications of each for specifying a political praxis.

The ‘flows-and-impacts’ approach examines the nature of cultural flows themselves—what is being circulated, where, how and to what effect—and has been subject to multiple and contradictory normative positions. The ‘cultures-of-economies’ approach presents a more consistent critique of capitalist relations of production and other systems of domination, but encompasses a range of views on how ‘the economic’ relates to ‘the cultural’, and consequently on what are the ideal sites and strategies for political change. More sound normative footing can be found in the third, ‘articulation’, approach, which interprets globalization not as inexorable force but as webs of interconnection among concrete places in the world, that themselves can become the foundation for critical practices and alternative trajectories.

KEY WORDS: anthropology, articulation, Bourdieu, consumerism, consumption, cultural economy, cultural industry, culture, Foucault, globalization, Gramsci, Polanyi, practice theory, resistance, subjectivity