



# Cultural diversity, social exclusion and youth in Latin America<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This text has been compiled from the author's previous publications: "Introducción" of the book *Los Estudios Culturales en México* (2003); *El Color de las Sombras. Chicanos, Identidad y Racismo* (1997); and "Imaginario y políticas culturales en América Latina" (2010).



Social Sciences are currently putting culture at the core of the challenge to build new social and civilizing projects. The approaches to understanding intersubjective and symbolic processes are gaining force as elements that enable a better understanding of social action, human behavior, identity processes, the emergence of new social actors, and the definition of human development projects that go beyond the logic of material possession as a criterion of success or beyond perspectives that regard inequality as natural.

The main theoretical paradigms have important limitations when it comes to interpreting the socio-cultural frameworks, despite some successes. These include multiculturalism, which questions the attempted condition of homogeneity and superiority of dominant cultures identifying the semantization of cultural borders and defining the thresholds from which difference and diversity are built. To this end, it analyses the processes by which collective identities are structured, especially in relation to the shaping of the thresholds of affiliation and difference by questioning the condition of minorities within societies and national cultures. It also emphasizes the cultural debate in the analysis of social action by incorporating, in a confused way, the cultural condition of sociopolitical processes and the sociopolitical condition of cultural processes.

Multicultural perspectives question the logic from which dominant metanarratives, such as racism or sexism, adult centrism or ethnocentrism, are shaped. From this position, the multicultural condition of our societies is emphasized and the logic that validates monocultural domination is questioned. From the multicultural perspective, the central theme of social and cultural debate is the quest for recognition and, by questioning the monocultural approaches, the so-called “universal values” are also criticized (Taylor, 1998).

However, multicultural perspectives do not limit their questioning to the analysis of elements that constitute the threshold of identification and difference but also incorporate the critique of homogenizing perspectives. With such an approach, multicultural positions become critical perspectives opposed to the dominant social order. Societies are fields of dispute for representations and meanings. Therefore, multiculturalism is part of a profound debate that questions the dominant discourses and in which the struggle for recognition becomes an important element of the multiculturalism movements and policies.

Critical multiculturalism questions power relations by assuming that cultural history is a history of power and that the analysis of identities requires an understanding of the social construction of differences (MacLaren, 1998). Multiculturalism looks for the deconstruction of colonial centers of power and the destruction of racist and excluding discourses, while emphasizing that social inequalities rather than cultural differences obstruct the formation of more democratic and fairer societies.

Despite the aforementioned elements, multiculturalist perspectives pay little attention to the structuring conditions of social relations and offer a weak incorporation of social anchorages. Moreover, they have a self-referential perspective and, therefore, the main weakness lies in not having addressed social inequality, which, in the Latin American context, goes hand-in-hand with cultural inequality.

From post-colonial perspectives, cultural phenomena are not only seen as the process that begins with the independence of colonized countries but are also those elements that encompass the totality of practices that have characterized post-colonial societies worldwide since the moment of colonization (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995). For post-colonialists, colonialism does not end with the act of political independence of colonized countries as, in most of them, neocolonial relationships prevail.

The theory that guides post-colonial work is that research in the humanities must define the nature of the relationship between knowledge and politics or between political and cultural issues in the specific context of its themes and field of study as well as historical circumstances, with the understanding that in the cultural discourse and exchange within a culture what commonly circulates are not “truths” but their representations.

A critical dialogue between external representations of our realities and our own representations is still a pending issue. Therefore, it is important to systematize those representations and to know how the knowledge and the imaginaries of our realities are being formed. At the same time, we should move forward in the understanding of how we produce knowledge about us and how we represent ourselves.

The intellectual history of post-colonial theory is marked, on the one hand, by the dialectic between Marxism and post-structuralism and, on the other, by post-modernism. From this interpretation field, debates on nationalism and internationalism, strategic essentialism and hybridization, solidarity and dispersion, and policies of structure/totality of both the particular and the fragmentary are emphasized. Furthermore, post-colonial theories recognize the analytical and social importance of the relationships between race and class (Gandhi, 1998).

Since the publication of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Gayatri Spivac (1988), inspired by Gramsci's thinking and considered one of the fundamental texts of post-colonial studies, the debates have emphasized the conditions that reproduce the relations of domination/subordination. Thanks to Spivac, a major improvement was achieved in studies about subordination both in social representations and disciplinary areas; even the participation of researchers was questioned. Beyond formal limitations of post-colonialism as a concept, there is an agreement that all post-colonial societies somehow remain subject to various forms of domination.

In Mexico and in Latin America some of the main elements of colonial domination that prevail as neocolonial social practices are the socio-cultural division of opportunities, diverse racist structures or racial, linguistic or religious divisions that reproduce an unequal treatment, as happens with indigenous peoples. In this way, post-colonialism is expressed as a continuous and complex process of endurance and reconstruction (*op. cit.*).

Post-colonialism does not only refer to a kind of automatic and unchangeable opposition and resistance to colonial powers but to a series of economic, social and cultural bonds and articulations, without which the processes cannot be adequately understood, as they are complex and ambivalent processes incorporated into social practices.

Post-colonialists emphasize the central issues that define their field of concerns, where they highlight slavery, migration, suppression of others, resistance to colonization, ways of constructing and representing differences, race, ethnic constructs, gender relations and responses to the influences of the great discourses from imperial Europe (*op. cit.*).

After the contribution of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, the field of cultural studies introduced new interpretative approaches by taking into account articulations between the dominant, the residual, the archaic, the emergent and the common (Raymond Williams). They also questioned the lineal perspectives that considered superiority of the modern over the traditional and the dominant over the subaltern (Valenzuela, 2003).

Cultural perspectives that are critical of dominant discourses build bridges from which multiculturalism is not only considered a field of social affiliation (of belonging or reference), but also takes relations with political identities into account. Moreover, insofar as the aim is to work from intra and extra institutional contexts, cultural studies are not dissociated from social and political intervention.

Cultural debate incorporated the deconstruction of discourses of domination and cultural studies reconstructed histories of sociopolitical processes and social class confrontations. As E.P. Thompson argues, the concept of social class is not only due to a situation defined by the role occupied in the production process and the ways of relating to mass production but also corresponds to a socio-historical category. In this process, relations between social classes produce institutions, culture and mutations that give them specific features but also enable cross-national comparisons (*op. cit.*).

Cultural studies considered some issues as fields of expression and organization of the new social processes, among which we can highlight culture, ideology, language, power and the symbolic. In this way, more than subjects of analysis, the aim is to build general theories that critically articulate different domains of life. Therefore, society must be analyzed from the juncture between theory, politics, economic and ideological aspects, and socio-political practices.

There is also a clear interest in analyzing socio-cultural organizations as a field of connections where diverse elements shape “unities” in specific contexts. The juncture makes reference to the production of unities starting from fragmented elements through practices signified by collective identifications. From this perspective, it is interesting to progress in the analysis of processes produced by the organization of cultural differences (Stuart Hall) (*op. cit.*).

Cultural studies are not only built upon disciplinary perspectives but assume cross-disciplinary and, sometimes, anti-disciplinary perspectives with a high interest in understanding the historical and social processes, not only from sedentary conditions but from nomadic perspectives that acknowledge the processes that define contemporary diasporas and migrations, which also involve dislocation, displacement, and cultural hybridism. From these perspectives, the condition of cultural border acquires new meanings or at least new emphases. National borders, more than representing the break of restraining spaces, express fields where something begins: a beyond that goes on incorporating the other side of the border, as a departure point, as a complementing and constituting element. Therefore, it is important to work with new fields of identity, where the in-betweens gain importance and allow the production of particular and community strategies of identification and belonging, because new identity fields and new production processes of the social are defined.

Studies of culture consider aspects such as *diversity*, which is a socio-cultural category of comparison (as well as being a system of acknowledgement of cultural contents and particular customs of a social group), and *difference* (understood as a process of articulation of a culture, therefore becoming knowable and appropriate to the creation of systems of cultural identification) but also the shaping of systems of significance, through which senses and meanings are attributed, which involves the (re)production of prejudices and stereotypes (Homi K. Bhabha) (*op. cit.*).

In this respect, Bhabha notes that beyond the difference in attitudes inscribed in the symbolic systems in the various cultural arrays, it is important to analyze the structure of symbolic representation and, rather than the content of the symbol and its social function, it is important to understand the structure of symbolization.

Some of the most suggestive criticisms of the path taken by many followers of the Birmingham School (not of its founders) emphasize that they have let themselves be caught out by a certain textual condition, where the text seems to acquire a self-contained condition, overlooking the connection with social contexts. Therefore, Fredric Jameson emphasizes the need to recover the critical theory of culture that comes from Marx, Freud, the School of Frankfurt, Luckács, Sartre and complex Marxism, and suggests redefining cultural studies as cultural Marxism and as a critique of capitalism. For this, the economic, political and social formations should be considered and the importance of social classes highlighted (Jameson, 1998).

These approaches become relevant in the context of multicultural perspectives that do not consider the system as an articulated whole, which must be recovered at wider levels because capitalism has a global “top down” condition, especially in finance, communication and computer science sectors. This is an urgent challenge for those who do not belong to those circuits of power and only suffer the effects of their globalized policies. By emphasizing the structure of cultural elements as material practices, cultural studies help us conceive ideological and cultural practices as part of the material relations in their particular discursive form and not as a fixed or unchangeable condition.

### **Latin America from a youth perspective**

The large demonstrations throughout the world are part of the exclusion and precariousness of people in contexts of great social inequality, a situation that has sparked off outrage from broad sectors of society where young people have a key role. Underlying the Indignant Movement there is a lack of hope for the future and a present full of uncertainty and apprehension. Millions of young people are facing the uncertainty of a widespread crisis that affects their lives, job prospects, access to benefits and their security in increasingly violent contexts from which, paradoxically, they are stereotyped and criminalized as if they were the cause of the violence and the economic shortage we are experiencing.

We observe risk scenarios resulting from a growing young population in the world and their presence is becoming central through their identity affiliations, cultural proposals, and social demands. Half of the planet's population is under 25 and one fifth is aged between 15 and 24 years; that is, 1.2 billion, which will reach 1.3 billion in the next two decades. However, the conceptual umbrella of youth has significant differences, especially when 84% of them live in underdeveloped countries (CONAPO, 2010:9-11). This geo-affiliation involves unavoidable challenges due to the fact that their major problems cannot be resolved in isolation as they are symbiotically linked with the limitations of national and civilizing projects in the contemporary world, especially because the dominant socioeconomic model involves policies oriented to favor a few at the expense of the vast majority, widening social inequalities and generating multiple areas of exclusion, poverty and insecurity.

Among young people there are important differences in life options and expectations based on regions, countries, class, gender, and ethnicity. These aspects affect the objective basis that define or obstruct their possibilities of developing feasible life projects. Alongside expressions that construct youth imaginaries from rhetorical positions that grant them a privileged and comfortable status characterized by incontinent hedonistic proclivity, there is an overwhelming reality where at least 515 million young people live on less than two dollars per day and more than 40% on less than one dollar (*Ibid.*: 16).

In the current late capitalist scenario the problems associated with young people's precarious and informal employment stand out. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that between 1997 and 2007 there was an increase of 147 million young people, but only 25.3 million entered the labor market (*Ibid.*: 44). The young population has higher unemployment rates than other age groups of the economically active population, because it constitutes one fifth of the world's working age population (24.7%) and 40.2% of unemployed people (*Ibid.*: 45). To complement this scenario of precariousness it is necessary to point out that, in 2005, 308.5 million young workers (56% of all the employed young) lived in poverty with an income below two dollars per day, reflecting their special situation of precariousness and vulnerability. These problems worsened in 2008 when unemployed youths reached 74.2 million (*Ibid.*: 46-47). Moreover, in recent months economic scenarios have become overwhelmingly complicated and their impact on unemployment is extremely serious. According to information from the International Monetary Fund, from September 2011, unemployment in the world reached 200 million people, which represents the highest level in history.

Young people suffer the increase in unemployment, vulnerability and job precariousness. The International Labour Organization estimates the loss of jobs in the world between 2007 and 2010 at 34 million, and that 30% of them (10.2 million) is among youths between 15 and 24 (ILO, 2010). Moreover, between 2008 and 2009 the number of unemployed youths increased by 8.5 million, a number that almost doubles the increase in adult unemployment (1.3 and 0.7) (CONAPO, 2010: 48). In order to document this scenario, it is relevant to consider a report by the United Nations that states that with the 2009 economic recession the youth unemployment rate in the world increased and reached 81 million people that year, while making clear the strong inequities associated with youth, because young people work more hours than adults, earn less and have low or no social security.

Considering the scenario, it is not surprising to see a high level of disenchantment among the young, because millions of them live with anxiety and despair on a daily basis. Many of them have gone out

on the streets to express their disagreement with the dominant economic model that creates poverty for many and enormous wealth for a few. In the last few months, the Indignant Movement has identified neo-liberalism and its beneficiaries (businessmen, politicians, bankers and speculators) as the *enemies of the people* and responsible for the crisis.

Squatters and the Indignant Movement call for a more democratic, transparent and inclusive global order based on a different, more equitable and egalitarian economic model; a model that takes care of the needs of the vast majorities and that is not subordinated to safeguarding the immoral wealth of the 1%. As Vandana Shiva says, the objective is to change the G8 for the G7,000,000,000, which gives priority to the totality of the planet living under precarious conditions at the hands of a few. The global context underlying the Indignant Movement highlights the economic crisis and questions the so-called solutions that only seek to protect the major financial capitals. Even though it may seem early or risky to try to define unique features among these movements articulated in a sort of global connectivity, we can identify some: most movements identify politicians, businessmen, bankers, speculators, consortiums, and high members of the clergy, as well as the mass media in collusion with power, as directly responsible for the devastation we are experiencing.

The Indignant Movement is led by young men and women. Young people that imagine better global scenarios and go out and fight to create them. But they are not the only ones; indignation has spread throughout the world and the movement now includes workers, some labor unions, intellectuals, artists, students, housewives, and a huge number of people with various experiences and social affiliations.

In each place, demands emerging from global contexts are becoming relevant. However, positions that are heard all over the planet prevail. Among them we find calls for global change, democracy for all, decent jobs, for the rich to pay the cost of their crisis and taxes, respect for human rights and an end to environmental destruction. Moreover, there are demonstrations against privatization of education and welfare, poverty, inequality, neo-liberalism and capitalism.

Faced with the antidemocratic, vertical and excluding positions of the rightwing and neo-liberal models, the "Indignants" believe in different styles and practices opposed to class methods and dominant groups. In streets and squares ripe with indignation, there is a radical movement that fights using peaceful methods, resists the police and media onslaught, promotes itself and calls for action via social networks (such as Internet, Twitter and Facebook), while forming agreements in assemblies using democratic, participative and horizontal methods.

Since the end of the now distant 1990s, many youths and activists outraged at the inequality extended by neo-liberalism and its representative organizations like the Group of Eight (G8), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB) fought in Seattle an unequal fight against excluding globalization. The movement persistently and heroically struggled for their voices to be heard and attention paid to their demands, but they were treated with repression and apathy in the many scenarios where they tried to pit issues of life against greed. Also crucial were the protests of the young that changed the social setting in the Arab countries of North Africa, such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and Syria in the Middle East. In May 2011, a new expression of indignation broke out in the squares of Madrid when 10,000 young people demanded employment and better living conditions. In view of an uncertain future, darkened by unemployment, the protest clashed with police violence in Gran Vía, but they took Puerta del Sol where they held fast despite repression, and their indignation spread to Barcelona and many other cities. Protests extended to Portugal, Greece, Ireland, the United States... until reaching 82 countries and 951 cities in the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people in October 2011. At the same time, young Chileans went out on the streets and for months demanded free quality education in opposition to the privatization of education, a movement widely supported in Chile.

Indignant slogans highlight the history of grievances and frustrations, as well as the options and alternatives that allow a hopeful future and fairer civilizational perspectives, which are inclusive and respect life, human rights and ecology, as well as prospects for a more equal and democratic world: GLOBAL DEMOCRACY NOW! UNITED FOR GLOBAL CHANGE! AGAINST CAPITAL, SOCIAL

REVOLUTION! BECAUSE BANKS ALWAYS WIN! HUMAN RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE! IF YOU DON'T LET US DREAM, WE WON'T LET YOU SLEEP! WE ARE NOT MERCHANDISE! TAX THE RICH! WE WON'T PAY FOR YOUR CRISIS! HOPE AND CHANGE! I CARE FOR YOU! and WE ARE SICK AND TIRED!

As Noam Chomsky, Eduardo Galeano, Naomi Klein and other intellectuals have noted, the "Indignants" represent a global decentralized movement against those who have created a systemic crisis in the world and a humanitarian disaster. In the speech given before the Occupy Wall Street movement, Naomi Klein pointed out that there are no longer rich countries, only rich people, an assertion that emphasizes the extreme enrichment of some who profit from the crisis and misery of the great majority of the planet's population.

The Indignant Movement is a turning point that indicates the need for a new global economic model, new national projects, new actors in the political process and a new civilizing project. In this endeavor, young people have taken the floor, the squares, and the financial power centers. They are the most excluded, those who suffer most acutely from unemployment, poverty, precariousness and social exclusion. The young are the great displaced; it does not matter if they have acquired academic qualifications, as the uncertainty limits their expectations and generates ever more frustration.

In Mexico, the movement led by the young people of #YoSoy132 turned around the image of young Mexicans as apathetic about politics and social affairs. For nearly two decades the idea of the *generación de la hueva* prevailed, alluding to a supposed indolence of youth towards political affairs. However, the national youth surveys (2000 and 2005) indicated that young men and women kept their distances from the traditional perspective of politics constructed upon the state-party system relationship. For them the image of politics had been profoundly discredited, as had the institutions of justice, including judges, magistrates and, above all, the police, who they did not differentiate from drugs traffickers. However, they were interested in participating in ecological matters, human or indigenous rights, issues allowing the identification of a thematic agenda of young people's concerns. This belies the supposed youth apathy and shows they were fed up with the demagoguery, corruption and imposture of politics that they identified in the party programs. #YoSoy132 shows that many young Mexicans are interested in social affairs and seek out new references of definition of politics associated with a new fairer and equitable national project, without corruption or impunity; an inclusive project that favors the majority and combats the immoral inequality in the distribution of income and wealth; a project that punishes the authoritarian and criminal figures that use political force to repress, disappear or murder citizens and revoke the mandate of civil servants unable to carry out the responsibilities conferred on them; a project where all voices have the opportunity to be heard and access to the appropriate channels; a project where the mass media strengthen the social fabric and elevate the cultural level of the people; a project where education and culture associated with employment and high quality health systems participate in the construction of better life projects for the young and where displacement is not obligatory. #YoSoy132 reminds us that we need a just, equitable, inclusive humanist project with a new civilizing future.

If exclusion were not enough, the feeling of insecurity is growing in many ways. The population is confronting policies that limit their spaces of freedom, while becoming increasingly aware of the threatening issues: the axis of evil, terrorism, organized crime, drug traffickers, the army, and the police. Fear, insecurity and violence increase their presence in Latin American social imaginaries: these intersubjective frameworks that participate in the definition of the meanings of everyday life. With the imaginaries of fear and violence, the social spaces are fortified and saturated through security devices, private security and the omnipresence of the police and the army.

Recognizing the need to carry out urgent transformations in the education system, I argue that the great problems of the education system lie in deficiencies and limitations of the socioeconomic model and the dominant national model. In the same way, I maintain that the great youth problems have no resolution in isolation, but refer to the great problems concomitant to the current national and civilizing project.

Alongside this scenario, we must recognize that the so-called Millennium Development Goals denote fundamental failures, especially in terms of the eradication of poverty, famine, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Dignified employment, quality universal education, development for the majority, democracy, quality of life and secularization, are pending issues and young people particularly suffer from the excluding condition of the neo-liberal project and the dominant civilizing model that generates proscription, poverty, wealth concentration, precariousness, corruption, impunity and death.

Together with the diverse forms of legitimated culture, there emerge multiple cultural forms created in the neighborhoods or in the spaces of private socialization with their own routines and meanings. The changes resulting from the transformation from rural to urban societies generate new logics in the socio-cultural construction of the spaces and the neighborhood participates as an ambit of mediation between public and private spaces. It is an in-between ambit which has had great importance in the formation of meanings of young people's lives and participates as a structured and structuring space of power relations (Valenzuela, 1988 and 1997). The neighborhood is one of the important components in the secondary socialization of children and youths as an ambit where codes, meanings, routines, lifestyles and cultural praxis are defined and constructed that give meaning to their lives. The neighborhood participates significantly in the processes of informal socialization and popular education of youths, and affects the definition of powerful identities and identifications that cannot be avoided by the formal education systems or remain invisible to the intraschool spaces.

The traditional education systems have little concern about understanding the elements underlying the bodies that have meaning through clothing, tattoos, piercings, scarification, alterations, the dispute over the meaning of spaces through graffiti, or the neighborhood codes that define the life of the young, an inattentiveness that leads to prohibition, *control and punishment*, mutilating communication processes that could help understand the underlying needs, demands, expectations and hopes of the young.

Pedagogy as cultural praxis alludes to the articulation of the intra and extra school ambits defined from the education syllabuses, teaching methods and pedagogic paradigms. This articulation also involves reflexivity on the social world and the ethical and axiological frameworks from which the senses and meanings of the lives of children and young people are constructed.

## Conclusion

We have started another millennium with a population of over six billion inhabitants and with major social differences. Along with the feeling that the planet is increasingly smaller, given that the density of the socio-cultural relations of the contemporary world is increasing, several cultural divergences are emerging in which expressions of rejection and intolerance, built upon positions marked by prejudice, stereotypes and racism, are appearing.

This situation reveals the importance of advancing in the study of the processes of interculturalism and the construction of cultural borders as a resource to deconstruct the discourses that legitimize socio-cultural exclusion and believe in the reproduction of inequality of opportunities. From these positions, people turn to perspectives that stigmatize cultural difference, with the aim of discrediting others who maintain distinct cultural forms.

Beyond the academic challenge involved in interpreting the meanings of these intercultural processes, it is necessary to advance in the understanding of the social processes that (re)produce the differences between human groups. This task is necessary in order to shape new fields of coexistence that are respectful of cultural differences, in which the relation with others can lead to enriching cultural bonds rather than to spaces of disagreement, conflict or exclusion.

The potentialities that frame the intensive development of the electronic and communication media, as well as those related to transport, bring different views closer and make cultural similarities and differences conspicuous. On this basis, it is possible to advance in the deconstruction of the excluding discourses that are assumed as universal and “unique” and challenge the elements from which self-referential and excluding perspectives are validated. The peoples and social groups are calling for recognition and for spaces in the definition of the new fields opened by globalization or, more precisely, are seeking another form of globalization defined from an inclusive integration that improves the living conditions of the majorities and in which cultural diversity is respected.

The search for recognition and respect for social diversity has taken on an unavoidable social significance in a contemporary world in which identity positions are growing that enrich the complex interculturalism and have achieved great presence in the debates arising from the fields related to religion, the generational issue, gender, ethnicity, the social option or biopolitics. The struggles for respect have taken an unavoidable central position and make us discuss the meanings of the interculturalism that we are experiencing.

The concern for the way intercultural relations are defined is expressed at multiple levels, from globalized fields to social relations which are expressed in daily ambits. In them, the fight for recognition takes many forms. The challenge is to understand that diversity enriches cultural life. This idea was adopted by UNESCO, which emphasized the fertile role of diversity in the seminal book *World Culture Report, Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism* (UNESCO, 1999).<sup>2</sup> Faced with those who believe that globalization yields unavoidable unilinear scenarios of cultural homogenization, it is worth noting that, at the same time, we observe strong processes of social and cultural fragmentation. The challenge lies in making the recognition of cultural diversity a reality and creating intercultural relations defined out of mutual respect.

Unfortunately, social inequality and lack of respect for difference are common practices which, on many occasions, are linked with the increase of vulnerability faced with the violation of human rights. The more than 6 billion people on the planet make up a multicultural whole that encompasses more than 300 million people belonging to the so-called “indigenous populations” and 5,000 different cultures and languages (Rasmussen and Sjoerslev, 1999). Only in Mexico, 90 languages and 62 ethnic groups and indigenous peoples are recognized.

Socio-cultural differentiation as a way of exclusion is particularly evident with reference to indigenous peoples and other ethnic or religious groups, as well as in the case of women, who represent 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in “the most absolute poverty” and scarcely occupy 6% of the ministerial positions in the world and 11% of parliamentary seats, while in 55 countries they cannot even participate in the public sphere (Halimi, 1999). Moreover, the United Nations Population Fund emphasizes the fact that 929 million people are illiterate, of whom 600 million are women and 329 million are men. Moreover, due to the mass violation of human rights, each year millions of people die, most of them women in poor countries.<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with the information of the World Bank, almost half of the world population survives on less than two dollars per day and one fifth on less than one dollar (2.8 and 1.2 billion people). Moreover, in the poorest countries, one fifth of the children do not reach five years of age and half of them suffer from malnutrition. This overall vision of poverty in the world is completed by considering that between 1987 and 1998 those people living on less than one dollar per day remained almost constant (1,832.2 and 1,198.9 million), while in Latin America and the Caribbean, this population grew in absolute and relative terms, passing from 63.7 million (15.3%) to 78.2 million (15.6%) (World Bank, 2000).

Meanwhile, inequality between poor and rich countries is growing and the difference in income between the two groups has doubled in the last four decades. In this context, the World Bank’s

<sup>2</sup> Later, the efforts of UNESCO resulted in publications such as the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2002) and the report *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, at the start of the 21st century, every year 585,000 women died of causes related to pregnancy; most of these deaths could be avoided (Sadik, 1999: 2).

observation becomes meaningful bearing in mind that “poverty is more than inadequate income or human development: it is also vulnerability and a lack of voice, power, and representation” (*Ibid.*: 12). However, we can also affirm that wealth has involved the depredation of resources of the weakest, the incapacity to listen, abuse of power and self-referential positions.

Despite the discourse in favor of peace and “tolerance”, the violation of human rights, intolerance and conflicts are highly present in the world. Amnesty International has identified at least ten international wars and 25 civil wars, while the countries that purport to be heralds of peace and make up the UN Security Council (United Nations, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom) are the five main exporters of weapons worldwide (Amnesty International, 2000). Also notable is the worrying increase in repression, poverty, inequality, social vulnerability and impunity, with almost 630 “killings” by governmental forces (*op. cit.*).

The understanding of socio-cultural processes must involve perspectives that break with the self-referential views that have prevailed in the dominant discourses. Meanwhile, it is necessary to understand the structuring processes of intercultural relations of inequality defined through institutional processes determined from dominant symbolic universes. Hence, cultural dispute is a political dispute. Next I will mention some of the elements that have determined the characteristics of the cultural confrontations from the elements examined by some theoretical perspectives on culture that have emphasized intercultural or multicultural relations.

Insofar as the fights for recognition take place in structured relations of power and are developed in the public and symbolic fields in which social representations are defined, the fight for the recognition of cultural differences and intercultural relations of respect occupies the centre of the fight for the democratization of our societies. As part of this process, we see an important culturalization of political participation and an increase in the dispute aimed at constructing projects of society that are more inclusive and less unfair.

As the existence of a single culture as a reference for all others is questioned, the cultural discussion has pointed to the deconstruction of the fields of power from which the dominant culture is legitimized. Based on these premises, the superiority of the dominant cultures and the subordinate role of the so-called cultural minorities are questioned, while the elements involved in the shaping of social identities are considered, taking into account the semantized thresholds of affiliation/differentiation.

By recognizing the heterogeneity of positions that form part of the debate on the formation of social senses and meanings, we can emphasize proposals that understand cultural resistance as a central element for the formation of more inclusive social scenarios. Hence, one of the pivotal issues of cultural debate emerges from the dispute over social representations and meanings, a scenario in which the fight of women, youths, indigenous peoples or religious groups has been conspicuous. Along with the debate on intercultural relations and multiculturalism, the debates on social identities and the social construction of difference have taken on great importance.

One of the central challenges to understanding the cultural changes in the world consists of working from the cultural in-betweens so that the frontiers become enriching bridges and do not remain as trenches of exclusion, intolerance, racism, sexism and disagreement.

Undoubtedly, one of the social processes that determinably form part of the shaping of intercultural and cross-border fields is migration. This is highly important in the contemporary intercultural dynamic, defined through concepts such as diaspora, deterritorialization/reterritorialization, cross-national communities, migration networks and other concepts from which the aim is to comprehend the human condition underlying the cultural transformations and recreations that define the meaning of the life of millions of human beings in the world. On many occasions, these people suffer humiliating treatments and their human rights are violated, or they die in the attempt, as has happened with 7,000 or 10,000 people who have died when trying to cross the border between Mexico and the United States since the start of *Operation Guardian* in 1994.

The increase in the inequality breach between rich and poor countries also affects the shaping of the scenarios that define the characteristics of migration processes. If we take into consideration that in the first 25 years of the 21st century the world population will increase by 2 billion people of whom 97% will correspond to these poor nations, we can consider that migration will take on greater importance than it has today.

At present, approaching Latin America from the socio-cultural and economic dimension involves considering the Latin Americans living abroad; a geopolitical concept that does not manage to undermine the status of many of these Latin Americans abroad who, in fact, continue to live as if they were in Latin America. According to American census estimates and several population studies, by the middle of the century, the Latino population in the United States will amount to between 25% and 30% of the total population, reaching almost 130 million (thereby becoming an absolute majority in some states such as California). This amount is higher than the estimated population of Mexicans living in Mexico in 2050.

The information provided by the US Census Bureau in 2008 reported 46.7 million Hispanics with documents and more than 12 million undocumented. This reality is relevant if we take into account that out of the 581,982,052 living in 2009 in the 30 Latin American countries, Latinos living in the USA surpass the population of most of them, except Brazil and Mexico and very close to Colombia. This fact is important for the definition of cultural policies from Latin America, especially if we consider that two thirds of Latinos in the USA prefer to speak Spanish. The former makes us believe that the design of large cultural policy strategies for Latin America involves providing services to this population that maintain strong links with the places of origin as a result of the intensive migration processes, the development of transport and mass communication and electronic media, such as Internet, which prompt new ways of being together.

On many occasions, the economic significance acquired by migrants grants them some empowerment in the places of origin through remittances, which have personal or family meanings, and in many cases in the places of origin are used for public works, buying instruments for the local band, the construction of a school or a hospital and so on. Moreover, there are varied forms of recreation and cultural reterritorialization of traditional practices in the destination places, as happens with the different Guelaguetza festivals by Oaxacan women in California.

Stronger links are recreated through music, festivals, events, soap operas and traditions. The new paths of Latin Americans are dense and creative. Moreover, they ask for the countries to see their migrants as more than a safety valve or foreign currency profitable through remittances. It is important to break with the fetishism of remittances and understand that the basis that enables the North-South flows of money are the socio-affective links and the networks of close human relations which explain why remittances are so important in the Latin American economies (Valenzuela, 2010: 266-267).

Recent debates on cultural diversity and cultural interactions take place within the issues which have not been resolved from multi- and interculturalism. Indeed, the discussions of multiculturalism had a great impact when making visible the processes of deconstruction of the prevailing discourses and narratives, especially in terms of demanding respect for cultural differences, while intercultural approaches considered the agreements and common elements as focal points of better forms of socio-cultural relations. In both cases, the producing and reproducing conditions of social inequality are blurred, have marginal or peripheral expressions or are simply ignored.

It is paramount to incorporate the relations between social and cultural exclusion as elements that form part of a global capitalist model that produces and reproduces poverty, inequality, precariousness and social exclusion, as well as the prevalence of prejudices, stigmas, stereotypes and racism as elements that are present in the (re)production of inequality and socio-cultural exclusion. This is the challenge implicit in the fight to acknowledge the major value of our cultural diversity.

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