

CROSSING BORDERS OF HYBRIDITY BEYOND MARGINALITY AND IDENTITY

Keywords: hybridity, otherness, identity politics, cultural alterity, transitional cultures

Abstract: Transition concepts such as ‘hybridity’, ‘alterity’, ‘diaspora’, ‘creolization’, ‘transculturalization’ and ‘syncretism’ have to an increasing extent become key concepts in various attempts at escaping the problems of suppression and exclusion involved in notions of purity, be it the purity of race or culture. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the concepts of cultural transition and to try to develop conceptual spaces within which it is possible to grasp and to study cultural identity without resorting to cultural essentialism. The paper explores the concept of hybridity and its uses in divergent and related fields, besides a critique of assumptions (those of purity, of marginality and identity). A discussion of cultural alterity, identity, diffusion and race leads to consideration of how syncretism and hybridity seem to do duty as terms for the management of the more esoteric cultural aspects of colonialism. It also focuses on cultural creativity – innovation and authenticity, ownership of cultural forms, and of technological modes of cultural mix. This links hybridity to more explicit political terminologies and constructs hybrid artefacts as commodities of difference in the context of culture. From an analytical perspective, the paper emphasizes the complexities of the power in transitions as well as in constructions of essentialist identities. We need to move beyond the limitations of both identity politics and the critique of essentialism without losing sight of the commitment to social and cultural critique. Focusing on the concept of hybridity, I argue that we should not only be concerned with what is hybridity, but also how are the notions of and distinctions between transition and purity applied, by whom, to what ends and articulated with which other elements. Turning the concepts of transition into analytical, rather than descriptive, they will open up new fields of study and new possibilities for critique.