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Cultural Studies: A (still) Progressive Project to Challenge Power or an Anachronistic Project Unwittingly in the Service of Power?

This paper argues that we are in the midst of a huge hegemonic displacement that fractures the old political formations and realigns the traditionally progressive movements with right-wing politics. The central question of the paper is: what is the role and place of Cultural Studies in this hegemonic slide? At the center of the discussion is the changing character of feminism and anti-racism through the debate on immigration.

Cultural Studies can be said to have initially started as a project to study the production of power relations in popular culture. However, today Cultural Studies is itself being slowly hegemonized. The clearest indication is the immense preoccupation with ethnic and cultural identities.

In this presentation, I argue that what we have been witnessing in Europe is the formation of a new type of hegemony that brings cultural distinctions to the forefront. This creates tensions within antiracist and feminist movements: once inequalities are articulated in terms of culture, religion and ethnicity, the political target for the struggle for equality gets confused and creates dilemmas for the movements. The same dilemma can also be traced in scholarly work of Cultural Studies scholars and I contend that it is the result of the inattentiveness to the new hegemony that reframes traditional sensitivities of Cultural Studies into the service of hegemonic politics. What we need is a newborn reflexivity that realigns our theoretical positions and political values with the wider context of the hegemonic displacement.