

Seeing Culture Everywhere, from Genocide to Consumer Habits



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Today's world is shaped by an obsession with cultural difference that penetrates everyday life and matters of state in unprecedented ways. Culture, and cultural difference, are commonly used to explain everything that's in the news - from wars to economic development and consumer behavior. This fuels the belief that our world is shaped by clashing cultures, a view that is counterproductive when it assumes falsely that culture is a timeless container that traps nations and ethnic groups. This challenge to the misguided and dangerous global obsession with cultural difference directly critiques the popular notion that world affairs-from insurgencies to corporate mergers-are determined by essential civilizations with immutable and conflicting cultures. "Seeing Culture Everywhere" offers an alternative view of a world in which cultural mixing, not isolation, is the norm, but where several historical trends have come together at the beginning of the twenty-first century to produce the current wave of 'culture think'. Brimming with concrete examples that move from the genocide in Rwanda to schools in Berlin, from a courthouse in London to the Aboriginal settlements in northern Australia, from the Chrysler boardroom to the war in Iraq, the book contemplates how ethnic identity can be mobilized in the service of all kinds of goals-violent or nonviolent, laudable or despicable - and the unintended affects such mobilization invariably produces. Through detailed cases in which decisions had to be made about cultural claims, the authors suggest ways to remain sensitive to the cultural impacts of policies and decisions without falling into the traps of determinism, essentialization, and misrepresentation. "Seeing Culture Everywhere" will be useful for specialists in anthropology, law, inter cultural communication, and international relations, as well as to general readers interested in ethnicity and travel. Joana Breidenbach, an independent anthropologist, journalist, and social entrepreneur who lives in Berlin, is author of "Tanz der Kulturen" ("The Dance of Cultures") and co-editor (with Nyiri) of "China Inside Out". Pal Nyiri is professor of history from an anthropological perspective at the Free University (VU) of Amsterdam. He is the author, most recently, of "Scenic Spots: Chinese Tourism, the State, and Cultural Authority" and "Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia".

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