In this provocative and timely new book, Alain Touraine explores the question of how we might live together in a truly globalized world society. Rejecting the seductive metaphor of a global melting pot, Touraine mounts a powerful attack on the idea that we now live together as equals, sharing the same social and cultural values. If anything, he argues, our differences are being heightened, as communities increasingly define their identities against the encroaching forces of globalization.

Touraine argues that the twin processes of globalization and particularization are pushing us further and further apart. On the one hand, traditional values and forms of cultural expression are being eroded by homogenized mass culture. On the other, communities are becoming more introverted as they fight to defend themselves from outside influences. Even the cities where our global networks originate and are controlled are made up of communities which are foreign to one another, as they defend their identities from the tokens of mass culture.

How do we avoid a global conflict between those who control the international networks of information, and those who feel threatened by them? The first part of Touraine's book asserts that the only way to prevent the destruction of identity is for individuals to develop a personal life-project, which he calls the 'Subject'. To become a subject, the individual constructs itself as an actor, forming a stable point of reference in a world of permanent and uncontrollable change. In the second part of the book, Touraine examines how this apparently non-social principle might be used to reconstruct social life. The first step is to recognize that others are also subjects, striving for a sense of personal freedom. Touraine then argues for a replacement of the old idea of democracy, defined as participation...
in the general will, with the new idea of institutions that safeguard the freedom of the subject and permit communication between subjects. This is the only approach that will allow us to live together, equal and different.

This book will be of great interest to second- and third-year undergraduates and graduate students of sociology and politics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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