

# Diversity's Fate in Cultural Policymaking

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As contestation over UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions made clear, there is little consensus among cultural policymakers about *what kind* of diversity we currently live with, let alone should seek to promote. Throughout negotiations, little serious attention was given to potentially divergent meanings of "diversity" within and across cultural boundaries, and for economic globalization. It is precisely the indirectness or ambiguity in this convention of the attachment (or lack of attachment) of the diversity concept to particular cultural subjects that has gone largely unremarked but remains most problematic.

## VIEWS ON POLICY

### Locating Diversity

The publicity given to debates over France's "cultural exception" argument, in fact, assumes just one possible account of diversity, which takes for granted that diversity refers to *national cultures* rather than intra-state cultural diversity. The US negotiating team opposed this with a view of "diversity," well illustrated by what one member, past Institute of Museum and Library Sciences Director Robert Martin, called our "notions of freedom of expression and the free flow of ideas." However, "freedom of expression" is not necessarily synonymous with "cultural diversity." Though these terms often become entangled, they have distinct purposes. "Freedom of expression" refers to an individual or collective right of enunciation or representation (the saying of "it," the doing of "it" or the making of "it"). But "cultural diversity" refers to variations within or among a given set of "its"—of collective cultural differences or available cultural products. These differences dramatize the question of whether diversity is a *process* to be promoted or a *state* of affairs to be accounted for and preserved.

Nor is "diversity of expression" the same as "freedom of expres-

sion," since the latter emphasizes a rights-based approach for the *expressive subject* and the former does not. A rights-based approach to culture requires a defined subject to act as a "claimant." But it might be impossible to locate a subject for diversity. If "freedom of expression" implies that there should be a subject, the "free flow of ideas" resists the identification of any specific subject by directing attention to the circulation of cultural materials in *acts of exchange*. "Freedom" carries multiple burdens in this debate, both of human rights and of trade liberalization. But "trade" and "rights" promise very different futures for diversity.

### Defining Diversity

UNESCO's convention defines "cultural diversity" as "the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression" (Art 4, No 2). This definition notably privileges the variety of different means of expression over differences among cultures. A preoccupation with the *forms* culture might take instead of the *varieties* of cultures would not surprise critics insisting the present treaty is meant to be a broadside to the influence of recent WTO global trade agreements over such cultural industries as the audiovisual. The argument is that UNESCO's diversity of expression is synonymous with "technologies of dissemination."

The UN has connected diversity to human rights in several ways, understanding the plurality in culture (or "unity-in-diversity") as a reservoir needed for freedoms and as inseparable from a democratic framework. The UN Development Program's 2004 Human Development Report has promoted a novel formulation of "cultural liberty," defined as the "capability of people to live and be what they choose," including choice of identity. The report treats diversity as a matter of "individual freedoms," and as a means of "expanding individual choices," and in so doing *aligns diversity with choice*. Such a formula potentially confounds an understanding of diversity as a source and frame for these choices rather than simply as a range of available choices.

### Managing Diversity

UNESCO repeatedly emphasizes the dangers to diversity posed by globalization's encouragement of homogenization—the specter of a global monoculture where we are all left to choose from the same cultural menu. For UNESCO, since diversity is subject to scarcity it must be managed. Both the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2003, and the present convention justify diversity as a means to promote exchange, innovation and creativity. They work together to grant diversity instrumental importance as a *resource*. The two conventions are complementary in their handling of diversity—the potentially nonrenewable

expanding cultural marketplace. Such a narrow conception of diversity is a cause for concern.

### Diversity's Contexts

During convention negotiations, "diversity" was a widely referenced floating signifier—useful for diplomacy but not helpful for policy—gathering to it a growing set of uneasy bedfellows. One upshot is a realization that there is no stable subject or referent for diversity beyond the legislative and regulatory arena of intergovernmental cultural policy itself. This arena aligns diversity with national cultures, individual freedom of choice, and state-managed inventories of items understood as resources, to circulate in acts of exchange. But this decon-

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resource. With heritage as a source of diversity, both conventions task states with drawing up "inventories" of cultural "content" to safeguard by itemizing, counting and listing it. In practice diversity becomes a kind of *inventory* of cultural "content" that is potentially extractable from any context, to be copied, appropriated, traded or recirculated. Diversity turns into a question of *access* to the cultural public domain.

As understood with regard to debates over national cultural industries, diversity quickly comes to refer to a desirable variability or quantity of cultural products. Here the subject of diversity is the "individual consumer," a circumstance promoted by the ways "individual freedoms" are folded together with the "free flow of ideas," in a framework of "cultural liberty." Once cultural expression is taken to be an itemized or an extractable array of resources aligned with choice, it becomes almost natural to conceive of diversity as measured in terms of the *greatest range of consumer choice* within an ever-

textualizes diversity in other ways, with potentially sobering consequences for the political recognition of cultural differences in pluricultural societies, when these are contingent upon specific territories, communities or neighborhoods.

Policymakers are defining the human rights, legislative and regulatory contours of new global cultural and economic configurations. Anthropologists are well-positioned to take up the task of demonstrating risks run by ignoring important implications of context, of situated knowledge, the meaningfulness of cultural forms, or the relation of cultural production to the shape, character or quality of social relations. If we do not direct attention to the relationship of diversity to particular cultural subjects, we might very quickly lose any handle on the diversity of the future. ■

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