Abstract: This paper explores the role media play in safeguarding cultural diversity, promoting cultural dialogue, facilitating the exercise of cultural rights, fostering cultural understanding and cultivating intercultural citizenship in the age of globalization. The paper highlights several interconnected leverage points: media content, practices, processes, ownership, education, structures, and policies. It argues that fostering cultural diversity in and through the media can go a long way toward bringing a civic discourse which favors tolerance and facilitates co-existence. It can contribute to the breaking down of cultural barriers, the initiation of cultural dialogues, the empowerment of marginalized groups, and the practice of good governance. At the same time, this paper argues, the celebration of difference does not preclude the valuation of a common cultural core or a common humanity which brings people together in spite of their differences.

Key Words: Media, Communication, Representation, Cultural Diversity, Cultural Rights, Globalization, UNESCO

MEDIA, CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND GLOBALIZATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The free flow of information in our contemporary societies has greatly enhanced connectivity and facilitated globalization, but it has also brought with it the threat of cultural standardization. The advent of new information and communication technologies has empowered previously disenfranchised individuals, marginalized groups and peripheral communities, but it has also added to the existing anxiety vis-à-vis hegemonic inclinations which seek to instill conformity, perpetuate sameness and efface difference. In an age marked by the imposition of the culture of media industries which breed homogeneity, the threat of cultural uniformity is more real than ever before. This paper examines the role media play in safeguarding cultural diversity, promoting cultural dialogue, fostering cultural understanding and cultivating intercultural citizenship. Focusing on key leverage points which shape the media environment today, it explores the ways in which media can facilitate “the exercise of cultural rights” (UNESCO, 2001) and promote cultural diversity. Fostering cultural diversity in and through the media can go a long way toward bringing a civic discourse which promotes tolerance, facilitates co-existence and enriches the human existence. It can contribute to the breaking down of cultural barriers, the initiation of cultural dialogue, the promotion of global reconciliation, the empowerment of marginalized groups, the strengthening of social cohesion, and the practice of good governance. At the same time, this paper argues, the celebration of difference does not preclude the valuation of a common cultural core and the assertion of a common humanity which brings people together in spite of their differences.

Diversity in a Socio-Historical Context

The attention to cultural pluralism and the recognition of cultural difference have a historical specificity which can be loosely associated with modern colonialism. In the post World War II era, the affirmation of cultural rights has been firmly yoked with the movements for independence and the calls for decolonization. For the newly independent states, the affirmation of cultural identity was a form of resistance against foreign dominance (Hamelink, 2003). With the waning of empires and the consolidation of nation states during late modernity, multiculturalism has appeared as a policy model for attempting to align the subordination of former indigenous populations and the normalization of incoming populations (Jakubowicz, 2006). With the waning of empires and the consolidation of nation states during late modernity, multiculturalism has appeared as a policy model for attempting to align the subordination of former indigenous populations and the normalization of incoming populations (Jakubowicz, 2006). Although largely developed and fully pronounced in colonial contexts, the suppression of difference became the hallmark for the treatment of various postcolonial subjects (and of different minorities) within European nations (Bennett, 2004). Disenchantment with the perceived management of difference from “a controlling
position of whiteness” in more recent years has made diversity a subject of renewed interest (Bennett, 2004, p. 7). Gradually, old practices whereby a dominant group uses the state to privilege its identity, language, history or culture were challenged by demands for more attention to ethno-cultural diversity and emphasis on multiculturalism. The old model of a homogenous nation-state based on the dominance of a privileged national group has come under criticism by individuals, groups and communities threatened by the possibility of exclusion or the specter of assimilation. The globalization of populations brought with it the realization among nation-states of the impossibility of encapsulating the totality of society within set boundaries (Beck & Camiller, 2004) and the need for envisaging a separate but shared space for the co-existence of diverse cultures. Not surprisingly, the traditional near-exclusive emphasis on social-cohesion and unitary identification gave way to a multi-cultural model of the state which recognizes diversity and accommodates difference (Robins, 2006).

Ironically, as a value, a practice and a policy, diversity has been criticized for being purposefully constructed and hierarchically ordered within an implicit Western liberal framework which tends to depoliticize and reify difference even as it celebrates it, “being constructed too much from the point of view of an invisible, controlling center of whiteness as the implicit, taken-for-granted norm of a culture unmarked by ethnicity in relation to which the differences of other cultures are to be registered, assessed and tolerated” (Bennett, 2004, p. 3).

Several factors have heightened the increased interest in cultural diversity and the accentuation of both cultural rights and cultural citizenship. In the West, the trend toward multiculturalism has largely been driven by such considerations as immigration, change in demographics, securitization of ethnic relations in geo-political terms, consolidation of democracies, and liberal consensus to adopt multicultural reforms (Kymlicka, 2007). For Saunders (2003), being impelled by realpolitik, the recognition of the importance of cultural diversity is also not void of a moral underpinning: “To seek pragmatic solutions within the contemporary conjuncture for local or regional challenges to the universal democratic self-image of modern ‘identities’ and nations requires more sensitivity to, and a better grasp of their ontological densities than thin and abstract liberal norms have hitherto been capable of providing. Realpolitik then requires that these norms and ideals be expanded to incorporate, at a higher moral level, the claims of the excluded” (p. 9). At least in the West, the currency of the discourse of human rights, the struggle of social movements, the efforts of diasporic communities to gain cultural assertion in the face of assimilation policies, the formation of hybrid identities, the coalescence of identity politics in a changing world, and most insistently the threat of cultural homogenization (and along with it the effacement of multiculturalism) with the encroachment of capitalism and the advent of globalization—all these have contributed to transforming pursuits of cultural identity into assertions of cultural rights. Thus, while the recognition of cultural rights is a near-global phenomenon, the celebration of cultural diversity as a value in itself is largely a Western phenomenon (Isar, 2006).

Significantly, although multiculturalism has become a near-global pursuit, it is not until recently that the international community has started to develop legal and regulatory principles for enhancing cultural autonomy and protecting cultural rights. Declaring diversity as an asset that is central for the vitality of society, the UNESCO has advocated a strong commitment to cultural diversity, pluralism and tolerance in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) and its World Report in Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2009). Deeming cultural diversity as a value to be cherished and declaring the exercise of “cultural rights” as an integral part of human rights, the declaration takes pains to affirm that “the defense of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity” (UNESCO, 2001). At the same time, the UNESCO (2001) document insists that cultural diversity—being “a value through which differences are mutually related and reciprocally supportive” (Cultural Diversity: A Platform, 2002, p. 13)—is not to be equated with or reduced to cultural difference. Thus, one is impelled to protect cultural diversity not for its own sake, but because it is a dynamic process which can enhance cultural understanding and breed tolerance for the coexistence of cultures and subcultures both within and across societies. Accordingly, the Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) calls attention to an intimate link between fostering cultural diversity, promoting cultural creativity and safeguarding democracy: “Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conductive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life” (UNESCO, 2001). If anything, the recognition of multi-cultural citizenship and understanding empowers human beings and helps them realize their fundamental individual, cultural, civil and political rights. Insofar as development without participation is a hollow achievement, emphasizing participation, inclusion, empowerment and creativity becomes instrumental in warding off the threat of cultural homogenization, achieving sustainable cultural plurality, and consolidating good governance.

In a globalized environment such as the one we live in though, protecting cultural diversity, safeguarding cultural autonomy and preserving cultural rights is a complex endeavor. The growing international interdependence which is induced by globalization opens up unprecedented opportunities but, at the same time, poses noteworthy challenges for achieving and preserving cultural diversity. While globalization has often been heralded as an opportunity and cherished as a context for facilitating the exchange of ideas, promoting participation and fostering creativity, it has also been criticized as an instrument of cultural uniformity (Reding, 2005) which risks to precipitate the death of pluralism (Magg, 2004) and to further the imposition of the cultural systems of dominant nations or developed countries in ways which stifle diversity (Goonasekera, 2003).

Yet, as Stimpson and Bhabha (1998) remind us, there is no such thing as “pure globality” (p. 185). More often than not, we are confronted with a complex relationship between the “global” and the “local” as the two are connected in intricate ways. The global draws on the local even as it strives to distinguish itself from it: “‘Global’ differs subtly but significantly from ‘international.’ The former asks us to think and act transnationally... We are to move, move across, move beyond, and above national borders as if we were as fluid and strong as
the winds. The latter asks us to think and act as if each of us belonged to a nation that is both autonomous and related geographically, practically, economically or culturally to each other" (Stimpson, 1998, p. 184). Setting in motion the interplay between the local, the national, the transnational, and the regional, on the one hand, and the global, on the other hand, is the development and consolidation of a global economic and financial system in the process of creating new markets and the emergence of a global information system to circulate information (Ayish, 2005). The advent and expansion of market economies brought about the prominence of motion and the pervasiveness of fluidity in the economic sense and otherwise. The information society in particular thrives on the flow of information which calls for the elimination of uncertainty and the bestowal of order on events, processes and developments, thus making information the object of control while harnessing the uninterrupted flow of information (Sholle, 2003). Yet, these same empowering forces under an information driven globalization are often perceived as endangering cultural diversity. Under the culture industry, the flow of information has facilitated the circulation of cultural products in ways which, often enough, impoverish diversity. If anything, the cultural exception debate suggests that cultural diversity can be a core value for some while a sore value for others (Frau-Meigs, 2007). Not surprisingly perhaps, when the United States attempted to apply free trade principles uniformly across the board, countries like France and Canada fiercely sought to protect their "cultural being" through the exclusion of nationally-produced cultural goods and services from global free trade regulations and agreements (Isar, 2006, p. 374).

Dynamic Media Changes

The pace with which media have been changing over the past few decades is phenomenal, to say the least. The increased global connectivity along with the convergence of communication infrastructures, media content and electronic devices have dramatically changed the way we experience media and interact with it (Jenkins, 2006). More than ever before, there has been an exponential multiplication of information and communication technologies and growth in media services and modes of delivery. For Tehranian (1999), the changes in technology, the transformation of media and the globalization of communication have a strong bearing on the ability of individuals and groups to safeguard diversity. Three interrelated types of media can be identified with different implications: Macromedia of communication (which are associated with global satellite and computer networks, trans-border data flows, scientific and professional electronic mailing, and commercial advertising) support the globalization of national markets, societies and cultures, though they privilege the power centers more than the periphery; Mesomedia of communication (such as the press, print media, audio-visual media, the film industry, and news agencies) are usually under the control of national governments or commercial and pressure groups and, as such, function mostly as agents of national integration and social mobilization; and Micromedia of communication (such as the telephone, copying machines, audio and video recorders, tapes, PCs, and the Web) have primarily empowered the centrifugal forces of dissent at the peripheries of power. They provide channels for counter-hegemonic projects of cultural resistance, socio-political participation and autonomous development. The affordability and accessibility of micromedia are not without implication on world peripheries which have increasingly been focusing on modernization, indigenous development, cultural identity, and political communication formation (Tehranian, 1999).

Yet, the effect of media is neither monolithic nor uniform. Media play a central role in fostering the homogenizing effect of the culture industry; as such, they shape our relationship with the other and with society. In an increasingly media-mediated culture, characterized by the high penetration of media which normalize specific views and practices through the power of representation, individuals develop a taste for what media show, consume what media promote, act in accordance with the information media divulge, construct reality within a media framework, and interpret events in light of what media communicate (Appadurai, 1990). At the same time, the phenomenal development in the field of media and communications and the imbrication of media types and platforms over the past quarter of a century or so are promising for cultural diversity. In broadcast media alone, the multiplicity of channels, the unprecedented access to and affordability of content production, and the proliferation of cross border programs have contributed much to the free flow of ideas and the multiplication of viewpoints. The accessibility of media, the free flow of information and the free exchange of views have been instrumental in promoting tolerance, understanding and co-existence. In a globalized environment such as the one we live in, promoting a media environment which fosters participation in civic discourse and multi-culturalism is particularly important, although not always achieved or practiced.

In some ways, media is a double edged sword, with the proclivity to be appropriated as a force of empowerment but also the tendency to be used as a means of subjection. Media can go a long way toward establishing commonness and fostering solidarity, but can also induce divisions, deepen misunderstandings, reinforce prejudice and distort reality. Media can be a valuable instrument in recognizing otherness, embracing difference and promoting cultural awareness, but can also have a divisive effect through their indifference to difference. Stated differently, media can put in perspective the diversity of groups and individuals with a great deal of authenticity and frequency, and in doing so they can facilitate intercultural dialogue; but they can also act as an instrument of marginalization, dismissal and effacement and function as a source of divisiveness, polarization and estrangement. As Tehranian (1999) points out, media and communication cannot be adequately conceived outside existing power structures for they can privilege certain players at the detriment of others: "Communication can act as a process of free and equal exchange of meaning, development of epistemic communities, and advancement of social solidarity, and hence of peace and harmony among individuals and nations. Conversely, however, communication can also systematically distort perceptions by creating phantom enemies, manufacturing consent for wars of aggression while stereotyping and targeting particular
ethic groups of nations into subhuman categories. Communication empowers, but it empowers more these with greater competence and access to the means of communication. The ethical choice in communication is therefore focused on whether the communicator is aiming toward power-free understanding or systematic distortions and powerful manipulations" (p. 2).

Key Leverage Points for Media and Diversity

The uneven access to communication calls for the need to protect and promote diversity in and through the media. Yet, while noting the important role media can play in promoting cultural diversity, one has also to emphasize that the issue at hand is not a communication issue strictu sensu. It has social, economic, political and organizational extensions which cannot be overlooked. In examining the role of media in establishing a global discourse which facilitates—or hinders—cultural diversity and understanding, there are several interconnected leverage points which warrant a close exploration: media content, practices, processes, ownership, education, structures, instrumentalization, and policies. Attention to these leverage points can contribute to fostering a media environment that is particularly attentive to diversity.

An analysis of the role of media in promoting cultural diversity starts with media content and media practices. The former pertains to the receiver of images and messages and is concerned with the way media are used and consumed; the latter relates to the emitter, sender and producer of images and messages. A number of queries come to mind here: What are the dominant professional media practices? To what extent do such considerations as editorial policy, personal beliefs of staff, and journalistic values affect media and diversity? How is diversity reported? No less important than media content and practices is media processes—an inclusive category which defines the parameters of representation and its consumption. A media processes inquiry entails the exploration of an interconnected set of questions: To what extent do media create a "cultural center" and a "cultural periphery"? Do media represent a potential cultural threat, insulating cultures from others while helping some cultures exercise their domination over others? How do media represent cultures, and whether they contribute to prejudice and stereotyping? Such influence bears on a number of important considerations which include the way knowledge gets constructed and reconstituted; the extent to which personal experiences, beliefs and feelings shape the depiction of individuals and groups in and by the media; and the manner in which narratives are construed and to what end.

In depicting reality, media also shape the representation of individuals and groups. Media play a crucial role in the construction of the image of "the other" and can hinder or facilitate awareness and understanding of difference. One of the ways in which perceptions become petrified in rigid categories is the "us" versus "them" paradigm which thrives on inaccurate depictions and negative images to characterize and categorize people. By offering a limited range of representations of the other—whether defined in terms of ethnicity, race, gender or religion—media tend to foster and ingrain certain stereotypes which come to shape the imaginary. Media can inculcate a negative construction of otherness that is insensitive to diversity or can embrace a rich, positive depiction of people and groups. Although stereotyping is a historical, political and social construct linked to collective frames of reference, it can be prolonged through certain discourses which are enhanced by the pervasiveness of media and the saturation of images. Although developments in information and communication technology have engendered the diversification of media outlets and the fragmentation of audiences in a way which helps reduce the poignancy of master narratives underwriting the construction of the other, long-established negative representations of minority groups and stereotypical depictions of segments of society tend to endure. In some instances, the process of othering translates into a suppression of regional, local and minority audience interests and access in ways which are amenable to the effacement or further marginalization of certain populations.

Warding against the effects of unfair and insensitive media representation requires developing and promoting media education and media literacy. This entails not only a critical reception and intelligent use of media products but also an understanding of the complex nature of media production, distribution and reception. A multi-cultural, pluralistic journalism education which goes beyond skills to emphasize the need for developing a critical perspective on current media practices (such as the ability to be reflective, evaluative and innovative) can also go a long way toward improving current media practices and promoting diversity (Martindale, 1991).

However, vital as it may be, being attentive to media education and media literacy is no substitute for addressing structural issues which pertain to regulation, access, control and participation. For cultural diversity to thrive and nurture democratic inspirations, there are important conditions that need to be fulfilled, the most insist being the protection of the freedom of expression, the promotion of free and equitable access to information, the facilitation of the free flow of ideas and views, the tolerance of media pluralism, the diversification of media ownership, and the support of independent media traditions such as public service broadcasting, community radio, citizen journalism and, more generally, media which are open and inclusive rather than unidirectional and exclusive. The development of alternative media approaches, in particular, has gone a long way toward easing the dominance of transnational media corporations, fostering the freedom of cultural expression, and promoting the representation of otherwise marginalized groups.

Still, in spite of the wide upholding and advocacy of the principles of freedom of expression, the free and balanced flow of information and the proliferation of ideas are far from being universal practices, nor is media pluralism likely to be an attainable objective among states where the media function as a state apparatus and where media freedom is not as sacrosanct and does not have the same sense of urgency or value one finds in Western democracies. Outside the West, although the advent of information and communication technologies has widened the scope of involvement and participation, the expression and exercise of cultural diversity remain hampered by a number of practices and realities, chief among these is state control over media, rates of illiteracy, access to resources and distribution of wealth.
Similarly, the vitality of autonomous local media and cultural industries is increasingly suffering in the face of the expansion of transnational conglomerates.

The latter point leads to a discussion of the political economy of media, the structure of ownership, control over production and distribution and the commercialization of broadcasting. Media mis-representation is sustained and reinforced through the structures of media ownership and control, as the dominant model remains that of profit-driven commercial media which are aligned with the interests of privileged elites and powerful groups in society. Even in developed countries where civil liberties are sacrosanct and where the freedom of speech is provided for by the law, the potential of media to promote cultural diversity is often hampered by structures of ownership. The dominant commercial patterns in and economic imperatives of media often result in the concentration of media ownership and production in few hands, leading to the perpetuation of monopolies which, being commercially-driven, risk to endanger the opportunity for having a pluralistic media environment that is amenable to eschewing homogeneity, supporting cultural diversity, enhancing access to the means of communication, allowing the empowerment of marginalized voices, and serving the needs of disadvantaged groups. Such is the case, balancing the commercial media with public service can go a long way toward enhancing diversity. Practically, however, the prevailing oligopoly of globalized media producers and distributors points to an increasing concentration of ownership and limitation on access and content sources which do not bode well for diversity (Murray, 2005). The monopoly over the space of communication is such that content comes from an increasingly limited source. The fact that few powerful actors are controlling the production and distribution of media products means that the production and distribution of local content is becoming increasingly scarce, giving free rein to a top-down flow of content from economically and socially empowered groups to less privileged ones—from developed nations to less developed countries.

The structures of ownership notwithstanding, traditional media monopolies are being challenged by contra-flows which affect cultural identity (Thussu, 2007). In an age when borders are increasingly fluid and undelineated, the relationship between media and state structures is being redefined. The instrumentalization of media is becoming important in negotiating key questions pertaining to cultural identity and cultural politics: How does a particular nation define itself with respect to its cultural identity, cultural heritage and cultural values? If media consciously strive to develop a unified identity—whether it be global, supranational, national, regional, local or group—what would that be at the expense of? Isn't it the case that national unity often takes precedence over cultural diversity? How does cultural diversity live up to the definition of culture as a unique and irreplaceable totality of values? Can there be an inclusive cultural politics of difference? Dealing with these issues requires sound media policies which can encourage cultural diversity, facilitate cultural understanding, foster favorable conditions for a culturally diverse media environment, promote the proliferation of pluralistic media, and safeguard diverse contents both in the media and in global information networks.

In its “Declaration on Cultural Diversity,” the UNESCO (2001) emphasized the importance of the freedom of expression and the freedom of information as a sine qua non for the development of cultural diversity. In today’s global environment, fostering these conditions requires a sound and comprehensive policy framework. As Robins (2006) points out, globalization may have facilitated the movement of people and the exchange of cultures, but globalization in and of itself does not foster cultural citizenship. If anything, “the technological changes and globalization are likely to increase—rather than diminish—the need for policies and, where necessary, regulations which promote cultural diversity and pluralism at the local, regional, national and global levels” (Cultural Diversity & Media Pluralism). Media policy and media regulation, both at the national and international level, can enhance the media’s potential to be a positive force of cultural diversity—whence the need to (a) strengthen the cultural, the social and by extension the democratic role of media; (b) design legal provisions for media practices so as to prevent monopoly, homogenization and excessive commercialization from taking hold; (c) develop self-regulatory measures such as codes of conduct and codes of ethics; (d) ensure the free access to information, provide regulation to safeguard the freedom of expression, and promote free, pluralistic and independent media; and more generally (e) promote good media practices.

Diversity at the Service of Democracy

Fostering an environment that is tolerant of and conducive to cultural diversity is necessary for upholding democracy in an age dominated by information and communication technologies. In democratic societies, media have been central to the democratic process, giving an outlet to diverse voices and channeling diversity into a process of democratic integration of public opinion and will formation. A free debate is necessary to reach an integrative unity, and media pluralism goes a long way toward achieving such a goal (Tehranian, 1999). In much the same way freedom of expression is important to assert cultural and individual identities, access to information is important for an active participation in decision making and contribution to democratic processes.

It is true that media can have an isolating effect and can be divisive, but it can also revitalize communities and rekindle community spirit. This is particularly the case with broadcasting. While in the past broadcasting has been largely controlled by either public service monopoly, which is used to disseminate government views, or by multinationals, which are symptomatic of the imbalances in the global trade of cultural commodities, a number of noteworthy trends are starting to take hold including the deregulation of television, the emergence of local content producers, the increasing popularity of local content, the creation of new viewing communities (Banerjee, 2003), and the development of community broadcasting and microradio (Ruggiero, 1999). Facilitating this transformation is the shift in media regulatory principles from regulation in the national public interest to a deregulation which is motivated by economic imperatives (Robins, 2006). Media convergence and the advent of web-based media and communication practices have further enhanced this
trend. The opportunities which new and accessible communication and distribution technologies afford are providing glimpses of hope for breaking away with older forms of representation. In the age of media convergence, individuals, groups and communities are more and more empowered by the use of a wide range of interactive media which enables them to put different views forward and promote alternative media content. The new dynamics are changing the very meaning of access to media and communication from a traditional emphasis on receiving and consuming to producing, emitting and sending. This multi-vocality has the potential to enhance civic engagement which is vital for democracy to take hold. Whether through internet use, blogging or chat room participation, a diverse public is taking part in the creation and dissemination of information that is not necessarily sanctioned by corporate media or by state apparatuses.

Unity in Diversity

It is fitting at the end to note that, in a truly multicultural society, diversity should not be something reluctantly accepted or accommodated, but a positive value to be cherished and fostered—whence the difference between "media tolerance" and "media diversity" (Parekh, 2002, p. 12). For diversity to acquire a positive (and productive) valence, there needs to be a common ground for the co-existence of sameness and difference, of commonality and pluralism. Cultural diversity acquires its value from and in relation to its opposite. In the absence of such a dialogic interplay, cultural diversity risks to fall into a runaway which promotes diversity for its own sake and, in the process, demeans it of its basic contribution, namely enhancing a core human commonality. What one may perceive as a fundamental contradiction between sameness and difference or between commonality and diversity may be more perceptively conceived as two sides of the same coin. If anything, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between diversity and conformity, as these two aspects unfold and develop in ways which make them more interconnected categories than irreconcilable antinomies.

In the final analysis, the paradoxical nature of diversity should not obfuscate a valuable common denominator. Cultural diversity is particularly important as it provides alternative view points, but it is also significant insofar as it brings to the fore a valuable irreducible core. Sen (1998) articulately captures the dynamic relationship between cultural freedom and cultural dependence: "the recognition of heterogeneity is important, but equally so is the need for making use of commonalities in the form of the shared importance of capabilities... While recognizing the unique value of culture, we should not neglect the importance of communication and the pervasive fact of cultural interdependence. "Treating one's culture should not be confused with the celebration of insularity" (pp. 320-21). While passionately advocating the need to respect cultural uniqueness and to recognize cultural heterogeneity, it is important to take heed of continuity, sameness and commonality. Nurturing relationships of difference should not be at the expense of fostering a sense of community. If diversity and diversification can continue to proliferate and inform sociality, it is not because diversity is a self-driven category that can be bracketed, but because it informs, enhances and revalues commonality (Stenou, 2008). Examples of reconciliatory elements which are tightly connected with basic and common human aspirations include dignity, empathy, fragility, hope, and value creation recognition which, while being culturally framed and experienced, bring people together irrespective of their cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds. Certainly, this is an inarticulate and elusive soft side which is not always easy to capture or pinpoint. However, to fail to acknowledge this soft side of the human existence, to lose sight of our common humanity, is to run the risk of turning diversity into a risk factor whereby difference may devolve into an unmanageable cultural anarchy, thus making the fault line between the richness and poverty of cultural diversity both thin and blurry.

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