

Preface



On the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, we have the chance to redress a great imbalance.

The phenomenon of “globalisation” came with the promise of facilitating – even revolutionising – our access to cultural knowledge across borders. Indeed, on a superficial level it may even seem like this is happening. But a closer look at the wider story unveils with great irony how predominant cultures are penetrating and monopolising societies across the world, belittling and even suppressing other ways of being; thus giving rise to yet another form of global inequality.

This imbalance has had profoundly negative consequences – namely the creation of cultural silos that reinforce biases and prejudices, and which inevitably lead to systemic injustice, intolerance and even conflict. Equally tragic, humanity is being systematically deprived of those cultural gems that would and should otherwise be enriching our existence – giving us a more complete experience of human life, compelling us to realise our interconnectedness and ultimately allowing us to become responsible and informed citizens of Planet Earth.

This is why international instruments like the Universal Declaration are so very important. Its principles encourage not only the freedom of cultural expression everywhere but also the proportionate exchange of knowledge and ideas between all of our planet’s human cultures. In doing so, it sets out the vision of bringing about a *true* globalisation.

Such a project couldn’t be more timely. The notion of “diversity” has never been as ubiquitous as it has in 2021. Over the last year alone, socially-conscious campaigns have gained unprecedented momentum in spotlighting and working to reverse the effects of longstanding cultural

biases against historically suppressed peoples, cultures and ideas. The contributions of many communities not traditionally credited with cultural or intellectual value are being unearthed and shared for posterity. There is increasing recognition that race, class, gender, age, and health discrimination are linked to biases emerging from a cultural context. As such, advancing the claim of cultural diversity is potentially the most pressing concern of the “diversity movement”.

This book is an attempt to propel the conversation and inspire action. For the purpose of coherence, it has been arranged into three sections that correspond to the three main domains through which cultural diversity is being progressed today. In “Think” we have the insights of leading scholars from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds, who together enhance our understanding of what cultural diversity has been and ought to be. In “Create” we have the experiences and reflections of practitioners in the cultural sector; artists and activists from around the world whose creative work is pioneering the kind of exchange necessary for cross-cultural understanding. And in “Lead” we have words from those who are leading global efforts at the highest levels to facilitate cultural expression and intercultural dialogue – from diplomacy to business, and education to technology.

The honour of editing such a volume is as overwhelming as it is humbling. I was painfully aware that the character of the book must aptly reflect its subject matter. So whilst it was clearly impossible to have a full representation of all of humanity’s cultural diversity within a single volume, a reasonable and sincere effort has been made to offer a flavour of its beauty and range.

I am also conscious of the risk of being caught up in the celebratory moment. Upholding and advocating the principle of cultural diversity certainly does not mean we cannot question the ethics and compatibilities of some cultural practices. But those conversations are only fruitful in a spirit of mutual understanding and trust – and this can only come about through the sort of intercultural dialogue that the Universal Declaration encourages.

Finally, I am deeply thankful to our contributors, to UNESCO and especially to the Khalili Foundation, whose support for such a project not only demonstrates the organisation's clear commitment to world peace, but more simply, its unfaltering love for the human family.

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Editor