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Summerschool

Spaces and Voices of Diversity

– Past and Present –

Some annotations on the history and career of a fashionable concept

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A descriptive and positive contemporary approach

„Diversity in society is one of the spices of life, as well as providing competitive advantages in international diplomacy and trade. Perhaps most important is that from a social systems perspective, cultural diversity enhances society's adaptability: Alternatives are present in the social system from which to draw when attempting to meet changing circumstances, due to changes in a society's ecological, or political context, whether arriving from within or outside a society."
(Segall et al. 1999, p. 323)

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1. On the historical development of the discourse of «appreciating diversity

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Before 1492
The „Other" as a product of mythology and imagination; little empirical evidence

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Ebstorf Map (Mappa Mundi, ca. 1300)

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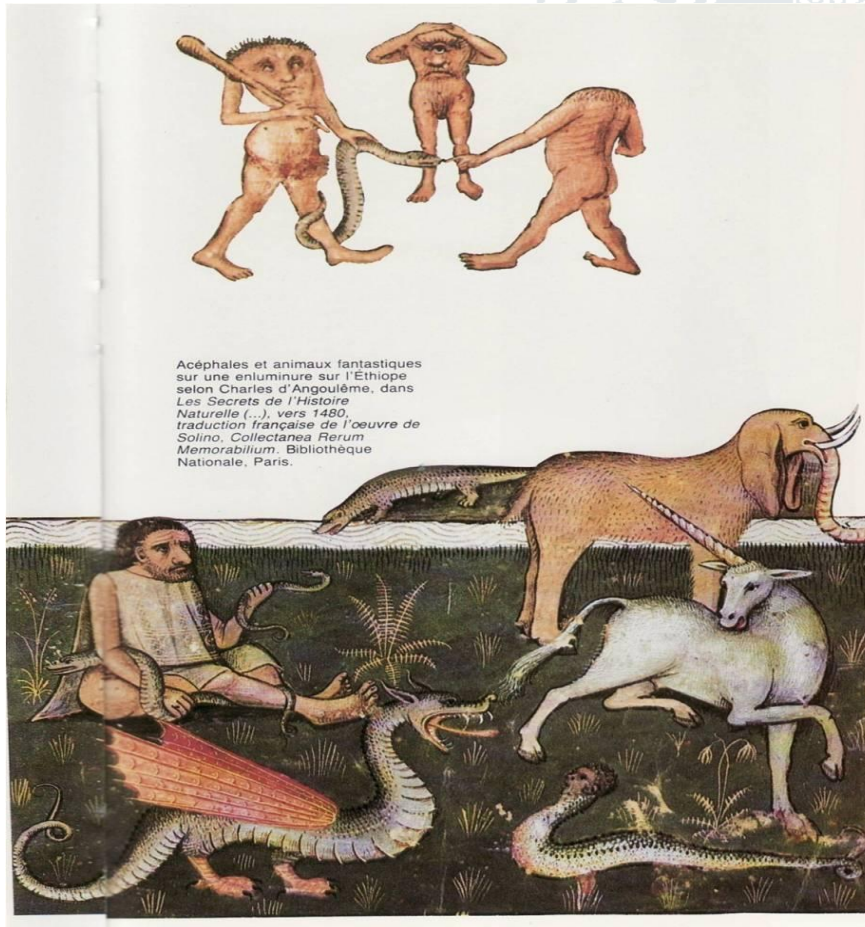
Acéphales et animaux fantastiques
sur une enluminure sur l'Éthiope
selon Charles d'Angoulême, dans
*Les Secrets de l'Histoire
Naturelle* (...), vers 1480,
*traduction française de l'oeuvre de
Solino, Collectanea Rerum
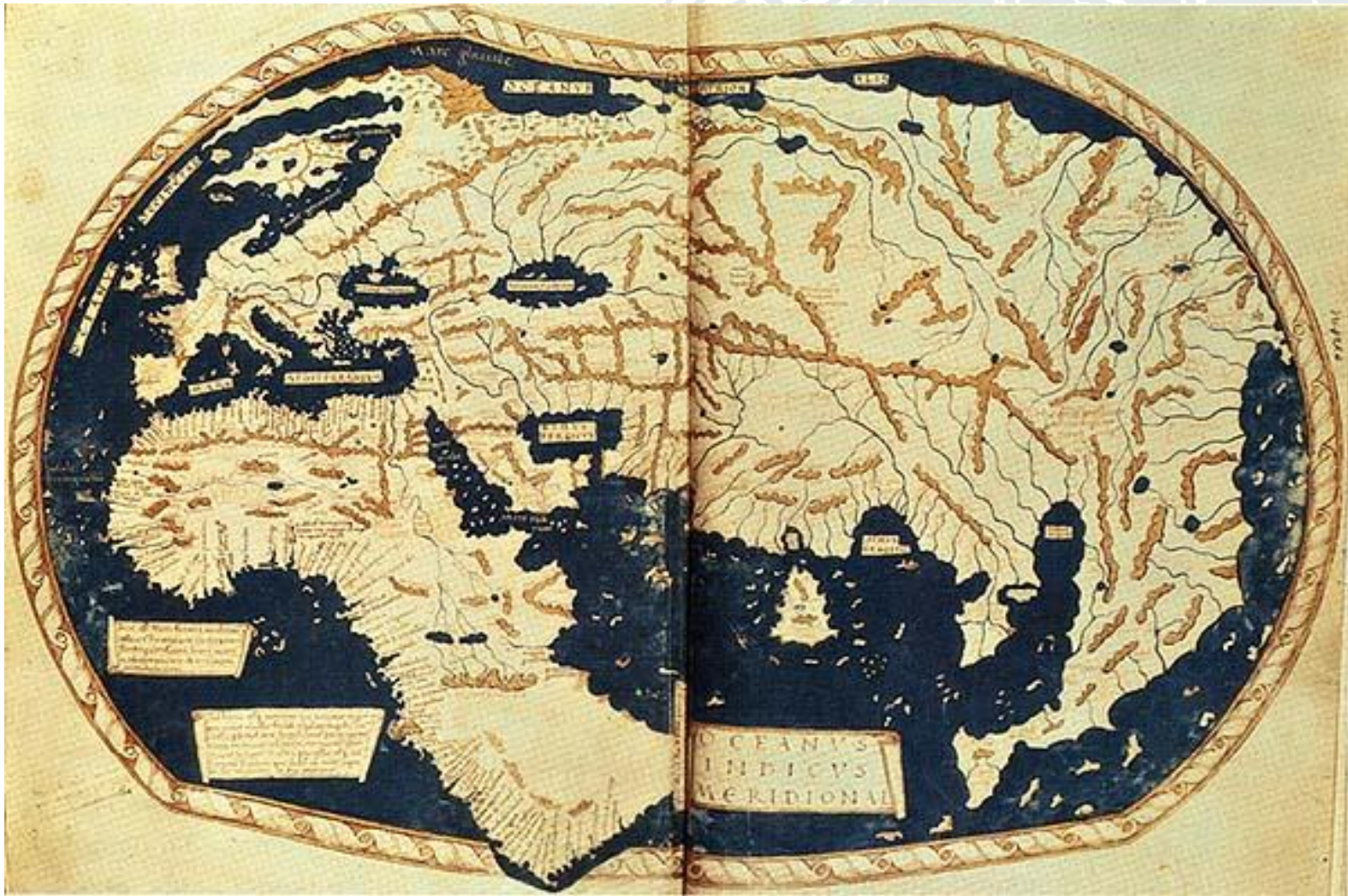Memorabilium.* Bibliothèque
Nationale, Paris.

Vers la fin du XIVème siècle le maximum de connaissance de la planète correspond à peu près à un quart de celle-ci et c'est la civilisation islamique qui en est dépositaire.

Toutefois, au début du XVème siècle, les différentes civilisations et sociétés vivent encore dans une époque de communication et de connaissance discontinues et limitées. L'Âge des Mondes Fermés est l'expression qui caractérise ce blocage dans les communications entre les civilisations.
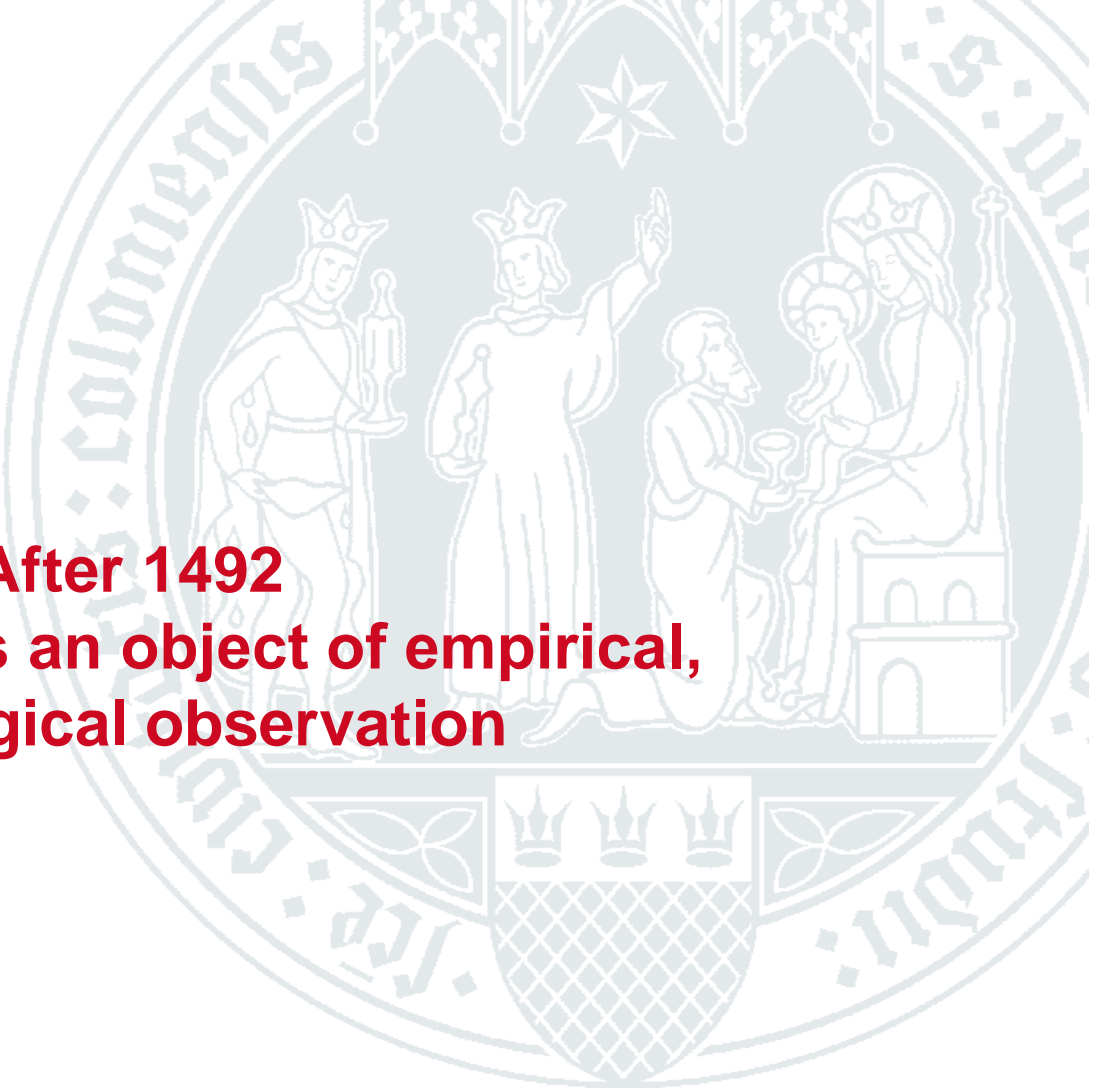
Le panorama limité et discontinu de la communication matérielle et spirituelle fait que les différentes civilisations vivent, essentiellement, centrées sur elles-mêmes.

Les cultures accentuent la dimension de l'isolement et présentent une attitude fermée. Les économies, essentiellement terrestres, sont limitées dans la quantité et dans la qualité de la production et de la circulation.

L'horizon fermé de la vie mène à ce que les réalités, tant naturelles qu'humaines, soient représentées à partir de catégories imaginaires.

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Map by Henricus Martellus (ca. 1490)

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After 1492
The „Other" as an object of empirical, ethnological observation

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Almirante de nauios para las Indias.

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From the Codex Florentinus by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (16th century): On the upbringing of children

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From the Codex Florentinus by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (16th century): Baptizing an Aztek baby

In the era of Enlightenment
the idea of cultural relativism emerges; comparative research methods in many fields, on many topics

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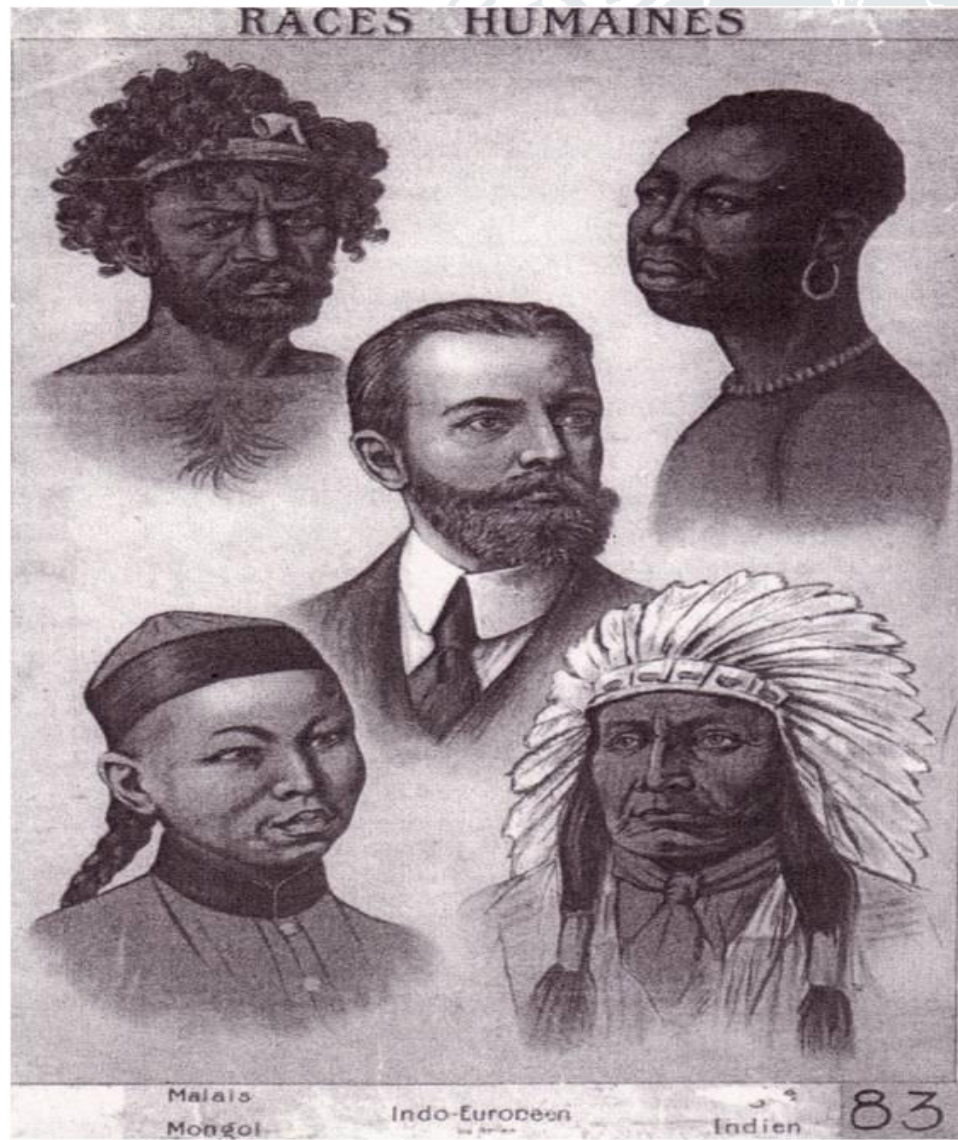Universität zu Köln

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1. On the historical Development of «appreciating diversity»

- Exploration of America as a prelude to reflected interaction on alterity and diversity in historical sources and literature (Todorov 1993 and 1999)

- Michel de Montaigne: Essais (1580-1588)

- Montesquieu: Lettres persanes (1721)

- Enlightenment:
  – Relativism, postulate of equality, comparative research as a methodological approach

- Constitutions of the US (1787) and of the French Republic (1792):
  – Equal Rights for Individuals (F and USA) and for Majorities / Minorities (USA; Canada)

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In the era of colonialism
The „Other" seen from the perspective of white superiority

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Human Zoos

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RACES HUMAINES

Malais
Mongol   Indo-European   Indien   83

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2. Present Discourses on Diversity

2.1 Diversity as a socially constructed paradigm

„Culture has emerged as a prominent principle of social explication and action in the 20th century, following an increase in contact between various populations and mindsets. Any familiar differences (of gender, social class / status, etc.) are perceived as secondary in relation to disparities of customs which are, in turn, guided by cultural beliefs.„

(Translated from Carmel Camilleri, 1995: 85)

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2. Present discourses on diversity

2.2 Describing diversity is not merely about „culture" in the ethnic or national sense, but about many lines of difference (intersection):

- socio-economic status (linked to educational level),

- ethnic and socio-cultural affiliation (self-ascription / ascription by others),

- nationality and citizenship,

- sex and gender,

- sexual orientation,

- age,

- ability / disability as well as physical and emotional well-being or health,

- skin-colour and other apparent physical features,

- religion, faith and spirituality.

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2. Present Discourses on Diversity

2.1 Diversity as a socially constructed paradigm

1960 – 2000 Stages and Paradigms of Managing Diversity

- Assimilation **<>** deficit hypothesis
- Multiculturalism **<>** difference hypothesis
- Diversity **<>** diversity hypothesis

(Allemann-Ghionda 2002: 487 ff.)

2.   Present Discourses on Diversity

2.1   Diversity as a socially constructed paradigm

- Critique of essentialism: culture and difference(s) as social constructions

- Social construction of ethnicity; socio-economic status is what counts (Bukow / Llaryora 1988)

- „Super-diversity": many types of migration, many layers and expressions of diversity (Steven Vertovec)

2. Present Discourses on Diversity

2.2 Praise of diversity: international and European agendas

- „Diversity" as a descriptive term refers to the cultural and political plurality of Europe (languages, historically developed social policies, education systems)

- „Diversity" denominates –

  - either the „cultural plurality" within an ethnic, national or religious context (UNESCO, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2002; European Parliament 2005)

  - or the entire range of differences, which are found within a group or society – not only ethnic, national or regional plurality (integrated diversity-approach) (Dietz 2007)

2. Present Discourses on Diversity

2.2 Praise of diversity: international and European agendas

- „Diversity" is used as a normative term in several international and European documents: Praise of Diversity

- Prospect: „Interacting in diversity for social cohesion" („accomodation")

- The Strategy for advancing diversity within the European Union has evolved from the prohibition of gender-discrimination towards the protection of societal plurality in a comprehensive perspective

(Cf. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 21)
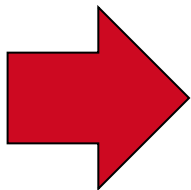
Diversity Approach

2. Present discourses on diversity
2.3. The challenge of implementation

Model of a Diversity-Approach according to Cox et al. (2001)

- Appreciation, advancement and utilisation of differences as a base-culture

- Pluralism

- Structural organisation of all institutional members

- Integration of all institutional members in informal networks

- Absence of institutionalised prejudice and of direct or indirect discrimination in matters of personnel policy

- Constructive conflict management, proactive Diversity Management

2. Present discourses on diversity
2.3. The challenge of implementation

- Equal Opportunity Policies within institutions (private and public)

- Municipal Diversity Policies – Policies of Plurality

- Tendency: evolving from Minority- or Focus Group Policies towards a Diversity-Approach

- Consolidated networking of Gender Mainstreaming, Intercultural Mainstreaming and best practice of care for elderly, disabled and non-disabled individuals

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2.   Present discourses on diversity
2.3.   The challenge of implementation

Inherent Risks and Challenges of

Equal Opportunity- / Diversity-Policies from

- Essentialism – Difference as „Otherness"
- Exaggeration of cultural or other differences
- Groupism
- Goodism (minorities are always innocent)
- Entitlement to unrestricted rights
- Undesirable counteraction against the appreciation of diversity: neo-assimilationism
- Socio-economic blindness

For earlier critical positions see: D'Souza 1991; Wood 2003.

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2. Present discourses on diversity
2.3. The challenge of implementation

If „diversity" transcends „culture", is the term „intercultural competence" problematic or obsolete?

If „culture" is not to be understood ethnically, nationally or essentialistically, but rather as a socially constructed way of life and a model for guidance for groups which have been defined according to various criteria, the term „intercultural competence" is useful as an expanded concept:

Intercultural competence today: diversity awareness

3. Faces of the discourse on «appreciating diversity»
3.1 Between positive discrimination and equal treatment

„We are deeply diverse in our internal characteristics (such as age, gender, general abilities, particular talents, proneness to illnesses, and so on) as well as in external circumstances (such as ownership of assets, social backgrounds, environmental predicaments, and so on). It is precisely because of such diversity that the insistence on egalitarianism in one field requires the rejection of egalitarianism in another".

(Amartya Sen, Inequality Reexamined. New York / Cambridge (MA), 1992:xi.)

3.2 Descriptive vs. normative approach
Acknowledging diversity

does not necessarily mean radical particularism

3. Faces of the discourse on «appreciating diversity»
3.3 Noble vs. utilitarian diversity discourses

➢ "Noble" version: Pro-diversity discourses are inspired by the idea of human rights and have no other goal

➢ "Utilitarian version": the ultimate goal is to ensure some change and / or advantage, be it the submission of a minority, conversion to a religion considered as superior, social cohesion, or commercial success.

➢ 3.3 Descriptive vs. normative concept of diversity

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For an extensive list of references, see Allemann-Ghionda 2011 as well as its English translation (pdf, unpublished).

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