Interculturality and the 'fragilities' of Human Rights
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Introduction

I live and work in a country which often tops most international rankings: no. 1 in the Worldwide Press Freedom Index (2009); no. 1 in Newsweek World's Best Countries (2010), no. 2 in the 'Good' country index (2014) but also no. 7 in the State of the World's Mothers (2010) and no. 7 in the Global Peace Index (2010). Finland also scored the highest number of points for the Freedom in the World 2015 Index (freedom rating, civil liberties, political rights). The Nordic country has thus often been revered and constructed as a utopia, especially in terms of equality, social justice, democracy and Human Rights. However there is another side to this fairy tale. According to a 2013 Amnesty International report Finland breaches many aspects of Human Rights (or contributes to breach them). In 2011 the small country of 5 million inhabitants granted arms exports to 25 countries that do not respect EU criteria in terms of Human Rights. For example the Ministry of Defence granted licenses to export rifles and ammunition to Kazakhstan, where press freedom and Human Rights are often said to be violated. Other examples include the way asylum-seekers are detained in police facilities with people facing criminal charges rather than in adequate locations; violence against women and girls is a serious problem; many instances of excessive use of force during police custody have been reported; and finally, conscientious objectors to military service are imprisoned, which has a discriminatory impact on their future (e.g. impossibility to become a civil servant). Very few news outlets, Finnish people and the hundreds of 'pedagogical tourists' that visit Finland every year would brandish and criticize Human Rights in the country, being unaware of these issues and having been brainwashed about the 'good' of the country (Dervin, 2013).

Finland often gives lessons about equality, democracy, Human Rights, etc. to other countries. This can easily lead to ethnocentrism (an implicit and/or explicit feeling of superiority towards the other, LeVine & Campbell, 1972) but also self-congratulation (*we help others and need no help*, de Oliveira, 2011). In terms of interculturality, understood here as the encounter of people from different countries, bearing in mind that they do not just represent a 'culture', but also different social classes, genders, generations, religions, that intersect (Dervin, 2015), this is highly problematic. This chapter questions the hegemony of Human Rights discourses (de Sousa Santos, 2015) when dealing with intercultural dialogue and proposes ways of including this element in a 'counterhegemonic way' (ibid.) in intercultural education. For Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009, n. p.) "In this time and age, it is not easy to theorise about Human Rights. Human Rights are supposed to be a strong answer to the problems of the world, so strong as to be universally valid. Now, it seems more and more obvious that our time is not one of strong answers. It is rather a time of strong questions and weak answers." Examples from the Finnish context illustrate some of my arguments.

Since the approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 discourses on Human Rights have become prevalent in "international law, global and regional institutions, foreign policies of (mostly liberal-democratic) states, and in the activities of a diverse and growing array

of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and networks" (Beitz, 2011: 1). In short they have a 'moral life', a 'legal life', and a 'political life' (ibid.). We also need to bear in mind, in order to avoid certain 'centrisms' such as historiocentrism or Eurocentrism, that Human Rights also have a 'historical life' (ibid.: 2). For instance the Cyrus Cylinder from Persia dating back to the 6th century before our common era, which promoted harmony between different people and faiths, has often been described as a first symbol of universal Human Rights (Mitchell, 1988: 83).

The founding member states of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) declared:

> "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for Human Rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace". (Article 26)

In the field of education Human Rights have played an important role over the past decades, especially in relation to the idea of interculturality. As such the EU White Paper on intercultural dialogue from 2008 identifies intercultural education as one of the five key areas where action is needed to safeguard and develop Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law and to promote mutual understanding. However the 'intercultural' in education still remains largely treated as neutral transactional encounters, ignoring the fact that they encompass and contribute to unbalanced power relations, differential treatment, different kinds of -isms such as racism, culturalism, linguism, etc. These represent what I consider to be the most 'hidden' violations of Human Rights. Following de Sousa Santos (2015: 1) I also believe that intercultural education can also too easily contribute to "a large majority of the world's inhabitants [not being] the subjects of Human Rights (…) but rather the objects of Human Rights discourses." This chapter problematizes these aspects.

Beyond mere *Human Rightism*?

Many scholars note that the conventional idea of Human Rights (*Human Rightism*) is problematic because of its inflationary use. Mchangama and Verdirame (2014, n. p.) note: "If Human Rights were a currency, its value would be in free fall, thanks to a gross inflation in the number of Human Rights treaties and nonbinding international instruments adopted by international organizations over the last several decades." The canonical definitions of Human Rights also seem to want to include 'everything', too many aspects that make the notion difficult to manage. For example, for Starkey (2003), Human Rights include personal rights, rights in relationships between people, public freedoms and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural rights. This inflation, and the lack of intersectionability between these aspects, often makes it challenging to work effectively with the idea of Human Rights in education.

Relevant to interculturality, de Sousa Santos (2015) is worried about the fact that Human Rights are "universally valid irrespective of the social, political and cultural context in which they operate" (ibid.: 7); the way they are conceptualized is often based on "a conception of human nature as individual, self-sustaining and qualitatively different from the non-human nature" (ibid.); what counts as Human Rights or not is determined by universal declarations, multilateral institutions and

North-based/Western non-governmental organisations (ibid.) and Human Rights are often presented as being problematic in the global South (not so much in the North, ibid.: 49). For the sociologist Human Rights discourses are dependent on and reproduce asymmetries of power deriving from the "neo-imperial, neo-colonial nature of contemporary world disorder" (2009, n. p.). He even argues that some representatives of the world disorder are objects rather than subjects of Human Rights discourses in e.g. the Global South; that a lot of human suffering does not count as Human Rights and that many acts of Human Rights violation have been done in the name of Human Rights (2015: 78). While promoting dignity, 'Western' notions of Human Rights can facilitate imperialism and the proliferation of misery (2009, n. p.).

During the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in Austria, certain lines were drawn between Western and non-Western interpretations of Human Rights (Friedman et al., 2005). The Bangkok Declaration, signed and released by Asian States before the 1993 Conference, offered a critique of Human Rights universalism:

> [The signatories] recognize that while Human Rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds (Hamelink, 1997: 100).

Let me take two examples to illustrate how Human Rights can be explicitly and implicitly used to manipulate discourses about self and other and lead to unjustified and politically motivated hierarchies. In 2014 the former Prime Minister of Finland organised the Northern Future Forum in Finland. His special guest was David Cameron, the then Prime Minister of the UK:

> "The prime ministers of the UK, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States will convene with the aim of sharing ideas and finding new ways of tackling the common challenges encountered in the modern northern European economies. The Northern Future Forum (NFF) is a unique event that brings together the prime ministers, business leaders, entrepreneurs and policy makers from nine northern European countries. The discussion at NFF 2014 will focus on how to foster equality, wellbeing and competitiveness under the current economic challenges. The meeting will also include presentations and discussions on policies, ideas and innovations that have helped create jobs and improve the standard of living in the participating countries." (http://nff2014.government.fi/about-northern-future-forum)

The following comment from Cameron, at the end of the event, illustrates well how the neo-liberal discourses of innovation and competition were masked by an imagined comparison between the imagined space of 'northern Europe' with China and Russia:

> "Finally for me, I think we are very rational northern Europeans, we come together and we talk about our problems, some of the difficulties that we have. I think we should also celebrate our successes and I think that one of the successes that we should celebrate is the fact that I profoundly believe that societies like ours that are open democratic and liberal and tolerant and disputatious and argumentative, we are more creative and more inventive than

closed societies whether in China or in Russia or elsewhere. And I think we should celebrate that one of the best ways to keep ahead and to be creative and to be recognised as the sort of societies we are, and the sort of creativity we achieve, we often talk about our problems but let's also pick up the values that we have which are very important part of our prosperity now and in the future."

Interestingly Cameron has imagined a new regional identity: Northern Europeans. The label includes the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries and Britain. Defining this new category as 'very rational', 'open', 'democratic', 'liberal', 'tolerant', 'disputatious', 'argumentative', 'creative', 'inventive' the British Prime Minister opposed it to 'closed' societies like China and Russia 'or elsewhere', creating a new hierarchy between and within the West and the East. Even though the word Human Rights is not mentioned as one of the 'values' and 'achievements' of Northern Europeans, many of the aforementioned characteristics hint at them: rationality (the 'rational' respects Human Rights), democracy, tolerance, open (vs. closed societies). Although many commentators would agree with the arguments made by Cameron, I argue that this typically leads to self-congratulation and satisfaction, but also asymmetries of power. As seen in the example of Finland in the introduction, many of the values spelled out by Cameron and opposed to the Chinese or Russians are not stabilized in this part of the world either.

The second example of manipulation of the universal understanding of Human Rights was reported by the Finnish media in November 2014. Although it does not relate directly to the canonical definition of the 'intercultural' as it deals with same-sex marriage, I find this case to be very relevant. At the time Finland was one of the last European countries not to have approved same-sex marriage. The then Interior Minister and Christian Democratic chair declared that she was opposed to marriage equality (Yle News, 20.11.2014). Her justification was based on the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. She claimed: "If we think about the UN declaration, which is significant from the perspective of a universal understanding of Human Rights, it says that everyone has the right... every man and woman has the right to marriage, in other words it defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman." Article 16.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

"Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution."

This is a good example of an unstable interpretation of Human Rights, used to serve political (and religious) motivations in one of the most 'democratic' countries in the world. Human Rights are used in the two examples to establish superiority and inferiority (van Dijk, 1987), to manipulate the other to "validate 'our' superiority" (de Oliveira, 2011) but also to create, in a way, hostility towards the other.

Intercultural education and the hegemony of Human Rights: Problematic supranational initiatives

In March 2015 the intergovernmental organization, the Council of Europe, which promotes, trains about and produces educational materials on Human Rights and citizenship education, announced that it was working on a "universal and objective system to define and measure democratic competences" (personal e-mail, 18.3.2015). Interestingly the idea of democratic competences is used interchangeably with intercultural competence in the message I received from the Institution. 20 core 'democratic' competences were defined by the institution: (amongst others) responsibility, tolerance, conflict resolution, listening skills, linguistic and communication skills, critical thinking, empathy and openness, autonomous learning skills (ibid.). Descriptors for each competence describe what people know, understand and are able to do and refrain from doing. According to the Head of the institution's department of education, the main objective is to define levels of attainment for each competence and "to incorporate into teacher-training programmes, recruitment tests and the school curriculum, across Europe and beyond" (ibid.). Although the word *Human Rights* is nowhere to be found in the description of the competences it is contained implicitly in many of its aspects (democracy, tolerance, responsibility, etc.). The initiative is taking place, of course, in a specific context: extremism is increasing on many fronts; people question who they are and where they belong, often putting boundaries between themselves and others to defend themselves; the world is facing horrific refugee crises, etc. So one might think that the work of the Council is much needed and welcomed. However while reading the description of the initiative, I worry about its supposedly 'universal' and 'objective' appeal. *Who will make the final decision as to what e.g. 'critical thinking' means or as to what 'responsibility' entails? Whose voices will be included in the descriptors? Will this lead to the 'center' (Europe) dictating to the rest of the world what democratic and intercultural competences are?* I also find many of the components – which relate to discourses on Human Rights – to be extremely problematic. For example the notion of tolerance has been criticized by many interculturalists for its somewhat passive and potentially patronizing characteristics (see Dobbernack & Modood, 2013; Adcock, 2013 about the Indian case). The same goes for the idea of 'openness': *Who can be deemed to be really 'open'? 'Open' to what? Can 'openness' always be considered genuine?*

In a somewhat more interesting but ambiguous statement on the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (2010), a group of United Nations experts expressed the idea that Human Rights are essential 'tools' for an 'effective' intercultural dialogue. The Statement lays a lot of emphasis on the idea of 'cultural diversity', an anthropomorphic word that hides the social beings who enter into dialogue and tends to remove agency off them. For instance, at the beginning, the Statement talks about globalization 'eroding cultural diversity' and the need to 'preserve cultural diversity'. However I agree with Wood (2003: 21) that "we are drunk with the idea that every difference of ethnic custom, every foreign or regional accent, every traditional recipe and every in-group attitude betokens a distinct worldview." The cultural diversity promoted by the statement, which resembles museum pieces to be 'preserved', could easily pass as 'concocted diversity' which "imagines the world as divisible into neatly defined social groups, each with its own thriving cultural traditions" (Wood, ibid.: 37). It is interesting to see that the Statement seems to contradict itself when its authors explain:

> "Cultural rights include the right to question the existing parametres of 'culture', to opt in or out of particular cultural entities, and to continuously create new culture. Individuals have multiple plural identities and inhabit societies which are also pluralistic. Promoting cultural diversity is thus the preservation of a living process, a renewable treasure for the benefit of present and future generations that guarantees everyone's Human Rights as an adaptive process nurturing the capacity for expression, creation and innovation" (UN, 2010).

What this means is that the authors of the Statement see culture as something that changes, a process, but it also recognizes the rights of people to opt out of culture. The oxymoron (two contradictory terms used together), "the preservation of a living process, a renewable treasure", in reference to promoting cultural diversity, translates well this process. What the Statement also argues for here is that Human Rights are a process that relies directly on cultural expression, creation and innovation. I agree with these points. However it is a shame that the Statement only refers to the fuzzy word of *culture* to discuss the link between Human Rights and intercultural dialogue. Jahoda (2012: 300) reminds us rightly that "'culture' is not a thing, but a social construct vaguely referring to a vastly complex set of phenomena." Maybe more importantly Holliday (2010: 4) argues that "culture can easily lead to essentialism by "preset[ing] people's individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are." This leads to the following questions: *When one talks about culture in relation to Human Rights, whose culture does one refer? Whose culture should one respect and why? Whose voice is included and excluded in these discussions?* It has become increasingly important to intersect culture and other identity markers (gender, social class, language, etc.) to deal with these issues.

The Statement also highlights political aspects of the use of Human Rights in intercultural dialogue:

> "No one may invoke cultural diversity as an excuse to infringe on Human Rights guaranteed by international law or limit their scope, nor should cultural diversity be taken to support segregation and harmful traditional practices which, in the name of culture, seek to sanctify differences that run counter to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of Human Rights" (UN, 2010).

This is an extremely important aspect of interculturality as we problematize it: culture (or cultural diversity in the Statement) is often used as an 'excuse', an 'alibi' to discriminate against the other and to put oneself on a pedestal (Dervin & Machart, 2015). Interestingly these practices are very much common in e.g. Finnish education, where the Other is often treated differently, segregated and asked to perform a 'cultural' other to please teachers', teacher educators' and decision makers' wish for multiculturalism (Riitaoja, 2013). For example in the following excerpt a student teacher explains how she witnessed such 'segregation' in a school she visited in Finland. The class teacher was reviewing English words for different kinds of fruit:

> "A lot of fruit was rather exotic at least to a northern country there were many food items on the word list that originated in Asia and Africa: mango, papaya etc. What the teacher did then was to ask one of her black pupils what some of

the fruit, specifically from her home country, tasted like. (…) I think that the teacher relied more on the so called cultural knowledge of the student rather than the authentic fruit related knowledge – after all just because the student looked African, she was born in Finland and in her words, had no idea".

To me, through the Statement, this could be read as infringement on Human Rights: based on her skin colour and apparent difference – rather than potential commonality as someone who was born, lives and studies in Finland – the teacher made the mistake of 'picking' on her.

Working on the 'fragilities' of Human Rights in intercultural education

I agree with de Sousa Santos (2009: 17) that we should not discard the idea of Human Rights. As the sociologist suggests what we need to do is to find ways of making people aware of their 'current fragilities', to help them to construct 'strong ideas and practices of resistance' (ibid.) and to deconstruct forms of indoctrination in relation to discussions on the 'intercultural' and hegemonic discourses on Human Rights.

In what follows I suggest ways of doing so. As rightly argued by Mchangama and Verdirame (2014), first of all, we need to narrow down and define a clearer set of Human Rights. It is essential for students to examine diachronically how Human Rights have been presented and constructed in different parts of the world. *What similarities and differences are there between these different models? Whose conceptions seem to have won over others internationally? What aspects of Human Rights from the past and different parts of the world would they want to keep and maybe apply in their school?* Discussions on Human Rights are included in many school subjects and are often found in textbooks. It is important for teachers and students to examine and compare how, across subjects, they are introduced and discussed.

Questioning the instability of Human Rights and their manipulation in discourses of intercultural dialogue is also an important educational goal. For de Sousa Santos again we need to raise 'suspicion regarding Human Rights' especially in their relation to 'Western, liberal matrix' (2009, 2015). De Sousa Santos suggests to compare e.g. Human Rights as discussed in the West to other 'grammars of human dignity' which have been considered "inherently inferior in ethical and political terms" (2015: 3). *Who is included and excluded from discussions of Human Rights? How is 'human dignity' conceptualized elsewhere? What commonalities and differences are there between 'our' ways and 'theirs'?* The fact that Human Rights also tend to be individualistic also deserves our full attention (de Sousa Santos, 2015: xiv).

At a more micro-level it is interesting for pupils to reflect on interculturality and human rights in their own environment. One interesting element is to discuss the rights of 'minorities' in the class (migrant-background pupils, representatives of religious, sexual minorities, etc.). Following Amselle (2010: 79) one could reflect on e.g. migrant background pupils' rights to claim and/or opt of out of an ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity which tends to be imposed on her/him in our schools. Pupils should have the right to appropriate or refuse their 'origins' (de Singly, 2003: 58). *How much of this is taking place in a specific school? How is it done? How can people be empowered to question these behaviours?*

Discussions of Human Rights and the 'intercultural' have often eluded the question of environmental issues. Quesseda (2013: 277) has proposed the fascinating idea of shifting the focus from *Human Rights* to *Human Duties* in this regard. This opens up the idea of interculturality. According to an increasing number of scientists our era is that of the *anthropocene* (*anthopos* = human; *cene* = new or recent), defined by humanity's major and ongoing impact on shaping the Earth's geology and ecology, and marks the end of the *Holocene*, a time when humans colonized new territories (Quesseda, ibid.). The anthropocene is represented by the explosion in the human population, the mass use of fossil fuels, demands on fresh water, the destruction of habitats and the dramatic loss of species as evidence for "the central role of mankind" in shaping the Earth's geology and ecology. In daily, media and intercultural discourses one often attempts to 'blame' and 'shame' e.g. the biggest polluters but the Anthropocene tells us that every single human being is responsible for this new chapter in the Earth's history, that all humans are a geological force (Quesseda, 2013: 274). Pollution thus becomes reciprocal: "my consumption, my way of life, the fact that I live, now relate me to other people on the basis of reciprocal pollution" (Quesseda, ibid.). All humans are thus equal in front of environmental issues (ibid.: 276). It is thus essential that intercultural education takes onboard this aspect and helps pupils to examine critically discourses about 'polluters' and 'victims of pollution', media reports on pollution beyond one's borders and to be more critical towards one's own position and contradictions (*how do I contribute to pollution directly and indirectly on a daily basis, in my own environment but also thousands of miles away through my consumption?*).

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the link between interculturality and discourses of Human Rights in education. Hegemonic and problematic perspectives on these issues were reviewed and 'counterhegemonic ways' of approaching Human Rights in the 'intercultural' suggested. Inspired by Hoskins and Sallah's (2011) critical discussions of the concept of intercultural competence I wish to summarize the main points made here by listing the kinds of knowledge, awareness, understanding and critical thinking that could be implemented in relation to Human Rights and the intercultural in education:

(1) Knowledge of Human Rights violations or contributions to such violations in one's own context. Demonstrate humility when discussing other contexts.

(2) Knowledge of the Human Rights discourses across time and space and how some of these discourses have remained and 'ruled over' others. Question Eurocentrism and indoctrination from the media and decision makers.

(3) Knowledge about alternatives ways of conceptualizing 'dignity' around the world in comparison to *Human Rightism*. Discuss their pros and cons, similarities and differences.

(4) Ability to select and discuss some precise aspects of Human Rights instead of a more global approach. Detect how discourses of culture and solid identity can violate other people's Human Rights.

(5) Awareness and understanding of the 'fragilities' of Human Rights.

(6) Ability to support those in need of claiming and/or opting out of static identities. Give them a voice.

(7) Critical thinking towards one's own beliefs and actions towards others.

(8) Knowledge of the characteristics of the anthropocene era. Define one's own Human Duties and those of others.

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