

ENGAGING DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS CURRICULUM IN HIGHER EDUCATION, IN THE NEOLIBERAL TWILIGHT ZONE

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Abstract: This article examines what it means to teach and research human rights and development now, within the context of public higher education (HE), as significant internal and external challenges face ‘human rights’ and ‘development’ as subjects in themselves. ‘Development’ has arguably been in crisis for decades, or has at least failed to escape from a neoliberal ‘twilight zone’, despite the emergence of critical, humanistic and rights-focused alternatives. Significant reversals have occurred for human development and human rights in recent times, as political regimes have shifted rightwards and public and political discourse have become more polarised and extreme. Official support and cooperation for human rights and development have stagnated or declined, while practice has gravitated towards humanitarian and economic agendas. Persistent conflicts are contributing to the largest crisis of displaced people in history, inevitably pushing security and humanitarian needs to the fore. The climate for human rights, already compromised by the ‘war on terror’, has deteriorated noticeably. Even the minimum ‘floor’ of humanitarian norms has been repeatedly shattered, making a progressive expansion of human rights seem unlikely and unattainable. Given this context of antagonism and retrogression, this article examines what the fundamental stakes are to educate for human rights and development. Noting how higher education’s own basic stakes have changed under neoliberalism, it engages the challenge to ‘decolonise’ higher education, while revisiting fundamental commitments to the ‘things’ involved in educating for human rights and development. It considers arguments for higher education curriculum in the sociology of development and human rights as **something**. While there are no definitive answers, decolonial curriculum and emancipatory teaching can help to sustain, rekindle, engage and nourish these conative fields, and push back against de-democratising and instrumental tendencies.

Key words: Higher Education; Development; Human Rights; Curriculum.

Introduction – working in the ruins, at the twilight of development and rights

What does it mean to teach and research human rights and development today? I frame this question as an academic sociologist within current concerns about public higher education (HE), as the taken-for-granted ‘reality’ of university, subjects and educational values are being reconfigured under neoliberalism. There are diverse possible definitions for neoliberalism, including ‘the disenchantment of politics by economics’ (Davies, 2017: xiv), and the pursuit of a doctrine of choice and freedom through a covertly authoritarian exercise of power (expressed, for example, by Margaret Thatcher’s statement: ‘there is no alternative’) (Monbiot, 2016). Neoliberalism profoundly challenges the imaginary of academic teaching - the very idea of higher education finds itself ‘in ruins’ (Readings, 1996). While these criticisms might appear excessively ‘macro’ and general, ‘[w]e simply have to talk about these general matters because the changes we are experiencing are so extensive and so fundamental that we cannot any longer feel confident that we have any working assumptions that are widely agreed’ (Collini, 2017: 4). Academics face a crisis of ‘habitus’, as the new neoliberal ‘rules of the game’ re-assemble our work, our identities and professions and imaginable futures (Shultz and Viczko, 2016). New demands for growth, performance and accountability suppress our everyday ethical dispositions (Zipin and Brennan, 2003), and put pressure on our moral, ethical and practical relations to ourselves, our students, our colleagues and collaborators, and the world. Why teach, how to teach and what to teach are questions that spin around, frustratingly, as individual educators struggle to deal with multiple pressures, challenges and crises.

In response to the challenge of working in the ruins, this article attempts to understand external and internal pressures on the subject areas of human rights and development and formulates an educational response. I

reflect through the lenses of my own home discipline, sociology, and contextualise the challenges within a general sense of educational disinvestment or ‘emptying’ that replaces ‘something’ with ‘nothing’ as a generalised tendency under neoliberalism (Alvesson 2013; Ritzer 2003). Facing the critiques that are challenging the subject matter from within human rights and development, I try to respond in a way that answers to recently proliferating demands to ‘decolonise’ the curriculum and the university. The article seeks ways through the impossibilities of the fields of human rights and development, by decolonising the curriculum, while arguing for educational praxis that treats education and curriculum as *something* in both general and specific senses.

The challenges to higher education, human rights and development are profoundly connected. Each of these things is experiencing pushback, with different forces pushing more or less simultaneously. The multiple pressures underpin a sense of across-the board erosion and crisis, and a sense of ‘emptying’ or displacement of a central, essential substance, or ‘something’. In parallel with these general trends toward ‘emptying’, the fields of development and human rights, and my own discipline of sociology continue to experience internal crises and challenges, with critical challenges being posed internally within the subject matter of human rights and development. Neoliberal transformations aside, there are existential, epistemological and ethical challenges within each domain, calling for a fundamental transformation of disciplinary subject matter from within.

Internal and external pressures on development and human rights

Crises of meaning are nothing new in development and human rights, as contestation is arguably constitutive of these fields (Khoo, 2015). Development thinking has been routinely criticised for being at an impasse (Schoorman, 1993), as being plagued with impossibilities and a looming sense of unease (Corbridge, 2007). There has been an increased intellectual diversity and dynamism too, opened up by post-colonial and post-development critiques, and as ethical, humanistic and ecological alternative perspectives emerged, especially from the 1990s onwards. Yet, development

theory and practice continued to face an impasse, trapped in a ‘twilight zone’ – between global neoliberalism and neoliberal globalism (Schuurman 1993; 2009).

The expansion of human rights and human development in the 1990s offered potentially powerful counterpoints to neoliberalism’s economic instrumentalism and implicit authoritarianism. South Africa presented a highly visible test-case as it transitioned from apartheid to an explicitly human rights-based regime after 1994. The connections between development and human rights strengthened as social movements and governments began, sometimes collaboratively, to push forward economic, social and cultural rights in different regions of the world. Even traditional human rights organisations such as Amnesty International began to engage with poverty and development issues (Fukuda-Parr, 2009: 171), socio-economic rights and democratic transitions. There was a real possibility that development could be re-imagined via a democratisation of politics, centred on struggles to realise socio-economic rights (Jones and Stokke, 2005). Coinciding with apartheid’s end, the Rwandan genocide evidenced the folly of development judged solely by the parameters of neoliberal macroeconomics and necessitating a shift in development thinking and practice to address human rights. Prior to the genocide, Rwanda had experienced economic growth, growing aid allocations and high levels of technical development assistance (Uvin, 2001: 95-96), while high and increasing levels of racism, authoritarianism, and structural violence were disastrously ignored (Uvin, 1998). Two different routes appeared to integrate human rights and development: the ‘Right to Development’ approach to development as a collective right, deriving from the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development and the ‘Human Rights Based Approach’ (HRBA) defining development as a human-centred process that leads to the realisation of human rights. The Right to Development was articulated by Southern jurists and endorsed by a coalition of Southern governments. It was consistently opposed by the ‘Western group’ of ‘developed country’ governments and has not been invoked by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). HRBA was an initiative of development agencies and

NGOs involved in development programming and succeeded in gaining traction among development practitioners, development NGOs and think-tanks and United Nations' (UN) agencies. However, HRBA have been criticised as superficial 'rhetorical repackaging' of essentially neoliberal policies, without reflecting human rights priorities. They remain at the margins of the fields of human rights and development while the two communities do not communicate well (Fukuda-Parr, 2009: 165; 169; 172; 176).

Mainstream development practice has remained more or less neoliberal, perhaps because it has been able to lean on the purposively minimal consensus presented by the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015). The MDGs were surprisingly successful in uniting the global development community (Fukuda-Parr, 2012), yet their very success arguably prevented the development mainstream from committing to significantly new intellectual ground. The 'Busan Principles for Aid Effectiveness' entrenched a new consensus after 2011, according business a similar standing to governments and civil society in 'catalysing' development (OECD-DAC, 2012). The parity of esteem for business allowed development cooperation commitments to retain a voluntary and provisional character, and avoid mandatory and binding responsibilities implied by the language of rights. A wholly positive role was assumed for the private sector, promoted using new, emptily hegemonic concepts like 'social entrepreneurship' (Kenny and Scriver, 2012). The tensions between neoliberalism and rights have never been resolved, with some pre-eminent advocates of socio-economic rights continuing to see human rights as being fundamentally irreconcilable with neoliberalism (O'Connell, 2007). Many critical development voices remain sceptical of the continued reliance on economic growth as the means to combat poverty and inequality, and to achieve development. The avoidance of explicit commitments to rights is notable (Ilal, 2011). In the negotiated transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, the human rights agenda fell victim to 'high-level hesitation', weakening rights-based

positions by assuming that rights could be ‘everywhere, but not specifically somewhere’ (Brolan et al., 2015).

In practical terms, in both the UK and Ireland, as elsewhere, the development agenda has been affected by the policy austerity that followed the 2008 financial crisis. Commercial interests have partly displaced and compromised the principles of development cooperation and untied aid. In Ireland, aid policy was reviewed in 2011, as the Department of Foreign Affairs (responsible for Irish Aid) became the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The 2006 Irish Aid White Paper (Government of Ireland, 2006), a 131-page policy focused on official development cooperation, hunger and poverty reduction was replaced by the 2013 White Paper, a 44-page document that maintained most of the 2006 aid policies in a general manner, but reframed development assistance to better fit with economic diplomacy, trade and investment for economic growth (Government of Ireland, 2013). Economic recovery and high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth since 2015 have not led to improvements in the aid effort, and the percentage GDP allocation to aid has continued to decline. In the UK, the change to a Conservative-led government in 2010 shifted the foreign policy frame, and the 2016 Brexit vote further pushed the reframing of a new ‘economic development strategy’ prioritising the UK’s economic self-interest: ‘[h]elping the world’s needy seems rather beside the point’ (*The Economist*, 2017). Against these trends of declining and stagnating development funding and rising business interests is a growing trend of long-term, intractable humanitarian crises, highlighted by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR’s) recent reports that the world now has more forcibly displaced people than ever recorded (UNHCR, 2016a; 2017). Given the urgency of humanitarian need, development NGOs have increasingly focused their operations on a combination of humanitarian assistance and business-friendly development solutions, while ambitions for longer-term transformative development programming have been de-emphasised.

Human rights have been increasingly challenged by securitisation and militarisation following the 9/11 attacks in Washington and New York in

2001. Official support for human rights and development became more ambiguous after 2001 as governments compromised on a host of human rights in the name of countering terrorism. The extreme and unpredictable violent acts perpetrated in many locations around the world have led governments to enact an array of counterterrorism laws and measures. These have opened the way for overbroad, vague, and intrusive action that threatens to violate basic rights and increase discrimination of minorities (Tayler, 2017), while governmental cooperation and support for official human rights mechanisms, such as regional human rights organisations has declined or become problematic (e.g. OAS, 2016).

Human Rights Watch's 2017 Annual Report notes that a global assault on human rights is underway and has found it necessary to make the case for a vigorous reaffirmation of basic human rights values. Similarly, Amnesty International's 2016-17 Annual Report was subtitled 'the global pushback against human rights', naming the rise of right-wing populist leaders such as Trump (United States), Orbán (Hungary), Erdogan (Turkey), Modi (India) and Duterte (The Philippines) as major threats to human rights. Governments in Russia, Turkey, Egypt and Syria continue to intensify repressive measures with increasing boldness (Roth, 2017). There is a worrying trend of harassment and violence against those working for human rights:

“[r]eprisals, threats, executions and criminalization of human rights defenders are part of a trend towards a continuation of severe abuses, jointly with more sophisticated methods employed by states, to reduce the efficacy and freedom of human rights defenders” (UNHCR, 2016b).

In conflict situations, the deliberate, indiscriminate and criminal targeting of civilians and civilian structures such as hospitals and schools marks an all-time low in respect for the most basic humanitarian norms and laws (WHO, 2016; Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack, 2014). Recent analyses have noted that healthcare is not simply collateral damage in conflict – it has become 'weaponised' (Fouad et al., 2017). The

‘naming and shaming’ strategy that has been used by human rights defenders as their main tool is increasingly ineffective, as many perpetrators are not only immune to shame, but revel in committing atrocities. Instead of covert violations, these actors use atrocious acts as enticements to attract recruits (Kumar, 2017). In the face of this, accountability for violations is no longer enough, forcing human rights activists to shift their attention elsewhere to target financial backers, arms suppliers, and other flows and networks that enable rights violations.

The universality of human rights has been challenged conceptually, theoretically and practically by both conservative and radical critiques, announcing the ‘twilight’ or even ‘endtimes’ of human rights. Even sympathetic and optimistic supporters are ambivalent about the prospects for human rights, as ‘the last Utopia’ (Moyn, 2010). Conservative jurists find human rights to be far too weak and ineffective as a body of international law (Posner, 2014), while anti-establishment polemicists lambast the institutionalised human rights movement and system architecture (Hopgood, 2013). Hopgood’s critique centres on what he calls ‘the Human Rights Imperium’, or ‘human rights with a big H’, while not rejecting what he calls ‘human rights with a small h’, those who work on the ground to protect human rights, often at great cost to themselves.

Demands for decolonisation – challenging curriculum

Despite the enormous expansion and relentlessly critical questioning of higher education, there is very little discussion of its educational substance, the curriculum. Curriculum has not tended to be ‘engaged’ as a topic of higher education debate and policy (Barnett and Coate, 2005: 1). ‘Curriculum’ encompasses what students should be experiencing, what it means to design courses, considerations of disciplinarity, the place of skills, and how we should see students – as human beings, as enquirers after particular knowledge or as possessors of particular skills. Barnett and Coate suggest an open, expansive view of curriculum as something in action, and as imaginatively designed spaces that are likely to generate new energies among students, inspire them and prompt a triple engagement of knowing, acting

and being. But this advice remains entirely vague on subject matter and how to treat content, since this is potentially vast and open, given that academia does not only transmit knowledge but creates it, observing the principle of academic freedom.

One definite and identifiable curricular demand that is coming from both critical voices within fields of study such as development studies or human rights, and from the student body is the call to ‘decolonise the curriculum’. Subject matter comprises ‘an understanding of what is valued and treated with respect by a particular social community’ (Jackson, 2011: 54). However, there are manifest demands for academia as a ‘particular social community’ and its values to become more critically reflexive and inclusive, addressing subject matter that has been marginalised, suppressed, or not been allowed to exist in the first place. Santos connects such demands to ‘the sociology of absences’ (Santos, 2001; Santos 2002). ‘Decolonisation’ is an imprecise and polysemic term, raising an important question for me: what does it mean to decolonise human rights and development education, taking sociology as my discipline and the university in my specific location, on the largely white, Western periphery of Western Europe. My university presents a very different context from Cape Town, Oxford or London, where ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Why is My Curriculum White’ protests have broken out. The demands for decolonisation are complex, connecting academic postcolonial or decolonial studies with social and political struggles around race, gender, and class. These critiques and struggles engage the historical, economic and political problem of colonialism. They represent critiques of how knowledge is produced and circulated, more general critiques of structural and societal inequalities and injustice and higher education’s complicity in these structures (Stein, 2017).

The most newsworthy demands have been the South African student demands since early 2015, leading to the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Fees Must Fall’ campaigns. The different forms taken by student protest indicate that the demands were not only about symbolic and material legacies of colonialism and racial discrimination. They also reflect the basic difficulties of expanding higher education in a global context of public policy austerity,

widening inequality and deteriorating working conditions and generational life prospects. In South Africa, student protests reflect a general disillusionment felt by the post-apartheid ‘born free’ generation with the transition brokered by the previous Mandela generation (Hall, 2016). The calls for decolonisation are inspired by the intellectual traditions of black consciousness and revolutionary anticolonialism, as they rebel against a narrow, and unrepresentatively white, Eurocentric and metropolitan curriculum that by its very codification as curriculum dismisses and devalues indigenous, black and local knowledges.

Academia continues to play a key role in reproducing a knowledge system that continues to reinforce white and Western privilege and predominance, while academia remains unwelcoming and unrepresentative of the majority of black students (Heleta, 2016). The protests highlighted the ongoing failure of the post-apartheid settlement to vindicate a central promise - free and accessible education for black South Africans that had been a key demand of anti-apartheid student activism for several decades (Irvine, 2016). They also question the development model and higher education’s presumed role in it, hence the decolonisation protest is ‘profoundly dissonant to the dominant neoliberal discourses currently shaping higher education’ (Shay and Peseta, 2016). Kathy Luckett suggests that the modernisation approach pursued by postcolonial elite universities in South Africa operates through a divided logic of practice, where different categories of students fare differently and face unequal burdens. In South Africa, the higher education participation rate is 60 percent for white students, but only 13 percent for black students, who further suffer very high attrition rates from failure and dropout (Luckett, 2016: 417). The modernisation narrative of development displaces the responsibility for injustice and the ‘colonial wound’ onto the previously colonised – the black students, who must struggle with proficiency in colonial languages, lack recognition for their identities, histories and cultures and cannot get equal access to civil society.

The ‘fallist’ protests in South Africa have found echoes and solidarity in other parts of the world, opening up complex and contradictory questions about inequality and privilege and what higher education has to do

with it. In the UK, a ‘Decolonise Our Minds’ campaign at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the ‘Why is my curriculum white?’ campaigns of the UK National Union of Students (NUS) have sprung up alongside ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ protests at Oxford University, where Rhodes’ colonial legacy is most materially manifest, symbolically in the form of statues but also in the Rhodes scholarships he endowed (Newsinger, 2016). The UK NUS campaign was led by BME (black and minority ethnic) students, who ‘find themselves unrepresented, their histories and cultures completely ignored in the academic field because for many years white writing and history has been given a higher standing, and universities continue to perpetuate this idea of certain sources holding academic privilege’ (Hussain, 2015).

Luckett observes that a ‘decolonial gaze’ helps us understand the pain and anger expressed by protesting students, but also thinks that academics should be more responsible for taking a stance in curriculum knowledge and pedagogy to try to interrupt the structural tendencies to reproduce inequalities. She thinks that curriculum should not treat students as ‘victims’, but recuperate and build students’ agency for integrated identity formation, deep learning and academic achievement. This does not mean that the colonial archive and western canons should ‘fall’ in the sense of being simply dismissed in a knee-jerk reaction, but established works should be read ‘against the grain’ to challenge and expand the canon, viewing all academic knowledge as context-laden and contestable (Luckett, 2016). Newsinger’s historical analysis, ‘Why Rhodes Must Fall’ (Newsinger, 2016) is an excellent example of a resource that enables reading against the grain.

The fundamental problem for curriculum is *the coloniality of knowledge* – a result of a 500 year-old global structure of imperial power, which operated unequal appropriations of knowledge, and marginalised non-imperial knowledges (Quijano, 2000; Hountondji, 1997; Connell, 2016). Education, especially higher education consolidates and replays coloniality through academic privilege, reproducing injustices of wealth, gender, race and language. Connell argues that neoliberalism and transnational capitalism do not displace these injustices and indeed further exacerbate them. Irvine

problematizes the de-democratizing and covertly authoritarian nature of neoliberalism, suggesting that universities have the responsibility to act as potential sites of critical democratisation and resistance against inegalitarian and authoritarian trends. In Irvine's view, it is the most marginalised university students who are most likely to drive a radical, transgressive alternative to neoliberalism (Irvine, 2016).

Connell suggests that curriculum can be reformed to be more democratic and focused on justice. While the resources and techniques of globally dominant knowledge formation should not be rejected outright, other knowledges should not be silenced or erased. 'Justice' requires that the knowledge of least advantaged groups is represented. Yet she also acknowledges that disadvantaged groups need access to powerful knowledges that they may need for the future. Connell argues that a democratic and intellectually productive education is one where shared knowledges and cooperative learning are emphasised. Irvine's view, however, is that it is the most radical and transgressive voices, not the most politely cooperative and easily accepted, who have the most potential to counter neoliberalism and drive transformative change.

In my discipline, sociology, decolonial work has only just begun. Almost all influential sociological theory comes from the European and North American metropolises. In relation to research and prestigious journals and publishing houses, the standard tendency is to view the majority non-Euro-American world as nonexistent, peripheral or as 'data', while assuming that 'theory', advanced training and success must be defined in metropolitan Northern/Western terms. Connell offers five proposals for decolonising sociology: firstly, a re-examination of the discipline's understanding of itself, de-mythologising its history, and bringing to light the global North perspectives embedded in leading theories, methodologies and forms of publication. Secondly, major non-metropolitan works, historical or contemporary, can be recovered and circulated, multiplying resources and challenging traditional imaginations of the discipline. Connell's own book, *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2007) could be seen as a laudable attempt to fulfil these two objectives. Thirdly, undergraduate courses and textbooks should

be diversified. Fourthly, the institutional framework of the discipline such as where associations, conferences and journals are concentrated needs to be reformed to reduce Northern hegemony and build new links and collaborations. Fifthly, new research agendas need to emerge, based on postcolonial perspectives and social needs across the global South (Connell, 2016). New directions taken by the International Sociological Association in recent years reflect the desire for a more representative and collaborative global sociology. In 2014 the ISA World Congress took place in Japan, the first time it was held outside Europe or North America, while work from a wider range of countries and regions has been emphasised by the electronic publication, *Global Dialogue*, fostering and publicising sociological work done by different regional and country groupings and in a wider range of languages.

Barreto clarifies decolonisation in relation to the human rights literature by dividing the history of human rights into two streams: one that developed in Europe, out of the struggle against absolutism and totalitarianism, and another that emerged in the context of the history of modern imperialism, in resistance to colonial violence and domination. His ‘second history’ of human rights is a response to colonialism, beginning with the conquest of the Americas and the colonisation of the world at large. It encompasses the struggle against slavery, wars for independence in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as in the struggles for decolonisation in Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean and the Middle East in the twentieth century. Also included in Barreto’s second stream are the struggles of social movements and indigenous peoples and in resistance movements against neoliberal globalisation and neo-colonialism, and against the complicit roles of governments, empires, transnational corporations and international financial institutions (Barreto, 2013b).

In his blog essay, chapters and edited volume representing ‘second stream’ scholarship, ‘Human Rights from a Third World Perspective’, Barreto offers an alternative corpus of human rights texts that can be used in curriculum (Barreto, 2013a; 2013b). His decolonial perspective can be located within the subfield of ‘Third World Approaches to International

Law’. The anti-colonial tradition in human rights is not separate and separable, but is interwoven with the development of the liberal, democratic and socialist lineages of rights. Nevertheless a curriculum privileging the second stream might pay more attention, for example, to eighteenth and nineteenth century declarations and constitutions of independence in the Americas, such as those of Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Haiti and Colombia and certain international human rights principles and treaties attributable to the second stream, including the right to self-determination, rights of peoples, the Right to Development, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Declaration on Decolonisation, the African Charter of Human and People’s Rights, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Barreto, 2013b). Without ever having explicitly located myself in this second stream as a scholar or an educator, I note that my human rights and development curricula generally reflect second stream materials, but with the addition and interweaving of critical development, feminist and ecological thinkers.

Sociology and the difficult praxis of critical development and human rights

I write this article about what it means to teach development and human rights from a disciplinary ‘home’ of sociology, itself said to be a misfortunate discipline in the face of neoliberal reform (Holmwood, 2010), ill-defined and vulnerable to the whims of government policy (Burton, 2016: 984). Holmwood’s diagnosis of sociology’s crisis highlights that sociology does not lack relevance, however the structural tendency to ‘export’ sociology to other applied disciplines is leading to its decline under neoliberal conditions of competition. For Burton, the ‘crisis’ of sociology is also the gift of sociology. It is what makes it a dynamic and lively intellectual meeting place, a home which is made, rather than given. For Burton, the sociological imagination is vivacious and hospitable, its distinctive mode of enquiry and practice has attracted her from her original discipline, English. The particularity of seeing the social sociologically – its ‘particular quality of

mind...[is that] which makes the unfamiliar more familiar and treats the familiar as a source of astonishment' (Gane and Back, 2012: 405).

LeRiche argues that curriculum should be important for students' lives outside any course. The purpose of the curriculum should be to empower students with strategies for learning that they can use for a lifetime (LeRiche, 1993). He suggests that the quality of life in society at large may be affected by the success or failure of curriculum to attain this broader learning objective. Zepke discusses the links between engaged learning and active citizenship and suggests that student engagement, active citizenship and subjective well-being are interconnected. Actively engaged students can contribute individually and collectively to subjective well-being:

“...by enriching the workings of democracy, voicing ideas in times of uncertainty, challenging the status quo thoughtfully, constructively and decisively in a world conflicted by ethical, environmental and political dilemmas and teaching learners to become aware of themselves as active citizens and their potential to effect change in a world that is open, fluid and contested” (Zepke, 2013: 640).

The canon of sociology has been thoroughly critiqued as missing significant intellectual traditions (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2007) and, following on from this, could be accused of upholding hegemonic domination through sociological pedagogy (Burton, 2016), but this can be addressed in a sociological way by paying attention to Santos' 'sociology of absences' (Santos, 2001; Santos 2002), using new works (Bhambra, 2014) and in a pedagogical way by placing emphasis on voice – the voice of the author but also of the context of responsibility, including the teacher and student's responsibility and being attentive to silences: 'Who speaks? Who listens? And why?' (Hooks, 1994: 40).

Sociologists have tended to evade human rights and its associated legal norms. This has led some sociologists to argue that human rights are something that sociology needs in order to renew itself as a discipline (Hynes

et al., 2010). The avoidance of normative theorising leads to a lack of normative grounding. Human rights provides a possible normative foundation for sociology, grounded in human equality and shared vulnerability (Turner, 1993), while sociology enables human rights to be theorised in changing social contexts. Sociologists tend to be wary of the foundationalism, seeing the presumed universalism of human rights to be unsociological and uncritical. But this is certainly not the position of those who work in human rights ‘with a small h’ (Hopgood 2013), the human rights from below (Ife, 2009). For human rights practitioners and activists, the critical distance between the normativity of rights as ideals and their distance from social reality is the basis of their work. Activists understand that rights are social by nature and can only be invoked and reproduced through social struggles. A sociological perspective contextualises the development of human rights laws, discourses and practices and facilitates critical understandings of the shortcomings of human rights in abstract terms (Douzinas, 2000) and the significance that human rights regains in the context of particular struggles over power, inequality and suffering.

In speaking of education as a ‘thing’ in itself, Rømer (2011) suggests that ‘thing’ of education is about protecting a public dialogue on topics that are publicly loved. Public love is love for something to pass on to all people because it is meaningful in itself, and because you cannot imagine a society without this knowledge or these values. For me human rights education is a ‘thing’ because I cannot imagine a world where human rights no longer exist as a subject to teach, yet rights violations and deprivations continue. Development studies is a ‘thing’ because I cannot imagine a world that has no interest in understanding differing societal trajectories, that is disinterested in striving for a more humane, just and sustainable future. Public love is protected by cultural contexts, institutions and laws. The educational ‘thing’ is also characterised by ‘myriads and appearances’, this ‘tumbling plurality’ that negates authoritarian pedagogy and creates new dialogues to interact with established ones. There is a constant tension between what is publicly protected - let’s call that curriculum - and what is constantly appearing – colleagues and students’ questioning and demands for

it to be different. Rømer suggests that every publicly protected thing has ‘a shadow, a moon, a henchman, an anti-matter. Education is a double planet’, ridden with tension because love is always part of a dispute, and as such there is no one final resolution to this problem of curriculum. We should not seek to resolve problems in education, but instead establish them – ‘as resilient devices, as tensions in full diversity’ (Rømer, 2011: 504).

For Bryan (2016) ‘good’ sociology teaching involves engagement with ‘difficult’ knowledge, and how this difficult knowledge is affectively felt, experienced and understood by learners. Difficult knowledge has social and historical content that is traumatic or hard to bear, and which occasions learning encounters that are cognitively, psychologically and emotionally destabilising for the learner. Most of what is taught and learned in critical human rights and development studies e.g. starvation, genocide, war, torture, rape and so on fits this category of ‘difficult knowledge’. As Taylor explains, difficult knowledge is knowledge that makes demands upon the knower; knowledge which is typically kept outside the bounds of the ‘thinkable’ and which, when introduced into the conscious attention of a learner, contradicts valued self-images (particularly the image of oneself as a coherent, good person) to the point of threatening the break-up of self-integrity (Taylor, 2011: 23). Curriculum needs to embed a deeper appreciation of the complex affective and psychic dimensions of teaching and learning. We need to understand teaching and learning as emotional processes and activities, in addition to the cognitive focus, competences or instrumental outcomes.

Conclusion: education for a democratic praxis of human rights and development

This article began by considering how the basic stakes of education have changed under neoliberalism, while turning to the question of what basic fundamental commitments, or ‘somethings’ might be involved in *educating for* human rights and development. Neoliberal critiques of higher education mask its neoconservative re-assembly and a distrust and refusal of critical thinking and (re)imagination (Schultz and Viczko, 2016). These challenges

compound the difficulties of teaching development and human rights, whose subject matter is challenged by critiques specific and internal to its subject matter, as well as by external political demands to both decolonise and reconstitute higher education curricula and higher education overall.

I conclude by admitting that there is certainly no finished ‘solution’, but argue that an approach that treats education and curriculum as *something* in both specific and general senses, facing the current challenges to teaching human rights and development as a kind of ‘double planet’ motivated by education as public love and its tension, or shadow - its internal and external critiques. For Dewey, education is not restricted to matters of schooling, but is a necessary function of life, relating to the principle of renewal. For myself and this discussion, the most compelling demands for renewal relate to demands for decolonisation, but also the urgent need to push back against the twilight of development, the denial of human rights and the disrepair of democracy, and fight for public ‘things’ (Honig, 2017).

It seems to me that there needs to be much more public discussion and reflection about the nature of the future that we are creating together in a technological, economic, ecological, cultural and personal sense – and especially of the tensions between the technology-focused and human-centred visions of education and learning. Despite the dystopian present trends, or perhaps because of them, decolonial critics, critical development advocates, human rights activists and educators must work collaboratively to educate as if education itself, human rights and development are all *something*, a contested (Prinsloo, 2016) but conative striving for positive change and towards futures that are democratically preferred.

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