

# CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES: THE CASE OF CYPRUS

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**Abstract** – *The notions of human rights and inclusion are directly interlinked, as the recognition of disabled children’s human rights is a sine qua non element in the quest for the realisation of an inclusive discourse. Their interconnectedness also pertains to their elusive and contentious nature in an era of increased globalisation. In order to clarify and reinstate the ‘conceptual misappropriation’ of inclusion, it is important to acquire a cross cultural understanding of inclusion and the ways that it is interlinked with the notion of human rights within the wider context of a cultural, historical and socio-political system. Taking as a case study the island of Cyprus in the emergence of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the attempt is to explicate this interconnectedness and lay bare the ways that the linguistic and pragmatic misappropriation of inclusion is both the result and the consequence of the inability to establish a human rights discourse within the wider socio-political context of a nation state.*

## Cross-cultural research and inclusive education

**C**ross-cultural research is crucially important in order to understand the ideological, political and social dynamics that converge and have a direct or an indirect impact on the attempts for the realisation of an inclusive education discourse. It is extremely useful to learn about the variegated contextual socio-political and historical frameworks against which the struggles for inclusive education (Vlachou, 1997) are taking place to thereby acquire a cross-cultural understanding of inclusion. In so doing, it will be possible to reflect on our own policies and practices and be enabled to ‘think otherwise’ (Ball, 1998), thereby addressing the political and contentious nature of inclusion.

In attempting to follow Ball’s emancipatory and critical urge, it is crucial that we envision and conjure up inclusion as a matter of ‘cultural politics’, as an issue that prominently and unequivocally ‘speaks to the protection of rights of citizenship for all’ (Slee, 2001a, p. 173). In making the interconnections, it is undeniably important to investigate the wider context within which inclusion and human rights are conceptualised and struggled over.

Cross-cultural research is concerned with the descriptions and analyses of a set of countries with the aim either to draw some conclusions or to facilitate the

process of finding solutions of common problems among the various countries (Vlachou-Balafouti & Sideris, 2000, p. 28). Especially in the contemporary era of increased globalisation characterised by ethnic and conceptual barriers being gradually demolished, the acquisition of cross-cultural insights is essential if we are to understand the political and contested nature of inclusive educational policy and practice. As early as in 1993, the World Education Report of UNESCO put the following clearly:

‘At a time such as the present, when profound changes are occurring in the wide structure of global Economic, Social and Cultural relations, and the role of education in these changes is coming to be recognised as fundamental, all countries can only benefit from knowing more about the cultural premises of each other’s education.’ (UNESCO 1993; cited in Watson, 2001, p. 11)

However, before proceeding to the context-specific interrogation of the interconnectedness under scrutiny and its impact upon educational policy and practice, it is important to provide some information regarding the kind of cross-cultural research deployed in this endeavour.

Cross-cultural research can take many configurations depending on the focal point of analysis. It can refer to single national case studies, and it may be either descriptive or explorative. The explorative case study adopts a critical stance and investigates the ideological, political and cultural bases of educational policymaking. This kind of cross-cultural research can be simultaneously comparative, in the sense that it can compare different historical periods of a particular socio-political context (Sweeting, 2001; Watson, 2001). This would bring to the surface the incessant struggles over meaning and over the discursive constitution of educational policymaking. The diachronic dimension of cross-cultural research is an extremely important task in attempting to disassemble the contentious and thereby political nature of inclusion and lays bare its interconnectedness with the issues of human rights and social justice within particular historical periods. As Armstrong et al. (2000) so pertinently put it:

‘An historical awareness provides the basis for raising questions about definitions, policies and practices in terms of whose interests do they serve and what contributions do they make towards the development of a more just and equitable society ... Historical understanding cannot guarantee the development of a more just and equitable society, but through an informed awareness of past conceptions, perspectives and practices, it will hopefully enable us to ensure that the struggle for change is a continuous one (Giddens, 1986).’ (p. 4)

Evidently, inclusion cannot be adequately understood unless it is placed within a socio-historical context and analysed against that context and the ways that issues of human rights and social justice are conceived and addressed within it. The triptych that underlies inclusion cannot be other than the notions of human rights, justice and power. Power, which is at the centre of this network, refers to the variegated ideological and structural forces that impinge upon the constitution of this interactive and reciprocally interrelated triptych saturating the struggles towards the realisation of an inclusive discourse.

Thus, the task of the policy analyst is to unveil the wider context within which issues of human rights and social justice are conceptualised and bear a major impact on the attempts for the realisation of an inclusive discourse. First, it is important to see how human rights are conceived and concomitantly contradicted by the official rhetoric evinced in the current special education legislation, thereby exhibiting the ways that meaning is implicated in the service of power (Thompson, 1994). Second, the aim is to expose the ideological forces that constitute the hybrid context within which the struggles for inclusion and human rights are taking place – taking the case of Cyprus as an exemplar.

## **The current legislation and the struggles over meaning**

Ostensibly, the Cypriot government is zealously concerned with the promotion of children's rights, especially their educational rights. It is then pertinent to ask:

- To what extent does this concern include disabled children's rights?
- What kind of legislation underpins special education?
- To what extent is the legislation predicated on a human rights discourse?

The government, while extolling its legislative alignment with the other European countries, deploys rhetoric with great dexterity and enthuses its commitment to the protection of disabled children's human rights. Taking into consideration the related stipulations of the Salamanca Report (UNESCO, 1994), the government proclaims the following praiseworthy statements in the preamble of the current Special Education Law:

'For equal rights education and the avoidance of the creation of a restrictive environment for the exercise of their rights ...

Because the rights of the children with special needs are safeguarded by the international proclamations and conventions sanctioned, the Parliament votes the following ...

Because the state has responsibility for the children with special needs from their birth ... .' (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1999)

However, notwithstanding these government's laudable proclamations, a stipulation in Article 2 vividly transgresses disabled children's human rights. For while it is initially stated that the responsibility of the state starts at birth, this statement is unabashedly annihilated by this evasively, albeit lucidly, contradictory stipulation:

'child' means a person from the age of three until the completion of the education as this is indicated in the interpretation of the term 'special education'.' (Article 2)

These statements are the linguistic reminiscent of intense struggles that lasted for many years over the age of the disabled children at which the responsibility of the state starts. The first White Paper in 1995 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995) stipulated that the responsibility of the state should start at birth. This, however, was considered to be rather expensive. After a string of contestations and alternations of consecutive White Papers (see Ministry of Education and Culture, 1997, 1998), it was eventually agreed that the responsibility of the state should start at the age of three. The preamble, however, remained stuck to the 'at birth' stipulation. Not only did this reflect the perfunctory and contradictory nature of the legislative document and its constitution by the 'ideologically diverse discourse types' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 90), but also the avid desire of the government to retain and add more pomposity to its glossy rhetoric.

Notwithstanding the exaggerated rhetoric, the linguistic progress towards an inclusive lexicon is evident since the first Special Educational Law of 1979 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1979) that was separatist in philosophy and glorified the existence of special schools. Nevertheless, despite the linguistic progress, the linguistic and thereby conceptual reminiscent of special educational thinking is a recurring theme within the document. The proclamations of inclusion constitute only part of the hybrid discursive legislative document whereby disabled children's human rights are contingently and provisionally envisioned. As stipulated within the legislative document:

'The attendance of a child with special educational needs in special units or in a special school or elsewhere is forbidden unless the extent and the length of the attendance is decided according to the stipulations of the Law.' (Article 4.1)

Another interesting quote, which declares the provisional nature of inclusion and the disempowerment of disabled children and their advocates, is the following:

‘... in cases where it is judged that it is necessary to provide special education or part of it, in a place other than the mainstream classroom, it is stipulated whether and to what extent special education and education should be provided in special units or elsewhere ... .’ (Article 12.C)

The document makes explicit its advocacy of the existence of two kinds of education, and testifies in the best possible way its support for a two-tier system of education. So much is the document concerned with the possible placement of disabled children in special schools that it elaborates on the issue, and gives further details on the relevant procedures for the accomplishment of the abovementioned considerations. Thus,

‘In case that the attendance in a neighbourhood special school is not possible, the Regional Committee cares for the free transportation of the child to and from the [special] school.’ (Article 12.C)

Arguably, it could be suggested that the above stipulation merely reflects the intention of the legislator to prevent practical difficulties arising and to safeguard the child’s right for free transportation. Even if this is the case, however, it is still a deficit-driven concern instigated by the intention to provide all the statutory credentials for the placement of the child in a special school, according to the ostensible ‘best interests’ of the child. Concerns like these, which are enunciated in order to render inconspicuous the corrosive effects of power that are discursively conveyed through the legislative document, subjugate disabled children. On the contrary, the ‘productive effects of power’, as encapsulated and explicated by Foucault (see Marshall, 1996), aimed at the empowerment of disabled children are non-existent within the document. Nowhere are there stipulations detailing the processes and procedures in order to enhance the participation of disabled children within mainstream schools and to safeguard their rights towards this end.

In attempting to expose and explicate the prevalent discursive orthodoxies of the policy document, due attention should be also given to the ‘discursive absences’ (Stenson & Watt, 1999; Fairclough, 2000) of the text that have an equally pervasive bearing on the ways that disabled children are positioned and constituted within the legislative document. Foucault’s idea of *despositif* also encapsulates, albeit from a different perspective, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the discursive and non-discursive relations constituted by ‘the said as well as the unsaid’ (Gordon, 1980, p. 194). In the same vein, Slee (2001b, p. 114) contends that ‘in the absence of a stipulative language of inclusive education, inclusive schooling represents a default vocabulary for assimilation’ and thereby exclusion. Having said this, it is evident that the legislative

document is by no means saturated by a human rights discourse. Its linguistic ambiguity is the result of the uncommitted and perfunctory ways that the education of disabled children is interlinked to the notions of human rights and social justice. The inclusion of these children in mainstream schools should be primarily a commitment to reinstate their human rights as equally valued members of the society. Kenworthy & Whittaker (2000) are adamant regarding the imperative necessity to forge an explicit link between inclusion and human rights:

‘Those who promote ‘inclusive education’ must be convinced of the human rights foundation and be prepared to assert it plainly and publicly if there is to be genuine progress toward equality for all children and their families. By failing to assert the right of the individual child we undermine the credibility of the campaign for the human rights of all children. We cannot hide behind the ‘illusion of choice’ ... .’ (p. 223)

The unabashed violation of children’s rights is legitimated on the basis of ‘their best interests’. The ‘normalising technologies’ of power (Foucault, 1990, p. 18) are inconspicuously and evasively exerted through the ‘professional’ and ‘scientific’ calibration of children’s needs. Suffice it to say that almost half of the legislative document is concerned with the assessment procedures, the professionals involved and the multidisciplinary committees assigned, either on a regional or a national basis, to arbitrate the extent of children ‘deficits’ and their subsequent appropriate placement according to their perceived ‘best interests’. Understandably, the focus of the legislative document and, by implication, of the education system is on children’s ‘deficits’ and ‘needs’ rather than on their ‘human rights’. The individualistic gaze constitutes these children as ‘abnormal’ and ‘imperfect’, while their human rights remain obscured and contingent on a multitude of ‘disciplinary technologies of power’ (Foucault, 1977; cited in Core, 1998, p. 237) imposed by the iniquitous special education practices. Children’s differences and needs become the sole focal point around which the educational system is structured and organised.

In this respect, disabled children’s placement in mainstream schools, far from being regarded as a matter of entitlement, is contingent on the unfettered decision-making ‘regimes’ of professionals that are instigated, inter alia, by vested interests and economic concerns (Tomlinson, 1982; Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Rieser (2000), a disabled person himself, is explicit when saying: ‘Other people’s (usually non-disabled professionals’) assessments of us are used to determine where we go to school; what support we get; what type of education; where we live ...’ (p. 110). In this scenario, disabled children’s human rights become, as Rioux (2002, p. 214) writes, ‘privileges to be earned’ and parents’

concerns to reinstate their disabled children's rights are, according to a New Zealand father, perceived by professionals as if they are 'asking for the moon or expecting too much or whatever ...' (Ballard, 1997; cited in Lindsay, 2004, p. 375).

Unless it is conceptually established and clarified that disabled children are entitled to be given the same chances and benefits as their peers, inclusion will then continue to be misinterpreted and substituted by the historical imperatives of special educational thinking masqueraded under the banner of inclusion. Insofar as the notion of inclusion is contingent on an array of exclusionary ideological and institutional dynamics, it will never cease to constitute a rhetorical apparition, thereby only securing what Slee & Allan (2001, p. 17) call a 'ghostly presence' within all arenas of educational policymaking.

The Salamanca Report made clear, as early as in 1994, the imperative responsibility of the states to protect and enhance the rights of disabled children. It clearly states: 'Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 61). Disabled children's presumable 'needs' should therefore be re-directed to their 'need' to be viewed as equal and valuable human beings entitled to be included in mainstream schools and societies. Failure to conceive and articulate inclusion in these terms leads to its pragmatic and conceptual misappropriation. At the same time, this failure corroborates the historical imperatives of special education thinking that, under the façade of the scientific 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1977), continue to legitimate the incessant violation of disabled children's human rights.

## **Inclusive education and human rights: the wider context**

In order to investigate the wider context within which the struggles for inclusive education are taking place, it is crucial to see to what extent this context is conducive to the protection of human rights – not only in terms of disability, but also in terms of class, racism and sexuality. The education system of a nation state constitutes the microcosm of the wider socio-cultural context and it is inevitably influenced by the prevalent 'ideological orthodoxies' inherent in this context. As Arnove (2003) puts it:

'In order to understand, appreciate and evaluate the real meaning of the education system of a nation, it is essential to know something of the history and traditions, of the forces, attitudes governing its social organization, of the political and economic forces that determine its developments ... .' (pp. 8-9)

Evidently, the conceptualisation of inclusive education and its interconnectedness with the issues of human rights and social justice is contingent on the multicentricity of forces that constitute the discursive contours within which the struggles over inclusive education policy and practice are taking place. The discursive contours are construed by the ideological predispositions entrenched in a particular socio-political and historical context. Ideologies are the result of historical and political conjunctures that shape the idiomorphic characteristics of certain societies. It is through these characteristics that ideologies emerge and get reified, thereby playing a prominent role within the wider educational policymaking framework of reciprocal interactions and interdependencies.

One prominent ideology in the Cypriot context is the excessive ethnocentricity or nationalism that was the result of the prolonged occupation and colonisation of the island and the incessant attempts of the foreign intruders to ‘dehellenise’ or, in other words, to alienate the island from Greece. The dream of enosis (unification) with mainland Greece and the preservation of the national ideals was the main political and cultural objective of the island for many years. Mavratsas (2003) gives prominence and grumbles about the catastrophic impact of the nationalistic ideologies on the consciousness of the social subjects in daily life.

Not surprisingly, the historical reality of the island has led to ‘a closed and ethnocentric education system’ (Angelides et al., 2003, p. 64), as well as to a state with an underdeveloped democratic tradition and lack of the notion of citizenship. These concerns have severe implications on the ways that issues of disability, racism and sexism are addressed within the Cypriot context. The ethnocentric mentality disavows any forms of diversity that, as Mavratsas<sup>1</sup> (2003) writes, ‘is tackled primarily as a political or cultural problem that must be “fixed” ’ (p. 96). Angelides et al. (2003), for instance, write about the lack of a multicultural ethos within the educational system and the society in general. Similarly, as far as sexism is concerned, Westering (2000) criticises Cyprus for its discriminatory practices against women. The following excerpt is indicative of the current position of women in the modern Cypriot society: ‘... women face discrimination that denies them the ability to pass on citizenship to their children if they are married foreign spouses’ (Westering, 2000, p. 16).

Interestingly, the same discriminatory practice applies to the inheritance of the refugee status and its ensuing economic benefits. Women cannot pass on the refugee status to their children – something that, in diametric antithesis, stands true for men. The insular and bigot gender based discriminatory practices have become, in a way, naturalised and well entrenched in people’s consciousness. This is, presumably, the reason why they still remain unquestioned and unchallenged.

These institutional and ideological predispositions are also related to the lack of a strong democratic tradition in an island that has been long bedevilled by



colonialism and that has been constantly threatened in terms of the national and physical survival of its people (Mavratsas, 2003). Not surprisingly, one other related characteristic of Cypriot people, which is the direct result of the historical conjunctures and, in particular, the more recent Turkish invasion of 1974 and the ensuing political instability, is the feeling of fear. This transpires in daily life in Cyprus.

‘The Greek-Cypriots think that they are in a situation of endemic insecurity and uncertainty that occasionally endangers even their physical survival.’  
(Mavratsas, 2003, p. 135)

This fear is not unjustified if we consider the history of the island and the constant threat that its people felt from the foreign intruders who wanted to conquer the island. This fear is accompanied by strong ethnocentric feelings and a narrow-minded mentality. Understandably, these characteristics and the ensuing ideologies are not irrelevant to the ways that people in Cyprus regard ‘difference’. Cyprus is still struggling to establish and promote basic democratic values that go beyond the nationalistic concerns, which have inevitably monopolised the political scene so far. Writing about the absence of a democratic tradition and the undeveloped public sphere, Phtiaka (2003) argues that, by implication, the island lacks the potential to beget ‘a broader democratic discourse where debates can be held on such rights issues as equal opportunities, or access to education in terms of race, class, gender or disability ...’ (p. 143). In much the same way, Mavratsas (2003, p. 122) writes about the ‘hegemony of the politicians and the inexistence of the citizens’, thereby denoting the ‘uncivil’ Cypriot society, which is the result of the hypertrophy and centralisation of the state that unabashedly promotes and safeguards conservatism, favouritism and micro-political self-interests.

Again, while recounting the reasons for the creation of the University of Cyprus, Persianis (1999, 2000) attributes some of the above characteristics to the ‘great state legitimacy deficits’, that is, the inability of the state to instil credibility and acceptability among its citizens. This phenomenon, unlike in other states, is exacerbated by the idiomorphic circumstances under which the independent state of Cyprus was constituted in 1960. Under the imposition of the three guarantor powers – that is, the UK, Greece and Turkey – Cyprus was declared, according to the constitution, an independent two-ethnic community state. The existence of an unchanged constitution, coupled with the failure of the government to achieve a viable solution of the so-called ‘Cyprus problem’, exacerbated the state legitimacy deficits. By implication, the Cypriot state sought ‘compensatory legitimation’ by deploying ‘material gratification’ (Persianis, 1999, p. 53). This practice has inevitably given rise to nepotism and micro-political concerns. Simultaneously, given its fragile and neo-constituted substance, the state has adopted a

conservative and proactive stance to whatever has been presumably perceived as a potential threat to the precarious political stability of the island. As far as these endemic characteristics are concerned, it is also interesting to quote the following:

‘A direct result of this conservatism is that the Cypriot society appears to have very little tolerance to difference ... and pluralism ... The lack of tolerance to difference is also responsible for the big problems that the Greek-Cypriot society faces in the inclusion of foreigners ... Given the atrophy of the civil society, the fact that the Cypriot society is relatively closed, mono-dimensional, despotic, and also exhibits exclusionary behaviours and mentalities, should not be something to surprise us.’ (Mavratsas, 2003, pp. 151-152)

The state has also sought compensatory legitimization through education. This, as Persianis (2000, p. 38) contends, was supplemented by the psychology of a small state whereby ‘the intellectual arena’ is regarded as the only arena in which a small nation can compete on equal terms with rich and powerful nations. As a result, a highly competitive educational system was created that, notwithstanding its immense contribution to the island’s current enviable levels of prosperity, has concomitantly created a materialistic society characterised by wealth and over-consumerism (Persianis, 1996). Inevitably, a capitalist economic system has ascended whereby the market-driven forces emanating from it bear profound and multifarious effects on the constitution and dissemination of educational policy. Although this phenomenon is not unknown in the UK and other Western countries, it finds its distinct place within the mosaic of discourses that underlie and distinguish the Cypriot educational system (Phtiaka, 2003) to systematically marginalize and exclude disabled children in the process.

In addition to the above considerations, it is worth noting that the excessive nationalistic ideas, along with the persistent ecclesiastical influence, are not limited to the construction and preservation of a restricted and unassailable knowledge. They also extend to the construction of a powerful and penetrating charity discourse that directly affects the pursuit of an inclusive education system based on a human rights discourse. The charity discourse that permeates special education (Tomlinson, 1982; Drake, 1999) finds a resonance with the values of the Christian Orthodox religion that preaches compassion and charity. Prominent figures in Cypriot society find their engagement in charitable events for disabled bodies and minds as the vehicle for the promotion of their public image as philanthropists and good Christians (Phtiaka, 2003). Disabled people are viewed as objects of pity whereby the ‘disciplinary technologies of power’ (Foucault, 1977; cited in Core, 1998, p. 237) are evasively and corrosively imposed on them, thus leading to their disempowerment and demotion of human dignity.

This kind of charity discourse, far from facilitating the Christian principle of equality, paradoxically gives rise to the dominance of 'elitist models' by means of which disabled people are cunningly and evasively manipulated by certain 'elites' that are enabled to 'amass and concentrate power' (Phtiaka, 2003, p. 147) to the detriment of disabled people's autonomy and recognition of citizenship (Barton, 1993). Phtiaka (1999) talks extensively about the prevalence of the charity model in Cyprus and the massive success that Radio-Marathon, the indigenous charity fiesta for disabled children, has had since its incipient stages in the early 1990s. But while the state absconds from any responsibilities towards disabled children, government officials and other stakeholders hail with sanguinity the 'achievements' of the charity event.

The 'micro-technologies of power' imposed on disabled children are 'rationalised' and obscured by the economic benefits that disabled children receive. In this respect, disabled people are obliquely constituted as passive receptacles of the benevolent humanitarianism and fail to emancipate themselves from the 'technologies of power' and to engage with the 'technologies of self' that enable 'individuals to affect a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom' (Foucault, 1990, p. 18).

## **The dialectic of the local and the global: setting the agenda**

Living in the era of increased globalisation, it is also crucial to interrogate the dialectic of the global and the local, and to investigate the ways that the tenets of globalisation are infiltrated by the idiomorphic conditions of a particular nation state. By no means does the phenomenon of globalisation imply the 'homogenisation' of cultures and social identities across the globe. A more apposite metaphor of the changes abetted by the new state of affairs is the notion of 'glocalization' developed by cultural analyst Robert Robertson in 1995 that conveys reiterating 'the hybridisation and pluralisation of cultures-dominant cultural forms mutated by receiving cultures which globalisation make even more globally visible. A global melange ...' (Green, 2002, p. 10).

In this respect, inclusion (and the policies that surround it) is constituted within an amalgam of both local and global forces that are reciprocally interlinked and interrelated. Given the current state of affairs, the myth of the independency of nations is demolished in much the same way as is the myth of the independency of individuals. Paradoxically, however, the myth of the existence of competent individuals who would be given the incentives to flourish within a liberating socio-political and educational context has ascended. In this respect, concerns for

human rights, social justice and equity are increasingly superseded by market driven considerations.

Prominence is given to the market driven notions of competitiveness and the necessity to incorporate the notions of efficiency, effectiveness and quality within the economic, political and educational policies. Resources are directed at those who are deemed productive and competent individuals, and away from students with special needs (Barton, 1999; Apple, 2001a, 2001b). Indicative of the prevalent thinking is a report prepared by a committee assigned to evaluate the education system of Cyprus and to make suggestions for its improvement. The committee was explicit on the necessity to come to terms with the demands of the EU and to produce the necessary human capital that is arguably the single vital input to the economic, social and individual welfare of a nation state (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004).

Especially in a country like Cyprus, with a turbulent historical past and with limited physical resources, human capital is regarded as the most important factor for production (Press and Information Office, 2003). Consequently, these new policy imperatives are considered crucial if the island is to fulfil the demands of a competitive global economy. At the same time, given the idiomorphic conditions of the island and the underdeveloped political ethos of the people in Cyprus, the market-driven spirit of competitiveness encouraged by globalisation is expected to have a more profound and hence a more negative impact on the already utilitarian and materialist outlook of the 'uncivil', as discussed earlier, Cypriot society. Given the historical reality and excessive nationalism of Cyprus, Mavratsas (2003) talks extensively about the 'atrophy' of the Cypriot society and the cultural and material incommensurate development of the island that distinguishes it from the other European nations. It is interesting to quote the following:

'It is due to this cultural underdevelopment that the Greek-Cypriot society often appears with a face that leads to the Third World (with which the Greek-Cypriots consider to have no relation) rather than the European Union ... And given the economic development of the Greek-Cypriot society, (a development that, it should be stressed, has been achieved in the absence of a contemporary economic ethos), one could justifiably talk about a disproportionate cultural and material development.' (Mavratsas, 2003, p. 134).

The pressures and demands of a global system are likely to exacerbate the abovementioned concerns regarding the disproportionate cultural and economic development of the country, something that will probably further level down the cultural, social and political ethos of the island. The University of Cyprus can arguably be the counter force to these gloomy allusions and constitute the

impartial voice to critique and interrogate the social, cultural and educational 'pitfalls' of the system. Even though there still remains some scepticism regarding the role and contribution of the University in the Cypriot society, it remains to be seen whether the 'dialectic relationships' of the University (and, soon, of the universities) with society will vindicate Persianis' (1999) contention that these reciprocal relations will eventually 'act as catalysts in the societal development of the island' (p. 65).

Inevitably, the muddled contextual discursive reality evinced in the institutional, social and cultural edifice of a nation-state has a direct and profound impact on the process of inclusive educational policymaking that it is constituted amidst a discursive avalanche of contradictory considerations and interests. Taylor (2004) talks about the 'discursive multiplicity' in all levels of social life that results from the economic and cultural aspects of globalisation. The increased concern for efficiency and productivity supersedes essential matters related to values and justice that constitute pervasive technologies of power (Foucault, 1990) that might have a corrosive effect on the institutional, cultural and social edifice of the country. 'Multiplicity' is the discursive trademark characterising current inclusive educational policymaking. This is evinced both within and between policies that purport to address and reinstate the human rights of disabled children.

## **Epilogue**

Understandably, the phenomenon of globalisation and the tenets of the European Union, which can be characterised as a sub-product of globalisation, instigate distinct local responses (Crossley & Watson, 2003) and pose contradictory considerations and dilemmas to the educational policymakers of the various countries. This is especially true for Cyprus with its idiomorphic and intricately complex historical, political and social realities. The concerns emanating from the competitive global economy are mirrored in and constitute great paradoxes within inclusive education policies that even though they envision a more equal and just society predicated on a human rights discourse, they concomitantly perpetuate the status quo and the unequal power relations that work to the detriment of disabled children and their advocates.

Given the fact that globalisation increased the interdependency of nations, cross-cultural research is necessary in order to address common international problems and assume 'global collective action' (Green, 2002, p. 1) for their resolution. As far as inclusion is concerned, cross-cultural research is important if we are to make transparent and unveil the contested and political nature of

inclusion and the implications this has on addressing the issues of disability and human rights.

In this respect, it is important that we establish and explicate a clear link between inclusion and human rights. This can be achieved by acquiring a clear understanding of a human rights approach and its implications on inclusive education policy and practice within a particular socio-historical context. Unless this interconnection is forged, the individualistic gaze will continue to act as a pervasive technology of power leading to the oppression of disabled people. If we are to destabilise and ultimately dismantle the powerful circle that leads to the oppression and disparagement of disabled people, questions like the following should constitute the focal point of our critical inquiry:

- What is a human rights approach to disability?
- What actions are necessary in order to facilitate a human rights approach to disability?
- How and why are certain groups of people constructed as ‘abnormal’ and excluded within a particular socio-historical context?
- How can a human rights approach be applied in education policy and practice?

The research inquiry should be constant and continuous in much the same way as the struggles for inclusion and human rights should be. As the case of Cyprus vividly suggests, the inability to conceptualise the centrality of a human rights perspective in a democratic nation bears a major impact on the inability to conjure up inclusion as a matter of ‘political urgency and necessity’ that is unequivocally concerned with the reinstatement of disabled children’s human rights, not ‘needs’. We should bear in mind, however, that these struggles should take place not only in all ‘arenas’ (Fulcher, 1989) of a socio-political system, but also within the deepest ideological and structural ‘recesses’ of that system. In Cyprus, an amalgam of socio-historical conjunctures and exigencies, have multifariously encumbered the development of a fully-fledged democratic nation-state capable of safeguarding and promoting a human rights approach to gender, race and disability. It is, nevertheless, expected that the European orientation of the island, especially after its accession to the EU, will contribute to the emergence and proliferation of political, social and educational structures and processes aimed at ensuring that all persons are equal before the law irrespective of individual differences. Simultaneously, however, it needs to be noted that the European orientation of the island will act, in a way, as a two-fold sword in the sense that the market values, which patently prevail in the EU, will put more pressure on Cyprus to become more competitive and capable of ensuring continuing development under the siege of globalisation.

Understandably, given the inimical endogenous and exogenous dynamics impinging on policy constitution and dissemination, inclusion remains amiss both conceptually and pragmatically unless it is conjured up as a human rights issue not only for disabled children but also for all children. The catastrophic linkage of inclusion with special education should be immediately jettisoned, while at the same time the linkage of inclusion with human rights should be urgently forged and established in the minds of everybody as the first critical step towards emancipatory change (Barton, 2004) for a more just and equitable educational and social system for all. The conceptualisation of the historically, socially and culturally contingent nature of inclusion will enable both key policymakers and other people to ‘emancipate their thinking’ and leave behind the iniquitous ideological predispositions, fears and biases that jeopardise inclusion and have so far obscured and deflected the road towards emancipatory change through the reinstatement and enhancement of human rights for all.

## Note

1. All the direct quotes lifted from Mavratsas (2003) have been translated to English from the original Greek by the author.

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