

# Education and struggles for recognition: the strategic role of empowerment

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## 1. Introduction

Two decades later of intense and hard debates about multiculturalism, especially in countries with the most migratory attractiveness, the social conflict around recognition is still alive in the arena of public discussion and not just for that reason —the respect for the idiosyncrasies and cultural specificities of people and communities sometimes quite varied. The struggles for recognition do not end in these identity conflicts. The scope of the struggles is vast, as we begin to realise against the, not surprisingly, rekindling of the struggles for legal recognition of citizenship rights, which suffer the attacks from the neoliberal political project, especially after the financial 2008 *crash* and the consequent negative readjustment of living standards of many segments of the population in many industrialised societies of the North and South.

The downward review of citizenship rights, in particular those which relate

to labour and social security, is causing outrage amongst the affected populations, and education, being true to its legislative role of defending human integrity, at least since the dawn of Western modernity, cannot passively witness this situation. In this perspective, its agenda goes far beyond the formation of *human capital* and qualification for employment. It also includes, given the present circumstances, the active involvement in the struggles for the defence of the juridical person and his/her rights, helping in terms of empowerment all those men and women who resist the wave of insecurity and evanescence of these prerogatives throughout the world.

As first objective, there is a need to place education within the context of struggles for recognition, giving particular emphasis to citizenship rights, which today are weakening. Here, we should revitalise the Honnethian concept of struggles for recognition, making the specifi-

cally legal recognition autonomous as a means of respect for the integrity of the individual.

As second goal, we need to combine education with empowerment, since it is through the latter that education is best outlined as supporting actor in the struggles for recognition in the field of Law. Thus, our interest here is to make the controversy of senses surrounding this interesting relationship between education and empowerment come to the fore.

Finally, it is necessary to show how the strategic role of empowerment is structured in these struggles for the defence of the juridical person and his/her rights, when we witness with concern a certain evanescence, if not decline, of the *Age of Rights*.

Therefore, this article intends to: associate education to the struggles for recognition, especially regarding the citizenship rights that are more fragile today, summoning the «moral grammar of social conflicts» of Axel Honneth, and show how that empowerment, promoted by education, can acquire in such struggles an interesting role in order to mitigate, if not contain, the obvious erosion of certain rights essential to the integrity of citizens, especially those most vulnerable.

## 2. Education within the context of the struggles for recognition: the rights front

The growing commercialisation of education and its submission, apparently unopposed, to the logic of the labour market

and its supposed needs in *human capital*, even without obvious improvement in terms of job prospects in the areas most severely affected by the post-2008 crisis (Standing, 2014, 115), is leading us to forget that the normative agenda of education, at least since the spread of Enlightenment ideals of freedom and emancipation, is not confined to, let alone end with, this utilitarian dimension. Education is more than just the professional adjustment of people. It would be bad if education was limited to producing professionally «well-adjusted people» (Adorno, 1998, 96), which is what today is assumed as a priority in a number of neoliberal-oriented policies, especially in the countries most affected by the Great Recession of recent years.

The normative reconstruction of education –to use our own terms, which resemble and are inspired by the methodological strategy used by Honneth in his work about «the theory of justice on social analysis» (2014, 7)— makes, indeed, other aspects of this praxis come to the fore. It is not only the formation of *human capital* and the development of employability that provide it with a name and identity, but also the defence of freedom, emancipation and social integrity of the human being, at least since the dawn of modernity and, in particular, since the Enlightenment (Kant, 2003, 11), all necessary for the respect and esteem of an individual bearer of rights.

It is through the assertion of these values and ideals that education is associated with today's struggles on behalf of respect for the human being, despite an entire trend aiming at silencing

them through «various forms of public pedagogy» (Giroux, 2008, 240) with neo-liberal characteristics. What is at stake —using and applying the Honnethian critical social theory to education— is the involvement and active commitment of educational practices to the struggles for recognition. These struggles cannot be explained, according to the author of this theory (1995, 160-170), through the logic of pursuing both material and cultural and symbolic collective interests, but through a grammar that connects moral claims from the moment when recognition expectations are defrauded in three key spheres: in the intimate relationship sphere (love, friendship); in the legal relations sphere (law); and in the social relations sphere (social life and work).

These spheres, which shape the social and moral order of the bourgeois capitalist society, develop specific forms of recognition (affective recognition, legal recognition and social recognition) on the basis of the principles governing these spheres: love (affective recognition); legal equality (legal recognition) and social valorisation (social recognition). The normative expectations of individuals, groups and organisations consist in the proper and fair fulfilment of these principles in the different areas of human interaction. When that is not the case, individuals and collectives are (morally) discredited and humiliated, i.e. disrespected in their normative expectations:

«What motivates individuals or social groups to call the prevailing social order into question and to engage in practical resistance is the moral

conviction that, with respect to their own situations or particularities, the recognition principles considered legitimate are incorrectly or inadequately applied» (Honneth, 2003a, 157).

The lack of respect, in that sense,

«must be regarded as the motivational basis of all social conflicts: subjects or groups see themselves as disrespected in certain aspects of their capacities or characteristics because they have become convinced that the institutional practice of a legitimate principle of recognition unjustifiably fails to reflect these dispositions» (2003a, 157).

What the author tries to show, by combining philosophical reflection with empirical data management, and rejecting the unjust accusation by Nancy Fraser of a «recognition-theoretical *monism*» (2003b, 237) in the known controversy *Redistribution or Recognition?*, is that negative, partial or distorted experiences of social recognition represent, in fact, the «affective source of knowledge for social resistance and collective uprisings» (Honneth, 1995, 143). Therefore, social struggles are based on moral claims of social recognition. The grammar of these struggles is basically moral, even when we superficially observe an eventual pursuit for material and cultural interests (1995, 166). Moral motivation is at the heart of social struggles. These struggles are between suffering and recognition. When recognition does not take place, negative feelings arise —the shame of oneself— but also indignation as a reaction against this non-recognition order.

Even Paul Ricoeur, although directing some criticism to the Honnethian explanation of the struggles for recognition, in particular by omitting peaceful experiences of recognition, such as situations where there is a suspension of disputes (states of peace), does not fail to recognise that the motivation of struggles for recognition, and therefore of social struggles, is essentially moral:

«Experiences of peaceful recognition cannot take the place of a resolution for the perplexities raised by the very concept of a struggle, still less of a resolution of the conflicts in question. The certitude that accompanies states of peace offers instead a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory» (2005, 218).

What these experiences confer on the struggle for recognition, as in the very particular case of the gift experience, is the «assurance that the motivation which distinguishes it from the lust for power and shelters it from the fascination of violence is neither illusory nor vain» (2005, 246). As for the duration of the struggles for recognition, and despite some ontological doubts, this author also considers that «The struggle for recognition perhaps remains endless» (2005, 246).

With regard to the recognition category entitled *legal recognition*, which is what matters to highlight in the context of our argument, the denial of fundamental individual rights, or if we want, the exclusion of those rights are in this field the real reason of indignation and revolt. The

«Age of Rights» (Bobbio, 1996), inaugurated with modernity and, in particular, natural law, stated that all human beings have rights and deserve equal treatment in this respect. However, despite the discrepancy observed in many places, between *de facto* rights and *de jure* rights, the feeling of injustice is great when the «right to have rights» (Arendt, 2004, 378) is denied, not only in the most basic sense of belonging to a political community (Birmingham, 2006, 59), but also in the sense of ownership of «personal rights» (Ricoeur, 2005, 199), according to the traditional division into civil, political and social rights.

Without being an invitation to social unrest or mobilisation of the masses against certain states of affair, the Honnethian explanation of social struggles, regarding legal recognition, is a good starting point to understand the struggles for the defence of citizenship rights that today are multiplying worldwide, especially in contexts where the effects of the post-2008 recession are most felt, and these struggles are led, in no small measure, by movements and social actors whose self-understanding is sharply achieved in moral and ethical terms.

What is happening, and returning to the «grammar» of Axel Honneth, can be seen as an attack on the universal citizenship rights, especially social and labour rights; an invective that causes so much indignation amongst the populations most affected by the downward review of these rights. The attack on the subjective rights is not new. Since the late 1970s, at least, we witness the resurgen-

ce of the neoliberal political project in the governmental action of various countries, both in emerging market economies and in affluent economies.

If, on the one hand, the «dissolution of consensus, caused by the economic crisis of the 1970s, revealed the welfare states, the new Keynesian economics and citizenship rights' guilt» (Ferreira, 2014, 30), on the other hand, we cannot ignore an increasingly more problematic situation for these rights. Unfortunately, citizenship rights have become the preferred object of neoliberal assaults, a kind of barrier that we have to take down in order to, first, impose more personal responsibility for life paths and, second, to encourage, in the context of systemic crisis, the implementation of the flexibility that will lead to more competitiveness, more growth and more jobs. It is this increasingly radicalised ideology that is legitimising, without shame, the unprecedented attack on citizenship rights: first, on labour rights through precarious links between employees and employers, or the decrease of power of negotiation between them; and, second, on social rights, which are now subject to conditionality schemes stripped of universality, i.e. schemes that deny the universal nature of these rights according to established criteria, and redefined every time by social policies based on assistance.

The reduction of rights, particularly in these two areas, is equivalent to (and translates into) a loss of citizenship status, i.e. a transformation of people into *denizens*, that is, citizens of second or third category: «A denizen is someone who, for one reason or another, has more

limited range of rights than citizens do» (Standing, 2014, 23). The loss of citizenship status is another way of saying that we are increasingly pushed into a «bare citizenship» status (Appadurai, 2013, 118) —a seriously compromised full citizenship with rhetorical intensity in most national constitutional provisions of the current states.

What is very worrying, besides the fact that this «bare citizenship» ridicules «the most current constitutional documents and official governmental claims», as sharply noted by Appadurai (2013, 121), is the increasing generalisation of this condition more or less everywhere: «A growing number of people around the world lack at least one of these rights, and as such belong to the *denizenry* rather than the citizenry, wherever they are living» (Standing, 2014, 23). According to the latter, «The world is becoming full of denizens» (2014, 192), not due to a truly unprecedented transcendent force or a combination of diabolical forces, but because «Increasingly, the state is converting more citizens into denizens» (2014, 271).

The loss of citizenship rights is a disturbing reality, especially if we take into account the importance of the law as «source of protection and preservation of individuals' physical, mental and social integrity» (Ferreira, 2014, 420), all the more so when we are ontologically fragile and vulnerable. If the social structure in many places is producing vulnerabilities and worsening broad sections of the population, then the effective legal defence of people becomes essential to, in some way, safeguard decency and dignity. The issue

is how to set up that defence, because, as expected, it will not fall from the sky. An action will certainly have to emerge. However, it is not enough to want that action, we must be *empowered* to deal with it and effectively implement it. This is how the issue of ‘empowerment’ arises in social struggles for legal recognition, which is bound with greater or lesser intensity to an emancipating and liberating education in its normative reconstruction.

### 3. Education and empowerment: not all is consensus

As a «form of disrespect» in the sphere of law (Honneth, 1995, 134), the denial of individual rights and, ultimately, the pure and simple exclusion of that sphere, equivalent to Arendt’s «killing of the juridical person» in a man (Arendt, 2004, 376-378), is the necessary reason, though not enough, to trigger social struggles for recognition in various contexts. It is a necessary reason, because it provides the impetus for these struggles through the feelings of injustice and outrage, the result of frustration of normative expectations in this area, i.e. expectations according to which we are all worthy of rights that protect our integrity as human beings. However, it is an insufficient reason, because the silent revolt against this offence –denying one’s rights– is not enough. We need, as Honneth stresses (1995, 163), «to publicly articulate and demand restitution for the disrespect and violation that they experience as being typical». A struggle for recognition only truly becomes a struggle for recognition when «personal experiences of disappointment» can be interpreted as «something affecting not just the individual

himself or herself but also a circle of many other subjects» (1995, 163-164). Therefore, the social struggle for recognition «stemming from the socially critical interpretation of commonly shared feelings of being disrespected», especially when this is atrophied or eventually denied for unjustifiable reasons, is to be understood as «a practical instrument with which to assert a claim to the future expansion of patterns of recognition» (1995, 164).

The question of *agency*, i.e. the ability to act in the sense described above, and possibly beyond, is something that arises in the struggles for legal recognition, because we cannot deepen this recognition, both «on the plane of an enumeration of personal rights defined by their content» and «on the plane of the attribution of these rights to new categories of individuals or groups» (Ricoeur, 2005, 198-199), with no claiming capacity and actions well conducted in the constituent areas of the public sphere.

The privatisation of dissatisfaction with regard to the denial of rights, stemming from a «massive individualisation of responsibility» in various fields of activity, such as paid work, but not limited to (Honneth, 2014, 248), certainly complicates the socialisation of the claims and the process of resistance to this denial of rights. In any case, and this is an aspect that probably we cannot get around, there is hardly any quarrel or dispute over legal recognition outside the *agency* of people that structure human collectivities, i.e. of authors and actors that are eventually involved in this fight. Therefore, it is necessary to combine education with empowerment, as the latter, promoted and

assumed by education, is better able to enhance the ability to act, reinforcing the personal powers of critical interpretation of reality and other resources, and the powers that eventually support a struggle in favour of the satisfaction of normative expectations within the rights that are more fragile today, namely the economic and social citizenship rights.

The strategic involvement of education with empowerment needs to surround itself with some caution, since empowerment, although literally meaning more power or increase of power, is a disputed concept in the spectrum of existing policy guidelines, thereby giving rise to interpretive disagreements. In light of the research conducted by Bacqué and Biewener (2013, 15-17), and systematising their contributions on the conceptual clarification of empowerment, there are epistemological advantages in envisioning this notion of empowerment in three types or models: radical or full empowerment, because it corresponds to the practice of organisations and movements that consider, in the multiplicity of their dimensions, empowerment as power acquisition aimed at emancipation and social transformation; social-liberal empowerment, pertaining to the reformist thinking of the welfare state; and neoliberal empowerment, very dominant in today's discourses and practices of ultra-liberal governmentality.

In the first model, empowerment is both an individual and collective process whose goal is to help individuals to conduct their lives and also to emancipate, where —in line with the social transformation theories of Paulo Freire, or the

more radical branches of the feminist movement— carrying out a process or dynamic of «awareness» as part of a process of action is important: «reflect to act, and this real ability to act is fundamental for an empowerment intervention» (Pinto, 2013, 53). Based on an awareness of social oppression, inequalities in the distribution of power and resources, the notion of empowerment aims at enabling individuals and groups to increase the «power to act» (Le Bossé, 2003, 45), in the sense of being competent to influence the allocation of social resources and the highly political definition of the legal system governing common life. Thus, for this purpose, we combine critical awareness with the critical and political engagement of individuals and groups.

The empowerment in question, as a whole, combines three dimensions: the individual or personal dimension, designating the process that allows each individual to develop critical awareness and their ability to act, thus implying the construction of a positive image of himself or herself, the acquisition of knowledge and skills that promote a critical understanding of the environment, the development of individual resources and the development of strategies to achieve personal and collective goals; the interpersonal, organisational or collective dimension, designating the development of the ability to act in collaboration on people and resources of the environment; finally, the political or social dimension, which raises the question of the transformation of society through collective action, especially when not satisfying the normative expectations of its members in some of its spheres.

Corresponding to reformist views of either democracy or regulation and management of public assets, the social-liberal, or left-wing liberal, model of empowerment does not go as far as is desired by the empowerment, advocated by feminist organisations and popular movements in the affirmation of the political nature of this process. The empowerment discussed herein certainly values the strengthening of the subject's powers, including the power to make multiple choices and life choices, such as resist or not the humiliation of their juridical person. However, it does not question the structural dimensions of the asymmetries or inequalities that ultimately hinder many opportunities.

The social and political dimension of empowerment, when present, is only considered, as underlined by Bacqué and Biewener (2013, 94), in the «sole perspective of making institutions more representative and promoting the reform of public policies, helping to build coalitions around this commitment». Therefore, even if it focuses on the qualification of the subject towards more democratic forms of approach to public things, valuing the social capital, responsibility, inclusion, citizenship and participation, the social-liberal empowerment is politically faint-hearted and significantly attenuates the radical direction of the first empowerment model, since it does not give due importance to the questioning of power differentials that are the basis of 'disempowerment' of both vulnerable people and groups.

The depoliticisation of empowerment and the consequent neutralisation of its

range is particularly visible in neoliberal empowerment. As a project of power or skill reinforcement, this empowerment is strictly individual. It consists, first of all, in individual accountability actions, aimed ultimately at 'self-help' (Bacqué; Biewener, 2013, 45), i.e. at the care and assistance of oneself. This perspective of empowerment refers to individuals who must take care of themselves: individuals, as bearers of the ability to act, are expected to deal with adversity and rise to the circumstances, making appropriate choices and not blaming anyone, except themselves when things do not go well. Therefore, being empowered means to be provided with the skills that enable us to individually confront the issues that arise in the various spheres of human interaction, whether of material resources or of moral humiliation. The emancipating promise of empowerment, in its full version, is placed in brackets herein. What matters is to empower the individual to strengthen its resilience to adversity, without pondering, even for a moment, the organisation of social struggles against the structural causes of many setbacks, as might be the case, in light of what we have been analysing –the social decrease of citizenship rights by ultra-liberal and neoconservative governmental policies.

We can therefore infer that empowerment, despite always meaning change, modification and transformation in terms of power or ability to act, does not necessarily mean the same in its different types or models. This should be kept in mind whether when we see education as empowerment, i.e. as strengthening action of 'agencies' of people and especially



disadvantaged groups, or when we want to outline, for guidance and pedagogical reasons, the role of empowerment in today's struggles in the legal sphere and within the recognition of rights.

### 4. The strategic role of empowerment in the struggles for legal recognition

In the light of the interpretive framework of Bacqué and Biewener, empowerment leaves us with a bittersweet feeling. If, on the one hand, it may be interesting to enhance the social struggles for legal recognition, in the Honnethian sense (Honneth, 1995, 164), on the other, it also generates some confusion, given the political connotations of the concept, and not only in the versions most notoriously politicised, as the radical or full versions, but also in all other versions or interpretations, as the left-wing liberals and those that now dominate the references to empowerment: the managerial and neoliberal versions (Bacqué; Biewener, 2013, 136).

The neutralisation of this confusion, even if difficult to fulfil, given the shaky ground on which it will have to be set, is important because not every empowerment can play an important or strategic role in social struggles for recognition. It is worth mentioning that these struggles, especially in the citizenship rights front, are demanding and challenging for the involved subjects, whether because the context is not very receptive to legal claims of certain nature, as is the case of social and labour rights in the context of the post-2008 «Great Recession» (Stiglitz, 2012, 191), or because these struggles, based on feelings

of injustice and experiences of disrespect, according to the «moral grammar of social conflicts» of Axel Honneth (1995), invariably put to the test the subjects' skills: first, because the individual subjects need to structure their claims «in an intersubjective interpretive framework» (Honneth, 1995, 164-165) in order to fulfil, at group level, these requirements; second, because the success of the struggles is inseparable from the ability to act collectively and in an organised manner in a given socio-political context.

Therefore, the question we put forward, given the constraints, is to know how that empowerment can play a strategic role in the struggles for legal recognition and under what interpretation or model.

A minimally clear answer encompasses several elements. First, empowerment with this function or role cannot forget the eminently political nature of social struggles for recognition of rights. The legal system of a country, a nation state, on which the recognition of individual citizenship rights depends, is a political construction that greatly depends on the forces involved. To enlarge «the terms of recognition» (Appadurai, 2013, 234) in a given society implies redefining the legal system and eventually transform society as a whole. When unleashing a struggle for legal recognition, both to defend rights as well as to expand them, we start a political «battle» for new ways of living together, with more respect and more esteem, because the normative expectations of citizens in a legal system of democratic law are based on that equality. The problem, of course, is when there is a *de*

*jure* equality and not a *de facto* equality. However, in this case, the restoration of parity between one and the other depends on essentially political struggles.

Second, empowerment with political, but not doctrinal, sense of social struggles for legal recognition needs to include the personal and interpersonal dimension of these struggles, i.e. the awareness that we must act both individually and collectively so positive results can be achieved. If giving rise to indignation and outrage, from the individual perspective, for the disrespect and humiliation experienced is important, little would matter if these emotional reactions did not give rise to collective actions of protest and change of the *status quo* —as difficult it may be to take this step because of the growing individualisation of social protest, consequence of the «blame mechanism of individuals» (Ferreira, 2014, 239) in the current neoliberal and socio-political settings. To be significant or decisive in social struggles for legal recognition, empowerment needs to assume, and be consequent in terms of programme, this double nature (individual and collective) of the struggles for law.

Third, the change intended with empowerment, basically aiming at, and according to Le Bossé (2003, 34), «individually or collectively increasing people's ability, influencing their reality according to their aspirations», means to assume that this change presents two equally necessary aspects: individual resources (cognitive skills, belief in oneself, self-esteem, participation, the ability to imagine alternative futures and articulate a voice of protest, amongst others), and collecti-

ve resources (the existence of possibilities for individual and collective actions, conditions of access and use of services, the availability of appropriated funds, for example). While having a decisive role in the struggles for legal recognition, as well as in the context of denial and exclusion of rights, empowerment needs to deal with both these aspects whether to avoid forgetting structural changes related to the modification of structural conditions, or mainly to trigger, amongst the people involved, their qualification in terms of skills, i.e. powers to act in the environment where their struggles take place.

Considering individual resources as the cornerstone, without falling «in the self-empowerment mirage» (Le Bossé, 2003, 42), i.e. the idea that individual change is enough so that people's aspirations come true, we should briefly define the major areas of this practice. There are synthetically three major areas of empowerment practices that are significant to the social struggles for legal recognition.

First, the cognitive empowerment, which consists, on the one hand, in the strengthening of the power of understanding of the social realities that affect people's lives, including the differentials of rights that create subordinate relations and indignities, and, on the other hand, in the development of a critical awareness as a preliminary step to a transforming and emancipating action, whether in the form of «awareness» (Freire, 2000, 36), or in the form of «consciousness raising» (Bacqué; Biewener, 2013, 69), despite the difficulties of access to the growing complexity of social systems.

A second area of the empowerment practice that makes the latter relevant in the struggle for legal recognition, and that complements the work performed in the cognitive empowerment area, is what we call, based on the conceptualisation of Nelly Stromquist (1995, 8), psychological empowerment, i.e. the action to strengthen the belief of the subject in himself/herself and improve his/her self-esteem and self-confidence in order to believe that, despite the antagonistic forces and invalidating powers, a fairer and more respectful social order of human integrity is possible. Empowerment, in this case, which seeks to suspend the person's disbelief in himself/herself, in their possibilities and abilities, leads to improved self-image and to an expanded horizon of possibilities. In this latter sense, it is important to focus on strengthening the «ability to aspire» (Appadurai, 2013, 237), i.e. on strengthening the power to imagine alternative futures and other possibilities.

Finally, the political empowerment gives shape to another, no less important, area for two reasons. First, because it is essential to the politicisation of legal issues through the enhancement of political interpretation of these issues, especially when dealing with offences to the basic rights of people in the form of short-term ideological justifications, such as the emergency policies in response to the deficits and public debts crisis in a considerable number of countries. Second, because political empowerment is seminal in the generation of power without which a collaborative, lucid and critical engagement is not possible in the change

of legal systems that are responsible for the instability, insecurity, suffering and fear of living of a growing number of people around the world, as we have already evoked based on the important study of Guy Standing (2014) —*The precariat: the new dangerous class*.

What is expected in this third empowerment area is the strengthening of the political *agency* of citizens or its political jurisdiction, concerning both the literacy on legal issues and the active participation in the struggles for modification of the terms of recognition in which it encloses.

The way these three areas of empowerment can be promoted by education amongst individuals and communities is something unresolved and largely depends on the specific circumstances: «It always requires the modification of a specific reality with the help of clearly identified actors, following ways that vary according to the contexts» (Le Bossé, 2003, 35). In any case, and in light of the good examples recorded in the work of Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo (1995) —*Women, education and empowerment*— we can always state that the required pedagogy requires the active participation of specific persons, respect for their culture and knowledge, horizontal relationships, rejection of paternalism, discussion of problems, the community of discourse and learning, awareness workshops, the enhancement of existing skills instead of blaming or disclosing weaknesses, cognitive or epistemic respect, i.e. to take seriously the way people see their world, and also the cognitive participation —the right to

participate in defining the situations object of intervention, as the case of a struggle for legal recognition.

Ultimately, it is worth mentioning that empowerment cannot develop in this way if it does not arise in the sphere of full empowerment, as promoted since the late 1970s by feminist groups and popular movements in Europe, America and in South Asia. This empowerment is defined as the process by which social actors «develop a *social awareness* or a *critical awareness*, allowing them to develop an *inner power* and acquire action skills, a power to act individually and collectively, which is a part of a social change perspective» (Bacqué; Biewener, 2013: 8).

## 5. Conclusion

When we dramatically state that «the sun is setting on the *Age of Rights*», and that there is no need of data to support such conclusion in the present situation of globalisation (Zolo, 2012), this is certainly not good news for those who are more exposed to factors regarding life insecurity, as the implementation of the «gospel of flexibility» (Standing, 2014, 41) in the sphere of work, with the consequent deregulation of labour relations and the decrease of social benefits in situations where they are most needed, such as unemployment, illness and retirement.

We are effectively witnessing an erosion of universal citizenship rights, which triggers, in many places, struggles for the replacement of such rights, if not for their extension, and this, as demonstrated by their normative reconstruction, cannot be

ignored by the liberating and emancipating education. This is how education was connected, in this text, to the struggles for legal recognition and how we advanced, with appropriate specifications, the idea that the best way education can help these struggles is to be connected to a radical or full empowerment, the only practice that is able to strengthen the powers to act on itself and on the environment, and release the *voice* of those discontent with this situation of disrespect for the most basic citizenship rights.

Empowerment, promoted by education, can have a strategic role in the struggle against the denial and exclusion of rights, at a moment when denizenship is increasing worldwide, i.e. citizenship of second category, which does not include all the associated rights (from civil and political to social and cultural rights).

Therefore, we can conclude that empowerment, when properly considered by education, in accordance with this article, can be viewed as the *spearhead* and as a barrier against a certain return of the Hobbesian state of nature, even in small formats, and not as dramatic as in the past when we tried «killing the juridical person in a man» (Arendt, 2004, 376-378).

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### Summary: Education and struggles for recognition: the strategic role of empowerment

The struggles for recognition, focused on cultural and identity issues until recently, are returning to public arenas in the form of struggles for legal recognition, precisely when we are witnessing, in the context of the post-2008 economic recession, a downward review of citizenship rights, in particular social and labour rights. This article discusses this issue by: first, associating education to the struggles for legal recognition, using the «moral grammar of social conflicts» of Axel Honneth; second, showing how education, connected to empowerment, may have an interesting role in the qualification of social actors involved in these struggles; third, defining the major articulations of this educational role in terms of empowerment. The article concludes by demonstrating the strategic role of empowerment, when promoted by education, in the struggles against the recession of subjective or citizenship rights.

**Key Words:** Education, struggles for recognition, empowerment, Honneth, social rights.

### Resumen: Educación y luchas por el reconocimiento: el papel estratégico del empoderamiento

Las luchas por el reconocimiento, centradas hasta hace poco en aspectos culturales e identitarios, vuelven al dominio público en forma de luchas por el reconocimiento legal, precisamente cuando estamos asistiendo, en el contexto de la recesión económica posterior a 2008, a una revisión a la baja de los derechos de ciudadanía, particularmente de los derechos sociales y laborales. Este artículo aborda este problema: primero, asociando la educación con las luchas por el reconocimiento legal, en base a la «gramática moral de los conflictos sociales» de Axel Honneth; segundo, mostrando cómo la educación, conectada con el empoderamiento, puede desempeñar un interesante papel en la cualificación de los actores sociales involucrados en estas luchas y, en tercer lugar, definiendo las principales expresiones de este papel de la educación en términos de empoderamiento. El artículo concluye demostrando el estratégico papel del empoderamiento, cuando es potenciado por la educación, en las luchas contra la recesión de los derechos subjetivos o de ciudadanía.

**Descriptor:** Educación, luchas por el reconocimiento, empoderamiento, Honneth, derechos sociales.