TEACHING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

By

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I hereby declare that all the data used in this work, have been obtained and processed according to the rules of the academic ethics as well as the laws that govern research and intellectual property. I also declare that, according to the above-mentioned rules, I quote and refer to the sources of all the data used and not constituting the product of my own original work.

Theologia Michalopoulou

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Abstract

The present MA thesis investigates Human Rights Education (HRE) through film in Secondary Education in Greece. The research follows a group of twenty students attending an English class in the Second Grade of a private Senior High School in Thessaloniki. The study aimed at bringing several human rights issues to the foreground with the help of movies, on which the students produced presentations and other projects. The students' reactions as well as their contribution to approaching human rights violations were recorded in the form of a diary, following the demands of the field of ethnography in education. The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate change phenomenon are the main issues approached from a human-rights perspective. The gap between legal, and moral obligations of Human Rights and the reality of their inapplicability in practice is a recurring issue, along with the impact of the economic and political neoliberalism on social inequalities. The class ethnography postulates a multi-faceted and complex picture of how adolescent students understand human rights as relevant or applicable in their lives.

1. Anthropology, Human Rights and Anthropology, and Anthropology of Education

It was 1948, three years after the WWII had ended during which human rights violations were systematically committed, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), to restore the damage caused by the war and vow "to never again allow atrocities like those of that conflict to happen ever again" (United Nations, 2021).

Several nation-states participated in this process which aimed to establish conditions of fruitful collaboration among them. The United Nations have defined human rights as those rights that are "inherent to all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status" (United Nations, 2021). However, even though the idea of human rights is based on the perception of the world as humanity, each nation-state joined the discussion having their own political agendas in mind.

Anthropologists' initial lack of involvement in human rights was attributed by scholars to various factors that could be summarised in the fact that anthropologists were interested in addressing the cultural particularities of different communities and their right to be preserved, keeping in mind that "different rights take precedence in different cultures" (Messer, 1993, p.223). This view came in contrast to the notion of human rights as a universal phenomenon which was blamed by anthropologists for being "ethnocentrically Western" thus disregarding the socio-cultural characteristics of various cultures and posing the danger of loss of identity of those communities (Messer, 1993, p.224).

Moreover, their apparent non-involvement with human rights was attributed to anthropologists' interest in and engagement with analysing socio-cultural and moral issues in a smaller scale rather than dealing with the larger-scale issues and legal frameworks that human rights' analyses entail (Messer, 1993). This is what Theodore Downing and Gilbert Kushner (1988) describe as a "moral and political minefield" that anthropologists were at first reluctant to face (p.1).

Nevertheless, evidence points to the opposite, as anthropologists have clearly and actively expressed their interest in human rights and have indeed pushed forward the discussion on human rights. They have advocated for the inclusion of collective and

indigenous rights in the human rights agenda, while their engagement with fieldwork has brought forward various human rights abuses and has contributed to their resolution (Messer, 1993, p.222). To name just a few such attempts, Thomas (1980 in Cook, 2003) contributed to the North Carolina Lumbee tribe's efforts to access federal recognition, while Lurie (1955) advocated for Indians' land claims. Finally, anthropologists' engagement with advocacy proves their involvement in the legal aspect of human rights, despite their initial marginalization and exclusion from such processes (Messer, 1993).

Barbara Johnston (2000) acknowledges the contribution of anthropologists from various disciplines (from forensic to medical anthropologists), highlighting that they are "immersed in human rights-related struggles and continue to struggle with human problems, arguing for basic rights, fighting battles, and occasionally winning" (p.39). Essentially, the interplay between anthropology and human rights has enriched both fields and contributed to their development. At the same time, Jane Cowan (2006) argues in favour of anthropologists' engagement in the development of a forum "in which theoretical debates about rights, justice, citizenship, and similar concepts could engage with empirical contextualised studies of rights-claiming processes" (p.9).

Cowan's (2006) work has enriched the analysis of the relationship between culture and rights, emphasising four conjunctions between the two concepts. "Rights versus culture" is the first, which resembles the "universalism versus cultural relativism" debate. For universalists, human rights should be the same for everyone and be enforced in the exact same way, regardless of the community in which someone belongs. On the contrary, according to cultural relativists, the way human rights are interpreted should be in accordance with the values of each culture.

The end of the 20th century was chracterised by the decline of socialism. This period signaled the emergence of numerous states inside which, at times, native populations became minorities in their own lands, while large groups of the population found themselves living outside the borders of their own country, sharing no common elements with the "locals" (Fisher, 2013). Underlining the anthropological take on human rights, Cowan (2006) addresses the "right to culture" – the second conjunction – in the context of which indigenous populations are given voice to claim their position and rights inside nation-states in this post-socialist era.

In the context of the “rights as culture”, the third conjunction, anthropologists approached rights as going hand-in-hand with cultures, existing inside cultures and not in a vacuum, giving rise to the notion of “human rights culture” (Rorty, 1986; Bobbio, 1996). The laws regulating human rights started being perceived as part of culture while human rights themselves were no longer considered an abstract philosophical notion, and thus became a point of interest for anthropologists (Cowan, 2006). Finally, the fourth conjunction, “culture as analytic to rights”, encompasses the notion that “rights could be grasped through methods of and orientations to cultural analysis” (Cowan, 2006, p.10). The fact that human rights are not considered to be constituting culture is essentially what distinguishes this conjunction from the third.

At the same time, anthropologists have made significant contributions to the field of education. Education is formed based on the demands of each society and its institutions and the socio-cultural contexts that have shaped it. To understand this connection between education and society, we will briefly analyse the contributions of two important scholars, Luis Althusser and Basil Bernstein.

The French Neo-Marxist Louis Althusser (1972) introduced the notion of “Ideological State Apparatuses”, examples of which are the school and family. Ideology is the tool by which such state apparatuses function. He comments that “[t]he School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple” as the primary means of control and dissemination of the established ideology (p.154). Therefore, schools have undertaken the task of “distilling, propagating, and reproducing basic ideological forms and comprehensions of society”, particularly in Western cultures (Comitas & Dolgin, 1978, p.166).

Indeed, educators and students enter the classroom with a set of prejudices formed by society and reproduced in the context of the classroom (Sotiropoulos, 2002). Students from every social group would eventually leave school to enter the work force having learned and carrying with them the necessary ideology that would ensure the perpetuation of the ideologies of the system. From the labourers who would leave school first, to the leaders who would be the last, "[e]ach mass ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfill in class society" (Althusser, 1972, p.105). This idea is in fact closely connected to the work of the famous British sociologist, Basil Bernstein.

Investigating the connection between students' social class, linguistic choices, and academic and career prospects, Bernstein (1964) introduced the notions of restricted and elaborated codes. The former entails a reduced "range of alternatives", while the latter calls for "a wide range of syntactic alternatives" (p.57). He supported that working-class students were more prone to using a restricted code, whereas middle-class students would turn to an elaborated code. His research proved that students' socio-cultural background and the class in which they belong affect their lexical and syntactical choices and impact their academic development. Therefore, it appears that both scholars managed to prove the inter-relation between education and society.

This perception of schooling as a cultural process is the basis of the connection between anthropology and education (Wolcott, 1967). Simply put, from an educator's perspective, we make the (un)conscious choice to teach the way we do because we belong in societies that follow certain norms that oblige us to educate the younger generations so that they can do the same in the future. This is the answer to the main question that anthropology of education has tried to investigate, namely "how and why do human beings *educate* the way they do?" (González, 2010, p.249).

This interplay between anthropology and education is thus established on notions of "power, knowledge, and identity" in the context of contemporary globalised, transnational, and multi-cultural societies in which various (non)dominant groups are trying to maintain or establish their cultures by means of educating their members based on their traditions, ideologies, and demands (ibid, p.250). Therefore, anthropology has provided education with access to diverse educational traditions, presenting the reality of the classroom as the researcher experiences it (Sotiropoulos, 2002).

Doing ethnography in classroom is a value that anthropology of education has adopted from anthropology (Bartlett & Triana, 2020). The characteristic of ethnography in the educational context in specific is that it includes a long-term engagement and close observation of the members of the school community and their activities leading to a detailed description of their culture (Burgess, 1981). The ways the members of the school community interact with each other, the social hierarchies established among them, the values each of the members contributes to the community and the ways in which those values have been shaped and managed to influence the school environment

are among the issues that an ethnographer working in the field of anthropology in education is focusing on.

Paul Willis' (1977) work has been a vital contribution in the field. He analysed the everyday reality of a group of male students in a British secondary school, their interactions with each other and with their community, and their unwillingness to conform to school rules. Echoing Bernstein's observations which we have previously analysed, Willis' ethnographic research proved that schools operate in such a way to prepare working-class students for working-class jobs, proving that students' social background affects their educational and professional future.

In the context of my research, the twenty students attending the class taught by me holding the three-fold role of teacher-researcher (the peculiarities of which will be analysed in the following sections) became the focal points of the research. Delving into how this class is organised and held together, and how each of its members functions, contributes to a better understanding of secondary school communities in general and the ways in which the outside world affects how adolescents' views and values are shaped and re-shaped. As adolescents experience life and absorb more and more stimuli, they enter a process of re-evaluation of the world around them and the norms it entails.

For instance, one of the students in the present study narrated an encounter with a few older Greek men verbally harassing a Muslim woman. Placing that in the wider context of racial discrimination in the Greek society, helped the student who had the experience – as well as his classmates who were exposed to it through his account of the events – engage in a fruitful conversation on the roots of discrimination against Muslims in Greece and the ways in which this phenomenon can be eliminated.

At the same time, watching and engaging with human rights movies gave students a glimpse of different cultures and the values that regulate them. For instance, dealing with the depiction of family relations in *Incendies (2010)*[1] encourages student-ethnographers to draw similarities and differences between the relationships presented in the movie and those of their own environment. Similarly, the students are trying to interpret and draw cultural connections between the way African American citizens are

[1] The film *Incendies (2010)* follows the story of two siblings who travel to the Middle East in an attempt to discover more about the history of their family.

trying to get a voice in the movie *Selma (2014)*[2] and the way in which people of colour are treated in modern societies, including the Greek.

This cultural interchange has taken up a key-role in the comparison between ethnography and translation. Talal Asad (2020) supports that social anthropologists often use the metaphor of translation to shed light to their role and clarify the connections and differences between ethnographers and translators. Even though he has criticised the practice for being subjective and fostering power relations between the ethnographer-translator and the source-culture, this does not confute that ethnographers need to employ translation to explain the ways in which different cultures think and operate. In a similar way, the students in the present study needed to translate the images and cultural messages they received from the movies they worked on and depict them in a way that would help their classmates understand the connection to their own realities.

This chapter has presented an analysis of the issues of human rights, their connection with anthropology, as well as the interplay between anthropology and education and the ways in which ethnography was implemented in the present research. The following sections delve into an analysis of Human Rights Education, setting the basis for the development of the course for the purposes of the research at hand.

[2] Dr Martin Luther King and his followers' march from Selma to Montgomery resulting in the 1965 Voting Rights Act is the main topic addressed in the movie *Selma (2014)*.

2. Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education (HRE) has been defined by the Council of Europe (CoE) as the "educational programs and activities that focus on promoting equality in human dignity" (Council of Europe, 2021). The CoE is regarded as "the continent's leading human rights organisation", comprising member-states from around the globe, including all the members of the European Union (CoE, 2021). The promotion of western and Eurocentric ideology has characterised its agenda since its establishment in 1949 by prosperous states which had come out of WWII victorious.

More recently, the CoE's Eurocentric view was reflected in its Group of Eminent Persons' Report (2011) supporting that "European societies need to embrace diversity and accept that one can be a hyphenate European" (p.34; Osler, 2015, p.247). Although it appears that the organisation deems the promotion of multicultural societies important, the reference to a "hyphenate European" reflects a desire of assimilation, the view that *you are welcome, as long as you fit in our "European" identity*. In fact, every state requires its citizens to abide by certain rules and ideologies that would ensure the uninterrupted functioning of society and the formation of its identity.

More specifically, being a citizen of a state entails being exposed to a set of dominant values and ideologies promoted by the state through public education. In Althusser's (2006) words, "the school…teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology*" (p.88). Thus, letting the state handle education had led primarily to systems of schooling that focused on and overemphasised national pride. Knowing their glorious national history and its superiority over that of other states had been the purpose of every national educational program.

However, the end of the Cold War and the peace and security it brought along shifted the public's attention to issues such as education, human rights, and their interconnection (Andreopoulos, 1997). This Post-Cold War era found scholars advocating for more liberal educational systems, favoring civic education (Ramirez et al., 2007). In this newly emerging globalised society, humans are citizens of the world, who feel the need to be educated about their rights (Ramirez et al., 2007, p.36).

HRE is essentially a three-dimensional concept, comprising of issues concerning learning *about* human rights, learning *for* human rights, and learning *through* human rights. The first relates to learning what human rights are and

developing “[a]wareness and understanding of human rights issues” (Compass, 2020, p.36). The second, learning *through* human rights, has to do with the recognition that “the *process* of learning is as important as the content of the learning” (Compass, 2020, p.19). Finally, learning *for* human rights, entails the development of “[s]kills and abilities to fight for and defend your own and others’ human rights” (Compass, 2020, p.36).

Moreover, HRE entails learning through exposure, experience and learning *in* human rights, as HRE is not merely something that can be taught, but rather something that requires active involvement and participation (Compass, 2020). When conducted properly, its outcome should be the adoption of a new lifestyle, one that inspires young citizens to get actively involved in the promotion, respect, and support of human rights.

Nevertheless, and regardless of the underlying socio-political agendas, the Council’s contribution to the promotion of HRE has been vital and undeniable, even if it has not always been successful. The latter is true, as even though the value of HRE is recognised by all states, the application of its principles is hindered, since evidence has showed that human rights are not equally applied to all students, while states avoid openly addressing minorities’ human rights, thus complicating or impeding the educators’ actions and desire to help establish a school community based on respect and equality (Tsoukala, 2019). This discrepancy has been highlighted by Decara (2013) and Osler and Lybaek (2014) who focused on the situation in Denmark and Norway respectively, depicting that although the value of HRE is undeniable, it usually oversees minorities’ rights.

Turning our focus on HRE in the Greek educational context, we can consider that it does not differ a lot from the practices taking place in the afore-mentioned countries, with the state recognising the value of educating students on human rights issues, though taking limited and at times disappointing steps towards this direction, as it will become obvious in the next section.

Founded in 1936, the “Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR) is the oldest human rights organisation in Greece”, showing the Greek state’s intention to address human rights consistently as far back as the previous century (HLHR, 2021). Among the most prominent attempts of the Greek state to promote a more inclusive educational system is the establishment of minority schools in Western Thrace to cater for the

linguistic and religious needs of the Muslim minority in the area and support their right to education in their own terms. Upon request of representatives of the minority population in the 1990's, graduates of secondary minority schools were given the opportunity to be enrolled to a Greek university of their choice at a percentage equal to 0.5% of the total number of enrolled students (Zachos, 2020).

Nevertheless, researchers suggest that such steps did not manage to improve intercultural communication; instead, they exacerbated the gap between the majority student population attending regular schools and the minority students (Soulas, 2019). Thalia Dragonas (2013) attributes the failures of the system to the peculiarities in the functioning of minority schools with two separate curricula that "[obey] no educational criterion whatsoever" (p.4).

In the years that followed, Greece welcomed immigrants from various countries. More specifically, in the years between 1991 and 2000, a great number of immigrants arrived from neighboring countries such as Albania and countries that used to belong to the Soviet Union, while from 2005 onwards Greece started welcoming immigrants from Africa (Soulas, 2019).

However, the values promoted in the Greek educational system highlighting the need to establish and maintain "one nation, one language, one religion" failed to set the ground for the development of an inclusive schooling system that would be based on the values of interculturalism (Christidou-Lionaraki, 2001, p.49). Education was seen as a tool of the state to achieve national homogenisation and to consolidate its power (Tarlami, 2020). In other words, the Greek state recognised migrant students' right to education, though the main problem with the way it dealt with their learning needs during that period was that it oversaw their linguistic and cultural background and focused solely on their assimilation in the Greek society.

More recently, and since 2015, Greece has been placed in the centre of attention, when an unprecedentedly large number of refugees and migrants started arriving in the Eastern-Aegean islands shaking the norms of the "traditional" Greek society and rendering the issues of inclusion and embrace of multiculturalism pressing, while exacerbating the inadequacies of the Greek educational system to live up to the expectations emerging from the newly established multicultural society (Soulas, 2019).

Multiculturalism is by no means a new phenomenon, as it had been brought to the foreground since the 1990s in Greece (in Europe since the 1960s/1970s). Nevertheless, since the beginning of the financial crisis in Greece, multiculturalism started being associated with xenophobia, which was exacerbated by the rise of far-right political parties. Such extreme ideologies had existed for decades, though after 2012 they managed to enter the political scene and gain legitimacy. In that context, multiculturalism was seen as a threat to the ethnocentricity and "purity" of the Greek society and its education system, with human rights issues being blatantly neglected in the Greek educational curriculum. This becomes even more obvious in secondary education, during which students go through major changes that contribute to the formation of their personalities as active citizens.

Researchers have also emphasised the absence of an organised human rights curriculum in the Greek educational context that would transcend the simple transmission of knowledge and incorporate actual experiential learning and emphasis on life skills (Gidiotou, 2016). The adoption of such a curriculum would not, of course, imply that multiculturalism and HRE should overshadow national identity (Tarlami, 2020). On the contrary, it would be a positive first step towards the establishment of an educational system that embraces diversity and welcomes pluralism.

Particularly in the secondary level, the Greek educational system focuses primarily on preparing students for their admittance to higher education and their introduction to the labour market. It is essentially based on the principle of "overwhelmingly seek[ing] to create the economically competent or adaptable worker, not the democratic or intellectual citizen" (Levinson, 2005, p.329). Therefore, particular emphasis is placed on passive memorisation of facts that would enable secondary school students to succeed in their national end-of-school exams that would help them claim a position in a university of their choice.

At the same time, attention to the promotion of life skills and moral values is limited or even neglected under the pre-text that such skills have already been instilled in students in their primary education years, overlooking that developing life skills that would encompass human rights values is an ongoing process which becomes even more important once students reach adolescence. For this reason, it is vital for the

introduction of a subject focusing on the development and promotion of such values to become a priority.

Addressing human rights issues should become the core of a subject and not merely an essay topic for the subject of Modern Greek Language or a topic of conversation on the relevant international day to be addressed quickly and then forgotten until the next year. And, if introducing a new subject altogether seems impossible, then at least initiatives should be taken by teachers to develop curricula to which human rights issues would be an integral part, as is the case in the present case study.

3. Methodology and Ethnography in the classroom

The study attempts to investigate the best practices which can be used for the instruction of human rights-related issues in the context of the subject of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in secondary education. To this end, a class comprising of twenty 16–17-year-old students participated in the design and implementation of a course directed to adolescent students.

The present study took place in the context of the subject of EFL offered to students attending the second grade of senior high school. The class is taught twice a week, with each session lasting 45 minutes in compliance with the national curriculum. Though not the norm in public schools in this grade, the private school at hand gives the students the opportunity to choose the English class they would like to attend. The first option is a "traditional" class preparing students who wish to sit a certificate exam at the end of the school year, while the second option is directed to students who are interested in preparing to study at a university abroad. Finally, the third option is a Project class taught by the researcher.

Project-based learning (PBL) has claimed a lot of positive attention during the past few years, as it is a primarily student-oriented teaching method, i.e., it aims at bringing the students at the center of the learning process, shifting away from the traditional view of the teacher as an authority (Shin, 2018). Its focus is on helping students develop a sense of autonomy and acquire knowledge by being actively involved in the process of finding it and reaching their own conclusions. Moreover, evidence has showed that such an instructional technique "has a positive influence in students' motivation and is able to enhance their cooperation skills" (Shin, 2018, p.95).

What is important to keep in mind is that the school year during which the study took place was characterised by a series of lockdowns in an attempt to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdowns and curfews, all educational procedures were taking place online, thus it became necessary for much of the material to be adjusted for both face-to-face as well as distance learning. The same was true regarding students' project-creations, the majority of which were designed online even during the periods of face-to-face instruction to prevent any problems occurring due to unexpected shifts to online learning. At the same time, it was my desire to expand the material's accessibility by focusing on making them in online form.

Following the aforementioned demands of PBL, the student-centric approach that was adopted became evident in the present research through the students' extensive involvement in every step of the process. From participating in the decision on the human rights movies to be dealt with, to fully undertaking the design of their projects with minimal supervision, and finally to engaging freely in discussions on the issues addressed in the movies the students were the protagonists of the project throughout the process. Nevertheless, the choice of "human rights" as the main topic was not an easy decision to make. To understand the process better, some background information is necessary.

I was hired to teach English as a substitute teacher to students aged 12 to 17 at the beginning of the school year 2020-2021. Teaching in a school – let alone a private school – with large groups of students was a new experience for me, as my previous working experience involved small afternoon classes in private language schools. I was welcomed with great enthusiasm and kindness by both my colleagues and the fellow English teachers, with the latter paying particular attention to providing me with all the necessary guidelines and information I needed to teach the classes I was given.

Their guidelines varied from practicalities such as which books to use, where to find complementary material, how to have access to the interactive white boards' software, to the more theoretical issues related to the students' educational and family backgrounds, possible behavioural issues, and tips on how to approach the students who were shy or had a hard time socialising. Extended meetings took place at the beginning of the school year to inform me on those issues about each class separately.

Nevertheless, it soon came to my attention that there was a particular class on which I was given no information or guidelines on how to handle. Discussing the issue with the head of the English department, our dialogue went somewhat as follows:

"It's a project class, let them do projects."

"On what?"

"Doesn't matter. Most of them won't do anything anyway. They've all either sat their exams and passed so they're done with English, or they've failed, so they're not interested. Just try to keep them busy."

Keeping a class of twenty 16-year-olds busy was bound to be no easy task, and even though I managed to get adequate information on their educational and behavioural background by my colleagues, I considered it impossible to spend an entire year doing projects on "anything". My concerns were confirmed a few weeks into the school year and after the students had already been bored working on meaningless projects on sports, singers, and others. Turning once again to my colleagues for guidance, one of them suggested having students work on movies.

For most of us, movies have been a part of our life from a very young age as a source of entertainment. Describing his experience with sneaking into cinema theaters in the 1950's, Giroux (2001) emphasizes that "[o]nce we got inside the theater we were transported into an event" (p.584). For him, it was an opportunity to access "a source of knowledge that, unlike what [they] were privy to in school, connected pleasure to meaning" (ibid, p.584).

Undoubtedly, entertainment is among the main aims of the film industry, yet films are much more than that. They have the power to "[offer] up subject positions, [to mobilise] desires, [influence] us subconsciously" (ibid, p.585). This realisation has helped the promotion of film as an educational tool that is powerful enough to affect students' way of thinking, since it is "not entirely contaminated by the void of formal schooling" (ibid, p.585).

The vivid imagery, music, and gestures of films can challenge the stiffness of the written text and liberate from the devoid of imagination traditional curriculum, providing the opportunity to pass on invaluable life lessons in a relatively subtle yet powerful way. For instance, theorising issues related to racial discrimination becomes much more powerful and meaningful when approached through a movie such as *Selma (2014)*. For this process to be successful, the students need "not just 'to see', but to 'see through'" the film (Snead, 1994, p.131).

To understand the latter statement, one needs to keep in mind that "[l]earning through aesthetics – in which cinema is included – stimulates learner reflection" (Blasco et al., 2011, p.174). The powerful impact of movies lies in their ability to "[trigger] disclosing emotions, [which] allows questions, expectations and dilemmas to arise" (Blasco et al., 2011, p.175). Indeed, movies are a source of storytelling through

which learners have the chance to expose themselves in familiar or less familiar situations and reflect on the characters' actions and motives.

Moreover, from a strictly pedagogical perspective, students who are taught through the use of movies present improved performance, since research suggests that "films increase the level of success due to their high motivational force and power to enhance detention" (Yakar, 2016, p.138). Among the greatest advantages of the use of movies in an educational environment are the "[c]ultural transfer, personal development, enjoyable learning environment, and suitability for distant education" (Yakar, 2016, p.138). The latter advantage appears to be particularly important, especially in the Covid-19 era during which all educational procedures were conducted online through distance learning.

At the same time, the cultural benefits that learners enjoy as a result of their exposure to various cultures and mentalities through films is closely connected to the importance of using movies especially in language classes. Yalcin (2013) emphasises that "films are windows into culture" and, since culture is an integral part of every language, language learning can help students understand and appreciate foreign cultures, embrace intercultural understanding, and eliminate stereotypes (p.265).

Nevertheless, the value of movies has not always been recognised by scholars. The debate on the "cultural value of motion pictures" began during the interwar period (Pattison, 2006, p.3). Representatives of the Frankfurt School condemned the promotion of such a "mass society" (Nealon & Irr, 2012, p.33). Such a society was characterised by the proliferation of mass-produced cultural products aiming to establish a society of "uniformity and homogeneity of needs, thought, and behaviour", leading to the death of individualism (Nealon & Irr, 2012, p.33). In that context, movies, and particularly those produced in Hollywood, were condemned as products designed for public consumption by the "lower masses" (Giglio, 2002, p.53).

Scholars have argued that the primary aim of the movie industry is to provide entertainment and not to serve as an instructional tool (Champoux,1999; Engert & Spencer, 2009; Metzger, 2010). Nevertheless, Daryn Bevan Egan-Simon (2020) supports the use of movies as educational tools highlighting that "it is wrong to dismiss the film as an educational tool simply because it has been created to entertain" (p.77). If anything, managing to combine entertainment with fruitful reflection and even

engagement in action should be considered among the greatest accomplishments of movies, as will be further analysed in the next section.

Another argument supported by critics of the use of films in educational contexts is the risk of approaching the latter with passivity, as the students are bombarded by a large assortment of images at such a speed that they have limited time to react and critically process what they are being exposed to (Broström, 2002). However, regarding students as passive recipients of stimuli would be an unfair representation of a generation that is emerged in modern technology and is capable of multitasking from a very young age and process the huge amounts of information they are exposed to.

The last concern on the implementation of movies in the class is related to the doubt as to whether students would be in position to appreciate films as a serious pedagogical tool and not "as a respite from more traditional pedagogical methods, such as reading and writing" (Egan-Simon, 2020, p.77). In any case, a great deal of responsibility to inspire students and instill the necessary respect for the process is entrusted to the educators.

And so, I welcomed the idea of focusing on movies with great hopes, though the same question as before kept circulating my mind: on what? What would be an interesting topic to work on through movies? And how could this be interesting to both me and a group of students who had joined this class thinking that they would need to do next to nothing to pass?

The idea to work on human rights movies came to me one evening as I was re-watching the movie *Not without my daughter (1991)*[3]. The movie has been severely criticised for its Orientalist agenda and subjective presentation of events happening in the protagonist's life (Mugerle, 2013). Nevertheless, watching the struggles of Betty, the protagonist, gain a voice and defend her rights against the profoundly patriarchal society that wanted her and her daughter to be submissive and docile, almost invisible, I started contemplating on how familiar those teenage students were with what is happening around the world and the forms that human rights violations are taking.

[3] The movie follows the struggles of Betty Mahmoody, an American citizen married to an Iranian, trying to escape Iran with her daughter.

I took the chance in one of the classes to talk a bit about this movie and, seeing that some of the students had watched it or read the relevant book, I was surprised to see their eagerness to discuss such social issues. Slowly, the idea to design a course that would be based on analysing movies that address human rights issues started consolidating and took form during the second term of the school year.

"Human rights films" have been defined as "the films that reflect the actual state of human rights violations, or the visions and aspirations as to the ways to redress those violations", with truthfulness being their most prominent characteristic (Bornkhorst, 2004, p.8). This justifies their use as advocacy tools by human rights activists aiming to raise awareness, foster understanding, and push for policy changes (Richter, 2016).

The production and dissemination of ethnographic films and the birth of visual anthropology, which focuses on the study of such productions in an attempt to understand the cultures filmed as well as the cultural background of those who engage in ethnographic filmography, are vital in that context and help bring such issues to the attention of a broader audience (Mullick et al., 2019; Vallejo, 2017).

Tascón (2016) highlights the value of the interplay between human rights and films emphasising that it "[injects] new possibilities for both fields – for human rights to be imagined outside of their strictly legal frames…, and for films…to have another site for exhibition" (p.258). And, if this "site" is a classroom, then human rights films can expand their field of influence even more. Indeed, movies have proven to be invaluable HRE tools, due to their familiar nature, as well as the fact that they can evoke emotions and engage viewers without letting them feel exposed or threatened (Blasco et al., 2011; Burres & Harding, 1997).

Educators' preference towards movies that address important human rights-related and social issues can be justified by the latter's ability to address complex issues in a pleasurable atmosphere (Duzhyk, 2019; Özensoy, 2019). Essentially, once the appropriate film is chosen, there is no need for formal instruction or detailed analysis of the issues addressed. Films can also promote students' understanding of the impact of human rights law on everyday life (Hamblin, 2016). Indeed, given the appropriate context, students are able to appreciate the film while contemplating the messages it promotes and developing feelings of empathy towards a large variety of human rights issues, more or less relevant to their own lives.

Nevertheless, the process of watching a human rights-related movie is not based on the relaxation and enjoyment one may expect from the experience of watching any other film genre. On the contrary, it requires commitment to the UDHR values (Collins, 2017). To ensure such a commitment, it is vital for students first to become familiarised with it and understand its importance, which is something that was taken into careful consideration during the designing process of the case study, as will be further analysed in the next sections.

Undoubtedly, the endeavour to bring human rights to the foreground of education comes along with a series of difficulties and obstacles, as "HRE is a dynamic area of work that invites self-reflection and the recognition that human rights are evolving…and can even be in conflict with one another" (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011, p.2). Such realisation brings forward the difficult role that educators are called to play once they undertake the process of incorporating a focus on human rights in their curriculum.

Research has suggested that prospective teachers are in need of training that specialises on the implementation of human rights education in class, as they feel inadequately equipped to address such issues (Cassidy et al., 2014). This inadequacy is based upon trainee-teachers' insecurity about their knowledge on the matter and their ability to handle students' and parents' expectations, highlighting the need for specialised training on HRE (Cassidy et al., 2014; Soulas, 2019).

In fact, it became obvious quite early in the present research that I needed a lot of work to become adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge to teach such a course focusing on human rights. Becoming familiarised with the necessary terminology (such as UDHR) or – to a lesser extent – the legislation (for instance the law under which the Greek state abolished the death penalty) was undoubtedly a tedious yet necessary task. At the same time, having designed and studied the material does not always entail successful transmission of knowledge to the students nor does it always mean that I was in position to provide answers to human rights-related questions they were expecting me to have deep knowledge on. More often than not, promising that "I will check and get back to you" was proven the best strategy.

At the same time, ensuring an environment of respect and harmonious co-existence among students has generally always been among educators' primary goals.

This becomes even more evident when teachers are trying to promote human rights understanding. Moreover, educators are tasked with additional responsibilities, namely, those of the facilitator, coordinator, and supporter of the educational process, stepping away from the role of mere knowledge-provider (Soulas, 2019).

The present research is a case in point, as I undertook a number of roles. Designing the course and coordinating the projects while supporting students in their research with respect to their boundaries and keeping in mind the importance of letting them work on their own in the process of discovering knowledge and forming opinions was definitely hard to manage. Nevertheless, the hardest part was adding the role and responsibilities of the ethnographer in the overall process.

Ethnography is generally defined as “a qualitative methodology that lends itself to the study of the beliefs, social interactions, and behaviours of small societies” (Naidoo, 2012, p.1). It is the ethnographer’s job to become part of that society, experience, and observe it closely. Essentially, ethnography entails “experiential learning through participation” in the sense that the ethnographer participates in the lives of the community members they investigate, observing their lifestyle and engaging in interaction with them through more or less formal interviews (Bartlett & Triana, 2020, p.3).

Nevertheless, observing the small society of the class in the context of the research was no easy feat. The active involvement in the class-community that is required by the ethnographer at times clashed with the impartiality and distance required by the researcher, particularly when the latter is tasked with the additional role of the educator, whose job is – ideally – to guide students to the search for knowledge but not intervene in their process of finding it. Therefore, maintaining the three-fold role of teacher-researcher-ethnographer included delicate balancing from my part and at times contradictory approaches.

The complexity of human rights instruction is exacerbated by the fact that they constitute a “hot” topic and promote a certain view of life, which at times could clash with the students’ or their parents’ beliefs. Being “neither politically nor culturally neutral”, human rights promotion could be met with reactions and doubtfulness, while

the teacher becomes this “dangerous public [intellectual]” entrusted with the responsibility to challenge the status quo (Skoumpi, 2013; Tsimouris, 2012, p.32).[4]

Inspiring students’ respect, trust, and understanding towards themselves, their classmates, but also the educational process became a high priority while trying to steer clear of moralistic clichés and preaching about respect. Designing and implementing the course aimed at developing critical thought that would render students capable of realising the notion of human rights and the ways in which it affects every aspect of daily life, as well as their shortcomings and misconceptions (Skoumpi, 2013). For those reasons, the present research suggests the use of movies.

Participants’ profile

The study presented in this paper was conducted during the second term of the 2020-2021 school year, during which the participants attended the second grade of Senior High School in a private school in Thessaloniki, Greece. The class comprised of twenty (20) students, the majority of whom were male (16 students), while the remaining four were female.

Despite the lack of homogeneity in the students’ sex, their socio-economic background was rather homogeneous, with all of them being Greek nationals, raised in upper-middle-class families. With the exception of one student who was enrolled in the school at the beginning of the school year after having been transferred from a public school on the other side of the city, the rest had known each other for many years and had established close relationships.

Prior to the beginning of the schoolyear, the teacher-researcher was unknown to the students. She had been informed about the profile of the group by colleagues who had taught this class in the past, highlighting that the students are very outspoken and at times opinionated. This was proven during their engagement with the course, as did

[4] Even though my experience teaching adolescents about human rights in this study was quite “safe” and met with significant appreciation, there were times in which I had to hold back from addressing some hot topics for fear of polarising the classroom. For instance, one of the “hot” issues addressed in class was homosexuality. Some of the students’ strong opinions on the “unnaturalness” of open displays of same-sex relationships signaled the delicacy of the issue, particularly considering that one of the students is a member of the LGBTQ community.

the rhetoric skills that some of the students possessed as a result of having attended rhetoric and debate afternoon clubs in their junior high school years. Overall, the students had a strong sense of ethics and a clear moral compass, while their opinion on several social issues was already formed as a result of personal research.

The girls in the class were quite vocal regarding women's rights and had very strong opinions. Three of them were literature enthusiasts, having read several books and developed an understanding of the world that was quite mature for their age. They had taken part in feminist marches, while one of them had volunteered in the A21 Campaign against human trafficking, distributing pamphlets and participating in the "Walk for Freedom" campaign in 2019, marching in the centre of Thessaloniki to raise awareness for human trafficking.

Among the boys, there was one who portraited themselves as "sui generis", passionately supporting LGBTQ rights outside the classroom, though being a bit reluctant to express themselves equally loudly in the presence of the rest of the group, and particularly the rest of the males. Many of the latter were interested in foreign politics and social issues and seemed to have done great research on the American socio-economic system and had strong ideas about many of the former US presidents and their actions on "hot" issues such as immigration, gun possession, intervention in the Middle East etc. One of the boys had a musical inclination and was aspiring to become a professional rapper. He had already written and recorded some of his songs and used rap music as a way to express how he felt towards various issues that the Greek society faces.

Regarding the students' level of familiarisation with the English language, the class was of mixed abilities which was used as the means of instruction, communication among students, and development of their projects. This lack of homogeneity in the students' level of English was a factor that I had to take into consideration during the process of designing and adapting the material used in class, as well as providing the necessary support to students depending on their linguistic needs.

Diary keeping as an ethnographic tool

Throughout the present case study, I was taking careful notes in the form of a diary. It is quite common for teacher-researchers to "engage in ethnographic work [using] diaries" (Burgess, 1981, p.75). Nevertheless, using diary entries as research data comes along with a series of shortcomings and difficulties, among which is accepting the inevitability of partiality (Hall, 2008). The commonly shared assumption that a diary is something personal containing delicate information that is not to be shared publicly implies that it brims with subjective interpretations of the events described.

This becomes even more evident when the events are narrated by a person holding the double role or teacher and researcher thus being actively involved in every aspect of the study. Knowing that, and in order to make right judgements to students' voice, I tried to incorporate verbatim phrases or even short dialogues conducted in class, as my aim throughout the study was to comprehend, engage, and introduce students to the human rights discourse. We spent an entire schoolyear sharing thoughts and experiences, discovering, and stretching our limits. However, I tried my best to ensure that what was said in class, no matter how extreme or politically "incorrect", was transferred in my diary unaltered.

On the other hand, ethnographic research involves "the study of informants, their actions and their activities as they occur", something which entails technical difficulties when the research is conducted in the context of a classroom (Burgess, 1981, p.78). Any teacher could attest that it is practically impossible to observe everything happening in a classroom, let alone be in position to keep notes that would be detailed and relevant enough to constitute part of a research. Besides, this is why the field is in fragments and this is created to a great extent by our presence. Indeed, at times, trying to attract students' attention and ensure their participation and cooperation with me and with each other while making notes and trying to "catch" everything they were commenting proved to be a herculean task. On top of that, even though the students were old enough to be able to discipline themselves and follow basic classroom rules (e.g., not using mobile phones. respecting their interlocutors etc.) there were moments in which I had to add imposing discipline to my already long multitasking list.

Soon, I started feeling like I could use some help, perhaps an assistant who would undertake the task of making notes while I would be engaging in discussions

with students and monitoring their work. However, for lack of such help, I opted for the second-best option, namely keeping brief notes during the lessons, and then taking advantage of breaks and free periods immediately after the lesson to write detailed diary entries in order not to forget anything important. My colleagues have often commented jokingly that they can only recognise the top of my head, as I always had my nose buried in a notebook whenever I got the chance.

This diary containing the observations that, to my honest view, are the most worth mentioning shall be presented in the next sections. The value of the diary in the present case study lies on its ability to provide for a source of reflection on the events taking place in the class, the students' reaction towards them, and the experiences and values that influenced those reactions. At the same time, it was a useful tool to contemplate on the activities conducted in the class and how they were welcomed by the participants. It was essentially a medium of addressing what went right and what not and finding ways to improve the former and remedy the latter. Finally, incorporating direct quotes from the students' contributions to class discussions provided a better understanding of the participants' values as those were shaped by their experiences, and the social structures of the group.

Lesson plans and materials

In the context of the study, a series of lesson plans and learning material were designed by the teacher-researcher. The study begun with the distribution of a short informal questionnaire (Appendix A) through which students' background knowledge, feelings, and views towards human rights were examined. Each aspect was approached with five statements presented in Likert scales. The scales included five points, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for the students to express their level of agreement/disagreement with each statement. The questionnaire was anonymous and distributed online via Google forms. Its aim was for me to develop a clearer idea of the students' familiarisation with the issues they were to be taught, in order to proceed with the course design.

Upon completion of the questionnaires, a series of introductory lessons took place, familiarising students with the concept of human rights, their definition, the UDHR, and the recurring debate between universalism and cultural relativism. The instruction of human rights in the context of the Project-based EFL class at hand was conducted through the use of a variety of famous Hollywood movies.

Each movie was carefully chosen keeping in mind three main factors. Those were the appropriateness of the movies, their accessibility by the students, and – more importantly – the range of the human rights issues they raised. The first factor relates to the students' age which was taken into careful consideration, as some of the movies included scenes that were appropriate for more mature audiences. In any case, I was available throughout the study and willing to discuss any issues raised by both students and their parents regarding the contents of the movies chosen, though eventually no concerns were raised.

At this point, it would be important to mention that, even though it had been my intention to actively involve parents throughout the process of working on the case study, this eventually did not happen. The main reason behind this rather unconscious reluctance to ask for parents' involvement was the fear that they may not be interested or available to dedicate time and energy to such a project. At the same time, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the school abstained from organising its monthly parent-teacher meetings. The latter were conducted by phone, i.e., any parents who were interested in speaking to any of the teachers were free to contact them by email and arrange a phone call. And, particularly considering that the students were in their final years of high school, their parents were mostly interested in contacting the core subjects' teachers. Despite the convenience of such a practice, it eventually led to most parents being unknown to me.

Moving back to the movie choice process, the second factor relates to the ease with which students were able to access the movies. The limited time available (two 45-minute sessions per week) required each student to watch the movies assigned in their own time. For this reason, it became imperative very quickly that the students have the means to watch the movies at home. Some of them I provided in DVDs, while others were accessed by students through popular streaming services such as Netflix.

In the same context, and to ensure accessibility, attention was paid to make sure that only Hollywood movies were included in the list. This led to the exclusion of a significant number of human rights films though it increased the chances of students having easy access to the movies, especially during the lockdown periods, during which face-to-face communication with me or with each other and exchange of material was impossible.

Analysing the different types of films, Bronkhorst (2004) makes a distinction between "documentary films" and "feature films". The majority of those chosen in the context of the present study belong to the second category, as students gaining access to documentary films presented greater difficulty. A leaflet was distributed to the students containing a list of suggested movies as well as the next steps to be taken. Each student was asked to choose the movie they would like to focus on. It was made clear that the list was open to adjustments and additions, therefore the students were free to choose a movie they want, provided that it was appropriate for the context and the aim of the course, as well as their age.

The students' choice of movies was eventually based on their personal preferences and experiences. For instance, a student who is a member of the LGBT community decided to focus on the movie *Milk (2008)*[5], even though it was not part of the original list. Some of the girls were also actively involved in feminist initiatives by taking part in demonstrations and writing on the school newspaper relevant articles, something which encouraged one of them to opt for movies such as *He named me Malala (2015)*[6]. No restrictions were placed in the cases in which the students had already seen the film of their choice or had read the book to which it was based. This was true, for instance, with the film *Not without my daughter (1991)* which was added to the list upon request of one of the students who had read the book and was eager to work on the issues raised by it and the movie.

Adopting a student-centered approach was one of my main aims from the beginning of the course. Such an approach is considered ideal, as "learners can proactively analyse the cultural background indicated in the movies and develop well-

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[5] The movie *Milk (2008)* follows the true story of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay American politician.

[6] *He Named Me Malala (2015)* is a movie about the Nobel Prize-winner Malala Yousafzai who managed to escape the Taliban when she was a teenager and has been advocating for girls' right to education.

structured and coherent schemas" which would later be activated and set the ground for active learning (Baek, 2020, p.181). Having the freedom to choose how they wanted to work, and which issues they wanted to focus on gave them the opportunity to adopt the role of the researcher (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 2003). Taking a step back, I let the students explore the issues and express their opinions freely.

The only restriction was that the students were asked to watch their movie of choice individually. Moreover, they were given a list including numerous movie options, so that students would have the chance to choose a different movie in case they changed their mind.

After long discussions and careful consideration of the students' suggestions, the titles of the movies that made it to the final list are included in the table below:

Table 1: Human rights movie titles

Schindler's List (1993)	The color purple (1985)
12 Years a Slave (2013)	Hotel Rwanda (2004)
Not Without my Daughter (1991)	The Island President (2011)
Selma (2014)	Paradise Now (2005)
The Pianist (2002)	Amistad (1997)
Milk (2008)	The Whistleblower (2010)
He named me Malala (2015)	American History X (1998)
Life is Beautiful (1997)	The Killing Fields (1984)
Philadelphia (1993)	Incendies (2010)
Dead Man Walking (1995)	Pleasantville (1998)
Citizen Kane (1941)	The Constant Gardener (2005)
An Inconvenient Truth (2006)	In the Name of the Father (1993)

Looking at the films that made it to the final list and delving deeper into the main issues addressed in them, one could locate various sub-topics of the human rights umbrella-term. This grouping of movies based on similarities in their plots and background stories helped in the development of the curriculum and the lesson plans, as will be seen further on.

He named me Malala (2015) and *Not without my daughter (1991)* are both based on books written by the protagonists addressing the hardships females are facing in the Middle East and the social barriers that are raised in front of them with their sex being the sole reason for unfair and at time inhumane treatment. Their struggles to become empowered and gain a voice in primarily patriarchal and at times misogynistic societies is what connects both movies to each other, as well as to *The Color Purple (1985)* and *The Whistleblower (2010)*, in which the quest for female empowerment and gender equality is powerfully impelling. The latter movie addresses human trafficking, a pressing human rights issue, in a brutal and shockingly accurate way.

Milk (2008) and *Philadelphia (1993)* is the next set of movies, addressing issues related to the rights of the members of the LGBTQ community or, more accurately, the ways in which those rights are entrenched. The blatant discrimination that this group of the population is forced to face is unfortunately a topic that is still relevant in the third decade of the 21st century.

Human rights in armed conflicts is the main issue addressed in the next set of movies. *Schindler' List (1993)*, *The Pianist (2002)*, and *Life is Beautiful (1997)* highlight the importance of maintaining humanity even in the most cruel and inhumane situations. The ways Jews' rights were violated during the Second World War and the brutality certain groups of the population faced are given through some of the most touching and wholesome stories, celebrating compassion and dignity in the face of blind injustice.

Sharing the same focus on human rights in times of war, *The Killing Fields (1984)* and *Hotel Rwanda (2004)* highlight human rights violations amidst civil wars and the devastating effects they can have on the individual and collective psyche. Closing this human-rights sub-topic, the movies *Incendies (2010)*, and *Paradise Now (2005)* place emphasis on the catastrophic power of hatred and bigotry and the importance of the establishment of a value system based on respect for the right to life and freedom of religion.

Death penalty is presented in the movie *Dead Man Walking (1995)* as one of the most despicable human rights violations. Highlighting the futility of such a harsh punishment, the movie urges viewers to reconsider the value of the right to life and to a fair trial even for the most gruesome of crimes.

The next four movies focus on instances of racial discrimination and the ways in which the right to equality is infringed. From the African American slaves' struggles in 19th-century America (*12 Years a Slave (2013)*), to the civil rights movement lead by the famous Martin Luther King Jr. (*Selma (2014)*), the violence and violations that people of colour are forced to face are the main focal points, proving that certain types of discrimination have managed to be relevant even today. The issue of colour is brought up again in the allegoric film *Pleasantville (1998)*. Colourful People[7] who have been freed from societal restrictions are looked down on by their black-and-white fellow citizens. Finally, *American History X (1998)* is among the most influential human rights movies, an ode to the importance of tolerance and education in the fight against discrimination.

Climate change is perhaps among the issues that are hardly ever connected to human rights in the minds of everyday people. Yet, *The Island President (2011)* and *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)* prove the close connection between environmental destruction and violations of the rights to life and to adequate standards of living. Global warming and its devastating consequences are highlighted in both documentaries, helping audiences realise the ways in which the struggle for basic human rights is linked to the pursuit for a clean and healthy environment.

Among the first steps taken during the research procedure was that of contacting students' parents in order to inform them about the content and design of the study and ensure their consent in their children's participation. It was made clear to both parents as well as students that taking part in the case study was voluntary and students were completely free to withdraw at any time they wished. The main research procedure comprised of 3 steps:

1. Movie screening (at home)
2. Project presentation and discussion
3. Discussion

[7] In the movie *Pleasantville (1998)*, the protagonists find themselves living in their favourite 1950's black-and-white sitcom. Their presence there triggers social unrest and gradually liberates the black-and-white citizens of Pleasantville, with the town eventually becoming coloured.

The first step was divided into three parts, namely, *before*, *while*, and *after* watching the film, the instructions to which were distributed to the students in the form of a leaflet (Appendix B).

More specifically, prior to watching the film, the students needed to watch the trailer of the film and read its summary online to have an idea as to what they were about to watch. It was also important to start brainstorming what the movie would be about. This process helps activate students' schemata and engages them in a process of trying to find the meaning of what they have read in the synopsis and seen in the trailer, and eventually find out if their guesses were correct.

In the second part, during which the students watch the film, they are encouraged to take notes regarding the main characters, place, and time of the movie. At the same time, they are engaged in a process of connecting the plot to the general idea of human rights. One way to do that is to locate possible links between the articles of the UDHR and the plotline. For instance, if the plot focuses on a man sentenced to capital punishment, the plot could be related to Article 3 of the UDHR.

Moreover, during this part, the students are trying to establish connections between the topics addressed in the movie and their modern life. Such connections could be historical or sociological, since, even if the movie addresses a human rights violation taking place in previous centuries, there may be contemporary examples of similar injustices. The students were free to explore and provide examples on the ways in which certain instances of human rights violations have been taking place throughout time, either in the same way or taking up different forms as societies were changing.

For instance, the institution of slavery in the U.S. in the 17th century – which is among the issues addressed in one of the movies chosen – is still relevant today, as examples of modern-day slavery, such as trafficking, attest. Similarly, even though huge steps have been taken since the 70's towards the improvement of gay and lesbians' protection of rights such as that of equality in western societies, nowadays they struggle to ensure other types of rights, such as that to marriage or adoption, while for those living in the East an act as simple as publicly expressing their sexual preferences could invoke severe punishment or even execution.

Finally, the third part includes the steps that the students need to take after they have watched the film of their choice. They are encouraged to search online for further

information on the historical context of the movie they have watched, if – of course– it is possible to find one. For example, if, as in the previous case, a movie focuses on slavery, the student working on this movie could look for information on the history of slavery in the U.S., the abolishment of slavery and so on.

Organising their thoughts, findings, and observations in a presentation is the final goal. Among others, the presentation should include a clear connection between the issues addressed in the movie and the human rights topics. Moreover, it should establish how relevant the human rights issue presented in the movie is to modern life. To achieve that, students would get accustomed to a process of locating connections between their own lives and experiences and those addressed in the movie.

The aim of the instructions was to ensure that the students would be in position to understand and feel confident about the project assignment and the course requirements. A schedule was then shared with the students regarding the dates on which each of them was expected to present their final project-presentations. However, prior to that and in order to give students adequate time to do their research and prepare their final projects, a series of in-class small-scale projects was conducted. This helped consolidate the knowledge acquired in the introductory lessons and direct students' attention to the most important points.

Step 2 was then taken during which students were given the chance to present their projects and share their findings with their classmates. They were already informed about the dates on which they were expected to present their projects on the movie they had chosen. The lesson plans presentations were designed having in mind logical connections among the movies and the human rights issues they dealt with. For instance, the discussion about women's rights was conducted using the movie *He named me Malala (2015)* or the topic racial discrimination was approached with the help of movies such as *12 Years a Slave (2013)*. Essentially, as it can become more obvious through the lesson plans (Appendix D), each teaching period (or groups of teaching periods) was dedicated to a different human rights issue. Finally, discussions on the ideas presented in the movies and the relevant projects, as well as additional small-scale projects took place during the third step.

4. Teaching and Learning about Human Rights

Researchers working in developing countries have proven that educating populations about their rights can contribute to the development of their country. Essentially, HRE can start a positive vicious circle, as education on human rights leads to development, which goes hand in hand with empowerment that leads to the realisation of the value of human rights. This eventually triggers more education, more development and so on (Dias, 1997).

HRE has the power to "break the vicious cycle of poverty and powerlessness" and act as a "humanising" factor, inspiring people to "take action against the dehumanisation and annihilation of people" making them realise their rights and the need to be protected (Dias, 1997, p.63; Hicks, 1997, p.80). And even though I believe that in countries where a privileged minority possesses most of the wealth far more would be needed than just educating the public on human rights, I *do* consider HRE a powerful tool towards a first step to change the public's mentality and overthrow corrupted regimes.

Speaking though about development and empowerment of unprivileged populations would perhaps not affect a group of adolescents of upper-middle-class families. Therefore, my goal became to prove to them through the course how closely connected every aspect of their life is to human rights and help them understand the value of HRE, particularly at this point of their life, as they get closer to adulthood.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyse human rights and the gap that exists between what they support by law and what takes place in practice. As it will become obvious further on, the students were familiar with human rights and were quite conscious about this gap between theory and implementation. The following episode is indicative of the students' understanding of this discrepancy:

"Miss, do you think you'll have the same treatment as [the prime minister]?"

Being a new teacher entails several responsibilities, more or less related to teaching itself, from filling out reports, to contacting parents, and spending endless hours trying to make the copier work. Yard duty, i.e., spending breaks with the students in the schoolyard, monitoring their behaviour and making sure they stay safe, is perhaps the one that I have enjoyed the most from the moment I started teaching. Not only does

it give me a chance to get out of the packed classrooms and get some fresh air – something extremely vital during the Covid-19 pandemic – but it also gives me the opportunity to get to know the students and bond with them in a less formal environment.

So, it was during one of my voluntary yard duties that one of the students asked me this question as I was approaching him and his classmates having formed a circle at the back of the school where students usually go when they want to smoke without getting caught. No matter how desperately I wanted to reply affirmatively, after a moment's thought, I realised that this would have been a lie. I may feel that I have the same rights as anyone in power on paper, but am I treated the same as them?

Before I had the chance to form a full response, another student added "we're talking about Covid and that the rich and the poor cannot equally have access to health". Some others added that some forms of expensive and potentially more effective treatment may be available only for the "rich and powerful". Indeed, I started doubting my chances of appropriate treatment should the doctors have to choose between me and the Prime Minister. Then again, I am fairly young so I would have priority over some of the older patients. There, discrimination again.

So instead of giving a straight answer, I got into "teacher mode" and started lecturing them about human rights and the right to health and to access to medical treatment. By the time the break was over, they were probably equal parts bored and intrigued, which I considered to be the perfect opportunity to introduce this human rights course. So, I began this research by sending to the students a short informal online questionnaire. My goal was to get a better idea of what they knew – or thought they knew – about human rights and what their overall impression on the value of addressing human rights in the context of the course was. As previously mentioned, the questionnaire involved a series of statements to which the students were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement. Some of the most interesting findings shall be presented in this section.

Not surprisingly, all students claimed to be familiar with the term "human rights", they responded that they could easily list at least five fundamental human tights, and that they could easily think of examples of human rights violations. Nevertheless, they expressed their ignorance towards what the UDHR is, while only four students

claimed to have heard the term. In response to the statement as to how satisfied the students felt with how much they know about human rights, more than half of the class were reluctant to provide a clear answer, choosing the middle point ("neither agree nor disagree"). Finally, I was surprised to notice that many students were of the opinion that human rights issues are "a grown-ups' topic", while even more of them agreed that people their age do not know a lot about it.

Having in mind my short conversation with their classmates regarding (un)equal rights to Covid19 treatment, as well as their reaction that human rights is a "a grown-up" topic, I was intrigued to discuss their views on the applicability of human rights. So, I began the discussion by asking the same question in class a few days later i.e., whether they consider human rights issues a "grown-up" concern:

> S1: "It's not that we don't know about human rights or that we shouldn't know…it's just that we have so much more to worry about. Let our parents worry about it."
>
> S2: "[Human rights] is something my parents read or hear about on the news or on videos...So, I figure I shouldn't bother too much with it. Not that I don't care, of course I care but there's so much happening in the world, wars, revolutions, climate change. I can't start thinking about that too!"

What the students seemed to overlook was the ways in which human rights is connected to all the other problems some of them claimed they should worry about ("wars, revolutions, climate change"). At the same time, they appeared to consider human rights as an "adult topic" and something not related to their lives, believing that they have other things to worry. This *"it's their issue"* rationale seems to reflect the idea that human rights are a matter belonging to the high-politics agenda, to which the audiences concerned have limited access, as indicated in the introduction of the present chapter.

Human rights have been established to ensure that large, disempowered groups of the population have equal access to quality living conditions, yet reality is proving that power – usually stemming from wealth– is able to tip the scales to the benefit of the few. This is an issue to which the students returned during a discussion on the level of applicability of human rights, particularly regarding issues related to the Covid19 pandemic and climate change. But more on them later.

The students also expressed their doubts that they would be capable of doing something or bringing change to the ways human rights are viewed and the violations that take place around the globe. Nevertheless, HRE is perhaps the most effective means of change. To expand the discussion of human rights applicability and to help them re-evaluate their views on the relevance of human rights issues to their lives, I started one of the first sessions with an overview of the history of human rights, leading to the question "Do you think that human rights apply today?".

Interestingly, most answers started with the same phrase "Yes, but….". A student mentioned that human rights apply in many countries, but not for everyone. He referred to the United States as an example and the Black Lives Matter movement, to which another student added his doubts on whether Native Americans have the chance to enjoy their rights. We could argue here that this opinion reflects the quality of the connection between globalisation and human rights.

Globalisation has undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of a more interconnected perception of the world, eliminating economic, trade, and cultural barriers, and enhancing transnational mobility. However, at the same time, in these modern globalised societies, "[h]uman rights violations continue to be the norm rather than the exception" (Arfat, 2013, p.18). Globalisation has brought forward a fragmented vision of the world, which becomes distinctive though the establishment of hierarchies and the perpetuation of inequalities, with Native Americans and African Americans being a characteristic example of this culture of discrimination and disenfranchisement.

Moving back to the initial question on human rights applicability, one of the students very emphatically said "yes, there are human rights, but they are never placed above interests". After my encouragement to elaborate, he mentioned that financial and other kinds of interests, especially in warzones or in countries that have a long history of war, are prioritised over human rights, and concluded with the phrase: "we forget about human rights once we get money in our hands". Indeed, if, for instance, child labor goes against every human-rights, legal, and moral code, why are children still exploited by famous international cocoa companies in the lookout for cheap – or even unpaid – workers (Bancroft, 2021)? It appears that financial interests have the power to supersede human rights and ignore blatant violations.

Another student contributed to the discussion by making a distinction between two types of human rights, the “applicable” and the “non-applicable” as she called them. She went on to clarify that in the “applicable” category there are now rights such as equality between the two sexes and equal access to voting rights, while in the second category there are the rights that are still not applicable to everyone, namely, the right to education which is still not applicable to some children in developing countries.

As previously analysed, the establishment of the human rights discourse was based on envisioning humanity as a whole, governed by basic, fundamental principles that were bound to apply to everyone by virtue of their human nature. Therefore, in theory, and to use the student’s example, all children have the right to education, guaranteed by the relevant UDHR articles and internationally ratified Conventions. However, perhaps the key-phrase here is “in theory”.

Despite the student’s young age, she seems to have grasped this discrepancy between what is theoretically and legally guaranteed and what happens in practice. Theoretically, children all over the world enjoy the right to education. Except, in practice, they do not: almost 240 million children with disabilities and 67 million girls do not have access to school (UNICEF, 2021), while 42.5 million children cannot even go to primary school (Global Partnership for Education, 2021).

Another student distinguished the “European” as opposed to the “African” rights, essentially meaning that there may be human rights in Europe but not in Africa or other developing places in the world. One of her classmates added to that by mentioning the example of China and its communist regime and comparing it to the democracies in Europe: “Human rights are applicable wherever there is democracy and, for as long as democracy is not spread around the globe, human rights will be a pipe dream”.

The students’ contributions reflect the view supported by Zembylas (2018) that human rights brim with contradictions, the most obvious of which being that between the legal guarantees for human rights in an international level and the reality as it has been formed as a result of human rights violations. At the same time, such responses most likely reflect the orientalist ideology prevailing in social media and being manipulated by politicians. Orientalism adopts a distorted way of looking at Eastern cultures, presenting them as uncivilised compared to the West. It was established to

rationalise European colonisation in the East during the Enlightenment as an act of rescuing the uncivilised (Said, 1978).

Bringing the distinction between universalism and cultural relativism into the discussion of applicability, many students suggested the adoption of the Aristotelian "*mesotes*", a middle point between universalism and cultural relativism: "Why not have both? Respect for some basic universal human rights but also recognition of the cultural differences of some groups?". Johansson Dahre (2017) has introduced the compromise term "relative universalism" as a solution to this black-or-white dilemma. His is essentially a theoretical model that supports the equilibrium between respect for universal human rights and regional cultural values. It seems that the students were correct in their suggestions of a combined view that would dispute the image of "universalism and relativism as two opposing forces" (Johansson Dahre, 2017, p.626).

So far, we have discussed the issue of human rights in theory and the discrepancies in their application, as these are established by the interplay between who human rights were created for (disempowered groups, developing countries, etc.) and who eventually benefits from them (powerful individuals, privileged groups of the population, etc.). Our problematisation from this point onwards will focus on more specific, tangible, and closer to the students' reality examples of human rights applicability, and the views the students hold towards them. More specifically, the focus will be on the connection between human rights and climate change, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on human rights, some students' views on which were very briefly discussed in the beginning of the chapter.

"If we can't stop the seas rising, if you allow for a two-degree rise in temperature, you are actually agreeing to kill us"

This is the phrase which Mohamed Nasheed, the former President of the Maldives, utters looking at the camera in the promotional trailer of the movie *The Island President (2011)* while the scenes alternate between his face and the images of a man fishing by the seaside only to be crashed by huge waves. Environmental change has jeopardised the survival of his country and its population, a realisation reached also by

former US Vice President and environmentalist Al Gore in the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)*: "our ability to live is what is at stake"[8].

Environmental degradation and climate change are among humanity's most imminent threats, alongside the Covid-19 pandemic which we will analyse later. However, this threat has not been born in a vacuum; it is the result of a complex interplay of politics, interests, and economic agendas, with neoliberalism at the core of the problem and perhaps the key to its solution.

Neoliberalism and its "principles of the free market, privatisation, individualism, consumerism, and competition" have managed to sneak into modern societies and affect all aspects of our lives, transforming us from citizens to consumers (Parr, 2015, p.70). In George Monbiot's (2016) eyes, neoliberalism is responsible for all kinds of woes, from "the financial meltdown of 2007-8 (…) [to] the collapse of ecosystems". I intend to focus here on this connection between neoliberalism and climate change and its catastrophic consequences which are primarily linked to human rights violations.

Dealing with climate change and global warming issues in a course that focuses on human rights took students by surprise. They were equally impressed to find out in a factsheet presented in class how much the sea level has risen in the past century or that there are small island countries whose population is in danger as a result of that. Establishing, however, a clear connection between climate change and human rights proved to be somewhat tricky, as seen by the following comment made by one of the students:

> "Global warming has to do with the environment. Or with politics, like what governments do – or what they don't do – to stop it. I don't see the connection."

The student, though not fully aware of the importance of his statement, made an excellent observation. Indeed, as discussed above, global warming is all about politics, and – I would add – economics. To understand the connection, Adrian Parr (2015) uses

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[8] *The Island President (2011)* is a documentary that follows Mohamed Nasheed, the former President of the Maldives, in his attempt to sensitise world leaders for the severity of global warming. In a similar tone, the former US Vice President and environmentalist Al Gore is approaching global warming and rising sea-levels as an international threat in the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)*.

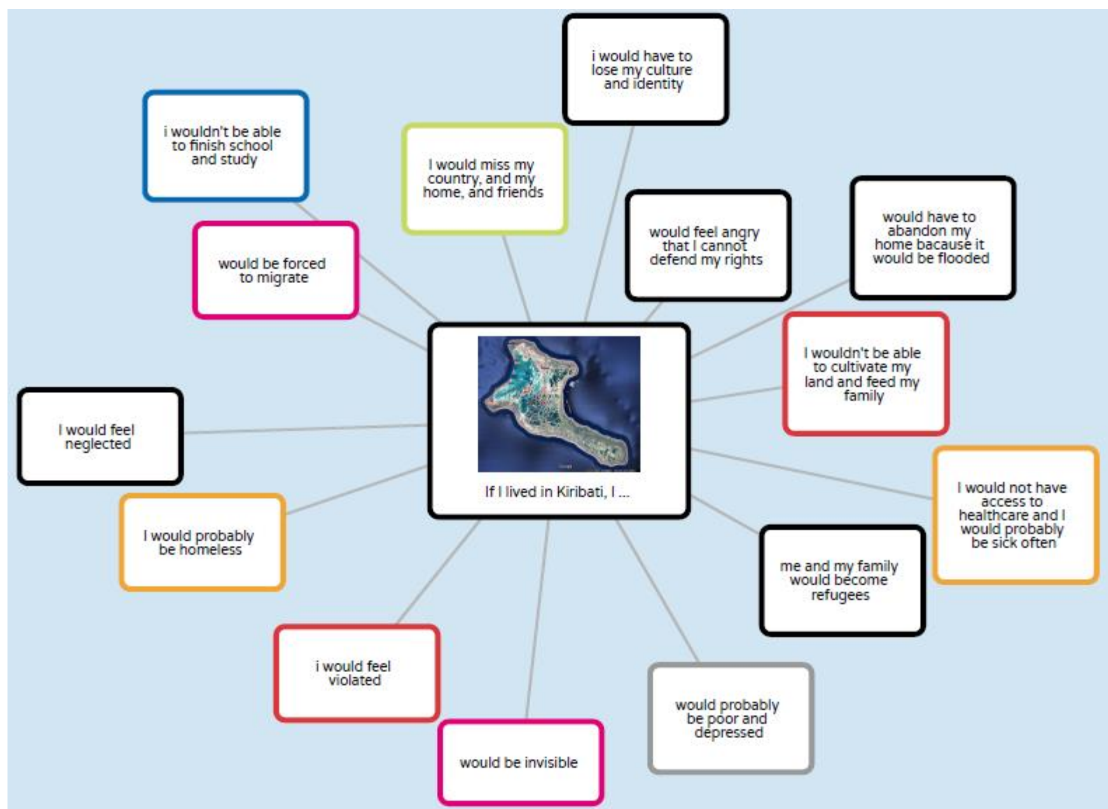
the example of the installation of solar panels. A seemingly positive measure towards the adoption of alternative sources of energy can have devastating environmental consequences when conducted uncontrollably as a result of the minimal governmental intervention preached by neoliberals.

Another student wondered: "Are climate change and human rights connected?". In fact, when we try to address the issue of human rights and climate change, the most important question is not *if* but *how* they are connected. A common understanding reached among scholars is that "[c]limate change as well as climate policies can have adverse effects on the human rights of certain population groups – and can exacerbate situations of injustice" (Schapper, 2018, p. 275). It has been argued that climate change is in fact a "new threat" to "old" human rights (Bell, 2011, p. 113). A healthy and safe environment translates to the protection of fundamental human rights such as those to life, health, and property. Therefore, enjoying a clean and healthy environment should be an international human right and the first step to eradicate instances of climate injustice (Schapper, 2018).

To help students comprehend the close connection between human rights and environmental change, I presented to them a map pointing at the small island of Kiribati[9] in the Pacific. The image on Google maps was enough to give them an idea of the effect of the rise of sea level on the geography of the island. They were then asked to close their eyes and visualise how their life would have been if they lived there. The students were then sent an online mind-map to fill-in with notes related to the human rights issues that would have been violated if they lived in Kiribati.

[9] The island of Kiribati, located in the central Pacific Ocean, has become famous for being one of the island-countries that is on the verge of disappearing in the next years if the sea level continues to rise exponentially.

Picture 1: Mind-map "If I lived in Kiribati, I …"



Introducing the map of Kiribati and this mind-mapping activity originally aimed at helping students visualise the severity of climate change and understand its urgency. Nevertheless, they managed to establish their own connections with human rights issues. As seen in the picture above, the students shared some powerful observations such as "I wouldn't be able to finish school and study", "I would have to abandon my home", or "me and my family would become refugees". "Like Syrians" is what one of them commented during the discussion that followed the activity.

Realistically speaking, Greece and, more specifically, the city of Thessaloniki, are not facing an imminent threat as a result of global warming. At the same time, environmental refugees may not be a common phenomenon in the students' everyday life, though refugees from Syria and other war- and injustice-torn countries are a common sight. This is exactly the point on which students made their connections, bringing an initially unknown cause of human rights violations (i.e., global warming) closer to their own reality and to their understanding of the concept of "refugee". Thus, they empathised with those who have been facing violations of their fundamental rights

and have been pressured to leave their homeland by powers beyond their reach – be that wars or rising sea levels.

To delve even deeper into the issue, once the brainstorming and "mind-mapping" process was over, the students were presented with the following statement and asked to discuss in pairs whether they agree with it or not:

> "Those who are the most severely affected by global warming are not only those who have done the least to cause it …but are also those whose voices are least likely to be heard in international debates and negotiations" (Dreher & Voyer, 2015, p. 58-59).

Some of the comments I overheard were the following:

> S3: "It's all about money. No one's imposing restrictions on the rich countries to stop them polluting."
>
> S4: "…like China. It's the world's greatest pollutant but the small islands are paying the price."
>
> S5: "No one would listen to the Kiribati people advocating for their rights; but if they were Americans that wouldn't have been the same."

Indeed, those who should be called to account for their carbon emissions remain untouchable, while the rest of humanity is urged to think green, switch off the lights, and plant a tree or two. In Lukacs' (2017) words, "[w]hile we busy ourselves greening our personal lives, fossil fuel corporations are rendering these efforts irrelevant". The prevailing neoliberal idea that private power should remain unaccountable and untouchable has left large corporations undisturbed while they profit at the expense of the environment.

Overall, it seemed also that the students were quite pleased – yet concerned – to get a glimpse into the human rights repercussions that the destruction of the environment can entail. The presentations of the movies *The Island President (2011)* and *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)* were received by the class with genuine interest and eagerness to learn more about the real stories behind the movies.

I also tried expanding the human rights agenda and make students understand the magnitude and severity of climate change and the tremendous effects it has on

human rights by looking at the following quote made by the United Nations in April 2020: “Our ability to learn from this pandemic will determine not only our success in responding to future pandemics but also other global challenges, of which the most pressing is undoubtedly climate change” (p. 20). Comparing climate change to a deadly pandemic is perhaps proof enough of the severity of the situation.

At this point, it would be wise to have a glimpse on the ways in which the school communities in Greece were affected by this pandemic. The schools opened in September 2020 with feelings of restrained optimism for a “normal” school year that would be different from the one we had to experience since March 2020 with schools closing and teachers being forced to make a transition to online learning overnight, having no experience and close to zero guidance from the state.

However, the beginning of the school year and the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions signaled the second wave of the virus with a tremendous increase in the number of people infected, particularly in the city of Thessaloniki. Local and international media started comparing the city to the Italian city of Bergamo, which had suffered the greatest impact during the first wave of the pandemic, with images of dozens of graves being dug every day to bury the victims of the deadly virus (Michalopoulos, 2020; Reuters, 2020). Thus, in November 2020 the Greek authorities announced a lockdown in the city, closing all businesses, and imposing curfews and mandatory online learning to students of all ages.

Addressing in class an issue as delicate as the pandemic was something that troubled me a lot, especially considering that the research was taking place while the second wave was still tormenting the country. I felt at first that I was walking on eggshells, trying not to stir any painful memories or ending up having a lesson that resembled the news, reproducing boring clichés of the “stay safe – stay home” kind. Instead, my goal became to help students locate the ways human rights have been affected in the Covid-19 era.

> *“My grandpa lost his right to life and to health treatment because of Covid. He didn’t die of it, but he died because of it. He wasn’t feeling well one evening, and they told him at the hospital that if he got there, he’ll have to wait till he gets tested negative before they can treat him. So, he preferred to stay home…He died the next morning.”*

For all my efforts to protect my students from any painful recollections, this sudden confession by one of the students who had not participated in that lesson at all, triggered a discussion on the rights of the elderly during the pandemic. The students expressed their concerns that social distancing has caused the isolation of this already marginalised group of the population, forcing them to live alone, and violating several of their human rights, as one of the students mentioned:

> S6: “We can chat online, have a video call, or even go out for a short walk. [My grandma] can’t do any of those, no freedom of movement or right to quality life whatsoever.”

In a similar way previous human rights discussions had developed around the “us vs. them”, “rich vs. poor”, “East vs. West” and other black-or-white arguments, this discussion soon became an “older people’s vs. adolescents’ rights” debate, sparked by the following comment:

> S7: “What about kids and teens like us? I have the right to live my life in freedom and make my own choices. But now everyone’s controlling when I can go out, how far I can go, if I can go to school or not…as if no one cares about our rights anymore.”

It turned out that the state-imposed curfews and restrictions had angered a significant number of the students, while others doubted whether they “have the right to complain”, considering the privileges their age and social position had granted them. Research has shown that because people of those ages are naturally going through various developmental stages that influence their character and behavior, they may be more susceptible to life-long consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic (Desmond et al., 2020).

Undoubtedly, adolescents living in impoverished communities have been affected the most, dealing with poverty, limited access to healthcare, and exclusion from online education (Gittings et al., 2021; Paiva et al., 2021). Although the adolescents in this class were far more privileged, this did not stop some of them from fervently supporting their views that the pandemic was a form of “dictatorship”, blatantly infringing their fundamental right to freedom.

Sure, we can't go out, but at least WE have a house to protect us, came the reaction by one of the students who was triggered by her classmate's reference to "dictatorship" which she regarded as "way out of line". The human rights of the homeless during the pandemic became her main argument highlighting that "when you need social distancing, how can we have enough shelters for everyone?".

Hearing that, I noticed one of the students reaching to his phone which was hidden under his desk and typing something. Not wanting to overreact and ruin the discussion, while also trying to ensure that basic classroom rules are followed[10], I approached his desk and nodded to him that he needs to put it away. "One second, one second! I need to find it!". *It* turned out to be an interview he had read a few months before given by a homeless man, Dimitris, who was narrating his life in the streets of Athens during the lockdown (https://www.lifo.gr/now/athens/astegos-tin-epohi-toy-koronoioy-oytos-i-allos-zo-me-ton-fobo).

When quarantine was enforced and businesses closed, the streets where homeless people like Dimitris find shelter and food were suddenly empty, leaving them exposed amidst a deadly pandemic. We read the article and I was pleased to notice that the students expressed their sympathy and concern towards the loneliness and fear experienced by Dimitris. So, I took this opportunity to use the following excerpt from the United Nations' pamphlet on Covid-19 and Human Rights that had been released in April 2020 and asked for the students' thoughts:

> "For more than 2.2 billion people in the world, washing their hands regularly is not an option because they have inadequate access to water. For 1.8 billion who are homeless or have inadequate, overcrowded housing, physical distancing is a pipe dream."

We can all get Covid, but how we'll deal with it depends on where we live, how much money we make etc. was one of the answers that attracted the most attention. Indeed, it seems that, as it was the case with climate change, the pandemic is another

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[10] School policy prohibits students from having mobile phones in the school premises. If there is a serious reason for which students need to bring their phones (e.g., to contact their parents at the end of the day), the devices are handed in at the Secretary's office when students arrive in the morning and remain there to be picked up by the student at the end of the day. There is, however, some leniency towards older students, though they are still expected not to use their phones during the lesson for any reason.

issue closely connected to financial status and political power. Neoliberalism instructs that it is *our* fault that we cannot have a steady job, *our* fault that we cannot save the planet, and now *our* fault that we can die from Covid-19. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the sick get sicker! Although my intention had been to sensitise students to the harsh reality of discrimination and injustice perpetuated by Covid-19, I noticed that our discussion resulted in a few students feeling ashamed of their better living conditions: "I haven't even thought about it that way…I'm definitely not ok with staying home all the time but at least I have one!".

Keith Barton (2019) argues that "[i]f students consistently think of human rights as problems that apply to other countries but not their own, then studying human rights may…blind students to the need to address such issues locally and internationally" (p.214). In our case, I considered it important to open students' eyes to the harsh reality that people around the world are facing in the times of Covid. I knew that some of the students were quite well-off and, since all of them were part of the upper-middle class and had the opportunity to attend a private school, this instantly put them in an advantageous position. Without, though, any intention to make them feel bad for their better circumstances, I felt the need to help them think outside the box, whatever that "box" may be, their family, school, neighborhood, city.

"He didn't die of it, but he died because of it…"

Seeing my students, who had been unaware of their classmate's tragedy, reacting to their classmate's confession about the way he lost his grandfather was a heartwarming moment. Some of them left their desks to hug him, while I saw many of them patting him on the back and asking him how he was feeling as they were leaving the class to take a break. Moments like those truly made me feel proud of the empathy these students managed to cultivate.

And if this small group of students could act, in a way, as a model of society, coming together to console their classmate the same way the world came together to resist the virus, could we argue that this pandemic-induced solidarity has overthrown neoliberalism? I support that our impulse to unite against a common enemy – be that a deadly pandemic or a catastrophic rise of the sea level – has the power to beat neoliberal individualism and even (optimistically speaking) expand human rights applicability to everyone, everywhere.

As seen in this chapter, using ethnography in the classroom has helped me develop a better understanding of the way students perceive the impact of climate change and the pandemic on human rights. Observing and participating in their discussions, I had the opportunity to notice the development of their perceptions of human rights issues. Starting from their initial views that human rights is an "adult" issue, I observed them as they realised the multiple ways in which human rights affect their lives, and finally witnessed them cultivating and sharing feelings of solidarity and empathy.

Conclusion: “Writing for Rights” and the future of human rights

It was during Easter break when I received a message from one of my students. Normally, I would have ignored work-related messages during holidays, though I was curious to find out why one of my students, who were supposed to be enjoying their break and preparing for their end-of-schoolyear exams, had taken the trouble to reach out to me. He wrote:

> “Hi Miss! Sorry to bother you, I was just googling random things about human rights, and I found about a thing called “write for rights”. Do you know about it? Maybe we could write about sth like that in class. I’ll let the others know if that’s ok.”

Microsoft Teams, the platform used by the school during online classes, also offered students and teachers the opportunity to create online groups, share material, and communicate through it. So, of course, I was beyond thrilled to allow the student to post his suggestion in our group there. “Write for Rights” is actually an Amnesty International initiative (https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/) whose aim is “to make a difference to the lives of the many people worldwide who are under threat for standing up for what’s right” (Amnesty International Campaign, 2020, p.2). The initiative develops around the idea of writing letters to a victim of human rights’ violations or to the authorities concerned showing support and determination to end such violations.

Soon, almost the entire class responded to their classmate’s idea, and I was taken aback by the way they started collaborating, recommending cases of human rights violations, and volunteering to write letters. My phone would vibrate all day, constantly receiving notifications that a student shared something, added a comment, or made a post in our group. I was truly touched by their enthusiasm and the fact that they were working completely on their own, on a project of their own choice, with zero instruction or supervision by me, with the exception of the occasional likes and heart-reactions to their posts – the minimum I could do to express my pride and gratitude for their tireless efforts.

The students proved that human rights could have the power to transcend the limits of the academic or scholastic environment and become an integral part of their lives. The anthropological perspective towards human rights as we approached it in

class acquired a practical meaning through the students' deeper understanding and engagement with human rights, as they took their first steps in discussing, researching, and – though to a far lesser extent – advocating for them. This is closely connected to Thomas Hylland Eriksen's (2020) argument in favour of taking anthropology into the world and introducing its contributions and practical applications to the public.

When we met again at school after the break, I was bombarded by the letters – written both by hand and electronically – the students had prepared on cases of human rights violations that attracted their interest (Appendix E). We read some of them in class along with a brief presentation of the cases they touched upon, in a session that was truly emotional. The children wrote letters to state officials and victims of human rights violations, expressing with honesty and determination their views on the value of ensuring the implementation of human rights laws.

Finally, as we were getting closer to the end of the schoolyear and having dealt with a great range of human rights issues so far, the question "where do we go from here?" started running through my head. Turning to Google for answers, I came across an interesting video of a talk delivered by William Schabas on what human rights will look like in 2066 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyHiUGdWdFc&ab_channel=TEDxTalks). Being pessimistic by nature, I started recalling the various human rights violations that the students and I had discussed during the past year. From female suppression and racial discrimination to people being forced to become refugees due to environmental destruction they had little to do with and, finally, to the blatant human rights violations caused by the pandemic, my view on the future of human rights was somewhat bleak.

However, I was curious to see what the students' thoughts were on the matter. After showing them the video, the students were then asked to comment on it and whether they share Schabas' optimism for the future of human rights. They were also encouraged to work in pairs contemplating on what they believe human rights will look like in 50 years from now and what rights they believe would be added, eliminated, or adjusted.

The students wrote their answers on a large poster, in which the following phrases were the most prominent:

"The future of human rights is building bridges, not walls!"

“Looking into the future of human rights is like looking into a mirror. If you stare for too long, the reflection turns ugly.”

“50 years from now, issues like trafficking, wars, death penalty will belong only in history books.”

“I hope women, gay, and people of colour won’t have to march to claim their rights.”

“In 50 years, I hope we won’t need borders, governments, laws, and judges to tell us what to do. I hope we’ll live in peace with nature and with each other.”

Asking a group of 16-year-olds to take out their markers and make a poster was met with a reaction that can be summarised as “what are we? Five?”. Yet, I was really surprised to see how eager most of them were to make small or bigger, pessimistic or full of hope, and more or less provocative contributions to the poster. The final result – though somewhat sloppy – was an accurate representation of the students’ hopes, fears, and expectations on the future of human rights.

During the last week of the schoolyear, I was more than happy to notice students coming to me in the teachers’ office or looking for me in the hallways and the yard to thank me for our classes and express their appreciation for everything they had been taught during the past few months. Some of them sent me messages thanking me, while – much to my surprise – a few parents (to whom I had never spoken or met during the schoolyear) called me to express their gratitude for the things their children had learned and the excitement the latter had shared with them.

The main aim of this research was to investigate HRE in a Greek Secondary school, and the ways in which understanding of human rights can be achieved through the use of movies in the context of the subject of English as a Foreign Language. Throughout the research, the students focused on various human rights issues, contemplated on their applicability, and produced presentations and other projects related to those issues and the movies on which they worked. The students' reactions and contributions to the topics discussed as well as to the course were recorded in a diary serving as an ethnographic tool, in hopes that this could help future teachers and researchers in the incorporation of HRE in the educational environment.

The discrepancies of the legal commitments and theoretical promises of those involved in human rights law-making was a recurring issue, as was the impact of wealth and socio-political power on the perpetuation of such discrepancies. Moreover, the relevance of human rights discourse and its connection to multiple aspects of everyday life was highlighted. The examples analysed here related to the pandemic and the human rights violations it entails, as well as to climate change and its connection with the infringement of basic human rights.

Both examples were placed within the broader argument of the impact of the neoliberal agenda on the perpetuation of human rights violations and the widening of the gap between theory and application of human rights law. Finally, the analysis ended on a positive note that the solidarity fostered in adverse conditions such as those created by the global spread of the Covid-19 virus and the imminent threat of global warming could have the power to overturn the individualism preached by neoliberalism.

Among the reasons I chose to become a teacher was my desire to be close to younger people, teach, and learn from them. The fresh ideas and creative way in which they see life are characteristic of adolescents and constitute some of the reasons why it was my conscious decision to seek employment in a secondary school. At the same time, becoming an ethnographer even for a while and observing my classroom from this position gave me a new perspective towards their views, problems, and hopes.

Admittedly, balancing my roles as an educator, an ethnographer, and a researcher proved to be a hard and at times confusing task. Nevertheless, I am grateful to my students for helping me accomplish it and for giving me the opportunity to discuss with them, record their concerns and – I hope – contribute to their understanding of the

importance of human rights education in their lives. It gave me great pleasure in particular to realise that the course managed to make an issue as complex and multi-faceted as human rights relevant to the students and their lives and to overcome their initial disinterest. The following anecdote proves exactly that, namely that HRE has the power to transcend the limits of the classroom and impact students' lives:

Being on hallway duty during the end-of-schoolyear exams on Greek Language and Literature, one of the students who had just turned in her exam paper run towards me and shouted:

> *"Miss, you won't believe what the topic of the essay was! Human rights!!! Boy did I have a lot to say!"*

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APPENDIX A – Human rights awareness questionnaire

Please express your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements.

Section 1: Background knowledge”

1. I am familiar with the term “human rights”.
2. I know what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is.
3. I can list at least 5 fundamental human rights.
4. I can easily think of examples of human rights violations.
5. I have heard about human rights at school.

Section 2: Feelings on human rights

6. I feel satisfied with how much I know about human rights.
7. I feel there is still a lot to learn about human rights.
8. I feel confident with my ability to talk about human rights.
9. I feel I can contribute to a conversation on human rights.
10. I feel confident with my ability to defend my rights if someone tries to violate them.

Section 3: Views towards human rights

11. I think that the issue of human rights does not affect me.
12. I believe that human rights is an important issue.
13. I think human rights is a “grown-ups” topic.
14. I believe it is necessary for all people to be educated on their rights.
15. I think people in my age know a lot about human rights.

APPENDIX B

SEARCHING AND TALKING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Choose one of the following films:

1. Schindler's List (1993)
2. 12 Years a slave (2013)
3. Not Without my Daughter (1991)
4. Selma (2014)
5. The Pianist (2002)
6. Milk (2008)
7. He named me Malala (2015)
8. Life is Beautiful (1997)
9. Philadelphia (1993)
10. Dead Man Walking (1995)
11. Citizen Kane (1941)
12. An Inconvenient Truth (2006)
13. The color purple (1985)
14. Hotel Rwanda (2004)
15. The Island President (2011)
16. Paradise Now (2005)
17. Amistad (1997)
18. The Whistleblower (2010)
19. American History X (1998)
20. The Killing Fields (1984)
21. Incendies (2010)
22. Pleasantville (1998)
23. The Constant Gardener (2005)
24. In the Name of the Father (1993)

Before watching the film:

1. Watch the **trailer** of the film
2. Read the **summary** (you can find both by searching the title of the movie on www.imdb.com)
3. Try to think **what the movie is going to be about**

While you watch:

1. Take a **pen and paper**
2. Take notes on the **main characters, place, time**.
3. Try to **connect** the story to the issue of human rights: find connections between the **plot** and the **articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (is your story about a man waiting his death penalty? Then maybe it has to do with the right to life – Article 3 of the UDHR)
4. Try to establish **connections** between the topics addressed in the movie and our **modern life** (e.g. if your movie is about slavery in the U.S. in the 17th century, think of examples of modern-day slavery, like trafficking etc.)

After you watch the movie:

1. **Search** for further information on the **historical context** of the movie (e.g. if your movie is about slavery, look for information on slavery in the U.S., the abolishment of slavery etc.)
2. Organize your thoughts and findings in a **presentation**
3. **Your presentation must include:**
   - The trailer of your movie
   - An overview of the main events
   - A short analysis of the main characters
   - An analysis of the historical background
   - A connection to the human rights issue
   - A reference to what impressed/didn't impress you in the movie
   - How relevant is the topic presented in the movie to our modern society?

***Remember: your classmates may not be familiar with your movie. Try to be as detailed and comprehensive as possible.**

APPENDIX C Students' posters on ten articles of the UDHR

APPENDIX D – Lesson plans titles

	Lesson titles	**Movies discussed**
Lesson 1	Introduction to human rights	-
Lesson 2	Defining human rights	-
Lesson 3	Analyzing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – Part I	-
Lesson 4	Analyzing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – Part II	-
Lesson 5	Universalism vs. Cultural relativism – Human rights from and to whom?	-
Lesson 6	Debate time: Is the UDHR a manifestation of Western cultural imperialism?	-
Lesson 7	Women's Rights – Talking about equality Part I	*He named me Malala (2015)* *Not without my daughter (1991)*
Lesson 8	Women's Rights – Talking about equality Part II	*The Color Purple (1985)* *The Whistleblower (2010)*
Lesson 9	LGBTQ Rights – Finding gold at the end of the rainbow	*Milk (2008)* *Philadelphia (1993)*
Lesson 10	Human rights during armed conflict – Blood-stained rights Part I	*Schindler' List (1993)* *The Pianist (2002)* *Life is Beautiful (1997)*
Lesson 11	Human rights during armed conflict – Blood-stained rights Part II	*The Killing Fields (1984)* *Hotel Rwanda (2004)*
Lesson 12	Human rights during armed conflict – Blood-stained rights Part III	*Incendies (2010)* *Paradise Now (2005)*
Lesson 13	Death penalty: Where human rights die Part I	-
Lesson 14	Death penalty: Where human rights die Part II	*Dead Man Walking (1995)*

Lesson 15	Racial discrimination (or “whatever happened to humanity”) Part I	*12 Years a Slave (2013)* *Selma (2014)*
Lesson 16	Racial discrimination (or “whatever happened to humanity”) Part II	*Pleasantville (1998)* *American History X (1998)*
Lesson 17	Human rights and climate change: A heated debate	*The Island President (2011)* *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)*
Lesson 18	Write for Rights – Amnesty International Initiative	-
Lesson 19	Human rights in the Covid-19 era: “The virus does not discriminate. But its impacts do.”	-
Lesson 20	The future of human rights: Where do we go from here?	-

APPENDIX E – “Write for Rights” – samples of students’ letters

1. Letter to the U.S. Secretary of State requesting action on Ciham Ali’s case (https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/eritrea-where-is-ciham-ali/):

Mister Secretary of State,

It is to my greatest disappointment that I recently discovered that a US citizen named Ciham Ali has been a victim of enforced disappearance and the U.S. government has turned a blind eye on her case.

You probably know much better than me that each and every one of us has the right to life and to liberty and that it is a crime when one holds us captive against our will. Yet, this is exactly what has been happening to Ciham for the past 8 years. So please allow me to ask you a very simple question: What exactly was the crime that a young girl of 15 committed when she tried to escape Eritrea and find a better life? Why would anyone arrest her and, more importantly, why has the United States – the land of freedom – done NOTHING about it?

I may be young but I know my rights and I know how to recognize when an injustice is taking place. Teenage girls should be going to school. They should be protected by their state and the police of their country and, if they can’t have any protection or education then at least they should have the opportunity to leave their country and search for a better future. They do not deserve to be kept captives and they definitely do not deserve your silence and disinterest.
I do hope you take my views into consideration and reconsider your country’s actions.

Yours,
...

2. Letter of support to Mikita, Belarussian teenager wrongfully imprisoned (https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/belarus-free-mikita/):

Dear Mikita,

I hope this letter finds you healthy and somewhat optimistic. I know it is hard to be positive when you are in prison, but I am writing to remind you that you have not been forgotten and that there are thousands of people out there, myself included, who have been thinking and praying for you.

I am 16 years old and I can only imagine how horrible what has happened to you must feel. But rest assured that you will eventually get the fair trial that you deserve and the police and the government will pay for what they did to you.

In our school we have learned a lot about human rights this year and I know that although injustice like yours happen every day, you will eventually be set free and enjoy your freedom and you life again.

I hope you get to read my letter and stay safe and positive.

Your friend,

3. Letter to the Chinese government demanding the release of Zhang Zhan who was imprisoned for reporting data on the Covid-19 virus against the government's will (https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/china-zhang-zhan/).

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a 16-year-old student from Greece and I have decided to write this letter for one simple reason. Your government has encarcerated Ms. Zhang Zhan for a significant amount of time and has violated her rights to freedom, to justice & to a fair trial.

I would like to inform you that your violations have not gone unnoticed and we will not stop until justice is served. The Chinese citizens and everyone in the world have the right to have access to objective information. However, your actions have deprived your citizens of this right and have deprived Ms. Zhan of her right to freedom.

Me and my classmates are appalled by your actions, and so is the international community. So I would like you to reconsider your stance and take action immediately releasing Ms. Zhang and restoring her reputation.

Regards,