Endangered Humanity – Preliminary Reflections from the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC)

Lidia Guzy

DOI: 10.17846/SS.2021.6.2.3-12

Abstract
This article represents reflections presented at the International Conference "Risks in the Risk Society: Old and new vulnerabilities in the age of COVID-19" which took place at Aristotele University in Thessaloniki, in February 2021. The paper discusses ethical dimensions of the current geo-political Covid crisis from a perspective of a recently established research centre on Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews (MEWSC).

Introduction – Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center (MEWSC)

The Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center (MEWSC) was established in October 2013 at UCC as an interdisciplinary research centre to promote the study of contemporary endangered cultures, religions, worldviews, religious cultures, and minority cultures and religions.

The centre focuses on tangible and intangible cultural expressions and the worldviews of endangered and persecuted peoples, social groups and in particular indigenous communities (https://mewsc.wordpress.com; Guzy/Kapalo 2017).

MEWSC aims and vision is to shift the focus from a script and numbers centred logic towards orality and other marginalised knowledge systems. The Centre experiments with a post and anti-colonial imagination in order to strengthen a counter-imaginative power against the genocidal and culturecidal logic of a global neo-colonial industrial and

post-industrial society. It also analysis and questions hegemonic anthropocentric and dualistic worldviews that marginalise all other forms of knowledge in order to successfully conquer, colonise, silence and exploit. The focus of the research Centre has been until recently South Asia, Eurasia (Eastern Europe and Siberia) and Latin America, but its interests extends globally beyond these regions.

Theoretical Concepts – Marginalisation and Endangerment

Marginalisation

Marginalisation as a concept is often equated with social exclusion, the systematic relegation of someone or some group to an inferior, less powerful and less influential position in society. Such processes of marginalization within modern states are often driven by national discourses that value and propagate the ideal of an undifferentiated, unified body of citizens underscoring the norms of dominant or majority groups in society (Young 1989).

Ethnic, religious, linguistic and indigenous minority groups find themselves systematically disadvantaged and excluded by such discursive practices as they are forced to conform to the social, cultural, political and economic forms of organisation and value system of majority societies.

An important aspect of the discourses that lead to the marginalization of minority and indigenous groups relate to the devaluation by mainstream societies of the cultural practices and forms of knowledge and knowledge transmission of minority communities and cultures, which are cultures of orality, visuality and performativity. Cultures of orality, visuality and performativity hold and transmit knowledge through dance, ritual spectacle, trance mediumship and other forms of embodied practice. These are all characteristics of many indigenous cultures and minorities. Linguistic minorities in particular value practices of orality with performed utterances central to their cultural knowledge systems. In relation to 'writing' cultures, oral minority cultures therefore are often judged deficient. Discoursive regimes that marginalise in this way are marked by the accumulation of pejorative ways of speaking about 'illegitimate' and non-institutionalised forms, for example languages that are classified as patois, pidgin, creoles, and dialects, while religious systems and practices that do not fit the world religions

paradigm are designated as magical or ritualistic, their religious texts, beliefs and creeds as superstitions and heresies.

Endangerment

In 2011 the UNESCO has released its list of cultural traditions that are in need of protection. "*The list may include only such property forming part of the cultural and natural heritage as is threatened by serious and specific dangers, such as the threat of disappearance caused by accelerated deterioration, large-scale public or private projects or rapid urban or tourist development projects; destruction caused by changes in the use or ownership of the land; major alterations due to unknown causes; abandonment for any reason whatsoever; the outbreak or the threat of an armed conflict; calamities and cataclysms; serious fires, earthquakes, landslides; volcanic eruptions; changes in water level, floods and tidal waves*." (http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/#Article11.4)

Endangerment of culture and ecology goes hand in hand with marginalisation. In this sense, the marginalisation of linguistic, cultural and indigenous communities resonates a systematic exploitation and degradation of the natural environment upon which so local communities depend. This dependency is not merely economic, it is also the lifeblood of the cultural worlds. Creativity and the production of indigenous knowledge (Sillitoe 1998) is the product of distinct indigenous epistemologies (Brabec de Mori 2016, 80), languages and cultural practices. Such epistemologies are grounded and sustainable through the material, environmental and ecological worlds inhabited by communities. Indigenous epistemologies are embodied in life-worlds of the particular people. The products of indigenous knowledge have enormous value for the dominant wider society but there is little recognition of their unique epistemological frameworks that gave birth to such knowledge, as "indigenous explanations" are appearing "meaningless for the modern world" (Brabec de Mori 2016, 80-81). The rejection of indigenous epistemologies can be accredited to the devaluation and near extinction of other ontological frameworks than the prevailing western "naturalistic" and scientific logic and ontology.

Research of the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre has been fostering the recognition and revaluation of indigenous

knowledge systems in order to turn the tables in academia towards the recognition of indigenous knowledge as postulated in anthropology since many years (see Levi-Stauss (1962), Agrawal (1995), Sillitoe (1998).

MEWSC organised in this vein a series of 'roving' international workshops and seminars in Ireland, Brazil, Greece, Denmark, Estonia, Poland, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia and India.

A first MEWSC winter school was mutually organised with the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU), in January 2018 in Amarkantak, India on the topic of *Endangered Cultures and Sustainability with special reference to Tribal and Folk Communities in India*[1]. A second MEWSC winter school *Indigeneity", Orality, and Liminal Ontologies: Methodological Pluralisms and Approaches to Culture*"[2] took place in Diphu, Assam, in North East India with the collaboration of the indigenous Centre for Karbi Studies.

Shortly after the last MEWSC winter school finished, the global lockdown started.

The Indigenous and the Europeans – Lockdowns and Colonial Experience

With the lockdowns, comparisons of the European situation with the colonial history and experience of indigenous people and the resulting marginalisation of their lifeworlds and worldviews can be drawn. The current geo-political health, hygiene and social regime of restrictions remind starkly of a colonial pattern emerging in a new dominant

[1] Winter school, 8th Jan till 12th January 2018 on *Endangered Cultures and Sustainability with special reference to Tribal and Folk communities in India,* at the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, organised by Prof. Ranju Hasini Sahoo, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, India; Prof Dr Sarit Chaudhuri, Director of the Indira Gandhi Manav Sangrahalaya (Museum of Mankind), Bhopal, India and Dr hab Lidia Guzy, Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre & India Study Centre Cork, University College Cork, National University of Ireland.

[2] Winterschool "Indigeneity", Orality, and Liminal Ontologies: Methodological Pluralisms and Approaches to Culture", 15-20 January, 2020 Diphu, Assam, North East India, Organised by: University of Tartu, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore (Prof Uelo Valk, Dr Margaret Lyngdoh, Estonia; Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council, (D.S. Taron), Karbi Anglong, Assam Centre for Karbi Studies, Diphu, Karbi Anglong; In collaboration with the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center (MEWSC), UCC

discourse of health and hygiene raising the risk to marginalise European humanistic values and even to endanger humanity as a whole. This seems to happen with the same colonial strategy and power with which indigenous people have been endangered and marginalised throughout the history of colonial expansion and exploitation.

With the Lockdown as a new global and local answer to a crisis, a particularly restrictive political method has first been introduced to humanity by XI Jingping in Wuhan in 2020. Lockdowns as authoritarian and anti-democratic innovations started to be advised (with caution and as a last resort) by the World Health Organisation. Since then they started to be promoted as a universal remedy to combat a declared pandemic by almost all democratic and non-democratic countries.[3]

Despite scientific proves that lockdowns do not work as Non Pharmaceutical Interventions, as presented by John Ioannidis and others[4], the "pandemic lockdowns" remain until today the preferred political method of European politics. Let us reflect on the analysis of Mexican President Lopez Obrador in December 2020 that "pandemic lockdowns are the tactic of dictators" (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/02/mexico-lopez-obrador-pandemic-lockdowns-dictatorship)

With lockdowns inalienable human rights to work, to travel, to socialise, to live in dignity and to freedom have been marginalised and endangered.

Human rights however are universal, inherent to every individual without discrimination. They are inalienable and as natural rights acquired after being born – thus no government nor any politician – can take them away nor assign them. Human rights are indivisible and interrelated, with all rights having equal status and being necessary to protect human dignity.

In the European Union since the beginning of the pandemic emergency, the political lockdown measures and the mounting testing

[3] Sweden, Mexico and Tanzania have been outstanding exceptions.

[4] Ioannidis et al "While small benefits cannot be excluded, we do not find significant benefits on case growth of more restrictive NPIs (Non Pharmaceutical Interventions). Similar reductions in case growth may be achievable with less-restrictive interventions". In: Assessing mandatory stay-at-home and business closure effects on the spread of COVID-19 by Eran Bendavid, Christopher Oh, Jay Bhattacharya, John P. A. Ioannidis
First published: 05 January 2021 https://doi.org/10.1111/eci.13484 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eci.13484

regimes have fully suspended or have heavily restricted several of these inalienable human rights.

An abbreviated Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1	Right to Equality
Article 2	Freedom from Discrimination
Article 3	Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security
Article 4	Freedom from Slavery
Article 5	Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment
Article 6	Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law
Article 7	Right to Equality before the Law
Article 8	Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal
Article 9	Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile
Article 10	Right to Fair Public Hearing
Article 11	Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty
Article 12	Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence
Article 13	Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country
Article 14	Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution
Article 15	Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It
Article 16	Right to Marriage and Family
Article 17	Right to Own Property
Article 18	Freedom of Belief and Religion
Article 19	Freedom of Opinion and Information
Article 20	Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association
Article 21	Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections
Article 22	Right to Social Security
Article 23	Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions
Article 24	Right to Rest and Leisure
Article 25	Right to Adequate Living Standard
Article 26	Right to Education
Article 27	Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community
Article 28	Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document
Article 29	Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development
Article 30	Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

With Social Distancing and Social Isolation as new social and political values, the core values of human sociality, community, conviviality, commensality and democracy have been hijacked by global health politics and by the new global health ethic of prevention and restriction.

Conviviality and commensality as crucial sociological foundations of communication, care, humanity and basic democracy – have become criminal acts in a technologically traced, traked, mediated, digitally surveyed, socially distanced and self-isolating world.

With masks – despite of multiple scientific proves of their inefficacy in relation to a presumed protection of oneself or others from a viral infection[5], face masks are still politically prescribed and instructed. They have become symbols and means of disciplinary, educational and re-educational measures of a new hygiene regime.

Singing, dancing, debating and creatively contesting a common truth have become criminal and heretic. Exactly the same dynamic of marginalisation and criminalisation applies to the historical and contemporary experiences of indigenous people worldwide.

Indigenous cultures are cultures of orality and performativity, where knowledge transmissions are performed through trance, dance, ritual spectacles, and other forms of embodied practice. These knowledge systems have been derogatively labelled "primitive", "unscientific", "magical" and "un-developed". In the same vein, also our humane face-to-face communication has been criminalised and denigrated, being considered unhealthy, toxic, dirty and dangerous.

In the same way as the value and knowledge systems of indigenous minority societies, also our humanistic European values have been degraded, denigrated, demonised and criminalised by simply following basic rules of humane communication.

All what makes humans human, namely culture, meaningful communication, sensuality, ritual, and religion have become today - in times of Covid - acts of criminals.

Within the political Covid emergency European humanistic values and cultural practices risk to be marginalised, criminalised, eroded and endangered by the technocratic and corporate-industrial powers of a new health and hygiene regime.

[5] For example the Meta study on masks: Kisieliski, Kai (et al). 2021 Is a Mask That Covers the Mouth and Nose Free from Undesirable Side Effects in Everyday Use and Free of Potential Hazards?IJERPH/Volume 18 /Issue 8 (open access) https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/8/4344; Ines Kappstein 2020 Mund-Nasen-Schutz in der Öffentlichkeit: Keine Hinweise für eine Wirksamkeit. In: Krankenhaushygiene up-2date 2020; 15(03): 279-295 DOI: 10.1055/a-1174-6591; Denis G Rancourt 2020. Face masks, lies, damn lies, and public health officials: "A growing body of evidence" https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343399832_Face_masks_lies_damn_lies_and_public_health_officials_A_growing_body_of_evidence; Prousa, Daniela 2020. Studie zu psychologischen und psychovegetativen Beschwerden durch die aktuellen Mund-Nasenschutz-Verordnungen in Deutschland (https://corona-ausschuss.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Studie%20zu%20psychologischen%20und%20psychovegetativen%20Beschwerden%20durch%20die%20Masken.pdf)

The criminalisation of humanity, of values of the individual and of values of human rights and dignity suggests a sociological transition. This seems to be a transition from a humanist/humane society to a new post-human/post-humanist global technocracy. This process fostered by the political promotion of lockdowns and legitimated by algorithmic control, artificial intelligence, digital technology, and digital surveillance is effectuated by exclusively pharmaceutical-industrial interventions to global health. As such, this sociological transition erodes the human, cultural and democratic rights of a humanistic European culture.

Conclusion:

While researching, documenting and advocating the issues of indigenous people and societies worldwide, the sudden emergence of a global pandemic in 2020 has presented to the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center a new research topic, namely the endangered and marginalised lifeworlds and worldviews of a humane and humanistic European society.

As an optimistic perspective based on long-term anthropological experience and research on indigenous marginalised and endangered cultures however, it can be seen that contemporary indigenous communities and societies in South Asia, Latin America and Eurasia have survived colonization with resilience and resistance, shaping today a post-colonial imagination, awareness and citizenship.

In the same vein, academical discourses can profit from the reflection on colonial historical experience of marginalised, persecuted and today endangered cultures and groups. This Experience and indigenous knowledge could be applied today to the experience of the global pandemic and in this way ensure a cultural resilience the context of dramatic cultural, political and social changes.

The Margionalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center studies today new colonisation processes amidst us – European citizens – whose cultures and traditions have been marginalised by new regimes of sanitisation, social control and the arbitrary categorisation through the lens of a hygiene purity and pollution.

Bibliography

AGRAWAL, A. (1995): Dismantling the Divide between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge. In: *Development and Change* 26, pp. 413 – 439.

BENDAVID, E., OH, Ch., BHATTACHARYA, J., IOANNIDIS, J. P. A. (2021): Assessing mandatory stay-at-home and business closure effects on the spread of COVID-19 by. In: *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* 51(4). First published: 05 January 2021 https://doi.org/10.1111/eci.13484. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eci.13484.

BRABEC DE MORI, B. (2016): "What makes indigenous unique? Overview of Knowledge Systems among the World's Indigenous People". In: *Past-Future-2016: Seminar on the Protection of Aboriginal Wisdom; Proceedings.* Huailien: National Dong Hwa University, pp. 78 – 85.

GUZY, L., KAPALO, J. (Eds.), (2017): *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Comparative Studies on Contemporary Eurasia, India and South America.* Lit: Berlin, Bern, London.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, C. (1962): *La Pensée Sauvage.* Paris: Plon.

SILLITOE, P. (1998): The Development of Indigenous Knowledge: A New Applied Anthropology. In: *Current Anthropology* 39(2), pp. 223 – 252.

YOUNG, I. (1989): Polity and Group Difference: a critique of the ideal of universal citizenship. In: *Ethics* 99(2), pp. 250 – 274.

KISIELISKI, K. (et al), (2021): *Is a Mask That Covers the Mouth and Nose Free from Undesirable Side Effects in Everyday Use and Free of Potential Hazards?* IJERPH 18(8) (open access). Available at: https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/8/4344.

KAPPSTEIN, I. (2020): Mund-Nasen-Schutz in der Öffentlichkeit: Keine Hinweise für eine Wirksamkeit. In: *Krankenhaushygiene up2date* 15(03), pp. 279 – 295. Available at: DOI: 10.1055/a-1174-6591.

PROUSA, D. (2020). *Studie zu psychischen und psychovegetativen Beschwerden mit den aktuellen Mund-Nasenschutz-Verordnungen.* PsychArchives. Available at: https://doi.org/10.23668/PSYCHARCHIVES.3135

RANCOURT, D. G. (2020): *Face masks, lies, damn lies, and public health officials: "A growing body of evidence*". Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343399832_Face_masks_lies_damn_lies_and_public_health_officials_A_growing_body_of_evidence;

Newspaper articles:

Mexico: López Obrador says pandemic lockdowns are the tactic of dictators. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/02/mexico-lopez-obrador-pandemic-lockdowns-dictatorship

Dr. Lidia Guzy
Study of Religions Department, CACSSS
College Rd, University College Cork (UCC)
National University of Ireland
Cork, Ireland
email: l.guzy@ucc.ie
Scopus ID: 55752173500