

Foreword

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

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FOREWORD

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

I present to readers an up-to-date book in which a new generation of researchers debate the contradictions and possibilities of human rights, some 60 years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The result of a productive partnership between the Doctoral Program *Direitos Humanos nas Sociedades Contemporâneas* of the *Centro de Estudos Sociais* of the University of Coimbra and the State University of Santa Cruz (Ilhéus, Bahia, Brazil), this work reflects the social struggles and political horizons of different places and continents which are rendered in dialogue. This book, in a bilingual edition that will be accessible to the international academic community, contributes to human rights being increasingly thought through an unfinished conversation, a critical dialogue among those who question their limits and explore their possibilities solely based on the mobilizing proposals of social transformation and the endless narratives of resistance to unjust suffering.

I believe that the Western understanding of the world far exceeds the Western understanding of the world and, thus, the Western understanding of the universality of human rights. It is about taking seriously the broader idea that there will be no global social justice without global cognitive justice, hence recognizing the profound implications for the relationship between human rights, social transformation and knowledge. I consider that this relationship can be deepened by means of what I call “ecology of knowledge,” an epistemological endeavor based on the incompleteness of any human knowledge intended to identify distinct knowledge and criteria of rigor and validity that operate credibly in social practices in order to develop creative interactions among them.

I have argued that human rights can no longer be reduced to the Western assumptions that underlie the claims of an abstract universality regarded as undisputed. The exuberant promises that many still see in human rights can never be fulfilled if their intercultural and counter-hegemonic horizons have turned their backs on other grammars of human dignity hitherto silenced or insufficiently recognized. In particular, I am referring to the grammars of dignity which in this vast world have expressed and express the struggles against forms of injustice based on colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy.

The book now organized by Bruno Sena Martins, Ana Cristina Santos and Saskya Lopes, “Contemporary Societies and Human Rights” (*As sociedades contemporâneas e os Direitos Humanos*), the result of continuous dialogues among researches that broaden our horizons, represent a valuable expression of what I have called “ecology of knowledge”, designed in the search for a post-abyssal future for human rights.