FLEKS
Scandinavian Journal of Intercultural Theory and Practice
Vol. 1 - Tolerance No. 1 - 2014 Side 1/5

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Karina Hestad Skeie
Line Alice Ytrehus

NLA University College
KarinaHestad.Skeie@NLA.no
LineAlice.Ytrehus@NLA.no

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

– Nelson Mandela

"It always seems impossible until it´s done".

- Nelson Mandela

The first two issues of FLEKS explore the notion of tolerance in theory and praxis. Tolerance is a rather appropriate point of departure for a journal on intercultural communication and interaction. In the intercultural context, mutual tolerance and/or respect are seen as basic requirements whether the objective is the reciprocal exchange of ideas (in a dialogue), or effective communication for informational, political or commercial purposes. In addition, politicians and theorists involved in debates about multi-ethnic societies frequently describe tolerance as a basic human virtue that is required for peaceful coexistence (e.g., Rawls 1993, Parekh 2006, Rattansi 2011).

Tolerance is a complex and multifaceted concept, and accordingly is not easy to grasp or study in a precise, coherent and non-reductive way. Usually the exercise of tolerance involves the making of a moral judgment, thus requiring knowledge, whether real or imagined, as well as reasoning and emotions. Tolerance may encompass anything from an acceptance and acknowledgement of something or somebody to an act of endurance that is undertaken with varying degrees of disapproval. In everyday life, the need for tolerance is most strongly felt when one is confronted by its opposite: hate speech, violence, contempt and exclusion. In everyday speech, we also hear calls for "zero tolerance" in certain multicultural settings. Sometimes these calls represent a firm adherence to basic values. Sometimes they represent a desire to defend what are considered to be vital interests. At other times, they are reactions based on fear, mistrust and misunderstandings. How can we determine what is what?

Tolerance is often conceived of as a universal virtue. This view is reductionist, however, as it fails to take sufficiently into account cultural and religious diversity.

Religious beliefs are important in the formation of norms and values. Despite this, tolerance does not always play an important role in the norms and values promulgated by different religions. The Christian Bible, for example, for centuries the major source for Christian norms and values, does not mention tolerance as a virtue. While Jesus' commandment "to love your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Matthew 22:39)[1] could instigate tolerance, it would be reductionist to interpret love and tolerance as the same phenomenon.

A second, but equally important, objection to the claim of universality is embedded in the concept of tolerance itself. As Rainer Forst points out, tolerance is a normatively dependent concept. His thoughts are well explained and developed in the article by Hans Marius Hansteen in this issue. Simply put, Forst's position is that even though the tolerated beliefs or practices are considered objectionable and, in important ways, wrong or bad, the arguments for their acceptance are still considered stronger than the reasons for rejection. This implies that tolerance is not a virtue or a value in and of itself. Tolerance needs to be combined with other normative resources in order to have substance, content, and limits – and in order to be regarded as something good at all (cf. Forst 2012, Hansteen in this issue).

In his much-acclaimed book *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2006), the British political theorist Bhikhu Parekh points out that in recent decades such diverse groups as indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, old and new immigrants, faith-based groups, feminists, gays, lesbians, and vegans have resisted assimilationist measures and demanded the right *not* to be mainstream. Not only do such groups demand equal rights as worthy citizens, they also require public legitimation of their difference (2006:1). For these social and political movements that demand cultural recognition of identity-related differences, writes Parekh, "the familiar plea for toleration is not enough because it implies conceding the validity of society's disapproval and relying on its self-restraint" (Ibid.). A sense of alienation or

1 This is one of the two key commandments in the Bible and is repeated in many of its chapters, for example, Mark 12.31, Luke 10:27, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8, and Leviticus 19:18.

inferiorisation, and the fear of social rejection or ridicule, all humiliate a person, depriving him or her of dignity and self-esteem.

Parekh argues that in the globalised world, cultural diversity is inescapable and is a value in itself. Nevertheless, a multicultural society cannot be stable unless it develops a common sense of belonging, solidarity and trust among most of its citizens. Social recognition is fundamental to the individual's identity and self-worth, and misrecognition can gravely damage both (Taylor 1994 in Parekh 2006:342). Thus, Parekh claims, "the good society does not commit itself to a particular political doctrine or vision of the good life and ask *how much diversity to tolerate within the limits set by it*" (2006:340, our emphasis). Because pluralism is inescapable, and because the inferiorisation, marginalisation or the expulsion of human fellow beings is degrading both to the victims and to the aggressors, we support Parekh's argument that a good society presupposes the acceptance of "the reality and desirability of cultural diversity and structures its political life accordingly" (2006:340).

How can this be ensured in practice? Parekh claims that a society needs to be dialogically constituted, and its constant concern is to keep the dialogue going and nurture a climate in which it can proceed effectively, stretch the boundaries of the prevailing forms of thought, and generate a body of collectively acceptable principles, institutions and politics. The dialogue requires certain institutional preconditions such as freedom of expression,…. and it calls for such essential political virtues as mutual respect and concern, *tolerance*, self-restraint, willingness to enter unto unfamiliar worlds of thought, love of diversity, a mind open to new ideas and a hearth open to other's needs, and the ability to persuade and live with unresolved differences. (Parekh 2006:340, our emphasis)

An interesting point here concerns the value assigned to tolerance in the context of a pluralist society. While most liberal and multicultural philosophy asserts tolerance as a vital virtue, Parekh posits links between tolerance and recognition, or mutual respect and concern. He distinguishes between tolerance in a homogenising and assimilationist society based on "the belief that there is only one correct, true or normal way to understand and structure the relevant areas of life" on the one hand, and his notion of the good society as referred to above, on the other (2006:1). Parekh's notion of "the good society" is liberal, stressing values such as human dignity and autonomy, but also communitarian values such as interdependence. Cultural difference is not confined within the limits set by liberalism or other particular cultural perspectives and does not suppress and marginalise what the majority or elite perceive as non-liberal values and cultures (340 et seq.). This recalls the views of the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim, and what he termed the liberal dilemma: "When the liberal principles become absolute, liberalism turns into absolute illiberalism" (Skjervheim 1968, p.15, in Ytrehus' translation).

We wish to dedicate this very first issue of FLEKS to *Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela* (1918-2013). To us he embodied tolerance and personal integrity. He showed that there are circumstances and contexts that may require personal and collective struggle and sacrifice, because a failure to act would implicate the individual in collective injustice and intolerance. Mandela did not accept social injustice whether it was done in the name of multiculturalism, apartheid or segregation policies. Instead, he struggled against social injustice for most of his long life. He even met his former enemies, who had imprisoned him for 27 years, with tolerance, understanding, and a dedicated desire for reconciliation and cooperation. Mandela inspired millions to strive for reconciliation and non-violent solutions. He was indeed the face of tolerance. We dedicate this issue to him in admiration, affection and gratitude.

Mandela's example underlines the fact that there are both theoretical and practical aspects to tolerance. Indeed, we would argue that tolerance is best understood by examining these

two aspects together. This is why the articles in these two issues explore tolerance from theoretical, philosophical, pedagogical and various practical points of departure.

Our aim is to bring together young and seasoned scholars. We have also included a student essay in order to inspire the upcoming generation of students within the field. The majority of the contributors work and live in Norway. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Elisabeth Büttner are two notable exceptions. Both are based at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland, where Dr. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, a well-established scholar in the fields of antisemitism and tolerance education, is Director of the Center for Holocaust Studies, and Ms Büttner is a promising PhD student. We are delighted to present their important research alongside that of Norwegian scholars.

The first article in this issue, which is by Associate Professor Hans Marius Hansteen of the University of Bergen, looks at tolerance and recognition from a philosophical perspective. Asking what it means to value diversity, Hansteen demonstrates how the perspectives of Rainer Forst on tolerance and of Axel Honneth on recognition can be combined to produce a fruitful approach to ethical dilemmas and judgments relating to cultural diversity. (This article is in Norwegian.)

In the second article, Associate Professor Kristin Rygg of the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) discusses how to promote cultural sensitivity through language courses and intercultural training in higher education. She asks whether the traditional approach to intercultural training, with its focus on knowledge about cultural differences and on skills for avoiding clashes between cultures, gives sufficient training in intercultural communication for people who will be working in dynamic and psychologically demanding multicultural environments. Rygg both exposes previous weaknesses in the field and also argues for the adoption of a mentalisation-based approach, which could be effective in encouraging empathy and culturally-sensitive and tolerant attitudes. (This article is in English.)

In the third article, Associate Professor Anne Birgitta Nilsen (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences – HIOA) analyses texts written by right-wing extremists, such as Anders Behring Breivik, and by Islamist extremists, such as Osama bin Laden. Comparing these rather unlikely bedfellows, she demonstrates continuities and similarities in their communications. Nilsen shows how hate speech promulgates conspiracy theories in order to spread hatred and intolerance, and also explains the functioning of relevant rhetorical devices. (This article is in Norwegian.)

The fourth article addresses the challenges of ensuring that newly arrived immigrants in Norway enjoy equitable access to, and use of, primary healthcare services. Associate Professor Ursula Småland Goth (HIOA) documents the systematic disparities in healthcare between newly arrived immigrants and the general population, and discusses how measures to increase tolerance and cultural sensitivity in the primary healthcare sector could contribute to bridging the gap. (This article is in Norwegian.)

What can we learn from the dark chapters in our history? Does research confirm the much-acclaimed link between Holocaust education and the enhancement of students' openness and awareness of prejudice, negative stereotyping and discrimination? These questions are addressed by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Elisabeth Büttner of the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Poland. In the final research article in this volume, they adopt a comparative perspective for their review of research into Holocaust education in Poland and beyond. Although their findings show that Holocaust education has been less effective than one would have hoped in reducing prejudices, negative stereotyping and discrimination, their article also provides some valuable pointers for ways of improving educational programmes aimed at achieving these goals. (This article is in English.)

In a pedagogical article titled 'Prudence and prejudice', Solveig Moldrheim from the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights discusses how to deal with negative prejudices in the classroom. She presents a review of research and educational resources on ways of changing attitudes in the classroom, and also provides practical advice based on her first-hand experience of teaching about tolerance and human rights. (This article is in Norwegian.)

The student essay included in this issue considers the challenges posed by religion in a multicultural society. The author is Terje Ahmed Frostad (Volda University College – HIVO). (This article is in Norwegian.)

Finally, Inger Daae-Qvale (HIOA) reviews Marianne Rugkåsa's book Likhetens dilemma [The dilemma of equality]. (The review is in Norwegian.)

FLEKS aims to stimulate open-minded, inclusive and tolerant research-based discussions on intercultural issues. In its search for truths based on sound research, the journal aims to be multi-vocal, multilingual and multidisciplinary in content and scope. Our intention is not merely to disseminate conclusions, but also to raise, and stimulate debate about important questions. If the articles in this tolerance-themed issue raise more questions than they answer, we will consider this a promising beginning.

References

The Bible: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Forst, Rainer (2012): "Toleration" in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/toleration/

Parekh, Bhikhu (2006): *Rethinking multiculturalism*. *Cultural diversity and political theory*. 2nd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rattansi, Ali (2011): *Multiculturalism: a very short introduction*. Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press.

Rawls, John (1993): *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press

Skjervheim, Hans (1968): *Det liberale dilemma og andre essays*. Oslo: Tanum