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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION



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INTRODUCTION



HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION: A MAP TO A MOVEMENT'S FUTURE

Lucia Nader (Executive Director, Conectas)
Juana Kweitel (Program Director, Conectas)
Marcos Fuchs (Associate Director, Conectas)

Sur Journal was created ten years ago as a vehicle to deepen and strengthen bonds between academics and activists from the Global South concerned with human rights, in order to magnify their voices and their participation before international organizations and academia. Our main motivation was the fact that, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, academics were working alone and there was very little exchange between researchers from different countries. The journal's aim has been to provide individuals and organizations working to defend human rights with research, analyses and case studies that combine academic rigor and practical interest. In many ways, these lofty ambitions have been met with success: in the past decade, we have published articles from dozens of countries on issues as diverse as health and access to treatment, transitional justice, regional mechanisms and information and human rights, to name a few. Published in three languages and available online and in print for free, our project also remains unique in terms of geographical reach, critical perspective and its Southern 'accent'. In honour of the founding editor of this journal, **Pedro Paulo Poppovic**, the 20th issue opens with a biography (by João Paulo Charleaux) of this sociologist who has been one of the main contributors to this publication's success.

This past decade has also been, in many ways, a successful one for the human rights movement as a whole. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has recently turned 60, new international treaties have been adopted and the old but good global and regional monitoring systems are in full operation, despite criticisms regarding their effectiveness and attempts by States to curb their authority. From a strategic perspective, we continue to use, with more or less success, advocacy, litigation and naming-and-shaming as our main tools for change. In addition, we continue to nurture partnerships between what we categorize as local, national and international organizations within our movement.

Nevertheless, the **political and geographic coordinates** under which the global human

rights movement has operated have undergone profound changes. Over the past decade, we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets to protest against social and political injustices. We have also seen emerging powers from the South play an increasingly influential role in the definition of the global human rights agenda. Additionally, the past ten years have seen the rapid growth of social networks as a tool of mobilization and as a privileged forum for sharing political information between users. In other words, the journal is publishing its 20th issue against a backdrop that is very different from that of ten years ago. The protests that recently filled the streets of many countries around the globe, for example, were not organized by traditional social movements nor by unions or human rights NGOs, and people's grievances, more often than not, were expressed in terms of social justice and not as rights. Does this mean that human rights are no longer seen as an effective language for producing social change? Or that human rights organizations have lost some of their ability to represent wronged citizens? Emerging powers themselves, despite their newly-acquired international influence, have hardly been able – or willing – to assume stances departing greatly from those of “traditional” powers. How and where can human rights organizations advocate for change? Are Southern-based NGOs in a privileged position to do this? Are NGOs from emerging powers also gaining influence in international forums?

It was precisely to reflect upon these and other pressing issues that, for this 20th issue, SUR's editors decided to enlist the help of over 50 leading human rights activists and academics from 18 countries, from Ecuador to Nepal, from China to the US. We asked them to ponder on what we saw as some of the most urgent and relevant questions facing the global human rights movement today: 1. Who do we represent? 2. How do we combine urgent issues with long-term impacts? 3. Are human rights still an effective language for producing social change? 4. How have new information and communication technologies influenced activism? 5. What are the challenges of working internationally from the South?

The result, which you now hold in your hands, is a **roadmap for the global human rights movement** in the 21st century – it offers a vantage point from which it is possible to observe where the movement stands today and where it is heading. The first stop is a reflection on these issues by the founding directors of Conectas Human Rights, **Oscar Vilhena Vieira and Malak El-Chichini Poppovic**. The roadmap then goes on to include **interviews and articles**, both providing in-depth analyses of human rights issues, as well as **notes from the field**, more personalized accounts of experiences working with human rights, which we have organized into **six categories**, although most of them could arguably be allocated to more than one category:

Language. In this section, we have included articles that ponder the question of whether human rights – as a utopia, as norms and as institutions – are still effective for producing social change. Here, the contributions range from analyses on human rights as a language for change (**Stephen Hoggood and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro**), empirical research on the use of the language of human rights for articulating grievances in recent mass protests (**Sara Burke**), to reflections on the standard-setting role and effectiveness of international human rights institutions (**Raquel Rolnik, Vinodh Jaichand and Emílio**

Álvarez Icaza). It also includes studies on the movement's global trends (**David Petrasek**), challenges to the movement's emphasis on protecting the rule of law (**Kumi Naidoo**), and strategic proposals to better ensure a compromise between utopianism and realism in relation to human rights (**Samuel Moyn**).

Themes. Here we have included contributions that address specific human rights topics from an original and critical standpoint. Four themes were analysed: economic power and corporate accountability for human rights violations (**Phil Bloomer, Janet Love and Gonzalo Berrón**); sexual politics and LGBTI rights (**Sonia Corrêa, Gloria Careaga Pérez and Arvind Narrain**); migration (**Diego Lorente Pérez de Eulate**); and, finally, transitional justice (**Clara Sandoval**).

Perspectives. This section encompasses country-specific accounts, mostly field notes from human rights activists on the ground. Those contributions come from places as diverse as Angola (**Maria Lúcia da Silveira**), Brazil (**Ana Valéria Araújo**), Cuba (**María-Ileana Faguaga Iglesias**), Indonesia (**Haris Azhar**), Mozambique (**Salvador Nkamate**) and Nepal (**Mandira Sharma**). But they all share a critical perspective on human rights, including for instance a sceptical perspective on the relation between litigation and public opinion in Southern Africa (**Nicole Fritz**), a provocative view of the democratic future of China and its relation to labour rights (**Han Dongfang**), and a thoughtful analysis of the North-South duality from Northern Ireland (**Maggie Beirne**).

Voices. Here the articles go to the core of the question of whom the global human rights movement represents. **Adrian Gurza Lavalle** and **Juana Kweitel** take note of the pluralisation of representation and innovative forms of accountability adopted by human rights NGOs. Others study the pressure for more representation or a louder voice in international human rights mechanisms (such as in the Inter-American system, as reported by **Mario Melo**) and in representative institutions such as national legislatures (as analysed by **Pedro Abramovay and Heloisa Griggs**). Finally, **Chris Grove**, as well as **James Ron, David Crow and Shannon Golden** emphasize, in their contributions, the need for a link between human rights NGOs and grassroots groups, including economically disadvantaged populations. As a counter-argument, **Fateh Azzam** questions the need of human rights activists to represent anyone, taking issue with the critique of NGOs as being overly dependent on donors. Finally, **Mary Lawlor and Andrew Anderson** provide an account of a Northern organization's efforts to attend to the needs of local human rights defenders as they, and only they, define them.

Tools. In this section, the editors included contributions that focus on the instruments used by the global human rights movement to do its work. This includes a debate on the role of technology in promoting change (**Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul**, as well as **Sopheap Chak and Miguel Pulido Jiménez**) and perspectives on the challenges of human rights campaigning, analysed provocatively by **Martin Kirk** and **Fernand Alphen** in their respective contributions. Other articles point to the need of organizations to be more grounded in local contexts, as noted by **Ana Paula Hernández** in relation to Mexico, by **Louis Bickford** in what he sees as a convergence towards the global middle, and finally by **Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and Anna Turley** in their movement-support model. In addition, it is noted by **Mary Kaldor** that NGOs are not the same as civil society,

properly understood. Furthermore, litigation and international work are cast in a critical light by **Sandra Carvalho and Eduardo Baker** in relation to the dilemma between long and short term strategies in the Inter-American system. Finally, **Gastón Chillier and Pétalla Brandão Timo** analyse South-South cooperation from the viewpoint of a national human rights NGO in Argentina.

Multipolarity. Here, the articles challenge our ways of thinking about power in the multipolar world we currently live in, with contributions from the heads of some of the world's largest international human rights organizations based in the North (**Kenneth Roth** and **Salil Shetty**) and in the South (**Lucia Nader, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah** and **Mandeep Tiwana**). This section also debates what multipolarity means in relation to States (**Emilie M. Hafner-Burton**), international organizations and civil society (**Louise Arbour**) and businesses (**Mark Malloch-Brown**).

Conectas hopes this issue will foster debate on the future of the global human rights movement in the 21st century, enabling it to reinvent itself as necessary to offer better protection of human rights on the ground.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this issue of Sur Journal was made possible by the support of the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Oak Foundation, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Additionally, Conectas Human Rights is especially grateful for the collaboration of the authors and the hard work of the Journal's editorial team. We are also extremely thankful for the work of Maria Brant and Manoela Miklos for conceiving this Issue and for conducting most of the interviews, and for Thiago Amparo for joining the editorial team and making this Issue possible. We are also tremendously thankful for Luz González's tireless work with editing the contributions received, and for Ana Cernov for coordinating the overall editorial process.



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Human Rights in Motion

Tools

GASTÓN CHILLIER AND PÉTALLA BRANDÃO TIMO

The Global Human Rights Movement in the 21st Century: Reflections from the Perspective of a National Human Rights NGO from the South

MARTIN KIRK

Systems, Brains and Quiet Places:

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INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS BICKFORD

Convergence Towards the Global Middle: "Who Sets the Global Human Rights Agenda and How"



MARTIN KIRK

Martin Kirk is the Head of Strategy for /The Rules, a global collective of activists and organisers working to tackle the root causes of inequality and poverty. He joined /The Rules from Oxfam in June 2012, where he had been Head of UK Campaigns. Before Oxfam, Martin was Head of Global Advocacy for Save the Children. A history graduate, Martin has worked extensively across private, public and NGO sector on government relations and engaging

the public on global issues. His twitter account is: @martinkirk_ny

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ABSTRACT

Eighty-six years on from the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, how are we doing? Are we getting better at managing this chaotic planet and “protecting the human”? And, given that, what does the future hold for human rights advocates and campaigners? In this article, the author attempts to address these questions. By focusing on a systems-level analysis, the author looks at the planetary system in three parts. First, the biosphere, upon which the life of our fragile species depends; then, the economic and financial systems that now largely dictate our fate; and finally, the morass of international bodies whose job it is, technically speaking, to promote and protect human rights into the future. The author concludes in an optimistic note, giving five recommendations primarily addressed to the human rights sector in their campaigning activities.

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Human Rights Campaign – Climate Change – International System – Corporations



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ARTICLE

SYSTEMS, BRAINS AND QUIET PLACES: THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNING

Martin Kirk

Eighty-six years on from the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, how are we doing? Are we getting better at managing this chaotic planet and “protecting the human”? And, given that, what does the future hold for human rights advocates and campaigners?

This article is my attempt to address these questions. I am going to go off-road a bit, by which I mean that rather than building a case on traditional policy analysis or statistical trends (although there will be some of that), I will focus on a systems-level analysis. Three systems in one, actually: the biosphere; the economic and financial systems; and international bodies. This will lead to five recommendations for human rights campaigning and a short reflection on what to do with the fact that rationality and reason can only take us so far.

I premise everything on an idea eloquently captured by Susan George:

Study the rich and powerful, not the poor and powerless.... Let the poor study themselves. They already know what is wrong with their lives and if you truly want to help them, the best you can do is give them a clearer idea of how their oppressors are working now and can be expected to work in future.

(GEORGE, 1976 apud STATE..., 2014).

The poor and powerless in this quote can easily be switched to the abused and oppressed; they are often the same people and even when they're not, the same forces of oppression apply.

I am not going to pull any punches. I present my case in a way that would be unlikely to convince a general public audience: using stark, to-the-point analyses and making the strongest appeals I can muster. We've learnt from experience that using doomsday scenarios and fear to engage the public is a counter productive strategy (CROMPTON; KASSER, 2009) but this piece is written for professionals, people fully capable of considering all realities, however unsettling.

Notes to this text start on page 396.

1 How are we doing?: A Systemic Look

So, how are we doing? No sane analysis could conclude anything other than that we have driven ourselves into a state of deep and urgent crisis. It's not hyperbole to suggest that the magnitude of the problems we face is almost beyond imagining. And what's more, we're driving ourselves further and faster into danger with every day that passes.

In this article, I'm going to side-step some traditional human rights concerns and look at the planetary system in three parts. First, the biosphere, upon which the life of our fragile species depends; then, the economic and financial systems that now largely dictate our fate; and finally, the morass of international bodies whose job it is, technically speaking, to promote and protect human rights into the future.

It is only through this grand, systemic perspective that we can understand why we are about to enter a phase of chronic and widespread human rights abuses, and how we might best protect what we can. It's in the changing climate, the economic chaos and political norms that the seeds of systemic human rights abuse are sown and watered. If we want to do more than fiddle while Rome burns, we must focus more of our attention at these systems and, critically, at what holds them together.

There are discernible and predictable patterns within any complex system. The full earth system may be far more complex than we can understand but it obeys certain laws. It has inputs and outputs, stocks and flows, control and feedback, and most of them are beyond the predictable influence of any individual or government. This is one of the paradoxes of the age: governments have never been more powerful but, at the same time, have never been less able to deliver peace and justice. It's also an unpalatable fact for human rights advocates because, like any power broker, we must believe in the potential of our influence. In our quests to make things better, we pick campaigns that we think—albeit often with considerable optimism—our power can achieve. But all the optimism in the world has not managed to drag our focus to the system in its entirety. We – the human rights professionals – subdivide. We select, prioritise and focus. We choose campaigns according to pre-prescribed categories of issue, expertise and competence. Of course we do! How else could we face Monday mornings? The enormity of the task would crush our spirits. So we adopt this managerial approach, like our leaders above us. It is how we have been taught.

The problem is that this managerial approach locks us into understanding and effecting only technical changes, at best. It rewards us for using categories that separate and as much as they focus. It's like we're trained to tinker with the carburetor in an internal combustion engine when what we really need to do is change the fact that it internally combusts. We are trained to see as separate things that are profoundly linked: NSA spying and the abuse of LGBT rights in Uganda, for example; the epidemic of suicides amongst farmers in India and the destruction of the Amazon rainforests; the explosion of student debt in the US and rising food prices in Kenya. Because we see from this fragmented perspective,

we are constantly dazzled and horrified by what the system logically spews out in the guise of brutality, mass poverty and conflict. We behave as if each atrocity was somehow a single, even natural, aberration, to be fixed with the reigning in of this dictator, the passing of that law or the signing of these international goals. We see so many Syrias; we live for so long with the Gaza Internment Camp; and we are asked so often to give money, time or space for an unending stream of starving children, death row convicts, and pitiful migrants that it can feel indulgent to spend time thinking in what can feel like unduly abstract terms, or in ways that contradict so much of the wisdom we received at school, from our parents, from our leaders. And so they, our leaders, get away with failure on a colossal scale: the failure of not being honest about how trapped they are in systems they cannot possibly understand, control or diverge from.

Furthermore, we tend to have very short memories when it comes to cause and effect—just think of how quickly a new government is blamed for the state of a nation, or how loudly we laud, or blame, the people we see immediately before us in revolutions—but the hard truth is we almost always give undue weight to what is immediately in front of us, and we are largely incapable of achieving all the insight into, let alone control of the forces that clothe some of us in luxury while damning many more to penury and pain. But what's certain is that we are limiting the insight we could have with many of our current practices. The only sensible, appropriately humble approach is to study the forces and principles inherent in the whole system.

2 Biosphere

So let's start with a look at the system that permits all other systems: our life-sustaining biosphere. It's been brutally evident for a while now that this system is adapting to significant pressures. The stock of CO₂ in the atmosphere is producing dangerous effects and we are doing worse than nothing to address the cause. Climate change has been known about since the 1960s. World leaders first took serious note of it at the Rio Earth Summit in 1990. Since Rio, we have increased the amount of CO₂ we pump into the atmosphere every year by 61%. We are not just failing to reduce global emissions, we are increasing them every single year, save for a small decrease after the economic stagnation caused by the 2008 crisis.¹ Once all the sound and fury of public relations and politics is stripped away, our simple failure is stark.

Now, assuming that a 2 degree Celsius rise in global temperatures is the point where things turn from bad to worse for humans, and a point we therefore want to avoid, we can pump roughly 565 gigatonnes more CO₂ into the atmosphere by mid-century. At current best estimates, the reserves of oil already located and scheduled for burning² will pump out 2,795 gigatonnes. So, bye-bye 2 degrees, and probably 3 and, very possibly, 4 degrees (MCKIBBEN, 2012). No one knows exactly what will happen with temperature changes, but according to Thomas Lovejoy, once the World Bank's chief biodiversity adviser, "If we're seeing what we're seeing today at 0.8 degrees Celsius [rise], two degrees is simply too much" (MCKIBBEN, 2012).

By “what we’re seeing today,” he means, in the words of the Global Humanitarian Forum, “[M]any communities face multiple stresses with serious social, political and security implications.... Millions of people are uprooted or permanently on the move as a result. Many more millions will follow” (GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN FORUM, 2009, p. ii). He means the increase in extreme weather events,³ and the 14% increase in incidence of conflict we are seeing that seem attributable to rising temperatures (HSIANG; BURKE; MIGUEL, 2013).

I don’t need to belabour this point; the statistics are readily available. It is, however, worth repeating just a sample of the IPCC’s most recent predictions, to underline the point that what we are seeing now is tame compared to what is coming. In Latin America, they predict the “[G]radual replacement of tropical forest by savannah in eastern Amazonia; significant changes in water availability for human consumption, agriculture and energy generation”. In Africa, “[B]y 2020, between 75 and 250 million people are projected to be exposed to increased water stress; yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent in some regions; agricultural production, including access to food, may be severely compromised”. In Asia, “freshwater availability [is] projected to decrease in Central, South, East and Southeast Asia by the 2050s; death rates from disease associated with floods and droughts are expected to rise in some regions” (THE CURRENT..., 2014). And bear in mind, the IPCC has a history of overly conservative predictions.

Sir Martin Rees, holder of The Albert Einstein World Award of Science and the Isaac Newton medal and former President of the Royal Society, routinely now asks the question, “Is this the last century of humanity?” (REES, 2005). In a book he published in 2003, he argued that the human race has a 50/50 chance of making it through to 2100.⁴ And then there’s James Hanson, perhaps the planet’s most prominent climatologist, who, after years of polite research and lobbying, is now more likely to take to the streets to protest, and saying that if some of the planned projects to exploit new sources of fossil fuels, like the tar sands of Canada, go ahead, it could spell “game over for the planet” (MAYER, 2011).

You can take issue with either one of these or the many other similar opinions by highly credentialed scientists, but you can’t reasonably discount them all. Even if one of them is half-right, we’re headed for the rapids. And as practically all of history teaches us, in times of stress, human beings are quick to turn on each other. In the extreme stress we are about to face, is it possible that we will even find the living ideal of universal human rights wiped off the map entirely? Can such things withstand permanent stress and conflict between mammoth corporations, governments and economic blocs? As the old Kikuyu proverb says, “When elephants fight it is the grass that suffers”.

3 Financial and Economic System

We’ll loop back to the climate later, but now we turn to the financial and economic system and the trajectory that is setting for us.

Oxfam made a great splash recently by drawing attention to the fact that the richest 85 people on the planet have the same wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion

combined (OXFAM, 2014). We need to acknowledge just two simple facts to see what this means for the future of human rights. First, that it didn't come about by accident; it is the logical outcome of our economic and financial system. The most immediate cause is the deliberate and uncompromising neoliberal policies that have been dominant in the West and forcefully imposed on much of the developing world since the 1980s. So, whereas inequality always has, always will and always must, at some level, be part of human society, what we see today is a very modern phenomenon, borne of the logic with which a particular—and, I would argue, extreme—ideology has infected the economic system. And the grip this ideology has on global power structures is being consolidated daily (MONBIOT, 2013).

The second fact is that inequality causes social disharmony, to put it mildly. Kate Pickett and Richard Wilson more than adequately proved the point in their seminal 2009 study of wealth inequality within and between nations, *The Spirit Level* (WILKINSON; PICKETT, 2009, 2014). Pick an indicator of social well-being and inequality makes it worse. Higher homicide rates, teenage pregnancy, incarceration levels, obesity, child mortality and lower educational attainment are all correlated with rising inequality. Studies since the publication of the book⁵ have reinforced everything it said and added a few impacts for good measure: rising inequality also fuels consumerism, adds to personal debt and even increases levels of narcissism. In other words, an unequal society is an unhealthy society. At the levels we are seeing globally today, to foster, or to not fight to reduce, systemically driven inequality is akin to giving a free pass to abuse of the species.

To put it another way, anyone concerned with levels of human rights abuses in the future must work to change the logic driving this inequality-causing economic system in the present, not because of some overlapping values imperative or political allegiance with other social justice campaigners, but because the latter is creating all the causes and conditions—on a planetary scale—necessary for the former to sky-rocket. The cause and the effects may or may not end up being closely linked in time, but at the level of the planetary system, a die has been cast.

It's not difficult to pinpoint some of the structures and decisions that this infection has caused. Any list of the top ten must include tax havens; corporate exceptionalism under the law (think about the idea that corporations are "too big to fail" to see the sharp end of that trend); the flooding of politics with money, particularly in the US; and trade rules heavily rigged in favour of those with the most money and lawyers—trade rules, furthermore, that are even now being redesigned, in the guise of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and similar deals, to invest even more power in corporate, profit-driven hands (MONBIOT, 2013). And supporting it all is the creation of the hyper-consumer, whose compassion is dulled and whose competitive instincts are permanently primed⁶ thanks to ubiquitous demands to buy, buy, buy and then continuous glorification of the idea that happiness is what you own. What else is the \$ 500 billion advertising industry for? Taken all together, the global economy is essentially now a wealth extraction system; ruthlessly efficient at drawing financial and resource wealth away from the majority of people.

The reasons for all this are, of course, many and complex. But stand far enough back and it is also quite simple. Essentially it boils down to the fact that the structural incentives and rewards that drive this corporate capitalist system are unable to directly register anything but economic value. The system is deaf, dumb and blind to climate destruction and mass human suffering. It is, at this stage, far bigger than any government or corporation. It is, to all intents and purposes, a living force. It's not alive in any traditional sense, of course, but it is undoubtedly possessed of an energy beyond our control. Unless the logic driving it is changed, the future is pretty much set in stone.

What's rather strange to consider is that the system has a powerful immune system made of human beings with which it fights off attacks. A part of this is the small army of apologists we are all very familiar with, the extreme examples being the likes of the Fox News network. Dangerous and regressive though they are, however, conservative talking heads are far from being the most pernicious enemy. The real white blood cells in the bloodstream are the rank and file employees, those decent, well-meaning people who follow their conscience, with integrity, to promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, supply chain upgrades and recycling schemes; NGO employees who unwittingly distract people from seeing the horror of the system by promoting the false solution of charity; and a mainstream media trained, and sometimes forced, to see and describe only so much. Good intentions are being exploited, and workers, used, as little more than human shields to protect the ability of the system to push onwards, "business as usual". Even the governing class is only accountable to a degree; as long as they work within the system—which they must to get to be the governing class; or, as John Ralston Saul describes it, "[T]hey are precisely the people whom our system seeks out" (SAUL, 2013, p. 26)—their power is limited. If it's starting to sound like I'm invoking an evil sentient force, just remember: the system is only doing what all complex systems do: protect and grow itself.

4 International System

Finally, before we turn to the good news, a look at the third part of the international system: the constellation of institutions that are, at least in principle, about more than generating capital.

The United Nations is as central a node of this system as there is—the United Nations in its broadest sense, that is, and thus including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁷ Until recently, corporate influence over these bodies has been kept somewhat contained and out of sight. That's not to say corporate interests weren't always a big part of the West's global development plan: the structural adjustment plans of the 1980s and 90s were a clear example of the hammers used to beat down the walls of protection developing countries needed to develop industry of their own (just as the West had done at a corresponding stage in its development) so that big Western corporations could set up shop. Still, there was a time when corporations and private interests were rarely seen at the public policy-making table.

That is all changing now. Close observers will know that we are witnessing the slow corporate infection of the whole UN system. It's not too outlandish to suggest that we could be witnessing the initial stages of the privatisation of the United Nations. To take just one example: a figure no less than Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary General, is making it his personal mission to usher in a new era of "partnerships" with the private sector. In doing so, he is picking up and supercharging an initiative launched by Kofi Annan in 2000, the Global Compact. According to official literature, The Compact is "a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption" (BAN, 2013).

To help him in his mission, Mr. Ban has broken with protocol and appointed a new Assistant Secretary General without General Assembly approval. He could only make this off-budget move because the post is paid for by Bill Gates. And, as it happens, it has been filled by Robert Orr, a long-standing affiliate of Mr. Gates (LEE, 2012). So now we have this private, unaccountable individual who, by dint of the fact that he hoarded the greatest amount of personal wealth the world has ever known, is allowed to finance the highest levels of the UN.

The small, if pointed, example of Gates and Orr aside, the pragmatists amongst us might reason that bringing big business into the UN tent and getting it to commit to such lofty principles is an excellent idea, as is channeling the oceans of wealth they control towards the beleaguered UN. The problem with this view was neatly summed up by former UNICEF Director Carol Bellamy: "It is dangerous to assume that the goals of the private sector are somehow synonymous with those of the United Nations, because they most emphatically are not" (DEEN, 1999).

The case of KPMG is just one example of what these emphatically different goals look like in practice. KPMG is built to generate profit and grow, as the system demands. That is its purpose, neither good nor bad. The problem comes when we forget that that is its overriding purpose and give it influence over structures that are built for other things. Here's why.

KPMG has been involved in the Global Compact since the beginning. Its commitment to the Compacts' ten principles, however, has not stretched to stopping it from setting up illegal tax shelters for its wealthiest clients. In 2003, an investigation by US attorneys found that, by actively creating illegal tax heavens, KPMG had deprived US citizens of \$2.5 billion in taxes. Once caught, KPMG admitted wrongdoing and paid \$456 million in penalties.⁸ Clearly, then, signing the Compact's 10th principle to "work against corruption⁹ in all its forms" was more of a symbolic act for KPMG, and not something that need interfere with its core business. To add insult to injury, KPMG has since joined the 10th principle's working group, whose job is "to provide guidance for work plan of the Global Compact Office on the 10th principle"¹⁰—talk about foxes in the henhouse!

KPMG is behaving in a way that is entirely consistent with the logic of a neoliberal system; it is doing what any large economic entity would do. How

else have we got to the stage where one third of all privately held wealth—at least US\$26 trillion¹¹—is held in tax havens? By being selective about how they interpret the rules, private interests are able to help build a deeply exploitative system behind the scenes, while still appearing as generous global citizens, helping smooth the edges of that system in public.

So, to summarise that brief tour of the three central systems within the larger global operating system that are bearing down on human rights, we have a biosphere careening inevitably towards violent unpredictability, if not catastrophic collapse (catastrophic for humans and some plants and animals, that is). We have a corporate capitalist economic system that can only recognise financial value and is incapable of hearing the screams of desperation echoing back at it as a result of the chaos it causes. And the closest thing we have to a global governance system is both weak and increasingly falling prey to that same neoliberal logic.

The changing climate will likely dry up vital natural resources in such a way as must pit countries against countries and powerful interests against powerful interests. Scarcity is on the horizon and we know from long and bitter experience that scarcity leads to tension and conflict. As British philosopher John Gray points out, scarcity and the attendant evils it brings, such as wars fought over access to rivers and fertile land, are in fact the norm in history.¹²

5 Recommendations

You'd be forgiven for feeling pretty bleak at this point. If so, I hope I can steer you back to hope and passionate resolve by the end. I am actually an optimist. I believe that just as we built the logic of the world's operating system, so we can change it. I believe Martin Luther King when he reputedly said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice".

My first recommendation for the human rights sector is to get radical. By which I mean, see the forces around us for what they are and do everything we can to change their fundamentals. A radical is someone who thinks or acts outside the Overton Window of the day, what is today generally accepted. And who, or rather what, determines today's Overton Window? Contrary to received wisdom, it is very rarely the mainstream leaders of the day; all they do is vie for power within it. In truth, the Overton Window is an articulation of the imperatives of the system. When the system prioritises economic growth above all else, as ours does, anything that seriously questions this will be labelled radical and ejected from polite society. Do we really believe that the best way to achieve change in the short lives each of us has on the planet is to be led by the nose in this way? It is the antithesis of that most precious of human rights: freedom of thought. Once you perceive the system in its entirety and recognise the inevitability of what it means for human rights, I challenge you not to find yourself thinking radical thoughts. Embrace them. Speak them. And remember what George Orwell is reputed to have said: "in times of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act".

My second recommendation would be to find and align with the many

others who are thinking radical thoughts. The crowds in Zucotti Park, Tahrir Square, Gezi Park and the street of Rio de Janeiro thought and spoke radical ideas. They didn't put access and manners before the imperative for justice. If we want to challenge the system, they are our guides and inspiration far more than the latest CSR initiative or tepid politicians. The day we see Amnesty International banners painting the sky alongside Occupy Wall Street, *La Via Campesina*, Idle No More and the Chilean students is the day we will be witnessing a truly powerful chorus of people whose eyes are open and whose minds and spirits are awake. Better that, by far, than ploughing time and energy into the UN Post-2015 agenda that, because it is a direct product of the system, can only ever work to prolong "business as usual".

My third recommendation is to learn about brains. This battle will be won or lost in the human mind. The world we've created is a reflection of our consciousness, so if we want to change the world, we need to change the way our brains work. That's not as Orwellian as it sounds. Our brains are never the same from one minute to the next; they are being constantly influenced by our environment. So when I talk about changing how our brains work, I am really talking about affecting the direction in which they will evolve. Help them see the big picture, rather than be distracted by the small, shiny or grotesque. We know so much more about why people believe and act as they do than even ten years ago. We should be looking to insights from this learning and hiring people trained in understanding these things. I'm talking about linguists, cognitive scientists and social psychologists. We're a long way behind the times in this; Edward Bernays wrote his seminal book *Propaganda* in 1928 (BERNAYS, 1928) and got the top echelons of corporate America to take the psychology of public opinion seriously.¹³ If the human rights sector could get up to speed with his 1928 insights, that would be an excellent development. But we can do much better than that, if we just recognise and invest in the expertise we need.

My fourth recommendation is to get serious about systemic thinking. It's how Microsoft got to be Microsoft. But they were only ever thinking small time; we need to think big. We need to make reading the systemic flows and understanding genuine pressure points — which are often very different from the ones traditional policy analysis will lead us to — second nature. We need to be able to identify the ventilation shafts in the Deathstar of the neoliberal system, and systems analysis is the way to do that.

My fifth and final recommendation is to re-imagine what the Internet is good for. Sending emails and writing blogs is all well and good, but the Internet is also essentially a giant ear. With modern analytics tools, we can calibrate our laptops to hear what the world is saying in the grandest and the most granular detail. We can listen to the collective mind as it processes thoughts. And with the right experts on hand, we can make sense of it. We can move beyond firing opinions into dark cyberspace and hope they hit something, or someone, useful. We can ride the waves of belief and opinion, rather than be tossed here and there in constant reactive mode. And, of course, we can organise on a previously unimaginable scale.

Done with well-informed mindfulness and consideration, I believe all this will help us work with the grain of human nature. It's easy to miss the fact that neoliberal hyper-consumerism is a phenomenally expensive and difficult boat to keep afloat, because it relies on constantly priming some of humanity's least productive values. Of course people are selfish and greedy in part, but in greater part we are compassionate, empathetic and kind, and these are far more powerful motivators. Empirical science says so (CROMPTON, 2010). It takes a \$500 billion¹⁴ a year advertising industry, massive communications infrastructure (what else is the Rupert Murdoch empire?) and untold amounts spent in greasing political wheels to keep us entranced with this system. It's about as natural as plastic—which leads me to my final half point.

The scale of the case I've made here is outrageously grand. For me, it all boils down to who we are, as humans. What are our short lives for? We have the answers everywhere we look. We have each been taught them according to our own traditions and cultures, but even a brief glance at what the wisest, most astonishingly brave and inspiring people throughout history have told us gives us an answer. Buddha, Socrates, Plato, Jesus, the Prophet Mohammed, Rumi, all the way to Mary Woolstonecraft, Mary Seacole, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela: at the beating heart of what each one said was the truth that the highest purpose of any life is the striving for the happiness and well-being of others. It is in the quiet places within each of us that we will find the answers and the strength needed, and so the connection to our true nature is the final source of understanding and hope. We must each go about this in our own way, but if we do, I have no doubt that we can change the direction of this world.

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1. See: <<http://co2now.org/Current-CO2/CO2-Now/global-carbon-emissions.html>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
2. Scheduled for burning here meaning that it has been factored into the economy via shares and stock prices. In other words, some of the biggest economic entities on the planet have already cashed in on the value of burning these massive reserves.
3. See: <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/langley/science/climate_assessment_2012.html>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
4. See: <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/14/featuresreviews.guardianreview10>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
5. See: <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/09/society-unequal-the-spirit-level>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
6. See e.g. Tim Kasser (2002); also Tom Crompton (2010).
7. See: <<https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/imfwb.htm>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
8. See: <[http://www.irs.gov/uac/KPMG-to-Pay-\\$456-Million-for-Criminal-Violations](http://www.irs.gov/uac/KPMG-to-Pay-$456-Million-for-Criminal-Violations)>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
9. I'm using the definition of corruption the UN—and indeed the Global Compact—use: “The abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. See: <<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/aboutthegc/thetenprinciples/principle10.html>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014. By acting to set up illegal tax shelters, in my opinion, KPMG clearly abused the power entrusted to it, and used it for private gain—albeit not always their own.
10. See: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/news_events/9.1_news_archives/2008_06_10/Background_Materials.pdf>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
11. See: <http://www.taxjustice.net/cms/upload/pdf/Price_of_Offshore_Revisited_120722.pdf>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
12. See: <<http://pypaik.wordpress.com/2009/11/02/the-ethics-of-scarcity-on-john-gray-and-j-g-ballard/>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.
13. For a wonderful exploration of this, watch the BBC Documentary “The Century of the Self” by Adam Curtis.
14. See: <<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2013/global-ad-spend-grows-3.2-percent-in-2012.html>>. Last accessed on: 12 Aug. 2014.

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