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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 Petrusek**), 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.

“WE DID NOT CREATE SUR JOURNAL BECAUSE WE HAD CERTAINTIES, BUT BECAUSE WE WERE FULL OF DOUBTS” – PROFILE OF PEDRO PAULO POPPOVIC

By João Paulo Charleaux – Conectas Human Rights



In a publishing world where analysts, writers, academics and journalists have their ideas rated by the number of “likes” conferred upon them by social networks, it is rare to come across someone with the kind of analogue knowledge such as that possessed by Pedro Paulo Poppovic, the São Paulo sociologist who for over 10 years edited *Sur-International Journal on Human Rights*, published by Conectas. He is also one of the few editors that can boast of a remarkable achievement: transforming the works of Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates into national bestsellers in the 1970s, when he was in charge of the *Os Pensadores* (The Thinkers) collection at the giant Abril publishing house. With their distinctive blue covers, these books still flood the shelves of bookstores across the country, disproving the myth that Brazilians are no longer interested in philosophy and literature.

Poppovic is anything but virtual. Tall, well-built and reassuring, he makes himself comfortable in a solid armchair beneath an array of bookshelves reaching to the ceiling of his apartment in a traditional neighborhood of São Paulo. Calmly holding the visitor in his line of vision for a good two seconds more than usual, he starts by reaffirming the importance of pen and paper, clearly rowing against the tide in a world increasingly steeped in fast virtuality. Poppovic speaks as a person with time on his side. “The book, physically speaking, is something that is almost sacred, filled with symbolic values that transcend the mere transmission of knowledge.” Despite this forthright assertion, he sighs as if seeking confirmation of the phrase or preparing himself to give an opposite view – which never materializes.

Few intellectuals feel at ease when confronted by doubt. When he joined the SUR editorial team ten years ago, Poppovic was an island of ideas surrounded by an ocean of question marks. “We thought a lot about whether the Global South existed or not as a generator of academic knowledge. But the Global South is a comparative, relative concept. Despite these doubts, we pressed on with this very

pretentious idea of giving voice to what the Global South could be, and we ended up by accepting the thesis that it does indeed exist."

This conceptual decision, combining intuition, practical experience and political judgment, was the cornerstone on which SUR was founded. "We were in the South, a long way from the Rule of Law as interpreted by certain northern countries, where most academic publications dedicated to discussing human rights issues originated"*; Poppovic recalls in an article co-authored with the current Conectas' Program Director Juana Kweitel in the issue 15 of the journal (December 2011).

The same spirit is reflected in a comment by Conectas' Executive Director, Lucia Nader, in a 2013 video commemorating the organization's 12 years of existence: "Although you were not based in Europe or the United States, or you could aim to be a regional organization."

This "dogmatic" decision to advocate the existence of the Global South resolved the question, and the Journal's editors were thereafter able to define their scope of action, presenting a logical explanation for what the Journal is, what it does and what its contribution in the field. Once the problems of a conceptual order were overcome, the group came face to face with a second, more practical obstacle: the shortcomings of many of the academic papers produced in the Global South. While the conceptual debate could be resolved with a coherent approach to the way the world was structured, there was no doubt that the Global South lagged behind in technical, academic and intellectual terms.

Poppovic candidly acknowledges that "most of the articles we received from the North were better than those we received from the Global South. Work produced in the Global South often contained excellent ideas but failed to conform to the academic standards of the time."

Categorical statements like this can be interpreted in different ways: as, for example, harsh self-criticism, or a certain kind of prejudice blurred by a Eurocentric or Americanized view of the world. It all depends on who is making the statements. To understand why Poppovic took it upon himself to criticize some of the contributors to the journal, we have to go back 40 years to when Poppovic was a young sociology student at the University of São Paulo's Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences.

Brazil was going through one of the darkest periods of its entire history. The military dictatorship, established in 1964 by the coup that overthrew President João Goulart, tortured, arrested and "disappeared" political dissidents, and also directed its persecution and anticommunist paranoia against university teachers and scholars working in the humanities. This was particularly the case with sociologists, philosophers and anthropologists who dared to criticize the oligarch, slave-owning and patrimonial traditions that had marked Brazil's 500 year history and which continued to determine the way the military government, widely supported by conservative sectors of society,

*See full article available at: http://www.surjournal.org/conteudos/getArtigo15.php?artigo=15,artigo_11.htm. Last accessed on: 20 July 2014.

businessmen and industrialists ran the country at that particular moment in our history.

As a young student, Poppovic was the assistant to one of the greatest academicians of the time, the sociologist Florestan Fernandes. Accompanying him was another young university sociology colleague, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Up to the 1990s Cardoso served as a senator and minister, and finally became President of Brazil for two terms (1995-2003). During these two mandates, Poppovic, as Secretary for the Ministry of Education, coordinated an innovative distance education plan for government-run schools in the vast interior of Brazil.

Poppovic's criticism of the quality of the Global South's academic production can be understood more as a lament about his own academic condition and of his colleagues and as a desire for change and improvement than as contempt for those resigned to the status quo. Faced with this limitation, Poppovic decided to risk trying out a remedy for the very evil that SUR had set out to combat in a metalinguistic way. "We decided to publish the articles anyway. We selected the best, even if sometimes we had to put up with some shortcomings. We were sent 80 articles, with no payment requested. We were never short of papers."

Given that the expectation of receiving top-class articles was obviously unrealistic, the editors of the journal then began to look for solutions to improve the editorial level of the contributions. A solution was found, together with the staff of the Carlos Chagas Foundation, that consisted of "coaching"—a challenging program designed to encourage good academic writing by young Brazilian researchers and activists.

"It immediately became clear to us what this challenge involved. It was not simply a question of printing a journal containing a few articles. The task of creating a journal with thinkers from the Global South took on an ambitious educational and training character. Again, the willingness to question our own certainties and to be prepared to delve into the unknown guided the editorial board's decisions. We never strove to be dogmatic. And although we worked on the journal with people from the same academic area, they were never from our own organization. We had no intention of using the journal to express our own points of view."

A group of editors governed by the prospect of profit, increased circulation and competition for sales might have regarded this as a non-starter in such circumstances. At this point, Poppovic began to speak more slowly, with increasing silences between phrases while he pondered the weight of each idea. He is perfectly aware of the current challenge faced by the journal. With such rapid changes in the publishing world, with questions being raised about the paper form of production and the high costs of translation, printing and mailing, it is inevitable that the publishers have, over the years, given thought to how SUR will survive into the future, with the virtual world encroaching ever closer on that of paper.

Poppovic sighs and looks around him as if searching for a non-existent window. After hours of discussion, the evening draws to a close and in the library of his apartment, surrounded by books in the half-light, the journal's editor appears to want to say that the future has arrived too fast, as fast as the approach of the end of the day. "I'm a reactionary. I like the print form, even though it more than doubles

the price of a publication,” he says, as if asking forgiveness. “The publications that are restricted to the internet lose substance. The idea that people only want to read short texts is far from the truth. Look at the United States, where 1,000 new books are printed every day. Look at São Paulo, which has more bookstores opening every day. I believe that SUR, after publishing 200 articles, needs to evolve. It needs to deal with more current issues. It needs to appear more regularly, and it needs a bigger budget. It must remain open, but as a typical academic journal. Its outlook and language are academic.”

Over ten years the journal has continued to reinvent itself. And even today, still solidly afloat, with 20 editions published in three languages and distributed to over one hundred countries, SUR is still seeking to innovate. The original group of editors, under Poppovic’s leadership, addressed the doubts and uncertainties of the time. The same is now happening with the new generation that has shouldered the same challenge of swimming against the tide to give a voice to the Global South. The synergy between the lessons learned in the past and bets on the future is producing one of the most worthwhile and interesting experiences of knowledge production aimed at action on human rights beyond the US-Europe axis.

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