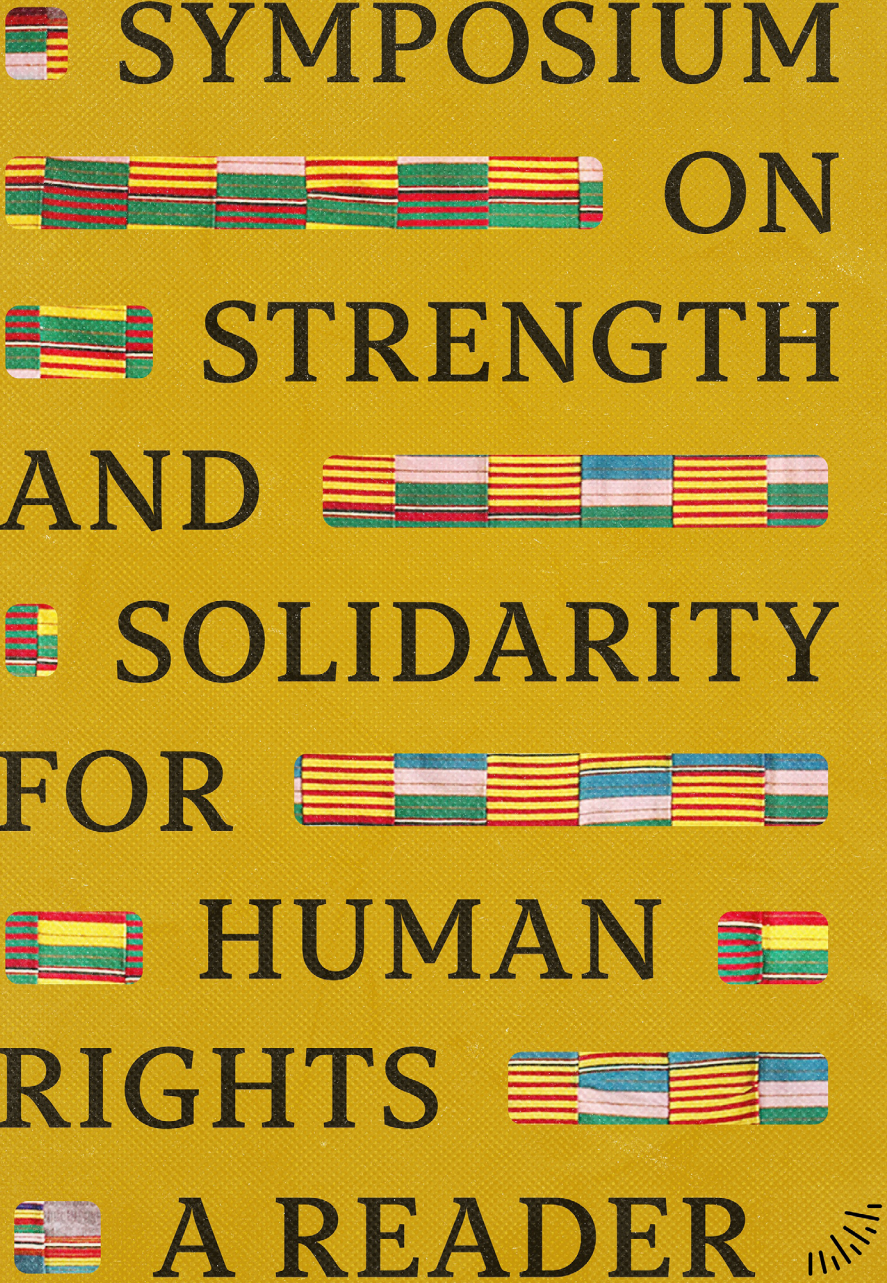
THE SYMPOSIUM ON STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS A READER



TOOLS FOR BUILDING A MORE POWERFUL & RESILIENT HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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THE SYMPOSIUM ON STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

A READER

TOOLS FOR BUILDING A MORE POWERFUL AND RESILIENT HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

ABOUT THIS BOOK

What follows in this Reader is a collection of practical reflections and readings included for the purpose of supporting those who are looking to organize discussion groups on the practice of solidarity and on building strength in their organizations and within and between movements. These materials were the primary content used by The Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights.

What is the Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights?

The Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights is a five-year project, ending in 2025, aimed at provoking new efforts and energy for building organizational strength and increasing solidarity across the human rights field. To that end, the Symposium sought to be a source of ideas and provocation within the global human rights movement, convening frontline activists, organizational leaders, and movement builders in conversations about the challenges that rights defenders face.

As the Symposium comes to a close, a number of participants have told us of plans to create their own versions of the meeting in future years, either focused on their own region or community, or built around a particular theme. In producing this Reader, our aim has been to provide them with information about the approach, and access to the materials we used, in case they find this helpful. They may of course choose to adopt a different approach. In the text that follows, we will usually refer to "our" Symposium rather than "the" Symposium, to underline that other options exist and we do not intend to prescribe our own method.

How is the material organized?

As the Symposium's Postdoctoral Researcher, I have been responsible for managing and organizing the reading material used in the Symposium, building on work by my predecessor Dr Ruth Kelly.

The introductory section lays out the rationale for convening our Symposium, and our hopes for the project.

The next three sections of the Reader take each of our three key themes in turn – "Solidarity", "Organizational Strength", and "Cultures of Respect". In each case, we first introduce the theme, then share the reading materials we chose to stimulate ideas and insight, and some prompts that might kickstart discussion. In some instances, we have not been able to include a particular reading: in such a case, we have shared our rationale for choosing it, and where it can be found online.

A final section, "Planning our Symposium", shares our approach to designing and setting up our meetings: operational considerations such as room design and accessibility; how we chose and invited participants; and how we sought to "hold the space" in the meeting room through our chosen approach to moderation.

Dr Daniella Lock
Oxford, October 2024.

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Welcome to the Symposium. For five years, we've used those words to greet our participants, either online – during the worst of the pandemic – or in person. And now we are happy to extend the greeting to you, our readers.

We always assumed this project would come to an end when its allotted time was up – March 2025. But as our final year got under way, we were both surprised and delighted to discover that many of our participants were hatching plans to mount their own Symposia. Some wanted to make the model available in a language other than English. Others wanted to give fellow rights defenders in their thematic area access to a new tool for building solidarity, or strengthening their organization or movement. And still others were thinking geographically, hoping to create a different thinking space for their national or regional peers where tough questions could be asked about how best to meet the challenges they faced.

Realizing that organizers of these future Symposia might want to look back and see what we tried to do and how it went, we decided to aggregate whatever information we had about our process in one place. Our goal is not to prescribe a method – we know everyone will need to adapt and innovate to suit their conditions, resource constraints and participants' needs. We hope, however, that by sharing what we did and what we learned, we can contribute to problem-solving and provoke new ideas and experiments.

Creating and running the Symposium was a wonderful experience, above all for the privilege of meeting and learning from so many remarkable leaders. We are delighted to pass the baton to them – and to you. We hope you will consider mounting your own Symposium, and if you do, we wish you every success.

Akwe Amosu



WHY A SYMPOSIUM?

BY CHRISTOPHER STONE

In the final months of 2018, movements for human rights in many parts of the world seemed at a crossroads.

To many it seemed as if the formal, international human rights institutions were buckling. At the United Nations, Zeid bin Ra'ad al-Hussein had just finished his term as the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, speaking bluntly about the backsliding and weak commitment to human rights obligations he saw among the member states.

The historian Samuel Moyn and the political scientist Stephen Hopgood had published devastating critiques of the global human rights movement, the essence of which was aptly captured in their book titles: The Last Utopia, and The Endtimes of Human Rights. Adding injury to insult, long-standing international donors to human rights organizations were cutting back on their support.

Yet, if international institutions were faltering in 2018, activism in the streets seemed to be as strong as ever. In countries as diverse as Armenia, Brazil, Chile, India, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Sudan, and the United States, protesters young and old turned out in large numbers to denounce systematic violations of their human rights. The protesters might have been growing disillusioned with the promises made by national governments and multilateral agencies, but they were crystal clear in their demands for rights and justice, and they were mobilizing in new kinds of social movements and organizations.

How could these advocates for human rights build their strength without the kind of support from powerful countries and wealthy donors on which movements for rights had been built over the previous decades? The Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights was conceived as a way to hold a sustained conversation about that challenge, drawing on experiences among human rights activists from the 1960s to the present. With a pair of planning grants from the Ford and Oak Foundations, a dozen people playing leading roles in human-rights organizing in different regions came together at Columbia University in New York to test various ways in which we might structure such conversations.

Then, in August 2019, about 20 of us gathered in Amman, Jordan, for the pilot of the full design. That was Group One.

As originally understood in ancient times, a symposium was part social occasion, part serious discussion. Smaller than a conference, a symposium would include anywhere between a dozen and thirty participants. By holding our Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights repeatedly every six months, with a new group each time, we have engaged roughly two hundred advocates and activists in these small-group discussions, building ties across regions and across movements, starting with that first group in Amman.



THE LANGUAGE OF RIGHTS

BY CHRISTOPHER STONE

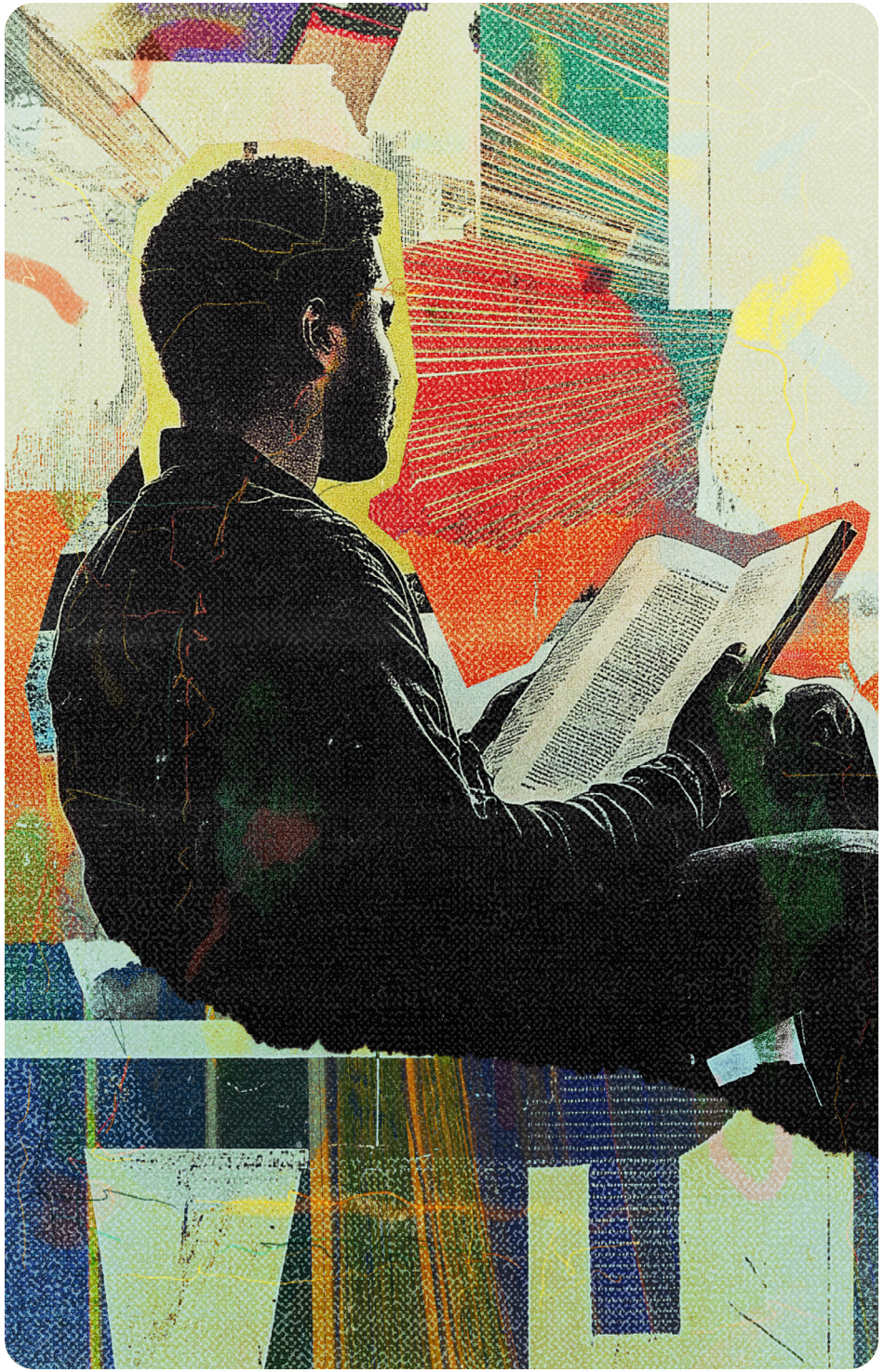
How should the participants in a Symposium introduce themselves and their work to each other? Ice breakers can be fun and revealing ways of getting to know a little bit about each other, and short, written biographies are helpful as a reference. The Symposium on Strength and Solidarity used both of those devices, but from the earliest workshops, those of us designing the Symposium wanted to do more. We wanted to find an efficient, engaging way to begin a conversation about how each participant was positioning their work in light of any scepticism they encountered surrounding human rights advocacy itself.

At the start of our second design workshop, an informal dinner conversation gave us the seed that became the basis for the first substantive discussion at each future meeting of our Symposium. At that dinner, we found ourselves sharing stories of how each of us was using the phrase “human rights” in our work. Some had deliberately remade their website to avoid the phrase; others had even changed the name of their organizations to remove the phrase; still others had started emphasizing the phrase in order to connect with new constituencies. Comparing how we each used the phrase proved a quick way to plunge into the strategic calculations that each of us was making in our different contexts and for different purposes.

The result was a session at the start of our Symposium, which we titled, “The Language of Rights.” In our version, we ask each participant to share with the group how their movement or organization uses the phrase “human rights” when speaking to different publics, when speaking to their own members, on their websites, in social media, and elsewhere, and we ask if they have changed how they do so. We give each participant five minutes to answer, and then the moderators and participants have a chance to ask follow-up questions, usually probing more into the “why” of the choices.

Some participants explain that, in their particular regions or contexts, human rights is seen as an excuse for protecting criminals, or is seen as an imperialist frame, or is too abstract to resonate with their constituencies. Others find that their younger members or more activist colleagues embrace the term and find power in it. In some contexts, the phrase has a powerful, defiant effect. In others, Symposium participants explain that they use the term in their legal advocacy, but not in their organizing.

These conversations have not only been fascinating, but they have led many participants to take this exercise home with them. Members of our Symposium have told us that they have repeated this exercise with their own colleagues, and in several cases they have adjusted how they speak and write about human rights as a result.



THE ROLE OF READINGS (AND OTHER PROVOCATIONS)

BY CHRISTOPHER STONE

The Symposium provided participants with a different kind of experience than other meetings, workshops, and conferences because of the use of readings. A “symposium” is simply a friendly gathering of people to enjoy each other’s company and to discuss matters of importance. In our Symposium, we used short readings, along with occasional video and other activities, to open those discussions. No panel presentations, no keynote address, no Q&A.

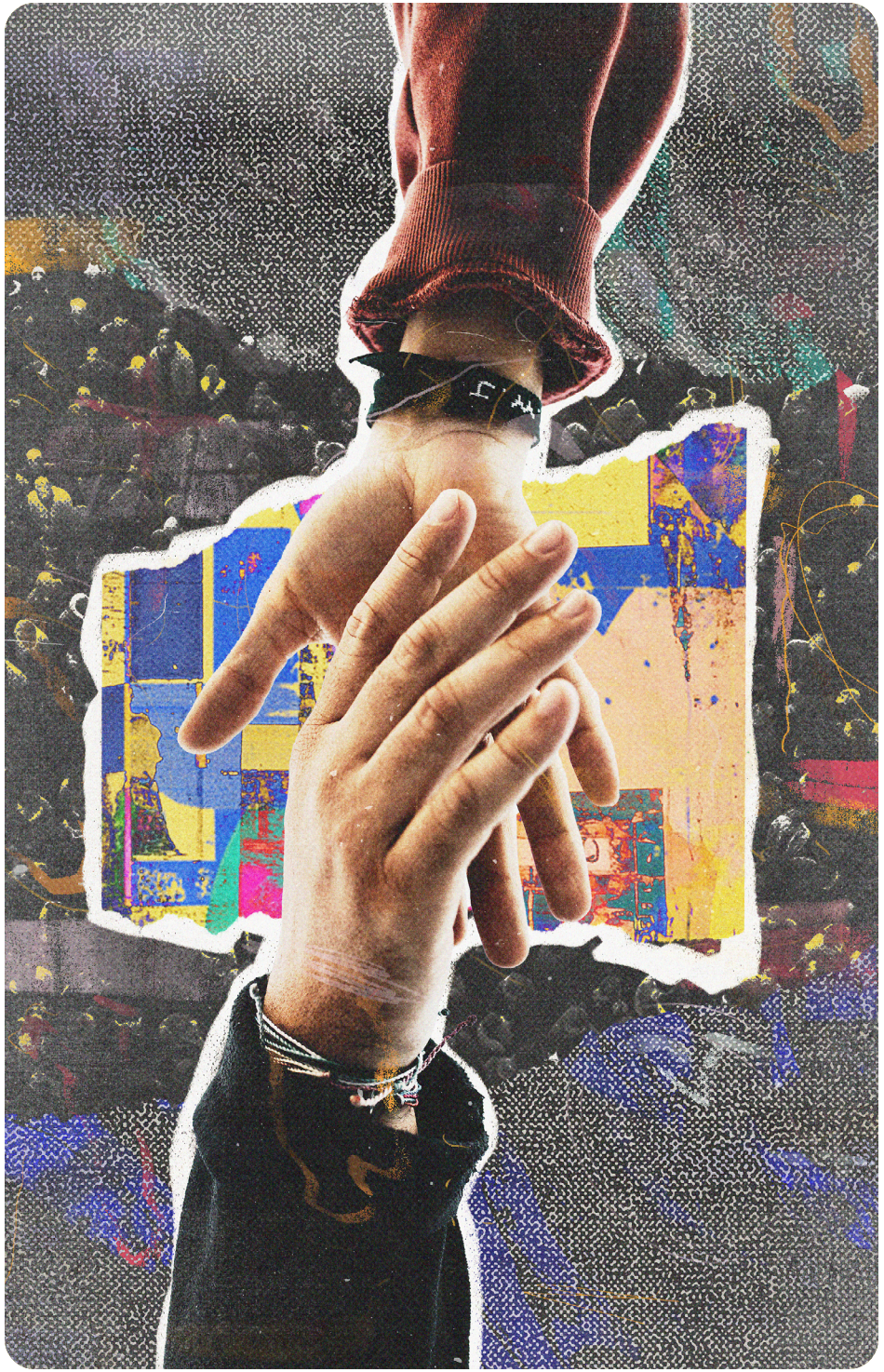
Why? Why readings, and why these readings in particular? Three reasons.

First, a short reading gives everyone relatively equal access to the conversation. For the first part of any Symposium conversation, the moderators ask the participants to stick to the material in the reading (or the video), and not to shift the conversation to their own story about their organization or another example from some history that they know. By sticking to the reading, everyone has access to the same material. Of course, participants feel different degrees of ease with any particular language, so moderators should take care to make sure that all participants have understood the basic content of the reading or video.

Second, the particular readings we use are of two broad types. Some are from the history of human rights movements, written by activists for activists. Others are case studies written specifically for these Symposium meetings, focusing on the experiences of one of our participants. We chose these kinds of readings to invite participants to see themselves and their movements in the material. The readings are intended to reinforce our understanding that we are building our work on the struggles, dilemmas, and choices of those who have come before us. At the same time, because the authors and protagonists of the readings are not in the room with us, it is easier for participants to question the decisions they made, and to debate alternative solutions to familiar problems. The readings are not meant to prescribe correct strategies, but instead invite honest debate from which we all can learn.

Third, the readings may inspire some participants to contribute to the future of human rights activism by doing their own writing, or by sharing their own experience through a case study. None of us may have the talent of Audre Lorde or Steve Biko, but we can each make our own contributions to present and future activists by writing honestly about our own struggles. The case studies invite participants in our Symposium to share their experiences in a very practical way, and those interested may find it useful to read Daniella Lock's notes on writing case studies later in this Reader.

SOLIDARITY



THE FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICE OF SOLIDARITY

BY AKWE AMOSU

At the heart of the Symposium lies a question: how can global human rights movements build, hold and use power to defend those whose rights are denied and abused?

No-one would expect to find protection for human rights in dictatorships and autocratic states. But the future does not look good in democracies either. Voters all over the world are giving up hope of help from those who run their societies. By shrinking social expenditure and enabling rampant corruption,

elites are prioritizing only their own interests and those of powerful institutions and corporations. So voters are turning instead to demagogues, whose divisive, xenophobic rhetoric and swagger nonetheless hint at trickle-down benefits for their loyal supporters.

In these conditions, human rights defenders should expect to find fewer and fewer friends and allies in powerful places. Reliance on international bodies and courts seems increasingly risky as accountability for impunity decreases – impunity that hits human rights and their defenders first and hardest.

Of course we need to keep using all the tools we have – we should not give up prematurely on a strategy when there's still a chance of success. But if we are thinking about future trajectories, we need to be honest about the assets available.

In our Symposium, we argued that one of the oldest tools in movements for rights and social justice is still one of the best – solidarity. If you want to challenge those in authority when they hold the economic power and the firepower, you need your own source of power – people power. Every labor or community organizer knows that success depends on mobilizing support and keeping it at the barricades – literal or metaphorical. Most of the great struggles of the past century – like the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-colonial movements across Africa and Asia, South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, the fight against nuclear weapons and the current massive mobilization for the Palestinian people – depend on solidarity.

Solidarity's potential for packing a punch is always there but sometimes it remains just that – potential that goes unrealized.

There are many ways this can be explained. It is true, for example, that there are so many struggles competing for attention that some are bound to go unsupported. Some argue that the human rights field has become so professionalized that activists and organizers and their skills have been marginalized. Others see reliance on digital tools as having fractured, even atomized, support, so that traditional organizing strategies and tools have been weakened.

Whatever the reasons, in our Symposium we argued that solidarity is indispensable and that it is vital that we figure out how to reinvigorate its practice so that it can mean more than a slogan, more than adding a hashtag, or liking a post.

In five years of passionate discussion on this topic among our Symposium's participants, we have learned a lot, and sometimes had to let go of long-held convictions and embrace new ideas. But as our Symposium comes to a close, at least three principles have seemed to us foundational for building sustained solidarity.

First, leadership and the choice of strategy should lie with those who have been wronged. They are the ones who suffer the violation, and ultimately they have the right to decide how they should be supported. When others make their own decisions about how to be in solidarity, they decide from their own perspective, taking their own interests into account and thereby risking fragmentation into multiple solidarity movements. Deferring to those who have suffered the abuse may be challenging when you aren't sure their strategy is a good one. But as our principal moderator Chris Stone likes to say, solidarity is political action on other people's terms – you are

meant to be supporting them, not imposing your own theories. The readings we have found most helpful for this principle are *The Basis of Black Power*, by the SNCC Atlanta Project, and Steve Biko's "Black Souls in White Skins" in his essay collection *I Write What I Like*.

Second, a movement whose members do not acknowledge and "disarm" the difference and privilege among them will inevitably be weakened. A truly diverse movement that links together communities coming from widely different constituencies and classes can, by definition, be strong because it is able to reach and recruit potential supporters across the board, and grow in influence. But if those in the movement who have privilege fear losing it, especially in the event that the movement is successful, their ambivalence will weaken the movement. Being in solidarity therefore means, as Audre Lorde puts it, reaching down "into that deep place of knowledge" inside yourself to "touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there." This is both a movement-wide and an intensely personal challenge, which Lorde elaborates in her seminal lecture, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, one of the most cherished readings in the Symposium's curriculum.

In December 2023, a group of Symposium participants came together to consider the significance of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To the two principles of "deference" and "difference" described above, they added a third "D" that they believed was vital for building powerful solidarity – that of finding unity despite disagreement. Our solidarity should extend to those with whom we disagree, they argued, using reflection and intentional dialogue to respect the rights of others.

In the readings we shared and discussed, we tried to draw attention to some of the ways that solidarity can be weakened, breaking down the principles and practices we think might be important. We asked questions about how to do the work: when people are suffering abuse and repression, who calls for solidarity to support them? In whose name? Who should decide the strategy? And for those willing to step up in solidarity, should they follow that strategy, or can they choose their own approach? And if you, as the bearer of the violation of your rights, are crafting a call for solidarity, how should it be done? What work do you have to do in advance to prepare the ground? One key reading we used to identify the nuts and bolts of a call for solidarity and the choices that organizers have to make is the 2005 "Call for BDS" which launched the global Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment campaign in support of the Palestinian people.

The readings mentioned above have focused most closely on the principles of building powerful solidarity to illustrate the complexities of putting solidarity into practice. We fully recognize that every situation is different and will require a strategy tailored for its specific characteristics. But deference, difference and disagreement – the "three Ds" as we have come to call them – have been foundational ideas for our Symposium participants. We can only urge others to reflect deeply on their relevance in the movements they seek to advance.



THE BASIS OF BLACK POWER

POSITION PAPER
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

This is the first of the five readings the Symposium used on solidarity. It takes us back to 1966 and a remarkable moment of struggle in the American South, known as the Freedom Summer, when black students from all over the US came south to challenge violent racial oppression in states that had been at the heart of chattel slavery and had fought during the American Civil War to keep it.

Many white students in the north mobilized to come and join them, so the writers of the Atlanta Project paper, The Basis of Black Power were reflecting on a period of activism in a multi-racial movement. Their paper lays out the case for ending that experiment in integration, and – paradoxically to some – rejecting the white activists' solidarity, at least in the form they were experiencing it.

Not all black activists in the Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, usually pronounced "Snick" for short) agreed with this position at the time, but in sharing this reading, neither agreement nor disagreement was our concern. We wanted instead to see which arguments made sense and which seemed unreasonable to our participants. If the argument was not that white students were racist or malign in intent, then why was it so important to condition their solidarity?

The myth that the Negro is somehow incapable of liberating himself, is lazy, etc., came out of the American experience. In the books that children read, whites are always "good" (good symbols are white), blacks are "evil" or seen as savages in movies, their language is referred to as a "dialect," and black people in this country are supposedly descended from savages.

Any white person who comes into the movement has the concepts in his mind about black people, if only subconsciously. He cannot escape them because the whole society has geared his subconscious in that direction.

Miss America coming from Mississippi has a chance to represent all of America, but a black person from either Mississippi or New York will never represent America. Thus the white people coming into the movement cannot relate to the black experience, cannot relate to the word "black," cannot relate to the "nitty gritty," cannot relate to the experience that brought such a word into existence, cannot relate to chitterlings, hog's head cheese, pig feet, ham hocks, and cannot relate to slavery, because these things are not a part of their experience. They also cannot relate to the black religious experience, nor to the black church, unless, of course, this church has taken on white manifestations.

White Power

Negroes in this country have never been allowed to organize themselves because of white interference. As a result of this, the stereotype has been reinforced that blacks cannot organize themselves. The white psychology that blacks have to be watched, also reinforces this stereotype. Blacks, in fact, feel intimidated by the presence of whites, because of their knowledge of the power that whites have over their lives. One white person can come into a meeting of black people and change the complexion of that meeting, whereas one black person would not change the complexion of that meeting unless he was an obvious Uncle Tom. People would immediately start talking about "brotherhood," "love," etc.; race would not be discussed.

If people must express themselves freely, there has to be a climate in which they can do this. If blacks feel intimidated by whites, then they are not liable to vent the rage that they feel about whites in the presence of whites--especially not the black

people whom we are trying to organize, i.e., the broad masses of black people. A climate has to be created whereby blacks can express themselves. The reasons that whites must be excluded is not that one is anti-white, but because the effects that one is trying to achieve cannot succeed because whites have an intimidating effect. Ofttimes, the intimidating effect is in direct proportion to the amount of degradation that black people have suffered at the hands of white people.

Roles of Whites and Blacks

It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (racism) is most manifest. The problem is not in the black community. The white people should go into white communities where the whites have created power for the express purpose of denying blacks human dignity and self-determination. Whites who come into the black community with ideas of change seem to want to absolve the power structure of its responsibility for what it is doing, and saying that change can only come through black unity, which is the worst kind of paternalism. This is not to say that whites have not had an important role in the movement. In the case of Mississippi, their role was very key in that they helped give blacks the right to organize, but that role is now over, and it should be.

People now have the right to picket, the right to give out leaflets, the right to vote, the right to demonstrate, the right to print.

These things which revolve around the right to organize have been accomplished mainly because of the entrance of white people into Mississippi, in the summer of 1964.

Since these goals have now been accomplished, whites' role in the movement has now ended. What does it mean if black people, once having the right to organize, are not allowed to organize themselves? It means that blacks' ideas about inferiority are being reinforced. Shouldn't people be able to organize themselves? Blacks should be given this right. Further, white participation means in the eyes of the black community that whites are the "brains" behind the movement, and that blacks cannot function without whites. This only serves to perpetuate existing attitudes within the existing society, i.e., blacks are "dumb," "unable to take care of business," etc. Whites are "smart," the "brains" behind the whole thing.

How do blacks relate to other blacks as such? How do we react to Willie Mays as against Mickey Mantle? What is our response to Mays hitting a home run against Mantel performing the same deed? One has to come to the conclusion that it is because of black participation in baseball. Negroes still identify with the Dodgers because of Jackie Robinson's efforts with the Dodgers. Negroes would instinctively champion all-black teams if they opposed all white or predominantly white teams. The same principle operates for the movement as it does for baseball: a mystique must be created whereby Negroes can identify with the movement.

Thus an all-black project is needed in order for the people to free themselves. This has to exist from the beginning. This relates to what can be called "coalition politics." There is no doubt in our minds that some whites are just as disgusted with this system as we are. But it is meaningless to talk about coalition if there is no one to align ourselves with, because of the lack of organization in the white communities.

There can be no talk of “hooking up” unless black people organize blacks and white people organize whites. If these conditions are met, then perhaps at some later date--and if we are going in the same direction--talks about exchange of personnel, coalition, and other meaningful alliances can be discussed.

In the beginning of the movement, we had fallen into a trap whereby we thought that our problems revolved around the right to eat at certain lunch counters or the right to vote, or to organize our communities. We have seen, however, that the problem is much deeper. The problem of this country, as we had seen it, concerned all blacks and all whites and therefore if decisions were left to the young people, then solutions would be arrived at. But this negates the history of black people and whites. We have dealt stringently with the problem of “Uncle Tom,” but we have not yet gotten around to Simon Legree. We must ask ourselves, who is the real villain--Uncle Tom or Simon Legree? Everybody knows Uncle Tom, but who knows Simon Legree? So what we have now in SNCC is a closed society, a clique. Black people cannot relate to SNCC because of its unrealistic, nonracial atmosphere; denying their experience of America as a racist society. In contrast, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Martin Luther King, Jr., has a staff that at least maintains a black facade. The front office is virtually all black, but nobody accuses SCLC of being racist.

If we are to proceed toward true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people. We must form our own institutions, credit unions, co-ops, political parties, write our own histories.

To proceed further, let us make some comparisons between the Black Movement of the early 1900s and the movement of the 1960s--i.e., compare the National Association for the advancement of Colored People with SNCC. Whites subverted the Niagara movement (the forerunner of the NAACP) which, at the outset, was an all-black movement. The name of the new organization was also very revealing, in that it presupposed blacks have to advance to the level of whites. We are now aware that the NAACP has grown reactionary, is controlled by the black power structure itself, and stands as one of the main roadblocks to black freedom. SNCC, by allowing the whites to remain in the organization, can have its efforts subverted in much the same manner, i.e., through having them play important roles such as community organizers, etc. Indigenous leadership cannot be built with whites in the positions they now hold.

These facts do not mean that whites cannot help. They can participate on a voluntary basis. We can contract work out to them, but in no way can they participate on a policy-making level.

Black Self-Determination

The charge may be made that we are “racists,” but whites who are sensitive to our problems will realize that we must determine our own destiny.

In an attempt to find a solution to our dilemma, we propose that our organization (SNCC) should be black-staffed, black-controlled, and black-financed. We do not want to fall into a similar dilemma that other civil rights organizations have fallen into.

If we continue to rely upon white financial support we will find ourselves entwined in the tentacles of the white power complex that controls this country. It is also important that a black organization (devoid of cultism) be projected to our people so that it can be demonstrated that such organizations are viable.

More and more we see black people in this country being used as a tool of the white liberal establishment. Liberal whites have not begun to address themselves to the real problem of black people in this country--witness their bewilderment, fear, and anxiety when nationalism is mentioned concerning black people. An analysis of the white liberal's reaction to the word "nationalism" alone reveals a very meaningful attitude of whites of an ideological persuasion toward blacks in this country. It means previous solutions to black problems in this country have been made in the interests of those whites dealing with these problems and not in the best interests of black people in the country. Whites can only subvert our true search and struggles for self-determination, self-identification, and liberation in this country. Reevaluation of the white and black roles must now take place so that whites no longer designate roles that black people play but rather black people define white people's roles.

Too long have we allowed white people to interpret the importance and meaning of the cultural aspects of our society. We have allowed them to tell us what was good about our Afro-American music, art, and literature. How many black critics do we have on the "jazz" scene? How can a white person who is not part of the black psyche (except in the oppressor's role) interpret the meaning of the blues to us who are manifestations of the song themselves?

It must be pointed out that on whatever level of contact blacks and whites come together, that meeting or confrontation is not on the level of the blacks but always on the level of the whites. This only means that our everyday contact with whites is a reinforcement of the myth of white supremacy. Whites are the ones who must try to raise themselves to our humanistic level. We are not, after all, the ones who are responsible for a genocidal war in Vietnam; we are not the ones who are responsible for neocolonialism in Africa and Latin America; we are not the ones who held a people in animalistic bondage over 400 years. We reject the American dream as defined by white people and must work to construct an American reality defined by Afro-Americans.

White Radicals

One of the criticisms of white militants and radicals is that when we view the masses of white people we view the overall reality of America, we view the racism, the bigotry, and the distortion of personality, we view man's inhumanity to man; we view in reality 180 million racists. The sensitive white intellectual and radical who is fighting to bring about change is conscious of this fact, but does not have the courage to admit this. When he admits this reality, then he must also admit his involvement because he is a part of the collective white America. It is only to the extent that he recognizes this that he will be able to change this reality.

Another common concern is, how does the white radical view the black community, and how does he view the poor white community, in terms of organizing? So far, we have found that most white radicals have sought to escape the horrible reality of America by going into the black community and attempting

to organize black people while neglecting the organization of their own people's racist communities. How can one clean up someone else's yard when one's own yard is untidy? Again we feel that SNCC and the civil rights movement in general is in many aspects similar to the anticolonial situations in the African and Asian countries. We have the whites in the movement corresponding to the white civil servants and missionaries in the colonial countries who have worked with the colonial people for a long period of time and have developed a paternalistic attitude toward them. The reality of the colonial people taking over their own lives and controlling their own destiny must be faced. Having to move aside and letting the natural process of growth and development take place must be faced.

These views should not be equated with outside influence or outside agitation but should be viewed as the natural process of growth and development within a movement; so that the move by the black militants and SNCC in this direction should be viewed as a turn toward self-determination.

It is very ironic and curious that aware whites in the country can champion anticolonialism in other countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but when black people move toward similar goals of self-determination in this country they are viewed as racists and anti-white by these same progressive whites.

In proceeding further, it can be said that this attitude derives from the overall point of view of the white psyche as it concerns the black people. This attitude stems from the era of the slave revolts when every white man was a potential deputy or sheriff or guardian of the state.

Because when black people get together among themselves to work out their problems, it becomes a threat to white people, because such meetings were potential slave revolts.

It can be maintained that this attitude or way of thinking has perpetuated itself to this current period and that it is part of the psyche of white people in this country whatever their political persuasion might be. It is part of the white fear-guilt complex resulting from the slave revolts. There have been examples of whites who stated that they can deal with black fellows on an individual basis but become threatened or menaced by the presence of groups of blacks. It can be maintained that this attitude is held by the majority of progressive whites in this country.

Black Identity

A thorough re-examination must be made by black people concerning the contributions that we have made in shaping this country. If this re-examination and re-evaluation is not made, and black people are not given their proper due and respect, then the antagonisms and contradictions are going to become more and more glaring, more and more intense, until a national explosion may result.

When people attempt to move from these conclusions it would be faulty reasoning to say they are ordered by racism, because, in this country and in the West, racism has functioned as a type of white nationalism when dealing with black people. We all know the habit that this has created throughout the world and particularly among nonwhite people in this country.

Therefore any re-evaluation that we must make will, for the most part, deal with identification. Who are black people, what are black people, what is their relationship to America and the world?

It must be repeated that the whole myth of "Negro citizenship," perpetuated by the white elite, has confused the thinking of radical and progressive blacks and whites in this country. The broad masses of black people react to American society in the same manner as colonial peoples react to the West in Africa and Latin America, and had the same relationship--that of the colonized toward the colonizer.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What do the writers mean by saying whites have an intimidating effect?
- What is the "sense of inferiority" that black students/ activists are said to feel?
- What is said to be going on in white minds with regard to their black counterparts?
- Why should white people need to be reassured by blacks about "brotherhood?"
- What do the writers argue is the solution to this problem?
- Is there any way in which whites can be in solidarity at that time? What about later?
- What would appropriate white solidarity look like?
- Where have you seen similar or comparable patterns in your own experience?



BLACK SOULS IN WHITE SKINS

BY STEVE BIKO

Four years after the SNCC Atlanta Project's paper appeared, a brilliant young activist in South Africa called Steve Biko published "Black Souls in White Skins," the first in a series of essays entitled, I Write What I Like. *Biko was the first president of the South African Students' Organization (SASO), open only to black students, which had broken away from the non-racial students' union, NUSAS. He is widely regarded as the father of the Black Consciousness Movement.*

At the first General Student Council of SASO in July 1970, Biko was succeeded as president by Barney Pityana, and elected chairman of SASO Publications. The monthly SASO Newsletter began to carry his writings, under the pseudonym "Frank Talk" It is startling to realize that Biko was only 23 when he delivered this searing essay. Eight years later, in 1977, Biko was tortured and killed while in the custody of the apartheid police.

This second Symposium reading on solidarity follows hard on the heels of the first, bringing forward a set of ideas that sharpen and toughen the argument. Where white motivation was not a core element of the SNCC paper, the impact of white privilege – how white power is used and for what purpose – is profoundly important in Biko's argument. The disabling effect of assimilation, and the necessity for black people to make their own decisions and organize independently, are arguments that underline the importance of deferring to black leadership and agency.

Black Souls in White Skins?

Basically the South African white community is a homogeneous community. It is a community of people who sit to enjoy a privileged position that they do not deserve, are aware of this, and therefore spend their time trying to justify why they are doing so.

Where differences in political opinion exist, they are in the process of trying to justify their position of privilege and their usurpation of power.

With their theory of "separate freedoms for the various nations in the multinational state of South Africa," the Nationalists have gone a long way towards giving most of white South Africa some sort of moral explanation for what is happening. Everyone is quite content to point out that these people – meaning the blacks – will be free when they are ready to run their own affairs in their own areas. What more could they possibly hope for?

But these are not the people we are concerned with. We are concerned with that curious bunch of nonconformists who explain their participation in negative terms: that bunch of do-gooders that goes under all sorts of names – liberals, leftists etc. These are the people who argue that they are not responsible for white racism and the country's "inhumanity to the black man."

These are the people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black man's struggle for a place under the sun.

In short, these are the people who say that they have black souls wrapped up in white skins.

The role of the white liberal in the black man's history in South Africa is a curious one. Very few black organisations were not under white direction. True to their image, the white liberals always knew what was good for the blacks and told them so. The wonder of it all is that the black people have believed in them for so long. It was only at the end of the 50s that the blacks started demanding to be their own guardians.

Nowhere is the arrogance of the liberal ideology demonstrated so well as in their insistence that the problems of the country can only be solved by a bilateral approach involving both black and white. This has, by and large, come to be taken in all seriousness as the modus operandi in South Africa by all those who claim they would like a change in the status quo. Hence the multiracial political organisations and parties and the "nonracial" student organisations, all of which insist on integration not only as an end goal but also as a means.

The integration they talk about is first of all artificial in that it is a response to conscious manoeuvre rather than to the dictates of the inner soul. In other words the people forming the integrated complex have been extracted from various segregated societies with their inbuilt complexes of superiority and inferiority and these continue to manifest themselves even in the "nonracial" set-up of the integrated complex. As a result the integration so achieved is a one-way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks the listening. Let me hasten to say that I am not claiming that segregation is necessarily the natural order; however, given the facts of the situation where a group experiences privilege at the expense of others, then it becomes obvious that a hastily arranged integration cannot be the solution to the problem.

It is rather like expecting the slave to work together with the slave-master's son to remove all the conditions leading to the former's enslavement.

Secondly, this type of integration as a means is almost always unproductive. The participants waste lots of time in an internal sort of mudslinging designed to prove that A is more of a liberal than B. In other words, the lack of common ground for solid identification is all the time manifested in internal strifes inside the group.

It will not sound anachronistic to anybody genuinely interested in real integration to learn that blacks are asserting themselves in a society where they are being treated as perpetual under-16s. One does not need to plan for, or actively encourage real integration. Once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration.

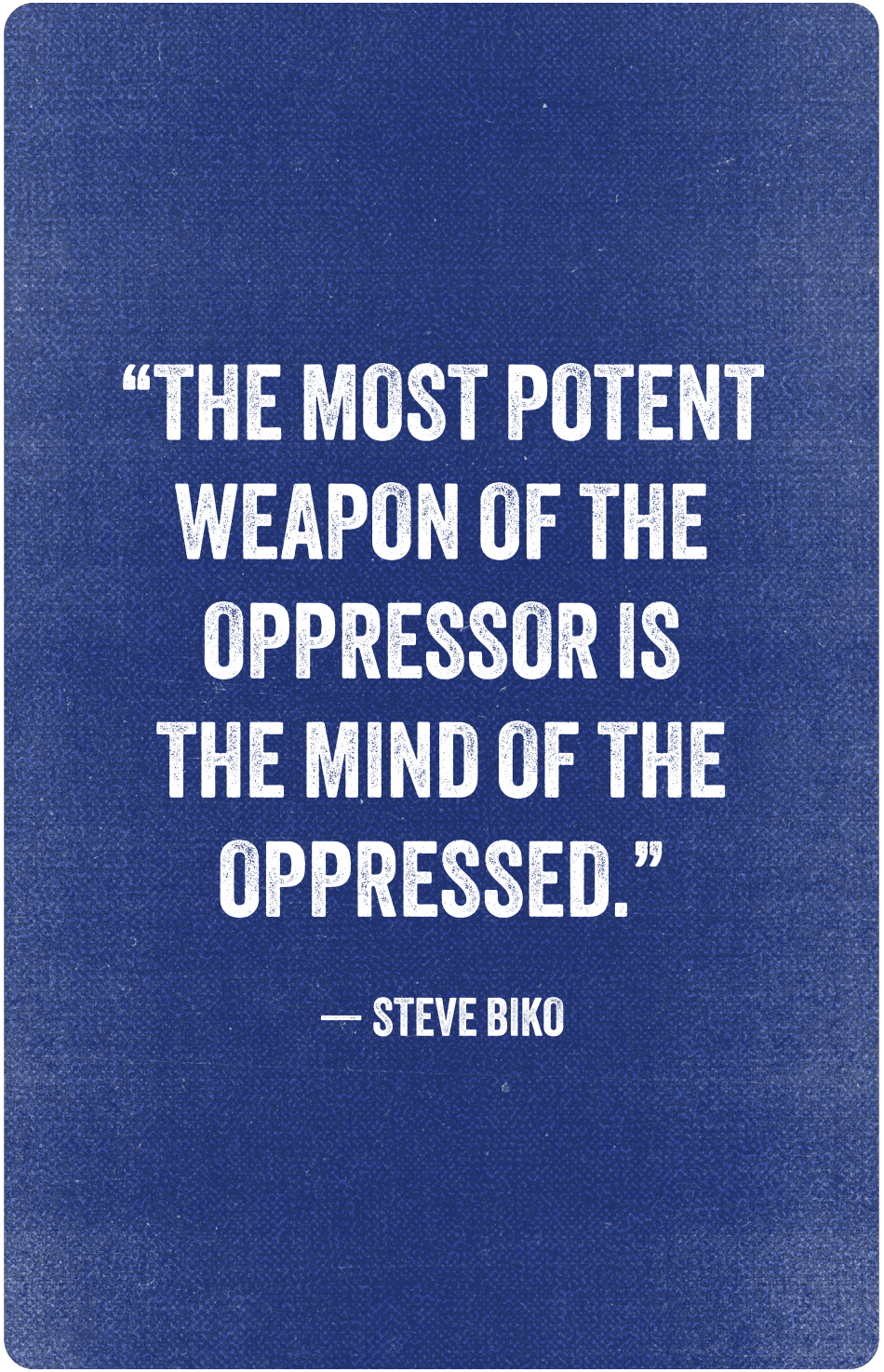
At the heart of true integration is the provision for each man, each group to rise and attain the envisioned self.
Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another. Out of this mutual respect for each other and complete freedom of self-determination there will obviously arise a genuine fusion of the life-styles of the various groups. This is true integration.

From this it becomes clear that as long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex – a result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration and derision – they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society where man is nothing

else but man for his own sake. Hence what is necessary as a prelude to anything else that may come is a very strong grassroots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim.

Thus in adopting the line of a nonracial approach, the liberals are playing their old game. They are claiming a “monopoly on intelligence and moral judgement” and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man’s aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds. They want to shy away from all forms of “extremisms,” condemning “white supremacy” as being just as bad as “Black Power!” They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skillfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges. But ask them for a moment to give a concrete meaningful programme that they intend adopting, then you will see on whose side they really are. Their protests are directed at an appeal to white conscience, everything they do is directed at finally convincing the white electorate that the black man is also a man and that at some future date he should be given a place at the white man’s table.

The myth of integration as propounded under the banner of liberal ideology must be cracked and killed because it makes people believe that something is being done when in actual fact the artificial integrated circles are a soporific on the blacks and provide a vague satisfaction for the guilt-stricken whites. It works on a false premise that because it is difficult to bring people from different races together in this country, therefore achievement of this is in itself a step forward towards the total liberation of the blacks.



Nothing could be more irrelevant and therefore misleading. Those who believe in it are living in a fool's paradise.

First the black-white circles are almost always a creation of white liberals. As a testimony to their claim of complete identification with the blacks, they call a few "intelligent and articulate" blacks to "come around for tea at home," where all present ask each other the same old hackneyed question, "How can we bring about change in South Africa?" The more such tea parties one calls the more of a liberal he is and the freer he shall feel from the guilt that harnesses and binds his conscience. Hence he moves around his white circles – whites-only hotels, beaches, restaurants and cinemas – with a lighter load, feeling that he is not like the rest of the others. Yet at the back of his mind is a constant reminder that he is quite comfortable as things stand and therefore should not bother about change. Although he does not vote for the Nats (now that they are in the majority anyway), he feels quite secure under the protection offered by the Nats and subconsciously shuns the idea of a change. This is what demarcates the liberal from the black world.

The liberals view the oppression of blacks as a problem that has to be solved, an eyesore spoiling an otherwise beautiful view. From time to time the liberals make themselves forget about the problem or take their eyes off the eyesore. On the other hand, in oppression the blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment. Theirs is a struggle to get out of the situation and not merely to solve a peripheral problem as in the case of the liberals.

This is why blacks speak with a greater sense of urgency than whites.

A game at which the liberals have become masters is that of deliberate evasiveness. The question often comes up, "What can I do?" If you ask him to do something like stopping to use segregated facilities or dropping out of varsity to work at menial jobs like all blacks or defying and denouncing all provisions that make him privileged, you always get the answer, "But that's unrealistic!" While this may be true, it only serves to illustrate the fact that no matter what a white man does, the colour of his skin – his passport to privilege – will always put him miles ahead of the black man. Thus in the ultimate analysis no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp.

"There exists among men, because they are men, a solidarity through which each shares responsibility for every injustice and every wrong committed in the world, and especially for crimes that are committed in his presence or of which he cannot be ignorant."

This description of "metaphysical guilt" explains adequately that white racism "is only possible because whites are indifferent to suffering and patient with cruelty" meted out to the black man. Instead of involving themselves in an all-out attempt to stamp out racism from their white society, liberals waste lots of time trying to prove to as many blacks as they can find that they are liberal.

This arises out of the false belief that we are faced with a black problem. There is nothing the matter with blacks.

The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of the white society. The sooner the liberals realise this the better for us blacks.

Their presence amongst us is irksome and of nuisance value. It removes the focus of attention from essentials and shifts it to ill-defined philosophical concepts that are both irrelevant to the black man and merely a red herring across the track. White liberals must leave blacks to take care of their own business while they concern themselves with the real evil in our society: white racism.

Secondly, the black-white mixed circles are static circles with neither direction nor programme. The same questions are asked and the same naiveté exhibited in answering them. The real concern of the group is to keep the group going rather than being useful. In this sort of set-up one sees a perfect example of what oppression has done to the blacks.

They have been made to feel inferior for so long that for them it is comforting to drink tea, wine or beer with whites who seem to treat them as equals. This serves to boost up their own ego to the extent of making them feel slightly superior to those blacks who do not get similar treatment from whites. These are the sort of blacks who are a danger to the community.

Instead of directing themselves at their black brothers and looking at their common problems from a common platform, they choose to sing out their lamentations to an apparently sympathetic audience that has become proficient in saying the chorus of “shame.” These dull-witted, self-centred blacks are

in the ultimate analysis as guilty of the arrest of progress as their white friends for it is from such groups that the theory of gradualism emanates and this is what keeps the blacks confused and always hoping that one day God will step down from heaven to solve their problems.

It is people from such groups who keep on scanning the papers daily to detect any sign of the change they patiently await without working for. When Helen Suzman’s majority is increased by a couple of thousands, this is regarded as a major milestone in the “inevitable change.” Nobody looks at the other side of the coin – the largescale removals of Africans from the urban areas or the impending zoning of places like Grey Street in Durban and a myriad of other manifestations of change for the worse.

Does this mean that I am against integration? If by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up by and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it.

I am against the superior-inferior, white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil (and a poor one at that).

I am against the intellectual arrogance of white people that makes them believe that white leadership is a sine qua non in this country and that whites are the divinely appointed pace-setters in progress. I am against the fact that a settler minority should impose an entire system of values on an indigenous people.

If on the other hand by integration you mean there shall be free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people, then I am with you. For one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society. This need not cramp the style of those who feel differently but on the whole, a country in Africa, in which the majority of the people are African must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style. What of the claim that the blacks are becoming racists? This is a favourite pastime of frustrated liberals who feel their trusteeship ground being washed off from under their feet. These self-appointed trustees of black interests boast of years of experience in their fight for the 'rights of the blacks.' They have been doing things for blacks, on behalf of blacks, and because of blacks. When the blacks announce that the time has come for them to do things for themselves and all by themselves all white liberals shout blue murder!

"Hey, you can't do that. You're being a racist. You're falling into their trap."

Apparently it's alright with the liberals as long as you remain caught by their trap.

Those who know, define racism as discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation. In other words one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate. What blacks are doing is merely to respond to a situation in which they find themselves the objects of white racism.

We are in the position in which we are because of our skin. We are collectively segregated against – what can be more logical than for us to respond as a group? When workers come together under the auspices of a trade union to strive for the betterment of their conditions, nobody expresses surprise in the Western world. It is the done thing. Nobody accuses them of separatist tendencies. Teachers fight their battles, garbagemen do the same, nobody acts as a trustee for another. Somehow, however, when blacks want to do their thing the liberal establishment seems to detect an anomaly. This is in fact a counter-anomaly. The anomaly was there in the first instance when the liberals were presumptuous enough to think that it behoved them to fight the battle for the blacks.

The liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone; that the blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation. No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. Rather, all true liberals should realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society.

The liberals must realise that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous "they" with whom they can hardly claim identification.

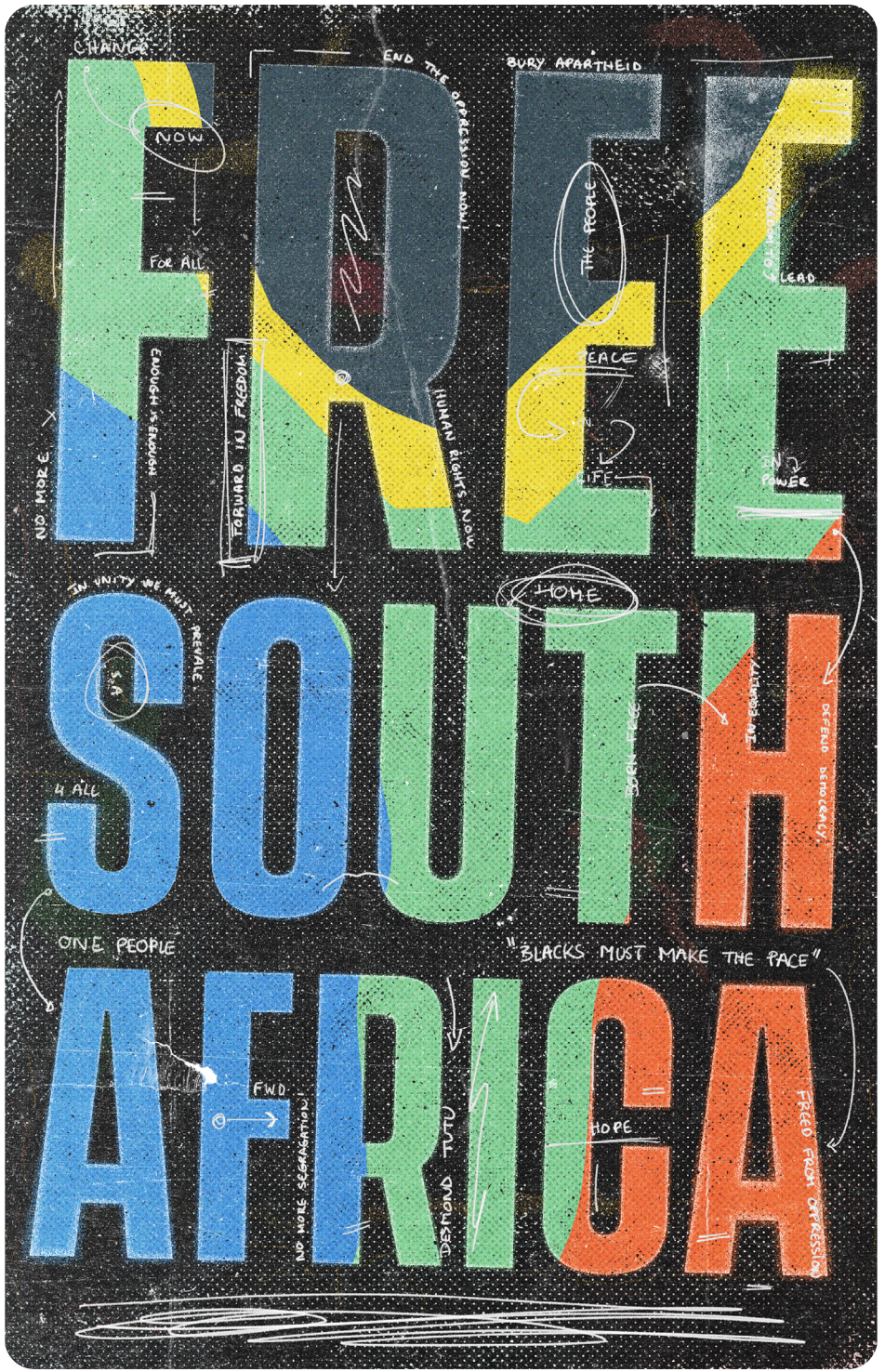
The liberal must apply himself with absolute dedication to the idea of educating his white brothers that the history of the country may have to be rewritten at some stage and that we may live in "a country where colour will not serve to put a man in a box."

The blacks have heard enough of this. In other words, the liberal must serve as a lubricating material so that as we change the gears in trying to find a better direction for South Africa, there should be no grinding noises of metal against metal but a free and easy flowing movement which will be characteristic of a well-looked-after vehicle.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Who or what is a white liberal, according to Steve Biko?
- What is the heart of his complaint against them?
- Why does Biko say that integration can't work?
- What interest do white liberals have in taking part in the black struggle? Is the motivation one that supports black liberation?
- What critical ingredient is inevitably missing from the world view of white liberals who claim to be standing in solidarity with blacks?
- What does Biko think white liberals should be doing?
- What are Biko's lessons on solidarity?

This text exists in other languages. You can find a French version at *https://strengthandsolidarity.org/paper/une-ame-noire-sous-des-peaux-blanches/*



BLACKS MUST MAKE THE PACE

BY DESMOND TUTU

Twelve years after Steve Biko wrote "Black Souls in White Skins," with apartheid still firmly in place, the radical anti-apartheid priest, Desmond Tutu, sat down and wrote a letter to Frontline magazine – our third reading on solidarity and the principle of deference to those whose rights are abused.

Blacks must make the pace

MAY I begin by complimenting you on your perseverance in trying to provide a forum for airing all kinds and widely divergent views. It is thus difficult to categorise your magazine and to fit it neatly into some pre-canned niche. Be careful though when you are praised by me. It could be the kiss of death for you! Never mind.

I have one little thought which I wish to air through favour of your columns if I may. As you know (c.f.Front-line Vol. 2 No. 2, P12), I have reiterated my one or two points of view repeatedly. One of these is my longing for a non-racial and genuine democracy in South Africa. I have gone so far as to say that I support the ANC wholeheartedly in its aim to achieve this goal whilst I do not yet agree with the methods they believe they have been compelled to adopt by the rigid intrasigence of the white man.

There is an important rider that must be added to all of this and that is what I consider to be the place of the white man in this – popularly called the liberation struggle. I am firmly non-racial and so welcome the participation of all, both black and white, in this struggle for the new South Africa which must come whatever the cost. But I want firmly to state that at this stage the leadership of the struggle must be firmly in black hands. They must determine what will be the priorities and the strategy of the struggle.



Tutu: whites should follow

Whites unfortunately have the habit of taking over and usurping the leadership and taking the crucial decisions – largely, I suppose, because of the headstart they had in education and experience in matters of this kind. The point is that however much they want to identify with blacks it is an existential fact that can't be willed away that they have not really been victims of this baneful oppression and exploitation as blacks simply because of their skin colour. It is a divide that can't be crossed and that must give blacks a primacy in determining the course and goal of the struggle. Whites must be willing to follow.

In fact, the greatest contribution that they can make, a crucial one, is to convert their fellow whites. If they could accomplish this then our goal would be attained without too much trouble.

(Rt. Rev.) Desmond Tutu
General Secretary
S.A. Council of Churches
Johannesburg

Published in Frontline, April 1982

South African magazine, 1978-91: http://www.coldtype.net/frontline.html

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FRONTLINE, April 1982..

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How does Tutu's letter compare with Biko's essay?
- Where or how do they differ?
- What does he say is the implication of "the divide that cannot be crossed?"

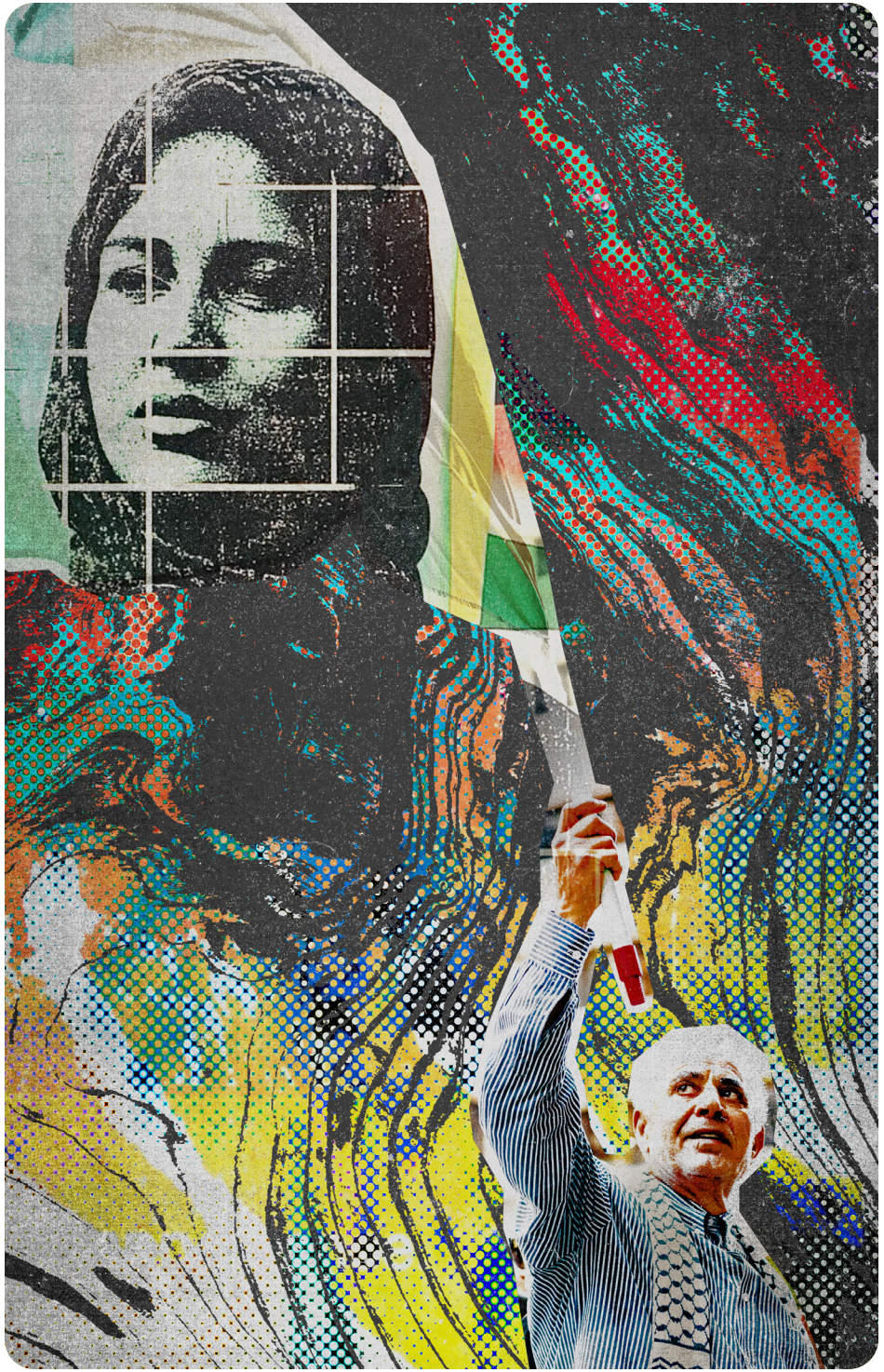


THE MASTER'S TOOLS WILL NEVER DISMANTLE THE MASTER'S HOUSE

BY AUDRE LORDE

To access the complete text, please visit:
https://monoskop.org/images/2/2b/Lorde_Audre_1983_The_Masters_Tools_Will_Never_Dismantle_the_Masters_House.pdf

You can also scan the QR code below.



BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS, A CALL BY PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Source: https://bdsmovement.net/call

In our Symposium's framing, it is important for those who wish to stand in solidarity to respect the leadership of those they want to support, and to defer to their strategy and demands. That in turn requires that those leading their struggle must issue a call – communicate their strategy and demands so that their supporters know what support is needed.

The call in 2005 by Palestinian civil society for "people of conscience in the international community" to organize boycotts

of Israeli goods, divestment from Israel's corporations, and sanctions and embargoes against Israel provides an illustration of what a call for solidarity looks like.

Any call to others for solidarity inevitably implies that strategic choices will have to be made. In the Symposium, we asked participants to break the BDS Call down into its constituent parts, to understand what choices had been made, and why.

For background we supplied the transcript of an interview with Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of the BDS movement. The interview can be found here:
https://strengthandsolidarity.org/podcast/16/

One year after the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which found Israel's Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal; Israel continues its construction of the colonial Wall with total disregard to the Court's decision. Thirty eight years into Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights, Israel continues to expand Jewish colonies. It has unilaterally annexed occupied East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and is now de facto annexing large parts of the West Bank by means of the Wall. Israel is also preparing - in the shadow of its planned redeployment from the Gaza Strip - to build and expand colonies in the West Bank. Fifty seven years after the state of Israel was built mainly on land ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian owners, a majority of Palestinians are refugees, most of whom are stateless. Moreover, Israel's entrenched system of racial discrimination against its own Arab-Palestinian citizens remains intact.

In light of Israel's persistent violations of international law; and

Given that, since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies; and

Given that all forms of international intervention and peace-making have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law, to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine; and

In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions; and Inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid and in the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression;

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's

inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall

2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and

3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Endorsed by:
The Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions and organizations below represent the three integral parts of the people of Palestine: Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Unions, Associations, Campaigns

- Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine (Coordinating body for the major political parties in the Occupied Palestinian Territory) • Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights (PICCR)
- Union of Arab Community Based Associations (ITTIJAH), Haifa
- Forum of Palestinian NGOs in Lebanon
- Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU)
- General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)
- General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT)
- Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors and Employees
- Consortium of Professional Associations
- Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC)
- Health Work Committees – West Bank
- Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)
- Union of Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC)
- Union of Health Work Committees – Gaza (UHWC)
- Union of Palestinian Farmers
- Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI)
- General Union of Disabled Palestinians
- Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC)
- Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
- Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign
- Union of Teachers of Private Schools
- Union of Women's Work Committees, Tulkarem (UWWC)
- Dentists' Association – Jerusalem Center
- Palestinian Engineers Association
- Lawyers' Association
- Network for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education, Ramallah
- Coordinating Committee of Rehabilitation Centers – West Bank
- Coalition of Lebanese Civil Society Organizations (150 organizations)
- Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), Network of Student-based Canadian University Associations

Refugee Rights Associations/Organizations

- Al-Ard Committees for the Defense of the Right of Return, Syria
- Al-Awda Charitable Society, Beit Jala
- Al Awda - Palestine Right-to-Return Coalition, U.S.A
- Al-Awda Toronto
- Aidun Group – Lebanon
- Aidun Group – Syria
- Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center, Aida refugee camp
- Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced (ADRID), Nazareth

- BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Bethlehem
- Committee for Definite Return, Syria
- Committee for the Defense of Palestinian Refugee Rights, Nablus
- Consortium of the Displaced Inhabitants of Destroyed Palestinian Villages and Towns
- Filastinuna – Commission for the Defense of the Right of Return, Syria
- Handala Center, 'Azza (Beit Jibreen) refugee camp, Bethlehem
- High Committee for the Defense of the Right of Return, Jordan (including personal endorsement of 71 members of parliament, political parties and unions in Jordan)
- High National Committee for the Defense of the Right of Return , Ramallah
- International Right of Return Congress (RORC)
- Jermana Youth Forum for the Defense of the Right of Return, Syria
- Laji Center, Aida camp, Bethlehem
- Local Committee for Rehabilitation, Qalandia refugee camp, Jerusalem
- Local Committee for Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Deheishe refugee camp, Bethlehem
- Palestinian National Committee for the Defense of the Right of Return, Syria
- Palestinian Return Association, Syria
- Palestinian Return Forum, Syria
- Palestine Right-of-Return Coalition (Palestine, Arab host countries, Europe, North America)
- Palestine Right-of-Return Confederation-Europe (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden)
- Palestinian Youth Forum for the Right of Return, Syria
- PLO Popular Committees – West Bank refugee camps
- PLO Popular Committees – Gaza Strip refugee camps
- Popular Committee – al-'Azza (Beit Jibreen) refugee camp, Bethlehem
- Popular Committee – Deheishe refugee camp, Bethlehem
- Shaml - Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center, Ramallah
- Union of Women's Activity Centers – West Bank Refugee Camps
- Union of Youth Activity Centers – Palestine Refugee Camps, West Bank and Gaza
- Women's Activity Center – Deheishe refugee camp, Bethlehem
- Yafa Cultural Center, Balata refugee camp, Nablus

Organizations

- Abna' al-Balad Society, Nablus
- Addameer Center for Human Rights, Gaza
- Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association, Ramallah
- Alanqa' Cultural Association, Hebron
- Al-Awda Palestinian Folklore Society, Hebron
- Al-Doha Children's Cultural Center, Bethlehem
- Al-Huda Islamic Center, Bethlehem
- Al-Jeel al-Jadid Society, Haifa
- Al-Karameh Cultural Society, Um al-Fahm
- Al-Maghazi Cultural Center, Gaza
- Al-Marsad Al-Arabi, occupied Syrian Golan Heights
- Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, Gaza
- Al-Nahda Cultural Forum, Hebron
- Al-Taghrid Society for Culture and Arts, Gaza
- Alternative Tourism Group, Beit Sahour (ATG)
- Al-Wafa' Charitable Society, Gaza
- Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ)
- Arab Association for Human Rights, Nazareth (HRA)
- Arab Center for Agricultural Development (ACAD)
- Arab Center for Agricultural Development-Gaza
- Arab Educational Institute – Open Windows (affiliated with Pax Christi International)
- Arab Orthodox Charitable Society – Beit Sahour
- Arab Orthodox Charity – Beit Jala
- Arab Orthodox Club – Beit Jala
- Arab Orthodox Club – Beit Sahour

- Arab Students' Collective, University of Toronto
- Arab Thought Forum, Jerusalem (AFT)
- Association for Cultural Exchange Hebron - France
- Association Najdeh, Lebanon
- Authority for Environmental Quality, Jenin
- Bader Society for Development and Reconstruction, Gaza
- Canadian Palestine Foundation of Quebec, Montreal
- Center for the Defense of Freedoms, Ramallah
- Center for Science and Culture, Gaza
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ramallah- Al-Bireh District
- Child Development and Entertainment Center, Tulkarem
- Committee for Popular Participation, Tulkarem
- Defense for Children International-Palestine Section, Ramallah (DCI/PS)
- El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe
- Ensan Center for Democracy and Human Rights, Bethlehem
- Environmental Education Center, Bethlehem
- FARAH – Palestinian Center for Children, Syria
- Ghassan Kanafani Society for Development, Gaza
- Ghassan Kanafani Forum, Syria
- Gaza Community Mental Health Program, Gaza (GCMHP)
- Golan for Development, occupied Syrian Golan Heights
- Halhoul Cultural Forum, Hebron
- Himayeh Society for Human Rights, Um al-Fahm
- Holy Land Trust – Bethlehem
- Home of Saint Nicholas for Old Ages – Beit Jala
- Human Rights Protection Center, Lebanon
- In'ash al-Usrah Society, Ramallah
- International Center of Bethlehem (Dar An-Nadweh)
- Islah Charitable Society-Bethlehem
- Jafra Youth Center, Syria
- Jander Center, al-Azza (Beit Jibreen) refugee camp, Bethlehem
- Jerusalem Center for Women, Jerusalem (JCW)
- Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC)
- Khalil Al Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah
- Land Research Center, Jerusalem (LRC)
- Liberated Prisoners' Society, Palestine
- Local Committee for Social Development, Nablus
- Local Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Nablus
- MA'AN TV Network, Bethlehem
- Medical Aid for Palestine, Canada
- MIFTAH-Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, Ramallah
- Muwatin-The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy
- National Forum of Martyr's Families, Palestine
- Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work – Gaza Area
- Network of Christian Organizations – Bethlehem (NCOB)
- Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace, Jerusalem
- Palestinian Counseling Center, Jerusalem (PCC)
- Palestinian Democratic Youth Union, Lebanon
- Palestinian Farmers' Society, Gaza
- Palestinian Hydrology Group for Water and Environment Resources Development-Gaza
- Palestinian Prisoners' Society-West Bank
- Palestinian Society for Consumer Protection, Gaza
- Palestinian University Students' Forum for Peace and Democracy, Hebron
- Palestinian Women's Struggle Committees
- Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD)
- Popular Art Centre, Al-Bireh
- Prisoner's Friends Association – Ansar Al-Sajeen, Majd al-Krum
- Public Aid Association, Gaza
- Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
- Saint Afram Association – Bethlehem
- Saint Vincent De Paul – Beit Jala
- Senior Citizen Society – Beit Jala

- Social Development Center, Nablus
- Society for Self-Development, Hebron
- Society for Social Work, Tulkarem
- Society for Voluntary Work and Culture, Um al-Fahm
- Society of Friends of Prisoners and Detainees, Um al-Fahm
- Sumoud-Political Prisoners Solidarity Group, Toronto
- Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ramallah
- TCC – Teacher's Creativity Center, Ramallah
- Wi'am Center, Bethlehem
- Women's Affairs Technical Committee, Ramallah and Gaza (WATC)
- Women's Studies Center, Jerusalem (WSC)
- Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, Jerusalem (WCLAC)
- Yafa for Education and Culture, Nablus
- Yazour Charitable Society, Nablus
- YMCA-East Jerusalem
- Youth Cooperation Forum, Hebron
- YWCA-Palestine
- Zakat Committee-al-Khader, Bethlehem
- Zakat Committee-Deheishe camp, Bethlehem
- The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People (PCR)
- Alternative Voice in the Galilee (AVIG)

This text exists in other languages. You can find a French version at *https://bdsmovement.net/call#French*, an Arabic version at *https://bdsmovement.net/call#Arabic* and a Spanish version at *https://bdsmovement.net/call#Spanish*.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How have the writers of the Call chosen to start? Why?
- Who is making the Call? What can you glean from the list of signatories?
- Who is it addressed to? Who is not included, and why?
- What is the ask? Is it tightly defined or open-ended? In either case, why might that have been the choice?
- Are the asks in the Call time-bound? How long is the Call supposed to last?
- Is there any role for Israelis who wish to stand in solidarity?
- Why have the drafters included a reference to South Africa?
- What might have been the preparatory work that was needed before the Call was launched? How long do you think the preparation took?
- Does this Call meet the test of "deference" to those bearing the violation of rights? Is difference playing a role in the way this campaign has been designed?
- What experience have you had in designing and issuing a Call?
- What can you recall about answering Calls made by others?

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH



INTRODUCTION

BY AKWE AMOSU

When participants in our Symposium focused on solidarity, they were largely thinking about the external relationships of an organization or movement: as the previous section illustrates, there are many choices to be made when we want to contribute our power to other struggles. But in order to deliver on those choices, an organization needs to be strong – able to function well and handle the pressure that inevitably comes with defending rights. That's why in designing our Symposium, we didn't just look outward but included readings and discussions on two critical indicators of an organization's health – organizational strength, and organizational culture (see the next section).

On organizational strength, we particularly focused on three key themes: internal systems and governance, how far to formalize structures, and the challenge of finding reliable funding.
On the governance front, no matter where they came from, or what kind of organization they ran, our participants brought up the same issues time and time again: boards that failed to fulfil their responsibilities; weak systems that allowed corruption to get a foothold; leaders who stayed too long; the burden of corporate-style administrative systems that didn't match their

needs; and the need for managers with more experience, particularly in staff management.[1] Those issues particularly mattered to formal organizations. But if looser, "grassroots" movements didn't have those challenges, they had others: who could decide on taking an action? Was it a good idea to adopt formal rules and policies? If not, how could disagreements be resolved?

Underlying all these issues were questions of power in an organization – where was it centered? Who had the authority to take decisions about political direction, or make alliances? Should movements become political parties in order to gain ground, or avoid electoral politics like the plague?

On the funding side, while needs may differ, formal organizations and social movements both are likely to need funds, and raising money poses challenges.
Funders may be afraid to be associated with too radical an agenda. A group may be too small to have adequate systems for handling funds and reassuring donors. The availability of funds may fuel both appetites and suspicions that weaken an organization's internal confidence.

1. If you would like a more detailed sense of how some of these conversations have gone at our Symposium, check out the article that appeared in Sur Journal on *https://sur.conectas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/sur-32-ingles-akwe-amosu.pdf*. You can also find episodes of our podcast that focus on different dimensions of organizational health, featuring Kenya, DR Congo, South-East Asia, Hungary, Hong Kong, Egypt, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

We did not always include a session on funding in our Symposium but when we did, a core issue was often the pros and cons of securing funds and managing donor relationships, how to avoid burdensome accounting and political restrictions, and whether it might be possible to find new revenue models that implied less dependency.

Case studies

To support discussion on these diverse issues, our Symposium team produced case studies on real situations that highlighted a choice or challenge that activists and organizations had to resolve. In each case, with the generous agreement and contribution of the organizations and individuals involved, we wrote an accessible narrative that would set out the dilemma or a challenge they navigated. Then we asked our participants to read the narrative, imagine themselves in the same situation, and debate what they would choose to do.

These case studies were produced solely for use by our Symposium, so we have not included them here. To illustrate the tool, however, we have included a fictional case study that combines elements drawn from real-life examples we have encountered. We have included a guide to writing your own case studies at the end of this section.

In our Symposium, the case studies provoked some of the liveliest debate and deepest insight, and we would encourage others planning their own Symposium to consider writing their own.



CASE STUDY: TO BE (OR NOT TO BE) A FORMAL ORGANIZATION

BY CHRISTOPHER STONE

This is a fictional case written by Professor Christopher Stone of the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford for the Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights. It presents a fictional composite of events in several countries and across several organizations. It is intended solely to provoke discussion and learning in educational and training settings and should not be used for any other purpose. None of the characters, places, or organizations are real.

Originally produced 5 October 2024.

It was a hot but windy afternoon in Grand-Passage, the sprawling, chaotic capital city of the Republic of Lemonia, and Albus was anticipating the evening meeting of the membership of RightsNow! with growing excitement.

It had been two years since he and five friends had started RightsNow!, and those years had proved both exhilarating and cataclysmic, sometimes both at the same time. They carried the scars of their multiple battles with the police and their several detentions, but miraculously they had emerged with the country's would-be dictator exiled and a new government installed with wide popular support. The foreign media probably exaggerated the influence of RightsNow! on the removal of the former President, but there was no doubting their ability to bring huge numbers into the street, and their pop-up street parties, guerrilla art, and social media savvy had made sure their powerful critique resonated across the nation.

The new government was barely two months old, but already there were signs that despite the President's youth and charisma, her government would likely be dominated by the same political elites that had shaped and perpetuated Lemonia's corrupt and kleptocratic state since the end of colonial rule. The new cabinet was younger and better educated than its predecessor, but no less luxuriously attired.

The new President was a medical doctor widely admired for her contributions to public health, including leading the upgrade of the Grand-Passage Regional Hospital and driving the formation of a network of community health workers across the entire country. That combination of a first-rate medical center and trained community health workers was

credited with sparing the country the worst of the Ebola and COVID pandemics that had decimated Lemonia's less prepared neighbors. Her leadership had won her international acclaim and even a nomination for a Nobel Prize, while within the country she became a folk hero known by all as the Good Doctor, or simply GD. Yet now, as President, GD seemed to be flaunting the perks of her new office and sounding over-confident in her own opinions, even far afield from medicine and public health. Disappointment in Albus' circle had deepened to the point that none of them trusted her.

Albus hoped that evening's meeting would see the membership adopt a plan to put RightsNow! on a sustainable footing, able to maintain pressure on the President and the new government to meet the expectations of the citizens, especially the youth, who had fought so hard to free the country from the grip of the old regime. The demands from RightsNow! had been straightforward from the start: the rights of everyone to clean water, healthy food, and medical services; the rights to assemble, speak freely, and protest loudly without harassment or attacks from the police; and equal rights in employment, housing, land, and education, regardless of gender identity, ethnicity, language, sexuality, religion, or financial situation.

The early years of an informal movement

In the early days of RightsNow!, its informality had been a strength. Before it was a youth movement, RightsNow! was just a slogan dreamed up by Albus and his five friends during the water crisis in Grand-Passage two years earlier.

The roots of the water crisis lay in two massive contracts that the government had awarded several years earlier.

The capital city was home to one million people and it was growing rapidly, like most cities in this part of the continent, and this growth was straining the infrastructure. The government at the time had secured a series of big loans from the World Bank and private international banks to expand the water and sewer systems, but the main contract to oversee the construction of new reservoirs, water mains, and sewers went to a newly formed company led by close friends of the President. At the same time, the government announced plans to privatize the water utility in Grand-Passage, and no one was surprised when the contract went to a firm that employed the President's son as a consultant.

Years passed with little progress on the new infrastructure until two years ago, when the combination of low rainfall, rapid population growth, and poor maintenance of the water mains led to water shortages in several neighborhoods. The two companies that won those big contracts blamed each other and the government for the problems, but no one was stepping forward to get water to the increasingly desperate communities. That's when a criminal gang seized the opportunity to prevent any but their own water trucks entering the affected neighborhoods, extorting fees from residents and businesses for the supply of drinking water. The police proved unable to help, even as the gang's tactics grew increasingly violent.

At the time, Albus was a young lawyer, having been called to the Bar only a year earlier after completing his legal studies at the national university in Grand-Passage. Through an introduction arranged by a friend of his father, he was now employed as a junior counsel in a firm whose managing partner was the head

of the national Bar Association. Albus knew nothing about the engineering of water and sewer systems, but he knew a lot about the corruption that lay at the heart of the water crisis. Two of his closest friends from high school were now among the country's most popular DJs, and many of the clubs where they appeared were being extorted by the gangs. One day at a barbeque in Albus' yard, these three had been talking with three other young friends: two journalists and a graphic artist. As the six shared their personal stories of the water crisis, reinforcing each other's outrage, they decided that they needed to bring that outrage to the doorstep of the President and demand that the government cut through the finger-pointing and deliver on the most basic right of the city's residents: the right to safe drinking water.

Without revealing the political message at the center of the plan, Albus applied for, and received, a permit to hold a concert in the somewhat dilapidated park across the street from the main gate to the enormous presidential compound. The DJs spread word that they would be providing the music at the concert and the journalists began promoting the concert on social media with the hashtags #RightsNow! and #Party4Water! The authorities failed to see what was happening until thousands of young people filled the park to overflowing and the air outside the President's compound was filled with angry shouts of "Rights Now!", "Water Now!" Alarmed by the unexpected crowd, the presidential police launched a poorly coordinated effort to shut down the concert and clear the park, resulting in many injuries and close to a hundred young people detained.

Neither Albus nor any other member of the core group of five friends was arrested at the concert, but Albus' name was on the permit, so he knew the police would be looking for him the next day. He arranged a conversation that morning with his managing partner, and the head of the national Bar Association, and they agreed that Albus would resign from the firm, at least temporarily, as he focused on organizing further legal protests. Perhaps grateful to Albus for taking the initiative to separate from the firm and admiring Albus' strategic instincts, the managing partner offered to continue to speak with Albus privately, as an informal advisor.

Meanwhile, thanks to the two journalists among the organizers, press coverage of the protest concert and the bungled police response was everywhere. Headlines blared "Right to Water Demanded at Compound Gate," and "Police Attack Water Protesters on President's Doorstep." The President's spokesperson said only that a few young radicals were exploiting the current water shortage to stir up trouble in the capital and warned that gatherings of this kind would not be permitted to continue.

Now, thinking back on the events of two years ago, Albus was still amazed that the movement grew as quickly as it did. Wherever the two DJs played in the weeks following that first concert, the crowds were chanting "RightsNow!" with the DJs' encouragement. Soon other DJs were doing the same, just to capture the spirit that seemed to be spreading across the capital's dance venues. And unable to get permits for any public protests, Albus and his friends used informal networks to stage pop-up concerts to demand the right to water, dispersing as quickly as possible when the police arrived.

Thanks to the graphic artist in the core group and her own friends, guerrilla art began to appear on city walls and pavements, with the slogan of the movement. And the demands began to expand, from the right to water to a wider series of rights – to assemble, to protest, and more.

Crucial to the movement's survival was the lack of any formal structure. There was no central pool of funds, no organizational hierarchy, no formal membership. As the police began to hunt more aggressively for the movement's leaders, the core group encouraged young activists to form separate cells, each able to organize their own actions without any centralized decision-making. Each of the original six friends who made up the core group were in frequent contact with the organizers of several individual cells, but none of them knew the organizers their core group comrades were in touch with.

The core group still met together, but instead of trying to direct the activities of the cells, they focused on reinforcing common messages across the movement so that the demands of every action were aligned and the tactics remained non-violent. The informal structure and the discipline it required of the core group allowed impressive protests to continue even when the police detained several of the key individuals.

A President sent packing

The RightsNow! movement was far from the only problem confronting Lemonia's President. The economy was barely growing, corruption investigations were swirling around him, and the country's charismatic medical hero was forming a new political party to challenge him in the next election.

GDP was growing at a rate of less than 1.5% while the population was growing annually at 2.9%, and youth unemployment was already 15%. Debt service payments were consuming just under half of the state's annual revenues, and the only way out of the water crisis would likely require additional debt. Economically, the President was trapped.

More worrying personally, however, were the corruption investigations. A trove of documents leaked from a financial consultant known as Peninsula in the Virgin Islands had been published online by a consortium of investigative journalists. Known as the Peninsula Papers, they revealed the efforts of various political figures globally to create shell companies that could hold funds whose ownership would not be traceable to them. The President's name had figured prominently in the Peninsula Papers, and journalists in Lemonia, the USA, and the UK were publishing speculative stories intended to trigger more consequential investigations by national and international regulators.

The pop-up protest concerts organized by RightsNow!, together with these economic and corruption challenges, came together in a call by the federation of labor unions for a national day of reflection – essentially a general strike by another name, because calling for a general strike would have been illegal. On the appointed day, huge crowds began to form on the major streets leading to the central square in Grand-Passage, all heading to an unofficial protest in the centre of the city. The police, having anticipated something like this, had assembled armed troops in the alleys and side streets surrounding the square, and when the protesters had gathered in large numbers, the police came out of their holding positions and boxed in the

crowd on all sides, even as more protesters were entering the square to join them.

Whatever its intention, the police maneuver proved disastrous. Those in the square tried to get out, while those arriving tried to get in. The police had sandwiched themselves between these opposing currents and panicked, swinging their batons at protesters on both sides of them. Additional police on the periphery tried to help their comrades by firing tear gas into the melee, producing a general riot. Armed police started shooting, and by the time the sun set and the square was cleared, there were more than a hundred deaths and many more injuries.

Watching the news reports of the chaos and the casualties, the President was uncertain what to do. The CEO of Lemonia's largest commercial bank phoned him with some advice, persuading him that his best chance of living out his remaining years in comfort was to resign and find refuge out of the reach of the investigations mounting against him. The CEO offered him the use of his private plane to leave that night. The President agreed, recording a resignation message before leaving for the airport. The next day the National Assembly called a special election for a month hence, which then catapulted the Good Doctor to the Presidency atop her hastily constructed new political party.

A plan for sustainability

With a clarity that he had not felt since the first days of RightsNow!, Albus understood that the movement that he and his friends had started two years earlier was now at a classic pivot point.

Albus had insisted that the core group collect all the information it could on what happened to the organizers of the Arab Spring demonstrations, and why those movements had failed to bring about rights-respecting regimes. And he went further, insisting also that the group look at the earlier history of anti-colonial struggles across the continent, examining where those struggles for self-determination and other political and economic rights had stalled. Now was the time that all of their efforts could be used to guide the movement forward.

Drawing on the informal advice he continued to receive from the managing partner of his former law firm, Albus had prepared a plan for RightsNow! to transition into a sustainable, legitimate, social movement with a constitution and democratic governance. It would become a legal entity, operating transparently and democratically, but avoiding the bureaucracy and compromises with donors that seemed to drain the activism and creativity out of professional NGOs.

The plan was based on the cells, which Albus reconceived as branches. Each branch would elect a chair and a secretary, both unpaid positions, for a one-year term, renewable for as many as five years in total. The chair and secretary of each branch would be responsible for coordinating branch activity and representing the branches in the Movement Forum, which would elect its own chair and vice-chair annually from among its members. The Forum would hire and supervise the General Secretary of RightsNow! and would need to approve any proposal for funding before that proposal could be submitted to a prospective donor. In addition to the chairs and secretaries of all branches, the six members of the core group would be members of the Movement Forum for as long as they

remained members of a branch, but they would not be replaced if and when they left.

The General Secretary would be a paid position with a three-year renewable contract. An annual general meeting of all members of all branches would have responsibility for approving the annual budget and setting the short- and long-term strategy of the movement. They would also be responsible for adopting requirements for branch recognition and for individual membership beyond those specified in the constitution itself – that branches be independent of any political party, and that individual members not be office-holders (or candidates for office) in any political party or government structure.

If funds were available and provision was made in the annual budget, the General Secretary could hire additional staff members. Amendments to the constitution where all of this was specified would require approval by two-thirds of those present for an AGM and fifty percent of the total membership of the Movement Forum.

Albus hoped that this structure would give the movement the stability it needed without heavy reliance on outside funding. The movement would remain the sum of the activism of its branches, but with the coherence that the AGM's strategy, the Forum's coordination, and the General Secretary's drive, could provide. Still, some donor funds would be needed, and Albus had secured the agreement of the Lemonia Human Rights Consortium, an NGO providing legal services and conducting its own strategic litigation on human rights issues, to serve as the fiscal sponsor for RightsNow!

Albus was looking forward to presenting this proposal to the meeting that evening. He was confident in the proposal, but also eager to hear what additional suggestions and refinements others might propose. He looked forward to the discussion and hoped that by the end of the evening everyone would feel the same degree of ownership and enthusiasm about the new constitution as he did.

A surprising meeting

Albus' excitement continued to build as the members of the movement began to gather at the dance club that one of the DJs had arranged to use for the early evening meeting. By the time the meeting began, there must have been a couple of hundred people present, a meeting larger than the movement would ever have risked in the past. Indeed, although membership was restricted to those who had been active in one of the cells for at least the last three months, this was the first time that most cell members would learn who else had been active members of the movement under the previous regime.

One of the journalists from the core group had volunteered to chair the meeting, and the rest of the core group had quickly assented, as she was one of the most articulate and widely admired leaders. When she called the meeting to order, she explained that the meeting had been called to chart the future course of the movement in Lemonia's new political context. She expressed her own appreciation, and that of the entire core group, to Albus for putting together a possible constitution for RightsNow! and a formal structure that had the potential to carry it forward over many more years.

Then, to Albus' surprise, instead of calling him to the front to explain the plan, she said that she had received a request from three of the cell leaders to put their own proposal forward, and that she had also received a request from one of the members of the core group, the graphic artist, who wanted to make a personal statement before the meeting took up Albus' detailed proposal for the constitution. In sum, the meeting would first hear from the three cell leaders, then from the graphic designer, and then from Albus.

The cell leaders who came forward had not been among those that he had been coordinating, so he barely knew them. In the former period, this had been an essential source of protection, but now Albus realized how little he knew about many of the people who had played key roles in the movement's activism. The three cell leaders stood together while one of them explained that they thought the best course for RightsNow! was to become a formal political party and try to get as many of its members elected to the National Assembly as possible. They argued that this was the crucial moment to do so, because the popularity of RightsNow! was at its height, and it would be impossible to maintain the level of excitement and reputation for effectiveness that the movement had achieved, particularly over the past year.

The issues for which RightsNow! had been fighting were inherently political, they argued, and so it was only through politics that these rights could be secured. They said that they understood the temptation to remain aloof from the dirty game of politics, but that this was only an option for those who had another source of power available to them: lawyers, financiers, and other elites.

For those who did not have access to elite power, politics was the best way to contest the power of those who had long deprived most citizens of Lemonia of their fundamental rights. Individual members of the crowd had been shouting words of encouragement occasionally through this speech, and when it ended, the crowd erupted in enthusiastic applause.

Albus was taken by surprise and felt a hint of panic in his gut. He had anticipated that RightsNow! would likely lose some members to politics, and that was why he had been careful to require that members of the branches would have to leave RightsNow! if they chose to seek political office. It had not occurred to him that RightsNow! might itself become a political party, and this seemed hugely wasteful of the power that RightsNow! had built. If RightsNow! entered politics, it would be forced into the same political calculations and compromises of every other party, and the country would lose its most distinctive, rights-based advocates. Albus noted the volume of applause for the three cell leaders and realized for the first time that the evening might end with a very different outcome than he had expected.

Then Albus had a further surprise. His graphic-design colleague from the core group came to the front and put yet a further option before the group. RightsNow!, she said, should consider dissolving now, at the height of its success. She argued that the movement was not the same as the vision and that in this new context, new movements would be needed. Rather than formalize RightsNow! with new procedures, new structures, a paid staff, a fiscal sponsor, and donors, the meeting should consider declaring victory and encouraging

everyone committed to the vision to find new ways to continue the struggle. This was a time, she said, for creativity and innovation, not the entrenchment of structures from a different period and a different context. The crowd was almost silent during her brief talk and the applause at the end was respectful but less boisterous than for the cell leaders. Still, Albus could feel that her message was sinking in.

As Albus realized that he would be the next to speak, his mind ran quickly over the unexpected attacks he had just heard on his own proposal, even before he had presented it. He had thought that the debate would be about the details of his proposed design, not about whether to sustain RightsNow! for the future. Was he prepared to argue on this broader question? Was he even the right person to propose the sustainability plan that he had spent weeks developing? And how had he failed to anticipate the meeting taking this turn?

Now he was being called to the front for his presentation. What should he say?

HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN CASE STUDY

DANIELLA LOCK

WHAT IS A CASE STUDY?

The Case Studies we have used in the Symposium are semi-fictionalized accounts of a serious dilemma an organizer or an organization has experienced in their work. The Case Study is usually written in the style of a story from the perspective of an organizer facing the dilemma, including an account of the relevant events that led to the dilemma arising.

The dilemma may relate to any aspect of organizing work, reflecting issues of power, privilege, solidarity and organizational strength. This includes problems in responding to external threats to an organization, or managing conflicts or support needs within or between groups involved in organizing.

A Case Study can be an effective technique for generating discussion around common challenges people face in both movement-building and building consensus on how to tackle those challenges. It can also encourage useful introspection on people's background assumptions and general approaches to organizing.

As the Case Study is semi-fictionalized, its value lies not so much in discussants understanding the facts underpinning the study's dilemma, but in their understanding of the issues the dilemma raises for discussants about their own work and that of related movements. In this way, the Case Study can act as a form of Rorschach Test (where a person's interpretations of an abstract image provide important insights into their outlook and psychological state) that enables organizers to better understand the ways in which they and others are operating in their field.

WHAT STEPS ARE INVOLVED IN MAKING A CASE STUDY?

While it is less important for discussants, understanding the factual context of the dilemma is crucial for those writing Case Studies, in order to present the dilemma in its most impactful form. Set out below are a number of steps for establishing that factual context and then framing it around a dilemma in a way that can provoke the most fruitful discussion.

I. PREPARATORY WORK

1. Identify a dilemma that an organizer may be experiencing or has experienced in the course of their work, where you (and others you speak to) are genuinely unsure how to respond, and that you think speaks to some general challenge in the field of organizing and/or human rights related work. The best type of dilemma is likely to be the one you think will divide a room of respected comrades completely in half about how the dilemma came about and how to move forward from it. There shouldn't be a simple or obvious explanation for the dilemma, or how the dilemma should be approached, as this will merely result in immediate agreement in the room! The best dilemma will also likely provoke impassioned conversations about whether or not it is necessary to challenge deep-rooted practices in or assumptions about the way organizing work is conducted.

2. The organizer experiencing the dilemma will be the protagonist of the Case Study. Speak to them about the prospect of writing a Case Study with them, making sure that they are comfortable with discussing the problem at length over a series of interviews. They also need to be okay with being the protagonist of the Case Study, and with their (semi-fictionalized) story being discussed at length by large groups of people. You can assure the organizer that they can sign off on whatever you write.

Important

However, you will need to make clear that you cannot control how people refer to the Case Study after it has been used in discussions.

3. The organizer also needs to be happy with you interviewing other people involved in the situation, who may be part of an opposing side in a conflict or with whom the organizer has had difficult relations. It will be crucial for writing the Case Study that you speak to all of the key figures involved in the events leading up to and surrounding the dilemma (often between five and ten individuals). You need to ensure that the others involved in the situation are prepared to be interviewed to give their perspectives on events leading up to the dilemma.

II. CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

1. Before conducting the interviews, do as much of your own research as you can on the organizations and the political situation they are working in during the relevant period in order to understand the dilemma thoroughly. Look up news articles about the organization(s) and political developments that might have affected their work. You should ask the interviewees to send you internal communications of relevance to the dilemma, as well as organizational reports, internal and external, that set out how the organization is meant to work – its structure, its constitution, funding models, internal policies, etc. Based on this research, write a timeline of the events leading up to the dilemma, as well as a note setting out the structure of the relevant organizations. Then identify where you can see gaps in your knowledge, which will inform what questions you ask your interviewees.

2. In conducting the interviews you want to be able to:

    a. Build an accurate factual picture of the dilemma and events leading up to it: With your interviewees, go through the research you have done so far and fill in gaps in your factual knowledge about the circumstances leading up to the dilemma. One useful technique is to make sure you keep recounting to the interviewees what you understand to have happened. If you hear conflicting accounts of the timeline, make sure to highlight that you have heard something different about what happened – this might jog someone's memory (which may often be inaccurate for a variety of reasons). Where in some cases accounts of what happened remain conflicting even after raising this with the interviewees, it will be up to you to make a judgment as to what happened. Remember, the Case Study is explicitly semi-fictional so the study can depart from the reality of what happened on occasion. However, this is mostly best done at a minimum and when it serves the purpose of centering the dilemma being faced.

    b. Understand your interviewees' perspectives on the dilemma: Try to get a sense from your interviewees of their views on the dilemma, what were its biggest causes, what are the different options for responding, and what, in their view, are the advantages and drawbacks of each option. These perspectives will inform how you frame the dilemma and the complexities that underpin it.

Rule #1

SAFETY ALERT

Remember to look after your interviewees and yourself during this process. While conducting the interviews, you may bring up subjects or events that are difficult to talk about. Before starting an interview, make clear to the interviewee that you are willing to stop if the process triggers unwanted thoughts, and that you are prepared to not ask questions about certain topics if that is preferred. Ideally, you will have the contact details of local support networks that can be contacted if the interviewee experiences distress or trauma. Also be aware of the potential for the interviewer to experience vicarious trauma while conducting the interview (you can internet search "Vicarious Trauma Toolkit" and find various means of support and assessment if there is no immediate access to local support).

III. WRITING THE CASE STUDY

1. In writing up the Case Study, it is helpful to start by setting out the scene in which the protagonist is confronted with a dilemma, and then describing the difficult implications the dilemma poses for them. It is in this first scene that you can introduce the reader to the contours of the dilemma in a simple and clear way.

2. With regard to the style of writing, the Symposium Case Study often adopts a slightly cheesy and dramatic tone to try to make the dilemma as engaging as possible. However, the writer should make their own assessment as to what kind of framing and writing style will be most engaging for their targeted discussants. For example, the writer might judge that a writing style which employs humor will best capture people's attention, or that, on the contrary, writing that is plain and concise will be more appreciated. Experimenting with different styles is often helpful at the beginning!

3. After setting out the dilemma, much of the rest of the Case Study will describe the circumstances that led up to the dilemma. Often a Case Study will begin at the founding of a movement or organization, and recount the intended goals of the organizers. The Case Study may also set out some of the achievements of the movement/organization.

Alongside this, the Case Study will chart the development of the practical difficulties that were encountered, which built up over time and led eventually to the dilemma. In following these events, the reader should be provided with the background information needed to understand the organization or movement's culture, its broader political impact and, crucially, its potential weaknesses. Ideally, there needs to be enough background provided in the study for the reader to be presented with multiple potential explanations for the organizational challenges that have confronted the organizer with such a serious dilemma. For example, where a dilemma regards a breakdown of trust in an organization's leadership, it might be that the Case Study's account of what happened highlights several factors that have led to this, such as a procedural gap in an organization's structure which doesn't ensure the full accountability of its leaders, or a failure of the organization to be led by those most affected by its work, or a leadership's lack of transparency about certain aspects of the work. Ultimately, it is often a discussion about which of the explanations is most salient that generates a fruitful conversation about how to overcome challenges in organizing.

4. After the events leading up to the dilemma have been set out and have woven together different threads of explanation for the dilemma, the Case Study should bring the reader's focus back onto the dilemma itself. The different options the organizer faces in responding to the dilemma should be described. As with the explanations for the dilemma, it should not be obvious what the organizer should do now – there should be a number of options that are plausible for discussants to grapple with. The Symposium Case Studies often end with the organizer making a decision, without it being revealed what particular decision that is. An epilogue can be written and shared at the end of the session, filling in the end of the story.

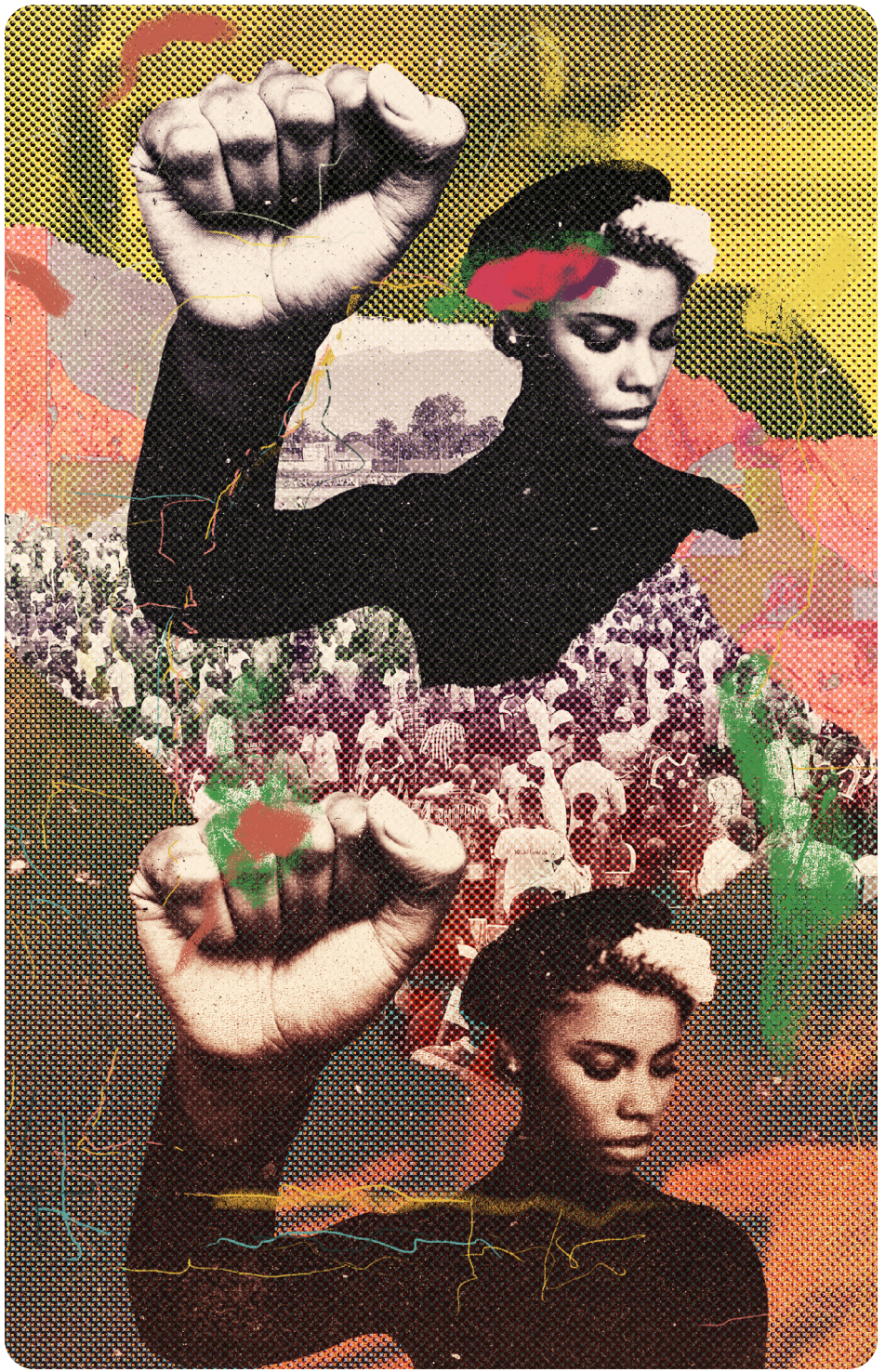
IV. FINALIZING THE CASE STUDY

1. Once a draft Case Study has been written, send it to the interviewees to check through and provide feedback. Be particularly prepared to edit where this is required for factual accuracy. Also be prepared to edit the Case Study after hearing organizers discuss the study – if there is lots of agreement in the initial parts of the discussion, it may be that the case needs editing to better signpost the complexities of the dilemma!

2. You will want to decide on how far your Case Study may be shared, taking into account the views of those whose experience you have documented. You may wish to limit circulation to the participants in your meeting. Or you might want to attach a Creative Commons license to the Case Study to enable general access and use. You can find out more information about what licenses are available and how to apply them here: *https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/*.

3. Ensure your Case Study has a footnote highlighting that the case has been fictionalized. Here is an example: This Case Study was written by X for [insert the name of discussion event] based on a series of interviews with A, B, C, D. The Case Study is intended solely for discussion in educational settings.

NOTES:



REVENUE MODELS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM

BY CHRISTOPHER STONE

Among the reasons for initiating the Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights was the need for those playing leading roles in human rights movements and organizations to develop skills different from those needed by the leaders of traditional social sector organizations. The best example of this need is in fundraising and the design of new revenue models for human rights work. Not only is raising money for human rights work different from fundraising in the arts, child development, or medical research, but the sources of revenue for this work, and

the ways in which it is sourced, can cause distinctive problems for human rights movements. A Symposium can be a place where human rights advocates and activists learn from the problems others have faced, compare ways of obtaining the funding needed, and consider new strategies for protecting their movements from the troubles that money can bring.

Most human rights organizations and movements depend on revenue models made up of some combination of these eight sources of funds:

- Government grants and consultancies (whether from domestic or foreign governments), such as those from the National Endowment for Democracy, the European Union, embassies, foreign ministries, or national funds

- Gifts and grants from professionally-staffed philanthropic foundations and trusts such as the Ford Foundation or the Oak Foundation, both of which funded the Symposium for Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights

- Earned revenue, through charging fees for trainings, selling publications, recovering costs from successful litigation, or selling consulting services

- Sub-grants or fees from a consortium of organizations or a single organization that has itself obtained grants or contracts from government or philanthropic sources

- Gifts and contributions from wealthy individuals, families, or companies with whom the movement or organization develops a continuing formal or informal relationship

- Membership dues from individuals and organizations

- Small contributions sourced from the public (on-line or otherwise)

- Investment and interest income from reserve funds or an endowment.

Each of these requires different sets of skills and resources to pursue successfully, and the opportunities to draw on one or another vary widely across contexts. Each brings its own power dynamics into the movement or organization. Each creates its own problems.

The two readings that follow in this Reader – one each from Argentina (2018) and China (2020) – describe the experience of the authors as their organizations expanded their revenue models to include membership dues or small contributions from the public. Despite the obvious attraction of these sources of funds and their use in other social sector fields, few human rights organizations seem to pursue them. Moderators might use these readings to open discussions of these particular revenue sources, or to provoke wider debates about other untested sources of revenue.



LOCAL COMMUNITY FUNDING: WHAT'S POSSIBLE IN LATIN AMERICA?

BY GASTÓN CHILLIER

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales

Source: This article first appeared on Open Global Rights on 21 August, 2018.
https://www.openglobalrights.org/local-community-funding-whats-possible-in-latin-america/

Much has been written on this forum about foreign, participatory, and local funding for human rights organizations. A central question is whether such organizations can center financial sustainability on support from local individual donors and free themselves from the traditional model of international funding. At CELS, we have concrete evidence to show that in Latin America this is possible. And the changes in our financial sustainability model have both provoked and

accompanied shifts in our model of activism toward much greater mobilization of and alliances with new social actors, with growing synergies between the two.

CELS will celebrate its 40th birthday in 2019, and for nearly all these years we have depended on funding from international foundations and governments. Yet, we have noted that a disproportionate amount of funding goes to Northern and international NGOs. Over the last 15 years, we talked the talk about changing our financial model but, until recently, did not walk the walk. Some of our own resistance, discomfort, and doubt that it would work was aided by close allies in Argentina and the US who questioned the feasibility of tapping local donors.

Then circumstances changed. First, we lost a key institutional donor who had provided us the exceptional opportunity to receive a significant five-year grant. Simultaneously, we saw evidence that our long-standing model of NGO activism centered primarily on influencing traditional power structures—the executive, Congress, courts, laws and public policy—at times was no longer providing sustainable results; greater emphasis on social mobilization was needed to sustain gains in the long term. It was time to recalibrate our strategies, streamline our research, litigation, and public policy advocacy, and put much greater weight on the alliances with social movements and other actors that we had been building since the crisis of 2001. These movements include, for example, the thriving feminist collectives and student organizations that have sparked historical shifts in the debate on gender violence and abortion rights, indigenous and peasant organizations, unions, and the like.

We set out to make these changes, believing in the complementarity between mobilizing support for the human rights agenda and transforming our funding model to one with a healthy balance between international funders and local individual donors. We are building a "CELS Community": a space for articulation and joint social activism with both individuals and social movements that creates a sense of belonging and common purpose toward advancing human rights.

The culture of donating, however, is weak in Argentina. Historically, the bulk of philanthropy has gone to Catholic charities, and more recently, giving has increased to international organizations such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International. Donations to national human rights organizations, such as CELS, is an incipient change.

In this context, in mid-2017 we launched a two-pronged campaign: 1) a digital strategy that generates contacts who support CELS via social networks, and 2) a telemarketing campaign known as warm-calling—contacting prospects who have shown interest in supporting our work. One year later, our efforts have yielded 2,400 new monthly donors within Argentina who provide over $21,000 each month—an amount that continues to grow. If we can sustain this trend, in six years, 50% of our budget will come from individual donors in Argentina, which we hope to complement with donations from abroad.

Nearly 70% of our donors are 50 or older, so sustaining this growth requires broadening our work on issues of interest to younger people, such as abortion and migrants' rights. Our job is complicated by the uncertainty provoked by Argentina's economic crisis, and its impact on donation decisions.

We also face the challenge of helping transform Argentine culture so that people commit to supporting local institutions.

Cultivation of local donors is important both politically and financially, as it is a tool for increased engagement, commitment, and accountability. As just one example: eight years after selling original artwork donated by prominent Argentine artists to raise funds for CELS, we have built an entire program of Art and Human Rights that attracts new individual donors and expands our social base. This program offers hands-on experiences via street art and in a host of museums, cultural centers and film festivals, and inspires greater activism as well.

Such work implies a shift in our identity and our capabilities to date. We are implementing the structural changes required to cultivate and sustain individual donors—from record-keeping to major changes in our communications skills. These changes are not always easy: some are technical, others cultural, such as overcoming internal misgivings or resistance to unchartered territory.

A first step is to raise awareness that the organization cannot continue depending on international financing and must explore local sources. This has involved discussions with the board and the entire staff. Smaller initiatives that bear fruit, such as our sale of artwork, show that this change is possible and beneficial. Once you have internal support, you have to dedicate time to cultivating individual donors and discovering ways to reach new audiences. We encourage colleague organizations to dive in, knowing the process involves trial and error.

This model implies greater levels of accountability to local constituencies and ongoing dialogue, active listening, learning and adapting. We are incorporating new organizational skills and forms of activism to promote the CELS community, such as collaborations with student groups that range from street mobilizations and video projects on reproductive rights to joint denunciations of violations of adolescents' freedom of expression. Incorporating these activities while preserving the quality of more traditional strategies is no small matter. We hope that our experience will inspire other organizations to move in this direction. We also hope that international funders, rather than withdrawing in light of this change, will become an active part of it, supporting Southern organizations as they make these challenging but groundbreaking changes.

This initiative takes place in a world marked by many geopolitical shifts. Grave human rights abuses are no longer characteristic primarily of the South. Take, for example, the migration crisis in Europe and the United States, or the criminalization and repression of social protest worldwide. Likewise, the solutions to human rights crises are no longer associated primarily with the North. On the contrary, greater leadership from governments and civil society is required in an increasingly joint fashion between North and South.

This is not the first time CELS has adapted its vision, mandate and strategies to respond to distinct political realities and societal needs, while never wavering from its core values. As we approach our 40-year anniversary, we stand prepared to continue this mini-revolution within our organization, conscious of the risks and challenges, yet convinced about the ultimate benefits to our cause.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What are the potential advantages of building up membership contributions?

- Is this a good strategy for long-term fundraising?

- What could go wrong with this kind of strategy? Is there a natural or ideal limit to the proportion of funds that should be raised this way?

- How might an organization or movement change as a result of this approach?

- How would you expect an organization's donors to react, if such a strategy is adopted?



IS CHINA THE FUTURE FOR HYBRID CSO FUNDING MODELS?

BY SHAWN SHIH-HUNG SHIEH

Source: This article first appeared on Open Global Rights on 11 May, 2020.
https://www.openglobalrights.org/is-china-the-future-for-hybrid-cso-funding-models/

China has not been fertile territory for civil society organizations (CSOs) since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, thanks to a wide-ranging and unrelenting crackdown on rights-based CSOs, activists and human rights lawyers, and the passage of a Foreign NGO Law in 2016.

The crackdown has led to the detention of many activists and lawyers, closure of rights-based CSOs, and harassment of their family members and supporters. Those who are not in detention have gone underground and are under constant surveillance

by an increasingly high-tech police and security force whose budget now surpasses that of the military.

The Foreign NGO Law has made it increasingly difficult for international NGOs to operate in China and support Chinese CSOs. International NGOs must now have all activities that take place in mainland China—trainings, conferences, funding—vetted by the Ministry of Public Security (China's police). This has made it almost impossible for international funders—unless they are governments or embassies—to partner with and fund Chinese CSOs, activists and lawyers, particularly those working in areas not sanctioned by the Chinese government.

It comes as little surprise, then, that international funding for Chinese CSOs is drying up. What did come as a surprise, however, was how quickly Chinese CSOs adapted to this situation and reinvented themselves to mobilize local funding to replace the international funding that was no longer coming in. This was one of the major findings of a research project we carried out last year on alternative pathways taken by rights-based CSOs in Asia to achieve financial sustainability.

The project involved interviewing leaders of CSOs in the Asia-Pacific region that had explored different ways to mobilize local resources. They ranged from relatively large CSOs with 20-30 full-time staff to small ones run by several staff and volunteers, operating in countries ranging from closed societies such as China and Vietnam to relatively more open ones such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

In selecting the CSOs, we leaned towards those with a rights-based approach that had previously relied on foreign funding.

What we found was that CSOs in China, one of the most repressive countries in the world, were ahead of their Asian counterparts in terms of finding innovative ways to tap into local resources. Some might think this is a measure of their desperation, and there is some truth to that. But it is also a measure of how much the funding ecosystem for CSOs in China has changed over the last decade. During that time, thousands of private foundations have been started by wealthy entrepreneurs and companies; central and local governments have opened up their deep pockets to contract CSO services; technology companies such as Tencent and Alibaba have created products and platforms to bring charitable online giving to millions of Chinese armed with a smartphone; and local governments have issued preferential measures to encourage social enterprises. In 2016, China passed a Charity Law to clarify the roles and responsibilities of charitable organizations and donors and strengthen public trust in charitable giving.

The result has been a sea change in the way Chinese CSOs are resourced. Ten years ago, many rights-based CSOs I spoke with had 80-90% of their funding coming from international sources. Now, some of these CSOs have 80-90% coming from Chinese sources. The Chinese CSOs I interviewed had tapped into many of these local sources—local philanthropy, government fees-for-service, corporate partnerships, social enterprise, and crowdfunding. In contrast, their Asian counterparts had fewer options and mainly focused on corporate partnerships and social enterprise.

For example, Friends of Nature, one of China's oldest environmental CSOs and a leader in using public interest litigation to hold polluting companies accountable, is a poster

child for financial sustainability. Alerted to the drafting of the FNGO Law in 2015, FON registered a foundation to help with fundraising, and partnered with a company to form the Gaia Nature School, a social enterprise delivering environmental education. It also set up a fundraising team to start an online crowdfunding campaign in 2015 that has enlisted around 1500 regular donors. FON's fundraising efforts paid off: their revenues nearly tripled from 2015 to 2018.

Another interesting model is a CSO that we will call The LGBT Association (a pseudonym). The Association works to expand acceptance of, and create an equal environment for, LGBT people in China by facilitating community dialogues and conferences and providing counseling to LGBT youth. The Association is essentially an informal network of volunteer groups and members around China who help organize activities and fundraising events. Crowdfunding brings in about half of their revenue with the rest coming from Chinese foundations and online sales of goods and services.

The last example is the Disability Innovation Center (also a pseudonym), which trains people with disabilities on job and leadership skills. The Center was founded by a CSO practitioner who received foreign funding for training civil society activists until 2014, when they were pressured by the government to stop their funding and close their center. The practitioner then started a center to train people with disabilities on leadership and life skills to prepare them for employment. The Center received support from Chinese foundations and the local government but struggled with getting the public and companies to support the Center.

After a few years, they discovered that their visually impaired trainees enjoyed working with coffee and started training them to be baristas, eventually opening up a social enterprise in the form of a coffeeshop. The blind baristas attracted media coverage and the attention of companies who wanted to partner with the Center to expand their business model. The Center also saw a change in the way the public interacted with people with disabilities and supported their business.

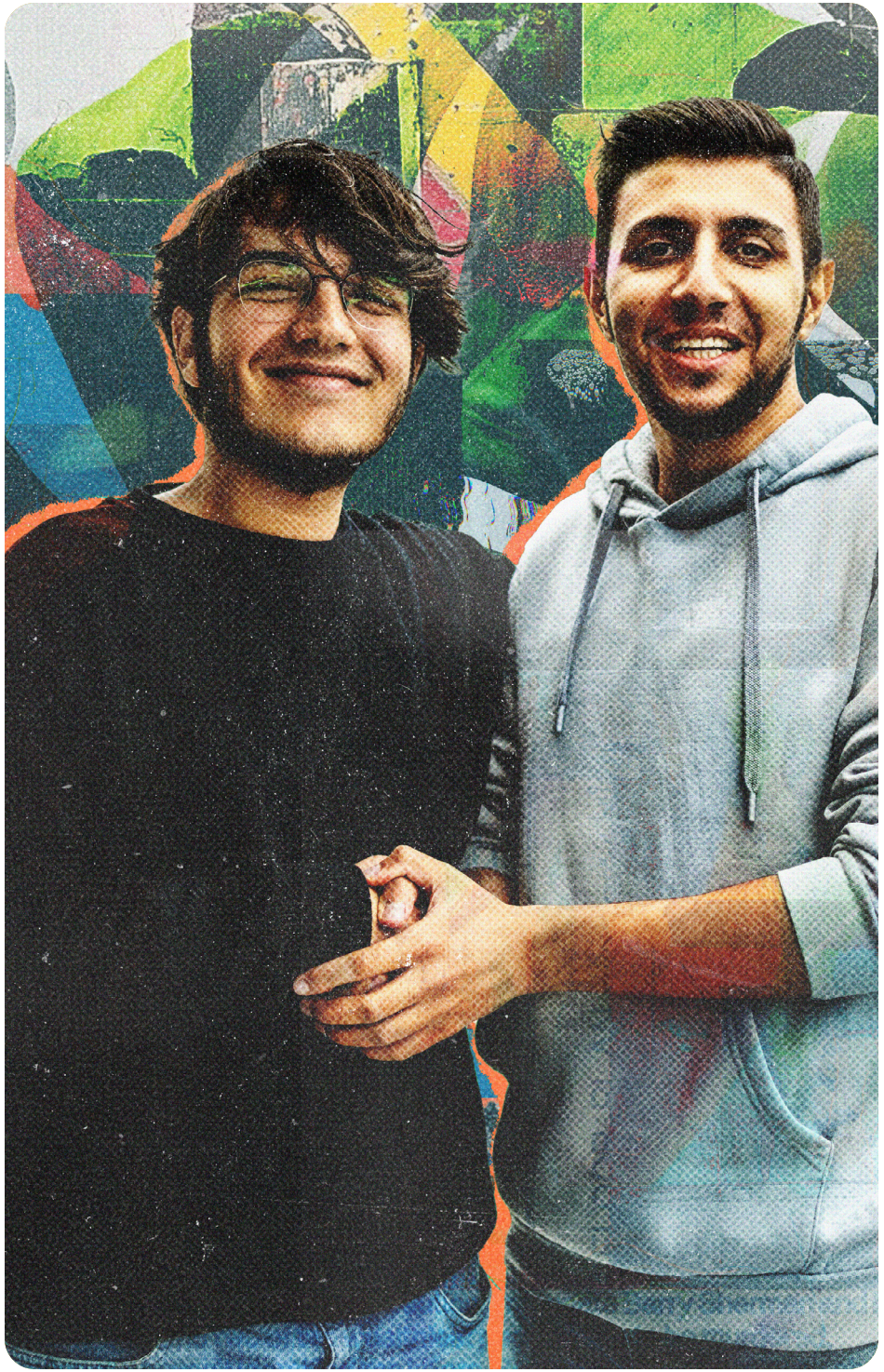
These cases should not diminish the hardships many rights-based CSOs face in China. They are constantly being monitored and harassed. The fact that two of the CSOs discussed here did not want their real names revealed speaks volumes about their fear of drawing attention to their work. There are also challenges to tapping into these funding sources. Environmental and LGBT groups can count on middle class and wealthy patrons, but labor groups have a more difficult time. In addition, CSOs exploring for-profit models need to manage governance and conflict of interest risks. In the case of the Gaia Nature School, FON settled on a partnership model with a consultancy company set up by FON members, formed a governing board for the school consisting of staff from both FON and the company, and required all income to be re-invested in the school with one exception: a portion of any profits would be donated to FON.

Nevertheless, the cases we found revealed that behind China's authoritarian Great Wall, there are a growing number of entrepreneurial CSOs tapping into a vibrant funding ecosystem with results that CSOs in other Asian countries can only hope to emulate.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What surprised you about this account, and why?
- Why do you think the organizations in the article had not previously tried these funding strategies?
- What are the pros and cons of raising funds locally?
- What risks do you see in relying on your own fundraising efforts?
- How could selling goods and services as a fundraising strategy affect your organization?
- What kind of organization would have difficulty using the strategies in this article?

CULTURES OF RESPECT



INTRODUCTION

BY AKWE AMOSU

It might be natural to assume that any organization that seeks to advance human rights is likely to treat its people well, but the evidence of recent years does not reassure. Multiple organizations have, over the past decade, faced troubling and very public accusations by staff and beneficiaries.

In some cases, the complaints have been shocking – sexual harassment and abuse, bullying, or exploitative conditions and inequitable pay.

In other cases, there is no major crisis, but staff complain of burn-out, strain caused by exposure to traumatic situations, or simply dissatisfaction and frustration with poor management. These problems might seem especially troubling in a social justice or human rights organization, but becoming a manager or employee of such an organization does not make one a paragon of virtue. Indeed, to make that assumption may be to increase the risk that problematic behavior will occur.

A more realistic approach may be to expect that the normal range of human failures will show up in any organization, and to work proactively to build the kind of culture that reduces the risk – what in our Symposium we have called a culture of respect. If an organization aims to create such a culture, it would seem only natural to put systems, rules and expectations in place that can catch or mitigate what is wrong or harmful. In our Symposium conversations we have focused on trying to understand the conditions in which mistreatment might occur, and what preemptive action might look like.

For example, leadership teams and governing boards that are defensive and seek to cover up abuse or punish whistleblowers risk worsening the problem. So what kind of preparation might be needed to make sure that doesn't happen? Or when organizations respond to internal crises with legalistic investigations that emphasize individual punishment over shared insight and action, are they attacking the problem at its roots? What might be a better way to do that?

Our assumption has been that learning from each one of these incidents will equip us to avoid the same fate.

Strong organizations and movements depend on an internal culture of mutual respect to sustain their teams. Creating such a culture may take time, but committing to that goal goes a long way towards building confidence.

One key reading we have relied upon to support our learning is an independent report investigating the circumstances that led to a suicide at the offices of Amnesty in France in 2018. In this section we say more about how we used it. In a subsequent piece we talk about exercises we have used to give participants a chance to reflect together on their own experiences in the workplace – whether as managers exercising authority, or as the objects of other people's power.



HOW MANAGEMENT SHAPES CULTURE

BY AKWE AMOSU & NANI JANSEN REVENTLOW

A theme we regularly discussed at our Symposium was the importance of building a culture of respect, specifically in relation to the ways that management systems, structures and practices may affect an organization's culture and staff.

There are many potential readings that might act as a springboard for such discussions, but one we found particularly useful was the independent report by British lawyer James Laddie QC on the circumstances that led to the death by suicide of an Amnesty International researcher, Gaëtan Mootoo.[1]

1. Review into the death of Gaëtan Mootoo by James Laddie QC. The full report can be downloaded at *https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/org60/9413/2018/en/*

It is important to note at the outset that the rationale for using this text was not based specifically on the tragic passing of Gaëtan Mootoo, nor was our use of it intended to cast blame on any individual or team. Rather we wanted our participants to benefit from the rare opportunity of understanding in detail how a series of administrative and operational decisions unfolded and how those organizational processes impacted an individual. No-one in that sequence of events intended harm to any individual and yet ultimately grave harm resulted.

For the groups of executive directors and movement leaders who took part in our Symposium, the intense and often impassioned debate in these sessions carried an important insight: what a manager may intend can land quite differently for their staff. And what can seem merely bureaucratic dysfunction may in fact result in serious problems.

When moderating this reading, we took a solid three hours, and asked participants to consider a series of questions:

- What did Amnesty's management do right in respect of Gaëtan Mootoo's situation?
- What systems did Amnesty have in place to cultivate a supportive and safe working environment? If systems were lacking, why do you think that was the case?
- What could the Amnesty management have done differently?
- What exactly is the duty of a management to their staff, and how far into an employee's personal life should it extend? Was that duty upheld or breached in this case?
- What difference does it make that Amnesty is a mission-driven organization?
- What might be different or distinctive about the culture of a human rights organization?
- What input is most critical in creating a culture of respect – organizational systems and rules? Or people?
- Reflecting on this case, how do you view your own actions as a manager? Will you do anything differently?

Our experience has been that participants in this discussion often experienced a shock of recognition on reviewing the Laddie Report, as they looked back at decisions and opinions of their own that, with hindsight, could have been harmful to their staff. There are no easy answers, and management cannot be undertaken with full 360 degree knowledge or without risk. But discussions of this kind offer an opportunity to consider how one might calculate such risk.

<u>One critical note:</u> moderators who decide to use this text should consider carefully how any reference to suicide or workplace distress may land with participants. They cannot know what trauma, primary or secondary, participants may have experienced in the past, and it is important to let participants know that, in order to take care of their own mental health, they are free to step out before, or at any stage during, the session.



LEARNING FROM OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

BY AKWE AMOSU

Anyone who has been employed has experience of a workplace or office culture. Like the fish that asks, “What’s water?”, we may never have given it any thought, but it is all around us – a combination of explicit rules, rituals and intangible expectations that determine the vibes at work.

Even for someone who tries to pin down exactly what is determining the atmosphere, it can be difficult to discover an exact source. Formal rules may be written in a staff handbook,

but who determines whether junior team members may contribute to the conversation during an informal tea break? What gives the men in the office permission to comment on a woman's dress but discourages a woman from commenting on a man's appearance?

We felt that only using readings to investigate cultures of respect and disrespect seemed too academic, given that everyone in the room had relevant lived experience. Instead we invented some ways to try and bring that experience into the open.

Our assumption in developing group exercises was that power – both formal and informal – was an influential factor shaping culture. How those with diverse forms of power behave towards their colleagues sets the terms for everyone else: a boss who likes to remind everyone of their ability to hire and fire will trigger a cautious atmosphere for those lower down the hierarchy. A straight colleague in an office who likes to flirt makes it easier for others to do the same, making the space challenging for queer colleagues. And so on.

We were conscious of intersectionality. A person may have several identities, and any given one may tend either to give them leverage and agency, or make them more marginal. One identity may be shared in common with others and give confidence. Another may isolate, and trigger hostility and exclusion. So we set out to explore the role that power, privilege and exclusion play in each individual's workplace, and to hear how our participants navigated their unique experience.

The exercise we used most often asked each person to reflect on times when they felt powerless or powerful. We assigned participants into pairs. In part one of the assignment, we asked them to think about a time in the past when they had felt dominated or pressured by another person's power. Each pair should find a quiet place and take it in turns to explain their experience, with its context – their position in a hierarchy, their class, racial, ethnic, gender or sexual identity, age or disability, the political climate – whatever they believed had shaped that experience.

In part two, they had to do something they found less comfortable. In the same pairs, we asked them to tell each other about a time when they had used their power over another to their own advantage. This might be deliberate – as when they used their managerial authority over a junior colleague, or inadvertent – where their own sense of identity safety blinded them to another's discomfort or vulnerability. In either case, we asked them reflect on what gave them their power, how they used it, and what they might have missed in the moment.

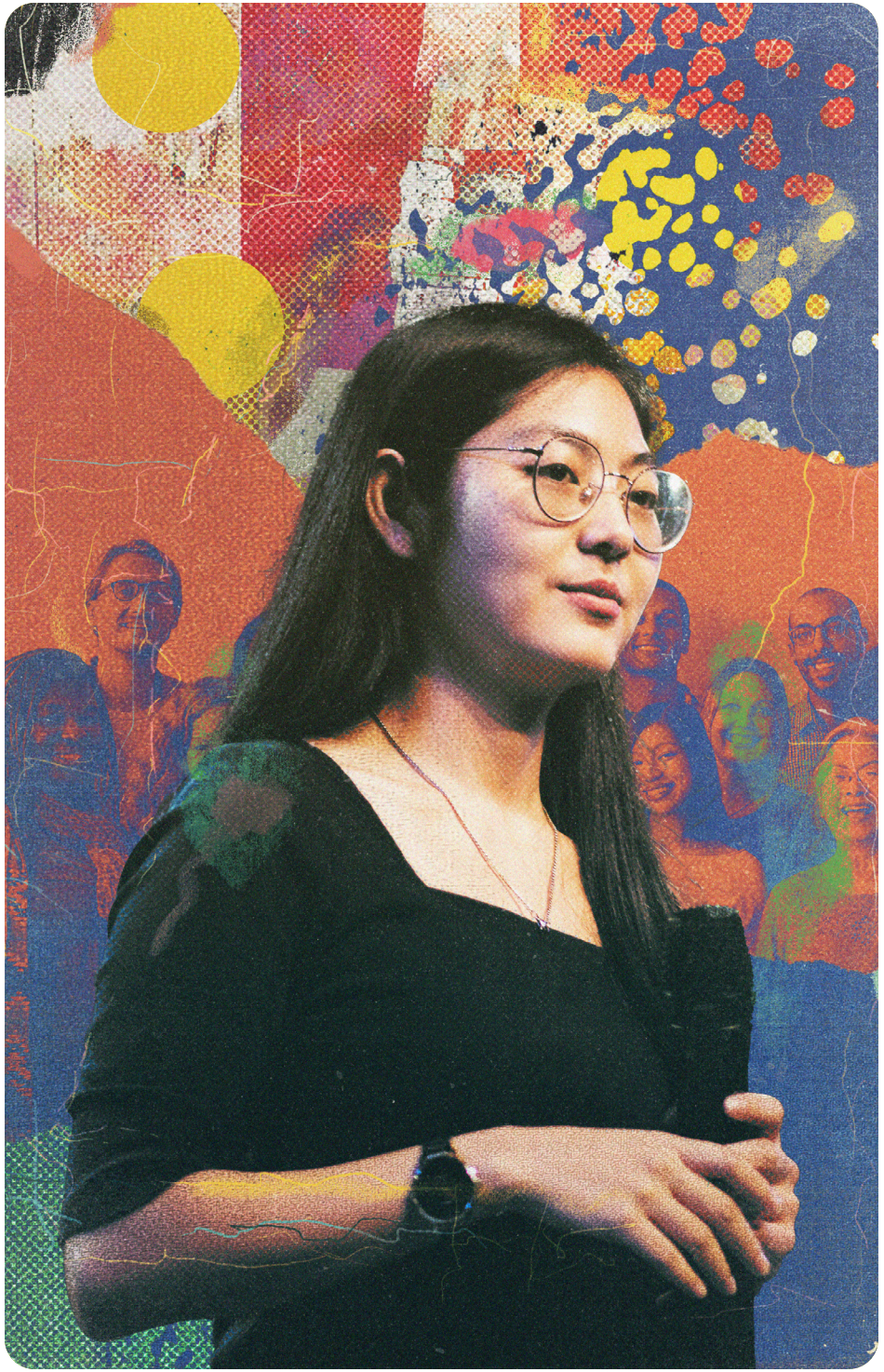
These conversations stayed private within each pair, but we did invite the whole group to reflect on what they had learned through the exercise, and one common observation was that we tend to center our own viewpoint and downgrade other perspectives, putting us at risk of missing the ways we might negatively impact others. But also, that reflecting with intent on how our actions look to or affect others is always within our reach, and even easy to do, if we can lower our defenses.

This was only one of the exercises we used. In another, we sorted participants into small groups and gave them a number of elements to make into a short role-play. The elements included positions – board member, or manager and staff, or a leader and grassroots activists; different identities; and a tough problem to address. It might be an imagined “me too” dispute or similar abuse of power; a perceived neglect of a team member, or failure in duty of care; an argument about a strategy choice that would favor or disfavor particular groups; in short – a dispute in which participants could act out the roles and imagine their way into the experience of different parties. Each group appointed its own observer to watch and comment on what they saw.

A third model we tried was to develop some scenarios in which identity-based inequities and power imbalances were evident, and to give one to each break-out group to discuss. Their task was to understand how the different forms of power were interacting in a scenario and to discuss how that might be shaping the workplace culture.

A key element in all these exercises was to avoid allowing the discussion to stay at a “third-person” and intellectual level. How the exercise made each participant feel was critical data for others in the group. Any such exercise is imperfect and can only provide an approximation to reality. What matters, however, is the exercise of speaking about uncomfortable subjects with generosity towards each other, assuming good intent, and learning about the blind spots that may make us less aware of the power we wield over others. Through such conversations we may learn to be less sure that we know how our actions impact others, and more attentive to the kind of culture we impose or to which we contribute.

PLANNING A SYMPOSIUM



CREATING THE SPACE

BY SARAH MOSTAFA-KAMEL

Reflections on organizing Symposium meetings

In connecting two hundred human rights leaders through twelve online meetings and in-person gatherings, the Symposium's goal throughout has been to create an environment where participants feel safe and cared for. We have wanted to enable them to focus on meaningful and productive discussions, build solidarity, and support each other.

The behind-the-scenes work that makes these meetings possible is meticulous, encompassing venue-selection and preparation; inclusive and accessible conditions; safety and security; travel needs and arrangements; and finding social and cultural activities that can enrich the experience for everyone. We pour our hearts into these preparations.

Creating a safe, comfortable, and healthy environment
Ensuring participants feel safe, comfortable, and cared for is central to our planning. We choose secluded venues that offer security and tranquility, allowing participants to relax and fully engage. We choose guesthouses that provide a warm atmosphere and cater to diverse dietary needs. A key requirement is access to nature: surrounded by lush greenery or serene views, participants can unwind and recharge.

Accessibility and inclusion
We are committed to making our meetings accessible and inclusive for everyone, regardless of identity markers such as disability, gender identity or sexual orientation. This means doing extensive research on the location of our meetings, to assess the extent to which all participants will be safe and included in that location. We select venues equipped with ramps and accessible restrooms, adding these features if they are not already available. We check in with local LGBTQI+ groups to become informed about the environment for sexual and gender identities. We also have one-to-one conversations with participants to discuss any particular health requirements they may have in relation to their environment. For example, it might be necessary to ensure there is a trained counsellor or a needed medical treatment available nearby. Our preference for smaller, family-friendly locations over large hotels helps create a warm and welcoming atmosphere and allows us to tailor our spaces to be as inclusive as possible.

Safety and security
Given the reality of state surveillance, we prioritize the safety and security of our participants, many of whom face significant risks. To safeguard confidentiality, we operate under the Chatham House Rule, and ensure all involved in meetings do not post about them on social media or publicly share photos of other participants. We also keep electronic devices out of meeting rooms and participant bios are shared only in hard copy during a meeting. They are then collected and shredded before the end. All communications about meetings and between participants are facilitated via trusted encrypted messaging platforms. And we continuously update our security protocols to adapt to the threats we can identify. To ensure the health and safety of all participants, we implement strict health precautions, particularly concerning COVID-19. This includes providing masks, ensuring adequate ventilation, and conducting COVID testing. These measures help maintain a safe environment so that participants can relax and focus on their engagement and collaboration.

Comprehensive travel support and preparations
We collaborate with a travel agent to provide a range of tailored itineraries and responsive support for specific participant needs. Having knowledgeable agents available by phone ensures flexibility and smooth handling of last-minute changes.

To prepare participants, we organize pre-travel group calls that cover:

- **COVID-19 Safety Measures:** Detailed information on vaccination requirements, testing protocols, and quarantine guidelines.

- **Travel Itineraries:** Clear explanations of their journey, including flights, layovers, and ground transportation, with assistance in arranging safe and convenient transit options.

- **Immigration Risks and Visa Requirements:** Comprehensive support for obtaining necessary visas and navigating customs and border control, including guidance on required documents and potential challenges.

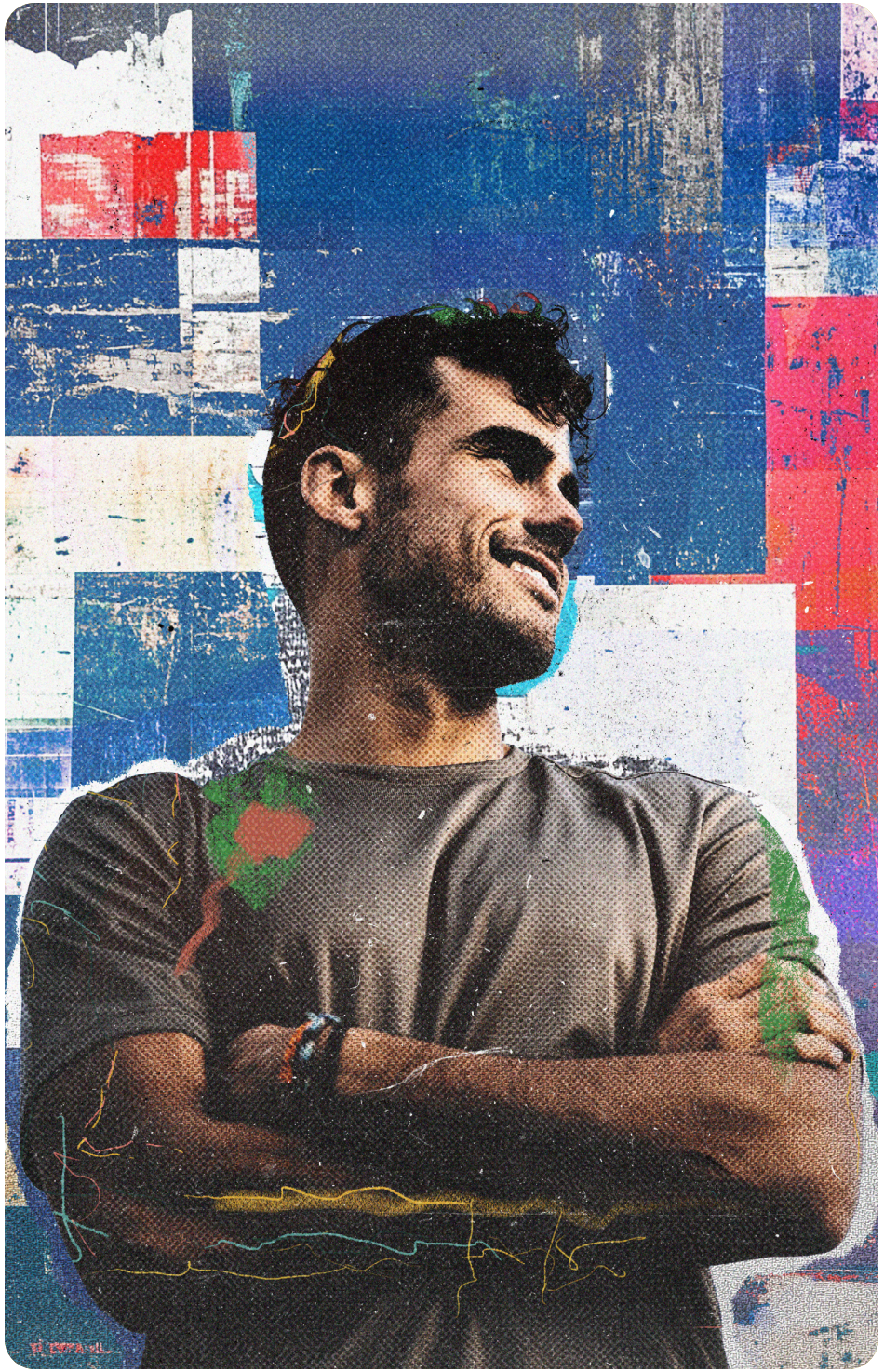
- **Travel Insurance:** Ensuring participants have adequate coverage for medical emergencies, trip cancellations, and disruptions.

We actively listen to participants' concerns and preferences, tailoring our support to meet their needs. Our commitment to open communication and personalized assistance ensures a smooth travel experience. Additionally, we address issues of racism and xenophobia by familiarizing ourselves with local visa schemes, educating our team and participants on potential risks, establishing support networks, and integrating these considerations into our event planning. These measures create a safe, inclusive, and respectful experience for everyone involved.

Creating an enriching meeting environment

We select secluded venues that provide both security and tranquillity. We prioritize locations that offer opportunities for outdoor activities, and organize various activities outside of formal sessions. These include group cooking sessions, hikes, poetry nights, and movie screenings. Participants have led salsa lessons, played charades, and shared stories around a fire, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community atmosphere.

To conclude, the well-being of our participants is the central consideration in all our planning. When participants feel cared for and safe, they will be more able to share and learn from each other. By focusing on accessibility, safety, and comfort, we create a space where participants can thrive and contribute to strengthening organizational capacity and solidarity within the human rights field.



MAKING THE SPACE ACCESSIBLE

BY ALBERTO VÁSQUEZ

Accessibility is essential to ensure that all Symposium participants, particularly those with disabilities, can engage fully and meaningfully in all activities. Without physical accessibility or accessible information and communication, many participants with disabilities will be unable to attend and participate.

This includes ensuring that all facilities are physically accessible for wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility, including meeting rooms, restrooms, bedrooms, shared areas, and planned outdoor activities.

It is also important to provide accessible information and communication. This involves offering materials in accessible formats, such as documents that are compatible with screen readers for people with visual impairments. Some participants may require additional adjustments or accommodations to participate in the Symposium, such as captioning, sign language interpretation, or personal assistance.

For example, for the disability-focused Symposium organized in collaboration with Mad Thinking, we took significant steps to make the event accessible to everyone. This Symposium was conducted online, and participants had various disabilities and access needs. We provided CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation) services and sign language interpretation for every session, ensuring that those with hearing impairments could participate without barriers. CART also benefited those for whom English is a second language. Additionally, we integrated an access check at the beginning of every session, where participants were informed about the available accessibility features and were also reminded to follow basic accessibility practices, such as identifying themselves when participating so that blind participants would know who was speaking, and avoiding talking too quickly to ensure proper interpretation and captioning.

When planning a Symposium, it's important to factor in the costs of accessibility and potential accommodations in your budget. Otherwise, you risk excluding participants who may have disabilities or special requirements. This planning also ensures that you have the flexibility to select any participant with a disability without having to worry about funding specific access requirements.

However, many accommodations come at no cost, and it's a good practice to ask participants in advance about the adjustments they may need. Remember, accessibility benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities.



CHOOSING PARTICIPANTS

BY AKWE AMOSU

Building a group of participants for a Symposium
The 11 groups we invited to our full-length meetings each consisted of activists and advocates from several continents playing leading roles in diverse frontline movements and human rights organizations; we also led conversations as part of an open-enrollment online course, and held a couple of half-day meetings with staff of philanthropic donors and full-day meetings of activists in a single country or a common field. Our experience taught us to adjust our readings and our moderating techniques to suit the profile of the participants in each format.

There are no special rules for assembling a group of participants, but your intentions are key. Who you have in the room will have a significant influence on your choice of materials and how your invitees approach the conversation. For example, a group of organizational directors might find it valuable to work with a case study about relationships with donors; but a group of program staff who don't have much to do with funding might not. A group of NGO staff might be comfortable with a lot of reading; a group of grassroots activists where educational levels are variable might prefer audio and video source material. So a first question is, who is your Symposium for, and why?

It is worth taking the time to answer that question in some depth before making your list of invitees. It might seem obvious that "everyone" is interested in a mainstream human rights topic, and at a surface level, that might well be true. But could that interest support participation in a two-day conversation about the detail of that topic? And will the participants have enough experience and knowledge of the topic to dive in deep? If not, you could find the discussion running out of steam after 30 minutes because too few people in the room know the topic well enough to have more to say.

Ensuring some common ground

That said, when you seek to serve, say, activists who work on incarceration, or policing, the great likelihood is that they are well enough informed in their shared subject area to gain value from that shared deep dive. Similarly, assembling a group by role will probably mean they have a lot in common which could support thoughtful exploration.

You might be thinking of inviting a very diverse group of participants. If so, a good question to consider might be, how will we ensure that a group that may not have much common experience is able to meet on common ground and draw from a common experience? You might want to start by providing the group with a relevant shared activity – going on a field trip, performing a play, or some scenario-planning – before discussions begin, so that some relevant ideas or concerns might arise and give the group some shared reference points.

In our Symposium, we chose, as our target group, leading actors in human rights organizations and movements. That usually meant an organization's executive director, or, in the case of a social movement, someone who was playing – albeit informally – a leadership role. We knew that carrying authority that way often implies duties, pressures and choices that most activists in the human rights field will rarely face, and we wanted to make a space where people in leading roles could talk freely with each other and know they would be mutually understood.

Selecting your participants

Once you know who in general you want your Symposium to serve, it's easier to identify your invitees. You can do this a few different ways, but whatever you choose, make sure there is an opportunity for participants to understand what form your meeting will take. A description of how the meeting will be run, what expectations you have of participants, and a confirmation from each invitee that they are happy to proceed will help to avoid problems later.

In assembling our Symposium's 11 groups, we knew our target group would have much in common, so we were comfortable combining people from all over the globe; usually there would be no more than one or at most two from a single country, and we found that the geographic diversity presented no problems. But since we knew that our readings were a critical part of the process, we took care from the start to make sure our invitees knew they would have quite a bit of advance reading to do in English, and that there would be no language interpretation.

We also made sure they would be comfortable with our requirement that electronic devices had to be left outside the meeting room, and that, given the pandemic, we would need them to comply with our health guidelines. And quite apart from these very practical concerns, we thought it was important to have a phone call in advance with each person, sharing our rationale for the meeting and answering any questions they might have.

There's no formula

That said, others might choose to do it differently. It all boils down to knowing your purpose and your target group, thinking about their probable needs and planning for those.



MODERATING THE SYMPOSIUM

BY AKWE AMOSU

Our Symposium session has no panel of speakers, no Q and A. For four days, a group of about 20 participants gathers in the same room every morning and most afternoons, with one of three moderators in the chair. The only thing that is specific to a session is the assigned reading – there are no gimmicks, or fancy choreography, no props or protocol to grease the wheels. All the action is in the text and what the group does with it, so the goal is to move quickly into a conversation that we hope will get its energy from curiosity, interrogation and provocation.

Moderation, when it is going well, is indispensable to a shared, equitable but enlightening experience, and yet it is self-effacing. A thoughtful, attentive moderator enables a group's shift from awkward silence into a fast and fluent exchange in which multiple participants are tracking different threads but are somehow all part of the same conversation, and everyone is learning.

As one of the Symposium's six moderators, I find it a maddeningly elusive skill – like the proverbial sound of one hand clapping. It's as much intuitive art as teachable technique. When you are reading the group's rhythm well and seeing its deep concentration as each insight succeeds the last, it can be a wonderful, even euphoric experience. Conversely, when you interrupt the flow with a badly timed pivot, or realize someone has been waiting too long to speak and they are frustrated, it can be chastening.

From the start, the moderator is observing herself and the group. Once everyone is seated, she confirms the reading and may, if she likes, say a few words about the historical context in which it was written, or even how she first encountered the piece. But she will not say anything about its content or significance, nor how it should be read. Instead, she will point to a phrase somewhere in the text and ask anyone to jump in with thoughts about what the writer is getting at.

If the group is a few days in, and comfortable, someone might comment after only a brief pause. But if they are newly assembled and still cautious or shy, there may be a long silence. If the moderator is on her game, she will not help out by restating the question or adding a follow-up comment.

She just waits. Eventually someone will offer a tentative suggestion, and in general, it will take less time for a second participant to respond. These early comments are usually directed to the moderator, who might then ask a quick follow-up, encouraging the speaker to say more. But once the conversation gains momentum, she will avoid responding to a question and simply bat it on to the wider group.

Those first minutes can feel awkward, and as a new moderator, I often lost my nerve and jumped into the silence. But once the group gets through it, the advantage of the approach becomes obvious. Since no-one, neither participant nor moderator, has been anointed as the authority on the text, everyone can join the conversation as an equal. Once initial unease has dissipated, participants are listening closely to each other to follow the threads on the floor, and there's a queue to speak.

The moderator has to figure out whether to take contributions in the order they are requested, or follow a particular thread – both approaches have risks, and a mix is usually the chosen approach. The moderator must watch for who might be feeling shy or marginal and try discreetly to draw them in, but keep a low profile, or the group's confidence in the "container" may wane.

There is always the question in a moderator's mind of how far to follow the group wherever it wants to go, or instead to steer the discussion towards particular issues that are germane – the things the Symposium cares about. Too little steering and participants can be left feeling that they've been sent on a hunt that had no treasure at the destination. Too much, and they may feel manipulated and discontented.

Participants are usually convinced that there's a hidden agenda behind our moderation. They are partly right – the readings have been chosen to cast light on matters to which we think the human rights field needs to pay more attention. But they are wrong to assume we are trying to manipulate the outcome. If we started a session by telling everyone our view of the reading and what it reveals, we would be killing the conversation dead. Our goal is for the group to find their own way through the topic, having their own insights and reaching their own conclusion about what is worth taking away.

Occasionally participants have asked us to change our approach. Some have pressed us to prioritize those who had spoken least, especially if they were of traditionally marginalized identities, and to invite participants to use the "two-fingers" signal to ask for the floor to make a brief response to a current point. We did adapt, finding real benefits, although participants sometimes used their two fingers intervention to launch a new thread. The key point is, we thought we should moderate the group the way it wanted to be moderated, and from then onwards, we made it a point with each new group to get early feedback.

We each moderate differently according to our personalities, but we follow a core set of principles so that our roughly 200 participants will all have had a similar, comparable experience. The *Guide to Moderation*, on page 191, is the working "manual" we wrote for our meetings, but its approach would work for any meeting designed along similar lines.

Here, three of us reflect on our preferred approach.

Nani Jansen Reventlow

One thing I've found useful when approaching moderation is to make sure I have a sense of who the people in the room are before I get there. I reflect on how the Case Studies and other reading material might relate to their personal circumstances and the context that people might be operating in. I've found that having this sense is helpful for getting to a deeper layer of discussion.

To the extent that people are able to make connections between their own situations and positions and the themes in the reading material, this is often where the interesting discussion arises. I encourage this in my moderation by making sure to invite a little more reflection whenever people refer to their personal circumstances.

In encouraging deeper and more personal reflection, I would say don't be afraid of being quiet for a little bit while people consider their response. In sitting with the discomfort of a silent room, one technique I find helpful is to count to ten in my head while I'm waiting for individuals to speak up. Another useful tactic is to employ some measured sharing of your own, in terms of relating aspects of the text to your own professional experience, while being careful not to center your own perspective in the discussion.

Finally, I also try to focus on being mindful of how people are in the room as the discussion progresses. This includes being aware that some of the conversation, even if it is not intended as such, can be triggering.

People in the space that you are holding have all sorts of different experiences. If you sense they don't want to go somewhere, then don't go there – respect that. If you can, find an elegant way to steer the conversation in a new direction. This includes being prepared to let others take the reins of the conversation!

Alberto Vásquez

A symposium can provide a platform for deep, immersive conversations that explore the underlying reasons and methods behind people's work. This environment fosters camaraderie as well as vulnerability, as discussions delve into the intricate challenges and critical decisions people face daily, particularly in their roles as heads of organizations and movements. Participants are often highly active and passionate in their fields, and many have strong personalities and voices, all of which requires a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Moderating our Symposium has been an important learning experience for me. One of the key lessons is the importance of setting clear goals and having a detailed plan for each session, which helps the moderator steer the discussion and be prepared to handle any unexpected turns. It is equally important to trust the group, and balance the planned agenda with the natural flow of the conversation. This approach honors the group's needs and interests, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and engaging. It can be challenging, because we often have certain expectations for the session that may not always be realized, but staying flexible helps keep the conversation meaningful.

Active listening is another essential skill to exercise. It allows one to follow the conversation closely, understand the diverse viewpoints, and challenge participants with insightful follow-up questions. Vital learning happens in those follow-ups. Sometimes, however, being too focused on achieving our goals can cause us to miss the thread of the conversation. Relaxing and enjoying the ride is necessary to have a meaningful conversation that you can follow closely.

Additionally, it is vital to foster the active participation of *all* in the room. This means encouraging equal contributions and addressing any power imbalances within the group. For example, one can make the point that it would be great to hear from those who have not contributed yet. It is important to pay attention to those who talk a lot but also to those who talk little. Ensuring participants feel invested in and valued is key.

By using break-out groups, we can build more intimacy and more immersive conversations, which are harder to achieve in plenary. Creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support is also key; clear ground rules allow everyone to speak up and share their thoughts more freely.

Finally, collective reflection among moderators, and feedback from participants, are invaluable for improvement. Every group is different, and what works for one may not work for another.

Samson Itodo

By posing provocative questions based on selected readings and case studies, I found a Symposium can stimulate analytical thinking amongst participants.

To me, moderation can help to underscore the key learning outcomes from the dilemmas, leadership decisions or crises in the readings. Importantly, in our Symposium, moderation was not taken to be like teaching a class, a public lecture or a therapy session. We focused on creating a safe space for learning by asking thought-provoking questions and encouraging participants to share perspectives on key themes in the readings.

In our Symposium, moderation required rigorous preparation. This included thoroughly reading the Case Studies and readings and coming up with provocative questions in advance, as well as thinking about the engagement of participants, and how to manage effectively the dynamics in the room, ensuring everyone's voice was heard.

Moderating the sessions at our Symposium has greatly improved my leadership, facilitation, and community building skills. I have learned the art and practice of crafting short and provocative questions, as they not only stimulate critical thinking but also facilitate group discussions. Moderation has also promoted my own personal reflections, as it has provided an opportunity to listen to other participants as they share their reflections.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD MODERATOR?

AKWE AMOSU

Recruiting moderators for a Symposium

In planning the Symposium, we decided we wanted to build a core of moderators beyond those who piloted the Symposium in 2019. The reasons might be relevant for others to consider: We wanted (1) larger capacity to be able to moderate more meetings, smaller workshops, dialogues, etc; (2) to be continually renewing our capacity, bringing fresh perspectives into the moderator team that shaped the development of the Symposium; (3) to expand the skill set of at least a few participants who showed an interest in the Symposium itself and seemed effective at drawing others into conversations.

We wanted to recruit the new moderators from participants in the Symposium. We anticipated that for many, this might be the first time they had been in a meeting with no prepared script, panelists or fixed goals. We guessed that if our future moderators had experienced a Symposium, they would find it easier to play the role.

Prior experience is by no means vital, despite the challenges posed by moderation. The qualities that are useful for moderating can be found everywhere that people get into intense discussions – at political events and union meetings or even at the bar. You should be able to spot a good potential moderator in any setting, once you know what you are looking for. So if you plan to hold more than one Symposium, you may find this a useful way to think of building up your moderating capacity.

What do we look for in a potential moderator?

+ A sense of urgency
The Symposium exists because it is vital that those struggling for rights and justice make better progress. The questions we ask are urgent. A moderator who isn't feeling the urgency will struggle to hold the room's attention.

+ Comfort with not sharing one's views
As the person "holding the room", the moderator has power – they regulate who is speaking, and for how long. If they share their own views they cannot avoid seeming to impose their views on the group. An ability to leave the space for others while they are enabling the conversation is critical.

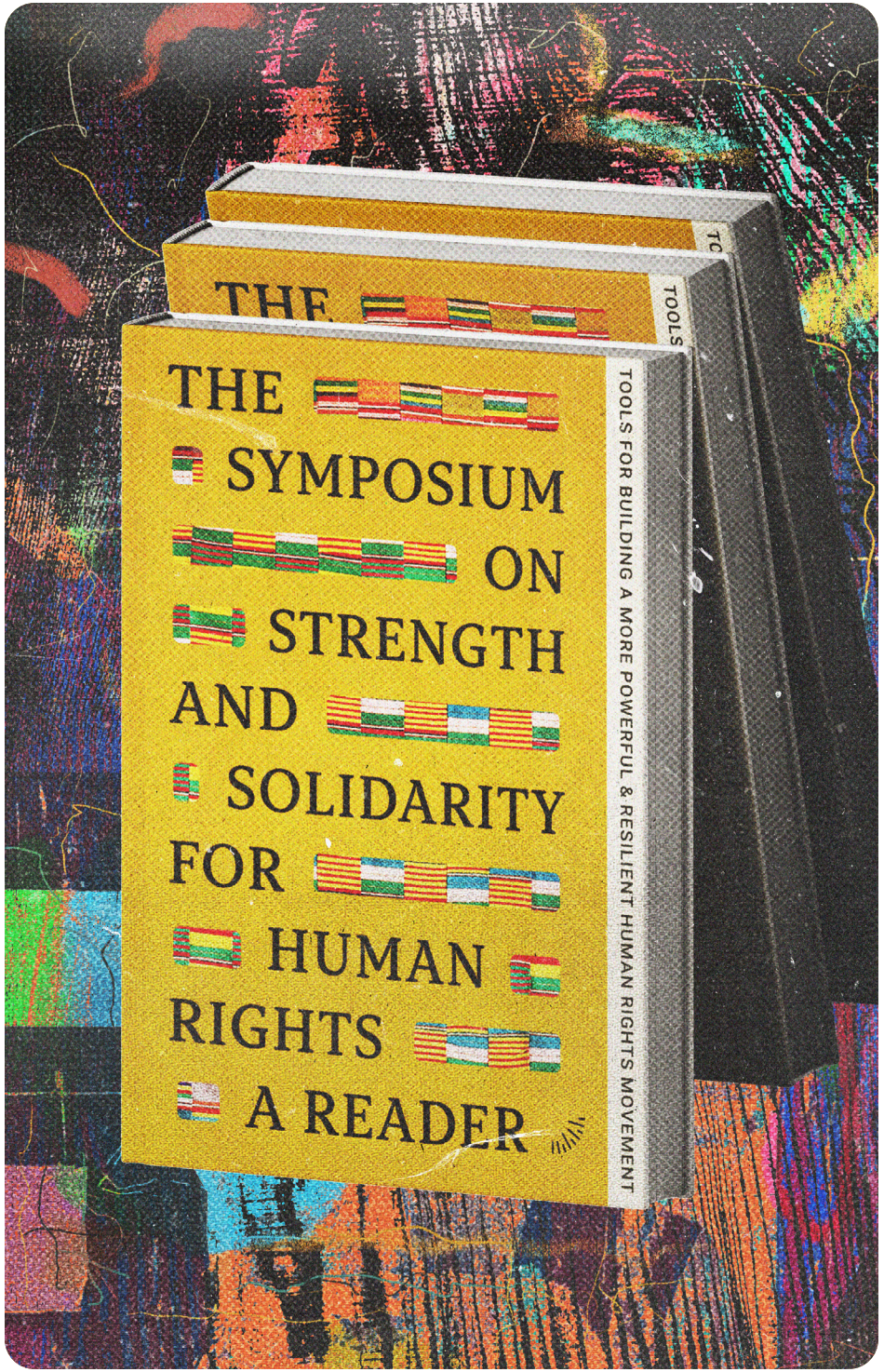
+ Respect for all
While a moderator might disagree with a view being expressed, they respect all views and maintain neutrality as far as possible. Each participant needs to feel safe and welcome in the space, without experiencing disdain or condescension.

+ A close and active listener
A moderator needs to listen closely to what participants are saying. If their attention wanders, it will quickly be detected by others in the room. If the moderator isn't interested and engaged, no-one else will be.

+ Unlimited curiosity
A moderator that feels curiosity communicates that to the room. They will be very familiar with the reading under discussion and they may have moderated the topic numerous times before, but they will still feel deeply interested to learn what others are finding in the text.

+ Observant and attentive
A moderator has to stay aware of what else is going on in the room, even while they are listening; someone may be shy to speak, another speaking too much; some may have checked out, or even, potentially, be communicating disrespectfully. As well as observing any of these things, the moderator will be finding ways to address them.

+ A tolerance for risk
Sometimes there may be a desire in the room to play it safe – avoid provocation or hurt feelings. A moderator needs sometimes to experiment with a suggestion, or risk a question that takes people out of their comfort zone. Gauging what is helpful and what goes too far is a useful skill! Ultimately, diverse approaches add value. The six of us who have moderated the Symposium to date are different in personality, and we tackle the task in quite different ways. We encourage everyone to find their own path.



A GUIDE TO MODERATION

The Symposium was created to provide leaders in human rights work with a space to reflect on how their context is changing and what that implies for their success or failure. While we believe current conditions call for organizations and movements to build their internal strength and for a more robust solidarity to be embraced and practiced by human rights activists, our goal was not to preach these views, or any other formula for success. Those who joined the Symposium knew their reality better than we did.

Our job was to provoke insight and exchange that supported their leadership and enabled their work to succeed. To that end, our principal moderator compiled this guide to the approach we used in our Symposium.

We chose a model of moderation designed to help participants get beyond habitual thinking, superficial engagement with ideas or concepts, and uncritical acceptance of ideology or conventional wisdom. Firstly, we anchored our conversations in a reading, so that all in the meeting were drawing from a shared resource which participants could augment with their own experience.

Secondly, we asked participants to start by engaging with the meaning of the texts that we read together, making sure that the group understood what was being argued before moving to evaluation of the argument. Thirdly, we invited reflections from participants on how the discussion might throw light on their own organizations and/or strategies and what they might want to learn, or do differently, as a result.

In parallel with the in-session moderation, we aimed to curate activities that would allow participants to feel connected and in relationships of solidarity with each other, forming bonds that would outlive the meeting and providing participants with a responsive network where conversations about strategy, management, leadership and solidarity could continue.

We arranged activities that were chosen because they allowed participants to gain insight into their own state of mind, to value and care for themselves and each other, to collaborate, and to develop relationships founded on exchange and communication beyond work-driven purposes. We tried to create a range of "channels" for building relationships of trust among participants
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The value of a common approach

Each moderator will have their own distinctive approach to a particular reading or session – that is inevitable, and there's no merit in all moderators adopting a single interpretation. That said, when moderators use a common "Symposium approach," we are modeling use of a tool that participants can learn, adopt, and deploy in other settings. A common approach means that we can offer some consistency from group to group, allowing members to have a shared experience over time.

Building habits of useful moderation

Providing effective moderation is a skill that becomes easier with practice. It is much easier to moderate a discussion of a reading or Case Study for the second or third time, so it is helpful if those new to moderation can moderate the same material at least twice before shifting to other texts. Some habits can be carried from one piece to another as moderators refine their own style over time.

Some useful habits we encourage include:

- Probe participant responses to encourage deep understanding of an issue;

- In case there are different assumptions in the room about how to get in line to speak, or how to intervene to respond or to ask a question, establish shared "rules of the road" at the start of the session;

- Make sure participation is balanced from the start and throughout, so that everyone gets to speak and no-one dominates;

- Be comfortable in silence. If you ask a question and no one responds, don't add a second question or refine it: just sit comfortably until someone is ready to contribute;

- Listen out for both acute insight and erroneous assumption, and make sure they are understood correctly and get a response;

- Offer provocation against bureaucratic, conservative, or unquestioned assumptions;

- Demonstrate and promote respectful exchange and disagreement;

- Once the discussion is flowing, lower your prominence, inviting others in with just a name or a gesture rather than speaking after each contribution;

- Stay alert for unanticipated emotional reactions and be prepared to change the tone or direction of the conversation, or even to call a pause, if someone appears to be feeling distress;

- Help participants find value in the discussion so it becomes a path to productive, useful action.

Moderating the readings

In most groups, many participants will have read the text, but not all will have understood what they read and at least one will not have read it at all. One way to begin in such a situation is to ask for a volunteer who can set the scene (or explain the problem the writer is addressing) for the benefit of those who may not have been able to read or make sense of it. Try to avoid providing a summary yourself, as that will undermine the expectation that participants have read the material in advance. It will help if you have made a list for yourself of the key points that you believe must be clear and on-the-table at the start so you can keep drawing on volunteers to set more of the scene until all these elements have been mentioned. At that point, you might turn to exploring the author's argument. What are they arguing for, and what do they mean by the assertions they make? Some moderators have a list of key sentences in the text to which they refer one at a time, asking simply: "What does the author mean by this?"

Once you are confident that at least most of the group has a good grasp of the writer's argument, pull together the points that have been highlighted and ask what the participants think of the argument. Do they agree or disagree, and why?

If important contradictions or arguments are not surfacing in the discussion and time is almost out, put those points as provocations to the group (do not comment on the lack of discussion on any point or otherwise critique the group).

One question all moderators face is how much of their opinions and conclusions they should share. There is no right answer to this, and moderators develop their own approaches to this issue. In general, however, you should mostly be curious about other views, asking questions to explore the participants' perspectives. We are not promoting any one interpretation or conclusion about any particular reading, and the moderator's opinion will likely take on more power in the discussion than the opinions of others.

If you do share your own reaction to the piece, you might try to do so to emphasize the importance of the piece rather than a particular interpretation. For example, you might begin by explaining how you first came across it, if the story underscores the importance of the piece in the field as a whole; or you might share how your own interpretation of the piece has changed wildly over time (implicitly authorizing multiple interpretations). Alternatively, you might end with a story of how you have come across this piece in other conversations, or how its lessons have shown up at important moments in particular human rights

campaigns in your own experience. In short, try to keep your own relationship to the piece at the start or the end, leaving the main conversation for the participants, and try to use your personal stories to place the piece in context rather than promote a particular interpretation.

Moderating the Case Studies

All of our Case Studies invite the reader to put themselves in the place of the protagonist. Each case generally ends with the protagonist facing a choice, and in some cases others also face choices.

One way to begin is to ask the group the obvious question without any preliminaries: what would you do in the place of the protagonist? Probe the answer given to encourage the participant to face the consequences of that particular decision. Then ask someone else what they would do (or ask the group if any of them would make a different decision), and probe that one similarly. Try to draw out the problems with any alternative choice. The cases do not have right answers to the question. Once you establish a few different possible answers, move back into the case to pull out the problematic elements, asking for participants' interpretation of key elements of the case. In some cases, you can also ask what participants would do in the place of other characters in the story.

An alternative approach is to proceed chronologically, regardless of whether the case itself is presented in perfect chronological order. Establish the conditions at the start by asking someone to explain for the benefit of those who might not have followed the chronology, and then ask participants what they imagine is going through the minds of the characters as each key event takes place.

Whether you pose the question of what the protagonist should do at the start or in the middle, you can probe the decision using the same questions we use in peer-to-peer coaching. What is the protagonist trying to accomplish? What's their goal? Then: What is difficult about the situation they face? Who is working against them, and who with them? And what emotions are at play? Then: What options do they have? And then back to the start: Having thought through all of that, what would you do?

Once the case is exhausted, it is easy to pull away from the specific case and ask if participants have faced similar situations, what was done there, and what the results were. If possible, you might conclude by drawing out some generic lessons from the case and the experiences of the participants, leaving the participants with some decision frameworks or general principles they might want to use in future analogous situations.

After the session

Be sure to debrief with fellow moderators as soon as possible after the session and make notes of any insights or innovations that should shape future sessions.

If you think a participant has found a discussion discomfiting in some way, check in with them afterwards or enlist a team member to do so right away.

If references to other materials have been made by you or other participants, consider sharing the links with the group.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book provides a wide range of materials intended to assist you and others in building on the debates that animated the Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights from 2019 to 2025. The individual pieces here describe many of the steps our team took along the way as we mounted our Symposium. We have many people to thank for working with us over the years, starting with those who helped the Symposium come into being.

From the first, we had the support of some key partners. Then-Dean Merit Janow, Dr. Anya Schiffrin, and the staff of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) embraced the project from the start, providing a home and the warmest collegial support, allowing us in 2019 to host a pair of design workshops in New York in February and April, and then a pilot symposium in Amman in August. SIPA masters students Cate Brown, Ines M. Boussebaa, and Nabila Mohd Hassan organized the meetings, conducted research, and wrote the Case Studies we used in the Amman pilot, whose members became Group One.

Those first steps were only possible thanks to the Oak Foundation and Ford Foundation, each of which provided a planning grant for the design phase, and then funded the project over its full five years. We deeply appreciate the warm support and incisive questions we received throughout the project, at Oak from Adrian Arena and at Ford from Martín Abregú, Salih Booker and Darren Walker.

Scaling up in 2020, we were grateful to secure the partnership of two key institutions. Firstly, the Fund for Global Human Rights agreed to host our two Symposium staff, and they have been flexible and supportive in multiple ways. We thank Regan Ralph and her successor Gabriela Bucher, David Mattingly, Brandee Butler, Rona Peligal, Rebecca Olschner-Wood, Claire Gibson Nangle, the HR team, the Finance team, IT colleagues Sami Al Amil and Bilal Sader, and Marianne Mollmann and the program team.

Secondly, we have been lucky to partner with the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights within the law faculty of the University

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Cate Brown came on board as the project's first program manager in 2020 after graduating from SIPA. She proved to be a multi-talented, passionately committed and all-round superb colleague who took on every challenge with enthusiasm and optimism. We were equally fortunate to recruit her wonderful successor, Sarah Mostafa-Kamel, a skilled organizer and leader, a trusted negotiator and partner for our vendors, and a reliable rock of kindness and care for staff and participants alike. Cate and Sarah contributed to every part of the Symposium and made it better. We were lucky to have them.

To our great sadness, one central contributor to this project is no longer with us. The late Innocent Chukwuma, the Ford Foundation's representative in Nigeria, was our original partner in the conception and creation of the Symposium. He co-moderated the design workshops, the Amman pilot, and Group Two in January 2021 before his sudden illness and death. A brilliant organizer, inspirational leader, and dearest friend, he was taken from us far too soon.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we thank the Symposium's participants from Groups One through Eleven.

You gave us and each other your full attention and creative insight, and you continue to practice a most admirable solidarity. We have been grateful to learn from you, and we remain in awe of your dedication to your communities, to social justice, and to the rights you defend. May you prevail.

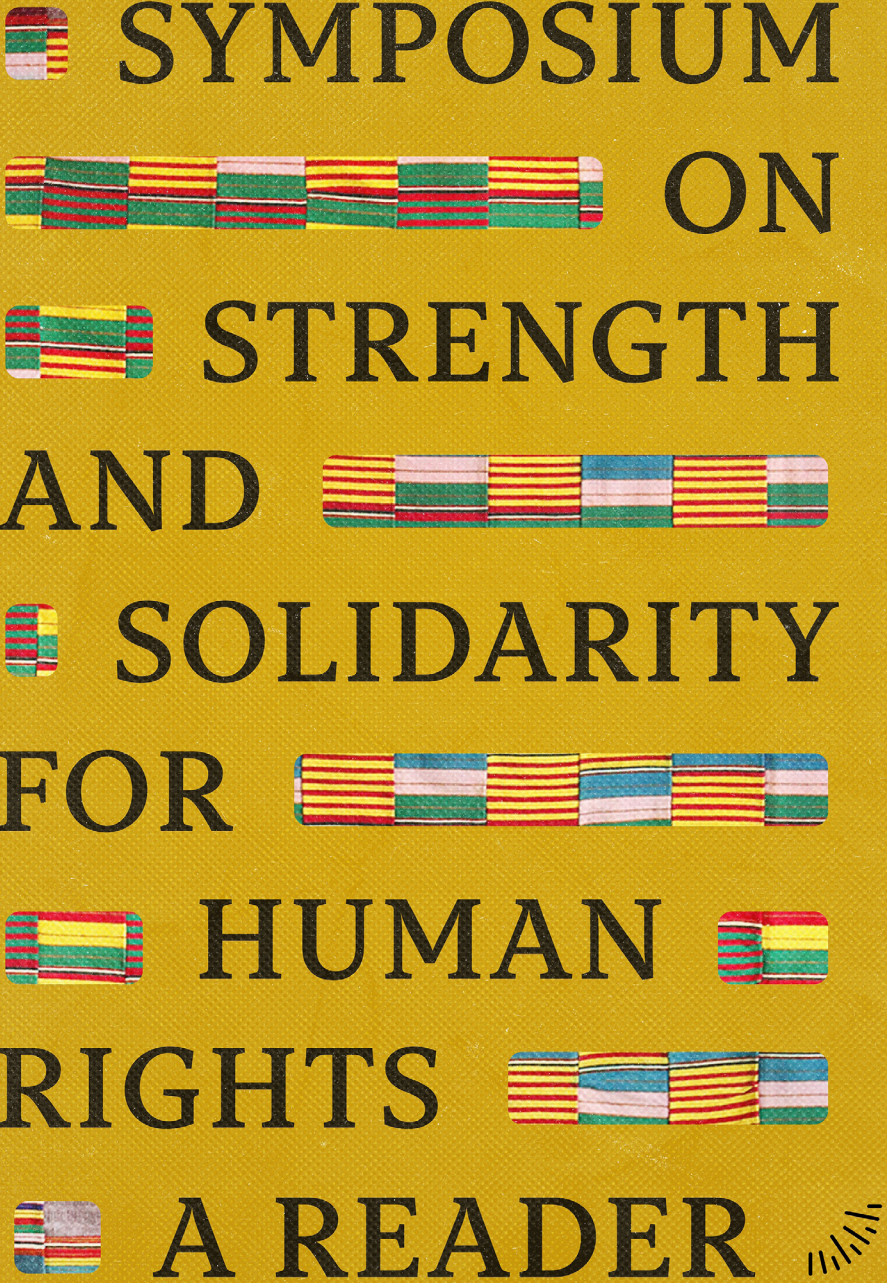
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THE SYMPOSIUM ON STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS A READER



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