



Introduction

Jerry Harris

Editor

The struggle for human rights may be the most inclusive and thereby the most important characteristic of globalization from below. It's the one issue that ties humanity together across borders and beyond suffocating states. Yet in a world beset by nationalism and multiple types of oppression communities often become isolated, blinded by their own grievances to the suffering of others. Identity politics, while establishing needed recognition, also separates and counterpoises one type of oppression against others. National and ethnic identities have led to violent conflicts over competing claims to land. Religions assert possession of exclusive truths and minority communities fight each other over disappearing jobs and dwindling resources. White workers losing economic security are led to blame foreign workers and immigrants and when Obama took the lead over Clinton some feminists counterpoised women's rights to the struggle against racism. The examples are endless, but rather than finding commonality in oppression, each identity lays singular claim to its own grievances and in doing so makes everyone else the 'other'. Perhaps the most dominant ideological expression of identity politics is Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations—a worldview that serves reactionary nationalism and contemporary imperialism, dividing the world into territorial and cultural zones of Hobbesian struggle.

Taking the path of solidarity, human rights provide a worldview that finds commonality in humanity's aspirations. In respecting the particular character and content of different oppressions with an expanding inclusion of rights, a shared universalism is created that unites rather than separates. Writing from Paris in 1950 author Octavio Paz sought to express Mexico's modern identity in the following manner:

Ever since World War II we have been aware that the self-creation demanded of us by our national realities is no different from that which similar realities are demanding of others. The past has left us orphans, as it has the rest of the planet, and we must join together in inventing our common future. World history has become everyone's task,

and our own labyrinth is the labyrinth of all mankind. (Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, New York, Grove Press, 1985, p. 195)

How different from Huntington's paranoid clash of civilizations. Paz was seeking a global humanism that today finds its home in the struggle for universal human rights. The Global Studies Association's 2009 conference at Florida Atlantic University was dedicated to exploring the multiple expressions of this struggle and the following articles were presented as panel papers.

The first section of this special issue, *Human Rights and the Struggle for Universality*, is focused on the development and meaning of human rights. Cross-cultural problems as well as questions of governance and the role of the United Nations are also examined. The first article is by conference keynote speaker Micheline Ishay who looks at the progress and shortcomings of human rights since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at the United Nations in 1948. Ishay takes the reader through sixty years of history by marking every two decades for review and analysis. She ends with a consideration of future challenges such as participatory democracy and alternative development. Conference organizer Mark Frezzo follows with a further and more detailed analysis of governance and the relationship between state functions, the United Nations and civil society. Our next author, Marek Hrubec, shares some common concerns with Frezzo on questions of cultural relativism and the universality of human rights. But whereas Frezzo's main interest is on the relationship between international, national, and local levels of governance, Hrubec pursues inter-cultural dialogue as a means to find a trans-cultural reality shared by all.

Section II is titled *Environmental Sustainability as a Human Right* and reflects the contemporary expansion of how we see and define human rights. We can no longer view nature as simply an economic input to growth. Instead the authors connect the right to a sustainable environment to a just and egalitarian future for all. In doing so each writer critiques the fundamental nature of capitalism as a society centered on unlimited individual consumption. In the first article Patrick Loy argues that solving the current economic crisis through a renewed round of unending growth would lead to an ecological disaster. Instead Loy calls for a transition to a new world system suggesting that market socialism could harness the brutality of the market while facilitating greater egalitarian values. Next, Rubin Patterson also contends that a livable environment and capitalism cannot coexist in the future. Both Loy and Patterson share a common assessment of the current economic system, but Patterson is interested in the growing intersection between deep ecologists,

radical labor activists and Marxists and their growing conversion to a mutually shared social vision. Fernando Perez and Luigi Esposito take a different approach, analyzing hyper-materialism and consumerism as a cultural of addiction. Situating addiction within the larger institutions and belief system of neo-liberalism they call for a fundamental shift in values towards sustainability in order to create a more human centered society. In the following article Mohammad Soleymani concentrates on economic globalization and its impact on sustainable development and climate change. Linking growth, energy consumption and global warming, Soleymani is mainly concerned with the negative impact of globalization on the Third World using charts and graphs to explain widespread economic inequalities. Lastly, Steve Milder investigates the anti-nuclear movement as it developed in the border area of Germany, France and Switzerland. This is a detailed study of grassroots activism in the Upper Rhine valley and the creation of a successful regional movement that lead to the emergence of the German Green Party.

Section III offers two articles on women and their right to property inheritance as a road to economic independence and equality. Hyun-key Kim Hogarth leads the reader through a historical analysis of marriage and inheritance rights for women in South Korea. Hogarth argues that South Korea's insertion into a globalized world helped accelerate the promulgation of equal inheritance laws and greater social power for women. Turning to Cameroon, Fonjong, Sama-Lang and Fombe also trace the historical development of women's right to land starting in the pre-colonial era, through the German occupation, the Anglo-French era and onto independence. Although constitutional and reform laws have been passed, the article points to the continuing struggle of women for education, land and food security.

In the last section, *Politics and Human Rights*, Elizabeth Aulette-Root investigates the political message of medical text on HIV by looking at the power relations that are represented between the state, health care professionals and those affected by the disease. The author argues that the text replicate an oppressive hegemonic discourse in order to legitimate the government rather than empowering and educating the victims of HIV and AIDS. The next authors, Ernesto Bustillos and Francisco Romero, are long-time activists in the Chicano movement. Their concern is defending the freedom of press and expanding independent media as an indispensable tool in building an autonomous political movement that can fight for immigrant rights. Lastly, Jerry Harris and Carl Davidson analyze the political movement behind the US presidential election and the new neo-Keynesian hegemonic bloc built around Obama. The authors contend that the mass base of minorities, youth and

workers hold progressive views on economic and social issues beyond the limits of the new ideology and need to push Obama to the left by expanding the definition of human rights to issues like health care.

This volume provides the reader with an expansive view on the issues of human rights and each section provides unique insights into a different series of topics. Ranging from theoretical discussions on cultural relativism and the universality of rights to the redefinition of environmental sustainability as an indispensable element of human rights each author offers essential works that help define the expanding terrain of democracy. The Global Studies Association hopes this fourth volume of proceeding papers and research will act as a significant contribution to the discussion and movement for human rights.