The International Human Rights Movement
A.K.A. (Proposed new title)
NGOs and the Human Rights Movement:
How NGOs try to make rights real (and sometimes succeed)

WAVE Room: 431 (Washington Square)
Tuesdays 4:55PM - 6:35PM

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I. Overview
The focus of this class is the NGOs and other civil society and social change organizations that help drive international social movements. To understand these kinds of organizations, we will zero in on the International Human Rights Movement (IHRM) as a case-study. That said, fundamentally, in many ways this is a class about organizations and how/if/when they drive change and achieve results. Students will leave with a deep appreciation of what it means to work in or with NGOs, such as those in the human rights movement, or the environmental or feminist movements: challenges, strategies, dilemmas, theories of change, etc. and be uniquely prepared to both analyze this particular sector and/or work in this or other fields as an NGO staff person, consultant, or leader.

The human rights movement is an ideal case-study. It is one of the most successful social justice movements of our time, establishing universal principles that govern how states should treat citizens and non-citizens, and helping to challenge dictators and authoritarian rulers in many regions, including Southern Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Over the last three decades, national human rights organizations (NGOs) have proliferated; today, a human rights community of some sort exists in virtually every country of the world. On the global level, simultaneously, the IHRM has become a powerful force. The movement strengthens—and is strengthened by—a complex web of institutions, laws, and norms that constitute a functioning global system that builds on itself progressively, animated by strong NGOs. As a mature social movement, the IHRM also has its tensions, challenges, and even pathologies.

Drawing on two decades of working closely with human rights (and other) NGOs in diverse ways—including, currently, as a member of the donor community—the instructor will bring countless examples from the field into the classroom, including internal debates about strategy development, measuring impact, donor strategies, theories of change, institutional representation, diversity, research methodologies, partnerships, networks, venues of engagement, campaigning, capacity-building, fundraising, resilience, sustainability, and external and internal communications.
II. Schedule of classes

Tuesday, January 24th, 2016

**Social Movements and NGOs**

There are two goals for today’s class: First, we will lay the groundwork for understanding the international human rights movement by focusing on the idea of a “movement”. We will use the lens of civil society theory and social movement theory to think about the ways in which individuals, associations, and organizations, including NGOs, engage with each other in building a movement “ecosystem”. We will also introduce the ideas of political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, and framing, as well as take note of the other kinds of actors (funders, governments, businesses) that are part of the broader movement ecosystem as well. Secondly, we will review course essentials, including the structure of the class and requirements. We will assign NGO presentations for the term and discuss subfields of human rights.


**READINGS**

- Surreptitious Symbiosis—Engagement Between Activists and NGOs by Marlies Glasius and Armine Ishkanian (NYU classes)
- IN GLOBALIZATION READER (NYU classes):
  - John Boli and George Thomas, “Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875”, Introduction, Chapter 1
  - Nitza Berkovitch, “The Emergence and Transformation of the International Women’s Movement”

January 31st, 2016

**The Human Rights System**

Today is a crash course on the international human rights system. Since the international system represents a set of political opportunity structures for the movement—and actors engage with the system regularly—it is vital that we have a basic understanding of it.

International Human Rights Movement (Bickford)

- OHCHR website: “Human Rights Treaty Bodies”:  
  http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx
- International Justice Center: “The International Human Rights Framework”  
  (http://www.ijrcenter.org/ihr-reading-room/overview-of-the-human-rights-framework/)
- Read through OpenGlobalRights.
- Glance at this directory of UN Special Procedures:  


Questions to consider:
(1) What is the human rights movement?
(2) What is the international human rights system?
(3) What is the relationship between the two?
(4) What does it mean to “realize rights”?

February 7th -- Defining the Movement

The international human rights movement is dominated and sometimes driven by human rights NGOs. In this class, we will define national and international HRNGOs and begin to examine their theories of change, structures, constituencies, and whom they represent, as well as Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs). We will also focus on how they are funded and especially the role of private philanthropy in the human rights ecosystem. Finally, we will discuss the “translator” or “vernacularizer” role that many professional NGOs play.

- Makau Mutua, Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights (on NYU Classes)
- Sally Engel Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle” (on NYU Classes)
- Fateh Azzam, “Why Should We Have to “Represent” Anyone?” (NYU Classes)
- Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others” (NYU Classes)

NGO Case-studies: National HRNGOs: Legal Resources Center (South Africa) (http://lrc.org.za/) and Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) (http://www.khrc.or.ke/) and CELS (Spanish) (www.cels.org.ar)

Questions to consider:
(1) What is the role of human rights NGOs in the broader human rights movement?
(2) Does it matter how human rights NGOs are funded?
(3) Is it problematic that most funding comes from the Global North while most HRNGOs focus on human rights problems in the Global South?

February 14th
**Theories of change and strategy**

Organizations set goals, have theories of change—whether they use this term or not—and develop strategies and tactics to reach their goals. This is a simple idea but it actually requires some thinking and analysis. In fact, these concepts will become key vocabulary for the entire class, as we will be examining strategy, tactics, and theories of change throughout the semester.

- Mackinnon and Amott, Mapping Change; Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation (NYU Classes)
- Transnational Information Politics: NGO Human Rights Reporting, 1986–2000 (NYU Classes)
- Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change (NYU Classes)
- Explore this website: “New Tactics in Human Rights” (https://www.newtactics.org/tactics) --consider different theories of change at work in these many examples

NGO Case-studies: International Center for Transitional Justice (www.ictj.org); Frontline Defenders (www.frontlinedefenders.org/); and Witness (witness.org)

**Questions to consider:**

1. Should organizations explicitly articulate a theory of change? Why might this be important, or not? What is the relationship between theory of change and strategy?
2. Does it make sense for funders to use theory of change as a key ingredient in making funding decisions? What would be other options?

**February 21st**

**Global dynamics of the international movement**

The international human rights movement has gone through different stages in its evolution, with shifting dynamics. Building off the Makau Mutua article from a previous class, this class will examine the emerging 21st Century dynamics of the international human rights movement, with a special emphasis on the “spiral theory” of compliance.

We will also examine the question of **funding** the human rights movement, critically examining state and non-state donors and global philanthropy and its role.

- Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, Introduction, Chapters 1-2 (p. 3-42)
- Bickford, “Transnational Advocacy Networks” (On NYU Classes)
- Bickford, SUR Journal Interview with Louis Bickford (On NYU Classes)
- Skim through IHRFG funding maps/website: http://humanrightsfunding.org/
- Also skim through AWID “Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots”, esp. pp.1-25 (on NYU Classes and also downloadable here: http://www.awid.org/Library/WTL-Full-Report-Final)

**NGO case-studies:** FIDH (https://www.fidh.org/en/), Conectas (http://www.conectas.org/en), and ESCR-Net (www.escr-net.org)
Questions to consider:
(1) How does the “spiral” theory help to understand the dynamics of the international human rights movement, especially the role of pressure exerted by international actors (including some states) on (other) states?
(2) What is—and what should be—the role of philanthropy in supporting human rights? What will the human rights movement of the 21st Century look like?

February 28th
Guest speaker: LUCIA NADER

● SUR: 5 reasons to fear innovation http://sur.conectas.org/en/five-reasons-fear-innovation/

March 7th
The Compliance Gap
The International human rights movement has focused for many years on building the human rights system including through a focus on international law and norms (including through treaties and conventions). But has this focus yielded results in terms of improving the rights of actual human rights on the ground? This will be the core of today’s discussion.

● Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, chapter 3 (Beth Simmons); and chapter 5 (Xinyuan Dai)

NGO case-studies: Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (www.business-humanrights.org/) and Center for Economic and Social Rights (www.cesr.org)

Questions to consider:
(1) How important are norms, standards, treaties, conventions? How would you compare the effectiveness of NGO strategies that focus on norm-development compared to other strategies?
(2) What is required for “compliance”? Why is there a compliance gap? How can we learn from compliance gap research in the past as we approach the idea of new treaties in the future in areas, for example, such as business and human rights or LGBTI rights?
March 14th—NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

March 21st
FILM: DIFRET
PAPER PROPOSALS DUE TODAY

March 28th
Cultural strategies: narrative, power, etc
The field of human rights is often defined as involving abuse (of commission or omission) by the state against individuals in the public sphere. But a gender analysis and other critiques have, over past decades, taught us that human rights can come under threat by non-state actors such as religious institutions, purveyors of “tradition” and “family values”, and can be committed in the private sphere as well as the public sphere. In this class we will disentangle some of these questions by looking at how NGOs have developed strategies and programs that focus on culture, tradition, and power outside of the state.

- Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power
- Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, chapter 14, "Changing Hearts and Minds", by Alison Brisk


Questions to consider
(1) can “tradition” violate human rights? How do NGOs deal with this challenge?
(2) Do human rights NGOs have a gender analysis? What would this mean? How would we know?
(3) How might we explain the profound success of LGBTI rights campaigns in recent years, at least in North America? Are there lessons to be learned from this subfield that other subfields of human rights could benefit from?

April 4th
The data and digital revolution and what it means for the human rights movement
There are at least three broad ways that the data and digital revolution are impacting human rights advocacy: first, as a substantive theme (and subfield), digital rights (or internet rights) is emerging as an area of concern that is linked to other rights areas such as right to privacy;
freedom of expression; and freedom of assembly. Second, by introducing a new set of communication and media tools which are transforming the nature and scope of advocacy work. Finally, it's created a humanitarian resiliency technology sector that introducing new frameworks and models for how we respond to global crises (globalization, refugees, disaster/disease management, economic development, etc) as well as introducing new forms of translocation activism. We will look at both of these areas during this class.


READINGS TBA

- Peruse these websites:
  - https://www.tacticaltech.org/
  - https://techfugees.com/
  - Center for Humanitarian Data: https://centre.humdata.org/
  - The Data Collaboratives: Exchanging Data to Improve People’s Lives, NYU GovLab, http://thegovlab.org/datacollaborative

Questions to consider:

- A certain set of human rights claims involve “public space”, such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. Is the internet “public space” and what does it mean to articulate rights claims in the digital realm?
- What risks and benefits frameworks will guide decision makers about tech and data-driven interventions in the human rights context?
- How can data regulation, policy, and standards effectively govern and provide accountability?
- Can general guidelines and principles be established for tech and data interventions whose social applications are deeply contextual and enmeshed in power relationships?

April 11th

Emerging Powers, multi-polarity, and human rights advocacy in the 21st Century

The international human rights movement has been connected in a variety of ways with American foreign policy—both because of US support for authoritarian regimes during the Cold War and, more recently, during the so-called War on Terror, but also because of genuine (if contradictory) US support for human rights globally as part of foreign policy since the 1970s. Many argue that shifts in the global order in the 21st Century will change the ways that human rights is articulated in foreign policy.

- Ted Piccone, “Global Swing States and the Human Rights and Democracy Order” (on NYU Classes)
International Human Rights Movement (Bickford)

- Noref, “Discursive Power of the concept of the rising power” (on NYU Classes)
- CONECTAS: Foreign Policy and Human Rights (on NYU Classes)

NGO case-studies: International Service for Human Rights (Geneva) and Forum-Asia, and Crisis Action

Questions to consider:
(1) Are we entering a new era of multipolarity in which emerging/rising powers like Brazil and South Africa are likely to play enhanced roles in global human rights?
(2) If so, what are the implications for human rights NGOs like Conectas?

April 18th
Details TBA

April 25th
LAST CLASS
Measuring Impact of Human Rights NGOs and the future of the international human rights movement
- Details TBA

PAPERS DUE MAY 5TH before midnight
PLEASE SEND THE PAPERS BY EMAIL TO lnb2@nyu.edu

III. Required readings
A. Please purchase/obtain:

- Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, Kathryn Sikkink (eds) (2013), The Persistent Power of Human Rights; From Commitment to Compliance (Cambridge);


C. Open a Twitter account and follow OpenGlobalRights (at OpenDemocracy) and read existing debates. Check regularly. Follow: Ken Roth, Chris Jochnick, Louis Bickford, Hossam Bahgat, FIDH, Iain Levine, BHRRC, etc. (to be discussed in class)

IV. Written Assignments and Grading
Students will be graded on the following:
1. PROPOSAL: Paper proposal (10%): One page maximum (text) plus one-page maximum bibliography (i.e. 2-pages maximum).
2. FINAL PAPER (60%)—10-page (maximum) single-spaced paper.
3. PARTICIPATION/reading/website analyses (30%)

VI. Instructor
Louis Bickford runs the Global Human Rights program at the Ford Foundation. Prior to joining the Foundation in 2012, he served on the executive leadership team at the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (2010-2012) and, before that, was a founding staff member and a director at the International Center for Transitional Justice (2001-2009), where he managed the Center's global network of NGOs and oversaw programs in South Africa, Chile, Morocco, Japan, and Spain. He also created the Memory, Museums, and Memorials program (later the Truth and Memory unit).

Bickford has also done independent consulting for numerous institutions and in various world regions, including in Afghanistan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and for institutions including the Center for Strategic and International Studies; the Expert Working Group on Transitional Justice (appointed by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina); and the Oak Foundation, where he undertook a strategic review of human rights programs.

From 1999-2001, he was Associate Director of the Global Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where he oversaw three global research projects, including the “Legacies of Authoritarianism” project, and managed the Macarthur Global Studies Fellowship program for PhD and MA students in the social sciences and humanities and ran a weekly Dissertators Workshop. He has given keynote addresses or lectures at Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines); University of Chile Law School; Duke University; Comissão de Anistia do Ministério da Justiça (Brazil); the Inter American Court for Human Rights (Washington, DC); Yale University Law School; the Universidad Liberoamericana (Mexico); University of Hiroshima (Japan); Kabul University (Afghanistan); University of Rosario (Colombia); Sabancı University (Turkey); University of Sarajevo (Bosnia); UNESCO (Paris); and University of Liberia; among others.

Bickford teaches regular graduate seminars on human rights and transitional justice at NYUxxx University (Institute for the Study of Human Rights), New York University (Wagner School) and the New School for Social Research (Graduate Program in International Affairs). He received a Ph.D. from McGill University (1999) and a MA degree from the New School (1991), both in political science.