

'There will always be enough people to fight for a decent future'

An Introduction

Henning Melber

*Not everything that counts
can be measured
and not everything
that can be measured
counts.*

(Albert Einstein)¹

The whole package, coming in at just over 300 pages, has the feel more of a scholarly book than it does a single journal issue, and it practically demands employment as such – for this volume has both the philosophical heft and general accessibility to serve as a primer to the field of genocide studies. While its modern historical case studies are limited to a meager handful of sub-Saharan nations (with two of them focusing upon Zimbabwe), they are all excellent works that provide a useful template for further inquiry. Moreover, the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre generously makes this issue along with others in the *Development Dialogue* series, available for free download at its website. If this volume is indicative of the broader work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre, then people of goodwill across the world have a valuable ally in their struggle against inhumanity and violence.²

This is the encouraging conclusion by a reviewer unknown to the Foundation. It was published in a scholarly periodical almost two years

1 As quoted by Kumi Naidoo, former head of CIVICUS and executive director of Greenpeace International when staying in Uppsala as a visiting scholar at the Centre for Sustainable Development of Uppsala University to prepare the manuscript published as 'Boiling Point – Can Citizen Action Save the World', *Development Dialogue* No. 54, July 2010

2 Guy Lancaster, *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, at the end of his review of *Development Dialogue* No. 50 (December 2008) in *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 12, issue 1, Fall 2010, p. 90.



Henning Melber

after the release in December 2008 of the volume commemorating the 60th anniversary of the UN genocide convention. Entitled ‘Revisiting the heart of darkness – Explorations into genocide and other forms of mass violence’, it had a print run of 10,000 copies, all of which have since been distributed.

The Foundation became aware of the review only coincidentally. This illustrates in a small way the challenges an ideas-based institution faces when it comes to accounting for its visibility, the relevance of its activities and the results of its work. As is so often the case, the advocacy of ethical values, ideas and norms as a form of wider political education and of scholarly or policy debate and as a contribution to a more enlightened public awareness and possible engagement produces visible and measurable effects (if they are visible and measurable at all) only after a certain time lag. It is thus not easy to provide quantitative evidence of results and relevance.

Of course, a small ideas-based organisation like ours needs proper conception and planning of its activities, the defining and setting of an agenda and designing as well as applying indicators to measure the effects of its work. But such measurement can only ever capture part of the story about the relevance of its mission and effects. The experience of a small South African NGO facing similar dilemmas is instructive:

We don’t *really* know whether we’re on the right track, not least because every move we make changes the terrain within which we’re travelling. This is the thing about social complexity. Every ... community and situation is in a state of change all the time. And we, who seek to intervene, are not separate from whatever it is we intervene into; on the contrary, we’re an integral member of the complex whole into which we intervene, and we change as it changes. All this stands to reason, if we take complexity seriously ... The world is fluid, and we are fluid, and everything is shifting in ways that we can gradually learn to anticipate, but not predict, and never control.³

The writers continue:

Measurement, especially quantitative measurement ... is easy ... compared with the challenging task of reading for what is *really* going on, in all its complexity and with all its nuances and contradictions, and making sense of this. The rigour and disciplined observation and imagination used in an effective open reflection process makes the

3 Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff (2011), *The Singer, not the Song. The vexed questions of impact monitoring and social change. The Proteus Initiative*, May, p. 12.

measurement procedures of impact monitoring seem like exercises done at primary school. In the final analysis, both the quantitative and the qualitative forms of reflection may be necessary, but with respect to different ‘outcomes’, and if this is so then much hinges on what exactly we mean by ‘impact’.⁴

Nevertheless, much of our work can be traced and put on record, and does provide a sense of the visibility and impact of the Foundation over the half-century since its official establishment as an autonomous institution by royal decree on 2 March 1962. Despite the temptations this rich history offers, this volume is not just a nostalgic excursion to recall ‘good vibrations’. Some of the contributions clearly go beyond self-appraisal and testify to the fact that a small group of people (never more than half a dozen) with a modest annual budget (never exceeding one million Euro in today’s terms) can in cooperation with many more like-minded individuals and initiatives achieve a great deal. There are also critical self-reflections. And there are those narratives beyond and behind the visible. Some of these come to the fore in the personal stories shared in this collection, which offer a variety of approaches and perspectives. They bear testimony to the fact that a history of ideas is at the same time a history of the people promoting these ideas.

In the case of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, everything started with ‘the Boss’, as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations was fondly and respectfully called by his staff at the UN. His legacy lives on, and continues to inspire many. Like few others in similar positions, Dag Hammarskjöld personified the spirit of justice, personal integrity and faith in humanity. He relentlessly promoted the principles of the UN Charter and his faith in the future.

As the transcript of his extemporaneous remarks at the UN Correspondents’ Association luncheon in his honour on 9 April 1958 reveals, Dag Hammarskjöld maintained the

... belief and the faith that the future will be all right because there will always be enough people to fight for a decent future ... I do believe firmly that ... there are enough people who are solidly engaged in this fight and who are strong enough and dedicated enough to guarantee its success.⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵ Quoted in Kaj Falkman (ed.) (2005), *To Speak for the World. Speeches and Statements by Dag Hammarskjöld*, Stockholm: Atlantis, pp. 51f.

According to Hammarskjöld, all of us are confronted with fundamental choices. His Cambridge University address only a few weeks later highlighted the need for people to position themselves. In this vein, he continued:

The conflict [over] different approaches to the liberty of man and mind or between different views of human dignity and the right of the individual is continuous. The dividing line goes within ourselves, within our own peoples, and also within other nations. It does not coincide with any political or geographical boundaries. The ultimate fight is one between the human and the subhuman. We are on dangerous ground if we believe that any individual, any nation, or any ideology has a monopoly on rightness, liberty, and human dignity.⁶

Ever since its establishment, the Foundation – albeit in often unconventional ways – sought to promote and support the ‘pursuit of happiness’ not only as an American dream but also in the spirit of Hammarskjöld’s humanism. This has never been understood as a backward-looking, iconographic approach. Instead, such commitment seeks to reactivate and translate the relevance of Hammarskjöld’s thinking and work as an international civil servant into global policy matters regarding current issues and challenges. It is a conservative role only in the sense that there are ideas and concepts that deserve to remain alive or be revived for the sake of a better future.

In the case of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, everything started with ‘the Boss’, as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations was fondly and respectfully called by his staff at the UN.



UN Photo/JO

⁶ Dag Hammarskjöld, ‘The Walls of Distrust’, address at Cambridge University, 5 June 1958, in Andrew W. Cordier and Wilder Foote (eds) (1974), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume IV, Dag Hammarskjöld 1958-1960*, New York: Columbia University, pp. 91f.

The struggle for a decent life for all in the name of humanity and humanist ideals always remains a struggle about the future. Many stories about the history of this struggle as it played out within the small arena of this Foundation could be told. Some of them are shared here. They allow insights into the role of this small secretariat, situated in the historical Geijersgården near the main hall of Uppsala University. Its location is somehow symbolic: it is almost equidistant from the Castle where Dag Hammarskjöld grew up and the cemetery where he is buried with other members of his family.

A year before his appointment as the second UN Secretary-General, Hammarskjöld penned the following words in his private notebook: ‘It is easy to be nice, even to an enemy – from lack of character.’⁷ One could have also added, from lack of empathy and solidarity with those who are victimised by those who abuse the power they seized or – worse – were entrusted with to serve the people. Hammarskjöld had a sense of justice. He was on the side of the oppressed. So should be we.

Based on Hammarskjöld’s cosmopolitan orientation, his devoted service to humanity and equality and his relentless efforts to bring violence of all kinds to an end (including the non-military violence exerted by structures), the Foundation soon joined other like-minded forces, individuals and alliances. Half a century after its establishment, the Foundation can stand proud of its record as a faithful advocate of alternative paradigms, and its promotion of the fundamental values enshrined not least in the Charter of the United Nations and all the global normative frameworks formulated since then.

Some of the following contributions take us down memory lane by offering glimpses of and experiences from the last 50 years. Others present evidence from our current networks, and finally we have also added some investigative, analytical views from the outside. In the end, though, all the evidence presented allows for only limited insights into the variety of undertakings, explorations, successes and failures.

If there is one lesson we embody above all else, maybe it is that the pen can indeed be mightier than the sword. At times against all odds, the belief in a better future does not succumb to force. One can kill

⁷ Dag Hammarskjöld (1993), *Markings*, New York: Ballantine (16th ed.), p. 70. The new translation by Bernhard Erling suggests the following English wording: ‘It is easy to be friendly even to the enemy – from lack of character.’ Bernhard Erling (1982/87), *A Reader’s Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld’s Waymarks*, p. 88. Fifty years after Dag Hammarskjöld’s death, the Foundation was able to make this unique work accessible electronically on our web site. See: <http://www.dhf.uu.se/publications/other-publications/a-reader-s-guide-to-dag-hammarskjold-s-waymarks/>.

institutions. One can destroy structures. One is able to marginalise and ridicule social movements and other forms of mobilisation and organisation. One can fight ideas by every means, even eliminate groups of people and individuals. But one can never ever get entirely rid of our visions, hopes and values about justice, equality, human rights and dignity. As a contemporary artist performing at the Foundation put it:

What kind of activist are you?

The dangerous kind.

I mean what's your issue?

Justice.

Can you be more specific?

Justice without borders.

Unfragmented. Decompartmentalized. Seamless, indivisible justice.⁸



There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

Dag Hammarskjöld would most likely have chosen other words and expressed them in a different style. But equally likely, he would have sought to put across a very similar message, sharing the same motivation and intent. We also like to assume that he would have approved of how the Foundation has, as a tribute to his vision and values, tried to translate this understanding into related ideas and practical action.

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem'

⁸ The Kenyan poet, playwright, spoken word artist and political activist Shailja Patel began her stay as guest writer with Mai Palmberg's 'Cultural Images in and of Africa' programme at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala with the opening performance of 'Slice A Heart On A Curve: The Poetics of Insecurity' at the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation on 3 April 2009. See <http://www.dhf.uu.se/events/public-events/slice-a-heart-on-a-curve-the-poetics-of-insecurity/>.