

by Revelation Kollektiv 9 months ago

Activist Scholarship in Human Rights: New Challenges

School of Advanced Study, University of London, Senate House, London, June 28th, 2017

There were so many brilliant parallel sessions, as is the custom, I was not able to attend them all. For more information about the other sessions that I missed, including the programme from the conference, see [here](#).



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Just about to present at the Human Rights Conference [#HRCCConference](#) just been introduced to fellow panelists.



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Opening panel addresses: Defining the Contours of Activist Scholarship in Human Rights

Reflections on academia, activism and the politics of the knowledge and learning

Dr Aziz Choudry, McGill University (Canada)



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Dr Aziz Choudry Politics of knowledge and learning. Learning from social movts are overlooked [#HRCCConference](#)



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Dr Aziz Choudry outlined how knowledge from the academy is privileged over other sites of knowledge, especially that of activism:



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The tyranny of the academy in terms centering the academy rather than social justice. Much knowledge comes from the struggle [#hrconference](#)



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The knowledge gained from activism has its own rigour.



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How do ppl on the ground understand research. Organic rigour via comm participation&theorising can come via social movement [#hrconference](#)



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Dr Choudry highlights the crucial process of relationship building in activism



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3 Rs Relevance what are you doing , Relationships how do you build rels' for knowledge production [#hrconference](#).



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Richard Flex: academic knowledge used to help activists work more effectively. Diff forms of rigour. Activists need2b accur8 [#hrconference](#)



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We cannot dismiss the rigour of activists. Walter Rodney. Black intellectual embedded in soc struggles& his contrib2 pedagog [#hrconference](#)



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Walter Rodney epitomises the scholar activist. Using the resources of the academy to facilitate social change [#hrconference](#)



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History can be used as a tool for social change [#hrconference](#)



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This reminds me of Martin-Baro and his thoughts that history and its historiography are inherently political processes designed to maintain a civic order as per a state's (hidden) agenda.

Choice, Inevitability or survival? Reflections on being an activist academic

Professor Nadjé Al Ali, SOAS, University of London (UK)



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Prof Nadjé Al Ali: Those of us hiding behind objectivity need to come out now. The times call for this. [#hrconference](#)



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Prof Al Ali discussed the relationship between the knowledge generated in the academy and that from the field and how the knowledge from the former can be translated to the latter.



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Al Ali: Feminism looking at intersections of power& how change can be effected. How do we transl8 r theories in2 the everyday [#hrconference](#)



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Should we consciously make choices about our sources of funding?



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Al Ali: Funding at HEIs can affect ambitus of activism. What are our red lines im terms of funding sources? [#hrconference](#)



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Al Ali: Diff types of activists. Challenged by having to tick boxes for the ref with her activist work. [#hrconference](#)



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Scholar Activism as a Nexus between Research and Community Activism via the use of Participatory Arts

Dr Ornette D Clennon, Critical Race and Ethnicity Research Cluster, Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)



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Just did my bit. It will be made available online soon. I spoke about grassroots activism and it critical race studies [#hrconference](#)



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I described the relationship building process of the activism process in terms of "process measures" and using a community campaign, asked questions about the neoliberal nature of university research and its

applicability in community contexts. I also asked how academic knowledge such as critical race studies can help communities better strategise their actions towards agency.

My talk is available [here](#).

Professor Donatella Della Porta, Institute of Human and Social Sciences at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Italy, via skype)



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Prof Donatella: Different types of knowledge of academic and the activist. Need to translate between diff fields [#hrconference](#)



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Prof Donatella: We need to make sure that academic knowledge is not the arbiter of power. It is not the final word. [#hrconference](#)



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Prof Donatella : What is knowledge in neoliberal terms? Commodified. Fake news and disdain for knowledge (me: But what type?) [#hrconference](#)



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Panel 1B - Methods in Activist Scholarship



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Just chairing as session on Methods in Activist Scholarship, now [#hrconference](#)



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Use and aspirations for use of digital tools at data-focused human rights NGOs

Isabel Guenette Thornton, PhD Student, University of Cambridge (The Whistle Project Group, UK)



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Isabelle Guenette Thornton: How do NGOs use digital tools as part of their activism activities [#hrconference](#)



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Isabel: NGOs favour face to face. Lots of frustration around use of technology. Not a strong commitment2 using tech. [#hrconference](#)



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Isabel: Community is too dynamic for a one size fits all digital tool. [#hrconference](#)



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When is it appropriate to use these tools?

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Technology can often be too impersonal:

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Isabel: Security of data is a major worry and a like of expertise to use digital tool [#hrconference](#)



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Isabel: Whistleproject app. Gathers information anonymous digital reports. Also data tracking 4 collaborative cross platform [#hrconference](#)



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Isabel: Working with DVC digital verification core. Students do the verifying of anonymous reports/data [#hrconference](#)



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Activist Scholar and collaboration with NGOs and social movements

Dr Zoi Aliozi and Ms Athanasia Zagorianou, Citizens Rights Watch (UK)

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Next paper Dr Aliozi and Athanasia Zagorianou. An academic, activist collaboration. They have set up a NGO [#hrconference](#)



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Aliozi: Digital activism. Academic input-methods. Activism- want urgent change conflicting approaches [#hrconference](#)



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Aliozi: There is very little lit on digital activism. How do we promote the value of activism? [#hrconference](#)



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Aliozi: What discipline does scholar activism belong to? We need more collaboration [#hrconference](#)



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Aliozi: How do we work with communities to advocate for Human Rights for social change? [#hrconference](#)



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Athanasia: A paper for academics and activists that both professionals can access

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Athanasia: The need for training for activists esp in terms of digital scholarship [#hrconference](#)



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Anathasia: Digital activism can teach more people. Activist: Rallies for social change. Advocate: Reps on behalf of others [#hrconference](#)



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Anathasia: Dangers of digital activism, fake news, propaganda etc. We need to be critical about use of the tools [#hrconference](#)



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Protest Monitoring and Standpoint Validity

Dr Michael Hamilton, Law School, University of East Anglia (UK)

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Dr Michael Hamilton: Human rights in term of monitoring reports. NI, Belarus collaborate with diff activist groups [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: Monitoring of Protest. Methods. Is impartiality necessary? Are the demands of activism&scholarship compatible [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: All persons have the rights to observe protests and civil activity. Who are protest monitors? [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: What is civil society? How can technology allow everyone from docum' Human Rights? State actors v non state actors [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: Astroturfing- pretending to have grassroots supports for their movements. So lines are very blurred [#HRCConference](#)



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'Astroturfing' can be a particular problem when grassroots activism and the labours of relationship building are not present or valued.

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Michael: Do we need accountability? Need for legitimacy testing? Do we need "even handedness"? [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: Even handedness testing is misguided. Me: Who decides the standard? [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: There are diff motivations for groups that will dictate their ambit for action in terms of monitoring [#HRCConference](#)



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Michael: The choice of what to monitor is a 'political' act. Me: Detachedness is also a 'political' act [#HRCCConference](#)



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I think the very act of deciding what and who to monitor describes the inherent power relations between the social actors in a campaign:

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Michael: We need look at evidence for claims of Human Rights. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Michael: Do we monitor the state or activist groups? This is a choice. Legal monitors esp4 the state. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Michael: What do we do when monitors are perceived as activists? [#HRCCConference](#)



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Perhaps relevant to the UK academy, REF and how research can be bound by neoliberal imperatives:

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Michael: Impact does not equal activism. Impact dances to clientism, open to those who can pay for research. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Panel 2A - Using Activist-Scholarship in Education

Using the Cantos Cautivos Archive in School-Level Human Rights Education

Dr Katia Chornik, University of Manchester (UK)

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Dr Katia Chornik: Using music and song as a form of political activism. Song as a form of recollection and reflection [#HRCCConference](#)



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Katia: Captive Songs were written in captivity as testimonies of their torture in Chile [#HRCCConference](#)



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Katia: Using song deconstruct torture memories. Music in Action, UK based company that deliver these projects [#HRCCConference](#)



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A view of the *Cantos Cautivos Archive in School* website

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Another organisation which does similar things with music "Music and the Holocaust"

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Katia: The songs can be discussed by the classroom and can be remixed by the children to explore the themes. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Using captive songs archive in school level HR education. Dr Katia Chornik [#hrconference](#)



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Learning with Women in Prison to inform US Prostitution and Trafficking Policy

Dr Jill McCracken, University of South Florida, St Petersburg (US)



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Dr Jill McCracken. Learning with Women in Prison to inform US prostitution and trafficking policy. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Jill: How do we reconcile our preconceived positions with research? Our preconceptions need to be challenged [#HRCCConference](#)



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Jill: Challenging prostitution as exploitative. Eradicate prostitution. HRs assume exploitation but sex workers not consulted [#HRCCConference](#)



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Jill: Preconceptions around exploitation leads to criminalisation which means working with sex workers become difficult [#HRCCConference](#)



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Jill: Need to acknowledge and interrogate our biases as researchers under cover of objectivity. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Dr McCracken's methodology:



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Jill: Comm based participatory research to gain richer information. Collabor work2 address sex trafficking&female inmates [#HRCCConference](#)



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Dr McCracken is a co-founder of the non profit organisation, Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP):



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Jill: SWOP behind bars sex workers outreach project. Working with sex workers, health, education and support [#HRCCConference](#)



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SWOP also works with faith groups:



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On the use of technology and its potential to blur geographical distinctions and relations between provider and client:



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Jill: Technology can make it safer for sex workers but can create legal problems too. [#HRCCConference](#)



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Jill: We need to codesign all aspects of the research. We need rigour within the whole process [#HRCCConference](#)



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The Challenges of Delivering Legal Education to Prison Communities and of Transforming Prisoners and Prison Officers into Activists for Change in Kenya and Uganda

Professor Nick Johnson, University of Warwick (UK)



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Prof Nick Johnson. African Prison Project- delivering legal education [#HRCConference](#)



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Nick: Prison and inmates learners learn law together in Kenyan prison project. Transformative of relationship [#HRCConference](#)



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Nick: They use material from London University as a distance learning course. Me: No Kenyan universities? [#HRCConference](#)



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Here, I wanted to hear more about the work the project did to engage Kenyan and Ugandan universities in helping them to design, write and deliver their own law courses that were specific to their native (legal) environments. From a critical race studies perspective, there did appear to be a post colonial implication, especially from the standpoint of the Kenyan project that was described.



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Nick: "African" expectations see of being ripped off. Lack of a safe space. Me: I dont get the white saviour aspect of this [#HRCConference](#)



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Over coffee break, Professor Johnson told me that they had tried to engage with local universities without much success.

Closing panel addresses - New Protection Tactics for Human Rights Defenders and Activist Scholars

The Enabling Environment for Human Rights Defenders

James Savage, Fund for Global Human Rights (UK)

James gave a brilliant overview of the state of the global issues around activism at the various levels in the various settings:

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Final stretch closing panel. James Savage: Trends for human rights scholars, global crackdown on freedom of speech [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Activists can be under threat for their activities. This is affecting universities [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Crackdowns on university researching around the globe. St8s using law to restrict the space4 basic freedoms [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Smear campaigns and weaponising red tape to censor activists [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Laws restricting civil societies. Response? Lack of resources to combat this harassment [#HRCConference](#)



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James: The state requires them to fight on too many levels. So not able to resist effectively [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Divide and rule between HR and development applied by the state. Awards that benefit awards not communities [#HRCConference](#)



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James: Civil society given wrong tools that endanger their existence [#HRCCConference](#)



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This was an interesting echo from Panel 1b about the potential inappropriate applications of technology for activism and that a one size does not fit all.



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James: Civil society organised itself to work around funding issues, governance to resist punitive legislation [#HRCCConference](#)



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James: Civil society. Using more local finders and coordinating funding. Coalitions being set up, movement building [#HRCCConference](#)



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James: Civil society becoming more aware of legal implications of new laws. Bringing people together for a larger voice [#HRCCConference](#)



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In Search of Safe Haven: The Challenging Task of Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk

Dr Moataz El Fegier, International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (Frontline Defenders, le and Be)



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Dr Moataz El Fegier: Task of relocating of human rights defenders at risk [#HRCCConference](#)



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Moataz: Why do HR defenders need relocating? 2show resilience as an org, escape persec'. There are legal implications4this [#HRCCConference](#)



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Moataz: Only Sweden has full guidelines for relocation. Policy challenges? Humanitarian visa more an EU policy [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz: EU fickle in applying Humanitarian visa (asylum) Not reliable4HR defenders, they don't want this status or disruption [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz: Only Spain and Ireland operate this scheme properly but it isn't adequate for HR defenders [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz: EU scheme for relocation. 15m euros over 3 years. Too many requirements for hosting orgs for this to work effectively [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz; Relocation in the region. This isn't effective because authorities can still collaborate with other states [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz: HR defenders can get deported back to his country [#HRCConference](#)



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Moataz: We need a special HR defender solution not assylum but a flexible system that will allow them to return [#HRCConference](#)



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Human Rights Activist Scholars and Social Change in Hong Kong

Dr Karen Kong, The University of Hong Kong (China)



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Dr Karen Kong: Social change in Hong Kong. Umbrella.movement and activist scholars
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Karen: Occupy movement in Hong Kong. Civil disobedience to disrupt power relationships
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Karen: Umbrellas used to defend against police tear gas. Student protests. Hence umbrella movement [#HRCConference](#)



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Karen: The scholar activist- eg Benny Tai perceived as high status and a broad base public intellectual [#HRCConference](#)



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Karen: Benny Tai was able to recommend protest as a way of teaching about democracy, this leads other teachers doing the same [#HRCConference](#)



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The umbrella movement did inspire young people to form their own political parties but:



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Karen: Some students disillusioned about Umbrella movement but more have increased their political engagement [#HRCCConference](#)



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Karen: Academics and students are now more surveilled and put under pressure for being involved in activist activities [#HRCCConference](#)



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Dr Kong describes the some of the pressures that academics can be put under if they are perceived as activists (dissenters) by the state.

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Karen: Prof Tai is facing 7 years in prison under "public nuisance" laws [#HRCCConference](#)



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