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Struggles over Universal Human Rights

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Struggles Over Universal Human Rights

Brian Gran

Editor

“At that time, I often thought that if I had had to live in the trunk of a dead tree, with nothing to do but look up at the sky flowing overhead, little by little I would have gotten used to it.”

Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*

As *SWB* readers know well, human rights are considered to be universal. Yet among the most persistent, and often times violent, contentions are ones over the universal qualities of human rights. Why are these qualities of human rights a point of struggle?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights famously arose from the atrocities committed during World War II. Despite the momentum towards a Cold War, the East and West were able to put aside their differences long enough to adopt the Universal Declaration.

Article 2 of the UDHR states:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

It is this Article that clearly enunciates that the rights articulated in the Universal Declaration belong to everyone. Everyone. No matter where one lives or who they are or what their status is.

Over and over, people experience crises through which their human rights are denied and often violated. Over and over, political leaders, governments, and many citizens struggle *against* universal human rights. They work to prevent exercise of others' human rights. They fight to deny human rights.

In this special issue, Loretta Bass presents four articles that deal with questions surrounding why some people desire to exclude others from membership in their societies. This social exclusion entails denial of human rights. Why do these isolating behaviors and beliefs continue when they are in conflict with universal human rights? Why do some actors attempt to deny human rights of members of some social groups? How do they reconcile their actions with values of common good and inherent dignity of all people? Perhaps the answer is that they do not subscribe to a common good; maybe they do not believe all people possess humanity and dignity.

In addition to the articles Bass presents, this *SWB* issue presents articles authored by Joachim Savelsberg and Jennifer Cheek and Lindsey Peterson. Through his article, “Global Human Rights Organizations and National Patterns: Amnesty International’s Representations of Darfur,” Savelsberg demonstrates how a prominent and powerful INGO communicated ideas and scripts about the horrors of mass violence and how this organization’s efforts shaped understandings of justice. As they identify consequences of human trafficking, Cheek and Peterson also call for justice. Their article, “Sorting Out Concern: European Attitudes toward Human Trafficking,” encourages *SWB* readers to employ research to produce social policy and legal changes around human trafficking.

On behalf of *SWB*, I want to thank Professors Loretta Bass and contributors to her special issue, as well as Professors Joachim Savelsverg and Jennifer Cheek and Lindsey Peterson. This issue is the result of the hard work of Colette Ngana and Lacey Caporale, the journal's Managing Editors, and Lisa Peters, Reference and Scholarly Communications Librarian of the Case Western Law School. I am very grateful for their efforts. We welcome Clarence Caporale Secky to this world and hope to do better on his behalf.