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Introduction: Qualitative Methods in Human Rights Research

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Qualitative Methods in Human Rights Research

Lacey Caporale

Guest Editor

Studying human rights using qualitative methods provides a unique and valuable approach to understanding the realities of human rights violations and global injustice. The focus of this special issue is to allow for marginalized narratives to be heard and recognized by a global audience. Specifically, qualitative methods provide the opportunity for diverse voices to impact human rights literature, while at the same time providing human rights scholars the opportunity to learn directly from those experiencing injustice and marginalization. From this vantage point, we are able to refocus our gaze on the humans affected by human rights violations and illuminate an urgency in addressing global injustices.

Anne Scheer's ethnographic research in an inner-city Midwestern United States elementary school focuses on the international human rights law that calls for the safe and nurturing environments in which children should be educated. In this particular school system, zero-tolerance discipline fails to control behaviors of the students, and disruption and chaos are the norm. In contrast to Foucault's theory of discipline, which argues that discipline controls are used to produce useful bodies, Scheer's findings suggest that the discipline at School James fails to teach students. The school's approach to discipline ultimately views students as unworthy of inclusion within the educational community. Scheer argues that by doing so, the school's zero-tolerance discipline denies students the right to education.

In their participatory research, Ana Kralj and Tanja Rener's focus on the lives of inhabitants of Škofije, a small village on the border of Slovenia and Italy. Since World War II, this small village has been divided into two multi-ethnic states: Yugoslav and Slovenian. Using semi-structured exploratory interviews, followed by focus groups, Kralj and Rener show how three generations in this village navigate physical and perceived boundaries. Kralj and Rener's research concludes that boundary making is never natural, and that people's understanding of space can change over time, with or without physical political borders.

Shaneda Destine's article focuses on Black women and femme social movement actors within anti-racist political movements in the United States, generally affiliated with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). In the fight against state violence and the justice for Black lives in the United States, Black women and femmes encounter intra-movement conflicts, which Destine argues can benefit from a Transformational Healing Justice Model (THJM). THJM includes holistic care within social movement work, encouraging ways for movement members to process oppression and political consciousness. Using focus groups to reveal Black women and femme experiences, Destine argues the need for healing justice in local social movements, focused on the long-term struggle of state violence and justice for Black lives in the United States. Destine's research contributes to our understanding of human rights work on the ground level, with recommendations of how to sharpen these movements and their fight for human rights.

Similar to Destine's research on addressing intra-movement conflict within political movements, Susan Hagood Lee's article provides a historical analysis of San Francisco's passage and implementation of its own Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This international human rights treaty, which has never been ratified by the United States, was passed and implemented in San Francisco with the support and commitment of feminist institutions over a three-decades period. Hagood Lee

documents how this treaty was implemented at a local level, and this article serves as a useful reference for cities looking to implement similar human rights principles.

In addition to the qualitative articles highlighted in this issue, Matteo Tracchi's theoretical article focuses on a human-centered approach to education. Tracchi argues that in order to adapt education to our globalized world, human rights need to be at the core of educational practice. In his article, Tracchi suggests that value generalization in schools, focused on universal human rights, would produce educational systems which enhance principals that respect religious and cultural traditions and perspectives. Instead of ignoring social constructions, Tracchi argues that a morphogenetic approach to education will teach the differences between structure, culture and agency, encouraging students to generally value differences and acknowledge their role in societies, ultimately creating a more accepting global society.

In his article, Timothy M. Gill uses a comparative-historical focus to make sense of the Trump administration's foreign policy, in comparison to the Bush II and Obama administrations. Gill uses Michael Mann's IEMP model of power, focused on ideological, economic, military, and political power to examine Trump's foreign policy approach and to compare it to those of the Bush II and Obama administrations. Gill argues that Trump's ideological power of national sovereignty threatens its role as international lender, as China continues to provide foreign aid as an alternative to U.S. foreign aid. Importantly, Gill argues that global human rights are at risk, as Trump threatens peace and increases tensions between the U.S., North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela.

Finally, Christine A. Wernet's film review of *Salam Neighbor* highlights Syrian refugees' marginalized human rights. The documentary takes place in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, home to over 85,000 refugees. The film highlights the lives of several refugees, including Raouf, a 10-year-old, whose trauma has not allowed him to return to school. Wernet explains that by showing these lives, the film makers attempt to break distrust between Westerners and Muslims. Wernet argues that the film is of use to policy makers, students and ultimately every American, as it sheds light on the Syrian refugee crisis and the pervasive violations of human rights among this population.

In highlighting qualitative research in human rights, this special issue aims to reveal the multiple voices and lives behind human rights violations, social movement work, and human rights treaties. Qualitative research has the benefit of revealing the lives affected by human rights violations and policies, to academics, policy makers, and activists. The motivation for this special issue comes from my own research, focused on the lived experience of gentrification. Using ethnographic and life story methods, my dissertation research focuses on the process of gentrification and how those living in gentrified communities are affected by the changing demographics, changing business venues, changing neighborhood culture, and increases in cost of living. The human right to economic, social, and cultural wellbeing certainly apply to this type of research. My hope is that this special issue sheds light on the lives affected by human rights violations and policies, and that the articles that follow can be used in conjunction with quantitative human rights research, to influence human rights policies and better ensure human rights are upheld around the globe.