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Human Rights and the Media

Brian K. Gran

Editor

The theme of this issue of *Societies Without Borders (SWB)* is **the media**. The inspiration arises from questions and puzzles Dr. Margaret “Maggie” Waltz advanced as one of the journal’s Managing Editors.

With Bradley Powell, Maggie served as Managing Editor over a critical period for *SWB*. This period is when the journal transitioned from the previous editors, David Brunnsma, Mark Frezzo, and Keri Iyall Smith, to its present home.

Like many other situations, we expected the transition to go seamlessly and easily. It did not. Instead, Maggie, Bradley, and I spent countless hours identifying, experimenting with, and reviewing platforms that could host *SWB*. We met with librarians and other experts about various options. We studied other journals’ approaches. Fortunately, we discovered that the Law School of Case Western Reserve University was keen on hosting *SWB* through its relationship with the company, Bepress.

Maggie worked hard to learn the “ins” and “outs” of the new Bepress system. She ensured that *SWB* continued to review manuscripts in a timely fashion. At the same time, Maggie, Bradley, and I reached out to new readers and authors. Maggie strove to develop ideas for special issues of interest to social scientists who study human rights. With

Lacey Caporale, the new Managing Editor, Maggie conducted *SWB*'s first podcast with Rachel Dissell.

Last spring, Maggie accepted a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship with the Center for Genomics and Society of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We congratulate Maggie on this success as we express our gratitude for her hard work and contributions to *SWB*.

As the theme of this special issue is *the media*, we are pleased to publish four articles that offer insights into ways media shape human rights and how human rights influence media. Peterson, Radebe, and Mohanty demonstrate how South African university students employed Twitter to challenge political leaders and university administrators. Using the hashtag, #FeesMustFall, students across universities protested increasing university costs. When #FeesMustFall spread nationally, a court attempted to censor the use of this hashtag, which backfired, leading to international spread of this hashtag. While Peterson, Radebe, and Mohanty present an instance of social media spreading a protest against cuts to university education, Correa and Pearce demonstrate how residents of the Texas Rio Grande Valley use media to develop an alternate human rights framework. Correa and Pearce's study presents evidence of how these residents constructed a counter-narrative to the narrative of security of the Mexico-United States border. The experience of assembling the counter-narrative, according to Correa and Pearce, informs our understandings of human rights frameworks. Social movements continue to use media to promote human rights in the larger frames of cultural discourse.

As Kennedy and Sardi note, however, some movements may use media as means of misleading or overstating their claims, as well as defending themselves from criticism. Kennedy and Sardi argue that the anti-circumcision movement has used social media to gain supporters while subsequently alienating feminist supporters by misaligning gender equality. Vissing, Burris, and Moore-Vissing examine Google and other search engines to determine how they influence what information we may uncover when trying to find and study information about child rights. A worrisome finding is that our Internet search history shapes what information we may find. In other words, rather than finding all sorts of information, our search histories may limit us to finding information that fits what we want to know. Can and will the Internet be used to constrain human rights?

Wernet reviews the film, *A Walk to Beautiful*. This film highlights the devastating effects of birth injuries for some women living in Ethiopia. While preventable and curable, Ethiopian women who experience birth injuries such as fistulas suffer profoundly from a lack of access to health care. Furthermore, these women are often cast aside by their families and suffer psychologically and socially because of their physical injuries. Wernet argues the film can be used in a variety of sociology classes and provides a clear depiction of human rights violations that affect millions of women around the world.