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A Difficult Time

Brian Gran PhD

Department of Sociology, Case Western Reserve University, brian.gran@case.edu

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A Difficult Time
Brian Gran

This issue of *Societies Without Borders* is published at a difficult time.

This journal and our community mourn the loss of Mark Frezzo. Mark was a sociologist of human rights. A former editor of this journal, Mark not only was committed to scholarship of human rights, but human rights in practice and their potential to improve how we live together. Mark made groundbreaking contributions to scholarship of the Global South, Cosmopolitanism, and Human Rights. Mark was President of the Thematic Group on Global Justice and Human Rights of the International Sociological Association. He was a major contributor to and leader of the Human Rights Section of the American Sociological Association. Mark's scholarship was highly regarded. With Polity, he published *The Sociology of Human Rights* in 2015. Mark worked with Anthem Press to establish a new series of books at the intersection of sociology and human rights. A member of the University of Mississippi faculty, Mark was a beloved teacher of students across decades and institutions. No doubt, his pedagogical success was due to his brilliance, kindness and generosity, and his fantastic sense of humor. Mark possessed a terrific sense of humor. Routinely, after a long, tedious meeting, he would sum up our accomplishments in a single, hilarious sentence. As a member and leader of the Science and Human Rights Coalition of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Mark was committed to the potential, meanings, and consequences of the human right to science. Indeed, this spring, Mark and I contributed a comment to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on its draft General Comment on this right. In April, the UN Committee adopted the General Comment. Mark's loss is especially felt given significant changes going on across the world, problems for which Mark's keen sense and powerful voice of justice are sorely needed. Mark communicated *justice* not only through his scholarship, but in his daily life.

Across the world, individuals and families are experiencing a COVID-19 pandemic that is constraining how we live together. Many government leaders have failed to act, despite advice of experts and experience with other viruses. Globally, we have experienced huge losses of life and terrible compromises in our health. Governments have expended significant resources as well as derogated our human rights, often failing to use these resources and derogated rights to save lives. As governments and businesses race to develop a vaccine, we ask whether this vaccine will be universally available, or driven by the market. We have experienced many awful consequences, from deaths and injuries to unemployment to closings of businesses and schools, but these consequences have unequally fallen on individuals and families who already face social, economic, psychological, and political vulnerabilities. We can do better.

In the midst of this pandemic, loss of life has occurred in many societies, notably the United States. On May 25, 2020, a police officer, Derek Chauvin, who is white, murdered George Floyd, who is African American, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mr. Floyd was arrested for trying to make a purchase using what was thought to be a counterfeit \$20 bill. Officer Chauvin is accused of killing Mr. Floyd by pressing his knee into Mr. Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes. Officer Chauvin's colleagues, Officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao, are charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. News sources report that Officer Lane and Officer Kueng restrained Floyd, while

Officer Thao observed the gross violence. During the nine minutes, civilians called on the officers to stop, warning the officers that Mr. Floyd could not breathe. The officers did not relent, and they killed Mr. Floyd. Strong responses were swift and vocal. Powerful protests took place not only across the United States, but across the world. Systemic racism is to blame for what happened to Mr. Floyd. Systemic racism is found in many societies. In the United States, systematic racism is found in major societal institutions, including those institutions charged with advancing justice, such as our legal and criminal justice systems, and our schools and universities. In the city where this journal is published, Cleveland, a police officer shot and killed a twelve-year-old boy, Tamir Rice, while another officer did not intervene, on November 22, 2014. Elsewhere in the United States, police officers have killed young people, and often these officers have not faced significant consequences. These outrageous murders occurred in a country where systemic racism continues to infiltrate many institutions, despite on-going efforts of community leaders. We must do better.

This issue of our journal is significant because it presents a crucial opportunity to learn about a key, perhaps essential, organization that can advance human rights of children. Dr. Agnes Lux is the guest editor of this special issue on independent children's rights institutions (ICRIs). Before pursuing her PhD in Political Science from Eötvös University, Dr. Lux worked for Hungary's Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, its Ombudsman, including leading the Ombudsman's children's rights project. Her experiences and scholarship are clearly brought to bear on this special issue on ICRIs. Often called children's ombudspersons and children's commissioners, we know little about ICRIs, how they work, what powers they possess, and their successes. Dr. Lux's special issue brings together articles from former children's ombudspersons of Greece, George Moschos, Iceland, Margrét María Sigurðardóttir, and Norway, Reidar Hjermann. These children's ombudspersons not only advanced children's rights and well-being in their respective countries, they were leaders on the international stage. Their work continues to serve as exemplars when it comes to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accompanying their work are four articles that take more academic approaches to studying ICRIs. These four articles seek to understand the workings and potential impacts of children's ombudspersons and children's commissioners.

This issue of *Societies Without Borders* is pleased to publish important articles by three scholars. The first article is by Dr. Suparna Soni, a Political Scientist. Dr. Soni's powerful work, "Dowry and Women's Rights in India," indicates that despite socio-cultural changes, India's dowry system persists and undermines women's rights. Dr. Matt Bakker, a Sociologist, places his study in the historical context of record-breaking levels of deportation in the United States in the last ten years that has incorporated state and local law enforcement into federal efforts. In his study, "The Detention-to-Deportation Pipeline and Local Politics of Resistance: A Case Study of Santa Clara County, California," Bakker explains why Santa Clara County established and employed its Civil Detainer Policy to resist participation into the federal government's detention-to-deportation pipeline. The third article is by Boadi Agyekum and is entitled, "A Logistic Regression Analysis of Life Satisfaction amongst African Immigrants in Hamilton, Canada." Dr. Agyekum's study confronts how discrimination and racism affect everyday lives of minority immigrants. His study reminds us that many people routinely deal with human rights violations that undermine satisfaction with their lives. We are grateful for their contributions.

In closing, I thank the Law School of Case Western Reserve University and her Deans, Jessica Berg and Michael Scharf. Deans Berg and Scharf have been long-term supporters of this journal, for which we are grateful. In addition, we thank again Lisa Peters. Ms. Peters is the Law School's Reference and Scholarly Communications Librarian, as well as the journal's go-to person for publishing the journal and working with its website.

I also want to thank Colette Ngana and Polina Ermoshkina. Ms. Ngana is the journal's Managing Editor. In this role, Ms. Ngana has managed all aspects of the journal and helped move the journal forward. While new to the role of Associate Managing Editor, Ms. Ermoshkina has quickly taken on significant responsibilities involving the journal. Without a doubt, this issue would not be published without the contributions of Ms. Ngana and Ms. Ermoshkina. Thank you for your hard work.