

EDITORIAL

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This special issue presenting psychological research on human rights, guest edited by Gabriel Twose and Christopher Cohrs, is truly groundbreaking. As Twose and Cohrs make clear in their introduction, despite the central importance of human rights in our lives, research psychologists have scarcely given this topic any attention. One reason for this is that violations of human rights take place mostly in non-Western societies, particularly in dictatorships, whereas research psychologists who have the luxury to study politically sensitive topics live in Western societies where rule of law and human rights are more normative.

The crucial importance of psychological research on human rights became most apparent to me when I returned from my studies in England to work in postrevolution Iran in 1979 and experienced the tragic transition from dictatorship under the Shah to dictatorship under the mullahs. This experience of living in a repressive regime meant that when I left Iran to work at McGill University in Canada in the late 1980s, one of the first topics I was interested to research was human rights (Moghaddam & Vuksanovic, 1990). In the decades that followed, Willem Doise and his colleagues examined social representations and human rights (Doise, 2002), and I collaborated with Norman Finkel to edit a volume on human rights and duties (Finkel & Moghaddam, 2005). This was just about the sum of psychological research on human rights until that time (Twose and Cohrs, 2015). When in 2013 I became the editor-elect for this journal and Susan Opatow, editor at the time, suggested that I work with Twose and Cohrs to develop their special issue on the psychology of human rights, I enthusiastically jumped at the opportunity. Twose and Cohrs (2015) have very ably introduced the papers in this special issue, so I am relieved of that responsibility, but I want to make two points to illuminate the larger context for this special issue.

A first point is that of course human rights violations also take place in the United States and other Western societies, but there is a very important difference: we can publicly criticize and take officials to task in the United States and other Western societies, whereas in China, Russia, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other dictatorships, it is far more difficult to voice dissent. Almost all of the scant research on human rights continues to be conducted by researchers in Western societies, who have the luxury of conducting research on this and other politically sensitive topics. Psychologists in dictatorships often face serious obstacles, including the possibility of jail and even death for themselves and their families, when they attempt to research human rights. Thus, those of us who have the freedom to research human rights and other such politically sensitive topics must take this duty seriously.

Second, research on individual rights needs to be complemented by research on duties and also on *collective* rights. The priority given to individual rights

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reflects the biases of Western societies, where individualism and rights prevail. This is reflected in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*, which was developed after World War II mainly through the influence of the United States and other Western powers. This declaration scarcely acknowledges duties or the rights of collectives. In particular, more importance must be given to the duties of authorities and elites to the economically poor, as well as to the collective rights of minorities and underprivileged groups with less power and influence. In order to make progress toward full democracy, the economically poor must be given real opportunities and political voice. This is essential for the long-term struggle against cultural and structural violence.

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