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Questioning Human Rights, the Media and Power

Over the last sixty years, there has been much global interest in human rights. New forms of state and non-state violence, as well changing modes of civil society organizing, have been occurring to an unprecedented extent and in unpredictable ways. Researchers in a variety of disciplines have focused on the diversification and pluralization of the meaning and experience of rights in complex sociocultural and political contexts. We do not seek to overturn this framework. But through this session, we would like to focus on a number of problems and issues:

Media. Mediation has been crucial to the global expression of rights, from judicial texts, documentary films, literature, to the internet. What, then, is the impact of mediation on the practice of rights, and are victims mere recipients, or rather active shapers of their rights?

Culture. ‘Rights’ is never used in verb form. But the processes in which justice is struggled for and achieved by individuals and collectivities are very much about action – making change across time, affect, collective memories, and micro-struggles in real situations. What are these dynamic cultural processes? Do they always depend on laws and judicial institutions, or can new practices of rights emerge from the spaces of everyday life? What are cultural rights?

Power. Common discourse assumes that human rights are predominantly a Good Thing. But what happens when a belligerent government exercises violence *in the name of* protecting human rights? Does a focus on rights sometimes obscure larger relations of economic, military, and even cultural domination?

This proposed session aims at addressing these and related questions from the perspective of cultural and media studies.