

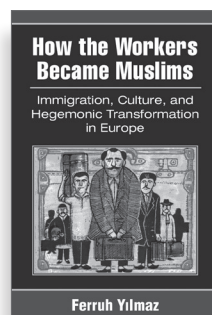
Book Reviews

Editor: Maarit Jaakkola

Ferruh Yilmaz

How the Workers Became Muslims: Immigration, Culture, and Hegemonic Transformation in Europe

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016, 238 p.



In his book *How the Workers Became Muslims: Immigration, Culture, and Hegemonic Transformation in Europe*, Ferruh Yilmaz offers a comprehensive study of the Danish media debate on immigration and immigrants from the mid 1980s to 2015. His analyses are made within a theoretical framework that takes its outset in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) ideas of evoking socialist, hegemonic strategies in order to intervene in and reconfigure "the ontology of the social". However, through his detailed empirical analyses, Yilmaz convincingly shows that the populist extreme right has succeeded in the effort of reconfiguration, and not the socialist left (pp. 5–6). He reaches this conclusion through innovative analyses of media-driven moral panics around immigration. By this he shows how actors from the far right have been able to use the climate of crisis to intervene and push through their agenda.

Yilmaz's main concern is social change (p. 28). His central analytical result is that the political discourse on immigrants has undergone a change, from immigrants being predominantly understood, in terms of economy and class, as 'guest workers', to being classified by cultural attributes as Muslims. He denotes this process a culturalization of discourse, and argues that it is to be understood as a change

in the ontological structure of society, which he conceives as being shaped by the discursive categories through which we perceive the social. Thus, those categories that obtain a hegemonic position in structuring society, he terms ontological categories (pp. 12–18). In order to empirically identify the ontological categories, he uses the concept 'empty signifier', central to discourse theory, in an innovative manner. He argues that it is the emptiness of terms that enables them to be used as if referring to stable entities shaping the world, due to their commonsensical character. As soon as the content is debated a category becomes contestable (pp. 32–34).

By analyses of a great archive of empirical media material, he convincingly shows how the discourse on immigrants has undergone a change of culturalization, and he locates the turn to having found place between 1984 and 1887 (Chapters 2 and 3). He writes:

By the late 1987, culture had taken a central role in explaining any phenomena in relation to immigrants, who were slowly being recast from being immigrant *workers* to *Muslim* immigrants, collapsing the ethnonational categories that had so far designated the immigrant groups under a single ontological category: Muslims. (p. 136)

Furthermore, Yılmaz highlights the year 2001 as marking a turning point. By the 2001 elections for Parliament, the culturalized hegemony of the social was consolidated to the degree where it became institutionalized in the governmental political system. The election of a right-wing government and parliament majority, as well as the Danish People's Party becoming the third largest party, was celebrated by right-wing politicians as a 'system change' (p. 162), and Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen articulated the elections as a break with the traditional left/right division and class struggle (p. 163).

Ambitiously, Yılmaz also traces the causes of these social changes, and I find this part of his analyses particularly innovative and original. Here, he adds to the poststructuralist discourse theory, which is often criticized for paying too little attention to the significance of actors, with theories of moral panics, and their occupation with the transformative effects of the practice of individuals/groups, and empirical events. Through careful and detailed analyses (Chapter 2, pp. 59-100) he shows how different, yet specific actors, such as the police, the justice minister Erik Ninn-Hansen, Red Cross spokespersons, and news media during the 1980s created an environment of crisis and panic around the number of immigrants coming to Denmark. As a result, the idea that the arrival – or “influx” as it was often termed in the debate – of immigrants should be reduced or stopped took on a common sense character. With the feeling of panic capturing the Danish debate, it created anxiety and uncertainty with regard to, among others, the future of the welfare state, which was increasingly represented as threatened by immigration. Simultaneously, the neoliberal challenges of welfare state politics weakened the Social Democrats, who failed in their traditional role of representing the working class, and instead adapted to the neoliberal logic. Thus, all in all, the media-driven moral panics paved the way for a destabilization of the ontological structure of society in terms of economic classes, and a societal void was created open for political intervention and reconfiguration.

As the last part of Chapter 2 (pp. 96-100) and Chapter 3 reveals, this opportunity was seized by actors from the extreme right, most notably the priest, and later MP for the Danish People's Party, Søren Krarup. The extreme right's populist intervention succeeded in shaping society as being structured by the ontological, and antagonistic, categories of 'Danes' and 'Muslims', e.g. through the articulation of immigration as the main threat to the nation. Interestingly, Yılmaz shows that a few very specific interventions from Krarup had a great establishing influence on the reconfiguration of society on cultural categories. He identifies two advertisements from Krarup placed in the right-wing newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 1986, both calling upon a boycott of a donation campaign organized by the Danish Refugee Council, and instead turning it into a referendum on Denmark's immigration policy, enabling 'the people' to be heard (p. 103). The ads turned out to succeed to the degree that Krarup hereafter became one of the most prominent participants in the public debate about immigration. Although his call for boycott did not succeed, he managed to both mobilize other extreme-right organizations (p. 118), and not least to turn the moral panic around refugees into a hegemonic crisis (p. 119). He fostered the idea, that 'the silent majority', as representing the popular will of the Danish people, did not have their concerns taken seriously by the political and cultural elites. Consequently, Krarup, and later the populist far right as such, positioned themselves as the true representatives of the people against the elites. Yılmaz also locates the idea of the social cohesion of Danish society as being dependent on cultural homogeneity, and thus threatened by immigration, to the 1986 ads. This idea has since shaped many debates and controversies around immigration (p. 170).

The success of the populist far right becomes evident in Yılmaz's discussion of his findings in relation to newer events and debates with relation to immigration in Denmark and other European countries (Chapter 4 and Conclusion). He shows that the culturalization of the dis-

course has been consolidated throughout Europe, to the extent that politicians from all over the political spectre are pushed to unite around “shared cultural values” against the perceived threat from Islam and Muslim immigrants (p. 184, 190f). This involves a whole range of issues being woven into the culturalized debate, with for example, equality of genders and sexualities, democracy, and freedom of speech being articulated as issues of controversy between the national culture and Muslim culture. He argues that the success of the hegemonic intervention from the far right has caused a move to the right for all mainstream political parties, which has been facilitated by chains of moral panics and controversies around Islam and Muslim culture (p. 184).

The book is a timely and welcome contribution to the research field of media and migration. Its scholarly contribution lies both in its empirical work, and its development of theory. Empirically, it offers a great overview of the Danish debate on immigration, and it traces central actors in the culturalization process. Although the book represents a Danish case study it will be of great relevance for scholars of media and migration studies in the other Nordic countries. As Yilmaz shows, the social change of culturalization must be thought of as a pan-European phenomenon, and the book is as such of great relevance for all researchers of European issues of immigration. In the Nordic countries the welfare state and its relation to the Social Democratic Parties has a strong history. It would be interesting to study whether the role of the Social Democrats in the right-wing turn of mainstream politics, and/or the idea of the threat against the welfare state from immigration, can be recognized across the Nordic countries. Furthermore, Yilmaz’s theoretical–analytical framework could beneficially be applied to cases of other national contexts. Though, evidently, it would demand specific local analyses to follow the method of Yilmaz and identify those actors and events that have facilitated more local changes. Theoretically, the book offers a great contribution to the field of discourse theory and analysis. By combining it with theories of moral panics, it addresses

the challenges to discourse theory for often being too structuralist, and its difficulties in capturing the practice of actors. Yilmaz convincingly demonstrates the ability to do this, without losing the solid theoretical framework offered by discourse theory. Nevertheless, it is a shame that he deliberately renounces the importance of materiality and race (p. 18, 20–21). An analytical sensitivity to these aspects might have given interesting insights into the embodiments of the culturalization, and their influence on the shaping of ontological categories. This could even, to a greater extent, have developed the field of discourse theory, which is often criticized for paying too little attention to materiality.

Apart from the scholarly contribution, the book must also be welcomed as an important societal contribution to countering the culturalization of the immigrant debate, and its stigmatizing effect on Muslim citizens. Although the study is rather pessimistic with regard to the scope of the success of the extreme right to turn the entire political spectrum and the debate climate in their favour, Yilmaz also ends with a more optimistic conclusion. He argues that when the new hegemonic order is the result of political intervention by far-right populist forces, and not the necessary result of structural development, then it must also be possible to intervene politically in other, new ways, that would not have to blame the weakest for all problems, and that would allow for diversity and plurality within popular identity (p. 196).

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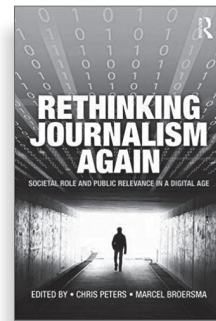
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Chris Peters & Marcel Broersma

Rethinking Journalism Again: Societal Role and Public Relevance in a Digital Age

London and New York: Routledge, 2017, 234 p.



In their introductory chapter of *Rethinking Journalism Again*, the editors Marcel Broersma and Chris Peters set out the aim of this edited volume as giving inspiration and new directions to reflections on the societal role and public relevance ‘of what we have come to call journalism’. Their guiding question is that if journalism is no longer the primary sense-making practice, what is it still good for? The forceful argument Broersma and Peters make is that journalism is neither primarily for journalists nor to serve the interest of media corporations. Rather, we journalism scholars should ask how journalism relates to the needs of people, what journalism does *for* people (original italics).

While the introduction to the book insinuates that the societal significance of journalism is seriously in question and that journalism is being pushed to the periphery of what Broersma and Peters call the informational ecology, in the afterword Silvio Waisbord soberly suggests that using the word ‘crisis’ to describe the current state of journalism may not be fully justified after all. He suggests that changes have been and are uneven, and that talk of a ‘crisis’ overlooks the nuances that capture the whole picture. The news business is in crisis, yes, but according to Waisbord it is justifiable to question whether journalism’s social standing is also in crisis.

Between these two chapters, the book offers intriguing insights into the topic from a great diversity of perspectives. Over 12 chapters some 20 eminent scholars present their musings on journalism and its societal role (the first section of the book), and on journalism and its public relevance (the latter

section). The texts originate from an expert workshop held at the University of Groningen in 2014. The workshop as well as the book are continuations of similar activities called, naturally, Rethinking journalism (the conference in 2009 and the book in 2012).

In the first section of the book, Nick Coul-dry attempts to re-construct the public rationale for journalism by suggesting that in order not to leave society without the vital exchange of ideas, a wider range of institutions in society should subsidise journalism, and media institutions (corporations) should refrain from taking subsidies from advertising if that happens at the cost of journalism’s role as a source of common reference points in society. John Steel suggests that journalism’s failure to deliver ‘deliberative democratic nirvana’ should be admitted, and that we need a new concept of democracy for the starting point of journalism. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen argues that in spite of the new online gatekeepers, such as search engines, the gatekeeping function of news media is *also* still there. The news media are definitely not alone any more, but are facing a combination of evolving old and new forms of online gatekeeping.

In the other chapters in this section, the question of how journalism scholars’ institutional position affects how they speak about journalism is posed (Matt Carlson), the changing expertise of the journalistic profession is discussed (Zvi Reich and Yigal Godler) and the helpfulness of conceptual tools of post-modernism to understand changes in journalism is proposed (Karin Wahl-Jorgensen).

In the opening chapter of the section discussing journalism and its public relevance,

Mark Deuze and Tamara Witschge argue that journalism should be treated as a moving object, something that *becomes* rather than *is* (original italics). Instead of seeing journalism as a stable research topic, we should show the process by which it is constituted within its social context—the impossibility of painting a single picture of journalism should be admitted. Seth Lewis, Avery Holton and Mark Coddington turn their attention to the relationship between journalists and audiences, observing—as several authors in the book do—that it appears to be fractured. They propose the concept of reciprocity (rather than participation) for re-building these ties, because it repositions journalists as network-based actors in society. In the final chapter of the section, Chris Peters and Marcel Broersma urge us to abandon ‘grand normative theories’ of journalism’s societal role and adopt ‘a bottom-up’ approach; that is, to study the actual informational habits of news consumers. In their view, this perspective enables scholars to move beyond prevailing claims about journalism (which they call naïve), and provide the foundation for a civically engaged populace.

Other insights in this section focus on entrepreneurial journalism (Jane Singer), the journalism of care as an alternative to conventional journalistic ethics (Kaori Hayashi) and the prevailing ‘news gap’ between the media and public (Pablo Boczkowski and Eugenia Mitchelstein). The very final word,

after Waisbord’s afterword, is given to Stuart Allan, who “re-visions” journalism by looking into stereotypes in journalism.

Rethinking Journalism Again offers a rich variety of inspiring thoughts. Although one may not be able to trace a strong common thread from amongst the variety of articles, this does not diminish the overall impact. The tone of the texts is commendably reflective, and the authors tend more to raise issues or arguments than impose complete solutions. As a collection of scholarly essays, *Rethinking Journalism Again* serves the research community well.

As an afterthought, one might briefly lament that in this age of interactive digital communication the printed book format appears somehow limited. The thoughts presented in this book (used here as an example only), were surely debated in the workshop that gave birth to it. Those comments are missing from the printed version, even though they would undoubtedly add value to further discussion on the topic. Perhaps at some point we shall see scholarly books with discussion forums, in which the authors engage in elaborations with their audience, attached.

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Niels Brügger & Ralph Schroeder (eds.)

The Web as History

London: UCL Press, 2017, 278 p.



Students entering universities today have never known a world without the Internet, or the Web, and for the better part of their lives smartphones were around and with them in-

stantaneous and ubiquitous access to information and communication. The Web is central to all parts of contemporary life and has been so for a long time. This is of course stating

the obvious and doing so easily comes across as a cliché.

Yet it is a worthwhile reminder to have in the back of one's mind when embarking on reading this edited volume on *The Web as History*. For two reasons; firstly, the archived Web is – potentially at least – an enormously rich resource for understanding the recent past and for elucidating amongst other things its informational dynamics, and this period is already decades long. Secondly, however, the archived Web is a very fragmented resource and large parts of it – especially of the early days – are actually lost and will remain so. That is, the ideas that “everything can be googled later” or that “the Internet never forgets” – a popular meme – which symbolize fundamental undercurrents of many of today's everyday life information practices and our collective understanding of the Internet as our external memory, are at best problematic. Clearly, the building of a meaningful, usable and public archive of the Web should be a given – the focus is on meaningful and usable, both simple enough demands, but as this book shows not at all easy to achieve.

However, as the book also shows, attempts are picking up and creative solutions have emerged and, importantly, solutions have also matured. The largest and most prominent such attempt is the US-based on-profit organization Internet Archive, whose collection of 279 billion web pages (August 2017) going back to 1996 is accessible with its search interface Wayback Machine. It is an enormous and extremely rich resource, yet despite this it also shows, and is very open about the fact that, not least in the design of its interface, its collection is nowhere near complete and really it is a collection of snippets and snapshots. The Internet Archive is also part of most chapters in the book, although not solely, and often in combination with other, typically national archives or even the live Web. What further becomes obvious in the contributions to this volume is exactly how important researchers' practices are. That is to say, how central are a reflective awareness of the researcher's own practices and her assumptions about how the Internet works and of how it is archived.

This book, edited by Niels Brügger and Ralph Schroeder, offers a selection of approaches to dealing with the fragmented disorderliness of the archived Web and approaches to understanding it, but most importantly to understanding through it. This is done – in the individual contributions – by relating relevant fragments of the archived Web to different contexts and to engaging with the prerequisites for their existence. Doing so is also part of a meta-reflection in that it contributes to elucidating how past events cannot just be accessed or reconstructed by studying them through the archived Web, but how they were also shaped by and through the architecture and social meaning of the Web and the various ways of engagement it affords and has afforded throughout its emergence and development. As Niels Brügger had already emphasized over a decade ago:

[U]nlike other well-known media, the Internet does not simply exist in a form suited to being archived, but rather is first formed as an object of study in the archiving, and it is formed differently depending on who does the archiving, when, and for what purpose (Brügger 2005).

Users of the archived Web will never or at least hardly ever see what the original users of the past live Web experienced. Most websites are dynamic assemblages drawn together at the moment a query is executed and presented to the user with (increasingly personalized) adverts, instructions for the formatting and design, links, texts, films or images all coming from different databases and leading further to new, yet to be assembled, sites. The archived Web, however, presents more or less static pages with dead links, lost style sheets, or error 404 place holders staring at us like boarded-up windows in a deserted house, non-functioning navigational menus and so on. This leaves aside considerations such as how a site was used, on which device or in which browser it most often appeared, when it was most active, which user group it was addressing, whether it was ridiculed or hyped and passed on to others, how it was searched

for and so on. Consequently, and importantly, the need to better understand information seeking and the role of online information in everyday life in order to make sense of the material in the archives is also highlighted in an understandably brief, but very insightful way in the introduction chapter. This chapter, written by the editors Niels Brügger and Ralph Schroeder, is a very useful overview. It works as a concise introduction to the field, including to the different levels on which challenges exist and where the strengths of online archives for research lie. The authors do not shy away from showing the complexities involved. It is also an excellent pointer to relevant reading in and around the area for those interested in the conceptual discussions framing the various aspects.

The Web as History takes on the task of showcasing empirical studies that “use the web to understand the past” (p.2), or more precisely in the editors’ words it focuses “on how the archived web can be used as an entry point to analysing societal developments at large” (p.13). The focus is on examples of how this can be done in practice, rather than on methodological discussions or theoretical reflections in their own right. This is no minor task, and as it becomes clear throughout the volume, there is no one solution or best way of going about this. The live Web is messy as we are all aware of and the archived web is no less messy and certainly more fragmented. The book, however, is not messy, but neatly organized in three parts, two containing three and one comprising six chapters.

Part one is entitled “The Size and Shape of Web Domains” and it is dedicated to understanding national web domains and collection biases of the Internet Archive. The chapters in this section employ quantitative methods and include work on two national web domains, namely the United Kingdom’s (chapter 1 by Eric T. Meyer, Taha Yasseri, Scott A. Hale, Josh Cows, Ralph Schroeder and Helen Margetts) and the Danish (chapter 3 by Niels Brügger, Ditte Laursen and Janne Nielsen), and a chapter attempting to gauge the selection biases of the Internet Archive by Scott A. Hale, Grant Blank and Victoria

D. Alexander. We know, of course, that web archives, as with all archives, are incomplete and it is certainly relevant to have an understanding of how incomplete they are. This is also addressed here. The really interesting question, though, is in which ways they are incomplete and this what Hale, Blank and Alexander’s chapter addresses by building a case study around the travel site TripAdvisor and its capture in the Internet Archive. Meyer and colleagues use web archive data, originally from the Internet Archive, to study the development of the ac.uk, the academic Web in the .uk domain over roughly 15 years (1996-2010). Their focus is on computational methods and links between pages and sites in order to establish networks. This is not an easy task with the archive data and it is interesting to follow the various workarounds this study develops. Niels Brügger, Ditte Laursen and Janne Nielsen’s chapter on the Danish Web combine data from the Internet Archive with material from the Danish national web archive and the domain name registry for the .dk domain. It is as they describe part of a larger venture to understand what a national web domain looks like and how its development over time could be understood. In addition, here the way in which different data sources are brought together is what makes the study interesting and relevant to learn from.

Part two is called “Media and Government”, a title that is somewhat misleading in that it suggests studies of the relationship between media and government. However, the two are rather put next to each other, as two of the chapters study media and one is concerned with government. Nevertheless, they are interesting examples of how web archives can feature in historical studies of these areas. “The tumultuous history of news on the web” by Matthew S. Weber, attempts to trace “the history of newspapers in the USA as they have grappled with adapting to new digital technology by tracing their development through their websites.” (p.84) This is followed by a chapter on “International hyperlinks in online news media” by Josh Cowl and Jonathan Bright, which focuses on the case

of the BBC News Online. In the light of recent developments and the targeting of major newspapers and other media outlets as ‘fake media’ by politicians and various often right-wing online communities alike, both chapters provide highly interesting reading, broadening the context for understanding contemporary developments. Part two concludes with a chapter on the “relationship between the French state and the Web in the second half of the 1990s” (p.118). In it, Valérie Schafer draws together an enormously rich material from the Internet Archive, newsgroups, interviews, audiovisual archives, official reports and so on to sketch out this intriguing history. Not least, the role of the famous French MiniTel is fascinating in this story and should interest many.

The book's final part is also its longest. Under the title “Cultural and Political Histories” a series of studies using mostly qualitative or mixed methods and a very readable coda by Jane Winters are united. Two of the chapters study controversial issues as they played out online in the last decade. Chapter 8 by Robert Ackland and Ann Evan elucidates the abortion debate in Australia 2005 to 2015, while chapter 9 by Peter Webster examines the so-called Sharia law controversy that engulfed the Church of England in 2008. Both are illuminating and offer interesting ways of using the Web to study the recent past. Ackland and Evans make use of their own live searches (on Google) from 2005, which they archived, and compare them to searches from 2015. As they highlight “historical hyperlink network analysis typically requires researchers to collect snapshots from the live Web over time” (p.189). Relying on retrospective searches in web archives is not going to provide the same opportunities as having built a robust collection when the event actually occurred. The question that this leads to, I think, is how should we think of such researcher-initiated just-in-case (probably) collections in terms of the new open access to research data policies that are emerging? Would these be good candidates to end up in such data repositories? The authors point to a further problem that I

think needs to be talked about more in regard to studies such as the ones in this volume, namely the role of Internet algorithms in organizing the information presented to users. We know very little about them, as they are owned by commercial actors, yet it could be changes in algorithms, subtle modifications or major ones, that change what an issue looks like on the Web. How can (the effects of) algorithms be part of the archive?

Two of the chapters in part three are dedicated to spaces and communities that no longer exist. The very influential early online community GeoCities is studied by Ian Milligan, and I am certain that I am not the only one getting very nostalgic when reading this fascinating piece telling the story of the digital ruins of this once great place. It would certainly make worthy obligatory reading for today's students in new media, information studies, digital cultures or similar university educations. Meghan Doherty studies the online evolution of the Islamic punk scene, subculture phenomenon that briefly blossomed online in the first decade of the 2000s. This was a fringe phenomenon and here the bias established in chapter two becomes obvious once again since almost nothing was captured in the public archives. Thus, for the study the live Web was used as archive, mainly relying on basic search engine searches. Readers will find some interesting conceptual and methodological reflections on the Web as its own archive in this chapter. The next chapter is an odd one since its main purpose is to showcase ten studies using a specific web archive compiled by the Internet Archive and acquired by the JISC Digitisation Programme in the UK. They are the results of a project by the British Library, the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London and the Oxford Internet Institute. Under the title “Cultures of the Web”, Josh Cowls presents short summaries of what could easily make up another anthology not unlike the one it is a part of. Most of it is certainly very relevant, but it is beyond the scope of this review to go into further detail. For readers looking for more in the style of the already presented work, this chapter certainly provides some useful pointers.

In the book's final chapter "Coda: Web Archives for Humanities Research – Some Reflections", Jane Winters provides a skillful summary and puts the finger – once again – on some of the core issues digital archives have to deal with, but which are not actually unique to them. She relates the challenges of doing research in today's web archives to archival research in general, where also chance and fleetingness have always had important roles to play. Can everything be archived? Could it ever? And should it be? She particularly highlights, and I agree, that in the past, most research has focused on the shortcomings that plague web archives and the difficulties encountered when doing research with them. This volume showcases many studies that actually successfully and reflectively do research in, with and on web archives. It does this by striking the right balance between a focus on tools and an interest in how digital history or the history of the digital is made and between traditional and novel skills and methods. As one of the contributing authors, Paul Webster reminds us (p. 203):

As with all other born-digital sources there is work to be done among historians in understanding these issues of method, and in acquiring the skills needed to handle data at scale. At the same time, it is part of the historian's stock-in-trade to assess the provenance of a body of sources, its completeness and the contexts in which those sources were transmitted and received. The task at hand is in fact the application of older critical methods to a new kind of source; a challenge which historians have confronted and overcome before.

With this in mind it is interesting to see that amongst the contributing authors, historians are clearly a minority, at least judging by the short bio sketches prefacing the chapters.

As someone who has researched mostly the live Web, also as its own archive, and information practices related to it, what strikes me as intriguing in this collection is how clear it becomes that if one of the (many) methodological challenges of studying today's digital cultures as they happen out on the Web and in social media is to account for their constant flux, then one of the (equally numerous) methodological challenges for studying in the archived Web is to account for the very lack of this constant flux.

In an ideal world I would have wished for more geographic variation. Yet having said this, *The Web as History* is a timely and topical collection jam-packed with interesting research and creative methodological discussions. I am convinced many humanities and social sciences researchers working in similar areas and historians venturing into this field, but also students on different levels – interested in the history of the Web or issues of method – will greatly benefit from reading this volume.

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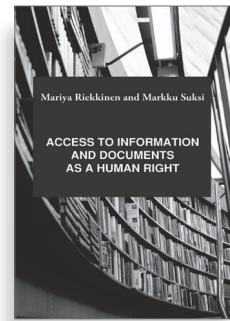
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Marya Riekkinen & Markku Suksi

Access to Information and Documents as a Human Right

Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Akademi University, 2017, 202 p.



The timely study *Access to Information and Documents as a Human Right* was undertaken in anticipation of the 250th anniversary of Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act from 1766. This is by far the oldest freedom of information act in the world, and has set a standard for, and inspired, many other countries. The research has been supported by The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the study has been published by the Institute for Human Rights at Åbo Akademi University in Finland.

After outlining the background in the foreword and chapter 1, a historical overview of the access to public documents and information in Finland and Sweden is given in chapter 2. Chapter 3 addresses how the principle of access to information and documents has developed through the United Nations (UN) legal framework, the Council of Europe, the European Union as well as the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the Inter-American system and NGO-drafted standards. In chapter 4, access to information is discussed in a comparative perspective, by examining constitutions and other national legislation in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Russia. An annex offers a summary of countries with constitutional reference to the right to the publicity of documents.

The authors argue that both freedom of information and freedom of the press, to be effective, require a right of access to government-held documents and information. Although current UN human rights law does not guarantee the right to access official documents, the authors believe that such a right

has acquired independent value and standing in many states and in some regional systems of human rights. They stress that the principle of access to information ensures transparency in public administration and, furthermore, that the principle is linked with anticorruption policies and also with the ideas of deliberative democracy and good governance, all vital components of democracy. These are also the main reasons why many national constitutions reviewed in the study have gradually taken part in a global shift to transparency by dismantling the secrecy of official information. On this basis, the authors conclude that the principle of making official documents and information accessible to everyone needs to be set by the UN, preferably as an explicit human right.

The 250th anniversary of Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act fully deserves this well-documented and thorough analysis of the history and state of access to information (ATI) legislation (also called freedom of information laws (FOI) or right to information (RTI) laws) around the world. Linking the analysis to human rights and international treaties under the aegis of the UN and regional bodies such as the Council of Europe, is a sensible way forward, as this reviewer has argued previously (Vaagan 2011).

It took almost 200 years after Sweden's landmark Freedom of the Press Act of 1766 before other countries started to pass similar laws (some as separate laws, others constitutionally enshrined) or introduced standards of public transparency: Columbia (1888), Finland (1919/1951), USA (1967), Denmark and Norway (both 1970), France (1978) etc. By

1997, around 22 countries had passed FOI/ATI laws, and since then approximately four countries every year have followed suit. Digitization and new technology of course greatly facilitate transparency in several countries, including making available online records and systems for disclosing information plus software to handle FOI/ATI requests. In 2014, Paraguay became the 100th nation to pass a FOI/ATI law. By 2017, an estimated 110 countries with 5.5 billion inhabitants have passed FOI/ATI laws, while another 50 countries with 450 million inhabitants guarantee FOI/ATI in their constitutions (Relly & Sabharwal 2009; McIntosh 2014).

On this basis, one could draw the hasty conclusion that we are surfing on an irresistible global wave of transparency in public affairs, and that all is well. Unfortunately, as the authors recognize, there are considerable obstacles. Too often, advocating human rights is seen in many countries in Asia, Africa, the former Eastern Europe and South America as Western interference in domestic affairs.

As I have argued earlier, passing a FOI/ATI law, even enshrining it in a constitution, is no guarantee for its efficient implementation. The turmoil from late 2010 surrounding Wikileaks has clouded its very genesis: government restrictions in most countries on FOI/ATI laws. For instance, in October 2010, when it was still possible to access the Wikileaks website, it listed leaked documents from no less than 212 countries (Vaagan 2011, 313). In today's geopolitical situation with flagging globalization and the rise of nationalist barriers in many countries, the realism of enforcing increased transparency in public affairs around the world can be questioned. Some of the main obstacles to efficient FOI/ATI implementation can still be summarized as follows:

Ideally, provision for ATI means not only the adoption of a law or regulations, but also the presence of technological infrastructure and a service-minded bureaucracy that all combine to facilitate the efficient storage, retrieval and access of public records and information. Ideally, this is made available in either

print or electronic form and usually free of charge to the inquisitive public, media and press. Yet legal provision is one thing, implementation quite another. ATI often turns out to be conditional and without an obligation of disclosure; systems for storage, retrieval and access are inadequate and bureaucracies can prove hostile to inquisitive citizens, potential investors and/or watchdog media and journalists. This state of affairs can be due to, for example, lacks in standards of accountability for civil servant conduct, which in turn may encourage bribes in exchange for information. In several cases, for example in Zambia, ATI legislation is little more than a cover-up for controlling the press. The spread of ATI legislation cannot be equated with a spread of democracy. Conditional legal provision is usually the case, as in Norway's Freedom of Information Act of 1970. (Vaagan 2011, 311-313.)

Another type of obstacle could be mentioned: former top politicians who regret having passed FOI/ATI laws, notably Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister 1997-2007. The United Kingdom was notorious for its secrecy and non-disclosure practice in public affairs under the mantle of the Official Secrets Act (1911, 1989). The UK was therefore very late in enacting a FOI/ATI law in 2000, which came into effect as late as 2005. When the charismatic Tony Blair swept into British politics in the mid 1990s and renewed the Labour Party with his New Left movement, transparency seemed an election winner. Yet when the law was passed in 2000, the British-American investigative journalist Heather Brooks started working on a book. It was published in 2004 under the title *Your Right to Know: A Citizen's Guide to Freedom of Information*, with a foreword by *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger. When the law came into effect in 2005, Brooks successfully demanded, and gained access to, the expense accounts of Westminster parliamentarians. This led to the 2009 expenses scandal, culminating in the resignation of the House of

Commons Speaker. Tony Blair later regretted implementing the Freedom of Information Act and considered it one of his main mistakes as prime minister. In his 2010 autobiography, Blair states:

Freedom of Information. Three harmless words. I look at those words as I write them, and feel like shaking my head till it drops off my shoulders. You idiot. You naïve, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it. [...]. The truth is that the FOI Act isn't used, for the most part, by 'the people'. It's used by journalists. For political leaders, it's like saying to someone who is hitting you over the head with a stick, 'Hey, try this instead', and handing them a mallet. The information is neither sought because the journalist is curious to know, nor given to bestow knowledge on 'the people'. It's used as a weapon. But another and much more important reason why it is a dangerous Act is that governments, like any other organisations, need to be able to debate, discuss and decide issues with a reasonable level of confidentiality. [...]. In every system that goes down this path, what happens is that people watch what they put in writing and talk without committing to paper. It is a thoroughly bad way of analyzing complex issues. At that time, the consequences were still taking shape and it didn't impact much in 2005. It was only later, far too late in the day, when the full folly of the legislation had become apparent, that I realized we had crossed a series of what should have been red lines, and strayed far beyond what it was sensible to disclose. (Blair 2011: 516-517).

Noting, as this study does, a global movement towards transparency in public affairs, one must also bear in mind that the introduction of FOI/ATI laws – as we see from Tony Blair's autobiography – has sometimes meant that politicians and bureaucrats who fear transparency, refrain from committing certain types of information to paper and instead rely on verbal communication. This suggests that to increase transparency, it is not enough to enact laws and sign treaties.

These considerations mean that, unfortunately, it is not very likely, in this reviewer's opinion, to expect either in the short- or medium-term time frame a human rights-based UN treaty on FOI/ATI that is acceded to, ratified and, not least, efficiently implemented and respected by all UN member states.

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