"WITNESSING" AS HUMAN RIGHTS PRAXIS: REMEDIATING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

by

CHARMAINE M. PERKINS
B.A., University of Waterloo, 1990
M.A., Simon Fraser University, 1995

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the
School of Criminology

© Charmaine M. Perkins 2009

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2009

APPROVAL

Name: CHARMAINE M. PERKINS

Degree: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY

Title of Thesis: "WITNESSING" AS HUMAN RIGHTS PRAXIS: REMEDIATING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Examining Committee:

Chair: Brenda Morrison
Assistant Professor in the School of Criminology

_____

Simon Verdun-Jones
Senior Supervisor
Professor in the School of Criminology

_____

Margaret Jackson
Supervisor
Professor in the School of Criminology

_____

Suzanne de Castell
Supervisor
Dean (Pro Tem) in the Faculty of Education

_____

John Whatley
Internal/External Examiner
Academic Program Director for the Centre of Distance Education and Department of English

_____

Robert Ratner
External/External Examiner
Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia

Date Defended/Approved: _____3 April 2009_____

Declaration of Partial Copyright Licence

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection (currently available to the public at the "Institutional Repository" link of the SFU Library website <www.lib.sfu.ca> at: <http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/handle/1892/112>) and, without changing the content, to translate the thesis/project or extended essays, if technically possible, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation of the digital work.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

While licensing SFU to permit the above uses, the author retains copyright in the thesis, project or extended essays, including the right to change the work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the work in whole or in part, and licensing other parties, as the author may desire.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a critical cultural analysis of recent discursive practices and effects of witnessing as a framework for human rights advocacy. By interrogating the concept of "witnessing," my study uncovers various modalities of "witnessing," in terms of practice and what agendas are fulfilled. Human rights organizations highlight injustice and attempt to engage their audiences as witnesses, through appeals to a shared membership in a moral, political, and global community. Drawing broadly on social justice principles, organizations strive to shape and enforce moral and political norms, their appeals targeting individuals: demanding attention, requesting support, and urging action. I argue that witnessing entails a praxis of engagement and social responsibility. Witnessing, however, faces an ontological crisis as it depends upon the dialogic relationship that exists between the victim and the viewer: the witness needs a responsive listener.

Human rights organizations seek to establish the ethical and political "rightness" of their goals, aligned with truth and justice. My study explores their self-presentation and recruitment strategies, remediated via websites, which outline the challenges and necessities of witnessing. Pedagogical practices made possible through new media connect (I)-witnesses to audiences, making them witnesses to abuses. This exposure, knowledge and (vicarious) experience become a contemporary cultural practice linking witnessing to virtual activism.

Through technology, witnessing transforms from an embodied experience to a virtual one. To ground inquiry into this technological re-mediation of human

rights praxis, I analyzed three websites as exemplars of witnessing practices. **Witness.org** focuses on the importance of creating eyewitnesses to injustice by providing cameras and training to activists to capture evidence. **IJM.org** (International Justice Mission) works on behalf of Christian missions to seek legal remedies and provide services for victims, thereby heeding God's command to seek justice on behalf of the oppressed. **Witnessingproject.org** is concerned with the effects, or "shocks," individuals sustain from witnessing violence and violations. Through awareness, it offers a model to understand different witnessing positions, transforming passive witnessing to empowered action. Each of these sites illustrates differently significant ways to think about and enact witnessing and addresses the transformative potential of witnesses.

DEDICATION

— is it I who remember, memory, or you who remember me? (Patrick Chamoiseau, 1999, p.3)

To those whose names and faces we will never know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

1   WITNESSING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND ATROCITY

> We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. (Butler, 2004, p. 23)

The focus of this study is on witnessing as a socio-cultural and discursive practice employed by human rights organizations in their attempt to transform audiences into witnesses of human rights abuses and atrocities. Human rights organizations highlight suffering and injustice faced by victims and seek to engage their constituents through appeals to a shared membership in a moral, political, and global community. Implied is a moral responsibility to respond to the suffering of others. Human rights organizations thus strive to shape and enforce moral and political norms, urging individuals to take action and defend the rights of the oppressed. Thus, these organizations establish the ethical and political "rightness" of their goals, aligned with truth and justice. Their appeals and mobilization strategies are thus aimed at making us all witnesses to human rights abuses.

To ground this study within a framework of what it means to witness human rights and atrocities, I begin with Romeo Dallaire, Canadian senator and former commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) forces in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, for his role as witness to Rwandan genocide, which he describes as the "failure of humanity."[1] Daillaire,

---

[1] This phrase is taken from the title of Dallaire's (2003) account of the Rwandan genocide, *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity*. He adds, genocide "could easily happen again," and the situation in Darfur appears to bear out his warning (p. xviii). Rwanda, in the absence of any geopolitical significance and resources, was not worth the risk of Western lives, argues Dallaire. Dallaire asks, "'Are we all human, or are some more human than others?' Certainly we

as (professional) eyewitness, has become inextricably linked to the Rwandan genocide for the role he played there and his continued efforts to rouse the conscience of the international community. Dallaire (2003) subsequently documents his Rwandan experience in *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda*, described as a tale about "betrayal, failure, naivete, indifference, hatred, genocide, war, inhumanity and evil" (p. xvii). In the 2007 movie adaptation of his book,[2] Dallaire explains, "I live with Rwanda every day. It is with me always. If this film can make a few more people think about what happened and to understand the need to avoid it [sic] from happening again, then that's a good thing (Hays, 2006)."[3] His "mission," he affirms, is "to keep genocide alive in the minds of people."[4] In addition to his role as embodied (eye)witness, Dallaire functions as symbolic witness whose duty it is to tell—and to continue retelling—his story like the ancient mariner does in Coleridge's poem.[5] In this sense, the role of the witness becomes "allegorical," as repetition

---

in the developed world act in a way that suggests we believe that our lives are worth more than the lives of other citizens on the planet" (p. 522). This point is echoed by Butler (2004) who argues that "some lives are grievable; others are not" (p. xiv).

[2] *Hotel Rwanda*, filmed in 2004, was one of the first movies to portray the genocide, with Nick Nolte playing the part of a UN commander. The following is Dallaire's response to the movie, reported by Ian Caddell: "Dallaire says *Hotel Rwanda*'s greatest sin was its decision to allow Nick Nolte to portray a thinly disguised version of [him]. 'I was pissed,' he says. 'Nolte was playing a version of a commander, running around with a pistol and shooting things. I met him afterwards and he felt badly that he didn't know the book was out. The producers tried to argue it was a composite [of UN personnel], and I remember saying, 'That's fine.' But then the film came out, *La Presse* wrote a review and said, 'Dallaire is not particularly effective'" ("Dallaire still haunted by his Rwandan devils" in *The Georgia Straight*, September 27-October 4, 2007. p. 83).

[3] This following quote is taken from Matthew Hays' article "From the Rocket to Rwanda," retrieved on 6/8/2006. (www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060608.wxdevil08/BNStory/Ent...).

[4] This quote is taken from Cadell's article in *The Georgia Straight*.

[5] In the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the old sailor accosts a wedding guest with his tale that he is bound to repeat as a form of atonement: "I pass like night, from land to land;/I have strange power of speech;/The moment that his face I see,/I know the man that must hear me:/To him my tale I teach" (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/poems/Rime_Ancient_Mariner.html). My

and Derridean spectral haunting, which Douglass and Vogler (2003) refer to as "a traumatized trace" (p. 36).[6]

In bearing witness to genocide, Dallaire has become a tireless advocate for human rights in his call for the international community to be accountable and exercise their duty to protect the most vulnerable. His role as professional advocate-witness did not come easily: Dallaire struggled publicly with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He explains, "It took me seven years to finally have the desire, the willpower and the stamina to begin to describe in detail the events of that year in Rwanda" (p. 5). Bearing witness, therefore, involves providing testimony as an eyewitness to what one has seen or experienced. Bearing witness also makes possible the recuperation of the traumatized self or "I" who lived through the experience and can testify to what occurred.[7] By repeating[8] his story, the act of re-witnessing, Dallaire hopes "to keep genocide alive." Douglass and Vogler suggest that the "witness must be repeatable, even tautological: it exists in fact *as* repetition and echo, in the series of recurrences at the same level of intensity" (p. 44, italics in original). Repetition is, therefore, required in the face of "the continuous danger of forgetting," which echoes Dallaire's fear

---

comparison is limited to the duty to witness and tell, and the repetition that is born out in rewitnesssing. In no way am I suggesting that this process is redemptive.

[6] Douglass and Vogler suggest that "the life of the witness is an allegorical site, with a range of possible meanings already mapped out. The relationship between the traumatic event and its witness, and a special dependency, since whether or not an event is traumatic can only be established by the existence of witnesses whose trauma both authenticates them and the reality of the event. As traumatized trace, the witness is an indexical sign or symptom of the reality of the event, the experience of which prevents the witness from communicating in normal modes" (p. 36).

[7] This possibility is raised by Felman and Laub (1992), Oliver (2001), and Antze and Lambek (1996) who suggest that victims, or survivors, can symbolically reclaim their subjectivity through testimony.

[8] Harold Frisch makes the connection between the Hebrew word for witness—its root—and its practice, which "includes the sense of persistent repetition" (as cited in Douglass & Vogler, p. 43).

that the genocide will be forgotten and that humanity's failure "could easily happen again" (p. xviii). With every version or retelling, Douglass and Vogler assert, however, that "nothing *can* be added, in the sense of contributing towards an advance, towards clarification, towards some conceivable form or mode of closure" (ibid, italics in original). In this sense, witnessing as performative practice becomes an act of *resistance*[9] against forgetting and denial in an attempt to salvage certain experiences and memories from oblivion (emphasis mine). This paradox of repetition, and of witnessing in general, lies in the "inadequacy of words" to convey "the unimaginable" (Douglass & Vogler, p. 44). Yet the witness is obligated to share her experience and seek a listener: bearing witness is "to remember, to be a living memory, to guard the past, to ask others to do likewise, and to illuminate the traces of the past and their meaning" (Booth, 2006, p. 73).

Western audiences, in contrast, seldom experience such grave injustices as genocide and mass acts of violence directly. We come to know about and witness atrocities and abuses vicariously,[10] through various media representations and the efforts of human rights organizations. My initial interest in this study and witnessing can be traced to the Rwandan genocide and my self-consciousness as a witness, many years after the fact. To some extent, this

---

[9] Booth (2006) observes that witnessing is "a gesture of defiance and resistance" against the suppression of what happened and of forgetfulness (p. 73). As an act of resistance, it is both "a witnessing *against* as well as witnessing about" (p. 91, italics in original).

[10] I use the term "vicarious witness" to indicate spatial, as well as temporal, distance, that is, the witness who is not physically present to an event and experiences it indirectly. Douglass and Vogler use the term "voyeur witness" which I avoid for its fetishistic connotations of sexual pleasure in the viewing experience. Arguably, violent and disturbing images are commodified, often as a form of spectacle, and consumed in a voyeuristic manner, but my emphasis is on the spatial relationship and how the witness experiences trauma indirectly.

study can be seen as an attempt to address the uncertainties, indeed the dilemmas, the witness, who comes to know about the suffering of others, confronts. Yet, I resisted writing myself into this text in an attempt to avoid the troubling questions inherent to witnessing atrocity, as commonplace as this experience has become in contemporary culture. In thinking about the Rwandan genocide several years after its occurrence, I could not recall media images or reports that named the brutal massacres genocide. I could only vaguely remember references to ethnic or tribal conflict, that Africans were senselessly killing each other. To implicate myself as witness—and to bear witness to the self—is, therefore, to be confronted with omissions and failures, without excuses and excessive contrition. As Zalaika (2003) poignantly observes, "Confessions and silences besiege the witness" (p. 95). To interrogate my role as witness is to grapple with the challenges and responsibilities of witnessing—whether it involves a "duty to know" about and acknowledge the suffering of others, as Cohen (2001) proposes. Acknowledgement, through remembrance, is linked to ethical practice through the "engagement" with images and texts (Simon, DiPaolantonio, and Clamen, 2000), or speaking out as an act of "denunciation" as Boltanski (1999) suggests. Through this study, I explore the socio-cultural framework of what witnessing entails through an examination of human rights praxis.

As witnesses to human rights abuses, audiences are seldom physically present and are mostly vicarious witnesses who experience events through visual, textual, and aural representations, which enable them to imagine what

"another has experienced" and what it must have been like (Keats, 2005, p. 175).

Media representations and digital technology allow vicarious witnesses not only to "stand-in" for the firsthand witness, but substitute the necessity of being physically present (Keats, 2005). Keats offers the following useful distinction between firsthand and vicarious witnesses:

> The witness is able to testify or make known the event with authority, knowledge, and relative certainty. On the other hand, vicarious witnessing begins with abstract *representations* of an event. The *evidence* is witnessed firsthand, but the event itself is pieced together from images, stories, and physical artifacts and then represented through the imagination. The vicarious witness can make the statement, 'I have imagined what another has experienced; hence, I believe I know something about the event'. Further, the vicarious witness is able to stand-in on the firsthand witness's behalf to testify or make known the event on the basis of a belief in the truth of the evidence. (p. 175, italics in original)

Witnessing can thus be seen as an experience mediated through cultural, representational practices, made even more immediate through new media. In the immediacy of representing what is going on elsewhere, technology provides the next best thing to being there—themes I explore in Chapter 3. I argue that technology remediates the experience of witnessing in this sense and opens up possibilities for participatory action on behalf of others, an objective for many human rights organizations in their mobilization campaigns. I use the term "remediation" to refer to a "borrowing" or "repurposing," that is, "to take a 'property' from one medium and reuse it in another. With use comes a necessary redefinition, but there may be no conscious interplay between media" (Bolter & Gruisin, 1999, p. 45). New digital media "refashion" and "reform" older media and, I suggest, open up possibilities for new kinds of social and political

6

action (p. 59-60).[11] Throughout this study, I use "remediation" to include these various conceptions. Additionally, in the spirit of Bolter and Gruisin's sense of "remediation," I use the term broadly to refer to "a process of reforming reality" (p. 56). In this sense, witnessing practices have been remediated through new media and digital technology.

Through globalized networks, vicarious witnesses learn about suffering and abuses occurring elsewhere. The proliferation and availability of information and images about conflicts and wars, acts of terrorism, sexual violence, or staggering poverty can be overwhelming. Staying informed and knowing what to do requires commitment and vigilance and can be emotionally and psychologically exhausting. When confronted with the devastating reality of human rights abuses, what do we do with this knowledge? As Cohen (2001) aptly asks, "How do we carry on with normal life, knowing what we know?" (p. 295).[12] Cohen uses the term "intellectual fatigue" to describe the effect that can arise "from knowing too much about human misery" (p. 192). Continued exposure to suffering carries other potential risks as well, for example, feelings of indifference, apathy, and desensitization: "what if continued exposure to this reality eventually deadens our moral and emotional receptivity to further images of suffering?" (p. 187). The literature I examined refers to the impact of

---

[11] Bolter and Gruisin refer to the Latin term *remederi*, "to heal, to restore health," which they have "adopted" "to express the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another. The belief in reform is particularly strong for those who are today repurposing earlier media into digital forms" (p. 59).
[12] Cohen points out that his question is "rhetorical, a tendentious bit of moralistic nagging. But I do mean it in an empirical sense. What is the space between us and the collective suffering of others?" (p. 295). Overcoming the geographic and psychic space that exists between the vicarious witness and suffering located elsewhere remains an ongoing challenge for human rights organizations.

witnessing suffering as "empathic distress," or "secondary" or "vicarious traumatization" (Kaplan, 2005; Keats, 2005; Douglass & Vogler, 2003; Weingarten, 2003; Cohen, 2001). Yet to avoid knowing or caring about the suffering of others is a morally ambiguous and precarious position that suggests that only some lives are "grievable," argues Butler (2004), and worthy of human rights protections. Human rights organizations invoke the universality of these rights and attempt to make us all responsible for ensuring that they are protected. No matter where human rights and injustices occur, human rights organizations assert that we all have a stake in defending the most vulnerable.

Given the geographic (and often psychological) distance that exists between vicarious witnesses and suffering others, human rights organizations attempt to shrink this distance by appealing to our individual and collective sense of conscience and shared membership in a moral, political, and global community. Within this "imagined community,"[13] we have an implied moral responsibility or duty to know—in spite of becoming distressed—about the suffering of others and to respond and act on their behalf to alleviate their suffering. Cohen suggests that "the duty to know, to keep informed about suffering and atrocities" is an even more "radical" proposition than the "duty to act" (p. 270). Cohen arguably overstates the importance of knowing, or more specifically, "acknowledgement," but in so doing, he alludes to the dangers that can arise from not knowing and not wanting to know. To counteract the extremes of denial and passivity, individuals, as Cohen sees it, ought—at the

---

[13] I borrow the term from Anderson (1983) who emphasizes the role the imagination plays in the construction of "nation" and a "political community" in which individuals cannot know each and every member, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community" (p. 6).

very least—to become informed, and perhaps to become "undone" by the suffering of others (Butler, 2004, p. 23). Human rights organizations, I propose, attempt to make us all witnesses to human rights abuses. The power and, indeed the potential, of witnessing lies in its utopian vision of solidarity with others, based on a shared sense of humanity. This vision sees all humans bound to each other. Witnessing within this "imagined community" has expanded exponentially, made possible through the Internet and communications technology. By embracing this technology, human rights organizations can remain connected to grassroots activists, disseminate up-to-date information, and mobilize their constituents into action. Witnessing, I suggest, has been remediated through these new technologies, connecting us to distant strangers and causes, potentially expanding what communities mean, and facilitating opportunities for participation and activism in global causes.

The focus of this study is on the epistemological framework of witnessing as a socio-cultural and discursive practice and how it has been adopted by human rights organizations. In referring to discourse as practice, which I discuss further in Chapter 3, I rely on a Foucauldian approach where "discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way we perceive reality" (Mills, 2003, p. 55). As Mills asserts, "discourses, or discursive formations, are groups of statements which deal with the same topic and which seem to produce a similar effect...or because they have a similar function," though many of these statements can conflict (p. 64). This approach allows me to interrogate what kinds of witnessing discourses are being produced to serve

specific agendas, in this case, human rights advocacy.[14]   Employing an "archaeological analytical strategy,"[15] I examine the construction of "witnessing" to uncover its various modalities and what it offers in terms of praxis in relation to human rights. An initial question that led to an interest in this area was whether there were practices intrinsic to witnessing that lent themselves to human rights work. I further explore how we are witnessing—and being asked to witness by human rights organizations—using these new technologies. I am interested in discovering similarities to older models of witnessing as well as differences in contemporary articulations and practices of witnessing.   Specifically, I have chosen three websites as exemplars of witnessing practices and explore how they have adopted a witnessing framework to reflect their human rights objectives:

- Witness.org embraces video and communications technology, providing grassroots activists with video cameras to record human rights abuses. Their objective is to expose human rights abuses by providing visual evidence and to transform us all into (eye) witnesses by extension.

- International Justice Mission (IJM), a Christian-based human rights organization, adopts the concept of the biblical witness. By heeding God's command, witnesses are urged to seek justice on behalf of the oppressed, an extension of the commandment to love one's neighbour.

- The Witnessing Project, unlike the two human rights advocacy websites, addresses the harmful or traumatic impact of witnessing everyday violence (both directly and indirectly). This site offers a model

---

[14] Mills notes that "Foucault's work on discourse is useful in helping theorists to consider the way that we know what we know; where that information comes from; how it is produced and under what circumstances; whose interest it might serve; how it is possible to think differently; in order to be able to trace the way that information that we accept as 'true' is kept in a privileged position" (p. 66).
[15] I borrow this term from Akerstrom and Anderson (2003) who refer to Foucault's approach to discourse as an analysis of the "regularities" and "displacement" of statements "over time" (p. 30).

for the (therapeutic) transformation of the passive witness to an active or engaged (I) witness.

Through an analysis of these sites, I suggest that witnessing is a practice of socio-ethical responsibility or engagement: it is an acknowledgement and response to suffering.

TOWARD A DISCOURSE OF WITNESSING: POSSIBILITIES FOR ETHICAL PRAXIS

Apart from legal studies,[16] literature and research on the role of the witness, and what it means to witness, is located in what is broadly referred to as trauma studies and, more specifically, Holocaust studies. "Trauma studies,"[17] Kaplan (2005) explains, "originated in the context of research about the Holocaust" (p. 1). Trauma is "often seen as inherently linked to modernity"[18] and has come to define the consciousness or experience that culminated in the World Wars and conflicts of the twentieth century (Kaplan, p. 24). Kaplan notes that Freud's early theories on female hysteria and trauma were later applied by British doctors to describe the symptoms of soldiers returning from World War I (p. 28). Interest in research on trauma resurfaced in the 1980s as a response to the Vietnam War and to research conducted by feminist psychologists working with

---

[16] Douglass and Vogler draw attention to the competitive and "adversarial" nature of the court room in which production of "the facts" is determined by evidentiary rules (p. 2).

[17] Kaplan, drawing on the work of David Becker (2001), cautions that trauma is not culturally universal and is experienced differently by individuals, communities, and cultures (p. 39). Douglass and Vogler point out "there is no special kind of event that provokes a traumatized reaction; nor is there a universal sensitivity to stress that provides uniform reactions to similar events" (p. 10). Humphrey (2002) also draws attention to "the cultural and political filters of witnessing trauma, pain and suffering" (p. 115). He further adds that there is a tendency in the West to medicalize trauma and treat it as "an abnormal individual psychological condition" which is isolated in the body and is separate from political structures and conditions (ibid).

[18] Kaplan refers to Kevin Newmark's work on Walter Benjamin, as well as Paul Gilroy's and other scholars who work in film and cultural theory (p. 24).

female victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse (p. 19).[19] Theories about

trauma called for the return to "the body," specifically the traumatized body of the

witness:

> The 'body' proved to be a fruitful site not only for theoretical debate, challenging the tyranny of scientific, social, political, economic, sexual, and biological abstractions, but for emancipatory politics as well. It promised a new and more authentic 'grounding' of our epistemological and ontological intellectual activities and of our Being. It energized new directions in the arts, and as the visible— and representable—site of trauma it proved an increasingly important signifier in all areas of the discourse of witness. (Douglass and Vogler, p. 13)

The return to "the body" challenged theoretical trends that favoured textual,

semiotic, and linguistic play, note Douglass and Vogler. For Kaplan, trauma

discourse became "a bridge" that linked theory to "material events" and to

"history, memory, and culture generally" (p. 35). Trauma discourses have,

therefore, contributed to the awareness of the psychological harms[20] of trauma

(manifested in the body) and the (in)ability of the subject to bear witness to her

experience.[21]

Although research by Holocaust scholars have largely shaped the field of

trauma studies, Kaplan observes that trauma studies have expanded to other

---

[19] Kaplan traces three phases of trauma research which were influential: "1) the 1980s wave of books (some popular) by psychologists (some feminists), responding (as did Freud) to war injuries (this time however to the Vietnam War) and to increased awareness of child sexual abuse; 2) the unexpected turn of humanists to trauma in the late 1980s (and increasingly from then on), perhaps because trauma theory provided a welcome bridge back to social concerns in an era when high theory had become abstract; and 3) the reaction to what rapidly was seen as a kind of 'faddish' interest in trauma or a collapsing of everything into trauma" (p. 25).

[20] Douglass and Vogler point out that "although most of trauma discourse is concerned with the psychological consequences of trauma, it is anchored in the conviction that special truths can manifest themselves in traumatized bodies" (p. 12).

[21] Douglass and Vogler identify two prevailing paradigms which construct the witness and witnessing differently: "Authenticity" of trauma, within the Anglo-European framework, is equated with "broken, incoherent" actions (p. 11). In contrast, "the assumption of a coherent ego and reliability of language and the narrative trope are more prevalent in the Latin American *testimonio* and the Japanese *hibakusha* narratives" (ibid, italics in original).

disciplines, namely, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, history, literature, critical theory, and developments in neuroscience (p. 33). Keats, too, identifies other fields of "cultural literature" in which witnessing features: law, religion, and literature (p. 173). In recognition of multi-disciplinary contributions to trauma studies, Douglass and Vogler suggest "there are increasing signs that we are reaching such a stage in what can be broadly conceived as a discourse of witness" and for the consideration of "witness as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon" (p. 3).[22] These authors propose the umbrella term "witness studies" to include "Holocaust studies, the Latin American *testimonio*, and atomic bomb survivor studies, which embraces various approaches, genres, and media" (p. 1, italics in original). In the spirit of their proposal, my research contributes to "witness studies" by examining how human rights organizations adopt witnessing discourses to appeal to their constituents' moral sensibilities to become witnesses to human rights abuses and atrocities. Further, I suggest that by employing communication technologies to inform constituents about current atrocities, constructing campaigns, and offering opportunities for involvement, they are engaging in witnessing projects which address injustice. To witness becomes an assertion of justice and is embedded within ethical practice: it demands a response to suffering.

---

[22] Rejecting the Holocaust as a unique paradigm, Douglass and Vogler argue for "an emphasis on typicality rather than uniqueness" (p. 2). Further, they report that "the growth and refinements in the field of comparative genocide studies have strongly challenged claims for the Holocaust's uniqueness, and have begun to implicate other countries than Germany in the perpetration of atrocities. Studies of Hiroshima, and of 'atomic bomb literature' are increasing Western awareness of the Japanese holocaust, its consequences, and literature" (p. 3).

THE FORTUNOFF VIDEO ARCHIVE FOR HOLOCAUST TESTIMONIES AT
YALE UNIVERSITY: THE IMPERATIVE OF WITNESSING

I begin with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies which I
situate as a precursor to later human rights projects that employ technology to
facilitate and remediate the experience of witnessing trauma. This video archive,
housed at Yale University, is a collection of over 4,300 taped interviews with
individuals who have "firsthand experience of the Nazi persecutions, including
those in hiding, survivors, bystanders, resistants, and liberators."[23] The project
emerged as a result of grassroots efforts in Connecticut by the Survivors Film
Project in 1979. Laurel Vlock, "a television specialist" and Holocaust survivor,
and Dr. Dori Laub, psychiatrist and child survivor, became involved in this project
to record testimonies of Holocaust witnesses.[24] This project was born from the
conviction that time was running out for survivor stories to be told, described as a
"diachronic moment of crisis" by Douglass and Vogler, as a consequence of
dwindling numbers of "authentic" survivors (p. 45). With few actual eyewitnesses
left, emphasis was placed on the "the discourse of the witness," evoked and
mediated through "texts and images" (ibid). Felman and Laub suggest (1992)
that testimony, as a discursive mode, has come to "define" our contemporary
period (p. 5). Langer (1991) points out that while the Germans left bureaucratic
records and "archives," absent was "survivor testimony" (p. xi). Kaplan observes
that "a new psychological dimension was added to Holocaust studies through the

---

[23] All quotes about the video archive are taken from www.library.yale.edu/testimonies.
[24] Other committee members were William Rosenberg, Professor Geoffrey Hartman at Yale, and
"other community members committed to this urgent task." As a result of this initial project, two
documentaries were produced: *Forever Yesterday,* which won an Emmy, and *About the
Holocaust.*

videotaped interviews" (p. 33).[25]   The video testimonies provided the human faces and stories of the Holocaust, the emotional impact of experiential knowledge.   The testimonies lend "immediacy"[26] to the viewing experience, momentarily collapsing the temporal and spatial distance between the event and its recollection for survivors and audiences.   Both witness-survivors[27] and the vicarious witnesses, described in the literature as "secondary witnesses,"[28] are brought together in this remediated experience of trauma.   For Keats (2005), "a vicarious witness joins the firsthand witness in bearing the images and memories of the trauma story" (p. 175).   This "bearing" of "images and memory" can be seen as both as internalized process as well as an ethical practice—the acknowledgement of relationships one shares with others—which Keats refers to as "a social responsibility whereby the vicarious witness can stand-in for the survivor" (p. 175).   In this sense, "it is the vicarious witness that carries the memory of the trauma event into the future when all known survivors are gone" (ibid).   Hartman (2001) observes that viewing the testimonies culminates in a double function of witnessing:

---

[25] The video archive involves a "testimonial process," which is "similar in nature to the psychoanalytic process, in that it is yet another medium which provides a listener to trauma, another medium of re-externalization—and thus historicization—of the event" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 70).

[26] In *Holocaust testimonies: the ruins of memory* (1991), Langer points out that "one of the distinctive qualities of oral testimony is its immediacy," where the "impromptu self," the self that "endured atrocity," is recalled in the act of remembering (p. 148).

[27] Humphrey (2002) points out that "as a cultural construction, 'survivor' is the identity created after witnessing" (p. 121).   It is an ambiguous position because it "simultaneously recognized and ritually sacrificed" the witness (ibid).

[28] Alsup (2003) borrows the term "secondary witness" from Felman to refer to "experiencing trauma not as a firsthand survivor" but an experienced that is removed spatially and temporally (p. 76).   Felman and Laub (1992) describe three levels of witnessing: "the level of being witness to oneself within the experience; the level of a being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing" (p. 67).

> ...you see people as they witness. The eye-witness uses his eyes,
> or the authority of his eyes...The importance of the project is also in
> that you see the witness; that is, the eye is also the eye of the
> interviewer and, by extension, of the audience, which is then given
> the ability to see. So the eye comes in twice in a different function.
> (Hartman in an interview with Ballangee, p. 128).

Mediated through video technology, the experience of witnessing becomes an act of remembering through which eyewitnesses re-witness their experiences through their retelling. Audiences, in turn, participate in the co-construction of this historical re-memory of the Holocaust. I explore this theme of the remediation of traumatic experiences (specifically human rights abuses) through technology by human rights organizations in their attempt to raise awareness, evoke empathic responses, and mobilize their constituencies.

These video testimonies, a form of oral history, differ from official records and archives because the focus of their documentation is on marginalized and suppressed experiences and narratives, in Foucault's sense of "subjugated knowledges" (1980, p. 81).[29] Langer (1991) describes them as "human documents rather than merely historical ones," which are less concerned with historical "accuracy" (p. xv). They contain errors and lapses and are significant for what they reveal about "the complex layers of memory" (ibid). Antze and Lambek (1996) point out that memory must be understood "as a human, cultural practice rather than a natural object or process; and the kind of practice is to be understood as moral rather than simply technical, intellectual, or instrumental" (p.

---

[29] The narratives of survivors, unlike historical and later literary accounts, were rescued from oblivion in this sense and accorded legitimacy.

285).[30] As "cultural" and "moral" practice, these testimonies legitimize the experiential knowledge of eyewitnesses and construct them as public memory: these testimonies "stand as a living memorial to counteract forgetfulness, ignorance and malicious denial."[31] It allows survivors to "emerge from anonymity," though not as "heroes or martyrs, labels they firmly reject, but as chroniclers of a melancholy and dreadful tale" (Langer as cited in Greene and Kumar, 2000, p. xii). Witnesses, many for the first time, had the opportunity to speak about their experiences, to become "experts of their experiences" (Greene, p. xxiv). Yet as Hartman (2000) makes clear, "we do not try to make historians of the survivors. We listen to them, accompany them, try to free their memories, and see each person as more than a victim: as someone who faces those traumas again, an eyewitness who testifies in public" (cited in Greene and Kumar, p. 252-253). Each witness offers her experience as evidence of what she endured.

The act of bearing witness authenticates the subjectivity of the witness and is less concerned with the production of official or historical facts or truths. Booth (2006) describes the witness as "a living and flawed vector of truth about the past, an archive transmitting its contents to others, [which] only touches the surface of the act of bearing witness and its relationship to truth telling" (p. 92). Thus, lived memory/experience ought not to be subject to the same rules as legal and historical records. Douglass and Vogler maintain that, in spite of

---

[30] The construction of memory, and identity, is, as Antze and Lambe suggest, the product of discourse: "memory implies identity, the self caught between its roles as subject and object of memory, the telling and the told" (p. xix).
[31] This quote is taken from www.library.yale.edu/testimonies.

inconsistencies, witness testimonies are not "worthless," for they "demand special modes of attention and interpretation. What survivors are witnesses to is their own suffering, in the past as victims and in the now as telling survivors" (p. 34). The focus of these video testimonies is on experiential knowledge and memory. Antze and Lambek suggest that evoked memory is a form of "I-witnessing": as both "eyewitness" account and as the symbolic act of reconstructing the narratival "I" (p. 42).[32] The subjective "I" authenticates the experience of the witness who can speak from the position of having "been there" (Felman & Laub, p. 36). However, the witness cannot be expected to speak about everything.[33] The video archive can thus be seen as a partial and "perspectival" record, one that is necessary in the construction of a public memory and archive (p. 242).

The documentation of witnessing through the creation of archives of experience resonates, I suggest, in the work of human rights organizations that adopt witnessing as an ethical framework to address injustice and human rights abuses. Witness.org, for example, uses video evidence (including interviews with witnesses) to counteract official accounts and denial of human rights abuses. Raw footage they have archived have been used to create documentaries about specific cases, for example, the trafficking of women. For IJM, personal stories and testimonies become the basis for building cases

---

[32] The reclaiming of subjectivity becomes an act of resistance because, as Felman and Laub point out, the Holocaust "precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims" (p. 80). In effect, "*one could not bear witness to oneself*" (p. 82, italics in original). Through testimony, the witness "reconstitutes the internal 'thou', and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself" (p. 85).

[33] Felman and Laub note that excessive demands are placed on the witness: having "been there," one must be able "to bear witness about everything" (p. 36).

against perpetrators. This theme of documentation through the creation of archives is also adopted by the Witnessing Project which collects narratives of different witnessing perspectives, whether as passive or engaged witness. As a socio-cultural practice, I suggest that a component of these witnessing projects entails the creation of public records and archives.

The archive as a memory project provides a link to the past and the future. Hartman (2001) offers the term "future memory" to suggest the connection between past and future generations: "There is a remembering forward as well as a memory directed towards the past, and that is what we are doing in this testimony project is remembering forward" (as cited in Ballangee, p. 228). This theme of memory to counteract forgetfulness lies at the heart of the Yale archive. The archive also functions, Hartman suggests, as an "Archive of Conscience" (in Greene and Kumar, p. 252). Simon, DiPaolantonio, and Clamen (2000) describe remembrance as an ethical practice that "resides not in the moments, images and texts but in our engagements with them" (p. 21). In remembering, audiences are entrusted with a duty to know. This duty to know about suffering and human rights is echoed within the human rights websites I examine in the study, where knowing implies (social) responsibility.

WITNESSING AS RECOGNITION OF THE OTHER

Witnessing requires an audience for testimonies to become "public memory" (Humprey, 2002, p. 115). However, this process is "contingent and uncertain" (ibid). There is no guarantee the witness will find a responsive listener nor does the reclaiming of subjectivity render the subject/witness whole again

(Booth, p. 87). As Greene cautions, "there are no redemptive messages or happy endings" to be found in survivor accounts (p. xxvvi). The "act of telling" can be retraumatizing for survivors who must "re-experience the event," note Felman and Laub, particularly if their narratives are not truly heard or accepted (p. 67). They experience the events not as survivors but as victims who were stripped of their humanity. Oliver (2001), too, draws attention to the paradox of speaking from the position of victim: "The content of testimonies of oppression reinscribes the survivor as victim or object even while the act of testifying restores subjectivity to the experience of objectification" (p. 98).[34] As object, the victim is rendered "speechless," similar to Spivak's (1994) notion of the "subaltern" who cannot speak within the confines of her "subaltern" status. The act of bearing witness resists, however, the disavowal of one's experience. In this sense, witnesses who narrate their experiences hope to find a responsive listener; their stories offer the hope that "what happened in the past will not be forgotten" (Greene, p.xxviii). Bearing witness, in this sense, becomes a "gesture of defiance and resistance" against denial and forgetfulness (Booth, p. 73).

Audiences, however, cannot simply be assumed to be responsive and willing to engage with cognitively and psychologically troubling material. The video testimonies at Yale pose challenges for vicarious or "secondary witnesses" because, Parker (2007) asserts, they test the "limits of our comprehension" (p. 111). They challenge the "comfortable ignorance" audiences have about not having to know about the Holocaust, an event that some locate in a distant past

---

[34] Oliver notes that "objects do not talk. Objects do not act. Objects are not subjects or agents of their lives" (p. 95).

that has little to do with them (Langer, p. 160). What can be known is uneasy and troubling, which makes viewing/listening to these testimonies difficult. Parker explains that dealing with the "incomprehensible" has to be "learned": "It requires an intentional cessation of our impulse to completion and harmony" (p. 111). Audiences need to resist the impulse to convert survivors into heroes whose narratives become tales of struggle and martyrdom. Langer urges against the impulse to render the Holocaust somehow "redeemable," as some kind of "homage" to the "human spirit" and the "triumph of will" (p. 3).[35] Instead, one finds that victims' experiences are much more complex and ambivalent (p. 2). Viewers of these testimonies are left instead with "the permanent *impossibility*" of reconciling what they can know about the Holocaust and how to make sense of the "unimaginable," a term often used in the Holocaust literature (p. 168, italics in original). However, Langer believes "an unreconciled understanding has a meaning and value of its own" (p. 168). Parker recommends the "practice" of "epistemological humility" and the acknowledgement of "the limits of our comprehension" (p. 111). In the face of the "impossibility" to comprehend the scale on which the Nazis carried out their plans for extermination, audiences can embrace, at the very least, the obligation to remember. Hatley (2000) maintains that "the struggle to remember the death of other humans *in spite of their annihilation* remains the last possible human act of ethical resistance against their desolation" (p. 42, italics in original).

---

[35] Instead of seeing their experience as a celebration of survival, witnesses have used other modes of expression. Langer offers the following quotes: "they died through" (p. 171) or "stay[ed] alive" during this period (p. 175).

Viewing (and listening to) testimonies about atrocity, however, poses psychological risks for vicarious witnesses. They are exposed to trauma and psychological distress resulting from feelings of empathy with survivors' experiences of suffering. The viewer becomes a participant and "co-owner of the traumatic event," experiencing trauma vicariously (Felman & Laub, p. 57).[36] Keats (2005) uses the term "witnessing after-image" to emphasize the role the imagination plays in "how one processes one's understanding or experience of shocking events" and "re-experiences the phenomenon" (p. 184).[37] The traumatic event is "embodied" differently for the vicarious witness through the use of imagination, hence Keats' calls for "further study on the imaginative processes and their link to secondary traumatization and post traumatic stress is required" (ibid). Imagining the experience of the other and the role of empathy are themes I explore in my literature review. The literature indicates the importance of a shared moral imagination and shared sense of community in connection to evoking feelings of social responsibility to others.

The theme of social responsibility, which is raised in the Holocaust literature, is echoed in the literature on bystanding and human rights as an attempt to counteract passivity and indifference to the suffering of others. Responsibility is linked in the literature to being responsive to and acknowledging the other and one's ethical relationships with others. Oliver (2001) refers to

---

[36] Felman and Laub also point out the following responses to traumatic information: paralysis, fear, hyperemotionality, numbness, outrage, and defensiveness as coping or "protective mechanism[s] in order to avoid painful and difficult information" (p. 72).
[37] Keats' article, *Vicarious witnessing in European concentration camps: imagining the trauma of the other*, focuses on the experiences of vicarious witnesses who visited concentration camps in Germany and Poland.

responsibility as the necessity of a response, hence "response-ability," that stems from an address that is made to the listener. Oliver draws attention to the relationship,[38] or "encounter," that exists between the survivor-as-witness and the audience-as-witness:

> We are obligated to witness beyond recognition, to listen to the testimony—to encounter each other—because subjectivity and humanity are the result of witnessing. That is to say, subjectivity and humanity are the result of response-ability. That which precludes a response destroys subjectivity and thereby humanity. (p. 90)

In this sense, the assumption is that witnessing requires the recognition of the humanity of the other. It is a dialogic[39] encounter through which "social recognition and meaning" is established (Humphrey, 2002, p. 114-115). Felman and Laub (1992) also observe that "testimonies are not monologues" (p. 70). The listener becomes "a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" (p. 57). The act of bearing witness requires an "addressee" (Oliver, p. 88). The recognition or acknowledgement of the other, however, requires "vigilance" and "openness" in relation to what we can know and recognize (p. 133).[40] Frisch (2004) points out that with fewer survivors still alive, "recent work on (and of) Holocaust testimony has begun to abandon the epistemic model [the prominence of eyewitness testimony and experiential knowledge] and articulate modes of

---

[38] This notion of a relationship exists whether or not one acknowledges its existence: For Hatley (2000), "one is born into the world already involved, already claimed..." (p. 13).

[39] Bakhtin (1981) calls attention to the "responsive" quality of discourse based on "an active and engaged understanding" (p. 282). Understanding in the context of atrocity need not mean full comprehension of that which cannot be known or understood; it does suggest, however, that one faces the challenge of actively hearing or engaging with the unimaginable.

[40] Oliver refers to "vigilance" as "listening to the silences in which we are implicated and through which we are responsible to each other. The combination of performance, elaboration, and vigilance makes openness and otherness possible. Vigilance is necessary to 'recognize' the unrecognizable in the process itself, to recognize that you cannot expect to recognize otherness" (p. 133).

witnessing that restore to prominence ethically-based testimony characteristic of medieval folklaw (and dismissively termed 'irrational' in most histories of legal procedure)" (p. 182). Earlier modes of witnessing, argues Frisch, were "predicated on an ethical relationship," in other words, one's socio-ethical status within a community (p. 24). This construction of witnessing based on the ethical relationships that binds survivor-witnesses and vicarious witnesses is finding more support, according to Frisch. The emphasis on creating ethical relationships through the recognition of a shared community and a responsibility to victims are themes that I explore in this study.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I began this discussion by focusing on what it means to witness atrocity, using Dallaire as both eyewitness to genocide and symbolic witness to memory. Turning to the audiences who learn about and experience atrocity and human rights abuses indirectly, mediated through various technologies, I distinguish between firsthand and vicarious witnessing. I use the Fortunoff Archives to frame my discussion of witnessing experiences mediated through video technology and connect the video archives to later projects that employ new technologies in the attempt to make us all witnesses to suffering. I highlight the themes of social responsibility and the importance of ethical relationships within a shared community, which is also echoed by the human rights websites I examine in this study. In this chapter, I discuss witnessing as an ethical imperative to know (and remember); it is a "moral obligation" and acknowledgement of the other (Booth, 2006, p. 87).

ORGANIZATION OF THIS PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I contextualize this study and my research interests within the broader literature of trauma studies and consider its emergence in the area of "witness studies." I discuss the eyewitness who bears witness and testimony, as well as the vicarious witness who learns indirectly about injustice and human rights abuses. Turning to the video archives at Yale as a precursor to later projects which mediate the experience of trauma, I highlight many of the themes I explore later on in this study.

In chapter 2, I review the literature on bystanding phenomenon and argue that witnessing entails an epistemological shift from passivity to engagement. To witness is to be responsive to social suffering. The literature emphasizes the importance of empathy, social responsibility (a commitment to social justice), and the recognition of relationships to counteract passivity. Being aware of atrocity and suffering, however, presents certain hazards, such as empathic distress or vicarious traumatization. Another theme that is echoed in the literature on bystanding and human rights is the shared sense of membership within a moral/global community. I explore how human rights organizations appeal to our moral imagination and attempt to transform their constituents into witnesses of human rights abuses.

Next, I turn to a discussion of my methodological framework and outline my research design. I begin with Foucault's sense of discourse as practice and situate witnessing as a socio-cultural practice that is remediated and transformed through technology. Technology facilitates vicarious witnessing and extends

ideas about community and activism. I explore the construction of what it means to "witness" as a "key word" to trace continuous, as well as various shifts, meanings, and practices. The human rights websites I have selected represent cases, or exemplars, of witnessing practices: the eyewitness, the Christian witness, and the witness as empowered agent. I follow with a description of my research design and analysis, identifying dominant themes and patterns within the data.

Beginning with chapter 4, I describe my first research site, witness.org, its mission statement, and how the concept of witnessing is applied in their work. Witness.org employs video technology to advance their human rights agenda. They provide grassroots activists with video cameras to document injustice. The emphasis is on "seeing" and the visual, in both a literal and metaphoric sense, to counter official documents and denials of human rights abuses and to make their constituents become eyewitnesses in the process.

In chapter 5, I focus on the International Justice Mission, a Christian-based organization, which employs a legal and biblical approach to seeking justice. They work as a referral service for Christian missions in the field and use the model of casework to investigate and document complaints of human rights abuses. To be a Christian witness, in this context, means to follow Christ's command to love one's neighbour and to take action to alleviate suffering. Their emphasis is on documentary evidence, intervention on behalf of victims, and education of their primarily Christian constituents.

In chapter 6, I examine the model presented by the Witnessing Project which addresses the psychological harm produced from witnessing (first-hand and indirectly) violence and violations. While not a human rights organization concerned with advocacy on behalf of others, this organization addresses the issue of passivity and suggests the possibility for the transformation of individual: from a passive and unaware witness to one who is compassionate and empowered. Acknowledging that trauma affects individuals and their response, this approach to witnessing offers some suggestions as to how individuals can overcome the effects to vicarious trauma and become engaged and responsive to their own, as well as others', suffering.

I conclude in chapter 7 by revisiting the epistemological framework of witnessing and what it offers in terms of human rights praxis. I present two school-based examples of pedagogical praxis for consideration. I follow with a discussion of digital activism and possible collaborations between human rights organizations and social networks. Finally, I offer some ideas for future research in the area of "witnessing."

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: SITUATING "WITNESSING" AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICE

In this study, I situate "witnessing" as a socio-cultural and discursive practice within the broader literature that covers a range of disciplinary genres. I approach the literature in the spirit of Douglass and Vogler (2003), who propose the notion of "witness studies" as an "umbrella" term that includes more specialized sub-genres of research on trauma. Specifically in this chapter, I first explore the construction of the "witness" against the backdrop of research on "bystander phenomenon" and discuss the challenges of responding to the suffering of others. In that literature, the terms "bystander" and "witness" are often conflated and used interchangeably. I suggest a distinction can, or ought to be, made between the two terms. The difference lies in the shift from passivity to some form of response or engagement. Acknowledging and reinforcing relationships—that is, interconnectedness between people who are not related through kinship ties, ethnicity, or nationality—can overcome bystander passivity, paralysis, and even indifference (Clarkson, 1996; Cohen, 2001). Empathy, strong social bonds, a commitment to social justice, and a shared sense of membership within a moral community, are all key to reinforcing strong relationships (Straub, 1989; Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Hoffman, 2000; Cohen, 2001). Next, I examine how human rights organizations draw on these themes and create campaigns that appeal to our shared membership in the human community to respond to the suffering of strangers. I explore the ways in which human rights organizations seek to create the conditions where "turning a blind

eye"[41] to human atrocity and suffering ought not to be a viable moral option. Urging individuals to overcome denial, passivity, and sensory overload and become engaged witnesses therefore remains a major challenge organizations face. I conclude this chapter with a consideration of what it means to be a witness to human rights abuses, focusing on the necessity of recognizing and responding to others.

BYSTANDING AND THE CHALLENGE OF WITNESSING

The literature on "bystander phenomenon" offers a framework for understanding how individuals respond, as well as their failure to respond, to those in need of help. The term "bystander" bears some resemblance, in part, to my usage of the tem "witness." The distinction, I suggest, between the bystander and witness hinges on the sense of responsibility one ought to feel, which can lead to action on behalf of the victim. Once the individual recognizes that some form of action is required to ameliorate the suffering of another, I argue that an epistemological and praxiological shift occurs. This shift transforms a passive bystander into an engaged, or involved, witness. Cohen (2001) defines the bystander as "a person who does not become actively involved in a situation where someone else requires help" (p. 69). For Straub (1989), the bystander describes "members of society not directly affected and outside groups, including other nations" (p. 5). The term is often used colloquially to connote neutrality,

---

[41] In *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, Asar Nafisi (2003) tells her students that "blindness" is the most unforgivable crime in fiction" (p. 224). She adds, "This I believe is how the villain in modern fiction is born: a creature without compassion, without empathy" (ibid). Blindness, like passivity, can be seen as the denial of the other and her suffering.

hence the term "innocent bystander," or synonymously, an onlooker, someone who happened upon a troubling situation. Cohen suggests, however, that bystander is a "tricky term" because it "already implies the judgement of passive or unresponsive witness and creates 'doubts' about the bystander's role" (p. 60). The question lingers as to whether the bystander could have done something to help, thereby preventing further harm, to ameliorate the suffering of the victim. In this sense, one could argue that the construction of the "innocent bystander" is potentially misleading, unless that person becomes an unintentional victim. Clarkson (1996), for example, takes issue with the notion that bystanding is an innocent activity because she sees bystanding as "the denial of relationship and, thus, kindness" (p. 4). For Clarkson, once people come to know about a situation or have some form of "contact," it "necessarily means they *are* involved" (p. 33, italics in original). Getting involved, however, is context-specific and depends on a number of factors. First, one must understand or identify that something is wrong and then determine what the individual can do to help (Cohen, p. 69). One can be aware that something is indeed wrong and still be uncertain as to how best to respond and whether one wants to become involved. The distinction, often ambiguously made in the literature, between the bystander and the witness pertains to the witness's willingness to become involved.

In this study, I outline the multiple meanings and associations of who is constructed as the "witness" and with conceptualizations of "witnessing" as a phenomenon—which is not meant to be exhaustive—in both the literature and in the websites. The following example by Cohen exemplifies the problem:

witnesses are "those who come to know, see or hear, either at the time or later" about the suffering of others (Cohen, p. 15). Yet, the same can be said of bystanders who might also come to understand the significance of what they saw or experienced. Cohen also uses the terms "moral witness" and "deliberate witness." The former refers to those who oppose official accounts that deny abuse (p. 256). The latter term, "deliberate witness," is also aligned with the moral act of resistance against perpetrators. Cohen also uses the term "active bystander" to describe those "powerless to intervene" against perpetrators but who resist and deny perpetrator's "versions" of events (ibid). Perhaps a more helpful framework for understanding the problem might lie in identifying under what conditions people do, and do not, offer assistance to others. Cohen outlines the following conditions that inhibit bystander intervention (p.16):

- "Responsibility is diffused" (others who are present are not taking action)
- Identification (and empathy) with the victim is absent
- Inability to conceive of, or recognize, effective intervention

Bystanding is, therefore, bound up in larger "ethical" questions, as Clarkson suggests, because it draws attention to how individuals choose to respond (or fail to) to the welfare of others and acknowledge or deny relationships or connectedness.

As a disavowal of relationship, the word "bystander" "has acquired the pejorative meanings of passivity and indifference" (Clarkson, p. 140). The "classic" example of the Kitty Genovese case, Cohen explains, "still shapes both the popular and the social scientific *iconography* of the 'passive bystander'" (p. 68, emphasis mine). Clarkson, too, cites the influence of the Kitty Genovese

31

case which came to represent passivity and indifference to human suffering as several bystanders failed to intervene to prevent her assault and eventual murder, although they heard her cries for help. This symbolic case precipitated further research which "led to the development of the concept of bystanding, or bystanding apathy, in Social Psychology by Latane and Darley (1970) to describe the behaviour of people in emergencies who are aware of a violent assault or injustice and do not attempt any effective intervention" (Clarkson, p. 3). More recent research has, however, challenged "the circumstances surrounding" the role of witnesses and the police in the Genovese case, which is often used as "a contemporary parable—the antithesis of the biblical tale of the Good Samaritan."[42] This new research alleges that one neighbour yelled, interrupting the attack, calls made to the police were ignored, and a subsequent attack on Genovese occurred in a location that was not visible to eyewitnesses. Cohen argues that cases such as these function as "metaphor[s] for urban malaise, a moral panic about 'what has happened to us'" (p. 68). The discourse surrounding the "passive bystander" has become "slightly hysterical," and has come to represent larger anxieties about urban decay, severed social bonds, and other social ills (p. 69). The end result is the creation of a false and simplistic dichotomy between the passive and engaged bystander that is both "sharp and melodramatic":

> On the one side, indifference, emotional numbing, desensitization, coldness, alienation, apathy, the anomie and loneliness of urban

---

[42] See Larry McShane's "Article casts doubt on 'Genovese syndrome'" in which he cites the work of professors Rachel Manning, Mark Levine, and Alan Collins in www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.2007..., retrieved on 10/27/2007. Their research challenges former reports that bystanders did nothing to help Genovese.

life; on the other, responsibility, moral sensitivity, compassion, good citizenship, bravery, altruism, community the Good Samaritan. (p. 69)

This reductive conceptualization provides little insight into how complex moral decisions are constantly "made and remade" by individuals (Clarkson cites Latane and Darley, p. 101). One is not simply indifferent and apathetic in every situation or, for that matter, always altruistic and courageous. Given its pejorative connotations however, to be a bystander is to stand accused of some inherent character flaw or social failing.

The literature on bystanding is relevant to my study because it focuses on individual responsibility and action and the role the "ordinary" person can play in influencing others, as well as shaping the outcome of a situation, in both desirable and undesirable ways. In short, individuals can make a difference, a theme that is reiterated by witness.org, ijm.org, and the witnesssingproject.org. Bystanders physically present at the scene "can exert powerful influence," Straub explains (1989), because "they can define the meaning of events and mov[e] others to empathy or indifference. They can promote values and norms of caring, or by their passivity or participation in the system they can affirm the perpetrator" (p. 87). Moreover, bystanders who "actively oppose" perpetrators "can reactivate the perpetrators' moral values and also cause them to be concerned about retaliation" (p. 5). Conversely, however, bystanders might identify too closely with perpetrators and be "coerced," negatively influencing whether others choose to assist victims (Bloom & Reichert, 1990, p.91). Even in cases where bystanders do nothing, Clarkson argues, they can become

"complicit" in the mistreatment of victims (p. 21). At the heart of bystanding lies a larger philosophical question and dilemma: is it morally wrong to do nothing (non-intervention) when danger is minimal for the bystander? Straub rightly asks whether bystanders have an obligation to act to alleviate the "maltreatment" of victims (p. 239). The issue of whether moral duties ought to be legally enforced is the subject of much debate. Menlowe (1999) points out that "in the law in English-speaking countries there is no general duty to rescue in either the criminal or the civil law," in contrast to many European countries (p. 5). In Canada, Quebec remains the exception, recognizing the duty to rescue in its Charter.[43] The question is whether "one who fails to rescue, particularly when the rescue is easy, does wrong; or does that person merely fail to do good?" (p. 7). Menlowe believes that (individual) moral culpability ought to have legal consequences.[44] Cohen, however, raises the larger issue of legislating "virtue" and whether it is "desirable and feasible" to use "the law to enforce certain standards" (p. 270). It would be extremely difficult to enforce these moral standards and establish culpability. For the purposes of this study, the issue of

---

[43] In Quebec, "which falls under civil law, there is a general duty to rescue in its Charter of Rights: 'Every human being whose life is in peril has a right to assistance…Every person must come to the aid of anyone whose life is in peril, either personally or calling for aid, by giving him the necessary and immediate physical assistance, unless it involves danger to himself or a third person.' The legal context is quite different from France and Germany, however; criminal law in Canada is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government, so failure to comply with an article of the Charter of Quebec does not constitute a criminal offence unless that by doing so a party violates the Criminal Code of Canada," retrieved on January 4, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duty_to_rescue.
[44] This issue become particularly fraught in relation to the international obligations of states to prevent grave humanitarian abuses such as crimes of humanity and genocide and challenges to another state's sovereignty. Menlow et al. (1993) and Wheeler (2000) have been useful references, as well as Canada's contribution to the international discussion on humanitarian intervention in its 2001 document, *The responsibility to protect.*

moral responsibility to assist strangers in other countries, and how it is employed by human rights organizations to construct their appeals, will be explored.

Inherent within discussions surrounding bystanding and inaction, namely, the failure to respond or speak out against injustice, is the question of moral blameworthiness and culpability. Cohen believes it is somewhat of a "stretch" to cast bystanders "as morally blameworthy as the perpetrators" (p. 215-216). For Clarkson, however, when "those who are watching or who are closing their eyes" allow "a tragedy to unfold," they become "complicit" (p. 8).[45] Clarkson, however, leaves little room for debate when doing nothing can lead to worse acts of abuse. Taken to its extreme, passivity is used to deny the existence of any relationships and any sense of obligation to others (Clarkson, p. 15). The potential danger inherent in passive bystanding lies in what, "at a covert psychological level it can permit or sanction" (ibid). At its worst, large-scale bystanding by "ordinary" people allowed the Nazis to carry out the extermination of Jews. In its most banal forms, bystanding can lead individuals to look the other way and deny that what is going on is any of their business. In this sense, the extremes of passivity serve as a cautionary tale because bystanders can, unintentionally, give "tacit permission to the abuse of power" (Clarkson, p. 9). Worse, cycles of passivity can lead bystanders "to devalue the victims and justify their own passivity" (Straub, p. 18). In effect, victims are blamed for what happens to them and are seen as deserving of their fate.

Yet passivity and the denial of relationship with others—particularly those who do not belong to one's immediate familial and social circle—can be

[45] For Zalaika (2003), "silence amounts to complicity when injustice is not denounced" (p. 294).

35

understood as "universal" coping strategies employed by bystanders who are physically present, as well as those "external" to an event, in order to avoid distress (Cohen, p. 17). Most Western audiences are "external or metaphorical bystanders, sitting in our living rooms facing texts and images of suffering" (ibid). These strategies of avoidance, or simply not wanting to know, arise from "the inability or refusal to be continually 'facing' or 'living with' unpleasant truths" (p. 20). Moreover, individuals, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information and images[46] about the suffering of others, often experience what Cohen refers to as "compassion fatigue." Being aware and informed, deciding on which campaigns/causes to support, and knowing which actions to take can lead to "almost debilitating paralysis" (Clarkson, p.11). Obviously, we cannot know about every cause and be involved in everything. "Tuning out" and "turning off" are, therefore, understandable responses (Cohen, p. 188).[47] If anything, Cohen suggests that the question should focus less on "why denial occurs" and more on "'why do we ever not shut out?'" (p. 249).[48] Cohen is mindful of the consequences bystanders, as well as witnesses, often experience when they do tune in, particularly—though not necessarily—when dealing with extreme cases of abuse and oppression, such as mass rape or child soldiers. Bloom and

---

[46] To illustrate the amount of information generated each year, Lanham (2006) provides the following statistics: "The world's total yearly production of print, film, optical, and magnetic content would require roughly 1.5 billion gigabytes of storage. This is the equivalent of 250 megabytes per person for each man, woman, and child on earth—each year!' (A megabyte=a million characters; a gigabyte=1,000 megabytes."

[47] Other defence mechanisms, which bystanders might not even be aware of, include "rationalization," or "motivated misperception," as well as outright "avoidance" of information about "victims' suffering" (Straub, p. 57).

[48] For Cohen, "the empirical problem is not to uncover yet more evidence of denial, but to discover the conditions under which information is acknowledged" (p. 249).

Reichert (1998) draw attention to the impact of "secondary traumatization,"[49] also referred to in the literature as vicarious traumatization, which they describe as "the toxic effects of a violent event upon a community of bystanders" (p. 88).[50] When individuals and communities feel helpless and are unable "to act to prevent harm," it "undermines [their] sense of efficacy, reinforces powerlessness, and often results in profound feelings of guilt and shame" (ibid). These feelings increase "empathic distress, described by Hoffman (2000) as the distress one feels upon "observing someone in actual distress" (p. 4).[51]

        While a feeling of empathy intensifies a sense of connection to others and a willingness to help, Cohen cautions that high levels of distress can have negative consequences "if the help is seen as too demanding or the need not deserving enough" (Cohen, p. 72). With so many organizations making "moral and psychological demands" that individuals "do something," individuals often shut down in the face of being bombarded with more information and appeals demanding that they respond to yet another group of suffering strangers (Cohen, p. 189).[52] The challenge organizations face is to create campaigns that evoke feelings of empathy without making individuals feel overwhelmed with guilt and

---

[49] "Secondary traumatization," also referred to in the literature as "vicarious traumatization," also affects professionals in health and caring professions, the result of chronic overexposure to trauma suffered by others (Hoffman, 2000, p. 200).

[50] Kaplan (2005), adapting Hoffman's work, indicates that vicarious traumatisation "may be a misnomer" in so far as "spectators do not feel the protagonist's trauma. They feel the pain evoked by empathy-arousing mechanisms interacting with their own traumatic experiences. Such mechanisms are especially powerful when a viewer has firsthand traumas that are similar to those being portrayed" (p. 30).

[51] Hoffman refers to the following types of distress: "sympathetic distress, empathic anger, empathic feelings of injustice, [and] guilt" (p. 4).

[52] Appeals to do something work best, according to Cohen, when donors are "not required to make a major investment of thought, time or energy" (p. 273). Cohen provides examples of "easy" ways to "do good and feel good," which include ethical wills and investments, fundraising credit cards, and donations of spare change (ibid).

shame. A more effective strategy is to appeal to an individual's sense of moral values and their "commitment to social justice" (p. 71). For Cohen, "only an overriding principle—like social justice" can make a difference when individuals deny relationships with others and look the other way (p. 295). Individuals who therefore see themselves as part of a moral community of shared values are more likely to care about the welfare of others and be willing to help.

EMPATHY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CARE

The arousal of empathic feelings, specifically identification with another's suffering, can overcome bystander passivity (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Hoffman, 2000; Cohen, 2001).[53] Human rights organizations, for example, design campaigns that evoke emotional responses, asking us to imagine, if we can, the unimaginable and the "intolerable," to quote Cohen. Hoffman (2000) defines empathy as "an *affective* response more appropriate to *another's* situation than one's own" (p. 4, emphasis mine). His focus is on the individual's psychological motivations "to help" and whether these motivations are "self-serving or based on true concern for the victim" (p. 29). The literature also makes the slight distinction between the terms empathy and sympathy: "Empathy can be contrasted with sympathy. Whereas empathy is feeling what another feels, or would feel, if she knew her own situation, sympathy is our own emotional response to another's situation, often sorrow or concern" (Weingarten, 2003, p. 166). This distinction is suggestive of the extent to which empathy can be

---

[53] If the bystander was in some way victimized personally or as part of a group, then she may be paralyzed by PTSD rather than by a lack of empathy.

considered altruistic and is aligned with prosocial motives: "it seems reasonable to conclude that although empathy-based helping makes people feel good by reducing empathic distress and provide empathic relief, the main objective is to alleviate the victim's distress. Empathic distress is, in short, a prosocial motive" (p. 33). If one does not help, one's distress continues as the "primary aim [is] to help another, and one feels good only if the victim is helped" (p. 35). Understanding the role affect plays, human rights organizations employ narrative and other representational strategies designed to evoke empathy, as well as certain levels of empathic distress and outrage for victims of injustice.[54] Such strategies have included the use of iconic images of starving children (famine in the 1980s) and individual narratives which personalize suffering. Empathy works by engaging the individual's moral imagination:

> Because of the human capacity to represent events and imagine oneself in another's place, and because of the power of represented events to evoke affect, to feel empathic distress one need only imagine victims, as when reading about someone's misfortune, arguing economic or political issues that involve victims or potential victims....(Hoffman, p.8)

Empathy thus allows individuals to bridge the psychological distance between themselves and others. The target audiences of human rights campaigns generally shares little in common with the victims they are asked to assist.[55] The former are generally "well educated, of higher socio-economic status, liberal in their political views, already belonging to the 'conscience constituency'" (Cohen,

---

[54] Empathic anger or outrage can be directed against perpetrators who cause victims to suffer, and individuals stand in solidarity and feel themselves "vicariously attacked" (Hoffman, p. 96).
[55] Cohen notes that individuals are more likely to respond empathically "when they are in a relatively comfortable state themselves; otherwise they might be too focused on their own needs to be open and responsive to cues signifying another's distress" (p. 198).

p. 196). One's self-concept as someone who is altruistic, who cares about the welfare of others, is closely connected to one's willingness to help those in need.[56] Bloom and Reichert (1998) echo the point that "helpful bystanders" have "strong moral concerns," are "empathic" and able to apply (moral) "standards" to "people in different social, ethnic and religious groups" (p. 90).[57] Helping, they note, is "self-reinforcing": the more one helps, the more one is motivated to continue to help and see oneself as a caring and compassionate individual (ibid). Further, witnesses are more likely to help, Straub indicates, when they feel a sense of responsibility, "(for example, he or she is the only person present or has special competence) or if people make the witness responsible by instructions or orders" (p. 84).[58]

Hoffman (2000) indicates that empathy derives its potency and potential when aligned to "caring and justice" (p. 216). While "justice is concerned with the rights people are entitled to," and ought to be applied "universally," Hoffman maintains that caring is different: "it does not refer to a particular act. It is an abstraction, a moral imperative, a fundamental value, a philosophical ideal. It says we must always consider others" (p. 225). Caring about the suffering is thus closely connected to the need to alleviate their suffering.[59] One's empathic

---

[56] A study done on rescuers found that "altruism resulted from a particular cognitive outlook...The recognition of who you are was more important than allegiance to any abstract moral or political agenda: help whomever you can, when you are asked" (Cohen, p. 265).
[57] Bloom and Reichert point out that individuals who offer help may have a stronger sense of empathy because they might have experienced marginalization and victimization, "but they have been able to sustain connections with others rather than disconnect from human bonds" (p. 90).
[58] Straub, like Cohen, notes that "when circumstances diffuse responsibility, helping is much less possible" (p. 84).
[59] Hoffman states, "The link between empathic distress and caring is obvious. Indeed, caring seems like a natural extension of empathic distress in specific situations to the general idea that one should always help people in need: 'We are our brother's keeper,' 'We must alleviate

response is, however, aroused for victims who are seen as "basically good" and/or deserving, and whose "fate was undeserved and unfair" (Hoffman, p. 107). If victims are perceived as deserving of their fate, bystanders and witnesses are not likely to intervene and offer assistance. Hoffman makes a connection between affect (empathic feelings) and a sense of injustice that leads to the incongruence between "actions and outcomes": an innocent person is wronged or treated unfairly (p. 223). We are able to imagine and feel what it is like to be wronged treated unjustly. Empathy is most easily aroused, however, for those who appear to be most like us. Empathic responses for distant others are often limited by "familiarity bias" (family members and those who belong to our immediate circle) and by "here-and-now bias" (those present) (Hoffman, p. 197). Cohen, too, raises the point about "suitable victims": "the best victims are those who are familiar, relatively easy to identify with, and not too responsible for their suffering" (p. 173). The challenge human rights organizations face is getting individuals—often geographically removed from atrocity—to care about, and act on behalf of, distant strangers.

The literature on bystanding phenomenon also identifies the importance of strong social bonds, which can overcome passivity and encourage individuals to become active and engaged witnesses. Bloom and Reichert maintain that "healthy attachment generates empathic connections among people: we cannot observe abuse and not be affected" (p. 88). Individuals are, therefore, more likely to act or intervene to help those to whom they feel connected, which

---

suffering, 'Treat people as ends, never means,' and 'Treat others as you would like them to treat you'" (p. 225).

41

echoes Clarkson's idea of the recognition of relationships (p. 135). Bloom and

Reichert ask, "What is our moral responsibility to each other? Are we, in fact,

"our brother's keeper?" (p. 91). Feelings of responsibility to others, not just those

with whom we are familiar, connect us to each other and enable stronger bonds.

The denial, or "subversion," of responsibility can lead to "excluding certain people

from the realm of humanity or defining them as a danger to oneself or one's way

of life and values" (ibid). If we are each other's keepers, we, therefore have a

responsibility to "alleviate suffering" (Bloom & Reichert, p. 225). Cohen, too,

echoes this sentiment and advances the notion of "fraternity." Although

androcentric and rooted in religious and political ideologies that denied the

"fraternity" and equality of racialized and gendered others, Cohen argues that this

concept holds "revolutionary" potential (p. 294).[60] When extended to "the distant

stranger," "fraternity" can be used to establish a "threshold of the intolerable as

exactly the same for everybody" (p. 293, italics in original). Cohen's notion of a

"threshold," though filled with promise and possibility, points to the telling reality

that all too often occurs: even when "the intolerable" is recognized, the political

will and action to prevent it falls short. Cohen asks whether there "could there be

a global community in which the obligation to assist others in danger and distress

was a powerful imperative? And where a deep sense of shame of passivity

---

[60] His argument of the fraternity as "the most ignored of revolutionary principles" is more optimistic than it is convincing: "The starting point is not pseudo-universalism or touchy-feely empathy, but a recognition of the radical and irreducible differences that do matter. The differences derive not from my ethnicity, culture, income, world-view, age, sexuality or gender, but from primeval facts that *my children have not and will not die from hunger* and that *I have or not will not be forced from my home after watching my wife hacked to death with a machete.* It is precisely because these differences are so profound that the most ignored of revolutionary principles has yet to be invoked: not liberty, not equality, but fraternity" (p. 293-294, italics in original).

becomes an 'effective mobilizing norm of social life'?" (276). The refrain "never again" in response to the Holocaust continues to ring hollow as conflicts that ought to have shocked and shamed the international conscience of the global community have not led to humanitarian intervention. The case of Rwanda is telling in this regard because the United States refused for many years to name the atrocities that took place as genocide.[61] In the case of Darfur, while the United States' Congress has agreed that genocide has been taking place, the United Nations has referred to the situation as a "humanitarian crisis," which does not compel (military) intervention. With competing state interests at stake and the question of which lives will be risked to save other lives, international responses often fall far short in preventing and responding to atrocities. As Straub observes, action and "sacrifice on behalf of people in extreme danger" requires "courage" (p. 239).[62] Feeling connected, and recognizing we are in relationships with others, might well be the starting point of engagement. Cohen asks, how then "can we create the conditions for more altruism?" (p. 261).

Promoting altruism as a pro-social good to counteract passivity is highlighted by several researchers. Human rights advocacy campaigns are based on the notion that people are inherently good and want to "do good." While theorists like Hoffman emphasize that altruistic objectives ought not to be

---

[61] Samantha Power (2002) documents in *"A problem from hell": America and the age of genocide* the bureaucratic nightmare that was involved in naming--and the refusal to name--what was going on in Rwanda genocide in spite of reports that were coming out before and after the massacres that clearly identified the scale and intent of the killings as such. The problem is apparent once more in the international community's failure to name, and so shape some type of response, the mass killings and displacement of over two million people in Darfur genocide.

[62] This idea of courage, and the courage to do the right thing, is addressed by Gary Haugen, the founder of International Justice Mission, in *Good news about injustice: a witness of courage in a hurting world.*

selfish or self-serving and ought to be directed towards helping another, recent

research[63] offers a physiological basis for feeling good when one helps others:

> When participants chose to donate money, the brain's mesolimic
> system was activated, the same part of the brain that's activated in
> response to monetary rewards, sex, and other positive stimuli.
> Choosing to donate also activated the brain's subgenual area, the
> part of the brain that produces feel-good chemicals, like oxytocin,
> that promote social bonding. (Farino, 2007).

This connection has already been embraced within popular culture by talk show

host and celebrity icon Oprah, as well as other spokespersons engaged in

charitable work, who enthusiastically espouses the slogan "Doing good feels

good," thus providing a rationale for altruistic behaviour. Though altruism is

associated in the literature with unselfish behaviour on behalf of others without

the expectation of any reward, populist notions of altruism allow for selfishness

as long as the goal of helping others is achieved.[64] Altruism therefore does not

run counter to Rational Choice theory,[65] suggests Cohen, confirming the

argument there are benefits to helping others.[66] Whether individuals are

motivated by a desire to help others or for the reward of "feeling good" and

---

[63] Research published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, and reported on the popular msn.com site by Lisa Farino, shows that volunteering, donating to charities, simply giving to others feels good and is connected to happiness and a sense of well-being ("Do good, feel good," retrieved April 10, 2007, at http://health.msn.com). Farino raises the question of whether helping, and giving, is "ultimately selfish."

[64] In response to Farino's question about the contradiction between helping, which might be undertaken for selfish rather than altruistic reasons, Dr. Stephen Post, professor of bioethics and co-author of *Why good things happen to good people*, asserts, "If the warm glow and 'helper's high' that people experience when they help others is selfish, then we need more of this kind of selfishness" (in "Do good, feel good").

[65] Rational Choice theorists' Clarke and Cornish employ the term "satisficing" to describe "reasonable outcomes" that can be expected from an individual's actions are applicable to this scenario: helping has benefits (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001, p. 25).

[66] Cohen suggests that "altruism is an anomaly to rational choice theory in the obvious sense that altruists are defined precisely as people who act without expecting rewards" (p. 264). However, he does anticipate the cynical response a rational choice theorist would offer, which is born out in attitudes that "doing good" does indeed have its own rewards: "rewards are merely hidden: the cost-benefit calculus takes in rewards of psychic gratification, reciprocity and peer-group approval" (ibid).

receiving approval, altruism remains the cornerstone of many human rights campaigns. Bloom and Reichert highlight its importance and note that altruism can be "modeled, learned, taught, and reinforced" and is "constantly recreated" in different contexts (p. 91). Clarkson offers the creative, and idealistic, suggestion of the creation of "bystander intervention training," designed along the lines of First Aid courses offered by Saint John's Ambulance (p. 108). In addition, she recommends the creation of an "archive" which would contain "bystander and bystander intervention stories, histories and researches" (ibid). First Aid courses are seen as essential training for many professionals (as well as interested individuals) because they offer life-saving skills. One could argue that "bystander intervention training" can be seen as an essential skill because individuals can be made aware of their roles and the impact they can have in shaping various outcomes. The larger question concern design and delivery: which agency will be responsible, how will such training be delivered, and to whom? In a similar vein, Straub also recommends "educat[ing] people about the 'bystander role': the insidious effects and moral meaning of passivity and the psychological processes by which people distance themselves from those in need" (p. 240).[67] What these examples demonstrate is the importance of empathy and helping behaviours in acknowledging relationships and connections to others. Understanding the potential dangers of passive bystanding, individuals can choose to be deliberative in their actions and become active or engaged witnesses. Human

---

[67] Straub goes a step further and suggests the utopian vision of the creation of sustainable helping communities and societies which he believes can be built through "real interaction in a framework of equality" that bring people into contact with each other, where "they come to know and accept each other" (p. 274). Straub does not elaborate on how these communities are created and how helping and interaction are promoted within these communities.

rights organizations assume a priori that their constituents are already witnesses who simply need to be mobilized into action. This study explores how the concept of "witnessing" is adopted and adapted by witness.org, ijm.org, and the witnessingproject.org in their projects.

THE LIMITS OF EMPATHY: THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTIFYING WITH STRANGERS

With the proliferation of shocking, at times sensational, images of suffering in the media, audiences may not only become desensitized but may often fail to respond empathically. As audiences, we are "doubly distant observers" who are viewing representations of representations (Cohen, p. 167). Kaplan (2005) cautions, "it is hard for prosocial motives to be aroused through mere isolated images of violence, aggression, deprivation, and death" because they lack the necessary contextual information (p. 93). Kaplan uses the example of images taken by embedded reporters at the beginning of the war against Iraq to make her point: these images "hardly seemed *real*" when compared to computer-generated graphics and video games (p. 94, italics in original). In the absence of historical and political information—compounded by the growing number of conflicts occurring globally—individuals are often left to make sense (on their own) of decontextualized sound bites and images on their television screens. Indifference becomes far more likely than empathy. Bert Archer (2007) addresses the problem of indifference, of being "blasé" about the suffering in Darfur, yet individuals "are moved to tears that a dog or cat has been abused?"[68]

---

[68] "What makes us care?" appeared in *The Globe and Mail* on July 14, 2007.

Citing research by Small, Lowenstein, and Slovic, Archer reports that "the less we think about a crisis, the more we're likely to care about it—and put our caring into action." These researchers discovered that "areas of the brain that direct sympathy are more primitive than those that allow us to understand things rationally." In short, people tend "to lose interest when things get complicated and unpleasant." This finding mirrors Hoffman's ideas concerning the activation of moral principles: "abstract" information that is complex and dense, statistics, for example, are described as "cool cognitions," often learned in "didactic contexts" such as "lectures" or "sermons" (p. 239). "Cool cognitions," Hoffman argues, need to be transformed into "hot cognitions" that arouse feelings of empathy (ibid). Moral values, to which I add social justice and human rights ideals, derive their "force" when linked to affect (ibid).

Human rights organizations face the challenge of providing their constituents with the necessary contextual information, without overwhelming them, to evoke empathic responses. Kaplan explains, however, that "empathic over arousal" is a necessary component in getting people to care (p. 123). Caring and feeling responsible for the welfare of others, therefore, is based on the acknowledgement of their suffering and the obligation to respond. In the case of past injustice, the obligation involves the duty to remember. Archer quotes Professor John Doris who offers the following explanation, which challenges research on the connection between self-concept and caring about others: "it's not really about good character, it's about making people care. The mistake is thinking that what we should be doing is trying to instill situation-

47

independent character traits in people." Instead of appealing to people's character and sense of (superior) morality, human rights organizations, according to Doris, need to rethink their appeal strategies and evoke other ways of getting people to care. As cringe-inducing as it sounds, Doris calls attention to the fact that audiences respond to "attractive victims," or "suitable victims," to quote Cohen. Doris suggests charities "trick" people or "lead people to trick themselves," based on what the research has uncovered about empathy and sympathy. One of the recommendations he makes is the use of celebrity spokespeople who give a "pretty face to issues."[69] This research contends that empathy on its own is not enough of a motivator to lead individuals to action, and human rights organizations, if they want to launch successful campaigns, need to adopt more "popular" strategies to get their messages across. Witness.org, for example, has Peter Gabriel as one of its founding members, and popular corporate brand Reebok is one of its sponsors. Other celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and George Clooney have lent their status and have become spokespersons closely associated with various causes.

THE CHALLENGES OF VICARIOUSLY WITNESSING SUFFERING

In my previous discussion, I examined the potential dangers of passive bystanding—namely, the disavowal of responsibility and relationships which can possibly lead to further suffering. Bystanding can lead to apathy and feelings of

---

[69] He suggests that Darfur needs a "mascot," as "crass" as it sounds. Darfur already has a celebrity spokesperson on board, namely, Mia Farrow. In my chapter on witness.org, I refer to George Clooney, Don Cheadle, and Brad Pitt who have founded *Not on our watch* to raise awareness about the ongoing violence, deaths, and displacement of people in Darfur.

powerlessness.   To counteract passivity, several researchers outline the importance of acknowledging responsibility to others based on the recognition of relationships and the obligations one has to respond to the suffering of others. Acknowledgement can bridge the distance that separates the bystander and the witness who is moved (affectively) to care about and act on behalf of others to alleviate their suffering.   However, as the literature illustrates, exposure to suffering can lead to "empathic distress" and "vicarious traumatization." I use the term "vicarious witness" to convey the individual who is affected, distressed, by what she sees and who is not present to the event.[70]   Kaplan accepts that "vicarious traumatization may be a component of witnessing" (p. 123).   Kaplan contends that witnessing extends from "the desire to help an individual in front of me" to "a broader understanding of the meaning of what has been done to victims, of the politics of trauma being possible" (ibid).   My research explores witnessing in the "broader" context of human rights advocacy and how organizations employ and adapt witnessing as a model for urging their constituents to feel connected to, care, and be responsible for distant strangers.

The problem, as discussed earlier, concerns the sheer volume of information about human rights abuses and suffering occurring globally. Geographic distance easily gives way to psychological distancing. Cohen notes, that we are "doubly distant observers" who "look at visual images or written texts that show others who are looking at the suffering of yet others" (p. 167). These

---

[70] Keats (2005) employs the term "witnessing after-image" to describe the traumatic experience of media and/or photographic images that can occur in the form of "intrusive thoughts, flashback memories, and nightmares" (p. 184). In this way, "the shock of a traumatic event is embodied: the body perceives, responds, organizes, remembers" (ibid).

images and texts are mediated through the media, usually television, as well as through various Internet sites (for example, news sources, links to human rights organizations, and social networking groups). Our knowledge of the suffering of strangers on a large scale is, for the most part, experienced vicariously: "All media response should be seen as at most vicarious trauma, not as experiencing trauma itself" (Kaplan, p. 90). Kaplan maintains that feelings evoked by these images and narratives interact with our own traumatic experiences and the degree to which an "empathic response is evoked" is much more "powerful" if the "viewer has had first hand traumas that are similar to those being portrayed" (p. 90). However, an empathic response need not be limited to personal experience. The literature suggests that an individual's moral imagination allows her to put herself in the shoes of others and identify, however momentarily, with the experience with another. The globalization of images of suffering—through photographs, television, cell phones, digital cameras, and video communications technology—offers occasions for vicarious witnessing: we see, therefore, we know what is happening to others. Visual images, even more so than text,[71] lend credibility to claims of injustice and provide evidence of what is really happening. Witness.org, for example, provides video cameras to grassroots activists to document human rights abuses. With regard to "the iconography of suffering," Sontag (2003) explains there has been a "long pedigree" but only of those images deemed "worthy," for example, images of "wrath, divine or human" (p. 40). The cliché "seeing is believing" is often invoked to suggest undeniable and

---

[71] Sontag (2003) conveys the appeal of the visual, referring specifically to the photograph, in the following advertising slogan used by *Paris Match* in 1949: "The weight of words, the shock of photos" (p. 23).

objective proof of abuses and atrocity. Television, as well as other communication technologies, functions as "a witness," though Ignatieff (1997) notes that it is more often than not "the bearer of bad tidings to the watching conscience of the world" (p. 23). Ignatieff contends that "television makes it harder to sustain indifference or ignorance" (p. 8). By projecting images and personal stories of suffering, visual media serves indirectly as a vehicle for the globalization of conscience.

Based on earlier discussions about desensitization to suffering and other aversive practices such as turning off and tuning out, questions emerge about what exactly is being witnessed. Critics have charged that viewing images of suffering has become another form of entertainment, a spectator sport, where audiences become "voyeurs of suffering" (Ignatieff, 1997, p. 11). Hoffman raises the problem of desensitization through "habituation": indifference often results from chronic and repeated exposure to another's suffering (p. 203). Further, images of suffering are appropriated and commercialized, and they "become part of our political economy" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997, p. 8). Certain places or sites such as Palestine become political "hot spots" and whole continents like Africa come to be known as places of unimaginable human suffering and disaster. In the West, these spaces are associated with ongoing conflict and violence. The experience of the suffering of strangers becomes reduced, Kleinman and Kleinman argue, to discourses of "victimization" and are shaped into "trauma stories" (p. 9-10). Victims are, therefore, further objectified, reinforcing their status as victims, and as little else, whose lives are seldom seen

(and imagined) outside the experience of suffering. These images, observe these authors, become "currency, the symbolic capital, with which they enter into exchanges for physical resources and achieve status as political refugees" (ibid). The problem is that decontextualized images alone—no matter how graphic— often do not compel action, and they cannot bridge what comes to be seen as an insurmountable distance that exists between distant strangers and viewing audiences who are in the comfort and safety of their homes. While television can shrink the geographical distance and bring us "face-to-face" with what is happening to other humans, it simultaneously "obscure[s] the distances—social, economic, moral—that lie between us" (Ignatieff, 11). Counter to research, discussed earlier, that highlights the connection between affect and identification with the suffering of strangers, Humphrey (2002), like Ignatieff, questions media presentations of content which lack substance and context. Television relies on "affectivity rather than knowledge (cognition) for the connection" to be made between victims and those who are (vicariously) witnessing their suffering (Humphrey, 2002, p. 91). Based on Humphrey's argument, appeals to both knowledge and affect are necessary if individuals are to be mobilized. For this reason, Humphrey remains skeptical of "the view that media coverage has contributed to a new moral universalism" because "it ignores the political reality of moral ambivalence" (p. 103). While the media has indeed brought the plight of strangers to the screen, one questions whether witnessing has led to an even more sensitized and responsive global community.[72] The other extreme of

---

[72] Humphrey indicts not only the media but the lack of political will by governments to intervene and risk the lives of their citizens to uphold "legal and moral" principles (p. 103).

having no images or coverage at all is, however, not a morally viable option, an even more "dangerous cultural process" where images are censored or suppressed (Kleinman & Kleinman, p. 17). These authors cite Mao's censorship policies in China that led to the famine in 1959-1961. A more recent example has been China's exclusion of foreign journalists from covering anti-government protests in Tibet in March, 2008.[73] While the proliferation of images often has the effect of desensitizing viewers, the absence of images would have a more chilling effect: "public silence" (p. 17).

The question of how to address suffering occurring elsewhere and the shape this response ought to take remains a challenge for vicarious witnesses and human rights organizations which attempt to shape their constituents' response. Boltanski (1999) asks what might action, or commitment, entail when viewing suffering from a distance. He acknowledges that "all moral demands converge on the single imperative of action," but often what kind of action one ought to take is unclear (p. xv). He regards the speech act as an act of commitment that can be empowering, by simply sharing what an individual has witnessed and the impact it has had. For Boltanski, speech[74] is closely connected to action. Alsup (2003) asserts that "speech *is* action" and, moreover,

---

[73] China not only blocked foreign reporters but blocked Internet users from seeing images on YouTube.com "showing foreign news reports about the Lhasa demonstrations, montages of photos and scenes from Tibet-related protests abroad." Further, Internet users who attempted to access the site were greeted with "a blank screen" (www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080317..., retrieved on March 17, 2008).

[74] Boltanski describes three types of speech: "the topic of denunciation, the topic of sentiment, and the aesthetic topic" (p. xv). "Topic" should be "understood in the sense of ancient rhetoric" to indicate the inseparability of an "argumentative and affective dimension. Speech here is affected and it is especially by means of *emotion* that we conceive of the coordination of spectators--each of whom is also a speaker—and consequently the transition from individual speech and concern to collective commitment" (p. xv, italics in original).

"it has material and ethical implications that can be as powerful as physical actions" (p. 80, italics in original). Speech is transformed, states Boltanski, when it is intentional, and is not merely words: "the crucial moment in this topic is the moment of commitment understood as the moment of transformation from the state of being a receiver of information, that is to say, of being a spectator, observer, or listener, into that of being an actor" (p. 31). For Polchin (2007), the epistemological shift[75] from passive (seeing) to active (saying) witnessing entails an act of translating and transforming "what one sees into language—to testify to one's experience by communicating personal knowledge to a larger public" (p. 210). Speech is thus made more meaningful when it becomes public and collective. When action is not possible, "effective public speech" becomes a vehicle for denunciation (Boltanski, p. 172). Boltanski explains that "each spectator makes what we call a *proposal of commitment* to the person he addresses and to whom he conveys the spectacle of suffering and how it concerns him" (p. 49, italics in original). Similar to the Oliver's (2001) sense of the obligation one has to the other, the "proposal" becomes an ethical act undertaken by the individual—a form of witnessing to others through responsible speech—about the impact of suffering. Oliver, for example, refers to "response-ability" as "an obligation inherent in the social encounter" and in acts of witnessing[76] (p. 90). Engaged witnesses, from Clarkson's perspective, are

---

[75] For the passive spectator, described as "a viewer who is unable, or unwilling, to speak about what she has seen," "the move from spectator to witness involves an epistemological gap whose bridging is always fraught with difficulty" (Polchin, p. 210).
[76] Oliver posits that "subjectivity and humanity are the result of witnessing. That is to say, subjectivity and humanity are the result of response-ability. That which precludes a response destroys subjectivity and thereby humanity" (p. 90). This notion of a "responsive response" is echoed by Simon et al. (2002).

"aware-responsive" and understand their "relational responsibilities"[77] towards others (p. 14). The engaged witness is, therefore, "sensitive" to the other and participates in social action in order to minimize harm and suffering (Kleinman & Kleinman, p. 8).

The vicarious witness cannot simply rely on distance as an excuse for inaction. Boltanski contends that the distant observer is not "exempt" from "moral obligation" or commitment simply because the suffering is occurring elsewhere (p. 13). Boltanski proposes that distance can be overcome by the use of imagination: the spectator and the unfortunate are able to imagine each other (p. 38). As discussed earlier, one's moral imagination connects the fortunate to the unfortunate. Boltanski uses the example of animal activists who argue for the interconnectedness between species and the need for their protection and preservation. Imagining the suffering of others who are in need of our help ought to require less of a cognitive leap:

> If human beings are able to recognize that they have something essential in common, join together in groups and constitute particular interests by adopting the cause of beings of a different species that they have never been close to—whales or bears for example—is it utopian to think them capable of forming, interpreting and demonstrating their interests, or possibly, their own suffering, by taking up the cause of human being far away who they are aware of only through the media. (p. 190)

The commitment of the "ideal and internalized spectator" to the other rests upon the acknowledgment that her response has "a direct action on the unfortunate"

---

[77] Clarkson addresses the issue of social and moral responsibility within the framework of "liability": liability an individual feels towards one's immediate circle, and liability extended to others based on relational obligations. These liabilities are not legal but socio-cultural and moral approaches to liability. Cohen, for example, resists the legislating of conscience, though he notes the use of "legal compulsion" to make specific forms of denials, namely, Holocaust denial, illegal in countries such as Germany, Israel, France, Canada, Switzerland, and Austria (p. 268).

(Boltanski, p. 38). Agency and a feeling of moral responsibility (in Boltanski's sense of denunciation) thus define the active observer. Understanding that both belong to the same moral community, the vicarious witness seeks action on behalf of victims to alleviate the latter's suffering.

HUMAN RIGHTS: UTOPIAN APPEALS TO A SHARED MORAL COMMUNITY

Human rights organizations appeal to membership in a moral community that upholds the intrinsic value of "the human" and reinforces the bonds the human community ought to share. The emphasis on "the human" is meant to reflect "our awakening to the shame of having done so little to help the millions of strangers who died in this century's experiments in terror and extermination" (Ignatieff, 1997, p. 4-5). Rights are thus guaranteed on the basis of one's humanity (Howard, 1995; Donnelly, 2003; Ignatieff, 2001), as a form of "moral entitlement" granted to the individual (Howard, p. 15). Violations are thus seen as the denial of another's humanity (Howard, p. 17). While not enforceable, these rights are invoked when they have been violated, often as a "last resort" (Donnelly, p. 13). They provide a utopian and "moral vision of human potentiality, which rests on a particular account of the minimum requirements of a life of dignity" (p. 17). Human rights are thus an attempt to prescribe "normative principles" or guidelines about how states ought to treat their citizens (Howard, p. 15). In this way, human rights can be seen as revolutionary because they present challenges to state sovereignty and have attempted to transform social, cultural, and political systems globally (Orentlicher in Ignatieff, 2001, p. 155-156). They also attempt to create a universal and shared sense of community built

upon (assumed) obligations and responsibilities towards intimates and strangers (Howard, p. 121). The notable "difference" between traditional and modern communities is this sense of "membership" that is not limited to kin and state: "the modern community is a community of citizenships. Anyone is permitted to be a member, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or place of origin...The privatism of one's personal life is balanced by social commitment and interest in the wide networks of non-kin associates with whom one's own life is bound up" (Howard, p. 128). Human rights organizations thus appeal to this sense of global community—one sees the term " global citizenship" being invoked as well—and moral responsibility when mobilizing support for their campaigns to defend the rights of others, no matter where violations occur.

Human rights are also seen as revolutionary because individuals are empowered through rights discourse to speak out against oppression and injustice. Ignatieff (2001) asserts that human rights have "gone global" and have empowered victims locally in their struggles (p. 7). Ignatieff adds, "human rights' instruments have given bystanders and witnesses a stake in abuse and oppression both within and beyond their borders, and this has called forth an advocacy revolution" (p. 8). While not elected representatives, human rights organizations function as global advocates and provide access to victims who "have gained historically unprecedented power to make their case known to the world" (ibid). Human rights discourse is empowering because it "gives voice to the aggrieved" (Ignatieff, p. 86). They have been referred to by Ignatieff as a "moral vernacular" (p. 68), a "lingua franca" (p. 53), and "a moral trump card"

(p.21). Minow (2002) describe rights as "aspirational" (p. 86), while Hicks et al. (2000) think of them as "the heritage of humanity" (Hicks et al., 2000, p. 5). Rights "give victims a firm moral ground from which to accuse not only the perpetrators of violence but every agent that fails to respond" (Rosenblum, 2002, p. 86). One aspect of the work human rights organizations are involved in is the public exposure of abuses, speaking out on behalf of victims.

In spite of the moral rightness and righteousness of much of the human rights agenda and the crucial work carried out by various organizations, critics have called into question the ideological and cultural underpinnings of human rights. Ignatieff's position is that "human rights have become the major article of faith of secular culture" (p. 53). He challenges the basic assumptions of rights discourses which construct the human as innately "sacred," stating that "rights are not a creed, it is not a metaphysics. To make it so is to turn it into a species of idolatry: humanism worshipping itself" (ibid). Ignatieff believes that rights have become a form of human worship and is adamant that this approach is "as flawed as those religious beliefs that purport to *know* God's plans for humans" (p. 88, italics in orginal).   Instead, he believes rights ought not to be based on appeals to human nature but on human history, particularly the history post-Holocaust (p. 80). Additionally, they ought to be advanced on the basis of what they "do" (p. 54). Human rights are, therefore, not to be used simply as "moral trump cards" and held "above politics" (p. 21). Human rights activists, Ignatieff argues, take for granted their roles as representatives of universal values, without asking themselves whose interests are being defended and whether it is

their right to speak for others (p. 10). Other scholars have also raised questions about the "universality" of human rights and are critical of them as a form of Western cultural and legal imperialism that have been exported uncritically to other cultures (Onretlicher, 2001; Howard, 1995). While some human rights organizations adopt the position that they are not explicitly political organizations, in practice, human rights work is anything but apolitical: "human rights activism likes to portray itself as anti-politics, in defense of universal moral claims designed to delegitimize "political" (i.e., ideological or sectarian) justifications for the abuse of human beings" (Igatieff, p. 9). However, the goals of impartiality and neutrality are political fictions, and Ignatieff boldly asserts that "human rights activism is bound to be particular and partial" (ibid).

Yet human rights embody an ideal that continues to be worth pursuing and ought not to be abandoned. Ignatieff suggests that rights language be used, but not as "moral trumps." He proposes the expansion of values such as empathy, conscience, and a sense of reciprocity, namely "the golden rule" (treat others as you would like to be treated) (p. 89). Reinforcing these ideas, Lacquer (2001) recommends creating conditions to treat others like "neighbours," as part of one's community, which is intricately linked to an expanding moral sympathy to strangers (moral imagination) (p. 134). While simple in theory, Lacquer is acutely aware of how badly, and often violently, intimates treat each other on a personal level (p. 135). In many ways, "the abstract 'human' is easier to cherish and respect than the all-too-real creature next door" (ibid). While human rights are based on universal claims of human dignity, the principles defining who counts

as "human" and which lives matter still fail to be applied universally. Butler (2004) contends that "certain lives will be protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (p. 32).[78] Given the inconsistent application of human rights, Butler proposes a rearticulation of the "human" and suggests that "an ongoing task of human rights is to reconceive the human when it finds that its putative universality does not have universal reach" (p. 91). Oliver (2001), too, emphasizes the obligation to "recognize the other" who is often "unrecognizable" (p. 133). For Butler, recognizing or "responding" to the human in the other is gained through an understanding of the "precariousness" of life (p. 134). Drawing on the work of Levinas, Butler refers to the significance of seeing the face of the other, in other words, to grasp the human in the other: "To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or rather, the precariousness of life itself" (ibid). Perhaps, this approach can serve as reminder of why human life and dignity ought to be preserved. To be awake to "the human" and "the precariousness" of life requires "vigilance," to quote Oliver.

---

[78] Butler raises the question of who counts as "human" in light of the war against terrorism and the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION: "DELIBERATE WITNESSING" DEMANDS A RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

Human rights organizations, which I refer to as professional witnesses,[79] make it their duty to know about the suffering of others and to direct and mobilize their constituencies into action. Cohen states they are involved in the "compassion business" (p. 164). He further explains, "This is a new cosmopolitan subculture--well informed, articulate and ideally located to observe the atrocities and suffering which not so long ago were beyond scrutiny" (ibid). One of their functions is to bring to light and expose human rights abuses. In addition to the publication of reports of abuse in various media, Cohen believes that the presence of human rights organizations was meant to reflect the "ambitious hope" that they might be enough to shame perpetrators into ceasing their actions (p. 257). As the record of atrocities shows, shame is seldom enough. Yet, Cohen believes "this faith should not be abandoned" (p. 257). For some countries who reject international critique of their human rights records, it has sometimes meant increased defiance against bodies like the United Nations, vehement claims of state sovereignty, and/or counter accusations of human rights abuses by countries like the United States. Condemnations of the human rights records of Iran or China have, for example, led to claims about the lack of due process for prisoners held at Guantanamo, the use of extraordinary renditions, and the use of torture which contravenes the Geneva Conventions.

---

[79] By professional witnesses, I am referring to advocates with professional expertise who work within organizations and networks, including Ngos, to represent the causes of victims to constituents who can donate resources (money and time) to various campaigns and who can participate in their domestic political processes to lobby their elected representatives to take action (usually some form of denunciation) on victims' behalf.

While not often enough, public acts of shaming can serve a function: tainting a country's reputation, subjecting them to international condemnation, and, in some cases such as South Africa's under apartheid policies, it can become the basis for international protests and boycotts by artists and private companies.[80]

In addition to exposing human rights abuses, human rights organizations inform and educate, appealing explicitly to our "moral imagination" to help others:

> They come to know about the misery of strangers, not as chance passers-by, but as representatives of an 'impalpable modern ideal: that the problems of other people, no matter how remote, should concern us all': They live with a highly attuned sense of acknowledgement. The discourse about global suffering is largely the product of their moral imagination. They select the information that goes into human rights reports, documentation for war crimes tribunals, charity appeals and political briefings. (Cohen, p. 164)

This sense of a shared moral imagination,[81] or a conscience, suggests both an acknowledgement of and identification with the suffering of others (including the emotions of empathy and sympathy), which "implies seeing the 'other' as part of your shared moral universe" (Cohen, p. 216). Functioning as "deliberate witnesses," to coin Cohen's term, human rights organizations urge their constituencies to take action, to become "deliberate" witnesses by extension, demonstrating their solidarity with strangers. Response, or action, on behalf of vicarious witnesses, however, remains an ongoing challenge. The problem rights organizations face is how to "bridge the gap between what people know (and profess to believe) and what they do" (p. 266). One of the problems, Cohen

---

[80] Article 2(7) of the UN Charter forbids interference by nation states in the internal of another state unless there is the threat to peace, from www.un.org/aboutun/charter, retrieved on January 2, 2009.
[81] Ignatieff (1997) observes that the "modern moral imagination" is not without its problems, particularly as involvement undertaken by "Westerners who make the misery of strangers their business" needs to be balanced by larger questions ("bad conscience") and whether involvement makes things better or worse (p. 5).

points out, is on the over-reliance and "faith in the power of knowledge: if only people knew, they would act. Paradoxically, these same organizations know better than anyone how misplaced is a faith that they see undermined by their daily work" (p.185). The problem, as outlined earlier by Archer and others, is that information (facts and figures), on the one hand, needs to be balanced with emotive appeal. Neither on its own has been shown to initiate action. The problem stems not from a lack of information or images, as Zalaika (2003) points outs, but "what do with so much of it," with the "excess" of information, which overwhelms (p. 89). The literature indicates there is no causal link between knowledge and action. Amidst the babel of statistics, and competing claims for and about truth, one often confronts the impossibility and "futility" of witnessing made "mute" in the face of overwhelming injustice (ibid).[82] Human rights organizations remind us that giving up, and doing nothing, is not an option because lives are at stake.

In spite of the gap that exists between knowing and doing, Cohen asserts that "no humanitarian, educational or political organization should even consider limiting its flow of knowledge" (p. 295). Instead, the challenge organizations face is how to transform knowledge into acknowledgement and acknowledgment into action (p. 249).[83] Cohen questions what the conditions are for getting people's

---

[82] The quest to tell the truth must not be abandoned as it is often the only response against injustice: "the sense of unreserved, transgressive, savage obligation to tell the truth" is "a call born out of the pitiless awareness of the absurdities of injustices that excuse such horrors" (Zalaika, p. 89).
[83] In my chapter on witness.org, I refer to the nexus between seeing-knowing-doing, as laid out by the organization. Seeing is intimately connected to believing, hence knowing, and action presumably follows, but witness.org never explains how this is achieved—only that it can be assumed. Cohen forms the following links in the formulaic chain he believes needs to be made: the "transform[ation]" of "ignorance into information, information into knowledge, knowledge into

63

attention: "when do people pay attention? When do they recognize the significance of what they know? When will they be aroused to act, even at personal risk?" (ibid). There are no easy answers. Some of these answers might be found in campaigns that have been successful in mobilizing constituencies into action. Perhaps, some of these answers have yet to be discovered through different types of campaigns and mobilization techniques undertaken in other less formal social networking activities. The objectives of human rights organizations are to make their constituents aware of the problem, educate them about the most pressing issues, and to offer concrete options for action. Cohen describes the rhetorical strategies employed by human rights organizations as the "empowerment chain": "(1) Something can be done. (2) We can do it. (3) You can make a difference; here is what you can do" (p. 219). Witnesses must, therefore, feel empowered to seek change and to make a difference in the lives of others who urgently need their help. Further elaboration of the "empowerment chain" by Cohen emphasizes the role of the "deliberate witness," the difference she can make in the life of others, and why her involvement is necessary:

1) An appeal to a sense of "we," or membership in "the same enlightened community" (p. 197)
2) Identification of the problem and description of the organization and what they do (p. 198)
3) Focus on the personal "you" in "the message of empowerment: 'You can do something'" (p. 199)
4) Strategy to counteract "common denials and rationalization for doing nothing" (p. 199)
5) The final pitch which includes the following strategies: immediacy/urgency; outrage is converted into action; the voice

---

acknowledgement (cognition into recognition, sight into insight), and finally acknowledgment into action (p. 249).

of reason; the onslaught against denial (specifically, "public denial, apathy, and moral weakness" (p. 201)

While my focus is not on specific rhetorical strategies, I do note the structural themes that are reiterated within the websites I analyze, for example, the emphasis on individual action and empowerment through action: the difference one individual can make.

WITNESSING AS A PRACTICE OF ENGAGEMENT

Creating the conditions, and the pedagogical possibilities, for an ethical praxis of responsibility is an ongoing challenge for human rights organizations. In reviewing the literature, there are more questions than answers. Straub, like Cohen, questions what the conditions might be for "enlarg[ing] compassion, the awareness of responsibility for other lives, and the feeling of an obligation to act" (p. 169). Moreover, Straub (1989) contends that the focus on the individual is too narrow an approach and must shift to broader considerations of our socio-cultural and political systems and in the ways they "promote social welfare, in part how they shape individuals" (p. 25). For researchers like Cohen, a sense of responsibility is closely connected to a sense of social justice and the equitable treatment of others. Cohen believes that "acknowledgement," also identified in the literature as "recognition," of others can help to overcome denial and the avoidance of unpleasant and difficult truths. Knowing about suffering demands (or ought to) that action be taken (p. 251). Cohen suggests we find a way of coming to terms with "'troubling recognitions' that are escapable (we can live with

them) and those that are inescapable" (p. 296).[84] To create these "troubling recognitions," information should be made "more available" to people who cannot claim not to know (ibid). Information is, as I discussed, not itself the problem but more so the desire not to know and not to be faced with not knowing what to do. Cohen questions whether we become "morally culpable" for our failure not to know and be "informed about suffering" and injustice (p. 271). In this sense, intentional and responsible action is implied in this "duty to know" (p. 270).[85] To witness, then, involves the moral obligation to be informed about, thus to acknowledge, the suffering of others. In the case of past atrocities like the slave trade, the treatment of First Nations peoples, the Holocaust, or Rwanda, this acknowledgement can involve a duty to remember. This duty to know and remember moves from personal action to political praxis when it becomes a part of public action, which "implies a larger ethical framework that has to do with public recognition of atrocities" (Kaplan, 122). Further, Kaplan sees the imperative of witnessing as a way of "prompting an ethical response that will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks about justice" (p. 123). Both witness.org and ijm.org share this ideological approach to witnessing.

     To conclude, witnessing can be seen as a composite socio-cultural practice of engagement: intellectual (to know), psychological (to be affected), and participatory (to act). In the participatory sense, to witness, as Polchin describes

---

[84] Cohen suggests we find a way of coming to terms with "'troubling recognitions' that are escapable (we can live with them) and those that are inescapable" (p. 296). Unfortunately, we can also live with the "inescapable" and "carry on with normal life" quite easily (p. 25).
[85] Cohen argues further that "an even more radical duty to act is the duty to know, to keep informed about suffering and atrocities" (p. 270). Cohen's point about the "duty to know," while overstated, in relation to action undertaken to alleviate suffering, is well taken.

it, is "to experience the event in some way, and then to testify to what you saw" (p. 210). It can begin with the public statement, a "denunciation" to quote Boltanski, to share knowledge about suffering and speak out on behalf of injustice. Human rights organizations, as will become clear in the following chapters, seek new methods and tools to engage their constituents and transform them into a shared community of witnesses to human rights abuses.

In the next chapter, I discuss my methodological framework and the role technology plays in the remediation of witnessing practices. I outline my research design, followed by a description of and an analysis of the websites.

3 METHODOLOGY: TOWARDS A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF "WITNESSING" PRACTICES

This research began as an exploratory examination into how virtual audiences are asked to become witnesses to human rights abuses and who, as part of the larger global community, will act on behalf of others. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological underpinnings of my research, address the broader conceptual questions of what witnessing entails, and examine how witnessing practices might lend themselves to human rights praxis. Employing Foucault's archaeological approach, the researcher can uncover the continuities and discontinuities within a discursive framework associated with witnessing practices. Further, this study makes the case for seeing discourse as practice. In addition, an examination of the word's etymology, more specifically, Williams's (1976) notion of the "vocabulary" of "witness" brings into focus the "general and variable usage" of concepts that acquire common currency (p. 12). I follow with a discussion of the socio-historical construction of the witness, highlighting the distinction between the "compurgatory" or "ethical" witness—one who swears to a relationship with another—and the "experiential" witness who has knowledge of an event (Frisch, 2004). Within this general framework, I explore how witnessing discourses are being engaged by three online organizations for their potential. This potential is further echoed in the ways in which witnessing practices are being remediated through video and communications technology, transforming how virtual audiences witness human rights abuse.

In Section II, I discuss the research design and organization of the study. The broad context for this research is the case study,[86] for the purpose of exploring different articulations and characteristics of witnessing. The focus is on three websites, specifically how they have adopted, and adapted, various modalities of "witnessing" as a central trope or theme in their work. The first is **witness.org**, a human rights organization that provides video cameras to grassroots activists to record human rights abuses. Its focus is on the eyewitness. **International Justice Mission** (IJM), in contrast, takes a Christian-based approach to witnessing, where witnessing is connected to the evangelical mission of doing God's work and seeking justice. **The Witnessing Project**, not an organization dedicated explicitly to human rights, provides a third perspective: a witnessing model that seeks to make individuals aware of the harmful effects of witnessing violence and the potential for transformation from a passive to an engaged/empowered witness. I employ content analysis to guide my research, which allows me to examine the substantive content (text and images) in these websites in order to discover thematic patterns within—and between—these websites. This study views these websites as exemplars of witnessing practices and examines the construction of witness categories or typologies.

---

[86] Lewis (2003) provides the following useful definition: "The term case study is used in various ways, but the primary defining features of a case study are that it draws in multiple perspectives (whether through single or multiple data collection methods) and is rooted in a specific context which is seen as critical to understanding the researched phenomena. The study may involve a single case but more commonly in applied research involves multiple cases, selected carefully to enable comparison" (p. 76).

SECTION I: MAPPING A DISCURSIVE ANALYTICAL STRATEGY OF
WITNESSING PRACTICES

I begin with a Foucauldian analysis of discourse and suggest that
witnessing discourses have been adopted by certain human rights organizations
both as a discursive strategy and as a practice of advocacy. My objectives are to
sketch what these witnessing practices entail and to situate them as a recent
socio-cultural phenomenon, remediated and transformed through technology. For
Foucault, discourses are "to be understood as practices" (Merquior, 1985, p. 76).
This is not to suggest that discourses do not "employ signs, but what they do is
more than use them to denote things" (ibid, italics in original). Mills (2003) adds,
"In considering the term 'discourse' we must remember it is not the equivalent of
'language', nor should we assume that there is a simple relationship between
discourse and reality. Discourse does not simply translate reality into language;
rather discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way we
perceive reality" (p. 55). In this spirit, I am applying the notion of "discourse"
generally to the various human rights perspectives and "statements"[87] contained
in the websites I examine. This approach is inclusive of textual as well as the
visual content (representational signs/systems).   Foucault's interpretative
framework,[88] which in his early work he termed "an archaeology of knowledge"
(Foucault, 1972), embraces "discontinuity," "displacements and transformations
of concepts," which are opposed to Enlightenment ideals of history as "totality," in

---

[87] Akerstrom Andersen (2003) note that "the statement is the smallest unit, which brings forth
phenomenon through enunciation" (p. 10).
[88] Foucault's archaeological framework is not meant to be prescriptive, state Akerstrom and
Andersen (2003): "the *archaeology of knowledge* was never intended to be a methodological
description for a systematized repetition and imitation" (p. 8, italics in original).

other words, authoritative narratives that plot "continuity" and linear "progression" (p. 4). Instead, he suggests we uncover the "ruptures" and "gaps" and consider the importance of relationality. By relationality, I am referring to Foucault's concept of the "series," which highlights juxtapositions, intersections, and overlapping principles that are not reducible to a "linear scheme" (p. 155). He calls for "a differential analysis of the modalities of discourse" (p. 139), where one notes various "archaeological shifts" (p. 161). While "archaeologists of knowledge" conduct searches, they do not seek some kind of genesis[89] or an absolute "beginning" (p. 131). Foucault suggests instead that archaeology describes "how a single notion (possibly designated by a single word) may cover two archaeologically distinct elements" (p. 161). Seen from this perspective, witnessing encompasses multiple meanings within the domains of law and social practices, as well as within the websites I examine: the role of eyewitnesses (or, for that matter, the expert witness), religion (believers in Christ as well as those who spread the Gospel), and psychology (possibilities for personal transformation).[90]

I am employing Foucault's metaphor of archaeology as an "instrument," as he suggests, to analyze the "social formations and epistemological descriptions" of types of "witnessing" discourses/practices (p. 208). Accordingly, this research explores "archaeological shifts" in "witnessing" discourses and practices and the

---

[89] These ideas are echoed in Foucault's reworking of archaeology, which he later describes as genealogy or "a history of problematization" (During, 1992, 125). Foucault links his earlier ideas about discourse to the "power-knowledge" nexus (Merquior, 1985, 84).
[90] Keats (2005) identifies witnessing discourses and practices within "three main fields": "law, religion, and the arts" (p. 173). Keats adds, "the act of witnessing arose in two professional contexts—medicine and psychology" (ibid).

ways in which they have been transformed. The word "witness" has multiple designations and covers "distinct elements" (ibid). I argue that contemporary witnessing practices share overlapping principles with older practices but also diverge and have been transformed by emergent technological possibilities. For example, the word "witness," once used to refer specifically to Christian martyrs, came to be associated with "bearing witness," or oath-swearing, and later to have cognizance of an event: the "eye-witness." From an embodied practice of being present in legal proceedings to the more general sense of "bearing witness" to what one has seen or experienced, yet another shift has occurred. One no longer has to be physically present and can witness, virtually, events that take place elsewhere via television and the Internet. Virtual witnessing has allowed greater numbers of people to be aware of what is going on globally. An archaeological approach, therefore, offers a way of thinking about discursive practices connected to "witnessing" within the context of human rights discourse, transformed or remediated through technological applications such as the Internet.

SKETCHING A BEGINNING: AN ETYMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF "WITNESSING"

An archaeological framework allows me to sketch the "relative beginnings,"[91] notably, in this case the etymology of the word "witness," and to

---

[91] In working through whether the starting point of my analysis, namely, the etymology of "witnessing," conflicted with Foucault's rejection of origins, I found his idea of "relative beginnings" helpful: "It's always the relative beginnings that I am searching for, more than the institutionalizations or the transformations than the foundings or foundations" (Lotringer, 1989, 46).

then focus on present articulations and practices of witnessing. "Witnessing" offers a symbolic field rich with meaning, a "keyword," to quote Williams (1976, p. 13). As he suggests, I have sketched a "vocabulary" of witnessing variations, being "conscious of the word[s] as elements of the problem" (p. 14). While "the original meanings of words are always interesting," Williams points out that the "variations" are far more interesting (p. 18). One of the early meanings of the word is its Christian use, which is the literal translation of the Greek word for martyr.[92] Agamben (1999) notes the Greek word for "witness" is *martis* or *martyr*: "The first Church Fathers coined the word *martinrum* from *martis* to indicate the death of persecuted Christians, who thus bore witness of their faith" (p. 26). Further, Agamben explains that "witnessing" one's faith takes the form of a "divine command" (ibid).[93] Martyr not only literally means "witness" but is also related to *mermera*, which translates as "care" and "trouble," as well as its derivative *mermaireia*, to "be anxious or thoughtful."[94] Martyr is also related to the Sanskrit word *smarti* or to remember and to the Latin word *memor* or "mindful" and is connected to memory. The word martyr was "adopted directly into most Germanic languages" from its original form where it literally meant "torture-witness." Frisch (2004) points out that in "Catholic discourse," the ideal witness or martyr demonstrates his faith through his death (p. 144). Within this

---

[92] See www.geocities.com/etymoline,t3etym.htm, retrieved February 12, 2004. The Oxford Dictionary (second edition, volume 20) cites 1250 as the date for the appearance of the word "witness" associated with the Christian faith and martyrdom.

[93] Agamben draws attention to Luke 12: 8-9 and Matthew 10: 32-33: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (p. 26).

[94] The following references to the etymological roots of the word witness were taken from www.geocities.com/etymoline.t3etym.hytm.

context, "testimony is inherently sacrificial; the first-person witness must be destroyed in order for his testimony to be authoritative" (ibid).

Further investigation into the early etymology of the word yielded intriguing results: its Old English form, *witnes*, had in fact meant "knowledge, understanding and wisdom"[95] (The Oxford Dictionary, Shorter Edition, 2002). Turning to the root word *wit* to see if there were other associations between the act of witnessing and knowledge, I discovered that it is associated with "thinking and reasoning" in general and, more specifically, with "mental capacity, intellect, and reason." Interestingly, it is also means "the seat of consciousness or thought, the mind." The word's archaic usage refers to "human understanding," as found in the phrase "the wit of man." In its original form, to "witness" would entail the exercise of one's consciousness, or more likely one's conscience. The word wit also offers other possibilities as it also means "to have cognizance of," "to gain knowledge of, get or come to know, to find out, to be informed of, learn." While the more archaic forms of the word are no longer invoked, wit has come to be commonly associated with a person who displays "quickness of intellect" and cleverness. While interesting variations, particularly associations to reason, understanding, and conscience, they bear little in common with contemporary and popular usages of the word "witness."

---

[95] Weingarten (2003) refers to Marchant who makes a connection between "witnessing" and creative art forms like poetry: "Wit is more than cleverness, and the word has the aura of heightened awareness, as in keeping one's wits during a crisis. *Wit* in this sense of the word is basically unchanged from its meaning (and spelling) in Old and Middle English. In the deep background of the Old English *wit* is the Indo-European root, *weid*, which gives us *wis*, as in our *wisdom* and *wise*…" (p. 305).

THE HISTORICAL EYEWITNESS: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE WITNESS

Within the legal paradigm, the role of the (eye)witness has particular relevance to this study because the witness's credibility is based on testimony, more specifically, her/his experience of events. Agamben provides a useful distinction between different meanings of "witness": "In Latin there are two words for "witness." The first word, *testis*,[96] from which our word "testimony" derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*terstis*), namely, the "disinterested witness." The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from the beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it" (p. 17). Thus, this witness is qualified to testify and provide testimony, taken from the Latin *testificari*, or evidence.[97] As an embodied activity, of "having been there," "witnessing" claims become more credible and meaningful.

Contemporary discussions and debates surrounding the role of the "eyewitness" address the reliability of eyewitness testimony in the legal system, with questions raised about the complex role memory plays in recalling events.[98] The credibility of the eyewitness is established, in part, on her character and the

---

[96] The word *testis* in the plural form referred to testicle, with a special application to "witness," or to "bear witness to virility," as well as testament (www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=t&p=7).
[97] Testimony also refers to "the Ten Commandments," attestation, "statement of a witness," evidence or proof. The Latin *testimonium* is composed of *testis* or "witness" and *monium*, "the suffix signifying action, state, condition" (etymonline website).
[98] Frisch (2004) refers to Elizabeth Loftus's *Eyewitness Testimony* (1979) in which she explores the unreliability of witness testimony, which has led to wrongful convictions, and "the complexity of the process of memory" (p. 11). Keats (2004) draws attention to research (namely, Cutler and Penrod's 1995 *Mistaken identification: the eyewitness, psychology, and the law*) which questions "the accuracy of eyewitness observation, memory, and exactness reflected in testimonial statements" (p. 173).

kind of epistemic authority granted by virtue of having been present at an event: firsthand knowledge of "having been there" and "having seen with her own eyes." This notion of the eyewitness, Frisch (2004) points out, is a "historical construct." Her research traces "the slow, unsystematic emergence of the modern eyewitness testimony as a monologic discourse of first-person experiential knowledge" (p 12). This modern witness slowly gained dominance and eventually replaced what she refers to as "the ethical witness" (ibid). Frisch attributes the rise of "epistemic witnessing," in other words, experiential knowledge gained through observation, to the emergence of ships' logs and, more generally, travel literature: the detailed records of captains and sailors' records of their voyages and explorations of the New World (p. 21). The epistemic (eye)witness was, however, a subcategory of the overall class of witnesses during this period. Moreover, it was not "synonymous with testimony, much less with credible testimony" (p. 23).

In medieval Europe, bearing witness was based on one's status, or social standing, in an ethical community (p. 24). "Compurgation," or the swearing of oaths,[99] derived from a sense of "solidarity" formed through relationship(s) with other persons within the same ethical community (p. 26). A witness's socio-ethical standing, his reputation,[100] was thus closely connected to his character

---

[99] The swearing of oaths--a form of testimony and, by extension, witnessing--has an etymological connection to *testis*, or testicles, though the relationship between the two is "disputed": "An old theory has it that the Romans placed their right hands on their testicles and swore by them before giving testimony in court. Another theory says that the sense of testicle in Latin *testis* is due to a calque, or loan translation, from the Greek," which is related to "defender (in law) supporter"—that is, to stand side-by-side (see www.bartleby.com/61/73/T0127300.html, retrieved on June 03, 2008).
[100] Women, minors, and the mentally incompetent were excluded from providing testimony (Frisch, p. 47).

and credibility (p. 44). His status, was, therefore, "conferred primarily" by the members of his community (p. 79). The medieval "ethical witness" thus differed from the modern eyewitness in that testimony or bearing witness was not an "autobiographical"[101] experience, that is, what the "I" has experienced, but a dialogical encounter.   Unlike the modern witness, in medieval law the witness was "conceived" in the second person (p. 33). The epistemic witness testifies to an addressee, the two brought together in a dialectical relationship,[102] a feature shared by contemporary notions of witnessing to the other.[103] Frisch explains that testimony was given in "the presence of parties on which the testimony bore, and "the status" of the witness "was established on the basis of an act that had itself to be witnessed by others, not simply performed" (p. 32).   While the medieval witness deposition was recorded, in the third person and not verbatim (p. 77), the document functioned as "a record of testimony, not testimony itself" (p. 123).[104] Testimony provided by the epistemic witness was located in the present, not a past experience or event recalled in the present moment, where the witness "swear[s] an oath of solidarity with a *person*" and is "predicated on an

---

[101] Frisch quotes Derrida (2005), from *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, for whom testimony is "always biographical": "it tells, in the first person, the sharable and unsharable secret of what happened to me, to me, to me alone, the absolute secret of what I was in a position to live, see, hear, touch, sense, feel" (p. 26).
[102] Bakhtin (1981) refers to the relationship between the speaker and the "responsive" listener where "understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other, one is impossible without the other" (p. 282).
[103] Frisch refers to research undertaken in Holocaust studies and the problem of dwindling numbers of survivors: "It is perhaps for this reason that recent work on (and of) Holocaust testimony has begun to abandon the epistemic model and articulate modes of witnessing that restore to prominence the ethically-based testimony characteristic of medieval folklaw (and dismissively termed 'irrational' in most histories of legal procedure)" (p. 182).
[104] Clanchy (1979) notes that in the thirteenth century, "to make a record often meant to bear oral witness, not to produce a document" (p. 211). Moreover, "medieval writing (lecto) was primarily something heard rather than something seen until the invention of printing, and writing (scriptura) often continued to be admired for its calligraphy rather than its textural accuracy" (p. 230).

ethical relationship" (p. 24, italics in original). In contrast, a temporal gap exists in modern witnessing between "the moment of witnessing and the moment of bearing witness" (Derrida cited by Frisch, p. 28). This temporal gap has, however, shrunken. Technology can bring together the individual bearing witness (to what she has experienced) and the vicarious witness in the present moment: "Today's digital technology has given the experience of participation even greater immediacy" (Polchin, 2007, p. 217-218).

Several shifts, however, led to the epistemic witness gaining "prominence" over the compurgatory witness. Frisch observes that this institutional shift can be attributed to the development of a more centralized administrative system in Paris (p. 81). This shift was accompanied by the transformation of feudal communities into "abstract collectivities," resulting in fewer local face-to-face encounters, and making it more difficult to establish personal reputation and credibility based on a shared ethos (p. 82). Testimonial oath thus became associated with "folklaw" and "inquisitional procedure" (p. 91) and was given in the "absence of the opposing party" who could no longer address the witness (p. 94). This shift means that testimony could be given without establishing credibility. The "rhetoric of ethos" was slowly replaced by a more centralized and bureaucratized practice where the "rhetoric of experience" became privileged: "The immediacy of the testimonial encounter is transformed from the moment of bearing witness to the moment of a privileged eyewitness vision outside the confines of the encounter" (p. 114). Frisch sums up this transformation in terms of the temporal shift from the present to the past or prior moment (ibid).

Experiential knowledge gradually replaced knowledge derived through relationship within an ethical community.

For the purposes of this study, I examine various articulations of witnessing within ethically-based human rights communities, as proposed by witness.org, ijm.org, and witnessingproject.org, which ask their various constituents to respond to (and be responsible for) the suffering of others. Technology plays an important role in the dissemination of information and establishing networks, partners, and communities. Several examples of witnesses and witness positions will also be identified in this study: professional/expert witness advocates, grassroots activists, survivor-victim witnesses, and vicarious witnesses.

WITNESSING TRANSFORMED: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

With the richness of "witnessing," in mind, I turn to ways in which the experience, as well as witnessing practices, has been transformed, or remediated, in light of their contemporary usage and technological possibilities. Technology has facilitated and transformed human rights work: it has allowed for the rapid dissemination of information of abuses and violations to audiences both near and far. Human rights organizations can issue electronic alerts to mobilize and educate various constituents far more quickly than through mail-outs, faxes, and television ads, though these methods are still employed. As an alternative news and information source, organizations can provide interested audiences with updates of cases that often receive little coverage in mainstream news

media. Users with Internet access[105] can become virtual and vicarious witness-audiences to human rights abuses and violations occurring globally.

Bolter and Gruisin's (1999) work adds yet another perspective in thinking about the practice of "witnessing" as a virtual experience. "Witnessing," in its early religious and legal practices, referred to an embodied experience: the martyred body of a Christian; an oath-swearer providing testimony at a trial; someone who has firsthand experience or knowledge. In the technological landscape, "witnessing" has been remediated and "reformed." New video and communication technologies place the user/viewer inside the frame or "window" of experience. I borrow the metaphor of the window from Bolter and Gruisin who refer to Leon Battista Alberti's ideas about Renaissance painting and perspective: the viewer was brought right into the world of painting. According to Bolter and Gruisin, "the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented" (p. 5-6). This concept has particular resonance in the world of computer software, where windows have been explicitly adopted to structure the user interface:

> When in the 1960s and 1970s Douglas Englebart, Alan Kay, and their colleagues at Xerox PARC and elsewhere invented the graphical user interface and called their resizable, scrollable rectangles, 'windows,' they were implicitly relying on Alberti's metaphors. Their windows opened on to a world of information made visible and almost tangible to the user, and their goal was to make the surface of the windows, the interface itself, transparent. (p. 31)

---

[105] Essays in *Human rights and the Internet* (2000), edited by Hick, Halpin, and Hoskins, present arguments that champion the use of the Internet by human rights advocates as well as cautions about its revolutionary potential.

Technology has allowed the user virtual presence at an event, regardless of physical proximity; she is transported, vicariously, to a place and time that can be accessed and replayed as desired. In transforming older media, such as television that broadcast images of experiences occurring elsewhere, new technologies have staked a claim in offering a more immediate and "authentic" experience--authenticity derived from the next best thing to being there when one cannot be present.[106] Bolter and Gruisin assert that new digital technology "appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (p. 65).

This remediated experience of the "real," of being present, is not only socially constructed but "has a history as a representational practice and cultural logic" (p. 31). This experience is achieved through the "double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy" (p. viii). Bolter and Gruisin attribute the characteristics of immediacy and transparency to representational practices during the Renaissance (p. 24). Painting and later photography, film, and television all placed the viewer inside the space of the medium. This sense of immediacy is achieved through the "effacing"[107] of the medium itself (and the designer), leaving the viewer "in the presence of the thing that is being represented: sitting in the race car or standing on a mountaintop" (p. 6). Immediacy, in turn, "leads to hypermediacy" (p. 19), described as "a

---

[106] Bolter and Gruisin note, however, that "although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the medium as a medium" (p. 19).
[107] Bolter and Gruisin suggest that "the transparent interface is one more manifestation of the need to deny the mediated character of digital technology altogether. To believe that with digital technology we have passed beyond mediation is also to assert the uniqueness of our present technological moment" (p. 24).

heterogenous space, in which representation is conceived not as a window on to the world, but rather as "windowed" itself—with windows that open on to other representations or other media" (p. 34). New technology offers, therefore, the promise, in a psychological and epistemological sense, of a remediated interaction with the world, one similar to Baudrillard's notion of the "hyperreal," where "the experience of the medium is itself an experience of the real" (p. 71). In other words, the user or viewer is placed inside the "windowed" moment, having the virtual experience of being there, made more apparent when the viewer can experience what is going on in "real time."

New video and communications technology transforms human rights work and, by extension, remediates "witnessing" practices. Organizations are able to present their causes to a, potentially, global and wired audience--that is, those with access.[108] Similar to older media such as television, users are "transported" (as if physically and geographically) into the moment and become virtual (eye) witnesses to suffering elsewhere. The "hypermediacy" of the Internet and, communication technologies in general, allow for the accelerated dissemination of information and the potential for speedier action and mobilization:

> Increasingly, the Internet has become a tool for the promotion and protection of human rights, being utilized to obtain, communicate and disseminate information. In addition, the nature of human rights abuses often necessitates rapid action to respond to violations, and the Internet provides the obvious tool for rapid, cheap and accurate information to be supplied and disseminated in

---

[108] The issue of access remains a crucial one, which I discuss in the chapter on witness.org. Roth (2000) raises the problem of the "digital divide" in "Reflections on the colour of the Internet": "Up to 1999, the Internet was mainly used by the literate in North America (of mostly Caucasian descent) and Europe, although it has currently become very popular and more accessible in Asian/Pacific regions. If access is unavailable to a large percentage of the world's population, are we seeing a digital divide between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' parallel to the First World/Third World cleavages?" (Hick et al., p. 174).

response. The Internet is changing the operation of human rights organizations, the use of information by them and the relationship between them. (Hick et al., 2000, p. 7-8)

One of the ways in which relationships have been transformed is through the formation of new partnerships and "constituencies of interest," where information is shared (p. 9). Hick et al. refer to the example of successful collaborations between governments and NGOs in "the global campaign to ban landmines" (p. 8). In this way, information becomes power in the hands of human rights advocates who can disseminate information quickly to a global audience about abuses and violations, challenge official versions of events, and mobilize various constituents into action "at the tap of a cursor"[109] (Axworthy, 2000, p. 19).

A more recent example of digital activism and partnerships between grassroots activists (primary eyewitnesses), NGOs, international media, and activists in other countries was witnessed in Myanmar in the fall of 2007, with the brutal action taken by the military junta against protesting monks. Cellular phones were instrumental in capturing images that were later downloaded to various Internet sources. Cell phones were used to covertly film the violence. The use of video cameras would have been more easily detected and destroyed during the junta's crackdown on dissent. Mellgren (2008) notes that very few images were available during the 1988 anti-government protests that led to 3,000

---

[109] Axworthy champions the revolutionary and democratizing potential of the Internet as a tool in human rights work in his essay, "The mouse is mightier than the sword," found in Hick et al's collection.

people being killed by the government.[110] Images were broadcast in mainstream news media and on sites like YouTube for the world to see, which refuted government denials of the use of violence, in effect, creating virtual eyewitnesses globally. Incidents like these have spawned other kinds of protests by both professional and amateur activists.

Digital activism has gone mainstream and social networks like Facebook are being used for purposes other than making friends and dating. Marches have been organized in cities around the world by both amateur activists and nonprofit groups, for instance. One such protest organized by a Facebook group called "Support the Monks' Protest" worked in conjunction with more experienced political advocacy groups, such as The Burma Campaign UK and Amnesty International.[111] Social networks are being used more frequently by various non-profit and political groups to mobilize individuals who can then "push their collective concerns to the top of politicians' agendas, a development that marks the beginnings of what might be called "open-source politics" (wired.com). Professor Michael Cornfield comments on this phenomenon and observes that "Facebook's use as a tool to organize grass-roots political efforts is part of a tradition that began with the fax" (ibid). He adds, "Every time there's a decentralized technology, individuals who feel outraged and powerless try to find the technology to organize and express themselves, and to find other people to

[110] See Mellgren in "Cell phones, web spread news of Myanmar: mobile phones, internet aid pro-democracy activists getting news out about Myanmar,"
(http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=3656364), retrieved in March 2008).
[111] See Sarah Lai Stirland's "Open-source politics taps Facebook for Myanmar Protests" in www.wired.com/print/politics/onlinerightsnews/2007/10/m... (retrieved on June 18, 2008). Another example of Facebook's promotion of activism was its "Giving challenge for successful collective action." The group Students for a Free Tibet won the $25,000 award (www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080414..., retrieved on April 15, 2008).

take action" (ibid). Technology thus makes possible the potential for a kind of

participatory politics where citizens can become involved in local and national

political campaigns,[112] human rights projects, and community-related debates.

For all the revolutionary and democratizing potential that the Internet—and

technology in general—holds, there is reason for healthy skepticism about

unquestioning faith in the power of technology and information to effect change

and mobilize audience/witnesses into action. Bolter and Gruisin argue that

technology is seen as a particularly "American promise" and as a form of secular

"salvation" (pp. 60-61). Whaley (2000) raises doubts about whether information

alone "will give people the wisdom to make appropriate decisions or political will

to carry them out" (p. 33).[113] She adds, "although information is a necessary tool

in the basic struggle for justice, it may not be sufficient to inspire those in relative

comfort to exert themselves on behalf of others" (ibid). The limited impact which

may be achieved by the simple provision of information by organizations is

echoed by Halpin and Hick (2000), who raise the issue of information overload

and "compassion fatigue."[114] While the technology allows for the acceleration

---

[112] In an unlikely case of Facebook activism—unlikely because the issue involved copyright reform—a small group of 50 protesters "in the winter of 2007" who were opposed to the Canadian government's plans "to introduce a bill that would, among other changes, allow copyright holders to place digital locks on content, thus preventing copies from being made" grew " in a matter of days, to 20,000 people" who joined the Facebook protest (retrieved on September 9, 2008, from www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/09/05/f-online-protest.html). The group now has 90,000 members, and the legislation of Bill C-61 has been delayed until June 2009.

[113] Whaley's essay "Human rights NGOs: our love-hate relationship with the Internet" can be found in Hick et al.'s edited collection.

[114] These authors outline, in "Information: an essential tool for human rights work," the challenge human rights organizations face: "Information overload presents another possible problem for the human rights world, which might be termed 'information fatigue'. When faced with so much information on many abuses and violations it is possible that people will become desensitized to the issues. This is a recognized and increasing concern for some charities who term this experience as 'compassion fatigue'. The value of the Internet in communicating huge quantities

85

and proliferation of information, "the human capacity to process that information, to give it meaning and utility, is sadly limited," note Soltus and Schonveld (2000, p. 78).[115] This issue is less about the availability of information, or information as knowledge, and more about why human rights (ought to) matter:

> There is a lack of instructional material that helps people to learn about human rights and understand why human rights are important and should be respected and defended. Human rights education is more than information. It is meant to help people to analyze the world around them, understand that human rights are a way to improve their lives and the lives of others, and take action to protect them. (Claude and Hick, 2000, p. 226)[116]

These authors make the distinction between information as raw data and facts, and the processing or "refining"[117] of that data into both an analytical tool to make sense of the world and a form of praxis. In other words, Claude and Hick envision human rights education as a tool for empowerment and action: "Empowering education supplies the means by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world" (p. 232). As a form of liberatory or participatory discourse, the individual seeks empowerment and, subsequently, transforms the world through her actions. Hick and Teplitsky point out, however, that the Internet is "neither foolproof nor infallible," though it is "an effective method of keeping human rights

---

of information cheaply and rapidly could also become a negative factor if focus is used in an indiscriminate manner" (p. 247).

[115] "Information overload: how increased information flows affect the work of the human rights movement" is part of the collected essays in *Human rights and the Internet*.

[116] Claude and Hick, in "Human rights education on the Internet: its day has come," offer the following definition highlighting the difference between traditional or "formal education" and "education for empowerment: "education for empowerment must go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and operate from the premise that humans not only have the ability to know reality, but they have the capacity for critical reflection and action" (Hicks et al., p. 232).

[117] Jim Davis and Michael Stack (1998) describe information as "the product of human intellectual activity," while knowledge is a "further refinement of information" (in Philip Agre and Douglas Schuler's *Reinventing technology, rediscovering community: critical explorations of computing as social practice*, p. 56).

issues on the table" (p. 53). Technology is thus adopted and adapted by human rights advocates as a (transparent) instrument to fulfill its unrepentant Enlightenment project of transmitting knowledge and transforming consciousness.

The "rightness" of rights discourse can thus be found in the value placed in humanity itself and human dignity, enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*[118] and various other international conventions and domestic legal codes. Human rights are embedded within a discourse of moral rightness and righteousness. Rights discourse is representative of a utopian view of the human being whose dignity is deserving of protection. Enacted to protect individuals, and humanity itself, from the worst atrocities that shocked "the human conscience" following World War II, it represents an ideal to be upheld. Ignatieff (2001) cautions, however, that rights discourse necessarily constructs humans as "sacred" and, in so doing, can be accused of "idolatry," in other words, "humanism worshipping itself" (p. 53). He argues further that human rights discourse has become a "secular" faith, which I might add, is replete with the rhetoric of righteousness. Rights discourse has enthusiastically substituted faith, so it would seem, in a Divine entity with faith in human dignity.[119] At its extreme, rights discourse contains a certain evangelical fervour, used by its proponents to champion "Truth" and "Justice." Human rights discourse,[120] therefore, poses

---

[118] See www.un.org/Overview/rights.html.
[119] Holocaust scholars remind us that human dignity and humanity itself were annihilated with the genocide of the Jews. The refrain of "never again" has been emptied of meaning with subsequent genocidal programs in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Darfur that have not resulted in mass international response to prevent them.
[120] Mills (2003) offers the following valuable insight: "Foucault's work on discourse and power is useful in helping theorists to consider the way we know what we know; where that information

certain challenges for its critics: balancing critique without undermining the inherent value and necessity of human rights ideals.

Foucault poignantly reminds us, however, that ideological "battles" are being waged "for truth, or at least around truth" (Gordon, 1980, p. 132). States, on the one hand, offer official (and powerful) versions of the "Truth" regarding their human rights records and the treatment of their citizens; human rights organizations, on the other hand, portray themselves as the defenders of the rights of the oppressed and the seekers of "Truth," seeking, according to Foucault, to transform "people's consciousness" (Gordon, p. 133). Truth, Foucault reminds us, "is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power" (p. 131). Truth remains a contested site, and the struggle for its legitimacy occurs on the discursive level, with human rights organizations contesting official and hegemonic discourses about the treatment of their citizens. To speak of a struggle being waged in the name of truth is, however, to invoke the "exercise" of power: "We are subjected to production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (p. 93). Within the context of human rights abuses and the oppression of individuals and groups of people, power is not simply a discursive "technique." It is concerned with the relations and forces "between struggle and submission," which Foucault outlines in his "domination-repression" schema (p. 92). In this paradigm, power is employed in its traditional, coercive sense, whereby dominant groups use repressive force against vulnerable and/or

comes from; how it is produced and under what circumstances; whose interest it might serve; how it is possible to think differently; in order to be able to trace the way that information that we accept as 'true' is kept in a privileged position" (p. 66).

marginalized groups in society. Human rights organizations can be seen to engage in a struggle to defend the rights of the powerless and to counter the force states and powerful groups employ against their citizens by exposing injustice. One of the ways human rights organizations do this is by producing their own versions of the truth and keeping a watchful eye, as it were, on state practices. By providing cameras to grassroots activists, witness.org subverts and reverses "the eye of power," engaging in counter-surveillance of the state and its functionaries (Gordon, p. 146). In seeking to transform global audiences into witnesses of human rights abuses and injustice, I suggest that human rights organizations ask that we become engaged in this struggle to defend the rights of others.

WITNESSING AS REMEDIATED PRACTICE: PROMISES AND POTENTIAL

New technologies have remediated the concept of "witnessing" and the ways in which one witnesses events. The concept of "witnessing" has opened up to include actual or present eyewitnesses as well as vicarious/virtual audiences who are taken inside the "witnessing" moment. The iconic footage of Rodney King being beaten by police, captured on video camera by an amateur witness, was mirrored in October 2007 by another amateur witness in Vancouver, British Columbia. Paul Pritchard captured four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers tasering and then restraining Robert Dziekanski who died minutes later.[121]

---

[121] The investigation into Dziekanski's death is ongoing. He was left wandering in the Vancouver airport for almost ten hours before his encounter with police. The video raises doubts concerning the police account of the incident on several key points: the number of shocks administered, as well as why the officers used a taser and not other means of subduing Dziekanski. The CBC

Pritchard's video refuted the official police account of what happened and was released to news sources, now available on YouTube. Pritchard's video has led to ongoing investigations into Mr. Dziekanski's death and the use of tasers by police officers.[122] A report has since been released, which has found that the force used by the officers was both "reasonable and necessary in the circumstances."[123] Ethical issues surrounding what it means to be an innocent bystander or witness, at what point one becomes involved (possibly offering direct assistance),[124] if at all, and what involvement entails are complex. For Pritchard's part, he is considering a career as a reporter. In an interview, he explains that "something good is going to come out of it. For me, to have a part

---

article, "Taser video shows RCMP shocked immigrant within 25 seconds of their arrival," provides a summary of the events leading up to Dziekanski's death (www.cbc.ca/british-columbia/story/2007/11/14/bc-taservideo.html, retrieved on February 1, 2008).

[122] While a moratorium on the use of tasers has not been called, Paul Kennedy, head of the Commission for the Public Complaints against the RCMP, has offered several recommendations: only experienced officers trained in the use of tasers should be allowed to use them; medical attention should be provided to individuals who have been tasered; clear operational guidelines need to be implemented; and a more comprehensive tracking system of taser use needs to be created (see www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/06/18/taser-report.html).

[123] The report that was released also suggested, in the autopsy report, possible "factors" that could have led to Dziekanski's death, "including heart disease associated with chronic alcohol abuse, an agitated state of delirium and inability to breathe while restrained, in "Airport death not caused by tasers, B. C. says," *The Globe and Mail*, December 13, 2008. A forensic pathologist explains, "what happened to Mr. Dziekanski was 'sudden death following restraint,' a syndrome that predates the use of tasers. It took officers 30 seconds to subdue Mr. Dziekanski after he was tasered, and one officer pushed his knee into Mr. Dziekanski's shoulder and neck area during the effort." Less emphasis was placed on the fact that Dziekanski was tasered 5 times "for a total of 31 seconds" (www.vancouversun.com/Mountie+never+intended+Dziekanski/1345278/story.html, retrieved on March 2, 2009).

[124] Pritchard's video made the news, but other witnesses such as Lorne Meltzer and Sima Ashrafinia—who countered official police reports with her eyewitness, as well as cellphone, evidence—attempted to speak and offer assistance to Dziekanski, www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2007/10/18/bc-taser.html and www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVnews/20081014/BC-taser-robert-08113?2-name=&no-ads=, both retrieved January 8, 2009.

in changing something at a national level is huge. This is definitely…changing my life."[125]

Once images or information proliferate, we are all made witnesses to human rights abuses whether or not we are physically present. The audience or public is no longer limited to one's domestic or national sphere but extends to larger global networks—often before media sources are on the scene. The technological possibilities of the Internet mean that human rights abuses/violations that might not be deemed "newsworthy" can still circulate through other web sources. Axworthy asserts that "when the interest of major television media has cooled and moved on, the Internet can help keep the heat on—focusing international attention on ongoing human rights abuses" (p. 19). The difference—and more so the potential communication technology has in making a difference in the way rights work is done—lies in the work human rights advocates/activists do: the people behind the machine, as it were. Quite often in the literature, technology and the Internet are anthropomorphized and seen to be the "real" agents of change. Where technology has made, and continues to make, a difference is in "the rapid and effective responses to human rights around the world, supporting the work of those who fight for justice and fairness" (Hick et al., p. 5). As Hick et al. point out, "the lofty ideals contained in numerous Declarations and Covenants may mean little to a victim, but the knowledge that your situation is being communicated across the world, or that an intervention is being made on your behalf, can bring hope where little else exists" (p. 5). Norris

---

[125] See www.truthnews.us/?p=877, retrieved on February 1, 2008). English professor Kim Blank at the University of Victoria comments, "He's become somewhat of a celebrity just by the fact of witnessing something."

(2001) echoes this sentiment by noting the role of the Internet "as a force for human rights, providing a global platform for opposition movements challenging autocratic regimes and military dictatorships, despite government attempts to restrict access in countries like China and Cuba" (p. 9).[126] Perhaps knowing that there are global witnesses to the suffering of others becomes the power, as well as the promise, of the Internet and communication technologies.

Whether a connection exists between Internet use and political engagement is explored in a study conducted by Kwak, Poor, and Skoric (2006). This study is relevant to my project because many of these websites are premised on the assumption that anyone who enters them is concerned about human rights issues and is ready (and can be urged) to take some form of action. Kwak et al. found that the assumptions made in the general literature propose that, "with each increase in system speed and capacity, scholars have theorized a potential increase in humanity's global sensitivities" (p. 190).[127] The literature also suggests that the Internet, "at the international level, has helped form new types of connections, as well as new types of action" (ibid). The expansion of communities/networks, as well as their mobilization for action, is at the fore of arguments for the championing of the Internet. Kwak et al. refer to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, and other organizations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty

---

[126] Some countries such as China have developed very sophisticated methods for limiting the exchange of information and access to sites that are perceived as a threat to the state. For example, the Chinese government blocked images of police clashing with Tibetan protesters as the 2008 Olympic torch passed through different cities. The government blocked websites containing the word "Tibet" (reported in "Digital activists target Tibet" by Jennifer Hollet at www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080414 and retrieved on April 15, 2008).
[127] Kwak et al. note that there is a gap in the research in terms of establishing an empirical connection between internet use and engagement with "international affairs and communities" (p. 190).

International, which have used the Internet successfully "to gain global support" and expand their "global reach" (p. 191). However, Kwak et al. caution that most of the research is "anecdotal and event based," with little empirical research to support these findings. As a result, these authors conducted their study[128] in the hope of discovering whether there is in fact a connection between internet use and "engagement with international affairs, such as knowledge on international issues, a sense of attachment to the international community, and participation in international events" (p. 194).[129]

Although Kwak et al. were unable "to establish the causal effects of the Internet international use," several of their findings are relevant to this present study because the Internet and communications technology are embraced by the rights community as new tools to disseminate information, raise awareness, and mobilize audiences into action (p. 208). Their study measured "three categories of criterion variables that represent individuals' engagement with international affairs and community: international political knowledge, international community attachment, and international participation" (p. 196). Using "hierarchical

---

[128] Their sample was comprised of 389 adults in Ann Arbor, Michigan and nearby townships and was "conducted as a class project of an upper-level theory-methodology course" (p. 195). Participants had several choices available to them: web, mail, or telephone survey, "yielding an interview rate of 66.5% (Web=65.8%; telephone=59.6%; mail=71.8%)" (196). Kwak et al used the U.S. Census Bureau's 2003 American Community Survey (ACS) to compare to their sample and found that the "key demographic characteristics of the sample resemble the profiles of the local population figures reported" in the ACS in terms of median age and household income (p. 196). There were a few notable exceptions: a higher proportion of women participated, compared to the ACS figures, and participants had a higher level of educational attainment than the Bureau's numbers (p. 196). Additionally, "the Web respondents were younger and higher educated than the respondents of the other modes. There was a greater proportion of female respondents for the Web survey than for the mail survey" (p. 196).
[129] These authors also locate their research in the context of diminished coverage of international news "in traditional U.S. media" (p. 192). This is an important point because the literature they explore shows a positive correlation between frequent exposure to international news and "favourable opinions" of other countries (ibid). What they found instead is that coverage of international affairs tends to be "sensational and conflict-driven" (ibid).

regression analyses," these authors found that Internet use was a higher predictor for international engagement than traditional media, namely, "newspaper or television" (p. 201). Age was also correlated to Internet use and international participation: "younger respondents tended to have a greater willingness to take part in international events" (p. 202).[130] Based on their overall findings, these authors were able to support their hypothesis that the Internet "connects individuals to the international community by helping them increase their knowledge of the world, facilitating their sense of belonging to the greater world, and motivating them to participate in international events and foreign volunteer opportunities" (pp. 206-207). Kwak et al point out, however, that more research is needed in the area of "international engagement, let alone the Internet" (p. 208).[131] These authors also provide several caveats relating to their study: they note it has limited generalizability, and they are aware that contextual factors need to be examined further, specifically the "quality of international news in local media, opportunities for involvement in international events that are available in one's community, and the composition of the local population with respect to the diversity of national origins" (p. 208). Generally, the Internet provides access to users who are already interested in international news and

---

[130] Kwak et al. found a "positive relation between television international news use and international political knowledge existed only among the older respondents" (p. 203). In contrast, "the Internet, as compared to television, was more useful to younger respondents in their understanding of international affairs" (ibid).

[131] Kwak et al. suggest that "future research may continue to contribute to the literature by analyzing the phenomenon using diverse perspectives and methodologies. Systematic research on organizational use of the Internet as a global communication tool or in-depth interviews of Internet users who are active in cross-national interactions on the Internet would be of help in understanding this interesting and important phenomenon. In addition, content analyses that allow a systematic comparison of information and news between the Internet and traditional media would be useful for advancing knowledge in this topic" (p. 208).

events, particularly when local media provides little or no coverage of these events (p. 208). These others propose that "fostering international engagement may be one of the main functions of the Internet" (p. 207).

I suggest that "international engagement" is connected to an individual's sense of participating in a global community. Technology offers this utopian vision of community, (global) citizenship, and communication in the sense that we are all connected virtually through various networks. Where the telephone once transcended geographical boundaries with AT&T offering clients the opportunity to "reach out and touch someone,"[132] new communication and video technology (the webcam and email for example) have remediated earlier forms of communication[133] and improved modes for connecting with others globally. Drawing on these promises, human rights organizations build on, and appeal to, our (inter)connectedness on a human level, using technology to transform us into both eyewitnesses to the suffering and human rights violations of others as well as I-witnesses, which I argue is the shift, or transformation, made possible when audiences feel compelled to act and seek change through their actions. The possibility of using this technology to invest an ethical dimension into the virtual encounter remains the challenge facing web-based human rights organizations.

---

[132] This famous slogan was created for AT&T's print and television campaign in 1979 and re-emerged as the simplified "reach out," building on brand recognition, in their 2003 campaign to promote their wireless services. See www.porticus.org/bell/bellsystem-ads-1.html (retrieved on January 25, 2008).
[133] Norris reminds us, however, of "the continuing social inequalities in the distribution of older technologies such as cable and satellite TV, and even the household telephone," which "suggests that some residual inequalities are unlikely to disappear completely in access to personal home computers and Internet connections" (p. 235).

VIRTUAL EMPATHY: THE NEXT BEST THING

Human rights organizations face the ethical challenge of constructing appeals that draw on an individual's sense of connectedness to others, as well as her moral sensibilities[134] in the hope of invoking empathy and action. Not only are older media and experiences remediated, so is the "self," according to Bolter and Gruisin (1999). The "remediated self," which Bolter and Gruisin also refer to as the "hypermediated self," is "a network of affiliations, which are constantly shifting" (p. 232). Further, this "networked self is made up both of that self that is doing the networking and the various selves that are presented on the network" (p. 233). With each network, or virtual and imagined community,[135] the "mediated self" enters and becomes a member. One can argue that a sense of connectedness to others in that community is established in much the same ways as actual, or embodied, communities. Agre's (1997) position is that computing is "something that people do as part of extended social networks," even as individuals sit independently at their computers (p. 243). The challenge then is to see computing as both an individual and "collective activity" (ibid). In this sense, the Internet extends and expands the networks to which individuals can belong.

Bolter and Gruisin suggest that, because users can inhabit different perspectives and points of view, "virtual empathy," a "common narrative strategy" found in film and television, becomes possible (p. 246). These authors add that

---

[134] Rhoda E. Howard (1995) contends that "human rights are a modern secular version of our societal need to have overriding, inviolable principles of morality. Whatever their origin, either in God's command or in the mind of humankind, human rights exist as a strong set of normative principles influencing the actions both of states and of citizens" (p. 15).
[135] Coate, in Agre and Schuler (1997), cautions that community is not a "monolithic" entity but "a commons that is made up of a bundle of smaller 'communities of interest'" (p. 173).

96

"empathy is so highly regarded as a means of knowing presumably because empathy is everything traditional Enlightenment was not: immediate, embodied, emotional, and culturally determined" (p. 246). These authors suggest that technology opens onto a "windowed" world linked to a multiplicity of perspectives and points of view. In the absence of face-to-face encounters, virtual encounters, it can be argued, become "the next best thing." Claims made in the name of remediation and reform hinge on the promises inherent in technology: with improved modes of communication comes the opportunity for membership in on-line communities that are as strong as off-line ones. In relation to human rights, the notion of a community of citizens concerned about the rights and welfare of others, as discussed in Chapter 2, is one of its central visions: "the modern community is a community of obligation to strangers as well as friends. The citizen possessed of a sense of obligation to others does not confine that obligation to her family, kin and clan" (Howard, 1995, p. 121). By extension, those individuals who are compelled to act in defence of human rights in the on-line world are most likely, though not exclusively, those who are socially aware and active in their off-line worlds. Kwak et al. (2006) make a similar point: "it is quite plausible" that those who are already interested in international news are 'drawn' to the Internet" (p. 208).

To conclude, new communication technologies remediate and transform "witnessing" practices. These technological forms substitute the need for physical presence and proximity in order for one to become a witness: one can witness virtually and vicariously what is going on elsewhere. In this way, anyone

can potentially become a virtual (eye)witness who learns about injustices locally and globally through various media sources and human rights organizations. As a vicarious witness, one witnesses others' bearing witness to their experiences. The possibility also exists, as I outline in Chapter 2, for the transformation of the individual in this "witnessing" moment from a passive to engaged I-witness who seeks action on behalf of others: signing and circulating petitions, making donations, volunteering, or simply sharing information with others. Technology thus enables the viral spread of witnessing practices to others who have access to computers. With these ideas in mind, I turn to the rationale for my selection of websites that embrace, in varying degrees, both the promises and potential of witnessing, and I identify how witnessing informs their different agendas.

SECTION II: RESEARCH DESIGN: RATIONALE AND CONSIDERATIONS

A necessary and central goal of human rights organizations, I argue, is to transform their constituents into aware/engaged witnesses who, based on a shared sense of global moral and political community, can be mobilized to assist those in need. My interest in this research project lies in the exploration of the range of modalities and articulations of "witnessing" and the ways in which human rights organizations utilize new digital technology to advocate on behalf of others. The sampling strategy I employed was purposive. Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) observe that "the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to

study" (p. 78). These three websites illustrate different aspects of witnessing, fulfilling the two primary aims of purposive sampling as described by Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003): "The first is to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered. The second is to ensure that, within each of the key criteria, some diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristic covered can be explored" (ibid). This aspect of diverse and multiple perspectives of a phenomenon are addressed in this study as witness.org, International Justice Mission, and the Witnessing Project are representative, and symbolic, of "witnessing" models or exemplars. The selection criteria reflect the general aims of this study: 1) witnessing, however conceived of, is explicitly adopted by these websites; 2) these sites reflect a human rights agenda and/or address injustice, abuse or violence; and 3) they must be available online. These websites are also illustrative of the democratizing potential of witnessing in a human rights context, in that technology makes access to information and forms of participation possible for digital activists and, more generally, "netizens."[136] The instrumental role technology plays is mentioned explicitly only by witness.org—and to a lesser extent by IJM as a tool that aids in investigative strategies—but all three sites embrace technology as a way of enhancing their work, whether it is used for rapidly disseminating information about campaigns and seeking support, educating audiences about various issues, presenting options for involvement, or creating archival records and resources.

---

[136] Zittrain (2008) describes "netizens" as not "simply consumers" but individuals who "also see themselves as participants in the shaping of a generative space" (p. D3 of a review by Darin Barney in "Netizens of the world, unite," in June 7, 2008 edition of *The Globe and Mail*).

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH SITES: DESCRIPTION AND
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

My initial interest in this research began with witness.org, a site I
discovered several years ago while researching materials for a project on the
International Criminal Court. Incorporating a rights-based agenda and explicitly
embracing video and communications technology, witness.org seeks to empower
grassroots activists by arming them with video cameras. The lens of the camera
(an extension of the eyewitness) bears visual testimony to human rights abuses.
Basing their early work on the premise that "seeing is believing," with the explicit
objective of transforming visitors to their site into (eye)witnesses to human rights
abuses, witness.org provides video documentary evidence to expose many such
abuses in various countries. International Justice Mission (ijm.org) takes an
altogether different approach. This Christian-based organization employs both a
legal and religious framework in describing its approach to human rights work.
Witnessing in this context translates into heeding Christ's command to seek
justice on behalf of the oppressed. Accepting referrals from Christian missions
already in the field, as well as other Christian-based human rights organizations,
ijm.org investigates and works with local authorities to bring perpetrators to
justice when possible and to seek compensation for victims.

Interested in the rich thematic possibilities of these websites, I expanded
my search to include the Witnessing Project (witnessingproject.org). This
website addresses the harmful and cumulative impact of witnessing violence
(both directly and indirectly), which registers as "common shock": the biological

and psychological responses an individual experiences. The term "common shock" applies to direct witnesses as well as to vicarious witnesses who experience secondary traumatization from their exposure to violence—whether from viewing or coming to know about traumatic events: 9/11 comes to mind, though there is no shortage of global examples of war and atrocities. The Witnessing Project, unlike the other two sites, is not involved in human rights advocacy, but it does offer a template for transformation, in this case a therapeutic one, from passive witness into an active and engaged witness. The following is a descriptive summary of the work each organization is involved in as well as how each employs witnessing practices.

Table 1 - Description of websites and what they do

Websites	Description of organization's activities
witness.org	Provides video cameras to grassroots activists (primary eyewitnesses) to record visual evidence of human rights abuses and expose injustice (to virtual witnesses). Raw footage and documentaries are accessible online.
ijm.org	Seeks justice for the oppressed/marginalized using a legal and theological framework where witnessing involves following Christ's example/teachings. Casework and videos are available online.
witnessingproject.org	Offers a model for those harmed (directly and indirectly) by witnessing violence and violations to be transformed from passive, unaware witnesses to intentional and empowered witnesses. An online archive of narratives is available where individuals share experiences of the different witness positions they have occupied.

Employing a case study approach allows the researcher to focus on and understand "what the selected case does—its activity, its functioning" (Stake, 2005, p. 452). Stake explains that "a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (p. 444). In this study, I approach witnessing as a discursive practice that has been adopted for multiple purposes by these websites. Stake uses the term "multiple case study" to describe the

101

interest in "a number of cases [which] may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon" (p. 445).[137] This investigation of "several exemplars can provide valued and trustworthy knowledge" (p. 459), while also lending "credibility" to a study through triangulation (p. 444).[138] Exploring how these sites employ witnessing within the context of human rights advocacy, I employed the following research questions to direct this study:

- In what ways might witnessing offer a framework for understanding human rights praxis?
- Alternately, how is human rights praxis a vehicle for witnessing practices?
- Who are constructed as witnesses?
- Once constituents become aware of themselves (their roles) as witnesses, what forms of action are they required to take?

By interrogating witnessing as a discursive practice, my study attempts to uncover various modalities of witnessing and to determine to what extent it offers a framework for praxis-oriented strategies of social responsibility engagement/advocacy.

To identify concepts related to witnessing strategies, themes, and patterns in the websites, I employed content analysis. Content analysis involves "…the study of existing documents, either to understand their substantive content or to illuminate deeper meanings which may be revealed by their style and coverage" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 35). The definition of documents has since expanded to include non-traditional data such as the Internet, which Warren and Karner

---

[137] Stake explains that cases "may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, with redundancy and variety each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (p. 446).
[138] Golafshani (2003) refers to triangulation as "a strategy (test) for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings" (p. 603).

"urge us to consider, and include," as a "source of cultural representations for qualitative analysis" (Warren & Karner in Faubert, 2007, p. 115). Content analysis has traditionally been employed in quantitative research for manifest approaches to coding, which is more closely associated with counting (Faubert, 2008, p. 119). Latent content analysis, in contrast, "involves an interpretative reading of the meanings of the content" (Faubert, p. 119). Both Altheide (1987) and Golafshani (2003) have provided an ethnographic slant to content analysis, where the researcher features as "the instrument" of the research in the iterative, interpretative, and interactive process of making meaning. Altheide suggests that ethnographic content analysis be "used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify the theoretical relationships. Its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis" (p. 68). This process of asking questions of the data, identifying recurrent thematic structures and patterns, offering explanatory accounts, and making connections to broader theoretical perspectives highlights the "inductive and deductive" aspects of ethnographic content analysis (Faubert, 2008, p. 120). This approach also draws on Glaser and Strauss's ideas of "*constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances" (Altheide, p. 68, italics in original). The researcher maps "specific categories as well as narrative descriptions" of themes and relationships in the data (p. 74).

To begin my analysis of the data, I adopted the iterative process outlined by Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003) in their "analytic hierarchy," which

outlines the various stages of qualitative analysis. It is a heuristic designed to guide the researcher from the initial stage of managing and interpreting the raw data into thematic and conceptual categories and later to develop explanatory accounts, both within and between case comparisons (p. 210). The "analytic hierarchy" is composed of a "series of 'viewing platforms'" and provides a framework for deriving meaning from data (p. 213). The iterative process is non-linear and allows for flexible movement along the ladder (ibid). The analytic process is characterized by three stages: the first is data management. Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor suggest breaking apart the raw data to discover core themes and concepts (p. 204). At this stage, the raw data is labelled, sorted, and synthesized. I began by employing a line-by-line analysis of the textual and visual content[139] of the websites, a form of "open coding." Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe "open coding" as "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (p. 101). I began by familiarizing myself with the textual content and dominant images, for example, logos, contained in the websites. Specifically, I devised a draft protocol of categories of interest that included both my initial assumptions, which I revised and revisited throughout the analytic process, and concepts I

---

[139] For the purpose of this analysis, I am referring to content rather simplistically, but am by no means suggesting that the content found on websites consists of "unimodal" e-books. As Landow (1992) points out in his early work, the "hypertext" is "composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms link, node, network, web, and path" (p. 3). Further, "anyone who uses hypertext makes his or her interests the de facto organizing principle (or center) for the investigation of the moment" (p. 12). In this sense, my focus on specific chunks of content reflect my interests in mapping out a narrative strategy that makes sense of the texts and images in these sites and are not meant to suggest that this is a linear reading of text that is organized along the principles of a beginning, middle, and end.

identified within the first site I analyzed. My initial review of the websites yielded the following concepts or categories:

- references to truth, justice
- the significance of human rights
- education
- action/advocacy/mobilization
- a public record/evidence

In the case of witness.org, the first website I analyzed, I began with recurring and salient themes that were repeated throughout the website. The first theme was that of eyes; the logo contained two pairs of eyes: one open, the other closed. Witness.org could thus be seen as exposing and opening unaware and unseeing eyes to injustice. The concept of vision—physical and moral—guided this strand of thematic categories that included becoming aware and gaining knowledge. Witness.org builds on the sense of sight through its use of the phrase "made you look," with two other organizing principles: thinking ("made you think") and action ("made you act"). Seeing and acting/doing are inextricably linked, as summed up in the following statement: "WITNESS is a human rights program that attracts the eyes of the world and inspires those who see to act." To action/advocacy/mobilization, I added empowerment because virtual audiences, within this framework, are not intended to be passive observers of atrocity and injustice: they can become eyewitnesses who are empowered by witness.org to take action on behalf of victims, becoming activists as it were. This theme of empowerment can also be found in the role witness.org undertakes in "strengthening" and supporting local/grassroots activists who are, in turn, "empowered" to record human rights abuses.

Another dominant theme included technology and the creation of visual evidence. References to technology featured prominently in this site and was associated with a struggle in the defence of human rights. Technology was described as an "arsenal" in this struggle to expose injustice "as it happens," making "us all eye Witnesses to human rights violations." Technology, I propose, is embraced as a tool for its transformative potential in that it enables activists to contest the denials of government officials—as well as other powerful groups such as the police and landowners—and to produce visual evidence of injustice. By transformative, I am suggesting that through the production of evidence, witness.org has been able to change the outcomes in several situations and raise awareness of abuses on behalf of victims: footage and videos have been used "as evidence in legal proceedings; to counter-balance the official reports governments make to the UN on their human rights records; for grassroots education," and in news and web broadcasts. Visual evidence, in the form of raw footage, has also been translated into documentaries and campaigns for specific issues, many of them available on the website and easily downloaded.

At this initial stage in the analytic process, I also reduced the data in each website into manageable chunks. Data reduction allows the researcher to make sense of the "overall structure in the data" (Ritchie & Lewis, p. 202). To make sense of and to get "a handle on the data for making comparisons and connections" (p. 203), I created the following template outlining the structural layout of the websites, including what appeared to be shared characteristics. All

three sites contained shared, overlapping organizing principles, for example, a mission statement describing the organization's purpose, usually followed by a brief summary of its history. The organizations provide descriptions of projects in which they are participating, including current campaigns, updates, and news. They all provide several options for involvement. Another interesting feature included an archive or a catalogue of past, as well as ongoing, campaigns, films, successful cases, or shared narratives. A list of publications is also available, usually with links that are easily opened and downloaded, as well as any past or upcoming appearances or events. All sites provide an educational section, which may contain resource material. Finally, the websites list their partners and affiliates and provide links to related websites.

Table 2 - Layout of websites

- What we do/about us
  - mission statement
  - history
- Activities/projects
- Get involved/donate/act now
- Archives/catalogue/research guide
- Current campaigns/news
- Publications/videos/film
- Education/resources
- Events/appearances/teaching
- Partners/affiliates/related links

This template was a useful tool for initial data management and organization of the layout and information contained within the three websites, which facilitated connections and comparisons for this researcher.

Turning from the identification of the overall structure of the websites, I continued to examine the mission statements of each organization, mapping their

narrative strategies, describing the rationale of the organization, its history, campaigns, and options for involvement. The descriptive stage is characterized by "refining and distilling more abstract concepts" with the goal of providing descriptive accounts of the data (p. 212). IJM, for example, adopts an explicit advocacy role in their mission statement: IJM "help[s] people suffering injustice and oppression who cannot rely on local authorities for relief. The agency documents and monitors conditions of abuse and oppression, educates the church and public about abuses, and mobilizes intervention on behalf of the victims." IJM intervenes in cases when local authorities or local justice fails. Their three-pronged approach to seeking justice can be summed up as follows: document (gather evidence to build their case and monitor the situation); educate (Christian and secular audiences); and mobilize (presumably their professional staff, possibly forming partnerships with local organizations, and their Christian and secular base in America). These three thematic categories—documentation, education, and mobilization—were also shared by witnesss.org, but only to a lesser extent by the Witnessing Project, its objectives are slightly different: their focus is on personal transformation and empowerment. Education, referred to as awareness, was the only shared category in this sense.

At this stage of the analytic process, Spencer et al. recommend that the researcher "revisit the original synthesized data to search for new clues, to check assumptions or to identify underlying factors" (p. 213). The researcher must also account for data that does not fit easily into some of the earlier categories that were generated. Both witness.org and IJM are interested in documenting, I

108

suggest, past and ongoing human rights abuses and creating a public record. I constructed this category because both organizations produce evidence and documentation of abuses, which are easily accessible to visitors of the site: witness.org produces video footage, documentaries, and alerts, while IJM produces case files in legal proceedings, bulletins, news updates, and includes personal narratives from activists in the field or victims who have been rescued. Unlike witness.org and IJM, the Witnessing Project does not produce evidence of human rights abuses or provide updates about cases and conflicts. I, therefore, revised initial ideas about documentation and a public record, to which I added the more inclusive term archive, which is explicitly mentioned by the Witnessing Project. The goal of the archive is less about documenting than collecting witnessing narratives that can be accessed by visitors to the site, who can also add their own witnessing stories. The archive also functions as an educational resource for witnesses: "The intention of the archive is to create a global resource of witnesses for witnesses. We believe that the stories, anecdotes, vignettes, moments that are archived here will provide support, encouragement, hope and inspiration to readers everywhere." By continually revisiting the data and searching for new categories and themes, the researcher gets a clearer picture of the relationships and patterns in the data.

Once I completed the analysis of each site, I explored possible relationships between, and among, these themes and across all three sites. Adopting a cross-sectional analysis, I compared mission statements, as well as their history, the need for audience education and support, and how the sites

109

addressed victims. By continuously revisiting the data and "refining categories," I

constructed shared themes common to the three sites: injustice/harm and how it

occurs; the central role education plays in making constituents aware of abuses;

mobilization of support and possible intervention on behalf of others; the

importance of documentation and the creation of a public archive; the importance

of hearing victims' voices/narratives; and an ethical appeal based on one's social

responsibility for others.   I later added the theme of

empowerment/transformation.   All three websites seek, in different ways, to

empower individuals to take action, by letting them know how they can effect

change and make a difference in the lives of others and potentially their own,

with self-transformation explicitly highlighted as the objective of the Witnessing

Project. Implied within this empowerment-action dynamic, I propose, one is no

longer a passive observer but an I-witness who asserts her subjectivity and

agency and who takes action to defend the rights of others. Witness.org states

emphatically that its goal is the "empowerment" of individuals to record injustice,

in addition to informing visitors to the site how they can become involved and

make a difference. This model is also adopted by IJM. Individuals are urged to

follow the Christian imperative to seek justice and to aid in the rescue of the

oppressed, empowered by their faith (Christ's teachings). Similar to witness.org,

individuals are directed on actions they can take, for example, becoming prayer

partners and fundraising. The Witnessing Project focuses on the empowerment

of the individual, through her awareness as a witness, with the hope of self-

transformation: from passive to an intentional and empowered witness.   The

following table contains "thematic summaries," also referred to as a "précis of content," which I employed to construct these analytic categories (Ritchie & Lewis, p. 202).

Table 3 - Themes shared by all three websites

- injustice and/or harm is caused by human rights abuses/violations (through an abuse of power and experience of violence)
- the need to educate audiences and make them aware of these abuses (as well as violence and its impact)
- the need to mobilize support (some form of intervention and/or need for change)
- the importance of documentation and the creation of a public archive (through video footage and archives, investigative and legal evidence, and personal accounts)
- the importance/impact of individual victim's narratives (placing a human face/voice on suffering and/or experience)
- an appeal (explicit and implicit) to a shared ethical responsibility--and a shared humanity and/or global citizenship--to care about/respond to the suffering of others (as well as the impact of violence)
- empowerment of individuals/witnesses to effect change in the lives of others (to make a difference) and possibly their own=transformation of conditions as well as self-transformation

Once I had identified the major themes within and across sites, I employed a similar strategy to classify the different kinds of witnesses (or witness positions) referred to in the websites. Creating a typology of witness positions became a useful reference tool that allowed me to make distinctions between the various categories of witnesses. Spencer et al. explain that "once the nature of a phenomena have been clarified and the data classified according to a set of substantive dimensions, refined categories or more abstract classes, the analyst may go on to develop typologies" (p. 214).[140] Within the websites, the distinctions between the various witness positions were not immediately apparent. For example, witness.org uses this very general statement to refer to different types of witnesses: "WITNESS empowers people to record injustice as it

---

[140] Spencer et al. provide the following definition of typologies: They are "specific forms of classification that help to describe and explain the segmentation of the social world or the way the phenomena can be characterized or differentiated. They may apply to groups of people within the population or to sets of phenomena like beliefs, circumstances or behaviours" (p. 214).

happens, and makes us all eyeWITNESSES to human rights violations." The "people" who are being referred to are later identified as grassroots activists, those on the frontlines; "us" refers to virtual audience-eyewitnesses. The same holds true for the Witnessing Project which does not distinguish between witnesses who experience violence firsthand and directly, and witnesses who are affected indirectly, including those who later come to know about violent and traumatic events through the mediated experience of television, the Internet, or other media (vicarious witnesses). The Witnessing Project describes its primary goal as follows: "To make people aware of themselves as everyday witnesses to violence and violation." From their description, we are all witnesses.

The construction of a typology of witnesses was useful in making distinctions and clarifying between categories, but these categories are not intended to be discrete, and they shift and can often overlap. Conceptually, this typology represents the different and shifting positions witnesses can occupy. From the websites, I identified three categories of witnesses: primary, professional and virtual/vicarious/indirect or secondary witnesses. Primary and direct witnesses are individuals who are spatio-temporally present and have firsthand experience of an event, for example, Holocaust survivors and victims of human rights abuses. They are eyewitnesses. In the case of witness.org, this category also includes grassroots activists who may also be victims but who record human rights abuses. The use of video cameras to represent the event to which they are present suggests a somewhat different relationship from other primary witnesses who are victims. The camera remediates the experience to

which they are present, suggesting a critical form of vicarious witnessing even as these activists are present to the event: they are intentional witnesses who are empowered in their role as activists and who undertake risks to capture proof of human rights abuses (professional eyewitnesses in this sense). Witnessing, in this context, is performative and closely aligned with representational practices. Professional witnesses/advocates may also be primary witnesses and grassroots activists who are present to an event.   However, their status as "experts" distinguishes them from other witnesses. In creating this category, my objective was to focus on their expertise in the areas of human rights, law, and the profession of advocacy services on behalf of victims.   Structurally, these individuals have access to various resources, including technological expertise, and can disseminate information and mobilize support globally on behalf of victims. Witnessing is facilitated and remediated through technology, whereby this category of witnesses need have no physical contact with victims or their constituents.   Professional witnesses, unlike virtual and vicarious witnesses, engage in ongoing work on behalf of victims. Virtual and vicarious witnesses, on the other hand, learn about human rights abuses indirectly through mediated practices (reading about, viewing, being informed by others about abuses). In this category, potentially anyone can be a witness, including those who experience an event indirectly. Based on my literature review and from an analysis of these sites, virtual/vicarious/indirect and secondary witnesses are not, however, meant simply to be passive observers. Witnessing involves, or ought to be, a participatory and performative element: witnesses are required to take

action on behalf of others, whether by donating money, volunteering, or sharing

their knowledge (for example, sending links to friends or posting their personal

narrative of a witnessing experience, in the case of the Witnessing Project). This

category of witness may be involved in various, ongoing human rights activities

or may choose to be involved in specific causes/campaigns. Action on behalf of

witnesses is an acknowledgement of our relationships with others, described in

the literature as a sense of social responsibility and shared humanity with others.

Witnesses can become empowered by becoming involved and making a

difference in the lives of others and, by extension, their own: moving from

passive to engaged/empowered witnesses. The following table represents the

three categories I identified within the websites:

Table 4 - Typology of Witnesses[141]

TYPE	DEFINITION
Primary/direct witnesses	grassroots (frontline) activists--or those present (firsthand experience)
Professional witnesses/advocates	those who have "expert" status, including those with human rights and legal expertise (this can include primary witnesses) who work for an organization and are advocates
Virtual/vicarious/indirect witnesses	Audiences—can include visitors to the site, those who experience violence indirectly, as well as those who come to know about injustice and become involved in some way through donation of money, volunteering, informing others

In this study, once descriptive accounts have been generated, the

researcher seeks "patterns of association within the data and then attempt[s] to

---

[141] My typology of witnesses bears some similarity with Cohen's (2001) own findings. He identifies three types of "audiences": "(i) immediate, literal, physical or internal (those who are actual witnesses to atrocities and suffering or hear about them at the time from first-hand sources; (ii) external or metaphorical (those who receive information from secondary sources, primarily the mass media or humanitarian organizations" (15). To this list, he adds a third category, "bystander states" to refer to "other governments or international organizations" (ibid).

account for why those patterns occur" (Ritchie & Lewis, p. 215). At the explanatory stage, the researcher seeks to establish "linkages" and "patterns of association" within and across the data (Spencer et al., p. 215). This process, argue Spencer et al., leads to the formulation of "why patterns, recurrent linkages, processes or apparent contradictions" in the data (p. 115). Initially, the interpretative framework I employed to enable comparisons across the sites was drawn from my knowledge of organizational structures and patterns of narratives, as well as strategies based on how one reads and interprets text: the characters or actor(s) (who they are), what they do (action or plot), and why (motivation or purpose). I later revised this model and adopted Wertsch's (1998) "pentad," which embraces a "dramatic approach to human action and motive" (p. 13). Described as an interpretative and interactional tool, Wertsch's "pentad" is a model for understanding the "agent and cultural tools in mediated action" (p.25). Wertsch simplified the pentad into the four Ws and H that represents the basic narrative structure of stories and plays: What, where, who, why, and how" (p.13). Adapting the framework of the pentad, I constructed a comparative analytic template to organize the activities of websites. Action, actors, or to use Wertsch's term "agent," and why (purpose) remained the same as my initial hypothesis outlined above and corresponded with Wertsch's categories what, who, and how. In identifying the purpose or objectives shared by all three sites, I revisited the sites and examined how they function. They all are advocacy-oriented, to greater (witness.org and IJM) and lesser degrees (Witnessing Project). These sites are all available online, highlighting both the importance of

"where," and the centrality of technology in remediating witnessing practices. Wertsch's "how" category in the pentad was somewhat more difficult to incorporate into my template. I interpreted this category as expertise and methods and, through a process of constant comparison, reclassified it as tools to reflect the functionality involved in how actors or agents engage in mediated action. The following template identifies structural as well as thematic patterns which highlight similarities and differences:

Table 5 - Main features and functions of the websites

Websites	witness.org	ijm.org	witnessingproject.org
Actors	grassroots activists, human rights defenders, virtual audiences	Christian frontline workers, IJM staff, Christians and the secular public legal	anyone who has experienced violence and violation (indirectly and vicariously)
Action	defend the human rights of the vulnerable: seek justice	intervention on behalf of the oppressed	transformation of passive or unaware witnesses into intentional, compassionate witnesses
Tools	video and online technology (to open the eyes of the world to human rights abuses), commitment to human rights	legal and criminal expertise; courage to heed God's call to seek justice	awareness, empathic listening skills, compassion
Advocacy	video evidence, documentaries, counter-reports, public education/engagement, news/info, policy change	documentation, intervention, education	shared narratives (online), workshops, seminars, counselling
Where	online	online	online

These three websites embrace different witnessing practices, remediated by virtue of digital technology. In adopting Foucault's interpretative, analytic approach to discourse, my objective was to situate witnessing as both a discursive strategy and a socio-cultural practice. Human rights perspectives, as seen through this framework, are reflective of, and produce, certain witnessing practices. Foucault's archaeological framework, specifically how a concept or word such as witnessing can have multiple designations, shared and intersecting

meanings and practices, as well as departures, was a useful analytic tool in this respect. Contemporary witnessing practices share overlapping principles but have been transformed by emergent technological possibilities. I examined and analyzed these specific websites as exemplars in the hope of sketching what witnessing offers as a framework for human rights praxis and how human rights praxis serves as a vehicle for witnessing practices. In attempting to offer "why" explanations for the patterns in the data, I examined the different kinds of witnessing embraced by each site. Witness.org attempts to turn its audiences into virtual eyewitnesses to human rights abuses by providing them with video evidence. Visual images from grassroots activists (primary eyewitnesses) who record what is going on in their countries is available online in witness.org's video archives and often serve as the raw material for the documentaries created by staff in their New York office. These primary I/eyewitnesses offer their experiential knowledge of events and can be documented, through the lenses of their cameras, to bear witness to injustice. In so doing, they challenge official state accounts of their human rights record. Professional human rights witnesses like witness.org make this information available and urge their constituents to confront and "look" human rights abuses in the eye (to become virtual eyewitnesses) and to take action, which I argue is to become I-witnesses. For IJM, witnessing is more of an implied practice, manifested in following in Christ's footsteps to seek justice, modelling His actions, on behalf of others. Witnessing thus entails an explicit evangelical mission: witnessing for, and in the name of, Christ, and spreading the Gospel to others (the goal is the conversion

117

of others to Christianity). Justice as envisioned by IJM is both divine/biblical and legal. Witnessing, therefore, can be seen as a prescriptive model of faith for how one ought to live in the world. In this sense, witnessing is embodied in the work of IJM's staff and is reflective of their faith in Christ. Defenders of human rights and their faith, they offer both testimony and a model for their audiences, primarily Christian but also secular. Lastly, the Witnessing Project adopts a psychological framework that embraces testimony, to one's self and others, as a transformative experience and practice. Because of the harm inflicted by exposure to violence, individuals can often be rendered passive and powerless. The Witnessing Project offers tools/resources for individuals to become aware and recognize how they respond to the traumatic effects of violence, and how they can become empowered to take action to effect change in their lives and the lives of others. In this sense, witnessing is therapeutic and involves self-transformation, through self-awareness. Within this paradigm, witnesses bear witness to the self and also witness others by sharing, as well as reading about, stories about witnessing experiences.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I outlined the methodological framework that underlines my research. Using a Foucauldian approach, I explored his idea of an "archaeology of knowledge" to sketch a rationale for exploring discursive "witnessing" practices within these websites, that is, how witnessing is conceptualized and adopted and adapted within the framework of rights discourse and in a self-empowerment context such as the Witnessing Project. Drawing on Bolter and Gruisin's concept

118

of remediation, I explored the impact digital technology has in transforming "witnessing" practices. These two theoretical approaches laid a foundation for my analysis of these websites, which represent different modalities of "witnessing." Thematic analysis was based on the mission statements and other textual and visual content in these sites in an effort to identify patterns within and across these sites. Detailed analysis of the specific sites and their articulations of witnessing are explored in the following chapters.

Treating these websites as "cultural artifacts" allowed me to explore the social construction of "witnessing" as a socio-cultural practice. These sites were easily accessible as they exist in the public domain of the Internet. They were rich in substantive content, textually and visually. Relying on web sources as primary data is to work within a dynamic and impermanent framework. Two of the sites, witness.org and ijm.org, underwent major transformations during this period. I initially discovered these sites several years ago, began analysis, but by the time I proceeded to the refining and writing stage, the sites had been redesigned: the substantive data I had been working with had changed significantly in some cases. The original data was no longer available, but I had hard copies of the data. This practice allowed me to return to the sites and examine how they had changed, which led to other opportunities for analysis. The fact is that data can easily be lost, and sites are constantly updated and redesigned, reflecting the dynamic nature of online environments.

One of the limitations of this study pertains to its "transferability"[142] to other websites that also adopt a witnessing perspective. Lewis and Ritchie (2003) suggest that qualitative research need not fulfill the requirement of generalizability, noting that qualitative research invariably focuses on smaller samples and is much more concerned with the rich, contextualized descriptions of very specific cases. This study draws attention to the multiple meanings of witnessing as a socio-cultural practice and explores how it has been adopted within the framework of human rights advocacy. Some of my interpretations may indeed be observable in other human rights advocacy sites that employ witnessing practices, and can thus be seen to have some "inferential"[143] applications, but the findings of this study are meant to be seen in this context as "working hypotheses or extrapolations rather than conclusions" (Cronbach as cited in Lewis & Ritchie, p. 268). The promise or potential witnessing holds as a practice of engagement finds support within a human rights framework in which advocates urge their constituents to become involved and take action on behalf of victims whose rights are being violated and who experience terrible abuses and atrocities.[144] Communications technologies remediate witnessing practices, increasing access and the potential for engagement for users. The act of

---

[142] Lewis and Ritchie (2003) observe that the question of generalizability, which is typically used to refer to quantitative research, and its uncritical application to qualitative research need to be examined. Instead, they note that "some authors prefer the terms 'transferability' or 'external validity'" to refer to this issue.

[143] Ritchie and Lewis refer to "inferential generalizations" to describe the extent to which "findings from a particular study can be generalized, or inferred, to other settings and contexts beyond the sampled one" (p. 285).

[144] In this sense, my findings suggest that witnessing is connected to a practice of engagement, which can be seen, according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), to have "inferential" implications when "the findings from a particular study can be generalized, or inferred, to other settings or contexts beyond the sampled one" (p. 285).

witnessing thus becomes a powerful trope, of simply acknowledging another's suffering, for human rights organizations who seek to increase the awareness of abuses—in the sense that "the whole world is watching"—and to mobilize individuals, making them central in the struggle to defend human rights—to take action to stop these abuses and assist victims.

The ways the three websites I have chosen make connections between witnessing and doing human rights work/advocacy is taken up in the following chapters. In chapter 4, I analyze witness.org and its focus on "seeing as believing" as an overarching theme, which underlines its strategy: to supply and train grassroots activists with cameras to record human rights abuses. Next, I examine IJM.org in chapter 5, a faith-based organization that uses witnessing as a model for seeking justice on behalf of the oppressed. I conclude my analysis with the Witnessing Project, which embeds witnessing within a psychological model that focuses on personal awareness and empowerment as a strategy for minimizing the harmful effects of witnessing violence and violations.

4   WITNESS.ORG: FIGHTING INJUSTICE WITH CAMERAS

The website witness.org (hereafter referred to WITNESS) served as the catalyst for this project. I became interested in the organization's use of witnessing as a deliberate strategy to expose human rights abuses through the use of video and communication technologies. Conceptually, "witnessing" invokes notions of truth-seeking/telling, to provide testimony, and, by extension, redressing wrongs. To witness, then, rings out idealistically as the voice of moral righteousness and indignation, in the belief that truth can counteract denial. Witnessing, I argue in my previous discussion of witnessing as "a key word," appeals to a certain moral sensibility that harkens back to the archaic meaning of the root "wit," which once referred to "the seat of consciousness" and "human understanding." I refer to witnessing as a discursive practice that acknowledges our relationships and connections to others: witnessing requires a response and is strongly tied to feelings of "response-ability" to others (Oliver, 2001). Within the framework of human rights, witnessing becomes an acknowledgment of our membership within the larger global (and ethical) community. We are responsible for safeguarding the rights of others, and we have a moral (and political) duty to respond to their suffering.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the foundation and objectives of WITNESS and how its approach differs from other human rights organizations, namely that it arms grassroots activists with cameras to document injustice.[145]

---

[145] WITNESS works "in partnership with more than 150 non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders in 50 countries" (www.witness.org). Their core partners are located in

Video technology is, as they see it, integral to advancing its human rights agenda. Based on its articulation and practice of witnessing, I suggest that WITNESS be seen as an exemplar for human rights praxis. Next, I examine the organization's logo, a pair of eyes, which helps to establish a framework for the significance of vision and the eyewitness. In the section "Image is everything," I explore the problematic use of the Rodney King incident as a trope for representing the cliché that "seeing is believing." The naïve confidence in the visual to transparently mirror or reveal the truth is interrogated in my discussion; like any text, the visual needs to be subjected to critical examination. In the section that follows, I discuss the role of (video) technology, as embraced by WITNESS, in the fight for human rights. Human rights work has been vastly transformed by technology: information about abuses is immediately accessible, and the rapid mobilization of various constituencies globally becomes possible. In this sense, what is unprecedented is the potential of new video and communication technologies, as employed by WITNESS, to educate and mobilize its constituents to become involved in the struggle to defend human rights. Technology, as I have discussed in my methodology chapter, has also remediated the experience of the witness: the individual no longer has to be present at events and can witness virtually and vicariously. One witnesses others bearing witness to events. Through acts of witnessing, the individual can, potentially, be transformed through participation in human rights campaigns

Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the former Soviet Union. Partnerships have been formed with activists in countries like Burma (internally displaced people and the issue of forced labour); Senegal, the Democratic Republic of Congo (child soldiers); and Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Human Rights Association and Women in Law & Development) (ibid).

(becoming I-witnesses).   WITNESS's goal, however, is to create a global community of eyewitnesses to injustice. I conclude with a discussion of some of the notable revisions that have been made to the site in the closing section, "WITNESS updated."

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES: CELEBRITY ACTIVISTS, HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Witness.org, founded in 1992 by Peter Gabriel, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and the Reebok Human Rights Foundation, proclaims its commitment to the power of the visual image and its ability to bring to light abuses that would normally be hidden. WITNESS is representative of the kind of collaborations that have become commonplace within the socio-political and cultural landscape, ones that match activism with celebrity and corporate sponsorship/funding. One has only to think of recent gains made by the "green" movement and environmental activists who have seen global warming and climate change become part of the larger political agenda. These issues have become "hot topics"—one could add trendy—with former U. S. Vice-president Al Gore as one of the most prominent spokespersons. Consumers are urged to "go green" and be more environmentally conscious in their purchases and practices. More recently, the Live Earth concert (July 2007) brought musicians, celebrities, filmmakers, and corporations (Smart, PHILIPS, and MSN) to ring the alarm and send out an SOS[146] about the need to take action for the sake of our planet. In

---

[146] On liveearth.org, the following information is provided about the mission of the SOS campaign: "to empower individuals to change their consumer behaviours and motivate corporations and political leaders to enact decisive measures to combat the climate crisis. The message of SOS is

the case of witness.org, well-known musician Peter Gabriel joined the rights-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and Reebok.

Gabriel follows the lead of Bob Geldof who lent his celebrity/star power to raise awareness and fundraise for famine relief, and organized a concert highlighting human rights. Geldof's Live Aid concert, the first of its kind held in 1985, raised millions of dollars for famine relief in Ethiopia.[147] Live Aid demonstrated that celebrities had the star power to mobilize a larger public, by bringing together music and entertainment with social justice concerns. Such high profile campaigns showed the promise and possibilities for "doing good," persuading people that they could "make a difference" in the lives of others who are less fortunate in faraway continents. Celebrity involvement, often referred to in mainstream discourse as celebrity activism, in political and human rights endeavours is now taken for granted, as evidenced by meetings between world leaders and celebrities: Bono[148] has met regularly with world leaders to discuss eliminating African debt, Angelina Jolie and the very outspoken Mia Farrow are Goodwill Ambassadors with various UN-backed organizations, and George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle, and Jerry Weintraub have founded *Not on our watch*,[149] an organization that focuses attention on Darfur

---

that everyone, everywhere, can and must Answer the Call to solve the climate crisis." This specific information was retrieved on 9/26/2007.

[147] Live Aid raised $283.6 million, which surpassed the expectations of organizers (retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Aid on December 19, 2008).

[148] Bono, founder of DATA (Debt AIDS Trade Africa), received the Liberty Medal "for his humanitarian work in Africa" (www.theglobeandmail.com/servelet/story/RTGAM.20070928, retrieved on 9/28/07). Last year's DATA's recipients were Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush.

[149] These celebrities have used their voices and influence to address the atrocities in Darfur. John Drummond, Executive Director of DATA, when asked about celebrity involvement in politics offers the following comment: "They're intelligent enough to know that their celebrity profile has given them a global fan base that they can easily tap into to make people aware—and make a

and provides humanitarian assistance: "Our mission is to focus global attention and resources to stop and prevent mass atrocities. Drawing on the powerful voice of citizen artists, activists, and cultural leaders, our mission is to generate lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for the vulnerable, marginalized, and displaced" (www.notonourwatchproject.org).

The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, renamed Human Rights First (HRF), is a "non-profit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization based in New York and Washington, D.C."[150] HRF lends both credibility and legal expertise to witness.org. Its mission statement outlines the organization's commitment to upholding the "rule of law" and the protection of the rights for those "at risk": "refugees who flee persecution, victims of crimes against humanity or other mass human rights violations, victims of discrimination, those whose rights are eroded in the name of national security, and human rights advocates who are targeted for defending the rights of others." HRF's homepage provides updates about Iraqi refugees, the situation in Darfur, the use of torture by the U. S., in addition to detailing specific ways visitors to the site can take action, a central component of the website. Additionally, HRF issues publications of various projects in which it is involved, for example, the use of torture at Guantanamo, and actively promotes campaigns in defense of human rights.

---

difference." Drummond is quoted in Gayle MacDonald's article "From depravity to saving the world. Impact of celebrity activists substantial, experts say," in the September 8, 2007 edition of *The Globe&Mail*. MacDonald compared the old Rat Pack with Sinatra, Martin, Davis Jr., and Bishop to the new one led by Clooney and company. For more information on *Not on our watch*, see www.notonourwatchproject.org for a description of the six project goals.

[150] For more information, see www.humanrightsfirst.org (all quotes taken from this site). When I first encountered witness.org, the name change had not yet occurred.

The Reebok Human Rights Foundation joined HRF to create WITNESS. The Foundation has established a Human Rights Program and gives annual awards to young activists. Its Board of Directors includes recognizable figures such as former U. S. president Jimmy Carter, Michael Posner (Executive Director of Human Rights First), musicians Peter Gabriel and Michael Stipe, Kerry Cuomo (Founder of the Robert. F. Kennedy Memorial for Human Rights), Elaine Jones (Director and Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund), as well as other activists and corporate representatives.[151] The Foundation embraces notions of ethical business practices, corporate conscience/consciousness, and responsibility in its following mission statement: "A commitment to human rights is a Reebok hallmark, as much a part of its corporate identity as its products. As a company operating in the global marketplace, Reebok believes it has an obligation to act in a socially responsible way. That is why, in 1992, the company adopted an international code of conduct mandating the fair treatment of workers involved in making Reebok products. Such actions have helped to define Reebok as a corporation that is willing to follow its conscience."[152] This rhetoric of rights conflicts with a report written in June 5, 2003 that raises questions about Reebok's labour practices.[153] A news item in *Ethical Corporation* released "independent audits of seven major footwear and apparel companies," Reebok being one of them, by the US Fair

---

[151] See www.hri.ca/hraward/advisors.html about the program.
[152] All quotes about Reebok's Human Rights Program are taken from www.hri.ca/hraward/advisors.html, retrieved on 7/23/2007.
[153] See http://business.nmsu.edu/ ~dboje/AA/academics_reebok.html for a critique of Reebok's labour practices by "Academics studying Reebok, Adidas, etc. & Athletic Campus Apparel Industry," retrieved on June 7, 2008. Reebok was bought by Adidas in 2005 (www.cbc.ca/money/story/2005/08/03/adidas-050803.html).

Labor Association.[154] One of the areas examined was "the protection of workers' rights," and "the audits purport to show every instance of non-compliance with the FLA code by accredited independent monitors."   In response to these findings, Michael Posner (an FLA Board Member, Executive Director of Human Rights First, and a Board Member of Reebok's Human Rights Program) offered this statement: "The first round of audits shows that there is room for improvement at *all* of these companies and in *all* of these factories" (emphasis mine). Reebok is therefore not singled out as the worst offender but as one of several companies that need to improve their practices. Interestingly, Posner adds, "the companies deserve a lot of credit for trusting the public with the grit as well as the gloss, on an issue that will take persistence and struggle for many years to come." Yet the "credit" that a corporation such as Reebok "deserves" conflicts with its labour practices, notwithstanding its rhetoric as a "corporation that is willing to follow its conscience" (The Foundation's mission statement).

The Reebok Human Rights Foundation has also had to deal with controversy over its Human Rights Awards Program, in light of its treatment of workers. The authors behind a study of Reebok refer to the award as an "annual spectacle" which is largely a "PR tool," and a "symbolic image builder for Reebok."[155] The implication is that the real motive behind Reebok's adoption of a human rights initiative, which can be seen as a clever branding strategy, is

---

[154] This information was obtained from www.ethicalcorp.com/content.asp?ContentID=666, which was retrieved on 7/23/2007.

[155] All quotes are taken from http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/AA/academics_reebok.html. In presenting the views contained in this site, I am not disputing Reebok's role in recognizing the work of activists and donating money to various causes. I am merely drawing attention to the contradictions that surround the role of corporations whose profit-driven motives often run counter to their human rights records regarding their treatment of workers.

increased sales: "As concern for human rights issues grows among consumers, particularly younger consumers, we believe our leadership and reputation will translate into greater preference for our brands and products." While the authors do adopt a cynical view of Reebok's practices, the annual awards are an attempt, on Reebok's part, to raise awareness about the work of "young human rights advocates" around the world, while also providing a cash award for activists to continue their work. Reebok's record,[156] not unlike similar corporations, does raise questions about the balancing act corporations face with respect to their competing roles and goals. In their article, the authors focus on the 2002 controversy when Dita Sari, a labour activist from Indonesia (who formed one of the first independent labour unions and was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for five years), refused to attend Reebok's ceremony and accept the $50,000 award (http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/AA/academics_reebok.html). Sari's refusal of the reward was based on her knowledge of Reebok's practices in Indonesia:

> There are five Reebok companies [in Indonesia]. Eighty-percent of the workers are women. All companies are sub-contracted, often by the South Korean companies such as Dung Jo and Tong Yang. Since the workers can only get around $1.50 a day, they then have to live in a slum area, surrounded by poor and unhealthy conditions, especially for their children. At the same time, Reebok collected millions of dollars of profit every year, directly contributed to these workers [from Indonesia, Mexico, and Vietnam].

---

[156] As Naomi Klein (2000) points out, Reebok has been one of "the most hypocritical" corporations which "rushed to capitalize on Nike's controversies by positioning itself as the ethical shoe alternative" and by establishing its Human Rights Awards (p. 422). She adds, "this is all rather sanctimonious, coming from a company that produces many of its shoes in the very same factories as Nike, and that has seen more than its own share of human rights violations, though with less attendant publicity (ibid).

In light of controversies such as these, the authors of this report on Reebok ask why actors and various celebrities agree to present awards and participate on Reebok's Board of Advisors. My discussion of this controversy is not meant to detract from WITNESS'S human rights work but is meant to highlight the tensions inherent in partnerships formed between non-profit, social justice organizations and corporations.

"THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING"[157]: THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY

Julia Scheeres describes WITNESS as "one of the biggest proponents of this seeing-is-believing philosophy."[158] Gabriel states he first had the idea for WITNESS in 1988, while he "was on a world tour sponsored by Amnesty International" and met "victims of human right abuses."[159] He was "shocked to discover how often the perpetrators avoided prosecution and successfully buried their atrocities." Gabriel felt that, in spite of the existence and publication of "written reports," "they often seemed impotent, leaving justice undone and many activists and victims very isolated." Gabriel's idea of providing activists with video cameras came later and became poignant "when amateur video footage of Rodney King being beaten by Los Angeles police officers proved how potent a

---

[157] Anti-war protesters chanted this revolutionary phrase in 1968, also the subject of Todd Gitlin's book of the same title in which he critiques the media and their representation of political movements (Retrieved from www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/1515001.html on September 25, 2006). The potential power of the gaze being directed at abuses suggests that perpetrators actions will not remain hidden.

[158] From *Pics Worth a Thousand Protests* by Julia Scheeres, retrieved on October 26, 2003 from www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,60828,00.html?tw=wn_tophead_2.

[159] See *A lens on the world. Musician Peter Gabriel provides human rights activists with cameras for a cause* (November 21, 2002) in the washingtonpost.com by Anne Hornaday, retrieved October 26, 2003 from w…/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentID=A17688-2002Nov20&notFound=tru 10/26/03.

tool for change video could be." The Rodney King case is described as a defining moment of truth where the amateur, the bystander, became a powerful witness to police brutality. In this case, the camera symbolized the power held by an ordinary citizen, and became the penetrating eye of justice, turning the gaze back on the perpetrator. In fact, Gabriel describes the work of WITNESS as "a reversal of Orwell's 1984" where "we are watching" (Cohen, 2001, p. 186). Ordinary citizens, as well as human rights organizations, could participate in counter-surveillance and expose injustices. Cohen champions the use of visual technologies by human rights organizations: "Visual images have a visceral public impact that no other medium can make. The lazy anachronistic belief in written information ('if only they knew') could become redundant, replaced by 'now they can see'. In this latest round of 'telling truth to power', technology is surely on our side" (p. 186). The power of visual evidence, as one strategy of many, to counter official denial of human rights abuses can be an effective tool. Cohen states that providing visual evidence to the world forces perpetrators to be accountable for their actions: "A row of silent witnesses—VCRs in hand or not— watching wrongdoing, often putting themselves at risk, is a powerful image. They are *active* bystanders—powerless to intervene, but a reminder to perpetrators that not everyone approves or colludes, and that their future denials will be countered by another testimony" (p. 256). For Cohen, witnessing can be seen as a "deliberate" and moral act which challenges official power (p. 257).

The "hyper-immediacy" of the visual image has an emotional power to move audiences, but images alone, as I discussed in my literature and

methodology chapters, can be easily discounted and emptied of significance. Yet, the visual image is often accepted as incontrovertible proof of events that one did not witness firsthand. Gillian Caldwell, former executive director of WITNESS, acknowledges there was a certain naiveté to the initial idealism of WITNESS (Hornaday, 2003). Empowering though it may be for activists to record human rights abuses, evidence, by itself, does not lead to substantive change, the photographs of prisoners taken by soldiers at Abu Ghraib is one such example. Even when the most damning visual evidence is produced, initially outraged audiences are not necessarily moved to certain forms of action, and, as Cohen cautions, audiences may become desensitized by information overload (and the repeated exposure to certain images). Caldwell explains that "within a few years, however, it became clear that WITNESS's initial mission was not enough. The vision of giving cameras to the world was beautiful and probably oversimplified, in the sense of just dropping off a camera without providing technical training in how to use it" (Hornaday, 2003). In her statement, Caldwell hints at the over-reliance of the image to effect change but believes that focusing on training programs for activists on the technological aspects of documenting images can mitigate problems associated with credibility. Caldwell is cautious, however, that the images captured by grassroots activists may not be as well received by audiences influenced by television:

> I think the Rodney King example perpetuated the early mythology that handheld video footage is going to be plastered all over the world's television screens and revolutionize the debate. Unfortunately, because of television's appetite and the audience's limited attention span, most footage our partners are shooting, at

least by television's standards, doesn't merit an international audience. (Hornaday, 2003)

Caldwell's argument can be challenged in light of the prevalence of new media. Mainstream and alternative media frequently solicit and include amateur eyewitness footage of events—for example, photographs and videos of eyewitnesses present at disasters, conflicts, or celebratory, public events—which are then aired on television.

In addition to providing grassroots activists with cameras, WITNESS ensures that activists also have the technical expertise to produce evidence of human rights abuses, literally creating visual documents (documentaries) which are then used to raise awareness and mobilize support through various campaigns. These documentaries, or testimonies, are, in a sense, reminiscent of social realist projects that were used to capture alternative portraits of life, other versions of truth and reality often excluded from the mainstream. Hornaday (2003) refers to Depression-era photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand, and Lewis Hine, as well as "60s-era filmmakers including Frederick Wiseman, who used hand-held cameras to create unvarnished portraits of American social institutions." To this end, WITNESS is "furthering a tradition of working with film to create politically aware and provocative documentaries," and doing it in a way that embraces "egalitarian ideals." Filmmaker Peter Wintonick[160] sees WITNESS as "decentraliz[ing] filmmaking," which puts it "at the

---

[160] Wintonick is one of the producers of *Seeing is Believing: handicams, human rights and the news* (2002), a documentary about WITNESS.

forefront of this revolution[161] of micro-documentaries, as I call them, or digi-documentaries, putting documentaries up on the Net, so they're not only available to the North American community or activists, but in theory to anyone who wants to log on"[162] (Hornaday, 2003). For Wintonick, technology can be seen to democratize the process whereby anyone, potentially, can produce documentaries, and everyone, potentially, has access to them.

By returning the gaze of those who abuse their power, videocameras in the hands of grassroots activists become "the eyes of the world when no one else is watching."[163] Initially designed for "entertainment purposes," the first handicam appeared in 1985. It has since become iconic of the power that even amateurs hold to produce images, moving the amateur from the private (home videos) to the public sphere (the news and online networks, for example). In the hands of activists, video technology becomes "political weaponry." In defending human rights, WITNESS empowers grassroots activists by giving them the tools to become their own witnesses, bringing attention to their causes. They are not simply passive recorders of abuses as often they place themselves at great risk

---

[161] In a review of *Seeing is Believing: handicams, human rights*, *and the news*, the explosion and availability of communication technologies are described as "the greatest technological paradigm shift since the Industrial Revolution." Further, "human rights activists, war crime investigators, right wing proselytizers and ordinary citizens are arming themselves with the tools of the new visual revolution" (www.cbc.ca/passionateeyesunday/feature_031102.html, retrieved on October 26, 2003).

[162] YouTube functions much the same way. Potentially anyone can become a videographer, an actor/performer, or a journalist and can upload their videos, which can then be seen by anyone who has access to a computer. John Cloud, noting the site's popularity, claims that "YouTube became a phenomenon in 2006 for many reasons, but one in particular: it was both easy and edgy, a rare combination. You can watch videos on the site without downloading any software or even registering" (www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570721,00.html). The article, "The gurus of YouTube: How a couple of regular guys built a company that changed the way we see ourselves, profiled the two main founders, Chad Hurley and Steve Chen (Retrieved on May 14, 2007).

[163] All references are taken from the 2002 documentary *Seeing is Believing: handicams, human rights and the news*, directed by Katerina Cizek and Peter Wintonick.

in challenging those in power.[164] In certain cases, knowing that a camera can capture their actions, some perpetrators might be deterred.[165]

For these reasons, the idealist belief in technology as revolutionary, its potential harnessed for "good" and for the improvement of most human activities, underlies the WITNESSING project. There is the sense that video technology can potentially transform anyone into an activist; "the reality," Caldwell notes, is, however, quite often different. This difference represents the "digital divide" that exists, "the gulf between those who have the technology and those who don't."[166] Caldwell explains that "we're a long way from actualizing and utilizing new technology on a grassroots level around the world. Half the world hasn't even made a telephone call." "When technology does cross the divide," Caldwell notes, "the results can be revolutionary."[167] A powerful example of mobilization is provided in the documentary *Seeing is Believing*: text messaging, a much more affordable mode of communication, was used in Manila to mobilize a protest against the president. When the news first became public that Estrada was freed

---

[164] The question is raised in the documentary *Seeing is Believing*, in specific reference to the work Joey Lozano does with the indigenous Nakamata people: "does this little piece of technology save lives or jeopardize them?" Lozano presented the Nakamata with a camera and showed them how to use it. The group was facing violence for having proceeded with their land claims case. The camera, seen as a threat, did not protect them from escalating violence (including a double murder), but they were able to gain public attention for their cause and eventually get the police to conduct investigations into the murders. Suspects remain at large.
[165] Scheeres cites the example of the "presence of a WITNESS video camera" in an armed confrontation in the Philippines where "indigenous activists say their equipment protected them against sugar company thugs who were trying to drive them off their land."
[166] In *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide* (2001), Norris provides an elaboration of the existing divides: "The *global divide* refers to the divergence of Internet between industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between the information rich and poor in each nation. And finally within the online community, the *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life" (p. 4, italics in original).
[167] Caldwell's comments are taken from *Seeing is Believing: handicams, human rights and the news*.

on corruption charges, communicating via text messaging and email, 200,000 people converged in Manila within two hours to demand his resignation, and they protested for four days and nights.

In fact, video technology has been at the forefront of several WITNESS campaigns, which have received coverage in the mainstream media, as part of fact-finding missions, and entered into evidence at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). WITNESS refers to the work of Ondrej Cakl, a Czech video activist, who has recorded footage of neo-Nazi activity in Prague (*Seeing is Believing*). His footage of the beating of a homeless man led to a police investigation. Cakl explains, "If people don't have visuals, they are not satisfied." He notes, however, that it is important that his work is not seen as propaganda, as "one side of a personal war." In yet another project, Eric Rosenthal took cameras into Mexican mental institutions (similar projects were conducted in Uruguay and the former Soviet Union), as part of a project of Mental Disability Rights International, to see the conditions under which people were living. The popular news program *20/20* followed up on Rosenthal's documentary, which led to one of the worst institutions being shut down. In Argentina, where over 30,000 activists have disappeared, a team of forensic anthropologists unearthing mass graves have used video technology to document evidence. Video evidence of the Srebenica massacre was also used by the prosecution at the ICTY.[168] Alan Tieger, senior trial attorney at The Hague,

---

[168] No further information is provided on the website or in the documentary on the nature of this evidence, in terms of who shot the footage and what evidentiary procedures were followed to ensure its credibility in a court of law. The following quotes are taken from the documentary *Seeing is Believing*.

refers to video as "the infallible witness," a "powerful, fact-finding tool, an arsenal of law enforcement." He does point out, however, that images do not speak for themselves. As one of the lawyers in the Rodney King case, he is well aware of the power of video images. He quite rightly notes that the defence also used video to make their case, "slowing down the tape and breaking it down into segments to show that the police acted in accordance with their training." Video is, therefore, not a "neutral tool." As the documentary makes clear, video images have also been used by Milosevic, anti-abortion groups, far right militia groups, Osama bin Laden, and by suicide bombers who video-recorded "last wills and testaments to recruit others." A certain tension, and certainly a critical issue faced by those who employ video technology, exists between what can easily become (or be seen as) propaganda. As Caldwell asserts, there is the need to "encourage critical thinking," to "get people to evaluate what they are being shown and told" (*Seeing is Believing*). One of the ways WITNESS hopes to get individuals to think about human rights advocacy and the use of new media is to develop "outreach" programs to "high schools, universities and graduate institutions and to get WITNESS Rights Alerts incorporated into curricula nationally and internationally" (Hornaday, 2003).

Empowered by the possibilities (and idealism) of technology, one of WITNESS's objectives is to make us all eyewitnesses to human rights abuses. As its website asserts, WITNESS is "a human rights program that attracts the eyes of the world and inspires those who see to act." The emphasis is on sight/vision, on "attracting" the attention of a global audience and mobilizing them

to take action. Within this context, I suggest that when one acts to defend human rights, one becomes a witness. To witness, by extension, is to become an advocate or an activist.[169] WITNESS refers to three different groups of witnesses who are involved in human rights advocacy: grassroots activists (primary eyewitnesses in my typology in Chapter 3); human rights activists, including WITNESS partners (professional witnesses); and visitors to the website (virtual, vicarious witnesses). The use of video and communications technology to document human rights abuses, as discussed previously, relies on the power of the visual image to bring to light injustice. The lens of the camera becomes the extension of the eyes of eyewitnesses. WITNESS relies on the strength of visual image to affect (shock or outrage) virtual audiences into taking action. Those who see, or witness, injustice, within this paradigm, ought to be moved (emotionally) to take action on behalf of victims, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility and obligation when one becomes aware of injustice. The epistemological assumptions, inherent within this framework, suggest that virtual audiences ought to be disturbed once they become aware ("seeing is believing") of human rights abuses and will be transformed by this knowledge and this experience to do something, to act. One can infer that grassroots activists are also transformed by their experiences of being eyewitnesses who are present to an event and who are doubly aware of their (activist) role in the representational process of documenting evidence of abuses. Their sense of empowerment—it can be assumed—derives from the work they do and from partnerships formed with WITNESS, a guarantee that they are connected to others who will present

---

[169] The leap from witness to activist is not articulated explicitly by WITNESS but is implied.

their cause to the rest of the world. In this way, the ontological status of the event captured on camera can also be said to change through this representational process. The event is experienced and witnessed intentionally, with the purpose that others will also witness it and seek to change oppressive conditions. These acts of witnessing confirm the ontological reality of events, which can be disputed or made to disappear without eyewitnesses. Witnessing, in this sense, is a deliberate act of resistance and is aligned with a quest for justice and the truth.

In its explicit adoption of technology to advance human rights advocacy, WITNESS seeks to distinguish itself from other human rights organizations. Technology makes it possible to re-conceptualize how to do rights work and reach a wider, global audience. Ideally, with expanding technologically literate, global publics, information can be disseminated quickly, often before it is broadcast (if it is considered "newsworthy" enough) on mainstream television. Human rights activists in North America and Europe can liaise with grassroots organizations around the world, no longer dependent on phones or faxes for communication. Images from a camera (digital or mobile phone) can easily be uploaded and streamed, updates sent via email, and messages posted on bulletin boards. Axworthy (2002), for example, champions the Internet for the ways in which it has revolutionized rights work:

> The key is how to maximize the Internet's potential for good as a tool to protect human rights: its use for human rights education, as a means of organizing human rights defenders and getting information on human rights violations out to the world. This is a technology that is revolutionizing the world. It is changing the equations of power, challenging the conventional channels of

communication, distributing and disseminating influence in the broadest possible fashion. It is democratizing the channels and getting rid of the gatekeepers. (16)[170]

For its potential to transform communication, technology is celebrated. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, technology is hailed, by its advocates, as a saviour[171] for its ability to transform most aspects of our lives.

Much less attention has been paid by advocates of communication technologies to the limitations[172] and the inequities that still exist with regard to access.[173] Hicks et al. (2000) point out that "the internet is not a neutral technology; it will, however, always remain what in fact it is: just a technology or a tool. The vital element in human rights activism remains the people in the equation, those who work together to promote and protect human rights" (p. 14). What the Internet does provide, on the one hand, is an "outlet" and "international audience" formerly denied to activists in certain countries, state Hick and Teplitsky (2000). These authors add, however, that "as a grassroots tool, it's

---

[170] Former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy (2002) highlights the positive qualities of the Internet in "The mouse is mightier than the sword," in *Human rights and the Internet* by Hicks, Halpin and Hoskins.

[171] Technology is seen as a particularly "American promise," according to Bolter and Gruisin (1999), where "collective (and perhaps even personal) salvation has been thought to come through technology rather than through political or even religious action" (p. 60-61).

[172] Kwak, Poor, and Skoric (2006) do note several "dystopian" perspectives of the internet that questions its potential to "connect people around the world" and transform communication: "…the connection could be fragmented rather than cross-cutting" (p. 207). The authors provide examples of hate and terrorist groups and note users tend to be far more "selective" in their choices of sites of interest (ibid). Other criticisms are leveled against the makeup of the internet: the perspective of the world it offers is largely Westernized and English, which some see as yet another form of "cultural imperialism," and, in general, a disparity exists between the views and news that get covered (p. 208).

[173] Norris (2001) discusses the disparities between the "information poor" which also mirror the economic and social inequalities in the developing poor in *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. She points out that "the underclass of information-poor may become further marginalized in societies where basic computer skills are becoming essential for economic success and personal enhancement, entry to good career and educational opportunities, full access to social networks, and opportunities for civic engagement" (p. 68).

neither foolproof nor infallible, but if nothing else it is an effective method of keep human rights issues on the table" (p. 53). "Severe imbalances of access around the world" continue to be a main concern, which is attributed to the fact that "computers are simply too expensive and complex to be readily available to all…" (p. 61). In addition to the cost, the Internet is "a complex, literate medium that demands considerable knowledge and training to use properly (ibid). Given these prohibitive features, Norris (2001) rightly asks, "Does the Internet create new inequalities, or reinforce existing divisions evident for decades in the spread of old communications technologies?" (p. 9). The nature of the debate surrounding the way the Internet has transformed the world can be summarized as follows: optimists champion the role of technology and Internet in the fight against poverty; skeptics believe "new technologies alone will make little difference" in the lives of the marginalized; and pessimists see a further exacerbation of the "North-South divide" (p. 9). A continuing concern, however, is "the *relative* inequality of opportunities" between the technological haves and have-nots, which appear "to mirror the broader pattern of access to the Information Society" (p. 51, italics in original). Norris explains that continuing disparities that exist are not specific to "the nature of the medium itself…but instead may be due to deep-rooted and endemic problems in poorer societies such as the general lack of income, leisure time, literacy, and education that hinder use of traditional media such as newspapers" (ibid). Those countries that have little or no access to older communication technologies—Norris mentions cable and satellite television or telephones—are likely to be left behind in the

141

"Information Age" (p. 235). Where this technology, including the Internet, can (and does) make a difference is in its use by various advocacy groups who can tap into its potential and find a voice (and audience) for their concerns:

> The characteristics of the Internet to shrink costs, maximize speed, broaden reach, and eradicate distance provide transnational advocacy networks with an effective tool for mobilization, organization, and expression that can potentially maximize their leverage in the global arena. (Norris, p. 172)

Technology, embraced by WITNESS, becomes a weapon in the fight to demand and restore justice. As described on the website, WITNESS "unleashes an arsenal of computers, imaging and editing software, satellite phones and email in the struggle for justice" (witness.org). The link between technology and weaponry is an interesting one as the Internet's origin can be traced to the United States military.[174] No longer associated with its original purposes, the Internet has since been transformed in terms of its multiple users and uses: accessing information and news; downloading music and movies; purchasing products and services; enrolling in online dating services and chatrooms; and creating blogs. The Internet has indeed revolutionized communication, and, by extension, human rights work. In this way, local activists are empowered by putting technology to use for their causes. At the international level, WITNESS and its partners disseminate this information in the form of documentaries and campaigns (alerts as well as petitions) to larger audiences, the goal being to inform them about human rights abuses and successes. In "attracting the eyes of the world, WITNESS partner groups reveal human rights violations that go

---

[174] Editors Hicks, Halpin, and Hoskins (2000) state that "the United States Defence Department, in order to exchange military research information, created the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (known as DARPANET, and later ARPANET)" (6).

unnoticed and unreported—to their governments and communities, to the international tribunals and UN committees, to TV viewers via outlets like the BBC, CNN, CBS, ABC, PBS, Canal+, Telemundo, and Worldlink Satellite Television, and to visitors to this website, which now receives over 1.5 million hits each month." With the above media partner networks, both domestic and international, and links to media outlets, WITNESS has become a recognized information and news source.

"WHAT THE EYE DOESN'T SEE, THE HEART DOESN'T GRIEVE OVER, HE THAT KNOWS NOTHING SEES NOTHING"[175]

Many of the themes associated with vision, uncovering truth, the production of a visual record, and the struggle for human rights are present in WITNESS. WITNESS offers a template for political and moral vision, in other words, how we ought to act when confronted with oppression and injustice.

Table 6 - Recurring Themes – Witness.org

Action: Struggle, Combat, Fight for Human rights (and their protection). Injustice is the equivalent of human rights violations and power inequities ("the powerful exploit the weak")
Actors: Human rights defenders (WITNESS staff), grassroots activists, and the virtual audience
Tools: Video and communications technology
Advocacy: Video evidence, Counter-reports, Public education, Information/news

The image that catches one's attention upon entering witness.org is a pair of closed eyes, followed below by eyes opened, the word "WITNESS" separating these pairs. It appears that the first pair of eyes is deliberately closed, as if to avoid seeing. One brow is slightly furrowed and there are lines suggesting

---

[175] Saramago (2006), in *Seeing*, breathes new life into this well-known aphorism with the addition he makes: he conflates not knowing anything with being unable to see, in other words, to be blind (p. 231).

possible effort to keep them closed. Following another interpretative possibility, these closed eyes might also represent a lack of awareness, where "what you don't know can't hurt you." Alternately, the closed eyes might represent the individual who does not want to know and to be confronted with horror. It is this ambiguity in the image that renders various interpretations plausible. Eyes closed shut typically denote an unseeing or blind state, a common metaphor that brings to mind idiomatic expressions such as "being in the dark" and "being blind to the truth," in other words, to be unaware/unknowing. With the eyes juxtaposed and separated by the word "WITNESS," the message is two-fold: witness.org makes you (potentially every visitor to the site) become, literally, an eye-WITNESS,[176] compelling you to see for yourself, with your own eyes, what is going on: the truth of human rights abuses. These formerly unseeing eyes have now been opened wide by WITNESS and must look on (witness) in shock and horror. Eyes opened represent not only the indubitable power of sight but of knowledge, awareness, and consciousness. These eyes also become the symbolic representation of what WITNESS does: open our eyes to atrocities. How it accomplishes this is addressed in the description that follows: "Using video and technology to fight for HUMAN RIGHTS." Furthermore, WITNESS sums up its mission as follows: "WITNESS empowers people to record injustice as it happens, and makes us all eyewitnesses to human rights violations."

WITNESS next launches into a description of its mandate, laid out in a series of action statements, which hinges on the tripartite equation of seeing-

---

[176] "Made you look" is one of the first assertions outlined in the description of what witness.org does. Witness works on the assumption that "seeing is believing," where sight and the proof of the visual become requirements for belief.

thinking-acting.[177]   The first assertion is "Made you look."   This declarative

statement conveys several different messages. At first glance, the construction

to make someone act [V+N+V] indicates that the subject is being acted upon, or

controlled, by a force known or unknown: WITNESS compels you to look, the first

step towards becoming a witness. To make someone do something, however,

raises the question as to whether it is with their consent or whether some kind of

force or pressure is being exerted. A more precise definition of "made" provides

the following nuanced meanings: "cause to exist, bring about, (disturbance,

difficulties, trouble, an enemy, sport, one's mark in the world, etc.)."[178] Clearly,

one of the aims of WITNESS is to cause or bring about disturbance, a feeling of

discomfort—not so much so that the audience will look away or be overwhelmed

by horror—but enough so that the gaze is captured and held (the eyes opening

to the shock of human rights abuses). This disturbance, I suggest, is one that

attempts to draw us out of our daily routines and lives of relative comfort, a

reminder that others are less fortunate. The aim of human rights organizations,

which I discussed in Chapter 2, is to reinforce a sense of connection, a

relationship, and a responsibility for others.   Inherent with a human rights

paradigm is the sense that we ought to care and be affected by the suffering of

others. When we turn a blind eye as it were, we may, by our silence, condone,

or even encourage, the abuse of power and put lives at risk.   Silence and

---

[177] In this equation, seeing is the first requirement and corresponds to an initial awareness of the problem, followed by thinking. At this stage, the subject processes the information and becomes more knowledgeable about the particular issue/problem. The final stage is acting on what you know, in other words, converting thought into action. The subject moves from a passive recipient of information and is empowered to do something in the fight against injustice.
[178] *Oxford Dictionary* (seventh edition).

inaction can make us complicit in human rights abuses, hence the potential

dangers inherent in passivity and ignorance, which I address in Chapter 2.

By making audiences look at and become aware of human rights abuses,

WITNESS attempts to implicate us in a kind of moral dilemma if we choose to

look away and do nothing. In doing so, WITNESS relies less on guilt as a

strategy but on our sense of moral responsibility to do something to end the

suffering of others. Moral outrage, therefore, ought to give way to action.

WITNESS thus urges us, through its campaigns, to acknowledge the suffering of

others and to have our eyes opened (the moral sense of vision), and to have our

consciences pricked. Implicit in this process, I contend, is the internal struggle

one faces about what it means to be a moral or "good" person. What does it

mean to do nothing or to be indifferent to the suffering of others? Is doing

nothing a tenable position for a witness who has been called to action? Knowing,

in this equation, thus becomes the basis for action. We become complicit,

argues Clarkson (1996), if we do nothing because inaction might allow abuses to

perpetuate. For many reasons, which I discuss in Chapter 2, individuals may

choose not to become involved, which has no bearing on their character (or lack

thereof). As an advocate for human rights, however, WITNESS appeals to its

constituents to heed the call, in the name of justice and what is right, to defend

the rights of others and to stop the abuse of power. In this sense, I suggest that

WITNESS adopts a "common sense"[179] approach to human rights, one that does

---

[179] In using the term "common sense," I am referring to a Gramscian notion that "there is not just
one common sense," (Forgacs; 1999, p. 327) and that it is often "an ambiguous, contradictory
and multiform concept" (p. 343). Marcia Landy (1994) adds, "common sense" cannot be
separated from notions of conformity and collectivity or from notions of resistance" (p. 78). In this

not require a specific political agenda or ideological framework: the morally responsible individual understands that she is connected to others and ought to care about their rights—particularly when they are violated. This individual ought, therefore, to take an active role in the global struggle for human rights.[180] WITNESS's goal is to transform the unknowing or unconcerned individual into an empowered and "deliberate" witness, to quote Cohen.

THE CHALLENGES OF BELIEVING WHAT WE SEE: RODNEY KING REVISITED

WITNESS draws on the cliché "A picture is worth a 1, 000 words"[181] to reiterate the power of images and the visual, and to provide a rationale for their

---

way, human rights, as a discourse and a practice, have multiple meanings and consensual but also conflicting interpretations. "Common sense" in this application is not regarded "negatively as a practical and hence a restrictive mode of understanding phenomena," but as "polysemic, formed of various strata from philosophy, religion, institutional practices, and individual experience" (p. 78). To this list, I would add history, politics, and culture, which shape and inform what can be considered "common sense."

[180] The importance of action and speaking out brings to mind the oft-quoted poem attributed to Pastor Niemoller, a Protestant pastor, who changed his pro-Nazi stance and became a vocal critic of Hitler. His views led to his arrest. He was sent to Sachsenhausen and Dachau (motlc.wiesenthal.com/text/100/xm0076.html, retrieved in February 2004. The poem, "First they came," has been adapted to reflect various groups who have been persecuted. For various versions, see www.serendipity.likda/niemoll.htm. The poem addresses the dangers of passivity: "When they (the Nazis) started arresting Communists, I was silent. I wasn't a Communist. When they started arresting trade unionists, I was silent again. I wasn't a trade unionist. When they started arresting journalists who wouldn't toe the regime's line, I was silent. I wasn't one of them. When they started arresting the Jews, I was silent. I wasn't Jewish after all. And when they came to arrest me, there was nobody left to speak for me."

[181] I decided to explore the origins of this cliché and discovered that the phrase was originally "One picture is worth ten thousand words," attributed to two advertising campaigns in the 1920s created by Frederick Barnard (www2.cs.uregina.ca/tildehepting/research/web/words/history.html, retrieved on 1/7/2005). The first campaign in 1921 was actually "One look is Worth A Thousand Words." In the second campaign, a revised version of this slogan became "One Picture is Worth Ten Thousand Words," and the advertising firm cleverly attributed it to a "Chinese proverb, so that people would take it seriously." Moreover, "it was immediately credited to Confucius [sic]." *The MacMillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Famous Phrases* "establishes the link between the two ads, but this source misquotes the 1927 advertisement by copying "a thousand" from the 1921 advertisement instead of replacing it by "ten thousand." This misquotation has "endured to become an American proverb, appearing on page 465 of *A Dictionary of American Proverbs,* edited by Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder and published by the Oxford University Press in 1992."

approach to human rights advocacy. WITNESS attempts to breathe new life into this well-worn expression by aligning it with the political and emotional impact of the Rodney King incident, thus making its work both culturally relevant and accessible to (primarily North American) audiences. WITNESS includes a description of this symbolic moment in urban America, captured on amateur video, to provide the following interpretation of how we are to understand what this moment represents: "In 1991, a bystander with a video camera captured the now infamous King beating in LA. The videotape shocked millions and showed that human rights abuses are worse when violators aren't afraid of detection. The lasting impression of the Rodney King beating and the riots that ensued showed the emotional power of the visual: the videotaped images gave the incident impact and immediacy that words could not." The power of the tape, captured by an amateur, cannot be trivialized: it ushered in a moment in which the power of technology and its democratizing potential were realized. Anyone armed with a camera could become an eyewitness and shape the political and moral landscape simply by being present and turning the watchful eye of the camera on violators of human rights. The reference to the King incident is certainly evocative, serving as a reminder that human rights abuses can happen anywhere and are not merely endemic to foreign despotic regimes. In fact, if it could happen in a country like America, one has only to imagine how much worse it is elsewhere where "violators aren't afraid of detection."

In referring to the videotape of the King beating, WITNESS focuses on its "emotional power" and impact, as well as the power of visual images to challenge

the version of reality presented by those in authority. The King incident, however, raised other troubling issues: the volatile subject of race relations in America, police brutality, and the question of a fair and just legal system for all. The reality [182] to which we were witnesses was later called into question. While WITNESS capitalizes on the dramatic power of the image, it obscures the ambiguities that arose as to what the images on the videotape actually represented, which resulted in the not guilty verdict (rendered by a mostly White jury), and the ensuing riots that erupted within Black communities. One critic of the media's use of the tape points out that "the tape lasted 81 seconds, but not one person in a thousand saw more than a few seconds of the tape. Viewers didn't see Rodney King attacking the policemen, unfazed by a stun gun; they didn't see the policemen stop swinging their sticks the moment he decided to surrender."[183] Lou Cannon[184] (April 28, 1998) reports that "the first three seconds are critical because they show Mr. King lunging in the direction of Officer Laurence Powell, who then responds with this baton blow." Cannon does not, however, dispute the fact that the beating is "brutal" but notes that "the first three seconds that were omitted by the television station are a window into all the things that have happened before the videotape begins. So what the viewer is

---

[182] I am reminded of Sontag (2003) who refers to Walter Leppman and his observation in 1922 about photographs: "Photographs have the kind of authority over the imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real" (p. 25). More sophisticated technology has ensured the primacy of the image through image enhancing software, the popularity and affordability of video and digital cameras, camera phones, and internet capabilities to stream and create movies.

[183] Harry Browne is critical of the media and the political climate in which the King incident occurred. He contends that "the hysteria surrounding the Rodney King incident" made "dissent" impossible. See www.harrybrowne.or/articles/RodneyKing.htm (Retrieved June 02, 2005).

[184] Cannon wrote *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD.* The following information is contained in an interview on www.courttv.com/archive/casefiles/rodneyking/interview/LouCannon (Retrieved June 02, 2005).

seeing is a partial record of a partial record." As Judith Butler (1993) points out in *Reading Rodney King. Reading Urban Uprising*, "what the trial and its horrific conclusions teach us is that there is no simple recourse to the visible, to visual evidence, that it still and always calls to be read, that it is always a reading, and that in order to establish the injury on the basis of the visual evidence, an aggressive reading of the evidence is necessary" (p. 17).

The visual, like any other text, needs to be interrogated and unpacked and therefore cannot simply be accepted at (sur)face value. As Cohen cautions, "there is no innocent eye" (p. 296). Cohen draws attention to the construction of visual images which are meant "to speak for themselves," based on the assumption that there exists "some degree of congruence—if not full symmetry—between the intentions of the sender and the perception of the viewer. A far more fateful assumption is that, despite each viewer's idiosyncratic sensibility, there is a common vulnerability to the raw sight of extreme human suffering: truths no one could deny, universal feelings of pity" (ibid). Even to accept the truism "Seeing is believing" asks that we focus on the act and not on the seeing subject. What is being seen is always mediated by an interpreting subject (gender, race, class, culture, nationality/citizenship, education, sexuality, and so on), her experience, the context, and content. We do not see or experience the world in the same ways. How to interpret what is being seen, where, and under what circumstances all play a part in the way we process and interpret information. WITNESS thus focuses idealistically on "the emotional power of the visual," and its equation of the visual with uncontested truth.

In the King case, the video—and what it represented—was subject to different, often competing, interpretations. The visual evidence on the tape did not result, initially, in the convictions of the police officers involved. The question then became less about what the tape captured and more about justice in a racially divided America. The tape itself did not lead to the riots (including the beating of Reginald Denny captured on television cameras), as WITNESS would have us believe. The riots ensued only after the verdict on the police officers was rendered, a distinction WITNESS does not make as it aligns the beating with the riots: "The lasting impression of the Rodney King beating and the riots that ensued showed the emotional power of the visual." The eruption of the riots after the outcome of the trial of the police officers showed that what we see and understand depends on our positionality in relation to what we are seeing. While there appeared to be a shared sense of moral outrage when the tape first aired, as Kimberle Crenshaw and Gary Peller (1993) note, "this broad consensus was misleading to the extent it made it appear that the video meant the same thing to everyone, subsequent events would reveal the deep cleavages in how the tape was understood" (p. 57). For many African-Americans, the tape was seen as "moral capital in a racial struggle. The immediacy and the accuracy of the video in an age of television, when coupled by the fact that it was filmed by a white American, persuaded blacks that whites could no longer hide from the truth. It was there in black and white for all to see" (Watts, 1993, p. 241). However, the act of seeing does not translate simply or easily into believing and knowing. Crenshaw and Peller explain that "*Both* the perception of the tape as showing a

'reasonable exercise of force' *and* the perception of the tape as showing 'racist brutality' depend, not simply on the physiology of the visual perception, but rather on interpretation, on the mediation of perception with background narratives that give visual images meaning" (p. 66, italics in original). That a mostly white jury could render a not guilty verdict highlights the ways in which meaning is mediated and created: the visual does not stand on its own without context. At the trial, for example, "the eighty-one second video was, in short, broken into scores of individual still pictures, each of which was then subject to endless interpretation" (Crenshaw & Peller, p. 59).

The Rodney King case highlights the challenges posed by visual images. Cohen (2001) makes the following valid point: "But telling the truth, as Jan Karski[185] discovered, is not the same thing as being believed. And pictures, as Rodney King discovered, can be disavowed as much as words. Furthermore, the transubstantiation of one thing (images of brutality) into another (respect for human rights) can hardly be taken for granted, any more than the iconography of the starving African child can still stand for social injustice" (p. 187). Inundated as we are in a landscape of images competing for our attention, it becomes difficult to know where to look and how to make sense of what we see. Even the faith we once placed in images, captured by another cliché which asserts that "a picture", or the camera, "never lies," continues to be contested. Can we believe

---

[185] Cohen offers the following insight: "The disjunction between 'knowing' and 'believing' appears in the story of Jan Karski, the Polish emissary who in 1942 gave detailed information about the unfolding genocide to a number of Western leaders. The facts were seldom disputed. Justice Felix Frankfurter, however, told Karski, 'I can't believe you.' When told that Karski was telling the truth, Frankfurter said: 'I did not say that this young man is lying. I said I cannot believe him. There is a difference'" (p. 160-61).

what we see? "Reality" is a contested site and practice, making skeptics of us all: images are carefully and deliberately constructed, they are regularly "touched up" or airbrushed, and with the aid of image enhancing software, they can be fabricated. "Reality" itself has become a form of popular entertainment with the proliferation and competition of "reality-based" television shows featuring "real" people, as opposed to actors, in various "real" (and surreal) situations. Marketing professors Rose and Wood (2005) "believe viewers desire to blend fact with fantasy in order to create a complexly constructed experience they call 'hyperauthenticity'."[186] In contrast to sitcoms and news programs, "the majority of reality fare depicts common people engaging in uncommon (wilderness survival) and common (home decorating) tasks, giving viewers the chance to compare and contrast their own lives with those of the show's 'protagonist'."

Using the power of images to bear witness to the truth of human rights abuses—and believing that outrage and action will result—cannot simply be assumed. Cohen cautions, "The values of witnessing and telling the truth belonged to a simpler era. They are being inserted into a moral culture too compromised to be rescued by the authentic information relayed by 'electronic witnesses'" (p. 186-87). Cohen thus raises an interesting point about the nature of witnessing in a technologically advanced age, and whether it is possible to witness in the way it once meant, as an embodied practice. It is instructive, therefore, to consider what aspects of witnessing in its "original" sense can still be reclaimed and what aspects have become discontinuous. The credibility of

---

[186] See *Scientists explain reality show popularity* in www.physorg/com/news5749.html, retrieved on January 22, 2009.

eyewitness testimony (and memory) has been challenged in legal spheres, and "truth" must be corroborated, interrogated, and questioned. Moreover, in a contemporary era saturated with images and the impact of technology, anyone, potentially, is an (eye)witness to human rights abuses, but not everyone feels compelled to, or is able, to act. What compels action remains a fundamental challenge for most organizations. WITNESS functions as an intervenor, and as moral and political conscience, urging those who see and come to know about human rights abuses to act on behalf of others.

"DELIBERATE WITNESSES"[187] AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

WITNESS asks that once our eyes have been opened to the suffering of others, we are left to contemplate what we have seen, what it means, and what our next step is going to be. "Made you think" is the second premise in the WITNESS formula: seeing-thinking-acting. WITNESS does not elaborate on what is involved or expected of its audience at this stage of the equation. One can assume that the individual processes the information in an attempt to understand what she has seen—perhaps considers what her role and responsibilities are to the those in need—and determines the "best" course of action—by "best" I mean the action which is most acceptable for the individual (ranging from signing a petition, making a donation, or volunteering). Thinking, or perhaps more precisely, knowing about human rights abuses links seeing (becoming aware) and action. WITNESS, however, provides little in the way of

---

[187] I borrow this term from Cohen whose notion of the "deliberate witness" is one engaged in the moral act of defending human rights (p. 257).

elucidating this process. As I have discussed throughout this study, knowing about abuses does not necessarily lead to action. As Whaley (2000) notes, "Although information is a necessary tool in the basic struggle for justice, it may not be sufficient to inspire those in relative comfort to exert themselves on behalf of others" (p. 33). Some individuals do not want to know and think about troubling realities. As I discuss in Chapter 3, individuals who have an interest in human rights and international issues are those most likely to seek information on websites such as WITNESS. There are others who may become witnesses when a specific issue receives media coverage or is highlighted by celebrity spokespersons, the scale of suffering is immense and requires urgent attention, and recognized human rights and aid organizations such as the Red Cross or Oxfam galvanize efforts in the form of television campaigns and mail-outs.[188] WITNESS does not elaborate on its strategies for mobilizing its constituents into action. Instead, there is an implicit assumption that once individuals are made aware—made you look—they will be spurred into action because it is the right and responsible thing to do.

The final assertion in the WITNESS chain is "Made you act." WITNESS leads the audience through this process of seeing, thinking, and, finally, acting. It is through this third element in the equation that WITNESS seeks to transform the passive onlooker into an active and engaged witness/activist. What follows is a re-articulation of the aims and purposes of their work, namely "to strengthen grassroots advocacy by making video and technology tools available to human

---

[188] I am thinking of mobilization efforts in the wake of the tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

rights defenders so that they can fight for human rights." The theme of a "fight" or "struggle" is reiterated whereby activists become "defenders" of human rights. Human rights are idealized in this context, I contend, and can be seen as more than political guarantees but, more generally, the embodiment of justice. The role of WITNESS is thus to seek justice, to promote and protect human rights globally, to provide the technological tools (its arsenal) and training, all of which would not normally be readily available to activists.

Exposing the truth about injustice and disseminating information to a wide audience is crucial to those who are not able to have their voices/causes heard. In this way, WITNESS functions as an advocate for the abused and exploited, testifying on their behalf. As WITNESS asserts, its "partners often operate in societies without basic rights protections," where those who are most vulnerable face the worst kinds of abuses. Some of the conditions that allow for the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, as identified by WITNESS, are "poverty, starvation and lack of education." The denial of these basic human security rights have more recently been promoted as part of the human rights agenda. While the focus of human rights campaigns has generally been on political and civil rights—those rights deemed necessary for the full participation of the individual in society—there has been a more integrated and inclusive approach by the United Nations and other bodies to include economic and security rights (for example, the right to be safe from violence). Attention has been given to the even more fundamental human rights required for basic survival such as subsistence and security. One definition describes human security as "an

approach to foreign policy that puts people—their rights, their safety and their lives—first."[189]   A report prepared for the United Nations by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen in 2003 provides the following definition:

> Human security means protecting vital freedoms.   It means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, building on their strengths and aspirations. It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood. Human security connects different types of freedom— freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one's behalf.   To do this, it offers two general strategies: protection and empowerment.[190]

The disenfranchisement of individuals who lack the basic necessities of food, water, housing, and education make them even more vulnerable to exploitation. WITNESS makes it clear, that as a result of the power imbalances in these situations, "the powerful" are able to "exploit the weak." Human rights activists place their lives at risk in some countries in order to expose injustice. Hence, "in these conditions, local human rights defenders need outside support."   By becoming a witness, one becomes involved in a project of solidarity with others who are defending human rights.   Support here is closely connected to the responsibility we have to recognize and protect those who are at the front lines, those fighting to expose injustice and bring them to light.   These activists, therefore, need our support in getting their message heard, pressuring those in power to recognize their rights (through WITNESS campaigns that bring to light human rights abuses), and providing assistance to victims.

---

[189] Retrieved on July 15, 2005 at www.humansecurity.gc.ca/psh-en.asp (Canadian Foreign Affairs).
[190] See www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/outline.html (Retrieved on July 15, 2005).

Another area in which WITNESS plays a role is as educator of the general public in putting human rights on the political agenda. Specifically, WITNESS sees its role as "mobiliz[ing] public concern and activism so that human rights move to the center of political debate." Several key ideas are raised here. Mobilization, another term with military connotations, suggests that the public needs to be informed and stirred into action, (or prepared for "active service") so they, too, can become activists in the pursuit of human rights. While activism is suggestive of some form of political engagement, WITNESS does not promote any specific political position; if anything, it simply advocates a generic human rights agenda: the notion that we ought to care about human rights and justice and must defend those who are unable to defend themselves. There is a sense that human rights are an intrinsic/inherent good; whether or not the audience has a specific conception of what these rights are (or perhaps the assumption is that everyone simply knows what human rights mean or entail), there is the sense that they ought to be everyone's concern. Without embracing a specific political position/agenda that might limit who its constituents are, WITNESS simply sees its role as a defender of human rights. By extension, those who become witnesses are also human rights defenders. The level of active involvement depends on the individual, whether it be sending a pre-written letter to a government official, signing a petition, making a donation to WITNESS, or becoming a volunteer/member. In these ways, human rights become everyone's concern and are not simply left to governments and politicians who often lack the political will to confront certain countries on their human rights record. The

message that comes across is that we all ought to have a stake in protecting and defending human rights. Simply stated, human rights matter.

To summarize, WITNESS provides both a re-articulation of what it means to witness as well as a model for doing human rights work: to provide visual evidence of human rights abuses, to be advocates on behalf of victims, and to mobilize others to bear witness to human rights abuses, in effect, to become witness-activists. Understanding the power of the visual, WITNESS employs technology to produce evidence that can be used in courts and public education campaigns. In terms of exposing and uncovering the truth, WITNESS draws upon this tradition of journalistic realism, and offers the "behind-the-scenes" account of what is really going on, often contradicting official positions. WITNESS videos have been used in multiple contexts: "as evidence in legal proceedings, to counterbalance the official reports governments make to the UN on their human rights records, for grassroots education, in news broadcasts; and for web broadcasting via the internet." WITNESS—similar to other rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to name a few—works to expose the abuses in these countries, bringing them to light before a global audience. By providing access and a forum for activists, WITNESS asserts that it "gives local groups a global voice by distributing their video to the media and on the Internet, and by helping to educate and activate an international audience around their causes." The notion of giving a voice to the marginalized is a crucial aspect of what WITNESS does and is central to its theme of "witnessing." Here lies the moral and political rightness of WITNESS's

project. We all have a stake in human rights and ought to bear witness to injustice, defending those who are most vulnerable.

RETURNING TO WITNESS: AN UPDATE

One of the hazards of conducting research on websites is the impermanent nature of the medium. Sites easily vanish into cyberspace, links become inactive, and sites are redesigned, bearing only some semblance to what they once looked like. Revisiting the WITNESS site upon conclusion of my analysis of the data in June 2005, I discovered that the site had indeed been redesigned. Initially dismayed, I decided to investigate how much the site had changed and what it had retained.[191]

The image of the pair of eyes held shut and then open is still featured as one of the site's central designs, vision remaining a constant theme. In this updated version, instead of a description of what WITNESS does, the text that follows is more concise and commanding: "SEE IT, FILM IT, CHANGE IT." While "IT" is not clearly identified, in this context, the referent suggests human rights abuse. The accompanying description about WITNESS asserts, "WITNESS partners with human rights defenders, training them to use video to document abuse and create change." This description is even more focused than the previous one because it clearly identifies WITNESS's collaborative role with other

---

[191] I discovered the site in the spring of 2002 for a project. Upon returning to it in April 2005, I found that the site had undergone some major transformations.

human rights groups and individuals in its provision of video training.[192]   More than simply making audiences aware of abuses—the earlier declarations of "made you look" and "made you think"—WITNESS's stated objective is change (described as action in its earlier mandate), presumably change that alleviates immediate and, where possible, suffering and abuse.   In some ways, change conveys more of a challenge as it demands—a call to action if you will—that action needs to be taken to transform and improve conditions for others.   In the previous appeal, the "you" had to be made to look, think, and act.   In this updated version, the directive issued is a command to anyone or everyone (activists, human rights workers, sympathizers, and concerned citizens) to see and be aware of injustice, film it, and change conditions for the better.   Here, filming what you see (human rights abuses) can lead to change.

What follows next is a description of its mission statement (previously located at the end), which highlights the use of video as a tool for empowering individuals whose stories can now be told and used as a tool for change. Similar to its previous message, WITNESS still sees the role video technology plays as instrumental, but the emphasis has shifted to providing training for activists: "WITNESS makes a difference because we train our partners to turn compelling testimony and images into powerful human stories and strategic advocacy campaigns that make a difference."   The value lies not in the power of the technology itself but in how it is used to make previously unknown images, stories, and voices known. This shift is important, because in the former website,

---

[192] WITNESS emphasizes the importance of networking with other "like-minded organizations to create powerful, wide-reaching campaigns. This approach enables many of WITNESS's videos to have an impact far beyond the modest resources we can provide."

the power of technology featured prominently and was described as the "arsenal" in the fight to defend human rights. The focus is now on people and their stories; technology is simply the tool. The documentation of abuses, "FILM IT," is still important—WITNESS acknowledges that "images are important"—but the primacy of the image to speak for itself or to move people to act is no longer taken for granted. WITNESS now states very pointedly, "footage alone is not enough to stop human rights violations." This acknowledgement is important because it represents a major shift from the position WITNESS first adopted. Specifically, earlier emphasis on the power of the image has now been replaced by "the power of video to open the eyes of the world to human rights abuses." The Rodney King incident is no longer featured as a symbolic example of the emotional impact of the image. Instead, WITNESS refers to its partnerships "with local organizations around the globe." Through its partnerships, "WITNESS empowers human rights defenders to use video to shine a light on those most affected by human rights violations." Notably, the focus has shifted from perpetrators to those whose lives are "most affected." They become the human faces, as it were, of injustice and human rights abuses, and their "personal stories of abuse" are transformed by WITNESS "into powerful tools of justice." Individual, personal stories, as I discussed in Chapter 2, have more impact than facts or statistics because audiences can more readily relate to individual, or specific, narratives: "people have a greater tendency to sympathize with victims they know something about, rather than ones represented by the most egregious statistics."[193] Human rights issues thus become less anonymous and abstract.

---

[193] Bert Archer in "What makes us care" refers to the term "identifiable victim effect," which was

162

They become more meaningful when real people are placed at the heart of stories. These stories also function as "educational tools" to inform audiences about human rights abuses, "bringing often unseen images, untold stories and seldom heard voices to the attention of key decision makers, the media and the general public."

Importantly, WITNESS sees its role as an advocate for change. In addition to representing those whose voices and stories are not usually heard, and working to draw attention to their causes, WITNESS "also catalyz[es] grassroots activism, political engagement, and lasting change." Based on this assertion, it is unclear what, specifically, WITNESS means by "political engagement" (whose) and "lasting change" (what kind). Presumably, by lending its support and raising awareness about specific human rights abuses, WITNESS, one can infer, empowers grassroots activists by providing access to an expanded global audience: they know they are not working alone and are supported. Through its campaigns, WITNESS can, potentially, mobilize different constituencies that can then pressure their governments to act. Action, in this context, would constitute "political engagement." From these assertions, what emerges is a sense of WITNESS as an umbrella organization concerned with creating stronger and sustainable partnerships and networks that can mobilize quickly when a particular human rights story requires attention. The emphasis on "lasting change" sounds similar to work undertaken by aid and developmental agencies. More than simply alerting audiences to abuses and engaging their

---

"first studied in 1968" by Thomas Schelling who noted the limitations of individuals' ability to feel compassion for others (*The Globe&Mail*, July 14, 2007).

163

gaze, WITNESS appears to be looking at the bigger picture, so to speak, at the conditions, or "root causes," in which abuses take place, working to create meaningful, long-term changes, long after the camera has stopped filming. Less clear, however, is what "lasting change" entails and how it can be achieved.

Another noteworthy area that the revised website emphasizes throughout is the "difference" WITNESS makes. WITNESS first describes this "difference" in terms of the training it provides its partners in the production of "powerful human stories." These stories are then used to create "strategic advocacy campaigns" which, in turn, "make a difference." This theme is later picked up in the conclusion where WITNESS presents successful and powerful examples of the kinds of changes/differences it, along with its partners, has achieved. In all the examples, video evidence was provided to enhance the strength (and possibly the outcome) of the case. In the first, legislative changes were made to California's "juvenile prison system in 5 days" when a WITNESS partner presented video evidence. Other examples include activists seeking reforms in Senegal (landmines) and Paraguay (the mental health system). What also marks these examples is the systemic nature of these changes and the impact they have on large numbers of people's lives (possibly the "lasting change" to which WITNESS refers). WITNESS partners were able to get the attention of those in power and lobby for change because they provided compelling visual evidence and testimony. In addition to making a difference, WITNESS urges its constituents to make a difference.

WITNESS makes the urgent plea to "Act Now" because "You can make a difference!" The reminder here is that the individual, "You," is empowered to make a difference; the message here is that no situation is so hopeless that nothing can be done. Several campaigns are listed, for example, one involving child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. With "just [a] click on one of these campaigns see how you can take action—by writing letters to government officials, organizing a screening or a fundraiser in your community, or boycotting clothing labels with unfair labor practices." These suggestions are specific, many of them new additions, which would depend on the level of involvement and commitment the individual chooses. To ensure these actions are easy and not time-consuming, WITNESS assures its audience that "actions can take as little as 2 minutes in front of your computer or longer if you have the time." A further appeal of encouragement follows: "However you do it, we hope you'll Act Now to support our courageous and hardworking partners who fight for human rights worldwide. Please help to make their voices heard, their abuses seen, and change possible. Act Now." By taking action, it can be inferred, one can become part of the ongoing fight for human rights. One, therefore, becomes part of the change when one becomes a witness. In this sense, becoming a witness involves more than becoming "eyewitnesses" to human rights abuses: one must now act to create change. In terms of its mission, WITNESS sees its work contributing to the "difference" in the lives of those who are denied their human rights and, arguably, in the lives of those who, empowered to act, have responded to the call to make a difference.

CURRENT DIRECTIONS: POPULAR FORMS OF ACTIVISM

This theme of "making a difference," sometimes framed as "doing good," is echoed (repackaged) as an appeals strategy in other media-driven campaigns. Individuals are encouraged to act, support certain causes, in the knowledge that their efforts/contributions can have an impact locally and/or globally. The emphasis is placed on the individual, in the very personalized address of YOU, as it only takes one person to make a difference—usually accompanied by stories that illustrate how the person's actions made a difference in the lives of others. The individual, in these campaigns, is gently urged to "do good," to make a change which can benefit the lives of others. This rhetoric signifies the current approach to philanthropy where anyone (or everyone) can "do good," not simply generous benefactors or activists. The hugely popular talk-show host Oprah Winfrey urges her audience to "pay it forward"[194] by doing something good for others, whether engaging in random acts of kindness or becoming part of her Angel Network. "Doing good," giving (money, time, expertise), has become equated with living a more meaningful life, becoming a better person and citizen. Moreover, as Oprah and others assert, it "feels good to do good." [195] Where being charitable or "doing good works" was founded in various religious practices/traditions, or where certain donors might choose to remain anonymous, new forms of charity are meant to be more public acts or gestures:

---

[194] In an episode which aired in the first week of September 2006, Oprah gave each of her audience members $1,000, and they were required to find someone deserving, within a week, and use the money to make a difference in their lives.

[195] This message is repeated in her March 17th, 2008 episode when she tells Simon Cowell who helped a couple struggling to pay the medical bills for their daughter that "Giving makes you feel good."

demonstrating, or performing, one's "goodness" publicly is both encouraged and celebrated, I argue, in a form of self-branding. For example, by buying "green" products, or wearing identifiable labels, one can be seen as a more conscientious or "concerned" consumer. Playing on the cliché "Do the right thing," "Do the [RED] thing" has become the catch phrase for "Red" products, launched on an episode on *Oprah* on which Bono was a guest.[196] Oprah asks and answers the following question, "Can a t-shirt change the world? This one can," adding that "you can begin to save lives with your purchases." Moreover, she stresses that "not everyone has the time to be an activist."[197] One can, therefore, "make a difference" by choosing the "right," or "red," products. Consumerism has thus taken on a philanthropist edge or edginess, if one buys into this strategy.

Another way in which "doing good" is being celebrated is to brand it as "sexy," or "cool," and to mirror the trend of "good works" undertaken by well-known celebrity activists, who have become, in some sense, the new philanthropists. Philanthropy has become "trendier" than ever, or so it appears; it has become the "new black" as a trend and even as a fashion/identity statement. Fans can now give to their favorite celebrity charity. Former president Bill Clinton (2007) has written about philanthropy in his book *Giving: How each of us can*

---

[196] The episode aired on October 12, 2006. The Gap, Converse, Armani, Apple, and Motorola were involved in this campaign where portions of specific "Red" products purchased were donated to various AIDS organizations. For example, t-shirts with logos such as "inspi[red]" and "empower[red]" were featured at the Gap and half of all net profits went to AIDS charities.
[197] She follows up by suggesting that instead of asking people to write yet another cheque, why not go where people live/shop. Cameras then followed her shopping spree with Bono, where she indulges in guilt-free shopping, where shopping becomes another form of "doing good." This point is reinforced quite tellingly by Penelope Cruz, another celebrity who endorses the "Red" campaign: "Charity doesn't have to be identified with the sadness of it."

change the world[198], endorsing "public service" as an inherent function of being a "good" citizen. Tralee Pearce (2006) opines, "Philanthropy is now a commodity, of sorts. Just as you would shop for the right house, you shop for the right outlet for all the good you have ready to bust out."[199] Ben Goldhirsh, interviewed for Pearce's article, hopes to reverse what it means to be a "do-gooder," with all its "pejorative" connotations, with the launch of his new magazine. Enthusiastically, he adds, "celebrity charity a la Angelina Jolie and Bono has never been hotter. Being good is the new citizenship."[200] This new and re-fashioned citizenship draws on a global consciousness that is a mixed bag about the awareness of, and our connections to, others—if not necessarily about the importance of protecting the human rights of others who are most vulnerable. The inherent hope is that people can be mobilized (by celebrities who endorse specific causes and campaigns and by human rights organizations), as necessary, into action. However, individuals must be urged (and reminded) to "do good," told what they

---

[198] Clinton has been appearing on various talk shows discussing his book, which is described in the William J. Clinton Foundation's site as "a book about citizen activism and public service." Clinton asserts that "the amount of good that so many individuals and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) have been able to do has proven to me that almost everyone-regardless of income, available time, age, and skills-can do something useful to others and, in the process, strengthen the fabric of our shared humanity" (www.clintonfoundation.org/071007-nr-cf-pr-wjc-bill-clintons..., retrieved on 9/8/2007)

[199] "Competitive philanthropy: 'Good is getting real sexy'" appeared in the style and trends section of *The Globe& Mail* on Saturday October 7, 2006. She interviews Ben Goldhirsh, a 26-year old who is "heir" to his father's "magazine publishing fortune." He is credited with the phrase that "good is getting sexy." He states that "just the way the transformation of technology in the cultural landscape affects how much money, interest and human capital goes into it, the same thing with good." Set to launch his own magazine, Goldhirsh enthuses that "We're trying to frame valuable content with an aesthetic that makes it engaging and exciting and entertaining." His approach is to "give good some teeth," to brand it sexy and appealing for his audience. As Pearce playfully intimates, "Soon it will be deeply uncool to not be engaged beyond writing a cheque. And it also isn't taboo to admit there's more in it for you than a warm and fuzzy feeling." "Doing good," as Pearce points out, is a "boost" for one's very public image/profile, be it celebrity or corporate.

[200] This point is also raised by Anil Patel, executive director of Framework Foundation, who is interviewed by Pearce. His organization matches volunteers with charities "at chic cocktail parties in Toronto and Calgary." The challenge Patel identifies is to get volunteers to think about the contributions they can make. In his words, "How big can you make your civic footprint?"

need to do, and how they can make an impact, "a difference," in the lives of others.

5 INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION: WITNESSING FOR CHRIST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE

My discovery of International Justice Mission (hereafter referred to as IJM) was serendipitous. I first discovered this organization in a documentary that exposed the sexual trafficking of young girls and women in Bombay.[201] Curious, I turned to the website and learned that IJM is a Christian-based human rights organization whose "mission" is to "help people suffering injustice and oppression who cannot rely on local authorities for relief. The agency documents and monitors conditions of abuse and oppression, educates Christians and the public about abuses, and mobilizes intervention on behalf of the victims."[202] I was initially skeptical of this organization because of its religious emphasis and its faith-based initiatives. This skepticism was based in an awareness of the colonial legacy of the Church and its overzealous missionary projects designed to convert and civilize indigenous populations in the developing world. This legacy is apparent in the residential school system in Canada and the role various Christian Churches played in the abuse of First Nations peoples. I was interested to discover if IJM acknowledges any of the tensions inherent in its Christian project of conversion and respect for indigenous cultures who host missionaries and their "good works." IJM does not address these issues on its

---

[201] *The day my god died,* directed and produced by Andrew Levine, was screened at the 2003 Vancouver International Film Festival. IJM was one of the organizations involved in rescuing young girls and women from various brothels in Bombay. Coincidentally, I later discovered that Levine worked with witness.org in 2000 to produce a short documentary on the trafficking of people in Nepal and India (www.thedaymygoddied.com/bios.html, retrieved on November 5, 2006).

[202] All references are taken from www.ijm.org, first retrieved on September 29, 2003. I later discovered IJM also has a Canadian counterpart, http://.ijm.ca, which was established in 2002 "to educate, empower and engage Canadians in the pursuit of justice for the oppressed."

website as its objectives are to assist missionaries in the field who witness abuses and often lack the expertise to intervene and advocate on behalf of victims. IJM's president, Gary Haugen, does point out in *Good news about injustice: A witness of courage in a hurting world* (1999) that Western missionaries have "abandoned" an ethnocentric approach in favour of one that sees them as "students" of the host country.[203]

While difficult to set aside my biases, it was important that I acknowledge them. Noting these initial doubts,[204] I sought to remain open to the ways in which IJM conceptualizes justice and human rights within a Christian-centered model. What I became interested in, and challenged by, was what "witnessing" meant in this context and its connection to human rights praxis. Additionally, IJM presented opportunities to explore commonalities, as well as differences, between a faith-based approach in the defence, and promotion, of human rights and justice in relation to a secular approach of an organization like witness.org.

---

[203] Haugen makes the following statements: "Over the last few generations the leaders of international missions have committed vast amounts of resources to the study of various countries and cultures. The theory of modern missions in the past couple of generations has focused on the task of conveying the gospel to communities in forms that are readily accessible in the existing culture. The notion of Western missionaries seeing themselves as purveyors of Western culture was abandoned long ago. Instead, Western missionaries have largely come to see themselves as students of the culture into which they enter. And in the educational and training institutions of the church and the missions community worldwide, this study has reached a level of sophistication, comprehensiveness and depth that *rivals or exceeds the expertise of secular educational institutions, foreign policy institutions, governmental agencies and international business groups*" (p. 187, emphasis mine).

[204] Strauss and Corbin (1998) are instructive in this regard and recommend that researchers acknowledge their biases, in the attempt to "break through or move beyond them" as much as possible (p. 97). Further, they suggest that researchers think about "what **this case** teaches us about other cases. We want to move from the **specific** to the **more general**. Therefore, we use a case to open up our minds to the range of possible meanings, properties, dimensions, and relationships inherent in any bit of data. Therefore, when we move on to the next case and those that follow, we are more sensitive both to those possibilities and to **what else** the new case might teach us" (p. 88, bold text in the original). Accordingly, I approached IJM as a specific case (typology) of "witnessing praxis" and attempted to evaluate it on its own terms.

While Christian faith remains central to IJM's work, it focuses on the legal expertise required to do human rights work, uniting faith with legal concerns. On the website, IJM explains that it emerged out of a "need" to address the kinds of abuses "missionaries and Christian service workers" were seeing in the field where "local authorities [could not] be relied upon for relief because the officials acquiesce in, support, or actively perpetrate the abuses." These "Christian workers" are often not in a position to intervene as they could "jeopardize their ministry and take on a task for which they have little training or experience." After completing a two-year study in 1996, "with about 75 evangelical ministries that support about 40,000 workers abroad," "the study affirmed a need for *an explicitly Christian ministry* to which such matters could be referred for professional attention" [italics mine]. The suggestion is that secular organizations are unable to appreciate the challenges that are unique to Christian missions. IJM, launched in April 1997, was designed to fill the gap in this niche market to serve the needs of specifically Christian ministries. Gary Haugen is a "former senior trial attorney with the Police Misconduct Task Force of the U.S. Department of Justice and director of the UN genocide investigation in Rwanda."[205] Located in Washington, D.C., IJM's full-time staff consists of "Christian experts," presumably those who have a strong background in the teachings of Church, and are also "lawyers, criminal investigators, researchers, and government relations experts."

---

[205] Haugen received the 2007 Wilberforce Forum Award: "Presented by Prison Fellowship and the Wilberforce Forum, the annual award recognizes an individual who has made a difference in the face of formidable societal problems and injustice," (retrieved on January 18, 2009 from http://ijm.ca/index.html).

IJM, like witness.org, advocates on behalf of victims by exposing injustice (and in so doing creating a public record of abuses), assisting victims and intervening where possible to end abuses, and mobilizing the public through educational campaigns. IJM identifies its mission as follows: documentation, intervention, and education. Documentation involves the production of "factual records of reported human rights abuses based on the investigations of legally trained professionals." Intervention focuses on the provision of a range of services to victims, including "emergency relief" and "victim care." Other forms of intervention include "perpetrator accountability (helping to bring the perpetrators to justice)" and "structural prevention (helping to prevent abusive conduct or conditions)." Through education, IJM seeks to raise the awareness of its target audience, which is primarily Christian,[206] about injustice and to inform its audience of the "concrete need for intervention on behalf of specific victims of abuse and oppression." IJM shares its stories of successful intervention, court cases, profiles of activists and victims, and ongoing missions in news briefings which are sent out to those on its mailing lists, in effect, providing "overseas examples of the tangible, effective relief that can be brought to the victims of injustice through international efforts." By targeting a Christian audience, IJM also hopes to remind (and in so doing, educate) its audience about the importance of Christian charity and service to others in need. It bases this duty to serve others, and to respond and rescue those in need, on "the biblical and devotional imperative to seek justice on behalf of the oppressed." "Biblical

---

[206] By education, IJM explains that it "provides people of faith with the training, mobilization tools and resources to translate their convictions into active engagement."

justice" invokes the belief in a "compassionate God" and his teachings, essential for Christians living in a world, IJM asserts, "inundated with much injustice." Christians are, therefore, required to place their faith in action in the service of the unfortunate, the vulnerable, and the oppressed. Along the lines of what Cohen (2001) advocates, IJM's call to action is premised on the principle of "fraternity," but one rooted in Christ's command to love one's neighbour or fellow human beings. Seeking justice on behalf of the oppressed becomes, as adopted by IJM, a Christian enterprise, aided through legal action.

To begin my analysis of IJM, I discuss its mission and commitment to the oppressed. Specifically, IJM accepts case referrals from Christian missions (organizations based in the "field") and other faith-based organizations such as World Vision,[207] then investigates and decides on the most effective way to assist victims. Next, I explore the function of "witnessing," what it means to "witness" in Christ's name: to testify about one's faith, and, in effect, spread the "good word" and to do "good works," which, in this context, means to seek justice and follow Christ's example to love others. In the section that follows, I examine IJM's call to Christians to actively seek to change the conditions of the oppressed. Faith, within this model, requires more than personal belief and prayer. The framework for action, identified as "biblical justice," forms the basis for IJM's work. The parable of the Good Samaritan thus becomes a touchstone for seeking solidarity with the oppressed. Christians are asked to put themselves

---

[207] IJM does provide links to what it refers to as "justice-minded organizations," which include Christian and secular organizations, one of which is the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (one of the founding bodies of witness.org), NGOs, and relief and development agencies. It is not clear if IJM collaborates (or has partnered) with the organizations listed.

to the test by contemplating what it means to be a good neighbour. To conclude, I revisit IJM and note the changes that have been made to the site since my initial discovery.

"FAITH IN ACTION": IJM'S MISSION TO SEEK JUSTICE

International Justice Mission, like witness.org, sees itself as a defender of the human rights of the vulnerable and the oppressed. As defined by IJM, injustice and oppression occur because individuals abuse their power and exploit those who are most vulnerable. IJM employs legal means to make perpetrators accountable for their actions (in some cases, engaging in informal mediation with powerful individuals) and seeks redress for victims. In this way, IJM stakes out its role as a body of legal experts in the field of Christian service and mission, advocating on behalf of those who lack the power and financial resources to defend themselves. The cases highlighted in IJM's updates focus on child labour, exploitative labour conditions, and sexual crimes (rape and prostitution). In targeting those who abuse power, IJM looks at the role perpetrators occupy and the context in which abuse occurs in an effort to "inform policy" and implement "structural solutions." The site does not provide details about what "informing policy" means or what structural solutions entail.

One of the ways IJM pursues justice is through casework,[208] with an emphasis on investigative techniques and legal expertise. Specifically, casework

---

[208] Various Christian and human rights organizations refer cases to IJM: "IJM serves as a referral agency for the vast network of overseas field workers who refer cases of abuse and oppression in the communities they serve." Often those in the field "lack the authority, expertise, or resources to intervene." According to the site, IJM also "provides legal and investigative assistance to those

entails the "accurate diagnosis of the problem." Success is measured in terms of IJM's ability to "deliver the appropriate assistance to victims."[209] Working in "partnership with local attorneys," IJM serves as advocate for those victims who are unable to afford legal representation, ensuring that victims can receive some form of recognition of their abuse and, preferably, compensation of some kind for their suffering. Cases are chosen based on several criteria. Firstly, cases are evaluated based on IJM's "mission focus," specifically, where "there is little or no opportunity for assistance from local officials." There must also be "effective documentation" or "evidentiary proof" to establish the facts of the case. Next, IJM determines the priority of the case, what it describes as the "compelling" nature of the case and whether it is "placed within the IJM prioritization of strategic categories of abuse and victims." Lastly, IJM evaluates the effectiveness of intervention, that is, the delivery of "appropriate assistance to the victim(s)."

Once IJM has analyzed a specific case, it then determines which type of intervention is most effective. However, before intervention of any kind is contemplated, "an analysis of the oppressor's source of power and the limitations of that power" is conducted. IJM notes that various intervention techniques can be used "independently, jointly or incrementally," depending on the situation. In cases where the perpetrator is an officer of the law, IJM presents its evidence to someone in a higher position of authority, with the expectation that legal

___

already involved with rescue and relief," working in "strategic partnerships with other organizations around the world."

[209] IJM does not accept referrals within the U.S., which is based on the assumption that services and financial resources are less readily available to the oppressed in other countries.

sanctions will be pursued if the domestic laws of the country also find the actions illegal.[210] Often, IJM relies on the "good faith and promises to act by government officials." Another intervention technique is the use of "personal appeal[s]," employed when there is the belief that appeals made to the perpetrator may be successful and "would not increase the risk of harm to the victim." Should local authorities or governments be "unwilling" (and I would add unable) to ensure perpetrator accountability, "IJM will analyze that government's sources of power and dependant relationships to determine whether exposing the injustice through the media, letters to key entities in the country or in the U.S., or other methods of public exposure might move the authorities to act within their power to stop the abuse or oppression." This kind of shaming technique may have an effect on some nations' credibility within the international community, a type of negative publicity campaign, though this approach is less effective in closed regimes like Zimbabwe or Iran. "Economic intervention," another strategy, calls on donor countries and organizations to withdraw their economic support of the nation in question once they are made aware of certain abuses. No examples are provided on the effectiveness of this strategy or IJM's ability to implement it. Lastly, intervention involves "aftercare" services for victims. IJM provides the following services: "emergency relief" which seeks to "bring an end to the abusive conduct or conditions"; compensation or aid of some kind; and "structural prevention"[211] which seeks "to prevent the abusive conduct or conditions."

---

[210] Seeking official legal recourse necessarily requires the cooperation and collaboration of domestic law enforcement and legal officials, including a working judiciary.
[211] In *Good news about injustice: A witness of courage in a hurting world* (1999), Haugen explains that structural intervention "is necessary to ensure that the victim and other vulnerable individuals

Working with "local organizations and government agencies," IJM provides a range of services for victims and their families, for example, "homes for girls rescued from forced-prostitution when they are unable to return to their families" and "micro-enterprise opportunities for people released from bonded slavery so that they can support themselves."

WITNESSING AS A FORM OF SERVICE ON BEHALF OF THE OPPRESSED

Table 7 - Recurring Themes – International Justice Mission

Actors: Christian frontline workers, IJM staff members, and Christians everywhere (witnesses who follow God's command to seek justice and "love thy neighbour"). Christian witnesses become contemporary disciples and human rights defenders.

Action: Intervention on behalf of the oppressed: legal sanctions, personal appeal, and prayer. Injustice is the result of the abuse of power.

Tools: Legal and criminal investigation expertise and Christian faith.

Advocacy: Documentation (evidence), Intervention, and Education.

As a faith-based human rights organization, IJM brings together notions of justice that are both Christian and legal. Within this model, rights are granted, firstly, by God and then encoded in human laws. Doing justice is rooted in the idea of compassion, which translates into service of those in need, namely, the poor and the oppressed. In this way, IJM workers become champions of justice, heeding "God's call" and providing care for those who are unable to defend themselves. Social responsibility can be translated, broadly, as the biblical imperative to help those less fortunate. Care, provided by IJM, is legal, physical,

and groups are not abused again. Perpetrator accountability is often the most important ingredient for structural intervention, for it stops the bad guys from continuing abuse and it creates powerful disincentives for others who might be likewise tempted to abuse their power" (p. 156). Haugen adds, "structural prevention often means trying to bring about changes in local or government agencies" (ibid).

emotional, as well as spiritual. While IJM focuses on its provision of legal expertise and aftercare services, it does not address explicitly how it separates—indeed, if it does—the legal from the spiritual, given its mission and biblical foundation: "the International Justice Mission offers its sacrifice of mercy and service in obedience to Christ, in support of His Gospel, and for the advancement of His Kingdom." A question that arises is whether victims, once they have been rescued, are obligated to receive the message of salvation as part of their care. Only in the FAQ section did I locate any information about IJM's evangelicalism in its human rights work. Here, IJM makes clear its focus, the rescue of victims:

> ...regardless of their religious beliefs, ethnicity, or gender. As an organization, we do not engage in *direct evangelism* of the victims we assist. We do make every effort to refer victims to appropriate aftercare from Christian providers, where the victim will be cared for emotionally, physically, and spiritually [emphasis mine].

IJM is able to create some distance between the legal services it provides and the work of Christian missionaries already in the field who provide aftercare for victims. However, it is unclear how IJM separates its legal objectives from its spiritual foundations: IJM acknowledges it does share the "Good News" of salvation, hence "witnessing" in Christ's name.

In the theological model, the individual bears witness in a "confessional" narrative (Foucault, 1997), in effect "witnessing" how s/he has been saved and affirming her faith and transformation in Christ. In this sense, to witness and to testify for Christ and to the Christian faith is to share publicly a narrative meant to lead others to Christ. It is a testimony, and a constant (re)telling, of a life of sin renounced, after coming to accept Christ as one's personal saviour. Douglass

179

and Vogler (2003) compare this performance of the self to the "story-telling in AA meetings" and note that "there are important social and therapeutic components to such testimonies, more significant by far than their evidentiary function" (p. 42). Bearing witness through confession and testimony are integral to the Christian narrative of a self reborn through Christ. In "Sexuality and Solitude," Michel Foucault (1997) offers a critical look at this narrative of public confession and "truth obligation":

> Christianity requires another form of truth obligation. Everyone in Christianity has the duty to explore who he is, what is happening within himself, the faults he may have committed, the temptations to which he is exposed. Moreover, everyone is obliged to tell these things to other people, and thus bear witness against himself. (p. 176)

Through this personal and public performance of the self, the Christian witness shares and offers her/his life as an example of the transformative potential of being reborn; it is a narrative of constantly being tried and tested. It is also a narrative of the goodness and mercy of God and His salvation of humankind, and more specifically, those who put their faith in Him. In the Christian text, God sacrifices His own son for our sake so that we may have "eternal life" (John 3:16). One, therefore, renounces one's former life, in effect bearing witness against that past life/self, and offers this new life in Christ, one of hope and light, as a model for others.

This act of bearing witness and testifying to truth is not, however, confined simply to a renunciation of the self. "Witnessing" (in Christ's name) also refers to spreading the "good news" of the Gospel, or "sowing the seed," with the instrumental objective of converting sinners to a life in Christ. The original

witnesses of Christ and of his works on earth were his disciples. Christ tells his

disciples that their mission, once he has been resurrected to Heaven, is to

spread the gospel: "But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you

from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he

shall testify of me: And ye shall bear witness, because ye have been with me

from the beginning" (John 15:26-27). This act of "witnessing" and affirming one's

faith is also associated with the archaic form of the word "witness," which means

martyr, in recognition of the fact that early Christians were persecuted and killed

for their beliefs. Transformation of the self through one's faith in God is not

achieved in isolation and is closely aligned to participation in the transformation

of society through the service of others.

In more contemporary articulations of what it means to bear witness and

to testify, "witnessing" takes on a more dynamic and dialogic nature, one that is

action-oriented. Emilio Castro (1986) describes in, *Faith and Witness*, "a kind of

witnessing that bears a connection to the world," one that actively engages with

social, cultural and political issues (p. 450). He calls for a more interactive or

engaged approach to witnessing. In a similar vein, Jan van Butselar (1985)

contends that "witnessing to Christ is not exclusively an extended verbal

exercise, but that from the beginning it is linked to the quest for justice" (p. 401).

He makes connections between "witnessing" and liberation struggles[212] that are

closely related to working with, and for, the oppressed and marginalized:

---

[212] In using this term, I want to convey the very politically charged climate, primarily in Latin
America, in which proponents of "liberation theology" advocated on behalf of the poor and the
marginalized for the transformation of society. Phillip Berryman (1987) describes liberation
theology as follows: "1. An interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle and hope

There is but one possibility left for the true witness to the suffering of the Lord: to side with the suffering people, the oppressed, the marginalized, the sinned against, to side with them and to learn how they had received the gospel and what effect the message of liberation through Jesus Christ has had in their lives. Proclamation is no longer from the top down, but upwards from the very base, the poor. Witness has become an invitation to believe in change, to believe in victory, because Jesus Christ has gained victory over sin, guilt, despair and even death. (p. 401-402)

Witnessing can thus be seen as a revolutionary or transformative act when attached to change and liberatory politics. To this end, witnessing involves the ethical imperative to speak out against injustice and to act on behalf of the oppressed.

Within this paradigm of Christianity, witnessing is associated with a form of praxis that is very much concerned with ideals of liberation and justice, working with those who are oppressed. James Marsh (1999) refers to a "praxis of liberation" and a "praxis of justice" which followers of Christ, referred to as "the Liberator," are encouraged to embrace (p. 191-92). [213] He explains that Jesus demonstrated "solidarity with the oppressed" (p. 201) and, in so doing, "presents us with a call to discipleship, and such a call is the basis for praxis oriented justice" (p. 206). This notion of praxis is echoed by Robert McAfee Brown (1990) who clarifies what is meant by praxis. He notes that the term is often used

of the poor. 2. A critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it. 3. A critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor" (p. 6). He notes that at the time when liberation theology gained popularity, there was not an explicit connection with the principles of human rights; it was based instead on theological principles, "on the proclamation of the gospel," of "good news to the poor." In this sense, the defence of human dignity and human rights is not optional but integral to the Church's mission of evangelism (p. 113). Liberation theology was less interested in the rights of the individual and more concerned with the "rights of peoples" to their labour/subsistence and self-determination (p. 117-118).

[213] In *Process, Praxis, and Transcendence*, Marsh (1999) explains that there are three components of liberation: the "socio-political, human psychological, and the personal-redemptive" (p. 191). Further, "liberation intends not only a new society but also a new human being. Justice needs to be linked to utopia" (p. 192). Faith is thus demonstrated through praxis.

interchangeably with "practice," in an attempt to distinguish it from "theory" (p. 65). Instead of the polarization of these terms, he suggests that they be understood in terms of a shared and "special affinity" because they are not "separable" (65). Moreover, "each continually influences, and is influenced by, the other; as the mutual interchange goes on, they are not only constantly transforming one another, but are transforming the overall situation as well" (p. 65). To put these ideas into the larger framework of liberation theology, McAfee Brown draws on the work of Gustavo Gutierrez: praxis is to be understood as "praxis of the poor" and "*praxis committed to change*" (p. 64, italics in original). [214] In this respect, liberation has an explicit "activist dimension" and aligns itself with the "struggle for justice; It calls for action and public witness" (Baum, 1987; 28). [215]

THE COURAGE TO SEEK JUSTICE: INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION'S MODEL

The transformative potential of "witnessing" is echoed, though in less radical forms than those imagined and practiced by liberation theologists, in organizations like IJM which bring together Christian/biblical teaching with secular and legal principles of human rights. The theme of witnessing for Christ and seeking justice is reiterated by former United States President Jimmy

---

[214] McAfee Brown (1990) also invokes the work of Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which praxis is envisioned as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). For Freire, the process of 'conscientization' was "a symbol of the possibility of dignity and power among the poor, as they are 'conscientized' to their actual situation and opt to change it" (p. 68).
[215] Baum (1987) notes that the transformation of society and the vision of justice are rooted in the "Gospel," which offer a "subversive message" (p. 25).

Carter[216] in an IJM-produced video. For Carter, what unifies both "endeavours" is the work of "sav[ing] souls" and "alleviat[ing] suffering," both "an integral part of witnessing for Christ." Asked what it is about Christ's teachings that has "elevated" Carter's "concern for civil rights into human rights," he explains that "Christ's human ministry" was directed towards those who were "despised"—lepers, for example. Carter compares them to AIDS victims today. Like good Samaritans, he believes Christians ought to "reach out to those most in need," those who are "suffering," "neglected," and those who are "weakest" and "need the ministry of the Christian faith." Carter adds further, "this is the main lesson we are supposed to derive from the life of Jesus if we are Christians." Living a life in Christ means, therefore, to follow in Christ's footsteps, to use his life as a model. While it is the tendency of "human nature," Carter asserts, for people to enclose themselves and associate only with those most like them who do not pose a threat to their security and prosperity, this approach is hardly Christian: "this is not really the sermon that Jesus preached, and it's not really emulating the actions Jesus took. He did not live in an encapsulated environment, safe, and trouble-free." However, Carter agrees with Haugen that it is indeed difficult to think about "hard" issues like human rights abuses and not to fall into despair. It is more "convenient not to know," to be blind to the suffering of others. He states that issues like torture, unlawful incarceration, and the lack of due process "prey on my conscience." As a former president, he notes that his "voice is to

---

[216] In an interview with Carter, Gary Haugen refers to Carter's book *Living Faith* and the connection he makes between "seeking justice" and "witnessing for Christ." This interview can be found in *Good news about injustice*, a video IJM produced in 1999. All quotes referring to Carter are taken from the video.

some degree influential in the human rights arena." If he "publicly condemn[s] a leader of a country as a human rights oppressor, it's not good for that leader and not good for that country to get foreign investors to come in and not easy for that leader to get loans from the world bank or the IMF." He explains, "I don't do this because it's a sacrifice or because it's some kind of unnecessary burden on me. I do this because it's a kind of responsibility that I relish. When we do have those successes and alleviate human rights abuses, it's very gratifying." While it is easy to give in to despair, Carter believes "the worst sin that we can commit, the worst mistake we commit, is to look the other way and say that since it is not completely soluble, I'm not going to try. I'm not going to help one person because there's going to be 900 others that I can't help. The best thing to do is to do what we can in the limited realm in which we live." He states further that "I don't think it's appropriate at all for us to say that since we can't completely solve a problem we ought not to even solve part of it or ought not to try." In this way, Christians, by seeking justice on behalf of the oppressed, are doing Christ's work.

Doing God's work, however, requires "courage," that is, the courage to do more than just have faith and spread the gospel, explains Haugen (1999) in *Good news about injustice: A witness of courage in a hurting world*. It is to "recover a witness of Christian courage in a world of injustice" because "we haven't yet learned how to rescue the oppressed" (p. 13). Christians are encouraged, therefore, to "take heart" (p. 45) and "prepare [their] minds for actions," in essence, they must "come to grips with the true nature of the world"

(p. 47). Haugen poses a challenge in his book, described as a "testimonial," for Christian witnesses to become defenders of the oppressed: doing so is to fulfill God's will. Yet, putting one's faith into action can be overwhelming, making it difficult to know what to do. IJM thus sees one aspect of its work as providing guidance to its Christian audience, empowering them to seek justice and offering concrete suggestions on what they can do: provide financial contributions, volunteer at IJM headquarters or overseas, become prayer partners, serve as interns, or pursue a career in human rights. Because IJM bases its foundation on "divine imperative," it differentiates its work from secular rights-based organizations. It shares more in common with religious or faith-based organizations which adopt a biblical framework for the defence of human rights. As outlined in a description of its values, IJM highlights its Christian foundation first, followed by its legal expertise and partnerships with local community groups and authorities:

     I.   IJM is a Christ-centred organization
     II.   IJM is professional
     III.   IJM is a bridge builder

BIBLICAL JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY WITH THE OPPRESSED

In a detailed description of what "biblical justice" entails, IJM makes the connection between seeking justice and doing God's work. This conception of justice differs from concepts created by humans, which is perceived to be flawed and imperfect: it is the divine law of God. This section, as outlined in the site, begins first with the statement that "Christians believe in a compassionate [and

just] God" and in His goodness, which is then juxtaposed against an account of the state of the world, one "inundated with much injustice, making it easy to turn away from bleak images and shut off our emotions, never humanizing the sorrow of each circumstance." The world is, from a theological perspective, a fallen world, a place of misery, bleakness, injustice, and sin. Moreover, as explained in the section on the biblical foundation, "this is a world in rebellion against God, a world in which power and deceit are used to take from men and women those good things given to them by their Creator; namely, life, liberty, dignity, and the fruit of creation, love and labor." These "good things" are here described as God-given, including creation,[217] love and labor (which can, by extension, be assumed to lead to the pursuit of happiness). These "good things" find their parallel in various legal codes, specifically, life, liberty, and dignity. Yet, as IJM asserts, many people are being denied these "good things."

What IJM offers Christians is a way to make sense of the chaos and injustice in the world, which is neither random nor inexplicable. It is the result of humans' fall from grace, original sin, which can be traced back to the rebellion of Adam and Eve who challenged and disobeyed God's will and authority. Here lies the explanation for the injustice, corruption, abuse, and oppression found in the world. God, however, offers hope in the face of injustice. As the ultimate Judge, and "a God of Justice," He "condemns and punishes those who so abuse others." God, however, does not leave the powerless to their plight: "He has compassion

---

[217] The "fruit of creation" appears here to be quite literal in its reference to the union between a man and a woman where offspring are produced, instead of metaphorically, for example, the ability to create and produce artistically or otherwise. Within the rubric of "human experience," labour appears to be intrinsic to human activity, as is the capacity to love, whether that entails love for one's God, another human being, and all human beings.

on those who suffer this evil and injustice; that he sees them and hears their cry."

IJM invokes biblical examples to demonstrate how God has used his believers as instruments to seek justice: "We learn that He intervenes in human history by raising up righteous prophets to plead for the oppressed and intercede on behalf of the afflicted." By extension, one could argue that IJM representatives function as modern day "disciples" who advocate on behalf of those suffering abuse (Haugen, p. 47). IJM, through its service to others in need, serve as models for other Christians to follow.

Given the fallen and seemingly hopeless state of the world, many Christians, Haugen asserts, tune out and shut off, not knowing what to do—often giving in to despair.[218] Without specifically naming the effect as "information overload" (Cohen, p. 187-88), one of the effects of trying to process mass amounts of information, IJM does address the way in which the proliferation of these images causes individuals to lose the sense that actual individuals are experiencing "grief and suffering." For that reason, IJM insists that "especially in this century, we must fight against the de-humanizing of brutality: while technology statisticizes abuse and death in a way that gives great shock value with high numbers, those numbers rarely tell individual victims' stories." Several key issues are raised here. "Brutality" thus becomes an abstraction, a number that becomes meaningless or incomprehensible.[219] Many such examples exist.

---

[218] Haugen refers to C.S. Lewis who identifies despair as "a greater sin than any of the sins that provoke it" (p. 60).
[219] Robert McAfee Brown (1990) discusses the three problems with relying on statistics to understand poverty and suffering. He argues that "statistics depersonalize," leading to "personal avoidance" (p. 51). They also "immobilize," or paralyze individuals with their sheer numbers, and they are "manipulable" (ibid).

Facts and numbers drawing attention to mass poverty or pandemic illnesses or diseases lose much of their potency because they become incomprehensible. The numbers describing the AIDS pandemic is one such example: it is estimated that "28 million people are infected and are living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa," many of whom "will die in 5-6 years."[220]   These numbers and statistics fail to capture the imagination, and victims become indistinguishable. The result is that we do not have a sense of the personal and the intimate, the face(s) of suffering. IJM attributes the facelessness (and voicelessness) to an abstract notion of "technology." "Technology" becomes the culprit for this numbing effect, but IJM never explicitly names what is meant by, or represented by, "technology." It is an interesting paradox as IJM embraces the technology and power of the Internet as a medium to conduct human rights work. Implicit in these claims then is the idea that there is good and bad "technology." Bad "technology" thus stands in as a substitute, a straw man of sorts, for the medium of television and is blamed for its desensitizing effect, and I would add de-contextualized, portrayal of suffering. This depiction of television by IJM does not allow for other possibilities that the format can, and has, also achieved.[221] Technology/television is presented as a mystifying force that empties images of meaning. IJM argues

---

[220] This information was contained in a link on the website for the Stephen Lewis foundation (www.stephenlewisfoundation.org), but it is also a special feature report by journalist Stephanie Nolen for *The Globe&Mail* at www.theglobeandmail.com/special/aidsinafrica, retrieved on August 17, 2005. Nolen went on to publish "28: Stories of AIDS in Africa" (2007). She attempts to humanize the pandemic by providing "portraits" of twenty-eight different individuals as a way to comprehend the incomprehensible, from What *twenty-eight million looks like* , a review by Melissa Faye Greene in *The Globe&Mail*, May 12, 2007.
[221] The immediacy of television which provided images, as well as ongoing news coverage and campaigns, has helped to raise awareness of various issues around the world. For example, viewers were made aware of the devastation suffered by people living in New Orleans when Katrina hit and were able to hear the voices of those who were left behind. News networks, talk shows, and other fundraising efforts were also conducted via various media.

that images on television distance its viewers, leaving them "numb to the hurt and persecution, we see only a faraway display on our television screens: surreal images portraying little of substance and less of meaning." Where witness.org placed a certain faith in the veracity of the image to convey facts, IJM focuses instead on the effect of saturation (of images) on the viewer. Images, particularly their sheer volume, alone can leave viewers overwhelmed and paralyzed, according to this perspective. Images accessed via a website can also produce the same effect. One can infer that IJM provides "substance" and "meaning" so often lacking, thereby making injustices real for its constituents by providing the faces and stories of victims. However, IJM, like other human rights organizations, faces the dilemma of mobilizing its audience, converting them from disengaged and passive witnesses into advocates for justice.

IJM challenges Christians to overcome apathy and feelings of powerlessness regarding the suffering of others, specifically those who are not their geographic neighbours (and often those whose backgrounds, cultures , and values differ). IJM asks the following question: "But as Christians who follow Christ's call to love our neighbors, is it right to do nothing?" The rhetorical question invoked here is similar to the question witness.org poses to its constituents about non-action in the face of injustice and human rights abuses. Both organizations struggle with the issue of action once individuals become aware of human rights abuses. IJM questions if inaction/inertia is a justifiable (or tenable) position for Christians. Haugen provides the following answer:

Christians must be reminded that they can make a difference,[222] that they "*can change things*" (p. 60, italics in original). By placing hope and trust in God's word and "character," Christians can renew their commitment to seeking justice for the oppressed (p. 69). Transforming faith into action means having faith in God's plan for every Christian, in other words, believing that "the great miracle and mystery of God is that he calls me and you to be part of what he is doing in history" (p. 34). In this way, Christians can take heart, and comfort, in knowing that "God does not give his people a ministry that he won't empower" (p. 104). Haugen reminds Christians that, historically, God has always responded to the suffering of his people by sending "a saviour and defender" (p. 36). In this way, IJM, as well as its Christian constituents, can be seen to embody God's promise (and plan) by working to defend the rights of the oppressed, and by coming to their rescue.

This call to which Christians must respond is premised on Christ's exhortation to his followers to love their neighbour. This principle is echoed throughout the New Testament as one of the fundamental commandments, second only to loving God "with all thy heart."[223] Based on Christ's teachings, Christians have an obligation to love and assist those in need, a revision of earlier calls to be their brother's keeper.[224] Love, mercy, and compassion thus

---

[222] I emphasized this point when looking at witness. org's revised strategy which focuses on encouraging visitors to their site that they can make a difference.
[223] References to the importance of loving thy neighbour can be found in the New Testament: Matthew 19:16-19; Matthew 22:35-40; Matthew 12: 28-31; Luke 10:25-27; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8. The following site was quite helpful: www.topical-bible-studies.org/24-0003.htm, retrieved on August 17, 2005.
[224] When Cain is asked where his brother Abel is, he responds that he is not his brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9). The lesson here is later echoed in the New Testament with the commandment (and expansion of earlier version) that we ought to love our neighbour.

become guiding principles on which Christians are advised to base their lives. It is an expansion of the notion of caring for others with whom we do not share any kinship ties but who are to be considered neighbours.[225] Loving one's neighbour is, therefore, closely related to seeking justice[226] for the oppressed. IJM illustrates the necessity of a Christian commitment to seeking justice by presenting a story and asking its audience "how do Christians transform their faith into action, especially when we are confronted with the brutality of injustice?" What follows is an account, as narrated by a *World Vision* representative, of a teenager named Bishara. The story presents a compelling description of excessive violence and brutality by state officials. The country and other political circumstances are never mentioned (to keep the victim's and his family's identities anonymous), and is illustrative of similar stories of state-sanctioned violence. The narrative is not complicated with statistics and historical information. It is difficult not to be horrified by the senseless violence employed by "security forces" against the teenaged Bishra who was "writing graffiti on a wall": he was shot "four times at point blank range. The first bullet took off part of his nose. The second bullet took off his lower jaw. The third bullet went in his left ear…" This story is meant to be symbolic of other cases and serves as a reminder to Christians that they need to question their commitment to Christ when they hear about injustice and choose to do nothing.

---

[225] When Jesus is asked "which is the great commandment of law," he replies, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:35; Mark 12:28; Luke 10:25; Romans 13:8). This information was retrieved on August 17, 2005 at www.topical-bible-studies.org/24-003.htm.
[226] "Justice," as defined by Haugen, "has to do with the exercise of power. To say that God is a God of justice is to say that he is a God who cares about the right exercise of power or authority" (p. 71).

To be overwhelmed by all the injustice in the world is understandable, but Haugen reminds Christians that God wants them to "know one thing: we will receive from him the power, the power to be his witnesses in word and deed 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8-9)" (p. 36). To this end, Christians must have both the "courage" and "conviction" (p. 14) to overcome their despair and become God's "instruments" for justice (p. 97), thus transforming their faith into action. They must "witness" by being faithful to God's commands and become "witnesses" in their actions, in effect, becoming activists for Christ.

Seeking justice thus entails becoming examples of God's love and compassion. IJM reinforces its message by drawing on exegetical text. The first reference is to I Corinthians 13:6 which equates love for those who are suffering with seeking justice and truth: "Love is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out."[227] This idea, reinforced in Isaiah 1:17, "commands us to 'seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, [and] plead the case of the widow.'" In the last reference to Micah 6:8, the "command" is "To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God." Christians are thus instructed to follow in God's footsteps and to demonstrate compassion[228] for those who are suffering: "seeking justice is a straightforward command of God for his people and part of Christ's prayer that his Father's will be done 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 5:10)" (p. 34). Christians are thus urged to lead by example and use their lives in following

---

[227] The following references of specific biblical passages are taken from IJM's website.

[228] Haugen's offers the following interpretation of compassion: "The word *compassion* comes from two Latin words: *passio*, meaning "to suffer," and *cum*, meaning "with." To say that God has compassion for the victims of injustice is to say that He actually suffers with them" (p. 78-79, italics in original).

God's will, to be "the salt and light of the midst of this world's darkness and corruption in order that we might not only preach the Good News of salvation but also demonstrate God's love and mercy toward those who suffer." The metaphors "salt" and "light"[229] are interesting metaphors for Christian conduct. In a world described as a place of "darkness and corruption," Christians are required to set themselves apart (from the world and others), to be in the world but not of it. They are to embody, through example, how to live in this fallen world. To be "the salt of the earth" is to be "a person of great goodness and strength of character,"[230] someone whose character and life become a model for the rest of us. In a similar vein, to be "the light in the midst of this world's darkness and corruption" is to be a beacon and guide of goodness against the backdrop of sin, to be an example to others. Living a life in Christ entails not only sharing his teachings and "demonstrat[ing] God's love and mercy towards those who suffer," but showing solidarity with the poor and oppressed and advocating on their behalf. The Christian practice of witnessing shares similarities with other models of witnessing that urges individuals to be moved (empathically) by the suffering of others and to take action on their behalf.

---

[229] In Matthew 5:13-14, Christ preaches to the multitude: "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:16 continues, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
[230] See www.askoxford.com, which was retrieved on August 24, 2006. In the foreword to Haugen's *Good News about injustice*, John Scott offers the following interpretation in reference to the metaphors salt and light: "Is it ["the community of the church"] not intended to penetrate the world like salt and light and so to change it, as salt hinders bacterial decay and light disperses darkness?" (p. 10).

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN: A MODEL FOR COMPASSION AND SERVICE

The parable of the Good Samaritan best exemplifies the "core concept" (Haugen, p. 72) of Christian love and compassion. When Jesus is asked by "a scholar of the Law"[231] to describe who his neighbour is, he responds with a parable.[232] In this parable, a priest, a Levite, and Samaritan encounter an unidentified wounded man[233] who was robbed and left for dead. Both the priest and the Levite offer the wounded man no assistance, but the last of the trio of passers-by, the Samaritan,[234] stops and attends to the victim's wounds, carries him to an inn, and pays the innkeeper to take care of him, promising to cover any future costs incurred in the care of this stranger. The parable concludes with Jesus returning to the original question of who is a neighbour and gets the lawyer to answer his own question, to which he replies, "the one who showed mercy toward him [the wounded man]" (Luke 10:37). Jesus then urges him to "go and

---

[231] I chose the interpretation of this parable from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GoodSamaritan, retrieved on 8/25/2006, to supplement readings from the New Testament.

[232] The parable begins with the lawyer asking Jesus, "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?' And he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly; Do this, and you will live.' But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:25-29).

[233] Whereas the identities, or "status," of the men who can help the stranger are clearly identified, no status is ascribed to the wounded man; he remains unknown in the parable. Boltanski (1999) argues that "the absence of status cannot be attributed simply to a stylistic constraint" (p. 10). He further elaborates that "the paradoxical outcome rests on the unfortunate's lack of definite status. And, in conformity with the structure of the parabolic statement, the outcome is paradoxical in the sense that the direction in which charity is exercised is not oriented by prior concerns" (ibid).

[234] The priest does not offer assistance, "presumably in order to maintain ritual purity" (wikipedia.org/wiki/GoodSamaritan), and neither does the Levite who the listening audience would expect to be compassionate to another's suffering. Traditionally, Levites "served particular religious duties for the Israelites and had political responsibilities as well" (wikipedia.org.wiki/Levite), retrieved on 8/29/2006. It is the Samaritan who stops and has compassion for the wounded man. The parable hinges on the paradox of which individual offers assistance as "Samaritans were despised by the story's target audience" (wiki/GoodSamaritan). Boltanksi also identifies the Samaritan as "an enemy of the Jews" (p. 10).

do the same" (ibid). Boltanski (1999) contends that "the real starting point [of the parable] is *the spectacle of suffering*" (p. 8, italics in original). Moreover, the parable can be seen as more than a lesson of compassion but as "a paradigm of action" (p. 8).[235] According to Boltanski, what the parable offers is "the conjunction of the possibility of knowing and the possibility of acting," what he identifies as "the possibility of being involved, of a *commitment*" (ibid, italics in original). While the Samaritan serves as an exemplar of the compassion one ought to have for a neighbour, one with whom one has no kinship ties or prior relationship, the parable, explains Boltanski, does not ask that we place our own lives at risk to aid another:

> The person who practices charity does not accomplish the impossible. He sacrifices time, goods and money, but it is a limited sacrifice. The task that presents itself to him is not insuperable; he arrives on the scene after the struggle has taken place, for example, and he is not required to put his own life at risk by confronting the robbers. (p. 8)

The power of the parable lies in the inherent act of goodness, "without it being treated as an obligation and so without it being liable to sanction when there is a failure to perform it" (Boltanski, p.13). The example of the Good Samaritan has endured as a model and continues to resonate in both its popular usage and in the law. The term refers to "a generous person who is ready to provide aid to people in distress without hesitation."[236] In terms of law, Good Samaritan laws and statutes are designed to "keep people from being so reluctant to help a stranger in need for fear of legal repercussions if they made

---

[235] Boltanski refers to Paul Ricoeur who notes, "the neighbor here belongs to the 'order of narration' as a 'chain of events': the parable converts the 'story told into a paradigm of action'" (p. 8).
[236] See wikipedia.org/wiki/GoodSamaritan for an explanation of the parable.

some mistake in treatment."[237] These laws are premised on the duty to rescue. Menlowe (1993) notes, "there is no shortage of philosophical theories defending a moral requirement to rescue. Post-medieval natural law theory advocated the ideal of Christian brotherhood and involved the notion of being my brother's keeper" (p. 5). In both biblical and early legal doctrines, one finds the basis for strangers lending assistance to those in need.

To conclude, IJM embraces the parable of the Good Samaritan and Christ's call to love one's neighbour in its role as defenders (contemporary disciples) of the rights of the oppressed, while also providing a model for Christians to follow. IJM reminds Christians that they are to be empowered by God's action plan for them and by his call that they seek justice: "IJM is ready to empower YOU to participate in God's work of seeking justice." Building their work on a "divine imperative," Christians are urged to put their faith into action and rescue those in need. IJM's approach to human rights work provides an interesting model for doing justice as it incorporates legal and investigative techniques to defend the human (but God-given) rights of the oppressed. Basing its foundation on biblical justice and on the concept of "witnessing," which evokes

---

[237] The purpose is to ensure that an individual providing assistance will not face lawsuits for "wrongdoing" should the victim undergo some form of injury in the provision of aid. While "common law provinces have no laws making it obligatory for people to help someone in need," Quebec is exceptional in this regard: according to the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Quebec Civil Code, there is "a duty on everyone to help a person in peril," if it "can be accomplished without serious risk to the good Samaritan or a third person" (http://ont.bankruptcycanada.com/goodsamaritan.htm, retrieved on 5/27/2007). Specifically, British Columbia's Good Samaritan Act notes that individuals are not liable for damages, with the exception of those "employed expressly for that purpose" or those who do so "with the view of gain": "A person who renders emergency medical services or aid to an ill, injured or unconscious person, at the immediate scene of an accident or emergency that has caused the illness, injury or unconsciousness, is not liable for damages for injury or death of that person caused by the person's act or omission in rendering the medical services or aid unless that person is grossly negligent" (www.qp.gov.bc.ca/strateg/stat/G/96172_01.htm, retrieved on 5/27/2007).

Christian etymological meanings, IJM uses its spiritual basis to seek legal remedies for the "voiceless" and the disempowered.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION REVISITED

Like witness.org, IJM has also updated and redesigned its website, now endorsed, interestingly, by both former President George Bush and former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.[238] The site is more streamlined and less text dense. Most notably, IJM's mission statement has been revised to give more priority to victims (followed by perpetrator accountability) the organization seeks to rescue, as well as the kinds of human rights violations they experience: "International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression." By shifting attention to the victims and identifying the specific types of victims, one gets a clearer sense of the kind of work in which IJM is engaged. In the earlier version of the site, victims were described in general terms, as "people suffering injustice and oppression." Victims now also specifically refer to the poor who are more likely to be victims of "violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression." Poverty has now come to the forefront as a condition that is disempowering, leaving the poor open to exploitation by the powerful. IJM thus makes an interesting shift by including economic rights as a part of the human rights platform. In the description of the historical legacy of the church, IJM offers the following critique:

---

[238] When I first discovered this site in 2003, such endorsements and public recognition had not yet occurred. Now, on the home page, along with a brief mention of who Gary Haugen is, the following information is provided: "Haugen and the work of IJM have been featured on "Dateline NBC," "The Oprah Winfrey Show," FOX News, MSNBC, CNN, NPR, *Forbes Magazine* and *The New York Times Magazine*."

"When the poor are hungry, homeless or alienated, the Church has come to their aid by providing food, shelter and missionaries to meet the pressing need. But when the poor have been oppressed, treated unjustly and suffered under the hand of someone more powerful, little was done on their behalf." "The Church" stands in as a symbolic representation of what appears to be a more generic (and homogenous) Christian (as well as political) enterprise. Traditionally, "the Church" has tended to the needs of the poor, but without advocating against the powerful on their behalf, in effect, to transform the conditions of their poverty (though there have been some exceptions as noted in my earlier discussion of liberation theology). Perhaps in an attempt to reinterpret and reactivate the role the Church can play (and perhaps even a return to the challenges Christ posed to the established body of the established Church), IJM invokes the biblical call for the Church to act as a leader and advocate for the poor and powerless.

Significantly, one of the changes is the omission of explicit discussions of IJM's biblical foundation, followed by biblical scripture describing God's character and his command to seek justice for the oppressed. Instead, IJM's critique is more succinctly directed to "the Church" as a generic body:

> IJM seeks to teach the Church to think and act differently about injustice. To become a Justice Church is to become part of the network of diverse congregations that have made a commitment to the fight for justice and to educate their members about the work of IJM.

In this new version and vision of the "Church," and what it ought to become, IJM affirms that the Church's role is to fight injustice. The challenge lies in the unification of "diverse congregations" to create the "Justice Church." IJM shifts

its focus from individual Christians to the broader body of "the Church": instead of instructing individual Christians to lead by example, to be light in the darkness and the "salt of the earth," it is "the Church" that needs to become a leader in seeking justice. Thus, IJM's new role is to reinvigorate "the Church" "to think and act differently about injustice," a much grander project.

While IJM's stated mission remains essentially the same, one of the notable changes[239] is its conceptualization of education. IJM remains committed to Christian organizations and audiences, but it no longer specifically identifies its audience as solely "people of faith." Instead, IJM has expanded its reach and now adopts a more general and inclusive approach: "IJM is committed to developing hearts and imaginations for justice." Presumably every heart and imagination is potentially open to IJM's message, though it appears more likely that Christians will be primarily drawn to the message delivered by a Christian-centered organization. Its new initiatives now span across "university and college campuses, and in churches and civic organizations in order to teach the public about human rights abuses and to provide concrete examples of tangible relief that can be achieved through international efforts." Its previous initiatives already included Christian prayer groups on universities and campuses, but the

---

[239] Another change concerns its approach, previously described as a two-pronged approach: casework and education. IJM now describes a "four-fold approach" that places victim relief at the fore, followed by perpetrator accountability, structural prevention and victim after care. These concepts were previously envisioned as various components of intervention. There is also a more detailed description of structural prevention, namely, the "prevent[ion] [of] the abuse from being committed against others who are at risk by strengthening community factors that are likely to deter potential oppressors, reduce the vulnerability of at-risk populations and empower local authorities to stop such abuses." Similarly, victim aftercare has also benefited from elaboration: "access to services to help victims transition to their new lives and to encourage long-term success." Specific aftercare services mentioned are "safe aftercare homes, counseling and emotional support, as well as facilitating educational and vocational opportunities," with the aim of "encourag[ing] long-term rehabilitative success."

addition of "civic partnerships" is new. No details are provided about these, presumably secular, "civic partnerships," with regard to specific organizations, but a previous link referred to non-Christian human rights organizations. How IJM intends to educate a larger public about human rights abuses remains unclear.

In streamlining the site and making its message more accessible (in terms of format and audience), there is less emphasis on Christians acting as witnesses to Christ's love by following His example (and, by extension, spreading his gospel of salvation). The message of compassion and love for one's neighbour has also been simplified: "As Christians, we are called to love our neighbor. Part of this faith in action is bringing freedom from oppression to the poor around the world." By loving one's neighbour, Christians can become involved in human rights struggles. Focusing on this "core concept," IJM no longer presents an argument about the fallen and corrupt nature of the world in which we live. Instead, IJM focuses on its leadership role and hopes to lead by example. While the organization no longer implicitly compares its workers to Christ's disciples who have risen up to help God's people when they have cried out for his help, IJM's human rights professionals are now quite simply described as advocates for the poor and the oppressed. In this way, a far subtler connection is made between what it means to be a Christian and defenders of the human rights of the poor and the oppressed. The Christian subtext is still present, but without an overtly evangelical rationale. The effect of such a change renders the site and the organization more accessible, potentially, to an even

wider audience, secular and Christian, by shifting the focus onto more secular,

and perhaps populist, notions of justice and human rights.

6 THE WITNESSING PROJECT: FROM PASSIVE TO EMPOWERED WITNESS

The Witnessing Project provides a framework in which witnessing is conceptualized as a process of self-transformation whereby passive, unaware, vicarious witnesses to traumatic events can become intentional witnesses, empowered to intervene and/or assist those in need. In my present study, I examined how human rights organizations like witness.org and IJM seek to make vicarious witnesses aware of human rights abuses and appeal to them to respond on behalf of victims. Whether individuals are physically present (eyewitnesses) to events or encounter them indirectly and vicariously, mediated via media, witnesses can play an influential role in the outcome of events (Straub, 1989; Bloom & Reichert, 1990; Cohen, 2001; Clarkson, 1996). Researchers such as Kaplan (2005) and Keats (2005), therefore, call for more research on vicarious witnessing and media-related trauma. Kaplan notes that "most of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly...we need to know as much as possible about the process" (p. 87). Similarly, Keats observes, "we know very little about the process and impact of vicarious witnessing in a public setting" (p. 176). Both witness.org and IJM focus on mobilizing witnesses—through education and appeals to their sense of social responsibilities and shared membership in a moral and global community—into action and service. Of the two human rights advocacy sites, only IJM refers to the desensitizing impact a witness might experience from continued exposure to disturbing images and information on the news. As a result, witnesses may find

it difficult to respond to the plight of others. Unlike the other two sites, the Witnessing Project is not an advocacy-oriented organization: it looks at witnessing from the perspective of the witness. My interest in the Witnessing Project thus stems from its focus on the witness who typically experiences violence, or trauma, vicariously (and is often unaware of its impact) and on the potential for the witness to shift from passive to intentional and empowered witnessing.

In its approach to witnessing, the Witnessing Project focuses on the impact that mundane or "everyday" acts of violence or violations have on the individual.[240] To witness, as defined by Weingarten—the director and founder of the Witnessing Project—is to "see, hear [be] told about interpersonal or structural violence and violation."[241] Their goal is to make individuals aware of the harms caused by continued exposure to violence and to provide them with "the tools to cope with the biological, psychological and societal effects of witnessing." The Witnessing Project embeds witnessing within a therapeutic model for transformation and empowerment that begins at the individual level and extends to families and communities: "The aim of the Witnessing Project is to help individuals, families and communities move from unintentional witnessing to active chosen witnessing, which has the potential to transform toxic experiences of witnessing into ones that heal." The framework for intentional witnessing is based on one's awareness and decisions concerning the possibilities for action, which appears to be a largely self-reflexive process that involves how one

---

[240] See www.witnessingproject.org for further information.
[241] All quotes are taken from the website unless otherwise indicated.

understands what is occurring and how best one can respond on behalf of another in the given context. According to Weingarten, becoming an intentional/aware witness can be learned,[242] and this opens up possibilities for a different praxis of witnessing. For witness.org and IJM, witnessing can be seen as a call to action, whereby witnesses are urged to acknowledge their relationships and responsibilities for others. As agents of change, they can make a difference in the lives of others. In contrast, within the therapeutic model outlined by the Witnessing Project, witnessing appears, initially, to entail a process of self-awareness (personal transformation), which is then connected to actions one undertakes on behalf of others. The witness, Weingarten, explains, "is in a position to observe the interaction between the perpetrator and the victim. Sometimes the witnessing happens at the exact moment of the interaction, and sometimes it happens far into the future" (p. 23). The witness thus becomes aware of herself as a witness who then determines what can be done in a situation or, as Weingarten suggests, at some later point when it is possible to do so.

The Witnessing Project adopts a psychology/therapy-oriented perspective,[243] providing workshops for therapists, health-care professionals, members of the clergy, with some of these workshops open to members of the

---

[242] Like Clarkson in Chapter 2, Weingarten calls for research that encourages more empathic behaviour and responses and notes in her book *Common shock. Witnessing violence every day: How we are harmed, how we are healed*, "Helping tends to promote helping, harm tends to promote harm, and inaction or turning away breeds more of the same" (p.36).
[243] Keats (2005) points out that "the act of witnessing arose in two professional contexts—medicine and psychology" (p. 173).

public.[244]   The Witnessing Project is affiliated with the Family Institute of Cambridge,[245] which offers workshops and seminars to clinicians and health care professionals, for example, courses on trauma—family-oriented as well as vicarious trauma clinicians experience as a result of exposure to their "clients' stories." The website refers to other services provided through the Witnessing Project, for example, customized workshops for organizations, individuals, couples, and families; a "five-day intensive trainings [sic] in witnessing practices, counselling sessions, as well as "consultations related to the applications of the witnessing model." Weingarten designed and delivers her witnessing model to individuals to increase their awareness of the different roles they can occupy in a given traumatic situation. Keats explains that Weingarten "developed a typology of witnessing that involves understanding the different perspectives people take in a witnessing situation for both therapists and clients. She believes that witnesses can be aware of a trauma situation and empowered to do something about it (i.e., stand-for the survivor), or are aware yet disempowered to take action (i.e., solely take-in or bear the story). On the other hand, witnesses can be aware yet empowered to act, or they can be both unaware of the trauma and disempowered to act. These perspectives dictate how one processes and acts in relation to the trauma event (p. 174). With reference to her witnessing model, Weingarten states that she has designed and taught this model in an attempt to

---

[244] The website refers to "workshops on hope and resilience," designed for professionals as well as for the vaguely defined "concerned adults."

[245] The website refers to the following as "core staff members": Dr. Carol Becker, also a clinical psychologist and family therapist, Dirk Kotze who is located in South Africa and whose combined fields are Clinical Psychology and Divinity, and Elmarie Kotze, a senior lecturer in New Zealand whose background is literature and philosophy.

"ameliorate the effects of violence following domestic, inter-ethnic, racial, political and other forms of conflict." Based on the website, one of the objectives of the Witnessing Project is to make individuals aware of the harm caused by witnessing violence directly and indirectly, and specifically how they might repair those harms. Weingarten argues in her book *Common shock. Witnessing everyday violence: how we are harmed, how we heal* that more needs to be known about how witnesses are affected by violence because they are "subject to the same dynamics as victims, but often neither they nor anyone else appreciates this" (p. 35).[246] Weingarten explains that witnesses can be physically "present" or "learn" about a traumatic event after it has happened (p. 22). Similar to Clarkson's (1996) ideas about bystanders who are present when victims are being maltreated, Weingarten also draws attention to the role witnesses can play in affecting the outcome of a situation: "The witness may respond in ways that are helpful, equivocal, or harmful" (p. 22). Witnesses can "assist others and avoid feeling helpless and overwhelmed" (ibid).

OVERCOMING "COMMON SHOCK": A STRATEGY FOR INTENTIONAL WITNESSING

Table 8 - Recurring Themes – The Witnessing Project

Actors: anyone who has experienced/witnessed violence and violation
Action: transforming passive/unaware witnesses into intentional, compassionate witnesses
Tools: awareness, compassion, active listening, various coping skills
Advocacy: workshops, seminars, counselling, intervention when possible on behalf of victims

---

[246] Weingarten adds, "We know a great deal about victims and perpetrators. We need to know as much about witnesses. If we do, we will have a better chance of being witnesses who respond constructively. Witnesses can play a key role in transforming everyday violence" (p. 22).

For the Witnessing Project, repeated exposure to violence can, potentially, produce traumatic effects, which, it can be argued, impact an individual's ability to respond effectively to someone else's distress. The problem, as identified by the Witnessing Project, concerns the prevalence of violence, which has become a part of our "common, daily experiences." Violence, the website explains, often "occur[s] between people we know," or "we just happen to be somewhere and see a gratuitous example of violence." Weingarten explains that individuals often register the impact of these violent events as "common shock."[247] This term is used "to capture the biological[248] and psychological[249] responses that are triggered when we witness violence and violation." "Shock" refers to a range of responses from "spaciness, distress, or bravado," which "affects our mind, body and spirit."[250] Moreover, the effects of witnessing violence are "cumulative" and can have long-term effects (p. 15).[251] The "paradox of common shock," observes Weingarten, "is the more we witness, the less we register" (p. 4). Based on these descriptions, "common shock" can be seen as a form of trauma one experiences. Weingarten argues that it should not, however, "solely be understood as a mental-health problem" (p. 9). Instead, she suggests that

---

[247] Weingarten states that an extreme form of "common shock" can lead to a "trauma response" (p. 8). Weingarten provides the example of witnesses to the planes crashing into the World Trade centre (ibid). "Common shock," Weingarten explains, "disrupts our fundamental sense of who we are, who others are, and our own sense of safety and security" (ibid).

[248] The biological effects, elaborated in *Common shock*, range from mild to moderate stress, trauma PTSD, a generally hyperaroused limbic system (p. 44-45).

[249] The psychological effects can manifest in a number of ways: numbness, anger, sadness, helplessness, shame, aggression, withdrawal and silence, violation of trust, and problems with memory (p. 46-56).

[250] The interplay between the body-mind, or the biological and the psychological, is a familiar discourse, but less so is the connection to the spirit, for which no definition is provided by the Witnessing Project.

[251] The effects, states the Witnessing Project, occur at the individual level, but there are "ramifications for our families and the society as a whole."

"common shock" "refers to human suffering" and believes "we don't need to medicalize it [common shock] to make it any more real or important to alleviate it" (ibid).

Based on the general description provided in the Witnessing Project's website, it appears that individuals, communities, and societies are exposed to and respond universally to violence and trauma. Adopting this strategy, violence is stated as a given reality in every society, undifferentiated and unmediated by culture, geography, conflict, class, or individual experience, which begs the question as to whether all members of a society experience daily and routine "shocks" in the same way. In my literature chapter, I referred to Kaplan (2005) who notes that trauma is not culturally universal. Douglass and Vogler (2003) also caution that "there is no special kind of event that provokes a traumatized reaction; nor is there a universal sensitivity to stress that provides uniform reactions to similar events" (p. 10). The website offers no such clarification on this, as well as other, issues; often, generalizations are presented as common sense knowledge. For clarification of many issues, I referred to Weingarten's text as a guide. In *Common shock*, Weingarten mentions the differential impact of violence in certain communities and societies, distinctions not noted in the website, and offers that "violence and violation are not evenly distributed, nor is terror" (p. 207). For Weingarten, different situations can produce varying degrees of trauma in individuals, but what is at stake appears to be one's ability to witness oneself as well as others, which "can be compromised" by "chronic conditions of structural violence," oppressive regimes, an abusive partner or

parent (ibid). Drawing on the work of Laub (1991), Weingarten argues that the "inability to witness oneself" leads to the annihilation of the self, a theme I also explored in my discussion in Chapter 1 on research about the Holocaust survivors. Weingarten adds, "When those who are oppressed lose the capacity to tell what is happening, those on the outside who "see may not understand" and be willing to help (p. 208). In her text, Weingarten hints at a distinction between the victim as witness and the audience as witness, as well as the act of bearing witness to the self and witnessing others, ideas not clearly conveyed in the Witnessing Project's website.

In focusing on the impact of witnessing violence, the Witnessing Project attempts to distinguish between different forms of violence and violations. The website explains that violence and violation "can be personal or structural." Personal violence involves the infliction of "harm or injury," and "the effects of this are usually visible to all involved, and may produce physical, psychological, spiritual, or material harm." This form of violence can best be understood, I suggest, when it occurs directly between an easily identified perpetrator and victim. Witnesses are less likely to assist victims when they fail to identify with or empathize[252] with victims (Cohen, 2001). Moving from interpersonal violence and violation, the Witnessing Project attempts to define institutionalized forms of violence: "Structural violence occurs when the social system itself exploits some people to the benefit of others, producing the same kinds of harms, but to classes of individuals. This kind of violence is often invisible to those who

---

[252] Weingarten explains that "empathy stays focused on the other's experience, while personal distress, caused by having an emotional reaction to another's experience, is focused on relieving one's own anxiety or discomfort" (p. 167).

210

benefit, and the causes of harm may be invisible even to those who suffer from them." In the absence of further elaboration or the inclusion of examples, it is unclear what kinds of "benefits" are conferred by this depersonalized social system to beneficiaries and what kinds of harms are inflicted upon the disadvantaged, particularly as the processes are "invisible" to both groups. Absent, too, is a sense of individual agency and how the social system is maintained from this explanation. This definition, unlike IJM's, which identifies injustice as the abuse of power, makes no mention of power or how the social system might be transformed. At most, the definition comes across as a diluted version of Marxism, with a suggestion of class oppression but lacking any reference to the economic structure or a powerful, ruling elite. For some indication of what structural violence might entail, I turned again to Weingarten's text. Here, she refers to "insidious processes such as racism, poverty, sexism, and homophobia," which are described as "manifestations of structural violence, often carried out by economic or technocratic methods" (p. 23). These examples illuminate, to some extent, the outcomes of structural violence, but it still remains unclear—based on the initial definition provided within the website—how individuals might become cognizant of harms which appear to be normalized by their social systems and what role they might play in transforming their conditions.

In contrast to violence, the Witnessing Project describes violation as more "subtle," but like violence, "it too occurs directly between people and indirectly through structural inequities and injustices." From this definition, violence differs

from violation only if, by the infliction of "harm and injury," the Witnessing Project is referring to physical assault. Following this logic, while violence is "usually visible to all involved," violations are less visible. Weingarten mentions that violation is "even more difficult to notice than violence. In fact, many people find themselves confused after an experience of violation, wondering what exactly happened to make them feel so awful" (p. 5-6). From this explanation, it is difficult to differentiate between one's hurt feelings and whether one has been violated. Unlike physical violence, Weingarten points out that a violation "may not leave a physical mark," though "there can be psychic traces" which may "disrupt our sense of meaning and make us feel fear and dread" (p. 6). This elaboration sheds little light on the difference between a violation and structural violence embedded in social systems that lead to discriminatory practices. The website lists the following "processes" as examples that "can create the experience of violation": "illness, disability, aging, discrimination, and immigration." Again, without specific examples or clarification, it would appear that the experience of violation becomes a matter of subjective interpretation, instead of the effects of discriminatory practices rooted in "structural inequities and injustices." The inclusion of the term violation renders this attempt at conceptualization vague and does little to inform a visitor to the site of the traumatic impact of witnessing violations—particularly when victims subjected to violations "find themselves confused after an experience," wondering what exactly happened to make them feel so badly." Although the emphasis in the website is, primarily, on the vicarious witness—the witness who observes an

interaction between a victim and a perpetrator—at times, it appears that the term witness might also refer to, and include, the victim, namely, the person who is harmed by violence/violation. It is unclear if those who experience violations are able to name or understand what has happened to them. Also unclear is how the virtual witness is meant to interpret the interaction that occurs between the victim and perpetrator and determine a course of action. Perhaps it is hoped that the vicarious witness can recognize that another person has experienced something traumatic and offer some kind of response in acknowledgment.

WITNESSING THE SELF TO WITNESS THE OTHER

Awareness, according to the Witnessing Project, is an essential skill for understanding what is going on and how one can intervene and assist victims. Drawing on Buddhist teachings about awareness, Weingarten adopts a similar approach and refers to awareness as "the opportunity to stay present so that we can contemplate what we want to do" (p. 164). Being aware, or present in the moment, it would appear, might help to minimize feelings of passivity and powerlessness. The Witnessing Project adopts the position that the average individual is, often, unaware of the "chronic debilitating effects of witnessing everyday violence" and needs to learn how to manage these "effects" or "shocks" on a personal and inter-personal level. Understanding that witnessing is like a "two-sided coin" that can be "toxic or beneficial to us," the Witnessing Project states that it "aims to help people to flip the witnessing coin from the harmful to the healing side." Consequently, one of its goals is "to provide people with the tools to cope with the biological, psychological, interpersonal and societal effects

of witnessing." The website states they "do this in a variety of ways, tailored to the particular presenting situation." However, no examples are provided of these "tailored" approaches. One would need to enroll in a workshop or counselling session to learn more about how the Witnessing Project teaches individuals to become aware and intentional witnesses. In *Common shock*, Weingarten observes that "while it is true that any of us may find ourselves in extreme circumstances in which the ability to witness will be crushed and of no avail, this should not deter us from having the skills of witnessing in our repertoire" (p. 208). The "skills" Weingarten refers to are therapy-oriented examples of "witnessing oneself" which, she states, is a "prerequisite to witnessing others": "keeping a journal," "meditation," and visualization exercises whereby the individual re-imagines past traumatic events and changes the outcome (p. 208-210). Weingarten states, "All of us, whichever role we are currently in, can witness ourselves. We can become aware of what we see—witnessing ourselves as victims. And we can become aware of what we do to others—witnessing ourselves as perpetrators. More able to witness ourselves in each of these roles, we will better be able to witness others in each of these roles as well" (p. 26). Within this therapy-oriented paradigm, the emphasis is on the individual and the development of awareness of herself as a witness, which is seen as fundamental to any action that might be taken on behalf of another.

For Weingarten, the ability to witness the self is connected to the ability to witness "intentionally" and "compassionately," which requires the recognition of a "shared humanity" with others (p. 160). In Chapter 2, I identified this notion of a

common and "shared humanity" as fundamental to appeals employed by human rights organizations to mobilize their constituents to assist victims of human rights abuses. Clarkson (1996), for example, refers to the acknowledgement of relationships with others, which is similar to Oliver's (2001) sense of the recognition of the other. Human rights organizations, I argue, seek to reinforce a sense of moral obligation and responsibility for others based on a common human bond: we ought to intervene in order to alleviate the suffering of others. Weingarten invokes a similar approach by emphasizing the role compassion plays in the recognition of the other: "Perceiving someone's shared humanity is a prerequisite for compassionate witnessing" (p. 161). According to Weingarten, compassion can be "understood as suffering *with* another with the intention of relieving that person's suffering" (p. 169, italics in original). Based on this approach to witnessing that emphasizes awareness, intentionality, and compassion, Weingarten designed a witnessing model based on the different positions one can occupy in different contexts.

THE WITNESSING MODEL: INTENTIONAL WITNESSING

Weingarten has developed a model for understanding the possibilities for action and empowerment, filtered through one's "awareness of what one is witnessing" (witnessingproject.org). Keats (2005) explains that Weingarten's "typology of witnessing" is based on "the different perspectives that people can take in a witnessing situation" (p. 174). Keats sums up the model in the following description: "Witnesses can be *aware* of a trauma situation and *empowered* to do something about it (i.e., stand-for the survivor), or are aware yet *disempowered*

215

to take action (i.e., solely take-in or bear the story).   On the other hand, witnesses can be *unaware* yet empowered to act or they can be both unaware of the trauma and disempowered to act.   These perspectives dictate how one processes and acts in relation to the trauma event" (ibid, italics in original).   By making individuals aware of themselves as witnesses, the hope is they will be better able to identify what role(s) they occupy within a situation and how they can become intentional witnesses who can respond more effectively on behalf of victims.   The   model   offers,   Weingarten   argues,   the   potential   for   the transformation of the often unaware or unintentional witness into one who can alleviate the suffering of others.   As a heuristic for understanding the role the witness can play, it has, I suggest, potential implications for pedagogical praxis. Both Straub (1989) and Clarkson (1996) recommend education on the effects of bystander passivity, with Clarkson advocating for "bystander training" (p. 108). Education on witnessing would reinforce the importance of social relationships and civic responsibility—the term "good citizenship" comes to mind—and provide witnesses with critical skills that encourage awareness about injustice (its causes and impact) as well as action that can be taken on behalf of others.[253]

The Witnessing Project's model visually represents the four witnessing positions Weingarten outlines in a 2x4 grid, which represent awareness-unawareness and empowered-disempowered configurations "in relation to any aspect of what one is witnessing" (p. 27).   The process of moving between the different witnessing positions appears to be iterative, requiring interpretation and

---

[253] In my conclusion, I refer to two school-based programs, Roots of Empathy and Social Justice 12. Although not focused specifically on witnessing, they do incorporate empathy and social justice, which are believed to be fundamental to "good citizenship."

assessment of the context in which violence and violation occur, as well as one's location within the specific situation. According to Weingarten, intentional witnessing—namely being aware of oneself as a witness in traumatic situations and assessing what one can do—means that individuals are better situated to "assist others and avoid feeling helpless and overwhelmed" (p. 22). However, while intentionality combined with empowerment remains the ideal position, Weingarten notes it is not easily achieved: "in some instances awareness may be all that we can offer" (p. 34).[254] While the website provides no specific examples to illustrate the different positions the witness can occupy on the grid (though the Witnessing Project archive contains personal narratives of witnessing experiencees), in *Common shock*, Weingarten provides personal anecdotes, shares experiences of her workshop participants, refers to role models such as former South African president Nelson Mandela, and draws on everyday as well as devastating events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Witness positions, explains Weingarten, can change and are context dependent, "influenced by whether or not one is aware and whether or not one feels empowered in relation to any aspect of what one is witnessing" (p. 27). Being aware, which the Witnessing Project identifies as the first position on the witnessing grid, represents the most "desirable" position for the person, as well as for others. The witness is aware, that is, "cognizant and mindful of the implications" of witnessing and possible consequences for herself and others, and determines the best way to take effective action regarding what she

---

[254] Weingarten points out that awareness "without action" should not be seen as "irrelevant" or "self-indulgent"...Action can be grafted on it far more easily than it can on lack of awareness" (p. 134).

observes.[255]   According to Weingarten, the aware-empowered position, while ideal, might not be easily achieved.   Weingarten provides various anecdotal reasons explaining that awareness might not translate into feelings of "control," action might not be easily determined, and witnesses might experience distress or contradictory emotions in a given situation (p. 27).   Even so, Weingarten believes that witnessing with awareness, intention, and compassion need not be seen as something extraordinary and "heroic": "instances of ordinary compassionate witnessing need to become as culturally available to us as heroic acts" (p. 36).   The witnessing archive available on the Witnessing Project's website can serve, I suggest, as one such resource that highlights "ordinary" acts of witnessing.   Weingarten suggests that "ordinary" and compassionate acts of witnessing begin with empathy (and the recognition of a "shared sense of humanity" that connects us to others and their suffering).   In Chapter 2, I explored the importance empathy plays in feeling connected to others, thus increasing our willingness to help (Cohen, 2001).   In the literature, empathy is closely aligned with feelings of altruism (Hofmann, 2000), moral concerns and social responsibility (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Straub, 1989), and caring and justice (Hoffman, 2000).   Both witness.org and IJM appeal to their constituents through ethical appeals, which are constructed on a sense of a shared humanity or community, social responsibilities and concern for the welfare of others, and feelings of compassion and empathy for the suffering of others.   Weingarten

---

[255] Weingarten explains, "Ultimately, every witness position creates consequences for the individual, family, community, and society. Each carries possibilities, challenges, and risks. Although I think it is desirable to be an aware and active witness, this is often a difficult position to achieve" (p. 30).

distinguishes empathy from sympathy: "Whereas empathy is feeling what another feels, or would feel, if she knew her own situation, sympathy is our emotional response to another's situation, often sorrow or concern. Scholars who study empathy believe it is universal, self-reinforcing, and expressed by children as young as a [sic] year of age" (p. 166).[256] Empathy does not, however, require, that we fully understand or know the suffering of the other, as often times the nature of the other's suffering is incomprehensible: "the impossibility of suffering the other's suffering" (p. 219). However, we do not need to experience and know the same kind or degree of suffering to intervene or assist another. For Weingarten, compassionate witnessing can act as the impetus for action when linked to the desire to alleviate another person's suffering.

The other witnessing positions in Weingarten's model appear to be more typical ones that witnesses find themselves in, more so than the witness who is simultaneously aware and empowered to act. In contrast to the aware and empowered witness, the second witnessing position can be seen as the least "desirable" because the individual is unaware and empowered and might undertake actions that can have negative consequences for others. The website states that this position "represents the most toxic condition for others, since a person in this position is unaware of the meaning of what she is witnessing but is empowered in relation to the situation. A person in this witness position is most

---

[256] In this sense, empathy is recognized as a personality trait. Individuals who are classified as having an emotional or personality disorder and who have suffered damage to the amygdala are often incapable of empathic responses. Psychopaths are identified as one such group who fail "to develop conscience and empathic feelings and consequently, because of emotional difficulties, [are] at high risk of developing antisocial behaviour" (Kirkman, 2002, p. 157).

likely to do harm, where 'do' refers to omissions as well as commissions." Specific examples to illustrate the kinds of "harms" that can result from an empowered yet unaware witness would render these descriptions more meaningful. The same holds true for the other witnessing positions. Weingarten's third witnessing position is the most passive of the positions enumerated by the Witnessing Project: the individual is unaware and disempowered. The website contends that the individual does not understand "the meaning and significance of what she is witnessing and therefore does not, for she cannot, act in relation to that which she is exposed." Being aware and disempowered is the last of Weingarten's witnessing positions and it "represents the position that most people experience with the most evident distress. The person is aware of what she is witnessing but feels helpless or ineffective in relation to it." Based on this model of witnessing, it is implied that awareness of oneself as a witness (who can potentially have an impact within a situation as well as on others) can lead to more effective types of witnessing.[257]

THE WITNESS AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE: THE POTENTIAL FOR SELF-TRANSFORMATION

The Witnessing Project offers a therapeutic model for the personal transformation of the (vicarious) witness, differing from witness.org and IJM, human rights organizations which advocate on behalf of victims. As human

---

[257] In *Common shock*, Weingarten refers to "two dimensions" that "influence" witnessing experiences: "context and perceived intent. Regarding the context, it makes a difference if you are the only one who witnesses an event or if there are other people—even one person—with whom to share the experience. Witnessing violence or violation in isolation compounds people's distress. It also makes a difference whether the violence you witness is intentional or accidental. People have a harder time witnessing situations they perceive as maliciously perpetrated than they do harm they perceive as unintentional" (p. 27).

rights advocacy organizations, they are concerned with raising awareness and educating individuals (vicarious witnesses) about human rights abuses, seeking to mobilize their support. Their focus is on victims, and vicarious witnesses are urged to assist victims and alleviate their suffering. For the Witnessing Project, the focus is on the vicarious witness and her suffering, which is described in the literature as secondary or vicarious traumatization and defined as "common shocks" by the Witnessing Project.   All three organizations conceptualize witnessing, and construct who the witness is, in ways that reflect different modalities and practices of witnessing. Witness.org seeks to empower activists (primary eyewitnesses) by providing them with cameras to document human rights abuses. In so doing, witness.org presents visual evidence of injustice, seeking to create, by extension, even more eyewitnesses to human rights abuses. IJM provides another lens through which to interpret witnessing: a faith-based approach, urging Christian witnesses to heed Christ's call to seek justice on behalf of the oppressed. Within this paradigm, Christians are reminded of Christ's command to love their neighbour and be their brother's keeper. The Witnessing Project adds yet another dimension to witnessing. Within its therapy-oriented model, the focus is on the vicarious witness, who can be an eyewitness to violence and/or violation or who learns about traumatic events.   The Witnessing Project is concerned with the "toxic" effects experiencing, or witnessing, violence has on the individual. This shift from victim to witness can be seen, I suggest, as a counterpoint for considering how individuals might transition from being passive or indifferent to the suffering of others to becoming

engaged or mobilized into action. Herein resides the potential of the Witnessing Project. As proposed by the Witnessing Project, awareness of oneself as a witness—one who understands the harms inflicted by witnessing everyday violence—is fundamental to understanding how one can become a more effective witness. The equation, presented by the Witnessing Project, appears simple enough: awareness transforms the passive witness into an intentional and compassionate witness who will act on behalf of victims. However, the Witnessing Project does not provide any insight as to why the average person might be motivated to become an aware and effective witness, and how she might go about doing so on her own initiative. Personal motivation or interest, or perhaps the experience of trauma as a victim or witness, becomes the impetus for self-transformation. Witnessing, within this conceptual framework, is not embedded, in any explicit sense, in larger concerns such as social justice, equality, or human rights. To some extent, witnessing could be seen, within the model of the Witnessing Project, as a moral imperative, in that it stems from caring about others and the desire to help. Grounded within a psychological model based on the provision of counselling services focused on the effects of trauma, it follows that the Witnessing Project designs and delivers courses and workshops for therapists, health care workers, and those who have experienced and been affected by trauma (courses, workshops, and counselling sessions for professionals as well as laypersons). From this perspective, therapists help their clients discover their potential as witnesses (as opposed to victims) who are empowered agents. Individuals who have been traumatized, either directly or

indirectly, might seek a therapeutic model, such as one offered by the Witnessing Project, to make sense of their experience and effect change in their personal lives.

Although its approach differs significantly from witness.org and IJM, the Witnessing Project has adopted a similar strategy with regard to documentation, a theme I identified in my methodological discussion, in its creation of a witnessing archive. Witness.org creates documentaries and makes available an archive of raw footage captured by activists. For IJM, through their legal investigations, they create case files on perpetrators, human rights abuses, and document how victims have been exploited. Visitors to their sites, similar to witness.org, can learn about cases in which IJM has been involved and how it has made a difference in victims' lives. Often, victims' narratives are presented, which, I argue, has the effect of providing a human face to suffering. In the case of the Witnessing Project, it has created a witnessing archive[258] to encourage discursive expressions of self-witnessing and witnessing experiences involving others, which is meant to provide "support, encourage, hope and inspiration to readers everywhere." Individuals share their experiences of witnessing with other witnesses within a social network and community. This idea of an archive or a resource was raised by Clarkson (1996) who proposed some kind of educational resource on bystanding, which would contain "bystander intervention

---

[258] Criteria, outlined in the website, are provided for the submission of experiences from "any four of the witnessing positions and can include the following: "unintentional witnessing, helpless witnessing, compassionate witnessing or some other kind. The account may describe a moment of transformation when a 'small' act shifted a witnessing experience. Or you may write about an intention to witness." Examples of stories found in the archive include the following themes: divorce, death, bullying, abuse, and racism.

stories, histories and researches" (p. 108). The Witnessing Project explains that "the stories, anecdotes, vignettes, moments that are archived [there] will provide support, encouragement, hope and inspiration to readers everywhere." Their archive submission guidelines provide contributors with suggestions for framing their witnessing experiences. Within this broad range of what it means to witness, individuals can bear witness to themselves, in effect, becoming I-witnesses to recalled or remembered experiences and selves (Antze & Lambek, 1996). The use of narrative as a form of therapy is connected to Weingarten's idea of compassionate or intentional witnessing,[259] which, I suggest, is connected to witnessing the other. Witnessing, in this sense, involves the recognition of the other and demands a response (Felman & Laub, 1992; Oliver, 2001). Both witness and audience are brought together in a collaborative process of constructing meaning. For Weingarten, through witnessing we can begin to repair the damage and "disruption" caused by violence and create a "new, revised, honest narrative" (p. 236). In this sense, compassionate witnessing can involve a constant "interplay among telling, listening, reflecting, rudimentary coherence, continuity, and connection" (ibid). Witnessing thus becomes participatory and performative as the witness engages in the construction of meaning and responds to the suffering of another.

While the Witnessing Project does not explicitly invoke a sense of obligation and responsibility to victims in the way witness.org and IJM do, it does

---

[259] Weingarten identifies "three key elements in compassionate witnessing" and notes they "can be learned and practiced": 1) "select a focus for one's witnessing that is doable"; 2) "listening carefully and responding carefully and thoughtfully can make a difference"; 3) "create transitions between compassionate witnessing of others and ourselves" (p. 192).

draw on similar themes of empathy, care and compassion for others, and a shared humanity. It differs in its approach to witnessing in that it focuses on the individual's incapacity to witness effectively, to oneself and to the other, as a result of routine exposure to violence and violation. The Witnessing Project seeks to make individuals aware of the ways in which they are harmed, in effect, traumatized by the effects of violence. Self-awareness becomes instrumental to personal transformation: the passive and often unaware witness can work at becoming an intentional and compassionate witness who responds to others' suffering.

7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

> 'Witnessing' is the term I use for prompting an ethical response that
> will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks
> about justice. (Kaplan, 2005, p. 123)

I use Kaplan's quote to contextualize the larger questions in this dissertation about witnessing and the role of the witness. In this study, I explored the various modalities of witnessing as well as how they are evoked as socio-cultural and discursive practices, employed by human rights organizations in their attempt to transform their constituents into witnesses to human rights abuses and atrocities. Witnessing, I argued, entails an ethical imperative and responsibility to respond to the suffering of others and to defend their human rights. Inherent to witnessing, one finds paradigmatic ideals of social justice and praxis: witnesses do not stand by passively in the face of injustice and suffering. Human rights organizations seek to shape and enforce these moral and political ideals as normative praxis by appealing to a sense of membership within a shared global community. Their appeal and mobilization strategies are designed to empower constituents by providing meaningful and concrete forms of engagement. In becoming witnesses to abuses, constituents can make a difference in the lives of others. Witnessing, I suggest, also entails a praxis of transformation, evidenced through an epistemological shift from passivity to engagement. Within the framework of human rights, witnessing is closely aligned with advocacy on behalf of the oppressed.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the experiential distinction between the eyewitness and the virtual witness. I began with Dallaire and discussed his role as embodied eyewitness, emphasizing the performativity of witnessing practices: as an act of repetition and resistance against forgetfulness, indifference, and passivity. To bear witness is to testify to what one has seen and experienced. Vicarious witnessing, in contrast, is facilitated through media and communications technologies. The spatial (and temporal) distance between the vicarious witness and the event is remediated through representational practices (text and images). The emotional distance, as discussed in the literature, can be minimized by one's ability to imagine the experiences of others and to empathize with them (Cohen 2001, Kaplan, 2005, Keats, 2005). The Internet (and various new media applications) has expanded both our potential to witness events and our sense of community by connecting us to others globally. Human rights organizations build on these connections and employ communications technologies to facilitate opportunities for participation and activism in global causes.

To contextualize this study, I propose that it can be seen as contributing to "witness studies," Douglass and Vogler's (2003) term which includes a diversity of "fields" and approaches "devoted to the topic of witness" (p. 1). These authors note that witness discourses fall under the broader field of trauma studies, which grew out of research on the Holocaust and has since expanded to other disciplines. In acknowledgement of this legacy, I briefly outline significant contributions of the literature on the Holocaust — notably, the use of video

testimonies, the relationship between the survivor-witness and the audience-witness, and the socio-ethical practice of response-ability — and locate the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale as a referent and precursor to later human rights projects. The Video Archive remediates the experience of witnessing trauma vicariously, negotiated through firsthand eyewitness testimony, "I-witnesses," the reconstruction of the "I" made possible through narrative and authenticated by the survivor having been there and having lived through the experience of the Holocaust (Antze & Lambek, 1996). Witnessing, in this context, involves the socio-cultural practice of remembering, a response and responsibility to survivors, despite their dwindling numbers. Witnessing, thus, becomes an acknowledgement of the other (Oliver, 2001). The Video Archive offers a template for the use of technology in negotiating witnessing experiences. This concept of the archive, the need for documentation and creation of a public record, can also be found in later human rights projects which challenge official records and document abuses.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature on bystanding to contextualize the dilemma of individual response or failure to respond to those in need of assistance. While the literature often refers interchangeably to the witness and the bystander, I suggested that an epistemological and praxiological shift distinguishes the witness as one who seeks action on behalf of another. The witness is not simply a passive observer but is responsive, acknowledging her responsibility and relationship with the other (Clarkson, 1996). This notion of an ethical relationship was also emphasized in the literature I explored in Chapter 1

concerning the obligation to survivors. Clarkson raises issues of culpability and moral responsibilities when individuals fail to respond because they can, indirectly, provide tacit approval to perpetrators. Cohen (2001) suggests, however, that strategies of avoidance and denial be seen as normative responses to distressing information (empathic distress and vicarious traumatization) and to the overwhelming volume of information (overload).

The literature emphasized the role emotion (affect) plays and notes the importance of empathy—the ability to imagine what another feels and identification with another's suffering—and its connection to social responsibility and action. Empathy works by engaging the individual's moral imagination and is understood to be a precursor to helping others in distress and alleviating their suffering. Empathy, when tied to prosocial and altruistic motives, forms the basis for engagement (Hoffman, 2000; Bloom & Reichert, 1998). Empathy is also connected to strong social bonds, feelings of responsibility and affinity to others, which Cohen defines as a sense of "fraternity," while Bloom and Reichert invoke the notion of being "our brother's keeper." For Cohen, empathy needs to be aligned to social justice because individuals who see themselves as belonging to a shared moral community which upholds egalitarian values and respect human rights are more likely to care about the welfare of others and be willing to act on their behalf. In this chapter, I also discussed recent trends within contemporary culture to market and brand empathy through populist appeals such as "doing good feels good." For Hoffman (2000), empathic motivations can be considered to be altruistic and aligned with prosocial motives when its "main objective is to

alleviate the victim's distress," though "empathy-based helping makes people feel good by reducing empathic distress and providing empathic relief" (p. 33). Feeling good is achieved only when one helps the other (Hoffman, p. 35). Within contemporary articulations of altruism, both elements are brought together with an apparent emphasis on the rewards for the giver. One can be cynical of this seemingly self-serving strategy that undercuts the motivations for altruistic action. However, this trend has been utilized to mobilize constituents to become involved in various campaigns to make a difference in the lives of others. I continued this discussion of new forms of altruistic appeals and possibilities for reimagining global citizenship at the end of Chapter 4.

Human rights organizations seek to strengthen individuals' altruistic commitments and appeal to their membership in a shared moral and political community. Understanding the role affect plays, these organizations employ representational strategies designed to evoke empathy by personalizing suffering and direct subsequent feelings of distress and outrage into action. These organizations uphold the utopian ideal of a shared community of individuals (global citizens) whose rights, when abused, need to be defended. In this respect, human rights organizations function as "deliberate witnesses" and ally themselves with the marginalized and the oppressed. Cohen observes that human rights activists adopt a moral ideal and "discourse about global suffering [that] is largely the product of the moral imagination" (p. 164). They strive to enforce the ideal that the suffering of others ought to "concern us all" and therefore make their constituents aware of human rights abuses and empower

them to seek action (ibid).   Cohen refers to the "empowerment chain" which human rights organizations employ to mobilize their constituents, focusing on what individuals can do and how they can make a difference (p. 219).   In my analysis of select organizations' websites, I discuss how they incorporate these strategies in their work.

I concluded Chapter 2 by reviewing various articulations of witnessing I identified in the literature. Witnessing is variously described as an ethical praxis of social responsibility, a commitment to social justice, and the acknowledgement of relationships with others not determined by kin (a shared human community). For Kaplan (2005), witnessing involves the "public recognition of atrocities" (p. 122).   Further, witnessing can be transformative in the sense of a shift in individuals' perceptions about "the world" and "justice," which I suggested is a theme that emerges in the websites I analyzed. This theme of transformation is also echoed by human rights organizations which call their constituents to action to change the oppressive conditions of victims. Witnessing can thus be seen as an ethical practice of engagement, and witnesses become agents of change. Borrowing from Cohen, I argued that witnessing refers to the moral obligation to know ("duty to know") and acknowledge the suffering of others.   As a public gesture, it can begin with a "denunciation," as Boltanski (1999) suggests, and as these websites demonstrate, become strategies for involvement and action. To sum up some of these common threads, I proposed that witnessing can be seen as a composite practice of engagement: intellectual (to be aware/know), psychological (to be affected and to care), and participatory (to respond/act).

In Chapter 3, I outlined my methodological approach and procedures, building on theoretical insights from the previous chapter. I employed Foucault's archaeological, analytical framework and his notion of discourses as practices to sketch what witnessing discourses entail. Employing this analytic framework allowed me to map multiple designations and practices, as well as shifts, of the concept "witness." For the purposes of this research, I refined my interests to include the following models based on the websites I analyzed: the eyewitness, Christian witness, and the witness as empowered agent (personal transformation). Building upon this approach, I explored the symbolic field of witnessing as a "key word" (Williams, 1976), from its early associations with Christian martyrs, testimony, and knowledge (cognizance and awareness). Next, I traced the historical and cultural construction of the eyewitness and distinguished between the "compurgatory" or "ethical" witness, who swears to a relationship with other persons in the same ethical community, and the "experiential" or "epistemic" witness, who came to replace the "ethical" witness within legal practices (Frisch, 2004). The "experiential" witness, Frisch observes, testifies about her knowledge of an event. Through this examination of witnessing practices, I situated witnessing as a socio-cultural phenomenon that informs human rights praxis, adopted to advance the advocacy strategies of witness.org, IJM, and the witnessing project. These practices, I argued, have been remediated by technology and transform vicarious (and virtual) audiences into witnesses of human rights abuses.

Building on the theoretical insights of Bolter and Gruisin (1999), I discussed the role of technology and how it has facilitated and transformed human rights work. New digital technology appropriates and refashions older media and remediates the experience of the real, placing users within the moment. The hyper-immediacy of the Internet and communications technologies has enabled human rights organizations to form new partnerships with local activists, NGOs, and governments, disseminate information at a more rapid pace, and mobilize constituents. Referring to contemporary examples of digital activism, I argued that technology has democraticized, to a large extent, participation for average citizens and has expanded social networks and communities. However, I noted that technology and the Internet are not infallible instruments. A "digital divide" exists, with access limited to individuals in industrialized societies. Additionally, I observed that greater availability of information about human rights abuses and injustice has not translated, for the most part, into action on behalf of others.

In employing technology, human rights organizations seek to expose injustice and suffering, defend the rights of the oppressed, and to urge constituents to become involved in this struggle. I contextualized the nature of these ideological and political struggles waged in the name of truth and justice and argued that human rights organizations are engaged in oppositional strategies against official (state), hegemonic discourses. Truth and justice are contested sites, and human rights organizations attempt to legitimize their roles through solidarity with the marginalized. In this sense, power functions not only

at the discursive level, but within the framework of human rights, it is grounded within the practices of states as coercive and repressive forces against the vulnerable. This notion of power as abusive is embedded within the approach human rights organizations adopt, engaged as they are in defending the rights of victims. Incorporating these perspectives into my study, I analyzed how the different websites function as exemplars of witnessing practices: exposing injustice through their campaigns, educating, and mobilizing constituents.

To ground these theoretical discussions about witnessing, I adopted a case study approach to interrogate what witnessing offers as a framework for understanding human praxis, how human rights praxis provide a vehicle for witnessing practices, and connect witnessing to a praxis of engagement and social responsibility. I employed content analysis to identify themes and patterns connected with witnessing strategies, first exploring how each site interpreted and adopted witnessing to reflect their human rights agenda, followed by a cross-sectional analysis of shared characteristics among these sites. I reviewed the mission statements of witness.org, IJM, and the witnessing project, their history, narrative strategies and appeals, campaigns, and options for involvement. The findings support many of themes outlined in the literature: injustice/harm is caused by the abuse of power; appeals to respond to the suffering of others are framed as one's ethical responsibility to care about victims and their human rights; the need to educate and make audiences aware of human rights abuses (knowledge); the importance of documentation; the use of individual narratives to personalize suffering; and the need for mobilization (action/participation). These

observations guided my in-depth analysis of each site in the chapters that followed.

To make sense of the raw data, I constructed analytical categories to distinguish between various witness positions. In this way, I identified three categories of witnesses: primary (eyewitnesses), professional (experts), and vicarious/virtual witnesses. These are not discrete categories, I explained, and witnesses can occupy multiple roles. Witnessing, I argued, is dynamic, performative, and participatory. Human rights organizations seek to transform their constituents by empowering them to become "I-witnesses" who can effect change in the lives of others (appeals to make a difference in the lives of others) and their own (by becoming advocates). For example, witness.org provides activists with cameras to document injustice, and, by extension, transform their virtual constituents into eyewitnesses. IJM embraces a model of legal and biblical justice to defend human rights and urges their constituents to heed Christ's call to seek justice and become witnesses in His name. The Witnessing Project's objective is to make individuals aware of the harmful effects of violence and violations and their potential for transformation as witnesses: from passivity to empowerment. I concluded that these websites adopted models of the "experiential" witness (the importance of eyewitness testimony to expose injustice) as well as the "ethical" witness (the emphasis on reinforcing ethical relationships within a global community).

Adapting the framework of Wertsch's (1998) pentad, I constructed a comparative analytic template to organize the main characteristics and activities

235

of these websites. I identified the agents or actors (who), the action they undertake (what), tools (how), and advocacy (their purpose). This template enabled me to highlight the similarities and differences across these websites as well as identify structural and thematic patterns. I demonstrated that witnessing has been remediated via digital technology. In the case of witness.org, "seeing as believing" was adopted as an overarching theme to transform constituents into a larger community of eyewitnesses. IJM employed a faith-based model to seek justice, urging its constituents to love their neighbours and seek justice on their behalf. The Witnessing Project provided a different approach, embedded within a psychological model that focuses on personal awareness and empowerment to minimize the harmful effects of witnessing violence and violations.

One of the strengths of this study, I suggest, is its focus on and analysis of these websites as a source of data. While the data can be seen as "unobtrusive and non-reactive" (Faubert, 2008, p. 141), websites are constantly being redesigned and updated, and some links become inaccessible or defunct. During the course of this study, both witness.org and IJM underwent significant changes in both their design and content. By focusing exclusively on the content or data contained within the websites, I could offer only limited insights regarding these changes. To add further support to a study such as this one, interviews with directors and other staff of these organizations could be used to validate the data from the websites. Through interviews, the researcher could uncover participants' decision-making processes concerning their focus and activities, their conceptual framework (how they conceptualize witnessing and its

relationship to advocacy and activism), and the role technology plays in witnessing. To further explore the theme of exposing human rights abuses, particularly the emphasis on vision (seeing) and (counter)surveillance—where the gaze of activists is turned on perpetrators—other human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Gendercide Watch could be included.

My analysis of witness.org in Chapter 4 showed that technology was integral to advancing this organization's agenda, premised, initially, on the cliché "seeing is believing." WITNESS empowers both grassroots activists with cameras to document injustice and its constituents to become witnesses and advocates. Within this model, one witnesses others' witnessing. The goal of the organization is to create a global community of eyewitnesses to injustice. Building on the themes I explored in the literature, I described how WITNESS employs visual evidence to counter official discourses and to expose injustice, turning the gaze on perpetrators. Its emphasis is on vision (physical and moral). WITNESS works on the assumption that once one sees and knows about injustice, one will be "inspired" to act. The theme of ethical and social responsibility echoes throughout its work. The "empowerment chain" (Cohen, 2005) I identified in the website can be summed up in the following equation: seeing-thinking-acting. By urging its constituents to confront ("look" at) injustice, WITNESS seeks to implicate visitors to this site with the knowledge of abuses and compel them to take action. Knowledge then becomes the basis for action. The implicit suggestion is that to do nothing is to be complicit, in the sense that victims continue to face abuse at the hands of perpetrators.

In my analysis of witness.org, I discussed the limitations of the assumption that seeing and knowing about human rights abuses will lead to action on behalf of the oppressed. I interrogated how WITNESS once employed the Rodney King incident to bolster its claim that "seeing is believing." In its updated design, WITNESS no longer adopts the cliché as its model or refers to the Rodney King incident to frame its argument. Instead, it asserts that images alone are "not enough to stop human rights violations." Previous to these changes, I argued that WITNESS did not demonstrate how images, which it equates with indisputable truth, alone will transform its constituents into witness-advocates. One can reasonably assume that, in advocating on behalf of victims, WITNESS acts as an advocate, seeking to evoke feelings of responsibility and commitment in its constituents, and provides avenues for effective intervention—how they can become involved and what they can do.

Another area I examined was the role of technology, which featured prominently in WITNESS's campaign against injustice. The emphasis on technology, specifically video cameras and digital technologies, to effect change and transform human rights work informs WITNESS's projects. In my analysis, I noted how technology has indeed facilitated various aspects of human rights work as well as some of its limitations, for example, the "digital divide" that still exists for individuals: availability, access, and literacy in new media are not realizable goals for many. Technology alone is not a panacea for the poor who still have little access to economic resources and rights. In WITNESS's redesigned version, less emphasis is placed on technology, which is no longer

described as the "arsenal in the struggle for justice." Instead, technology is seen as a tool, and the emphasis is on providing training for activists in filming/documenting abuses.

I concluded my discussion of WITNESS by observing changes to the website. WITNESS still embraces the importance of visual evidence, but its message is a more commanding call to action: "See it, film it, change it." The theme of change permeates throughout: creating "lasting change" for those whose rights are being abused and urging constituents to make a difference in the lives of others. The emphasis has also shifted from perpetrators to focus more on victims and their "stories," which are meant to evoke an emotional response. Suffering, in this way, becomes less abstract and more "personal," perhaps more real. This theme of making a difference, I proposed, informs many contemporary appeals to altruistic action and new forms of philanthropy, echoed in the mantra "doing good feels good." Individuals are provided with concrete actions they can take to make a difference in the lives of others, as well as, I suggested, in their own lives. The theme of transformation (structural and personal) is embedded in these appeals. Becoming involved in charitable work, service (performing good works) has become "cool" and trendy, marketed as "new" forms of citizenship. Seen in this way, human rights organizations like witness.org can serve to remind individuals of the need to "do good," what forms of actions they can take, and provide individuals with concrete examples of how their efforts have made a difference and helped lives.

In Chapter 5, I focused on IJM, a Christian-based organization, and its approach to justice and human rights. Similar to witness.org, IJM advocates on behalf of those lacking the power and financial resources to make perpetrators accountable, employing documentation (case work), intervention, and education as its tools. IJM identifies injustice as the abuse of power and uses legal action to assist and rescue victims, fulfilling its Christian mandate to serve others— following Christ's call to love one's neighbour and to seek justice on her behalf. This model is based on the actions of the Good Samaritan who embodies compassion for a stranger without the expectation of reward. I analyzed how this model of action and service is employed by IJM and functions as a reminder to Christians to be active in their faith. To witness is to seek justice, legal and biblical. Biblical justice, IJM explains, is rooted in compassion and service to those in need. Social responsibility, in this paradigm, is premised on Christian faith and teachings. Christians are urged to be their brother's keeper and to seek solidarity with the oppressed. Witnessing, I argued, is performative within this framework as Christians fulfill their duties to their faith by doing "good works" and spreading the "good news" (the Gospel). Here, service is aligned to advocacy. I situated witnessing as dialogic praxis, whereby Christians are reminded to speak out against injustice and defend the rights of the marginalized. In this sense, witnessing can be seen to share and inform human rights objectives. IJM thus seeks to empower Christians, reminding them to put their faith in action.

While IJM presents action or service on behalf of others as an ideal Christians are meant to embody, it acknowledges that their Christian constituents

240

face several challenges. IJM observes that Christians live in a fallen world and often despair, tuning out and shutting off disturbing information. IJM differs in its approach to witness.org in its conceptualization of technology, blaming "technology" for the "dehumanizing" way it portrays images of suffering. Unlike witness.org that placed a certain faith in images, IJM's position is that images alone portray little "substance" or "meaning." IJM thus makes sense of these images for its constituents, by personalizing and contextualizing suffering and bringing victims' narratives to the fore. The website offers cases/narratives featuring victims, the nature of their abuse, and how IJM has intervened on their behalf. Making its constituents aware of suffering and injustice, IJM implicates them explicitly, asking, rhetorically, if "it is right to do nothing?" Within IJM's paradigm, Christians have an imperative to heed "Christ's call to love their neighbours." Christians are thus urged to become involved and are provided with opportunities for action.

IJM, like witness.org, has also updated its website. It shifted its focus from perpetrators to victims, now identified as the poor who are more vulnerable to "violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression." The connection between poverty, which I broadly referred to as economic rights or security, and exploitation represents a substantive shift in IJM's previous discourse. Further, IJM places the onus on "the Church" as a homogenous and collective body to return to its roots as it were: Christian notions of charity and service to the poor. IJM's call to action has shifted from individual Christians to "the Church," urging it to become a leader and advocate ("the Justice Church") for the poor and

powerless. However, the message of loving one's neighbour remains integral to its mission. Specifically, IJM informs Christians that "faith in action" involves "bringing freedom from oppression to the poor around the world," a radical message that can be traced to Christ's role as advocate for the powerless. The role of the "Justice Church," composed of a "network of diverse congregations," is to educate, mobilize, and lead its congregations in the fight against injustice. IJM thus embraces a leadership role, for this new Church and Christians. Additionally, IJM seeks "civic partnerships" with secular audiences. While a Christian mandate is still present, I suggested that IJM makes its organization appear, potentially, more accessible because its message has become more inclusive (Christian and secular audiences alike). Though it is unclear how IJM will fulfill its new mandate, its mission and purpose reflect a broader human rights agenda than its previous iteration.

In Chapter 6, I explored the Witnessing Project's model for personal transformation and action. Witnessing is conceptualized as a process of self-transformation whereby passive, unaware, and vicarious witnesses to traumatic events can become intentional witnesses who are empowered to intervene and assist those in need. Unlike witness.org and IJM which focused on victims of human rights abuses, the Witnessing Project focused on the vicarious witness and the effects of vicarious traumatization, referred to as "common shocks." The premise of the Witnessing Project is that violence has become ubiquitous, and individuals are harmed from frequent exposure to violence. Its objective is, therefore, to provide individuals with "tools" to cope with the effects of

experiencing, or witnessing, violence. While witness.org and IJM are advocacy-oriented and seek to mobilize their constituents to take action on behalf of others, the goal of the Witnessing Project is self-awareness and empowerment of the individual. Underlying this approach is a sense that individuals first need to be made aware of the effect(s) witnessing violence/trauma has on them (to witness the self)—and to minimize its harmful effects—before they can be empowered to help others.

The Witnessing Project outlined its therapeutic model for personal transformation, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, decision-making, and possibilities for action. Within this typology of "intentional" and "compassionate" witnessing, four witnessing positions are identified by the Witnessing Project, based on whether the individual is aware-unaware and empowered-disempowered. These positions, in relation to what one is witnessing, dictate how a witness interprets and assesses a situation, her role, and formulates a response. The website offered few explanations and examples to illustrate how the model works, and how witnesses might become motivated to become intentional witnesses. Although the Witnessing Project adopts a different approach from witness.org and IJM, I identified several key themes that were shared by witness.org and IJM: empathy, compassion, and the recognition of a shared humanity. In my analysis of the Witnessing Project, I suggest that empathy is connected to a willingness to help others, and feelings of compassion are based on the recognition of a shared humanity. Based on its witnessing model, the Witnessing Project seeks to educate, and make the individual aware,

of the harmful effects of violence and to empower witnesses to become agents of change through personal transformation.

In all three websites, education is highlighted to various degrees. Both witness.org and IJM make explicit their objective to inform and educate their constituents about human rights abuses. Witness.org refers to outreach programs to schools and universities, and IJM mentions its affiliations with groups on campuses. For the Witnessing Project, its goal is to educate individuals about the harms of exposure to violence. As witnessing exemplars, they provide opportunities for thinking about pedagogical practice and how witnessing might inform different projects. In Chapter 2, I refer to several authors (Straub, 1989; Clarkson, 1996) who cite the need for programs highlighting various aspects that broadly encompass witnessing perspectives and practices. Building on these ideas, in the following section I discuss two educational programs within British Columbia's school system which adopt some of the central components of witnessing discourses and practices, namely, the role of empathy and its connections to social justice and citizenship.

WITNESSING AS PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE: CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

In Chapter 2, I explored the importance of empathy as an integral component of moral development, altruism, and caring relationships. The research emphasized the role empathy plays in overcoming bystander passivity through the acknowledgement of connections to others (social bonds) and the desire to assist others in need. Both Cohen (2001) and Hoffman (2000) observe that empathy derives its potency when aligned with social justice principles. In

other words, one's concern for the welfare and the rights of others is closely connected to one's awareness of obligations to others. While the ability to imagine what another experiences is an important first step to involvement, individuals also need to acknowledge their social responsibilities which require them to intervene on the behalf of others in distress. Bloom and Reichert (1998) affirm that altruism can be "modeled, learned, taught, and reinforced" (p. 91). In this respect, altruism can be understood as another social and interactional skill that can be learned. In a similar vein, schools and employers alike stress the value of developing social and/or emotional intelligence. The implication(s) for developing a pedagogical praxis of witnessing lies, as the literature suggests, in the recognition that qualities such as empathy, altruism, and social responsibility are not simply innate abilities but social skills that can be learned. Both Clarkson (1996) and Straub (1989) recommend education on bystander passivity and its effects, with Clarkson raising the possibility of a course on "bystander intervention training" designed and delivered along the lines of First Aid courses offered by Saint John's Ambulance (p. 108). Two such programs are available in select Canadian schools, which focus on the importance of empathy, social justice, and citizenship: The Roots of Empathy (across Canada) and Social Justice 12 (British Columbia). These programs highlight the pedagogical possibilities for witnessing and advocacy.

I chose these two school-based programs to illustrate the pedagogical possibilities for witnessing. Within the parameters of this study, I can provide only a brief overview, but these two programs offer different ways of increasing

students' awareness about their relationships with, and responsibilities to, others, and their roles within their communities. Witnessing within these educational contexts can be seen as a remediation of the social subject through initiatives which seek to promote the value of relationships and the importance of social responsibility. Within the formalized setting of the classroom, this subject is transformed over time, as part of a broader educational project, into a responsible citizen. Less formal approaches to education are embraced by the three websites I examined. Education is connected to awareness about human rights abuses, and witnessing in these contexts becomes linked to social consciousness and ethical action. Witness.org, IJM, and the Witnessing Project, bear some similarity to these two educational programs, in that they aim to transform the social subject from one who is passive to one who is an aware and empowered to take immediate action on behalf of others. Roots of Empathy seeks to remediate relationships through empathic interactions with an infant. Social Justice 12, an umbrella course that addresses human rights and citizenship, introduces students to concepts such as equality, injustice, and human rights. Students are provided with the historical background of the unjust treatment of various groups, introduced to Canadian legislation, and role models. An added, applied component for formulating an action plan to address injustice is also mentioned.

Roots of Empathy adopts an approach for developing empathy and caring relationships through interactions with an infant and his parent—parenting and "infant safety" are embedded within the program. Empathy becomes a

cornerstone that is seen as "central to competent parenting and successful relationships in all stages of life." It also encourages prosocial behaviour and can lead to the development of nurturing, caring relationships, minimizing aggression and bullying that so many students experience directly and vicariously in their lives. Social Justice 12, in contrast, asks students to be critical about and reflective about injustice and its consequences by being able to identify the causes, grounds on which individuals are discriminated, and as well as the consequences. While "age, race and ethnicity, religion, mental and physical ability, political belief, sex, and sexual orientation" are identified as "specific characteristics" for which a person might be discriminated, "sexual orientation" has been singled out as controversial topic for parents. The focus on historical as well as current cases of discrimination in Canada means that students are asked to critically assess gains made as well as current forms/practices of discrimination and injustice. The history and creation of Social Justice 12 represent the struggle against discrimination and the continued need for an engagement with justice and human rights.

Roots of Empathy (hereafter referred to as ROE),[260] a program designed to increase "social/emotional competence" and "empathy" in children, is employed as a strategy to minimize aggression and bullying. It is delivered to children from kindergarten to Grade 8 and focuses on a model of "experiential literacy" through

---

[260] All quotes are taken from www.rootsofempathy.org, which I retrieved on February 9, 2009. This program is also "delivered in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States." The program was developed by Mary Gordon, president, in 1996, who states that "Educations is the most effective peace-building institution in the land. Our schools serve as our Ministry of Peace."

interactions with "a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom every three weeks." A Roots of Empathy instructor, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, helps children "identify and reflect on their own feelings and feelings of others," which builds empathic awareness and understanding: "The cognitive aspect of empathy is perspective taking and the affective aspect is emotion." Additionally, ROE makes the connection between empathy and "responsible citizenship and responsive parenting." ROE identifies empathy as essential to building "more respectful and caring relationships" and claims that its program has been shown to reduce bullying and aggressive behaviours with peers and increase "prosocial behaviours."[261] The program was developed to address the pervasiveness of bullying that children are exposed to directly and indirectly and to build feelings of "social responsibility":

> It is often overlooked that in 85% of schools bullying episodes (Pepler & Craig, 1995) there are onlookers and bystanders. These witnesses, our children, are being adversely affected. Unlike other programs that address bullying or targeting the victim or bully, Roots of Empathy works universally with the whole class. The program teaches perspective taking skills which enable all students to gain insight into how others feel and develop a sense of social responsibility for each other. (Mary Gordon)

ROE, similar to the Witnessing Project, observes that vicarious witnesses are also affected by the violence. ROE bases its approach to non-violence and anti-bullying on "perspective-taking" skills, which encourages students to imagine and "understand what others are feeling," while also encouraging students to "take

---

[261] The website refers to evaluative studies of ROE programs conducted by the University of British Columbia, the government of Manitoba, and the University of Western Australia. These studies compared ROE students to those not enrolled in the program. The findings indicate that ROE students demonstrated "increased social and emotional knowledge; increased prosocial behaviour (sharing, helping and including) with peers (rated by teachers); and decreased aggression with peers (as rated by teachers)."

responsibility for their actions and inactions." This approach, ROE asserts, supports prosocial behaviours and minimizes bullying because children "learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice."

Embedded in Roots of Empathy are several themes I explored in this study. The focus of ROE is on building "social and emotional knowledge," through empathy, while emphasizing a range of other values which include a "culture of caring": students are taught to care about others, as well as "their world and the future." In Chapter 2, I referred to Hoffman (2002) who noted the significance of caring when connected to notions of justice. Hoffman describes caring as "a moral imperative, a fundamental value, a philosophical ideal. It says one must always consider others" (p. 228). This consideration for others and their feelings is embedded within ROE's approach to building healthy relationships. Straub (1989), too, connects caring for the welfare of others to feelings of responsibility and involvement. For ROE, promoting a "culture of caring" is linked to good citizenship. Values described in the website that are important for "civil society" include respect, inclusion, diversity, as well as "consensus and collaborative" skills, thematically organized under the title "participatory democracy." Allowing young children to observe and interact with an infant, ROE believes that children can be taught to be more aware of their own feelings as well as the feelings of others. Through "messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building," students can learn to develop caring relationships and become less aggressive and hurtful in their interactions.

Social justice 12 (hereafter referred to as SJ12) also provides opportunities for students to become more aware of the world in which they live, the importance of justice, and the role they can play in effecting change. The Integrated Resource Package (IRP) provides the following rationale: "The aim of Social Justice 12 is to raise students' awareness of social justice, to enable them to analyze situations from a social justice perspective, and to provide them with knowledge, skills and an ethical framework to advocate for a socially just world" (p. 11).[262] In addition to the pursuit of social justice, the course encourages "social responsibility" and a "commitment" to "work[ing] towards a more just society": "The course includes an emphasis on action, providing opportunities for students to examine models of social change and implement strategies to address social justice" (ibid). SJ12 emphasizes critical thinking and analysis, "ethical reasoning," and empowered action (ibid). Students learn to define, recognize, and analyze injustice, applying their knowledge to various issues and becoming involved in creating a socially just world as "agents of change" (ibid). A "key component" of the course is a "student-created social action plan," which "encourages community membership and collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all members of that community." The course is designed to draw on knowledge students acquired in their social studies courses and provide them with avenues for exploring "cases," "causes," and "consequences of social injustice," the role government and public policies play in "promoting or failing to promote social justice," as well as examining how individuals ("role models")

---

[262] All quotes are taken from www.bc.ca/irp/social_justice12/sj12irp2008.pdf, retrieved on February 8, 2009.

have "fought for justice." Additionally, the course highlights the role of technological competence and literacy, emphasizing communication skills and critical "reflection" on "the role of these technologies in society" (p. 18). While only an elective, SJ12 outlines ambitious and admirable goals. Many of the themes that this course covers are ones I explored in my study: social justice connected to membership in a shared, global community; social responsibility and citizenship; and empowered agents who work or advocate for change.

Interestingly, Social Justice 12 emerged as a response to discrimination and omissions within the curriculum, and has become an exercise in the struggle for the recognition of justice. SJ12 received government approval in August 2008 but has yet to be offered in any high schools in Richmond or Abbotsford.[263] The course has been met with resistance and controversy. Some parents have objected to the course because they believe it "encourages homosexuality."[264] The Abbotsford school board asked for a review of the course, based on the concerns of parents who cited "family values," before its delivery because of concerns that it is "malleable to the individual beliefs of teachers."[265] In response, a march was held to protest the school board's decision to modify the

---

[263] J. Steffenhagen (2009) reviews the conflicts surrounding Social Justice 12 in her blog (http: communities.canda.com/Vancouversun/blogs/reportcard/archive/2009/01/21/richmondpromotes-social-justice-12.aspx), retrieved on February 8, 2009.

[264] Steffenhagen quotes Superintendent Bruce Beairsto who explains that a review of the "learning outcomes" shows that Social justice 12 addresses "discrimination based on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

[265] Steffenhagen cites her colleague Catherine Rolfsen who covered the issue. At one secondary school, "the school rushed to take out parts of the course and expand others, creating a new course called 'Global studies and Active Citizenship,'" which "no longer contains sections on homosexuality, and gay and lesbian rights" in http:communities.canada.com/Vancouversun/blogs/reportcard/archive/2008/09/19/no-social-justice-in-abbotsford.aspx, retrieved on February 8, 2009.

course.[266]   The course is the result of a complaint filed on the grounds of discrimination: SJ12 was "developed as part of an unprecedented agreement between the provincial government and two activists—Murray and Peter Corren."[267]   The Correns filed a human rights complaint against the Ministry of Education for its "fail[ure] to make the B.C. curriculum inclusive of positive and accurate portrayals of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students and same-sex families."[268]   Jenny Sims, former B.C. Teachers Federations President, grounds the human rights complaint within the context of homophobic bullying, which, she argues, is "one of the most persistent problems in schools and on school grounds."[269]   Sims adds, "The fact is, the B.C. curriculum is not reflective of the diverse nature of our communities especially with regard to matters of homophobia and discrimination against sexual minorities."   Faced with a human rights complaint by the Correns, the Abbotsford school board has now decided to offer SJ12 in September 2009 to students who receive parental consent.[270]

Witnessing within these formalized contexts can be seen as a vehicle for developing a gradual awareness, or consciousness, about relationships,

---

[266] Originally scheduled to be a Pride Parade on December 6, 2008, the rally was later called a social justice march because of a lack of support. Chantell Gregg, a student at W.J. Mouat Secondary in Abbotsford, explains that in light of "opposition," "we just decided to call it the social justice rally to include all types of discrimination to make it more Abbotsford-friendly—if you can call it that—so we could gain more support (www.xtrawest.ca/public/Vancouver/Rally-in-Abbotsford-5968.aspx, retrieved on February 8, 2009.

[267] See Steffenhagen's article from September 19, 2008.

[268] For further details, see *BCTF supports Human Rights complaint of Murray and Peter Corren*(http://bctf.ca/NewsReleases.aspx?id=1614) retrieved on February 8, 2009. Jenny Sims, former B.C. Teachers Federation President issued the news release.

[269] The following quotes are taken from *BCTF supports Human Rights complaint of Murray and Peter Corren.*

[270] The decision was made on February 9, 2009 while I was concluding an overview of the controversy. See *Abbotsford school board permits controversial social justice elective* (http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/02/10/bc-abb..., retrieved on February 10, 2009.

responsibility, and social justice. The social subject is remediated and shaped by the curricular objectives of these programs. Unlike the websites I examined, the witnessing experience is not remediated by technology whereby vicarious witnesses are confronted with the suffering of others and called to action. The Roots of Empathy program focuses on the immediacy of intimate interactions to foster caring relationships. In the case of Social Justice 12, the use of technology is mentioned, but it remains open as to how it might facilitate an interactive experience of witnessing as the focus is on technology as a tool to access information.

TECHNOLOGY, NEW MEDIA, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS: MODELS AND IMPLICATIONS

The prominent and organizing role technology plays in shaping and enabling online/digital activism, as embraced by these organizations, was instrumental to this study. New communication technologies and social networks facilitate opportunities for accessing and sharing information, developing new partnerships and collaborations, and engaging in cultural and political practices in unprecedented ways. Praised for its revolutionary and democratizing potential, technology and its various applications inform every aspect of our social and political practices. In Chapter 3, I provided examples of digital activism and discussed how the "decentralization" of technology has increased the potential for individual participation. Moulitsas Zuniga (2008), known for his blog Daily Kos

in the U.S. which features political commentary and analysis,[271] praises communication technologies for "unlock[ing] and facilitate[ing] a genuine democratization of our culture. No longer content to sit on the sidelines as spectators, a new generation of *participants* is taking an active role in our culture and democracy" (p. 1-2, italics in original).[272] For Moulitsas Zuniga, "active participants" have "bypassed" the "traditional gatekeepers" and have become "the first generation that has direct, individual access to the world and to the emerging technologies" and can communicate directly "*with each other*" (p. 8, italics in original). New technologies have transformed and remediated how we access information and communicate with each other and have allowed individuals to participate in new ways in creating and shaping their cultural spaces. With global Internet users "surpassing [the] one billion" mark,[273] and the increased popularity of social networks such as Facebook and the micro-blog service Twitter, the potential for online activism and witnessing practices is still in its nascent stages.

---

[271] On the role bloggers have played in transforming communication and mainstream media, Moulitsas Zuniga notes, "Bloggers have taken the media world by storm, shoving aside self-described "experts" in the technological, political, sports, and entertainment realms. Amateurs are flooding video-sharing sites like YouTube with content. Unpaid musicians post their own original material in websites created for that purpose or on MySpace or Facebook pages" (p. 68).

[272] For Moulitsas Zuniga, technology has facilitated a new social movement: "In tactics and process and strategy, this new movement is unprecedented. Yet in terms of its overall mission, its cultural zeitgeist, it is the successor of many movements before us that spurred great societal advances—universal suffrage, the rise of organized labour, civil rights legislation" (p. 6).

[273] See *Net users top one billion* from www.vancouversun.com/story_print.html?id=1211040&sponsor=, retrieved on January 23, 2009. The article lists China as the country with the largest number of users, followed by the U.S., Japan, Germany and England tied, and France. The most frequented websites were Google, various Microsoft websites, Yahoo, AOL, and Wikipedia. Facebook was the "top social networking site worldwide," with a growth of "127 percent in the past year" and "222 million visitors in December" 2009 alone.

The strategies employed by U.S. president Barack Obama's political campaign strategists are instructive for the various ways new technologies were harnessed to communicate with younger, tech-savvy audiences, fundraise, and provide potential voters with unprecedented access to a candidate through social networking sites like Facebook. Keane (2009) observes that Obama's campaign had "unprecedented success at mobilizing young Americans,"[274] which was borne out at the polls with record numbers of young and first-time voters. Student and grassroots groups also organized independently of Obama's campaign via social networking sites, held rallies, raised funds, which was for many "their first real foray into electoral politics."[275] Mitchell (2009) describes Obama's campaign as the "first" to have been "profoundly shaped—even, at times, dominated—by the new media, from viral videos and blog rumours that went "mainstream" to startling online fundraising techniques."[276] Mitchell adds, "The rules of the game have been changed forever—by technology." Obama began using Facebook as a medium to connect with potential voters "as early as 2007" and has "more than 2 million supporters on Facebook" and "millions more

---

[274] Blogging about the potential for educating and mobilizing young people to become more energy efficient, Keane refers to the Obama's campaign use of new media to reach youth, retrieved from http://thinkmtv.com/044FDFFF009D7A6A000800996455/User/Blog/BlogPostDetail.aspx on January 26, 2009.
[275] Graham-Felsen (2007) provides examples of student organizations which responded to Obama's "multiracial background," "post-partisan rhetoric," and experience as community organizer: "To a civic-minded generation that engages in community service at record levels but generally doesn't vote or trust politics as a force to change the world—Obama's past as a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago resonates" (Retrieved from www.alternet.org/story/48316 on January 26, 2009.
[276] Mitchell is author of *Why Obama won: The making of a President 2008*. Excerpts from his book were retrieved on February 3, 2009, from www.alternet.org/module/printversion/123192. Mitchell attributes Obama's success to his technological competence as well various strategies employed to reach potential voters and subvert negative rumours. McCain, in contrast, was seen as a technophobe with little Internet experience, which I recall was played for comedic effect on *MADtv* by Bobby Lee.

on other such websites": "This is great interaction between politician and the public."[277] The impact of having a profile/page where individuals can be added as friends and post comments made Obama, I suggest, accessible, knowable, and personable to the public. Social networking enables a sense of what I refer to as virtual intimacy: One can learn intimate as well as banal information about friends, from the minutiae of their lives to more significant experiences. While Obama's success has been attributed to the effective deployment of new technologies, Harfoush (2008), a "new media strategist and a member of Barack Obama's digital campaign," presents a somewhat different perspective: "It wasn't about new media; it was about the fact that the campaign gave new media the opportunity to become an integrated part of the communications...I think it helped us to access a lot of people by giving them tools to organize, to create events, to connect with each other and giving them everything they needed, so that when they went off-line they were fully equipped—be it canvassing to talk[ing] to their neighbours."[278] Harfoush stresses the "social" aspect to new media and emphasizes that social media becomes "a tool" to execute the "vision" of any organization or movement.

The challenge for human rights organizations, indeed any organization, is their ability to expand their reach to increasing numbers of constituents who can be mobilized into action. In this study, I outlined various ways that human rights work has already been transformed and remediated by communication

---

[277] This information was retrieved on January 26, 2009, from http://expeditus.com/barack-obama-and-facebook.

[278] Harfoush, a young Canadian "media strategist," was featured in an online interview by Felesky (2008)—retrieved on February 8, 2009 from http//www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/12/04/felesky-rahaf.html.

technologies. With the untapped potential that exists for information sharing,

human rights organizations will need to consider what their roles are in shaping

and participating within this landscape. Information no longer remains within the

domain of traditional media and experts. O'Connor (2009) draws attention to the

fact that "emerging social media are not only supplementing but supplanting the

legacy mainstream media," pointing to examples where those who reported

"breaking news"—from the plane crash in Hudson River and the terrorist attacks

in Mumbai—have been Twitter users.[279] Zuckerberg explains that Facebook's

works on "the concept of 'the trusted referral'": one is more likely to "watch, read,

and engage with [the] content" that is sent from a friend. By extension, one is

also more likely to sign petitions, promote and attend events, and fundraise for

organizations that have been approved by people they know. While features in

mainstream media—television and print—boosted the profiles of witness.org and

IJM, much more relevant might be the incorporation of social network

applications and interactional opportunities for visitors of these websites. As

well, organizations might increase visitors to their websites and mobilize users

through other social networks, no longer simply relying on those already familiar

with their work. Witness.org has since incorporated several new features to its

website: an embedded link to Facebook, a witness blog, a link to a human rights

---

[279] O'Connor researched "what role emerging media might play" in "journalistic trust and credibility" as "a Fellow at Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics and Public Policy. O'Connor interviewed Randi Zuckerberg, a member of Facebook's creative marketing team, who discussed Facebook collaborations with mainstream media such as CNN and CBS in designing applications: "We recently launched a product called Facebook Connect, which allows companies to incorporate Facebook's social tools into their website. Facebook users can log into other sites with their Facebook login and see what content their friends are consuming and activity their friends are taking on that site," retrieved from http://alertnet.org/story/121211 on January 23, 2009.

media website called "The Hub," a media board where anyone can post information, as well as other information sharing applications such as Digg and Del.icio.us. In accepting that "the rules of the game" have already changed, human rights organizations can choose to become key players who can use the technological tools to share their vision and mobilize greater numbers of people to become witnesses to human rights abuses who will act to effect change and make a difference.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, there are several possibilities for future research in the area of witnessing. As I discussed in Chapter 1, "witnessing discourses" have their roots in trauma studies and Holocaust research (Douglass & Vogler, 2003). Douglass and Vogler suggest that "there are increasing signs that we are reaching such a stage in what can be broadly conceived as discourse of witness…as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon" (p. 3). Seen from this perspective, "witnessing discourses" would span across various disciplines, include multiple perspectives, and would entail comparative socio-cultural analyses and practices. Within this study, I argue that witnessing can be seen as a form of ethical engagement and practice and connect witnessing to social justice objectives. Themes of social responsibility, citizenship, and participatory politics are all implied under this general rubric of witnessing, and future studies might explore these relationships as technology and new media enable new social networks and movements and provide possibilities for involvement. Based on the gaps identified in the current literature by several researchers (Kaplan,

2005; Keats, 2005; Weingarten, 2003), there are opportunities for researchers to explore the effects of vicarious or secondary traumatization on (virtual and vicarious) witnesses who are constantly exposed to information, "news," about conflict, war, oppression, violence, and injustice. Future research on witnessing practices can provide further insights into what it means to witness as well as the limitations and challenges of witnessing—building upon witnessing practices located within and outside legal contexts—within cultural forms of expression such as art, literature, theatre, and ritual. These examples are meant to be illustrative, though not limited, to the potential and possibilities for research on and about witnessing. As my own study demonstrates, research on witnessing is multi-disciplinary, inclusive of various perspectives, and has implications for individual, as well organizational and group, practices.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS CITED:

Agamben, G. (1999). *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the archive*. New York: Zone Books.

Agre, P. E. (1997). Building community networks. In P. E. Agre and D. Schuler (Eds.) *Reinventing technology, rediscovering community: Critical explorations of computing as a social practice*, (pp., 165-190). Greenwich, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Alsup, J. (2003). A pedagogy of trauma (or a crisis of cynicism): Teaching, writing, and the Holocaust. In Witnessing the disaster: essays on representation and the Holocaust (M. Bernard-Donal and R. Glejzer, Eds.) (pp.   ). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,

Altheide, D. L. (1987, Spring). Ethnographic content analysis. *QualitativeSociology*, 10 (1), 65-77.

Akerstrom Anderson, N. (2003). *Discursive analytical strategies: understanding Foucault, Kosselleck, Laclau, Luhmann*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. (reprinted 1991). New York and London: Verso.

Antze, P. & Lambek, M. (Eds) (1996). *Tense past: Cultural essays in trauma and memory*. New York and London: Routledge.

Archer, B. (2007, July 14). What makes us care? *The Globe and Mail*, pp. F6.

Axworthy, L. (2000). The mouse is mightier than the sword. In S. Hick, F. Halpin & E. Hoskins (Eds.). *Human rights and the internet* (pp. 16-20). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bailey, I. & Alphonso, C. (2008, December 13). Airport death not caused by tasers, B. C. says. *The Globe and Mail,* pp. A. 6.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). *The dialogic imagination: four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.) (C. Emerson& M. Holquist, Trans). (seventh paperback printing 1990). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Ballangee, J. R. (2001). *Witnessing video testimony: An interview with Geoffrey Hartman. The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.1, 217-232.

Barney, D. (2008, June 7). *Netizens of the world unite. The Globe and Mail Review of Books*, pp, D 3.

Barsotti, N. (2008, December 4). *Rally in Abbotsford in support of Social Justice 12*. Retrieved on February 8, 2009 from www.xtrawest.ca/public/Vancouver/Rally-inAbbotsford-5968.aspx.

Baum, G. (1987). *Compassion and solidarity: the Church for others.* Toronto: CBC Massey Lecture Series, CBC Enterprises.

Berryman, P. (1987). *Liberation theology: The essential facts about the revolutionary movement in Latin America and beyond.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Bloom, S. L., & Reichert, M. (1998). *Bearing witness: Violence and collective responsibility.* New York and London: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press.

Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant suffering: Morality, media and politics.* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bolter, J. D., & Gruisin, R. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding new media.* Cambridge and London: MIT Press.

Booth, W. J. (2006). *Communities of memory: On witness, identity, and justice.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Butler, J. (1993). Endangered/endangering: Schematic racism and white paranoia. In R. Gooding-Williams (Ed.), *Reading Rodney King: Reading urban uprising* (pp. 15-22). New York and London: Routledge

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence.* New York and London: Verso.

Cadell, I. (2007, September 27-October-4). "Dallaire still haunted by his Rwandan devils." *The Georgia Straight*, pp. 83.

Cannon, L. (1998, April 28). Official negligence: How Rodney King and the riots changed Los Angeles and the LAPD. Retrieved June 2, 205, from www.courttv.com/archive/casefiles/rodneyking/interview/LouCannon.

Castro, E. (1986, October). Faith and witness. *The Ecumenical Review,* 38 (4), 447-455.

Chamoiseau, P. (1999). *Childhood* (C. Volk, Trans.). Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.

Clanchy, M. T. (1979). *From memory to written record: England, 1066-1307.* London: Arnold.

Clarke, R. V., Cornish, D. B. (2001). Rational Choice. In R. Paternoster and R. Bachman (Eds.), *Explaining criminals and crime: Essays in contemporary criminological theory,* (pp., 23-42). Los Angeles, California, Roxbury Publishing Company.

Clarkson, P. (1996). *The bystander (An end to innocence in human relationships?).* London: Whurr Publishers Ltd.

Cloud, John. (2007). The gurus of YouTube. How a couple of regular guys built a company that changed the way we see ourselves. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from www.time.magazine/article/0,9171,157021-1,00.html.

Coate, J. (1997). Cyberspace innkeeping: building online community. In P. E. Agre and D. Schuler (Eds.) *Reinventing technology, rediscovering community: Critical explorations of computing as a social practice*, (pp., 165-190). Greenwich, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Coleridge, S. T. (1817). *Rime of the ancient mariner*. Retrieved September 8, 2008, from http: //etext.lib.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/poems/Rime_Ancient_Mariner.html.

Crenshaw, K. & Peller, G. (1993). Reel time/Real justice. In R. Gooding-Williams (Ed.), *Reading Rodney King: Reading urban uprising* (pp. 56-70). New York and London: Routledge.

Dallaire, R., & Beardsley, B., Major. (2003). *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.

Donnelly, J. (1989). *Universal human rights in theory & practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Douglass, A., & Vogler, T. A. (Eds.) (2003). *Witness and memory: The discourse of trauma.* New York and London: Routledge.

During, S. (1992). *Foucault and Literature: Towards a genealogy of writing* (first published in 1992). New York and London: Routledge.

Farino, L. (2007). *Do good, feel good.* Retrieved, April 10, 2007, from http://health.msn.com.

Faubert, J. (2008). *Qualitative research methods in Criminology: Crim 321-3 Study Guide*. Burnaby, British Columbia: Centre for Online and Distance Education, Continuing Studies, Simon Fraser University.

Felesky, L. (2008, December 5). *Social media strategy: inside Obama's online campaign*. Retrieved on February 8, 2009 from http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/12/04/felesky-rahaf.html.

Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York and London: Routledge.

Forgacs, D. (Ed.) (1999). *A Gramsci reader: Selected writings 1916-1935*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1972). The archaeology of knowledge & the discourse on language(A. M. S. Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1985). Sexuality and Solitude. In M. Blonsky (Ed.), *On Signs* (pp. 365-72). Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Frisch, A. (2004). *The invention of the eyewitness: Witnessing & testimony in early modern France*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literature (Number 279).

Gitlin, T. (2006). "The whole world is watching." Retrieved September 25, 2006, from www.vcpress.edu/books/pages/1515001.html.

Golafshani, N. (2003, December). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8 (4), 597-607.

Gordon, C. (Ed.). (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977. Michel Foucault* (C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Gourevitch, P. (1998). *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Graham-Felsen, S. (2007, February 21). Howard Dean 2.0: Obama engages youth on the web. Retrieved on January 26, 2009 from http://www.alternet.org/story/48316.

Green, M. F. (2007, May 12). "What twenty-eight million looks like," The Globe and Mail, sec. D.

Greene, J. M., Kumar, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*. New York and London: Simon & Schuster.

Hall, N. (2009, March 2). "Mountie 'never intended' for Dziekanski to die." Retrieved March 2, 2009, from www.vancouversun.com/1345278/story/html.

Hatley, J. (2000). *Suffering witness: The quandary of responsibility after the irreparable*. Albany: SUNY.

Haugen, G. (1999). *Good news about injustice: A witness of courage in a hurting world*. Illinois and Leicester: InterVarsity Press.

Hays, M. (2006). "From the Rocket to Rwanda." Retrieved August 6, 2006, from www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.200608.wxdevil08/BN.story/Ent.

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hick, S., Halpin, E. F., Hoskins, E. (2000). *Human rights and the internet*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hick, S., Teplitsky, A. (2000). Internet solidarity: Grassroots movement struggles for human rights. In S. Hick, E. F. Halpin & E. F. Hoskins (Eds.), *Human rights and the internet* (pp. 52-64). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hollet, J. (2008). Digital activists target Tibet. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080414.

Hornaday, A. (2002, November 21). A lens on the world. Musician Peter Gabriel provides human rights activists with camera for a cause. Retrieved on October 26, 2003, from w./wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contented=A17688-2002Nov20&notFound=tru 10/26/03.

Howard, R. E. (1995). *Human rights and the search for community*. Colorado: Westview Press Inc.

Humphrey, M. (2002). *The politics of atrocity and reconciliation: from terror to trauma*. New York and London: Routledge.

Ignatieff, M. (1997). *The warrior's honor: Ethnic war and the modern conscience*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.

Ignatieff, M. (2001). *Human rights as politics and idolatry* (A. Gutmann, Ed.). New York: Princeton University Press.

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2001). *The responsibility to protect: Research, bibliography, background*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.

Jay, P. (2008, September). The rise of Facebook activism. Retrieved September 9, 2008, from www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/09/05/f-online-protest.html.

Kaplan, A. (2005). *Trauma culture: The politics of terror and loss in media and literature*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Keane, B. (2009, January 6). *Facebook and YouTube Helped Obama and can help clean energy, too.* Retrieved on January 26, 2009 from http://think.mtv.com/044FDFFFF009D7A6A000800996455/User/Blog/BlogPostDetail.aspx.

Keats, P. (2005, September). *Vicarious witnessing in European concentration camps: Imagining the trauma of another*. Traumatology, 11(3), 171-187.

Kirkman, C. A. (2002). Non-incarcerated psychopaths: why we need to know more about the psychopaths who live amongst us. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 9, 155-160.

Klein, N. (2000). *No logo: Taking aim at the brand bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.

Kleinman, A., Das, V., & Lock, M. (Eds). (1997). *Social Suffering*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Kwak, N., Poor, N. & Skoric, M. M. (2006). Honey, I shrunk the world! The relation between Internet use and international engagement. *Mass communication & society*, 9 (2), 189-213

Lacquer, T. (2001). The moral imagination and human rights. In M. Ignatieff, *Human rights as politics and idolatry*, (pp. 131-136). New York: Princeton University Press.

Landow, G. P. (1992). *Hypertext: the convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

Landy, M. (1994). *Film, politics, and Gramsci*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Langer, L. L. (1991). *Holocaust testimonies: the ruins of memory*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Lanham, R. A. (2006). *The economics of attention: style and substance in the age of information*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press

Lewis, J. (2003). Design Issues. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, Eds.) (2006 reprinted). Thousand Oaks, California and London: SAGE Publications.

Lotringer, S. (Ed.). (1989). *Michel Foucault. Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966-1984* (J. Johnston, Trans.) New York: Semiotext(e)

MacDonald, G. (2007, September 8). From depravity to saving the world. Impact of celebrity activists substantial, experts say. *The Globe and Mail*, pp. A1, A7

Marsh, J. (1999). *Process, praxis, and transcendence.* Albany: State University of New York Press

McAfee Brown, R. (1990). *Gustavo Gutierrez: An introduction to liberation theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

Mc Shane, L. (2007). *"Article casts doubt on 'Genovese syndrome'."* Retrieved on February 10, 2007, from www.theglobeandmail.com.servlet/story/RTGAM.20071001

Mellgren, D. (2008). Cellphones, web spread news of Myanmar: Mobile phones, internet aid pro-democracy activists getting news out about Myanmar. Retrieved in March, 2008, from http://abcnews.go.com

Menlowe, M. A., Mc Call Smith, A. (Eds) (1993). The duty to rescue: the jurisprudence of aid. Aldershot, England and Brookfield, Vermont: Dartmouth Publishing Co

Merquior, J. G. (1985). *Foucault*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Mills, S. (2003). *Michel Foucault: Routledge Critical Thinkers*. New York: Taylor & Francis

Minow, M. (2002). *Breaking the cycles of hatred: Memory, law, and repair*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press

Mitchell, G. (2009, February 3). *How Obama won: The rise of web 2.0.* Retrieved on Febraury 3, 2009, from www.alternet.org/story/123192

Moulitsas Zuniga, M. (2008). *Taking on the system: Rules for radical change in a digital era*. New York: Celebra, a division of Penguin Books Limited

Nafisi, Azar. (2003). *Reading Lolita in Tehran: a memoir in books*. New York: Random House

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide?: civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press

O'Connor, R. (2009, January 20). *Facebook and Twitter are reshaping journalism as we know it.* Retrieved from http://www.alternert.org/story/121211

Oliver, K. (2001). *Witnessing: Beyond recognition.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press

Orentlicher, D. F. (2001). Relativism and religion. In M. Ignatieff, *Human rights as politics and idolatry*, (pp. 141-156). New York: Princeton University Press

Parker, T. K. (2007). Teaching the Holocaust: The ethics of "witness" history. In M. Goldenberg and R. L. Millen (Eds.), *Testimony, Tensions, and Tikkun: Teaching the Holocaust in colleges and universities.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press

Pearce, Tralee. (Oct 7, 2007). Competitive philantropy: 'Good is getting real sexy'. *The Globe and Mail*, pp. L 2

Pierre Claude, R., Hick, S. (2000). Human rights education on the internet: Its day has come. In S. Hick, E. F. Halpin & E. Hoskins (Eds.), *Human rights and the internet* (pp 225-237). New York: St. Martin's Press

Polchin, J. (2007). Witnessing the witness: "Not looking at lynching photographs." In F. Guerin and R. Halles (Eds.), *The image and the witness: trauma, memory and visual culture.* London: Wallflower Press

Power, S. (2002). *"A problem from hell": America and the age of genocide.* New York: Perennial, An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2003). Generalizing from qualitative research. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, Eds.) (2006 reprinted). Thousand Oaks, California and London: SAGE Publications

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., & Elam, G. (2003). Designing and selecting samples. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, Eds.) (2006 reprinted). Thousand Oaks, California and London: SAGE Publications

Rosenblum, N. L. (Intro) (2002). Justice and the experience of injustice. In M. Minow, *Breaking the cycles of hatred: Memory, law, and repair.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press

Roth, L. (2000). Reflections on the colour of the internet. In S. Hick, E. F. Halpin & E. Hoskins (Eds.), *Human rights and the internet* (pp. 174-184). New York: St. Martin's Press

Saramago, J. (2006). *Seeing* (Trans. M. J. Costa). New York and London: Harcourt, Inc

Scheeres, J. (2003). Pics worth a thousand protests. Retrieved October 26, 2003, from www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,60828,00html?tw=wn_tophead_2

Simon, R. I., DiPaolantonio, M. & Clamen, M. (2000). Remembrance as praxis and the ethics of the inter-human. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk/Cmach/Backissues/j004/Articles/s

Sontag, S. (2003). *Regarding the pain of others.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Sottus, E., & Schonveld, B. (2000). *Human rights and the internet* (S. Hick, E. F. Halpin, E. Hoskins, Eds.). New York: St. Martin's Press

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., & O'Connor, W. (2003). Analysis: practices, principles and processes and Carrying out qualitative analysis. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, Eds.) (2006 reprinted). Thousand Oaks, California and London: SAGE Publications

Spivak, G. C. (1994). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams, L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and Post-Colonial theory: A reader*, (pp. 66-111). New York: Columbia University Press

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (third ed.) (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, London: SAGE Publications

Steffenhagen, J. (2009, January 21). Richmond promotes Social Justice 12. Retrieved on February 8, 2009 from http://communities.canada.com/vancouversun/blogs/reportcard/archive/2009/01/21/richmondpromotes-social-justice-12-aspx

Steidle, B. & Steidle Wallace, G. (2007). *The devil came on horseback: bearing witness to the genocide in Darfur*. New York: Public Affairs

Stirland, S. L. (2007). 'Open-source politics' taps facebook for Myanmar protests. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from www.wired.com

Straub, E. (1989). *The roots of evil: The origins of genocide and other group violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (second ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc

Van Butselar, J. (1985). Dialogue and witness. *The Ecumenical Review*, 37 (4), 398-405

Watts, J. G. (1993). Reflections on the Rodney King verdict and the paradoxes of the black response. In R. Gooding-Williams (Ed.), *Reading Rodney King: Reading urban uprising* (pp. 236-48). New York and London: Routledge

Weingarten, K. (2003*). Common shock. Witnessing violence every day: How we are harmed, how we can heal.* New York: Dutton

Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action.* New York: Oxford University Press

Whaley, P. (2000). Human rights ngos: our love-hate relationship with the internet. In S. Hick, E. F. Halpin & E. Hoskins (Eds.), *Human rights and the internet* (pp. 30-40). New York: St. Martin's Press

Wheeler, N. J. (2000). *Saving strangers: Humanitarian intervention in international society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press

Zalaika, J. (2003). Excessive witnessing: The ethical as temptation. In A. Douglass and T. A. Vogler (Eds.), *Witness and memory: The discourse of trauma*, (pp. 89-107). New York and London: Routledge

PRIMARY WEBSITES CONSULTED:

www.ijm.org

www.library.yale.edu/testimonies

www.thewitnessingproject.org

www.witness.org

OTHER SOURCES:

www.askoxford.com. Retrieved on 24 August, 2006

www.bartleby.com

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/social_justice12/sj12irp2008.pdf. Retrieved on February 8, 2009

www.bctf.ca/NewsReleases.aspx?id=1614, *BCTF supports Human Rights complaint of Murray and Peter Corren* (published on July 8, 2005). Retrieved on February 8, 2009

www.cbc/Canada/british-columbia/story/2009/02/10/bc-abb, *Abbotsford school board permits controversial social justice elective*. Retrieved on February 10, 2009

www.cbc.ca/british-columbia/story/2007/11/14/bc-taservideo.html. Retrieved February 1, 2008

www.cbc./canada/british-columbia/story/2007/10/18/bc-taser.html, *Witness blames RCMP, Vancouver airport for death of Tasered man*. Retrieved on January 8, 2009

www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/06/18/taser-report.html

www.cbc.ca/money/story/2005/08/03/adidas-050803.html. Retrieved on September 3, 2005

www.cbc.ca/passionateeyesunday/feature_031102.html. Retrieved on 26 October, 2003

www.clintonfoundation.org/0710007-nr-cf-pr-wjc-bill-clintons. Retrieved on 9 August, 2007

www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVnews/20081014/BC_taser_robert_081 03?_name=&no_ads=, *A woman's regret on anniversary of Taser death*. Retrieved on January 8, 2009

www.thedaymygoddied.com/bios.html, Retrieved on 5 November, 2006

www.ethicalcorp.com/content.asp?ContentID=666. Retrieved on July 23, 2007

www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=t&p=7

www.expeditusmedia.com/barack-obama-and-facebook, *Barack Obama and Facebook* (published on January 15, 2009). Retrieved on January 26, 2009

www.geocities.com/etymoline,t3etym.htm. Retrieved 11, February, 2004

www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.2007928. Retrieved on September 28, 2007

www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080317.*China's exclusion of foreign journalists from covering anti-government protests in Tibet.* Retrieved 17, March, 2008

www.harrybrowne.or/articles/RodneyKing.htm. Retrieved 2 June, 2005

www.hri.ca/hr.ca/hraward/advisors.html. Retrieved on July 23, 2007

www.humanrightsfirst.org (predates www.witness.org)

www.humansecurity.gc.ca/psh-en.asp (Canadian Foreign Affairs). Retrieved on 15 July, 2005

www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/outline.html. Retrieved on 15 July 15 July, 2005

www.ijm.ca

www.liveearth.org. Retrieved on September 26, 2007

www.motlc.wiesenthal.com/text/100/xm0076.html. Retrieved on February 11, 2004

www.notonourwatchproject.org

Oxford Dictionary. (2002). (Shorter edition)

Oxford Dictionary (second edition, volume 20)

Oxford Dictionary (seventh edition)

www.ont.bankruptcycanada.com/goodsamaritan.htm. Retrieved on 27 May, 2007

www.physorg.com/news5749.html, *Scientists explain reality show popularity* (published on August 11, 2005). Retrieved on January 22, 2009

www.porticus.org/bell/bellsystem-ads-1.html. Retrieved on January 25, 2008

www.qp.gov.bc.ca/strateg/stat/G/96172_01.htm, Retrieved on 27 May, 2007

www.rootsofempathy.org. Retrieved on February 9, 2009

www.serendipity.likda/niemoll.htm

www.stephen.lewis.foundation.org

www.topical-bible-studies.org/24-000.htm. Retrieved on 17 August, 2005

www.truthnews.us/?p=877. Retrieved on February 1, 2008

www.un.org/aboutun/charter. Retrieved January 5, 2009

www.un.org/Overview/rights.html. Retrieved January 5, 2009

www2.cs.uregina.ca/tildehpting/research/web/words/history.html. Retrieved on 1 July, 2005

www.vancouversun.com/story_print.html?id=1211040&sponsor=, *Net users top one billion*. Retrieved on January 23, 2009

www.en.wikipedia.org/Levite. Retrieved 29 August, 2006

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duty_to_rescue. Retrieved January 4, 2009

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Aid. Retrieved on September 26, 2007

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/wiki/GoodSamaritan. Retrieved on 25 August, 2006

FILMS AND TELEVISION:

Haugen, G., International Justice Mission, World Vision, World Vision & InterVarsity Press. (1999*). Good news about injustice. A witness of courage in a hurting world*

Levine, A. (2003). *The day my god died*

Rakieten, E. (Executive Producer). (2006, September). *Oprah* [Television broadcast]. Chicago, Il: Global

Rakieten, E. (Executive Producer). (2008, March 17). *Oprah* [Television broadcast]. Chicago, Il: Global

Wintonick, P. & Cizek, K. (2002). *Seeing is believing: handicams, human rights and the news.*