Visual Anthropology

TECHNOLOGIES OF WITNESSING: THE VISUAL CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public

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ABSTRACT This introduction explores some of the broader themes in this special section on the technologies of witnessing. In today's globally mediated world, visual images play a central role in determining which violences are redeemed and which get recognized. Northern human rights activists understand this fact and in recent years have built a transnational communications infrastructure through which "local" actors' claims are formatted into human rights "issues." I discuss the axiom that underpins this infrastructure, the notion that "seeing is believing," and then go on to briefly analyze some of the models (mobilization of shame) and forms (testimony) through which activists mediate their claims. [Keywords: human rights activism, media, visual culture, testimony, witnessing]

The articles in this special section have their origin in a working group that I ran on human rights, media, and religion at NYU's Center for Religion and Media in 2003–04. Triangulating these three terms—human rights, religion, and media—was a challenge for the group. Given the broad scope of the categories, we chose to limit our discussions to northern-based nongovernmental organization (NGO)–generated human rights discourse and practice and to concentrate on the link between rights and visibility in relation to concepts of "testimony" and "witnessing." In terms of religion, we focused largely on Christianity—not as an object of human rights but as part of its foundational history, which in turn enabled us to grasp how the rhetoric of martyrdom and injury inform contemporary human rights activism. We asked ourselves how different media or "mediatized" genres shape testimony and what concepts of "witnessing" are operative in (or through) these various forms. This led us to think about human rights visual culture ("what do human rights look like?") and the role played by representations of suffering in producing solidarity and action. Occasionally, our conversations centered on what Saidiya Hartman (1997) and others have referred to as the "violence of visibility"—that is, the violence inherent in the processes through which individual biographies are converted into social texts (Feldman 2000:54). We, however, were less concerned with the perils of representation (something that studies of mass media do well enough already) than with mapping the broader mechanisms of publicity through which claims are translated into a human rights framework and circulated in the international arena. The following articles reflect this particular endeavor.

PERSUASIVE IMAGES

In today's globally mediated world, visual images play a central role in determining which violences are redeemed and which remain unrecognized. Northern human rights activists understand this fact and, in recent years, have built a formidable transnational communications infrastructure through which "local" actors' claims (often, although not always, from the global South) are formatted into human rights "issues." This new infrastructure is organized fundamentally around the need to internationalize. Whether an indigenous group on a remote island in the Philippines (like the one described by Sam Gregory in this issue) or women in the capital of Argentina, any group wishing to broaden its reach must rely on strategies that will enable it to circumvent governments, armies, corporations, or other entities that are violating rights and to connect with supporters abroad. Foremost among them is the skillful deployment of visual images, especially film and video—in the form of a documentary, raw footage, a PSA, or a clip on a website.

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In recent years there has been a proliferation of organizations and venues dedicated to producing, distributing, and exhibiting rights-oriented media, from those that provide technical training in video production to those that facilitate connections between filmmakers and local grassroots activists to those that aid in distributing and exhibiting human rights media.[1] These organizations and the social practices around them constitute a circulatory matrix, or dedicated communications infrastructure, out of which human rights claims are generated and through which they travel. Comprising multiple layers—commercial, nonprofit, nongovernmental, intergovernmental, and community—which are distinct but often overlap, these circuits provide the scaffolding for the making public of human rights violations. Each of the following articles pays close attention to the processual aspect of how this publicness is achieved—that is, to the social processes through which the visual culture of human rights is produced and circulated. I use the term *visual culture* here in an expanded sense, one that incorporates the dialectical relationship between visual forms and nonvisual forms in different domains. I do so because I think we need to rethink the ways in which we talk about visual culture in order to take into account the changing legal categories and modes of political mobilization that give force to visual media and that simultaneously are constituted by media. Leshu Torchin's discussion of *Ravished Armenia* in this issue directly addresses this point in her analysis of how the film, an example of early cinema, was surrounded by nonvisual practices (public lectures or performances) that were integral parts of the screening of the film. Such a retooling of how we theorize visual culture might enable us to better grasp the imbrication of publicity and politics and the dynamics by which they transform one another. Sam Gregory and Ronit Avni (this issue) bring an important perspective to the task of understanding the production of human rights visual culture because they are themselves activists who are involved in the creation of persuasive images and innovative strategies through which to circulate them. Through their work at WITNESS and Just Vision, these authors have unique insight into the processes through which human rights categories are constructed through media.

Seeing is believing: This axiom underpins the reliance on a kind of documentary visuality that characterizes the new human rights communications infrastructure, with its emphasis on bringing that which is hidden into the light, and its realist insistence on the universal legibility of visual facts. Activists often approach photographs and moving images as transparent mirrors of reality and conflate them with proof; this despite the fact that images always demand interpretation, as countless writers on documentary photography and film have pointed out. The truth status of moving images always depends on critical contextualization, a point perhaps most starkly illustrated by various readings of the Rodney King video footage elicited by the prosecution and the defense during the trials. In his article, Gregory takes up this point, examining the tension that arises between the need to tell transnational stories—stories that are framed for international audiences with little awareness of the local context and which function by inducing feelings of guilt or shame—and the need to resist the "globalization of local images stripped of their meaning" by keeping intact local voices in local contexts. "Visual evidence, the cornerstone of much media coverage, . . . can hold a deceptive immediacy and tends to overwhelm purely verbal arguments," Gregory writes. "It lends itself more easily to the creation of outrage, horror, and indignation: a moral outrage that has the power to overwhelm the potential for bearing genuine ethical witness."

What Gregory is describing is a concept at the heart of most human rights advocacy, which is the belief that publicity can induce compliance with human rights norms on the part of states and other violators. This concept, referred to as the "mobilization of shame," rests on the notion that, by exposing the gap between self-professed norms and behavior, activists can actually "shame" states into changing their behavior.[2] By showing the world what violators are doing, the world will pressure offenders into stopping. Thomas Keenan describes this logic as a kind of "wishful fusion of an Enlightenment faith in the power of reason and knowledge with a realistic pessimism that retreats to shame appropriate to the unenlightened" (2004:436). He goes on to suggest that the dark side of this belief in revelation is overexposure, or what Susan Moeller calls "compassion fatigue" (1999).

When WITNESS was founded by musician Peter Gabriel and the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights in 1992, cameras were given to local human rights activists around the world with the idea that they could document abuses on tape "and demonstrate to the world the validity of their claims against their government."[3] Eventually, activists realized the naïveté of the idea that just by giving people cameras they would be able to capture abuses, not only in terms of the mechanistic assumptions about revelation and exposure but also in terms of how video advocacy actually works. Local activists needed training to know how to create effective representations that would fit into existing mass media protocols. WITNESS responded by focusing on providing these production and communication services to its partner organizations. Gregory's article outlines the process of consultation, which is the engine that drives this form of collaborative advocacy. Starting with each local partner organization's aims, WITNESS helps to design an advocacy campaign that will reach targeted audiences in local arenas as well as in international ones, whether they be a "human rights decision-making body, a government policy-maker, a community, or the global public." What Gregory describes is, in effect, a communications strategy that has the ability for "smart narrowcasting"—a process that entails personalizing messages to specific groups and individuals and reaching them through specialized communication. This approach contrasts with a "dumb" broadcast model in which messages are spread indiscriminately to a larger and much less differentiated audience.[4] The evolution of WITNESS away from a kind of 1990s technophilia and model of change based on the transparency of media to one of brokering

relations between partners, audiences, and decision makers suggests a new hybrid model of advocacy, one that combines traditional shaming techniques in the court of public opinion with more targeted forms of communication that depart from mass media storytelling conventions.

The role of WITNESS as a provider of specialized communications services to groups in need of professional assistance in how to use media to make rights claims is not without challenges, a point Gregory makes when he writes that it is not enough to teach people how to generate outrage over a particular incident. What is needed is a commitment to teach people how to use video in such a way that those who view the material come to understand the underlying structural issues and context in which particular rights are abused. Gregory calls for a "contextualized, embedded video advocacy strategy," one that attempts to grapple with second generation economic, social, and cultural rights and does not rely solely on the "efficacy of the violence and extreme oppression of civil and political rights" to mobilize audiences. In the long run, the adoption of this kind of approach is not only more morally palatable but also more effective.

As a fellow activist and cultural producer, Avni shares Gregory's concern with the need to remain sensitive to local context and structural conditions that underlie human rights violations and political conflicts. Both remain committed to a form of praxis that is focused on respectful partnership with local civilian–citizen groups. However, as founder of the Just Vision project, Avni describes her desire to move away from an human rights framework within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. After working at WITNESS for several years, Avni concluded that the documentation strategies currently in place (esp. with film and video), used without complementary strategies, are inadequate to alter the broader situation in the region. Citing Kenneth Roth's observation that the shaming model works best when "'there is a clear violation, violator, and remedy,"' Avni points out that in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, both sides feel they have legitimate historical claims and such a dichotomizing antagonistic strategy only polarizes, stigmatizes, and further entrenches public opinion, rather than having the intended effect of putting an end to abuses. The model of condemnation and shaming embodied in the piles of documentation produced by NGOs in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza translates into fear, Avni suggests, and fails to account for the degree of rage felt on both sides. Taking her cue from her work at WITNESS, Avni decided to work with "changemakers," individuals who were involved in grassroots activism. It is an approach that has enabled her to embrace peacemaking as a means through which to bring about meaningful change or a remedy. Avni's Just Vision project seeks to document the civilian peacemaking process and in so doing to "cut through the fatigue" as she put it at a presentation at New York University. Implicit in Avni's analysis is the suggestion that at least some segments of Israeli and Palestinian society are exhausted not just with finger pointing but also with the nationalist narratives that have fueled the conflict. Through their imaginings of a more peaceful future, the activists documented by the Just Vision project are in effect trying to construct a postnationalist subject position and model, one that would allow both peoples to move beyond national narratives and the divisiveness that has accompanied them.

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Human rights activism relies heavily on testimony. Testimony is a discourse genre or narrative practice that became a pervasive and powerful tool after World War II, when Holocaust survivors were asked to testify as witnesses to war crimes (Felman and Laub 1992:6). Since then, testimonies have been produced in the context of a large number of historically specific injustices, including forced migrations; genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia; war rape; and resulting projects of prosecution (International Criminal Tribunals) and national confrontation (e.g., South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

Testimony has been progressively refined in terms of how it is produced and circulated. It has become a transnational cultural form, one that plays a crucial role in almost every human rights campaign today. On a very basic level, human rights are about perceived injurious experience. They are about making claims for recognition and redress on the basis of one's humanity.[5] Rights claims are made through the idiom of suffering, and they tend to arrive recoded, in testimonial form, as "sad, sentimental stories" (Rorty 1993:122). Over time, conventions of performance of testimonial narrative have emerged, and they hinge on the presentation of victim's bodies, which elicits sympathy from the audience. Elsewhere I have described testimony as an "intercultural technology" in activist contexts, by which I mean that testimonial practices bring together people across boundaries of difference, putting them into relationship with one another in such a way that obligations are put into play and communities of solidarity are formed (McLagan 2003).

This process of being brought into relation across national and cultural boundaries is explored by Torchin in her article on *Ravished Armenia,* a dramatic silent film released in 1919. *Ravished Armenia* was the centerpiece of a campaign staged by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief to draw attention to the atrocities and genocide against Armenians. An early example of the importance of the mediation of testimony to the creation of politicized publics, the article examines the coming together of new technologies with humanitarian and human rights discourses, which at the time were much less distinct from one another than they are now. The film was a coproduction of commercial and quasi-Christian–quasi-humanitarian–human rights interests. Torchin traces the film's circulation through these intersecting networks, noting how the film transformed a distant crisis into an issue meriting the attention of U.S. and British government officials as well as general movie-going audiences. She analyzes the ways in

which the film—and the editorials, cartoons, and opinion pieces that came out around the film—hailed a sort of latent Christian witnessing public through their reliance on familiar tropes of martyrdom and biblical iconography.

The film is based on the written testimony of a young Armenian woman who escaped the genocide and made it to the United States. Eventually, a Hollywood producer bought up her story and a screenwriter was hired to help turn her first-person life story into a marketable script. Torchin notes how the film combines "the peculiar mix of sexual stimulation with persecution and martyrdom," describing a scene in which Aurora Mardiganian, the young woman on whose testimony the film is based, reenacts the brutal impaling of women by Turks with "little pointed crosses." *Ravished Armenia* simultaneously titillates and disgusts audiences, and in so doing, the film constructs and asserts Mardiganian's moral capital out of suffering. Moral capital is a critical component of the process by which certain individuals become "nodes in global identifications" (Nelson 2001), persons perceived to embody moral values or ideals to which we aspire and which inspire our solidarity. In the case of *Ravished Armenia,* the heroine's display of virtue and endurance in the face of horrifying atrocities turns her into a martyr, one that Western and largely Christian audiences were expected to save. Although politics in the moral register are obviously problematic, Torchin's article reveals that already by the early 20th century, movements such as the nascent struggle for human rights and international humanitarianism were dependent on the circulation of affect-intensive images and narratives, such as testimony, to create a sense of connection to a place or project.

Clearly, in other words, Armenia—and the response to it at the time—was predictive of the situation we find ourselves in today. Both Gregory and Torchin are interested in how testimony circulates—in the formation of witnessing publics, or ethical–political communities, through the circulation of affective images and stories of human rights abuses. The campaign organized around *Ravished Armenia* rested on the intersection of overlapping commercial, activist, and Christian networks in Europe and the United States. As the film moved through and across these various networks, the Armenian genocide became an object of international politics. Torchin focuses on the specifics of this social process, demonstrating how the media around the genocide managed to establish the importance of the situation to outsiders. The strange bedfellows brought together by the campaign against abuses of Armenians do not just foreshadow the "unholy alliance" of faith-based organizations, commercial media, and U.S. foreign policy that we have seen recently in Africa and Asia around AIDS, the persecution of Christians, and the trafficking of humans; they, in fact, reveal the deep historical roots of the rapidly liquidating coalitions that characterize most all forms of activism today.

Avni's work, however, suggests an altogether darker aspect of the visual and narrative culture of human rights witnessing. She suggests that the circulation of testimonies about human rights abuses in certain situations actually leads to a stratified, mass-mediated economy of suffering, one in which victimhood is reified and fetishized. Avni and Gregory both remain sensitive to the deeply problematic role of the global mass media in perpetuating the very human rights problems on which they report, whether it be "hotel journalists" who air drop in for a quick walk around and sound bite from a militant representative of one side or another (Avni), or editors' ignorance of what human rights are actually as a legally binding framework (Gregory). As northern activists, they are aware of the dilemmas of those caught between their accountability to their partners (wherever they may be) and the need to engage in media management, which by definition forces them to become more responsive to northern agendas.

Torchin's argument is that there is a fit between the emergence of nascent forms of activism around humanitarian and human rights concerns and the rise of new visual technologies—namely, early cinema—and that this creates the possibility for the formation of new political publics. The notion that political publics are historically tied to particular media forms is manifest in the work described by the other authors as well. Both Avni and Gregory write about the development of innovative strategies of witnessing that are dependent on the widespread adoption of home or consumer video technologies (and eventually digital technologies). Taken together, the articles underscore the dialectical relationship between what visual media is available—be they chapbooks, lithographs, photographs, film, or video—and the creation of new platforms for action.

NOTES

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1. For an analysis of this emergent infrastructure, see McLagan 2005.

2. See Keenan 2004 for an analysis of this concept.

3. This quote is from the WITNESS website, www.witness.org, accessed September 29, 2005.

4. For a description of how this model works in the U.S. political arena, see Rosenberg 2004.

5. The literature on human rights theory is large. For a recent collection of essays on the topic from a humanities perspective, see South Atlantic Quarterly (Summer 2004) 103(2).

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Transnational Storytelling: Human Rights, WITNESS, and Video Advocacy

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ABSTRACT Video is increasingly utilized by human rights groups as a component in their advocacy strategies. This article looks at how video is used for a range of local, national, and transnational human rights audiences—both traditional and alternative. Drawing on a case study from the Philippines, it considers the challenges and issues faced by WITNESS (www.witness.org), its locally based human rights partners, and other similar organizations as they create and use video as visual evidence, testimony, and moral story before local, international, and transnational human rights audiences. These challenges include the contextualization of stories and sight bites, dilemmas of moving testimony between advocacy and media arenas, and the difficulties of establishing an ethical relationship, a community of witness, at a distance. This article is written in a personal capacity, although it draws on my experiences working as Program Manager at WITNESS. [Keywords: video, human rights, advocacy, WITNESS, testimony]

INTRODUCTION

> This will provide evidence of what actually happened. In the past there were incidents where we were harassed and yet it was us who was summoned to court. We are hoping that whenever we are assaulted, we can use the video to support any case we could submit in court.
>
> —NAKAMATA et al. 2001

> This camera means that someone in this world cares about us, about our struggle, seeing this camera here today means that we are not alone.
>
> —NAKAMATA leader (WITNESS 2001)

In these quotes, leaders of NAKAMATA, an indigenous people's organization in Mindanao, the Philippines, talk about the loan of a digital video camera from WITNESS, a New York–based organization that supports locally based human rights groups around the world to integrate video into documentation and campaigning. The loan is a component in a partnership between the two organizations to support the use of video in a campaign around ancestral land claims being made under Philippine national law. In the process of pursuing these claims over the years, tribe members have suffered frequent assaults, murders, and seen the police refuse to act (see Figure 1).

Two strains of current human rights discourses are present in the NAKAMATA quotes. The first is a legal one (based on a national law grounded in international human rights standards), while the second is the transnational moral and empathetic discourse of solidarity that underlies the modern-day practice of mass-mobilized human rights activism. The quotes also describe how video footage specifically is mobilized as visual evidence, and they highlight the camera as an instrument at the start of global advocacy chains. These chains connect with networks of organizations, conveying human rights information out to a range of audiences for the purposes of mobilizing transnational human rights action. These organizations anticipate that this information will act as a catalyst for action with a witnessing–spectator public—a public that is either preexisting or that will be generated during the course of the advocacy process.

Although this article is written in a personal capacity, it draws substantially on my experiences working as Program Manager at WITNESS (www.witness.org). The WITNESS working methodology is driven by a commitment to ensuring that the voices of those directly affected by human rights violations are heard—in particular by audiences, both near and far, who have the power to ensure that change occurs in relation to those violations. Our organizational philosophy is rooted in using video for defined advocacy purposes and goals of change. Later in this article, I explain

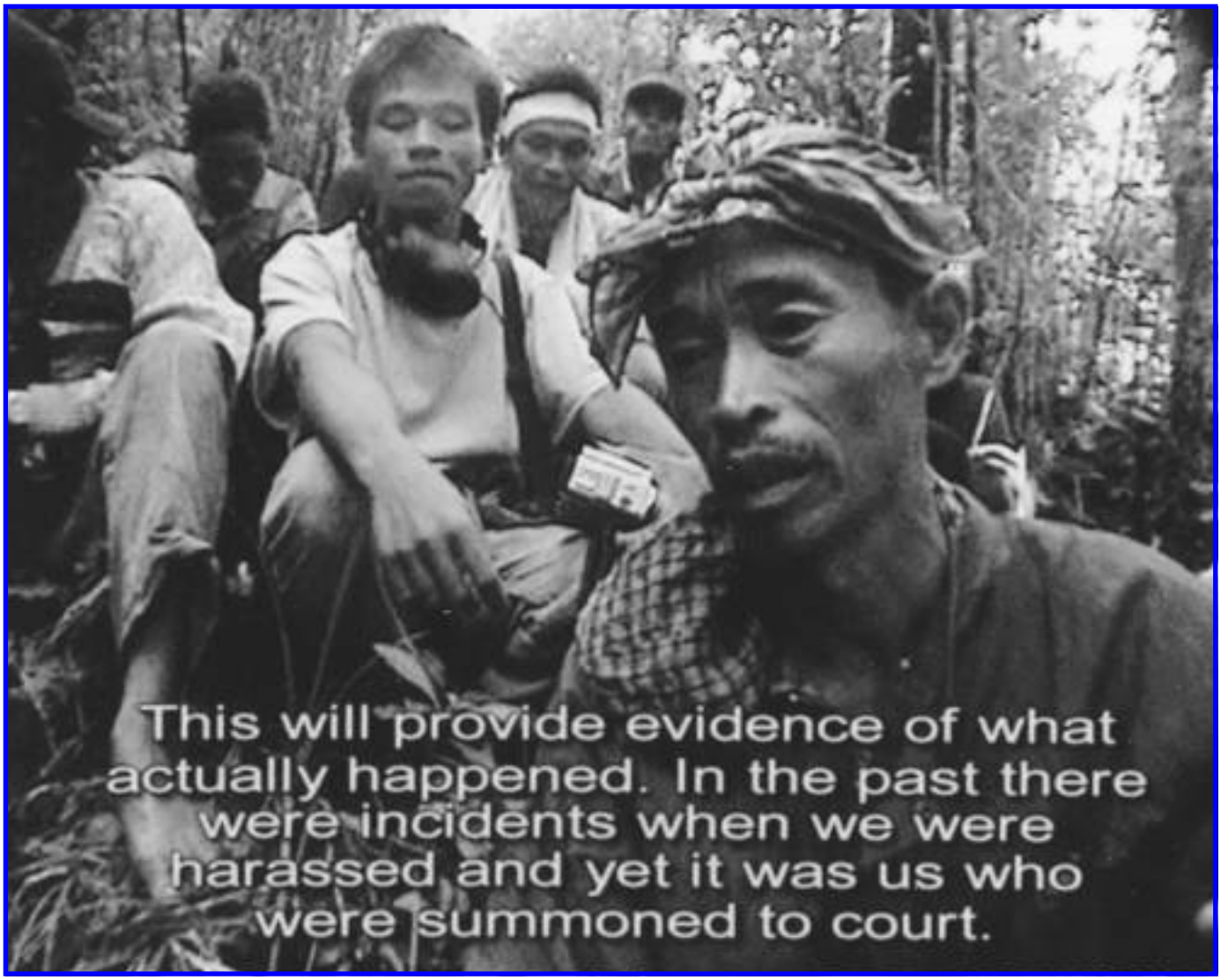

FIGURE 1. NAKAMATA leaders in the Philippines discuss using video. (Photo by Joey Lozano/WITNESS).

our work in the context of choosing audiences, and I outline the range of potential audiences we address—including the judicial and quasi-judicial, solidarity, activist, and community groups, as well as decision makers and ad hoc audiences created via the World Wide Web.

A brief explanation of WITNESS organizational history will help inform some of the discussion that follows. It is a small organization working at an intersection of multiple professional worlds, including those of human rights (in which it primarily places itself), strategic communication, news media, and entertainment media. It was founded in 1992, in a historical moment shortly after the Rodney King incident in the United States had demonstrated the galvanizing potential of handheld "amateur" video—being in the right place at the right time. Its founders, including the musician Peter Gabriel, and the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, were inspired by the idea of placing video cameras in the hands of human rights activists around the world—the "frontline" defenders of human rights who witnessed what was happening as it happened. However, the lesson learned over the next years was that this in itself was insufficient on a number of levels. Activists needed training to operate cameras; in particular, they wanted strategic guidance on where the audiences were for the video they shot and on how to incorporate video into their attempts to influence those audiences. They sought support through the process of production and postproduction, and in the implementation of distribution and advocacy plans with the finished video. WITNESS currently partners with between 12 and 15 locally based human rights organizations, all at different stages of this process of using video in advocacy. These core partners work across a range of rights issues including both civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. It works with groups that draw on visual imagery and evidence (both graphic and otherwise) as well as those that are more testimony focused.

My aim in this article is to consider three elements. First, I look at how mainstream media and human rights

NGOs analyze, frame, and use human rights content from the ground—in particular, audiovisual media—and the dilemmas of the visual overwhelming the verbal, the graphic, and the analytical—the sight bite or sound bite slighting the "full story." Next, I consider the ways in which video and media are constructed, mobilized, and used with specific campaign audiences, drawing on how WITNESS approaches its work. I focus here particularly on a case study of WITNESS partners in the Philippines. Of particular interest, as audiences, are those transnational publics and advocacy networks that are increasingly mobilized in human rights campaigning.[1] These include preexisting or established audiences, as well as alternative venues and ad hoc audiences that human rights groups create through a campaign.

Second, drawing on this discussion of the situation in the Philippines and on experience working with grassroots groups within the Burma refugee–exile community, I emphasize the agency and voice of the growing number of locally based human rights organizations that have emerged in recent years as a result of the globalization of human rights discourse, as well as new trends in human rights including economic, social, and cultural rights and transitional justice. I consider how locally based human rights groups intersect with a global media and human rights landscape as part of their transnational advocacy, and I pose questions about strategies to best represent the complex realities in which these organizations are situated.

Third, and in conclusion, I look at the concomitant tension these groups face between presenting contextualized stories and sight bites. I also consider the dilemmas presented by moving testimony between advocacy arenas, as well as the veracity of establishing an ethical relationship, "a community of witnesses," especially when efficacy and achievement of "impact" may clash with ethical or truthful representation of the origins of the testimony or the context of a situation.

THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA, COMPASSION FATIGUE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE

As we set the scene for looking at new uses of video by human rights practitioners, we must first look at the tendencies to date on how audiovisual media is used in human rights advocacy—that is to say, primarily as a tool for generating media coverage and for garnering direct donor and activist support. These two uses have dominated the distribution of audiovisual "news" material by human rights organizations.

Public knowledge of human rights has historically been mediated via the mainstream print, web, television, and radio. Consequently, human rights organizations have paid attention to the mass media as a primary vehicle for audiovisual material. Yet this comes at cost. As a recent study on journalism, media, and human rights policy by the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP) confirms, much mass media have a limited understanding of what human rights are as a legally binding framework. The study finds that in the competition for news space, "human rights issues are *reported* more than covered" (ICHRP 2002:121–125, emphasis added). It goes on to indicate a set of systemic problems with how human rights issues are reported, which include a tendency to conflate human rights law and the laws of war (leading many journalists to assume that human rights are only relevant in coverage of conflicts). There is confusion about where human rights are, especially among journalists and editors in the global North, so that stories close to home that could be placed in the context of international human rights standards are usually not. There is also a lack of awareness of the scope of human rights, which means that social, economic, and cultural rights are almost entirely absent from the human rights discourse of the media.

In response to the dual need to (1) engage with mass media as the main information source for a broader public and (2) respond to the perceived information gaps within the media's current reporting, most major human rights organizations have developed highly skilled media and mass public-oriented campaigning teams. However, this has often caused internal organizational tension—for example, research departments' perceived priorities on the ground are supplanted by the need to manage public profile and generate media coverage. One of the consequences of this is the sense that human rights NGOs are caught between their accountability to their partners in the global south and the need to engage in, as the ICHRP report notes, "a press-led campaigning strategy [which] has led them to become more responsive to the political agendas of Northern countries" (ICHRP 2002:48). As human rights organizations enter a news market in which human rights stories must be pitched against every other newsworthy item, the pressure to adapt a story to suit the needs of a Northern media constituency increases and the challenges of internal accountability mount.

In addition to the structural misunderstandings of what and where human rights are, most mainstream media coverage of human rights also focuses on short news stories, often reliant on stark visual imagery and guided by the voice of a newsperson intermediary. This pattern is framed in the ICHRP report as a case of reporting, not covering. A number of commentators—including Susan Moeller, Stanley Cohen, and others—have critiqued media (and human rights or humanitarian NGOs providing the stories and information, and in many cases using similar imagery for their charitable fundraising appeals) for contributing—via their reporting of abuses, conflict, and humanitarian disaster—to saturating the public with images of suffering.[2] This practice can lead to what Moeller calls "compassion fatigue," wherein audiences, faced with an overwhelming series of isolated scenes of global mayhem or absolute misery, lose or abdicate their ability to respond with caring to a situation.

Clifford Bob extensively analyzed the way in which locally based NGOs in the "global morality market" compete in an unequal relationship for support from northern NGOs. They must tailor their narrative, their messages,

and thus their marketability to secure support, even at potential expense to their root causes.[3] One such example is the success of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria. They shifted emphasis away from the political issues underlining their disputes with the Nigerian government and toward issues of environmental destruction, government repression, and the role of Shell Oil Company. This created much more international support but moved attention away from many of the original, more complex, locally specific demands revolving around local autonomy. In tailoring their messages, locally based NGOs also risk generating damaging, uncontrolled, external pressure via the temporary spotlight of global media or NGO attention.[4]

The way in which human rights documentation and material is used in both the mainstream media and in the specialized, narrowcast (i.e., intended for and framed for a specific target audience) advocacy that I focus on more in this article poses a twofold dilemma for the human rights practitioner. This dilemma can be framed in terms of questions about what is distributed and how it is distributed. The "how" involves the manner in which advocates frame or reframe material for distribution within a media agenda and within dominant funding strategies. The immediate danger is that this reframed audiovisual imagery, testimony, and accompanying message can distort priorities, decontextualize complex local situations, perpetuate stereotypes, and, in the cases of North–South relationships, deform alliances. Ultimately, the risk is that responses generated by this material—be it because of the saturation of the visual, the reframing of the material to fit an agenda, or the emphasis on shame and guilt—can be counterproductive in concrete ways on the ground, and neither sufficiently effective nor morally palatable in the long term.

I sidestep the issue of whether this information should be distributed at all, because images and testimony direct from the people most affected can indisputably be a key component in galvanizing transnational action. I believe that, as Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman note, although we can problematize images and narratives of suffering,

> our critiques of appropriation of suffering that do harm does not mean that no appropriations are valid. To conclude that would be to undermine any response to human misery. It would be much more destructive than the problem we have identified; it would paralyze social action. We must draw upon the images of human suffering in order to identify human needs and to craft humane responses. [1997:17–18]

THE WITNESS APPROACH TO "VIDEO ADVOCACY" AND THE AUDIENCE

The transformative power and possibility of the direct voices, testimony, and experiences of those most affected by rights violations to create change for themselves is confirmed for me by some of the WITNESS experience. Our focus is on empowering human rights advocates to use video to cover the issues that they identify as most critical in their community and to which they have the greatest access and understanding—as opposed to training professional journalists to report on human right issues based on media appetites. The approach is focused on enabling human rights organizations on the ground to collect, analyze, edit, and disseminate information for maximum advocacy impact. The goal is to complement—not replace—other forms of advocacy, by supporting our partners in identifying the audiences they need to reach with their arguments and by drawing on by video's unique power to bring these stories, as well as the visual "evidence" of a human rights abuses, directly to a human rights decision-making body, a government policy maker, a community, or the global public (see Figure 2).

Part of the WITNESS working methodology has been to work with its partners to find new and relevant advocacy-oriented audiences for visual evidence and testimony. We then collaborate to ensure tactical collection, creation, dissemination, and appropriate repurposing of material for sequenced and targeted distribution to these audiences in a way that breaks through an information-cluttered environment. This is a contrast to the traditional view of visual media, which, as noted above, many human rights advocates consider to be primarily within a news paradigm or in a "soft" promotional, fundraising, or educational role rather than a directed advocacy tool. At WITNESS, videos are created for audiences as much as about a topic. They are constructed with an appropriate style, format, and visual and storytelling language for specific audiences. An assumption underlying all of this audience chasing is that it is not necessarily the size of the audience that is most important. Rather, it is their relevance to your message, and your ability to package information in a manner that resonates for that audience. The scope of your audience in itself is not necessarily important, but the impetus to act following exposure to the audiovisual media and accompanying advocacy is important, be it out of a conviction or newfound understanding, shame, guilt, or moral necessity—whatever the intended effect may be.

In the process of working with locally based human rights groups, WITNESS starts with their goals for advocacy. From this, we work with our partners to identify which audiences have the potential to influence their advocacy, are amenable to a video-based approach, and in what sequence these audiences need to be persuaded. Bearing in mind the organizational and environmental constraints facing a given human rights group, together we then identify what approach and format of video will work for that audience. When the audience is distant to the experience of our partners, we help them ascertain how best to frame their story or help them identify allies who can help with this process.

These potential audiences might include: (1) evidentiary settings such as a courtroom or international war crimes tribunal, for which video could function as direct, contextualizing, or circumstantial evidence; (2) quasi-judicial settings, including many of the bodies that monitor compliance with international human rights law but have limited enforcement power, for example, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, or other UN charter

FIGURE 2. A trainer from Burma Issues, a group working with WITNESS, provides instruction in using video for human rights work. (Photo courtesy of WITNESS)

and treaty bodies, as well as institutions at a regional level; (3) direct-to-decision-maker, meaning that in some cases, video needs to be shown directly to a key decision maker or decision-making body so that they can "witness" directly human rights violations or "meet" the victims; (4) community mobilizing, in which video is shown within a community to mobilize members to take action on a specific issue, or to demonstrate the capacity of individuals and communities to challenge abuses and alter the context in which these abuses happen; (5) activist organizing within a community or virtual community of solidarity, such as via the Internet; and (6) mass media coverage in news and mainstream documentary. WITNESS and its partners recognize that we operate in a world of powerful media; we need to try to co-opt and utilize that power but, at the same time, question how advocates manage this relationship in a way that maintains their agency and intent.

In the following case study of WITNESS work with a partner human rights organization, I explore some of the particularities of what is told, to whom it is told, and how it reaches those audiences.[5]

NAKAMATA: VIDEO ADVOCACY IN THE PHILIPPINES

This article opened with quotes from the leaders of NAKAMATA, a Philippine indigenous people's coalition. In 2001, WITNESS initiated a regional capacity-building project with a longtime partner Joey Lozano, an experienced human rights advocate based at an organization called INSIGHTS and someone who has used video regularly in his work around environmental and human rights issues. A component of the program involved training a new partner organization, NAKAMATA, to use video as a tool for documentation and advocacy. NAKAMATA includes 12 peoples' organizations in Bukidnon, on the island of Mindanao. They are using the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), a national law in the Philippines, to press for the return of ancestral lands taken over by settlers and cash crop growers. Although the IPRA is progressive in content,

the implementation of the law and realization of the rights outlined has not been smooth. In the summer of 2001, NAKAMATA was documenting the process of peacefully and legally pursuing ancestral land claims when three indigenous leaders were murdered, others attacked, and a village razed. Police were supposed to be assigned to protect the tribe members, but they were not present at those times. This was not the first such incident—over the previous years, hundreds of tribe members had been assaulted or killed.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, when the authorities failed to act, Joey Lozano and NAKAMATA were on the scene: documenting, gathering evidence, interviewing, and recording the crime scene. Among the footage they gathered was material showing the last moments of a dying man and footage of his son, a young boy, discovered hiding in the sugarcane, having just watched the murder of his father. They interviewed the witnesses and survivors, as well as local police and government officials, who defended their own inaction. In the weeks and months after the attacks, this visual evidence and testimony was shown to multiple broad and targeted audiences, nationally and internationally, in several different registers of human rights discourse. These included a domestic legal framework, an indigenous rights perspective, and a solidarity activism call to action. Whenever possible, it drew on the "boomerang" potential of mobilizing key distant audiences with influence that could be exerted on the local situation.[6] Below, I discuss the successes of this use of video and highlight the pitfalls and long-term challenges that remain as well as their relevance to a wider discussion of transnational storytelling using video.

The raw footage was used in a traditional legal framework when it was submitted as direct evidence of the attacks to police authorities. It was also part of a brokered deal with the Probe Team, a top Philippines investigative news show (similar to CBS's 60 Minutes in the United States). The television program was provided with the footage on the condition they acknowledge who had filmed it and frame the story responsibly. It would be the first time that footage shot by an indigenous coalition in the Philippines had been shown on national television.

In the immediate days after the attack, NAKAMATA and Joey Lozano also made effective use of a tactic that WITNESS has seen utilized by other grassroots groups working in areas with nominally accountable local officials or civil servants and needing to bear witness to the failure of these officials to act as they should have. They "presenced" the inaction of local police officers: They deliberately and clearly filmed both their own presence before officials asking for action and also the officers and themselves in the police station as the police declared that they had been unable to protect tribe members because they had to be on duty at a fiesta on the day of the murders. Guided by Joey Lozano to film this, NAKAMATA hoped to force the officers to act right then, by highlighting their culpability and the possibility that with the filming they would now be held to account. NAKAMATA also saw that this material could be used to demonstrate inaction by the police to higher authorities and to show how this failure to act had been registered at the time of the incident.

This footage shortly afterward became part of a video that Lozano and NAKAMATA produced, which was entitled *Rule of the Gun in Sugarland* (WITNESS "Rule of the Gun in Sugarland" Rights Alert n.d.). The video documented the attacks and pressed for international action from human rights solidarity and advocacy groups. Like most advocacy videos, it was short, empathetic with the victims, and largely to the point. WITNESS broadcast *Rule* on its website as an online "Rights Alert" in which supporters were encouraged to watch the video, read textual background on the issues at stake, then write to authorities in the Philippines, asking them to investigate the attacks and provide protection to NAKAMATA. The online "Rights Alert" served as a reference point for information and a mobilizing point for gathering action materials. It also functioned as a globally visible window (on a relatively prominent international website) into a localized issue. WITNESS has seen, anecdotally, how the presence of visual evidence on a creditable website can create an impact out of proportion perhaps to the actual audience who will view the material online.[7] This is the case when institutions targeted by the video material are susceptible to the politics of shame—that is, in countries that at least nominally subscribe to a rhetoric of human rights, democracy, and accountability, rather than the repressive dictatorships such as Burma or North Korea—or when they can also feel the pressure of transnational mobilizing in economic or reputational terms. One tentative explanation for this is to consider how it is somehow more shameful to be seen (and not just read about) as a rights abuser and to know additionally that a global audience can potentially view this evidence.

In the online strategy, we drew on the growing role of primarily web-based alternative testimonial networks that distribute social justice–oriented information. These networks include a number primarily reliant on visual media—including the Indymedia and OneworldTV sites, which have simultaneous focuses on the engaged individual video activist and the idea of a video commons, as well as sites such as the WITNESS online presence (www.witness.org) that focus on enabling existing sources of human rights information, primarily organizations, to access a global public.[8]

Crossing between the parallel networks of video testimony, online and written testimony, and calls to action, WITNESS and Katerina Cizek and Peter Wintonick, two Canadian filmmakers who featured Joey Lozano's work heavily in their film *Seeing is Believing: Handicams, Human Rights and the News* (2002), contacted other human rights networks that had more widespread reach with their action alerts. We asked them to send out notice to their readers and to put a link to the video on their websites. Together WITNESS, Cizek, and Wintonick also publicized and distributed the

video to groups who could support NAKAMATA's work within the indigenous rights community.

In framing the video for international audiences, Lozano and WITNESS primarily used a international human rights discourse—highlighting indigenous land rights and community integrity, and equal treatment under the law—which complemented a domestic law enforcement–civil rights approach that applied to the ongoing Philippine domestic criminal investigation and to the overall Indigenous Peoples Rights Act under which the coalition members were making their claims.

WITNESS often conceives of its role as an international ally in terms of helping secure access so that key power brokers, who have decisive influence on a particular issue, can hear the voices and concerns of our partners. In this instance, WITNESS worked to get copies of the video into the hands of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo just as letters began to come in from the online campaign and the *Seeing is Believing* screenings and broadcasts, which were helping generate attention worldwide.

The use of the video material to generate pressures from international and local sources—in different formats for different audiences—achieved results. For the first time ever in the history of NAKAMATA's exposure to attacks, the Philippines National Bureau of Investigations conducted a thorough investigation. Charges were pressed against three individuals, and two arrests were subsequently made. As of the time of this article, two individuals were due to stand trial.

The WITNESS work with NAKAMATA illustrates some of the characteristics of transnational audiovisual witnessing—namely, the rapid distribution of images and testimonies from the sites of violations to widespread yet targeted audiences—as well as key elements of the kind of contemporary, narrowcast campaigns that WITNESS supports its partners to engage in: that is to say, effective repurposing of material, with targeted audiences in mind, and measured sequencing, so that impact, using video and other techniques, in one advocacy arena opens up space in another.[9] For example, a successful court case will open the way to a meeting with a government official and the possibility of a mass media news story. Sometimes, online Rights Alerts prove most effective when they follow on the heels of other advocacy efforts that use video, lobbying, or other forms of pressure, and wider media exposure. The Rights Alert then provides the final impetus to action and a "window of shame." It can be more effective in this way, rather than bearing the weight of creating action in and of itself.

CONTEXTUALIZING "DISTANT" SITUATIONS: GLOCALIZATION, "CITIZEN JOURNALISM," AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

In the immediate aftermath of the case, the video and advocacy had a direct effect on the over one thousand families who are members of NAKAMATA: There were no further attacks on members of NAKAMATA in the following year. However, the process of actually prosecuting the accused murderers has been slow, and the underlying issues of land reform and the particular claims of NAKAMATA member organizations remain unresolved. In early 2005, vigilantes linked to local landowners and businesses razed a village of one of the member tribes and attacked members, and the cycle seems set to continue.

The challenge that NAKAMATA now faces is how to mobilize the same level of pressure around the underlying structural issues of land reform as they were able to generate around a set of graphic murders captured on camera. If they are able to do so, they would be able to bring genuine resolution to the conflicts that are causing the rights abuses against them. Until his recent serious illness and untimely death, Joey Lozano had been working with NAKAMATA on a follow-up video that would integrate into their campaign around land claims and call for a broader recognition of the failed implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act in the Philippines.

In this article, I focus on the storytelling and mobilization elements of these challenges, although there are clearly other dimensions, including how to mobilize activity in an environment in which resources and access to other forms of technology (even as minimal as a mobile phone) are limited and in which tribal spokespeople have limited direct access to broader support constituencies, both domestically and abroad.

In presenting the story of their situation, NAKAMATA faces a series of potential obstacles that are the same as those for many human rights groups and subjects of human rights media attention around the world: namely, how do they confront the culture of the "sight-bite of global mayhem" to present a contextualized depiction of their lives that recognizes story and voices as well as emotive imagery? Would stories that are grounded in particularities and which explained context help to secure any kind of long-term resolution to their land reform claims or the structural issues underlying the pattern of violence against them? How do they balance appeals to external audiences with community empowerment created either via the storytelling process or its result? For human rights practitioners such as WITNESS working with groups like NAKAMATA, would such a contextualized depiction be an effective way to involve sections of a disengaged global public who are overexposed to generic, decontextualized images of global violence and poverty? Would it be feasible to incorporate them into a community of witnesses that would be proactive in its support?

A visual advocacy strategy that responds to these challenges has been described as the idea of the "globalization of local contexts" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997:18), acting as a counterweight to the globalization of local images stripped of their meaning. In other technological and marketing contexts, this has also been called "glocalization" (in a somewhat contested definition, as a single agreed-on meaning has not been found). In glocalization, the local accesses the global, but on its own terms.[10] In the human rights and contemporary multimedia context, this would

imply considering how local testimony and site-specific "visual evidence" go hand-in-hand—that is, a reinvigoration of the idea of empowered local voices authoring narratives (in near real-time) about their own contexts next to contextualized, local images.

A range of ideas related to this concept is currently circulating in the journalistic world. Local human rights activists are, in a sense, truly "embedded," living and reporting on the context of rights violations on a long-term basis, unlike the journalists sent to experience life with the troops in Iraq. They also share some similarities with the new movements in "citizen journalism" or "participatory journalism."[11] These movements are characterized by citizens playing "an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information" (Bowman and Willis 2003:9). It is what has unfolded in blogs, online postings on alternative and mainstream media sites, and the online photo and video sites, which, for example, played a role in the immediate aftermaths of the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. In the "blogosphere," Hossein Derakhshan's idea of "bridge bloggers"—those who "write for an audience outside of their daily reality" and who frequently come from the periphery of the current blogosphere—is explored at the Global Voices site.[12] This is an "international effort to diversify the conversation taking place online by involving speakers from around the world and by developing tools, institutions, and relationships to help make these voices heard."[13] Outside of an explicit news sphere, podcasting and nascent blogging and vlogging sites are beginning to explore the potential of unmediated, widespread dissemination of audiovisual material of voices from outside the mainstream.

This reprioritizing of local voices in local contexts would reflect the underlying structural realities of the current situation around generating human rights information. Within this system human rights groups at a local level are currently the sources of much of the material that decision makers and viewers in the North see, experience, and read about. In addition to the media, hegemonic international human rights groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (within the context of their report-writing work) rely on the documentation of locally based groups, corroborated by extensive research by their own researchers, as the primary source for their authoritative reports and the other information they provide to publics.

The discussion of rights by these local-level "embedded" human rights groups is, and would be, by no means a unitary discourse. Human rights language is constantly being reappropriated and refashioned.[14] Geographically and thematically oriented rights groups at a local and international level around the world learn about human rights legal orthodoxy, and then adapt, localize, and push de facto human rights–based arguments. They choose the particularities of human rights that function in a particular situation, and act with conceptual fluidity for different legal and nonlegal audiences. This may mean pragmatic reframing of their activities for effective fundraising or to engage advocacy and solidarity allies (cf. Bob 2005 in analyzing North–South funding dynamics and "pitching the product"). Even recognizing this situation, human rights language is used because aspects of it can speak to the groups' situations, not just because it is a way to access support.

Such a contextualized, embedded video advocacy strategy also empowers an attempt to grapple audiovisually with the economic, social, and cultural rights that are an integral part of the new rights discourse, especially in the global South. Just as the chilling reality is that the efficacy of violence and extreme oppression of civil and political rights is often demonstrated by its apparent invisibility to the public glance and the lack of the obvious "site-bite," so too with the "structural suffering" or "structural violence," often related to the absence of economic, social, and cultural rights. As Paul Farmer, a doctor, medical pioneer, and founder of the NGO Partners in Health, notes in his writings on structural violence in Haiti: "Structural violence all too often defeats those who would describe it . . . . Case studies of individuals reveal suffering, they tell us what happens to one or many people; but to explain suffering, one must embed individual biography in the larger matrix of culture, history, and political economy" (Farmer 1997:272).

The complexities of this move from the individual to the structural story, contextualized in the local yet aware of its place in the political economy of a broader system, are also evinced in another growing area of human rights practice—transnational and international justice. Here, victims are granted a particular status to speak out about the abuses they have suffered under a previous governing system. They often function as both individual testifier to a particular abuse and as a representative case or synecdoche for broader problems (see Figure 3).

CONCLUSION

Human rights groups reach out to multiple sets of key audiences, including the juridical sphere, activists, their own community, the media, the historical record, and policy makers. Each of these audiences has divergent and restrictive needs for how testimony and human rights narrative be constructed and framed. Local and international NGOs translate local cultural idiom and the intent of interviewees and testimony givers, using a dictionary of global human rights discourse and tailoring this material for an audience. As the availability of media tools and strategies permeates globally, stories that were being told but not heard are circulating more widely, and the traditional lines between who creates, distributes, and uses audiovisual information are blurring.

As they deploy visual imagery and stories, human rights groups must make decisions on how to balance competing needs of efficacy and "authenticity," and of the impact of the visual image against testimony and the story. With some audiences, an analysis of the particularity and nuance of an issue or testimonial story may undermine it as an advocacy call for a particular action or response, whereas with others

FIGURE 3. An internally displaced person talks about life under oppression in Burma. (Photo from Burma Issues, courtesy of WITNESS)

a putative or real visibility of the underlying structure and context may be powerfully persuasive. Visual evidence—the cornerstone of much media coverage and, in some cases, the only way to start a debate—can hold a deceptive immediacy and tends to overwhelm purely verbal arguments. It lends itself more easily to the creation of outrage, horror, and indignation: a moral outrage that has the power to overwhelm the potential for bearing genuine ethical witness. This challenge of the visual and verbal, and of representing context and causality, is exacerbated in situations of structural violence, in which there can be the absence of both an easily identifiable violent act and an easy way to represent systemic dimensions.

As a counterweight to the glut of the graphic and decontextualized, there is a pronounced critique of this latter style of documentation and presentation, particularly among social movements and community-based organizations. Their compelling argument is that a contextualized, interpretative documentation is the only long-term solution for a true justice, even amidst the competing demands of everyday audience needs. People at a grassroots level know and understand the issues they are close to better than most outsiders, and there now exists an opportunity for their voices to be more consistently heard by decision makers or other publics. External testimonial audiences, including policy makers and broader publics, need to see the "contextualized local" for them to understand the world. New technologies and opportunities in media generation and distribution offer the potential to expand the range of creators of this documentation. As an ideal, this mode generates support for the primacy of internal empowerment in the community by demonstrating the agency of the community in taking action itself. At the same time, it remains persuasive to external testimonial audiences.

The overall aim of this article has been to look at how human rights organizations, victims, and survivors create relationships and reactions—of ethical community, of "community of witness," of moral shame, of guilt—as they use audiovisual media to communicate with close and distant audiences. I argue for an approach that empowers communities and citizens to generate and share information in ways that create impact while maintaining the ideal of a contextualized relationship that involves an understanding of the structural causes of human rights abuses, as well as

the circumstances in which testimony was made and visual evidence gathered. However, questions remain regarding how to settle on a midpoint between efficacy and authenticity and between short-term impact and long-term change, as well as how to negotiate the interchange of human rights information between NGOs, both in the global South and North, and between human rights organizations, the mass public, and the media.

NOTES

Acknowledgments. This article is dedicated to Joey Lozano, who passed away in September 2005. It draws on what I have learned from the experiences of my colleagues at WITNESS and at our human rights partner organizations worldwide—particularly Joey Lozano, the members of NAKAMATA, and Pi Lek, Kwe Say, Taw Nay Htoo, and Klaarte Jong at Burma Issues. Meg McLagan, Larry Alan McDowell, and the members of the New York University Center for Religion and the Media working group on Media, Religion and Human Rights provided valuable input on developing the article.

1. See McLagan (2003), as well as the discussion of transnational advocacy networks in Keck and Sikkink (1998).

2. See Moeller 1998 and Cohen 2001.

3. See Bob 2002 and 2005.

4. But see Bob (2005:176) on the critical factors for success in framing local issues for international causes, "organizational and material resources, knowledge of distant audiences' preference, media savvy, and strategic skills."

5. For other case studies and more information on many of these strategies, see the case studies at www.witness.org and the recent *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism* (Gregory et al. 2005).

6. But see Keck and Sikkink 1998.

7. However, this effect is clearly limited in the long run, and in contexts of image saturation, as for example in the case of the continuing widespread distribution of visual images of the Israel–Palestine conflict. See Ronit Avni, "Mobilizing Hope: Beyond the Shame-Based Model in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict" in this issue.

8. In addition to these audiovisual-based networks, there are many others based around written testimony (and often mediated through the web): for example, the global action networks that have been developed by major human rights and environmental organizations, as well as less centralized activist networks.

9. For discussion of the nature of the emergent rights-oriented communications infrastructure, as well as WITNESS work with the organization Mental Disability Rights International, see McLagan 2005.

10. For a range of definitions, see, for example, Craig Stroupe's (n.d.) ideas page.

11. For an overview of many of these sites, see Ourmedia (n.d.).

12. See Global Voices (n.d.a).

13. See Global Voices (n.d.b).

14. For a more critical look at the human rights vocabulary, see Kennedy 2002.

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Mobilizing Hope: Beyond the Shame-Based Model in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

RONIT AVNI
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ABSTRACT Author Ronit Avni left her position at WITNESS, a nonprofit organization that trains nongovernmental institutions worldwide to incorporate video and digital media into their human rights advocacy campaigns, to launch Just Vision. Just Vision is dedicated to documenting, exposing, and supporting that which is not seen in mainstream broadcast images of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, such as local Palestinian and Israeli civilians working to build a grassroots consensus for peace. Avni discusses the reasoning for her shift from human rights monitoring within the context of the conflict to promoting civic models for peace building using documentary film and the Internet. She also examines some of the implications of this shift: How they play out in the work of Just Vision, and what they might tell us about the limitations of conventional human rights documentation practices in specific contexts. [Keywords: Israeli–Palestinian conflict, video, peace, documentary]

INTRODUCTION

In August 2003, I left my position at WITNESS, a nonprofit organization that trains nongovernmental institutions worldwide to incorporate video and digital media into their human rights advocacy campaigns, to launch Just Vision. Just Vision is dedicated to documenting, exposing, and supporting that which is not seen in the mainstream broadcast images of the conflict—local Palestinian and Israeli civilians working to build a grassroots consensus for peace. The following article shares the reasoning behind my shift from human rights monitoring of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to promoting civic models for peace building. It also examines some of the implications of this shift—how they play out in my work with Just Vision and what they might tell us about the limitations of conventional human rights practices in specific contexts.

FROM OUTRAGE TO ACTION: COMMON APPROACHES TO HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION

The logic behind the methodology of many contemporary human rights organizations is as follows: Uncover a human rights violation; document it; expose it to an intended audience—possibly a politician, a community leader, a corporate executive, shareholders within a company, the media, or the general public; appeal to their sense of moral outrage and indignation; and then shame the perpetrator(s) into compliance. This may occur either directly or by influencing the perceptions and actions of those with the power to pressure the violator into behaving in accordance with international law. In its simplest terms, "mobilizing shame" (Keenan 2004:435–449), no matter how sophisticated the campaign, remains the dominant strategy—galvanizing outrage into action. The scandals, public outcry, and subsequent inquiries sparked by graphic photographs of British and U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners illustrate this trajectory. Yet despite a handful of guilty verdicts, it is still too early to determine whether the United States will respond to pressure and curb systematic torture and sexual humiliation after the initial media frenzy subsides.[1]

As Program Associate at WITNESS from 2000–03, I worked alongside lawyers and activists from Banjul to Tegucigalpa to Peshawar. I was in contact with dozens of local NGOs from around the world who were either in the process of using, or seeking to use, video and still cameras to launch publicity campaigns. They sought to expose grievous abuses of government, corporate, and local power that resulted in individual and collective rights violations. These organizations deemed the production of digital media as vital to their work in protecting human life and dignity.

In some instances, the presence of a camera succeeded in shielding innocents from harm and deterring would-be-perpetrators from acting.[2] Occasionally, damning footage prompted governments and corporations to yield to human rights organizations' demands. In Mexico, for instance, authorities dismantled a neglectful, abusive government-run psychiatric facility whose actions were videotaped and publicized by Mental Disability Rights International. The government then created and financed a community-based mental health program in its stead (Mental Disability Rights International n.d.).

Yet in certain sociopolitical climates, this strategy of simply exposing and shaming perpetrators has proven both problematic and inadequate. Thomas Keenan cites the ubiquity of journalists in Bosnia to demonstrate that the presence of video cameras and international exposure via mainstream broadcast news outlets do not necessarily lead audiences to pressure governments to intervene to prevent a massacre or genocide from unfolding. "Images," he writes, "always demand interpretation, even or especially emotional images . . . . This implies a second rule, that of unintended consequences or misfiring" (Keenan 2002: 104–116). In other words, the recording and wide dissemination of a violation does not necessarily lead to effective political or humanitarian action.

Kenneth Roth, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, states that his and other like-minded human rights organizations derive their strength from "our ability to hold official conduct up to scrutiny and generate public outrage." This occurs, Roth observes, when there is a clear "violation, violator and remedy" (Roth 2004:63–73). If these three preconditions are not met, then human rights NGOs must evaluate whether their involvement is warranted and

constructive. This is not to undo decades of crucial work intended to deepen global respect for human life and the fundamental equality of all persons but, rather, to ensure that dignified, equitable treatment actually extends to the people who need it most.

THE ISRAELI–PALESTINIAN CONTEXT

In Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, a well-developed network of more than 70 Israeli, Palestinian, and international NGOs has emerged since the first *intifada*. These NGOs record and expose rights violations perpetrated by the Israeli military and by Palestinian militant groups,[3] as well as by Israeli settler vigilantes.[4] This conflict is arguably one of the most highly documented in the world because, despite Israeli military censorship, journalists by and large gain entry and access to both societies and can live in fairly comfortable conditions (one finds many broadcast journalists enjoying the amenities of the luxurious American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem before taking day trips to refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza),[5] and because there is a tremendous appetite worldwide for news about this geopolitical and religious epicenter.[6]

Yet, with all network and satellite television cameras trained on this sliver of land, and with numerous human rights organizations issuing reports, petitions, photographs, documentaries, and more, it is difficult to gauge whether the scale and scope of abuses have decreased in any measurable way.[7] True, some significant victories have emerged over the years, such as the Israeli High Court of Justice's (HCJ) long overdue decision in September 1999 to ban the use of "moderate physical pressure"—effectively, torture—by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) during interrogations of Palestinian detainees.[8] However, the result was accomplished primarily through the courts. In the end, it was a web of GSS deceptions that the HCJ could no longer tacitly permit, rather than any successful mobilization of popular opinion turned squarely against the practice.[9]

By and large, one might argue that despite widespread, graphic, and unflattering media coverage, the situation with regard to the protection and promotion of human rights within the specific context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has in fact deteriorated.[10] Dr. Stanley Cohen—one of the founders of the largest Israeli human rights organizations, B'Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories)—explores this phenomenon in his book, "States of Denial" (Cohen 2001).[11] Adi Dagan, Spokeswoman for the Coalition of Women for Peace and MachsomWatch, an organization of Israeli women who monitor Israeli soldier conduct and document abuses at checkpoints in the Occupied Territories, states

> what we witness in general at the checkpoints, at Kalandia checkpoint specifically, is that fewer and fewer people are able to pass, and fewer and fewer people are even trying. Carving the West Bank into very small cantons and restricting travel between them is a trend that is only getting stronger . . . . I think that rather than improving, the situation is only getting worse. [Dagan 2005]

Of course, one cannot simply gauge the efficacy of strategies for protecting human rights by measuring whether the frequency of a given violation increases or not. It is impossible to determine how many soldiers, GSS interrogators, armed settlers, and would-be suicide bombers refrained from acting on account of the stigmas associated with, and punishments meted out for, certain rights-violating behaviors. It is likely that without the vigilance and hard work of human rights groups such as B'Tselem, Physicians for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, abuses would continue, and the perpetrators would be able to casually deny, deflect, or discredit allegations made against them.[12] Yet the fact that such a large network of NGOs has not succeeded in diminishing the scale of violence, degradation, and discrimination in the region—even with a multifaceted approach that involves legal channels as well as documentation of abuses—illustrates the magnitude of the conflict and the need for additional, complementary strategies for motivating both societies to engage in consistent, ethical, rights-respecting conduct.

At WITNESS I periodically received unsolicited requests from NGOs and concerned individuals seeking cameras to record housing demolitions, settler attacks on Palestinian residents of Hebron, or to stand at checkpoints to monitor Israeli soldier conduct. Some callers sought to deploy cameras to prevent unjust behavior. Others wanted to accumulate documentation of such conduct for public record, or to generate evidentiary submissions for future courts or tribunals. Most often, well-meaning individuals requested cameras to make amateur, short, and often first-time films focusing exclusively on Israeli abuses of Palestinian human rights. Rarely did these individuals think through how their films could impact the situation in any meaningful, constructive, and long-term way.

The release of several independent professional, feature-length documentaries about this topic, including *Checkpoint* (2003), *Gaza Strip* (2002), and *Arna's Children* (2004), along with constant network and satellite newscasts of violence emanating from the Middle East, prompted me to question would-be filmmakers about the value of adding yet another amateur film to the mix, especially when those of professional quality and popular appeal had yet to lead to measurable results in the form of a reduction of violence, discrimination, or public humiliation.

FINDING REMEDIES: BEYOND DOCUMENTING THE VICTIM AND VIOLATION

The preponderance of requests for cameras that I received at WITNESS prompted me to ask: What more can the human rights community do when a principal challenge is not the dearth of documentation about certain rights-related issues but, rather, the glut of it?[13] How does one protect and promote human life and dignity when people have either become desensitized to watching up-to-the-minute coverage of abuses or, even if they are not desensitized, simply fail to

FIGURE 1. Palestinian and Israeli Peace Builders in Deir Ghussun, West Bank. Video image from Just Vision's current documentary. (Courtesy of Just Vision)

act?[14] One need not do more than ask a U.S. citizen about recent casualties in Iraq to discover that people by and large aren't tuning in, they are turning off.[15] This apathy is the case even when reports of such rights violations are emanating from generally sympathetic reporters, including controversial embedded "journalists." Consequently, contemporary human rights advocates must ask: What else might motivate concerned audiences to hold individuals or institutions accountable for destructive behavior, and under what circumstances?

Working at the intersection of media activism and human rights with NGOs from more than a dozen countries, I faced the question of whether the paradigm of identifying and documenting the victim or perpetrator is always appropriate and useful. In other words, can documentation of the violator and violation, to use Roth's terminology, actually exacerbate violence, discrimination, and hatred? (Roth 2004:63–73). Does it rob victims of their agency, treating them as totally disempowered, while stigmatizing perpetrators without addressing the root causes of conflict? Does it provide the parties involved with the framework, incentive, and models to engage in meaningful change? Will this paradigm lead to a remedy?

In his essay entitled, "The International Human Rights Movement: Part of the Problem?," David Kennedy writes, "As a dominant and fashionable vocabulary for thinking about emancipation, human rights crowds out other ways of understanding harm and recompense. This is easiest to see when human rights attracts institutional energy and resources that would otherwise flow elsewhere" (Kennedy 2002:101–126). Where else can energy and resources be channeled to support a resolution acceptable to the majorities within both Israeli and Palestinian societies? What is missing from the current corporate and activist media landscape? To further draw on Kennedy's language, what other "promising local political and social initiatives to contest local conditions" might be explored and supported? What "lost vocabularies that are equally global-vocabularies of duty, of responsibility, of collective commitment" (Kennedy 2002:101–126) can be bolstered in order to encourage

Israeli and Palestinian civic and political leaders to engage in a meaningful quest for reconciliation, restitution, and peace?

The current sociopolitical climate in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza has been shaped by competing security and democratic imperatives, religious, capitalist, and ethnonationalist ideologies, not to mention the thousands of incidents of violence, displacement, and intimidation that have occurred over more than five decades. Clearly, international human rights advocates seeking to influence local behavior need to demonstrate an awareness of the actual unfolding of historical events and clashing ideologies. Yet they must also cultivate a sensitivity to the psychological impact of these developments on the Israeli and Palestinian publics, because the way that each society perceives itself—often as a misunderstood, abandoned people under the gun—ultimately affects the policies and practices they support or condemn. In other words, if Israeli Jews regard themselves to be on the brink of perpetual extermination, then it is unlikely that naming or shaming alone will succeed in curbing what they consider to be defensive and thus necessary or legitimate behavior. Images of rights violations captured by advocates who fail to grasp this will likely "misfire" (Keenan 2002:104–116). To adopt Roth's framing, if the majority of the Israeli public is at odds with the human rights community with regard to its assessment of who has primary responsibility for curbing rights violations in the region, then it is unlikely to speak out against them. Similarly, if Palestinians determine that they have limited options in the face of bulldozers, settler violence, and an Israeli army with far superior resources and military capabilities, they are unlikely to mobilize en masse against guerilla tactics or suicide bombings. It may be necessary to continue to invoke the vocabulary of human rights and to provide broadcast media with brief, often decontextualized images of violence—if for no other reason than to prevent the erosion of the only internationally recognized, albeit imperfect, framework for protecting human life and dignity—but this strategy is certainly inadequate.[16] As Keenan notes, "Because images are so important, we cannot count on their obviousness, fall for the conceit that information leads ineluctably to actions adequate to the compulsion of the image" (2002:114).

In 1994, the late Prime Minister Yizhak Rabin stated: "If we find a partner for peace with the Palestinians, they will run their internal affairs without the [Israeli] High Court of Justice, *B'Tselem* or all sorts of groups of mothers and fathers and bleeding hearts" (Montell 1999). Rabin was articulating views espoused by the Israeli mainstream, five years after the creation of B'Tselem and on the heels of extensive public awareness campaigns portraying Israeli government and military abuses of Palestinian human rights. Perhaps the public had not bought into the intrinsic value or plausible unbiased application of the human rights framework, which was itself created in response to the genocide of one-third of the world's Jewish population in World War II. Perhaps Israeli Jews saw it as contrary to their own national interests, be they altruistic or selfish. In the wake of the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the surrounding Arab countries, criticism of Israel by the international community is often regarded—irrespective of the validity of the accusation—as an expression of an enduring and irremediable anti-Semitism. In short, if the message conveyed by the human rights community to the majority of Israelis through condemnatory language and visuals is (mis)interpreted as an expression of deep-seated hatred of Israelis as Jews, then international outcry and requests for change will fall on deaf ears (Melchior 2001).[17] As Adi Dagan of *MachsomWatch* states regarding her documentation of rights violations perpetrated by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints against Palestinians:

> The million-dollar question is how to relate—how to influence people and not alienate ourselves—without deterring people. There is the sense of [our organization] being perceived as an out-of-touch minority . . . . You have to go the route of persuasion, and for that you need to touch upon things that worry people and not things they aren't concerned with. It's a difficult matter, but I think that if we want to work with the Israeli public that's what needs to be done. . . . [In] general I see that making the Israeli public take an interest in what happens on the Palestinian side isn't working that well . . . . I'm debating the matter. It's undecided. There's another approach that's gaining momentum: showing the effects of the checkpoints and the occupation on soldiers and on the army, showing the extent of the harm to our side. Perhaps this is an effective approach but it doesn't really appeal to me; however I see that it's something the press is always interested in. [Dagan 2005]

Palestinians have suffered mass displacement, expulsion, killing, discrimination, torture, the destruction of property, administrative detention, and denigration by Israelis and in refugee camps and cities in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait. These experiences make the promises of human rights advocates, proclaimed in language of universal emancipation, ring hollow. Media depictions of Palestinians as either terrorists or primitive victims, as well as self-serving invocations of the Palestinian cause by politicians and by ideologically militant groups like al-Qaeda, amplify Palestinian distrust toward external actors, including those who aspire to be reliable, effective mediators.[18]

Apathy and, by extension, inaction characterize most civilian responses to this conflict precisely because individuals think they are powerless to influence the situation. Moreover, in the victimizer–victimized paradigm so often adopted by both activist and mainstream media (even if they differ as to who is the true victim and victimizer), both parties are dehumanized as agents incapable of change.[19] Israeli Jews often operate as though their very existence is under eternal siege by irredeemably hostile world opinion while Palestinians often translate their sense of powerlessness to inaction.[20] Both of these views are ultimately disempowering, obscuring opportunities for civic participation in the enterprise of peace building and the struggle to preserve human life and dignity in the context of equality.

MOBILIZING HOPE

In 2001, WITNESS began to use film as a tool for mobilizing audiences by providing them with examples of campaigns in which ordinary civilians succeeded in changing a given rights-related issue. Along with the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and the Rights Now campaign of Columbia University's Human Rights Institute, WITNESS released *Books Not Bars* (2001), a film that highlights the youth-led movement to channel U.S.-government and corporate funding away from building and profiting from youth detention centers in favor of educating marginalized, criminalized, and neglected youth populations—primarily within communities of color. *Books Not Bars,* although neither unique in its approach nor comprehensive in its content, bridged a critical gap. It provided concrete examples of how ordinary people—youth, no less—could demonstrate human agency and affect their environment in ethical, constructive, and rights-respecting ways. Although the film provided statistics capable of generating public outrage with regard to discriminatory incarceration and sentencing practices, it also demonstrated the power of lay people to affect their surroundings. The paradigm was not one of victimizer versus victimized; instead it focused on those agents of change seeking to promote ethical behavior. Like human rights advocates, the film's producers' operating assumption is that media, however imperfect and unpredictable, matters—that images have the power to effect change. Yet they sought to mobilize hope rather than shame.

WHEN SHAMING AND BLAMING MISFIRES

In thinking through a strategy for promoting unbiased, nonviolent conduct and ensuring that human beings thrive in a rights-respecting environment, at times I am reminded of a philosophy for good parenting: Love the child, condemn the behavior, and provide constructive models for the child to emulate. Perhaps this same principle can be applied to collectives, including nations. In terms of advocacy, if we were to operate within the framework of human rights, this would mean affirming this right while simultaneously condemning specific abusive or corrupt behaviors. It would mean highlighting those actions and initiatives that embody the values enshrined by international human rights law. In practical terms in the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, this would mean constantly reiterating the concern of the world community for the well-being of both Israelis and Palestinians while condemning and demanding accountability for dehumanizing, unethical, and illegal behavior. It also means acknowledging deep, legitimate fears and working to assuage them while not allowing for such fears to be manipulated and used as a cover for abuse. Finally, it means applying the framework equitably all over the world—both within a global context as well as within this specific environment. This metaphor is not meant to be applied selectively—and, thus, patronizingly—in one geopolitical context.

Condemning, isolating, and punishing actions rather than actors means treating even the most grievous violators as evolving individuals capable of change. Such change, if it occurs at all, could take decades, so I am not suggesting that corrupt, abusive, or oppressive behaviors remain unchallenged or unconstrained. But from an advocacy perspective, I propose that the so-called violator be treated as an agent of change—worthy of existence, intrinsically valuable (to affirm a core principle of the human rights framework), yet perhaps behaving in deeply unethical, abusive, corrupt, or discriminatory ways. This approach is especially important when a large portion of a population may have been engaged in collective acts deemed questionable under international human rights law (resistance fighting, terrorist tactics, or military service, for example). In such circumstances, shaming may alienate a large group that might otherwise participate in a peace-building process.

MINDING THE GAP: HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING AND PEACE BUILDING

While at WITNESS, I came to understand that peace building and human rights advocacy, although often complementary, were far from synonymous. Although genuine, widespread respect for human rights cannot be achieved without peace, one can advocate for human rights indefinitely, without ever serving to advance peace. The antagonistic paradigm of human rights advocacy might even delay or decrease the likelihood for genuine reconciliation. Increasingly disturbed by this realization, and inspired in part by the model of *Books Not Bars*, I chose to leave WITNESS in 2003 to launch Just Vision, an organization dedicated to supporting hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli civilians who are working to build a base for peace. I felt that the endless hours of footage featuring rumbling tanks, bombed-out buses, home demolitions, wailing parents, masked militants, shooting soldiers, and cries for revenge—those signature images broadcast regularly from the region—convey an overwhelming message to viewing audiences that the conflict is intractable, the populations militant and irreconcilable, and the situation beyond hope or help and even outside the realm of moral concern.

Amid profuse documentation of violence and violations, the media and the human rights NGO community often ignore and marginalize those people who embody the values of tolerance, equality, respect, nonviolence, and due process that the human rights world seeks to promote. Unbeknownst to most people within Israel, the Occupied Territories, and beyond, there are thousands of Israeli and Palestinian civilians who are working daily, cooperatively, and with great courage in the face of widespread apathy and antipathy to build a peaceful, equitable, and rights-respecting future. They come from every professional field, every geographical location, and every socioeconomic, ethnic and religious sector of their societies. Yet the media and the human rights community constantly privilege the voices and actions of militants over those of these civic leaders.

FIGURE 2. George Saadeh of the Bereaved Families Forum at his Daughter's Memorial, March 2004. Video image from Just Vision's current documentary. (Courtesy of Just Vision)

Just Vision is composed of young women from East Jerusalem, Israel, North America, and Brazil, working together to highlight Israeli and Palestinian civilians who cross checkpoints and social divides in nonviolent, cooperative ways, to engage in projects that may lead to a more peaceful, dignified future. These Israelis and Palestinians are by no means unanimous in their analyses of the root causes of the conflict or its ideal resolution. Yet the differences between them may prove both informative and constructive. We are seeking to learn from the widest spectrum, publicizing in-depth interviews with 180 Israeli and Palestinian agents of change. They include doctors, religious leaders, former prisoners, former soldiers, educators, farmers, economists, psychologists, media makers, youth, artists, athletes, women's groups, and more. We are asking: Who are they? What are they doing, why, and at what cost? Who gains from their efforts? What lessons have they learned along the way that could prove beneficial to others seeking to follow their lead? How is it that many survived incarceration, torture, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, housing demolitions, displacement, and even the murder of their children, and now pursue a nonvengeful, non-nihilistic path? The Parents Circle: Bereaved Families Forum, to name one such organization, consists of over 500 Palestinian and Israeli families that have lost next of kin to the conflict. Its members are doing everything in their power to preserve lives on both sides.

All of the interviews, conducted primarily in Arabic and Hebrew, are being gradually published online at www.justvision.org. A large segment are already accessible in English and these will soon be accompanied by educational curricula and an action component whereby interested audiences can ask local media to increase their coverage of these kinds of civic initiatives for peace. We are also trying to break new ground in examining the contested history of this conflict. Rather than the standard bifurcated narrative about the history of this issue, which juxtaposes a singular Palestinian perspective with an Israeli one, we are asking all 180 interviewees to name up to ten historical events and up to four personal events that have shaped their understanding of the conflict and inspired them to take action. Using digital technology, we are

FIGURE 3. Just Vision Project Comanager Nahanni Rous Filming Sami Al Jundi of Seeds of Peace, January 2004. Photo by Leda Dederich. (Courtesy of Just Vision)

aggregating the responses so that audiences can examine the differences and shared understandings among Palestinians and Israelis committed to resolving the conflict through diverse and peaceful means.

Finally, Just Vision is releasing a documentary film that portrays the efforts of Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers as they press for change within their respective communities. By broadcasting this film on Israeli, U.S., and Arab satellite television, we hope to invert the shame-based human rights model, to inspire our audiences to learn more about these unsung heroes and to lend their support in advancing grassroots peace building.

Because film tends to be narrative driven, reductive (covering complex issues in as little as 30–180 minutes), and anecdotal, we chose it as an appropriate medium to follow a limited number of individual Israeli and Palestinian stories over time. We wanted audiences to connect to the characters featured on a visceral, visual, and emotional level. Just Vision's website is meant to complement the film with comprehensive, in-depth information to respond to audiences' questions and to better address the complexity of the issue.

Just Vision's approach seeks to complement video activists' and broadcast journalists' coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by inspiring and encouraging the international community to support the local leaders of promising civic initiatives. In a recent interview with Just Vision, Dr. Sami Adwan, the Palestinian Co-director of the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East states:

> Grassroots work—the development of this and other people-to-people projects—is necessary, but not sufficient for the achievement of peace. A political decision or agreement can be implemented from the top down, but in order for peace to be transformed from a political decision to a reality, people must follow it. For this reason, we need both bottom-up and top-down mechanisms to function together and reinforce one another. [Adwan 2005][21]

Given that we feature nongovernmental actors with seemingly limited power, I am often challenged to demonstrate the value of this work. I respond by emphasizing the diverse array of individuals who have created cultures of tolerance person by person, from the ground up—the feminists and the civil rights advocates. This process is cumulative, not a quick fix. No single initiative or methodology can address all grievances or needs with regard to this conflict. Only through sustained political and civic engagement, with support from the international community, will systemic and constructive transformations occur in the

direction of a peaceful, rights-respecting, equitable, and dignified future. Michal Zak, director of the facilitation training program at the School for Peace at the mixed Palestinian and Jewish village of Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam (Oasis of Peace) in Israel, affirms this strategy in a recent interview with Just Vision:

> [Our work] is not going to stop the bulldozers. It won't do that. But I researched the roots of the change in South Africa, and from a few articles I read I realized they mentioned nine causes for the transition to democracy. The first was the economic sanctions on South Africa. The second was that the security forces were exhausted and couldn't enforce the violence they initiated and used. And somewhere between one and nine was the fact that there were always groups that engaged in dialogue and cooperation, and white people who joined in the black people's struggle. [Zak 2005]

CONCLUSION

In contrast to the daily inundations of news broadcasts showcasing violence, militancy, and condemnations of rights violations framed in lifeless legalese, Just Vision promotes coverage of local civic leaders taking risks for democracy, reconciliation, transparency, restitution, and peace: Palestinians and Israelis who work to break down barriers as allies even when enmity and intolerance seem most extreme. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the canary in the media coalmine, where saturation and desensitization will soon overwhelm audiences on many social issues. The human rights community would do well to support or partner with organizations and initiatives that inspire people to act in nondivisive, visionary, and constructive ways. Shame may deter some negative actions, but it takes positive actions to move the situation forward to resolution.

NOTES

1. The BBC recently reported that seven U.S. soldiers have been sentenced, with two others pending trial (BBC News Online 2005).

2. See an uncut videotaped interview with the late journalist Joey Lozano from Mindanao (Lozano 2000).

3. These include HAMAS, Islamic Jihad, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

4. The online resource, Ariga, links to nearly 80 such groups (Ariga 2005). The NGO Monitor tracks 73 such organizations (NGO Monitor 2005). The NGO Network of the United Nations includes about 75 groups (United Nations 2005).

5. William Langewiesche in "Hotel Baghdad: Fear and Lodging in Iraq" (2005:105–108) refers to this practice as "hotel journalism."

6. Reporters without Borders ranked Israel 36 out of all countries in terms of freedom of the press (Reporters without Borders 2004). However, the Israeli daily newspaper, *Ha'aretz,* recently reported that the United States is examining the rise in censorship in the Israeli press. According to *Ha'aretz,* the previous U.S. human rights report on Israel described censorship as "limited to the banning of news in cases of 'very near certainty of damaging security interests' of the state" (Benn 2005).

7. Human Rights Watch's World Report states:

> The Israeli authorities continue a policy of closure, imposing severe and frequently arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, contributing to a serious humanitarian crisis marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. The movement restrictions have also severely compromised Palestinian residents' access to health care, education, and other services. Over the past two years these restrictions have become more acute, and in many places more permanent, with the construction of a "separation barrier" inside the West Bank. [2005]

8. On September 10, 1997, the Center for the Defense of the Individual petitioned the HCJ to end the use of a technique called *shabeh* on Ragi Mahmud Saba during his interrogation. Previously, the state had always defended this practice on the grounds that the constant blaring music, painful shackling, and sack were necessary to isolate prisoners from one another between their interrogation periods, while protecting the detention facilities and its occupants. The court continuously accepted this counterintuitive explanation despite vociferous protests from human rights attorneys. In this case, however, the state reversed its position that shabeh was merely employed during the waiting period to isolate prisoners and protect the interrogators. Instead, it proclaimed that shabeh was—in its view—vital for the progress of the interrogation and was therefore justified on the grounds of the "necessity of defense." This marked a major turning point that prompted human rights attorneys to request that the Court reject the "waiting" defense altogether and accept this self-evident explanation instead (Knesset 1999).

9. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, no survey had been conducted gauging the Israeli public's stance on torture prior to the ruling. Therefore, I draw this conclusion having witnessed firsthand the Public Committee against Torture in Isreal's (PCATI) peripheral and disrespected status in the eyes of the Israeli public. I spent the summer of 1999 as a volunteer for this organization, and was personally derided for my contribution to its cause. Moreover, much of PCATI's funding and support derives from non-Israeli sources. Finally, the fact that numerous members of parliament sought to reinstate the use of torture in Israel immediately following the ruling indicated that many Israelis regarded this as a valid and necessary security measure (Alon 1999; *Ha'aretz* 1999). To their credit, both PCATI and the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW) adopted a multipronged strategy for combating torture, by appealing to the public's sense of moral outrage while pursuing legal remedies to the problem.

10. Or, to step away from the terminology of "rights," the well-being and capacity of individuals and communities to survive and flourish has suffered.

11. This is as opposed to other issues such as the rights of gays and lesbians in Israel or of women in both Israel and the Occupied Territories, which have made some recent advances. "Israel today is one of the world's most progressive countries in terms of equality for sexual minorities. Politically, legally, and culturally, the community has moved from life at the margins of Israeli society to visibility and growing acceptance" (Walzer 2003).

12. A respected colleague, journalist Frank Smyth, recently wrote to me about this issue. He states: "It is always an advance to document rights abuses. The cumulative impact is to shame the perpetrators and those who support them on any side, and that far outweighs any desensitization that may occur. Think of the alternative. That would be to deny that they occur at all" (Frank Smyth, personal communication, January 20, 2005).

13. Susan Moeller explores the issue of "compassion fatigue" prompted by broadcast media's fixation with "crisis coverage" (Moeller 1999).

14. Andrew Blau discusses the fact that although more media is being produced, a smaller percentage will be seen because production is outpacing demand at the moment. See "The Future of Independent Media," conducted for the Global Business Network (Blau 2004).

15. Despite the drop in popularity of the Bush administration—which relates to a complex intersection of economic and political factors, not the least of which is the increasing price of gas in the United States—I suggest that U.S. citizens are not paying greater attention to (or mobilizing against) human rights violations in Iraq,

be they suicide bombings or military actions. Rather, they are growing wearier of U.S. casualties and of the domestic economic toll of the war.

16. Kennedy writes,

> To maintain the claim to universality and neutrality, the human rights movement practices a systematic lack of attention to background sociological and political conditions that will determine the meaning a right has in particular contexts, rendering the evenhanded pursuit of "rights" vulnerable to all sorts of distorted, and distinctly non-neutral outcomes. [Kennedy 2002:101–126]

17. Please note that approximately one-fifth of the Israeli population is comprised of Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

18. In a recent interview with Just Vision, Sami Al Jundi of Seeds of Peace states:

> Our activities are primarily based on building bridges of trust between the Israeli and Palestinian side, and between Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Druze. Our activities aim to provide each side with the opportunity to reflect upon its human and civilized side, a side that isn't seen on TV and in the media. In the media the Palestinians are presented as terrorists and the Israelis as occupiers, soldiers and settlers. [Al Jundi 2005]

19. Eliyahu McLean, an interfaith activist and an organizer of the Sulha Project, an annual three-day event attended by thousands of Israeli, Palestinian, and international participants who gather for the purpose of dialogue and reconciliation, observes:

> We are two deeply wounded peoples sharing this land. We act out of woundedness and fear, not what's really in our best interest, and in fact we make the wounds deeper. We Israelis are traumatized by our history, the Shoah, the Holocaust. Palestinians have been displaced and traumatized. You can't talk rationality to someone who's traumatized. I think it's a huge obstacle, the collective national traumas that we are both oozing, and it's perpetuating the way we behave. [McLean 2005]

20. See the Palestinian National Authority's response to a 2003 Medecins Du Monde report that included a condemnation of the Palestinian Authority for "serious violations of international humanitarian law." Yasser Arafat's Media Adviser responded that "Only the (Israeli) occupation is a war crime . . . . The occupation is the source of every problem here" (Palestinian National Authority 2003).

21. PRIME is a groundbreaking initiative that engages Palestinian and Israeli teachers in the creation of joint history textbooks that include both historical narratives.

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Ravished Armenia: Visual Media, Humanitarian Advocacy, and the Formation of Witnessing Publics

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ABSTRACT Discourses around human rights frequently treat media as transparent delivery systems for testimony and spectacles of atrocity. Such views detract from the degree to which media circuits shape human rights claims, in which aesthetic strategies transform a vast and distant horror into sympathetic cause, and systems of exhibition channel sentiment into action. This article's study of *Ravished Armenia* and the early film advocacy of Near East Relief in the Armenian case yields not only the contributions of media to claims-making process and humanitarian action but also Christian underpinnings of human rights movements. The evangelical legacy produced missions that provided the transnational infrastructure for sharing visual testimony and administering aid and offered an instrumental iconography of suffering that shaped an early "rights imaginary." [Keywords: film, activism, Armenian genocide]

In 1919, *Ravished Armenia* was released. This silent, eight-reel film was a commercial adaptation of Aurora Mardiganian's written account of the brutalities suffered by the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and witnessed by Mardiganian herself. Oscar Apfel, a later associate of Cecil B. DeMille, directed the film while early film pioneer Colonel William Selig produced. The screenplay is attributed to Nora Waln, the publicity secretary of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR). And in a bid to both authenticity and sensationalism, the 17-year-old Mardiganian starred as herself. Just as with the publication of her testimony, the film was screened under the auspices of the ACASR—later to become Near East Relief (NER)—as part of a much larger fundraising campaign designed to generate both publicity and money for the Armenian cause.[1] The New York City screenings ran for 12 days with afternoon and evening showings. The room sat approximately 1,000 and the admission cost was $10 per ticket. A report from the *New York Times* quotes spokeswoman Mrs. Oliver Harriman:

> The whole purpose of the picture is to acquaint America with ravished Armenia . . . to visualize conditions so that there will be no misunderstanding in the mind of any one about the terrible things which have transpired. It was deemed essential that the leaders, social and intellectual, should first learn the story, but later the general public shall be informed. It is proposed that before this campaign of information is complete, as many adults as possible shall know the story of Armenia, and the screen was selected as the medium because it reached the millions, where the printed word reaches the thousands. [*New York Times* 1919:4]

Visual media as a tool for activists is nothing new, and the NER's showing of *Ravished Armenia* represents an early exploration into the possibilities of film as a new medium for testimony. Film can visualize abject conditions or humanitarian mission work for a broad audience while stories and images marshal the sentiment of vast and dispersed spectators to generate empathy, encourage action, and, as in the case of NER, raise money for political and relief efforts.[2]

Ravished Armenia is a significant case, not for its technical excellence—indeed, it received little more than a few tepid reviews and its success beyond the NER fundraising campaign is uncertain—but as an example of the convergence of international humanitarian activism and entertainment media practices at the turn of the 20th century. This film and its context offer an opportunity to consider the practices of publicity and testimony in human rights advocacy. The Armenian crisis, a period extending

from the Hamidian Massacres of 1894–96 to the genocide and purges of 1915–23, occurred at a transitional point: Visual media technologies, specifically the graphic magazine and film, developed alongside a discourse of international human rights enforcement.[3] These new forms of media enabled more immediate contact with suffering at a distance, presenting trauma for the viewers "at home." In the face of tragedy, a sense of moral obligation to those overseas—whether legally, politically, or charitably—came into play.

Testimony and publicity provide useful frameworks for understanding the work that this film, and its skillful use of images, was intended to carry out. Testimony as a genre is presumed to hold socially and morally transformative properties. In this sense, it is not just a representation but also more akin to a "speech act" that occasions beneficial change in a process that involves both speaker and listener (Felman and Laub 1991). When they are successful, testimonials are not simply forms of witnessing. Instead, they produce a community conducive to listening and responding. In this way, the transformative and ethical possibilities of testimony can be seen in genres as diverse as Christian witnessing, the legal process, and human rights advocacy. Drawing on these legacies, Meg McLagan (in press) argues that the performative dimensions of testimony make "ethical claims on viewers and listeners and cultivate potential actors in the political arena." As a form of political communication, speeches are public acts; they must access the political arena in order to hail a public sphere or audience, which McLagan (2003) has called "witnessing publics." Although human rights advocacy has relied on testimony to make ethical claims on its audience from the time of the abolition movement, this performative tradition has expanded dynamically with the emergence of new media forms in the 20th century.

The exhibition of *Ravished Armenia* took place within a wider consciousness-raising campaign that was designed to transform feeling into immediate action. Early work in human rights and genocide has treated media as delivery systems for information, advancing the idea that the exposure of atrocities is enough to stimulate action. Recently, scholars such as Thomas Keenan (2001), Susan Moeller (1999), and Barbie Zelizer (1998) trouble this position in their examinations of the moral and political failures surrounding recent human rights crises, such as those in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Although Harriman's introduction to the film points to this belief in the transparency of photographic images, the practices around the film indicated that for these images to work, aesthetic strategies invoking recognition and compassion needed to be incorporated into the exhibition of atrocities and that the practices of circulation and exhibition directly played into the film's capacity to stimulate action. One key way of eliciting both compassion and outrage was to highlight the religious dimension of Turkish atrocities against Christians. Such presentations elicited empathy by connecting to a visual tradition of suffering in Christian iconography as they traveled through a sophisticated transnational network responsive to and dependent on these modes of expression: missionary organizations.

Ravished Armenia was successful not only because visual images produced a moral obligation to act but because those images were part of a much larger global network of information and humanitarian concern constructed over time by Christian mission organizations, which had long been involved in forming a language of testimony and a global circuitry to move that testimony around the world.[4] From early on, the Armenian Crisis was represented as the victimization of Christians by Muslim oppressors, and Christianity became a conceptual force in shaping these testimonial encounters. *Ravished Armenia,* and the wider campaign of which it was a part, reveals various economies—religious, cinematic, political, and legal—that come together in the formation of images geared to animate action. Study of the film reveals the centrality of visual media to the development of international humanitarian advocacy; however, much of the success may be attributed to the weaving of images into a larger political campaign. In the Armenian case, the campaign was waged in a Christian register.

The Armenian campaign drew on the fact that, in the 19th century, the fate of Christians at the hands of Ottoman Turks had long been a cause for identifying and opposing persecution (Lauren 2003). The shared religious identity reminded the Christian viewer-reader that the Armenians were also Christians and thus deserving of human compassion. A report in an 1896 *Harper's Weekly* notes, "The massacres in Armenia very justly aroused a feeling of horror and indignation throughout Christendom, and excited a widespread desire to protect and aid the unfortunate victims." Christianity evoked shared identities, recognition, and the expectation of compassion and action. To invoke Christianity was to produce the witnessing public that would respond to the imperiled Armenians. Furthermore, the Christian mission projects had assured a transnational Christian presence and a network for information exchange. Peter Balakian (2003) has argued that the Armenian case represents a significant milestone in the evolving history of human rights and that interest in ideas about human rights were intensified by the extensive use of Christian discursive networks.[5]

The tight link between Christian missions, political advocacy, and the Armenian crisis can be seen in the figure of James L. Barton, who left a position working for a missionary organization to become director of NER. Barton couched his advocacy directly in the language of social gospel. "The Armenians have no one to speak for them and it is without question a time when the voice of Christianity should be raised," Barton wrote in a letter to rights activist Cleveland Amory (Barton 1930:4). Barton's use of a "Christian voice" evokes both the speech act of testimony and a more political form of communication that "makes ethical claims and hails collectivities" (Barton 1930:4). Barton's voice is intended to depict the terrible conditions of Armenians, but these conditions will be visualized within a Christian framework that informs aesthetic strategies and encounters

with the testimony. Local religious organizations supplied venues and audiences for testimony; missions abroad served as the origins of the reports of atrocities; U.S. and German missionaries stationed in the Ottoman Empire assisted victims; the U.S. State Department used the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions to launch an emergency drive for the collection of funds. In both rhetoric and structure, the relief effort around the Armenian crisis brought together an emerging human rights framework with an established mode of Christian organizing.

As this Christian network of information and humanitarian action developed, so too did the technologies of publicity that created new witnessing publics. A growing sense of obligation to respond to suffering at a distance intensified as visual technologies granted new immediacy to far away places. One of the most important forms at the turn of this century was the new graphic magazine. Images drawn from the editorial cartoons incorporated the act of witnessing and expressed concern over the issue of response. Figure 1, "Waiting the Signal?" depicts the Armenian case within a gladiatorial arena, in which the figure of Turkey stands above a prone Armenia, arm outstretched to the crowds; both await the thumbs up or down response from the audience, the global public. Figure 2 depicts Armenia as a fallen woman, savaged by a Turk—a caricature of a violent orient—while a weeping world garbed in military gear stands and looks on. The caption, "Tears, Idle Tears," suggests that sympathy alone ("idle tears") is not enough and action is necessary. Both cartoons invoke the act of viewing through witnessing and both imply a call for greater action. "Tears, Idle Tears" is particularly noteworthy for making the world a political spectator whose passivity indicates complicity.

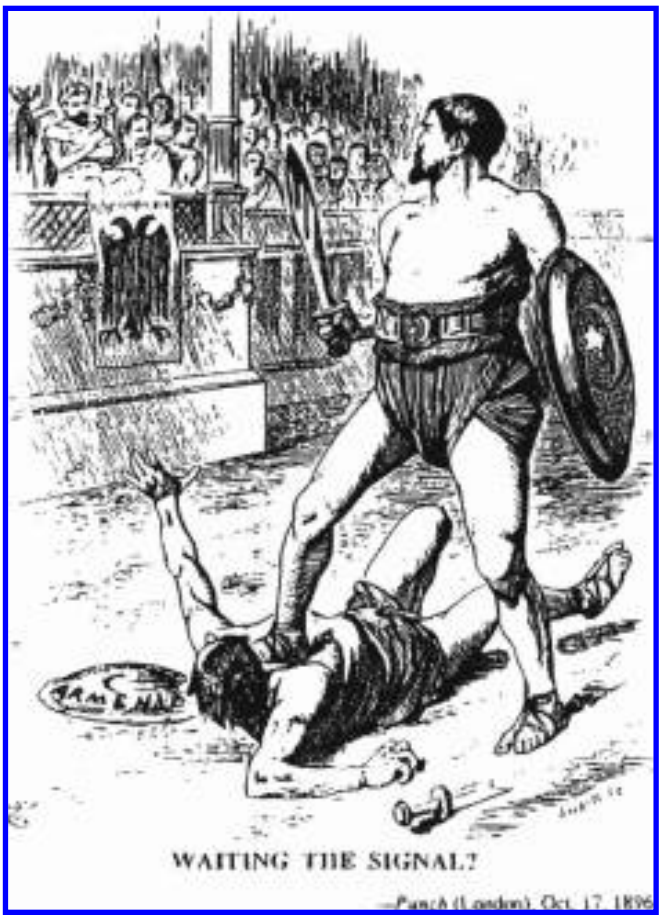

FIGURE 1. Image courtesy of The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota.

In these media, the Armenian crisis had been staged for transnational audiences, eventually becoming a commonplace by the late 1920s. Pictorial magazines offered illustrated accounts of the traumas suffered. Books chronicling the massacres found a ready audience. Among the publications was an eyewitness account of the genocide, as told by Mardiganian, which appeared in serial form in *The New York American* (Variety 1919). A book version was published in the United States as *Ravished Armenia* and the United Kingdom as *Auction of Souls*. Although no numbers are available for the earlier printing, a reprint in 1934 boasted an alleged circulation of 360,000 copies (Slide 1997). Mardiganian, having endured the horrors of the Armenian genocide, arrived in the United States in 1917 at the age of 16. She was taken in by an Armenian American couple, who also aided her in her search for her brother by posting advertisements in newspapers. These advertisements were followed by newspaper interviews, which further publicized her story and eventually brought it to the attention of screenwriter Harvey Gates. Gates and his wife adopted Mardiganian and placed her in the charge of Nora Waln, publicity secretary of the ACASR–NER. With them she delivered a testimony for publication. This publication, in turn, was made into a film that chronicled massacres, deportations, and rape and featured Mardiganian as herself. Although producer William Selig held the rights to the film, the promotions boasted the film as "Produced for the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief." In 1919, a 21-city campaign of special screenings on behalf of ACASR was launched with ticket process ranging from $2.50 to $10.00. These cities included Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Indianapolis (Variety 1919:49). Mardiganian toured with the film, appearing at screenings, dinners, and other fundraisers; when the engagements became too many for a single individual and likely far too much pressure for one girl, Mardiganian impersonators were used. Historian Anthony Slide makes a compelling case for Mardiganian's exploitation by these commercial practices; however, it is important to recognize that this is not irreconcilable with the advocacy goals of ACASR–NER. NER mobilized *Ravished Armenia* with the assumption that viewing these abject conditions would move audiences to contribute to the fundraising campaign.

At the center of this activity is the presumption of transparency: The film depicts the conditions experienced by Mardiganian. The presence of Aurora on screen and in the audience deepens the indexical resonance that advances the truth claims of the film. Nevertheless, sets of aesthetic and

FIGURE 2. Image courtesy of The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota.

narrative strategies contribute to the film's meanings and shape an audience response. In the Armenian case, there were sign systems in place that facilitated the presentation of the suffering as cause; among such mobilizing aesthetics were images that capitalized on an Orientalist imaginary and long-standing Christian tradition of representing suffering. Earlier representational practices had established a template; *Ravished Armenia* drew on these iconic tropes that engage and stimulate this witnessing public while making legible (and palatable) a concept of distant suffering.

To do this, the mediation of the Armenian crisis drew heavily on established tropes of the savage Turk, sexually avaricious and cruel, ravishing helpless Christian women (see Figure 2). Cinema (and Col. Selig) had adopted the literary titillation of the Oriental harem and Turkish cruelty as early as 1909 in films such as *In the Sultan's Power. Ravished Armenia* evoked this tradition in its title and in its content. Shortly after the film begins, the Turkish Governor, Husein Pasha, seeks to bring Aurora into his harem. Later in the film, she and her sister are taken to a slave auction; although she escapes, scenes of slave markets continue throughout the film.[6] Interspersed with tales of massacre are title cards informing the viewer of the "Unspeakable Turk," who was "steeped in murder, rape and pillage" (Apfel 1919:Reel One, Title 14). Although such images were designed to dehumanize the Turk and engage audience sympathy, they were clearly designed to titillate as well. The film's press kit promised such visions as "real harems," noting how "with other naked girls, pretty Aurora Mardiganian was sold for eighty-five cents" (Slide 1997:10). The press fixated on this aspect. The *New York Times,* notes Slide, wrote of these harems and slave markets; the trade press noted "a sensational story of Turkish depravity" (1997:10).

These scenes of titillation underscore the commercial dimension of this film. The historian Gregory Topalian sees this as the commercial exploitation that undermined an "important issue" (Topalian 1998:77), but this risks missing how political advocacy can be carried out through sexual stimulation, not despite it. Sensation provides an excellent mode of publicity. Furthermore, these scenes were intercut with the stories of massacres and deportations. This structure suggests that a more identifiable and individually based narrative aided in conferring meaning onto the landscape of vast atrocity. These recognizable forms grounded the audience as they marshaled sentiment. Clearly the use of such tropes is fraught, and I do not endorse the racist and troubling depictions; rather, I seek to call attention to those images that readily hail an audience, thanks to long-standing histories and the titillation of the imagination. Human rights historian Paul Gordon Lauren notes that particularly effective in spurring public outcry and demands to protect humanity were the "pen-and-ink drawings in newspapers [that] provided visual images of rapacious Turkish troops burning homes, riding over dead bodies, and massacring children and women who were clearly wearing medallions of the Christian cross" (Lauren 2003:66).

Ravished Armenia illustrates the peculiar mix of sexual stimulation with persecution and martyrdom. In the second reel of the film, an Armenian man is violently enjoined to "swear the Moslem oath"; if so, his people would be saved. Instead, he responds, "There is but one God, and Jesus Christ, his son, is my savior." Although only the titles remain here, the implication is that the man is slaughtered for his testimony. Within this moment, the policy of extermination, tied to imperial and religious goals, is clearly reduced to martyrdom and a witnessing to Christ. This martyrdom is inscribed en masse later in the film in the crucifixion of naked women. The crosses are raised and a row fades into the horizon, suggesting the extent of the violence. What follows is a close-up of a woman gazing upward in mournful agony, a bird of prey hovering above her. These images draw on a tradition of representation, producing a recognizable form of suffering that merits outrage and compassion. Notably this sequence intersects with the titillation initially supplied by the harem fantasies, as it asserts not merely a crucifixion of women but their nudity as well.

These tropes not only lend a recognizable framework but a palatable one as well. Interviews with Mardiganian have revealed that these images derived from her account of a brutal impaling of women. As noted in Slide 1997, "The Turks didn't make their crosses like that. The Turks made little pointed crosses . . . and after raping them, they made them sit on the pointed wood" (1997:6). Given my own visceral resistance to imagining and sharing such horrific events, the impulse to turn to a more sanitized and familiar shape of suffering and pain makes sense. The Christian iconography of suffering supplies the necessary familiar and recognizable shapes of suffering that invoke the ready-made

FIGURE 3. Image courtesy of The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota.

sentiment of a Christian audience. Indeed, given the familiarity and widespread usage of this iconography, one could see their function as transdenominational; Christian iconography has infiltrated the secular imaginary. The martyrdom imagery supplies a means of "political communication through which ethical claims are made and collectivities are hailed" (McLagan 2003). The Armenian massacres came to be visualized as mass martyrdom (see Figure 3).

The film draws heavily on the Christian claims invoking biblical and ritual histories that seek to produce a shared humanity for an audience addressed as if they were Christian. An opening title card informs the audience that Armenia is "the first nation in the world to adopt Christianity. Within this land was located the Garden of Eden . . . and here, on the summit of Mt. Ararat, the ark of Noah landed when the deluge subsided. Here beneath the shadows of Mt. Ararat, lies Armenia, the cradle of infant humanity, where dwelt four million peaceable and industrious souls." Christianity and its loci function assert the personhood of the victims, work as a hailing mechanism, and even suggest the possibility of biblical affiliation as a form of land claim.

Audience response suggested the efficacy of these affecting images—that they would be decoded as encoded. Slide notes that Hanford C. Judson of *Moving Picture World* wrote, "One would think the scenes in *Auction of Souls* had been pictured in Armenia at the time of the persecution of this Christian people. They are given the chance to declare for Mohammed, but are true to Christ, and from this comes their martyrdom, burnings, starvation, outrage beyond relief and torture beyond the power of the mind to realize" (1997:13). The *L.A. Evening Express* wrote: "Now the producers have broken with tradition and in stage setting, costume, and action have reproduced not a conventional Arabian nights slave market and harem scene, but they have taken as their models these places as they actually exist today" (Slide 1997:12–13). The National Board of Motion Pictures described the film as "a frank straightforward exposition of the sufferings of Armenia which makes a sincere and powerful appeal to every drop of red blood in America's manhood and womanhood" (Slide 1997:11). Notably, these descriptions assert the truth of the images as well as their potential for appeal. Fears of anti-Turkish sentiment, addressed by Britain's Foreign Office, equally suggest the capacity for appeal.[7]

But were these images in fact mobilizing? Although commercial and exploitative, the film was used by NER as part of a very successful campaign that raised upward of $100 million between 1915 and 1930. Moreover, the film encouraged further use of film publicity in fundraising campaigns. However, it was not the images alone that produced this overwhelming response but also the circuits of transmission and contexts of exhibition that shaped the advocacy work of this film.

NER used multiple media venues, from pen and ink to performance as part of the fundraising campaign for the Armenian cause. Although *Ravished Armenia* was a commercial film that came to be used for this campaign, NER entered the field of visual publicity soon after, making the most of both the lifted censorship of the war years and the interest in the Near East. James Barton's account of this publicity project, in his chapter "Letting the Public Know," addresses the movement of newsreel companies into the Near East and the ways NER capitalized on their presence. Barton writes

> The Committee, because of its contacts with the people and the officials, was able to give these photographers access to unusual material and the companies in turn graciously permitted their operators to take special pictures of the relief conditions and the children for exclusive use of the Committee. This mutual arrangement with the moving-picture producers was supplemented by a wealth of camera-pictures by the staff. [1930:390]

In effect, the Committee provided the circuits through which visual media would travel; they were the gatekeepers to the events and they would, in turn, receive "special pictures" for the use of NER.

These short films depicted the harrowing conditions of orphanages, refugee camps, and the work of the NER, and they concluded with an announcement of local campaigns for relief. They were distributed to theatrical and nontheatrical venues alike and played in schools, churches, and public gatherings, many of which supplied attendant venues for action, typically fundraising. For example, NER

launched "Golden Rule Sunday," an event in which families were asked to eat a simple orphanage meal and make a sacrificial gift equivalent to at least the cost of an average U.S. dinner. This event took a larger public form and soon local community organizations arranged Golden Rule meal events. These events would often take place in hotel banquet halls (donated) while "a simple orphanage menu" was served. Films and special guest speakers supplied a large attraction. "Often more than a thousand people would attend these simple meals at which moving pictures were shown and the work of the Near East Relief was presented by speakers from overseas" (Barton 1930:384). Although donations were likely solicited as a means of entry to the event, the films could draw publics and potentially reinforce the identification supplied by the performance of the meal itself. The very conditions of the event, as well as the titles that informed viewers of local campaigns, asserted a context of action; the compassion evoked was already mobilized and additional channels of action supplied.

The value of film as publicity and practical tool did not go unnoticed. Many films were produced during this time including *Alice in Hungerland, Seeing is Believing, One of these Little Ones, Stand By Them a Little Longer, A Great Achievement or Uncle America's Golden Rule*, and *What the Flag Saw* (Barton 1930:391). Although churches continued to supply an excellent action site, a ready audience, and strategies to channel the humanitarian impulse, NER also made use of theatrical venues. Short films that depicted the organization's work, the conditions they sought to alleviate, and a title directing the viewer to the local campaign initiative were used as fillers for the feature presentation. Celebrity was also mobilized as a mode of publicity. Jackie Coogan, a child actor, became the figurehead for "the Children's Crusade" and "visualized for the Near East the child interest of America" (Barton 1930:391). Audiences who sought out films with this popular child star would encounter these pleas for aid. And as with the Golden Rule Sunday, action could be built into the act of attendance. In one case, "a milk campaign was organized across the country by using the moving-picture houses where Jackie's pictures were being shown, to collect cans of condensed or evaporated milk. The supplement to the price of admission was a can of milk" (Barton 1930:391). Film offered an effective way of producing a witnessing public, as the medium was used to visualize both the abject conditions and the mission efforts. However, it was neither the aesthetics nor the perceptual experience of another's suffering alone that resulted in the efficacy of the fundraising campaign. A crucial part of the film-based campaigns appears to have been plans that incorporated context and provided direct action routes in tandem with the film presentations. In fact, such campaigns capitalized on the appeal of film as a form of mass entertainment as well as a mode of testimony.

Film and other visual media offer effective modes of mobilizing accessible tropes, both popular (sexual exploitation and Orientalist) and Christian, both of which enable performances of suffering and redemption, and of persecution and the assured humanity of the victim, all of which supplies a moral call to action for Christian publics. Although exploitative and problematic, particularly in the troubling maintenance of a Christian-based transnationalist narrative, the images alarmed audiences and resulted in if not action, the sentiment that action was demanded in the political and legal arenas. Furthermore, the network of circulation through these channels assured that an immediate form of response would accompany the call to action—that the emotional or sensational appeal could be translated into action. The church-based networks that supplied modes of information circulation and venues of exhibition and action contributed to the effective strategy of the film medium as a delivery system for testimony. The purpose here is not to celebrate a Christian success with the "revelation to action" model of human rights media discourse, but to note how Christian mission organizations formed the circuits and shapes of film testimony to produce an effective fundraising campaign and animated humanitarian advocacy on an international level.

NOTES

1. This transformation occurred later in 1919 on incorporation (Peterson 2004:51–52). The relationship between these two organizations is not fully explored in this article, but suffice to say that they do appear to be interrelated, with ACASR appearing as an earlier incarnation of NER. Elaine Tejirian (2000) offers further information on the relationships between early mission and relief organizations. For purposes of simplicity, the organization will be referred to as NER.

2. I am very grateful to the film historian Anthony Slide for providing the bulk of the historical information surrounding this film. His research yielded interviews with Mardiganian, documentation of response to the film, and, most importantly, a title list that supplies enormous insight into the entire structure of the film. This last element is particularly important given that, at this time, only a fragment of the film (a 15-minute reel) is available.

3. Although *Ravished Armenia* and subsequent films of NER take place after the 1915 genocide, this transitional period spans from the Armenian Massacres (the Hamidian massacres) of the 1890s, which were reported and visualized through graphic weekly magazines, to the official extermination policy that resulted in the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Although I do offer a (negligible) distinction between the Hamidian massacres and the later genocide, I nonetheless accept the massacres as genocide. This is a politically tendentious issue; however, this article will not serve as a defense of this position.

4. Although it is tempting to dismiss the mission movement as a form of cultural imperialism, much like one could dismiss commercial media as incompatible with an activist cause, Christian missions have been associated with such early human rights movements as abolitionism.

5. This hailing of Christian sensibilities persisted, as the *Nation* (1885) chided Christian Europe for its distraction. The Christian aspect was even invoked by Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, a Jewish man. When Ambassador Morgenthau arrived in Constantinople to meet with the U.S. community and the Young Turks, Talaat Pasha queried his interest in the Armenian people, "You are a Jew; these people are Christians." Morgenthau responded, "You don't seem to realize that I am not here as a Jew, but as the American Ambassador. My country contains something more than 97,000,000 Christians and something less than 3,000,000 Jews. So in my ambassadorial capacity, I am 97 percent Christian . . . The United States will always resent the wholesale destruction of Christians in Turkey" (Morgenthau 1918:335).

6. The film no longer exists in its entirety. However, a title list is available within Anthony Slide's history of the film, enabling the narrative elements to be known.

7. Such concerns were legitimate. The *Moving Picture World* wrote, "The appalling sights created not only a feeling of hatred and detestation for the abominable Turks, but an unquenchable determination to relieve the suffering and despair of innocent Armenian and Syrian women and children" (1919:884).

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