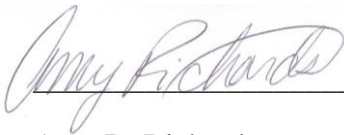


Bearing Witness:
An Analysis of the Reporting and the Reception
of News about Distant Suffering in the light of
John Howard Yoder's work on Witness

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I, Amy D. Richards, attest that this thesis has been composed by me, and that the work is my own, and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Richards". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Amy D. Richards

Dedication Page

With thanks and gratitude to the learning community of New College, I learned much and was encouraged greatly. I am grateful to the Earhart Foundation for providing generous financial support for the academic year of 2005-2006.

I am also deeply blessed by friends and family who have continued to love me dearly during an extended period of high-strung, introspective thesis writing. All the while, they have been examples of compassion reaching out to those both near and far. With love and gratitude, I say thank you.

Abstract

In this thesis I analyse the reporting and the reception of news about distant suffering in the light of John Howard Yoder's work on witness. Studies of news reporting about foreign wars, genocide and disasters commonly conclude that the practice of bearing witness to distant suffering contributes to a context where both journalists and spectators appear to have limited moral agency. I argue that the practice of bearing witness has ethical significance for those actively engaged in bearing witnessing. In his work on Christian witness, Yoder demonstrates how witness can be understood as a method for moral reasoning. I assert that Yoder's argument presents a fruitful approach for interdisciplinary consideration of the ethical significance found in the practice of bearing witness to distant human suffering.

In chapter one, I lay the foundation of my investigation into the ethical agency involved in bearing witness. John Howard Yoder's theological approach to social ethics provides that foundation. Central to Yoder's claim that witness is a form of ethics, is the premise that presence testifies. Yoder calls this the 'phenomenology of social witness'. Yoder's work opens new ways in which to ask questions about the practice of bearing witness as a form of social ethics. It is from this foundation that I begin to ask questions about the news media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering, the subject of chapter two. Media practices are social practices that involve a dense interaction of many layers of society. In the media practice of witnessing distant suffering, governments, charities, news media organisations, and audiences are all involved in what I call the social formation of the Global Samaritan. The foundational work on Yoder in chapter one allows me to ask the question: How is the Global Samaritan a presence, and to what does this presence testify?

In chapters three and four, I focus on two of the prominent groups which contribute to the formation of the Global Samaritan: audiences and foreign correspondents. News audiences as moral agents already seem a problem for Yoder's claim that presence testifies. Do audiences who bear witness to distant suffering have moral agency? How can the amorphous and fleeting presence of television, internet, or twitter audiences testify? In the chapter on audiences, the initial claim regarding presence makes for an important investigation into how audiences can potentially move beyond mere spectatorship and towards participation in care for the suffering.

Foreign correspondents bearing witness to distant suffering do not face the same obstacles to testifying as audiences do. After all, foreign correspondents are often live, on-the-scene of extraordinary circumstances of suffering. The danger and risks foreign correspondents face in order to report live from scenes of devastation and disaster testify to the fact that the situation is indeed dangerous and causing suffering. Yoder's claim that presence testifies is a claim strongly paralleled within the tradition of investigative journalism. In chapter four, I investigate the ethical function of foreign correspondent presence. I consider the foreign correspondent's dual role as the proxy 'eyes and ears' of the public and the proxy voice for those without a voice. Through these two roles, I explore major concepts involved in the practice of investigative journalism. One prominent issue I explore is the tension between the principles of a liberal democratic press and the practice of frontline reporters live, on-the-scene of extraordinary and extreme situations.

In the final chapter, chapter five, I focus on the experience of three frontline reporters bearing witness to human suffering. BBC [British Broadcasting Company] reporter John Simpson's reflections on his coverage of the beginning of the Iraq War illustrate the importance of bearing witness as involving real presence on location. Norwegian freelance reporter Åsne Seierstad's reflections on covering the Iraq War from Baghdad further contributes to the concept of 'being there' as central to bearing witness. Focus on Seierstad also furthers discussion on women reporters bearing witness to war. The third reporter I highlight is BBC reporter Fergal Keane. I focus on his reflections covering the Rwandan genocide to illustrate how the claim to bearing witness involves more than spectatorship, but often involves participation. I conclude with an analysis of the media practice of bearing witness, involving the range of reporter presence to the quasi-presence of the audience, in the light of John Howard Yoder's claim that bearing witness is a form of social ethics.

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Rationale for Project

The conceptual category under investigation in this thesis is the concept of witness and the practice of bearing witness. The broad question I am concerned with is: How do witness bearers authenticate their truth claims? This is an important question for many fields of inquiry such as philosophy, law, theology, and more recently a prominent question for investigation in studies of media, society and technology. In this thesis, I argue that the Christian religious practice of bearing witness to belief can provide insight into the modern media practice of bearing witness, particularly the media practice of bearing witness to suffering in distant places.

I first investigate practices Christians draw on in order to authenticate truth claims. I am not primarily interested in how translatable Christian practices are into media practices of bearing witness. Rather, I want to know how practices in Christian life are understood as authenticating testimony. With that insight, I then investigate the practices already involved in media witnessing to determine if those practices perform comparative functions. Christian theology is the more established field of inquiry into the concept of witness, and therefore provides an important resource for the emerging questions of witness in the field of media studies. Since I am working with truth claims, my work is in the domain of ethics. As with the concept of witness, ethics is a more established area of inquiry in Christian theology than in media studies. My thesis is a project of comparative ethics in which an established field of ethical inquiry provides insight into an emerging field of ethical inquiry.

Introduction to 'Bearing Witness' as an Ethical Act

Bearing witness is an ethical act. Whether a person bears truthful witness or false witness, bearing witness involves moral agency. At some level a choice to bear witness, or not to bear witness, involves selectivity. Choosing to testify to an experience or event that may be contested by others, or contested by the established narrative of a culture, may alter the rest of a person's life. Witnessing is not without cost to both the agent bearing witness and possibly to the audiences, the secondary witnesses hearing or observing the testimony. Therefore, deciding to bear witness or not to bear witness has moral and cultural significance. Consider the example of two British journalists working in Soviet Russia and the moral and cultural significance of the witness they provided.

In the 1930s, Malcolm Muggeridge, an eager young reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, left England for what he believed to be the Promised Land, Stalin's Moscow. Muggeridge soon found his hopes for utopia dashed as he travelled the Soviet countryside confirming underground reports of the mass starvation of peasants on the collectivized farms. In 1933, Muggeridge was one of few journalists to cover the Ukrainian famine during which conservative estimates report three to three and a half million Ukrainians died.¹ Muggeridge was not a man who intended to expose the problems with Soviet communism—he had been a believer in the great possibilities of a socialist state. Instead of protecting his own position, he wrestled through the crisis of ideology and bore truthful witness by reporting on the deadly famine. Muggeridge wrote in his diary, 'whatever else I may do or think in the future, I must never pretend that I haven't seen this. Ideas will come and go; but this is more than an idea. It is peasants kneeling down in the snow and asking for bread. Something that I have seen and understood.'² Muggeridge chose to 'never pretend' that he did not see the Ukrainian people dying of starvation. This is in comparison to his colleague, Walter Duranty, Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times*, who denied the famine in hopes to keep his privileged access to Stalin. Duranty responded to the famine by sticking to the Communist party line of, 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.'³ Duranty was awarded the American journalism Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on Soviet Russia's 'Five Year Plan'. Muggeridge felt the cost of bearing witness to a contested narrative; he was eventually forced to leave Russia and *The Manchester Guardian*. While the 1930s public ridiculed Muggeridge and lauded Duranty, it is the testimony of Muggeridge that is now lauded, especially among Ukrainian communities, and the title of 'Stalin's Western Apologist' associated with Duranty.

Muggeridge's claim that he must 'never pretend' that he was not a witness to the starvation of the Ukrainian people carries the moral weight which often accompanies

¹ Hennadiy Yefimenko, "Demographic Consequence of Holodomor of 1933 in Ukraine," ed. Institute of History Kiev (The all-Union census of 1937 in Ukraine, 2003). *Holodomor* is the Ukrainian for "hungerplague".

² Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time* (New York: Morrow, 1973).

³ Duranty used the omelette line in reference to Stalin's 'Five Year Plan'. S.J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty: The New York Time's Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 222.

witnessing versus other modes of perceiving or ways of coming to know things.⁴ Muggeridge's story, and Duranty's as well, illustrates how being a witness can involve being caught up in a 'web of complicity'.⁵ Muggeridge and Duranty are journalists. We might think: surely there must be some sort of professional ethical code journalists ought to follow. But that is only for professionals. What about for audiences? Are we under the same moral obligations? We cannot pretend that 'we never knew' and even more so given advances in media technology where audiences are invited to 'witness destruction for yourself' as in the project between Google Earth and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

In 1998, then US President Bill Clinton offered an apology to survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide where he said, 'It may seem strange to you ... but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.'⁶ But what happens when the technology *does* allow us, sitting in our offices, to witness the terror? While the project between Google Earth and the USHMM is not *live* satellite feed, it could be. The technology exists. For now, it is frequently updated coverage of destroyed villages and refugees of the Darfur region of Sudan. This genocide prevention project technologically equips news audiences to bear witness for ourselves—to bear witness to far more than we can respond to.

How do we speak truthfully about suffering? How do we *bear witness* to suffering that is far removed from our own experience? Does the act of bearing witness involve the moral agency to help alleviate suffering? 'Bearing witness' is a phrase used in the popular, professional, and academic discussion of journalistic coverage and audience reception of news media reporting on distant suffering. The media practice of bearing witness includes the activities of journalistic reportage on distant suffering as well as the audience reception of the reports. In our modern global age, bearing witness seems to be

⁴ In *Christ and the Media*, Muggeridge contends that the television camera is a lying witness. 'Not only can the camera lie, it always lies.' Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 30.

⁵ Witnesses caught up in 'webs of complicity' is a concept that I borrow from John Durham Peters. John Durham Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2005), 256.

⁶ William J. Clinton, "To Genocide Survivors, Assistance Workers, and U.S. And Rwanda Officials," (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 1998).

an important mode of communication that involves speaking about the suffering of others.

The ethical significance of bearing witness is rich territory for exploration in both the fields of Media studies and Christian ethics. In this thesis, I contribute to an interdisciplinary conversation by investigating how the Christian theological category of witness can provide an analytical tool for understanding the media practice of bearing witness. I argue that theologian John Howard Yoder's constructive theology of witness as Christian social ethics can help illuminate the ethical significance involved in the media practice of bearing witness. Yoder shows how the Christian practice of bearing witness to conviction is a way of making truth claims. Yoder is a fruitful conversation partner in exploring the moral agency involved in the media practice of bearing witness to the truth about human suffering.

Placement of Research amongst Current Scholarship

Broadly speaking, my research approach of using Christian theology to provide insight into the field of Media studies situates my work amongst those from the 'Media, Culture, and Religion Perspective' as Robert White calls it.⁷ Stewart Hoover, one of the leading scholars of this perspective, explains the interdisciplinary impulses of the research:

Among media scholars, attention has begun to focus on culture and questions of culture, opening up scope for consideration of those dimensions of life we traditionally have thought of as 'religious.' At the same time scholars of religion have begun investigating ways in which religion is done outside the boundaries of traditional faiths, doctrines, histories, and orders.⁸

My work broadly fits into the media, culture, and religion perspective, because I am interested in exploring how a signifying practice such as witness functions as a meaning-making practice in Christian Theology and also in Media Studies. In addition to the media, culture, and religion perspective, I am also contributing to interdisciplinary research on developing the concept of witness as an analytical tool to be used in Media and Communication Studies. These scholars include Daniel Dayan, John Ellis, Elihu

⁷ Robert A. White, "The Media, Culture, and Religion Perspective: Discovering a Theory and Methodology for Studying Media and Religion," *Communication Research Trends* 26, no. 1 (2007).

⁸ Stewart Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

Katz, Tamar Liebes, John Durham Peters, Paddy Scannell, and Günter Thomas.⁹ In 2005, when I began focussing my thesis on the concept of witness, this group of established scholars had not yet met under any formal grouping. There are more scholars involved in this research group, but I have only engaged the work of those listed above. In the spring of 2008, the research group stated their aim:

to examine critically the topic of ‘witnessing’ from the perspective of multiple disciplines and to explore its viability as a bridging concept for the cultural sciences. In particular, the phenomenon of ‘witnessing’ has the potential for promoting an original and fruitful comparative perspective for a series of current cultural issues: the representation of the suffering of others, technology and ‘human agency’, epistemological issues surrounding forms of communication, media ethics, the social organisation of knowledge and experience, media and alterity, and not least the communicative construction of cultural memory with its ethical aspects.¹⁰

The research group’s interest is in how the concept of ‘witness’ might be developed into an analytical category for the Media and Communication Sciences. Witnessing, as a conceptual category, is predominantly found in the study of religion and law. However, the research group cites changes since the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries in how the concept of witness is now being explored in three other fields of practice. These three fields include 1) bearing witness as in relation to accounts of the Holocaust; 2) the analysis of television by the media and communication sciences; and 3) philosophical as well as theological discourses on epistemology and hermeneutics.¹¹

My research fits soundly within the remit of the ‘witnessing’ research group’s aims. I contribute by showing how witness as presence and participation is a mode of making an ethical claim. I look to Christian theologian John Howard Yoder’s argument that Christian witness is ethics. I investigate the question of whether other forms of embodied witness prove to be ethics as well. In this interdisciplinary investigation of the concept of witness, I do not treat the disciplines as hermetically sealed off from each

⁹ Some of these scholars contribute to the media, culture, and religion perspective, but contributions to research on the concept of witness are also explored outside of the media, culture, and religion perspective.

¹⁰ Günter Thomas, "Academic Goals, Conception, and Object of Investigation for the Research Symposium" (paper presented at the Witnessing: Cultural Roots, Media Forms and Cultural Memory, Villa Vigoni, Italy, April 27–30 2008).

¹¹ Ibid.

other. Overall, each chapter has its own bibliography, but theologians appear in my discussion of Media and Journalism Studies and those from the cultural sciences appear in my discussion on Christian Theology. This is a testament to the multi-directional nature of interdisciplinary work. While a Christian theological understanding of witness can help us understand the media practice of witnessing, Media and Journalism Studies can help us understand aspects of witness as embodiment and mediation in Christian theology as well.

In chapter one, I lay the foundation of my investigation into the ethical agency involved in bearing witness. John Howard Yoder's theological approach to social ethics provides that foundation. Central to Yoder's claim that witness is a form of ethics, is the premise that presence testifies. Yoder calls this the 'phenomenology of social witness'. Yoder's work opens new ways in which to ask questions about the practice of bearing witness as a form of social ethics. It is from this foundation that I begin to ask questions about the news media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering, the subject of chapter two. Media practices are social practices that involve a dense interaction of many layers of society. In the media practice of witnessing distant suffering, governments, charities, news media organisations, and audiences are all involved in what I call the social formation of the Global Samaritan. The foundational work on Yoder in chapter one allows me to ask the question: How is the Global Samaritan a presence, and to what does this presence testify?

In chapters three and four, I focus on two of the prominent groups which contribute to the formation of the Global Samaritan: audiences and foreign correspondents. News audiences as moral agents already seem a problem for Yoder's claim that presence testifies. Do audiences who bear witness to distant suffering have moral agency? How can the amorphous and fleeting presence of television, internet, or twitter audiences testify? In the chapter on audiences, the initial claim regarding presence makes for an important investigation into how audiences can potentially move beyond mere spectatorship and towards participation in care for the suffering.

Foreign correspondents bearing witness to distant suffering do not face the same obstacles to testifying as audiences do. After all, foreign correspondents are often live, on-the-scene of extraordinary circumstances of suffering. The danger and risks foreign correspondents face in order to report live from scenes of devastation and disaster testify to the fact that the situation is indeed dangerous and causing suffering. Yoder's claim that

presence testifies is a claim strongly paralleled within the tradition of investigative journalism. In chapter four, I investigate the ethical function of foreign correspondent presence. I consider the foreign correspondent's dual role as the proxy 'eyes and ears' of the public and the proxy voice for those without a voice. Through these two roles, I explore major concepts involved in the practice of investigative journalism. One prominent issue I explore is the tension between the principles of a liberal democratic press and the practice of frontline reporters live, on-the-scene of extraordinary and extreme situations.

In the final chapter, chapter five, I focus on the experience of three frontline reporters bearing witness to human suffering. BBC [British Broadcasting Company] reporter John Simpson's reflections on his coverage of the beginning of the Iraq War illustrate the importance of bearing witness as involving real presence on location. Norwegian freelance reporter Åsne Seierstad's reflections on covering the Iraq War from Baghdad further contributes to the concept of 'being there' as central to bearing witness. Focus on Seierstad also furthers discussion on women reporters bearing witness to war. The third reporter I highlight is BBC reporter Fergal Keane. I focus on his reflections covering the Rwandan genocide to illustrate how the claim to bearing witness involves more than spectatorship, but often involves participation. I conclude with an analysis of the media practice of bearing witness, involving the range of reporter presence to the quasi-presence of the audience, in the light of John Howard Yoder's claim that bearing witness is a form of social ethics.

Chapter 1: Witness in John Howard Yoder's Christian Social Ethics

Christian theology makes a significant contribution to the discussion on the media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering, by illuminating the ethical significance of bearing witness. In this chapter, I develop a Christian theological account of witness by looking specifically to John Howard Yoder's work on how practices such as reconciliation and egalitarian membership, involved in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, constitute the visible social ethics of Christian communities. I examine Yoder's argument that Christian witness is made visible to the 'watching world' through the embodied presence of Christian communities. I consider criticisms of Yoder's claim regarding the possibility for the translation of Christian presence to be understood by the watching world. I conclude with Yoder's argument of how *being there*, presence, is a place from which to begin making ethical claims.

I have divided this chapter into three large sections: first the resource of Yoder's tradition, second the practices that comprise Christian witness, and third the function of witness in Christian moral inquiry. In this chapter I primarily focus on the Christian category of witness as a way to understand how the Christian church engages with the world. Nonetheless, I do acknowledge that witness is not the only way in which to look at how Christians engage the world. What Yoder adds to this discussion is to make clear how witness is connected to being present and how presence itself is a form of moral engagement with the world. Yoder's work on witness as Christian social ethics yields important insight for a multi-disciplinary understanding of how the practice of bearing witness can be ethical engagement.

Yoder wrote on many topics in Christian theology, but for the purposes of this discussion I will focus on his proposition of witness as a method for doing Christian social ethics. Yoder's work has received much recent attention from theologians who draw on his life and work as a resource to begin the discussion of witness as ethics.¹²

¹² Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). James Wm. McClendon, *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2000). Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004). Michael G. Cartwright, "Being Sent: Witness," in *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006).

Yoder began his construction of Christian social ethics with the resource of his tradition. He did not begin by taking a detached, dispassionate step back from the discipline of Christian theology to begin his project. Rather than a view from nowhere, Yoder began with a view from a particular location,¹³ that of his own Mennonite tradition.

1.1 The Resource of an Anabaptist Identity

The overarching question of this chapter is, ‘What moral agency does ‘bearing witness’ involve?’ In this section, I address the origins of Yoder’s idea that bearing witness has moral agency. In essence, he derived the idea from his Anabaptist heritage. I will expand upon that simple statement in this section by exploring Yoder’s theological training, how he sought to mine his heritage as a resource for social engagement, and how he dealt with charges of disengagement.

The Anabaptist movement, a sixteenth-century branch of Christian heritage that includes Yoder’s Mennonite tradition, are charged with sectarian withdrawal. Anabaptists belong to a religious branch not known for their social engagement or impact on the wider world. Yoder’s life-work is a project of redeeming his Mennonite tradition’s mode of social engagement. Stanley Hauerwas and Alex Sider observe that Yoder was part of a ‘Mennonite *ressourcement* movement similar to the developments in Catholicism associated with Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.’¹⁴ Yoder strived to show how Mennonite practices were actually resources for engaging the world, and how these practices were not just Mennonite but catholic. It is in looking to Yoder’s early academic training that we can see the beginnings of his constructive project in which he ‘encouraged Mennonites in active engagement with the larger world, thinking them too separate.’¹⁵

1.1.1 Sketch of Yoder’s Academic Training

Earl Zimmerman offers an insight into Yoder’s early academic training that focuses on the origins of Yoder’s social ethics and the first sparks of what was to become

¹³ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2002), 14. Stanley Hauerwas and Alex Sider wrote the introduction to the posthumous publication of Yoder’s theology textbook.

¹⁵ Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 169.

Yoder's successful book, *The Politics of Jesus*.¹⁶ John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) began his academic study in a time when 'Mennonites in North America lived in culturally separate, religious communities. ... [T]hey had routinized their beliefs and practices into their communal life, but eschewed active social engagement.'¹⁷ In Yoder's undergraduate study at Goshen College, Indiana, Harold Bender (1897-1962), the dean of Goshen Biblical Seminary, influenced Yoder in 'using historical research on the Anabaptist movement to help Mennonites recover their radical religious heritage' as a response to social change.¹⁸ Bender was part of the Mennonite *ressourcement* movement mentioned by Hauerwas and Sider. Among others Bender influenced Yoder in 'helping Mennonites formulate a more viable and engaged social ethic from an Anabaptist perspective in response to the challenges of the postwar world.'¹⁹ I will discuss this idea of the radical reformation spirit as a resource for Christian social ethics in the next section.

A very formative time in Yoder's life, reflected in the corpus of his work, was his engagement with theological and social questions emerging in post-war Europe. After quickly completing undergraduate work at Goshen College, Yoder, through Bender's connections and guidance, left the US to work in Europe from 1949-1957. His multi-faceted work began in France where he worked with the Mennonite Central Committee resettling war refugees. Speaking on behalf of the peace church tradition, he worked with the World Council of Churches exploring the question of war. During his time in Europe Yoder wrote a PhD at the University of Basel where 'he studied with Oscar Cullmann (1902-1999) in New Testament and Karl Barth (1886-1968) in theology.'²⁰ Yoder wrote on Mennonite church history. His dissertation theme from 1957 was, 'The origins of radical Protestantism within the Swiss Reformation in the 1520s'. Zimmerman contends that Yoder's early notions on the 'politics of Jesus' were influenced in two important ways during Yoder's time in Europe. First, 'Yoder began formulating his ethic in response to the devastating humanitarian, political, and religious crisis in post-war

¹⁶ Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*, ed. J. Denny Weaver, vol. 8, *The C. Henry Smith Series* (Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007). Zimmerman draws on Yoder's unpublished letters and papers from Yoder's undergraduate time and his time studying in Europe.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

Europe.’²¹ Second, Yoder’s constructive effort in theology and social ethics ‘grew out of his historical research on the sixteenth-century Anabaptists.’²²

Yoder worked out of his own Mennonite tradition, from whence he was able to find *ressourcement* for the broader Protestant Reformation tradition and beyond. Yoder claimed that he studied the history of the people called Anabaptist, but ‘[n]onetheless my conviction has always been that my normative testimony is “catholic,” i.e., pertinent to any Christian.’²³ This was a radical proposition given that North American Mennonites in the 1950s were known for their withdrawal from public life. Yoder counters the claims that the Anabaptist simply represent quietism and sectarianism, and I will look at the way he counters the famous German American theologian Richard H. Niebuhr’s labelling the Mennonites as sectarian after I look at how Yoder appealed to his tradition as a *ressourcement*.

1.1.2 *Ressourcement* of the Radical Reformation

I will not be considering Yoder’s doctoral dissertation or work written during his time in Europe, but rather at his subsequent work all influenced by the theme of ‘radical reformation’. Yoder’s first impact outside of Mennonite or peace church circles came with his publication of *The Christian Witness to the State* (1964) and then even more so with the publication of *The Politics of Jesus* (1971). In these texts, Yoder claims that Christian social ethics should begin with Christ’s obedience as a normative and realistic possibility for the Christian church. Yoder claims that this vision throughout church history has been at times compromised, pushed aside and even lost. He identifies Constantinianism as epitomising the greatest compromise. Yoder is often criticized for too easily making Constantine a villain in his history of the relationship between the Christian church and the state. William Cavanaugh offers this nuance to Yoder’s use of Constantinianism:

Constantine does not represent the mere ‘fall’ of the church from some pristine state of righteousness ... What is lumped together under the term ‘Christendom’ is in fact a very complex series of attempts to take seriously

²¹ Ibid., 75-76.

²² Ibid., 27.

²³ John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 8.

the inherently political nature of the church and its instrumental role in the integral salvation of the world in Jesus Christ.²⁴

Yoder credits the Protestant Reformation with recalling the vision of Christ's obedience as central to Christian ethics, but faults many of those original protestors for loss of this vision. Yoder argues that the critical perspective which began with the Protestant Reformation should always be a mark of the church. He agrees with the original reformers' contention toward the Roman Catholic Church, but then he goes on to criticize Luther and Calvin for putting church renewal into the hands of civil governments. Yoder argues that it is at this point that the critical perspective of the original reformers was jettisoned. While the main reformers found themselves re-enmeshed in the compromises of the state, the radical reformers held on to the centrality of Christ's obedience as normative for how the Christian community is to live in the world. Yoder claims that the radical reformers' guarding of this vision provides a resource for the practical moral reasoning of the Christian community.²⁵

After the original Reformation the radical reformers continued to maintain a vigilant stance against civil government defining Christendom. One of their central concerns was 'how the body of believers relates to the powers of this world.'²⁶ Yoder's claim is that radical reformers relate to the world through the practices that constitute Christian witness. There are some who argue that witness as a mode of relating to the world is an ineffectual way to relate to power. In the next section, I consider the charge that the radical reformers are a community of believers socially ineffective and disengaged from the world.

1.1.3 Charge of Sectarian Withdrawal

Yoder himself commented on the quietism of North American Mennonites in political and civic life especially in contrast to his active engagement in post-war reconstruction with the Mennonite Central Committee in Europe. Nonetheless, he did not

²⁴ William T. Cavanaugh, "Church," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 397.

²⁵ Yoder cites the view of the radical reformation as, 'most thoroughly worked out in the thought and experience of the Swiss Brethren among the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and among the Quakers and Baptists arising out of seventeenth-century Puritanism.' John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

want the Mennonites and other peace churches of the radical reformation tradition characterised as ‘politically irrelevant and socially irresponsible’ when it came to thinking about Christian social ethics. He believed that Anabaptists can make a significant and a critical contribution to Christian social ethics. Much of Yoder’s work is a response to the social responsibility position advocated by H. Richard Niebuhr and even more so by the work of his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr. Gerald W. Schlabach describes Yoder’s life work as most often seemingly shaped by answering the Niebuhrian charge. ‘That charge: Christians who embrace the non-violent ethic of Jesus may get Jesus right, but they at the same time render themselves politically irrelevant and socially irresponsible.’²⁷

Yoder’s position on how Christian witness functions as a socially engaging ethic was a counter position to the dominant view of Protestant social ethics characterised by Niebuhrian social ethics. Yoder’s main point of contention was that the social responsibility ethics of the Niebuhr brothers made a person’s allegiance to nation, state, or class more determinative than a person’s membership in the body of Christ. While the Niebuhrs’ approach to Christian ethics focused on social responsibility and realism, Yoder’s approach focused on an ethic of discipleship or imitating of Christ. As just one example of Yoder’s contention with the Niebuhr brothers, and a very prominent example in the academic field of Christian ethics, I will examine Yoder’s response to H. Richard Niebuhr’s book *Christ and Culture* in which Mennonites are characterised as ‘sectarians’ who withdraw from culture.

H. R. Niebuhr is using the word ‘sect’ based on Ernst Troeltsch’s typology of church, sect, and mystical distinction in *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church*.²⁸ It is clear that the Niebuhr brothers fall into Troeltsch’s typology of ‘church’ where Christ is understood as ‘the Universal Redeemer with an ethics of compromise and cultural responsibility’, and Yoder falls into Troeltsch’s typology of ‘sect’ where an understanding of the Lordship of Christ leads to ‘an ethics of pure conscience and

²⁷ Gerald W. Schlabach, "The Christian Witness in the Earthly City: John H. Yoder as Augustinian Interlocutor," in *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, Penn.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 228. Schlabach notes that while Yoder’s later work “turned to Jeremiah and Diaspora for models of constructive social engagement, he was still answering ... the Niebuhrian charge”.

²⁸ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1931).

obedience to the life and teachings of Jesus'.²⁹ H. R. Niebuhr expands his typologies to five ideal-types to characterise kinds of ethics in the Christian traditions. H. R. Niebuhr's typologies have been important teaching heuristics for theology and sociology of religion,³⁰ but some challenge the implications of the categories as disregarding the social impact of traditions, such as Yoder's Mennonite tradition, termed 'sectarian'.³¹

H. R. Niebuhr claims that the Mennonites, one of the remaining groups of the radical reforming Anabaptists, 'represent the attitude most purely' of Christ and the church's rejection of culture.³² H. R. Niebuhr creates an axis with five typologies in order to understand the relationship between Christ and culture as practiced in different Christian traditions. At one end is 'Christ Against Culture' and at the other end is 'Christ the Transformer of Culture'. The typology of 'Christ Against Culture' is characterised by the position in which the appropriate way to be like Christ involves the rejection of culture and withdrawal from culture. H. R. Niebuhr describes the 'transforming' category in opposition to the 'against' category.

Though they hold fast to the radical distinction between God's work in Christ and man's work in culture, they do not take the road of exclusive Christianity into isolation from civilization, or reject its institutions with Tolstoyan bitterness.³³

For Yoder, these were fighting words. Yoder contended that while H. R. Niebuhr claimed the five typologies are a sociologically objective synthesis of the way major Christian traditions interact with the issue of Christ and Culture, the radical reformers are given unfair treatment. Yoder believed that while H. R. Niebuhr claimed objectivity, he was actually advocating the 'Transformation' position and eschewing the 'Radical' position. Yoder responds to H. R. Niebuhr's characterisation of radical reformation ethics as an

²⁹ James M. Gustafson, "Preface: An Appreciative Interpretation," in *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), xxxi.

³⁰ The heuristic value of H. Richard Niebuhr's project is asserted by both defenders and critics of Niebuhr's work *Christ and Culture*. Glen H. Stassen, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen H. Stassen and D. M. Yeager (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). James M. Gustafson, "Preface: An Appreciative Interpretation," in *Christ and Culture*.

³¹ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic.*; McClendon's *Systematic Theology: Ethics*; David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 2001 ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1951), 56.

³³ *Ibid.*, 190.

ethic of social disengagement, by arguing that the Anabaptist vision can be understood as an ethic of social engagement and of social transformation.³⁴

The Christ and culture problem that H. R. Niebuhr addresses is the moral conflict between *the radical demands of Jesus* (Christ) versus *everything which people do* (culture). Yoder's critique of Niebuhr's argument begins with Niebuhr's definitions. While Niebuhr states the definition of culture as 'everything which people do,' Yoder argued that latent in this characterization was an understanding of culture as 'a given non-Christian civilization to the exclusion of the cultural productivity of Christians.'³⁵ Yoder called Niebuhr's view of culture 'monolithic'. He does not argue that Niebuhr has a simplistic view of culture that fails to account for the diversity of cultures. Rather, his argument is rooted in [the project of] Christian ethics. Yoder is critical of Niebuhr for placing the radical demands of Jesus outside of culture, as if followers of the radical demands of Jesus played no part in culture making. Yoder argues that part of the diversity of culture, *everything which people do*, includes the participation of the believing community, followers of *the radical demands of Jesus*. For Yoder, Christian social ethics does not only involve transforming structures of this world, but also involves creating forms of culture as well, such as 'hospitals, ... egalitarianism, abolitionism, feminism'.³⁶

Yoder understands H. R. Niebuhr to say that a social ethic based on the radical demands of Jesus is ineffective because it will not change society. Yoder by contrast viewed the social responsibility ethic as identifying 'culture' with political control, '[t]hus government becomes exemplary for all of culture.'³⁷ A social responsibility ethic, as typified by the Niebuhr brothers, manages 'society from the top'. Yoder on the other hand is calling for a paradigm shift away from the Christian ethical imperative to rule the world and toward a discipleship ethic that transforms society through the engagement of Christian witness. David Fergusson points out that H. R. Niebuhr's Christ and culture typology:

³⁴ John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen H. Stassen and D. M. Yeager (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

ignores the possibility that the development of a distinctive church may be for the sake not of withdrawal but of witness and mission. The purpose of a counter-cultural distinctiveness, it may be argued, is not isolationism, but a proper contribution to the ideal social world. It is to be faithful as the disciples of Christ in the world where the mission of the church is to be conducted. It is world-affirming but from a distinctive perspective.³⁸

Yoder wants to reshape the Christ and culture problem in which everything which people do (culture) is not assumed to be autonomous of the radical demands of Jesus (Christ). Yoder identifies the problem of 'Christ and Culture' as being when elements of culture (powers and principalities) claim autonomy *from* the Creator God, and claim autonomy *over* men and women. Elements of culture, such as governments, are presumed to be monolithic when it is assumed, 'that independently of the will of the Creator God they are able to provide to a person and to society a full, integrated, genuine existence.'³⁹ Yoder proposes that the key to engaging the Christ and Culture problem is concrete situational discernment based on confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. Thus, a Christian community would ask itself, 'What are the dimensions of culture that deny the Lordship of Christ, and what are those that confirm what Christ is doing in the world?'⁴⁰ Yoder gives an answer to this question: sometimes the church celebrates aspects of culture, and sometimes is condemns aspects of culture. He does offer a few concrete examples:

Some elements of culture the church categorically rejects (pornography, tyranny, cultic idolatry). Other dimensions of culture it accepts within clear limits (economic production, commerce, the graphic arts, paying taxes for peacetime civil government). To still other dimensions of culture Christian faith gives a new motivation and coherence (agriculture, family life, literacy, conflict resolution, empowerment). Still others it strips of their claims to possess autonomous truth and value, and uses them as vehicles of communication (philosophy, language, Old Testament ritual, music). Still other forms of culture are *created* by the Christian churches (hospitals, service of the poor, generalized education, egalitarianism, abolitionism, feminism). Some have been created with special effectiveness by the Peace Churches (prison reform, war sufferers' relief, international conciliation).⁴¹

³⁸ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, 65.

³⁹ Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*," 68-69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Yoder is arguing that withdrawal from one dimension of culture is not a rejection of all of culture. The Christian church's rejection of some elements of society can be a mode of responsible participation as withdrawal itself communicates dissent. Even where the church has withdrawn from certain aspects of culture, Christ is still Lord over all of culture. Yoder claims that the church's 'assignment' whether through engagement or withdrawal is to 'represent within society ... a real judgment upon the rebelliousness of culture and a real possibility of reconciliation for all.'⁴² This process of judging rebellious aspects of cultural powers and principalities which claim dominion over men and women, and the process of reconciliation, are two practices of a discipleship ethic. Yoder more commonly calls discipleship ethics 'Christian witness'.

1.2 Christian Witness is Substantive of Practices

Yoder is interested in the idea of specific practices constituting community ethics rather than appealing to universals found in creation.⁴³ He does not begin his ethic from creation, but rather from redemption.⁴⁴ The Christian community's patterns, or forms of life, are derived from the life of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. These practices, of Christ and the church, provide a specific location from which to draw norms for ethical behaviour. He discusses prominent practices, or traits, as the 'particular kinds of behaviour that our faith requires.'⁴⁵ The practices are the church's witness. This enigmatic claim can best be explained by a chapter title from *For the Nations*, 'The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm'. The church is a 'New Humanity' organised by the politics of Jesus. The church body as a pulpit means that her body proclaims her message. Christians' actions and life together proclaim the gospel message. The church as a paradigm means that her ethics, her way of life together, is paradigmatic for ethics beyond the church. Yoder claims that the world can recognise this new paradigm through

⁴² Ibid., 70-71.

⁴³ Carter identifies an influence of Karl Barth in that like Barth, Yoder's basis for social ethics is not based on the doctrine of creation alone, but they both derive norms from Jesus Christ. Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), 208.

⁴⁴ Yoder's argument against the *a priori* base of creation or natural theology as a starting point for ethics can be found in his ground-breaking *The Politics of Jesus*. The thrust of *The Politics of Jesus* is that ethics is rooted in revelation, that which was revealed by Jesus Christ.

⁴⁵ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Herald Press, 1992), viii.

the patterns of church practices. The church communicates through her actions. ‘This points to the awareness that the way most communication works is not by projecting and then reassembling a maximum number of atoms of information, nor of axioms and maxims, but by pattern recognition.’⁴⁶ After looking at some of the practices of the church described by Yoder, I will consider how recognisable or translatable the patterns of practices actually are in the wider world.

1.2.1 Practices

In his book *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, Yoder enumerates five central practices. In other publications, Yoder has condensed the list down to fewer practices and expanded the list in other places.⁴⁷ In *Body Politics*, Yoder specifically leaves out the overarching practice of servanthood because he discusses this central Christian practice in great detail in *The Politics of Jesus* and *The Christian Witness to the State*. Here, we will look at the six practices as forming the substance of Yoder’s Christian social ethic, beginning with servanthood and then considering the five other practices of the church discussed in *Body Politics*. The practices that constitute the Christian faith are overlapping, so that performing one practice is often interrelated with the performance of another. The Christian community is not a perfect community optimally performing each trait; how the church performs one practice can be corrective of how the church fails or underperforms another. Given that Yoder represented the pacifist tradition, it is interesting to note that he did not include non-violence among his listed practices. The reason was not because he believed that only some were called to the pacifist position, but rather because *not* being violent is not a practice that forms the church. The church is constituted by peaceful social practices such as the six that follow.

1.2.1.1 Servanthood

Yoder uses the Pauline vision of ‘principalities and powers’ to describe social and political structures that are in rebellion against the proclamation that Christ is Lord of all. The church’s relationship to social and political structures is to be the ‘conscience and the

⁴⁶ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 43.

⁴⁷ Yoder includes eight practices in: John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994).

servant' of such structures.⁴⁸ Servanthood may be through conscientious participation, by helping in the 'creation of structures more worthy of human society', or it may be through the conscientious objection to collaborating with structures that are oppressive to human society.⁴⁹ Yoder uses the categories of obedience and faithfulness, rather than the category of effectiveness, to measure the results of the church's service to the 'powers'. Victory over the rebellious principalities and powers has already been achieved in Christ, the job of the church is to proclaim this truth not achieve it. Therefore, the church is called to the practice of servanthood as a way to witness to the world that the Lordship of Christ is indeed true. This truth does not need to be proved by the church's seizing of worldly power. A dominant theme throughout all of these practices includes the position that the ends never justify the means. Such a claim begins with the position of obedient and faithful servanthood. The *means* is defined by the *end*: if the message is peace then the means are peaceful; if the message is grace then the means are characterised by grace.⁵⁰

1.2.1.2 Reconciliation

For Yoder, the practice of reconciliation is a defining characteristic of how the church functions as a society because it has to do with the administering of justice. Reconciliation includes a process of judgment and forgiveness. Yoder identifies the following two verses as mandates for the church to practice reconciliation: 'If your brother or sister sins, go and reprove that person when the two of you are alone. If he or she listens, you have won your brother or sister.' (Matt. 18:15 Yoder's translation), and 'What you bind on earth is bound in heaven.' (Matt. 18:18) Further, Yoder cites Jesus' words from the gospel of John chapter twenty-three where Jesus empowers the disciples to forgive sins: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'⁵¹ Conflict resolution empowers a community to practice justice that is not only ratified on earth but also 'bound in heaven'.

⁴⁸ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, Second Edition, 1972 ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich., and Carlisle, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company and The Paternoster Press, 1994), 155.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gerald Biesecker-Mast, "The Radical Christological Rhetoric of John Howard Yoder," in *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, Penn.: Cascadia, 2004).

⁵¹ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 3.

1.2.1.3 Solidarity

Yoder is exploring a ‘link between ecclesiastical practice and social ethics’ when he likens the practice of solidarity in the Christian community to the Eucharist.⁵² Both are practices which demand ‘some kind of sharing, advocacy, and partisanship in which the poor are privileged, and in which considerations of merit and productivity are subjected to the rule of servanthood.’⁵³ The ethical significance of the Eucharist is lost when the church turns the Eucharist into a meal where some are exalted and some are humiliated; such was the Apostle Paul’s admonishment to the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 13). Solidarity as a resource for moral discernment will put the Christian community alongside those who are being treated unjustly.

1.2.1.4 Egalitarian Membership

As the ecclesial practice of the Eucharist has ethical implications for the community, so too does the act of baptism. Yoder claims that baptism is a ‘ritual act whose first, ordinary meaning is egalitarian.’⁵⁴ The rite of baptism is the initiation into a new humanity, a new community that is not organised by societal hierarchies. This new humanity is the people who make up the Kingdom of God. Yoder says of the Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 that ‘*ethnic standards have ceased to count in our estimate of anyone.*’⁵⁵ In the new humanity of ‘trans-ethnic inclusivism’ difference is not to be eradicated. Yoder explains that people are ‘reconciled not by being homogenized but by accepting one another.’⁵⁶

Yoder argues that Paul’s ‘equalization message’ is different from an Enlightenment notion that *all men are created equal*, as Paul’s message ‘is rooted not in creation but in redemption.’⁵⁷ Yoder points out that it is not a doctrine of creation, or an uncovering of natural law theory, that indicates that all people are equal, but rather the redemption and transformation of communities into people who do not stand for second-class citizenship. ‘What it took to begin to free Americanism from racism a century later

⁵² Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 361.

⁵³ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 21-22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁶ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 29.

⁵⁷ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 35.

was not a notion of equality through creation but the good news of redemption.’⁵⁸ An important aspect involved in the practice of egalitarian membership is that membership is voluntary. This is Yoder’s critique of Christendom; the ethical significance of Christian membership is that the members have been redeemed, not forced to associate in new ways.

1.2.1.5 Lay Empowerment

As the previous practice illustrates that there is no hierarchy of citizenship based on ethnicity, sex or other social standing, lay empowerment emphasises that all citizens have roles. Lay empowerment, what Yoder calls the ‘fullness of Christ’ is the symbiotic necessity of many different roles to be performed in the Christian community. Paul uses the analogy of the body to illustrate the interrelated functioning of the church. This trait of the Christian church witnesses to lay empowerment: ‘every member of a body has a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role.’⁵⁹ Yoder reasons that if all have gifts, ‘we need to challenge the concentration of authority in the hands of office-bearers accredited on institutional grounds.’⁶⁰ The practice of lay empowerment is behind the critical perspective of the radical reformers’ wariness toward the concentration of power.

1.2.1.6 Dialogical Freedom

Dialogical freedom is the open process of communication referred to by Yoder as the ‘Rule of Paul’, on how the meeting of the church should proceed, as seen in Paul’s instructions to the Christian community at Corinth to ‘let everyone be ready with a Psalm or a sermon or a revelation. . . . As for prophets, let two or three speak, and the others attend to them. . . .(1 Cor. 14:26, 29).’ Yoder suggests the modern equivalents of assembly, parliament, or town meeting as contemporary translations of the church meeting together as ‘a public gathering to deal with community business’.⁶¹ Yoder’s assertion is that all believers are priests and prophets, these offices are not reserved for some special being with a different ontological status from the rest of the community.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁶¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1971), 28.

Rather, the practice of moral discernment belongs to all members of the community.⁶² Yoder makes the distinction between the radical reformation claim to freedom of speech with that of Enlightenment claims to freedom of speech and assembly. ‘Whereas the Enlightenment call for intellectual liberty ascribed to every educated mind autonomy and the right to doubt, the Puritan case for the freedoms of speech and assembly appealed to the sovereignty of the Word of God.’⁶³

1.2.2 Visibility of Practices

Each practice provides a rich field to explore, and it was Yoder’s purpose that they should be explored in the moral discernment process of the church, and possibly by others too. The practices of table fellowship, egalitarian membership, and reconciliation are not new practices, but Yoder claims that ‘in the gospel setting they have taken on new meanings and a new empowerment.’⁶⁴ The ethical significance of the church for the wider world is found in the church’s witnessing nature. Yoder argues that the strength of the church’s recommendation of these ethical practices does not come from the church’s lobbying power, but from the persuasive witness of her people living out their claims.⁶⁵ As emphasized in the practice of servanthood, the church’s effectiveness is measured by the faithfulness and obedience with which she performs the practices. Yoder is criticised for his discipleship ethic sliding into ecclesial triumphalism where the church is a paragon of perfection.⁶⁶ His work does take on the dogged persistence of saying that the church has been too compromised to be distinguishably visible from the wider world within which it lives. He sees the church as an exemplar to be continually refined or *reformed* in order to maintain her public witness.

Witness has to do with social visibility. Yoder argues that the church’s belief and confession of the transcendent God becomes visible to the wider society ‘only if represented by a discrete empirical community’.⁶⁷ The church derives social visibility through Christian practices. To ‘fraternize trans-ethnically,’ ‘share bread,’ and ‘forgive

⁶² Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*.

⁶³ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 20.

⁶⁴ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 371.

⁶⁵ John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 2002 ed. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1964).

⁶⁶ Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*. Cavanaugh, "Church."

⁶⁷ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 188.

one another' are visible activities; 'they are not opaque rituals.'⁶⁸ This way of living is social witness because it is recognisable beyond the Christian community. David Fergusson points out that Yoder's Christian social ethics achieves visibility in the wider culture through 'counter-cultural distinctiveness', but Yoder argues that 'distinctiveness' itself does not make a Christian practice Christian. What makes Christian practices Christian is that the practices are '*specifically* or *specifiably* Christian, i.e., true to kind, authentically representing their species.'⁶⁹ Whether Christian practice is 'distinctive' or even counter-cultural depends on what is happening in the wider culture. Distinctiveness is not a criterion of Yoder's Christian social ethic. Being present as 'a discrete empirical community' through organising community life based on the politics of Jesus is a criterion for Yoder's Christian social ethic. Visibility begins with the social phenomenon of the believing community existing in the first place.

I have considered how the practices are visible to the wider world beyond the Christian community. Next, I will consider Yoder's claim that the practices are translatable into the governing and organising of the wider society.

1.2.3 Translatability

In the title *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* Yoder claims that the practices are recognisable to the watching world. In this section, I will explore that claim. Note that Yoder does not say that the practices are performed *for* the watching world: because they constitute the life of the church, they happen regardless of audience. Yoder first focuses his discussion of Christian social ethics by claiming that the church is called to certain practices, but then he broadens the claim and states that ultimately the world is called to these practices as well. If these practices are indeed good news, then they can be recognised as good news by all who hear the news. Yoder does not mean that the practices can be coercively applied, for they do not make sense out of a context of belief. He simply argues that the practices can be recognised for their social function. Therein lies their translatability.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 75.

⁶⁹ John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (1992): 294.

⁷⁰ Yoder used the term 'middle axioms' when he first discussed the theme of translatability in *The Christian Witness to the State*. Middle axiom was a term used by the circles in the World Council of Churches when Yoder was working with them during his time in Europe. Middle axioms had to do with

This is an important nuance that Yoder makes; the translatability of Christian social ethics is in its social function. The Christian practices have social and political significance, function, and value in the wider world as well as the church. If they bring flourishing to the church, they will bring flourishing to the wider community. The good news of Jesus for the church is also good news for the world. The Christian practices ‘can be prototypes for what others can do in the wider world. ... [T]hey can be commended to any society as a healthy way to organize.’⁷¹

Yoder claims that translation can go both ways. In fact, it is when the faith community sees these functions outside of the church that the state or some other politic becomes a corrective witness to the church. The faith community may very well ‘see Jesus in actions of solidarity, unity, reconciliation’ taking place outside of the faith community. When the answer is yes to Yoder’s question ‘But do we see Jesus?’, then the church needs to be open to multi-directional witness.⁷² Yoder calls this ‘interworld transformational grammar’ where both worlds can find ‘common turf’ on which to talk to one another. Yoder acknowledges that a common moral language is more readily found when the two parties have shared history and other commonalities. He says that the real test of the accessibility of a common moral language will be its capacity to illuminate conversations with more than those with whom we already have good will, but ‘to illuminate meaningful conversations with Idi Amin or Khomeini or Chairman Mao.’⁷³

Yoder acknowledges that some Christian practices as paradigmatic for social functioning in the wider world may get lost in translation. With regard to ‘servanthood’ as a practice for the world, Yoder acknowledges that ‘servanthood’ as a social practice may be too Christologically specific to be identifiable outside of the church. Without an eschatological understanding, servanthood may be too risky and scandalous a pattern to emulate. Yoder claims that while many leaders do argue that servanthood is part of their

finding a way for ecumenical Christian ethics to interact with the wider world in a language not particular to the church. Michael Cartwright notes that Yoder stopped using the language of ‘middle axioms’ after *The Christian Witness to the State* but continued use of the concept through phrases such as ‘translatability’ and ‘bridging language’. Michael Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 17.

⁷¹ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 46.

⁷² Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 58.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 42.

corporate strategy, they do not really believe it.⁷⁴ Regarding servanthood, Yoder does acknowledge that the life world of the believing community may not directly translate beyond the believing community.

The translatability of a Christian community's social ethics from one life world to another is an important part of ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue, and practical moral reasoning in the pluralistic public sphere. Yoder claims that none of the practices he describes as the politics of Jesus require the church to think about how to translate their understanding to the pluralistic public sphere. He argues that the practices are public practices; they 'lend themselves to being observed, imitated, and extrapolated.'⁷⁵ Interestingly, this seems to be understanding through mimesis more than through translation. Yoder's scholarship has received criticism in the area of translation. How knowable is the meaning of Christian practice outside of Christian communities? In the next section, I consider criticisms of Yoder's simplistic, or perhaps I should say optimistic, claims to translatability.

1.2.3.1 Criticism of Translatability

Theologians influenced by the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy question Yoder's claim to an 'interworld transformational grammar' capable of existing between the life of the church and the wider world.⁷⁶ The criticism, noticeably led by Stanley Hauerwas, is that these practices cannot be translated because the language world of the church, which Hauerwas identifies as worship, is incommensurable with the language world outside of the church.⁷⁷ Hauerwas does agree with Yoder that the pursuit of a vocabulary for public moral discourse should not be done by appealing to 'non-particular sources of moral insight,' such as 'reason,' 'nature,' and 'creation'.⁷⁸ Hauerwas argues, as does Yoder that an appeal to universals such as reason, nature and creation removes the distinctive

⁷⁴ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 47.

⁷⁵ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 75.

⁷⁶ The 'linguistic turn' in theology and philosophy is characterized by the world only being intelligible through language. Further, translation from the life worlds of differing linguistic groups cannot be achieved for the languages are incommensurable. That is, life worlds defy translation from one language into another. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

⁷⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000).

⁷⁸ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 41.

witness of the Christian church.⁷⁹ In the appeal to universals, what is lost in translation is the church. Yet Yoder is more hopeful than Hauerwas in his belief that appeals to particular Christian practices can be understood outside believing communities.

Bernd Wannenwestch also questions Yoder's claims regarding the translatability of the church's practices. Like Hauerwas, Wannenwestch identifies worship, specifically experienced by performing the liturgy, as the concept that gets bypassed in Yoder's bridge from Christian practices to practices in wider society. Wannenwestch argues that 'Yoder seems to want more and ends up with less.'⁸⁰ What Yoder misses in his recommendation of the church's practices as a model is 'the impact of worship on secular politics.' Wannenwestch argues that the worship experience of liturgy 'employs the metaphorical imagination in which liturgical experience spills over in a complex and manifold way.'⁸¹ Both Hauerwas and Wannenwestch believe that the focus on the practices' social function is to the detriment of the meaning of the practices as Christian worship.

Michael Cartwright offers a nuance to Yoder's bold claim to translatability and the criticisms of incommensurability, by suggesting that Yoder's thought offers a contrasting model to the debate that attempts engagement and acknowledges that there are times for withdrawal.⁸² 'Yoder engages all invitations for dialogue *as if* translation is possible but with an openness to taking seriously the objections of a missionary in a world of seemingly incommensurate perspectives, ideologies, cultures, and histories.'⁸³ Cartwright notes that Yoder does this by insisting that 'we take each problem as it comes,

⁷⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

⁸⁰ Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 88.

⁸¹ Ibid. He discusses in more detail the spilling over effect in the following book: Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan, trans. Margaret Kohl, *Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸² Cartwright notes that Yoder is aware of the "theoretical issues, at the levels of epistemology, ontology, and validation, involved in trying to communicate the good news," and that Yoder addresses these philosophical issues in more detail in his article "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation". Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," 33.

⁸³ Ibid., 34.

without assuming that any one problem is ultimately formidable in some global or monolithic sense.⁸⁴

Theologians and philosophers continue to question claims of translatability, but academics from other areas of study have found Yoder's work applicable to their field. Political scientists and sociologists have found that Yoder's work on the moral agency involved in the social practices of the church can speak cross-culturally to the wider world. Cross discipline approaches can be helpful to consider the moral agency involved in social roles such as the role of the journalist in a liberal democratic society or the role of civil society organisations. I will be doing the work of translation in the next few chapters by looking at the moral agency involved in a few of the translatable Christian social practices as performed in the wider world by audiences and journalists. Yoder's work is increasingly gaining attention in this multi-disciplinary way, particularly among those in political science.⁸⁵ Yoder's work is translatable to the work of political scientists given the common turf of how societies relate to power. Yoder argues that an understanding of Jesus' relationship to the powers can help in 'the task of *social* discernment to which we are especially called in our age.'⁸⁶ Yoder claims that the concrete experience of Jesus remains relevant for critiquing institutional powers. Next, I will consider political scientists' particular interest in Yoder's work on the role of voluntary associations and institutional power. I will also consider some of the criticism by theologians questioning Yoder's emphasis on voluntary associations.

1.2.2.2 Voluntary Associations

The practice of 'Egalitarian Membership' involves the conviction that all are equally valid members of the community regardless of sex, ethnicity or social status. Yoder claims that membership based on conviction must be non-coercive, and therefore, membership must be voluntary.⁸⁷ Voluntary commitment was one of the central tenets of

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Alain Epp Weaver, "After Politics: John Howard Yoder, Body Politics, and the Witnessing Church," *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999). Romand Coles, "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder: "Outsiders" and the "Otherness of the Church"," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 3 (2002). Richard Bourne, "Witness, Democracy and Civil Society: Reflections on John Howard Yoder's Exilic Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 2 (2007).

⁸⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 156.

⁸⁷ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 25.

the early radical reformers; church membership must be voluntary based on conviction of belief. Voluntary membership preserves the distinction between those who are members of the church because of conviction and those who are members because of an authoritarian decree. This is part of Yoder's critique of Constantinianism. Voluntary associations are a necessary part of transforming social and political structures because their minority voices can speak out against cultural 'pressures toward an inauthentic morality of conformity'.⁸⁸ Yoder is arguing that the minority dissent should be given just as much of a hearing as the majority position.

What Yoder contributes to a cross-disciplinary conversation is a way to consider the moral agency of voluntary associations in civil society. '[S]ociologists of knowledge will continue to note the importance of voluntary associations, of which the free church remains a prototype.'⁸⁹ Yoder's contribution on the impact of civil society in democracies is considered in recent political science scholarship. For instance, Richard Bourne looked at how Yoder's work on exilic ecclesiology, characterised by minority status and voluntary association, 'parallels and exceeds some of the most fruitful understandings of civil society and democratic participation.'⁹⁰ Romand Coles found Yoder a helpful conversation partner in his discussion of political practices that strengthen a pluralistic society.⁹¹ In addition to the positive reception of his contribution to the understanding of voluntary associations in civil society, Yoder has also received criticism for this emphasis.

Yoder's critics point out that an emphasis on voluntary association of church membership and participation reduces the church to *just* another *choice* of the many voluntary associations one could be a part of in civic life such as a workers' union or a community recycling association. Oliver O'Donovan asks:

Is Yoder, in the name of nonconformity, not championing a great conformism, lining the church up with the sports clubs, friendly societies,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bourne, "Witness, Democracy and Civil Society: Reflections on John Howard Yoder's Exilic Ecclesiology," 212.

⁹¹ Coles, "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder: "Outsiders" and the "Otherness of the Church"."

colleges, symphony subscription-guilds, political parties and so on, just to prove that the church offers late-modern order no serious threat?⁹²

More sympathetically, Alain Epp Weaver notes, ‘Yoder’s stress on the voluntary character of the church unwittingly mirrors the liberal capitalist reduction of all alternative ways of life to consumer choices and the church to the level of yet one more *voluntary association*.’⁹³ How will the church be distinguishable from any of the other associations? Again, we return to the concerns of translation. Can the life world of the church really be known outside of the church?

These are important concerns and Yoder does in places acknowledge that Christian theological claims are not fully commensurable with sociological claims. I discuss this below in section 1.3.1 with reference to the church as ‘first fruits’ of the Kingdom of God. It seems that what Yoder appreciates about sociology is that it describes visible communities. Sociologists cannot measure or describe the Augustinian invisible church, but sociologists can measure voluntary membership.⁹⁴ Yoder includes sociology as one among many forms of description that can contribute toward the study of Christian social ethics.

We cannot discuss theology alone but need to interface with the human sciences which are talking about the same phenomena from other perspectives. ... If love leads someone to go out and make peace with one’s adversary, is this not an event which a sociologist could describe? It is therefore appropriate, even imperative, as we flesh out the realism of the message of reconciliation that we attend to those other disciplines. There is no room here for the kind of dualism which would avoid such cross-references on grounds that they would represent unbelief or a confusion of categories.⁹⁵

⁹² Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 224.

⁹³ Weaver, “After Politics: John Howard Yoder, Body Politics, and the Witnessing Church,” 8.

⁹⁴ Yoder describes Augustine’s doctrine of the invisibility of ‘the true church’ as a result of the Constantinian decree of compulsory baptism. Yoder argues that voluntary membership more readily allows for a distinction between the position of belief and unbelief. Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 57.

⁹⁵ Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder’s Social Ethics*, 243. Zimmerman is quoting Yoder from an unpublished address: John Howard Yoder, “The Science of Conflict,” unpublished lecture in the Warsaw series, May 10-20, 1983, Mark Thiessen Nation, Yoder Collection, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1.

Yoder is interested in understanding human behaviour through many disciplines. He illuminates the ethical significance of participating in a faith community based on voluntary association. He illustrates how the most non-coercive form of communication for communities is witness, a public embodiment of belief. He illustrates how merely being there, in the public realm has political significance. Yoder's *ressourcement* of his tradition has made a significant contribution to contemporary Christian ethics and it has the potential to affect other fields of study concerned with community representation and engagement in politics and society. In this next section, I consider how simply *being there*, present amidst turmoil and strife or peace and flourishing in real locations, is associated with the special status given to the testimony of eyewitnesses. The testimony of an eyewitness is a truth claim premised on *being there*.

1.3 The Moral Agency of Being There

For Yoder, the primary meaning of witness is 'the functional necessity of just being there with a particular identity.'⁹⁶ In Yoder's use of the word witness as a noun, *a witness* is a person present at a specific location. As a verb, *to witness* as a form of communication means a person's presence is noticeable because her identity or his identity is distinguishable from the surroundings. The Niebuhrian charge to which Yoder's life-work responds is the accusation that a Christian witness of 'just being there' is a passive witness and therefore an irresponsible and ineffectual social ethic. Yoder believed that the word passive is far too often conflated with the word pacifist. The peace church tradition believes that the witness of pacifism is constituted by active participation in conflict resolution and justice affirming practices; pacifism does not equal the absence of violence. The fruit of Yoder's *ressourcement* emphasised that the witness of the peace church tradition is not quietism, a passive withdrawal to the bucolic life, but rather engagement with the world through the 'politics of Jesus'.

In this section, I investigate how bearing witness is contingent upon the act of being there. I look at Yoder's argument that witness as the embodiment of conviction and belief, is a method for making truth claims that emphasises truthfulness rather than securing claims to *the Truth*. I end this third section by investigating Yoder's concerns

⁹⁶ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 42.

about how the effectiveness of Christian ethics is measured, and how a method of witness measures up to concerns about efficacy.

1.3.1 Being There as Testimony

Yoder claims that just being present with a particular, and at times distinctive, identity is a recognisable witness to the wider world. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, this is what he means by the metaphor of the church body as a pulpit. The church's practices are her social witness. For instance, the practice of reconciliation is public when the 'watching world' sees an ethnic divide that is prevalent in the wider world overcome in the church's life together. Recognition comes through patterns of action, repeat performances over an extended period of time. These repeat performances are performed not because there is an audience of the 'watching world', but because these practices are what constitute the social nature of the church. Simply by being, the church is a public witness, 'just being there as an unprecedented social phenomenon'.⁹⁷ Yoder explains his phenomenology of social witness:

The simple fact that the church is intractably present on the social scene as a body with its own authority, economic structure, leadership, international relations, openness to new members, conscientious involvement in society at some points, and conscientious resistance at others means that the social process cannot go on without taking account of her presence and particular commitments.⁹⁸

Yet Yoder is claiming more than the church as a social phenomenon.⁹⁹ The church's example of inter-ethnic reconciliation is not simply a matter of soliciting voluntary membership for people interested in learning how to practice reconciliation. Yoder is making the far greater claim that the future Kingdom of God is present now among the people of God. While the church is 'a sociological entity in its own right' measurable by sociologists, Yoder does not reduce the social ethics of the church to just

⁹⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 187.

⁹⁹ Yoder acknowledges that every claim to do phenomenology is 'avowedly ambiguous ... in that it suggests the reliability or commonality of appearances as I see them, as if my proposing "simply to describe" were a recourse to "objectivity" and thus not subject to anyone's second guessing.' John Howard Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," in *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 79.

another voluntary association based on common conviction.¹⁰⁰ Yoder's claim is that when churches practice reconciliation they are not only participating in behaviour that has noticeably positive benefits for society, but ultimately that they are participating in the Kingdom of God. Yoder claims that the existence of the church is the 'first fruits' of the Kingdom of God. The existence of the 'first fruits' is a promise that more is to come. Yoder explains:

This means both that the church's presence constitutes a part of the promise that more is to come (what is meant by the biblical word 'earnest'); but also that its quality and direction have begun to be manifest. The church does communicate to the world what God plans to do, because it shows that God is beginning to do it.¹⁰¹

Yoder's project in constructive theology is Christian ethics. He wrote about the church at a level of prescription, what *ought* to be based on the norm of Christ as the starting position for Christian social ethics. At the level of description, the church has failed and failed miserably at times. Yoder was not unaware of this. His work began as a critique first of his own tradition for becoming complacent and neglecting the critical edge of Mennonite testimony. Nonetheless, Yoder emphasises that witness has to do with longevity and patterns of recognition, of correction, confession and forgiveness, that witness to the character of the church. The practices that Yoder enumerates as public witness are only witness when enacted in real, historic situations. While the church might have been an exemplar in one attitude, she may have been repressive in another. At no point in history is the church a perfect exemplar, but it is through the particularity of history that the church's witness testifies. This is part of the fragility of witness; if the church is not present she does not participate in the social phenomenon of bearing witness.

Emphasised throughout Yoder's Christian ethics is that the church's very existence testifies to the Christian kerygma, the good news that the Kingdom of God has come. As I mentioned above, Yoder's work is criticized for too easily sliding into 'ecclesial triumphalism'. The charge is reasonable given his claim of the church as 'first fruits'. Yet, Yoder's use of the word 'earnest' presents the eschatological tension of the now, but not fully realised coming of the Kingdom of God. *Being there* is public

¹⁰⁰ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 78.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

testimony, but testimony of what? Yoder claims that the church's presence testifies to 'the promise that more is to come.' In that promise is the acknowledgement that not all is fully realised and that includes claims to *the Truth*.

1.3.2 Witness as a Method for Ethics

The Christian church makes a truth claim in her proclamation of the kerygma, the good news that the Kingdom of God has come. In the task of doing ethics, questions of methodology are important. Methods for *how* truth claims are made play a determining role in determining which truth claims get a hearing in society and even which truth claims are believed. In Yoder's project of Christian social ethics, he is interested in removing the determining function of methodology as much as possible. Yoder uses the words 'non-methodological' and 'non-foundationalist' in proposing a repair to the problems he sees in the academic discipline of Christian social ethics.¹⁰² He uses these words playfully and antagonistically. He is not making epistemological claims that he can actually propose a 'non-foundationalist' approach to ethics or that his method for ethics is 'non-methodological'. Yoder is critical of universal claims as the beginning point for doing Christian ethics and he proposes a foundation of particular claims instead. Yoder critiques what he calls the 'methodologism' emphasised in text books on Christian social ethics for neglecting to attend to the determining function of methodology. Thus, he proposes that witness is the least coercive method of ethics for making truth claims. Yoder's use of the words 'non-methodological' and 'non-foundationalist' is not descriptive of his project in Christian social ethics. His use of these words is actually an argument against the dominant positions in Christian social ethics. His chapter on the 'alternatives to methodologism' was published in a collection called *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*.¹⁰³

1.3.2.1 Witness as 'Truth Claim'

How does the church make truth claims? Moral philosophers and theologians have offered many methods for moral reasoning. Yoder questions 'the relative adequacy of' beginning ethical inquiry from the methodological position of 'ends, means, contract,

¹⁰² Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism."

¹⁰³ *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).

virtue, story, and/or whatever else as modes of elucidation or even of validation.’¹⁰⁴ He offers a ‘non-methodological’ method contingent on being non-coercive. Yoder reasons that because the message is peace, the means of communication must be peaceful. In his writing he does not focus on ‘truth claims’; rather, he uses ‘the more biblical phrases “witness” and “proclamation” as naming forms of communication which do not coerce the hearer.’¹⁰⁵

Yoder is concerned about coercive communication practices. It is fruitful to consider the etymology of the word coerce given the importance Yoder ascribes to the word in his criticism of methodology in social ethics. It comes from the Latin *coercere*, from *co-* and *arcere* this second word the root for the word ‘ark’ meaning to shut up, close off, and restrain.¹⁰⁶ Coercive methods of ethics are a zero-sum game of making truth claims. If I claim *the Truth*, then all other claims to truth lose. Witness as a method to making truth claims is not done by forcibly constraining all other moral agents. Witness is a claim to truthfulness and faithfulness. When witness ceases to be truthful and faithful, it is no longer called witness. It is then called false witness, a coercive and oppressive form of communication the Decalogue warns against.¹⁰⁷

Yoder explains that witness is a non-coercive form of communication because it works from particulars to universals. The radical reformers criticised Christian moral reasoning which began from universal concepts such as ‘reason’ and ‘nature’ or ‘creation’ rather than the particularity of Jesus for Christian ethics. Yoder finds his tradition’s approach to moral reasoning from particulars a more hopeful and a less coercive way to communicate in a pluralistic and relativistic environment:

To say that *all* communities of moral insight are provincial, that there exists no nonprovincial general community with a clear language, and that therefore we must converse at every border, is in actuality a more optimistic and more fruitful affirmation of the marketplace of ideas than to

¹⁰⁴ Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 81. He does recognise that insights from this “meta-ethical” spectrum may be of assistance at different points along the process of inquiry.

¹⁰⁵ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 56.

¹⁰⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition) (Oxford University Press, 1989 [cited]).

¹⁰⁷ Walter Brueggemann argues that the theological importance of the Decalogue is freedom from oppression. The commands relate to the liberation of the Exodus by establishing “policies to create a society that practices Yahweh’s justice instead of pharaoh’s injustice, and to establish neighbourly well-being instead of coercion, fear, and exploitation.” Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 184.

project a hypothetically general insight which we feel reassured to resort to, when our own particularities embarrass us, but which is not substantial after all when we seek to define it.¹⁰⁸

Yoder recognises his approach is biased too. It is biased toward the particular, but he prefers the bias toward particulars since such a method ‘is less subject to *a priori* bias’ found in universal foundationalist claims.¹⁰⁹ Yoder argues that the reason the radical reformers can give the advice to begin ethical inquiry from existing communities, is because they were never in the privileged position of established religion where they could appeal to universals. For Yoder this is the special *ressourcement* that his tradition can offer the Christian church universal today. The Christian church is no longer in the position of establishment. Yoder is offering a method for Christian ethics to proceed from a minority position. The method for proceeding begins by looking at what communities already value.

Yoder proposes his particularistic method for doing Christian ethics as a way to proceed in the project of ethics in a pluralistic world. His proposal is a continuation of his *ressourcement* of the Radical Reformation insight that since God potentially speaks through all people in the church, the practice of giving minority voices an opportunity to be heard should be a routine practice of the church. By expanding this claim beyond the church, Yoder allows for other voices to be heard from outside of the church, but he is not arguing for relativism. Yoder is arguing that the church may find, *and has found*, other voices of truthfulness outside of the church, but this is a method of ethics *for* the church. Yoder is not doing ethics for the whole world; he is doing ethics for the church. The particularist foundation from which the church begins moral inquiry is from the historically-contingent life of Jesus Christ. The foundation to which the church appeals for discerning the truthfulness of minority or other voices outside of the church is Jesus. Yoder argues that when “we do see Jesus” in people and communities outside the church, that these people and communities are tactical allies. When God’s grace is revealed by other sources, Yoder argues that the church should follow it:

We may be tactical allies of the pluralist/relativist deconstruction of deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty, without making of relativism itself a new monism. We share tactical use of liberation

¹⁰⁸ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 41.

¹⁰⁹ Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 79.

language to dismantle the alliance of church with privilege, without letting the promises made by some in the name of revolution become a new opiate. For the reconstruction we shall find other tactical allies. ... We may then find tactical alliances with the Enlightenment, as did Quakers and Baptists in the century after their expulsion from the Puritan colonies, or with the Gandhian vision, as did Martin Luther King, Jr.¹¹⁰

This quote is from an essay Yoder titled, '*But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth.*' The phrase 'but we do see Jesus' comes from Hebrews 2:8-9, Yoder translates: 'As it is, we do not yet *see* everything in subjection to him. *But we do see Jesus*, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death.'¹¹¹ Yoder explains that while Christ reigns as sovereign over all of creation, 'we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.' Since the church does not yet see everything in subjection to Christ, there is an eschatological tension involved even in the truth claims made by the church. Yoder therefore suggests that beginning with particular, existing communities is *less* coercive than beginning with universal claims.

1.3.2.2 The Fragility of Witness

There is no universal template or perfect form of Christian witness. There are 'patterns of human action' that are faithful to sharing in the testimony of Jesus.¹¹² Witness emerges out of daily faith, a living out of faith, and this lived experience is particular history not universal history.¹¹³ Theologian Susan Frank Parson argues that witness is fragile because it is particular. Witness is not passed on by inheritance, by symbolism, or paradigmatic example, but out of the 'lived experience' of each person's conversion and discipleship. The truth claims made by a Christian or a Christian community are verified by their everyday practices over time. The Christian witness cannot coerce anyone to believe, the persuasive impact of a Christian's truth claims comes through the real experience of communities.

¹¹⁰ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 61-62.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹² Nicholas Lash suggests that rather than asking the question, 'What might "witness" or "martyrdom" mean, today?' We should be asking, 'What form might contemporary fidelity to "the testimony of Jesus" appropriately take?' Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, Ltd, 1986), 91.

¹¹³ Susan Frank Parson, "The Problem with the Ought in Moral Theology" (paper presented at the Theology and Ethics Research Seminar, The University of Edinburgh School of Divinity, New College, 2006).

Bearing witness as a method for ethics is not contingent upon forcefulness or power. It is contingent upon the vulnerability of the *servant* being present as an embodiment of her beliefs. Bearing witness in the Christian tradition is inextricably linked with the body. The New Testament Greek word *martur* was transliterated into English as the word ‘martyr’.¹¹⁴ Third century Christian theologian Origen wrote that ‘everyone who bears witness’ to Christ ‘may properly be called a witness [Gr. *martur*].’ He wanted to correct the church practice of reserving the name *martur* only ‘for those who have borne witness to the mystery of godliness by shedding their blood for it.’¹¹⁵ Because bearing witness involves the physical risk of being there, the phrase ‘bearing witness’ remains inextricably linked to martyrdom.

According to theologian David Bentley Hart, Christian martyrdom is the Christian practice of persuasion. Hart argues that the ethical significance of Christian persuasion must always correspond to its message of peace and the effectiveness of the persuasion is lost when ‘subordinated to some other discourse of power and violence’ as Christian history has proven.¹¹⁶ Christian martyrdom is an imitation of Christ’s renunciation of violence. Thus, Christian practice ‘must always obey the form of Christ, its persuasion must always assume the shape of the gift he is, it must practice its rhetoric under the only aspect it may wear if it is indeed Christian at all: martyrdom.’¹¹⁷ Christianity’s ‘own peculiar practice of persuasion’ is made visible through difference, ‘the powers of the world can suppress only through violence that creates martyrs, and so confirms—contrary to all it intends—the witness of a peace that is infinite.’¹¹⁸ Hart claims that while the gift of the martyr, his or her life, is received in violence, the martyr’s gift cannot be returned violently. Hart explains:

¹¹⁴ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), 1175.

¹¹⁵ Origen (c. 228, E), 9.343. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 430.

¹¹⁶ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 441.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 442.

Christian rhetoric can be only a declaration of witness, and a gift. A gift of martyrs ... can never be returned violently, as the Same; because this gift is always peace and beauty, violence can 'receive' the gift, but never return it.¹¹⁹

Theologian Duncan Forrester uses the analogy of the martyr as absorbing and removing some of the violence and suffering of the world: 'the martyr who dies is often understood as one who absorbs in her suffering a little of the rage and terror of the enemy. Her dying as a martyr diverts some of the terror from the weak and the vulnerable.'¹²⁰ What is significant to point out in Hart and Forrester's understanding of martyrdom is the moral agency of the martyr to transform violence. There is no proliferation of violence in the gift of the martyr, and martyrdom may signal an end of violence.

Yoder argues that Christian witness must be an act of servanthood and completely free of exerting power. Because it does not claim power, witness is not annihilated even if the Christian disciple is. Persuasive influence comes from serving, not from forcing. While Yoder claims that witness is the most persuasive form of communication, shared interpretation cannot be forced. The death of a Christian disciple is not a guarantee that his death will be interpreted as a case of martyrdom. Sociologist Émile Durkheim classifies martyrdom as a type of suicide. He characterises martyrdom as an 'over integration into one's society.'¹²¹ Writing about early Christian martyrdom, Durkheim says, 'All these neophytes who without killing themselves, voluntarily allowed their own slaughter, are really suicides. ... [T]hey had completely discarded their personalities for the idea of which they had become the servants.'¹²² Interestingly, in Durkheim's description of martyrdom, the notion that the person died in service to an idea retains the communicative agency that Yoder points out is involved in bearing witness. The death may not be interpreted as 'martyrdom', nevertheless, it is *recognised* as service to a belief. This communicative agency of recognition is not linked to force.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Duncan B. Forrester, *Apocalypse Now? Reflections on Faith in a Time of Terror* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2005), 81.

¹²¹ *Le suicide: étude sociologique* was published in English in 1951. References are from the following English translation: Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951).

¹²² Ibid., 227.

Durkheim addresses early Christian martyrdom. What would he make of Christian martyrdom in more recent history? Would he classify the deaths of Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr. as suicides provoked by over integration into the ideas of their societies? These men knew that witnessing to their beliefs could very likely lead to their ‘slaughter’. The concept of martyrdom in the modern church focuses not only on confessing Christ under the threat of death, but also on denouncing coercive practices. ‘Many modern martyrs ... are not killed for admitting to the name of Christian, but for preaching the faith in a way that threatens vested interests.’¹²³ The deaths of Romero, Bonhoeffer, and King may not be interpreted as Christian martyrdom outside of the church, but many may recognise the social function of their struggle against hegemonic powers. Their ‘lived experience’ bears witness to the truth claim that being present does threaten ‘vested interests’.

1.3.3 The Efficacy of Witness

In his ground breaking *Politics of Jesus*, Yoder characterised the field of Christian social ethics as far too focused on effective results. He was writing this in a time when Protestant Christian social ethics predominantly focussed on social responsibility ethics.

Christians in our age are obsessed with the meaning and direction of history. Social ethical concern is moved by a deep desire to make things move in the right direction. Whether a given action is right or not seems to be inseparable from the question of what effects it will cause. Thus part if not all of social concern has to do with looking for the right ‘handle’ by which one can ‘get a hold on’ history and move it in the right direction.¹²⁴

Yoder offers a corrective to this focus. His position is that efficacy as a measure of Christian engagement with the world is coercive and incongruent with the inherent vulnerability in the Christian practice of bearing witness. He argues for a discipleship ethic regardless of its efficacy.

Essentially for Yoder the church’s means of influence correlates directly to her obedient faithfulness.¹²⁵ Part of this faithful obedience is simply being present as a sign

¹²³ Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 412.

¹²⁴ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 28.

¹²⁵ While Yoder claims that the practices and worship of Christians are performed regardless of efficacy, Craig R. Hovey notes that Yoder seems to be implying that if only these practices were pure enough the public outside of the church would be able to see Jesus. Hovey points out that this is the major point of

to the world of what God is doing in the world. Witness as a presence that confronts social forces may at times unmask idols. The witness of the church may pioneer practices that cultivate peace over protectionist measures, or the witness of the church may simply be a sign of hope. How can a sign of hope be an effective form of engagement? Yoder gives an example of the efficacy of signs:

Much of the achievement of the civil rights movement in the United States must be understood by means of this category of symbolic evaluation. A sit-in or march is not instrumental but it is *significant*. Even when no immediate change in the social order can be measured, even when persons and organizations have not yet been moved to take a different position, the efficacy of the deed is first of all its efficacy as sign.¹²⁶

What Yoder means by the deed itself having effect, relates to his contention that dissent, or even protest or withdrawal, is a position in and of itself. Yoder claims that the act of dissent is itself an action that communicates. He argues that conscientious objectors or nonconformists, ‘do not have to give an alternative social strategy, just by saying “no”, they unmask idolatry.’¹²⁷ Withdrawal does not necessarily equal disengagement with the world. Withdrawal from one aspect of culture or several specific aspects of culture can witness to dissent with those *particular* positions, yet not a wholesale denunciation of culture. For instance, Yoder himself refused to pay a percentage of his income tax proportionate to what US tax payers contributed to US nuclear proliferation.¹²⁸

The efficacy of witness, Yoder argues, begins with the achievement that other voices, minority voices, get a hearing. Yoder found this Christian position emphasised by the radical reformers. Practices such as egalitarian membership, lay empowerment and dialogical freedom meant that the Holy Spirit potentially spoke through any and all Christians, and therefore, all should have the right to speak in turn. Yoder’s Christian social ethic is peaceful engagement with the world through a discipleship ethic.

divergence between Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. Hovey says that Hauerwas does not believe that the world can ever really see Jesus without entering into the good news first. Craig R. Hovey, "The Public Ethics of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas: Difference or Disagreement?" in *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004).

¹²⁶ Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 161.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹²⁸ Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*.

Christians engage the world through practices that are specifiably Christian. Sometimes these practices are distinguishable from what is going on in the wider world and sometimes they are not. Yoder emphasised that the point of Christian distinctiveness is not to be unique simply for the sake of nonconformity, but simply to be Christian.¹²⁹ The efficacy of Christian witness is correlated to faithful discipleship.

Conclusion

Yoder provides a body of work in which he posits that the natural resources for Christian social ethics are the practices of Jesus, or as Yoder declared them *The Politics of Jesus*. Christ as normative for Christian ethics is Yoder's starting point and he illustrates how this historically contingent foundation for Christian ethics has been neglected and remembered at different times during the history of the Christian church. Yoder cites his own church tradition that came from a line of radical reformers, not only as a resource for considering how the church should engage with culture from a minority position, but also as a model for hearing voices from outside the church. The method of engaging with culture that Yoder offers is witness. Witness is a method of ethics that is biased toward subjective particulars rather than objective universals. It is a method of ethics in which the witness bearers are not responsible for determining whether or not their message was effective; they are responsible for the truthfulness of their messages. The persuasive power of witness does not lie in forced acceptance. The persuasive power of the witness lies in the vulnerability of the witness who is present and engaged in culture, and yet has the conviction of a particular identity.

Yoder helps us see how some Christian practices can be recognised outside the church as ethical ways of organising life together. Issues of translation remain. The understanding of the church as 'first fruits' may be incommensurate outside of communities which proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come. Nevertheless, Yoder shows us how some Christian practices can be recognised as forms of practical moral reasoning for use beyond the church. The social function of some Christian practices can be seen in the media practice of conveying news of distant suffering. Public servanthood and dialogical freedom, for example, are recognisable in the practice of journalists giving voice to those who have little access to publicity. The practice of lay empowerment is

¹²⁹ Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," 295.

recognisable in the role of the journalist holding office bearers to account. The practice of egalitarian membership with an emphasis on voluntary association is recognisable in the formation of audiences into active members of civil society organisations. I explore all of these forms of practical moral reasoning in the next few chapters. The ultimate reason for appealing to Yoder, however, is that he shows how bearing witness to a belief is a way to make truth claims.

Bearing witness to distant suffering proclaims the truth that human beings should be free from torture, genocide, starvation, and civilian bombing, as well as the belief that human beings should be cared for in the aftermath of natural disasters. Yoder makes the argument that truth claims are authenticated through the community's public presence and engagement with the situation. Yoder provides the groundwork for considering how a community's practice of *bearing witness* to their belief is a form of social ethics. Thus, I consider the moral agency involved in the media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering. I begin by looking at the media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering first as a community of actors under the umbrella name of the Global Samaritan, and then I consider audiences and journalists as moral agents.

John Howard Yoder is a valuable choice for conversation partner regarding the practice of bearing witness. He is not the only theologian with whom to have this conversation, but his work particularly underpins the moral agency involved in the act of bearing witness. I end this chapter with a question which I address in the next chapters and that I will return to in the conclusion: How does Yoder's argument for bearing witness as a form of social ethics help us understand the moral agency involved in the media practice of bearing witness to distant suffering?

Chapter 2: The Narrative of the Global Samaritan

In this chapter I introduce the character of the Global Samaritan *bearing witness* to human suffering in the global media sphere. In order to explain who the Global Samaritan is and the space in which the Global Samaritan exists, I draw on literature from several fields: Media and Journalism Studies, Christian Theology, Political Theory and Sociology. This chapter provides the framework for normative understandings of the public realm and the Western humanitarian community. The figure of the Global Samaritan functions as a metaphor for the ‘chain of intermediaries’¹³⁰ involved in delivering humanitarian aid to people suffering in distant lands. The conveyance of humanitarian aid includes everything from raising awareness of the need, motivating political action, and actually delivering care to the people.

I carry forward John Howard Yoder’s claim that bearing witness is social ethics, into this and subsequent chapters to see if Yoder’s claim serves in the investigation of the moral agency of the Global Samaritan. Yoder argues that the existence of a community organising their life based on their convictions is public testimony, that is, social witness. Their action together bears witness to their belief; this is what Yoder called the ‘phenomenology of social witness’. In this chapter, I consider normative understandings of the public realm primarily in the work of Hannah Arendt and with some attention to the work of Jürgen Habermas. Both Arendt and Habermas have concepts that parallel Yoder’s phenomenology of social witness. Arendt describes public realms brought into existence based on common cause. The result of these public realms is political action that bears witness to the community’s shared belief. Habermas describes the social function of civil society organisations in the public sphere. These organisations of voluntary association communicate their convictions based on their ‘programmatic character’. The common cause which brought them together in the first place, will be the basis for what they do when they are together.

The Global Samaritan, representing the Western humanitarian community, *bears witness* to the belief that human beings should be free from starvation, genocide, and torture, as well as other human-made or natural causes of mass suffering. The Global Samaritan bears witness in the global media sphere. In the final section of this chapter, I

¹³⁰ Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

consider technological and sociological changes that have contributed to the cultivation of a global media sphere as a place to bear witness to distant human suffering. I begin my discussion of the Global Samaritan with an introduction to the narrative of global compassion.

2.1 The Narrative of Global Compassion

The narrative of global compassion is a political and journalistic frame helpful in its explanation of how to understand the world from a Western gaze after the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, journalism coverage of foreign news was framed by the politics of the Communist world versus the Democratic world. News media editors and scholars have used the metaphor of a chess board—there were major countries creating two teams.¹³¹ There were those on the side of the communists and those on the side of the democratic countries. Countries not clearly aligned were pawns between the major players ready to fall to one side or the other. Such was the interpretive frame from which journalists reported on stories from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Under the narrative of the Cold War, geopolitics guaranteed Western journalistic coverage of distant and unfamiliar places. With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the Cold War narrative no longer provided a frame for foreign news coverage. A new rationale was needed in order to justify Western news agencies travelling to foreign and distant places to perform the expensive task of news gathering.

The experts to whom I refer to in this chapter, argue that the Cold War narrative was replaced by a hopeful narrative of moral intervention and humanitarian care, the narrative of global compassion.¹³² The narrative of global compassion, of course, is a product of its time. The 1990s began with wars and genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia and Western humanitarian intervention in these places.¹³³ There are other

¹³¹Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London: Vintage, 1999). Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Philip Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict* (Boston, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002).

¹³²Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Birgitta Höijer, "The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering," *Media, Culture and Society* 26, no. 4 (2004). Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. D. Robert DeChaine, "Humanitarian Space and the Social Imaginary: Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors without Borders and the Rhetoric of Global Community," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2002).

¹³³Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Sociology of Humanitarian Intervention: Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia Compared," *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science pol* 18, no. 1 (1997).

narratives used to explain foreign news coverage in the West,¹³⁴ but for the purposes of this thesis, I am focusing on the narrative of global compassion. This narrative is not without criticism; for instance Michael Ignatieff claims that the challenge is that the narrative of global compassion cannot sustain continued coverage of chaotic death and destruction in far away places. He argues that without an overarching narrative such as the Cold War or interests of the British Empire, identification with the viewers is made on the ‘lines of pure emotional empathy with the starving the suffering, the dying and the massacred’. Ignatieff goes on to argue that these ‘very flimsy lines of identification’ are ‘unsustainable over any extended period because they do not form part of a “bigger picture”’.¹³⁵

For television journalism, the heuristic of the narrative of global compassion is a frame for international coverage in which complex issues in distant and unfamiliar places can be covered in a way that is still relevant to national interest. If foreign news coverage is not made relevant to national interests, then it is not broadcast. I discuss the importance of public relevance in section 2.3 of this chapter. The essential point is that which is not made relevant does not receive a public hearing let alone a public voice. The players involved in the narrative of global compassion include more than news media organisations. The narrative is populated by a full cast of members.

2.1.1 Cast Members

The narrative of global compassion is populated by a cast of characters.¹³⁶ I identify these characters in five groupings. First, there are the news organisations with the

¹³⁴ For instance Philip Seib identifies the narrative of the clash of civilizations found in: Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1998). Huntington posits that the clash of civilizations is essentially a clash between the West and Muslim countries and like in the Cold War, the in-between States again become pawns. Thus Western news coverage of foreign countries is cast in light of such a clash. This narrative need not be considered as a counter narrative to the narrative of global compassion. Both rationales for framing foreign news coverage can co-exist. Seib provides an analysis of Huntington’s thesis in: Philip Seib, "The News Media and "the Clash of Civilizations", in *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Philip Seib (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹³⁵ Michael Ignatieff, "Preface," in *Watching the World: British Television and Audience Engagement with Developing Countries*, ed. Adrian Cleasby (London: Third World & Environment Broadcasting Project, 1996).

¹³⁶ The players in the narrative of global compassion or the story of moral interventionism, are referred to under different names by various authors, but overall they reference a similar cast. See Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. Höijer, "The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering."

leading roles played by the war reporter and foreign correspondent. In chapters four and five, I provide in-depth analysis of the role of the foreign correspondent in the narrative of global compassion. A second grouping central to the cast is played by aid workers of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also called charities. A third grouping of characters includes the peacekeepers of international political bodies such as the United Nations. These bodies can provide both physical presence at sites of suffering as well as policy regarding suffering such as the UN resolution called the ‘Responsibility to Protect’.¹³⁷ A fourth group includes diplomats and elected-government officials of individual States. And fifth, not to be excluded from the ensemble is the *public*, many people constituting a singular *persona ficta*. The public is involved in the funding of the aid agencies, the voting in of the politicians, and the viewing of the media news organisations. In chapter three, I direct my focus primarily on the public. Excluded from the central cast of the narrative of global compassion is the object of compassion, the victim of suffering. The ‘victims’ are not included in the final grouping of *public* because the victims are the object of the gaze of the *public*.

The roles required of the cast members are inter-related, for example the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) would like to put pressure on diplomats or governments to act, so they invite a journalist along to a restricted area to cover a story. The reporter, who would like access to the restricted area, happily accompanies the ICRC and mediates the story to both government officials and the public. The hope is that the public will exert pressure on politicians to do something for the suffering of the distant strangers. Once news media organisations get involved in disseminating the images of suffering people, then relief agencies begin to receive donations. I will illustrate the next three chapters with variations on this script and I will question the axiomatic claims and conventional wisdom that accompany the narrative of global compassion. In this chapter, I consider news audiences and news reporters together, whereas, I devote the subsequent chapters to individual groupings.

I focus this thesis on investigating the narrative of global compassion as represented in the genre of televisual foreign news coverage. There are other genres of media which could be explored using this frame as a method for investigating cultural

¹³⁷ The UN passed this resolution in 2005. It was primarily brought forward by Canadian members of the UN following their frustrations with the UN’s inability to act in Rwanda.

practice. The narrative of global compassion could also be investigated through other genres such as popular films, including *Blood Diamond* (2007) and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), but also in documentary films like Paul Freedman's *Rwanda – Do Scars Ever Fade?* (2003), or his film on Darfur *Sand and Sorrow* (2007).¹³⁸ Live Aid campaigns and the Make Poverty History campaign are cultural artefacts of a further genre that could be investigated with the framework of the narrative of global compassion.¹³⁹ These campaigns are often accompanied by commercial brands linking company names like GAP to t-shirts in support of campaigns. Even the book-of-the-month at Starbucks, *A Long Way Gone* by former child soldier Ishmael Beah, is a cultural artefact which could be categorised under the broad heading of global compassion. Starbucks is promoting this book by a former child soldier as a way to promote 'community and conversation' about global suffering in Starbucks' coffee houses.¹⁴⁰ In foreign news coverage, the entertainment industry and other culture-making enterprises, the West is cast as a global citizen.

2.1.2 Global Citizenship

Birgitta Höijer situates the discourse of global compassion 'at the intersection between politics, humanitarian organizations, the media and the audience/citizens.' All of the cast members in global compassion share the same citizenship, that of global citizenship. Anthony Giddens describes globalisation as creating 'the intensification of action at a distance' and this generates new forms of identities.¹⁴¹ Journalism practitioners and scholars Howard Tumber and Frank Webster argue that globalisation contributes to global citizenship and the 'globalisation of conscience'. Globalisation has 'encouraged the spread of a consciousness of the world that proclaims that people should share certain conditions.'¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Paul Freedman made the distinction between his documentary film on Rwanda and his film on Darfur. He clearly distinguished the film on Rwanda as a 'documentary' film, whereas he called the Darfur film an 'advocacy' film. I recorded this in a conversation with Freedman on 25 September 2008 following the screening of both films.

¹³⁹ Kate Nash, "Global Citizenship as Show Business: The Cultural Politics of Make Poverty History," *Media Culture Society* 30, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁴⁰ "Riveting True Story of Hope and Redemption "a Long Way Gone" Is Next Starbucks Featured Book," *Starbucks Press Release*, January 11 2007.

¹⁴¹ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 4.

¹⁴² Howard Tumber and Frank Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice* (London: Sage, 2006), 4.

Höijer's research on audience reaction to humanitarian news coverage in Sweden revealed a local audience with a global conscience. She concludes that the narrative of global compassion is an attractive framework for citizens because it encourages civic and political interaction while bypassing the partisan involvement required in the Cold War framing of international reporting. Höijer notes the trend that people would rather become a member of a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) than a political party because of NGOs' 'apolitical character'.¹⁴³

With their philanthropic and altruistic messages and practices, they are apparently above the power games and hypocrisy of ordinary politics. They exist to serve humanity, they always side with the victims and they appeal to our most noble feelings—compassion and altruism.¹⁴⁴

As I noted in the roll call of cast members above, the victims of suffering are not included as players in the narrative of global compassion. Feelings of compassion and altruism begin with cast members. Compassion is a subject-centred or subject-directed emotion and form of reasoning done by the cast members of global compassion.¹⁴⁵ The object of compassion may be a victim of any combination of what media organizations call the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'—disease, famine, war and death.¹⁴⁶

The picture of the world that cast members of the narrative of global compassion paint is a picture of the West as global citizen. Epitomising this picture of the world shaped by the narrative of global compassion is in the title of civil action organizations like, *Not on Our Watch*, and the accompanying book *Not On Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond*. Actor Don Cheadle, of *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) fame, and John Prendergast, a former official in the US Clinton administration, co-wrote the book and co-founded the organization that encourages citizens to influence their governments to act. The picture of the world generated by the narrative of global compassion is that there are global citizens who can stop genocide and suffering in distant places. The responsible global citizen is the modern day Global Samaritan.

¹⁴³ Höijer, "The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering," 518.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Martha Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," in *Social Philosophy and Foundation* (1996). In Chapter 3, I provide an extended discussion on Nussbaum's argument that compassion is a subject-centred form of moral reasoning, with reference to audiences of foreign news coverage.

¹⁴⁶ Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*.

2.2 Global Framing of the Parable of the Good Samaritan

In literature on the topic of witnessing distant suffering, the parable of the Good Samaritan is invariably invoked.¹⁴⁷ Western humanitarianism has roots in the West's Christian tradition. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a story in the moral imagination of most Westerners. Whether or not a public imagery of the parable is cultivated through hearing the Gospel of Luke 10:29-37 or through watching the season finale of the television show *Seinfeld* (1998),¹⁴⁸ the West associates the parable of the Good Samaritan with a humanitarian impulse. The Samaritan was moved by compassion and he aided the suffering man. In this section, I will look at the West as Global Samaritan, and at problems that arise with assigning the Samaritan *global* agency. I then consider how audiences in the first centuries of the Common Era may have understood Jesus' parable of the Samaritan in contrast with twenty-first century understanding.

2.2.1 The Analogy of the Good Samaritan and Humanitarian Action

Social critic Luc Boltanski argues that the framing of the West as the Global Samaritan is a helpful frame because the important point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that pity 'must rapidly give way to action.'¹⁴⁹ Boltanski cites the parable of the Good Samaritan as a fruitful way to describe forms of compassionate relationships because the story is realistic:

It is realistic first of all because it focuses on the situation with its inherent constraints and on the ends with which individuals must come to terms if they are to commit themselves. It is also realistic because it places itself at the level of action, and specifically of an action directed towards the relief of the unfortunate's suffering which must consider both its practicability (taking into account the constraints on the person providing help) and effectiveness (the likelihood of effectively changing the condition of the suffering individual). Finally, it is realistic because it chimes with common experience.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Lillie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2006). Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*.

¹⁴⁸ In this episode the central cast is imprisoned for violating Massachusetts' Good Samaritan Law when the central cast fails to help a man being carjacked. Instead of helping, the *Seinfeld* characters laugh at what they see as a spectacle of an over-weight man struggling. The social interpretation of the parable simply derived from this episode watched by millions of viewers is *bystanders are complicit*.

¹⁴⁹ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, 47.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

The analogy of the Good Samaritan is problematised when pity cannot be followed by rapid action which is the case of witnessing suffering at a distance. Boltanski argues that news of distant suffering is not new to the last two centuries, but because of technological innovation in global communication systems the witnessing of distant suffering is far more prevalent. The problem is that global spectators who react with pity to suffering conveyed by a global media system have little recourse to act immediately.

The spectacle of the unfortunate being conveyed to the witness, the action taken by the witness must in turn be conveyed to the unfortunate. But the instruments which can convey a representation and those which can convey an action are not the same.¹⁵¹

Boltanski goes on to say that there exists a ‘chain of intermediaries between the spectator and the unfortunate’ in order for any action to be achieved.¹⁵² While response via intermediaries is an incredible obstacle to action and almost a complete limitation on direct action, response through intermediaries is not a complete negation of any action. The ‘chain of intermediaries’ is what I have described as the players in the narrative of global compassion. The spectator, or the public, is only one among many cast members. Nonetheless, Boltanski’s concern remains: the spectator’s reaction of pity cannot be followed-up by immediate action.

Eventually Boltanski justifies the media practice of witnessing distant suffering. He acknowledges that the humanitarian promotion of the spectacle of suffering provides an avenue for the public to ‘denounce’ the perpetrators of violence as well as a way for the public to express ‘sentiment’ for the unfortunate victims in a manner that is linked to a call to action. The link to the call for action involves the long chain often starting with humanitarian aid organisations, both NGOs and UN bodies, encouraging journalist reportage on the suffering, the public’s reception of the news and then movement to put pressure on officials and more charity organisations to become involved. It is the fragile link between spectator’s pity and the possibility for real action, on-the-ground, that allows Boltanski to justify the humanitarian promotion of the spectacle of suffering. He argues that action ‘exercised from a long way off’ is ‘useless’ and an ‘illusion’ of action if it is not connected to real presence. ‘Ultimately what justifies the humanitarian movement is that its members are on the spot. Presence on the ground is the only

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵² Ibid.

guarantee of effectiveness and even of truth.’¹⁵³ Boltanski is interested in what possible action is available following the sentiment of pity.¹⁵⁴ In the end, action requires somebody to be there, on the scene. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the only people present to the man’s suffering were the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan. Audiences to the parable do not know whether the first two had pity, only that they did not act. Audiences learn that the Samaritan had pity and did act. What is the position of the audience? Is the audience present to human suffering in their role as spectator?

2.2.2 First Century Audiences to the Parable

To begin with, Jesus told a parable about a man suffering on the side of the road and the author of Luke recorded that story. The parable was not a news story hurriedly filed for the evening news. It was not a live or direct call for action for any audience to rush to the aid of the man suffering on the side of the road. It was a parable told to a specific audience at a specific time. The modern audience of the parable of the Good Samaritan gives the preferred reading of the parable as an analogy for how to act in a humanitarian crisis; this was not the case for audiences of the first few centuries. Biblical scholar Riemer Roukema traces theological writings from the first centuries illustrating that the parable was understood allegorically, ‘the Samaritan being seen as Christ the Saviour of sinners, who had been robbed by the devil.’ Early Christian audiences to this parable ‘were ready to identify themselves with the wounded man helped by the Samaritan, who was represented by other Christians.’¹⁵⁵ Given the modern prevalent use of the parable of the Good Samaritan as a call to humanitarian action, I think it is worth renewing our modern understanding of the parable by revisiting earlier interpretations of the parable in the Christian tradition. In the next chapter I ask the question of televisual audiences: How far do audiences make *Good Samaritans*? I will turn to insight on first century audiences to assist in the evaluation of twenty-first century audiences.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 181.

¹⁵⁴ Eugenia Siapera criticises Boltanski for positioning the role of the spectator as irrevocably a moral agent. Siapera offers an aesthetic viewing where ‘the political question of mediated emotion as an aesthetic form is “what is this that we see, hear, read?” and “what does this break/shock imply or reveal?” and not the question of credibility: is what we see real/believable nor the question of action put as: what action must be taken if what we see is real? The aesthetic question therefore precedes and frames the question of credibility and action – it focuses on the occasion that has given rise to the emotion and on the way in which it is mediated.’ Eugenia Siapera, “Mediated Emotion,” *Estudos em Comunicação* 1 (2007): 60.

¹⁵⁵ Riemer Roukema, “The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity,” *Vigilae Christianae* 58 (2004): 56.

Twenty-first century audiences identify with the Good Samaritan. To consider how first century Jewish and Samaritan audiences might have identified with the parable of the Good Samaritan, I primarily consider the work of New Testament scholar Ian McDonald.¹⁵⁶ He provides a socio-historical telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan in which he explains the social context a Jewish audience and a Samaritan audience might encounter in the story. McDonald begins by describing ‘the social and economic upheavals of Herodian times,’ and the effects on the people of Israel:

dispossession of land Jews held in the North (a policy with an uncanny resemblance to what is known today as ethnic cleansing), and the consequent creation of a massive pool of unemployed urban poor in the South with all the symptoms of distress that go with it (not to speak of fiscal and temple taxation), then we not only place the robbers in their social context ... but priest and Levite could be seen by many as ecclesiastical oppressors, extracting through the Temple tax money the poor could ill afford and imposing the cruellest sanction on Jewish people who could not pay: exclusion from Israel’s life and worship.¹⁵⁷

2.2.2.1 Jewish Audience

A Jewish audience, many of whom have travelled the dangerous roads before, have the perspective of the ‘view from the ditch’ with the traveller.¹⁵⁸ New Testament scholar Howard Marshall notes that the man in the ditch ‘is intentionally left undescribed; he can be any man, although a Jewish audience would naturally think of him as a Jew.’¹⁵⁹ For the Jewish audience, here is the parabolic subversion of the story: help must come from outside, but to have it come from a Samaritan is like being kicked when you are already down. McDonald cites the Mishna, ‘He that eats the bread of Samaritans is like one that eats the flesh of swine.’ McDonald draws from Biblical scholar Robert W. Funk who writes, ‘all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no choice but to give

¹⁵⁶ McDonald cites these sources for a socio-historical critical reading of the parable: F. Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, Eng. Tr., Maryknoll, New York 1981; W. Stegemann, *God the Lowly: A Socio-Historical Interpretation of the Bible*, Maryknoll 1984; others include Machovec, Pixley and Clevenot; also J. Ian H. McDonald, *Biblical Interpretation and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 175-86.

¹⁵⁷ J. Ian H. McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 27-28.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 28.

¹⁵⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 447.

themselves up to mercy.’¹⁶⁰ Funk argues that in order for the audience, the audience then and now, to *understand* the parable is to take up the position in the ditch: ‘it does not suggest that one behave as a good neighbour like the Samaritan, but that one become the victim in the ditch who is helped by an enemy.’¹⁶¹

2.2.2.2 Samaritan Audience

To continue on in McDonald’s socio-historical telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritans are not observing the action of the story from the ditch with the traveller. Many Samaritans had found opportunity to prosper economically during Herodian upheavals.¹⁶² Biblical scholar Michael Knowles argues that audiences of the first centuries would recognise the particular cues embedded within or implied by this text as depicting the Samaritan in this manner: ‘the parable depicts a Samaritan oil and wine merchant travelling a regular commercial route, which would account for his cargo, his beast, his access to funds, his apparent destination, and his planned return.’¹⁶³ Knowles acknowledges that this depiction is not a new finding, but this interpretation ‘finds important confirmation in recent archaeological research.’¹⁶⁴ So a Samaritan audience, which McDonald argues was part of Luke’s intended audience, would observe the action of the story from a place of relative safety and prosperity. They are in the position where they could do something, but why should they, given the racial and ecclesiastical tension between themselves and the Jews? McDonald claims that for the Samaritan audience, the parabolic subversion is a call to remembering the past, an earlier Jewish recording of the actions of good Samaritans. McDonald summarizes the actions of the Samaritans recorded in 2 Chronicles 28.5-15 when the prophet Oded persuaded the Samaritans to return Jewish women and children wrongfully taken in war:

¹⁶⁰ Robert W. Funk, "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor," *Semeia* 2 (1974): 79.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 28.

¹⁶³ Michael P. Knowles, "What Was the Victim Wearing? Literary, Economic, and Social Contexts for the Parable of the Good Samaritan," *Biblical Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (2004): 151.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on asses, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees ...¹⁶⁵

McDonald is not offering this comparison as original insight. Marshalls and Knowles cite that this is a well-accepted interpretation in Biblical Studies.¹⁶⁶ For the Samaritan hearer the 'parable summons the hearers to obey the best in their tradition.'¹⁶⁷ For the Samaritans it was a reminder of who my neighbour is, even in acrimonious times.

2.2.3 Twenty-First Century Audiences to the Parable

Modern Western audiences to the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan are closer to the position of the Samaritan audience simply because neither the Samaritan nor the modern audience is in the ditch. Readings of the Biblical passages may actually have a wider audience outside of the West, but I am focusing on Western audiences given the tie of this parable to the Western narrative of global compassion. I have never heard an appeal to the parable of the Good Samaritan used in the parabolic subversion intended for the Jewish audience—that help will come from the despised. While it is perfectly applicable and we often hear vignettes of someone being forced to accept help from her enemy, we do not hear an invocation of the parable, '*Remember the Good Samaritan.*' More likely, we would hear an aphorism such as *beggars can't be choosers*. The West reads the text through the experience of predominantly being in the position to *give* charity and mercy rather than to *receive* it. I think it is helpful to have another angle on this situation and a Dalit perspective can provide that contrast.

2.2.3.1 A Dalit Theological Perspective of the Parable

In the modern Western reference to the Good Samaritan, the meaning of the Samaritan as the despised one liberating the righteous one is lost. The West is not a monolith. There are groups among Western audiences who may relate more to the

¹⁶⁵ McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 30.

¹⁶⁶ 'For nearly a century, commentators have noted that 2 Chron. 28:15 bears a striking resemblance to, and likely provided the inspiration for, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.' Knowles, "What Was the Victim Wearing? Literary, Economic, and Social Contexts for the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 147. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*.

¹⁶⁷ McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 30.

Samaritan as the despised one, rather than the Samaritan as the economically advantaged one. Such groups within the West might relate more to modern interpretations of the parable coming from outside of the West. A Dalit perspective on the parable is a modern interpretation for a community that might experience a variation on the parabolic subversion intended for the Jewish audience. Indian theologian, and specifically of Dalit Christian theology, M. Gnanavaram contextualizes the parable where the Dalit, the lowest Indian caste, is likened to the Samaritan. The Dalit is like the Samaritan not for being in the privileged place to give charity, but rather for being of a despised people. The parabolic subversion intended for the Dalit audience Gnanavaram argues is a realization of a Dalit consciousness:

It makes Dalits realize that they should not simply suffer their lot but that they should take responsibility for themselves. We [Dalits] can learn from the parable that when they become aware of the situation, as the Samaritan does, they can take responsibility even for helping others who are oppressed as well.¹⁶⁸

Here compassion and charity for the victim comes through the liberation of the oppressed to show solidarity with the suffering. Gnanavaram compares Western theology which reads the parable of the Good Samaritan through charity as a responsibility of the economically secure, with that of Dalit theology which reads the parable through liberation of the oppressed and liberation via the oppressed.

Both McDonald and Gnanavaram take a socio-historical view of the parable. When they speak of the parable's meaning for contemporary audiences they are talking about the process of the Christian church continually reading the Biblical parable and grappling with what it means for modern audiences of the Gospel. Given the association of the parable of the Good Samaritan with a Western humanitarian narrative of global compassion, I will look at a few interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan at a wider, popular level in the West.

2.2.3.2 Popular Culture uses of the Parable

The parable of the Good Samaritan has influenced the moral imagination of Western society as we can see through the continued use of the reference in legal and

¹⁶⁸ M. Gnanavaram, "'Dalit Theology' and the Parable of the Good Samaritan," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 50 (1993): 78.

media practices. The Western audiences' understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan can be illustrated by briefly considering laws that reference the phrase 'Good Samaritan' and news coverage that uses the phrase 'Good Samaritan' in the headlines.

Good Samaritan Laws

We can see what a culture within a civil-law country values by the laws they enact. Many Western countries have a 'Good Samaritan Law', either under that name as in the US and Canada, or some other name that thematically fits into the category of Good Samaritanship.¹⁶⁹ Jan M. Smits finds it helpful to look at these laws under the single category of Good Samaritanship because the parable's 'biblical origin has ensured the discussion of the case in nearly every Western legal system.'¹⁷⁰ Good Samaritan laws are intended to encourage citizens toward a practice of neighbourliness, extending compassion beyond dependent relationships, when in the proximity of somebody in distress. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the lawyer's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' The lawyer wanted to know the limits of his duty as neighbour. So too do the Good Samaritan laws answer the question of who is my neighbour and what are the limits of duty required. According to the laws, neighbours have to do with proximity and time; whoever is near at the time of danger is the victim's neighbour. Eye-witnesses are neighbours. In the *general duty to rescue* laws, European countries and individual US states and Canadian provinces vary on who is obligated to render assistance. In some cases, it is only the eye-witnesses, and in other cases passers-by within the time-span of the distress are under obligation too. And, in the case of the law in Belgium: 'everyone informed of the danger' is under a general obligation to provide assistance to the person in peril.¹⁷¹ Howard Marshall points out that Jesus' parable illustrates that you cannot define neighbour in the casuistic manner the lawyer seeks to define neighbour, you 'can only be a neighbour.'¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Good Samaritan laws often cover three aspects: 1) the duty or obligation to rescue; 2) the protection from liability in the event that the rescuer causes unintended damages; and 3) prohibiting the entitlement to reward for the rescuer's intervention. Jan M. Smits, "The Good Samaritan in European Private Law; on the Perils of Principles without a Programme and a Programme for the Future," in *Inaugural Lecture* (Maastricht University: Kluwer-Deventer, 2000).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 450.

Good Samaritan Headlines

As discussed above, Western theological interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan emphasise the aspect of those with resources charitably and generously giving to those in great need. A glance at BBC headlines from 2007 using the phrase *Good Samaritan* retain the emphasis of charitable acts but also reveal the dangerous world of acts of charity and mercy to strangers. Only two of the headlines from the BBC news website referencing Good Samaritanship were simply about the act of charity, rather the predominant use of the phrase *Good Samaritan* was used when the rescuer became the victim: *Addict stole from Good Samaritan; Good Samaritan beaten Unconscious; 'Good Samaritan' tourist stabbed; 'Good Samaritan' raped by convict; 'Good Samaritan' left in coma; Crash man knifed Good Samaritan.*¹⁷³ A US headline from *The New York Times* has similarly dubious view of Good Samaritanship and encourages readers toward reconsidering neighbourliness altogether: *Samaritan's Death Raises Questions About Her Choices.*¹⁷⁴

The parable of the Good Samaritan, or a general reference to the Good Samaritan, is still evident in the moral imagination of the West and the parable's critical question of 'Who is my neighbour?' remains a central meaning in the reference's popular use. I do not really think the Good-Samaritan-turned-victim news headlines are scare tactics trying to discourage neighbourliness, but rather a narrative framing of news coverage which highlights good versus the audacity of evil.¹⁷⁵ The headlines highlight that the miracle of neighbourliness, in a dangerous world where even the one you consider your neighbour may *beat, stab, rape, or kill* you, still exists.

McDonald argues that the modern audience perspective is much more like the perspective of the Samaritan audience who could find in the parable a:

¹⁷³ Survey of news headlines on www.BBC.co.uk conducted on 9 October, 2007.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Wilson, "Samaritan's Death Raises Questions About Her Choices," *New York Times*, August 15 2007.

¹⁷⁵ John Fiske argues that television news is a narrative form where 'heroes embodied socially central values, whereas villains and victims embodied deviant and disruptive ones.' Therefore Good Samaritanship that resulted in victimization would more readily receive coverage over 'normal' Good Samaritanship because victimization meets the news criteria or value of negativity. 'What is new is what disrupts the normal.' Normal Good Samaritanship is not as newsworthy when it does not result in victimization. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 284-8.

narrative concept of morality in which the question of identity – ‘Who am I?’ – and that of goal or *telos* – ‘What ought I to become?’ – are brought to the fore and subjected to the criterion of ‘neighbourly’ initiative towards ‘the man in the ditch’.¹⁷⁶

McDonald is articulating an active audience response to the hearing of the parable. The audience of the parable of the Good Samaritan was given a lesson in sociality rather than procedures for emergency and hospice care. McDonald says that the parable is more about questions of identity formation than about providing a principle or rule of care. The parable provides a narrative for audiences to work out what kind of communities they are and what they hope to be. In order to have a narrative concept of morality, there must be some kind of community being shaped by the narrative. The parable has to be heard within some sort of community. Can a Western television audience be a community? I take up this concern in the next chapter where I concentrate on audiences.

In this section I have investigated the claim of the West as Global Samaritan through looking at how the parable of the Good Samaritan works as a way to frame foreign news coverage of suffering in distant places. I pointed to the contrast in how audiences of the first centuries and contemporary audiences might interpret the parable. The frame of the parable of the Good Samaritan as a frame for news coverage of disasters and suffering has communicative value, people moved by compassion act: pick the man up from the side of the road, tend to basic emergency aid, and transport the man to an Inn for hospice care, and then return again to check on him. The West as Global Samaritan problematises personal care in a one-to-one method. In order for the Global Samaritan to administer person-to-person care, a whole system of action is involved for the conveyance of care. This system of conveyance, or Boltanski’s ‘chain of intermediaries’, begins with the lawyer’s concern of limits, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Global compassion begins by introducing new neighbours into the neighbourhood in order to be cared for by the Global Samaritan, constituted of news organisations, NGOs, international political bodies, State government officials, and the public. In the next section, I argue that the neighbourhood in which the Global Samaritan resides is the global media sphere. In the narrative of global compassion, direct action is delivered at the far end of this system. The system begins with a visible representation of a neighbour on whom to have pity.

¹⁷⁶ McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 36.

Without such publicity, the system that makes up the Global Samaritan has nowhere to direct compassion. Publicity proves the beginning of a lifeline for those men, women, and children suffering on the side of the road.

2.3 Publicity as a Lifeline

In order to achieve anything like the proximity of the Good Samaritan to the suffering man in the ditch, the Global Samaritan begins with raising awareness, casting public light on distant suffering. As I discussed above with reference to New Testament scholarship, the Samaritan figure in Jesus' parable was likely equipped with oil, wine, and money ready to minister to the needs of the suffering man. The Global Samaritan of the twenty-first century is equipped to begin to minister to the needs of mass suffering with global, networked communication. The first aid response given to victims of distant wars, famines and natural disasters is publicity, awareness at a global level of the existence of particular instances of suffering. In this section, I consider how raising awareness of humanitarian crises is the beginning of how the Global Samaritan acts. Before I investigate the global media sphere as the vehicle for raising awareness about humanitarian disasters, I begin with a theoretical investigation into the nature of the public sphere, or as Hannah Arendt names it the 'public realm', and the role of publicity.¹⁷⁷

I am interacting with the ideas of Hannah Arendt primarily for her articulation of the public realm and secondly, for her understanding of the difficulty of making the private emotion of pain relevant to a large public. I use the language of *the* public sphere or *the* public realm realising that the public realm is not a monolith.¹⁷⁸ There are many publics in every country let alone within international bodies. In fact, my use of the phrase global media sphere as the place of conversation for global compassion is a sphere made up of many different publics while excluding other publics. Arendt's public realm need not be considered a monolithic realm subsuming all publics and claiming a central and single public sphere. Her definition of the public realm as a place created by human

¹⁷⁷ I first encountered the connection of modern media publicity and Arendt's connection of publicity and the public realm in the following article: Oliver O'Donovan, "The Concept of Publicity," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2000).

¹⁷⁸ Discussion on multiple publics is found in: Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Zone Books, 2005). Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique the Actually Existing Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

hands makes room for multiple publics created by various communities as places to practice politics and coordinate action. Arendt's articulation of the public realm provides a normative description of the important roles played by publicity and privacy in the public realm. Thus, Arendt provides a helpful framework for understanding the public function of appearance and lack of appearance in the discourse on global compassion. In Arendt's use of the word 'public' she is concerned with two issues: first, the ability of a person to 'appear' before others, and second, the social relevance of some people's 'appearance' compared to other people's 'appearance'. I look to Arendt's work with my concern in mind, that the public appearance of the suffering in the neighbourhood of the Global Samaritan is the beginning of action in the narrative of global compassion.

2.3.1 Publicity as Appearance

Arendt argues that in the public realm, 'appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality.'¹⁷⁹ Crucial to Arendt's understanding of the public realm is that this is where the action of politics takes place, the action of word and deed. To be denied appearance in this place is to be denied reality. In Antiquity, being denied public appearance was the fate of slaves, women and foreigners.

To be deprived of it [publicity] means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others by its appearing to all; 'for what appears to all, this we call Being,' and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality.¹⁸⁰

Arendt's argument, that to be deprived of appearance is to be deprived of life, is not far from the sentiment Alan Johnston expressed when he was released from 114 days held hostage in the Gaza Strip by Palestinian militants known as the Army of Islam. Johnston, a BBC foreign correspondent to Palestine, said that being held in captivity was like 'being buried alive, removed from the world'.¹⁸¹ Johnston thanked news organisations for keeping his story 'alive' during his captivity. The publicity supplied by the news organisations served as an umbilical cord to sustain his connection to the real

¹⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1998), 50.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 199. Internal to Arendt's quote, she is quoting Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* 1172b36ff.

¹⁸¹ Tim Butcher, "Bbc's Alan Johnston: I Dreamt of Being Free," *Telegraph.co.uk*, 5 July 2007.

world. Johnston uses figurative language suggesting that without the lifeline of publicity, he would have been extinguished. Johnston had access to a radio for fourteen of the sixteen weeks in captivity. He said hearing messages of support gave him a ‘psychological boost’. ‘It was amazing to be lying in solitary confinement and hear people from Nigeria, Malaysia or friends from London, colleagues sending messages of support.’ Former hostages Terry Waite, John McCarthy and Brian Keenan recorded messages for broadcast on BBC World Service encouraging Johnston during the captivity.¹⁸² Keeping the story public, Johnston, in his dark cell, could feel the social solidarity in the world beyond his cell. Johnston needed witnesses to his ordeal. Arendt argues that the reason we need witnesses has to do with the connection of appearance to reality: ‘The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves’.¹⁸³ As for the public reception of Johnston’s story, this was not an unfamiliar story in Western media—Western journalist, or aid worker, working in a volatile foreign location taken hostage by extremists—therefore the public acknowledgement of Johnston’s plight was not a contested reality. Former hostages Waite, McCarthy and Keenan provided credible confirmation of Johnston’s reality because they too had experienced similar captivity. In this case, while they were not first-hand witnesses of Johnston’s kidnapping or captivity, they are credible witnesses able to verify Johnston’s experience because in this situation, they are expert witnesses. McCarthy, Waite, and Keenan could say it really is like this.

2.3.1.1 Contested Testimony

Solidarity, the presence of others, confirms reality, but not all reality is easily confirmed and some realities are even contested as Arendt observes regarding the public reception of the first Holocaust survivor testimonials. The pain and horror communicated by survivor testimony took time before it acquired a shape recognisable to those outside of the concentration camps. As I quoted above, Arendt writes, ‘whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality.’¹⁸⁴ The problem with our experiences seeming like a dream is that if there

¹⁸² These former hostages have chronicled their stories respectively in the following books: John McCarthy, *Some Other Rainbow* (London: Bantam, 1993), Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), and Terry Waite, *Taken on Trust* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

¹⁸³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

is no one to confirm the reality of our experience, we too may become convinced that it was indeed only a dream. Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* of the doubtful public reception of Holocaust concentration camp survivor testimony:

There are numerous reports by survivors. The more authentic they are, the less they attempt to communicate things that evade human understanding and human experience—sufferings, that is, that transform men into ‘uncomplaining animals.’ None of these reports inspires those passions of outrage and sympathy through which men have always been mobilized for justice. On the contrary, anyone speaking or writing about concentration camps is still regarded as suspect; and if the speaker has resolutely returned to the world of the living, he himself is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality.¹⁸⁵

Arendt derives these observations from hearing testimony of survivors at the Eichmann trials and reading testimonials. Arendt was interested not only in the doubt expressed by the public in receiving the testimony, but the doubt of the actual eyewitness of his or her own experience. She cites survivor Bruno Bettelheim’s essay ‘On Dachau and Buchenwald’, he writes: ‘It seemed as if I had become convinced that these horrible and degrading experiences somehow did not happen to “me” as subject but to “me” as an object.’¹⁸⁶ He goes on to say that of course those in Paris, London, and New York were incredulous at the reports of gas chambers, because even the prisoners standing right outside of the crematoriums were incredulous until five minutes before they were marched inside to the gas chambers.

The reception of Holocaust survivor testimony has changed since 1951, the publication date of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In the section below on sociological changes to the public realm (2.5), I consider how the acceptance of news reports of genocide are far more readily accepted, less ‘suspect’, in the public realm given that the narrative frame of the Holocaust is part of the Western humanitarian collective memory. What is important to understand from Arendt’s observation on the reception of Holocaust testimony is that because the experience seemed so unreal, and therefore non-existent, to both the hearers and the speakers, there was little chance for the ‘mobilization of political

¹⁸⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1951), 439.

¹⁸⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, “On Dachau and Buchenwald” (from May, 1938, to April, 1939), in *Nazi Conspiracy*, VII, 824, as quoted in Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 439.

passions'.¹⁸⁷ Central to Arendt's understanding of the importance of public appearance is to be a part of a body politic that can act. Alan Johnston's release from captivity came with the uniting of Western media and political pressure on Palestinian politicians and the Palestinian people themselves organising in protest on the streets in support of Johnston whom they believed to be their proxy representative to the wider world (a concept I explore in great detail in chapter four).

2.3.1.2 Privation of Testimony

As a point of contrast to the nature of publicity, I will briefly consider what Arendt means by privacy or the private realm. Arendt considers the private sphere from both an ancient understanding of privacy and a modern understanding of privacy. I consider the modern understanding of privacy, the privacy of our intimate lives being sheltered from the public gaze, in section 2.3.3. First I discuss how relevance is the bottom-line criteria for why some issues appear in the public realm and some issues do not. First, I turn to Arendt's description of the ancient understanding of privacy.

In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities.¹⁸⁸

That capacity, according to Arendt is the capacity to act in political life, the life that takes place in the public realm. The private realm was the place of slaves and women. Privacy meant being deprived access to representation, appearance and thus reality. While slaves are captives, being held captive does not equate privation of publicity as we see in the cases of kidnapped Western reporters or aid workers. Johnston, in captivity, received publicity not privacy, a prime reason why he and other journalists are targets for kidnapping. His kidnappers gained access to publicity through Johnston. Johnston was twice made to read a transcript prepared by the group Army of Islam, once while wearing a 'bomb vest'. The kidnappers posted the video-recorded message on an obscure website used by militants. Johnston gave voice to the Army of Islam's position condemning Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and their demand for the release of Abu Qatada, a Palestinian-born Islamic cleric held by the UK government.¹⁸⁹ More

¹⁸⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 441.

¹⁸⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.

¹⁸⁹ "Bbc Captive in 'Bomb Vest' Video," *BBCNews.co.uk*, 25 June 2007.

importantly, Johnston gave global internet traffic, essentially publicity, to their publicity-deprived website.

The Army of Islam had privacy in the sense of privation from a voice in political life, and certainly in international political life. A press release or a letter to a news organisation stating their political requests would have gained them little attention, but kidnapping a UK reporter and forcing him to broadcast their message on an obscure website afforded the Army of Islam global publicity. If all publicity is good publicity, it is because of the ancient understanding that privation is bad and complete privation is the life of a slave, a life of non-existence. Thus, pursuit of publicity by those in the realm of privation is often an asymmetrical pursuit characterised by tactics such as kidnapping and suicide bombing of culturally significant targets. In order to appear in a public realm from which the kidnappers believe they are deprived, they hijack publicity by making their voice relevant based on the social relevance of the target, a person or a publicly significant place.

2.3.2 Publicity as Relevance

I have discussed ‘appearance’ as the first aspect signified by the term public, I will now look at ‘relevance’ the second aspect that Arendt identifies. Arendt calls the public realm an artefact, a world created by human hands. The public realm is not a physical location; it is rather ‘the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be’.¹⁹⁰ This world, or *polis*, is determined by things held in common. Among the multiple publics, worlds fabricated by human hands, is the world of global compassion where values such as compassion and human rights are held in common and where creeds have been codified, governing bodies elected, social action groups mobilized and moral imaginations formed. ‘To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.’¹⁹¹ Arendt’s metaphor of those who gather round the

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

table is a fitting and very contemporary metaphor for the public realm in which the discourse of global compassion takes place.¹⁹²

The tables of global compassion, plural for there are multiple tables co-existing, inter-relating, and cooperating to various degrees, are observable and measurable artefacts. Around these tables sit politicians and diplomats, non-governmental humanitarian aid organisations, journalists and media organisations, activist organisations, religious communities and various other publics. The public realm of global compassion is a place of politics, for human action, in words and deeds have emanated from decisions made at these tables. To further illustrate that the public realm of global compassion is indeed a place of politics, these multiple tables together have produced the political by-product of *strange bedfellows* as in the case of Gary Bauer and Richard Gere. Bauer, President of the Washington D.C.-based Family Research Council, shared a stage with Hollywood actor Richard Gere to urge the US congress to pass the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act in 1997. Bauer advocated for the right of Sudanese Christians to be free from the religious persecution by their government while Gere advocated for the end of persecution of Tibetan Buddhist monks. This was not a typical alliance for Bauer, the president of a US conservative Christian organisation, to align himself with the Buddhist religion, but in the public realm of global compassion he found common cause at a new table of global concern.¹⁹³

The narrative of global compassion is a helpful frame for explaining how the modern experience of witnessing human suffering is done through television or computer screens. It is worth returning to Arendt's understanding of the nature of the public realm. She asserts that human suffering is not such an easy topic for citizens to gather around. She argues that the reason human suffering is a difficult topic for the public realm is because pain is a private emotion. What does it take for human suffering to be publicly evident on our television screens? Arendt argues that the intimate pain of the body must be put on display.

¹⁹² With a modern hermeneutics of suspicion we can ask the question, 'Who is not invited to this table?' The many distant suffering are not agents gathered round the table; their presence is as objects on the table.

¹⁹³ I investigated this case of *strange bedfellows* in Amy Richards, "The Universal Sacredness of Life: A Case Study of Christian Ngo's Rhetoric Working in Sudan" (Wheaton College, 1999). In this study, I found that within the realm of a NGO's constituency rhetoric tended to be exclusive to that community, but when needing to join with other communities the NGO's rhetoric became more inclusive to further their goal.

2.3.3 The Public Appearance of Suffering

Arendt describes the ancient understanding of privacy as privation of the means to a political life. She describes the modern understanding of privacy as a means to ‘shelter the intimate’. The private realm shelters the world of subjectivity, shelters the things that do not thrive in the light of publicity. Arendt argues that some experiences cannot bear the harsh light of publicity such as the subjective emotion of pain.

Indeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great bodily pain, is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all. ... Pain ... is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all.¹⁹⁴

Yet, we clearly see that the public appearance of the pain and suffering of victims of humanitarian crises is not just the mainstay of NGO fundraising campaigns and journalistic coverage of famine, genocide, tsunamis, plane crashes and many other natural and man-made disasters, it is seemingly the *sine qua non* of coverage. Without the appearance of suffering, how is the story to appear in the public realm? Arendt deals with the issue of what is required to make the experience of pain fit for public appearance. In order to make a public appearance, private emotions must be ‘transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape fit for public appearance.’¹⁹⁵

How can the subjective experience of pain be made public for a wide audience to hear and to see? In order for publicity to work, the material presented before audiences must be made relevant to those audiences. Pain is made visible Arendt argues, through bodily suffering.¹⁹⁶ ‘[I]t is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy’.¹⁹⁷ In the case of suffering through famine, disease and war, no longer do people have recourse to the privacy of four walls and a roof. Once the walls of privacy are destroyed, all the things of a private, intimate, nature are relevant for public viewing. We

¹⁹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50-51.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹⁶ This topic is also addressed in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). In chapter three, Scarry writes of the impossibility of rendering pain into language because pain has no object. She contrasts pain with the emotion of hunger. Hunger has an external object to which the emotion is directed, the object of food.

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 72.

see this in journalistic news coverage of refugees who have fled their homes. News media organisations rely on recording the refugees' labour in Arendt's sense of the word labour:

the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labour.¹⁹⁸

They are presented labouring in the open, maybe in lean-tos but rarely within walls and a roof, breastfeeding, eating and cooking, washing bodies and clothes, and even dying without the benefit of privacy. While these necessities of everyday life may already be performed in more of an 'outdoor' setting than what is practiced in Western cultures, the necessities are not performed for the external gaze and do not signify pain and suffering until captured and captioned as such by global media practitioners. Susan Moeller in her book *Compassion Fatigue* gives the extreme example from the 1992 famine in Somalia of a camera crew trying to record the sound of dying by pushing a microphone into the face of a starving child about to die.¹⁹⁹ Yet, we need not focus on the most extreme example to show the kind of coverage, the kind of imaging of bodily suffering it takes to shape the private experience of pain for public appearance. There are standard images that represent famine, war, and disaster all portraying a person in need of some biological necessity. This is a pragmatic exchange, privacy for the necessity of publicity because it is in the realm of the public in which action can take place. While it is a pragmatic exchange, it is also an exchange for those promoting the politics of global compassion—their promise of some sort of intervention to justify the invasion of the intimate. The subjective experience of pain cannot take up physical space in the public realm or visual and audio space in the mediated public realm, but bodies do, and bodies deprived of the biological necessities to flourish particularly give public appearance to suffering.

Through Arendt's concept of the public realm, I have demonstrated how publicity can function as a lifeline to reality. In this thesis, Arendt provides a normative framework for understanding the public realm as a place to participate in political life. She characterises the public realm as a construct by people who hold common cause together in order to act. That which appears within the public realm is that which is socially relevant to those around the table. Early testimony of Holocaust survivors did not receive

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁹ Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, 102.

ready reception in the public realm. Today, because of the legacy of the Holocaust and the West's historical consciousness of failing to act quickly, bearing witness to genocide is a relevant topic in the public realm. In the next two sections, I look at how technological and sociological changes to the public realm have made it a place where genocide is readily discussed and displayed. How did the victims of genocide and other suffering become a part of the Global Samaritan's neighbourhood? I will begin to answer this question by looking at technological changes to the public realm.

2.4 Technological changes to the Public Realm

I consider how technological changes have altered the nature of the public realm by looking at the work of social and political theorist, John B. Thompson. Thompson argues that electronic mass mediation alters the public realm. He argues that *mediatisation* changes the ability to appear before the eyes and the ears of the public. The dominant way to appear before the public realm today is through the 'new visibility', a mediated visibility.²⁰⁰ Arendt's concerns were with how human suffering can appear in the public realm when issues like pain are so difficult to communicate in public. Thompson adds to this discussion how human suffering in far away places becomes public focus. Thompson begins his investigation of the 'new visibility' in the public realm, with Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere. Habermas's public sphere is a place of reasoned, public deliberation. Thompson asks the question: Has the modern technical media of mass communication altered the ideal-type of the Habermasian public sphere?²⁰¹ Thompson is interested in the new visibility in the public realm not 'understood simply as an extension of the traditional model' of visibility, thus he evaluates the opportunities and risks that accompany visibility in public realms achieved through electronic mediation.²⁰²

Thompson concludes that the new visibility no longer depends on spatial co-presence and face-to-face conversation as characterised in Habermas's public sphere; now publicity is connected to the 'distinctive kind of visibility produced by, and

²⁰⁰ John B. Thompson, "The New Visibility," *Theory, Culture and Society* 22, no. 6 (2005).

²⁰¹ John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990). John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity a Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

²⁰² Thompson, *The Media and Modernity a Social Theory of the Media*, 245.

achievable through, the technical media of mass communication.²⁰³ Thompson identifies three main changes resulting from the mediatisation of the public sphere. The new visibility achieved is non-localized, non-dialogical, and open-ended. I consider these three aspects of mediatisation by looking at the opportunities and risks opened up for the global public sphere, the virtual neighbourhood of the Global Samaritan.

2.4.1 The Global Public Sphere is Non-Localized

Regarding the first alteration to the public realm, Thompson describes the new public space as non-localized, a space not contingent on local space or local time. Thompson emphasizes the word *space* over *place* since, ‘the sphere of mediated publicness is extended in time and space, and is potentially global in scope.’²⁰⁴ Thompson’s description of a mediated public sphere does not lose Arendt’s importance of the public realm as a space manufactured by humans. Arendt too emphasized *space* over *place*; the public realm’s ‘true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be’.²⁰⁵ Space is extended by creating virtual real estate not connected to the finite capacity of local real estate. In addition to space, time too is altered through compression or extension. Through extension of the local we can see ‘live’ events taking place far away and through compression of time we can witness events from the past taking up space in the public sphere all over again. In the media coverage of human suffering, current events are often framed by significant events from the past. I explore this issue more in the next chapter.

A global public sphere is the optimistic possibility provided by global networked communication systems. More and more *spaces*, or Arendt’s tables of common causes, can be created as well as more and more *time* can be created since people need not simultaneously sit down to global networked common tables to join the conversation. Possibilities for creating Arendt’s tables at which people gather round to determine their capacity for action seem limitless. This is the hopefulness of the democratisation of the public realm through technological advancement, but the story is not such a direct correlation between increased technological means and universal representation in the

²⁰³ Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, 108.

²⁰⁴ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity a Social Theory of the Media*, 246.

²⁰⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

public realm. Tables of common cause are not simply products of technological advancements. The mediated global public sphere is highly managed and those who feel under-represented have to struggle for visibility.

Visibility, commonly referred to as media publicity, is not just the vapid pursuit of celebrity culture. Visibility is necessary in order to contribute to the public realm.²⁰⁶ The struggle for visibility returns us to Arendt's publicity as a lifeline; existence is contingent upon appearing in public. There are groups who have to struggle for visibility. Thompson acknowledges this central concern: 'The struggle to make oneself heard or seen (and to prevent others from doing so) is not a peripheral aspect of the social and political upheavals of the modern world; on the contrary, it is central to them.'²⁰⁷ Sociologist Leon Mayhew is in agreement with Thompson that public communication today is synonymous with mediated communication. Mayhew notes that the struggle for visibility in the West is not against totalitarian strong-arms censoring dissonant voices, but rather against a sophisticated media environment managed by the privileged authority of 'professional communications experts'.²⁰⁸ Such is the managerialism of publicity today with its own professional offices of public relations specialists.

A characteristic of the modern mediatised public sphere is that those in possession of the technology have an advantage over those without access to it. The story is not so very bleak, however: there are two rather bright spots. First, many NGOs and other groups of common concern have voluntary or paid communication officers who are committed to the group's mission and skilful at publicity management. Mayhew's view of professionalised media access does not need to be completely pessimistic. The second bright spot is that with new media technologies new opportunities of access abound. Thompson believes that it is in the struggle for visibility that modern social movements

²⁰⁶ This was also the argument of British MP George Galloway when he took part for several weeks in the reality television show *Celebrity Big Brother*. In one episode he appeared in a blue, spandex, full-bodied leotard to perform a dance, and in another episode he role-played a cat lapping up milk from the hands of his seductress co-star. When asked by the press why he did this, he replied that to appear before the politically apathetic you need to join them where they are.

²⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity a Social Theory of the Media*, 247.

²⁰⁸ Leon H. Mayhew, *The New Public: Professional Communication and the Means of Social Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

have made themselves particularly adept at creating mediated events to counter the dominant ideology in the public sphere.²⁰⁹

Thanks to the development of multiple forms of mediated communication and the rise of numerous media organisations which are relatively independent of state power, the information environment is more intensive, more extensive and less controllable than it was in the past.²¹⁰

In a chapter called 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', Jürgen Habermas revisits his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (published in 1971)²¹¹ and reconsiders his conceptualization of the public sphere in the light of new media technologies. Concurring with Thompson, he concedes that civil society organisations 'constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy' can achieve visibility in the modern mediated public sphere.²¹² Habermas writes that elements of civil society can:

manage to have a political impact via the public media because they either participate directly in public communications or, as in the case of projects advocating alternatives to conventional wisdom, because the programmatic character of their activities sets examples through which they implicitly contribute to public discussion.²¹³

Mayhew's analysis was overall pessimistic: only the highly managed messages by professionals will be heard or seen in the mass mediated public sphere. Habermas's analysis on the other hand, holds out hope for civil society organisations, people gathered for a common cause. Habermas identifies the possibility of being heard through the 'programmatic character of their activities. This is a hopeful and optimistic observation for those gathered round the table of global compassion. A community heard through their 'programmatic character' parallels John Howard Yoder's argument for how a community's practices bear witness to their beliefs. In the conclusion of this thesis I will consider together Arendt's social phenomena of tables of common cause, Habermas's claim that communities implicitly contribute to the public sphere through the

²⁰⁹ Thompson defines ideology as rhetoric in service to maintaining power.

²¹⁰ Thompson, "The New Visibility," 48.

²¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

²¹² Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 453.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 454.

‘programmatically character of their activities’, and Yoder’s phenomenology of social witness.

In the previous section, I mentioned that cast members of global compassion, such as NGOs, have public relations specialists who ensure that distant human suffering remains relevant in the public sphere. Even so, the publicity managers of NGOs still struggle for visibility in the mass mediated public sphere. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair offered a critique of access to the mediated public sphere in a speech delivered to Reuter’s Headquarters in London ‘On the Challenge of the Changing Nature of Communication on Politics and the Media’. He accused the media of reports in which:

Things, people, issues, stories, are all black and white. Life’s usual grey is almost entirely absent. ‘Some good, some bad’; ‘some things going right, some going wrong’ – these are concepts alien to today’s reporting. It’s a triumph or a disaster. A problem is ‘a crisis’.²¹⁴

Given the ‘black and white’ environment of reporting in the public sphere, Blair said that, ‘Non-governmental organisations and pundits know that unless they are prepared to go over the top, they shouldn’t venture out at all.’²¹⁵ NGO public relations managers in the struggle for visibility are faced with the dilemma that Blair highlights.

There are both positive and negative aspects to the democratization of the media: alternative media research shows how public spheres open up when multiple forms of mediated communication are available to a civil society engaged in promoting their activities.²¹⁶ On the other hand, even though a democratization of mediated public realms results in more venues for creating public communication, there is little control over the civility of the communication style. Violence and threat may be the style of communication a group uses to gain publicity. As I discussed in section 2.3.1, the Army of Islam took Alan Johnston hostage in a struggle to make their message visible. Taking foreigners as hostages and suicide bombings are mass mediated events designed to achieve publicity.²¹⁷ This is an increased risk in the modern mediated public realm that is

²¹⁴ Tony Blair, "The Challenge of the Changing Nature of Communication on Politics and the Media," *Reuters' Headquarters*, 12 June 2007.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Pantelis Vaitkiotis, "Communication Theory and Alternative Media," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2005).

²¹⁷ Thompson’s phrase ‘mediated event’ includes some of the aspects in the concept ‘media event’ as defined by Dayan and Katz in: Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). Thompson identifies the overlap to include:

not tied to a central location. Central and physical locations allow for more control of the local sphere. The stakes of hi-jacking the global media sphere pay huge dividends in global media coverage.

Brigitte L. Nacos, professor of political science and a former US foreign correspondent, defines terrorism in relation to its goal of publicity.²¹⁸ She argues that terrorism and media have an inextricable link—violence is committed or threatened for the goal of exposure.²¹⁹ Forced publicity returns us to Arendt's account of ancient privacy as the privation of publicity, *no publicity is bad publicity*. The goal of terrorism is that previously ignored grievances are discussed; mass-mediated terrorism furthers political agendas. Nacos describes terrorism not as vengeance over a personal vendetta, plucking out the eye of the one who plucked out your own, but rather as choosing a symbolic target to garner the most publicity. While there may be revenge or retribution involved in the attack, the revenge is at an abstracted level since the act is not done as a personal vendetta against that particular person. The act symbolically represents the group's message in a so-called universal language. Nacos illustrates with a quote from Osama bin Laden speaking of the September 11th attackers:

Those young men (...inaudible...) said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed other speeches made everywhere else in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs—even Chinese.²²⁰

It is a universal language only in so much as global cultures interpret the destruction of property and the killing of people as an expression of grievances. Audience interpretation and translation of events is of course varied. An alternative interpretation might be offered that it is an act of liberating citizens from a dictatorial regime. The ambiguity is prominent in the popular saying *one man's terrorist is another man's*

‘an occasion which is planned in advance and broadcast live, which interrupts the normal flow of events and which creates an atmosphere of solemnity and high expectation.’ John B. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 75.

²¹⁸ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

²¹⁹ In a quarterly edition of *Communication Research Trends*, Biernatzki investigates current communication research on the unwitting collaboration of mass media with terrorism. William E. Biernatzki, "Terrorism and Mass Media," *Communication Research Trends* 21, no. 1 (2002).

²²⁰ Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 41. Nacos' source is from archived material from *The Washington Post*.

freedom fighter. I took up this issue of translatability in chapter two with regard to interpreting a death as suicide or Christian martyrdom.

Thompson and Mayhew argue that modern visibility requires mediated visibility. Modern ownership patterns of global media organisations determine who has access to visibility, thus creating an asymmetrical balance. Nacos identifies the terrorist bombing of the U.S. Navy destroyer, the USS Cole, as a text-book case of garnering public sympathy for those without the material means to gain access to publicity. This was a David against Goliath fight by two men in a twenty foot boat against a 9,100 ton warship. While a non-localized public sphere on the one hand allows for the flourishing of diverse voices, those in control of public spheres on the other hand cannot control the forceful means by which some make their voices heard. More important than making their voices 'heard' is the need to be 'seen', or on display, in the global public sphere.

2.4.2 The Global Public Sphere is Non-Dialogical

Thompson argues that the public sphere expanded through the technical media of mass communication is predominantly non-dialogical. Global public spheres are characterised by display, which is the visual. Habermas idealises the early eighteenth-century public sphere of local coffee houses where learned gentlemen read newspapers and then rationally engaged in dialogue about the politics of the day. Habermas argues that the new public sphere is a re-feudalized public sphere.²²¹ The modern public sphere is a global-mediated public sphere in which ownership of communication systems resides in a few, powerful hands. Habermas argues that this concentration of power by the few returns the character of the public sphere to the middle ages where the powerful few displayed their power, or exhibited themselves like peacocks, before the people under rule in the kingdom. His argument is that today's public sphere once again relies on display or spectacle over dialogue. Tony Blair's chastisement of news media organisations was along the lines of Habermas's argument. Blair argued that, 'Non-governmental organisations ... know that unless they are prepared to go over the top, they shouldn't venture out at all.'²²² In the raising of humanitarian awareness to respond

²²¹ Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

²²² Blair, "The Challenge of the Changing Nature of Communication on Politics and the Media."

to global crisis, NGOs find themselves going ‘over the top’ in their struggle to create a spectacle dramatic enough to force space in the global public sphere.

Must Thompson and Habermas’s identification of the mediated public realm as non-dialogical be construed as wholly negative? Communications scholar, John Durham Peters gives a positive account, in a peculiar way, of non-dialogical communication. He is trying to nuance the over-correction of the ‘ideal speech situation’ of Habermas’s rational discourse taking place in the traditional public sphere by claiming that non-dialogical communication is what we are *already* doing most of the time, even in our face-to-face communications. Peters’ bold claim is rooted in the title of his book, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. He argues that at some level, all communication is mono-logical dissemination, speaking into the air, rather than an exchange of interiorities. Peters calls this ‘a permanent kink in the human condition’.²²³ He claims that a true exchange of interiorities is sought after in communication modes such as telepathy. Telepathy is a communication of mind-to-mind and not in need of any mediation. Telepathy, in theory, is information exchange of interiorities, but such an account of the ultimate form of dialogical communication bypasses bodies or any other form of medium. Spirit to spirit communication bypasses bodies, but the human condition is one of embodied spirits. Peters argues:

media are not mere ‘channels.’ Media matter to practices of communication because embodiment matters. The body is our existence, not our container. ... Any adequate account of the social life of word and gesture—of ‘communication’ in the broadest sense—needs to face the splendid and flawed material by which we make common cause with each other.²²⁴

Peters comes to the conclusion that one-way transmission need not always be trumped by dialogue.²²⁵ This has important implications for the common world of global compassion that holds that to witness the distant suffering of others is not simply about information transfer, but also about building more humane modes of life together. These practices can be developed in gatherings around Arendt’s tables of common cause. Peters makes room for the role of mediatisation in the gathering of people around common

²²³ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1999), 29.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

tables. He provides a defence for the use of mass media by defending the use of actual human bodies as channels of communication, an incontrovertible necessity. 'In the ethical nervousness about criticizing dialogue, it becomes clear just how much rides on it as a principle of justice and authenticity.'²²⁶ He is not eschewing dialogue, but rather claiming that both tools of humankind's life together, dialogue and monologue, can be used in service to ideology or be informed by justice. Just as there is the possibility for both monologue and dialogue in the public realm, there is also the wide range of possible meaning interpreted by participants in the global public sphere.

2.4.3 The Global Public Sphere is Open-Ended

The final characteristic of the new global public sphere that Thompson identifies is the vastly more open-ended potential of message reception. While all three of these characteristics of the global public sphere—open-ended, non-dialogical, and non-localised—were present before electronic global network communication, Thompson highlights these characteristics as the most altered. What Thompson means by open-ended message reception is that symbolic material prepared for mass dissemination now has 'an indefinite range of potential recipients.'²²⁷ Message production flows primarily one-way, *from* producers *to* receivers with the cultural and material means to receive it. While this is mono-logical interaction compared with the Habermasian preference of dialogical communication, Thompson like J.D. Peters argues that there is some kind of interaction that contributes to the agency of the audience.

The possible agency that Thompson perceives the audience to have is what he calls 'mediated quasi-interaction'. He acknowledges that compared to the intimacy of face-to-face interaction, this second option is poor, but nevertheless, it is some kind of interaction:

But mediated quasi-interaction is, nonetheless, a form of interaction. It creates a certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and symbolic exchange. It also creates distinctive kinds of interpersonal relationships, social bonds and intimacy (what I call 'non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance').²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Thompson, "The New Visibility," 33.

²²⁸ Ibid.: 33-34.

It is important to consider this quotation with reference to the narrative of global compassion, for it explains why Western publics are subjected to images of human suffering in far away and unfamiliar places. Western audiences would rarely have occasion to call these people ‘neighbour’ if it was not for cultivating the symbolic exchange that puts human suffering on display in Western living rooms. In the text quoted above, Thompson illustrates the point that ‘individuals are linked together’ by witnessing the same social situation of distant human suffering. He points out that the social bonds created work in two directions. First, some audience members exposed to the symbolic material may now share a common cause of obligation to relieve the distant human suffering. The global publication of news coverage of distant suffering can help create new and wider common worlds. New common worlds *are relationships*. What it takes for a shared sense of obligation to result in people coming together in order to act together, is still a far off, and is the topic of the next chapter.

The second kind of relationship created by mediated quasi-interaction is characterised by a kind of social bond that Thompson calls ‘non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance.’²²⁹ Thompson’s work is useful when considering the kind of non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance that is created by the coverage of the distant suffering of others. While the conscience of the Good Samaritan may be pricked by the filmed or photographed suffering of a distant other, does the fact that the Samaritan’s vision is mediated, uni-directional, and lacking co-presence alter the experience of compassion? These issues of audience agency are the topics for investigation in the next chapter.

In this section on technological changes to the public realm, I have demonstrated how technological advancements in global networked communication systems have altered a normative understanding of the public realm. In this research, I do not espouse a position of technological determinism. Technology in and of itself is not an agent of change. Throughout this research, I discuss technological and sociological changes in tandem. The modern act of witnessing human suffering in distant places has been shaped by both sociological and technological changes. Technology helps shape attitudes and values already present in a culture. This is what is meant by calling television a cultural form (a heading in section 3.1.3 of the next chapter). Thompson claims that television as

²²⁹ In his most recent book *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*, Thompson constructs a social theory of the social and political significance of scandal that posits the importance of the symbolic capital found in reputation and trust. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*.

a medium is particularly suited to a society of self-disclosure. It is important to point out that it was the *human* production values that went into creating the style and content of television broadcasts, that have produced a public realm of self-disclosure, not the mere invention or advancement of technological equipment able to transmit a close-up of a talking head into our living rooms. Thompson describes social and technical considerations working together which create the possibilities of ‘new types of interaction’:

Seeing is never ‘pure vision’, it is never a matter of simply opening one’s eyes and grasping an object or event. On the contrary, seeing is always shaped by a broader set of cultural assumptions and frameworks, and by the spoken or written cues that commonly accompany the visual image and shape the way in which the images are seen and understood.²³⁰

The narrative of global compassion is a story told in the global media sphere. In the next section I focus on the social changes to the Western public reception of distant human suffering. Arendt argues that people only appear in the public realm because they are deemed relevant to the eyes of the public. The lawyer was keen to define limits to where the boundaries of his neighbourhood began and ended when he asked, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ The answer to this question should determine who was relevant to be addressed as a neighbour. The application of the law to ‘love your neighbour as yourself,’ was not relevant to those who resided outside of the lawyer’s neighbourhood. In this next section I look at how cultural experiences influence who achieves visibility in the neighbourhood of the Global Samaritan.

2.5 Sociological Changes to the Public Realm

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag argues that ‘[b]eing a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience.’²³¹

Sontag’s claim is far from Arendt’s observation that the problem with presenting pain in the public realm, is that it is not always believed. Since the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, there has been a positive shift in the reception of Holocaust testimony in public realms. Witnessing the Holocaust has been a central cultural experience that has

²³⁰ Thompson, "The New Visibility," 36.

²³¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), 16. *Regarding the Pain of Others* is a continuation of Sontag’s project begun in *On Photography* where she explores ways in which we look at the world through the documentation of images. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

contributed to the display of human suffering, particularly genocide, in the global media sphere.

2.5.1 The Legacy of Survivors *Bearing Witness* to the Holocaust

Public acceptance of Holocaust survivor testimonial has changed. Historian Annette Wieviorka traces that change along a sociological and technological path to arrive at the act of modern televisual witnessing. She cites the Eichmann trial as the advent of the modern impulse to witness televised testimonials of human suffering.

Every era finds a different material support for testimony: paper, videotape, court of justice, documentary. Even when the story remains identical in its factual components, it is shaped by collective considerations, by the circumstances surrounding the act of bearing witness. It becomes part of a larger story, part of a social construct, as the Eichmann trial demonstrates with particular clarity.²³²

It is the *act of bearing witness*, and the dissemination of those testimonies through the video recordings of testimonies that have helped shape what it means to provide historical witness today. In *The Era of Witness*, Wieviorka is concerned with how recorded oral testimonies about the Holocaust affect historical discourse on the Holocaust. She looks at how both the historian and the witness find one another in each other's spaces during the writing of history:

For how can a coherent historical discourse be constructed if it is constantly countered by another truth, the truth of individual memory? How can the historian incite reflection, thought, and rigor when feelings and emotions invade the public sphere?²³³

The modern technological era of the witness, Wieviorka argues, began with the Eichmann trials. 'With the Eichmann trial, the witness became an embodiment of memory, attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past.'²³⁴ There were just over one hundred witnesses called to give testimony, vetted like a casting call from an enormous pool of applicants. The 'majority of the witnesses (fifty-three) came from Poland and Lithuania, territories over which Eichmann had little jurisdiction or

²³² Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 83.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 144.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

authority.²³⁵ They were chosen to testify to their personal experience. Wieviorka gives a helpful comparison of the Eichmann trial with the Nuremberg trials:

Whereas Nuremberg sought to cast light on the perpetrators and on the mechanisms that generated the war, and sought to criminalize war instigators—to cast them as war criminals—[in the Eichmann trial] the spotlight was now exclusively on the victims. Whereas Nuremberg sought to intervene in history by establishing the principle that political actors can be judged and by attempting to create a new basis for international law, the Eichmann trial undertook to create a memory rich in lessons for the present and the future.²³⁶

Wieviorka identifies the function of the Eichmann testimonies as a way ‘to return a name, a face, a history to each of the victims of mass murder.’²³⁷ Her contention as a historian is that recording history is secondary to recording individual memory. She goes on to say that this function ‘is not confined to Holocaust testimony. Instead, it is at the heart of how our society and our media function.’²³⁸

Sociological changes to testifying to the Holocaust have transformed ‘the witness into an apostle and prophet.’²³⁹ It is not enough for Holocaust survivors to just record their testimonies before a video camera; they need ‘converts’ to keep the testimony *alive* before the public. We see this in the discipleship practice of young people visiting extermination camps such as Auschwitz or Dachau. Wieviorka writes that visiting real sites gives the third generation ‘a lived experience’ from which they can take up the mantle and become ‘witnesses for the witness’. ‘This model seems to recall the Gospels: these young people will be the apostles who, once the witnesses have disappeared, will be able to carry on their word.’²⁴⁰ Such apostolic succession is what keeps the testimony alive in the public realm. The public reception of Holocaust testimony, of any testimony, Arendt wrote, can ‘survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent

²³⁵ Ibid., 86.

²³⁶ Ibid., 88-89.

²³⁷ Ibid., 142.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., 135-36.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 136.

that it appears in public.’²⁴¹ Earthly immortality is pursued in the Holocaust survivor practice of cultivating public realms that will ‘never forget’.

2.5.2 The Legacy of the Holocaust Frames Modern Genocide

The modern public realms of human rights activists involved in the narrative of global compassion are public realms in which the mandate to ‘never forget’ is taken seriously. Michael Ignatieff, former journalist and Director of Harvard University's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, like Sontag claims that the modern story of witness and testimony is to give witness to human suffering.²⁴² He agrees with Wieviorka that the Holocaust has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the demand for testimonials, as well as how testimony of suffering appears in the modern public realm. Ignatieff notes that the technological and the sociological changes since the Holocaust were not the beginnings of the testimony of suffering in public, but they helped exploit and accelerate the *already present* public interest in the suffering of strangers. He contends that the public would not be interested in pictures of piled corpses if they were not already pre-disposed to a narrative of concern for the stranger. Ignatieff is interested in explaining the narrative behind the conviction that the suffering of strangers really does matter.

Ignatieff calls the story the ‘moral interventionist story’. He tells the story along these lines: the narrative of universal human rights that began with Christianity was worked out in natural law ethics and the doctrine of toleration, a universalist pre-cursor to the concern with discrimination on any grounds. There is no longer a ‘narrative of imperial rivalry or of ideological struggle’ left, but rather a ‘narrative of compassion’.²⁴³ At the time of the codification of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there were two sets of human rights cultures: the socialist narrative and the capitalist narrative. Post-Cold War there is only one, the capitalist narrative. The end of the Cold War, Ignatieff argues, began the era of intervention, that is, the moral intervention to relieve the suffering of distant victims. In *The Needs of Strangers*,

²⁴¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 55.

²⁴² Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁴³ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 4.

Ignatieff explores the question: When is it right to speak for the needs of others?²⁴⁴ In *The Warrior's Honor*, he explores why we speak for others at a global level:

If we take it for granted now that suffering strangers are our responsibility, it is because a century of total destruction has made us ashamed of that cantonment of moral responsibilities by nation, religion, or region that resulted in the abandonment of the Jews. Modern moral *universalism* is built upon the experience of a new kind of crime: the crime against humanity.²⁴⁵

Those who speak for the needs of others, I have called the cast of the narrative of global compassion: foreign correspondents, aid workers, peacekeepers, diplomats and the public. Ignatieff describes the subject of the narrative of global compassion as the 'pure victim' of genocide, famine or other disaster, a victim with no recourse to family, tribe, faith, or nation. Dependence is upon the charity of strangers and often that chain of strangers begins with the foreign correspondent on assignment in some far away and unfamiliar place. Belief in the narrative of compassion necessitates that suffering must be witnessed and not forgotten. In the narrative of compassion, strangers will speak for the needs of the 'pure victim' in the public realm. I explore this fiduciary role, or proxy role, in the conclusion of the thesis.

Suffering people do not just appear as 'pure victims' on our television screens. The narrative of global compassion frames the coverage of humanitarian crises whether it is famine, war or genocide. The images of crisis are not objective views outside of the historical experience of the West. Modern images of genocide and the labelling of images as genocide already exist in the public imagination, framed by the legacy of the Holocaust. The Western image of genocide already includes the equation that with knowledge of human suffering comes complicity. Once suffering is introduced into our neighbourhood, our global public media sphere, spectators have neighbourly obligations. Ignatieff explains this equation:

Television images cannot assert anything; they can only instantiate something. Images of human suffering do not assert their own meaning; they can only instantiate a moral claim if those who watch understand themselves to be potentially under obligation to those they see. Behind the seemingly natural mechanics of empathy at work in viewers' response to

²⁴⁴ Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (Vintage: 1994).

²⁴⁵ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 19.

these images lies a history by which their consciences were formed to respond as they do.²⁴⁶

John B. Thompson argued that social and technical changes work in tandem, creating opportunities and risks for ‘new types of interaction’. Ignatieff has made a career of trying to unravel the contradictory new interaction between ‘promiscuous voyeurism’ and ‘internationalization of conscience’ produced by the narrative of global compassion. With no intention of declaring news coverage of distant suffering *verboten*, or even tossing out the porous language of *universalism*, Ignatieff cynically observes that coverage is *not* ‘suffering with’ but rather a ‘cruel mime of immediacy’.²⁴⁷ Like the other scholars highlighted in this chapter, Ignatieff ends with a moral claim of the need to move ‘from voyeurism to commitment’.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I demonstrated that technological advances alone do not *determine* how we see the world. Nor do technological advances alone broaden neighbourhood boundaries. Social values shape how technologies are used. The Global Samaritan may consider suffering people in Darfur, Congo and Myanmar to be neighbours, yet not acknowledge human suffering in certain neighbourhoods of London or New York. Neighbourhoods are sites for the struggle of representation or publicity because the cost of not appearing in the public realm, as Hannah Arendt strongly stated, can be the matter between life and death.

As mentioned in section 2.2.3, New Testament scholar McDonald pointed out that the parable of the Good Samaritan may be a story that communities tell about themselves as a reminder of what kind of people they have been in the past and what kind of people they want to be in the future. Given the West’s failure to help save the Jews of modern Europe from mass slaughter, what might the West do the next time they are witness to genocide? In order to bear witness to past genocide, in the narrative of global compassion, there is a strong emphasis on bearing witness to new genocides.²⁴⁸ The mantra of ‘never forget’ is practiced through raising awareness of new human suffering.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁸ The US Holocaust Memorial Museum has a genocide prevention program based on the idea that in order to bear witness to the Holocaust, new genocides must be prevented. www.ushmm.org

Collective memory of the Holocaust is often recalled in the introduction of new atrocities into the public realm.

The witness of the Good Samaritan involved presence with the victim, as did the witness of the Priest and the Levite. The witness of the Good Samaritan also involved engagement, while the witness of the Priest and the Levite did not. In the modern era of global networked communication many people witness human suffering. Very few people can claim 'I never knew.' Even so, not all who witness human suffering are understood to be involved in the process of *bearing witness* on behalf of the victims. Bearing witness involves more than spectatorship; it also involves engagement in the story told. In this chapter I worked with the concept of the Global Samaritan as the figure who bears witness to distant suffering. In the next three chapters I consider the moral agency of audiences and journalists who also participate as the Global Samaritan. I turn first toward audiences. Can television audiences who witness distant human suffering be more than spectators?

Chapter 3: Televisual Witness as Spectatorship and Participation?

In the previous chapter, I identified the cast members of the narrative of global compassion as: diplomats and elected-government officials, non-governmental organisations, peacekeepers of international political bodies, foreign correspondents, and news audiences. In this chapter, I focus on televisual audiences, the spectators of distant suffering. I use the word ‘televisual’ over ‘television’ simply to acknowledge the many forms of news media delivery. I evaluate the analogy of the audience as the Good Samaritan. I argue that the analogy works when spectators actively judge suffering to be worthy of compassion. I argue that the analogy breaks down when televisual spectators are put under moral obligation to relieve the suffering of every object of their gaze. I argue that spectators’ participation in active reception is measured not by their direct reciprocal interaction with the person whose suffering they see on television, but in their participation in work to alleviate this human suffering. The claim that audiences are *bearing witness* to distant suffering requires engaged, not passive spectatorship.

In the previous chapter I discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable, neighbours are witnesses moved by compassion. Neighbours move from the position of proximate spectator to the position of participator. Today the most predominant way in which we witness the suffering of others is through the electronic mediation. This modern cultural practice of witnessing distant suffering problematizes the relationship between neighbour and proximity as understood in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Everyone who passed by the man on the side of the road in the parable of the Good Samaritan was complicit simply by the virtue of being in the same place at the same time. Being present engages witnesses. The privileged status of an eyewitness in a court of law is contingent on time and space. With proximity drastically altered and temporality altered to a lesser degree, are *televisual* eye-witnesses under the moral obligation to act in a neighbourly manner? If so, any attempt to enforce the Belgian Good Samaritan law holding ‘everyone informed of the danger’²⁴⁹ under the general obligation to rescue would be ludicrous and futile. Nevertheless, complicity comes with knowledge. In this chapter I explore three topics. First, I begin by investigating an

²⁴⁹ Smits, "The Good Samaritan in European Private Law; on the Perils of Principles without a Programme and a Programme for the Future," 6.

accusation that gazing at television violence is itself a violent act. The other two major themes I investigate have to do with audience agency. I argue that audiences have the agency to respond to unjust suffering, beginning with their compassionate response. Finally, I consider potential audience agency through the formation of ‘publics’. By ‘publics’ I mean a particular body of people, real or imagined, who have some kind of collective purpose. I begin with the accusation of impotent audiences.

3.1 An Accusation: Spectatorship of Violence is Violence

To focus the discussion on the complicity of the televisual witness, I consider this question: What kind of witnesses do spectators of suffering make? Theologian John Milbank claims that watching violence is violence. In a chapter titled ‘Violence: Double Passivity,’ Milbank deals with the concern of modern violence and spectatorship.²⁵⁰ He discusses three sites of the violence of spectatorship. I concentrate on the first site, recorded or televisual violence, but it is worth briefly considering the other two. The second site of gazing on violence is the morally superior gaze at the past. History is the place where savage acts took place, and where such savagery still continues in the modern world, those are marginal places exhibiting a ‘historical hangover’.²⁵¹ The third site of violent spectatorship Milbank identifies is found in the practice of pacifism. He claims that the position of Christian pacifism is indefensible. According to Milbank, pacifism is a counterintuitive position because the pacifist’s ‘*gaze at violence*’ is violence.²⁵² There are some very helpful aspects to Milbank’s essay as well as some problems.

Milbank’s language in the essay on the double passivity of violence is provocative. To be fair to Milbank, he wrote the essay as a response to Stanley Hauerwas who presented an essay on the Christian pacifist position.²⁵³ Hauerwas, in his own provocative fashion, opened his remarks by claiming that he was tempted to commit

²⁵⁰ This chapter is found in: John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵³ In a personal conversation with Professor John Milbank on 29 November 2007, I asked him if he really held to such a strong position on the spectatorship of violence. I brought up Martha Nussbaum’s example of youth in the Greek polis visiting the theatre for a lesson in civic duty through the medium of often very violent tragedies. Milbank said that he agreed with Nussbaum and took such a contrarian position just to show his opposition to Hauerwas’ position.

metaphysical violence against Milbank simply by presenting his argument first.²⁵⁴ Hauerwas' defence of Christian pacifism is much indebted to the work of John Howard Yoder. Milbank's accusation of spectatorship passivity involves equating the witness of pacifism with passivity. This has been a prevalent charge against Christian pacifism that Yoder and now Hauerwas argue against. In this chapter, I consider how analogous Yoder's argument, that witness involves active engagement and participation, can be with the witness of televisual audiences.

3.1.1 The Spectatorship of Televisual Violence

With regard to televisual violence, Milbank writes that the wealthy middle-class west is an *onlooker* of violence, 'scenes of violence in wild nature, human violence in remote places, or else of simulated, fictional violence.'²⁵⁵ In the case of viewing the distant suffering of others, we often witness the aftermath of violent acts, not the actual acts of violence.²⁵⁶ The presence of suffering leads us to believe that violence has just happened. Milbank's metaphor of the double passivity of spectatorship as violence is helpful because it emphasizes that mere spectatorship is not a neutral position; viewing violence involves judging it as violence. The *double passivity* of his description of viewing violence involves two passive acts. The first passive act is the viewing of violence and judging it as violence, often done at a distance. The second passive act is doing nothing to remedy the privation of the good, all the more likely when the violence and suffering viewed is far away.

Milbank arrives at this judgment of double passivity through a privation theory of violence like that of an Augustinian privation theory of sin, which views evil not as a separate force that triumphs over the good, but evil is simply the withholding of the good. From this perspective, violence is not only committing the act of violence, but violence is also withholding remedy from violence.²⁵⁷ Thus, being a spectator of violence,

²⁵⁴ Hauerwas and Milbank's papers were presented at the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College, Illinois, 17 March, 2000. Proceedings have since been published in: Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs, eds., *Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2003).

²⁵⁵ Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*.

²⁵⁶ This insight I learned from Jolyon Mitchell. A concept he explores in: Jolyon Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁵⁷ Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, 26.

particularly in our modern cultural form of viewing violence from a significant distance, according to Milbank, involves withholding the good. He concludes: ‘looking at violence is actually *more violent* than participating in violence – that to be violent *is* actually to survey in a detached, uninvolved fashion a scene of suffering’.²⁵⁸

While I acknowledge the debate setting in which Milbank first gave his paper, I still take issue with Milbank’s claim that ‘gazing at violence is the greatest violence, indeed the very essence of violence’.²⁵⁹ In his conclusion, Milbank takes the focus away from the victim; this alone is problematic. But, he also removes agency from the audience. He claims that audiences are ‘confined to a *telos* of mere reception’ because there is no possibility for reciprocal participation.²⁶⁰ I believe he is too hasty in declaring that there is *no* participation in reception. I agree that there are problems in the spectatorship of violence, but I do not think the problem is lack of reciprocal participation with the object of the spectator’s gaze. There are times when a viewer’s life can be dramatically changed without ever interacting with the original object of the viewer’s gaze.

Reception itself is *not* an end of the televisual experience. In the next sections, I investigate the issue of the *telos* of television news. I argue that mere reception is not the end goal of the cultural practice of broadcasting televisual news of distant human suffering. I argue that the ritual of television news reception involves a continuum with multiple ends possible. The most robust possible end of audience reception of distant human suffering is in the potential for news audiences to form ‘publics’ who collectively can effect change. Nevertheless, not every act of televisual news reception will result in reciprocal participation. Such impossibility leads me to question what is meant by reciprocal participation by televisual audiences. But, first I emphasise an important insight that I do take away from Milbank’s argument on the spectatorship of violence.

3.1.2 Spectators Judge Violence

What I find helpful in Milbank’s metaphor of the double passivity of viewing violence is the moral concern raised over the issue of *judging* violence, yet doing nothing.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 28.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 30.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 31.

I also agree with his charge that a morally superior gaze at the past is a violent act done not just to those in the past but to those presently suffering from the ‘antiquated’ violence of civil war and genocide. This superior gaze on the past corresponds to Western televisual viewing of suffering in unfamiliar, foreign places as products of ‘foreign’ places. Michael Ignatieff acknowledges this problem with regard to television news. ‘Television has unfortunate strengths as a medium of moral disgust. ... television news is more adept at pointing to the corpses than in explaining why violence may, in certain places, pay so well.’²⁶¹ Ignatieff claims that Western moral disgust results in an often racist misanthropy toward the people in Africa or the East, as well as resulting in a generalised misanthropy ‘that the world has become too crazy to deserve serious reflection.’²⁶² This could also be called spectator compassion fatigue as defined by Susan Moeller: ‘[u]ndifferentiated mayhem leads to emotional overload’.²⁶³

Milbank, Ignatieff, Moeller, and I argue from the position of Western spectatorship. Before continuing from this position, it is important to acknowledge that the spectatorship of suffering is not only the prerogative of Western television audiences. Reflection on Western consumption of the spectacle of violence tends to be a cynical critique, but this must not be applied to spectatorship world-wide. Social critic Susan Sontag calls this ‘breathhtaking provincialism’. She argues:

[I]t is absurd to identify the world with those zones in the well-off countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people’s pain, just as it is absurd to generalize about the ability to respond to the sufferings of others on the basis of the mind-set of those consumers of news who know nothing first hand about war and massive injustice and terror. There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to what they see on television.²⁶⁴

Sontag rightly argues that not all spectators of violence are viewing from zones of privilege. If cynicism is the over-correction of moral disgust, Sontag helps rein-in cynicism by reminding well-off spectators that many who will be simultaneously witnessing these events have themselves suffered grave injustice. In fact, the news

²⁶¹ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 25.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, 25.

²⁶⁴ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 99.

coverage of civilian casualties in war may depict the war taking place in their own country. This is not often considered in the scholarship on the spectatorship of violence.

3. 1.3 The Televisual as a Cultural Form of Witnessing

When Milbank judges the act of spectatorship of recorded violence as violence, he is judging the *use* of the cultural form of television as violent. Milbank describes violence as violence when it ruins how something should be or diverts from how something should develop.²⁶⁵ He is critical of television spectatorship as having a ‘*telos* of mere reception,’ rather than allowing for reciprocal participation. I believe Milbank’s argument lacks the insight that a media-centred critique provides. A media-centred critique considers the technological and sociological formation of audiences witnessing distant human suffering. I make this argument by looking at the medium of television as a cultural form, and more specifically the genre of television news broadcasts.

Milbank posits that by being passive spectators of violence is a violent act. This position is based on the lack of reciprocity between the spectator and the person viewed on television. A similar problem is present in the analogy of ‘the audience’ as the Good Samaritan; the audience lacks direct reciprocity with the person viewed on television. Both lines of thought require a view of the television broadcast as an extension of face-to-face communication. Here is where a media-centred view of the televisual, that is, all mediums providing electronic delivery of the visual such as television and internet computers, can be of help. Televisual witness is not the extension of face-to-face interaction; it is not giving the Good Samaritan the super-human, but nonetheless embodied, ability to travel the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, followed by near instantaneous stops in Darfur, Congo, and Burma which would be a very likely *flow* of the nightly news.²⁶⁶ Such a view requires audience reception to develop into a direct extension of the good from the viewer to the person suffering. What if the reciprocal participation that televisual spectatorship provides is not reciprocity between the viewer and the individuals who are suffering, but rather between the viewer and other viewers?

²⁶⁵ Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*.

²⁶⁶ I think Raymond Williams’ concept of *flow* can be extended beyond the use of television broadcast and can be re-conceptualized in a televisual era into an *iflow*. Audiences are self-selecting of their media consumption. Audiences interested in humanitarian coverage, in one day will encounter the *flow* of disaster coverage through radio news in the morning, throughout the day on email alerts from NGOs as well as pop-up ads, and by evening encounter more humanitarian coverage on the television broadcast news. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

What if the good, therefore the *telos*, which televisual witness provides is the social integration of audiences which may unite into publics of common cause in which such collective attention *may* result in humanitarian aid, policy change or physical intervention?

The cultural form of televisual media has *not* most prominently developed into a mode of communication which extends face-to-face, dialogical communication. It is only within the last decade that the televisual has been readily accessible outside of institutional use, at least for those with computers and internet access, as a tool to extend face-to-face, real-time communication in video-conferencing programs like Skype. A prominent Communication theorist known for research into news reporting and reception as a cultural form is James W. Carey. He contrasts a transmission view of communication theory with a ritual view of communication theory.²⁶⁷ The transmission view sees communication as an extension of messages in space. This would include the technological extension of face-to-face communication. The ritual view is communication as the maintenance of society and representation of shared beliefs. According to a ritual view of communication, a television genre such as news broadcasts:

creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.²⁶⁸

Carey views communication taking place in the everyday over a single dialogical exchange. He defines communication as ‘a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.’²⁶⁹ Carey gives the example of a ritual view of the role of newspapers in social life; I think this ritual view can be expanded to include the role of watching televisual news as well. A ritual perspective will ‘view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is

²⁶⁷ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, ed. David Thorburn, *Media and Popular Culture: I* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

portrayed and confirmed.²⁷⁰ The nightly news is then a projection of community ideals and their embodiment in a cultural form.

As I discussed in the last chapter (2.2.2), J. Ian H. McDonald's interpretation of the message intended for the Samaritan audience was a remembrance of their tradition and their past righteousness in order 'to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process'. McDonald argued that hearing the parable is an integrating social practice where the re-telling of the parable contributes to the:

narrative concept of morality in which the question of identity – 'Who am I?' – and that of goal or *telos* – 'What ought I to become?' – are brought to the fore and subjected to the criterion of 'neighbourly' initiative towards 'the man in the ditch'.²⁷¹

Does McDonald's insight apply to the cultural practice of foreign news coverage of distant human suffering? Of course the parable of the Good Samaritan was a *parable* and not a live report of a man suffering in the ditch. Nonetheless, the cultural practice of reporting on suffering in far away places does tell us something about our society's identity, goals and concerns. There are problems with making the 'man in the ditch' an abstraction or the generalised other of a social issue. I address this later in the chapter.

The cultural form of the televisual, through technology and social use, has most prominently developed into a mode of perception called *witnessing*.²⁷² The focus is not on dialogical interaction, the focus is on the viewer's experience of coming to know things. Media Studies scholar John Ellis argues that our cultural news conventions allow viewers to delegate their 'look' to that of the television's look at the world outside.²⁷³ Television news is communication staged for witnesses. Face-to-face communication might be simulated as in the case of BBC news analysis show presenter Andrew Marr in London having a one-to-one video phone conversation with Alex Salmond MP in Scotland, but the purpose of the conversation is for the broadcasting to UK audiences. Marr and Salmond's conversation is scripted, in an open question-and-answer format, a staged performance for spectators, for witnesses. Television is a cultural form that

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 20.

²⁷¹ McDonald, "The View from the Ditch - and Other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan," 36.

²⁷² John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

²⁷³ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 163.

provides the opportunity for witness; it is public communication, optimistically intended in Western democracy, to be for public deliberation. John Durham Peters points out that public communication is never ‘purely’ two or three people having a conversation. ‘Every public act or utterance engages third parties, whether as eavesdroppers, spectators, inspectors, police, judges, enemies, or friends. . . . This communicative constellation— dialogues between two or three people staged for a third party—is symbolic of public settings generally.’²⁷⁴

While television viewing makes us witnesses, John Ellis argues that the cultural form of television also provides a process for ‘working through’ what we witness by offering citizens through multiple genres of television formats. He draws the term ‘working through’ from Freudian ‘psychoanalysis where it describes the process whereby material is continually worried over until it is exhausted.’²⁷⁵ Ellis finds that broadcast television can serve this function of working over the unintelligible as well. ‘Television attempts definitions, tries out explanation, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, harnesses speculation, tries to make fit, and, very occasionally, anathemizes.’²⁷⁶ The nightly newscast works through new and unintelligible material by anchoring it into understandable and familiar segments presented by a news *anchor*. While the story may have no resolution, the segment within the television program will have an ending, but news is on-going and tomorrow night more material will be worried over in each segment. For Ellis, television’s ‘process of working through is currently one of the principle ways of coming to terms with what we have witnessed.’²⁷⁷

Ellis argues that the ‘essence of this sense of witness’ experienced through the televisual is that ‘we cannot say that we do not know.’²⁷⁸ Peters agrees with Ellis, that informed audiences ‘means their capture within webs of responsibility or complicity. Being informed can be a profoundly life-transforming event.’²⁷⁹ Being informed, having

²⁷⁴ Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition*, 105.

²⁷⁵ Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, 78.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition*, 256.

witnessed creates moral agents out of viewers. I began this thesis by introducing the theme of complicity and witness by telling the stories of journalist Malcolm Muggeridge's experience of reporting on the Ukrainian famine and former US President Bill Clinton's apology to Rwanda. Muggeridge claimed that he could 'never pretend' that he did not know of the starvation of the Ukrainian people. To do otherwise would be false witness. Clinton never came out and said that the international community 'never knew' what was happening in Rwanda. His language was hedging, we 'did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.'²⁸⁰ The prevarication is evident in Clinton's awkward apology. He never denies the international community's failure to act, but neither does he acknowledge the international community's complicity in the Rwandan genocide.

What kind of moral agency is involved in the cultural practice of televisual witnessing? I have argued that it does not forge a direct relationship between the witness and the images of individuals viewed. John Milbank's accusation, therefore, that spectators of violence withhold the good and that spectator reception is confined to 'mere reception' needs to be reconsidered. Media scholars such as Thompson, Carey, Ellis, and Peters argue that televisual witness creates common symbolic interaction among the members of the audience. The spectators are partaking in a shared set of symbols. The spectators' reading of the set of symbols will be 'polysemic'.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, it is significant that spectators focus attention on the same text. Thus far, I have emphasised that audience agency involves the focusing of collective attention. Collective attention begins the journey toward creating tables of common cause. In the narrative of global compassion nascent tables of common cause begin with collective attention and the shared judgment of compassion.

3.2 Compassion as Reasoned Judgment of Violence

Milbank's explanation of the 'double passivity of violence' actually involves a very active first step of making a judgement: judging violent images as violence.

²⁸⁰ Clinton, "To Genocide Survivors, Assistance Workers, and U.S. And Rwanda Officials."

²⁸¹ Varying audiences will develop varying responses to the actual interpretation of the set of symbols. Media Study reception theories such as Stuart Hall's work on encoding and decoding television messages contend that media texts are 'polysemic', having more than one reading, and the reading an audience will have of the text is affected by sociological factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and community. Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. D. Hobson S. Hall, A. Lowe and P. Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

Passivity only enters the equation when the first act of moral judgment is not followed by the second act, that of alleviating injustice. My purpose in the last section was to change the second half of Milbank's equation. Instead of an audience responding directly to the object of their gaze, I argue that the kind of reciprocity television news creates is collective attention potentially for collective action. In the third section of this chapter I look at the possibilities for collective action, but first I focus on how compassion can itself be active audience reception. Compassion, like the judgment of violence, is a two-step process: first judging the situation to be worthy of pity, and second doing something to relieve the suffering.²⁸²

Regarding the cultural harm of the incessant production of and exposure to violent images, various media scholars and cultural critics have argued for the viewer practice of distancing our gaze, but this is *not* to be conflated with a non-evaluative gaze. Sontag called for an 'ecology of images' in her early book, *On Photography*, and she does not completely give up that argument in her later work.²⁸³ Bernd Hüppauf calls us as spectators to 'defamiliarize our gaze' in order to avoid knowingly empathizing with suffering that we know nothing about.²⁸⁴ Luc Boltanski²⁸⁵ and Lilie Chouliaraki²⁸⁶ propose an aesthetic gaze which allows for detached reflection. These scholars call for a reflective gaze but not at all for a non-evaluative gaze. Hüppauf calls a non-evaluative gaze a process of 'emptying the gaze,' becoming 'morally indifferent to that which is represented.'²⁸⁷ A gaze that does not include judgment does not fit the remit of what it means to be a 'witness.' To claim to *bear witness* requires the judgment of joining the side of the *good*.²⁸⁸ An interpretation of an image as a documentation of human suffering by the hand of violence and oppression, requires the moral agency to judge evil. Recall the moral agent is the audience.

²⁸² I am using the word 'pity' and 'compassion' interchangeably throughout this chapter.

²⁸³ Sontag, *On Photography*. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 97.

²⁸⁴ Bernd Hüppauf, "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," *New German Critique* 72 (1997): 15.

²⁸⁵ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*.

²⁸⁶ Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*.

²⁸⁷ Hüppauf, "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," 32.

²⁸⁸ John Durham Peters, "Witnessing," *Media, Culture and Society* 23, no. 6 (2001).

The judgment of violence can be the *beginning* of compassion. Is this what moved the Samaritan? The Samaritan judged that the man on the side of the road had experienced violence, and he ‘was moved with compassion’ (Luke 10:33). Compassion is not just awareness of another’s suffering, but the deep hope to relieve the suffering. The *good* is hope; what is in question here is the actual possibility to make that hope operational. In the spectatorship of distant suffering the response of compassion is a form of reasoning and a judgment that someone has suffered by the violence of nature or humanity. Moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that compassion is an emotion based on thought and evaluation, and that ‘compassion is a certain sort of reasoning.’²⁸⁹ Compassion is an activity based on the spectator’s point of view. Nussbaum says that the spectator’s perspective is:

informed by the best judgment the onlooker [spectator] can make about what is really happening to the person being observed – taking the person’s own wishes into account, but not always taking as the last word the judgment that the person herself is able to form.²⁹⁰

Compassion is a spectator-centred perspective. This is in agreement with my earlier discussion on how televisual witnessing is a viewer-centred mode of perception. It is the spectator judging that the other person is deprived of some aspect (or aspects) of the good. Moral philosopher Lawrence A. Blum observes that although compassion is for the person, it is the condition of deprivation that is ‘the focus of compassion,’ the pain, misery, hardship, suffering and affliction.²⁹¹ The one receiving the compassion of the spectator may not know she is in any sort of deprivation. Criteria for judging another as an object of compassion is based on the spectator’s concept of human flourishing, the spectator’s ‘picture of the world’.²⁹² Nussbaum identifies three criteria in which spectator-centred compassion is reasoned and judged as an appropriate response to suffering: 1) How *serious* is the situation? 2) Who is at *fault* for the situation? 3) How likely would I find myself in *similar possibilities*?²⁹³ I will consider her criteria with

²⁸⁹ Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 28.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁹¹ Lawrence A. Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 174.

²⁹² Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 33.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

reference to news coverage of distant suffering as an example of ways in which compassion is reasoned judgment.

3.2.1 A Reason for Compassion: Seriousness of Situation

The first criterion Nussbaum identifies is the seriousness of the situation. In the case of the spectatorship of famine victims, for example, distant audiences witness late stages of famine because the preliminary stages of drought, political corruption, and military and civil unrest are too difficult to visually represent.²⁹⁴ Journalistic coverage of humanitarian disasters, particularly of famine, relies on the production of stock images. The stock famine image is the starving child. The starving child also represents the ultimate *innocent victim* of humanitarian disasters. Former foreign correspondent Susan Moeller reveals the trade's shorthand for the stock photo: BB, an acronym for bloated-belly.²⁹⁵ Moeller explains that images are needed in the appeal to spectator compassion because images legitimize the seriousness of the situation:

Images help to legitimate the use of the word 'crisis' for an event. A 'crisis' occurs when the abstractions of injustice or racism or prejudice of pain, violence or destruction become concrete on a scale large enough to attract attention. It is the role of imagery to make the incorporeal, corporeal. That is how images tap so easily into our emotions, which respond more readily to flesh-and-blood people than to ephemeral concepts, however transcendent.²⁹⁶

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Hannah Arendt argued that it is in the appearance of men, women and children's physical *labouring* for biological needs that pain is most readily represented for public appearance. Biological need is the lowest common denominator with regard to the best conception of human flourishing to which spectators might appeal. Victims of late-stage famine make 'ideal victims' because their biological needs are visibly evident to help the spectator in her judgment of compassion.

3.2.2 A Reason for Compassion: No Fault of Victim

A second characteristic of compassion as a reasoned response is the lack of fault or culpability of the victim. Who is at fault for the situation? Birgitta Höijer conducted

²⁹⁴ This is Amartya Kumar Sen's thesis in *Poverty and Famines: an essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981) that famines are not natural disasters, but manmade.

²⁹⁵ Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, 43.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

audience research in Sweden on how audiences responded to televisual news coverage of humanitarian suffering during the Kosovo war in 1999. The result of her audience analysis was that audience compassion was highly dependent on visual images of the representation of 'ideal victims'. She found that spectators considered middle-aged men pleading to be evacuated from refugee camps as the victims least worthy of their compassion.²⁹⁷ Michael Ignatieff argues that the category of crimes against humanity created the public imagery of 'the pure victim':

[G]enocide and famine create a new human subject—the pure victim stripped of social identity, and thus bereft of the specific moral audience that would in normal times be there to hear his cry. The family, the tribe, the faith, the nation no longer exist as a moral audience for these people. If they are to be saved at all, they must put their faith in that most fearful of dependency relations: the charity of strangers.²⁹⁸

Innocent victims of crimes against humanity strongly represent the seriousness of the situation and the problem that no one in their proximity can help them. To be reliant on the compassion of strangers is to be in a very vulnerable position; this was Funk's point about the man in the ditch's reliance on the compassion of the Good Samaritan, 'all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no choice but to give themselves up to mercy.'²⁹⁹ Yet conversely, what makes the needs of strangers our obligation is our emotional response of compassion. Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues that our moral obligations, a commitment to just generosity, begin with those of our families and multiple communities, and then extends to welcoming the stranger who comes among our communities, and further extends beyond our boundaries *when* prompted by compassion. MacIntyre claims that compassion is a virtue that 'extends beyond communal obligations [and] is itself crucial for communal life.'³⁰⁰ The virtue of compassion is cultivated through 'attentive and affectionate regard for that other'.³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ Höijer, "The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering."

²⁹⁸ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 20.

²⁹⁹ Funk, "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor," 79.

³⁰⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 124.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

3.2.3 A Reason for Compassion: Similar Experience

The third criterion Nussbaum identifies in the judgment of compassion is the realization of similar possibilities. *How likely is this going to happen to me?* On a motorway if we come upon an accident that has just happened, we might think that it just as easily could have been us. This aspect of compassion, similar possibility, is related to proximity. In order for us to consider ourselves potential victims of a similar tragedy or injustice, there needs to be some kind of approximation of our own life to the victim's life, such as the likelihood of travelling on the same road or similar social vulnerability. Proximity is both a *physical* and *social* approximation. For instance US citizens living in hurricane-vulnerable coastal cities may share the same city but not necessarily the same risks. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 highlighted the line between the similar possibilities shared by the vulnerable and the much less vulnerable. The latter were able to leave town with at least a car-full of possessions while the vulnerable were trapped in the city.

Compassion based on identifying with the victim is further removed when the victim is physically far away as well as victim to the suffering of famine, genocide, or war. Most Western audiences have not suffered such large scale devastation in recent history, but this is not to say that there are not many people marginalized from the fruits of Western affluence. Actually, it is from the marginal places where the cultural practice of compassion is refreshed as in the case of Dalit theology's contextualisation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (discussed in the last chapter, 2.2.3.1). Nonetheless, similarities can still be made in drawing on life experiences of tragedy and of flourishing. A mother watching television coverage of famine may empathise with the mother on television who has no food for her children. Compassion resulting from the reasoning that you could be in a similar position remains spectator-centred emotion. Nussbaum explains:

But even then, in the temporary act of identification, one is always aware of one's own *separateness* from the sufferer – it is for *another*, and not oneself, that one feels; and one is aware both of the bad lot of the sufferer and of the fact that it is, right now, not one's own. If one really had the experience of feeling the pain in one's own body, then one would precisely have failed to comprehend the pain of another *as other*.³⁰²

³⁰² Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 35.

Nussbaum's important insight raises concerns regarding the nature of solidarity. Does solidarity require *similar experience*? The cast of Global Compassion is largely constituted of those who have not had *like* experience. Efforts to reduce the gap of physical proximity, such as war reporters on-the-scene or aid workers on-the-ground, does not as easily address the concern of *social proximity*.

3.2.3.1 Link to Justice

It is in this third characteristic of compassion that Nussbaum identifies a link to justice. While there is self-interest involved in the criterion of 'similar possibilities', this aspect of compassion may be the spur to the just distribution of goods. Nussbaum argues that reasoning based on the criterion of vulnerability to similar possibilities connects 'prudential concern and altruism,' and provides an 'egalitarian raising of the floor'.³⁰³ Prudential concern and altruism is the kind of compassion reasoning appealed to in the Good Samaritan laws—offer assistance to your neighbour, because the next time it could just as likely be you. An egalitarian raising of the floor provides a level of justice for everyone with regard to the prudential concern that one day those on the upper rungs of the ladder may end up on the vulnerable lower rungs. Thus, if the bottom level of society is raised up, the chance for falling into vulnerability is reduced. Here is where Nussbaum offers a fragile connection from compassion to justice. She writes that compassion 'is not sufficient for justice, since it focuses on need and offers no account of liberty, rights, or respect for human dignity.'³⁰⁴ Compassion is judgment that victims do not deserve the violence done to them, but 'it does not entail that the person has a *right* or a just claim to relief.' Nussbaum believes that, 'compassion at least makes us see the importance of the person's lack, and consider with keen interest the claim that such a person might have. In that sense it provides an essential bridge to justice.'³⁰⁵

Compassion's link to justice is already fragile. Compassion's link to justice is made that much more tenuous given audiences' physical distance from victims. Audiences witnessing crimes against humanity may be motivated to want to do something, but the possibility for action is limited. In televisual witness, awareness does not guarantee action. Ignatieff tells the story of travelling to Rwanda in July 1995, with

³⁰³ Ibid., 36.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 37.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who was there to address the genocide survivors. Ignatieff reported that the secretary-general told the survivors that the ‘international community has not forgotten them.’ Ignatieff observed that the only time the audience applauded was when the secretary-general said that the guilty ones will not escape: ‘They will be punished.’ After the secretary-general left, Ignatieff stayed and listened to some of the survivors discussing the visit:

At least he came, one says, and he expressed sorrow. Yes, that is true, someone else says, but he did not listen. He did not ask any of the survivors to speak. They know the murderers’ names. They were once neighbors, even friends. The survivors need justice now, as much as they need bread, and they do not believe they will get it.³⁰⁶

The reasoned judgment of compassion has little resemblance to judgment when the follow through of justice is not within reach. Is this cultural form of witnessing distant suffering simply a ‘cruel mime of immediacy’ as Ignatieff at one point suggests? Or, might compassion be an emotion worth cultivating in a society when there may be some occasions where compassionate responses to news about suffering result in public action and the pursuit of social justice? UN Secretary General Kofi Annan attributed the very positive and immediate international response toward the victims of the December 2004 Asian tsunami to the global visibility that televisual coverage gave to the actual event, aftermath and rebuilding efforts.³⁰⁷ He called the global publicity ‘a unique display of the unity of the world.’³⁰⁸ How do we move from the activity of judgment to action? The way to judge the quality of compassion is by its fruit. A tugging of the heartstrings alone does not result in the emotion of compassion. Nussbaum claims that when compassion affects our lives by influencing our beliefs, patterns of life, motivations and expectations, then it is a form of judgment and reasoning.³⁰⁹ Compassion is a form of life that needs to be cultivated.

³⁰⁶ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 78.

³⁰⁷ As reported in Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 14.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 38.

3.2.3.2 Cultivation of Compassion

A central critique of the politics of compassion is that as a basis of reasoning and as a prompting for public deliberation, compassion is partial and narrow.³¹⁰ The politics of compassion will lead to action in some places and not in others producing unbalanced and inconsistent results. Secretary-general Annan lauded the display of global unity following the Asian tsunami, but one of the reasons that the tsunami was given such televisual visibility and relevance world-wide was because over forty countries suffered the loss of citizens in the disaster. Another reason for the world-wide compassionate response had to do with timeliness—it was during the Christmas holiday season. Audiences had more time to give to the spectatorship of suffering victims of the tsunami, and more time to reflect on a compassionate judgment that led many audience members to participation in public fundraising campaigns for disaster relief and rebuilding. Nussbaum acknowledges the criticism that compassion is partial and narrow moral reasoning. Generally, the issues we understand and that have relevance to us are the issues that matter to us most. Therefore, the task of moral development, which includes the ‘intelligence of compassion’, is to build on the understandings of justice that we already have to make justice make sense in a broader context.³¹¹ McDonald gave this as the likely interpretation the Samaritan audience was meant to take from the parable of the Good Samaritan.

How does a culture learn and develop patterns of life influenced by the emotion of compassion? Nussbaum’s answer is through the spectatorship of tragedy: developing the moral imagination through the stories of tragedy will help educate a society in becoming compassionate spectators. Nussbaum cites the use of tragedy in Greek society’s civic education. The role of tragic theatre is to cultivate compassion in the youth:

Such a spectator is learning pity in the process. Tragedies acquaint young people with the bad things that may happen in a human life, long before life itself does so: they thus enable concern for others who are suffering what the spectator has not suffered. Moreover, they do so in a way that makes the depth and significance of suffering, and the losses that inspire it, unmistakably plain – the poetic, visual, and musical resources of the drama

³¹⁰ Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*.

³¹¹ Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 48.

thus have moral weight. ... the drama sets up pity; an attentive spectator will, in apprehending it, have that emotion.³¹²

Nussbaum describes the process of the spectatorial role as seeing things from the sufferer's point of view while acknowledging the common humanity between them as 'an education in social justice,' not that people will make radical social changes, 'so powerful are the dulling forces of habit.'³¹³ What Nussbaum presents us with is an argument for compassion as a form of reasoning that is developed in an ad hoc manner where the understanding and cultivation of compassion begins from the spectator's conception of human flourishing and changes as she. Can this be extrapolated? Can Nussbaum's reasoning for the spectatorship of tragedy on stage work as a possible justification for the spectatorship of the *actual* human suffering of people in distant places?

Susan Sontag addresses this in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Her argument for viewing images of distant suffering parallels Nussbaum's argument. An education in social justice requires the awareness of social injustice. Sontag asks: *What is the purpose of photographing and viewing suffering?* She argues that the 'photographs are a means of making "real" (or "more real") matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore.'³¹⁴ The underlying pedagogy is that social and psychological maturity requires the understanding that depravity exists. She argues that acknowledging the existence of suffering 'caused by human wickedness' is a good in itself.

Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral psychological adulthood. No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia.³¹⁵

While Sontag forthrightly states that such ignorance is 'moral defectiveness,' she offers a nuance to the purposes for witnessing suffering. Sontag argues for the 'more general understanding that human beings everywhere do terrible things to one another.'³¹⁶ She is not claiming that images of suffering should function as a remembrance of specific

³¹² Ibid., 39.

³¹³ Ibid., 40.

³¹⁴ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 6.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 102.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

grievances because that leads to perpetual vengefulness. The images are not for the purpose of creating guilt, nor are the images ‘supposed to repair our ignorance about the history and causes of the suffering it picks out and frames.’³¹⁷ Sontag claims that the images ‘cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers.’³¹⁸ She believes that the justification for witnessing distant suffering is in order to ask these questions: ‘Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is this some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged?’³¹⁹

John Durham Peters argues that exposure to suffering as civic instruction is part of the heritage of the tradition of a free press. A founding principle of the freedom of the press tradition is objectivity, and in the test case of exposure to suffering through the images of the dead and dying, the role of objectivity is ‘understood as the imperative to hold disgust for the sake of education’.³²⁰ Exposure to trauma as civic instruction is a political-moral claim that the sight of trauma requires a moral response from the spectator.³²¹

In her book *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of News About Violence*, Media Studies scholar Jean Seaton traces the public representation of suffering from ancient Romans through Communist Russia to today's spectators of suffering on television. Her argument corresponds with the reasoning of Nussbaum, Sontag and Peters. The spectatorship of suffering is part of our moral development:

On the whole we believe that our willingness to witness suffering is to our credit. It is not merely that our knowledge of their pain may be useful to those subjected to it: we like to believe that there is a virtue in frankly confronting a difficult subject...being a spectator may sometimes bring out the best in us – and echo a long, even ancient tradition of bearing witness –

³¹⁷ Ibid., 104.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition*, 220.

³²¹ Ibid., 222.

so that the task of the news is to catch our attention with accounts of events that will test our mettle...³²²

While all four scholars acknowledge that to judge an image as unjust human suffering does not directly result in action, they do not go as far as Milbank in declaring the spectatorship of violence to be a violent cultural practice. Peters describes witnessing *as* participation and Sontag argues for spectatorship as an opportunity to think, reflect and question. Sontag states that there is nothing morally wrong with:

the standing back from the aggressiveness of the world which frees us for observation and for selective attention. But this is only to describe the function of the mind itself. There's nothing wrong with standing back and thinking. To paraphrase several sages: 'Nobody can think and hit someone at the same time.'³²³

Spectators of tragedy, whether at a dramatic theatre production or the television broadcast of suffering, create a collective of focused attention on the important issue of social justice. The common symbolic interaction of cultivating sites for compassion such as broadcast news of distant human suffering is itself a significant cultural practice. This alone is participation on behalf of audiences, but audience agency can move even further. Spectators can potentially participate in 'publics'.

3.3 Spectators' Agency for Reciprocal Participation

I now turn to the possibilities for active audience reception. Milbank is rightly concerned about the agency afforded to television audiences when they witness injustice. He claims that after the judgment of violence, there is no possibility for moral action. I claim that there are potential, albeit modest, possibilities for spectators to act. Active audience response is found in the reciprocity and participation between and among spectators. Media Studies scholar Daniel Dayan's work on television publics has showed how audiences move from being spectators to being participators. Dayan uses the metaphor of *birthing* in this move from spectatorship to participation.³²⁴ This metaphor provides the room for the potentiality of fully-formed publics, but with the nuanced

³²² Jean Seaton, *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of News About Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), xx.

³²³ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 106.

³²⁴ Daniel Dayan, "On Mothers, Midwives and Abortionists: The Genealogy and Obstetrics of Audiences and Publics," in *Audiences and Publics: When Cultural Engagement Matters for the Public Sphere*, ed. Sonia Livingston (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2005).

awareness that full gestation, maybe even conception, does not always occur. The potentiality for publics to be born does not always result in the existence of actual publics, an actual social body linked by common cause.

In this section, I look at how publics *might* come into existence. The concrete and real life example of Charles Breen, a spectator of distant suffering, will serve to illustrate the argument of how spectators can potentially form publics. Breen is involved in public advocacy with the Washington D.C.-based organisation Save Darfur Coalition. My interview question to Breen was: Do you see yourself as having a role in bearing witness to genocide?³²⁵ Breen answered with the story of how he became involved in bearing witness to the genocide in Darfur. In 2004, Breen saw the film *Hotel Rwanda*. He was disturbed that he could not recall any discussion about the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 when it happened. He did not remember talking about Rwanda at university or at his church or anywhere else. Soon after the film, Breen heard about the situation in Darfur through television news coverage on C-SPAN. A US senator presented images from Darfur and declared that the situation in Sudan was genocide.

Breen registered for membership on the Save Darfur Coalition website. For over a year, he followed the news and activities of the organisation, and then took an active step in becoming involved in the organisation's plan for a national Darfur prayer day. Breen asked the pastor of his church, The First United Methodist Church of South Haven, Michigan, if their church could participate in the prayer day. The pastor suggested that Breen should give a short sermon about Darfur and the prayer day. Breen focused the sermon on his experience as a film and television spectator and about how he could be doing more to help. The church congregation responded positively to Breen's sermon. Some members of the congregation also joined the on-line Save Darfur Coalition; others began to follow the story in the news and cut out newspaper articles about Darfur. The church appointed Breen to the role of Darfur justice coordinator. In this role Breen updates prayers regarding Darfur, he arranges monetary offerings for Darfur Aid Relief, and he edits a current news section featuring Darfur in the church's newsletter and email

³²⁵ The interview was conducted by my student research assistant Jonathan Stoner, a Media Studies student at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Stoner interviewed Charles Breen on October 26, 2008. I presented parts of this chapter at the American Academy of Religion 2008 Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois. My paper was chosen for the research section called: Religion, Holocaust, and Genocide Group -- the theme was "Observing Genocide: Christian Theological Paradigms for Intervention and Non-Involvement in Mass Violence".

correspondence including internet links to important information about Darfur. Breen also arranged for his church to display a large banner on an outside wall of the church with the words 'call to your conscience' and the internet address for the Save Darfur Coalition.

Breen's initiative moved beyond the walls of his church. Soon after he preached he was contacted by a few people in Grand Rapids, Michigan asking him to start a Save Darfur, Grand Rapids group. At the time of this interview with Breen, the Save Darfur, Grand Rapids group numbered over one hundred people. Breen's work with the Save Darfur Coalition put him in alliance with other organisations of common cause. He volunteered for the role of West Michigan contact for the Michigan Darfur Coalition, and he became involved in the Michigan Divestment Campaign based in Detroit. Breen's story is not the everyday response to televisual suffering in distant places, but his story is not completely atypical or outside of the realm of the possible. Breen provides an illustration to the process Dayan describes as television audiences 'going public'.

3.3.1 Collective Attention

Dayan charts the potentiality involved in how spectatorship might lead to the formation of publics. He begins with spectatorship as the possibility of collective attention. Dayan's 'collective attention' parallels John B. Thompson's concept of 'mediated quasi-interaction.' Thompson defines the kind of interaction that television creates as 'a certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and symbolic exchange.'³²⁶ Spectators are exposed to the same material. Dayan describes the television spectator of broadcast news as always 'watching with' others.³²⁷ 'Watching television means being part of a "reverse-angle shot" consisting of everyone watching the same image at the same time or, more exactly, of all those believed to be watching.'³²⁸ In the ritual of watching the nightly news, 'the public serves as a dimension of the spectator's experience.'³²⁹ Publics are constitutive of

³²⁶ Thompson, "The New Visibility," 33-34.

³²⁷ Dayan explored this idea in: Dayan and Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*.

³²⁸ Daniel Dayan, "The Peculiar Public of Television," *Media Culture and Society* 23 (2001): 743.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*: 746. The ritual of watching a nightly news cast is still a prevalent activity, but this concept of 'watching with' will need adjustment given the increased practice of watching video on-demand on the internet or on home televisions. Perhaps viral video sharing will lead to the concept of 'exposed as well'.

collective attention. Günter Thomas argues that in modern, mediated society attention and awareness is a commodity of scarcity. Attention is a 'contested cultural property and resource.'³³⁰ Like Dayan, Thomas argues that collective attention has the potential to lead to the formation of publics: 'If this accumulation of attention is centred on specific topics and attains some stability over time, it results in the creation of a public.'³³¹

Dayan identifies several types of publics, for instance, there are 'taste publics'. Taste publics are usually birthed into the world by demographers aiming to sell to them. I concentrate on what Dayan calls 'issue publics', or political publics, for these publics are constitutive of focused attention on a particular issue 'aimed at determining certain courses of action.'³³² This is closest to the kind of public the Global Samaritan makes, an 'issue public' concerned with humanitarian care for human suffering in far away places. Collective attention may produce publics, but it produces other groupings as well. Dayan distinguishes publics from *crowds* that also emerge from shared attention.³³³ A crowd is a collective of attention that requires spatiality and temporality. Publics do not; publics can be constructed through shared symbolic interaction that can be accessed from any space and time. I emphasised this aspect of publics in relation to Hannah Arendt's *public* realm in the previous chapter. Arendt argues that public realms are artefacts constructed for a common cause that do not require everyone being present in the same place, at the same time.

3.3.2 Social Integration

The narrative of global compassion is a narrative that is cultivated and maintained in a media environment. It is not always tied to the same physical and temporal location. Social integration is maintained through the on-going coverage of distant human suffering framed by the need for a humanitarian response from the Global Samaritan. Conceptualising media as environments of social integration removes the emphasis of television as a medium to extend face-to-face interaction. Seen in this light, James W.

³³⁰ Günter Thomas, "The Cultural Contest for Our Attention: Observations on Media, Property, and Religion," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, ed. William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 273.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

³³² Daniel Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," *Journal of Media Practice* 6, no. 1 (2005): 12.

³³³ *Ibid.*: 11.

Carey's ritual understanding of television news watching as communion fits as a better model than the transmission models of media theory as sending and receiving. This concept is well illustrated by empirical findings in research on the power of images *over* audiences. David Domke, David D. Perlmutter, and Meg Spratt examine the power of visual images on audiences.³³⁴ They argued that the transmission view of communication is 'overly simplistic'. They essentially argued Carey's ritual view of communication, 'that images most often interact with individuals' existing understandings of the world to shape information processing and judgments.'³³⁵ In their findings, they concluded that:

visual news images (a) influence people's information processing in ways that can be understood only by taking into account individuals' predispositions and values, and (b) at the same time appear to have a particular ability to 'trigger' considerations that spread through one's mental framework to other evaluations.³³⁶

Their findings corroborate Susan Sontag's argument that the pictures that do not numb us from habituation or lose their meaning are the pictures we have picked out for iconic representation because they are associated with our narratives, our convictions, either reinforcing or corroborating them. 'Pathos, in the form of a narrative, does not wear out.'³³⁷ Sontag suggests using pictures as secular icons given that they nurture the belief and the values behind the image.³³⁸ The iconic picture of the starving child reinforces the narrative that we, the West, are a people of global compassion who care about the innocent victims of genocide and famine. Sontag argues that it is not for the photographers to solely determine what is representative of their time. The pictures will be iconic only if a community already holds the narratives as chronicles of their time. 'The photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it.'³³⁹ The interpretation of images, the hermeneutics of images, is done by the community. While communities are collectives of focused attention that promote

³³⁴ David Domke, David D. Perlmutter, and Meg Spratt, "The Primes of Our Times? An Examination of the 'Power' of Visual Images," *Journalism* 3, no. 2 (2002).

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.: 131.

³³⁷ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 74.

³³⁸ Ibid., 107.

³³⁹ Ibid., 35.

social integration and shared meaning-making, Dayan distinguishes communities from publics. Communities do not need to make themselves understandable beyond their community, whereas publics must be understood by a wider *general public*. What does it take for a community's interpretation to 'go public'? The community's concern has to be constructed as a reason why others beyond the community should care about the issue.

3.3.3 Going Public

Dayan argues that crowds, spectators, witnesses, and communities may become publics if they 'go public', that is, if they seek visibility for their collective concern. Most audiences do not become publics. Dayan reasons that it is not because they are 'lazy' it is just that collective audiences generally do not seek visibility. There has to be a reason for 'going public'. 'Going public involves, on their part, the construction of a problem, a reflexive decision to join, commitment, performance, etc.'³⁴⁰ The concern for human suffering has been a concern of communities for a long time, but in order for this concern to 'go public' beyond communities, it takes a birthing process. In the last chapter (2.4 and 2.5), I discussed the sociological and technological changes to viewing distant suffering. Michael Ignatieff argues that global compassion has gone public because of 'aid workers, reporters, lawyers for war crimes tribunals, human rights observers all working in the name of an impalpable moral ideal: that the problems of other people, no matter how far away, are of concern to us all.'³⁴¹ Ignatieff describes the process of going public in language similar to that of Thomas on the formation of publics through the accumulation of attention on a specific topic that attains some stability over time. Ignatieff describes global compassion as a public issue that has increased over time:

Weak as the narrative of compassion and moral commitment may be, it is infinitely stronger than it was only fifty years ago. We are scarcely aware of the extent to which our moral imagination has been transformed since 1945 by the growth of a language and practice of moral universalism, expressed above all in a shared human rights culture. Television in its turn makes it harder to sustain indifference or ignorance.³⁴²

Collective attention focussed on the topic of distant human suffering promotes social integration and shared meaning-making around the theme of human rights. A shared

³⁴⁰ Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," 13.

³⁴¹ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 5.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

human rights culture in the West is a result of collective attention on human rights issues. Now there is a human rights culture, a human rights public. Once spectators can be called *the public*, what agency does the public have?

3.3.3.1 The Public as a *Persona Ficta*

‘The public’ is often spoken of as a *persona ficta* with references such as the voice of the public (*vox populi*), or taking the pulse of public perception, or in the discourse on mediated global suffering ‘the public’ is clinically diagnosed with *compassion fatigue*. Dayan identifies the public as a fictive and sociological dialectic. It is at once a social reality, the gathering of an audience for an event, as well as an intellectual construct produced by observing and defining it. In his analogy of birthing publics into the world, Dayan describes some as mothers, some as midwives, and some as abortionists.³⁴³ Publics are never totally autonomous in their constructions: ‘Publics need co-producers to help them exist and to advertise their claims.’³⁴⁴ These co-producers, or obstetricians in Dayan’s vocabulary, might be journalists, politicians, social action groups, or religious bodies. They deliver the newborn public into the light of publicity. Ignatieff identifies ‘aid workers, reporters, lawyers for war crimes tribunals, human rights observers’ all as co-producers of publics involved in the narrative of global compassion. Audience member, Charles Breen played the role of midwife birthing the concern of genocide in Darfur into his church and beyond the walls of his church.

The journey from thousands of dimly-lit sitting rooms where spectators witness suffering, and judge it as so, to a collective mobilisation of those television witnesses is a long and involving process. That journey might begin with informal water-cooler conversations or café conversations, not yet public, but also not completely private. The next stage is still not formal politics but a discussion of ideas and opinions in letters to the editors, web blogs, and discussions on talk shows.³⁴⁵ Dayan believes audiences can foster

³⁴³ Dayan, "On Mothers, Midwives and Abortionists: The Genealogy and Obstetrics of Audiences and Publics."

³⁴⁴ Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," 15.

³⁴⁵ This is John Ellis’s conception of the various television genres as a process for *working through* or *worrying through* issues of concern.

civic culture, an informal politics.³⁴⁶ Publics are finally birthed when political discussion takes place:

Formal political debate is the moment when the talk of publics is invited into the discourse of politicians or journalists. Turned into an argumentative resource, this talk is now offered in quotes, excerpts or paraphrases that are supposedly expressive of the publics' will and serve as a justification or legitimization for given course of action within the political system.³⁴⁷

The process for a group of common cause to be 'turned into an argumentative resource' is a process developed over time.³⁴⁸ In the last chapter (2.5.2), I discussed how the social imaginary of genocide awareness and prevention had a specific history. The Global Samaritan is a *persona ficta*, it is the public concerned with humanitarian and moral intervention in far away places. According to Dayan, the Global Samaritan functions more as a public than as a community because a public represents a *generalised cause*.

3.3.3.2 The Public is a Voice for the *Generalised Other*

Dayan distinguishes publics from communities because communities deal with particulars and publics deal with the *general*. Dayan also distinguishes publics from witnesses. The privileged status of the witness in a court of law is completely contingent upon the person having been *witness* to a particular event, not to a similar event. In contrast, 'publics do not relate to particular situations but to the principles or issues that these situations exemplify and to the values involved.'³⁴⁹ Both witnesses and communities are contingent on the particular in ways that publics are not. Witnesses and communities are not solely confined to particulars as in the case of an 'expert witness' on ballistics or a community held up as an exemplar for neighbourhood crime reduction. Nevertheless, the strength of witnesses and communities' testimony is in their proximity

³⁴⁶ Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," 14.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ It is true that there are far more 'almost' publics than live births of publics because of a narrowing of a mediated public realm. This is an issue taken up by several media scholars with specific reference to the politics of global compassion: Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. Tamar Liebes, "Television's Disaster Marathons: A Danger for Democratic Processes?" in *Media, Ritual and Identity*, ed. Tamar Liebes and James Curran (London: Routledge, 1998).

³⁴⁹ Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," 11.

to the issue. Moral obligation differs from communities to publics. Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre describes three levels of moral obligation practiced by communities. The first obligation involves those in our immediate families and communities and the second level of obligation is to the stranger who enters our families or communities.³⁵⁰ Publics appeal to the third level of moral obligation that MacIntyre identifies, a commitment to justice that extends beyond our relationships of close proximity. Dayan argues that in order to go beyond relationships of close proximity, ‘publics are submitted to the normative requirements of the general public sphere. They must offer a discourse directed towards the common good, a discourse that is potentially universal.’³⁵¹

Televisual witnessing, and the communities formed by such collective attention on human suffering in far away places, is attention directed at the generalised other who Ignatieff calls the ‘pure victim’. Televisual spectators witness far beyond their ability to act. Attention is focused on the many victims of famine, genocide, or war, but it is a generalized victim. J. Ian H. McDonald argued that the parable of the Good Samaritan speaks of the identity of communities being rooted in positive practices, and that is true for the analogy of publics as Global Samaritans. The *good* resulting from the public’s focusing of collective attention on a common cause results in an argument for social justice about a *condition*. Moral philosopher Lawrence Blum argues that compassion is an emotion that focuses on the condition more than on the person suffering: ‘Although it is the person and not merely the negative condition which is the object of compassion, the focus of compassion is the condition.’³⁵² News media practitioners are often reliant on an individual as an iconic representation of a larger condition. The BB, the journalistic shorthand for famine victim with a ‘bloated-belly’, serves as a metonym for the entire famine. According to Blum, the emotion of compassion is much more likely to be focussed on the general condition, famine, rather than the immediate object of compassion, the person with the bloated-belly.

While spectator agency includes the potential to participate in publics, the work of the public does not necessarily correspond to that which the spectator was first eyewitness to. The agency available to the spectator presents the following logic: You

³⁵⁰ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*.

³⁵¹ Dayan, "Paying Attention to Attention: Audiences, Publics, Thresholds and Genealogies," 11.

³⁵² Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity*, 174.

can do nothing for this one dying, but now that you are *aware* you can do something for others like her. This is evident in the example of Charles Breen, who had a compassionate response to the story of genocide presented in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. He then became involved in genocide prevention in Darfur, Sudan. He is expressing solidarity with a cause rather than with a person. This poses a problem for the use of the Good Samaritan as an analogy for the Global Samaritan. Theologian Luke Bretherton argues that: ‘the Good Samaritan responds to one he finds nearby, not some generalised “Other” who exists nowhere and everywhere.’³⁵³ Then again, to express solidarity with a cause does include solidarity with others committed to the same belief that human beings should not be victim to genocide. The story-formed community that takes up the narrative of global compassion is not one community, but many communities coming together to form a public working for social justice. *Social* justice is not the same as *individual* justice. Publics produce discourse that is potentially universal, whereas communities, that do not seek the light of publicity beyond their members, do not need to produce universal discourse.

3.3.4 Audiences as ‘Bearing Witness’

What can John Howard Yoder’s argument, that bearing witness is a method of ethics, contribute to our understanding of televisual audiences as ‘bearing witness’ to genocide, famine and other suffering? The active engagement and participation of audiences in publics can be an ethical act. Milbank is right to point out that it is unethical to judge evil and do nothing, but he is wrong to claim that audience moral agency ends there. The potential for moral agency, the ability to respond to images and stories of suffering on television, is found in audiences gathering around a common cause with the purpose of bringing about action. Yoder contends that there is moral agency involved in freely associating with others who all have a common cause; he calls these groups ‘voluntary associations’. He argues that members in voluntary associations cannot be reduced to mere audiences. Membership requires the performative action of joining. Voluntary membership makes clear who is a part of a group and who is not. Civil society, made up of varying groups of voluntary societies, is defined by active participation that is not backed by the state or commercial agencies, although it might of course be influenced

³⁵³ Luke Bretherton, "The Duty of Care to Refugees, Christian Cosmopolitanism, and Hallowing of Bare Life," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19, no. 1 (2006): 57.

by state or commercial forces. This definition of civil society is akin to Hannah Arendt's 'public realm' and to Jürgen Habermas's 'public sphere'.

Habermas is in agreement with Yoder's position that voluntary associations are a necessary part of transforming social and political structures. What Yoder calls voluntary associations, Habermas calls opinion-shaping associations. Habermas claims that these associations include the church but can also include a range of other communities from 'cultural associations, and academies to independent media, sport and leisure clubs, debating societies, groups of concerned citizens, and grass-roots petitioning drives all the way to occupational associations, political parties, labor unions, and "alternative institutions."'354 For Habermas these associations are the core of 'civil society' which is 'constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy.'355 Habermas identifies *how* voluntary associations can have political and social impact. It is when a community's projects advocate alternatives to conventional wisdom: 'the programmatic character of their activities sets examples through which they implicitly contribute to public discussion.'356 Habermas is essentially arguing for witness, or embodied testimony, as their form of communication. Habermas agrees with Yoder, that when a community's activities represent their beliefs, then their beliefs are made public. Yet, as we saw in this chapter, that in order for the community's beliefs to 'go public' in an amplified way, an 'obstetrician' may be required.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that engaged spectatorship is not confined to a mere telos of reception. Like Milbank, I agree that the spectatorship of violence begins with the actively, engaged judging of violence as violence. In the case of the spectatorship of suffering, spectators judge suffering to be unjust. It is through the emotion of compassion that spectators make the moral judgment that those suffering are not at fault and that they should not have to endure such pain and deprivation. I argued that the cultural form of television, and other forms of the televisual, is not for extending face-to-face conversations. It is to focus collective attention on issues providing spectators with the opportunity to focus on a common cause. I diverge with Milbank

³⁵⁴ Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," 453-54.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 453.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 454.

when he restricts spectator agency to mere reception because there is no reciprocal interaction with the object of the spectator's gaze. I argued that the reciprocal participation that spectators engage in may not be directly with those they witnessed on television. The potential participation spectators can actively engage in may well begin with other audience members. The focus of collective attention and shared meaning-making around the same issue potentially creates publics who in civil societies exert political, economic, and social pressure on governments, businesses, and other institutions to act in a way that will relieve human suffering in the lives of those far away. This is what it means for audiences to bear witness to human suffering. Clearly audience spectatorship does not involve reciprocal participation with the object of the spectator's gaze. Multiple levels of mediation take place between the 'victim' and the spectator, and the likelihood of the spectator's extension of the good reaching the 'original victim' is minimal. In this chapter, I have only considered the levels of mediation involved in spectator agency.

I began this chapter with the question: How convincing is the analogy of the audience as the Global Samaritan? Throughout this chapter I argue that the analogy of the Good Samaritan breaks down, but can be built back up in other ways. Because the cultural form of television news is not simply about extending the proximity of face-to-face interaction, spectator agency should not be measured by reciprocity with the object of the spectator's gaze. When television news features three recently orphaned children under-clothed and under-nourished in a Darfur refugee camp, how *ought* thousands of spectators to respond? Thousands of offers *of the good* (clothing, food and protection) extended to just these *three children*? An extension of the *good* in the spectatorship of distant human suffering is about publics arguing for potentially universal principles. Engaged spectatorship is not about turning our gaze *away* from these three children. Engaged spectatorship has to do with becoming committed to positions and organisations that work toward representing the needs of all suffering children.

I have argued that the analogy of the audience as the Global Samaritan does not work. Television technology cannot restore the proximity of the Samaritan to the man suffering on the side of the road. The analogy of the audience as a part of the Global Samaritan, like fingers, for example, or toes works a bit better. Global compassion involves a long chain of audiences, aid workers, governments, and journalists. The chain of links does move toward incarnating the Samaritan in distant places. To be involved in

this long chain is to direct more than a passive gaze at suffering. There is participation; it may not be reciprocal participation with the actual object of the spectator's gaze. Rather it is participation in a *general* or *universal* cause. In the next chapter, I investigate another level of mediation in the narrative of global compassion. Audiences witness distant suffering because their gaze is often directed there by the embodied witness on the scene, the foreign correspondent.

Chapter 4: The Foreign Correspondent *Bearing Witness*

In the last chapter I addressed the cultural practice of audiences bearing witness to distant suffering. The largest hurdle in imagining audiences as *Good Samaritans* has to do with the fact that audiences are not physically present with those suffering. In this chapter, I focus on the cultural practice of foreign correspondents gathering the news of distant suffering. Do foreign correspondents make *Good Samaritans*? After all, they are present on the scene. Nonetheless, the analogy of the Good Samaritan remains problematic. While physical presence is an aspect important to foreign news reporting, the aid that journalism can offer to those suffering is not immediate aid. The journalist's role in global compassion is not the direct equivalent of the part played by the Samaritan, rather it is part of a larger enterprise, to raise public awareness and to document history. In this chapter, I explore the claim that foreign correspondents 'bear witness'.

John Howard Yoder's work on the moral agency involved in the Christian practice of bearing witness provides interesting points of comparison with the ethical questions related to being a journalist involved in investigative journalism. I make two parallels between Yoder's Christian social ethics and investigative journalism practices. In section 4.1, I consider the parallel practice of holding those in power to account. The second parallel I consider is Yoder's claim that presence, or *being there*, is a way to authenticate truth claims. I investigate this parallel through the journalist's dual function as a proxy for the public and a proxy for the voiceless.

Central to the claim that a journalist is 'bearing witness' is the fact that they are there, on-the-scene as history unfolds. As a way to explore the journalistic claim of bearing witness, I will look at two separate groups of people for whom journalists bear witness: for their audiences and for those at the scene. First, journalists bear witness on the frontline of wars and disasters because their audience cannot be there themselves. Journalists act as the stand-in or proxy eyes and ears for the public (section 4.2).³⁵⁷ Second, journalists bear witness by being there *with* and there *for* those who have suffered great injustice or trauma but do not have the means to give voice to their experience. In this way, journalists are the proxy voice for those who have suffered but

³⁵⁷ Sections 4.2 and 4.4 of chapter four have been adapted from elements in: Amy Richards and Jolyon Mitchell, "Journalists as Witnesses to Violence and Suffering," in *Handbook of Global Communications Ethics*, ed. Robert Fortner and Mark Fackler (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2010).

do not have the means to testify before a wider audience that may be able to assist in righting the injustice or perhaps providing some relief from their suffering. I consider journalists as the proxy voice for the voiceless in section 4.4. Between the sections on journalists as proxy for the public and proxy for the voiceless, in section 4.3 I explore the question: Can women be proxies? Before I address the role of journalists as proxies, I consider the journalistic claim of *bearing witness* within the frame of a liberal democratic press.

4.1 Investigative Journalism in a Liberal Democratic Press

The practices of a liberal democratic press emphasise ideas of press autonomy and objectivity. Journalist scholar James Curran lists the three key concepts in the traditional or conventional accounts of the democratic role of the media as: the watchdog role, the public representative or ‘fourth estate’ role, and the public information role.³⁵⁸ The liberal democratic tradition of the press is also referred to by William Hachten as the ‘Western concept’ of the press.³⁵⁹ Hachten enfolds the Libertarian and Social Responsibility theories of the press³⁶⁰ in addition to the Democratic Socialist concept and the Democratic Participant concept of the press³⁶¹ all into the Western concept of the press. In the Western press, the watchdog function of a free press, the role of the press to criticise and scrutinise its own government, is the paramount value. A very close second is the value of a free press as the ‘fourth estate,’ that is, the press imagined as a fourth branch of government representing the will of the people.³⁶² The third role is the informational role of the press. This role supports the claim that the public should be

³⁵⁸ James Curran, "Mediations of Democracy," in *Mass Media and Society*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 2005).

³⁵⁹ See "Chapter Two: Changing Ideologies of Press Control," in William Hachten and James Scotton, *The World News Prism: Global Information in a Satellite Age*, 7th ed. (New York, New York: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

³⁶⁰ The Libertarian and the Social Responsibility theories of the press come from the classic: Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).

³⁶¹ Hachten and Scotton add these last two as possible expressions of liberal democratic press as well. There are other theories of the press practiced in the West, such as Alternative Media theory, see: Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (London: Sage Publications, 2002). Nonetheless, the point of alternative media is still to provide the watchdog function of scrutiny of the state which the ‘mainstream’ media have failed to provide given ownership patterns and other links to power.

³⁶² This public representative role of the press has affinity with Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere of reasoned deliberation. See: Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

exposed to a free marketplace of ideas and the ideas that the public deem most important will set the agenda for the news industry. This is the theory of the Western concept of the press; practice is variable.

The functioning of a democratic society relies on a free press to inform citizens, provide a public sphere for debate, and look after the public's interests by keeping watch over government. A free press derives objectivity through being largely independent of government control. In order for the press to sustain the practice of truth-telling to the citizens of a democracy, the value of objectivity plays an important role. Objectivity has to do with autonomy. While objectivity is considered an ethical imperative in American journalism, Europe has had a strong tradition of partisan press reporting that is still recognisable in some quarters today. Nonetheless, what is held in common in American and European journalism is that the news organisation whether partisan or not, is independent from government control of censorship.³⁶³ To be otherwise in Western journalism is to be a propagandist tool of the state.

The Christian practice that John Howard Yoder identifies as Lay Empowerment shares some understanding with the Western concept of the press. Both practices involve moral reasoning which communities need in order to hold those in power publicly accountable. Lay Empowerment is based on Paul's analogy of the church functioning like a human body. Like individual body parts, all of the church members work together to create a whole body. Yoder reasons that if all members have roles, 'we need to challenge the concentration of authority in the hands of office-bearers accredited on institutional grounds.'³⁶⁴ The parallel is clear. Journalism in a liberal democratic press is meant to serve as a check on governmental power, corporate power and other areas of concentrated power. The role of the journalist is to be sceptical and critical of those with political, financial, and cultural influence.

Yoder claims that those with rhetorical influence will steer society. Yoder cites the epistle of James chapter three as providing this warning to teachers and all other leadership roles. The role of the leader within a community is a dangerous role 'because

³⁶³ Michael Schudson, "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism," *Journalism* 2, no. 2 (2001).

³⁶⁴ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 51.

the tongue is hard to govern' and communities are steered by language.³⁶⁵ '[L]ike the small bit turning a horse around or the small rudder turning a ship around, or the small flame setting a forest ablaze, language has a dangerously determining function.'³⁶⁶ Yoder focuses the James text much more on the social 'phenomenon of language' over the 'modern psychologizing individualism' as the context for James' admonition.³⁶⁷ The journalist's role is to scrutinise public rhetoric.

Yet journalists themselves are public rhetoricians not only because they can persuade publics and even 'birth' publics as discussed in the previous chapter, but journalists can direct the public toward *what* to think about in the first place. Journalists and news media agencies can act as agenda-setters and gate-keepers. Yoder identifies journalism as among the influential leadership roles 'engaged in steering society with the rudder of language.'³⁶⁸ The roles of leader, teacher and journalist are all important roles that Yoder claims should be approached by people acting as 'Agents of Linguistic Self-Consciousness'.³⁶⁹ Despite doubts of translatability from Christian practice to other practices, Yoder is willing to consider a conversation between the practical moral reasoning used by Christians in the role of agent of linguistic self-consciousness, with the practical moral reasoning used by people in the wider world fulfilling similar roles of leadership in their community. Yoder claims that the moral reasoning of a leader in a Christian community and that used by a journalist in liberal democratic society will be similar, as both will:

watch for the sophomoric temptation of verbal distinctions without substantial necessity, and of purely verbal solutions to substantial problems. [They] will scrutinize open-mindedly, but skeptically, typologies that dichotomize the complementary and formulae that reconcile the incompatible. [They] will denounce the diversion of attention from what must be done to debate about how to say it, except when

³⁶⁵ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 32. Yoder translates *didaskalos* from James chapter three as both teacher and leader.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Journalist is found among this list of who Yoder identifies as 'Agents of Linguistic Self-Consciousness': 'the demagogue, the poet, also the journalist, the novelist, the grammarian'.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

attention to language renews and clarifies the capacity for moral discourse.³⁷⁰

The moral reasoning required of the teacher and leader in the Christian community is consistent with the moral reasoning required of the journalist in a liberal democratic society. Agents of linguistic self-consciousness help shape a community's conversation by the words that they use, or do not use. Yoder rightly emphasises that this is an important and ethically significant role in a community.

Well-known investigative journalist John Pilger edited a collection of 'investigative journalism that changed the world'. In his collection, Pilger commends several investigative journalists who have acted as 'agents of linguistic self-consciousness' through illuminating the language of obfuscation used by governmental and corporate powers. Pilger includes Martha Gellhorn's reportage from Dachau, Germany as a commendable performance of truth-telling. She was among the first journalists on the scene in Dachau following Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945. Pilger reflects on his years of correspondence with Gellhorn:

we agonised over the gulf between the morality in ordinary people's lives and the amoral and immoral nature of power: a distinction she believed journalists were duty-bound to understand. 'Never believe governments,' she wrote, 'not any of them, not a word they say; keep an untrusting eye on all they do.'³⁷¹

Investigative reporters like Pilger and Gellhorn have a clear understanding of the journalist's role, in Yoder's words, to 'challenge the concentration of authority in the hands of office-bearers accredited on institutional grounds.'³⁷² Pilger recognises that journalists and news media organisations do steer society with the rudder of language. Pilger admonishes news organisations in Britain, 'from the Murdoch press to the BBC,' and more broadly Western news practices for their failure in acting as agents of linguistic self-consciousness. 'The fate of whole societies is reported according to their usefulness to "us", the term frequently used for Western power, with its narcissism, dissembling

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 33. I have replaced 'He' with [They] as Yoder is discussing the practical moral reasoning involved in the role of 'Agents of the Linguistic Self-Consciousness'.

³⁷¹ John Pilger, *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism That Changed the World* (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2005), 1.

³⁷² Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, 51.

language and public omissions: its good and bad terrorists, worthy and unworthy victims.³⁷³

Speaking truth to power and speaking truth to one another involves the ethical practice of linguistic self-consciousness. Speaking truth requires self-reflexivity on the part of the reporter: Am I coercing the audience in my account? Authenticating truthful speech often involves physical presence. Pilger asked Gellhorn how she was able to report on the war in Vietnam in 1966 in a way which was unlike any other American news coverage. Gellhorn told Pilger: 'All I did was report from the ground up, not the other way round.'³⁷⁴ In Pilger's collection of heroic reportage, the journalists held those in power to account and the journalists were present, on the ground. Pilger works these two ideas into his redefining of investigative journalism: 'I have applied a broader definition than detective work and included journalism that bears witness and investigates ideas.'³⁷⁵ Journalism that 'bears witness' does not at first seem to belong among the journalistic practices which constitute a liberal democratic press. If objectivity has such a vital role to play in the Western concept of the press, what happens when journalists claim that some modes of journalism engage the journalist in a very self-involving way such as in the journalistic claim to be *bearing witness* to the events they report?³⁷⁶

4.1.1 Journalistic Claim of Bearing Witness

The concept of journalists *bearing witness* is a phrase used in academic discussions,³⁷⁷ but it is also a claim made by journalists themselves.³⁷⁸ The question is

³⁷³ Pilger, *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism That Changed the World*, xvii – xviii.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

³⁷⁶ Günter Thomas argues that witnessing is kind of communication reliant on self-involvement. Günter Thomas, "The Search for Public Intimacy: Witnessing under the Conditions of Late Modernity" (paper presented at the International Communication Association, Dresden, Germany, 2006).

³⁷⁷ See the following publications for academic discourse on the concept of journalists as *bearing witness*: Simon Cottle and Mugdha Rai, "Between Display and Deliberation: Analyzing Tv News as Communicative Architecture," *Media Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (2006). Fred Inglis, *People's Witness: The Journalist in Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton, eds., *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

³⁷⁸ For instance, these journalists' claims of 'bearing witness' are used as pull quotes on their book jackets: Kate Adie, *The Kindness of Strangers* (London: Headline, 2000). Fergal Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005).

now, how does the role of bearing witness differ from the traditional roles of the press in a liberal democratic society? I consider this question by focusing on Western news coverage of distant suffering. In many ways the conventional roles of the Western press—scrutiny of the state, representing and informing the public—still exist in the journalistic practice of bearing witness to global suffering. The watchdog function of Western journalism now becomes the *global watchdog* function. The public’s right to know goes beyond national borders; they have the right to know what is happening in far away places. In the Western concept of the press, global news coverage is about the ‘free flow’ of information. This does not necessarily mean two-way dissemination of global news, but basically the unimpeded ability of the Western correspondent to gather news from foreign countries for dissemination to the Western public.³⁷⁹ The current popularity of the claim that journalists *bear witness* has in part to do with advances in technology, in both transportation and telecommunications, that enable journalists to witness extraordinary events.

The central characteristic of the journalistic practice of ‘bearing witness’ is ‘being there’ at an event to provide first-hand, or eyewitness, testimony. Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer in their research on war reporting suggest that it is times of crisis, such as natural disasters, war, and crimes against humanity, that provide the starkest contrast with which to investigate everyday modes of journalistic practice.³⁸⁰ Journalistic negotiation of objectivity and engagement in covering stories is part of the everyday practice of journalism. Here this negotiation will be investigated against the extraordinary and extreme backdrops of war and genocide. In the Western concept of the press, a free press is reliant on the concept of objectivity, but the claim of reporters ‘bearing witness’ calls into question practices of objectivity. Of the genres of journalistic reporting, the role of the foreign correspondent best epitomizes the journalistic claim of ‘bearing witness’.³⁸¹

4.1.2 The Foreign Correspondent

What is a foreign correspondent? They are also known by other names such as foreign news reporter, war correspondent, global crisis reporter, and frontline reporter. Several studies on war reporting emphasise that reporters of war do not want to be

³⁷⁹ Hachten and Scotton, *The World News Prism: Global Information in a Satellite Age*.

³⁸⁰ Allan and Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*.

³⁸¹ Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*.

identified as ‘war reporters’ or ‘war correspondents’ because they also cover other foreign news events such as humanitarian crises as well as the Olympics.³⁸² The foreign correspondent as traditionally understood in Western journalism was a journalist native to the country of the news organization but living long-term in another country, with fluency of language, knowledgeable of the culture and confident in it, and increasingly building a network of contacts as well as continuing the contacts from the previous correspondent.³⁸³ Such a practice of foreign correspondence provides the perfect illustration of the function of witness as ‘being there’ as a long-term witness. Changes in modern journalism, however, alter the kind of witness provided by the foreign correspondent. With both technological changes and decreased attention to foreign news coverage, the picture of the correspondent spending years in a foreign country is fading. More often, news organisations send foreign correspondents from hubs in major cities—London, New York, Tokyo—thanks to quick and easy modern travel, or they ‘parachute’ star journalists into foreign locations when events happen.³⁸⁴

In extensive interviews with journalists, Howard Tumber and Frank Webster found that besides the romantic and exciting lore of the life of the foreign correspondent, journalists were drawn to frontline journalism for the social value of ‘truth seeking’ and for the sense of having a front-row seat to the making of history.³⁸⁵ The moral duty of ‘truth seeking’ as a motivation for frontline journalism elevates the profession to a ‘vocation’.³⁸⁶ Allan and Zelizer write that the journalistic practice of truth-telling rests on the authority of ‘presence, on the moral duty to bear witness by being there.’³⁸⁷

³⁸² Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*. Inglis, *People's Witness: The Journalist in Modern Politics*. Ulf Hannerz, *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁸³ Hannerz, *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*.

³⁸⁴ For a discussion on ‘parachute reporting,’ see Hannerz, *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*, pp. 23-26, and see also: Philip Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Mark Pedelty, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents*, New York (Routledge: 1995). John Maxwell Hamilton and Eric Jenner, "Redefining Foreign Correspondence," *Journalism* 5, no. 3 (2004).

³⁸⁵ Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*.

³⁸⁶ Howard Tumber, "The Fear of Living Dangerously: Journalists Who Report on Conflict," *International Relations* 20 (2006): 445.

³⁸⁷ Allan and Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, 5.

As discussed in the previous chapters, witness is contingent upon presence and proximity both concepts redefined by modern advancements in technology that increasingly allow us the ability to witness live events in multiple places within a short amount of time. Televisual witness allows us intimacy at a distance, a new kind of proximity. Televisual witness brings live pictures to us, and we can see events unfold for ourselves. So, if we can witness for ourselves, given the modern technology that delivers images to our own homes, why do we need the additional mediation of journalists physically present trying to describe the scene? Modern televisual viewers are suspicious and savvy viewers well aware of the manipulation of images. In order to restore the authenticity of the image, the presence of frontline journalists risking their lives in order to capture the image imbues the audio/visual testimony with authenticity. Mortal contingency restores the credibility that widespread image manipulation has corrupted.³⁸⁸ This is the value of the foreign correspondent, physically being there. The televisual witness of the audience is mediated by a machine, audio and video technology, and also by the mediation of the journalist. Frontline journalism provides ‘visual authentication as well as personal testimonies, and thereby positions itself (and us the viewers) as “bearing witness”.’³⁸⁹ Witness, inextricable from the word martyr, still involves the physical significance of *being there*, or of someone being there in the name of the public.

4.2 Proxy Eyes and Ears for the Public

A fundamental reason for frontline reporters being on the scene of wars is to provide the public with eyewitness testimony of war being fought ‘in the name of the public’. In this section, I explore some of the challenges journalists faced when trying to provide the public with truthful and critical accounts of the 2003 Iraq war. In order to be the proxy eyes and ears of the public, journalists put themselves at grave risk to be there on the scene. Bearing witness to war is dangerous because *being there* is dangerous. The year 2007 was the most dangerous in over a decade for journalists’ worldwide. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that sixty-five journalists were killed in direct relation to their work in 2007, the highest death toll since 1994 when sixty-six journalists

³⁸⁸ Arlid Fetveit, "Reality Tv in the Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?" *Media Culture Society* 21, no. 6 (1999). Fetveit identifies the use of mortal contingency, a ‘real’ person in danger, as one of the conventions used to restore authenticity to images in contemporary culture.

³⁸⁹ Cottle and Rai, "Between Display and Deliberation: Analyzing Tv News as Communicative Architecture," 179.

were killed amid conflicts in Algeria, Bosnia, and Rwanda.³⁹⁰ With thirty-two deaths, Iraq was the deadliest location for reporters in 2007 and Iraq has continued to be the deadliest location for journalists since the US-led invasion in 2003. I look at some of the ways in which journalists gain access to the frontlines of war.

4.2.1 Embedded Journalism

The practice of being ‘embedded’ has a long history: ‘from the earliest correspondents in the nineteenth century through to . . . the Second World War and Vietnam’ and most recently with the unprecedented numbers of embedded journalists in the Iraq war.³⁹¹ In 2003 the US Pentagon offered over 700 embedded slots to US and non-US journalists. The Pentagon realised that with the widespread use of real-time communication technology, news organisations would be more difficult to manage than in the past. For instance, the press pools of the first Gulf War under the first George Bush would not be as effective in this war. Thus, they proposed ‘embedding’ journalists with troops. The US Pentagon, in their proposal for implementing the embedded journalist program for the 2003 Iraq war, stated this as their reason:

Our ultimate strategic success in bringing peace and security to this region will come in our long-term commitment to supporting our democratic ideals. We need to tell the factual story—good or bad—before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions.³⁹²

As embeds, news teams would be given access to Iraq and could broadcast within the constraints of the Pentagon’s guidelines. The most prominent guideline cited was censoring material that would compromise the security of the troops. Other guidelines embedded journalists agreed to included that, ‘journalists were forbidden to report who the USA thought were legitimate targets, the methods the troops used to distinguish between legitimate targets and innocent civilians and the ways that soldiers were

³⁹⁰ The Committee to Protect Journalists is a New York-based non-profit and non-governmental organization founded to promote the protection of journalists and independent journalism. They have published the report *Journalists Killed in 2007* on www.cpj.org

³⁹¹ Des Freedman, "Misreporting War Has a Long History," in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (London: Pluto, 2004), 67-8.

³⁹² Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War*, 51-2. Seib is quoting: “Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Command’s Area of Responsibility,” United States Department of Defense, www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/d20030228pag, 1-2.

“engaging with” legitimate targets.’³⁹³ The US Pentagon offered over 700 slots to US and non-US journalists. It was the American taxpayers who paid the bill for the training, outfitting, transporting, sheltering and feeding of the journalists, as Seib says, ‘not the news organizations’. Seib claims that news organisations could determine the market value and reimburse the government and that ‘[f]ailing to do so is the kind of thing that undermines the public’s perception of journalists’ independence.’³⁹⁴

The practice of embeds challenges the claims that a free press is free from government control. Philip Knightley in *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq* chronicles how journalists’ pursuit of reporting the truth is ‘the first casualty’ of war because of governments’ increased management of the media during war time. *The First Casualty* was published in 1975 and Knightley continually updates the work to include recent wars. After reflecting on the 2003 Iraq war, he concludes his latest update with the pessimistic view that journalists in future will either be embedded or face the dangers as a unilateral journalist if they want any real autonomy. He surmises that the age of the war correspondent ‘as hero appears to be over’.³⁹⁵

News organisations recognise that embedded reporting poses a threat to the value of objectivity and the related value of independence. On the other hand, news media organisations also recognised that journalists embedded with Coalition troops would provide an unprecedented view of modern war in action. Journalistic coverage from the position of ‘embed’ produced spectacular and epic images of war as well as close-up footage of Coalition military troops *in-situ*. Embedded journalists were able to produce frontline footage from the relative safety of an armoured tank and were generally safe from ‘friendly-fire’ as well as free from suspicion when crossing Coalition check-points. These are generally not advantages afforded journalists making their way to the frontline

³⁹³ Bob Franklin et al., *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies* (London: Sage, 2007), 73.

³⁹⁴ Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War*, 52.

³⁹⁵ Philip Knightley, *The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London: André Deutsch, 2003), 548. I think new constructions of hero stories may arise. For instance *Time* magazine correspondent Michael Weisskopf, in his book *Blood Brothers: Among the Soldiers of Ward 57*, tells a new version of the hero story. Weisskopf was embedded with US troops when he performed the heroic deed of throwing a live grenade out of the humvee that had been thrown into the US military vehicle while travelling through an Iraqi marketplace. The bomb went off in Weisskopf’s hand. His book chronicles his recovery time in solidarity with the soldiers in Amputee Alley, Ward 57 of Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

of war independent of government assistance. News organisations gained increased numbers of viewers who wanted up-to-the-minute coverage of ‘reality TV’ focused on the everyday life of the troops.

Ultimately embedded journalism leaves us with the question: Can embedded journalism fulfil the watchdog function of Western journalism when *in bed* with the very people meant to be scrutinised? The US Pentagon claimed that the significance of embedded journalists was ‘to tell the factual story—good or bad’, but guidelines restricted journalists from reporting on how the military determined who legitimate targets were. Embedded reporters were not free agents to question the government’s framing of who is targeted as an ‘enemy’, and thus they were limited to reporting on the accepted ‘enemy’. Without the process of deliberation, reporting in such a situation is reduced to the topos of patriotism standing against the ‘enemy’ who is trying to take away ‘our way of life’. Tumber and Webster argue that this is the *information war* that governments and military fight to get the public behind the war effort.³⁹⁶ Their research concluded that embedded journalism in the opening of the war produced stories that promoted patriotism more than stories that encouraged deliberation. Stories of patriotism automatically legitimise the war as a sacrifice to protect ‘our way of life’ circumventing the step of debate on the legitimacy of declaring war in the first place. The practice of journalism in a democratic society involves providing a public forum for deliberation; embedding journalists with the military omits this process.

Journalists reflecting on their experience as ‘embeds’ with the military reported that they felt conflicting loyalties and they commented on the one-dimensional nature of their reports. Detached observation is not easy when sharing lived experience, and is that much more difficult when the experience is in such an extreme, life-or-death situation. Tumber argues that reports quickly become ‘I was there’ stories. David Morrison and Howard Tumber found the ‘I was there’ form of reporting in their research of the British coverage of the Falkland conflict where the access of British journalists was restricted in number and managed by the British military.³⁹⁷ Tumber notes the same ‘I was there’ form in the reports filed by embeds at the start of the Iraq war.³⁹⁸ Frontline correspondent

³⁹⁶ Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*.

³⁹⁷ D.E. Morrison and Howard Tumber, *Journalists at War -- the Dynamics of News Reporting During the Falklands Conflict* (London: Sage, 1988), 95-6.

³⁹⁸ Tumber, "The Fear of Living Dangerously: Journalists Who Report on Conflict."

Allan Little criticised the reporting done by embeds. He argued that the journalist's job is that of scrutiny and the 'hi, mom' reporting done by journalists of their host-soldiers was not scrutinising anything.³⁹⁹

Journalists are reliant on multiple sources and in the case of being an embed, military sources are the only sources available. This resulted in one-dimensional reporting, and contributing further to the myopic dimension was real-time broadcasting. Seib described an embedded reporter's *real-time* coverage of Iraqi soldiers fleeing Basra that gave the impression of widespread spontaneous surrender which turned out not to be the case. Seib concluded that one 'reporter's snapshot of events became transformed into a definitive panoramic view.'⁴⁰⁰ Live stories, while exciting, are often incomplete. Seib's concern is that the trust between the audience and journalist is being further eroded. Journalists can only be the proxy eyes and ears of the public when there is trust.

The normal practice for journalists to gather information from multiple sources is severely limited when embedded with one battalion or even restricted to safe-zones in Baghdad. The journalist is not in a position to observe what the war is doing to the civilians, and as 'our eyes and ears' neither is the public able to witness the distant consequences of the war in which their government is engaged. It was weeks before the embedded journalists had the opportunity to observe and interview the Iraqi people. Again, this is government's management of the press as well as management of public perception of the war 'back home'.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism conducted a content analysis of US television coverage from the first week of the war produced by embeds: 'The reports avoided graphic material; not one of the stories in the study showed pictures of people being hit by weapons fire.'⁴⁰¹ The Cardiff School of Journalism had similar findings of reports filed by British embeds; the coverage was 'full of action, but without the grisly consequences.'⁴⁰² At the start of the Iraq war, the West witnessed war without consequences. Another barrier that journalists faced when trying to gain access to

³⁹⁹ Allan Little, "The Remembrance Sunday Debate" (paper presented at the War, Journalism and History Conference, University of Edinburgh, 11 November 2007).

⁴⁰⁰ Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War*, 61.

⁴⁰¹ As reported in Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 55.

⁴⁰² As reported in Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 56.

ordinary Iraqi people, involved military flights direct to Baghdad. Journalists were essentially positioned on rooftops.

4.2.2 Rooftop Journalism

Those who flew direct to Baghdad were mainly stuck in the Palestine Hotel because of the dangerous situation throughout most of Baghdad. Rooftop journalism was not just a consequence of embedded journalism, it reflects the growing pressure for round-the-clock, real-time news coverage. The correspondents with the 24-hour news organisations were under pressure to produce live footage throughout the day and consequently earned the nickname ‘roof monkey’.⁴⁰³ The news organisations received live pictures of their correspondent standing on the hotel rooftop with bombs blasting in the background. Bill Neely of ITN described the scene:

You have your hotel and up on the top you have your satellite dishes and cameras, and you have your journalist in front of the camera and they’re just there all day long, talking to the camera – ‘And now we can go back to Baghdad live and talk to our correspondent. What’s happening there now?’ And the correspondent will say, ‘Well, what’s happening in Baghdad, is this . . .’ But they haven’t left the roof. They’re just getting their information from other people. . . . You’re just feeding a beast that’s all-consuming, that wants instant information, instant judgements – what happened, how did it happen. It often takes a very long time to work out how something happened. But there you are, on the roof, [and] you’ve got to give answers. You can’t keep saying, ‘Well, frankly, I don’t know,’ otherwise you’d be out of a job.⁴⁰⁴

Neely argues that there has to be a place for the ‘journalism of discovery’ and discovery takes time. He argues that as well as the roof monkey, there needs to be the journalist ‘on the ground ferreting away to get the story.’⁴⁰⁵

In the experiment with ‘embedded journalism’, what resulted was exciting visual coverage without much thick, contextual description about what was being witnessed. Simon Cottle differentiates between the *reporting frame* and the *reportage frame*. The reportage frame includes the ‘aims to provide the means for generating in-depth understanding by going behind the scenes of “thin” news reports and providing “thick”

⁴⁰³ Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*, 92.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

descriptions of reality.⁴⁰⁶ Rooftop reporting is display rich, but very little contextual framing, that is, Cottle's *reporting frame*. Cottle argues that the reportage frame can provide the display of reporting with images as well as the deliberation of contextualizing the account. Yet, as ITN reporter Neely pointed out 'ferreting away' checking sources takes time and does not make for real-time or visually interesting footage. Moreover the 'live exposure portrays the embedded war reporter as a human figure who is as concerned about *being* live as about staying alive.⁴⁰⁷ The excitement of liveness gives authority to the frontline reporter as bearing witness to actual war. In the midst of a conflict, this is true both for a journalist on a hotel rooftop and for another in a US tank. Physical and temporal proximity position the journalist as witness, while live broadcast positions the audience at least as temporal witness. While rooftop journalists were reliant on the display of live images, those journalists who were on the ground and interacted with Iraqi people found themselves embedded in another kind of reliance.

4.2.3 Local Fixers

While the practices of embedding and rooftop journalism can put restraint upon journalists' mediation of news in Iraq another issue that affects their testimony is their reliance on local fixers. Because of dangers and unfamiliarity with the local area, Western journalists use local fixers. Fixers are local residents who can potentially play multiple roles such as driver, interpreter, security guard, tour guide, and someone to read and translate the local newspapers, in addition to working as a freelance journalist for a Western news agency. Local fixers are very important to the foreign correspondent who may cover a vast area, as for example the *Africa* correspondent for a Western news organisation. They are equally important to the parachute journalist who is likely to be unfamiliar with the local culture and language. Using fixers is another mode of the journalist 'being there' to bear witness firsthand even though the testimony is mediated through the fixer. It adds a new dimension to the mediation of bearing witness: the dimension of reliance.

⁴⁰⁶ Cottle and Rai, "Between Display and Deliberation: Analyzing Tv News as Communicative Architecture," 179.

⁴⁰⁷ Johannes Maier, "Being Embedded - the Concept of 'Liveness' in Journalism," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5 (2006): 98.

In Tumber and Webster's interviews with Western journalists covering war, they found that when it came to hiring local fixers, frontline correspondents identified 'reliability and quick-wittedness' as the most sought after attributes in a fixer.⁴⁰⁸ Western correspondents valued the fixer's ability to negotiate and react quickly in intense and potentially dangerous situations. Jerry Palmer and Victoria Fontan conducted interviews with seventeen Western journalists and fourteen local fixers operating in Iraq. They identified the most important attribute of fixers was their access to local contacts, in a context where 'religious, tribal, political and personal affiliations are crucial in the creation of trust.'⁴⁰⁹ The researchers also reported that the Iraqi fixers' predominant frustration with Western journalists was that they asked questions in ways that the fixers found culturally offensive. Iraqi fixers experienced the burden of translating the Western journalists' questions into culturally acceptable forms before posing the questions to Iraqi citizens.

While objectivity is a highly revered aspect of Western journalism, it is not the norm by which Western journalists choose their fixers. The research on fixers conducted by Tumber and Webster as well as by Palmer and Fontan emphasized that word for word translation was not necessary, Western media agencies were not looking for professional interpreters where accuracy was of the highest value. Rather, they wanted someone who could give quick summaries with background information. Journalists provide their local fixer with a brief of what they want for the news piece. The fixer first finds the right person to interview and then translates for the interview. Because of the dangerous situation in Iraq, many fixers went without the foreign correspondent and conducted the interview on their own.⁴¹⁰ Most of the people who reported for Western media sources in Iraq in 2007 are local journalists who now report for the Western media outlets. Western media is very heavily reliant on fixers given that many Western reporters do not speak Arabic let alone the Iraqi dialect of Arabic as well as the dangers faced. Many Iraqi fixers are now essentially proxy reporters for Western news agencies, which puts them in great danger.

⁴⁰⁸Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*, 106.

⁴⁰⁹ Jerry Palmer and Victoria Fontan, "'Our Ears and Our Eyes': Journalists and Fixers in Iraq," *Journalism* 8, no. 1 (2007): 12.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has reported that simply being associated with the practice of journalism can prove deadly for local fixers doing the job of translator, camera-operator, security guard or driver. There are additional risks for the local fixer which the foreign correspondent does not face. The foreign journalists arrive with flak-jackets and other security measures in place, and they can freely leave the area or be evacuated out in the case of an emergency. That is not the case with the local fixer as Bill Neely of ITN reflects:

[T]he people that we work with, who help us, usually have to stay and suffer the consequences – of not just what has happened there but what we have done in publicising this conflict. And those people may sometimes feel emboldened by our presence and working with us, and they may say things to people in authority that they wouldn't have said otherwise. Then, when we leave, they're punished for it in some way.⁴¹¹

The risk faced by the local fixer is magnified by virtue of their being dependent on the location. Fixers' families are at risk; this is a risk not faced by the foreign correspondent, who can leave a family safe in London or New York. Nonetheless, these are risks that fixers take voluntarily: perhaps they want to play a part in getting their local story told to a Western audience. Also of course, there are the financial pressures in a conflict-driven economy, where the fixer can make a substantial salary.

Sometimes Western journalists can help get their local fixers and their families out of conflict areas, but more often the scenario is of the local fixer getting the Western journalist out of danger. The 1984 film *The Killing Fields* illustrates this scenario in the dramatic true story of *New York Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg who is saved by his local fixer in Cambodia, Dith Pran. Captured by the Khmer Rouge, Pran talked their captors out of executing himself and Schanberg, and Jon Swain, another Western journalist. The Khmer Rouge handed them over to be held by the French Embassy and later demanded that all Cambodians and other Asians be turned out of the safety of the embassy which meant into the *killing fields*. Pran was forced to leave the safety of the embassy and his Western employer. In the end, Pran did manage to survive and escape into the countryside, but it was years before Schanberg knew the fate of his Cambodian fixer.

⁴¹¹ Bill Neely quoted in Tumber and Webster's *Journalists Under Fire*, p. 113.

Many fixers believe that the mortal risk involved in working with Western news agencies is worth it. They want justice for their people and their country, and they believe that the light of Western publicity through the mediation of the foreign correspondent can help deliver justice. Caroline Wyatt of the BBC describes the motives for the fixers and interviewees she worked with in Chechnya:

The people who helped us there or who were interviewed by us got into trouble afterwards. But they knew in talking to us how dangerous it was. ... we said to people, 'Are you sure you want to help us? Are you sure you want to be interviewed on camera? ... Are you sure you want your real name put up?' And most of the time they said, "Yes, for sure. I don't care what happens because I want the world to know what's happening."⁴¹²

As with embedded journalism, reliance on local fixers brings up questions of objectivity. The local fixer might be partial toward a political party and therefore purposefully mistranslate or omit material. The research shows that Western journalists do not prioritise objectivity in their choosing of local fixers. The risk for Western journalists is that the fixers will shape their view of the situation by their selection of interviewees and locations. As the local fixer can become a proxy journalist for the West, so the Western journalist can become a propagandist for the local fixer. Palmer and Fontan note that building trust is necessary between foreign correspondents and their local fixers in order for foreign correspondents to believe that they can pursue reporting the truth. The researchers found that the best assurance was found through the building up of networks of local fixers over time who could be vouched for and shared among Western news agencies (as well as poached). As the foreign correspondent is the audiences' eyes and ears in far away places, the local fixers are the eyes and ears leading the otherwise blind and deaf journalist in a foreign land. Being there to bear witness again proves to be risky for the foreign correspondent: there is not just the physical risk, but the risk of trusting strangers.

Journalists necessarily have a specific and limited view from inside a tank or from a hotel rooftop. A news organisation with embedded and unilateral reporters throughout Iraq still cannot provide the viewing audience with the whole picture. If images were sufficient to testify to the whole picture, then satellite images could do the job of supplying eyewitness testimony to news audiences. The US Pentagon could have

⁴¹² Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice*, 115.

mounted cameras on coalition tanks, and altogether avoided the controversial and expensive program of embedding journalists. How is video footage recorded by the hand of a journalist in a tank different from a recording made by the hands of military personnel? The argument against embedded journalism is that a recording from inside a tank by a journalist would not be any different from one made by a soldier. Nevertheless, the normative claim remains that journalists, who are supposedly independent of government control, should be on the frontlines of war to provide the public with an impartial testimony. Normative claims to impartiality and objectivity are further called into question in the discussion of journalists as proxy voices for the voiceless. Before I investigate journalists' second role as proxy, I consider the challenges women journalists face in their role as credible witnesses for the public.

4.3 Can Women be Proxy Witnesses?

Being present provides credibility to the journalist's claim of truthful reporting for the public. But, the fact of being present is not the only link to credibility. Sometimes the credibility of testimony is contested on the basis of sex. Can women be the proxy eyes and ears of the public when the testimony of women is considered suspect? I began this thesis with the focus on bearing witness as understood in the Christian tradition and I return there to consider the concept of credibility and the contested witness of women. The twelve apostles were not the first eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection; nonetheless it was their witness which claimed the eyewitness authority in the early church. Witness is a fragile form of making a truth claim, because the credibility of the claim is inextricable from the perceived credibility of the witness. Such is the case with the first eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection. The Synoptic gospels and John all agree that Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness, but they do it reluctantly according to New Testament Scholar, Claudia Setzer. She argues that the gospel writers could not violate the fixed tradition that Mary Magdalene was the first witness, so the gospel writers' narrate the story in a way that diminishes the significance of Mary Magdalene being the *first* eyewitness.

Setzer cites the example of the Gospel of John as offering a 'confused choreography' to diminish the witness of Mary Magdalene:

Mary Magdalene is the first to discover the empty tomb (20:1-2) and the first to meet the risen Jesus (20:14-18), but sandwiched between these incidents is the scene where Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to the

tomb and the Beloved Disciple is the first to arrive and the first to *believe* in the risen Jesus.⁴¹³

Setzer argues that while John's choreography 'retains the tradition of Mary Magdalene as the first to discover the empty tomb ... it also gives the Beloved Disciple pride of place as the first person ... to actually believe that Jesus has risen.'⁴¹⁴ Setzer works through each gospel account of the discovery of the empty tomb.⁴¹⁵ Like the gospels' tradition of muting the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other women, Setzer finds the tendency of muted female witness 'continued in later documents like *Epistula Apostolorum* and certain church fathers.'⁴¹⁶ And, further, some who contested the very idea of Jesus Christ's resurrection contested it on the grounds of Mary Magdalene's witness, 'as Celsus's Jew does in the second century, "But who saw this? A hysterical female."⁴¹⁷

Lucy Winkett, like Setzer, claims that Mary Magdalene's testimony continues to be suspect, and therefore muted, in contemporary Christian thought. Winkett argues that 'Mary of Magdala has been for centuries conflated with other Gospel characters.'⁴¹⁸ These stories have contributed to the composite figure of Mary Magdalene: the woman who anoints Jesus Christ's head' with expensive oil (Mark 14. 3-9); the woman who washes Jesus Christ's feet with her tears and hair (Luke 7.36-50); and most often, the Samaritan woman at the well whom Jesus tells that she is not living with her husband and has five other husbands.⁴¹⁹ Witness bearers, like Mary Magdalene, have little control over how their testimony will be received. Contested witness or contested testimony is part of the fragility of bearing witness as a method of making truth claims. Mary Magdalene's testimony was discredited based on her sex even though she met the requirements to be an apostle of Jesus Christ: she was an eyewitness to his life, death, and resurrection. While much of the privileged status of witness is contingent on 'being there' as an

⁴¹³ Claudia Setzer, "Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 2 (1997): 262.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ In Matthew (28:1) and Luke (24:2) Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb and is told by an angel of the Lord that she will see the risen Christ in Galilee. In John (20:14) and in the second ending of Mark (16:9), Mary Magdalene not only sees the empty tomb but she is reported to have been the first person Jesus appeared to after the resurrection.

⁴¹⁶ Setzer, "Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection," 264.

⁴¹⁷ Setzer cited, *Against Celsus* 2.55.

⁴¹⁸ Lucy Winkett, "Go Tell! Thinking About Mary Magdalene," *Feminist Theology* 10, no. 29 (2002): 21.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

eyewitness, in this case being a woman cancelled out the authority that she had gained from being there, live-on-the-scene. To what extent has this been the experience of women frontline correspondents?

The common gender bias that women journalists face in reporting on the frontlines of conflict and disaster zones is that women should focus on ‘women’s issues’ which does not include serious issues such as international politics, war and genocide. While women reporting on war has a long history, Martha Gellhorn being a very prominent case in point, nonetheless, women war reporters ‘disrupt still-lingering stereotypes of women’s conventional roles in journalism and the wider society.’⁴²⁰ I explore two ideas with regard to the contested or challenged testimony of women war reporters. First I consider the issue of ‘women as spectacles’, and second I consider the accusation of the ‘feminisation of news’.

4.3.1 Women Journalists as Spectacles

The authority that journalists gain from being there, on the scene, is undermined by the fact that once they appear on the screen they themselves become a spectacle. Earlier I discussed how visual spectacle characterised journalistic reportage at the start of the 2003 Iraq war. We saw spectacular images of journalists trying to stay alive in coalition tanks or on the rooftop of the Palestine Hotel. The focus was not so much on uncovering and scrutinising information, so much as directing the audience’s gaze to journalists’ bodies in mortal danger, and this was all the more the case when the bodies were female. Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, scholars in the fields of media and journalism, explore the concept of ‘women as spectacles’ in journalism. They begin theorising from Jürgen Habermas’ critique of the refeudalization of the public sphere. In chapter two I discussed this critique, which describes a mass mediated public sphere controlled by a concentration of media ownership, which produces a sphere for show and spectacle, rather than a sphere for public deliberation. Chambers, Steiner and Fleming are concerned with the way women journalists ‘find that they are not only deliverers but also objects of news.’⁴²¹ Steiner claims that women’s reportage ‘is most controversial in sports and war,’ and it is no coincidence that both are

⁴²⁰ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 198.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

‘arenas in which physicality and bodies are very much at issue.’⁴²² This was true with regard to news coverage at the start of the Iraq war when women war reporters themselves were the object of news reports.

BBC foreign correspondent Hilary Andersson wrote that the ‘Iraq war was a good war for women war reporters.’⁴²³ She was among five BBC reporters, three women and two men, at the British Divisional Headquarters in southern Iraq. It seemed to Andersson that women frontline war reporters were in ‘vogue’ and the focus was on attire, hair, personal histories, and occasionally ability.⁴²⁴ Some reportage had a *meta* quality, there were stories about women reporting on war: ‘Sky’s Emma Hurd spent one evening in the crucial run-up to the fall of Basra answering on-air questions, not about the advancing British troops, but about what on earth women were doing reporting wars anyway.’⁴²⁵ Women became newsworthy spectacles because of the oddity of women *being there* in the first place. Andersson called this the ‘wow factor’ for news media agencies. Since the ‘wow factor’ does not give gender parity in frontline war reporting, Andersson worries about when the novelty of women war reporters is no longer novel.⁴²⁶ Will the number of women reporters decline?

Women reporters’ credibility as the public’s eyes and ears on the scene is diminished when focus is shifted from the scene and onto the bodies of women. The focus on the body as spectacle detracts from the deliberative function of the press. Again, this is in part the case with the spectacular images that men and women embeds and rooftop journalists produced in Iraq, but here is the added dimension of the exploitation of sexuality. Steiner cites an example from 2002 of CNN reporter Paula Zahn. CNN ran an advertisement campaign asking, ‘Where can you find a morning news anchor who’s provocative, super-smart, oh yeah, and just a little bit sexy?’⁴²⁷ Steiner acknowledges that the sexual exploitation is not without the complicity of women reporters: ‘Much of the

⁴²² Linda Steiner, "The 'Gender Matters' Debate in Journalism: Lessons from the Front," in *Journalism: Critical Issues*, ed. Stuart Allan (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 43.

⁴²³ Hilary Andersson, "Iraq: Frontline Women -- the Wow Factor," *British Journalism Review* 14, no. 20-24 (2003): 20.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*: 21.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*: 22.

⁴²⁷ Steiner, "The 'Gender Matters' Debate in Journalism: Lessons from the Front," 50-51.

pandering is done by women. It is women newscasters who smile flirtatiously, ask personal questions, hug rapists, and show cleavage. Women are manipulated to attract male and female audiences.’⁴²⁸ Throughout this thesis, I have emphasised how physical presence is a means to authenticating truth claims, but the exploitation of human bodies diminishes the authority of presence. Steiner and Andersson share the concern that female presence on the scene of wars may be reduced to the ‘wow factor’, a gimmick to attract viewers. Mary Magdalene’s testimony was contested because she was a woman and her testimony was further diminished by conflating her with women of ill-repute in the gospel stories. The credibility of Mary Magdalene’s physical presence is discredited because of sexual exploitation of her body. Paula Zahn’s credibility as a journalist is discredited by the sexual exploitation of making her female body a spectacle for broadcast news.

4.3.2 The Feminisation of Journalism

Another instance of contesting journalistic testimony that is connected to women involves the criticism of the ‘journalism of attachment’. Later in sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3, I explore the journalism of attachment in more detail, but here I want to highlight the connection of the journalism of attachment to the gender debate in investigative journalism. The journalism of attachment is a style of journalism that calls into question journalistic impartiality. It is a style of reportage which emphasises the ‘human face of war’. One way critics attack the credibility of women and men sympathetic to the kind of stories produced by the journalism of attachment, is to characterise the reportage as resulting from the ‘feminisation of journalism’.

Journalism scholar Greg McLaughlin connects ‘journalism of attachment’ to the increased number of women war reporters.⁴²⁹ He made a direct correlation between the increase of women reporters and the increase of reportage on civilian experience and

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁴²⁹ Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 162-3. McLaughlin connects the ‘journalism of attachment’ with the ‘New Journalism’ the 1960s led by ‘journalists-cum-novelists such as Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson’. McLaughlin argues that New Journalism eschews objectivity and uses subjectivity to express the writer’s moral vision of the world. ‘It is journalism as art, the writer’s moral vision and personal perspective always to the fore. The techniques of factual journalism (the use of the passive voice, the chronicling of events, the use of interviews) are blended with those of fiction (the authorial point of view or first person narrative, the use of style and imagination).’

other personal stories. Researchers Canny Kennard and Sheila T. Murphy found that there were qualitative differences in the reports filed by women and men journalists during the war in Bosnia. They found that women filed more ‘coverage of victim-based stories’, ‘soldiers’ profiles, ‘human rights stories’, and that women reporters more often brought attention to the systematic rapes of Muslim women in Bosnia than men reporters did.⁴³⁰ Linda Steiner offers a critical reading of the statistical evidence of women reporters filing more human interest stories than men. She investigated feminist scholarship of war reportage on Vietnam and Bosnia and found that there was little ‘evidence that men and women “essentially” acted differently as reporters or editors.’⁴³¹ Steiner reasons that in the competitive news business, women may have pandered to get assignments by claiming to ‘provide a women’s angle.’⁴³² ‘To the extent that women adopted a human-interest approach ... may reflect what editors assigned women to do or how men edited women’s stories. It reflects what women promised to do to get a job and connived to do when sexist male/military sources denied them access.’⁴³³

Rather than the connection between the ‘human face of war’ and the presence of women on the frontlines, some researchers have reasoned that a trend toward investigative journalism as *bearing witness* has resulted in more reportage on the human face of war. Howard Tumber, Philip Seib and John Pilger connect the idea of investigative journalism as *bearing witness* with the conversation about the journalism of attachment. Tumber, along with researchers Marina Prentoulis and Frank Webster, explored the connection between the increase in women war reporters and the increase in human interest stories from the frontlines. They concluded that the correlation should not be reduced to gender differences. They explain:

The shift towards human interest stories, encapsulated in the phrase ‘the feminisation of news,’ may be paradigmatic of a broader cultural shift, consonant with moves towards a ‘journalism of attachment.’ The latter, favoring more ‘human’ stories of civilian victims and some degree of emotional involvement, may be allowing women reporters more space for approaching war stories in their own way and, at the same time, allowing

⁴³⁰ Canny Kennard and Sheila T. Murphy, "Characteristics of War Coverage by Female Correspondents," in *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Philip Seib (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 137.

⁴³¹ Steiner, "The 'Gender Matters' Debate in Journalism: Lessons from the Front," 46.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 48.

male correspondents to respond to the intensity of the war, without the 'macho' bravado often associated with the war correspondent.⁴³⁴

I have found Prentoulis, Tumber, and Webster's conclusion to be consistent with my research findings. In the next chapter, I consider the way two men and one woman reported 'human' stories from the frontlines of war and genocide. In their memoirs, the three journalists are very forthright about their emotional involvement with the stories they reported. I agree that the human face of war is not a feminisation of war reporting, but a cultural shift toward 'bearing witness'. Gendering what kind of stories female or male journalists should tell, limits both women and men. Central to the concept of bearing witness is the claim that the person who is there on the scene, is the person who has the credibility to tell the story. It is true that women reporters may have more ready access to 'be there' in a room with Bosnian Muslim women who testify to their experience of rape, but this does not mean that men reporters are incapable or exempt from bearing witness for the Bosnian women.

The root gender bias in the accusation of the 'feminisation of journalism' is the false dichotomy that women more naturally report on subjective, emotional experiences while men tend to report on objective, factual stories. The gender bias involves one more step; objective stories are more credible than subjective stories. By this account, when journalists, women or men, file stories in which they testify to some sort of emotional involvement, their testimony may be contested as corrupted testimony. Pilger avoids the false dichotomy of female journalism versus male journalism by broadening the definition of investigative journalism to include 'journalism that bears witness and investigates'. He begins his account of 'investigative journalism that changed the world' with Martha Gellhorn whose famous reportage is collected under the title, *The Face of War*.⁴³⁵ Instead of arguing that Gellhorn feminised war reporting, I agree with the arguments that reportage like Gellhorn's opens up journalistic space for women and men to provide truthful accounts from zones of conflict. In this next section, I explore the idea of the journalist giving voice to the voiceless as the second proxy role of the journalist who bears witness.

⁴³⁴ Marina Prentoulis, Howard Tumber, and Frank Webster, "Finding Space: Women Reporters at War," *Feminist Media Studies* 5, no. 3 (2005): 377.

⁴³⁵ Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, Rev ed. (London: Granata, 1993).

4.4 Proxy Voice for the Voiceless

The second group of people for whom journalists bear witness is those people at the scene who have suffered but do not have the means to testify before a wider audience. The journalist is the proxy voice for the voiceless, hoping to assist in righting the injustice or perhaps providing some relief from the suffering. Here, I particularly focus on the difficulties encountered by Western journalists bearing witness to crimes against humanity. There is a sense in which all reporters are engaged witnesses, as opposed to impartial witnesses, even when they are just reporting the facts. When it comes to reporting on crimes against humanity some journalists admit to being motivated by a human rights agenda. BBC correspondent Fergal Keane is one of these journalists. His practice of journalism is motivated by the 'concept of international justice' and the belief that, 'the weak need protecting; the powerful need to be challenged.'⁴³⁶ This kind of journalism challenges the strongly held principle of reporter impartiality. Journalistic impartiality is strongly linked to the idea that in order to maintain objectivity, journalists must be detached from the subject of their reporting. I considered this concept in section 4.2.1 questioning the impartiality of journalists embedded with coalition troops. Bearing witness to genocide poses new sets of questions to consider with regard to journalistic impartiality. In this final section, I focus on four controversial issues concerning journalists' role as proxy for the victim: testifying in court, the advent of the journalism of attachment and its critics, and lastly, 'do something journalism'.

4.4.1 Testifying at International Criminal Tribunals

When, if ever, should journalists testify at international criminal tribunals? There is a range of views from those who believe that journalists should be granted the privilege of being able to disregard court subpoenas, to those who argue that journalists who witness crimes have a duty to testify. There is a noticeable American and British divide running along the continuum regarding testifying. This may partly be due to the US's more rigid tradition of the 'objectivity norm' and the specific appeal to 'shield laws' that protect reporters from revealing sources.⁴³⁷ Jonathan Randal of *The Washington Post* is a well-known case of a journalist who received a subpoena for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ITCFY) and refused to testify. Randal was part of

⁴³⁶ Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 365.

⁴³⁷ Schudson, "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism."

an appeal by over thirty international journalism organisations to the international court to create the privilege of a journalist's right to refuse to testify. Their aim was to establish that journalists first be seen as 'independent observers rather than potential witnesses.'⁴³⁸

In response the Tribunal Appeals Chamber outlined a two-part test:

First, the petitioning party must demonstrate that the evidence sought is of direct and important value in determining a core issue in the case. Second, it must demonstrate that the evidence sought cannot be reasonably obtained elsewhere.⁴³⁹

By contrast to Randal, Lindsey Hilsum, freelance reporter for the BBC, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, was issued a subpoena and testified at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Hilsum was one of the few Western correspondents in Rwanda when the Rwandan President was assassinated. She believed it was her obligation to testify at the ICTR about the 'general situation' of Rwanda, but Hilsum felt she could not testify against any one 'individual to whom I have had privileged access.'⁴⁴⁰ Hilsum argues that the opposition against journalists becoming legal witnesses is mostly an American criticism:

They [Americans] say that if we act as witnesses in such tribunals, we lay ourselves open to charges of bias, cross the line between being observers and participants in a story, and endanger ourselves and fellow reporters trying to cover war crimes and other human rights abuses.⁴⁴¹

Hilsum was also critical of the British newspaper journalist Ed Vulliamy, who not only testified against a specific Serbian individual but also attempted to cover the proceedings of the ICTFY for *The Guardian* before and after he took the stand. For Hilsum, this action was 'a blurring of the line between the journalist as observer and as participant in the story.'⁴⁴² In spite of this criticism Hilsum admits that she became a *participant* in covering the Rwandan genocide because she thought it was 'the right thing to do.'

⁴³⁸ Robert L. Spellman, "Journalist or Witness? Reporters and War Crimes Tribunals," *Gazette: The International Journal For Communication Studies* 67, no. 2 (2005): 133.

⁴³⁹ *International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Trial Chamber, Prosecutor v. Radoslav Brdjanin*, Decision on Motion of Johanthan Randal to Set Aside Confidential Subpoena to Give Evidence, 7 June 2002. As quoted in Spellman, "Journalist or Witness? Reporters and War Crimes Tribunals," 134.

⁴⁴⁰ Lindsey Hilsum, "Crossing the Line to Commitment," *British Journalism Review* 8, no. 1 (1997): 32-33.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 29.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*: 33.

The normal rules of journalistic ethics are overwhelmed by murder on this scale. I was aware of crossing the line and becoming a participant rather than an observer, but I felt it was a moral duty to use my unique position to influence the historical record in the court. By accident of history, I happened to be there.⁴⁴³

Ed Vulliamy, of *The Guardian*, testified at the ICTFY twice and even inadvertently revealed a source. Nevertheless, Vulliamy was concerned with what kind of history is left on the records:

I decided this was a chance for some kind of reckoning for the only people I really cared about—the victims. I threw aside any pretence of neutrality and went to The Hague. I gave the prosecution in the Tadic case all my notebooks and I told them everything I knew.⁴⁴⁴

The duties that accompany the journalistic practice of foreign correspondents being there, Vulliamy argues, may include abandoning ‘neutrality’ and ‘to reckon with what we witness and to urge others to do the same.’⁴⁴⁵

4.4.2 The Journalism of Attachment

As can be seen from the proceeding discussions, journalists who reported on the genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in the early 1990s began asking related questions about the roles of objectivity and impartiality in reporting on crimes against humanity: How can we be *detached* about covering mass atrocities against civilians? How can we be *dispassionate* when we are walking among the rotting corpses of slaughtered innocent populations? How can we not become engaged? How far does being a witness to human atrocity carry with it an obligation to those who suffer?

The BBC reporter Martin Bell coined the phrase ‘the journalism of attachment’, which he defined as ‘a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor.’⁴⁴⁶ His experience reporting on Bosnia was essentially as an *embed* with the civilians of Sarajevo when it was under siege. Like embedded reporters,

⁴⁴³ Ibid.: 30.

⁴⁴⁴ Ed Vulliamy, "Neutrality', and the Absence of Reckoning: A Journalist's Account," *Journal of International Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1999): 605.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.: 612.

⁴⁴⁶ Martin Bell, "The Journalism of Attachment," in *Media Ethics*, ed. Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 1998), 19.

Bell was in physical solidarity with those on whom he reported, in this case the civilians of Sarajevo. This and related experiences in the Balkans led him to suggest that in ‘our anxiety not to offend and upset people, we were not only sanitizing war but even *prettifying* it’.⁴⁴⁷ In this context he argues that journalists must avoid ‘shading the truth’, highlight the fact that ‘war is a bad taste business’ and therefore not be afraid to show the bloody reality of the effects of war.⁴⁴⁸

Reporters advocating a ‘journalism of attachment’ argue that in the coverage of ethnic cleansing or genocide, treating both sides as holding a reasonable position would be to ‘equate aggressor and victim.’⁴⁴⁹ The CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, developed this point further:

I have come to believe that objectivity means giving all sides a fair hearing, but not treating all sides equally. Once you treat all sides the same in a case such as Bosnia, you are drawing a moral equivalence between victim and aggressor. And from here it is a short step to being neutral. And from here it’s an even shorter step to becoming an accessory to all manners of evil.⁴⁵⁰

The logic here is rooted in her personal experience of covering the Bosnian conflict in the early 1990s. Both Amanpour and Bell acknowledge that for journalists, while there is no possibility of bearing witness neutrally from above, the validity of their singular and limited view from the ground was susceptible to manipulation.

4.4.3 Criticisms of the Journalism of Attachment

Some critics describe the journalism of attachment as ‘advocacy journalism’, suggesting it is flawed in several ways. Two lines of criticism are particularly noteworthy. First, attachment to the civilians of one side may be at the expense of other civilian populations. This may result in overlooking atrocities committed by the side to which the journalist is ‘attached’. Second, advocacy journalism is not as independent from government as it claims. Philip Hammond believed that the ‘journalism of attachment’ was just as susceptible to becoming a tool of propaganda during war as impartial and detached journalism.

⁴⁴⁷ Martin Bell, *In Harm's Way* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995).

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-220.

⁴⁴⁹ Vulliamy, "Neutrality', and the Absence of Reckoning: A Journalist's Account," 611.

⁴⁵⁰ As quoted in Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*, 53.

Instead of truthful reporting, the agenda of advocacy journalism has sometimes made reporters highly selective, leading them to ignore inconvenient information... And despite claims to be pursuing a moral, human rights agenda, the journalism of attachment has led to the celebration of violence against those perceived as undeserving victims.⁴⁵¹

Hammond cites as examples the bombing of Serbian civilians during the Bosnian war and the emptying of the refugee camps sending the Hutus back into Rwanda where they would likely become victims of revenge attacks by Tutsis. One reason why journalism of attachment is susceptible to such faults is because of what Hammond calls a simplistic reportage framing of 'good versus evil morality.'⁴⁵² As for Hammond's second criticism, questioning the actual independence of advocacy journalism, he found that advocacy journalism has frequently coincided with the perspectives and policies of powerful Western governments.

The debate between the journalism of attachment and the journalism of detachment is commonly framed in a polarized fashion, with advocates and opponents coming down forcefully on either side of the discussion. Nevertheless, journalists do move *from* observer *to* witness, from a level of detachment to engagement, whenever they embark on covering a story about violence or suffering. Even if they do not recognize it, they do make a moral judgment when they decide to show certain images and not others, when they select one local eyewitness, when they put themselves in a vulnerable position to cover a story or when they decide to testify at a war crimes tribunal.

4.4.4 Do Something Journalism

Related to the conversation of 'advocacy journalism' and the 'journalism of attachment', many journalists covering extreme stories of conflict and suffering feel that they must galvanise their public to do something. Journalists might feel this tension as the result of their double role of proxy. In their role of proxy witness for the public, journalists might have expectations that the public, once aware, should 'do something'. Yet, a journalist's success at bearing witness should not be measured by whether or not

⁴⁵¹ Philip Hammond, "Moral Combat: Advocacy Journalists and the New Humanitarianism," in *Rethinking Human Rights: Critical Approaches to International Politics*, ed. David Chandler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 180.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 178.

the public act. This is an important claim, for as I concluded in the last chapter the potential for audience agency to act like the Good Samaritan is limited. After many successful years as a war correspondent, Martha Gellhorn came to understand that the success of her reporting was not premised on galvanising the public to do something. Gellhorn began her career believing that her job was to motivate the public to do something; she came to disavow this reasoning and she asserts that the role of the journalist is to bear accurate witness as an end in itself.⁴⁵³ It is worth quoting her at length to understand the evolution of her motivation for reporting on conflicts and suffering over a sixty-year span:

When I was young I believed in the perfectibility of man, and in progress, and thought of journalism as a guiding light. If people were told the truth, if dishonour and injustice were clearly shown to them, they would at once demand the saving action, punishment of wrong-doers, and care for the innocent. How people were to accomplish these reforms, I did not know. That was their job. A journalist's job was to bring news, to be eyes for their conscience. I think I must have imagined public opinion as a solid force, something like a tornado, always ready to blow on the side of the angels.⁴⁵⁴

Gellhorn's initial reasoning is similar to the role of the news media in the narrative of Global Compassion. For instance, Philip Seib argues that the 'news media must serve as the persistent conscience of the newest world order' of moral interventionism, and further that the journalist's most important role is 'to be the witness who arouses conscience'.⁴⁵⁵ In contrast to Seib as well as her earlier position, Gellhorn questions arousing consciences as the telos of journalism. Note Gellhorn's change from the journalist as the public's conscience to the maintenance of trust between journalist and public:

Now I have different ideas. I must always, before, have expected results. There was an obtainable end, called victory or defeat. One could hope for victory, despair over defeat. At this stage in my life I think that I think this is nonsense. Journalism is a means; and I now think that the act of keeping the record straight is valuable in itself. Serious, careful, honest journalism

⁴⁵³ I became aware of Gellhorn's perspective through BBC foreign correspondent Allan Little when he referenced Gellhorn in describing how his source of motivation moved from rousing the public toward a motivation of documenting what happened as a 'form of honorable behavior between writer and reader.' Little, "The Remembrance Sunday Debate".

⁴⁵⁴ Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, 373. Gellhorn included the introductions to the 1959 first edition and the subsequent editions in the appendix of the 1993 edition. The quotes are from the 1959 introduction.

⁴⁵⁵ Seib, *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*, 121.

is essential, not because it is a guiding light but because it is a form of honourable behaviour, involving the reporter and the reader.⁴⁵⁶

Keeping the record straight is important for the journalist's relationship with the public, but it is also important for the journalist's role of proxy for the victims. While foreign correspondents may begin with objective and impartial coverage that represents the interests of their public, the ideas in this chapter suggest that the relationship between the journalist and the victims of suffering become a powerful motivation for 'keeping the record straight.' In the end, an accurate record will better serve public deliberation. While the journalist is the public's proxy eyes and ears on the ground, she may also be the *only* voice on the ground capable of achieving publicity at a global level.

Repeatedly journalists claimed that frontline correspondents are recording history, they have 'a sense of making history.'⁴⁵⁷ As Gellhorn reflected, the value of journalism is 'the act of keeping the record straight' as a form of honourable behaviour. With reference to Gellhorn's insights, Allan Little responded:

You want to be true to the people. You don't want to let them down. ... How can I do justice to these people? I must get it right. ... that is why I was there on the ground.⁴⁵⁸

Through 'getting it right' and 'keeping the record straight', journalists empower both the public and the people on the ground. Media Studies scholar Jean Seaton claims that the victim is less of a victim when he or she takes on the role of a witness. Journalists can give agency to victims by bearing witness on their behalf, becoming witnesses for the witnesses. When a victim is given the opportunity to narrate the events, the victim is able to 'exercise some control and to regain some kind of authority in the most harrowing of circumstances'.⁴⁵⁹ The victim is thus able to become 'an active shaper of the story of what happened and less merely a victim.'⁴⁶⁰ A journalist who provides a public platform for a victim to testify has *done something*. It may not result in a judgment from an international court, but giving voice to the voiceless is a 'form of honourable behaviour' and can be an end in itself.

⁴⁵⁶ Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, 375.

⁴⁵⁷ Tumber, "The Fear of Living Dangerously: Journalists Who Report on Conflict," 445.

⁴⁵⁸ Little, "The Remembrance Sunday Debate".

⁴⁵⁹ Seaton, *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of News About Violence*, xxiii.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The nascent journalist may think that his reportage will cause direct action, but the veteran journalists cited throughout this chapter emphasise that good journalism is not measured by direct results. John Howard Yoder's discussion on the moral agency involved in bearing witness sheds light on the practical moral reasoning behind journalists' claim to bearing witness. Yoder fought against the charge that bearing witness is a passive, ineffective and irresponsible form of social ethics. Yoder argued that simply by being there, 'intractably present on the social scene',⁴⁶¹ to provide truthful and faithful accounts is an end in itself. This is an insight which contributes further to the discussion of the ethical claim of journalism that bears witness. Effective journalism should not be measured simply by action: getting it right through honourable behaviour is also efficacious.

Conclusion

The journalistic claim that bearing witness involves acting as proxy for the public and proxy for the victim is not without controversy. Some of the wariness generated by the term *proxy* is inherent in the risk and fragility in being represented by others and in representing others. There are many risks in acting as a proxy. In the Western understanding of journalism, journalists practice their trade with constant radar scanning for press manipulation. War reporters fear becoming a tool of the state or a tool of their local fixers. In the case of embeds, they need to be wary of the risk of 'going native' and joining the camaraderie of the troops. Journalists reporting on genocide are wary of the staging of atrocities where they might essentially become a proxy for one faction. Yet many journalists understand their trade as a vocation, a calling worthy of their lives despite the risks, and even despite the action, or inaction that results from their reportage.

I return to my initial question: Do reporters make *Good Samaritans*? Like the Samaritan, the journalist most often arrives at the scene after the violence has occurred, but in time to be present for the suffering. Yet the attention the Samaritan gave the Jewish man in the parable is not commensurate with the attention a journalist can give. In a documentary on war photography James Nachtwey explains that whenever he shows pictures of starving people he is inevitably asked if he stopped to give them food. He replied that most journalism coverage of mass starvation is done at refugee feeding

⁴⁶¹ Yoder, *For the Nations, Essays Public and Evangelical*, 187.

centres where the starving people are beginning to receive nourishment.⁴⁶² The Samaritan cannot be a very exact analogy with the journalist. The man in the ditch in the story was just one man. The mass atrocities and calamities that journalists cover are *mass*.

The journalist can shine the light of publicity on the situation. Sometimes the publicity will result in some kind of civic or governmental relief and aid, but sometimes success simply means that the reporter accurately records an event. The journalist can report that a Jewish man was violently accosted by robbers on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. The journalist can report that the Jewish people have been suffering under socio-economic pressures exerted by Herod's government. The journalist can still further report that criminal activity, such as roadside muggings, has risen with the increase of the urban-poor in the southern part of the kingdom. The journalist can give possible explanations for why other Jewish people, such as the priest and the Levite, have failed to assist the man in the ditch. The journalist can broadcast this story with accompanying images to millions of viewers. However, the journalist cannot assist the man from the ditch and help bear him to hospice care as the actual story will most likely involve not one man in the ditch, but hundreds and thousands. There are occasions in journalists' careers where they have personally assisted, in Samaritan-fashion, a person in distress.

Journalists alone do not make *Good Samaritans*. As discussed in the last two chapters, journalists are among several players in the story of global compassion. Foreign correspondents extend the boundaries of our neighbourhoods, our reach of moral obligation, by introducing new neighbours into our communities. The role of the Western foreign correspondent understood within a human rights community, extends the traditional role of the watchdog function of a Western press to include the function of the West as global watchdogs. Thus the news value of the genocide in Rwanda is understood within Western communities as an event that demands attention by a community that has promised that 'never again' should genocide go unnoticed, and 'never again' will it turn a blind eye. The onus is not on the journalist alone. The obligation is on the community.

In the final chapter, I consider the experience of three journalists involved in bearing witness to distant suffering. By considering their accounts of being in particular places—Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia and Rwanda—we can see how being there in extreme

⁴⁶² Christian Frei, "War Photographer," (2001).

situations can lead to engagement in the stories reported in a way that everyday journalism does not.

Chapter 5: The Lived Experience of Bearing Witness

In this final chapter I consider the lived experience of three journalists who bear witness to war and genocide. Award-winning journalists John Simpson, Ásne Seierstad, and Fergal Keane write about what it was like to report on extreme and extraordinary events. Through their reflections, we can begin to understand the challenges foreign correspondents face when *bearing witness*. In the narrative of global compassion the journalist might be the first link in the intermediary chain of humanitarian action. The community of the Global Samaritan, at its most robust, may be able to effect change at the political level, and may be able to deliver humanitarian aid for relief, recovery and even sustainable projects. The majority of stories that frontline correspondents file do not ignite a robust response. Nonetheless, many journalists feel that their presence, being there in person, somehow made the situation different.

In this chapter, I investigate the experience of Simpson (5.1), Seierstad (5.2), and Keane (5.3) practicing journalism in the midst of war and genocide. In these three sections I give attention to the voice of each journalist as they provide a thick description of the perilous experience of bearing witness to extraordinary events. In the final section (5.4), I offer an analysis of journalists bearing witness in the light of John Howard Yoder's work on witness as social ethics. This chapter is followed by the conclusion of the thesis in which I return to the full figure of the Global Samaritan, journalists and audiences alike, to consider the efficacy of bearing witness to distant suffering.

Reflections on Bearing Witness to War and Genocide

In order to investigate the lived experience of journalists bearing witness to extraordinary times, I use the journalists' memoirs. Using memoirs is not an unprecedented way to investigate moral responses or motivations of journalists. It is a methodology used by Journalist Studies researcher Howard Tumber to look at how journalists 'operate in the field' and to examine journalists' experiences and motives.⁴⁶³ Moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that in order to discern a person's compassion, 'we need only look at the perceptions and thoughts expressed in what he writes (assuming that he is sincere). When we do this, we see in his opinion all the

⁴⁶³ Tumber, "The Fear of Living Dangerously: Journalists Who Report on Conflict," 439.

materials of compassion.⁴⁶⁴ While Nussbaum was making particular reference to discerning a judge's compassion through his or her written opinion on a case, I believe that a journalist's memoir on his or her reporting of a significant event is comparable to a judge writing an opinion on a case. Both are acts of explaining and working out why the writer acted and thought in the manner that they acted and thought, *both* were written for the public record. Further, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that to understand moral reasoning, it is 'always at the level of practice a sufficient answer to the question: "Why did you do that?"'⁴⁶⁵ In their memoirs, Simpson, Seierstad, and Keane reflect on why they performed their journalistic practice in the manner that they did. Their memoirs provide a contextualised and reflective retelling of the practical moral reasoning involved in their practice of investigative journalism.

5.1 John Simpson

To understand the risks of being there to report from a war zone, I consider the experience of the BBC's World Affairs Editor, John Simpson, when covering the beginning of the 2003 Iraq war. Simpson believed that his presence in Iraq as a unilateral journalist rather than an embedded journalist would somehow render things different for the people of Iraq and the public of the BBC audience. His lived experience highlights many of the concepts I discussed in the last chapter such as the dangers faced by frontline journalists, media assistants and their fixers, and the challenge of maintaining journalistic independence from the military. Simpson recorded his experience of his second Gulf War in *The Wars against Saddam: Taking the Hard Road to Baghdad*.⁴⁶⁶ In the first Gulf War, Simpson was frustrated by the US Pentagon's press management.⁴⁶⁷ For Simpson, embedded journalism had the same ring to it as press pools.⁴⁶⁸ Simpson had two central concerns after his press pool experience from the first Gulf War. First, the press pool system limited journalist access to only the information the military willingly supplied.

⁴⁶⁴ Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," 55.

⁴⁶⁵ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 112.

⁴⁶⁶ John Simpson, *The Wars against Saddam: Taking the Hard Road to Baghdad* (London: Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁶⁷ Simpson wrote the following book on his experiences from the first Gulf War: John Simpson, *From the House of War: John Simpson in the Gulf* (London: Arrow, 1991).

⁴⁶⁸ For further examples of embedded journalism in Iraq see Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, editors, *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq – An Oral History* (Guildford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2003).

Simpson's second concern had to do with the limited contact with the civilian population of Iraq. Simpson did not want to work under similar constraints when covering his second Gulf War. He declined an embedded slot with coalition forces attacking Baghdad from the South. He chose instead to independently travel through Kurdish northern Iraq to reach Baghdad. Simpson and his BBC crew left from Turkey and travelled through Kirkuk, Mosul and Tikrit before arriving in Baghdad. Simpson reasoned that retreating Iraqi soldiers and 'shoot now, think later' American soldiers at check points would be his news team's greatest dangers. Simpson's criticism of US troops comes across very clearly in his memoir on his second Gulf War. His thoughts on American soldiers are that they are not careful and that they are poorly trained in discernment.

If you are a scared, indifferently trained, heavily armed nineteen-year-old from Mobile or San Bernardino, any vehicle which drives up to your position is a likely threat. And if your officers have told you that the preservation of your own life comes before any other consideration, then you are quite likely to shoot someone, just in case.⁴⁶⁹

Unilateral news teams were more at risk than news teams embedded with coalition troops. Simpson and his news team consisted of cameramen, security adviser, producer and local fixers. Simpson's wife, Dee, is usually his producer and travels with him, but not this time into Iraq for which he was 'profoundly glad'. On the morning of 6 April, Simpson discussed with Kamaran Abdurrazak Mohammed, his Kurdish translator, the risks of working with a non-embedded BBC crew, like 'the lack of a flak-jacket', and asked Kamaran if his family knew the risky work he was doing. Kamaran answered, 'No, they think I stay in the hotel and translate the newspapers. It is easier that way.'⁴⁷⁰ Later that day Simpson and his crew followed Kurdish and American Special Forces in route to Dibarjan. The troops sighted a couple of Iraqi tanks in the distance, stopped and called for American air strikes to take out the tanks. Simpson shouted, 'Flak-jacket time'. The BBC crew stopped at a crossroads behind the military troops and prepared cameras to record the two incoming US Navy F-14s.

By chance, there was a wrecked Iraqi tank lying right beside the crossroads; it must have been attacked and destroyed earlier in the day. It's

⁴⁶⁹ Simpson, *The Wars against Saddam: Taking the Hard Road to Baghdad*, 290.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

not impossible that the presence of this tank, when an attack was being requested on another tank nearby, caused the disaster that followed.⁴⁷¹

An American missile landed about twenty yards away from the crossroads where the vehicles had pulled to the side, among them Simpson and his crew.

Fourteen pieces of shrapnel hit me altogether, and I was knocked to the ground. Most were pretty small, like the ones that hit me in the face and head, but two the size of bullets were big enough to have killed me. One lodged in my left hip, the other stuck in the plastic plate of my flak-jacket right over the spine.⁴⁷²

With head, legs and arms bleeding and a left eardrum ‘completely blown away’, Simpson gathered himself and his colleagues near him and they started the process of broadcasting. Simpson soon discovered that Kamaran had been severely wounded. In route to hospital, Kamaran died of his wounds inflicted by American ‘friendly fire’. All of Simpson’s crew had been wounded to varying degrees, aside from Kamaran’s mortal wounds, Simpson’s wounds were the most severe and with long lasting effect: ‘the shrapnel in my hip will probably remain slightly painful for the rest of my life.’⁴⁷³ Upon returning to the UK, medical specialists advised that it was best not to remove the shrapnel, as his body will grow around the metal and it will become a part of him. Simpson named the shrapnel ‘George W. Bush’. In his book, Simpson emphasises that Kamaran’s mortal injury, a severed artery in his leg caused by shrapnel, could not have been prevented by a flak-jacket. What is evident in Simpson’s book on the Iraq wars is that journalists are at great risk from the friendly-fire. In the first four weeks of the 2003 Iraq war, sixteen journalists died, seven ‘were killed by American bombs, bullets and missiles.’⁴⁷⁴

By choosing not to accept the free US Pentagon flight directly into Baghdad or to accompany coalition ground troops as an embedded journalist, Simpson incurred additional risks to himself and his news team. Simpson’s criticism of embedded journalism is similar to the criticism I discussed in the last chapter (4.2.1). Simpson

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 329.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 330-1.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 335.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 349.

claims that while there is a heavy price to pay as a unilateral, there is also a price to pay for embedded reporting:

[I]t became quite difficult for all but the hardest-nosed reporters to be absolutely honest about the soldiers who fed them, transported them, gave them the power they needed for their equipment, and (when necessary) saved their lives from the enemy. That mere word, 'enemy', shows how a mind-set was created, ... If you are with one side in a war, your fortunes and those of the soldiers you are with are pretty tightly intertwined; deep down, you are praying that they won't fail.⁴⁷⁵

Large media organisations, such as the BBC, were in the position to send teams of correspondents and their crews both as 'embeds' as well as operating as independents. Simpson and his BBC crew chose to be unilateral:

We didn't want to be beholden to the very people whose actions we were obliged to report on impartially. Nor did we think that it was right that the only reporting on this war should come from the embedded correspondents or else from those based in Baghdad.⁴⁷⁶

Simpson, in his effort to hear more voices from the Iraqi people, found he was more reliant on the local people.

Personally, much as I appreciated the remarkable possibilities which 'embedded' correspondents would have for reporting from the front line, I could not myself think of joining their number. Maybe I was wrong; if I had, I would not have led my friend and translator Kamaran Abdurrazak Mohammed to his death, nor suffered mild but lasting injuries myself. But you are what you are, and if I had to make the decision again I would do exactly the same thing.⁴⁷⁷

Simpson's criticism of the first Gulf War most likely led to his decision to cover the second Gulf War as a unilateral. In a report Simpson filed from Baghdad at the end of the first Gulf War he said, 'As for the human casualties, tens of thousands of them, or the brutal effect the war had on millions of others ...we didn't see so much of that.'⁴⁷⁸ Both Gulf Wars lacked detailed coverage of the suffering of the Iraqi people. At the start of both Gulf Wars, Western audiences largely witnessed war without consequences. Simpson was determined to make public the voice of 'ordinary' Iraqis.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 350.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 351.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 287.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

Like Simpson, the next journalist I consider did not want to be under government restraint, in this case the restraint of the Iraqi government. Also like Simpson, she took great personal risks in order to find ways to circumvent government's management of the press. In her case, government management came through the Iraqi government.

5.2 Åsne Seierstad

Norwegian journalist, Åsne Seierstad, essentially became a rooftop journalist during the beginning of the Iraq war. Her work as a whole is not characterised by rooftop journalism, a kind of journalism where the reporter rarely speaks to citizens dwelling in the city because the journalist does not leave the five-star hotel. Nonetheless, in Iraq, like many other journalists in the Palestine Hotel located across the Tigris from Saddam Hussein's Presidential Palace in central Baghdad, Seierstad became a rooftop journalist on 19 March 2003, the start of the 'shock and awe' US-led coalition bombing. In Iraq as well as in other places, Seierstad characterises her journalism as being driven by friendship with ordinary people in extraordinary times. Seierstad is insistent on being there on the ground with the people. In the last chapter, I cited Martha Gellhorn's belief that the job of investigative journalism is to 'report from the ground up, not the other way round.'⁴⁷⁹ Seierstad's style of journalism is similar, 'I want to talk to people, find out how they live.'⁴⁸⁰ Like a personal mantra, she repeats this phrase throughout her reflective books about reporting from Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya. Before I focus on Seierstad's experience in Baghdad, I briefly consider her motivation to 'find out how they live' during wars in Serbia and in Afghanistan.

Seierstad claims that her motivation for writing *With Their Backs to the World: Portraits from Serbia* was a corrective to the criticism that coverage of the spring 1999 war in Kosovo lacked a Serbian perspective. Seierstad had been a part of that single-sided Kosovo coverage in her reportage for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK. She offers this book as a corrective, a chance for Serbs to tell their story. During the winter and spring of 2000, Seierstad lived in Belgrade and interviewed thirteen individuals from Serbia and one family of Serbian refugees who fled from Kosovo. She left Serbia in the summer and the book was published by September. One of her

⁴⁷⁹ Pilger, *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism That Changed the World*, 1.

⁴⁸⁰ Åsne Seierstad, *A Hundred and One Days: Fear and Friendship in the Heart of a War Zone*, trans. Ingrid Christophersen (Cambridge, Mass.: Basic Books, 2006), 21.

interviewees, Snezana, thanked Seierstad for writing about Serbia when Serbia was ‘world enemy number one’.⁴⁸¹ Seierstad updated the stories for two subsequent publications. The second edition was published in 2001 following the arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, and the third edition was published in 2004 as a follow-up to life three years after the end of the Milosevic era. In *Portraits from Serbia*, Seierstad wanted to hear the voice of the everyday people in Serbia. She spent time just hanging out with the people she chose to interview, going to a baptism or making sausages, and allowed these people to freely speak and be heard. She explains her motivation for the 2004 edition, ‘I had turned my attention to other wars in other hemispheres, leaving Serbia to stumble and drop out of sight and mind. ... I once again sought out my old friends to learn what they’d been through.’⁴⁸²

This style Seierstad experimented with in Serbia, befriending and often living with her interviewees and then publishing the stories, became a format that she repeated in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya. I primarily focus my attention on how she heard the voices on the ground in Iraq throughout this section, but the motif is evident in her other writing. In the foreword to *The Bookseller of Kabul*, she writes that after six weeks accompanying and reporting on the Northern Alliance for Scandinavian media organisations, ‘weeks of gunpowder and gravel, where the conversations concerned military tactics and advances’, she enjoyed conversations with a bookseller in Kabul.⁴⁸³ She wanted to talk with the ‘real’ people of Afghanistan. At the end of this section, I will return to Seierstad’s *The Bookseller of Kabul* in connection with the issue of contested testimony. For now, it is important to realise that when she left for Baghdad in January 2003, *The Bookseller of Kabul* had only been available in Norwegian since September 2002 and was not yet available in an English translation. While Seierstad was in Baghdad she had not yet achieved the international acclaim and criticism that has come with the publication of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

⁴⁸¹ Åsne Seierstad, *With Their Backs to the World: Portraits from Serbia*, trans. Sindre Kartvedt (New York: Basic Books, 2005). The third update of the book was first published in Norwegian in 2004 and then in English in 2005.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸³ This quotation is from the Norwegian foreword of *The Bookseller of Kabul* which differs from the foreword in the English translation. Knut Christian Myhre translated the Norwegian foreword into English for the purpose of his article. Knut Christian Myhre, "The Bookseller of Kabul and the Anthropologists of Norway," *Anthropology Today* 20, no. 3 (2003): 19.

I began this section claiming that Seierstad was a rooftop journalist in Baghdad. In the last chapter (4.2.2), I discussed how parachute journalism is closely associated with rooftop journalism. News media agencies ‘parachute’ their star reporters into the thick of things to provide spectacular coverage. In January 2003, Seierstad was not considered a star reporter and she was not a regular employee of any news media agency. She primarily works as a freelance foreign correspondent. In my discussion on John Simpson, I emphasised how risky Simpson’s decision was to enter Iraq as a unilateral reporter, that is, not as an embed of the coalition troops, but he was accompanied by a BBC production crew and the crew was supported by the institution of the BBC. As a freelance journalist, Seierstad was on her own. She did not have the backing of a news organisation to obtain a visa for her entry into Iraq. She managed to obtain a visa through connections with a friend working with Norwegian Church Aid in Iraq.⁴⁸⁴ She had to supply her own safety equipment like a gasmask and bulletproof jacket. Seierstad reflected on her lack of preparedness compared to other foreign correspondents:

I am probably the only journalist in Baghdad who has not attended a survival course. There they learnt how to don a gasmask and slip on safety clothing in a flash, how to measure the air’s gas content, how to fall down during a possible attack, how to evaluate dangerous situations. Most editors would not send their journalists into crisis zones without such a course, but no one has sent me; I sent myself.⁴⁸⁵

In *A Hundred and One Days: Fear and Friendship in the Heart of a War Zone*, Seierstad reflects on the challenges of actually hearing the real voices of the Iraqi people. Broadly, the two main challenges were circumventing Iraqi government censorship and trying to stay alive while reporting from the center of a bombing campaign. Seierstad filed reports from Baghdad between January 2003 and April 2003, with an intervening two weeks in February spent in Syria where she eventually obtained a visa renewal.

Seierstad experienced both official censorship and self-censorship. She primarily experienced official censorship through the watchfulness of her Iraqi government-assigned ‘minder’. As we saw with Simpson’s experience, given the language and cultural differences in Iraq most Western journalists were reliant on local fixers. In Baghdad in order to receive a press visa, Seierstad was assigned an official fixer or

⁴⁸⁴ Seierstad, *A Hundred and One Days: Fear and Friendship in the Heart of a War Zone*, 13.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

minder. Takhlef was Seierstad's official minder, interpreter and monitor from the Baath Party. She found him at odds with her purposes: 'I am here to find dissidents, a secret uprising, gagged intellectuals, rights violations, expose oppression.'⁴⁸⁶ Instead, Takhlef identified interviewees from Baath Party representative families, and he escorted Seierstad only to official sites 'approved by the Ministry of Information.'⁴⁸⁷ Seierstad managed to get a new minder, Aliya. While Aliya was not a member of the Baath Party, she was still not willing to go outside of the government's regulations. 'It is her job to report on where we have been, with whom we have spoken and what we have spoken about.'⁴⁸⁸ Seierstad found that when her minders were briefly away, Iraqi citizens would speak soft enigmatic statements in English: 'They don't say what they really mean. No one can say what they really think.'⁴⁸⁹ And, 'But you cannot read my thoughts. ... We want freedom.'⁴⁹⁰

Under the restrictions of the government, Seierstad found it difficult to get the kinds of stories she wanted to tell. Her editor in Norway wanted a long feature article for the weekend. Seierstad reflected on the tensions of trying to report from such a restricted zone. 'It's hard to work. It's hard to find stories. As the limits are so strict, good ideas, ideas that could be carried through, are few and far between.'⁴⁹¹ The tension came from both Iraqi government restrictions and from self-censoring in order to retain her visa. She eventually submitted a story about what life was like under sanctions for those who thrive in a black market economy and for those who barely manage to scrape by like the woman who was forced to sell her UN soap ration. Seierstad's story of ordinary Iraqis is not unlike the stories she filed of ordinary Serbians.

In *A Hundred and One Days*, Seierstad is free to describe the details of interviewing an Iraqi who was critical of the Baath Party, but when she originally filed the story she censored many of the important details for the protection of her source. She interviewed Father Albert a priest at St. Joseph, a Chaldean Catholic church in Baghdad.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 91.

Seierstad had slipped away from her minder and was able to interview the priest in French. The priest spoke critically of Saddam Hussein. Seierstad asked Father Albert ‘repeatedly whether I really might write down what he has said, which he confirms.’⁴⁹² She included most of what Father Albert said in the article she filed that afternoon, but she took precautions.

I call the priest something else and do not mention Tariq Aziz by name [the Deputy Prime Minister who is Chaldean Christian and a friend of the priest]. I describe him as ‘one of Saddam Hussein’s closest collaborators’. That the wife of the Deputy Prime Minister is busy preparing a hideaway for the aftermath of the war could be dangerous if it were known.⁴⁹³

Even after the bombing began, the Iraqi government still censored the foreign press. Journalists were banned from having satellite telephones in their rooms. If journalists were found with satellite phones, the phones were confiscated and the journalist’s visa revoked. Seierstad found a way around this censorship. She kept her satellite phone and continued to give live reports to the ever-growing number of news agencies paying for her freelance coverage from Baghdad. Seierstad circumvented the Iraqi guards by appealing to their sense of modesty toward women:

When talking on the phone I turn the shower on full, undress and wind a towel around me. If anyone knocks on the door I call out: Who is it? If it is the guards I pour some water over myself, open the door a crack and ask them to wait while I get dressed. That gives me time to hide the satellite telephone and the antenna.⁴⁹⁴

During the bombing, Seierstad found another opportunity to circumvent official Baath Party minders. She simply spoke Norwegian. Minders’ linguistic training did not include Norwegian. Minders stood next to all foreign journalists to prohibit ‘words such as “dictator”, “tyrant” or “brutal” to characterise Saddam Hussein, or to pinpoint targets that have been hit. [Journalists] can be no more specific than “a large building, close by”.’⁴⁹⁵ While bearing witness to the voice of the people in Iraq was a challenge, Seierstad found ways to gather stories and to get those stories to a wider audience.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 175.

The second main challenge Seierstad faced in Baghdad was physical danger. As a freelancer, she was able to take more risks. Many foreign news agencies forced evacuation of their news teams from Baghdad. The editors who Seierstad did freelance work for could not force her to leave. Weeks before the bombing began, Seierstad's visa expired and she was sent out of the country. While waiting at the Iraqi Embassy in Amman, Jordan Seierstad met an exodus of foreign journalists. Journalists from 'leading British and American newspapers' told her, 'You should go [home] too'.⁴⁹⁶ Her editor in Norway, her mother, father, sister and brother all wrote to ask her to leave. Her visa was renewed and Seierstad decided to return to Baghdad.

Most of the foreign journalists still in Baghdad stayed at the Palestine Hotel. At the Palestine, Seierstad received advice from the more veteran journalists. She gathered supplies for her room and taped her windows to prevent glass from shattering after a bomb blast. Her equipment for filing stories consisted of little more than her satellite phone and laptop computer. Compare this with the Channel Four's equipment: computers, several satellite telephones, editing equipment, generators, and three satellite telephones which they hid throughout the Palestine Hotel to avoid confiscation of all of them at once.⁴⁹⁷

As I discussed in the last chapter (4.2.2), rooftop journalism from the Palestine Hotel was characterised by the spectacle of live coverage where the 'war reporter as a human figure ... is as concerned about *being* live as about staying alive.'⁴⁹⁸ Seierstad experienced this first hand. At 5:30 a.m. on 19 March the shock and awe bombing campaign began. She reflects that all the journalists piled out onto their balconies to transmit live feed to their home studios. 'From the balconies above I hear a Babelesque confusion of voices – Spanish, Arabic, English, French.'⁴⁹⁹ Seierstad called NRK, the Norwegian public service channel. She reflects that all she could do was focus 'on the horizon and describe what I see.'⁵⁰⁰ She had no other information apart from the fact that the bombing startled her from her bed and what she could see out her window. Seierstad

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁹⁸ Maier, "Being Embedded - the Concept of 'Liveness' in Journalism," 98.

⁴⁹⁹ Seierstad, *A Hundred and One Days: Fear and Friendship in the Heart of a War Zone*, 162.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 163.

is self-reflective about those opening days; her reporting was more about the spectacle out of her window than in-depth analysis. The NRK radio host asked her if she knew if ‘Saddam Hussein might have been killed’. In her memoir she writes: ‘How the hell would I know? I think. But choose to say: So far we have no information as to whether the Iraqi president has been hit in the attack.’⁵⁰¹ A few nights later, again from her room, she reports on the coalition bombing of the Presidential Palace. She called it perfect timing for the live *News Night* broadcast in Norway. The palace was in flames and there were continual explosions. She writes:

I report what I see. The bangs are audible in the studio via the telephone receiver. Some of them cause the enormous concrete hotel to shake and the windows to vibrate. A crash, I speak, another crash, I continue to speak, and then we say goodbye to Åsne Seierstad in Baghdad. The studio hangs up.⁵⁰²

Seierstad became a valuable freelance news source for many news agencies as so many reporters were made to evacuate. Over the first three weeks of bombing her workload increased: ‘I report for Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Dutch TV, as well as several radio stations. Occasionally, I work for BBC World and CBC in Canada,’⁵⁰³ Her employers began booking ten minute slots, at the cost of ‘thousands of pounds’, for her to use the ‘live point’ set up by news agencies like Reuters and AP, where they provide cameras and satellite connections.⁵⁰⁴ Once the coalition forces arrived in Iraq, Seierstad found that she could venture into the city and that people would speak more freely since they no longer feared Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party. In her final month in Baghdad she reported on the new freedom to criticize the Hussein era, she reported on the death and devastation resulting from the bombing campaign, and she reported on the latent tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

Seierstad became a valuable witness in Baghdad because so many other witnesses for the foreign press were forced to leave. Her credibility, in part, came from her ‘live’ presence. In this thesis, I have argued that presence contributes to the authority and credibility found in bearing witness. In her books on Serbia and Baghdad, Seierstad

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 163-4.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 170.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 200-1.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 200.

intertwines reports from the field with the narrative of how she went about gathering the stories in the first place. In both books, there is a clear sense that she is the narrator, and when she writes of thoughts and impressions they are her thoughts and impressions. When she does report the thoughts and feelings of other people, her report is clearly based on interviewing these people. She cites them as the sources that provided her with the information. In her books on Serbia and Belgrade, Seierstad's presence, actually being there on-the-scene, is central to the narrative. Yet, controversy follows Seierstad's testimony. Her testimony is contested based on her internationally best-seller, non-fiction novel *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

Seierstad is criticised for removing her presence from the narrative; she literally wrote herself out of the story. While Seierstad is an investigative journalist, we need to ask: Is *The Bookseller of Kabul* investigative journalism? Seierstad arrived as a journalist in Afghanistan in September 2001. As I noted earlier, after months of frontline reporting on military tactics she wanted to have conversations with the 'real' people of Afghanistan. The centre of the controversy regarding *The Bookseller of Kabul* is her decision to write a book in the hybrid style of literary form and investigative journalism.

The controversy began when Mohammed Shah Rais read an English translation of *The Bookseller of Kabul* and received many requests for interviews from international journalists. In the book, Seierstad gives Rais the alias of Sultan Khan, but there was little anonymity for the Rais family, one of only a few bookstore owners in Kabul. Had Seierstad known that her first novel would become Norway's top selling nonfiction book in history and translated into twenty-six languages, she may have taken more precaution in what she wrote about Rais and his family. Seierstad writes of gender relations in Afghanistan. She claims in the foreword that one of her reasons to write on the Rais family was in order to reveal the experience of the silent women. Rais had invited Seierstad to his home for dinner, she wrote of her first impression:

Sultan recounted stories; the sons laughed and joked. The atmosphere was unrestrained, ... But I soon noticed that the women said little. Sultan's beautiful teenage wife sat quietly by the door with a baby in her arms. His first wife was not present that evening. The other women answered questions put to them and accepted praise about the meal but never initiated any conversation. When I left I said to myself: 'This is

Afghanistan. How interesting it would be to write a book on this family.⁵⁰⁵

Rais went to Norway and threatened Seierstad and her publishers with a defamation and libel lawsuit. He was particularly ‘incensed by her suggestions that his daughters had premarital sexual relations—an allegation which, if it became known, would jeopardize their marriages and threaten their lives.’⁵⁰⁶ According to anthropologist Knut Christian Myhre, many of Norway’s anthropologists became interested in the debate. He writes that their concerns focused on ‘social and political repercussions texts may have when they “make it back” to the context of study,’ as Seierstad’s book did make its way back to Kabul.⁵⁰⁷ This is a concern that many investigative journalists consider: How do I protect my sources? What Myhre found lacking in much of the public debate was a critique based on post-colonial concerns.

No one raised the question of whether Seierstad’s representation of ‘the Afghans’ as a totalitarian-minded people hell-bent on subjugating women provided a rationalization for Norwegian participation in a Western neo-colonial project in the Middle East.⁵⁰⁸

Myhre questioned Seierstad’s project because she began with the intention of telling the ‘real’ story of the oppressed lives of women in Afghanistan. Others defended Seierstad’s position as a journalist’s right and a mission to reveal injustices. For example, book reviewer Carol Bere acknowledges the suspect journalistic methods in *The Bookseller of Kabul*, but argues that revealing the abuse of women trumps the other concerns:

Whether fiction, nonfiction, or so-called immersion journalism, provocative works like *The Bookseller of Kabul* add to the growing body of literature that explores the situation of Afghan women from historical, social, and cultural perspectives. Women’s rights to freedom, to personal choices—whether in work or in marriage—and to education in a country where the literacy rates for women are marginal, are certainly the subtext, indeed the implicit argument of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ Åsne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, trans. Ingrid Christophersen (New York: Time Warner Book Group, 2003), x.

⁵⁰⁶ Myhre, "The Bookseller of Kabul and the Anthropologists of Norway," 20.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: 21.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ Carol Bere, "Domestic Tyranny," *The Women's Review of Books* 21, no. 6 (2004): 17.

In her role as the proxy voice for the voiceless, Seierstad has an amplified voice largely through the celebrity she has achieved with *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Yet, following the controversy her testimony is at times considered suspect. In 2008 Christina Lamb, a reporter for the *Sunday Times* of London, asked Seierstad about her controversial journalistic practices, 'she replied evasively that she had never expected the book to do so well.'⁵¹⁰ In Lamb's review of Seierstad's latest book on Chechnya, *The Angel of Grozny: Orphans of a Forgotten War*, Lamb found herself suspicious 'about the line between reportage and imagination' in Seierstad's writing.⁵¹¹ In the books following *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Seierstad's presence is firmly established. In her reports from Baghdad, Seierstad is careful to identify when her minder provides translation or when she interviews people on their own. As we saw in her interview with Father Albert, the Chaldean Catholic priest, Seierstad noted the language they spoke, that the translator was not there, and she described how she filed the story in order to protect the safety of several people.

Both Simpson and Seierstad have faced the perilous dangers involved in bearing witness to war in Iraq. Through their stories we can begin to understand the mortal danger journalists face as well as the danger the local minders and sources face. Journalistic testimony authenticated through presence is tied to the theological understanding of witness. As I discussed in chapter one under the title 'The Fragility of Witness' (1.3.2.2), the New Testament Greek word for witness is *martur*. Because bearing witness involves the physical risk of being there, the phrase 'bearing witness' remains inextricably linked to martyrdom. Yet, the fragility of witness experienced in frontline journalism is not only the physical risk, there is also emotional risk involved in bearing witness to atrocities. War correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote in 1954 near the end of his life, '*I've been immersed in it too long. My spirit is wobbly and my mind is confused. The hurt has become too great.*'⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Christina Lamb, "Shadows of a Forgotten Land; Books. (Features)," *Sunday Times*, 9 March 2008, 45.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² This remark by Ernie Pyle is cited in a pamphlet for journalists on how to deal with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Joe Hight and Frank Smyth, "Tragedies and Journalists: A Guide for More Effective Coverage," (Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, University of Washington, 2003), 7.

Anthony Feinstein, a psychiatrist who focuses on post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), conducted in-depth interviews with over one hundred war journalists and over one hundred journalists who did not report on war, he concluded:

War journalists have significantly more psychiatric difficulties than journalists who do not report on war. In particular, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD is similar to rates reported for combat veterans, while the rate of major depression exceeds that of the general population.⁵¹³

Given the many risks of getting the story wrong and getting hurt in the process, why do they do it? The third journalist on whom I focus allows us to explore the idea of bearing witness to crimes against humanity and the difficult decisions that journalists face when bearing witness to genocide.

5.3 Fergal Keane

In this section, I consider the work of another well-known BBC correspondent, Fergal Keane, in order to reflect upon the difficulties inherent in bearing witness to crimes against humanity. This is by no means a new practice. It is hard not to be haunted by Richard Dimbleby's 1945 radio report of what he saw at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, or John Pilger's photographic record of the Khmer Rouge's killing camps in Cambodia in 1979, or John Sweeney's exposing of the massacre by Bosnian Serbs of Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995. Keane's award-winning reports in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide stand within this tradition of journalists who have borne witness to genocidal crimes against humanity.⁵¹⁴

In the last chapter, I discussed some of the challenges encountered by Western journalists who report on genocide and who choose to testify in international criminal tribunals. I suggested that all reporters are engaged as active witnesses even when they are just reporting the facts. I cited Keane as an admittedly engaged frontline reporter in some of the stories he covers. As I previously noted, Keane himself writes that his practice of investigative journalism is motivated by a human rights agenda, the 'concept of international justice' and the belief that, 'the weak need protecting; the powerful need

⁵¹³ Anthony Feinstein, *Dangerous Lives: War and the Men and Women Who Report It* (Markham, Ontario: Thomas Allen and Son, 2003), 199.

⁵¹⁴ For more on international and local coverage of the genocide see: Jolyon Mitchell "Remembering the Rwandan Genocide: Reconsidering the role of Local and Global Media", *Global Media Journal* Autumn 2007. (At: <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/index.htm>)

to be challenged.⁵¹⁵ Through Keane's lived experience of reporting on the Rwandan genocide, we can see how some stories challenge the strongly held principle of reporter impartiality.

Keane claimed that if he was to bear witness, what else could he do but record what he has seen. He wrote, 'This is especially true of Africa, where a journalism of passion and involvement is essential. We must not report countries like Rwanda as if they were demented theme parks, peopled by savages doomed to slaughter each other in perpetuity.'⁵¹⁶ Keane saw much reporting on Africa reduced down to an explanation of the 'old bogey of tribalism' and ignoring the 'fact that [Rwanda] was an act of systematically planned mass murder, a final solution of monstrous proportions'.⁵¹⁷ He reflected that his reporting would probably do little, but he was convinced that he must testify to what he saw:

To witness genocide is to feel not only the chill of your own mortality, but the degradation of all humanity. I am not worried if this sounds like a sermon. I do not care if there are those who dismiss it as emotional and simplistic. It is the fruit of witness. Our trade may be full of imperfections and ambiguities but if we ignore evil we become the authors of a guilty silence.⁵¹⁸

These are Keane's reflections from October 1995 just after filming for *Panorama* a story on the Rwandan genocide, eight years before he testified at the criminal tribunal. While the decision of journalists to testify at criminal tribunals is controversial, we can see that Keane was already committed to testifying, journalistically or otherwise, to the fact that what happened in Rwanda was 'an act of systematically planned mass murder'.

Keane, as the BBC Africa Correspondent, was covering South Africa's first multi-racial elections when his editors sent him to investigate the stories of atrocities in Rwanda following the assassination of President Habyarimana on 6th April 1994. Before then Keane was covering the turbulent run up to Mandela's election as South Africa's

⁵¹⁵ Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 365. The title of Keane's memoir, *All of these People*, is after a poem by Michael Longley. Keane felt Ulster writer Longley was, "one of the most sensitive chroniclers of the pain caused by the Troubles. It is his tribute to those who have inspired him; I carry a little photocopy of this poem wherever I travel in the world. *All of these people,/ alive or dead,/ are civilized.*" (xv)

⁵¹⁶ Fergal Keane, *Letter to Daniel: Despatches from the Heart* (London: BBC Books, Penguin Books, 1996), 160.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

first post-apartheid president. He had seen suffering, but what he witnessed in Rwanda had a profound impact upon him. Keane saw *limits* in the wars he had covered before Rwanda; he felt the atrocities committed in Rwanda had no limits. He did not feel journalistically prepared for what was required of him in order to cover such a story. In the following discussion I consider not his memorable reports for BBC News and *Panorama*,⁵¹⁹ but his controversial decision to testify at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Keane's decision raises ethical questions about the responsibility of a journalist to bear witness to what he or she has seen in a legal context. Keane's own story provides two contrasting cases of what journalistic testimony might involve. In one case Keane testified in favour of the accused and in the other against the accused.⁵²⁰

In the first case, Keane was first a witness for the defence. Keane and his BBC television news team produced a story about the Hutu Mayor of Butare, Sylvain Nsabimana. The Mayor organized a convoy to remove Tutsi orphans out of Butare and to safety in Burundi.⁵²¹ When Nsabimana was arrested by the ICTR and charged with genocide, Nsabimana's lawyer asked Keane to testify on behalf of the man being charged with crimes against humanity. Keane had since read of the atrocities Nsabimana was accused of committing; nonetheless, Keane chose to testify in the war crimes court as to the good act he witnessed. Keane's testimony at the ICTR testified to the veracity of the story he filed. He explains his position thus:

We could only report what we saw him doing. ... I had seen Nsabimana do something that was ostensibly good. But I now knew about the circumstances in which he had taken power and I had read human rights reports which alleged he was an active participant in the slaughter of local

⁵¹⁹ For more from Keane see PBS's website *Ghosts of Rwanda*, and his interview (19 March 2004) on his experience covering this story and his further reflections after the tenth anniversary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ghosts/interviews/keane.html> (accessed 21 April, 2009).

⁵²⁰ In the following two accounts of how Keane came to testify at the ICTR, I consider Keane's memoir in which he discusses how he came to be a witness for the ICTR. Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*. Keane wrote an earlier book on Rwanda giving a historical account of what led up to the Rwanda genocide: Fergal Keane, *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey* (London: Penguin, 1996).

⁵²¹ While the mass violence followed within days after the 6 April assassination of the President in most of Rwanda, it was 'slow' to reach Mayor Nsabimana's town because the head of the district was a Tutsi, Jean-Baptiste Habyarimana (no relation to the President). Angered by the 'inaction' in the Butare district, 'Interim Government President Sindikubwabo ... came down and gave an inflammatory speech, asking the people if they were 'sleeping' and urging them to violent deeds.' On the 20th April, the district head was replaced by an extremist, 'and the killing started immediately.' Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 244.

Tutsis. Because I believe in the principles of international justice, and because the right to a fair defense should be an integral part of that system, I said I was willing to appear.⁵²²

In the second case, Keane was a witness for the prosecution. It is illuminating to place this brief first account alongside Keane's decision to testify at the ICTR in the case against a second Hutu mayor, Sylvestre Gacumbitsi. Gacumbitsi was Mayor of Nyarubuye a town near the Tanzanian border. For Keane Gacumbitsi 'would become a key figure in my Rwandan story, someone who would follow me past the borders of place and time, a sinister presence which frightened and angered me, and which I would one day have to return and confront.'⁵²³ In the chain of command, there may have been others more senior than Mayor Gacumbitsi who instigated the systematic killing of the Tutsi population, but according to Keane for the victims of his district, it was the arrest and conviction of their mayor that approximated anything near justice.

Keane put together the story of what happened in Nyarubuye based on his interviews with many eyewitnesses. Mayor Gacumbitsi instructed the Tutsi people of his district to stay where they were and they would be safe. Days later he instructed them to gather at the local, Nyarubuye Catholic Church and school compound for a safe refuge. On 15 April, Gacumbitsi ordered 'as many as 7,000 men', the local military and police officers as well as the Hutu men from the district, to attack the church. Many of them 'covered their faces with banana leaves, hiding their faces from their neighbours they were about to attack.'⁵²⁴

[Gacumbitsi] gave orders to the police to open fire. ... Grenades were exploded among the densely packed crowd of Tutsis, splashing blood and flesh onto the walls. All of the survivors remember the terrible noise – the crashing of automatic rifle fire, the explosions, people screaming, babies dropped by their mothers howling. This went on for about twenty minutes. ... Then the order was given for the Hutu peasants to move in and kill. There were many Tutsis still alive, and Gacumbitsi and his cohorts wanted as many Hutus as possible to be complicit in the killing. It was the work of true Hutu patriots. That is what the architects of genocide called it: *work*. ... they hacked, slashed and bludgeoned their neighbours to death.⁵²⁵

⁵²² Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 310.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

A few survived the onslaught. Keane focused on one of them: Valentina Iziribagwaya. She was still alive and pulled out of the church with other remaining survivors. Gacumbitsi ordered the survivors to be killed. Valentina remembered, 'He said they should kill us as they would kill a snake by hitting it on the head.'⁵²⁶ Two of Valentina's schoolmates were ordered to kill her; she pleaded with them by name to have mercy on her. They hit her on the shoulder with a club and then smashed her fingers into the ground and finally slashed her on the head with a machete knocking her unconscious. They left her for dead. Valentina regained consciousness and survived for thirty days among the dead. Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) soldiers eventually found her and brought her to a clinic where Keane first met her.

Keane was not in Rwanda when Gacumbitsi gathered the Tutsis of his district into the churchyard and then had them slaughtered. According to Gérard Prunier, the genocide claimed an estimated 640,000 people 'in about six weeks between the second week of April and the third week of May.'⁵²⁷ Another 160,000 would be killed in the succeeding weeks. Up until mid-May Keane had been in South Africa reporting on the elections. His narrative coverage of what happened in the Rwandan town of Nyarubuye is pieced together from the multiple sources of Tutsi survivor testimony, Hutu farmers who observed from the hillsides, and his own visit to the churchyard weeks after the atrocities to witness for himself the decaying bodies in the tropical heat.

Sylvestre Gacumbitsi did not become a 'key figure in [Keane's] Rwandan story'⁵²⁸ because Keane was an eyewitness to the slaughter of Tutsis in the churchyard; rather Keane was an eyewitness to the suffering caused by Gacumbitsi. He was witness to the aftermath. Gacumbitsi was the name Keane heard again and again in his interviews with survivors at the clinic where he met Valentina. Upon hearing the survivor testimony, Keane and the BBC television crew went to Nyarubuye to see the churchyard. The reporter needed to corroborate survivor testimony with physical evidence. The RPF escorted the news team to the village. The suffering of those Keane interviewed and the churchyard of corpses he witnessed gave impetus to a somewhat audacious plan. Keane

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁵²⁷ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 261. Estimates range from half-a-million to one million victims. In his discussion of 'How many were killed?' Prunier makes a strong case for their being about 850,000 victims.

⁵²⁸ Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 318.

admits that it was his feeling of rage at what he saw that inspired him and his BBC crew to go after Gacumbitsi:

I could never feel what the survivors felt about him; his role in their lives had been catastrophic, while I had been simply a witness. But I knew that if we could find him there was a chance of some justice for Valentina, and the murdered thousands of Nyarubuye. What we were seeing in Rwanda inspired rage. It would be wrong to say we felt a responsibility towards the dead. That is too neatly defined a way of putting it. ... But here there was a chance to use our journalism to hold a killer to account. By that time we also knew that the country had been abandoned by the international community. The extremists knew this too. Wherever Gacumbitsi was hiding he would not be expecting a visit from a BBC television crew.⁵²⁹

Keane heard that Gacumbitsi had fled to the refugee camp at Benaco in Tanzania. There were an estimated quarter of a million refugees in the Benaco camp. Gacumbitsi had managed to obtain a 'community leader' role in the international camp and was in charge of distributing food to the refugees who had fled his district. In reflecting upon actually confronting Gacumbitsi face to face, Keane writes that he felt 'a great deal of fear and boiling anger.' In an effort to apply the journalistic principle of objectivity, Keane knew his 'questions could be firm,' but he could not lose his temper.⁵³⁰ Gacumbitsi responded coolly, denied everything, and suggested that Tutsis would indeed come up with such a story. Five years later, Keane faced Gacumbitsi again, this time at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The evidence UN prosecutors wanted from Keane included the video footage of the aftermath of the massacre and his interview with Gacumbitsi, 'our documentary had been influential in making sure that Gacumbitsi was placed on the priority list for arrest by the International Tribunal.'⁵³¹ The recorded documentary and interviews were not sufficient for evidence, Keane's physical presence was necessary as an eyewitness to verify the footage.

Keane's testimony was contested. The defence lawyer tried to prove that Keane's footage was propaganda from the Tutsis of the RPF given the fact that Keane and his crew were escorted to the massacre site by the opposition force.⁵³² This was not an

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 324.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 326.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 336.

⁵³² Ibid., 344.

unusual charge by the defence teams of people charged with crimes against humanity. At both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) and the ICTR this charge was used when Western journalists were escorted to massacre sites. The defence lawyer argued that the RPF staged the event at the churchyard for publicity and as an attempt to draw in the international community. A year after Keane testified at the ICTR, ‘Gacumbitsi was convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and rape and sentenced to thirty years’ imprisonment.’⁵³³

In the last chapter (4.4.1), I discussed the debate surrounding the issue of journalists who choose to testify at international war crimes tribunal. Before he was asked to testify at the ICTR, Keane was determined to report to the world that what happened in Rwanda was ‘an act of systematically planned mass murder’.⁵³⁴ His conviction of this fact was based on the results of his investigative journalism. Keane walked through the churchyard filled with decaying bodies, he interviewed survivors with wounds still festering, while he is not an eyewitness to the mass murder at the church, he is a witness to the immediate aftermath and he is a witness for the eyewitnesses. Keane spent the time interviewing many and varied sources. He followed the line of eyewitness testimony to reveal the role of Mayor Gacumbitsi in the systematic killing of the Tutsi population in his district. When the ICTR requested that Keane testify, Keane had the ‘journalist’s right to refuse to testify’.⁵³⁵ As we have seen, Keane did not refuse to testify. The opportunity to testify at the ICTR provided one more opportunity to bear witness to the genocide of the Tutsi population in Mayor Gacumbitsi’s district. Keane’s decision to testify at the ICTR is not a typical result of his investigative journalistic practice, but in this situation he found that ‘the journalism of objective assessment and rational comparisons meant nothing’ when set ‘against the vastness of the evil of genocide.’⁵³⁶ Keane’s Rwandan story illustrates journalism motivated by compassion and moral judgment where the institutional principles of impartiality and neutrality would result in false witness.

⁵³³ Ibid., 346.

⁵³⁴ Keane, *Letter to Daniel: Despatches from the Heart*, 160.

⁵³⁵ I discussed the ‘journalist’s right to refuse to testify’ in chapter four, under the section ‘4.4.1 Testifying at International Criminal Tribunals’.

⁵³⁶ Keane, *Letter to Daniel: Despatches from the Heart*, 158.

5.4 An Analysis of Journalists Bearing Witness in the light of Yoder's Work

In the last chapter, I discussed parallel practices of bearing witness found in Christian witness and in journalistic witness. I showed how John Howard Yoder's work on the moral agency involved in the Christian practice of bearing witness could help us understand moral agency involved in the practice of investigative journalism. The two main parallels I explored were the practice of holding those in power to account and the claim that presence, or *being there*, is a way to authenticate truth claims.

Through the investigative journalistic practices of John Simpson, Ásne Seierstad, and Fergal Keane, we have seen the difficulties involved in holding power to account. Simpson worked hard to retain autonomy in order to avoid becoming a mouth-piece for the U.S.-led coalition forces. Seierstad had to find ways around the Iraqi government's restrictions of topics and people on whom she could report. Keane made the difficult decision to testify beyond the typical practice of journalism in order to hold Mayor Gacumbitsi to account. The lived experience of these three journalists illustrates that the ethical act of holding power to account is performed differently according to the situation in which they find themselves. What was common among the three journalists was their conviction that not to bear witness to the situation, or failure to bear witness, was tantamount to false witness.

In the last chapter, I investigated the claim that presence is a way to authenticate truth claims. This is particularly the case when journalists are acting as witnesses for the witnesses. That is, they are acting as the proxy voice for the voiceless. Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that a key role in communities is the proxy, 'someone who acts as a proxy for ... those who will only have a voice ..., if someone else speaks for them.'⁵³⁷ In the community of global compassion, the role of proxy voice for the voiceless often begins with the frontline correspondent. MacIntyre argues that the only people capable of systematically speaking for those unable to speak are 'friends'. A journalist has the ability to speak systematically for others, 'that is, to assert, to question and to prescribe in the light of the other's conception of ... good.'⁵³⁸ We have seen

⁵³⁷ The quotation without the omissions is: "someone who acts as a proxy for the radically disabled, for those who will only have a voice in the deliberations of the community, if someone else speaks for them." MacIntyre's reasoning can be used to discuss how countries treat radically disabled citizens, and I am extending his argument to account for how the human rights community represents people who are suffering. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 147.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

through the journalistic practices of Simpson, Seierstad, and Keane how they came to befriend people who had experienced unfathomable suffering. All three journalists provide accounts of friendships with specific people either in Iraq, Serbia or Rwanda. They cite these relationships as motivating factors in their practice of investigative journalism.

MacIntyre pairs the ability to be a proxy, a friend who speaks for those unable to speak, with the virtue of truthfulness. Truthfulness includes the duty of justice for the one being represented as not to be truthful is an ‘act of injustice that deprives the other of what we owe to her or him.’⁵³⁹ As Martha Gellhorn reflected, the value of investigative journalism is ‘the act of keeping the record straight’⁵⁴⁰ the practice of working toward the truthful representation of other people’s experience. Frontline correspondents’ presence on the scene of war, genocide, or some other devastating situation, will not necessarily stop injustice but their presence may somehow render the situation different. Journalism scholars Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer explore this idea, ‘Being there suggests that the violence, devastation, suffering, and death that inevitably constitute war’s underside will somehow be rendered different—more amenable to response and perhaps less likely to recur—just because journalists are somewhere nearby.’⁵⁴¹

The concept that a journalist’s presence may somehow render the situation different, can be illuminated by what John Howard Yoder calls the ‘efficacy of a sign’ or the efficacy of presence.⁵⁴² Yoder argues that just being there, being present is an effective form of engagement. Presence, not results, is how to judge the efficacy and value of an ethical practice. How does this help us evaluate journalistic practices? When Allan and Zelizer suggest that the injustices of war ‘will somehow be rendered different’ because of the presence of a journalist,⁵⁴³ does this mean that a journalist’s reportage led to a ceasefire? Yoder gives us the opportunity to speak about the faithful presence of journalists without having to measure the efficacy of journalists’ reportage as a result of international military intervention, humanitarian aid, or even the prevention of genocide.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁴⁰ Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, 375.

⁵⁴¹ Allan and Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, 5.

⁵⁴² Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 161.

⁵⁴³ Allan and Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, 5.

In the previous chapter, I discussed ‘do something journalism’ (section 4.4.4). Journalism that bears witness should not be quickly categorised as ‘do something journalism’. The telos of journalism should not be coercing powers into action; rather the telos should be what Gellhorn called the ‘maintenance of trust’ between the journalist and those whom the journalist represents: the public and the victims. If the telos of journalism is the maintenance of trust, we can measure Simpson, Seierstad, and Keane’s performances with these primary questions: Did they provide a truthful account for the public? Did they provide a truthful account for the victim? These secondary questions might follow: Did their journalism motivate the public to act? Did their journalism result in the alleviation of suffering?

Yoder’s interest in bearing witness as a way of doing social ethics brings his pacifist concerns to the fore. He is interested in identifying the least coercive way of doing ethics. An ethic focused on results, such as utilitarianism or even an ethic of ‘do something’ journalism, is a method focused on the ends. Bearing witness is a method focused on the means. Yoder argues that it is a less coercive way to make truth claims because bearing witness is a practice contingent on the vulnerability of the witness. Having foreign correspondents bearing witness involves the journalist being there and the risks associated with being there in extraordinary times of volatility, danger and suffering regardless of the results. The hope, as well as the belief and conviction, is that the presence of a journalist will somehow render the situation differently. As Yoder claims, the ‘efficacy of a sign’, which might be the presence of a journalist, is first its effectiveness as a ‘sign of hope’.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁴ Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 161.

Thesis Conclusion

In the opening paragraph of this thesis, I asked: How do witness bearers authenticate their truth claims? I claimed that I was primarily interested in a project of comparative ethics and issues of translatable ethics from one field to another were of secondary interest. John Howard Yoder has proved an illuminating conversation partner for this project. His constructive theology of witness as Christian social ethics was a particularly helpful way to investigate the comparative moral agency involved in the media practice of bearing witness to human suffering. From specific practices such as ‘agents of linguistic self-consciousness’ to the overarching concept of the ‘phenomenology of social witness’, Yoder’s theological and ethical category of witness served as an effective and insightful analytical lens through which to view the media practice of bearing witness. Following the summary of chapters, I outline how my thesis research contributes to Media Studies and Christian Theology.

Summary

In chapter one I demonstrated that Yoder’s work on witness can be understood as Christian social ethics because witnessing is the act of embodying practices central to the Christian message. Yoder argues that witness is a non-coercive form of social ethics. Witness is a method of ethics in which the witness bearers are not responsible for determining whether or not their message was effective; they are responsible for the truthfulness of their message. The persuasive power of witness does not lie in forced acceptance. The persuasive power of the witness lies in the vulnerability of embodying beliefs. Christian practices include the act of servanthood as well as the practice of lay empowerment where all members of the community contribute to the well-being of the community through social roles such as leadership. Yoder counted journalists among the leaders of communities and claimed that all leaders ought to be ‘agents of linguistic self-consciousness’ because they are engaged in ‘steering society with the rudder of language.’⁵⁴⁵ I would include in Yoder’s cautionary recommendation that journalists and news organisations ought also to be agents of visual culture self-consciousness, for both language and visual culture work as rudders in steering the public imagination. This is especially the case where audiences would not be likely to encounter similar situations in

⁵⁴⁵ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, 32.

their own lives, as for example when Western audiences watch news media coverage of genocide.

Yoder argues that the Christian practice of lay empowerment publicly witnesses to the belief that all members of the church have empowered roles regardless of social position. Paul's metaphor, the Christian church working as a single body yet constituted by many, serves as more than a metaphor for empowerment. It is also a metaphor of mediation. Christ is communicated to the world through the church. Christ serves the world through the body of the church. The analogy of the Global Samaritan caring for mass suffering only works when these two ideas of mediation and embodiment through multiple communities come together. The participation of these multiple communities involves a long line of mediation constituting the *persona ficta* of the Global Samaritan present and bearing witness.

Yoder's concept of the 'phenomenology of social witness' can help explain the symbolic world of the Global Samaritan cultivated by means of media practices. Yoder describes the social phenomenon of the existence of a people who gather together under a common conviction. The more a people practice their belief together, the stronger their notion of themselves as a *polis* becomes. As their identity as a people strengthens, the more intractable their presence becomes in the public sphere. Their presence in the public sphere is their social witness. Yoder's thought on social witness strongly parallels Hannah Arendt's tables of common cause and Jürgen Habermas's claim that communities implicitly contribute to the public sphere through the 'programmatic character of their activities'.

In chapter two, we learn that the activities of the Global Samaritan have to do with providing humanitarian care for those who are suffering. The analogy of the Global Samaritan, based on the Christian biblical parable of the Good Samaritan found in the Gospel of Luke, served my argument by providing a way to discuss news reporting and reception of distant suffering. In the Biblical parable, a lawyer asks Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus tells a story where all who are near are our neighbours and all who act in a neighbourly way are neighbours. Modern media technology and practices broaden our neighbourhoods. People suffering in far away places are brought near to us through the social practice of foreign news coverage of humanitarian disasters. Why are these people from far away places brought into the living rooms, the neighbourhoods, of the West? I argued that the narrative of global compassion provides a Western framework to

legitimise foreign news coverage after Cold War politics. This narrative is based on the belief that other people in need, often in distant locations, are the responsibility of the West. This politics of pity is narrow as it is practiced in some distant places while not in others, and therefore the distribution of charity is uneven. Charity received by suffering peoples from the West is in correlation to publicity received from the West—the more public attention focused on the visual display of human suffering in distant locations, the more likely those people will receive aid. The politics of pity and the pursuit of publicity are linked concepts in the study of news coverage and reception of distant human suffering and humanitarian intervention, or as I have called it, the narrative of global compassion. The analogy of the Good Samaritan illustrated how media can mobilise morality. Media technology and social practices can work to cultivate a global media sphere where the appearance of distant suffering positions audiences as witnesses. None who have seen or heard can pretend that they did not know.

Not all spectators become participants in the stories they see and hear. Those who choose to participate, position themselves as witnesses to injustice. They have judged that those suffering are not at fault. And further, spectators may judge that those suffering deserve justice. As I argued in chapter three, audiences alone are not directly analogous to the Good Samaritan. Spectators have little to no agency to respond directly to the human suffering that they witness on television. While audiences may witness a close-up shot of a baby dying of tuberculosis in a refugee camp, audiences can do nothing for *that* baby. Television spectators' capacity for moral agency in the stories they witness has to do with representing general or universal causes rather than particular causes. Spectators can come to participate in campaigns for the funding of tuberculosis treatments in refugee camps and especially in treating childhood tuberculosis. The Good Samaritan gives immediate care to the man near to him; there is physical proximity between the two because they both travel on the same road. Western audiences only visit these remote roads through a process of mediation. Audiences as potential participants in the narrative of the Good Samaritan offer general care that requires multiple layers of mediation before achieving the goal of relieving human suffering. Audiences may never physically be there to administer care.

Yet journalists are physically present with those who are suffering. In chapter four I considered key concepts of investigative journalism in relation to the claim of journalists *bearing witness*. In chapter four and five, I argued that investigative

journalism should not be judged simply by results but rather by the practice of providing truthful and faithful accounts. This is an insight I arrived at through Yoder, and it is an insight that contributes further to the discussion of the ethical claim of journalism that bears witness. Effective journalism should not be measured simply by action that might result from it: getting it right through honourable behaviour is also efficacious. I explored truthful and faithful practices through the dual roles of proxy fulfilled by frontline correspondents. Journalists hold those in power to account in their role as the public's eyes and ears, and in their role of being a voice for the voiceless.

In chapter five, we saw the challenges involved in practicing truthful and faithful investigative journalism through the concrete examples of John Simpson, Åsne Seierstad, and Fergal Keane. Their credibility to speak for others and their credibility to direct the audience's gaze has to do with the credibility of journalists being there, on-the-ground. Their witness is credible because presence serves as testimony. Presence proves to be a central attribute of the act of witnessing and inextricably knots witnessing to the issue of martyrdom. The moral agency of the Global Samaritan, the chain of intermediaries involved in relieving human suffering, begins by *being there* as a witness. Being there may be the on-the-scene journalist or it might be the live-quasi-presence of the audience. By being there, witnesses are caught up in a web of complicity.

Contribution to Media Studies and Christian Theology

In this thesis I have contributed to the emerging literature on the concept of *witnessing*. The concept of bearing witness proves rich territory for exploration in both the fields of Media Studies and Christian Theology. My research contributes to an interdisciplinary conversation by investigating how the Christian theological category of witness can provide an analytical tool for understanding the media practice of bearing witness. While I am suggesting that a Christian theological account of witness can be helpful for Media and Communication Studies, I am aware that a multi-directional witness, from media to theology and from theology to media, can happen at the same time. Many of the questions that cultural critics, including journalists and others in Media Studies, ask are similar to the questions that theologians ask. The fields share an ethical concern for how humans can best flourish. Journalists have brought up concerns that are inherently theological, such as Fergal Keane's reasoning for engaged reporting based on

the belief that ‘the weak need protecting; the powerful need to be challenged.’⁵⁴⁶ As well as journalist and cultural critic Michael Ignatieff’s questions of ‘when is it right to speak for the needs of strangers?’ And, is it ‘possible to define what human beings need in order to flourish?’⁵⁴⁷ While Keane and Ignatieff are not writing specifically for the Christian church, as Yoder argues, the church would do well when ‘we do see Jesus’ in people, communities and social institutions outside of the church, to make tactical alliances. When God’s grace is revealed by other sources, Yoder argues that the church should follow it.

The phenomenology of witness, witness as presence, has implications at both practical and theoretical levels for Christian Theology and Media and Communication Studies. I have predominantly focused on the theoretical levels in this thesis with the broader goal of contributing to how the concept of ‘witness’ might be developed into an analytical and ethical category for Media and Communication Studies. Yoder claims that simply by being, the church is a public witness. He writes, ‘just being there as an unprecedented social phenomenon.’⁵⁴⁸ Yoder’s phenomenology of social witness has implications then for other social bodies gathered around ‘tables of common cause’ (to borrow Hannah Arendt’s metaphor). Yoder and Arendt would agree that existence publicly testifies. Media and Communication Studies scholar Paddy Scannell in his forthcoming book investigates the usefulness of phenomenology to the study of witness in the field of Media and Communication.⁵⁴⁹ My research contributes to both Media and Theology in the area of social ethics by thinking morally about the spectatorship of suffering. It is a contemporary practice of the Christian church and the wider world.

I began my investigation suspicious of the use of the parable of the Good Samaritan. I questioned whether it is an adequate analogy for the West cast in the role of the Global Samaritan keeping watch over the hot spots of the world. I was suspicious that the Global Samaritan was voyeuristic and exploited altruism in order to continue neo-

⁵⁴⁶ Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 365.

⁵⁴⁷ Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, 12.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁴⁹ *Love and Communication* (forthcoming) is the third in a trilogy Scannell has written on Media, Culture and Society. The first volume is: Paddy Scannell, *Media and Communication* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2007). In the second forthcoming volume, *Television and the Meaning of 'Live,'* Scannell relates presence to the ‘liveness’ of television. He discusses this concept briefly in the following article: Paddy Scannell, "What Reality Has Misfortune?" *Media Culture Society* 26, no. 4 (2004).

colonialism. My research has broadened my understanding. The risks involved in the narrative of global compassion remain, but new possibilities also exist. My investigation has revealed that the narrative of global compassion is also about maintaining and cultivating a social imaginary of humanitarianism, finding common cause together, and reassembling our body politic in new places and in new ways. Originally I was suspicious of the use of the parable of the Good Samaritan as a frame for Western coverage of foreign news. My concerns ran along the same lines as John Milbank's concerns that because the spectatorship of violence creates a subject to object relationship, that there was little moral agency involved in audience spectatorship.

Yet while I was deeply concerned that spectators had little agency, I also knew some other experience to be true. To use a colloquial expression, it appears that people often 'cut their teeth' on one story, only to find themselves engaged in the next similar story. The spectator may not have been able to offer anything to the original object of his or her gaze, but the experience of spectatorship was not for nothing. As J.D. Peters, Jean Seaton, Susan Sontag and Martha Nussbaum all argue, there is educational civic value in being exposed to tragedy. Several examples emerged in my thesis research confirming my intuition of 'cutting teeth' on one issue of injustice to impassion spectators to become involved in the pursuit of justice. Chuck Breen, the 'average citizen spectator' whom I discussed in chapter three, became engaged in local Michigan community organising for the prevention of genocide in Darfur after being moved by the story of the Rwanda genocide as portrayed in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. HBO commissioned film director Paul Freedman to produce a documentary on the genocide in Rwanda. After making the documentary, Freedman, with no outside funding at the start and at great personal expense, took on the task of making a documentary about the genocide in Darfur and he is currently working on a documentary on the under-reported war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵⁵⁰ My own experience also serves as an example. In 1999 I wrote a research dissertation on the humanitarian situation in southern Sudan and the work of Christian NGOs.⁵⁵¹ That spring after submitting the dissertation, I went to Kosovo to work in refugee camps. I teethed on the refugee situation in southern Sudan and I became

⁵⁵⁰ Freedman's films on Darfur and Rwanda: *Sand and Sorrow* (2007); *Time Machine: Rwanda - Do Scars Ever Fade?* (2004)

⁵⁵¹ Richards, "The Universal Sacredness of Life: A Case Study of Christian Ngo's Rhetoric Working in Sudan".

engaged in the refugee situation in Kosovo by working in the refugee camps in Macedonia.

Milbank was right to say that the extension of the good to the object of the spectator's gaze is an unlikely occurrence. Moral agency in this direct manner is very limited, but what has emerged throughout my thesis and what seems to be the significance of the concept of bearing witness is that once a person knows that injustice exists, she can become engaged in the prevention of further injustice or involved in the restoration of justice. In his memoir about covering the Rwanda genocide, Fergal Keane writes of being formed by his first experience on foreign assignment in Africa. In 1983, he covered war between Eritrean guerrillas and Ethiopian soldiers. He writes of that moment as a 'point of departure for me' and after covering this first story he continued to tell similar stories claiming, 'how could one not tell those stories.'⁵⁵²

I return to a story I told in the introduction. Part of the promise of Malcolm Muggeridge's claim to 'never pretend' that he did not know what was happening on the Ukrainian collective farms, and part of the promise to 'never forget' the atrocities of the Holocaust, is to bear witness to similar events. Bearing witness to similar events somehow does justice to the events of the past. Even though people still commit genocide, the promise of 'never again' is not a vain promise. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum's project of genocide prevention is premised on the hope that bearing witness to past genocide will help prevent future genocides.

Surprisingly, I have found the role of collective memory to be the most redeeming factor in the use of the analogy of the Good Samaritan. At first it appeared that the Good Samaritan as the Global Samaritan posed too many problems, such as restoring proximity, and the popular focus of the West as a benevolent and altruistic benefactor working from a place of plenty to serve the needy. Ian McDonald's socio-historical interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan as a story that helps form the character of a community, and reminds a people about who they have been in the past and who they want to be in the future, actually provides a strong case for foreign news coverage of distant human suffering as framed by the narrative of global compassion. The framing is done not just by news media organisations; the framing reflects larger societal

⁵⁵² Keane, *All of These People: A Memoir*, 164.

concerns of the West such as the growing human rights culture. The analogy of the West as Global Samaritan could be a reminder of the promise made: ‘never again’.

A connected surprise revealed in the investigation of the narrative of global compassion, is an implicit critique of liberalism. While the Global Samaritan is a singular *persona ficta*, the Global Samaritan exists through the linking of many different levels of society. The lone foreign correspondent in some remote location and the isolated television viewer in the dimly lit sitting room seem to characterise the atomised individualism of modern liberalism. But the Global Samaritan is constituted and incarnated by the coming together of many individuals round the common cause of alleviating suffering. I was surprised that witnessing in this highly mediated form involves strengthening aspects of community, not reinforcing an atomised society, when people choose to become engaged participants over passive spectators. The Global Samaritan is a modern, globally networked body that can be materialised throughout the world in a multitude of configurations. The emphasis is on bodies *networked* to act together. J.D. Peters claims that this is the social significance on which media studies should focus. He identifies the social significance of the media as ‘their [media] rearrangements of our bodily being, as individuals and as bodies politic.’⁵⁵³ The analogy of the Global Samaritan is a prime example of rearranging bodies politic by rearranging neighbourhoods, by bringing near those who are far and therefore establishing obligations to them.

Witnessing is a rich concept for exploration in Media Studies and Communication Sciences, indeed it is a concept already richly explored in Christian theology. As I have demonstrated, the work that the category of witness has done for theologians can be of service to media scholars. It seems crucial to follow this research further with inquiry into the ethical significance of witness in media studies. I will focus my attention in future research on how media mobilise morality. I also plan to contribute to practical theology on issues regarding Christian moral reasoning with regard to media practice and technology and the Christian Church’s response to televised global suffering.

⁵⁵³ Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, 228.

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