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THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY IN THE ASIAN REGION

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Introduction

Wendy Brown has commented on the importance of recognising the 'interval' between theory and politics, and working in the space between. [1] She advocates refusing the 'dichotomy between the local and the global, the national and the transnational, the intellectual and the practical'.[2] Brown's comments seem particularly apposite for the project of analysing human rights advocacy. There are significant gaps between the academic debates on human rights, the actual language and protocols of the bodies devoted to ensuring the achievement of basic human rights, the language of activists, and the ways in which these issues are discussed in the media. These issues are compounded in a transnational frame where people must find ways of communicating across differences of language and culture.[3] In this paper, I will consider some case studies of human rights advocacy in the media with a particular focus on strategies for communication between different cultural frames and discourses. By 'cultural frames and discourses', I am referring not just to so-called national cultures and languages, but also to the cultural and discursive practices associated with particular institutions.

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[1] This paper was presented at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Adelaide, 5–8 July 2010. It has been peer reviewed via a double referee process and appears on the Conference Proceedings Website by the permission of the author who retains copyright. This paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation.

[2] Wendy Brown, et al., 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps*, 6, 2006 <http://www.usyd.edu.au/contretemps/contents.html>, p. 41.

[3] Elsewhere, I have considered some of these issues with respect to transnational feminist discourse. Vera Mackie, 'The Language of Globalization, Transnationality and Feminism', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Volume 3, No 2, 2001, pp. 180–206; Vera Mackie, *Gurôbaruka to Jendâ Hyôshô [Globalisation and Representations of Gender],* Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobô, 2003;Vera Mackie, 'Shifting the Axis: Feminism and the Transnational Imaginary', in Brenda Yeoh et al (eds) *State/Nation/Transnation*, London: Routledge, 2004.

This paper is a small part of a larger project where I am exploring the changing paradigms of human rights in the Asia-Pacific region, the tensions between universalism and particularism and the gaps between academic, bureaucratic, activist and popular media language on human rights.[4] In this paper I will focus on one question: how to effectively translate the academic and bureaucratic language of human rights into the popular media? In order to explore this question I will undertake a brief analysis of two popular texts on human rights: Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*[5] and Walter Kälin, Lars Müller and Judith Wyttenbach's *The Face of Human Rights*.[6] Given my own interests, I will particularly focus on how they represent human rights issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Background

Since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 there have been various developments in the understanding of the means for achieving human rights. The Universal Declaration has been supplemented by a series of treaties and conventions which focus on specific groups or specific forms of discrimination: women, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, those subjected to racial discrimination and xenophobia, workers, and refugees. The United Nations has declared specific foci for particular time frames, including the First, Second and Third Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, the United Nations International Women's Year, the United Nations International Decade for Women, the International Year of the Disabled, the Year of the Child, and so on. These Years and Decades have been brought into focus through a series of United Nations International Conferences, particularly in the last decades of the twentieth century. This has included world conferences on Women, Racism, Human Rights and Population and Development, with associated declarations, treaties and conventions.

These actions have been paralleled by developments in the academic discourse on human rights. Academic commentators have identified different 'generations' of human rights: first generation rights to security, property and political participation; second generation rights to welfare, education and leisure; and third generation rights to national self-determination, a clean

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[4] 'From Human Rights to Human Security: Changing Paradigms for Dealing with Inequality in the Asia-Pacific Region' is a Future Fellowship Project funded by the Australian Research Council.
[5] Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009.
[6] Walter Kälin, Lars Müller and Judith Wyttenbach (eds) *The Face of Human Rights*, Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2004.

environment, and indigenous rights.[7] Academics have raised the question of the 'intersectionality' of different systems of inequality based on gender, class, ethnicity and so on.[8] They have also questioned the efficacy of the concept of 'race'.[9] In the context of assertions of 'women's rights as human rights',[10] there has been extensive discussion of the gendering of international law, and the operation of dichotomies of 'public' and 'private' in the international arena.[11]

While academics talk of 'gender relations' or the 'gender order', bureaucrats and activists address 'women' and 'men'. Academics question the very concept of 'race', but recognise the discrimination suffered due to 'racism'. Or, in other words, academics try to find ways of engaging with United Nations Declarations and Conferences against racism, while retaining our scepticism about the concept of race. Academics and activists seek sexual rights, sexual autonomy and sexual citizenship, while the United Nations bureaucracy sees sexuality almost exclusively through the lens of reproduction (except, perhaps in the context of HIV-AIDS prevention campaigns). In the wake of the so-called 'Asian Values Debates' after the Bangkok Regional Conference on Human Rights, national leaders in international forums claimed to speak for a unified national culture, while activists making claims against a nation-state for vindication of their rights emphasised the diversity of needs within the boundaries of a nation-state, and asserted that their claims could be justified in terms of transnational norms.[12]

There are thus significant gaps between the academic debates on human rights and the actual language and protocols of the bodies devoted to ensuring the achievement of basic human rights for all, as has been noted by Euan MacDonald.

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[7] A. Byrnes, et al. 2009, *Bills of Rights in Australia: History, Politics and Law*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009, p. 16.

[8] R. Raj, (ed.) *Women at the Intersection: Indivisible Rights, Identities and Oppressions*. New York: Center for Women's Global Leadership. 2002.

[9] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, University Press, 2000; Patrick Wolfe, 'On Race and Racialisation', *Postcolonial Studies*, Volume 5, No 1, 2002; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination', *Cultural Anthropology*. Volume 23, No 2, 2008.

[10] K. Tomasevski (ed.) *Women and Human Rights*, London: Zed Press, 1993; Joanna Kerr, *Ours By Right: Women's Rights as Human Rights*, London: Zed Press, 1993; J. Peters and A. Wolper, A. (eds) *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*. Routledge. 1994; M. Agosin (ed.) *Women, Gender and Human Rights: A Global Perspective*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

[11] Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, 'The Gender of Jus Cogens'. *Human Rights Quarterly,* Volume 15, No 1, 1993; Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, *The Boundaries of International Law: A Feminist Analysis.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

[12] Pheng Cheah, 'Posit(ion)ing Human Rights in the Current Global Conjuncture', in S. Geok-Lin Lim, et al. (eds) *Transnational Asia-Pacific: Gender, Culture and the Public Sphere,* Urbana: University of Illinois, Press, 1999; Anthony Langlois, *The Politics of Justice and Human Rights: Southeast Asia and Universalist Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.

> Whatever the chosen scholastic response, however, one thing seems clear: the gap between theory and practice in international human rights is an important issue, and one that threatens to undermine both sides if some sort of *rapprochement* is not achieved.[13]

Micheline Ishay, in her ambitious history of human rights, has also identified pressing issues for human rights advocacy in the twenty first century. She identifies two possible trends.

> …a negative trajectory, if we consider the ascension of nationalist forces and the weakening of democratic ones in the domestic realm, particularly after September 11; and a more positive path, should we consider the proliferation of international human rights institutions and the growth of the anti-globalization movement in the realm of civil society.[14]

The questions raised by Ishay and others, however, can only be answered through grounded research which is attuned to conditions at the local, regional and global level. It is interesting to note that Ishay's book has few detailed references to the Asia-Pacific region, suggesting the need for more empirical and theoretically informed research in this region.

In addition to the academic and bureaucratic languages of human rights alluded to above, there are also specific languages and vocabularies deployed by activists in order to make human rights claims. All of the official United Nations conferences, for example, are usually accompanied by parallel non-governmental organisation (NGO) conferences.[15] Activists at these conferences need to be able to communicate with their own stakeholders, while also making claims in language that will be understandable to the bureaucrats in the United Nations, national governments, and multilateral and bilateral aid agencies.

All of these groups make use of the media. The United Nations itself has a massive publications program and is increasingly making use of digitisation and electronic media to disseminate information. Aid agencies and NGOs also use diverse media to communicate their activities. Just to provide one example, I receive regular e-mail alerts from such organisations as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and also from international non-governmental organisations. Both these official and unofficial channels are making increasingly sophisticated use of the new media communications technologies.[16] Meanwhile, the mainstream media are also engaged in commentary on all of these forms of advocacy.

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[13] Euan MacDonald, 'Review Essay: The Future of Human Rights? Theory and Practice in an International Context', *German Law Journal*, No 8, 1 August 2004.p. 970.

[14] Michelene Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era*, California, 2004, p. 345.

[15] Annelise Riles, 2000. *The Network Inside Out,* Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.

[16] Just ten or so years ago, alerts from NGOs would take the form of plain text e-mail messages which would be manually forwarded among networks. These days such messages are likely to deploy sophisticated html editing with embedded photographs, sound and video, and interactive links.

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on two micro-level case studies of texts which attempt to deal with human rights issues in an accessible media format: mass market book publishing. It will be instructive to see whether these texts can provide lessons – positive or negative – on how to translate from one cultural frame to another. It will be instructive to see whether these sample texts achieve the task of translating bureaucratic, academic and activist modes of communication into more popular spheres. In conducting this analysis, I recognise that human rights advocacy involves more than just stating the facts, or even just providing a narrative in a realist mode. Other commentators have noted the importance of narrative in human rights advocacy.[17] I am interested in analysing these narrative strategies, from a consciousness that texts work not only through vocabulary and propositional content, but also through discursive positioning. It is necessary to look at the structure of texts, the contents of texts, and the narrative strategies and discursive frameworks which inform them.[18] Similar points can be made about photography, which must be analysed in terms of the specific representational possibilities of visual culture.[19]

In each of the texts under analysis here, the strategy is slightly different. Kristof and WuDunn's book deploys the techniques of the human interest story in the 'quality' media. Kristof is a journalist and WuDunn a former journalist for the *New York Times*, and the book was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Kälin, Müller and Wyttenbach's book attempts a different kind of translation. The various textual explorations of human rights are juxtaposed with a series of photographs. Their stated intent is to show the 'face' of human rights, or, in other words, to use the resources of visual culture to contribute to the discourse on human rights. The feel of this

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[17] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and Circumfession', in Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (eds) *Postcolonialism and Autobiography*, Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1998, p. 7; Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 3; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds) *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996, p. 10; Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

[18] Sara Mills, *Discourse*, London: Routledge, 1997; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Longman, 1995; Alison Lee and Cate Poynton (eds) *Culture & Text: Discourse and Methodology in Social Research and Cultural Studies*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000; for some earlier attempts to deploy the methodology of critical discourse analysis to the analysis of feminist and human rights discourse in the Asia-Pacific region, see: Vera Mackie, '"Japayuki Cinderella Girl": Containing the Immigrant Other', *Japanese Studies,* Volume 18, No 1, May 1998, pp. 45–64; 'Sexual Violence, Silence, and Human Rights Discourse: The Emergence of the Military Prostitution Issue', in Anne Marie Hilsdon et al (eds) *Human Rights and Gender Politics,* London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 37–59;. Mackie, 'The Language of Globalization, Transnationality and Feminism',

[19] On the methodologies of 'reading' visual texts, see, inter alia, Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds) *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, Hanover: University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press, 1994; Hal Foster (ed.) *Vision and Visuality*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1988;Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996; Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, London: Penguin, 2002 [1977]; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. For an earlier attempt to consider the use of visual texts in contemporary global media, see Vera Mackie, 'Faces of Feminism in Transnational Media Space', *Jendâ Kenkyû*, No 6, March 2003.

substantial volume is a cross between a textbook and a 'coffee table' book reminiscent of those from such international art publishers as Phaïdon.[20]

Half the Sky

Half the Sky comes to the reader with all of the authority of the *New York Times* and all of the prestige of the New York-based publisher Alfred Knopf. Further prestige has accrued with the award of a Pulitzer Prize.[21] In many ways, this is a worthwhile book which draws attention to gender-based human rights abuses throughout the world. Kristof, in particular, has for some years used the pages of the *New York Times* to draw attention to such issues. The authors' words are also backed up with actions, in the form of charity projects which assist people in disadvantaged third world communities. I am also, however, interested in how (largely first world) Anglophone readers are being positioned in this text. It is immediately apparent that some distance is being taken from academic discourse in the choice to focus on 'women' as a group rather than 'gender' as a process and a structure. The focus on women as a group (or, in the 'human interest' style of the writing, as a series of individuals) has implications for the kinds of strategies that can be advanced.

The first part of the title might also cause some pause. 'Women hold up half the sky' was, of course, the slogan attributed to Chairman Mao in the early stages of the revolution in China. Few, however, would nowadays be able to use this slogan without irony. Many analysts have discussed the double burden for Chinese women under both the socialist and post-socialist regimes, and the skewed sex ratio due to the favouring of male children.[22] Even more surprising is Kristof and WuDunn's assertion that 'China has emerged as a model on gender issues for developing countries'.[23]

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[20] I am thinking of such books as Steve McCurry's *Portraits*, (London & New York: Phaïdon, 1999). Magnum photographer Steve McCurry is known for his photographs of the so-called 'Afghan Girl', and for the documentary and *National Geographic* article which documented the search the woman in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan. See: Cathy Newman, 'A Life Revealed', *National Geographic*, April 2002, unpaginated Special Report with photographs by Steve McCurry; Steve McCurry, 'I Could See her Eyes through the Camera Lens. They're still the same,' *National Geographic*, April 2002, unpaginated; Lawrence Cumbo Jr. (Director), *Search for the Afghan Girl*, National Geographic Films, 2003; The 'Afghan Girl' is discussed in more detail in Vera Mackie, 'Afghan Nights', *Meanjin*, February 2003; Mackie, 'Faces of Feminism in Transnational Media Space'.

[21] On 13 June 2010, the paperback edition had an Amazon best-seller ranking of No 190 <http://www.amazon.com/Half-Sky-Oppression-Opportunity-Worldwide/dp/0307387097/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1276375871&sr=8-1>, accessed 13 June 2010.

[22] Antonia Finnane, 'Dead daughters, dissident sons, and human rights in China', in Anne Marie Hilsdon et al (eds) *Human Rights and Gender Politics,* London: Routledge, 2000; Anne E. McLaren (ed.) *Chinese Women: Living and Working*, London: Routledge, 2004.

[23] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 206.

The book sets out a series of issues to be addressed, and also puts forward possible solutions.

> We will try to lay out an agenda for the world's women focusing on three particular abuses: sex trafficking and forced prostitution; gender-based violence, including honor killings and mass rape; and maternal mortality, which still needlessly claims one woman a minute. We will lay out solutions such as girls' education and microfinance, which are working right now.[24]

Each issue is encapsulated in a short vignette, and usually personalised through the story of one, named individual. This is a style which has been honed through years of writing feature articles for the *New York Times.* A further strategy is the setting up of a 'straw' person to be knocked down, or the positing of a false syllogism to be demolished. In most cases, though, these controversial statements leave a stronger impression than the subsequent pages devoted to disproving them. Thus, one chapter has the title 'Is Islam misogynist?', [25] which I would suggest has the effect of feeding into knee-jerk forms of Islamophobia, no matter how many pages are devoted to answering this question with a qualified negative. A similar effect is achieved by the following statement and apparent rebuttal of the tendency to 'blame the victim'.

> One of the reasons that so many women and girls are kidnapped, trafficked, raped, and otherwise abused is that they grin and bear it. Stoic docility – in particular, acceptance of any decree by a man – is drilled into girls in much of the world from the time they are babies and so they often do as they are instructed, even when the instruction is to smile while being raped twenty times a day.
>
> This is not to blame the victims…[26]

Once again, the denial does not have as much rhetorical effect as the statement of the dubious proposition. Furthermore, the framing of the issue in these terms leads us back to a focus on individualistic solutions rather than structural ones – the issue is 'docility' rather than structured relationships of inequality.

Similarly, there is a tendency to simply reproduce harmful stereotypes rather than challenge the discursive construction of otherness. Since the 1970s, the stereotype of the 'nimble fingers' of young female workers in factories in Southeast Asia has become a cliché in the gender and development literature.[27] This is the kind of image which was used by representatives of third world nations at one time in order to attract transnational corporations to set up factories in their

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[24] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. xxi.
[25] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 149.
[26] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 47.
[27] Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, '"Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers": An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing', *Feminist Review*, 7, 1981, pp. 87–107.

free trade zones. For Kristof and WuDunn, however, this slogan does not provide an opportunity to analyse the gendering of labour markets or the gendered construction of otherness under the conditions of transnational capitalist development. Rather, the slogan is reproduced at face value.

> 'They have smaller fingers, so they're better at stitching,' the manager of a purse factory explained to us. 'They're obedient and work harder than men,' said the head of a toy factory. 'And we can pay them less.'[28]

Not only is the slogan reproduced, it is translated to other contexts. In describing a once again very worthy project of training women to become paramedical workers who can treat local women in the absence of fully qualified medical practitioners, the 'nimble figures' trope is irresistible to the authors: 'Mamitu had nimble fingers and first-rate technical skills, and even if her biological knowledge was limited, she steadily accumulated experience repairing internal injuries…'.[29]

Human rights issues in this book are largely externalised, situated in the third world rather than at 'home' in the United States, despite the subtitle 'Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women *Worldwide*' [emphasis added].[30] The reader is positioned as a privileged, first world, Anglophone reader of the *New York Times*, quality journalism and quality non-fiction.[31] Human rights violations occur offshore, in exotic third world locations, where people speak incomprehensible other languages. In the description of an inspiring young US-born female aid worker, a basic uneasiness with difference is revealed in the description of her facility in the Swahili language as 'jabbering'. [32]

My fascination with this book had been prompted by following Kristof's articles in the *New York Times* over several years, and struggling to find a position from which to understand and critique a series of articles where he travels to Southeast Asia and 'buys' two young women in order to illustrate the workings of economic coercion in the transnational sex

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[28] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. xix.
[29] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 121.
[30] For example, maternal mortality rates are provided for the US, as a contrast with third world countries. However, only national aggregate statistics are provided, thus missing an opportunity to discuss possible differences within the US due to poverty and class positioning, or to discuss how disadvantage might affect maternal mortality in migrant, minority or poor African American communities. Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 98, 99, 1156, 119. In the paperback edition of the book from Virago, the subtitle has been changed to 'How to Change the World'. Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: How to Change the World*, London: Virago, 2010. Since this paper was first presented, Germaine Greer has made similar criticisms of the book. Germaine Greer, 'Half the Sky: How the Other Half Suffer, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2010, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jul/31/half-the-sky-germaine-greer>, accessed 12 October 2010. I am indebted to Paul Rae for this reference.
[31] The *New York Times* and such books as *Half the Sky* are, of course, available to a global market. Nevertheless, a close reading of Kristof's feature articles and Kristof and WuDunn's book reveals that the world-view of the texts is that of the privileged, Anglophone, university-educated resident of the US.
[32] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 92.

industry (what some would refer to as 'trafficking'). These stories also appear in the book. My unease was prompted by such passages as the one below.

> We became slave owners in the twenty-first century the old-fashioned way. We paid cash in exchange for two slave girls and a couple of receipts. The girls were then ours to do with as we liked.[33]

What are we to make of this rhetorical strategy whereby the (presumed) first world reader is interpellated as a potential slave-owner, as someone who can purchase another human being and do what they like with them?[34] Whether the authors and readers are positioned as potential slave owners, or as potential saviours (as in this case), the power relations and the discursive positioning of the wealthy white first world man and the impoverished female third world 'other' are not challenged in any way.[35] Kristof and WuDunn's rhetorical positioning in this text is compatible with what I have elsewhere referred to as the 'metropolitan gaze', which emanates from the centre, and which has the power to judge, classify and categorise the objects of the gaze.[36] Writing about human rights here perpetuates a dichotomy between the first world and the third, or in terms of my interests, between the Euro-American centres and the Asia-Pacific region. I opened this paper with Wendy Brown's suggestion that we should refuse the 'dichotomy between the local and the global, the national and the transnational, the intellectual and the practical'.[37] Kristof and WuDunn's book, however works to reinforce rather than challenge such dichotomies by constantly positioning the first world reader at a distance from the third world women who are the subject of the book. I wonder if there are rhetorical strategies which can challenge rather than reaffirm such positionings?[38]

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[33] Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, p. 35

[34] This rhetorical strategy is even more astonishing given the troubled history of slavery in the US.

[35] Note also that the women are referred to as 'slave *girls*' [my emphasis], not women.

[36] Vera Mackie, 'The Metropolitan Gaze: Travellers, Bodies, Spaces', *Intersections*, September 2000, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue4/vera.html>, unpaginated, accessed 12 June 2010; Mackie, *Gurôbaruka to Jendâ Hyôshô;* see also Patrick Wolfe's comments on the 'historical purchase of the "white men saving brown women from brown men" sentence, which… captures a feature of transnational domination that continues into the present.' Wolfe is referring to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's use of the phrase 'white men saving brown women from brown men' in her account of the debates over the practice of *sati* (the immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre) in colonial India. Patrick Wolfe, 'Can the Muslim Speak? An Indebted Critique', *History and Theory*, 41, October 2002, p. 380; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 287.

[37] Wendy Brown, et al., 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps*, 6, 2006 <http://www.usyd.edu.au/contretemps/contents.html>, p. 41.

[38] I am reminded here of the extensive debates on Dennis O'Rourke's fictionalised documentary, *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, where the film-maker purchases the time and services of a 'bar girl' from Bangkok, and attempts to 'save' her by purchasing land for her in her home village, while documenting and staging this relationship on film. While there is much to criticise, O'Rourke does not shy from portraying his own complicity and culpability in the multiple and overdetermined structures of inequality between first and third world. Dennis O'Rourke, *The Good Woman of Bangkok,* Canberra: Film Australia, 1991. For commentary on the film, see, *inter alia*, Chris Berry, Annette Hamilton and Laleen Jayamanne (eds) *The Filmmaker and the Prostitute: Dennis O'Rourke's The Good Woman of Bangkok,* Sydney: Power Publications, 1997, *passim*; Mackie, 'The Metropolitan Gaze'. For some

The Face of Human Rights

The editors of *The Face of Human Rights* set out their project in the following terms.

> This book attempts to visualise all these dimensions of human rights. Its photographs celebrate the enjoyment of human rights, i.e. life in freedom and dignity, in its full richness and across cultures. The accompanying texts document, explain and detail the human rights standards as defined by international law and applied in practice. At the same time we want to illustrate and document how human rights are violated. The examples from South and North, West and East show that no state and no society is totally immune to the temptation to disregard the rights of others when this serves one's own purposes. Finally we want to show what the international community, international or local non-governmental organizations working at different levels do to prevent, sanction and redress human rights violations.
>
> As it is impossible to cover all relevant problems and all countries, the texts and photographs have been chosen for their illustrative quality. Inclusion or exclusion of a particular right, case, procedure, organization or person should therefore not be taken as a statement of the editors on its worth and relevance or lack of it. Neither can the limitation of examples to one of the warring parties in an armed conflict be interpreted as indicating that only one side is violating human rights.
>
> The representation of human rights directs our attention to those who are uncompromisingly committed to protecting them. The portraits in this book demonstrate what individual people can do to counteract the violation of human rights.[39]

The text includes the relevant human rights conventions and declarations, explication of the different generations of human rights, verbal portraits of human rights activists, extracts from such texts as Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*,[40] and an account of Death Row in Huntstville, Texas. The inclusion of the essay on Death Row in Texas, and the inclusion of photographs from the US, the UK and Europe as well as the third world helps to dispel any impression that human rights issues are largely third world issues. This is in contrast to Kristof and WuDunn's book, *Half the Sky,* where human rights issues are almost totally externalised. *The Face of Human Rights* also attempts a more complete coverage of human rights issues – not just gender-based discrimination, but all of the issues addressed in the major UN declarations and conventions.

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attempts to write in ways which expose power structures and reflect on mutual implication/imbrication, see, *inter alia*: Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', *Australian Feminist Studies*, No 1, 1986; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism', in Chandra Talpade Mohanty et al (eds) *Third World Women and the Politics of Difference*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991; Ien Ang, *On not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 17, 89, 178–201; Cynthia Enloe. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, pp. 43–56; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'Unquiet Graves: Katô Norihiro and the Politics of Mourning', *Japanese Studies*, Volume 18, No 1, 1998; Vera Mackie, '"Asia" in Everyday Life: Dealing with Difference in Contemporary Japan', in Brenda Yeoh et al (eds) *Gender and Politics in the Asia-Pacific: Agencies and Activisms*, London" Routledge, 2002; Mackie, 'Shifting the Axis'; Vera Mackie, 'In Search of Innocence: Feminist Historians Debate the Legacy of Wartime Japan', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Volume 20, No 47, July 2005, pp. 213–215.

[39] Kälin, et al. *The Face of Human Rights*, pp. 8–9.

[40] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003.

The essay on health care in Afghanistan bears the curious title 'Visualizing Women's Health Care in Afghanistan', when in fact the essay is a verbal explanation, with no explicit discussion of what it might actually mean to 'visualise' such an issue.[41] This is one of the frustrations of the book. As someone who has spent much of my time analysing visual culture and who is sympathetic to the power to communicate through visual as well as verbal means, the lack of a clear articulation of what it means to communicate through the visual seemed like a missed opportunity. Similarly, I felt the lack of a clear articulation of why this means of communication is particularly suited to human rights advocacy.

As for the photographs themselves, the over 400 photographs are dispersed among the text of the 720-page volume. Some are single- or double- page spreads, some are arranged on fold-out pages to illustrate particular issues. Some series of photographs are clearly illustrative. A text on the 'right to marry' is surrounded by photographs of a mass wedding ceremony in South Korea, and examples of ceremonies from (Greek) Cyprus, Trinidad and Tobago, Iran, Japan, USA and Mexico.[42] Similarly, a section on education is surrounded by photographs of classrooms from around the world, including Afghanistan, India, Cambodia and Indonesia.[43]

As the editors point out, they are at pains to illustrate not only violations of human rights, but also the enjoyment of human rights. Thus, we have not only photographs of the Dili massacre in East Timor in 1999,[44] but also images of persons with disabilities exercising their rights to protest in India in 2000. The latter is a complex image. While it illustrates the actions of a state which discriminated against persons with disabilities by a government which proposed not to count them in the census, it also illustrates these very people gathering in a public place in order to exercise their rights to public speech and assembly.[45]

Several spreads work by similar forms of juxtaposition. A left-hand page reproduces Olympe de Gouges' 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen' from 1791, an extract from the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and a quote from Victor Hugo on the need for women's emancipation. The right-hand page shows a photograph of Aung San Suu Kyi making a speech in 2003 and a photograph of a female delegate to the constitutional council in Afghanistan in 2003. Once again, however, the point being made by the photographs is unclear. Does the photograph of Aung San Suu Kyi represent

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[41] Sima Samar, 'Visualizing Women's Health Care in Afghanistan', in Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, pp. 178–181.
[42] Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, pp. 347–353.
[43] Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, pp. 430–469.
[44] Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, pp. 52–53.
[45] Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, p. 137.

an exemplar of the 'female citizen', or an illustration of the continued political repression by the Myanmar government which has held her under house arrest?

In the section on the right to privacy, discussion of the prevalence of closed circuit cameras and other forms of surveillance and the articulation of the threat of 'having your picture recorded more than 300 times a day'[46] seems to bring into question the whole project of visualising human rights. This demonstrates the contradictory nature of this particular project. While the editors have been keen to deploy the resources of visual culture in order to raise consciousness about human rights issues, these images might have been deployed even more effectively with some more reflection on the workings of visual imagery.

Conclusions

I am raising issues about the use of visual and verbal representations in these texts not in order to reject their respective strategies out of hand, but rather to suggest that we need to take care in how we choose to communicate messages about human rights violations and how we choose to stimulate action and advocacy. I am suggesting that strategies of communication which leave the first world viewer in a position of sovereignty rather than challenging that sovereignty can only have limited efficacy in effecting global social change.[47] Given the huge cultural studies literature which is available in order to consider the ways of communicating in diverse verbal and visual means, it would be a pity if the authors of such well-meaning texts as these were not able to take advantage of such reflexivity. It seems to me that it is not enough simply to 'show' and 'tell'.[48] Rather we need a more sophisticated understanding of the workings of verbal and visual texts, whether we communicate from the position of activists, academics, bureaucrats, journalists or stakeholders.

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[46] Kälin, et al., *The Face of Human Rights*, p. 320.

[47] There is, of course, a huge literature critiquing Anglophone writings on the 'third world' and in particular on the 'third world woman'. See, inter alia, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in Mohanty e al (eds) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, pp. 51–80; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.) *'Race', Writing and Difference*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985, pp. 262–80; Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category "Non-Western Woman" in Feminist Writings on India', in Ranajit Guha (Ed.) *Subaltern Studies VI*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989; Mackie, 'The Metropolitan Gaze'; Mackie, *Gurôbaruka to Jendâ Hyôshô*.

[48] Julie Stephens, '"Show and Tell": Writing on Third World Women', *Arena*, No 88, 1989, pp. 167–172.