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**Human Rights Discourses on a Global Network:
Rhetorical Acts and Network Actors from Humanitarian NGOs, Conflict Sites,
and the Fiction Market**

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by

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As the language and ideology of human rights globalizes, some scholars have revisited pressing questions about the universality and cultural relativity of human rights as theory, discourse, and practice in philosophy, law, and culture. While some view the globalization of human rights negatively as Western cultural imperialism, others see it positively as a means to empower the oppressed. These arguments often reach an impasse because they presume human rights as a fixed entity.

This project reconsiders this assumption in the debate about the globalization of human rights by attending to the discursive (and thus changeable and changing) nature of this language and ideology, and the networked system through which it globalizes. By modeling a global discourse network, it examines how a globalizing discourse of human rights might be affected by and be affecting its subjects, especially their individual identity and agency. Thereafter, it tests this model on three actors speaking from different subject positions and through different textual genres – a humanitarian NGO and a speech; a genocide survivor and an autobiography; and a global author and a novel.

These case studies suggest that groups and individuals speaking from traditionally less-than-powerful subject positions (like the NGO and crisis survivor) in a typical human rights framework can benefit from the discourse and its network. They gain global presence and influence through the network's amplifying effects on identity, influence, and conventions, which offer its users the chance of appearing as agents. But there are also instances (as with the author and novel) where the universalist rhetoric of the discourse and the global reach of its network (their power) cannot overcome the force of other more divisive discourses and networks oriented around markers of difference like nationality, ethnicity, class, or religion.

This project thus outlines some possibilities and limits of speaking globally through a purportedly universalist discourse in a network situation, and identifies consistent problems of representing human rights crisis and causes as globalized speech acts and from postnational speaking positions, in a still nation-centered world.

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Introduction

Rethinking the Ties Between Globalization and Human Rights Through Discourse

In Paris, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted what Eleanor Roosevelt prophesied, “might well become the international Magna Carta of mankind” – the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (Robertson 30). This document contains a preamble and 30 claims for “the rights of all peoples around the world and formalizes them within the framework of international law” (O’Byrne 26). It invokes, as lawyer Geoffrey Robertson observes, “the notion that individuals, wherever in the world they live, possess a few basic powers which no political order can remove” (xiii). The term “human rights” thus reflects the understanding, as anthropologist Micheline Ishay notes, that these are “rights held by individuals simply because they are part of the human species” (3).

Since that historical moment in Paris, a growing collection of human rights instruments (covenants, conventions, declarations, and resolutions) have been produced, and a developing set of human rights bodies and organizations (state councils, commissions, committees, and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) have been created to promote, protect, monitor, and implement the language and ideas of human

rights as articulated in the UDHR.¹ These actions – the generation of human rights instruments and the formation of human rights bodies – represent various efforts to create agents with which to translate the language and ideology of the UDHR into reality. And these agents end up (re)generating the vocabulary and philosophy of the UDHR through the texts they create and the ways in which they use UDHR logic in their social interactions, giving the idea of human rights and its substantive list in the UDHR new life and new forms of agency, influence, and power as they do so. These agents produce and reproduce, in effect, human rights discourse, here understood, drawing from sociolinguist Norman Fairclough’s theory of discourse, as the textual products, discursive acts, and social practices oriented around the UDHR’s logic (*Discourse and Social Change*). In so doing, they also seem to interpolate themselves into a growing network of UDHR “native speakers,” creating themselves into an especially interesting discourse community, within and outside of nation-states, within and aside from national and international legal frameworks, and with the potential to act as agents on local levels while empowered to do so by an international legal imperative that does not necessarily seem to be imposing an entirely alien mandate onto specific circumstances. This project seeks to explore the actors and conventions of this emerging discourse community, specifically the effects on individual identities and agency when they enter such a discursive space.

One consequence of this proliferation of human rights discourse is its apparent globalization of the UDHR’s language and ideology, rendering its particular logic as at once normal, commonsensical, desirable, and universal. Unlike some international or global discourses like “democracy” that may go against the grain of some more authoritarian cultures and information technology that may necessitate particular kinds of infrastructure to make sense, human rights language can appear as a natural addition to many contexts. Even if people might disagree on the substance of human rights and the language of rights itself, there will likely be consensus on the idea of human dignity, even

¹ For a selected list of human rights documents, see United Nations, “International Human Rights Law.” For a select list of human rights institutions, see United Nations, “Human Rights Bodies.”

if what that dignity might mean may vary. The language of human rights and perhaps even its ideology can hold significant transcultural appeal. Moreover, there is the matter of states signing onto various conventions that comprise international human rights law. These human rights instruments and bodies (hereon termed the international human rights system) claim international purview in part because of the UDHR's aspirations to universal applicability but also in part because a majority of states have signed, if not ratified and protect them. The increasing presence of human rights discourse through the actions of state and non-state actors affect individuals and groups in many parts of the world. These actors thus invariably contribute to, if not actively aim toward, the worldwide propagation of the language and ideology of human rights as encoded in the UDHR. In no small part because of this reach, this globalization of human rights has become a contentious issue. The prevailing question seems to be – is the globalization of human rights “good” or “bad,” especially for those the norms seek to protect? It may seem absurd to question the “good” of promoting human rights norms worldwide. This perhaps counterintuitive contention arises partly because the very phenomenon of human rights, be it their origins, nature, content, or scope, and be they understood as law, discourse, or practice, is still much debated.

One of the central debates that has affected the project of human rights at least since the drafting of the UDHR is its claims to universality. Often referred to in the human rights field as the universalist-relativist debate, this issue pivots on the purported universality of human rights as proclaimed by and in the UDHR. The points of contention have to do, in general, with whether the claim of universality is a descriptive or prescriptive one, to borrow Patricia Roberts-Miller's articulation of the rhetorical meanings of universality (44). Are the rights listed in the UDHR descriptively universal (read: these are the rights shared universally by all human beings just because they are human) or prescriptively universal (read: these should be the rights shared universally by

everyone because they are human)?² The underlying charge informing this debate has been, almost from the start with the drafting of the document, that the declaration is steeped in notions of individualism, liberalism, and democracy privileged by the West, primarily the U.S., the U.K., and France. Aside from the troubling point of possible cultural imperialism, there was a serious concern about the possibility of promoting human rights worldwide. The worry was that, if human rights are indeed Western constructs, then might their applicability fall short in non-Western cultures? For some, the origin and nature of human rights was not as important as its ability to achieve its aims – protecting individuals in a way that allowed them to live as they saw fit, without interfering harmfully with others. This liberal approach in itself, however, may be considered particularly “Western.”

Historically, the universalist-relativist debate began even during the drafting of the UDHR. One such challenge to the notion of universal human rights came from the American Anthropology Association’s (AAA) “Statement on Human Rights” in 1947. In this document, the Executive Board of the AAA problematized the UN’s efforts to draft a statement of human rights for all peoples, stating: “Ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, are found in all societies, though they differ in their expression among different peoples. What is held to be a human right in one society may be regarded as anti-social by another people, or by the same people in a different period of their history” (542). It argued that since “standards and values are relative to the culture from which they

² These already weighty questions open up to even more complex questions relating to the language and philosophies inscribed in the UDHR. A few of the language issues, primarily the use of rights language, as opposed to a language of duties or responsibilities, issues closely linked to the kinds of values inscribed in the language and the modes of practice the language will elicit, are summarized by Henry Steiner and Philip Alston (323). One language-related issue Steiner and Alston raise is, for example: “Is that [rights] language intrinsically superior to other possible ones – for example, the language of duties that might lead to a Universal Declaration of Human Duties? Is rights language essential to the values and goals of the human rights movement? Or is the currency of that language a matter of historical contingency, in that the postwar movement to protect human dignity found its roots in liberal political cultures in which rights had long ago taken root?” (323).

derive,” therefore, “any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture [here understood as Western] must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole” (542). Thus, the association asks: “How can the proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America?” (Steiner and Alston 372). It warned the UN, in other words, of overlooking the place and particularities of local culture in their aims of creating a universal statement on human rights.³

Another objection to the universal project of the UDHR also arose during the document’s drafting stage, this time from the Saudi Arabian delegation that protested to the freedom to choose who one wanted to marry (Article 16) and the freedom of religion (Article 18). Commenting on the freedom to marry, the delegate states:

The authors of the draft declaration had, for the most part, taken into consideration only the standards recognized by Western civilization and had ignored more ancient civilizations which were past the experimental stage, and the institutions of which, for example, marriage, had proved their wisdom through the centuries. It was not for the Committee to proclaim the superiority of one civilization over all others or to establish uniform standards for all the countries of the world. (qtd. in Ignatieff, “The Attack on Human Rights” 103)

A similar argument of culture versus human rights arose later from political leaders in East Asia. These government leaders, including then Malaysia’s Prime Minister Mahatir Mohammad and Singapore’s Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, insisted that human rights were entrenched in Western values counter to Asian values. Instead of what they

³ In 1999, the AAA’s Committee for Human Rights issued another statement, “A Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights,” accepting the UDHR as a “baseline” for the “promotion and protection of the right of people and peoples everywhere to the full realization of their humanity, which is to say their capacity for culture” (pars. 3,6). For an overview of the American Anthropology Association’s relationship to human rights in these 1947 and 1999 statements, see Karen Engle, “From Skepticism to Embrace: Human Rights and the American Anthropological Association from 1947-1999” (2001).

characterized as Western notions of democracy and individual rights, these leaders opted for an Asian path to development and prosperity, a route, as Michael Ignatieff and others have commented, that “depends on authoritarian government and authoritarian family structures” (“The Attack on Human Rights” 105). Clearly, the AAA was not far off in its cautionary warnings to the UN. Further Islamic and Asian values challenges to the UDHR have usually been framed in terms of cultural values, group, and collective rights, as the association predicted.

It seems that, even by 1947, the lines for the universalist-relativist debate had been drawn: the discussion became one where, as Karen Engle notes, “culture” is seen as oppositional to “human rights”: “To be for human rights would be to oppose the acceptance of cultural practices that might conflict with one’s interpretations of human rights’ norms. To support an acceptance of conflicting cultural practices would be to oppose human rights” (536-537). No wonder, then, that the shape of that debate has been widely discussed.

Human rights law scholars Henry Steiner and Philip Alston identify three broad positions in this universalist-relativist debate – universalists, relativists, and strong relativists. Universalists maintain that at least some human rights listed in the UDHR, such as “rights to equal protection, physical security, free speech, freedom of religion and free association are and must be the same everywhere” (366). Relativists claim that most, if not all of the human rights in the UDHR are morally encoded in cultures and thus will only work in cultural contexts that find these UDHR rights in keeping with their particular social values and beliefs. Strong relativists take the relativist position even further, arguing not only that rights are culturally specific, but also that “no transcendent or transcultural ideas of right can be found or agreed on, and hence that no culture or state (whether or not in the guise of enforcing international human rights) is justified in attempting to impose on other cultures or states what must be understood to be ideas associated particularly with it” (367). This debate’s three positions have been taken up in the academic arena at least since Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab’s 1979 *Human*

Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives.⁴ Almost thirty years later, this debate is all but passé, as evidenced by the 2007-2008 back-and-forth between Jack Donnelly and Michael Goodhart in *Human Rights Quarterly*.⁵

The tripartite debate, at one level, emerges from rather essentialist assumptions about culture, human rights, and their interactions. Culture and human rights are treated as static and singular things – as if there is, always was, and always will be only one, unchanging culture for one group, and as if there is, always was, and always will be only

⁴ In their introduction, “Human Rights: a Western Construct with Limited Applicability,” Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab state that “the Western political philosophy upon which the [United Nations] Charter and the [Universal] Declaration [of Human Rights] are based provides only one particular interpretation of human rights, and that this Western notion may not be successfully applicable to non-Western areas” because of cultural and ideological differences (1).

⁵ In 2007, *Human Rights Quarterly* published “The Relative Universality of Human Rights” by Jack Donnelly wherein Donnelly argued for the “relative universality” of human rights: he stated that human rights can be said to be universal in what he called the functional, international legal, and overlapping consensus sense, but not in what he termed the anthropological and ontological sense. Donnelly thus suggested that human rights, when understood in this relative universality could allow for national, regional, and cultural particularity as well as more diversity and relativity.

In the next issue of the journal, Michael Goodhart responded to Donnelly’s article, noting that Donnelly’s article offered valuable insights to the universalist-relativist conundrum that has plagued human rights since at least the drafting of the UDHR. But, Goodhart finds that the terms universal and relative cloud efforts to understand the conceptual dimensions of human rights. He argues that human rights are neither relative nor universal, but they possess near universal appeal. Because of this global appeal, he suggests that one need not turn to claims of universality or relativity to make human rights legitimate locally, nationally, regionally, or internationally. According to Goodhart, the strongest evidence for promoting human rights is its relevance in the eyes of individuals across the world: that people turn to human rights to craft lives of dignity for themselves and others.

This same issue carried Donnelly’s reply to Goodhart. In response to Goodhart’s “neither universal nor relative,” Donnelly replies that human rights are “both universal and relative” (194). He explains that he is trying to appeal to certain universalist arguments and certain relativist arguments to defend human rights, not trying to expand the claims of human rights universalism. He also counters that the “universal” legitimacy of human rights lies not in its global appeal and the fact that people turn to it, but that human rights laws have been accepted by a majority of states internationally.

one, immutable set of human rights norms. Some universalist, relativist, and strong relativist positions all base some part of their arguments on these assumptions. Their arguments also rely to a degree upon an essentialist assumption about the interaction between culture and human rights norms – that the norms must be native, local, or innate to the culture for the norms to have applicability, legitimacy, and authority. These assumptions about a homogenous and static culture, an unchanging and unchangeable set of human rights norms, and their interactions produced efforts to prove the universalist position by showing human rights norms to be shared across cultures. The logic of this assertion posits that, if human rights norms are common across cultures, then a case can be made for their universality. This approaches the issue of universality as a descriptive statement – asserting this is the way things are. Also according to this logic, if there are human rights that are universally shared, then it should follow that, at least for the most “basic” rights, the statement of universality should also be a prescriptive one. If these are shared norms across cultures, then these norms should also be upheld for and by everyone and everywhere.

Ironically, this same line of reasoning is often used to disprove the universalist position. Relativists and strong relativists, oddly enough, apply the same logic that the universalists use but to opposite ends. They set out to disprove the universal claims of human rights as descriptive in order to show that making it prescriptive would be an infringement of culture. In each of these cases, the additional and tacit part of this first assumption is often that human rights norms, as inscribed in the UDHR and in the international human rights system, are Western – individualistic, liberal, and democratic in philosophy.

There is, however, another level to this universalist-relativist debate that moves away from the essentialist notions of culture, human rights, and their interaction. In this alternate logic, the individualism, liberalism, and democratic underpinnings of the UDHR and the human rights project are recognized. In this logic, one position, adopted perhaps most overtly by Ignatieff, asserts that, despite the Western nature of these norms, they are needed as benchmarks to guide the improvement of the conditions of humanity across the

world (“The Attack on Human Rights”). In short, even if these norms are not universal and even if they are particular to Western traditions, they can and possibly should nonetheless be universally applied for the good of humankind. The alternative would be to allow certain practices, supported by cultural tradition, that are affronts to human dignity. Human rights, especially the instruments of international human rights law, offer a resource for those within a culture and those from other cultures to resist practices, especially state-imposed ones, which deny their freedoms.

Donnelly seems to adopt a similar position, arguing, though, for what he calls a “relative universalist” position, wherein human rights are both relative and universalist. Like Ignatieff, Donnelly finds that human rights as idea and as listed in the UDHR can be a useful tool for those with less power to resist those with more, especially the power of the state. He and others espousing this more pragmatic position (what human rights was is not as important as that people are making it work for them) also adopt the view that culture is changeable: even if the norms are not native to a group, they can be adopted by the group or its individuals, especially if these norms benefit the group or the individuals in the group. From this perspective, whatever the descriptive nature of human rights universally, they could and perhaps should be applied universally: whether or not they are really Western or universal may be important, but not as important as the reality that they are needed to improve social justice in the world.

A counter position, articulated perhaps most strongly by Makau Mutua, maintains that the Western nature of these norms must be recognized so that a more multicultural approach to human rights can be adopted, thereby leading to a more truly universal (in substance, not just in name) set of human rights norms. Interestingly, even Mutua, who would seem to be a strong relativist, does not oppose the proliferation of human rights, only that it be truly multicultural.

Each of these positions, Ignatieff’s, Donnelly’s, and Mutua’s, share the implicit assumption that cultures and human rights norms are mutable. They usefully move away, each to different degrees and ends, from essentialist notions of culture, human rights, and the relationship between these two social constructs. This project adopts a similar non-

essentialist, social-constructionist approach to culture, human rights norms, and their interactions. Where it differs, and hopes to expand this universalist-relativist conversation as it relates to the globalization of human rights, is that I approach human rights, not as philosophy, but as discourse – language and language use. While the concept of human rights and its substantive list in the UDHR have been extensively discussed as a philosophy with many positions, some of which I have just sketched above (in terms of the legal frameworks relying on it on national levels and trans- or international levels, and in respect to the organizations which implement it, including NGOs), there has been little attention paid to how its language and ideology are used rhetorically, that is, in terms of how they are used by individuals and groups to stage arguments, speak truth to power or assert their own, or implement projects under its aegis. The purpose or aim of human rights discourse is after all to offer those with less power within their own societies and in an international system and a global society a vernacular that authorizes their protests against oppression. Yet little work has been done on how this language and ideology is taken up by individuals at the global level.

To fill this lacuna, the present project will not be not so much concerned about whether globalization and human rights have a negative or positive relationship in terms of means and outcomes, be they legal, moral, or institutional. Rather, it is critically interested in the proliferation of human rights *discourse* in an age of political, economic, and especially cultural globalization. That is, it is interested in seeing how various forms of human rights talk emerge and are used to negotiate situations typical of an increasingly globalized set of world networks (communication, infrastructure, legal, or interpersonal).

If, with increased interactions between people because of globalization, the boundaries between cultures grow looser and societies more heterogeneous not just in make up but in mind sets and values, then might human rights norms, admittedly dominant as practiced by the international human rights system, be more open to change, as more speakers outside governments in the narrow sense enter the conversation? Might it be possible that the globalization of human rights discourse, so often seen by its opponents as a new form of cultural imperialism enacted by dominant nation states, now

be functioning somewhat differently, now acting as a channel for transforming that discourse, so that what was once seen as a hegemonic imposition from outside might actually become more empowering for those who most need the power of human rights? These are the underlying questions driving this study. In asking these questions about whether and how human rights debates evolve new forms of speech for new speakers as they globalize, this project thus seeks to revisit the question of human rights discourse globalization in ways that open up the universalist-relativist dilemma by considering the permeability of human rights as not necessarily a philosophy or a first principle of law, but rather explicitly as a discursive construct. This experiment is based, quite straightforwardly, on the fact that the UDHR first took form *as a document written by a form of international consensus*, with no clear force as a philosophy, a law code, an institution, or anything else.

In fact this discursive nature of human rights is not entirely new. It has been discussed most often in terms of its usage by the U.S. government, whereby the government is accused of manipulating the language of human rights, that is, using this discourse only rhetorically for its own political agendas without subscribing to the ideology substantively. But it has also been raised in terms of its usage by the American left – the section of U.S. society most closely identified as advocates of human rights, often seen in opposition to the U.S. government that is most often characterized as a violator, or at least a less-than-sincere supporter, of human rights. Former Executive Director of Human Rights Watch Aryeh Neier, for example, makes these twin arguments about how human rights discourse is open to manipulation (not necessarily in the negative sense) by both the U.S. government and the American left.⁶ In “Rights and Wrongs,” Neier raises these observations to question what is meant by “rights,” but in so doing, he shows the openness of the term, thereby suggesting as I do here, that human rights might best be approached as a fairly permeable and pliable language.

⁶ In his article “Rights and Wrongs” (2007), Neier analyzes the way the U.S. government, under President George W. Bush, and the American left use “rights talk.”

This call to attend to human rights as language and language use is not mine alone. Some scholars like law professor Florian Hoffmann and cultural anthropologist Shannon Speed have started to emphasize the discursive nature of human rights as a way to step away from some of the dilemmas inherent in the universalist-relativist debate. They suggest that it might be better to focus less on the question of what human rights are or should be (universal or culturally relative) philosophically but to concentrate on what human rights as discourse does or can do globally and locally in practice. That is, they move away from the universalist problem of justifying global promotion of human rights based on shared cultural values and the relativist critique that a Western concept of human rights will have not just limited applicability but will be another avenue for Western cultural imperialism. They do so by suggesting that human rights itself, like culture, is not a static concept. Like culture, human rights too can be open to change.⁷

The work of Hoffmann and Speed opens the possibility that human rights when conceived as discourse might constitute a network joining human beings together in new consensuses, rather than defining what these humans *are* or *are worth* or *are due* in their inalienable rights as human beings. This is an implication of Hoffmann's and Speed's work that my project tries to develop. Hoffmann and Speed approach this discursive potential of human rights from the same premise, developing their work from the assumption that, as discourse, human rights language is transformable. Speed adopts a more practical approach and demonstrates the promise of human rights language as an empowering tool for indigenous rights promotion. Hoffmann, on the other hand, takes a more philosophical approach and suggests more generally the possibilities of using human rights discourse to fight oppression by less authorized discourse users.

This move towards paying attention to the discursive and thus more open and mutable nature of human rights is a useful one if only because it turns away from the too-

⁷ See Hoffmann, “‘Shooting into the Dark’: Toward a Pragmatic Theory of Human Rights (Activism)” (2006); Speed and Alvaro Reyes, “‘In Our Own Defense’: Rights and Resistance in Chiapas” (2002); and Speed, “Representing Culture, Translating Human Rights Symposium: Panel I: Translating Human Rights: Introduction” (2006).

simple dichotomy premised on essentialist notions of human rights and culture that has driven too many examinations of human rights and human rights discourse globalization to date. One is not then left with the binary options of either there *are* universal human rights norms to which all people, whatever their culture, must comply or there are only *culture-specific* norms to which all individuals in their respective cultures subscribe and from which they cannot possibly alter. Neither of these are attractive options, especially when societies are becoming increasingly diverse culturally, in part, because of globalization, involving, as Mike Featherstone notes, the “flows of goods, people, information, knowledge and images” which “gain autonomy at a global level” and with “third cultures” of individuals who are not just national in orientation (1). The possibility of appealing to another set of values not shared by that culture but shared by other cultures or recognized by other cultures as appropriate for human beings is attractive if not necessary to the human rights project as presently constituted. Moreover, this approach fundamentally transforms the optic on the problem away from essentialism and into a more transactional framework not just in terms of the origins and substance of human rights, but also in terms of people. It highlights what people (want to) do with human rights, with globalization, with their identities and agency, rather than simply what they are in human rights discourse and processes of globalization.

Again, others have already begun work on this discursive approach to the universalist-relativist and globalization-human rights questions. A number of these scholars take the human rights industry as it is, largely Western and European, as they differentiate the industry, the ideology on which it is based, and the purposes and uses to which “human rights talk” in its many forms can be applied. They thus explore the mutability angle by tracing how the conventions of this discourse are deployed or deployable for particular ends. Examples of such approaches might include Speed in cultural anthropology, Meg McLagan in documentary filmmaking, Clifford Bob in political science, and WITNESS Program Manager Sam Gregory in human rights

activism.⁸ Each of these approaches have sought to understand how the system of human rights as discourse might work for or against those whose rights claims most need the power of human rights. Their work, with exception of Bob's that has centered on the limits rather than the possibilities, has focused to a degree on the legibility of human rights discourse as a tool for agency, suggesting in fact that this discourse has more entry points than earlier analysts had assumed and thus may serve more forms of agency and power than traditionally conceived. Some of this work, like that done by Gregory with the U.S.-based human rights video advocacy group WITNESS appears to be trying to create more entry points through various transnational cooperations and communications and with different forms of media. It is in this spirit that the present project is being undertaken. Like these other scholars, I am concerned with how this discourse might be a tool rather than a hurdle, even if it is a tool originally designed by the masters, for those who need as many tools as they can to improve the living conditions of their societies and of others.

While the work by scholars and activists like Speed, McLagan, Gregory, and Bob have focused on the conventions that might lead to global recognition, there is also an underlying concern in their work with persuasion and audience, two issues critical to rhetorical and argumentation studies. While the focus in this project is not so much on persuasion and argumentation, in the sense of creating sympathy through sentimental stories, as discussed by Richard Rorty, or the mobilization of shame, as observed by

⁸ See McLagan, "Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public" (2006) and "Circuits of Suffering" (2005); Gregory, "Transnational Storytelling: Human Rights, WITNESS, and Video Advocacy" (2006); and Bob, "Merchants of Morality" (2002) for a concise introduction to their work. For more in-depth discussions, see their books – *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism* (2005) edited by Gregory, and *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (2005) by Bob. McLagan, Gregory, and Bob are each interested in understanding the structures of publicity and advocacy, including their respective conventions and media, that inform and enable transnational human rights advocacy. Gregory's article provides a useful overview of the main issues (advantages and disadvantages) of local and transnational human rights advocacy through visual texts in an age of globalizing human rights discourses and of global communication networks.

Thomas Keenan, it is concerned with persuasion in the sense of transnational, transcultural, transpersonal recognition, of being identifiable, if not being relatable across various degrees of difference. I am thus here interested in how human rights language presumes something shared between all peoples as being more important than what is not shared. That constant tension between power in similarity and difference is, after all, the fundamental promise and problem of human rights, no matter how utopian it might seem to some. The quirky reliance simultaneously on similarity (we are all human) and difference (you are being treated as less human than I) is a central paradox of the human rights project.

The language and its advocates presume a particular notion of global community, almost a kind of cosmopolitan vision, as described by Ulrich Beck, one wherein individuals may be located at a particular local or national site and are actively present and engaged in these communities but also actively aware and involved in other communities, be they international, transnational, or global. The human rights project envisions this kind of cosmopolitanism, not the kind of cosmopolitanism that belongs to no particular locale and therefore neither cares for particular communities nor has loyalties to any groups. Instead, it asks for individuals to care about more than the immediate communities to which they belong; it asks for people to care about all communities of human beings. Such appeals for recognizing similarities and differences, calls for cosmopolitan visions and feelings, in a system of nation-states and organizing around identity politics certainly face problems, not the least of which are the very identity markers human rights discourse elides – race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nationality.

This project will remain aware that there are challenges to such cosmopolitan calls in human rights discourse. It will also be conscious of the limits to this discourse's mutability, as Speed and Mutua among others have pointed out. Those with more power will invariably have greater influence on the discourse. Speed and Mutua ironically insist on the mutability of the discourse for different reasons: Speed to show the oppressed can

claim agency with it, however alien; Mutua to show the oppressed are further oppressed by it, when its alien nature is deliberately not recognized or underplayed.

I will add to their concerns a set of analyses that show clear limits on the speaking positions that individuals must recognize if they are to be able to claim the agency which human rights discourses promise. This promise will include, of course, new forms of global human appeals that might even have the potential to circumvent more established, less flexible, forms of institutions and associations who have until recently seemed the sole stakeholders, administrators, and possessors of this discourse's power and moral authority. This project thus explores the possibilities and limits of subjects of human rights discourse to gain agency through the discourse and to influence the discourse, especially in light of its growing global reach.

This project suggests but one possible way to approach this question of the relationship between human rights discourse and its subjects (their identity and agency) in a global context. It proposes that human rights might be conceived as *discourse*, that is, as a moral code that human rights language represents, and as texts, discursive practices, and social practices that exemplify this language in use. It also proposes the notion of a *global discourse network*, that is, a web of interconnected circuits of language and communication oriented around human rights philosophies and practices through which this discourse circulates worldwide. This idea of a global discourse network builds primarily on the work of cultural anthropologist McLagan, sociolinguist Fairclough, feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti, literary scholar Michael Hardt and political theorist Antonio Negri. The hope is that such a framework might shed light on how discourse globalizes, which in turn, could help with the effort to assess the relationship between human rights discourse and its subjects, specifically, and the ties between human rights and globalization, more broadly.⁹

⁹ For examples of scholars who ask and try to answer this question, see Alison Brysk's *Globalization and Human Rights* (2002), with articles like Richard Falk's "Interpreting the Interaction of Global Markets and Human Rights" (61-76); Clifford Bob's "Globalization and the Social Construction of Human Rights Campaigns" (133-147); and

To make its case, the dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One (Chapters One to Four) builds an argument for approaching human rights as discourse and its globalization as proliferating through a global system of networks. It explains the theoretical foundations of the project, suggests what a discursive view of human rights might entail, makes some preliminary observations on the general characteristics of a global discourse network of human rights, and offers some rough ideas of what this discourse network system might mean for the subjects of human rights – individual human beings. In doing so, it hopes to add another factor for consideration in the universalist-relativist debate in the context of globalization.

Part Two (Chapters Five to Seven) works through three case studies in order to try and clarify the features and functions of such a network, and to explore what is at stake with this discourse’s globalization. The case studies come from different subject positions (the *personal positions* from which individual subjects may speak within the network) and genres (the *textual forms* and *conventions* through which individual subjects may speak within the network) so as to capture the multiple subject positions and genres in the host of personal and textual performances and practices that comprise a global discourse network. They also primarily focus on “Western” and “non-Western” intersections, either in terms of a “Western” group (an NGO) working in “non-Western” areas or “non-Western” individuals (a survivor and a novelist) speaking to “Western” audiences. Let me now break these down in greater detail.

Chapter Breakdown

Jack Donnelly’s “Human Rights, Globalizing Flows, and State Power” (226-241). Also see Matthew J. Gibney’s *Globalizing Rights* (2003), with articles like Vandana Shiva’s “Food Rights, Free Trade, and Fascism” (87-108), Homi K. Bhabha’s “On Writing Rights” (162-183), and K. Anthony Appiah’s “Citizens of the World” (189-232). See too Nicholas Owen’s *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* (2003), that include articles like Michael Ignatieff’s “Human Rights, Sovereignty and Intervention” (49-88), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Righting Wrongs” (164-227), and Susan Sontag’s “War and Photography” (251-274).

Chapter One describes how this project sits at the crossroads of globalization, human rights and discourse scholarship, and suggests what a discourse and network approach might add to each field of study. It offers fundamental definitions for the terms on which this project rests: globalization, human rights, and discourse, and argues that human rights could be productively studied as discourse. The broad and contested range of scholarship on the three terms are outlined, to set my project within and with respect to existing projects, so that my use of fictional texts of various genres in the context of real legal and political debates can be explained. Chapter Two describes a discourse approach to defining “human rights.” It explains how and why it might be useful to view human rights as discourse with the help of Fairclough’s social theory of discourse in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992).¹⁰ To illustrate the histories and theories of human rights discourse, this chapter also draws from the work of political theorists Donnelly in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (1989, 2003) and Ishay in *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (2004) among others.

Chapter Three describes a network approach to understanding how human rights discourse might function. It explains how and why it might be productive to characterize a global discourse network of human rights. Some key features and functions of this network are suggested with the help of McLagan’s notion of “a circulatory matrix” of rights-oriented media organizations and practices¹¹ and the theory of global power proposed by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2001). Chapter Four tries to suggest what such a combined discourse and network approach might bring to questions of identity and agency critical to the study of human rights and globalization. It borrows from the work of Hardt and Negri on global forms of power, *Empire* and *Multitude*, as well as Braidotti’s notion of “nomadic subjects.” Together, these four chapters lay out the

¹⁰ Each case study will also borrow heavily from Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis approach to reveal how each of the texts (each one of them an instance of human rights discourse) conveys global power in the way that Hardt and Negri identify.

¹¹ For an overview of McLagan’s work on these issues, see “Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public” (2006); “Circuits of Suffering” (2005); and “Human Rights, Testimony, and Transnational Publicity” (2003).

histories, theories and method that this project draws upon to conceive and analyze human rights as a discourse globalizing through a network system.

Chapter Five marks the start of the case study section. It looks at how an international humanitarian aid NGO like *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) uses human rights discourse from an “official” speaking position. Although human rights discourse is often seen as a language available to individuals and groups to check a state’s abuse of power, this chapter explores how members of civil society, especially internationally-influential NGOs, might use it to claim state-like power for themselves, even as they insist on their non-state status. To do so, the chapter compares the human rights discourse in the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, delivered by then MSF President James Orbinski, to the organization’s stated humanitarian mission. This MSF case study seems to show that an organization can use the power of human rights discourse to claim for itself a kind of global power.

The speech is first dissected to demonstrate how MSF uses human rights discourse, emphasizing the moral language premise of the discourse, to insist on its non-political, non-state, position as a purely “humanitarian” organization. This “just moral, not political” rhetorical frame is then contrasted with MSF’s deeply political and state-like practices and policies. This example suggests how human rights discourse might allow internationally-influential NGOs, like MSF, to present themselves as purely charitable organizations even as they become governing forces, in influential if limited ways, in sites across the world. This type of “governing-NGO” thus exemplifies both a new global identity forged through discourse and a new global power enabled specifically by a global discourse network of human rights.

Chapter Six considers human rights discourse as employed from the “quasi-official” speaking position of human rights crises survivors – “quasi-official” because survivors are typically “officially” implicated in rights discourses, but not necessarily as agents in control of this speech. In most human rights situations, they are spoken *to* and *of*, but are not themselves speaking. Although human rights discourse is often seen as a “Western” vocabulary forced upon the “non-Western” areas of the world, some texts by survivors seem to show another facet of the power of human rights discourse. That is,

how the discourse seems to be adopted and adapted by members of the “non-Western” parts of the world to express their own sense of ethics and humanity in the face of “Western” hegemonies. The case study in this chapter is the life narrative of Rwandan genocide hero Paul Rusesabagina. It will be used to suggest that some “non-Western” individuals, often by definition the objects of human rights situations, appear to negotiate the moral power of human rights discourse, and in so doing, seem to create themselves as subjects of human rights discourse and agents in the global human rights arena.

Specifically, the chapter unpacks how Rusesabagina’s particular use of human rights discourse in his autobiography *An Ordinary Man* (2006) appears to lend him power as a speaking subject. This particular use involves reframing “non-Western” human rights crises in moral rather than political terms for a “Western” audience that, though interested, might not be as well-informed, about such “foreign” events with global repercussions. The chapter illustrates how Rusesabagina appears to leverage his identity as a human rights crisis survivor, an identity that when coupled with his own manipulations of human rights discourse, enables him to fashion for himself globally recognized identities with specific influence. He becomes an agent with power rather than a victim. For instance, the global reach of his identity-based power allows him to run the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation that helps orphans and widows of post-genocide Rwanda. This case study suggests that some human rights texts may be seen as not just singular instances of the “West” disempowering the “non-West” or simple individual acts of witness by victims of human rights crises situations. Rather, such texts may be conceived as particular moments of human rights language use that holds productive power. This is because these texts can assist human rights survivors from the ‘non-West’ to connect with their “Western” counterparts and form fruitful global connections.

Chapter Seven looks at human rights discourse as employed from an “unofficial” speaking position of novelists – users of human rights discourse not connected directly with known entities, that is, with known human rights actors. It is generally acknowledged that, although human rights activism and humanitarian aid may arrive with the best of intentions, they often leave behind destructive, unintended consequences. If the MSF and Rusesabagina case studies suggest the frequent, but not always flexible,

productive power of human rights discourse in use within a global discourse network, this chapter highlights the potentially problematic force of human rights language and ideology. It analyzes *Anil's Ghost* (2000) by Sri Lankan-born, Canadian-based novelist Michael Ondaatje. The novel critiques the way some international human rights investigations seem oblivious to the potentially negative impact of their presence on local conditions. At the same time, the novel itself has been criticized for neglecting to attend to the specifics of the local human rights crisis that it represents. This case study suggests that the power of human rights discourse to transcend national boundaries, despite (or perhaps because of) the global nature of its language and ideology, may still be limited by preoccupations of the national.

The Conclusion returns to the research questions and preliminary hypotheses in order to deliberate on the outcomes of this project, revisit the proposed global discourse network model, and suggest two particular directions for future research – the question of an emerging postnational subject and that of global literature.

My hope for this project is that understanding how human rights discourses might be circulating through a global network may help shed light on the issues of history and advocacy, and of analysis and critique, so vital to human rights activism. It should be possible, if not important, however, to analyze the discourse and power of human rights without seeming to either refute its right to exist or to support its cause directly. The hope is that discourse, globalization, and human rights scholars (among others) might, albeit with significant adjustments, find the discussion here of a global discourse network useful for studying not just human rights discourses, but also possibly other global discourses like development, nutrition, or medicine.

Part One

In Theory:

A Global Discourse Network

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage:

Defining Globalization, Human Rights, and Discourse

This chapter is the first of four that spell out the theoretical foundations of this project. The first defines the project's key terms – globalization, human rights, and discourse – and locates it in the intersections of globalization, human rights, and discourse studies. The second chapter outlines a discourse approach to human rights. It lays out what it means to conceive of human rights as discourse by describing the key aspects of what I identify as human rights language and language use. The third chapter explicates a network theory of human rights discourse globalization. That is, it articulates how human rights discourse might be understood to be circulating worldwide through a global discourse network by discussing what I take as the main features of such a network. It also outlines how this network appears to help globalize human rights discourse. Finally, the fourth chapter suggests how such a network theory might guide an analysis of the globalization of human rights discourse, as well as how such discourse globalization might affect and be affected by an individual's agency and identities. My goal is to provide an alternative way of studying the phenomenon of human rights as a globalizing discourse, illuminating the effects that emerge when a set of philosophical premises become reference points for various acts of communication.

Let us begin by situating this project on human rights as a globalizing discourse within a larger framework of globalization, human rights, and discourse scholarship. In this chapter I will briefly explain where this project might fit in each of these areas of study and how it hopes to contribute to them.

Globalization

Globalization is a fraught term, loaded with a range of positive and negative meanings and associations. As Giles Gunn observes, “As now used, *globalization* conjures up in many minds a spectacle of instantaneous electronic financial transfers, the depredations of free-market capitalism, the homogenization of culture, and the expansion of Western, by which is usually meant American, political hegemony” (“Introduction” 19).¹² Alongside this rather negative view of globalization, he notes there is also the argument that globalization has improved some aspects of human life worldwide. He writes:

[G]lobalization has also by some accounts made possible a threefold increase in the world’s per capita income, reduced by half the number of people living in dire poverty, reinforced the movement for nuclear disarmament, helped expand the environmental movement and encouraged the international organization of numerous subordinated groups, from women and writers to victims of human rights violations and sufferers from such medical scourges as AIDS and bubonic plague. (Gunn, “Introduction” 19)

It is not only the effects of globalization that make the term so unstable and contested. There is also disagreement on what processes this term refers to (economic, political,

¹² Gunn adds that globalization is “hardly an attractive prospect – especially when accompanied by evidence of widening economic inequality, worsening ecological degradation, intensified ethnic rivalry, spreading militarism, escalating religious nationalism, and other ills – globalization generally brings with it, as many of its critics, from Zygmunt Bauman and John Gray to Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi have noted, the erasure of local differences and the integration of more and more of the world’s people, as well as of entire sovereign states into a geopolitical system that inevitably erodes their ability to shape their own destinies” (“Introduction” 19).

cultural or some combination of these three areas) and thus when such processes came into being (in pre-modern times, as a product of modernity and capitalism, or with the advent of postmodernity).

Immanuel Wallerstein, for instance, has tended to focus on the economic aspects of globalization, in no small part because his framework of world systems theory is premised on the spread of the capitalist system across the globe. By contrast, others like Roland Robertson, Malcolm Waters, Arjun Appadurai, and Frederick Buell have argued that these processes involved more than economics or politics alone: globalization always included cultural interchanges on the symbolic and discursive levels. In terms of starting points of these processes of globalization, historians William McNeill and Marshall Hodgson, for example, have argued that globalization started not in the early modern period, with the growth and expansion of European capitalism, but instead almost two millennia before, with the advent of an Afro-Eurasian zone of civilization ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific (Gunn, "Introduction" 20). Anthony Giddens, on the other hand, understands globalization as emerging during the modern period, coinciding with the arrival of modernism and the development of the nation-state under capitalism (Gunn, "Introduction" 29). Meanwhile David Harvey locates the launching point of globalization later, with the emergence of postmodernism at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, while Thomas Friedman situates this start date even more recently, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Gunn, "Introduction" 29).

Although scholars define the effects, processes and starting points of globalization differently, most agree on four of its characteristics.¹³ As Manfred Steger summarizes in *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (2003): First, "globalization involves the *creation* of new and the *multiplication* of existing social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries" (9). Second, "globalization is reflected in the *expansion* and the *stretching* of

¹³ See David Held and Anthony McGrew's *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate* (2003) for a range of globalization definitions, especially in Part 1, "Understanding Globalization," 51-121.

social relations, activities, and interdependencies” (11). Third, “globalization involves the *intensification* and *acceleration* of social exchanges and activities” (11). And fourth, “the creation, expansion, and intensification of social interconnections and interdependencies do not occur merely on an objective, material level” (12).

The following working definition of globalization might be drawn for this project: “Globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant” (Steger 13). Notice that here globalization refers to “a set of social processes” and not a social condition, which Steger terms “globality” (7). In common speech, we often use “globalization” to mean both, but it is important for the question of a global discourse network to distinguish the social *condition* of “globality” from the social *processes* of “globalization.” In this project, “globality” will be used to mean “a *social condition* characterized by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant” (Steger 7). For this project, the starting point of globalization is not as important, although my tendency is to gravitate to the long view of history, and so I find the arguments for identifying processes akin, if not similar, to global interactions in the pre-modern period quite persuasive. It seems to me that parallel processes were in play from the first moments of human interaction, but the nature of these interactions and processes have changed over time, especially in terms of the intensity and frequency of these interchanges. As for the issue of the effects of globalization, they are, in part, the question at hand in this project. It will not be considered in general, but only in the specific instance of human rights discourse and its globalization.

Given the contested nature of the term globalization, its beginnings, its effects, and its processes, it comes as no surprise that globalization scholarship is also vast and

varied.¹⁴ In the second half of the twentieth century, some globalization scholars like Wallerstein and Giddens, as mentioned above, have tried to explain globalization as a product of advanced capitalism and modernity.¹⁵ In so doing, they have mainly focused on the way globalization changes how time and space is experienced, and what such changes mean for societies in terms of politics, economics, and culture.¹⁶ Other scholars have shed light on how globalization affects local places (their politics, economics, and culture) in the context of empire. By empire (until Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri realign the term, as I shall address below), they often mean European imperial conquests since the sixteenth century and U.S. imperial expansion since the mid-twentieth century. These scholars call these primarily negative effects “cultural imperialism.”¹⁷

John Tomlinson’s analysis of four ways in which the discourse of cultural imperialism has developed is worth dwelling on here, since this project is in some respects concerned with human rights as a potential form of cultural imperialism and of human rights discourse as a kind of symbolic and linguistic empire. Tomlinson examines the ways in which the discourse of cultural imperialism has been deployed as media imperialism (the export of news and television programs from the dominant First World global media conglomerates to the Third World market that stifles local and national culture), as a discourse of nationality (the imposition of Western cultural values and ideas

¹⁴ See Held and McGrew’s *The Global Transformations Reader* (2003) for a range of topics that have dominated contemporary globalization studies. Also see David Oswell’s *Culture and Society: An Introduction to Cultural Studies* (2006) for a concise overview of contemporary globalization studies from a cultural studies perspective.

¹⁵ See Wallerstein’s *The Modern World System, Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* (1974, 1980) and Giddens’ *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990).

¹⁶ Landmark examples include Giddens’ “time-space distancing” in *The Constitution of Society* (1984) and *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Manuel Castells’ “network society” in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), David Harvey’s “time-space compression” in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), and Arjun Appadurai’s five landscapes – “ethnoscapes,” “technoscapes,” “finanscapes,” mediascapes,” and “ideoscapes” in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural economy” (1990).

¹⁷ Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1971) are classic studies of cultural imperialism.

upon non-Western national, local, and indigenous communities in a world system of nation-states), as a critique of global capitalism (the exploitation of labor by multinational corporations specifically and the casting of capitalism as an imperialist power and a homogenizing cultural force more generally in a world system of global capitalism), and as a critique of modernity (the imposition of the (Western) modernist project of progress and development from the developed West to the undeveloped or developing non-Western countries often through capitalist endeavors).¹⁸ These four areas in which the discourse of cultural imperialism have developed, it seems to me, carry over to various other fields of research in globalization studies.

Interestingly, Tomlinson sees the discourse of globalization replacing that of imperialism, thereby identifying a recharacterization of global power framed at first as imperialism (prevalent during the modern period until the 1960s) and then as globalization (during the postmodern period following that). He identifies several differences between the two forms of global power, noting that imperialism had at least a specific trajectory and purpose in mind – “the *intended* spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe” – even if it did not always play out this way in practice (Tomlinson 175). On the other hand, globalization is a more incoherent and indirect process, growing out of interconnections and interdependency across all places worldwide. Moreover, he suggests that the “cultural experience” of globalization affects all countries of the world, whereas before with imperialism, the cultural impact was greater in the peripheral countries than in the core countries. While Tomlinson is right to identify this recharacterization of global power and to discern differences between the two frames that are not merely discursive but material, one might argue that the “cultural

¹⁸ See Herbert Schiller for an example of cultural imperialism as media imperialism. In “Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era,” Schiller draws from the historical developments in geopolitics, especially in terms of the presence and influence of U.S. government policies and corporate enterprises, to argue that cultural imperialism, if not specifically in the form of U.S. political or media culture, is still alive. Only now, its agents are transnational corporate actors and their mode of operation is through a comprehensive control and manipulation of communication systems and cultural products like television shows, shopping malls, and sports.

experience” of globalization, especially in terms of the flow of wealth, still moves from periphery to center, wherein the center is not so much imperial powers like Britain and the U.S. but capitalist powers like multinational corporations such as Microsoft and Nike. In other words, the framework of understanding global power in imperialism and some understandings of globalization, while shifting from a nation-state model to a multinational corporation one, remains rooted in a center-periphery model with resistant margins and hegemonic centers.

Such a center-periphery model, while productive for projects of cultural imperialism critique in the age of imperial powers during the process of colonization and decolonization, may not be as useful for an age of Empire (in Hardt and Negri’s sense) with no center and no periphery, where there are multiple hegemonic sites, including resistant ones like dominant international NGOs, and margins within centers, and peripheries within cores. The persistence of this framework has been one of the limitations of postcolonial studies to grapple with the economic, political, and cultural processes of globalization. As Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman observe, there is a reluctance in most postcolonial studies research to see globalization as anything more than “a form of intensified neoimperialism headquartered in the United States” (607).¹⁹

¹⁹ O’Brien and Szeman identify the following limitations of postcolonial studies in dealing with globalization: “Its tendency to see globalization as little more than a form of intensified neoimperialism headquartered in the United States is one reason why it has been possible to see postcolonialism as the study of globalization *avant la lettre*. The entry on globalization in [Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s] *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, for example, makes the claim that ‘the key to the link between classical imperialism and contemporary globalization in the twentieth century has been the role of the United States,’ which is responsible for initiating ‘those features of social life and social relations that today may be considered to characterize the global: mass production, mass communication, and mass consumption.’ This is a commonly held view of globalization—a kind of ground zero that explains everything in terms that find immediate sympathy with critics, scholars, and activists around the world: the United States as global hegemonic bully. What most often seems to be signified by the ‘United States’ here is not so much its citizens, or even some subsection of them, but everything from the U. S. state apparatus (including its military power) to Hollywood and American cultural industries more generally, to that unholy triumvirate of consumerism, capitalism,

They identify several problems with this center-periphery model, with the U.S. as the neoimperial power, especially the way it overlooks “a more thorough examination of the sites and modalities of power in the global era – including those sites of institutional power” including multinational corporations but also NGOs and philanthropic groups (608).²⁰ O’Brien and Szeman note, moreover, that although many of these institutions are located “intellectually and materially” in the U.S., this “does not obviate the need to understand the networks in which they operate as something more than crude extensions of a national will-to-power” (608). This project tries to move in this direction of examining the networks along which a discourse of human rights transpires and creates as it globalizes by borrowing from a different view of global power, one that moves away from the center-periphery model to one of Empire where there are no centers or peripheries and where power resides also in collectives of individuals alongside that of nation-states, institutions, or corporations.

In contrast to other frames for understanding globalization and global power like cultural imperialism, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2002), have sought to offer a less totalizing and disempowering view of globalization, or at least one that troubles the center-periphery paradigm. As Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman declare, Hardt and Negri’s concept of Empire is a “sweeping rethinking of the phenomenon ordinarily called ‘globalization’” wherein globalization is characterized as “primarily an economic (and secondarily a cultural) phenomenon; if it is considered in political terms at all, it is usually thought of as simply a threat to (nation-based) politics as such” (177-78). Departing from this conventional view of globalization, Hardt and Negri characterize the contemporary state of the world in the throes of globalization as

and modernity” (607-08).

²⁰ O’Brien and Szeman identify some problems with demonizing the U.S. as the source of “bad” globalization as follows: “It reasserts a view of sovereign power and of political causality that, after Foucault, seems difficult to sustain, especially as imagined on a global scale; it depends on the simplest versions of the cultural imperialist thesis, whose problems John Tomlinson has exposed; and it locates power in a specific national space, reasserting the legitimacy of national boundaries and national characteristics, both of which have been forcefully challenged over the past several decades” (608).

being in the process of forming a new political order, a new form of sovereignty, that is truly global, that is one that “has no outside” (Brown and Szeman 178). Hardt and Negri’s work in *Empire* is both descriptive (this is how they see globalization unfolding and changing the geopolitical landscape of global power) and suggestive (this is their attempt to conceptualize the economic, political, and cultural changes that are ongoing as an inchoate global order comes closer into being).

If cultural imperialism in its various discourses discussed by Tomlinson seemed preoccupied with culture and imperialist states, and globalization studies focused on economics and multinational corporations, Hardt and Negri’s most recent reconceptualization of global power attends to politics and forms of contemporary sovereignty. As Brown and Szeman cogently observe, Hardt and Negri conceive contemporary sovereignty as a “mixed constitution,” consisting of “the interplay of various forms of political agency: ‘monarchic’ entities like the Pentagon or the WTO; ‘aristocratic’ entities like the multinational corporations; and the ‘democratic’ forces of the NGOs” (178). By having multiple sites of power and “no outside,” Hardt and Negri’s rethinking of global power (and globalization) moves away from the rather limiting paradigm of center-periphery prevalent in cultural imperialism and some research on globalization.

Hardt and Negri’s take on globalization processes are also less totalizing than some perspectives offered by cultural imperialism and globalization because instead of resisting from the disempowered margins that one would be relegated to by cultural imperialism and globalization, one can resist, indeed one can build, from within Empire, using the very tools made available by globalization like communications, transportation, and infrastructure for local, national, regional, and global interactions. This at least is the argument of these authors who suggest that Empire has generated the conditions of possibility for “homohomo, humanity squared, enriched by the collective intelligence and love of the community,” that is the creation of new identities, collectivities, and radically democratic polities through Empire (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 204). This project, to a degree, attempts to trace and analyze the production of novel subject positions and

communities of speakers and readers generated by the globalizing discourse of human rights, and what conditions of possibility are held out by and for this discursive space.

Despite these valuable possibilities for rethinking globalization offered by Hardt and Negri's concepts of global power as a decentered Empire and empowered multitude, in potential, if not-yet manifest form, there remains the unavoidable presence of U.S. dominance in the world with which to contend. It would be unrealistic to argue that the U.S. is not a superpower, if not the principle one after the end of the Cold War, as Per Olsson reminds us. But it would also be unrealistic to presume that this monopoly will continue forever, even if its power and influence is greater than those of its European colonial predecessors.²¹ All imperialisms rise and fall, as the history of the ancient and pre-modern empires of Rome and Byzantine, and the modern ones of Britain and Russia attest (Paul).²² Moreover, while it is true, as Olsson notes, that the U.S. has the political influence, due in large part to its economic presence and military might, to intervene decisively in events across the world (the Gulf War in 1990-91, the ongoing wars in Afghanistan that began in 2001, and in Iraq that started in 2003, for example), it is also true that neighboring countries and regional associations may hold greater sway and have more impact in the future on their fellow regional neighbors, if not the world, than they

²¹ In his review of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, "Empire – A New Communist Manifesto?" Olsson criticizes these authors for downplaying the power and influence of U.S. imperialism, given that "the U.S. is the only superpower left and its position vis-à-vis its two main capitalist rivals (the European Union states and Japan) has strengthened in the course of the last ten years. In fact, never in history has one power occupied such a dominant military, diplomatic, and economic position. U.S. imperialism controls nearly one-third of world output, in the late 1980s it was 22 per cent" (par. 4). Olsson continues: "The power and influence of U.S. imperialism is in many ways greater than that of the European colonial powers at the end of the 19th century, when the dominance of British imperialism was undermined by the rapid development of German capitalism and the rise of U.S. imperialism. To deny the dominant role of U.S. imperialism today is to deny reality" (par. 6). For another critical view of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, one that critiques these authors' theorizing of place and space in the context of imperialism, see Ian Angus' "Empire, Borders, Place: A Critique of Hardt and Negri's Concept of Empire" (2004)

²² For a detailed discussion of the political concept of "Empire" (not that forwarded by Hardt and Negri, but a more traditional one), and how it pertains to the U.S., see "Empire?" on *Global Policy Forum*.

do at present. Michael Weinstein, for example, has discussed the possibilities for a “new regionalism,” whereby the system of world politics drifts towards multi-polarism as a form of containment policy against the imperialist powers of the U.S.²³ In some cases, the local and national actors and practices are what concerns people more, these policies are more directly influenced and informed by actors and actions closer to home, including those of neighboring countries and of regional associations like the European Union (EU) in Europe, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in South East Asia, or the African Union (AU) that succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Africa.

The power and influence of the U.S. as an imperial superpower may appear impossible to challenge, but, if we turn to Foucault’s concept of biopower, that such force ultimately derives from and is executed by individuals and can thus be altered by them, then there is some sense that U.S. imperialism, whatever its form and degree, may, like other imperialisms, one day fade. Hardt and Negri, it seems to me, appear to be suggesting that the inklings of the shift, if not decline, of this power are beginning to emerge, and to be proposing possibilities towards another kind of less superpower-centered form of global power. Weinstein’s arguments for a new regionalism and multi-polarism seem to point in the same direction, while using different terms. While this

²³ In his article, “The New Regionalism: Drifting Toward Multi-Polarity” (2004), Weinstein suggests that the U.S. will likely not remain a single superpower. He writes: “The most likely configurations of world politics in the coming decade are weak to moderate multi-polarism and weak multilateralism. There is some small chance that the United States will regain acquiescence in its status as the ‘world’s only superpower’ and, with it, a comparative advantage for the realization of its policies and the satisfaction of the interests actuating them. The more highly probable scenario is a slow drift toward multi-polarism” (par. 5). At the same time, he is careful to note that such multi-polarism must be backed by military power. He considers China to be the preeminent site for the emergence of multi-polarism because of the country’s explicit commitment to military development. He writes, “What drives the New Regionalism is a partial power vacuum caused by recognition of the limits of American projection of military power and the loss of American political credibility as a trustworthy ally and collaborator, and moral credibility as a champion of democracy, human rights, and even global capitalism. The regional power positioned most favorably to take advantage of the vacuum is China (par. 7).

project acknowledges the dominant presence of the U.S. in many aspects of globalization processes through multinational corporations, international NGOs, and law and trade agreements, it also does not want to give too much power to the U.S., as if this was and always will be the only economic, political, and cultural agent in the world. To do so would seem to encourage the very U.S-centric worldview supported in large part by the nation's dominant presence in the world and fed by the problematic ideas of U.S. exceptionalism and provincialism.

Recently, other scholars have studied globalization in the context of human rights, that is, the global human rights framework since World War II.²⁴ They have tried to assess the impact of globalization on human rights and vice versa, and the effects of globalizing human rights, from the three conventional perspectives of globalization (economic, political, and cultural).²⁵

Some scholars find mostly a positive relationship between globalization and human rights. They argue that globalization supports the conditions for realizing human rights. Examples of pro-globalization scholars in Alison Brysk's collection from the economic perspective include Amalia Lucia Cabezas in her essay, "Tourism, Sex Work, and Women's Rights in the Dominican Republic," and Wesley Milner with his piece, "Economic Globalization and Rights: An Empirical Analysis." Other examples of pro-globalization essays include, from the political perspective, Wayne Sandholtz's

²⁴ For example, in "The Second Great Transformation: Human Rights Leapfrogging in the Era of Globalization" (2005), Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann argues that the current global human rights framework includes an international human rights regime, a system of global governance, a global normative order premised on an ideology of human rights, a global communications and mass media network, a global civil society, and a global human rights social movement (34-38).

²⁵ The essays in Held and McGrew's *The Global Transformations Reader* (2003) like Held's "The Changing Structure of International Law: Sovereignty Transformed?" (162-76), Robert Wade and Martin Wolf's "Are Global Poverty and Inequality Getting Worse?" (440-46), and Mary Kaldor's "Global Civil Society" exemplify such studies (559-63). The essays in Brysk's *Globalization and Human Rights* (2002), Gibney's *Globalizing Rights* (2003), and Owen's *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* (2003) also typify such scholarship, as footnoted earlier.

“Humanitarian Intervention: Global Enforcement of Human Rights” and, from the cultural perspective, Clifford Bob’s “Globalization and the Social Construction of Human Rights Campaigns” and Jonathan Fox’s “Transnational Civil Society Campaigns and the World Bank.”²⁶

Other scholars see a largely negative relationship between globalization and human rights. They maintain that globalization deteriorates the conditions for realizing human rights. Examples of anti-globalization scholars in Brysk’s and Gibney’s edited collections, from the economic and political angles, include Kristen Hill Maher in “Citizenship’s Exclusions in an Age of Migration,” Susan George with “Globalizing Rights?” and Noam Chomsky in “Recovering Rights: A Crooked Path.” In Gibney’s collection, Vandana Shiva’s anti-globalization position in “Food Fights, Free Trade, and Fascism” comes from economic, political, and cultural perspectives.²⁷

²⁶ From the economic perspective, Cabezas explains how women in the Dominican Republic channel tourism, sex work, and women’s rights to improve their living conditions, while Milner finds economic globalization mostly improves security rights and subsistence rights (44-58, 77-97). From the political perspective, Sandholtz sees humanitarian intervention as a positive move towards global human rights enforcement (201-25). From the cultural (especially communication technologies) perspective, Bob explains how global communications and the globalization of human rights can enable local groups to assert their cause globally (133-47). Still from the cultural perspective, Fox finds transnational civil society campaigns to be a promising way to battle international goliaths like the World Bank (171-200).

²⁷ From the political and economic angles, Maher finds that labor migrations in a global economy tend to invite human rights violations, since states deny migrants full citizenship rights (19-43). George argues that globalization, essentially “neoliberalism gone global,” undermines the human rights of most people in the world by deepening poverty, reducing life expectancy, and widening inequality within and between countries (7, 15-33).

Picking up on the empire context of globalization discussed earlier, but still from the political and economic angles, Chomsky insists that globalization, basically “a manifestation of U.S. economic and political hegemony,” allows powerful U.S. economic and political actors to deny the human rights of most people across the globe, under the guise of defending human rights and promoting democracy (7, 45-80).

Incorporating the cultural angle with the political and economic angles as well as the empire context, Shiva maintains that globalization, principally “a continuation of

Regarding the overall value of globalization to human rights and vice versa, still other scholars cautiously say, “it depends.” They argue that the relationship between globalization and human rights depends on *who* is globalizing *what* aspect of life (economics, politics, or culture) and *how*. It also relies on who is globalizing which *human rights*, and how. Examples of “it depends” scholars in Byrsk’s collection include Falk with “Interpreting the Interaction of Global Markets and Human Rights” (from economic and political perspectives), Shayne Weyker with “The Ironies of Information Technology” (from a cultural perspective), and James Rosenau with “The Drama of Human Rights in a Turbulent, Globalized World” (from economic, political, and cultural perspectives).²⁸

The present project falls in this “it depends” group, and it focuses on the question of who is globalizing which *human rights* and how. It subscribes to the assumption that the *effects* of globalization on human rights and vice versa depend on *which* dimensions of globalization, and *whose* notions of human rights, are being considered. In this project, the focus is on the cultural dimensions of globalization, instead of the economic or

Western colonialism,” enables powerful Western states and corporations to undermine food and trade rights in India (7, 87-108).

²⁸ From the political and economic perspective, Falk argues that globalization and human rights can be mutually beneficial if democracy can be radically deepened at the national level and extended to international institutions and transnational markets. This would entail widening people’s participation in decision-making from national to global levels (61-76). Donnelly maintains that until global institutional systems that implement and defend internationally recognized human rights are in place, the state carries the burden of protecting human rights nationally (226-41).

From the cultural perspective, Weyker observes that the information technology opportunities enhanced by globalization (the ability to gather facts, to collaborate, and to attract publicity) can help human rights NGOs promote their causes if these NGOs also address the pitfalls of information technology created by globalization like too many competing voices and causes, and vulnerabilities to surveillance and sabotage (115-32).

Combining the economic, political, and cultural perspectives, Rosenau outlines different ways that certain aspects of globalization (“mobility upheaval,” “weakening of states and sovereignty,” “microelectronic technologies,” among others) can help or hinder particular actors promote or violate economic, cultural, political, and security rights (148-67).

political dimensions. That said, the case studies will quickly and repeatedly show that, in reality, culture, economics, and politics are inseparable in any analysis within the framework of globalization.

Although this project sits in this “it depends” line of studies, it takes a slightly different angle from these canonical studies of the globalization phenomenon by focusing on the means of human rights globalization (how its network extends itself over the globe, and to what effect), rather than on its ends (the impact of a specific ideology or philosophy of human rights on political, economic, or cultural power). Scholars in each of these three groups (pro, anti, it depends) mainly approach the link between globalization and human rights in terms of the outcomes of situations in which human rights ideologies are exercised on a global level. In so doing, they seek most often to assess the positive or negative outcomes of human rights on globalization and vice versa. Their guiding questions thus include: Is globalization “good” or “bad” for human rights? Are human rights good or bad for globalization? Is globalizing human rights good or bad?

The present project tries to evade such acts of judging a priori, so that it illuminates how these situations are structured, rather than what outcomes might be forthcoming to be evaluated. What it seeks to focus on, instead, is seeing human rights as a globalizing discourse, in order to bring to the globalization and human rights debate a way to consider means (how global networks of communication, institutions, and power actually interact with human rights ideologies) not just the outcomes of that interaction. Attending to the means (how globalization circulates human rights discourses and how human rights ideas and practices affect globalization) makes sense because the degree to which human rights and globalization positively or negatively impact each other largely depends on how one affects the other (and, as we shall see, where the interactions take place).

In a sense, the approach here resembles that present in the study of global media in the context of the media imperialism debate particularly prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s but still relevant today in that it shares similarities with the ideas of “active

audience” put forth by global media scholars like Joseph Straubhaar and on the generation of contra-flows of media production from the Third World in the face of dominant global media flows to this audience from global media conglomerates based in the First World as discussed by Daya Kishan Thussu. What these scholars attend to, which is sometimes overlooked by others in their critique of media imperialism, is the activity of audiences when receiving a message, their non-passivity in acts of meaning making, their forms of resistant consumption. While the world of human rights discourse and that of television shows are not identical, they are both engaged in acts of communication at local, national, regional, and global levels, often involving mediations on the parts of producers, distributors, and consumers in terms of managing foreign cultural images, ideas, and languages, as they modify, merge, or misappropriate more local forms and national agendas. To bring such concepts of adoption and adaptation of foreign ideas as they enter local sites from the world of media studies to the arena of human rights should yield valuable frameworks for understanding the relationship between globalization and human rights discourse.

Moreover, focusing on the interactions between globalization and human rights ideologies has the added benefit of encouraging proactive, instead of reactive, scholarship on globalization and human rights. Instead of seeking evaluations of particular situations as good or bad examples of the interaction between globalized forces and human rights ideologies, studying their interactions may enable a better grasp of how these effects come about, and, with this understanding, the power most recognize in human rights and globalization could be harnessed to generate desirable outcomes. In other words, instead of only learning whether the link between human rights and globalization is positive or negative after the fact, this approach seeks to illuminate how the links between human rights and globalization produce outcomes in the present, so that other uses might be made of this particular discourse network in the future.

As Mark Goodale argues in the introduction to *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law Between the Global and the Local* (2007) edited by Goodale and Sally Engle Merry, when one studies the *practice* of human rights, that is, “the range of

practices, legalities, political systems, and so on, that emerge *in relation to*” the assertion of the universality of human rights, then one can better grasp the dynamics of universalism through which the ideology of the universality of human rights proliferates (10). As the essays in Goodale and Merry’s collection and those in *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (2001) edited by Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson, suggest, it may be that at play in the worldwide development of human rights discourse is the dynamic of globalization discerned by Roland Robertson as “the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular” (*Globalization* 177-78). What is most interesting about human rights discourse as it seems to be globalizing, is that the universal and the particular shift according to various perspectives, even if there may be a dominant language and ideology of human rights ingrained in the international human rights system. While the philosophy and practice of human rights as institutionalized into this system is often considered the universal and the cultural practices that differ from this norm are typically identified as the particular, this view is not held by everyone. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, as a moral language and ideology, what is universal about how humans should behave and live because they are humans will range quite widely according to individual and group moral beliefs and systems of ethics.

Ultimately, this project seeks to contribute to globalization studies by offering a more process- or procedural-oriented perspective on the globalization and human rights debate. It tries to trace these processes of universalism, as Goodale calls it, or of universalization and particularization, as Robertson terms it. In my case studies, therefore, I will focus particularly on how individuals interact with the global communication networks through which human rights ideologies are created, reinforced, and implemented.

Human Rights

Along with its focus on globalization as a network phenomenon, this project will entertain a broader (less unconventional) notion of human rights, instead of the

traditionally recognized set of human rights listed in the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), codified in covenants like the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and monitored by UN bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Committee. That is, it will take on not just *official*, *legal*, and *international* forms of human rights legislation, but instead will acknowledge that human rights also has less official forms, especially as sets of concepts, expressions, and reference points that can be used in many other contexts, including news reporting, fiction, and personal interactions. I am particularly interested in the role of non-state actors like NGOs, survivors, and artists, as human rights creators, defenders, and promoters. This approach to human rights thus departs a little from convention because it envisions human rights as *discourse*, instead of the more traditional views of human rights as metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, and cultural ideology that I will discuss below. I will explain what I mean by "human rights as discourse" in the next part of this chapter. And it adopts a less rigid view of human rights actors, forms, and sites, which have typically been confined to "official" ones like the U.N., state governments, and human rights reports. More will also be said about this less official view of human rights that I concentrate on later in this chapter. But first, let me sketch some common views of human rights in order to suggest what this project might add to human rights studies on globalization.

As with the varying definitions of globalization, scholars also disagree on how to define "human rights," no matter that there may be a general consensus on the specific list of covenants, charters, and laws that are its official legal instruments. Scholars' definitions often depend on how they understand the nature, content, scope, and priorities of this term. Although scholars disagree, most often accept five assumptions about human rights. As Burns Weston summarizes in "Human Rights: Concepts and Content" (2005): first, "human rights are understood to represent both individual and group demands for political power, wealth, enlightenment, and other cherished values or capabilities" (20). Second, "human rights are commonly assumed to refer, in some vague sense, to 'fundamental,' as distinct from 'nonessential,' claims or 'goods.'" Third, "human rights

refer to a wide continuum of claims, ranging from the most justiciable to the most aspirational.” Fourth, “human rights...are qualified by the limitation that the rights of individuals or groups in particular instances are restricted as much as is necessary to secure the comparable rights of others and the aggregate common interest.” Finally, “if a right is determined to be a human right, it is understood to be quintessentially general or universal in character, in some sense equally possessed by all human beings everywhere.”

This project understands human rights to be a discursive set of fundamental moral values to which utterances or other speech acts are referred (a set of philosophical precepts, given form in specific speech acts and enacted in particular ways). Whether these moral values are articulated as duties or rights, as justiciable or aspirational, as religious or secular, particular individuals or groups refer to these values to express their belief about what all human beings deserve (should do or have) just because they are human. A more detailed explanation of this notion of human rights as discourse will be offered in Chapter Two.

Although this project mostly adopts the five assumptions mentioned above, it emphasizes different aspects than theorists tend to do, in an attempt to focus on globalization as influencing human lives and practice, with reference to this particular set of philosophical-ethical principles. To that end, it focuses on the more material existence of human rights in discourse (as texts and practices referring to a set of values as concrete reference points), instead of the more abstract notions of human rights as philosophy. It emphasizes the moral basis of human rights seen in everyday frameworks as values, instead of the legal status of human rights as claims operating in juridical frameworks. It stresses the human origins of human rights (individuals and groups determine what are human rights), instead of the institutional sources of human rights (national, regional, and international government entities dictate what are human rights). It does so in order to get at a less official (less academic, legal, and institutional) view of human rights, and to focus on more popular (more general, common person) understandings of the language and ideology instead.

These particular emphases consequently affect the way the nature, content, priorities, and scope of human rights are construed in this project. This study regards human rights as a socially constructed process, rather than as a predetermined product. That is, it moves away from the notion that one international governmental entity, like the United Nations, fixes what everyone, everywhere and always must consider as human rights (their nature, content, scope, and priorities). Instead, it turns more toward the idea that what is considered to be human rights change and vary with different people, times, and places, even when the acts and thoughts still often appeal to the official, legal frameworks around the UN. This project will also consider human rights to be simultaneously, and paradoxically, universal and culturally relative, rather than either just universal or only culturally relative. That is, it shies away from the notion that when particular individuals and groups believe certain moral values are human rights, they necessarily think it applies only to themselves and their groups. Instead, it leans toward the idea that they likely believe these fundamental moral values apply (should apply or belong) to all humans, even those outside of their groups.

Like globalization scholarship, human rights studies are also vast and varied.²⁹ Although most scholars would accept the five assumptions listed above, they still argue over the nature, content, priorities, and scope of human rights. Not surprisingly, then, human rights scholarship has largely developed around these four interrelated topics. The topics are interrelated because the debates scholars have about scope and priorities often stem from their different views about content, which in turn are rooted in their different assumptions about the nature of human rights, and vice versa.

²⁹ See Steiner and Alston's *International Human Rights in Context* (2000) and Ishay's *The History of Human Rights* (2004) for a range of typical topics and debates that have engrossed past and present human rights scholars. Ishay, for example, identifies six major human rights debates: (1) the origins of human rights, (2) the Enlightenment legacy of human rights, (3) the socialist contribution to human rights, (4) the cultural relativism versus universalism of human rights, (5) the tension between security and human rights, and (6) the relationship between globalization and human rights. Ishay briefly discusses these six debates in her introduction (6-14).

In terms of the nature of human rights, scholars have been most preoccupied with the question of origins. The debate scholars have over using the language of rights instead of the language of duties to protect human beings typifies studies on the nature of human rights, as does the debate over the universality or cultural relativism of human rights.³⁰ As for the content of human rights, scholars have been engrossed with the issue of types of rights. The questions about whether only civil and political rights are (can or should be) “real” human rights and whether social, economic, and cultural rights are (can or should be) real human rights exemplify scholarship on the content of human rights.³¹

In terms of the priorities in human rights, scholarship has been dominated by the question of rights hierarchies. A classic case of priorities studies occurred during the Cold War years, when scholars debated the hierarchy between civil and political rights, on the one hand, and social, economic, and cultural rights, on the other.³² In so doing, they essentially were arguing about the priorities of one type of right over another. As for the scope of human rights, scholarship has centered on how universal or culturally relative human rights are (can or should be). A notable example of such studies arose during the 1990’s East Asian economic boom, when scholars argued whether human rights were

³⁰ See Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000), especially chapter 5 “Rights, Duties, and Cultural Relativism,” 323-402, for an overview of these two *nature* debates and excerpts from writings by human rights scholars like David Sidorsky’s “Contemporary Reinterpretations of the Concept of Human Rights” (1979), Cass Sunstein’s “Rights and Their Critics” (1995), Raimundo Pannikar’s “Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept?” (1982), and Abdullah Ahmed An-Na’im’s “Human Rights in the Muslim World” (1990).

³¹ See Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000), chapter 3 “Civil and Political Rights,” 136-236, and chapter 4 “Economic and Social Rights,” 237-320, for an overview of these *content* debates and excerpts from writings by human rights scholars like Amartya Sen’s “More than 100 Million Women are Missing” (1990), James Nickel’s “How Human Rights Generate Duties to Protect and Provide” (1993), and David Beetham’s “What Future for Economic and Social Rights?” (1995).

³² Examples of such *priorities* scholarship include Amartya Sen’s “Freedom and Needs” (1994) and Human Rights Watch’s “Broken People: Caste Violence Against India’s ‘Untouchables’” (1999) in Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000).

compatible with Asian values.³³ In so doing, they basically were negotiating the scope of influence human rights had (could have or should have) across cultures.

Studies about the ties between globalization and human rights involve all four of these themes.³⁴ The main issues in each theme include: the ongoing universality versus cultural relativism debate (nature),³⁵ the status of “third-generation rights” (content),³⁶ the priorities of security over human rights (priorities)³⁷ and the tension between Islam and the “West” (scope). But human rights and globalization scholarship also adds the topic of human rights actors. Scholars are engrossed with the role of the state and of non-state

³³ See Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000), chapter 6, part D “East Asian Perspectives,” 538-53, for an overview of this particular *scope* debate and excerpts from writings by human rights scholars like Bilhari Kausikan’s “Asia’s Different Standard” (1993) and Yash Ghai’s “Human Rights and Governance: The Asia Debate” (1994). Also see Jack Donnelly’s *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (1989), chapter 6, “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights,” 109-24, and chapter 7, “Human Rights and Cultural Values: Caste in India,” 125-42.

³⁴ See Chapter 16, “Globalization, Development and Human Rights,” in Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000), 1306-62, for an overview of the challenges globalization poses to human rights, especially in the political and economic dimensions of globalization. Also see Chapter 5, “Globalization and Its Impact on Human Rights,” 245-314, and Chapter 6, “Promoting Human Rights in the Twenty-first Century: The Changing Arena of Struggle,” 315-56, in Ishay’s *The History of Human Rights* (2004), for an overview of the main issues globalization brings to human rights and vice versa.

³⁵ See Weston’s “The Universality of Human Rights in a Multicultural World” (2005) in Richard Pierre Claude and Burns H. Weston’s *Human Rights in the World Community* (2006), 39-51, for an overview of why this particular *nature* debate remains relevant (or is even more relevant) in our globalizing world.

³⁶ See Chapter 4, “Community or Solidarity Rights – Group Rights,” in Claude and Weston, *Human Rights in the World Community*, 235-82, for examples of scholarship on “third generation rights” like the right to development. The term “third generation rights” comes from French jurist Karel Vasak who grouped rights into three generations: first generation rights were civil and political rights, second generation rights were social, economic and cultural rights, and third generation rights were solidarity rights. See Weston’s “Human Rights: Concept and Context” (2005), 21-23, in Claude and Weston’s *Human Rights in the World Community* (2006) for more on Vasak’s three generations of rights schema.

³⁷ See “After September 11: Security versus Human Rights” in Ishay’s *The History of Human Rights* (2004), 279-92, for an overview of this debate.

actors (“civil society” and nongovernmental organizations) as human rights protectors, enforcers, and defenders.³⁸

Traditionally, then, scholars typically employ one of three perspectives in their human rights studies: they have envisioned human rights as metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, and/or cultural ideology.³⁹ Scholars who see human rights as “metaphysical abstraction” mostly discuss it philosophically. Mainly philosophers, they are typically concerned with *theoretical* matters about the nature, content, priorities, and scope of human rights. They ask questions like “Are there any natural rights?”⁴⁰ or “How should human rights be conceived?”⁴¹ Norberto Bobbio’s *The Age of Rights* (1996), Michael Ignatieff’s *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (2001), and Patrick Hayden’s *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (2001) might be considered classic examples of scholarship that see human rights as “metaphysical abstraction.”

³⁸ See Steiner and Alston’s *International Human Rights in Context* (2000), Part D, “States as Protectors and Enforcers of Human Rights,” 985-1128, for an overview of this *actor* topic and articles like Samuel Huntington’s “American Ideals Versus American Institutions” (1989), 1086-88, on this issue. Also see Steiner and Alston’s chapter 11, “Civil Society: Human Rights NGOs and Other Groups,” 938-84, for an overview of non-state actors in the human rights field and excerpted articles like David Rieff’s “The Precarious Triumph of Human Rights” (1999), 967-69, on this issue. For an insightful look at how civil society organizations are changing the field of human rights, see Paul Gready’s *Fighting for Human Rights* (2004) which include essays like Nick Buxton’s “Debt Cancellation and Civil Society: A Case Study of Jubilee 2000” (54-77), Don Hubert’s “‘New’ Humanitarian Advocacy? Civil Society and the Landmines Ban” (78-103), and Ian Smillie’s “Climb Every Mountain: Civil Society and the Conflict Diamonds Campaign” (174-91).

³⁹ I adapt Neil Stammers’ astute identification of four perspectives of human rights in human rights studies – metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, strong particularism, and structuralism – in “Social Movements and the Social Construction of Human Rights” (1999) (990-94). I adopt directly Stammer’s first two perspectives, but merge his last two into one, and call it “cultural ideology.”

⁴⁰ H.L.A. Hart’s “Are There Any Natural Rights?” (1955), reprinted in Patrick Hayden’s *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (2001), 151-62.

⁴¹ Thomas W. Pogge’s “How Should Human Rights Be Conceived?” (1995), reprinted in Patrick Hayden’s *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (2001), 187-210.

In contrast, scholars who view human rights as “legal positivism” mainly analyze it legally. Largely lawyers and activists, they are primarily invested in *practical* and *legal* questions about the nature, content, priorities, and scope of human rights. They seek to establish, implement, monitor, and enforce human rights as law. Louis Henkin’s *The International Bill of Rights* (1981) and Geoffrey Robertson’s *Crimes Against Humanity* (1999) would likely typify studies that view human rights as “legal positivism.”

Finally, scholars who see human rights as “cultural ideology” chiefly debate it culturally. Primarily anthropologists and sociologists, they are mostly interested in theoretical (human rights as a cultural or sociological idea) and practical (human rights as a cultural or sociological practice in historical contexts) questions about the nature, content, priorities, and scope of human rights. They examine issues like whether the idea (and practice) of human rights is (can or should be) culturally relative or universal, and if the notion (and implementation) of human rights is (can or should be) relevant to communitarian and socialist societies. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab’s *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives* (1979) and Richard Wilson’s *Human Rights, Culture, and Context: Anthropological Perspectives* (1997) would probably exemplify studies that see human rights as “cultural ideology.”

One problem with the first two conventional perspectives (human rights as metaphysical abstraction and as legal positivism) is that they tend to cast human rights as a fixed, end-product, instead of seeing it as changeable and in-process. That is, they frequently treat human rights as one fixed set of legal claims, having in mind, of course, the UN’s international bill of rights (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) and other legal human rights instruments. This is particularly the case when human rights are seen as legal positivism. And they often overlook how human rights (this set of legal claims) came to be (through social construction) and continues to develop (in-process, again through continued social construction) through a huge range of, often, unpredictable agents, even outside of official entities and institutions. This is especially at issue for the metaphysical

abstraction view of human rights. For example, in the metaphysical abstraction group, philosophers often seek to theorize human rights, as if there is and always will be only one set of moral values identified as human rights. In the legal positivism group, lawyers generally aim to implement human rights, as if there is and always will be only one set of legal claims recognized as human rights.

Although this traditional focus of human rights as end-product has its value, it could also be useful to recognize human rights as essentially socially constructed and so always in-process, a position common to the third perspective of human rights discussed here – cultural ideology. This perspective presents a more nuanced view of human rights since anthropologists and sociologists often work between and betwixt the tensions of the universal and the particular, for example they often research through field work of particular dynamics between individuals and groups, thereby often encountering how human rights as language and ideology moves and morphs through use. Although there is a recognition in this view of human rights that the international human rights system (the body of laws oriented towards human rights protection, the agencies responsible for monitoring human rights worldwide, and the states that support through their judiciary the preservation of human rights and the persecution of human rights abuses) presents a dominant and hegemonic force in human rights theory and practice, there is also attention paid to how this dominant language and ideology of human rights is borrowed and built upon in myriad ways by individuals and groups to increase their agency and defend causes important to themselves.

This emphasis on the social construction and mutability of human rights is important because the idea and practice (or ideas and practices) of human rights did not mysteriously and miraculously appear one day, all of a sudden, fully formed. Rather human rights was (or were, and still are being) created by society (or societies). That is, some individual or group in some society (or some individuals or groups in some societies) constructed the idea and practice (or ideas and practices) of human rights. Even the UN's international bill of rights and all the legal human rights instruments that most scholars see as the material existence of "human rights" were generated through social

processes. State representatives, professional experts, and non-state representatives created these documents that are commonly used to identify human rights.⁴² In this way, human rights could be seen as essentially social constructs.

These state and non-state actors (individual and group) continue to construct new documents, practices, and institutions that develop our ideas and practices (nature, content, scope, priorities, actors) of human rights. “Human rights” did not end with their codification in the UN’s international bill of rights. If anything, those fundamental three documents have become the parents of many, many biological and foster offspring. The hundred-odd legal human rights instruments (declarations and treaties), the numerous human rights institutions and organizations (state and non-state), and the host of human rights actors and practices (legal and moral, state and non-state) that exist today attest to the continuous growth of human rights.⁴³ In this sense, human rights could be understood as being constantly in process.

Moreover, if human rights are conceived as being only a fixed end-product, the ties between globalization and human rights tends to be analyzed in terms of outcomes, and not means. Seeing human rights as end-product often invites questions about what the international human rights system does to people, or what legal human rights instruments and institutions do to the political, economic, and cultural aspects of globalization. Some scholars see a positive relationship: they argue that the availability of an international legal human rights regime (legal instruments and institutions) means

⁴² See Johannes Morsink’s *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (1999) for a detailed discussion of how state representatives, professional experts, and non-governmental organizations cooperated and clashed to create the UDHR, a document human rights scholars generally recognize as the foundation for all other human rights legal instruments.

⁴³ See United Nations, “International Human Rights Law,” for a selective list of international human rights instruments. This non-exhaustive list alone contains 106 declarations, covenants, optional protocols, conventions, resolutions, and basic principles.

people everywhere can demand their human rights.⁴⁴ Others see a negative relationship: they insist that the presence of an international human rights system strips some people of their human rights.⁴⁵ They tend to arrive at these either-or positions (and outcomes-based positions) because they usually see one set of human rights – the international human rights instruments and institutions. As such, they often only assess the link between globalization and human rights in terms of outcomes.

Furthermore, thinking of human rights as a fixed, end-product tends to remove people (and their individual acts of agency) from the human rights and globalization picture. This view of human rights as end-product often overlooks how human rights are social constructs and ever evolving. Human rights becomes something *external* from people and societies, as something people go to (in the positive view) or something forced on people (in the negative view).⁴⁶ This view ascribes a lot of power to entities and structures (the international human rights instruments and institutions), thereby often overlooking how people (social actors with agency) might be the ones who create and develop these entities and structures. Questions about what people do to (or with) the international human rights system, or what people do to (or with) political, economic, and cultural globalization are thus more easily neglected. In short, this end-product view of human rights often does not invite the question of how people create and change human rights as a globalizing discourse because its focus is on how one kind of globalizing “human rights” creates and changes people.

Conversely, recognizing human rights as socially constructed and in-process allows for an analysis of the ties between globalization and human rights not just in terms

⁴⁴ This tends to be the view of scholars who see human rights as legal positivism like Donnelly in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (1989) and Rhoda Howard in *Human Rights and the Search for Community* (1995).

⁴⁵ This is sometimes the view of scholars who criticize human rights as cultural ideology. See Pollis and Schwab’s *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives* (1979) for examples of such scholarship.

⁴⁶ See Stammers’ “Social Movements and the Social Construction of Human Rights” (1999) for an excellent critique of this end-product view of human rights and an argument for the social construction of human rights.

of outcomes but also means because people can be put back into the globalization and human rights picture. Identifying the social processes that construct and continue to develop ideas and practices of human rights enables a view of human rights as something internal to people and societies, as something people develop for themselves and apply to themselves.

This means different kinds of questions can be opened up about the ties between globalization and human rights. For instance, how do people (as individuals or groups, as state or non-state actors) create and use the existing international human rights system, or seek to develop it further, to help them adjust to the political, economic, and cultural changes globalization brings? Or how do people adapt their particular notions of human rights (that may be different from or similar to those in the international human rights system) in terms of theory and practice (nature, content, scope, priorities, actors) as globalization affects their political, economic, and cultural lives?⁴⁷ In short, by putting people back in the picture, by seeing human rights as socially constructed and in-process,

⁴⁷ Some scholars, especially in social movement studies and cultural anthropology, have put people back in the human rights and globalization picture as active rather than passive actors. In cultural anthropology, the collected editions *The Practice of Human Rights* (2007) by Mark Goodale and Sally Engle Merry and *Culture and Rights* (2001) by Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson contain excellent examples. In social movement studies, for example, Neil Stammers' "Human Rights and Power" (1993) and "A Critique of Social Approaches to Human Rights" (1995) argue persuasively for the role of social movements in the socio-historical development of human rights. Alan Hunt's "Rights and Social Movements: Counter-Hegemonic Strategies" (1990) and Nikhil Aziz's "The Human Rights Debate in an Era of Globalization: Hegemony of Discourse" (1999) have shown how people contest and change forms of "human rights" and "globalization" "from above" with their own versions "from below." Aziz borrows these "from above" and "from below" frames from Richard Falk's notions of "globalization from above" and "globalization from below" in "The Making of Global Citizenship" (1999). From the state perspective, Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat's "Forging a Global Culture of Human Rights: Origins and Prospects of the International Bill of Rights" (2006) shows how even the creation of the UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR was one of contest and compromise among nations with competing visions of human rights as idea and practice.

by envisioning human rights as discourse, the horizon of inquiries about the ties between globalization and human rights can be expanded from outcomes to means.

This project emerges from these different schools of human rights studies that have developed around these three human rights views – metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, and cultural ideology. While it neither adopts any one view nor belongs to any one school, it shares the most similarities with the perspective of human rights as cultural ideology adopted by many cultural anthropologists working on human rights who see the language and ideology as socially constructed and in-process. This project rests on the practical situation that these three views of human rights can be unified by conceiving human rights as discourse (whereby discourse refers to language and language use) and studying it discursively (that is, as text, discursive practice, and social practice). In this project, then, “human rights as discourse” refers to various acts using human rights language (a general social *moral* code recognized by a particular group of people), and which leave traces of human rights language use (the texts, discursive practices, and social practices that refer to the moral code).⁴⁸ Chapter Two expands on this definition of human rights as discourse.

It seems useful to conceive of human rights as discourse in this way because it exists as discourse after all. With human rights as metaphysical abstraction, for example, how are human rights philosophies expressed (or in what form do these ideas exist, or how do people manifest their notions of human rights) if not in discourse? As language (moral codes, systems of moral values, or ethics) and language use (oral or written texts like speeches and books, and discursive and social practices like classroom lectures, public readings and universities)? In the case of human rights as legal positivism, what

⁴⁸ For an overview of three different approaches to “human rights” (legal, conceptual, and discursive) that is somewhat similar to the one laid out here, see Goodale’s “Locating Rights, Envisioning Law Between the Global and the Local” (5-10). The legal approach is akin to what I term here “legal positivism,” the conceptual approach is much like what I call here “metaphysical abstraction,” while the discursive approach is what I undertake with this project – a focus on human rights as discourse while keeping in mind its existence as cultural ideology.

are human rights laws and their implementation if not discourse? Or as language (legal norms) and language use (written texts like human rights covenants and treaties, and discursive and social practices like trials and international criminal courts)? And, with human rights as cultural ideology, what are cultural beliefs and practices (or in what form do beliefs and practices exist, or how do people materialize their beliefs and practices) if not through discourse, both as language (cultural traditions, customs, or conventions) and as language use (texts like stories and symbols, and discursive and social practices like taboos and rituals)?

Therefore, for practical reasons, I will elide the differences of these three basic approaches to human rights studies (metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, and cultural ideology) as used in particular disciplines, and again will look for less official uses of principles drawn from the acknowledged human rights institutions and instruments. After all, each of these disciplines within the broader framework of human rights studies is but one particular path (offering a specific view into what I consider a broader field of human rights discourse in use. Each approach sets a specific goal for its analysis of human rights discourse). That is, metaphysical abstraction, legal positivism, and cultural ideology are all different ways of handling distinct aspects of human rights as discourse, with specific analytic ends in mind.

A *discourse* approach to human rights as I intend it would inform each of these three perspectives and their respective bodies of scholarship. Such an understanding of human rights as discourse would admittedly make almost every speech act related to human rights a discursive event and potential object of analysis. In consequence, I am limiting my corpus of texts particularly to the *non-official* speech acts deriving from human rights discourse. From what would be perhaps an infinite number of speech acts oriented around human rights language and ideology, then, this project centers on three paradigmatic ones, as a first approach to seeing what the broader field of human rights discourse might imply beyond its documented official uses within legal and (quasi) governmental organizations. As represented in the chapters below, these speech acts come from different speaking positions (aid worker, genocide survivor, and novelist) and

genres (speech, autobiography, and novel), chosen specifically to highlight certain important issues. For example, what is the role of humanitarian aid and its relationship to human rights activism? What is the relationship between human rights advocacy and autobiography? What kind of work is expected from a novel about a human rights crisis? Moreover, even with the choices made of three specific speech acts to represent critical moments in non-official human rights discourse use, this project focuses chiefly on questions of speaking position: specifically how human rights discourse affects and is affected by the identity and power of those who use it. This is a first-order analysis, looking to offer some basic characterizations of who may speak credibly within this discourse, and what effects they are empowered to achieve.

In sum, then, in re-envisioning human rights as discourse, this project shifts from the convention of seeing human rights as a set of fixed legal claims (as end-product) to human rights as sets of socially-constructed, varying and variable, moral values (as in-process). Some might conceive of this as shifting from a legal to an anthropological focus on human rights. Ultimately, this is what this project hopes to contribute to human rights studies: it suggests one possible approach to human rights as a social construct that changes, despite its official position. This in-process view of human rights will hopefully allow a re-evaluation of the globalization and human rights debate in terms of outcomes and means.

Discourse

Defining human rights as a discourse, however, is itself an act fraught with scholarly instability. Like globalization and human rights, discourse definitions also vary from scholar to scholar, depending largely on their theoretical and disciplinary positions. In *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (2000) for example, Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak, and Eva Vetter list eight definitions of discourse compiled in Elisa Vass' *Diskursanalyse als interdisziplinäres Forschungsgebiet* (1992). These definitions range from broader meanings like "speech, conversation, discussion," "series of statements or utterances, chain of statements," and "language as a totality, the linguistic

universe,” to more specific meanings from particular theoretical and disciplinary positions like “rule-governed behavior that leads to a chain or similarly interrelated system of statements [that is, the discourse of particular forms of knowledge like the discourse of medicine or psychology] for instance in the work of Michel Foucault,” “language as something practiced; spoken language (e.g. in the work of Paul Ricoeur),” and “discussion and questioning of validity criteria with the aim of producing consensus among discourse participants (e.g. in the work of Jürgen Habermas)” (25-26).⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, this project understands discourse first and foremost as language (that is, a general social code recognized by a particular group of people), and as language use and language in use (that is, texts, and discursive and social practices, that refer to the social code). For example, with human rights discourse, its *language* may be (and this project sees it as such) a general lexicon for a social *moral* code recognized by a particular group of people. And its *language use* may include (and this project identifies it as such) the texts, discursive practices, and social practices that *refer* to the moral code. Chapter Two explains this definition of discourse and of human rights as discourse in more detail. As language use, it has specific impacts on situations and on its users, as the case study chapters of this dissertation will exemplify.

The definition of discourse adopted in this project draws in large part from sociolinguist Norman Fairclough who, in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), combines linguistic discourse analyses and social discourse theories to analyze discourse from three dimensions: discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice. Fairclough’s discourse theory focuses on what linguists, following Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist approach to language in *Course in General Linguistics* (1959), commonly refer to as *parole* or “language use,” – that is, individual performances or particular speech acts of a *langue* or “language” (understood as a general system of language).

⁴⁹ I have listed six of the eight meanings. The other two definitions are “discursive presentation of a train of thought by means of a series of statements” and “form of a chain of statements/expressions; the manner in which they came about (archeology): scientific, poetic, religious discourse” (Titscher et al. 25-26).

Chapter Two elaborates on Fairclough's discourse theory and method of discourse analysis.

Although the view of discourse in this project is heavily indebted to Fairclough's, it departs slightly from it. Unlike his somewhat narrower definition of discourse in reference particularly to a social purpose (discourse as language use, that is, discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice), the definition adopted here adds *langue* (a specific lexicon of human rights terminology, most particularly) to Fairclough's "language use." That is, in de Saussure's terms, this project attends to both the *langue* and *parole* of discourse. *Langue* is included in this project's definition of discourse so as to capture a dialectical relationship between *langue* and *parole*, that is the interactions between specific moments in language use, and the systems which condition them. Doing so highlights that language use (that is, individual performances or particular speech acts of a language) shapes and is shaped by the language. The concept of *langue* is also being added to this project's understanding of discourse so as to stress that individual performances or particular speech acts of human rights discourse (language use) often come to change the existing general system of human rights discourse (language). In other words, discourse might best be conceived as both language and language use because the two are often inseparable.

Like globalization and human rights studies, discourse scholarship is also vast and varied.⁵⁰ Rather than do an injustice to the breadth and depth of discourse theory and research by sketching some briefly here, I will only focus on the kind of discourse study, critical discourse analysis, with which this project is concerned. Fairclough's approach to discourse study is a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA), also sometimes known as critical linguistics (CL), pioneered by a network of linguistic, semiotic, and discourse scholars (Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak among others) in the

⁵⁰ See Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland's *The Discourse Reader* (2004) and Diane Macdonell's *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (1986) for a representative (if selective) range of scholarship in discourse studies.

early 1990s when they met for a small symposium in Amsterdam.⁵¹ With background influences from the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas' claims about language and power, the project of CDA is, broadly speaking, to examine and expose power exerted through language in and as social practice.⁵² As Wodak states:

⁵¹ Since these scholars are better known on the other shores of the Atlantic than in the Anglo-American academy, I'll briefly introduce some of these foundational figures of CDA that have informed my work. These introductions are drawn from Wodak and Meyer's *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2001):

Norman Fairclough is Professor of Language in Social Life at Lancaster University in the U.K. His work has attended to the interactions and connections between language, power, and social change in various historical processes including modernity and globalization in the U.K. context and elsewhere. His publications that most influence my work include *Language and Globalization* (2006), *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2001), *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), *Language and Power* (1989). Other publications include *Discourse in Late Modernity* (1999) with Lilie Chouliaraki and *Media Discourse* (1995), among others.

Teun van Dijk is Professor of Discourse Studies at the University of Amsterdam, and Visiting Professor at the Universitat Pompe Fabra, Barcelona. His work in the 1980s analyzed news in the press (*Structures of International News: A Case Study of the World Press* (1984)) and the reproduction of racism in different types of discourse (*Elite Discourse and Racism* (1993)). His more recent work focuses on the relations between power, discourse, and ideology (*Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (1998)).

Ruth Wodak is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis at the Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna and also Research Professor and Director of the Research Centre on Discourse, Politics, Identity at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Her research areas include discourse and politics (*The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (1999)), methodology in CDA (*Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2001)), racism and anti-Semitism (*Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (2001)), and gender (*Gender and Discourse* (1997)).

Fairclough has the most influence on my research project, while van Dijk helped me understand more the discourses of ideology, and Wodak the historical context for CDA. For more on the history of CDA, particularly its development from the 1970s onwards through the work of Gunther Kress, Roger Fowler, Theo van Leeuwen, among others and the influence of M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar to CDA, see Wodak's "What CDA is About – A Summary of its History, Important Concepts, and its Developments" (2001).

⁵² In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Habermas writes that "language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized

CL and CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse). (“What CDA is About” 2)

The “critique” inscribed in the C, the “critical,” of CL and CDA, as Fairclough puts it, “is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things’ (“Critical and Descriptive Goals in Discourse Analysis” 747). The “discourse” of CDA often refers to two kinds of relations between discourses and social practices. As Theo van Leeuwen, one of the founding scholars of CDA, observes, there is “discourse itself [as] social practice, discourse as a form of action, as something people do to, or for, or with each other. And there is discourse in the Foucaultian sense, discourse as a way of representing social practice(s), as a form of knowledge, as the things people say about social practice(s)” (193). For van Leeuwen, CDA “is, or should be, concerned with both these aspects, with discourse as the instrument of power and control as well as with discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality” (193).

Three concepts are thus vital to CDA – the concept of power, the concept of history, and the concept of ideology.⁵³ Wodak articulates well how these concepts are applied in the practice of CDA when she writes:

power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations...are not articulated,...language is also ideological” (259).

⁵³ In “What CDA is About,” Wodak explains the place of power in CDA thus: “A defining feature of CDA is its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise. Not only the notion of struggles for power and control, but also the intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses are closely attended to” (11). She adds, “CDA takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Power is signaled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person’s control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text. It is often exactly within the genres associated with given social occasions that power is exercised or challenged” (11). This last statement is particularly relevant to

Taking into account the insights that discourse is structured by dominance; that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted, that is, it is situated in time and space; and that dominance structures are legitimated by ideologies of powerful groups, the complex approach advocated by proponents of CL and CDA makes it possible to analyze pressures from above and possibilities of resistance to unequal power relationships that appear as societal conventions. According to this view, dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalize them, that is, the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning are obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: they are taken as “given.” Resistance is then seen as the breaking of conventions, of stable discursive practices, in acts of “creativity.” (“What CDA is About” 3)

Critical discourse scholars often rely on Hallidayan linguistics, Bernsteinian sociolinguistics, and refer to the work of literary critics and social philosophers such as Pêcheux, Foucault, Habermas, Bakhtin, and Volosinov to do such work (Wodak, “What CDA is About” 7).⁵⁴ This kind of critique and mode of practice is incredibly important

my project in the way that it looks at different genres of texts (lecture, autobiography, and novel).

As for the concept of history, this is most prevalent in Wodak’s work wherein she adopts a “discourse-historical” approach, which focuses on the historical perspective when analyzing discourse. This has not been a major focus in my project, in part because of its comparative nature, which makes it difficult to delve deeply into specific historical contexts. But I have situated each of the case studies in relevant contexts, paying attention to the history of the occasion and life of the text and of the historical event with which it is concerned.

In terms of the concept of ideology in CDA, Wodak writes, “Ideology, for CDA, is seen as an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. CL takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions” (10). While definitions for ideology vary by scholars, it is here used to refer to “social norms and processes within which, and by means of which, symbolic forms circulate in the social world” (10). For an indepth discussion of the development and various meanings of the term, ideology, see van Dijk’s *Ideology* (1998).

⁵⁴ For an overview of how these critical theories are put in play with CDA, see Wodak and Meyer’s *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2001) and Fairclough’s *Discourse and Social Change* (1992).

and continues to be relevant in our contemporary times whereby ones ability to wield power is largely predicated on the means to represent particular realities – real or imaginary – through language, be it written word, visual image, aural sounds, or physical gestures.

This mode of analysis is certainly one that this project seeks to practice in its exploration of the relations between human rights discourse and its subjects in the three case studies undertaken here. Although its mode of practice is similar, this project departs a little from CDA in terms of its agenda. Critical discourse scholars tend to hold a rather Marxist-inspired agenda that seeks to defend the powerless group against a dominant powerful group.⁵⁵ Instead of having the primary aim of criticizing those in power (although there is implicitly in this project a critique, not in the negative sense, but in Fairclough’s sense of making connections visible, of the power wielded by the authorized users of human rights discourse in the international human rights system), this project is more interested in the power tensions, the struggles and dynamics of influence, among various users of this discourse at different sites across a global terrain. Rather than automatically conceive of state and institutional actors as the powerful and citizens and non-state actors as the powerless, this project tries to trace the logics and dynamics of power through language and language use. That is, it seeks to unearth and understand the

⁵⁵ In “What CDA is About,” Wodak’s description of some key agendas for CDA clearly shows these Marxist-inspired leanings. For instance, in discussing the concept of power, she emphasizes the critique of groups in power: “For CDA, language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use *powerful* people make of it. This explains why CL often chooses the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyses the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and opportunity to improve conditions” (10, my italics for emphasis). And when discussing the role of critical theory to CL and CDA, she highlights again a Marxist-inspired consciousness raising agenda: “Critical theories, thus also CL and CDA, are afforded special standing as guides for human action. They are aimed at producing enlightenment and emancipation. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion. Even with differing concepts of ideology, critical theory intends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs and interests...One of the aims of CDA is to ‘demystify’ discourses by deciphering ideologies” (10).

moments and mechanisms of equilibrium and disequilibrium as power is wrested through language and in various instances of discourse at a global level.

This attention to tensions at various sites, rather than a straightforward one between the binary categories of the powerful and the powerless is particularly relevant for an increasingly globalized world. In the context of Empire as described by Hardt and Negri, one wonders if the center-periphery paradigm echoed here in CL and CDA may need to be revisited. This is not to say that there are no sites of power and resistance, but that when there are multiple pockets of power and myriad networks of resistance that operate at local, national, regional, international, and global levels, alternative frameworks for critique and analysis may be needed. This project tries to illuminate some of the loci of power in the international human rights system by approaching it discursively and examining power as it is claimed in various points in the global space of human rights discourse.⁵⁶

In terms of globalization, some discourse scholars have studied globalization discourse but few study discourse globalization. A quick search for the keywords “globalization” and “discourse” in three standard critical discourse studies journals, *Discourse & Society*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, and *Discourse Studies*, for example, bring 41, 1, and 7 hits respectively. Of these 49 hits, only 2 focus on discourse globalization.⁵⁷ Both articles are on the globalization of human rights discourse.

⁵⁶ For a selection of examples on how discourse analysis can be used for political analysis, see David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis’ edited collection, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, and Social Change* (2000). Chapter One, “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” by Howarth and Stavrakakis offers a particularly cogent and coherent discussion of key terms and concepts in discourse theory and its importance for political analysis. Their work is influenced heavily by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s political theory of discourse, as developed in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985) and Laclau’s *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (1990).

⁵⁷ The search covered the 2002-2006 issues of *Discourse & Society*, the 2004-2006 issues of *Critical Discourse Studies*, and the February 1999-February 2007 issues of *Discourse Studies*. These were the issues available in my online search, and I take them as representative of current trends in discourse research.

Discourse and Society published both articles: Elisabeth Le's "Human Rights Discourse and International Relations: *Le Monde*'s Editorials on Russia" (2002) and Harri Englund's "Towards a Critique of Rights Talk in New Democracies: The Case of Legal Aid in Malawi" (2004).

More studies on discourse globalization are needed as the world globalizes and discourse becomes a bigger and bigger part of people's lives. As Fairclough states in *Language and Power* (2001):

Language is becoming an increasingly important element of social life. Globalization itself points to part of the reason for this. Globalization entails "action at a distance" – it means that social processes and social relations are stretched out across huge distances both in terms of mileage and in terms of social and cultural differences. Representations of these processes and relations in discourse therefore become increasingly important in maintaining some sort of order within this complexity – part of what binds people together as for instance employees of the same multinational corporation is shared representations of what they do. But at the same time, language is becoming more important in what they do – for instance in what is now widely referred to as a "knowledge-based economy," what multinational corporations do, what goods and services they produce and sell, is increasingly a matter of particular ways of using language. For example, in a multinational hotel chain such as Hilton, a significant part of the "goods" is the way language is used in interactions between staff and customers, in printed documents and signs, in publicity for the hotels, and so forth. (205)

Since language (read: discourse) is infiltrating more and more aspects of everyone's lives (work and leisure, public and private), it would be valuable to attend to the relationship between globalization and discourse. One means for doing so is to study the globalization of discourse.

The phrase "globalization of discourse" (or "discourse globalization") is not necessarily meant to refer just to a discourse (like human rights) spreading globally (although lawyers and activists are trying to circulate the human rights discourse codified

in the international human rights instruments and institutions globally). Although discourse can be said generally to be globalizing in this uni-directional way (from center to periphery), this view of discourse globalization is perhaps too limited. The globalization of discourse seems to be a more complex phenomenon: discourse appears to be globalizing in multi-directional ways (from multiple places and groups to multiple places and groups, from peripheries to centers, from centers to peripheries). As Fairclough states in *Language and Power* (2001):

We can talk of a “globalization of discourse,” which does not mean that discourse is simply becoming homogenous on a global scale (although there are homogenizing tendencies), but rather that what happens in one place happens against a global horizon – it is shaped by international tendencies affecting discourse (and it also contributes to shaping them). (205)

This, then, is how this project conceives of “globalization of discourse” or “discourse globalization,” and this area of study is another to which this project hopes to contribute.

To study the globalization of discourse, it is important to ask which discourses are globalizing, where, when, why, how, and by whom. It is crucial to find out how such globalizing discourses interact (cooperate, clash or change) with other available discourses at particular places or with particular groups. Possible answers to these questions may suggest how discourse globalization affect people (their identities and their power) in particular situations (local, national, regional, or global).

This project hopes to add to this critical area of study in discourse scholarship, discourse globalization, by analyzing human rights discourse as an example of globalization, and as a typical global discourse network. The study envisions this network as having the following characteristics: it is a web integrating diverse local and global discourses that cooperate and contest with each other; that circulates power locally and globally; that is premised on values, thereby carrying moral power; that has multiple individual and group creators and users; that affects the social, cultural, and political identities and thus power of individuals and groups across the globe; that generates its own power through discourse production, circulation, and consumption; and that has

many sites of power but no center of command. Chapter Three explains this concept of a global discourse network in more detail.

Ultimately, the case of human rights discourse will be used to help understand the mechanisms of discourse globalization (or what I am calling a global discourse network). This idea of discourse globalizing as a network is not meant to be limited to human rights discourse. Rather, it could perhaps be extended to understand other globalizing discourses like environmentalism, development, and terrorism, as well, albeit by first understanding the characteristics of these other discourses and their mechanisms of globalization. While the particulars for each discourse may well be unique, there may also be commonalities of characteristics, processes, or effects when these languages traffic on global network systems. For example, there may be commonalities of performance on a network (the kinds of restrictions imposed on users based on various conventions specific to the discourse, for instance).

Some Conclusions

To sum up, this project sits at the intersections of globalization, human rights, and discourse studies. The chapters that follow will develop the idea of a global discourse network with the aim of shedding some light on the phenomenon of discourse globalization through the example of human rights as a globalizing discourse. The next chapter will expand on the notions of discourse that I have been using here, while the following two (Chapters Three and Four) will take up the idea of networks raised here. Subsequent chapters will include specific case studies that help to characterize specific aspects of workings of such a network. Looking at the globalization and human rights debate not just from the perspective of what each phenomenon might be doing to people, but also what people might be doing to each phenomenon will clarify not only how discourse globalization might affect people's identities and power in particular situations, but also how people with particular identities and power might affect discourse globalization from particular situations. In the end, the hope is that this project might add

to the vital discussion on the conditions of possibility for people to act and be noticed, through discourse, in a globalizing world.

Chapter 2

A Global Discourse Network, I:

A Discourse Approach to Human Rights

Let us begin with what it might mean to think of human rights as discourse rather than as a philosophy or ethical code. In Chapter One, I defined human rights as a *discursive* set of fundamental *moral* values to which people refer when they perform particular speech acts. I also defined discourse as a set of language and language use, using Ferdinand de Saussure's differentiation between *langue* (a general system of language), and language use or *parole* (individual performances or particular speech acts of language) (13, 9). In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), de Saussure argues that *langage*, the full phenomenon of language, comprises both *langue* (as a pattern underlying all possible acts in language) and *parole* (as a group of all actual language acts that have arisen in applying *langue*) (9).

In the present project, discourse (roughly equated here with what de Saussure calls *langage*) refers to a discursive set of moral codes (human rights language, the possible articulations of a particular, underlying pattern of moral values with predictable connections) and to the various performances and speech acts that reference these codes. In other words, thinking of human rights as discourse entails conceiving of human rights

as a kind of language potential (a general moral code recognized by a particular group of people through the use of very specific language forms) and the language uses that characterize the group (the texts, discursive practices and social practices that refer to the moral code).

Such a two-part view of discourse underpins the two-part definition of human rights in this project. That is, when I refer to human rights as a discursive set of fundamental moral values, that statement constitutes my technical definition of the potential archive of human rights language, its *langue*. And when I speak of people performing particular speech acts that reference the discursive set of moral values, that reference comprises my description of human rights language use, its *parole*. These definitions need more explanation, as I will provide in this chapter.

This notion of human rights as discourse in use in a community rather than just as an abstract moral code is not mine alone. It is informed by Florian Hoffmann's argument in "Shooting into the Dark': Toward a Pragmatic Theory of Human Rights (Activism)" that "human rights" does not exist in itself, but comes into existence when it is evoked. He writes, "The meaning of human rights is produced by different linguistic constructions used in specific contexts... There is no empirical reality 'out there' of which human rights discourse would be a one-to-one representation" (407).⁵⁸ Citing discourse

⁵⁸ Hoffmann writes, "The meaning of human rights is produced by different linguistic constructions used in specific contexts. Prima facie, the content of human rights discourse could be termed empirical human rights conditions, i.e., the degree of the realization of features of individual and collective human life prescribed by human rights in the so-called real world. Indeed, the symbolic imagery invoked in much of human rights activism - and a good amount of academic reflection, too - is predominantly geared towards those empirical conditions, to different forms of physical suffering. There is no empirical reality "out there" of which human rights discourse would be a one-to-one representation. There are no tortured bodies, oppressed women, gagged journalists, or persecuted indigenous peoples; it is only the linguistic structuring of the empirical 'being' of individuals or groups that creates these facts as the reality of human rights. In conceptual human rights discourse, an injured body, for instance, can only be identified as a tortured one by understanding the context in which the injury occurred and by grasping the specific meaning of the social actions of which the event in question is made up" (407).

scholars Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, he argues that this absence of empirical reality reveals two critical points about “human rights both as and in discourse” (407):

[Human rights] are, like all social concepts, “never fully referential, in the sense of identifying a verbal sign that stands for or refers to (and thus comes to represent) some unambiguously identifiable feature of an external reality.”

Instead, human rights discourse arises from “the complex of interconnections and relations that constitute the social,” which cannot, therefore, be objectively explained but, at most, subjectively – or intersubjectively – understood. (407)

While the view of human rights existing as discourse pursued in this project shares aspects of Hoffmann’s understanding, it tries to think through the idea of discourse a little further by drawing from the work of Norman Fairclough as will be explained below.

Basically, however, I am thinking along the same lines as Hoffmann when he writes that the existence and power of that entity known as “human rights” is shaped by its users, even as their uses are constrained by the already present language of human rights.⁵⁹ When people speak in human rights terms (when they engage in acts of human rights language use), they render human rights “real.” In doing so, they also (re)shape the lexicon of the language, making it tangibly present in their moments of language use. It is useful to remember too that human rights philosophy and its attendant discourses were conceived in acts of language, which were then given power through the force of law and by the agreement of state governments.

⁵⁹ Hoffmann states: “Human rights are indivisible from the subjective meanings actors bestow on them in concrete situations. They imply a particular first-person account in which the formula ‘I have a right to’ is woven into a concrete context. This first-person account is irreducible either to a systemic third-person account or to any predetermined intersubjective rationality. Yet neither would it, therefore, be entirely controlled by the individual actor, as she or he can only construct that meaning through an always already given language of human rights. The outcome is, hence, from a third-person perspective, both unpredictable and inscrutable. This means, among other things, that there is no objective way to determine the correct use of human rights. Human rights discourse cannot manifest itself other than through the mutually incommensurable human rights consciousnesses of those actors engaged in human rights talk, regardless of the institutional context within which they are situated” (407-8).

Human Rights Discourse as Language

The lexicon at the basis of human rights discourse can trace its lineage to a very precise moment. Most human rights lawyers, scholars, and activists recognize the list of human rights (and the *moral values* behind the list) codified in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), legalized in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and institutionalized in the international human rights system as the classic lexicon of possible “human rights.” Considered as *langue*, this codified set of moral values is typically understood as what all human beings have (should have or should not do) because they are human; the documents are particular *paroles* which are the foundational statements in the historical existence of human rights discourse. In other words, for this group of human rights professionals or experts, this moral code and the texts which express it (in this case, a set of legal and quasi-legal documents) together constitute the *langage* of human rights. And these lists of rights constitute their most frequent semantic fields. Hoffmann refers to this classic code of human rights as “rights talk” (406).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Hoffmann writes, “The prima facie content of ‘rights talk’ is what could be termed the standard cliché of human rights, the textbook answer to the question of what human rights (supposedly) are. It is zealously propagated and tirelessly reproduced by an institutionalized and professionalized human rights movement, both academic and activist. Its main tenets claim (1) there are legally valid and institutionally enforceable human rights, most notably those listed in the ‘international bill of rights’; (2) these rights are universal in the sense that everyone has, or should have, them; (3) the rights are indivisible in the sense that the international bill of rights essentially forms a coherent package of claims to a certain type of personhood and community, subsumed precisely under the label of human rights; (4) on account of the latter, empirical conditions of human beings can and should be measured against the standards set by these human rights norms; and (5) the foundations of these human rights norms lie in some mixture of common (rational) morality and cross-cultural equivalence” (406).

For the average person, however, the *language* of human rights may be less formalized. It may function for them as a kind of common-sense morality.⁶¹ For instance, most people associate human rights with vague notions of human dignity, which ultimately stem from their own socially-influenced ideas of morals. It is important to remember the social aspect of people's ideas of human dignity and morals. This is because although each person may have a personal sense of human dignity and morals, the power of his or her individual idea as a reference point for action and speaking ultimately derives from social moral systems (that is, socially available ethics) like religious principles or cultural standards.⁶² For most people, then, their particular set of moral values (which itself amalgamates aspects of various socially-existing ethics) usually becomes their understanding of what all "human beings" have (should have or

⁶¹ This project takes as one of its assumptions that human rights are being (or has the potential to be) discussed virtually everywhere in the world by virtually everyone, not just the official or authorized actors in the international human rights system.

⁶² I use the term "social," instead of "cultural" or "political," to characterize the framework of an individual's notions of humanity and morality because I want to emphasize here the social aspect of individuals. That is, even as an individual, one is, intentionally or not, a part of some society or a member of some group. Moreover, I find the term "social" can convey the various complexities (race, class, sexuality, and religious beliefs) that are commonly signified by the terms "cultural" and "political," which on their own may not stress enough the group aspect to which I want to call attention. These terms ("cultural" and "political") too may mislead or distract because of their connotations: political, for instance, may foreground traditional concepts of state politics, while cultural may underscore notions of essentialism that I do not intend. The terms political or cultural thus may actually take away from my focus on individuals themselves and their status as *social* (if also political and cultural) beings.

My concern with the social aspect of discourse mechanisms here is informed by Fairclough's socio-linguistic discourse theory that centers on how discourse affects social changes and vice versa. I will discuss the key features of Fairclough's discourse theory in this chapter in a moment. Although Fairclough's attention is primarily on groups within a nation (his examples come primarily from British politics, business and media), my interest is in societies at the global level. My focus on the social is also influenced by Neil Stammers' work on human rights ideology and social movements, particularly his idea that human rights norms are socially constructed, which I described in Chapter One. Since, in this project, I am interested in the phenomena of discourse, human rights, and globalization, (all social phenomena as I have defined them in Chapter One), I have here used the term "social," rather than "cultural" or "political."

should not do) because they are human. In other words, this group of non-human rights professionals or experts could adopt moral codes *other* than those officialized in the international human rights system as *their* language of human rights. To extend the linguistic metaphor I have been using here: each individual's human rights discourse may be considered an idiolect of the available language, and some of those idiolects might diverge seriously from the group norm.⁶³

Hoffmann provides an illustrative example of this tension between official and unofficial, often personal, interpretations of human rights. On the official end, he relates an instance where the Prince of Liechtenstein insisted, before the European Court of Human Rights, that his right to a fair trial was violated during German domestic proceedings about a valuable piece of artwork previously held in possession by his father. This act is a formal, classical use of human rights speech, whether it works or not, which leads a group invested in human rights to work the situation through in the terms of this language.

On the unofficial end, he discusses a case of a Brazilian *favelado* claiming, before a parliamentary human rights commission, that a neighbor violated his human rights by stealing his twelve-year old lover. According to the international human rights system, the Brazilian *favelado*'s concept of human rights is unacceptable, while the Prince of Liechtenstein's notion of human rights is acceptable. Hoffmann asks, "By what criteria is the *favelado* considered to use human rights incorrectly, and the Prince correctly?" (407).⁶⁴ What, in other words, is the basis for accepting the international human rights

⁶³ An idiolect is often used in linguistics to refer to the speech habits of a single person.

⁶⁴ Hoffmann writes, "By what criteria is the *favelado* considered to use human rights incorrectly, and the Prince correctly? Both cases seem intuitively clear cut, not least since, in the former case, the mistake consists of the fact that the complainant potentially claims a right to violate the rights of a third person (the female minor), whereas in the latter case, a deprivation of the right to fair trial can potentially always constitute a human rights violation (with regard to the relevant instrument referred to), independent of the object the claimant pursues through the trial. Beyond intuition, though, what is the basis for calling the first use of human rights a wrong re-description, but the second an, at best, clever application of human rights to a new problem set? Ultimately, the decision rests

system as the standard? In this case, Hoffmann seeks to highlight the difference in interpretation of the term “human rights”: the Brazilian has his notion of human rights, clearly indexed around his personal desires rather than to international definitions about what rights people are “supposed” to enjoy, while the Prince has another one, indexed to international standards of legal treatment of all individuals before courts.

Hoffmann’s point is that the international human rights system recognizes the interpretation of the Prince, and not of the Brazilian, thereby revealing the discursive form and content aspects of human rights privileged in the international human rights system. I agree with his clear critique of the centrality of the system, one that sets the power of institutions on the side of users whose “speech” seems more correct. At the same time, this example also reveals that people, those considered outside of the system, non-officials, have their own ideas of what human rights are and their ideas may be very different from those espoused by the system. And, although their unauthorized position may preclude them from trying more successfully to integrate their ideas into the system, their notions of human rights should not be dismissed. Based on the proliferation of rights like environmental rights and sexual rights, now increasingly associated with human rights, it is possible that other ideas of human rights may find their way into the international human rights system some day. They may not share the same standing as civil and political rights, but they may at least have some place in the system.

This project thus defines the *language* aspect of human rights discourse as a general social *moral* code subscribed to by a particular group of people and manifested in a set of language-based practices. It treats the human rights experts’ view as only one aspect of (and approach to) a larger discourse phenomenon on human dignity and morals, even though the experts’ view is often projected as being a universal sense of (and means to) these human dignity and a moral world. The international human rights system’s list

with those empowered to decide right or wrong, i.e., legality or illegality, within a particular language game. There can be no firmer foundation for such an inherently foundationless decision” (408).

of human rights (and the moral values that inform them) expressed in a lexicon first set down in the documents with which I started this section, *claims* (or appears to claim) universality (in the sense that these human rights do, or should, apply to all people). But it may be more accurate to say, as scholars like Makau Mutua and Raimundo Panikkar have suggested in “Savages, Victims and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights” and “Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept?” respectively, that this list reflects only one particular ethic that the system *seeks* to universalize. This list is a lexicon of moral-ethical language that the system supports as its high-status expression. This particular ethic has been characterized as mostly secular (rather than religious), liberal (rather than socialist), and individualist (rather than collective). As such, the “official” human rights language of the international human rights system may be better understood as specifically driven by a set of existing notions and approaches to human dignity and morals that have been given special force by being included in official documents which give it specific kinds of authority, especially when these documents are signed and ratified by state governments.

I hope this clarifies how human rights exist, at least in one vision, as discourse, and how as discourse, human rights manifests itself as a moral language. Chapter Three expands on what is meant by human rights as a moral code or language. It also elaborates on the implications of the different views of human rights language held by lawyers, scholars and activists, on the one hand, and by ordinary people, on the other. Before that, let me amplify another aspect of discourse at play here – its language use. The way human rights language is used (its set of social practices) is critical to how users are authorized as members of a human rights discourse community.

Human Rights Discourse as Language Use

I began to think that human rights discourse might be productively understood in terms of how people use its moral language because of Fairclough’s sociolinguistic

theory of discourse, best articulated in his *Discourse and Social Change* (1992).⁶⁵ I will rehearse the main points of Fairclough's theory in order to explain what I mean by human rights discourse as language use. Fairclough's theory of discourse has six key aspects which exemplify *how* human rights discourse can be seen in terms of human rights language in use. To make this case in another way, I will match the main characteristics of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to Fairclough's six key features of discourse. My goal is to show *why* what most human rights scholars conventionally refer to as "human rights," that is, our international human rights system, might be seen to exist and function discursively rather than as a moral code alone. Since the UDHR is arguably a core document of this system, it can straightforwardly be taken as a representative example from which judicious generalizations about the discourse as a whole might be drawn.

There are basically six key aspects to Fairclough's sociolinguistic theory of discourse, by which he means *only* language use (loosely, *parole*), and not, as I see it, language *and* language use (loosely, the whole phenomenon of *langue* plus *parole*). He develops his theory by combining Michel Foucault's work on discourse, especially Foucault's notions of the socially constructive aspects of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), and Mikhail Bakhtin's work on intertextuality, particularly Bakhtin's discussion of the way texts are composed of bits and pieces of other texts in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986).⁶⁶ The writings of these two theorists allow Fairclough to articulate the manner in which discourse, as language use, is shaped and reshaped through its uses.

⁶⁵ The germ of his theory can be seen in *Language and Power* (1989, 2001) and its refinement in *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Change* (2003). But I draw chiefly from *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), which I think best articulates his theory.

⁶⁶ See especially the essay "The Problem of Speech Genres" (60-102) written by Bakhtin in 1952-53.

Fairclough locates his dynamic view of the relationship between texts, discursive practice and social practice within Antonio Gramsci's hegemonic view of power, whereby power is not so much imposed heavy-handedly from a higher authority, but ingrained in people through institutions of education, religion or the state to the point where the people subscribe to the dictates of the higher authority on their own accord.⁶⁷ Fairclough's six main definitions of discourse state:

- (1) Discourse has three dimensions. Any instance of discourse is at once a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice.
- (2) Discourse has intertextual aspects. Each text is influenced by other texts, either literally (one text includes explicit bits of other texts) or discursively (one text convention is made up of bits of other text conventions).
- (3) Discourse is not just a mode of representation, but also a mode of action. Any instance of discourse not only represents society, it also acts on society.⁶⁸
- (4) Discourse has a dialectical relationship with social structures. Any instance of discourse shapes and constrains social structures just as social structures shape and constrain instances of discourse.⁶⁹
- (5) Discourse helps construct (or enact) society. Discourse helps constitute people's social identities, social relationships, and systems of knowledge and belief.
- (6) Discourse affects power. Discourse enables ideology and hegemony, which in turn influences power relations in society.

Each of these statements is worth its own brief clarification.

⁶⁷ See Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (1971).

⁶⁸ This notion of discourse as not just a mode of representation but also a mode of action follows from Fairclough's reference to Bakhtin's work on intertextuality, if one considers such actions to be part of Bakhtin's dialogics of textual representations. If one text is informed by a previous text and informs a future text, then the text can be said to act, in its construction of another text.

⁶⁹ See Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981).

1. Discourse Is Text, Discursive Practice and Social Practice

First, let's take Fairclough's three-dimensional view of discourse as text, discursive practice and social practice. For Fairclough, any instance of discourse (any discursive event) is at once "a piece of text," "an instance of discursive practice," and "an instance of social practice" (*Discourse and Social Change* 4). "Text" refers to "any product whether written or spoken." This includes, for instance, documents, books, films, advertising, speeches and songs. "Discursive practice" refers to "the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation, for example which types of discourse... are drawn upon and how they are combined." This includes, for example, the rule-bound behaviors that produce texts (e.g. genres and other conventions for structuring discourse familiar to the group). "Social practice" refers to "the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event, and how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice and the constitutive/constructive effects of discourse." That is, "social practice" includes the grounds for the discourse's existence and the shared understanding of how and why it can be produced, consumed, and evaluated by the group as successful or failed (if we recall the cases of the Prince of Liechtenstein and the Brazilian *favelado*). Overall, Fairclough sees discursive practice as a particular form of social practice that centers specifically on the processes of text production, distribution and consumption (71).

A document like the UDHR can readily be understood as discourse in all three of Fairclough's dimensions (discourse as text, discursive practice and social practice). In terms of discourse as text, the document easily lends itself to being seen as a piece of *text*. Structured in a genre form that resembles a constitutional document, the UDHR begins with a preamble and then lists thirty articles of human rights, it is clearly a "product" of a certain cognitive and social act, as Fairclough's definition of a text stipulates (4). Historically, the act that generated that text is very precisely located. Eleanor Roosevelt (U.S.), Peng-chun Chang (China) and Charles Habib (Lebanon) mainly drafted the document from January 1947 to December 1948; the UN General Assembly adopted and

proclaimed it on December 10, 1948; and most UN member states pledged to promote it from then on (Morsink). As a text, couched in quasi-legal governmental forms, the UDHR answered more or less to the expectations of all these institutions.

In terms of discourse as an instance of discursive practice, the processes through which the UDHR was produced and interpreted enable the document to be viewed as an instance of *discursive practice*, here understood as a complex set of negotiations that allowed it to emerge as a “successful” (i.e. comprehensible and correct) statement of a particular set of moral values that could ground future action. For example, in its drafting stage, the UN member states disagreed on the form (and by implication the status and role) of the document. Some member states, including the United States and Russia, argued that the document should take the form of a declaration, maintaining that the document should only carry moral weight and serve as a set of standards to which states are encouraged to strive and achieve. As they saw it, a declaration would make the rights in the document aspirational (good, even necessary, for a state to allow its citizens to exercise and enjoy these rights), but not justiciable (illegal, if a state prevents its citizens from exercising and enjoying them). Other member states, including the United Kingdom and Australia, urged that the document be in the form of a covenant or convention, insisting that it must hold legal force if it is to serve as a means to prevent states from abusing their citizens. A covenant would make the rights in the document justiciable. That is, states would be *legally* bound to enable their citizens to exercise and enjoy these rights. They could not simply affirm the document’s principles as a point of reference with no force of its own, as would be the case for a declaration.

This disagreement displays at least two instances of discursive practice as a typical discussion aimed at producing a text moves forward. That practice here converges on the process of the debate itself, whereby the member states used a known discursive format to resolve their dispute. Thus, the UDHR is an instance of the discursive practice of using a debate form to resolve disputes. The debate centers on the formal gap between moral and legal discourse, as recognized by the member states. That is, the member states

were appealing to different types of available discourses (moral versus legal) and disagreeing on how best to draw upon them or combine them in producing the UDHR as a text to be received in moral or legal discourse, or as something else. Ultimately, the UDHR is the result of the discursive practice of using *known* types of discourse to produce what its founders saw as a *new* form of discourse, a process Fairclough identifies as a common discursive practice. The document also embodies the discursive practice, typical in modern times, of distinguishing (and privileging) the authority of *legal* language over *moral* language in international politics.

In terms of discourse taken as an instance of social practice, the institutional and organizational circumstances under which the UDHR was created allow the document to be seen as an instance of *social practice*, here understood as acts conditioned by social organizations and the values those acts are seen to foster. For example, in its drafting stage, the UN member states disagreed on the content of the document. Some member states, mostly the capitalist countries, argued that the document should only include civil and political rights. Other member states, especially the communist countries, insisted that the document must cover social and economic rights as well. As it stands, the UDHR contains both civil and political rights, and social and economic rights. But the civil and political rights (Articles 3-21) are listed before the social and economic rights (Articles 22-26) (Arat, *Human Rights Worldwide* 14-15). The document has in it, therefore, a distinct theory of social values.

In fact, this dispute and its outcome reveal at least two different instances of social practices at play in the UDHR, which connect directly to tacit assumptions about the structure of its underlying moral framework. For one, the dispute itself signals the institutional divide within the UN member states according to the way they organize their respective societies. Member states that privilege civil and political rights, like France, the United Kingdom and the United States, mostly subscribe to a liberal sociopolitical

system that emphasizes individual negative rights (Morsink 222-32; Ishay 221).⁷⁰ Member states that privilege social and economic rights like Russia mainly defer to a socialist sociopolitical system that stresses collective positive rights (Morsink 222-232, Ishay 221). The UDHR thus instantiates the social practices of the UN (as revealed in the institutional divide) and the social practices of its member states (as seen in their respective sociopolitical systems).

As for its outcome, the fact that civil and political rights precede social and economic rights in the list of articles in the UDHR suggests an institutional bias within the UN for its more powerful member states, thereby revealing a second instance of social practice at work. At the time of the UDHR's drafting, the more powerful member states were those that subscribed to liberal sociopolitical systems like the United States and the United Kingdom (Morsink 1-4). Not surprisingly, the UN appears to have privileged its more powerful member states' preference for individual negative rights over its less powerful member states' preference for collective positive rights. The UDHR thus instantiates in textual form the apparent social practice of the UN to favor its more powerful member states in its institutional processes and products. No wonder, then, that Mutua has referred to the UN, much like its forerunner the League of Nations, as basically a means for European-American domination of international affairs (214). He notes that the U.N. Security Council, "the only organ of the United Nations that wields real power, has been dominated by the United States, United Kingdom, France, and

⁷⁰ Rights claims are sometimes classified as negative or positive rights, wherein a negative right only requires that one refrain from interfering in another's actions (freedom from), while a positive right imposes a moral obligation upon someone to act in a particular way (rights to). In the "three generations" view of human rights first advanced by French jurist Karel Vasak, the first generation of civil and political rights (*liberté*) are often considered to focus more on negative rights, requiring only that the state not intervene in the actions of its people. The second generation of social, economic and cultural rights (*égalité*) are typically seen as centering more on positive rights, necessitating state intervention to secure the rights of its people. Articles 2-21 of the UDHR are generally corresponded to civil and political rights, while articles 22-27 are typically considered social and economic rights (Weston, "Human Rights: Concept and Content").

formerly the Soviet Union. China, the only permanent non-European member of the Security Council, has traditionally been isolated by the three Western powers that control it” (245).

In case his readers miss the clear correlations, Fairclough adds that instances of discursive practice are really a particular form of social practice. It is easy to see how this is the case with the UDHR. By revisiting the example of the UDHR as an instance of discursive practice (the declaration versus convention, moral standard versus legal rules), it is easy to see how the *discursive* practice of privileging a convention over a declaration, that is of ascribing more authority to legal rules than to moral standards, is also a *social* practice in the institutional and organizational realm of international politics. States seem to take the push of law more seriously than the pull of morals. Thus the UDHR as a declaration, instead of a convention, is not just an instance of discursive practice (the member states’ choice of one discourse form over another), it is also an instance of a particular kind of social practice (the member states’ privileging of law over morals).

2. Discourse Is “Intertextual”

Any productive discourse by definition will be implicated with more than one text or act. To see what that means in another way, let us turn next to Fairclough’s idea that discourse has “intertextual” aspects. That is, each text is shaped by other texts, either directly (one text comprises explicit bits of other texts) or indirectly (one text is influenced by other texts). Drawing from Bakhtin’s work on intertextuality, Fairclough defines intertextuality as “the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo and so forth” (84). This is a primary characteristic of discourses, as well.

The UDHR can quickly be grasped as having intertextual aspects. In terms of *direct* intertextuality, for example, the UDHR borrows direct phrases from the 1945

Charter of the United Nations. The fifth paragraph in the UDHR's preamble essentially repeats the opening paragraph of the UN Charter.⁷¹ The sixth paragraph in the UDHR's preamble reiterates Article 55(c) of the UN Charter.⁷² In terms of *indirect* intertextuality, the UDHR certainly carries the influence of earlier texts. One of the clearest instances appears in its second paragraph that echoes Franklin Roosevelt's "four freedoms" (the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear) as described in his 1941 State of the Union address (Roosevelt).⁷³

This intertextual aspect of discourse plays a key role in my notion of discourse circulating across the world through a global discourse network (which I explain in Chapter 3). Essentially, I envision fragments of human rights discourse in one discursive event appearing (in similar or altered form) in another discursive event, or influencing another discursive instance in some direct or indirect way. Examples of such influence might be the way one text might establish the appearance of credibility for another text or human rights actor. A text might also signal debates that need to be engaged with and which are then taken up in another venue. All of these discursive events are thereby

⁷¹ The UDHR states, "Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (par. 5). The UN Charter states, "We the peoples of the United Nations determined...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women...to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (par. 1). I have underlined the identical language for emphasis.

⁷² The UDHR states, "Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (par. 6). The UN Charter states, "[...] the United Nations shall promote [...] universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all" (Article 55(c)). I have underlined the similar language for emphasis.

⁷³ The UDHR states, "Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people" (par. 2). I have underlined the similar language for emphasis.

linked not only by their use of human rights discourse but also by their intertextuality. They embody or include bits and pieces of earlier discursive instances. And this intertextual quality of discourse is, in large part, what enables a particular type of discourse, like human rights discourse, to travel as widely as it does. It allows discourse, in other words, to self-(re)produce. I discuss this self-generating nature of human rights discourse in more detail later in Chapter Three.

3. Discourse Is a Mode of Representation and a Mode of Action

Now, let us consider Fairclough's notion, derived from Bakhtin and Foucault, that discourse is not just a mode of representation, anterior to thought, but also a "mode of action," "one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other" (63). That is, in any discursive act, people not only represent society in a text (be this text a visual, aural, oral or written product or performance), they also act on it and even construct it.

The UDHR can easily be seen as an instance of discourse that both represents and acts on the world. As a mode of *representation*, the document captures what its makers believed were the rights people had because they were human. This representational role of the UDHR can be seen in the grammar of its statements. For example, the UDHR makes *descriptive* statements like "All human beings *are* born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1, emphasis mine) and "All *are* equal before the law" (Article 7, emphasis mine). These descriptions are meant to *represent* the way things *are*. That is, when the UDHR states, "all human beings *are* born free and equal in dignity and rights," it is *describing* how all human beings *are* free and equal (Article 1, emphasis mine). It is representing, through language, what it *finds* to be true for all human beings, an act which creates or posits the image of a human being.

As a mode of *action*, the UDHR sets a prescriptive (but not yet legal) standard of human rights for people to enjoy and governments to achieve. Again the active role of the

document can be seen in its statements' grammatical construction. For instance, the UDHR makes *prescriptive* statements like “No one *shall be* held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (Article 4, emphasis mine) and “No one *shall be* subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Article 5, emphasis mine). These prescriptions are designed to *construct* the way things *should be*. They are developed in the hopes of becoming and exerting legal force in the future. That is, when the UDHR states, “no one *shall be* held in slavery or servitude,” it is *prescribing* that human beings *should not be* slaves or servants (Article 4, emphasis mine). It is constructing, through language, what it *demand*s to be made true for all human beings, and what it hopes to enforce. Despite these ideological aspects of the UDHR (it naturalizes one particular way of being human for everyone), its demand that everyone enjoy specific living conditions is probably desirable. It creates the image of “desirable living conditions” that will force decisions onto individuals and other entities.

4. Discourse Has a Dialectical Relationship with Society

This latter point underscores how discourse acts on society. Drawing from Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, Fairclough explicates his idea of discourse as a mode of representation and mode of action with his view that discourse has a “dialectical relationship” with society. That is, he finds that any instance of discourse shapes and constrains social structure just as any social structure shapes and constrains any instance of discourse. For Fairclough, this dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure makes discourse “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (64).

The UDHR can quickly be grasped as having such a dialectical relationship with social structures in the world. For instance, in the example of the UDHR as an instance of social practice discussed above, social structures could be seen to be influencing

discourse. That is, we observed how discourse, in the document's form (a declaration, instead of a convention), status (moral standards, instead of legal rules) and content (negative and positive rights), could be considered as shaped and constrained by social structures like the power relations between member states within the UN, the power hierarchies posited between law and morality in international politics, and the sociopolitical systems of the member states. Likewise, in the example of the UDHR as a mode of action noted earlier, discourse could be seen as trying to influence social structures. That is, it was possible to observe how discourse (the power inherent in the discourse form), in article four of the UDHR, sought to shape more equitable power relations between human beings in society by prohibiting slavery and servitude. Similarly, article five of the UDHR was aimed at constraining social actions on human beings in society by banning torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The UDHR could also be seen as influencing social structures in that it informs (and potentially validates) the subsequent actions of transnational human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that have premised their activism on the document (Schmitz).

5. Discourse Helps Construct Society

Fairclough expands his concept that discourse shapes and constrains society by identifying three specific ways in which it helps construct society. For him, discourse helps constitute people's "social identities," "social relationships," and "systems of knowledge and belief" (64). By "social identities," he means people's "subject positions" in society, that is their identities as social subjects or social selves. By "social relationships," he means people's social relationships with others. And by "systems of knowledge and belief," he means people's ideas about the world and how it works.

The UDHR can readily be seen as helping to construct society by constituting people's social identities, relationships and systems of knowledge and belief. In terms of

social identities for example, the document locates rights in people as *individuals*, thereby underscoring their *individual* social identities, as distinct from their *collective* social identities of race, sex, religion, or national origin. As the UDHR states, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (Article 2). Thus the UDHR constitutes a global social identity for people, that of being an individual human being in a global *human* society. For this reason, the UDHR is a world historical document – it aims to apply to everyone everywhere. Such universal aims open the door for either charges of false universalism to be leveled against it, as has been done, or else for new applications of it to emerge on the global stage, as I will pursue below.

In terms of *social relationships*, because the UDHR locates rights in people as individuals, it is designed to model and enable social relationships between people with those outside of their social groups. That is, it seems to establish social relationships between people as individuals based on their common bond of being human beings, not on their respective race, sex, religion, or national origin. In fact, it appears to encourage social relationships between individuals across such traditional boundaries based on their common humanity, instead of treating those outside their respective groups differently. As the last part of article one urges, “All human beings...*should* act towards one another in a spirit of *brotherhood*” (emphasis mine). Thus the UDHR can be seen as constituting a new type of social relationship between people, a *global* relationship, modeling individuals as being related to other people in the world on the basis of a shared humanity.

Here, we must distinguish this discourse claim from a more questionable declaration of universal values. By creating within a discourse certain strategic reference points (for example, being human and the fact that all human beings become, by default, part of a global human community), the UDHR posits a global social relationship that is different from other means of fostering global social ties like Esperanto, Zionism, or the

League of Nations. Although Esperanto does aim at creating a global community, its members are those that actively learn the language (“Esperanto”) and thus *leave* aspects of their positions as national subjects. Similarly, Zionism, as a political movement supporting a homeland for the Jewish people, means that its members are self-selecting (“Zionism”). Its focus on a Jewish nation too makes it a more nationally-centered community, despite the fact that its members may be across the globe. Even the relationships established by the League of Nations also differ from that of the UDHR: the members of the League of Nations were states, not individuals like the UDHR, thereby making the ties *inter-national*, rather than global (Townshend).

In contrast to Esperanto, Zionism, or the League of Nations then, and especially in terms of *systems of knowledge and belief*, the UDHR put into practice and officialized globally the *idea* that *all* individuals held human rights. That is, it represents certain basic rights as applying to everyone, regardless of their nationality, simply because they are human: it offers the chance for those human values, moreover, to achieve various forms in specific locations (communities, nations, courts). It also legitimized the idea that a global *statement* of these human rights could exist that did not violate the particularity of nations or individuals. Prior to the UDHR, such ideas or statements existed nationally, but not necessarily globally. For instance, the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaimed a list of similar rights for some, but not all, French people (Ishay 81-84). However, these rights were not applicable outside of France. Thus, although there are intertextual connections to previous documents like the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the UDHR seems to constitute a distinct global system of knowledge, combining aspects of its predecessors to create a new framework for its discourse as being *here* and *everywhere*, not just *here* in a particular concrete situation, nor *everywhere* in the abstract. It is based on the belief that all human beings have basic rights just because they are human, even if there continues to be debate about what those rights have to be.

Once the UDHR is recognized as shaping people's social identities in ways that extend beyond the nation state, their social relationships, and their systems of knowledge and belief in the ways that I have just discussed, it is easy to grasp how the document could be understood as helping to construct society. For example, when it identifies people's social identities as individual human beings (or makes people realize this global social identity) and when it defines people's social relationships with other people in the world on the basis of their shared humanity (or makes people recognize this global social relationship), it seems to help develop a more global society of human beings. This kind of society could help unite people from different countries, thereby potentially fostering practices that may create a less nation-centric world.

Likewise, when the UDHR articulates a list of human rights that, as the participant nations agree, people possess universally, not just in the abstract, the document appears to help construct societies across the world that would subscribe to this particular moral code. This code again could help unite people across different religious and philosophical moral values and systems into a discourse community of a new sort, allowing for a particular set of speaking positions to appear in many sites across the world. This kind of global society may seem akin to notions of "global diaspora," defined as a situation where individuals who belong to a particular community actually live apart, that is, a community not defined by physical proximity, but rather by other markers (Cohen). Since "diaspora" continues to be tied to ideas of the nation, and the UDHR recognizes individuals regardless of their national identity, or lack thereof, it would not be entirely accurate to conceive of the global society constructed by the UDHR as a global diaspora. Yet this kind of UDHR-oriented global society could be seen as a diaspora of speaking positions: it incorporates individuals who are at different locations into a worldwide conversation, thereby building a network that is global and discourse-based, rather than a community premised on more traditional membership markers like national or ethnic identity.

At the same time, it might be the case that a global community, like that envisioned by Howard Perlmutter, oriented around human rights language and ideology may be developing (a description which calls to mind Hardt and Negri's ideas on multitude) as something more than a set of connected speaking positions. While Perlmutter does not speak directly about human rights oriented communities, he does suggest that, although the world has been organized vertically into nation-states and regions, it is now also being organized horizontally by systems of interaction that engender communities not of place, but of interest, shared opinions and beliefs. To make that case, Perlmutter cites examples of global cooperation in terms of government (for example, weapons proliferation or disarmament for the purpose of collective security) and economics (for example, trade agreements that reveal commitments to mutual penetration of national markets), which focuses on nation-states as the actors in the process of interaction. But these horizontal systems of interaction can also take place at the level of non-state actors, even individuals, and, as such, begin to be identifiable as acts along a global discourse network that I discussed above.

For instance, OneWorld.net, a global information network with twelve cooperative centers in Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, and Latin America, represents one such concrete example of a global community that is not quite a community as traditionally defined. Indeed OneWorld.net seeks to create such a global community of individuals and organizations. As its U.S. website notes, "OneWorld.net is the premiere global hub for groups and individuals who care about international issues – a town hall for today's interconnected world" ("Introduction"). Whether or not this community might be considered one of a diaspora *per se* is an interesting question to consider, but lies outside the scope of this project. For now, I only want to note that such "hubs" like OneWorld.net appear to be part of a global discourse network. They seem able to act in consort, without requiring specific kinds of place to foster their interaction. Such actors in this discourse community need only to be connected through some system of communication.

6. Discourse Affects Power

Finally, let us look at Fairclough's notion that discourse is inextricably linked with power. He sees discourse as a political and ideological practice. By political practice, he means any discursive practice that "establishes, sustains and changes power relations, and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations obtain" (67). By ideological practice, he means any discursive practice that "constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations" (67). Since discourse enables politics and ideology, which in turn influences power relations in society, discourse is a vital source of social power.

The UDHR can readily be recognized as enabling the practices of politics and ideology, and in turn affecting power relations in society. In terms of *political* practice, for example, the document can be seen (at best) as enabling people to protect themselves from abusive actions by more powerful entities, especially states. In this way, it changes (or at least attempts to change) unequal power relations between often less powerful individuals and more powerful states. In terms of *ideological* practice, the UDHR can be seen (at worst) as naturalizing and universalizing what is arguably a very particular (some say "Western") worldview of human beings and human society. That is, because the document claims that the rights it lists are *universal* (that is, held by *all* human beings *everywhere*), it might be seen as imposing its worldview on people and societies that may not subscribe to it. The individualistic and liberal notions implicit in the UDHR, for example, could be seen as sustaining existing power relations between often less powerful communitarian, socialist states and more powerful democratic, liberal nations. There are also situations where the concepts of human rights, as captured in the UDHR, may mean little to particular communities, thus seeming to represent a form of external oppression, especially when it clashes with or discounts valued local codes of conduct. Scholars like Mutua (as noted earlier) as well as Obiora Chinedu Okafor and Shedrack C.

Agbakwa have argued that the UDHR overlooks African codes of what is appropriate conduct for human beings.⁷⁴

To turn to a more specific example, Raimundo Panikkar, in “Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept?,” has suggested that, in the Indian tradition (that is, traditional Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist conceptions of reality), where *dharma* (“The order of the entire reality, that which keeps the world together”) rules, the idea of human rights as conceived in the UDHR may sit rather uneasily. Pannikar writes:

A world in which the notion of *dharma* is central and nearly all pervasive is not concerned with finding the ‘right’ of one individual against another or of the individual *vis-à-vis* society, but rather with assaying the *dharmic* (right, true, consistent...) or *adharmic* character of a thing or an action within the entire theanthropocosmic complex of reality. (96)

In this reality, “the starting point...is not the individual, but the whole complex concatenation of the Real...The individual’s duty is to maintain his ‘rights;’ it is to find one’s place in relation to Society, to the Cosmos, and to the transcendent world” (96). As such, Panikkar suggests that the Indian tradition would insist that human rights are not individual human rights alone because “the individual...is an abstraction, and an abstraction...cannot be an ultimate subject of rights...the individual is only the knot in and of the net of relationships which form the fabric of the real” (98). It would also maintain that human rights are not human alone because animals, “all the sentient beings and the supposedly inanimate creatures, are also involved in the interaction concerning ‘human’ rights. Man is a peculiar being, to be sure, but neither alone nor so essentially distinct” (98).

⁷⁴ For essays that argue the opposite position, that is, for the common ground across cultures for the *idea*, if not necessarily the content, of human rights, see Kwasi Wiredu’s “An Akan Perspective on Human Rights,” and Francis M. Deng’s “A Cultural Approach to Human Rights among the Dinka” in *Human Rights in Africa: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1990). For an Asian perspective, see Kenneth K. Inada’s “A Buddhist Response to the Nature of Human Rights” in *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights* (1990).

Pannikar's argument is presented here not to suggest that those who subscribe to the worldview of *dharma* are incapable of understanding or using the ideas of human rights as captured in the UDHR. Rather, it is to underscore just how particular a worldview the international human rights system represents, and how it may not be as universal as it might like or claim to be.

Despite its apparent lack of universal acceptance and applicability, however, human rights discourse might still function globally in potentially productive ways, as the endeavor of One.World.net might suggest. Moreover, the condition of human rights discourse as a network with specific entry requirements and the ability to be adapted by its users must be considered. From descriptions of how discourse works, even if the language and ideology of human rights might start off as a concept alien to a particular site, community, or debate, it does not have to remain so. As discourse, human rights is not only *imposed on* users, the users also *impose on* it. Indeed, the language, ideology, and practices of the human rights industry (approved, after all, by many different kinds of international and national governmental entities) may also eventually be employed in localized ways to empower the very communities that found human rights quite foreign.

In “‘In Our Own Defense’: Rights and Resistance in Chiapas,” an article about the Community Human Rights Defenders’ Network (the “*Red de Defensores*”) begun in 1999 by Chiapas human rights attorney Miguel Angel de los Santos, for example, Shannon Speed and Alvaro Reyes observe that while the language and ideology of human rights, as stated in the UDHR and embodied by the international human rights system, were quite alien to the indigenous people involved with the organization, they adopted and adapted the vocabulary and ideas in order to improve their circumstances.⁷⁵ Speed and Reyes state, “Prior to coming to the *Red*, some *defensores* had little or no

⁷⁵ The aims of the network are “to bring together a group of young indigenous people from various conflicted regions of the State to train them in national and international human rights law, as well as the fundamental practice of legal defense in the Mexican justice system,” with a focus on national and international agreements on indigenous rights (Speed and Reyes 76). It seeks “to eliminate the need for intermediaries between the indigenous communities and the state” (84).

experience with the concept of human rights. In the words of “Ricardo” from Nicolas Ruiz, “Before, no one talked about ‘human rights.’ It had no meaning for us” (78).⁷⁶ With the help of the organization, the indigenous people came to deploy human rights for their own purposes. The authors cite “Miguel,” another defender, as saying:

We indigenous people do not know what our rights are. They say we have rights, but we don’t know what those rights are, for example [in relation to] the taxes imposed on us by the government through its institutions. Indigenous *pristas* don’t know their rights. The government helps them, in order to get their votes, but they still don’t know what their rights are. We as human rights *defensores* are learning what our rights are, and we are reclaiming them. (Speed and Reyes 78)⁷⁷

This statement reveals the alien character of human rights discourse as instantiated in the international human rights system. But it also suggests the potential for groups that have traditionally been discounted in the creation of the system to manage the discourse for their own purposes. Many who decry what they see as the leveling power of globalization would be suspicious of such statements as a *loss* of indigenous or local identity: Miguel, however, perceives it as an *enhancement* to his sense of indigenous identity.

Some Conclusions: Human Rights as Discourse

In rehearsing the six key aspects of Fairclough’s discourse theory and showing how the UDHR (and by implication the international human rights system) reveals similar attributes, I have tried here to suggest how and why human rights might be seen as discourse, that is, how human rights might be best understood as language and

⁷⁶ Speed and Reyes explain that “*defensores*” can be loosely translated as “defenders.” They add however that, since, in Spanish, defense attorneys and public defenders are called ‘defensores,’ the term thus connotes the legal defense of human rights, not just their promotion (79).

⁷⁷ Speed and Reyes note that “*Pristas* are followers of the PRI party, which ruled Mexico and the state of Chiapas for more than seventy years, until 2000” (85). The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was Mexico’s main political party from 1929 until the early 1990s (Merrill and Miró).

language use, and why the international human rights system, might be recognized as existing and functioning discursively. This view of human rights as discourse lays the foundation for a network theory of human rights discourse. In order to describe how human rights discourse might be understood to be globalizing through a *discourse* network, I first have sought to suggest that what human rights experts often abbreviate as “human rights” might actually exist as discourse.

Before turning to discuss a network approach to human rights discourse, allow me to reiterate how the UDHR, as a piece of text, rather than as a discursive practice or social practice, specifically illustrates the discursive quality of the international human rights system. In using the UDHR as an example, I have focused on a *textual* instance of human rights language use. I started from a specific set of governmental negotiations and tracked some of its impacts as the UDHR gave those debates a specific form of afterlife. It would have been just as easy to pick an instance of discursive practice like monitoring, report writing, witness interviewing, or survivor testifying. To approach other examples of discursive practices would have required me to adduce different forms of intertextuality, and to account in more flexible ways for the time and place where such discursive acts would originate and have their impacts. Yet, the results would have been similar: Each of these discursive practices would likely reveal characteristics similar to the six key aspects of discourse identified by Fairclough, and their actions would probably have left behind some kind of textual evidence (in written, recorded, or material form), even if the original discourse was not produced in that form, as the UDHR was. Likewise, an instance of social practice like a truth commission hearing, an international criminal court trial, government lobbying, or grassroots campaigning could have been chosen to the same end. Although such discursive practices and social practices are vital instances of human rights language use, they are not the focus of this project, because investigating these situations would require more attention to and evidence for the *impact* of discourses enacted as social practice.

My concern here instead is with *textual* examples of human rights discourse that make a particular lexicon and set of discursive practices available to different users and communities under particular conditions of power and status, and what that availability and promise of power or status seems to mean for subsequent (most often but not exclusively intertextual) discursive acts. As such, I have chosen a textual document, the UDHR, to illustrate human rights discourse as language in use, correlated most closely with that text's site of production and with what Wolfgang Iser has called its "implied reader," the ideal receiver for whom the text's use and meanings would be straightforwardly transparent. As the case study chapters will demonstrate, the existing order of texts within a global discourse network is a particularly telling byproduct of the network.⁷⁸ This network operates heavily in terms of availability of information to empower its users, and it often circumvents many other layers of community, national, and international organization that are seen as traditional stakeholders and power-brokers in human rights situations. For now however, having established a discourse approach to human rights, I will proceed to investigate how a network approach illuminates the workings of human rights discourse.

⁷⁸ By order of texts, I mean the predispositions we have towards using particular texts in specific ways. These presets are what Foucault terms "orders of discourse" in his 1970 lecture, "The Order of Discourse."

Chapter 3

A Global Discourse Network, II:

A Network Approach to Human Rights as Discourse

In Chapter One, I suggested that human rights discourse could be understood as globalizing through a global discourse network. I characterized this network as a web of discourses (1) that is premised on moral values; (2) that holds diverse human rights languages which cooperate and contest with each other; (3) that comprises multiple users, forms, and creators; (4) that exerts moral power; (5) that generates its discourse and power; (6) that globalizes itself and its power as a network; and (7) that globalizes itself and its power through its intersections with other networks. These statements need explication, which I will try to provide now. As I did in the previous chapter with characteristics of discourse, let me here discuss some possible characteristics of such a network, and how, as a whole, they seem to help globalize human rights discourse.

Human Rights Discourse is a Moral Language

Although the international human rights system and human rights experts like lawyers and activists tend to focus on the *legal* foundations, forms, functions and force of

human rights discourse, it is also important to attend equally, if not more, to its *moral* basis, appearance, workings and power within the communities who use it. Indeed, one of the key features of human rights discourse may be its root in moral notions that seem commonplace to certain users. That is, the language (*langue*) of human rights discourse may best be understood as a moral one: it is a kind of moral code that uses specific linguistic and discourse resources. To understand why human rights discourse might be equated with a moral language, it is helpful to turn to political theorist Micheline Ishay's work on the early ethical contributions to human rights discourse, in her *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (2004), and to political theorist Jack Donnelly's distinction between "moral rights" and "legal rights" in his *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (1989).

In *The History of Human Rights*, Ishay argues that the present international human rights system carries traces of moral values (morality) and moral systems (ethics) prescribed by religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and by philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Confucius (16-61). Echoing Fairclough's notion of intertextuality discussed earlier, she posits that the morality and ethics of these religions and philosophers shaped the international human rights system, in the past, by influencing the Enlightenment thinkers who laid the foundation for the framework. For example, Ishay proposes that Thomas Hobbes' notion of the right to life as an incontrovertible right (a right to be upheld, if necessary, against the state) came from the ancient Hebrew laws' deep respect for the sanctity of individual life (57). She also sets forth that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of the social contract partly drew from the Bible's commandment that "thou shall not steal" (57). She suggests too that Hugo Grotius translated the Bible's injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself" into a "natural law" of moral obligation toward one's enemy, and that Immanuel Kant further transformed this commandment into a "categorical imperative" (57). This represents a specific understanding of intertextuality, in which a set of texts shares a base of particular concepts (a specific lexicon of terms, in the sense I am pursuing here).

What Ishay shows historically, Donnelly articulates theoretically in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. Like Ishay, Donnelly highlights the moral foundations of the idea and practice of human rights. Yet he does so by identifying the source of human rights essentially as the assumption of “man’s *moral* nature” (17). For Donnelly, the human “nature” from which human rights stems is “a moral posit, a moral account of human possibility.” He explains, “The moral nature that grounds human rights says that beneath this we may not permit ourselves to fall.” In other words, he sees human rights as arising from a particular moral standard of humanity, of the “inherent dignity of the human person,” of what constitutes being human. They are the limits and possibilities to which people are entitled to live a life “*worthy* of a human being.”

Donnelly also underscores the moral basis of the idea and practice of human rights by defining it ultimately as a particular, foundational class of *moral* rights, which arise from commonly held assumptions of “principles of righteousness” (12). For him, human rights as concretely expressed, can take the form of moral rights or legal rights, in that all human rights are moral rights, but once they become law, they also achieve a new status as legal rights. Donnelly notes, for example, that the right not to be discriminated against because of one’s race is a human right, according to article two of the UDHR, and thus also a moral right. But it is also a legal right in the U.S. according to the U.S. Constitution and various Civil Rights Acts (12). At times, of course, these three types of “rights” might actually become detached from each other.

The historical evidence presented by Ishay and the widely accepted theoretical assumption articulated by Donnelly points to the purported moral roots of human rights discourse, an idea that can fruitfully be rephrased for the present purpose as the foundation of all human rights discursive foundations. What they call a moral foundation allows me to term the language (*langue*) of human rights discourse a moral one. Ultimately, this *langue* serves as a kind of foundational moral code for humanity, transformed into an archive of discourse acts, realized in the form of concepts, terms, and statements that enable individuals to speak as a member within a community of discourse users. I suggest that this moral foundation might be thought of as defining concepts that

constitute the fundamental lexicon available to a global discourse network of human rights, and particularly as its high interest reference points. It encompasses what various human rights languages share, and unites their texts, discursive and social practices, as well as their creators and users in a single discourse network. I now turn to more specifics about the languages that might comprise such a network.

Human Rights Discourse Includes “Human Rights” and “Human Dignity” Languages

Since human rights discourse is rooted in purportedly commonly held moral notions, it should come as no surprise that there are many kinds of human rights languages as these notions are employed in widely varying discourse settings. That is, there are what might be referred to as many dialects of “human rights” language (variations on the moral code officialized in the international human rights system), as there are many “human dignity” languages (other moral codes complementary or contradictory to the officialized “human rights” language). Again, Ishay and Donnelly can help clarify what it means to think of human rights discourse as including “human rights” and “human dignity” languages.

Ishay distinguishes between the human rights language in the international human rights framework and those in other moral systems (ethics) like Hinduism or Islam. That is, although she argues that the international human rights system is influenced by older religious and philosophical moral values (morality) and systems, she qualifies that it is not just a direct amalgam of *all* these previous moralities and ethics.⁷⁹ Rather, the system

⁷⁹ In *International Human Rights* (2007), Donnelly defines international regime as “a set of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures accepted by states (and other relevant international actors) as binding in an issue area. The notion of a regime points to patterns of international governance that are not necessarily limited to a single treaty or organization” (239). Instead of Donnelly’s term “regime,” that may carry negative connotations, I will be using “system,” understanding the international human rights system to refer to a set of principles, norms, rules, procedures and their institutions that state and non-state actors recognize and accept as binding in the field of human rights agendas and activities.

gives shape to the discourse as it rejects certain aspects of these existing values and value-systems that clash with its own predominantly individualist sense of morality and liberal notion of ethics. In other words, she lays out the exclusions that the UDHR debates enacted in practice: the moral codes of all negotiating nations are not equally represented in it.

For instance, Ishay points out how the caste system prescribed by Hinduism is not part of the international human rights framework because it contradicts the framework's notion that all human beings are born equal (57). Similarly, she observes that the international human rights system rejects Plato's concept of social hierarchy and the Quran's discrimination between Muslims, non-Muslims and former Muslims because they oppose the system's principle of non-discrimination (58-59). Thus for Ishay, although the system adopts and adapts bits and pieces of other religious and philosophical moral values and systems, it constitutes an entirely different morality and ethic, separate from any one existing system. *And* this distinct morality and ethic is in turn heavily influenced by liberal and individualist senses of morals that are not present in all communities.

Like Ishay, Donnelly also separates the human rights language of the international human rights system from those of other moral systems in religion or philosophy. For Donnelly, as for Ishay, the system represents just one particular set of moral values organized into an ethic out of (but distinct from) all these other religious and philosophical moral values and systems. Donnelly captures this distinction as a difference between "human dignity" and "human rights." To him, human rights (read: the moral values and system of the international human rights system) is but *one* approach to protecting human dignity, just as the other religions and philosophies are *other* approaches to preserving human dignity. He insists that, although the approaches to protecting human dignity in these religions and philosophies relate closely to the human rights approach, they are not the same thing.

Indeed, Donnelly argues against scholars who locate human rights in Islamic, African, Chinese, Hindu or socialist traditions. He insists that these other approaches to

human dignity often differ, if not challenge, the extant international human rights system (49-60). According to him, these traditional human rights approaches frequently contest the basic premise of the human rights approach that sees each person “as an equal and valuable human being endowed with certain inalienable *rights* (in the strict sense of titles and claims) that may be claimed even against society as a whole” (50). In other words, he is distinguishing between human rights as statements specific to various community and national contexts, and human dignity as a more general, umbrella notion that more flexibly accounts for other approaches to protecting human beings.

In rejecting certain claims of Islam as human rights discourse, for instance, Donnelly refutes the arguments of various scholars like Khalid M. Ishaque, Majid Khadduri and Abdul Aziz Said, maintaining that the Islamic approach differs from the human rights approach because Islam focuses on people’s duties, rather than their rights (52).⁸⁰ And when people do have rights in Islam, these rights exist because of their status or actions, instead of because they are human beings (Donnelly 52). Their human dignity lies in their adherence to duty and action, not in innate properties like rights. As for Hinduism, Donnelly, like Ishay, observes that its caste system contradicts the basic notions of equality and inalienable rights central to the human rights approach, yet nonetheless has in it a notion of human dignity (125-42). Like Ishay then, Donnelly also separates human rights as a distinct set of moral values and system officialized into the

⁸⁰ Ishaque argues that human rights form the core of Islamic doctrine, listing fourteen human rights that are Islam has recognized and established including the right to protection of life, right to justice and right to freedom. Donnelly maintains that these “rights” are actually duties of rulers and individuals, not rights held by everyone (51). Khadduri also lists five rights held by men according to Islam including rights to personal safety, respect of personal reputation, equality, brotherhood and justice. He states that these rights are bestowed by God. Donnelly observes that these rights cannot be human rights because they only apply to men, not women, and are given by God, not held because one is human (51). Said notes that in the Islamic view, it is God that grants human beings certain rights. He writes, “Human rights exist only in relation to human obligations. Individuals possess certain obligations towards God, fellow humans and nature, all of which are defined by Shariah. When individuals meet these obligations they acquire certain rights and freedoms which are again prescribed by the Shariah” (Said, “Precept and Practice” 73-74).

international human rights system. This human rights language of Donnelly's is what most experts, including Donnelly and Ishay, generally refer to with the phrase human rights.⁸¹

Much like Donnelly, I call the broad archive of moral codes on which the international human rights system is based *human rights language*, with its distinct network ties to legal and national systems. In turn, other moral codes of religions and philosophers exist in another relationship to this archive, as different discursive practices: they are the *human dignity languages* of other community organizations. Like Ishay and Donnelly, I adopt the view that human rights language differs from human dignity languages in its global reach, and that it is useful to consider human rights language straightforwardly as one of many human dignity languages, being globalized instead of localized in a traditional community of users. In one sense, then, human rights language is one *dialect* of human dignity language, with its own set of discursive practices.

That is, in the international human rights system, what experts commonly abbreviate as human rights might best be differentiated as having more than one element: as an emerging set of moral values (a foundational morality, posited as common) and a system of morals (an ethic, a specific articulation of those morals within a specific framework) that the UN (through the agreement of its member states) have codified and institutionalized into declarations, covenants, commissions and courts as a *legal* dialect of human dignity language with a particularly large community of "implied users" ("humans"). That discourse may actually have little reference to conventional communities (professions, entities, nations, groups), yet it seems to create its own kind of community at the global level. Perhaps, like any community, there will be those who are

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida in his essay "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" in *Acts of Religion* (2002), makes a version of this argument about Christianity as a particular set of moral values and practices being inscribed worldwide through a Latin-derived Anglo-American language and culture that informs religious vocabulary like "cult," "faith," "belief," "sacred," "holy," "saved," and "unscathed" (67). Derrida refers to this process of Latin-Christian discourse globalization as "globalatinization" (67).

included and those who are excluded based on the dominant beliefs and practices of the group, as the cases of the Prince of Liechtenstein and the Brazilian *favelado* offered in Chapter Two testify. Although a human rights community would, in theory and by definition, include potentially everyone, since membership would be premised on being human, the individual beliefs and practices of this multitude might not always mesh smoothly with those of the group as a specific discourse community. All human beings may think they can appeal their human rights to a court, but that court will impose additional conditions on participation.

The boundaries between human rights and human dignity and their respective discourse communities to which I am calling attention may not be theoretically adequate, but they need to be considered. For example, the borders between human rights and human dignity languages may not be as rigid as Donnelly would have it. It might be more accurate to include human dignity languages together with human rights language in a global discourse network of various discourses predicated on the foundational lexicon of human rights concepts. By doing so, these languages (officialized human rights language and other human dignity languages) might each be recognized as an individual type of human rights language, each with its own practices and power, which contribute to a more expansive and embracing set of notions of what it means to be human.

This point is precisely what the present project is attempting to pursue. It will treat even more localized human dignity languages as variants of human rights language, even if it's not part of the officialized human rights language, because, following Fairclough's idea of the dialectical relationship between discourse and society, that officialized human rights language will be open to influences in society. These social influences will quite naturally include the moral values and systems of human dignity languages, as well as other issues. I also count other human dignity languages as variants of human rights language (potentially attached to alternate discourse practices) because, as discussed in Chapter One, the international human rights system is always in-process. It is a social construct that can and does change, and all change cannot be seen as

originating in just theory or just practice. Again, Ishay and Donnelly can help clarify this position.

Ishay's work supports this interpretation of all these local languages indexed to human rights concepts being part of a more extended network of discourses because she shows how "human dignity" languages seem to be becoming part of "human rights" language in a meeting of the local and the global. She argues, first, that the moral values and moral systems of religions and philosophers continue to shape current developments in the international human rights system. For example, she suggests that Hindu and Buddhist moral systems about the natural world, now being attended to by Western discourses, are paving the way for current ideas and discourses of environmental and animal rights (57). She also observes that Plato, Aristotle and Cicero's moral beliefs that people can reason critically, can be good, can search for just actions and develop good governments, are setting the stage for contemporary initiatives of civil society human rights organizations (58).

Moreover, the ways these religious and philosophical moral values and systems influence society also seem to be affecting the international human rights system, construed as an officialized discourse with its attendant institutions and practices. For instance, environmental concerns have become part of the officialized human rights discourse through ideas and practices about cultural rights or the right to development. This process also exemplifies the intertextual nature and workings of discourse identified by Fairclough as discussed in Chapter Two. To take another example, within the context of the UDHR framework to which I have been referring, human rights NGOs have come to play a critical part in the officialized institutional and community mechanisms of the international human rights system. The system's human rights monitoring reports, for instance, relies heavily on information from human rights NGOs. This suggests that local actors and their actions can exert power in a global network.

Donnelly also allows me to suggest that human dignity languages and other localized dialects of human rights language ought to be considered human rights languages. Even if they are not exactly human rights languages in the sense of being

already extant around the more specific discourse of the UDHR, these human dignity languages are implicated in the extended discourse network oriented around the UDHR. He uses the example of how people often think of human rights and human dignity dialects and languages as similar, if not identical, when he argues against other scholars who identify human rights language in Islamic, African, Chinese, Hindu and socialist traditions (49-60). These scholars basically argue for what I consider to be dialects of human rights language (localized variations on the moral code officialized in the broader global regime) that are influenced by local human dignity languages. In so doing, Donnelly's example highlights how even scholars can chose to treat human rights and human dignity languages almost interchangeably, counting all of them as human rights language, if they are not looking for the different frameworks of institution and practice that support these discourses, and settle on addressing the UDHR lexicon of concepts as the chief markers of human rights and human dignity discourses alike.

The ability to draw such a distinction, however, suggests that regardless what scholars like Donnelly may insist on theoretically, in practice, individuals mostly form their own vision of human rights language. Such personal visions point toward two related discursive practices (those centered on the official human rights system and those oriented around some other system of human dignity) as part of a single extended discourse network. One might construe the two systems as two different circuits of the same network. Concomitantly, this model of an extended human rights discourse network also allows for accounts of how communities grow around these variously configured and localized discourses. On the broadest theoretical level, this process might include creating dialects of human rights language by merging human dignity languages with human rights language as Donnelly's scholars do. Or it might involve redefining human dignity languages as human rights language in specific local cases: such a process would be driven by local practice, habit, history, or circumstance.

Generally, most people on an ordinary day-to-day level would not distinguish between the official human rights language of the international human rights system and other human dignity languages. Rather, they are more likely to simply group all of them

under a common-sense category like human rights language, willfully overlooking these other parts of the discourse structure which become critical when a discourse common to a group becomes officialized in particular ways. As discussed earlier, for the average person, human rights language is not necessarily human rights language as defined by Donnelly and Ishay, but some personalized version of human dignity languages. Either way, the bottom line is that people (experts and non-experts alike) often find all these versions to be human rights language, practically speaking. And yet, there lies in this process something more, that is, the specific ways in which global and local discourses intersect and (re)form each other within a network.

For all these reasons – the in-process nature of human rights language as shown by Ishay, and the tendency by experts and non-experts of the international human rights system to treat human rights and human dignity dialects and languages all as human rights language – I argue that the language aspect of human rights discourse should include human rights language (that is, the moral code officialized in the international human rights system), dialects of human rights language (that is, more local variations on the system’s moral code) and human dignity languages (that is, other extremely localized or previously community-based moral codes complimentary or contradictory to the officialized human rights language). My case studies will therefore center around texts that complicate this boundary, as individuals, like the Prince of Liechtenstein and the Brazilian *favelado* referred to in Chapter Two, use one domain of discourse on this network to get access to another.

I suggest, in sum, that all these languages might be grouped together to comprise a global human rights discourse network wherein they clash and complement each other through a plurality of actors who use and create them. These actors produce, distribute and circulate various texts, and “dialects” of discursive practices and social practices that refer to the available types of human rights *langage* within a network. Each of these types of human rights *langage* has its preferred mode of access to its *langue* (the code, or underlying structure of the *langage*) and its dominant forms of *paroles* (the instances of

langue in use) that identify their memberships. I now turn to the users and uses (*parole*) of these diverse types of human rights language.

Human Rights Discourse Has Multiple Users, Forms and Creators

If human rights discourse is rooted in moral notions, as I have described it, and if almost everyone everywhere in the world has a sense of morals, however individualized, then it follows that my assertion of many dialects and languages that people might consider as human rights language should not seem to be extreme. Concomitantly, it would also follow from the assumption and my extension of it that there would be many *users* of human rights language and many *forms* of this language in use.

These users might include state actors like heads of state, politicians, judges, soldiers, police officers, and non-state actors like activists, lawyers, academics, doctors, journalists and survivors. These would be the producers, distributors and consumers of human rights discourse as language and language use. As the discourse's "implied users," they are the figures most likely to be authorized to contribute to the creation, circulation and consumption of the moral code through their production, distribution and consumption of texts, discursive practices and social practices that refer to this moral code. To help illustrate what I mean by users and forms of human rights discourse, I will turn to Don Hubert's analysis of state and non-state actors and their use of human rights discourse in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), one of the more successful examples of human rights campaigns.

In "'New' Humanitarian Advocacy? Civil Society and the Landmines Ban" (2004), Hubert details the many actors that birthed and nurtured that remarkable campaign. They include the members of NGOs like the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, Handicap International (HI), Mines Advisory Group (MAC), Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA), Medico International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) (Hubert 80-81). It also involved the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and of UN agencies like the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO),

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Hubert 83). State representatives from the European Union, the Swedish Parliament, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Senate and Congress also played a part (Hubert 83-84). In short, state and non-state actors created, nurtured and raised that campaign to success. In doing so, this project also evolved new forms of action and collaboration for human rights advocacy.

This plurality of actors has also contributed significantly to options for intertextuality within this discourse, since they produced, circulated and consumed many forms (texts, discursive and social practices) of human rights language in use, resulting from their practice within the discourse. In terms of texts, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) published *Landmines in Cambodia: The Coward's War* (1991) by E. Stover and R. McGrath and *Landmines: A Deadly Legacy* (1993) by the Arms Project, a division of HRW and PHR. The VVAF published *After the Guns Fall Silent: The Enduring Legacy of Landmines* (1995). The ICRC published *Mines: A Perverse Use of Technology* (1992), *Landmines: Time for Action* (1995), and former British Army combat engineer Patrick Blagden's *Anti-personnel Landmines: Friend or Foe?* (1996). ICRC surgeons in the field also published reports in Western medical journals (81).⁸²

The UN agencies generated their own textual examples of human rights discourse in yet another set of genres (Hubert 83). UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali raised concern about the devastating effects of landmines in his *An Agenda for Peace* (1992), his article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* (1994), and his foreword to the proceedings of a Council on Foreign Relations symposium on landmines in 1995. And the U.S. State Department published a report *Hidden Killers: The Global Problem With Uncleared Mines* (1993), while Senator Patrick Leahy submitted two resolutions to the

⁸² For examples of these ICRC reports, see R. Coupland's "Amputations from Antipersonnel Mine Injuries of the Leg" (1989), R. Coupland and A. Korver's "Injuries from Antipersonnel Mines: The Experience of the ICRC" (1991), and R. McGrath and E. Stover's "Injuries from Land Mines," *British Medical Journal* (1991).

UN General Assembly in 1993, one to urge member states to implement a moratorium on export and the other to call for an “eventual elimination” of landmines (Hubert 84). Such texts span the whole gamut of genres from official laws and resolutions (paralleling the case of the UDHR), through public appeals by major actors in the program, and to less formal, but even more public genres.

In terms of discursive and social practices, another whole block of speech acts emerged to parallel this production of texts. These actors used signature campaigns, conferences, symposiums, meetings, and proposed resolutions, legislation, moratoriums and bans, to make landmines a human rights issue at local, national, regional, international and global levels (Hubert). These discursive and social practices, as well as the textual products mentioned earlier, all represent instances of human rights language in use by the multiple state and non-state actors associated with the campaign.

At the same time, these actors are not just passive consumers of human rights language, but also its active producers. Hubert’s example is again illustrative. The ICBL created the 1997 Ottawa Treaty (the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction) (Hubert). This treaty added another layer to the officialized human rights language of the international human rights system. It added what might be called the right not to be destroyed by anti-personnel mines. This is another common-sense provision, yet also an argument that human rights language can be constructed at need from within the community. This addition, already a part of many human dignity languages, entered the officialized human rights language with this treaty. This example suggests how the users of human rights discourse might also create new entries of human rights language and change the human rights language of the existing international human rights system. Thus human rights language, even the officialized human rights language, might be said to have many creators.

Law scholar Florian Hoffmann and cultural anthropologist Shannon Speed have both suggested that human rights discourse might self-generate and change in this way. Hoffmann refers to this characteristic as the “intersubjectivity” of human rights discourse,

suggesting that any one interpretation of human rights stems from prior interpretations and influences the interpretations that come after it in a “dynamic process of mutual feedback loops” (409).⁸³ I would underscore that this intersubjectivity also highlights the agency of individual actors on the network. Returning to his example of the Brazilian *favelado* and the Prince of Lichtenstein which I referenced in Chapter Two, Hoffmann writes that the *favelado* might be persuaded to understand human rights in the same way as the international system, or he might not, or he might learn how to frame his claims in terms of more acceptable human rights claims. Whatever the outcome, Hoffmann finds the process through which such negotiation occurs to be a two-way affair, whereby it is not just the *favelado*’s human rights consciousness that is affected but also potentially those of the members of the commission, and by implication potentially that of the international human rights system as a whole. In this sense, human rights discourse has many producers, creators and users that may be interacting directly or indirectly with each other, and with the foundations and forms of the discourse itself.

Speed has referred to this interactive nature of human rights discourse as “the dialogic nature of human rights,” “that all understandings and usages of the discourse of human rights are formed in relation to previous ones and will affect those that come after” (400). While Hoffmann takes this self-generating nature to mean that the understandings and uses of human rights language would have the potential to contest and alter more dominant ones, and be subject to change themselves, Speed is less optimistic. She suggests that the question of power must not be forgotten: the interpretations of those with power will, she argues, almost always have a greater impact than the understandings of those with less power. While Speed’s point is well taken, one

⁸³ Hoffmann writes, “What is important is that none of these adaptations is ever a one-off renegotiation of meaning and identity. Instead, they constitute a dynamic process of mutual feedback loops. This implies that no particular interlinking of human rights discourse and human rights consciousness is ever safe from subsequent modification. This is as true for any informal conversation about human rights as it is for the judgments of domestic or international tribunals. Hence, human rights are only instantiated momentarily when particular meanings emerge through the interaction of discourse and consciousness” (409).

wonders too whether power also needs to be thought of in a more diverse way. Power, after all, need not be a static position (one always has the same degree of power in whatever situation, or power as based on political, social or economic standing). Might not the language and ideology of a discourse also convey power? Might not human rights discourse, when used in particular ways and situations render those with traditionally less power more authority? It seems, therefore, that the moral force of human rights language and ideology would grant moral authority to those that use it, whatever their original power position, and that any analysis of the discourse must also account for the effects of this power across the discourse network.

I suggest that these human rights discourse *users* (and creators) and their *uses* of human rights language (that is, the texts, discursive and social practices) might be seen as comprising a global human rights discourse network aimed not only at forming communities, but also to distribute certain forms of power. These actors as well as their texts and practices all seem to be influenced by the moral power of the discourse. They also appear to draw from and to exude this ideological kind of power. I now turn to this moral force of human rights discourse, in order to clarify what power effects might be at play in this situation.

Human Rights Discourse Exerts Moral Power

Another key feature of human rights discourse is the way it wields moral power. There is ample evidence in the archive of social and discursive acts alluded to above to suggest that this discourse is able to act on society (make states and people do certain things or behave in certain ways) because of its claim to moral weight. Its deep roots in morals make it a morally loaded language that exercises force beyond discourses that are more straightforwardly administered by particular interest groups like one promoting liberalism (a libertarian interest group). This discourse works rather by potentially implicating all users engaged in all acts. By “morally loaded,” I mean that the discourse implies that, if one does as it says, one is a moral person. But if one refuses to do its bidding, one is considered an immoral person. That is, the discourse equates its existence

and its force with the moral and the good, and thus with other discourses, such as religion, manners, and law itself, in particularly intricate ways. Or more precisely, consumers of that discourse come easily to equate the discourse with the moral and the good. Here a social judgment becomes transformed into a state of being. As such, those conversant with the discourse would find it very hard to resist what this discourse prescribes because doing so makes them somehow immoral or bad. Similarly, they would find it very easy to subscribe to human rights discourse because doing so makes them somehow moral or good.

The moral power of human rights discourse, as described above, may also straightforwardly enable human rights discourse to be used to manipulate individuals and groups. Although this is possible, the discourse is more often employed in a more positive way, in that its deep moral roots entail what Donnelly calls “moral interdependence” (212). With “moral interdependence,” Donnelly suggests that states and individuals work out of the assumption that they all belong, as human beings, to a global moral community.⁸⁴ And they acknowledge a sense of moral responsibility for other members of the community and for the moral health of the community as a whole. That is, states and individuals realize that they may be perceived as threatening the moral standing of other states and individuals when they deny other peoples’ human dignity. They submit to the premise that they diminish the moral status of the community as a whole when they degrade (or when they enable or allow other states and individuals to degrade) the humanity of their fellow community members, by directly violating, supporting or indirectly permitting abuses, of human dignity. The discourse’s moral basis thus becomes a central criterion for its actors to be deemed appropriate members of its community, and for the validity of the whole human rights network. In contrast, a legal discourse is not invalidated as wholeheartedly, if one bad law is enacted into the system: a lawyer is not considered an inappropriate actor on that network just because she argues

⁸⁴ By “global moral community,” I mean that the discourse inevitably joins all states and individuals in a moral *human* community, which supercedes their particular identities of nation, race, gender or sexuality.

the “wrong” (i.e. losing) side of a particular case. There is room in that network space for actors to be received variously, in ways perhaps not available on a human rights discourse network.

Donnelly offers some examples of the peculiar moral power of human rights discourse when used as persuasion. He points to the reactions people have to abusive dictators as an example:

Butchers such as Pol Pot and Idi Amin still shock the consciences of all people and provoke a desire to reject them as not merely reprehensible but prohibited by clear and public, authoritative international norms; even governments with dismal human rights records of their own seem to feel compelled to join in condemning the abuses of such rulers, and those of lesser despots as well. (Donnelly 212)

In other words, people and states, whether they are Cambodian or not, or Ugandan or not, seem to spurn the human rights abuses of Pol Pot and Idi Amin, or know they ought to, to the point where alternate narratives about their actions cannot be entertained. The approach people, as actors on a human rights discourse network, take towards such violence seems to come from a supranational vision of morals that almost completely occludes the local. And states, whether they are human rights advocates or violators themselves, must concomitantly appear to reject these violent acts of inhumanity, sometimes in an all or nothing equation of the head of state with the whole state. The states’ reactions to the abuse appear to stem (at best) from their moral character or (at worst) from their concern about moral image.

It is not possible to know for sure whether states and individuals might otherwise repudiate these dictators and their actions or other human rights violators and violations because they truly believe in a moral global community or because they simply want to protect their image as a moral nation or person. On a discourse network, that difference is an almost inconsequential judgment based on intent rather than the content of the message sent. For this project, such possible, yet impenetrable, motives are not as important as the fact that they seem to believe that it is important to *appear* to acknowledge the immorality of such actions. That is, human rights discourse seems to

make them act in a particular way because of its moral suasion, no matter where else they might be positioned on a global system of networks.

I suggest that this claim to moral power might be the dynamo that charges or drives the users and forms of human rights language within a global human rights discourse network. This moral power generates and regenerates itself through the actors and their discursive acts in the network even as it conducts its power to and on them. I will now turn to this self-generating aspect of human rights discourse and its power, to see what other effects one might look for when a particular foundational ideology engages communities on a discourse network.

Human Rights Discourse Generates Its Own Discourse and Power

If human rights discourse carries moral power, and if, as discourse, it produces and reproduces itself in ways characteristic of its own foundational ideology and of its particular discourse network, then it follows that it also generates and regenerates its own “moral” power. That is, its ideology will reproduce itself and generate its effects. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s notions of “biopower” and “biopolitical production” in *Empire* (2000) are helpful here. “Bio” here is used in the materialist sense, to refer to the physical body, and not in a naturalist sense, with its essentialist notions of genetic or biological determinism.

Hardt and Negri borrow the idea of biopower from Michel Foucault to characterize the nature of power in *Empire*. In “Right of Death and Power over Life” in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1978), he develops a history of social forms, observing that, beginning in the seventeenth century, European society (especially those entities who were involved in the administration of society like rulers and governments) focused increasingly on the body – “the body imbued with the mechanisms of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes” – and on regulating and controlling the body and its life functions – “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 139). The result was the creation and implementation of various

“regulatory controls” to govern and police the state by governing and policing human life in all its bodily functions. Another outcome that persists today, moreover, is that there never exists a biological entity (body, organ, etc.) that is not always-already deeply marked by social circumstance. That is, all bodies are *gendered* and not *sexed*; all “biological entities” (read as essentialist creation) are not naturalist, they are constructed and interpreted. Foucault described this exercise of power over human life as “a biopolitics of the population” and this form of power as “biopower” (*The History of Sexuality* 139-40). In other words, there came to be a system of power that governed the physical bodies and functions of individual people. Hardt and Negri argue that this is the form of power that supports Empire today. Empire rules every aspect of human life of the global population biopolitically.

The authors combine Foucault’s notion of biopower with another concept derived from the French philosopher, that is, the shift in social forms from a “disciplinary society” to a “society of control,” in order to describe the workings of Empire’s power. They describe how concrete situations of discipline eventually turn into more abstract mechanisms of control (*discourses* of control, as I am using the term) (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 22-23). Following Foucault’s history of socio-political developments, Hardt and Negri observe that, if modern societies were previously disciplinary societies (governed through disciplinary institutions like “the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, [and] the school”), then post-modern societies, including those under Empire, are now comprehensible not in terms of their institutions, but as societies of control (ruled from within, by the subjects themselves, not as enforcement agencies, but as systems of laws and practices that are internalized and self-imposed). The authors maintain that, in a society of control, “the behaviors of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are...increasingly interiorized within the subjects themselves” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 23). That is, the members of a society almost govern themselves, they police each other, holding each other to the norms already ingrained in their society by the disciplinary institutions that are now an established part of society. Note that this is again a definition of a discourse community as I am using it.

Hardt and Negri argue that these Foucaultian concepts of societies of control and biopower characterize the main features of Empire. Empire's power works internally (from within society) and invasively (over all aspects of human life). They thus appear to unite the two notions, redefining "biopower" as "a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 24). That is, for Hardt and Negri, biopower is a form of power over life, through the minds and the bodies of people. They state, "The highest function of this power is to invest life through and through, and its primary task is to administer life. Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 24). *And* it is a kind of power that works from within people, from within their own desires, rather than simply being imposed upon people unwillingly. That power is *internal* to people and society, functioning subjectively, rather than *external* and *intersubjectively*. As Hardt and Negri put it, with biopower, "power is not something that lords over us but something that we make" (*Empire* 165). In turn, life is administered and actualized by that power. So the concept of "biopower" is also not essentialist, because it is the network and its power that actually define what "intersubjective" means in a community of discourse, since all available speaking identities are predicated on it.

I suggest that the power of human rights discourse might thus be understood as "biopower" in the way Hardt and Negri describe. The way human rights discourse seems to order society suggests that it might be included as a form of biopower. For instance, human rights language appears to dictate who should be considered human and how states and people should and should not treat human beings. Various human rights texts, like monitoring reports, also track people and their lives. And there are many discursive and social practices associated with human rights language, like witnessing and campaigning, that absorb, interpret and rearticulate society and social events. These examples suggest that human rights discourse might be seen as a form of biopower, as defined by Hardt and Negri.

The authors also outline how biopower self-generates through processes of “biopolitical production,” which they define as the “production and reproduction of life itself” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 24). That is, it creates and recreates itself by producing and reproducing people and the world on its patterns, physically and metaphysically. As Hardt and Negri state, “Who we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other are all created through this social, biopolitical production” (*Empire* 66). To explain what they mean, they offer the example that one important way biopower self-generates is through the biopolitical production of “agentic subjectivities” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 32). That is, it fashions “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds,” and it produces “producers” (32). For Hardt and Negri, biopower fashions what people *suppose* they need, how people *think* they should interact socially, what people *make* of their bodies, and what people *believe* in their minds and hearts. In short it creates people’s subjectivities by creating their “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds” and thus ordering their world views by imposing particular orders through bodies, as Foucault suggested, as well (32).⁸⁵ At the same time, for Hardt and Negri, since biopower comes from *within* people and society, it is *people* who produce these “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds” (32). That is, *people* create their subjectivities: they are not passive subjects, but active agents. They are the “producers” of biopolitical production and thus of biopower (32).

I suggest that human rights discourse as biopower might be understood as self-generating through processes of biopolitical production as conceived by Hardt and Negri, operating through bodies, as outlined by Foucault.⁸⁶ Indeed, the texts, discursive and social practices of human rights language in use might be seen as instances of biopolitical production. The way that human rights discourse produces and reproduces people and the

⁸⁵ For an interesting parallel account of this process of ordering, see Norbert Elias’ *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (1939), which focuses on how social forms create the spaces and bodies of the state.

⁸⁶ Foucault has also discussed such ordering through bodies in his work on institutions, for example, in his book, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973).

world through its language use suggests that it creates its power through processes of biopolitical production. The previous example of monitoring reports shows how these human rights texts can indeed produce and reproduce specific relations between people and the world by characterizing states as oppressors and people as the oppressed, and separating the world into human rights-enlightened and unenlightened societies.

Makau wa Mutua, for example, has discussed how human rights reports often pit First World states or institutions against Third World states and cultures. In “Savages, Victims, and Saviors,” he writes:

The report asks that the West cut off aid, condition assistance, impose sanctions, and/or publicly denounce the unacceptable conduct of the Third World state.

INGOs [International NGOs] thus ask First World states and institutions to play a significant role in “taming” and “civilizing” Third World states, even though such a role relies on the power and economic imbalances of the international order which favors the North over the South. (225)

The earlier examples of discursive and social human rights practices, like witnessing and campaigning, also illustrate how the discourse tends to create and recreate social life by representing people as either victims or saviors and acting on those roles, and by dividing the world into zones of human rights heavens or hells. Like the human rights reports, these practices also often characterize those in the First World as saviors and those in the Third World as victims.

This situation can, of course, have an ideologically tendentious side, considering that those who prepare these reports often do so for institutions based in the First World and for readers who hold power in the First World. This strategy of defining a network actor essentially as a First World savior needed to rescue Third World states and people may be a rhetorical ploy contrived to solicit action from its readers, rather than necessarily an intentional attempt to denigrate those in the Third World and elevate those in the First. Nevertheless, the effect of such a strategy, as articulated by Mutua, does seem to render the tactic, however well-meaning in intentions, questionable. Since it is entirely possible for other Third World states and cultures, if not the one being reported

on itself, to address the human rights problems of its own or its regional neighbors, it should not be necessary to resort to dividing the geographical regions of the world into saviors and victims in any unnuanced way. Moreover, a discourse network on which such power is implemented need not equate subject positions with any particular entities.

These representations of people and the world engendered by human rights language in use often make observers and users of the discourse alike desire a moral code that will bring justice to people and order to the world. This is an assumption that stereotypes the whole action of discourse as a kind of Star Trek universe. That is, these human rights texts, discursive and social practices reveal or remind people of their tacit assumptions on why they might need and want an international human rights system for themselves and for the world. To extend the Star Trek analogy, the humans and sentient species of the galaxy know that they need a United Federation of Planets as a governing body to maintain peace and order. Despite such clear limitations, however, such texts transform individuals into Hardt and Negri's agent-subjects, making them want to subject themselves to a larger power that, ironically, they create by themselves and for themselves. In short, individuals produce their own subordination, and the discourse network can be the medium through which it happens.

At the same time, however, since individuals use and create human rights discourse, they could also benefit from its moral power. That is, they might use and create its power for themselves, through their production, circulation and consumption of texts as well as discursive and social practices that refer to human rights language. They might conduct the moral power of human rights discourse to themselves through their discourse use. They thus highlight the agent side of Hardt and Negri's agent-subjects, appearing to claim for themselves the force of that larger power to which all (including themselves) are subject. In other words, they might derive their own power from and through the language and language use.

In these seemingly contradictory ways, through these biopolitical agent-subjects, products and processes, human rights discourse might have a more positive side. It might not simply be universalizing or characterizing, but implementing a broader exercise of its

agency, creating and recreating itself and its own power. In this way, human rights discourse could be understood to be self-generating, even as it looks like it is imposed from without. I propose that this creation and recreation of human rights discourse and its power might be seen as generating and regenerating within a global human rights discourse network. The combination of perspectives I have adduced here suggests that such a network forms and revives its power from these agent-subjects and their discursive acts (that is, different *nodes* in the network) even as it conducts its moral power to and upon them. It also derives and sustains its power from *other* power networks like world systems of law or global communication circuits (the news media like the BBC or CNN, for instance) or transnationally-connected advocacy organizations (Greenpeace and Amnesty International, for example) that intersect with it in a global system of networked power. To address some of the implications of this definition of a global discourse network, I now turn to such circuits. I will focus on their *globalizing* aspect, that is, the way they convey not just texts, language, and ideas but also power across the world. This discussion may help to clarify such a network's propensity for creating various identities and agency for its actors.

Human Rights Discourse Globalizes Itself and Its Power as a Network

I suggested earlier that the kinds of human rights language that make up human rights discourse, and their users, forms and creators, might be conceived as comprising aspects of a broader global human rights discourse network with access through many different human-rights-based discourses, including discourses indexed to notions of human dignity. I also posited that these languages, their use, and users are united in a network in no small part because they are bound together by the moral roots and moral power of this discourse. This network, then, is not just a web of discourse (lexicon, acts, speaking positions, agents, subjects) but also a network transmitting power. Indeed, human rights discourse could be understood as extending and expanding itself and its power through a network of this particular structure and in its intersections with other networks in a global system of power networks. This model of a global discourse

network of human rights is, however, not mine alone, but rather is informed by Hardt and Negri's notions of "Empire" and "network power," and by Meg McLagan's idea of a "circulatory matrix" of rights-oriented media organizations and practices.

Hardt and Negri argue that "Empire" – "the political subject that effectively regulates...global exchanges [of economics and culture]" – is the form of power that rules over our globalizing world (xi). They characterize Empire as a networked system of global power, explaining that Empire runs on "network power," whereby "power [is] constituted by a whole series of powers that regulate themselves and arrange themselves in networks" (162). In short, Hardt and Negri argue that, in a globalizing world organized by capital and media, power is produced and reproduced through networks of specific constitution, and that global power is generated and regenerated through a global system of networks.

One of these authors' network examples is a communication network, by which they are emphasizing that the kind of discourse network to which I am referring here functions as a communication structure, exchanging messages, and defining speaking positions. They define communication networks as systems of forms and users that produce "language, communication, and the symbolic" (32). A global discourse network of human rights as conceived in this project could straightforwardly be envisioned within this framework as a type of communication network since, as Diane Macdonell states in *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (1986), "discourse is social" (1). She writes, "Dialogue is the primary condition of discourse: all speech and writing is social," involving communication between at least two users (1). A global human rights discourse network might thus also be understood as a kind of communication network wherein the moral power of the discourse draws users and creators into the network. It is a network that serves its agents and brings them into frameworks of power not necessarily proximate to their own. These actors then are enabled to produce, circulate and consume more discourse, thereby pulling in more users and creators. In this way, the network extends and expands the discourse, and each individual actor gains a wider sphere of potential agency by means of the network.

This concrete potential again has an abstract, managerial potential whose effects may not always be positive. Hardt and Negri also argue, for example, that communication networks help globalize our world and produce global power. In terms of communication networks enabling globalization, they write:

Communication not only expresses but also organizes the movement of globalization. It organizes the movement by multiplying and structuring interconnections through networks. It expresses the movement and controls the sense and direction of the imaginary that runs throughout these communicative connections. (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 32)

Expression, therefore, is based on an *imaginary* (Lacan's term), an assumed reality structure that exerts its control over the agents through its discourse practices.

In keeping with the idea of a global human rights discourse network as a type of communication network, the network could be seen as helping globalize human rights discourse in the ways described by Hardt and Negri. That is, the network seems to allow for the production, distribution and consumption of human rights discourse at a global level.

As for how communication networks generate global power, the authors state: Power, as it produces, organizes; as it organizes, it speaks and expresses itself as authority. Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but more creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them. The communications industries integrate the imaginary and the symbolic within the biopolitical fabric, not merely putting them at the service of power but actually integrating them into its very functioning. (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 33)

That is, the network seems to inculcate the moral code of human rights language into people and the world through its production, circulation and consumption of human rights texts, discursive practices and social practices, rendering people agents and recipients of human rights discourse, and the world intelligible through the structures it provides for experience. Since such acts of discourse tend to regulate what and how

people think of themselves as humans, and their world as a human society, the network could be said to be globalizing the ideological power of human rights discourse.

Hardt and Negri also describe communication networks as working democratically and oligopolistically. On the one hand, communications networks function by means of infrastructures like the Internet, that offers for the most part a democratic structure, “a nonhierarchical and noncentered network structure” that resembles what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call a rhizome (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 299).⁸⁷ In contrast, broadcast systems model different kinds of communication networks, ones that are mostly oligopolistic because they have fixed points of emission. They model mechanisms of “centralized production, mass distribution and one-way communication” and involve a relatively small number of big media conglomerates as authorized producers of its content (for example, Viacom, AOL/TW, Disney, Clear Channel, and News Corp) and control broadcast systems as a communication framework (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 299). The project pursued here, however, models tensions between both poles, as human rights discourse circuits enact both the democratic possibilities of a global discourse network and the oligopolistic limitations posed by existing structures in the international human rights system and related global communication networks that perform the vital work of publicity so critical to human rights advocacy.

Cultural anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Meg McLagan has sought to describe the phenomenon of these global communication networks oriented around

⁸⁷ In their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari suggest that approaching an analysis of a communication network as composed of rhizomes might be more useful as a framework for analysis than the conventional mode of studying objects and subjects in their singularity and in their conventional structures. Using terms from botany, they characterize a rhizome as a subterranean stem (for example bulbs and tubers) that “assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers” (7). A rhizome thus ceaseless establishes connections between all sorts of things, people, events and places. If a rhizome ruptures at one spot, another part of it will continue, or it will produce a new part. To approach things rhizomatically, is to foster and consider the multiplicity of connections between previously unconnected things.

human rights in her notion of “a circulatory matrix” of rights-oriented media organizations and practices. In her article, “Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public,” she writes:

In recent years there has been a proliferation of organizations and venues dedicated to producing, distributing, and exhibiting rights-oriented media, from those that provide technical training in video production to those that facilitate connections between filmmakers and local grassroots activists to those that aid in distributing and exhibiting human rights media. These organizations and the social practices around them constitute a circulatory matrix, or dedicated communications infrastructure, out of which human rights claims are generated and through which they travel. Comprising multiple layers – commercial, nonprofit, nongovernmental, intergovernmental, and community – which are distinct but often overlap, these circuits provide the scaffolding for the making public of human rights violations. (192)

What McLagan describes here could be considered one particular media-focused set of human rights discourse-based networks, a subset of the larger network that I have been working through here. What McLagan’s description seems to be pointing to is various networks – in her case, networks of video production, distribution, and exhibition – comprised of various actors, including organizations, venues, technology, filmmakers, local grassroots activists, social practices – that are dedicated to publicizing human rights violations and promoting human rights claims. As she describes these networks, she refers to them as “circuits,” comprised of “multiple layers – commercial, nonprofit, nongovernmental, intergovernmental, and community – which are distinct but often overlap” (“Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public” 192). It may be more useful to describe this situation of ‘distinct layers overlapping’ as different networks and their actors intersecting. Different terms, perhaps more descriptive terms, but the action being described remains the same – nodes of one network are linking up with nodes of other networks.

McLagan's characterization of these human rights discourse-oriented networks also seems to suggest that their potential for cross-network linking appears to be part of what enables these networks and actors to work so powerfully locally and globally. One network and its actors become better able to mobilize by culling the resources of other networks and their actors. As discussed above, Hardt and Negri have called this kind of rhizomatic generation and regeneration of power "network power" and theorized that it is at work in the contemporary world of international and global politics. That is, power forms in local circuits of interest, with the potential of globalizing into forms of what they consider Empire – established networks of power that influence individuals as well as groups.

McLagan's reference to "social practices" in her quote also calls attention to how each network and its respective actors function according to particular discursive conventions – established ways of speaking, acting, listening, responding, even thinking – that influence all their interactions with other networks and other actors. For instance, Jonathan Benthall, in *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (1993), has characterized the formulaic way that mainstream Western media tended to narrate disaster relief stories. And David Kennedy, in *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (2004), has observed how human rights language and ideology tends to categorize people into distinct groups of victim, perpetrator, hero, or bystander. In a similar vein, Mutua, in "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," has characterized the human rights movement as being marked by the "damning metaphor" of "savages-victims-saviors (SVS)" (201), while Obiora Chinedu Okafor and Shedrack C. Agbakwa, in "Re-Imagining International Human Rights Education in Our Time: Beyond Three Constitutive Orthodoxies," have identified the tendency for human rights education to conceive of the world as "human rights hells" (often the Third World societies fall into this camp as "human rights violating societies") and "human rights heavens" (usually "Western" societies belong to this group as "human rights respecting societies"). All these are elements of the power enacted through discourse networks.

In another article, “Circuits of Suffering,” McLagan highlights the impact of organizational infrastructure of media networks oriented around human rights on what topics become important and how they are discussed. She writes:

With the invention and global spread of digital technologies, however, social movements have dramatically restructured their relationship to publicity, demonstrating that media are not simply conduits for social forces, but rather are key sites for the definition of political issues and communities and the making of active and attentive publics. (“Circuits of Suffering” 223)

McLagan argues that such networks indexed around the lexicon of human rights are becoming at once more specialized and more modular, a situation that makes human rights activism at once harder and easier in different ways. Her article focuses on a rights advocacy network, charting “the consolidation of a set of interconnected institutions, social networks, and practices into what can be described as an emergent rights-oriented communications infrastructure through which rights claims are transformed into rights “issues” and put into circulation” (“Circuits of Suffering” 224). She argues that this network, this set of institutions and social actors (both institutional and individual) translate “local political concerns” into “narratives and discursive forms that registered *as political* in an international context” (“Circuits of Suffering” 224).

The specific work on texts to be presented as the second part of the present project is much influenced by McLagan. Like her, I too am interested in how these interconnected institutions and actors seem to be functioning, and how their actions are at once expanded and curbed by the practices of the media. While McLagan focuses on human rights advocacy institutions and actors like WITNESS and Active Voice, and media channels, my case studies present both overt human rights advocacy actors like MSF and Paul Rusesabagina, as well as less institutionally implicated actors like Michael Ondaatje, who most would not see as a human rights advocate, no matter that he takes it up as the topic of a novel.

And unlike McLagan’s work that centers on visual representations especially documentary film and video, the project undertaken here mainly discusses written texts (a

speech archived online, an autobiography and a novel), although it will at times wander into film, as with the case of Paul Rusesabagina whose story has been visualized in Terry Georges' *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). My project includes less obviously advocacy focused and audience targeted texts, because it seeks to ask what these other less official texts bring to this consolidating set of institutions and social actors dedicated to human rights advocacy and to extending the network. It also hopes to explore more broadly what these texts might add to the meaning and interpretations of human rights in and outside of the international human rights system as discussed by Hoffmann and Speed.

Such attention to the intersection between a global human rights discourse network and other communication networks is critical to the case studies I present below. While these communication networks enable the actors in a global human rights discourse network to produce, distribute and consume human rights discourse globally, their discursive and social norms also sometimes limit the scope of the actors to do so. I take up the relationship between a global human rights discourse network and other communication networks in detail in the case study chapters. For now, let me expand on how the network seems to globalize human rights discourse and its power through its connections with other networks.

Interim Conclusions: Human Rights Discourse Globalizes Itself and Its Power in a Global System of Power Networks

As noted above, a discourse network such as I have been modeling does not just stand alone, but works in concert with other networks, as a set of circuits that together make the whole, but which are not necessarily well-integrated with each other. As such, the specific network I have been discussing here has the capacity to extend and expand human rights discourse and its power not only through its own network formation, but also through its connections with other network formations across a potentially global system of networks.

Aside from the work of McLagan, this discourse network idea and its intersections with other networks is informed by Hoffmann who emphasizes other

aspects of the fluid nature of human rights and how it travels across the globe over the kinds of networked connections that I have been pursuing here. He writes:

Reference to human rights, whether in good or bad faith, and with whatever connotations, constitutes an undeniably empirical element in a world that is increasingly marked by global communication streams and material exchanges, a world in which the “trans-,” the “cross-,” and the hybrid has, at least in part, replaced what was previously assumed to be the coexistence of discrete, bounded formations such as nation-states, cultures, or identities. Human rights is a firm part of this dynamic global intermixture of vocabularies, actors, and institutions. No particular use or connotation given to the term has a monopoly on expressing the essential nature of the concept. The meaning of human rights is neither clearly bounded nor stable; it is neither global nor local; neither law, morality, nor culture; nor are these elements firmly locked together in a stable formation. Human rights is a fundamentally fluid concept, and it is this fluidity that is at the basis of both its omnipresence and its stubborn resistance to being reduced to any set of essential characteristics. (405)

As I have argued in another way above, Hoffmann here underscores the sense that, as discourse, human rights are open to influence by their production, distribution and consumption by its users. And in an age with increasingly interconnected global communication systems and intercultural exchange, the language and ideology of human rights will be open to all sorts of changes from various parts of the world and multiple social actors, be they institutional or individual, officially authorized or unofficial and unauthorized. Hoffmann thus gestures towards the interconnectedness of what I am here positing as a global discourse network of human rights with other global systems. Nonetheless, although I concur with Hoffmann that the “meaning” of human rights is at once global and local, and that it encompasses aspects of other networks from law (legalized code of justice) or other cultural systems like religion (formalized systems of morality) or even “common sense” (socialized systems of ethics), he underplays how

human rights discourses are grounded in ethics, value systems of what is right and wrong, morally speaking, as I focus on here.

In slightly different terms, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, in “The Second Great Transformation: Human Rights Leapfrogging in the Era of Globalization” (2005), describes other globalizing networks in which human rights discourses are implicated. She identifies the following components of the current global human rights framework: an international human rights regime, a system of global governance, a global normative order premised on an ideology of human rights, a global communications and mass media network, a global civil society, and a global human rights social movement (Howard-Hassmann 34-38). Each component could be understood in the present context as a different *node* in a global human rights discourse network. For example, each act or text of human rights discourse implicated within the context of the international human rights system is not an isolated event, but is also tied to the system of global governance and a global civil society. In short, all of these components could be seen as intersecting, if not constituting the same global network of human rights discourse, as well as being attached to other networks (global and non-global). Howard-Hassmann herself calls attention to the networked nature of these components when she refers to “a global communication and mass media *network*” (emphasis mine). Howard-Hassmann’s international human rights system, for example, could be seen as a network of actors, institutions, procedures and regulations. And it could be viewed as associated with other networks like international, regional and national government or judiciary systems. A system of global governance like that of the UN, could be understood as affiliated with regional state governmental networks like the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other state governmental networks. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to know when one network ends and another begins because the

interconnections between some of these networks are so dense. The relationship between the international human rights system and the UN, for instance, is especially tight.⁸⁸

However, the important factor may be the interconnectedness of the network across various nodes, not its absolute extent or which rhizomes may or may not be in it. And for the present project, my focus is on how the network creates an order of texts of various sorts. For example, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on military abuse in Burma might affect directly or indirectly the international human rights regime's monitoring reports on Burma, and the UN and ASEAN's diplomatic ties with the country. This report might also shape the ideological materials that human rights advocates disseminate in the world. Or it might influence a BBC news report on the Burmese military, and increase or decrease the legitimacy and strength of advocacy groups for human rights and democracy in Burma. It might also affect the identities and power of Burmese people in and outside Burma (like the exiled community or the Burmese diaspora) who are active members of a global civil society.

Since a global discourse network of human rights intersects so many other networks, it could also be understood to draw the power of these other networks to itself, as the proliferation creates a tendency to a very particular kind of globalization. This globalization is not a universalism, but rather the ability to provide rhizomatic circuits into many different domains across the globe. To return to Hubert's discussion of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines as an example, one of the reasons the campaign worked so well, as Hubert concludes, was that it harnessed the powers of state and non-state actor networks (94-100). Hubert demonstrates how the Steering Committee and the broad-based coalition of the ICBL organization drew from the network power of national campaigns and grassroots activism (97-98). He also highlights how the ICRC and UN agencies tapped into their credibility and authority to publicize and support the

⁸⁸ See United Nations, "Human Rights Bodies" for a list of UN human rights bodies that are supposed to protect and promote the international human rights norms in the regime. This list shows how virtually inseparable these two networks are from each other.

campaign (99-100). Hubert further illustrates how a core group of states used their connections with other network powers like the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, the OAS, the OAU and ASEAN not only to prevent these bodies from categorically rejecting the ban but also to build regional support for the ban (100). As the HRW report and ICBL campaign examples suggest, then, a discourse network of human rights seems to extend itself and expand its power globally through its intersections with other networks.

The Model of a Global Network, Revisited

The project of these two chapters (Chapters Two and Three) has been consistently aimed at drawing out a model of how a global discourse network in general works, and specifying how the case of a human rights discourse in particular might work. The seven main characteristics of a global human rights discourse network sketched out here tend, moreover, to exercise power in very particular ways, especially as it globalizes its reach and creates speaking positions associated principally with morality. This claim to moral power remains accessible in some way to actors across the network, no matter how large that network, since by definition what is available in a network is always accessible across its various nodes.

In drawing out this model, I have tried to suggest that human rights discourse might be understood as circulating itself and its power worldwide through its own network formation and a global system of networks. Nonetheless, this model of a global discourse network is clearly meant to represent only one possible way to analyze the globalization of human rights discourse and its effects on people. The hope is that a better sense of how discourse globalizes might help illuminate other effects of the system, particularly the emergence of actors on the network and how the lexicon of the network is used *globally* even while it remains open to exercising power *locally*. To finish my outline of what is at stake in such a model, let me now turn to how a framework like a

global discourse network might be useful for critical questions of individual agency and identity. I discuss this in general in the next chapter and in detail in the case study chapters that follow.

Chapter 4

Applying Network Theory to Questions of Power and Identity:

Some Conclusions on Human Rights Discourse, Power, and Identities

This final chapter of my project's first section addresses the relationship between human rights discourse and people's identities and power. I touched on the idea that this discourse seems to influence and be influenced by people's identities and power earlier in my exposition, when discussing Norman Fairclough's notion that discourse helps constitute people's social identities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and belief. It was also alluded to in the discussion of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of "agentic subjectivities."

Now, I deliberate explicitly on this particular implication of seeing human rights as discourse and globalizing through a network here, because the case studies in the second part of this project are concerned primarily with what human rights discourse seems to do to and with people's identities and agency, and what people seem to do to and with the moral nature and network power of human rights discourse. This last piece of the model must, I believe, be made explicitly, because of the ubiquitous assumptions that *globalized* or *networked* power must necessarily work against individuals' exercise of power and against their ability to be agents of their own identities.

Yet to this point, this model has attempted to outline the conditions for the possibility of what Florian Hoffmann describes as a “pragmatic perspective” that “aims to comprehend human rights discourse not in terms of what it could be, or ought to be, but in terms of what it arguably is, namely a plural, polycentric, and ultimately indeterminate discourse amenable to use by everyone nearly everywhere” (409).⁸⁹ This chapter thus tries to show how a network theory, as described above, might help with analysis of the effects of human rights discourse on people (their power and identities) and vice versa. In short, it seeks to extend the vision of the framework sketched out above by showing how it helps to address this analytical question. To make this final step, I will draw from Hardt and Negri’s notions of “Empire” and “multitude” in *Empire* (2000), and Rosi Braidotti’s idea of “nomadic subjects” in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), to suggest what a network approach might lend to the question of individual people’s agency and identities.

Network Power: The Relationship Between Human Rights Discourse and People’s Power

As discussed earlier, Hardt and Negri argue that “Empire” – “the political subject that effectively regulates...global exchanges [of economics and culture]” – is the form of power that rules over our globalizing world (*Empire* xi). Their idea of Empire, however, is a regime of power, not an imperial state. It is a network, as I would term it here. They

⁸⁹ Hoffmann writes, “Wherever individuals and groups wish to challenge what they perceive as oppressive or hegemonic structures, they can avail themselves of that discourse, as if using a hammer to send shockwaves through a concrete wall. The logic of plurality implies, however, that the effect of these discursive irritations is beyond the control of those creating them, and is ultimately uncertain. There is no single correct signification and thus use of human rights, only context-specific uses” (409). This notion of not being able to control the effect of human rights discourse use is a symptom of a globalizing world perhaps where an event is not confined to one place, but can have effects in other places. This suggests another kind of tension inherent in human rights discourse, that of context-specific uses that seem to decontextualize the event. I will come to this idea more in the case study of Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* in Chapter Seven.

maintain that Empire, as it exists today, tends to oppress rather than serve people and the world. At the same time, these authors also insist that people do not always have to live in a world wherein Empire dominates negatively. Rather, they argue that people can change the form of Empire under which they and the world falter today, to another form of Empire through which they might flourish.

Hardt and Negri suggest that the more dominating form of Empire present today has grown out of one set of European-based situations, and that it can be changed to a more liberating form of power available to individuals. This claim is possible because they identify *individuals*, and not infrastructure, juridical networks, or states as the source of Empire's power. And if individuals create Empire and have comprised and reinforced the contemporary form of Empire, then individuals could also recreate Empire and compose it in another form. Hardt and Negri call these new individuals as collective agents a "multitude;" individuals with "productive, creative subjectivities" (*Empire* 60). They are groups of agent-subjects, individuals with "agentic subjectivities," who create and recreate life, and thus produce and reproduce Empire since, as a biopower, Empire grows and exerts itself by regulating, following, interpreting, absorbing and rearticulating life. Hardt and Negri's argument is thus straightforward, if surprising to those opposing globalization in its present form. First, Empire is indeed a system of global power over the multitude (those subject to the power). Yet Empire is actually produced and reproduced by the multitude. In consequence, it could thus be created and recreated to serve rather than oppress them. Whether or not such a non-hegemonic Empire, one that seems to function as a democracy in its most idealized form, can be realized is debatable. Networks, as I have outlined in the last chapter, become exceedingly complex and self-defining, and hence probably ever more resistant to innovation. Moreover, it would seem difficult, if not impossible, to serve everyone equally well at the same time. Yet because such networks are rhizomatic, as I have explained, they retain some potential for innovation and Hardt and Negri are not being purely utopian.

These authors thus suggest that the more oppressive form of Empire as it exists currently could be transformed to a more enabling form of Empire because, as discussed

above, they discern *networks* as Empire's system of power. And if established networks engendered the dominating form of Empire, then multitude could forge new networks or add significant rhizome-circuits to existing ones to create a more liberating form of Empire. Echoing the network model that I am pursuing here, Hardt and Negri characterize the multitude of individuals as floating "asystemic elements" within the system of Empire that can combine and recombine to foster positive "asystemic movements" (*Empire* 60). They write, "[The multitude] are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations on the system [of Empire], This perpetual motion can be geographical, but it can refer also to modulations of form and processes of mixture and hybridization" (60). The authors seem to deploy the term "asystemic" to contrast with the notion of "antisystemic movements" discussed by Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein in "Dilemmas of Antisystemic Movements."

Hardt and Negri find that Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein tend to flatten struggles against the modern world system, understood as a capitalist world-economy, by a too neat inversion of system versus antsystem (*Empire* 428-29). By using the term "asystemic" instead of antsystem, Hardt and Negri try to correct this bias and to resist the impulse to see the struggles against their own vision of a contemporary world system, understood as Empire, as a direct counter of the system, i.e. *antisystemic*, or as the *only* model for non-system elements. Rather, they try to conceive of Empire as a global network that can be affected by elements that may be part of the system but may not always follow its flow, i.e. *asystemic*.⁹⁰ For these authors, then, Empire exists as a system

⁹⁰ Hardt and Negri write, "The relationship between 'system' and 'asystemic movements' cannot be flattened onto any logic of correspondence in this perpetually modulating atopia. Even the asystemic elements produced by the new multitude are in fact global forces that cannot have a commensurate relationship, even an inverted one, with the system. Every insurrectional event that erupts within the order of the imperial system provokes a shock to the system in its entirety. From this perspective, the institutional frame in which we live is characterized by its radical contingency and precariousness, or really by the unforeseeability of the *sequence of events* – sequences that are always more brief or more compact temporally and thus ever less controllable" (*Empire* 60-61).

of power networks that are set in motion by the multitude, and, in consequence, the multitude could change these existing networks and create new ones to transform the current form of Empire. That is, individuals could by definition influence a network of discourse within which they are engaged.

The power of human rights discourse on people and the world could be thought of in the way Hardt and Negri conceive of the power of Empire since, like Empire, the power of human rights discourse is also, as discussed earlier, a form of biopower and a system of power networks. Like Empire, too, human rights discourse as it exists today can sometimes seem to dominate rather than liberate people and the world. In short, human rights discourse could sometimes be seen to restrict people's power, even as people have access to a larger tissue of life because of it. From the perspective of today's form of Empire, this potential is clearly asymmetrical, but it is simply an inadequate account of how networks and their actors interact to deny it altogether.

Empirical evidence supports this claim, no matter how weak it may initially seem to some. Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol's *Just Advocacy? Women's Human Rights, Transnational Feminisms, and the Politics of Representation* (2005) showcases instances wherein human rights discourse seems to function by further subjugating traditionally vulnerable groups like women and children, reducing them to helpless victims needing to be rescued by paternal saviors. In one of the chapters in this edited book, "Claiming Afghan Women," Amy Farrell and Patrice McDermott highlight the way the transnational U.S.-based organization, Feminist Majority, sought to speak for Afghan women in 1996 mostly by rendering the women as spectacles of pity. In so doing, this organization not only overlooked the successful work of the national Afghanistan-based Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), but also undermined RAWA's efforts to improve their lives as Afghan women since 1977. In another chapter, "Piercing the Veil," Madhavi Sunder showcases how because human rights law tends to place religion beyond state or juridical intervention, it often leaves Muslim women unprotected from discriminatory Islamic practices. In both cases, power was distributed even as individuals were disenfranchised.

At the same time, however, although human rights discourse may sometimes, perhaps inadvertently, end up dominating rather than liberating people, there are also instances where people may empower other people and themselves with it. Farrell and McDermott, for instance, demonstrate how both Feminist Majority and RAWA harnessed human rights discourse to influence U.S. foreign policy on Afghanistan. They qualify, however, that although each organization drew upon the discourse to increase their authority to speak for the Afghan women, neither organization had enough power to change the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy. Nor could they control the U.S. government's co-optation of their rhetoric and actions. In Sunder's chapter, however, the author observes that despite the authority human rights law often confers on Islam, Islamic feminists are nevertheless using human rights discourse to undermine the power of religious discourse. Indeed, according to Sunder, these feminists are not dominated by the "Western"-biased international human rights system that may seem culturally ill-fitting for Islamic communities. Rather, they are adapting human rights discourse to suit their own needs.

The model I am pursuing helps to amplify the grounds for Hardt and Negri's claims. One reason people seem to be able (albeit to varying degrees of success) to capitalize on human rights discourse in empowering ways may be because they play active roles as "subject-agents" in constructing human rights language and its power across a global network that works locally, as I have modeled it. As Hardt and Negri note, it is the subject-agents that produce the power of Empire through biopolitical production. In the case of human rights discourse, this means individuals create the power of human rights by investing moral power in the language, and by generating its moral power through producing, circulating and consuming human rights texts, discursive conventions and social practices. Since people create human rights language, they can also recreate it as a moral code to enable themselves and others, especially those from traditionally vulnerable groups. Of course, as Farrell and McDermott's qualification about the inability of Feminist Majority and RAWA to control the course of U.S. foreign policy shows, how successful people are at using human rights discourse to enable

themselves and others depend on their extant position on the network. Some people, like heads of state, heads of corporations, and media moguls have more public power than other people like state citizens, workers for corporations, and media consumers because they are more heavily intertwined with the network, giving them more power to effect distant nodes on it. A superpower like the U.S. may ultimately dwarf the power of two women's organizations.

Yet it is important to remember that instances of human rights discourse and their actors do not happen in isolation. Rather, they occur within a global human rights discourse network that exists to conduct power to its actors and their actions. It is useful to recall, too, that this network intersects with and draws power from other networks within a global system of power networks. As such, although individuals, or singular organizations, may not have much power of their own, they can draw on or appeal to *network power* from all these networks. This is the case I was making for the human rights discourse network based on the UDHR, when I outlined how its foundation in morality modified its power in very specific ways.

Thus, another reason people might be able to create empowering forms and effects of human rights discourse is that the power of this discourse, like that of Empire, lies in a global discourse network of human rights that intersects with other networks. Thus individuals can draw power from these networks and have networked power. This is how one system (a discourse network) might leverage another (like the international press, the Hollywood film industry, or advocacy networks on the Internet), thereby increasing its own power. What works at the level of networks, may also function at the level of individual actors, given that they are coterminous, if not equal. Individuals, together with other actors, might forge new networks, or change the nature of the current network, to better serve their needs.⁹¹ The case study chapters in the next section of this project will take up this notion in more detail.

⁹¹ See Gregory et al., *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism* (2005), for an engaging look at how WITNESS, an independent media organization, seeks to

In all these different ways, then, human rights discourse and its network could be seen to shape people's agency. If discourse always involves creators and users (that is, *people* create and use discourse), and the network comprises people who produce, circulate and consume the discourse, then it should be acknowledged that *people*, not the discourse itself, shape their own power and that of other people, at least to some degree, by their participation and choices of direction taken across nodes and circuits. In other words, people, through human rights *discourse*, empower themselves and others, or perhaps inadvertently disempower others. And people, through *networks*, shape their own and other people's agency, and, in turn, are shaped by these same networks in ways that are not always fully intentional. Critically, neither the discourse nor people have absolute priority.

Now that I have outlined how a network approach might help with analysis of the relationship between human rights discourse and people's power, let me turn to how it might help investigate the link between human rights discourse and people's identities.

Network Identities: The Relationship Between Human Rights Discourse and People's Identities

In *Nomadic Subjects* (1984), Braidotti offers a supplement to a model like Hardt and Negri's that allows for some forms of individual agency. Outlining what forms such agency might take, she suggests that people, as agents on the network, can function as "nomadic subjects." She defines a "nomadic subject" as someone who does not so much travel from place to place (although many do) as someone who traverses norms. Braidotti writes, "It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling" (5). In this subversion of norms, nomadic subjects do not so much create power as alter their subject positions by moving along networks of power and in so doing gain access to various nodes, implied subject positions, and circuits. In this way, they reject the identities and power attached to their pre-inscribed subject positions.

empower human rights survivors by helping them document their cases in a video documentary and present them to a politically powerful elite audience (Gregory et al.).

Braidotti describes “nomadic consciousness” as “a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self” (25). In short, nomadic subjects cross convention boundaries, not necessarily country borders or county lines. In this way, they change their subject positions, thereby claiming fluid and multiple identities and moments of power. They subvert the flattening effects of globalization by insisting on plurality and by highlighting local effects of particular network circuits, rather than imaging a network as a more rigid machine.

The power that human rights discourse enacts on people and the world could be productively thought of in light of Braidotti’s notion of nomadic subjects. If a discourse like that of human rights largely conventionalizes people and the world, insisting as it does on what humans *are* and enforcing how they should behave, as well as what the world *is* and how it should run, then human rights discourse might be conceived as a set of conventions. And people who challenge these conventions, those who create and use this discourse in unconventional ways, might be considered nomadic subjects. That is, by changing the discourse, resisting the way the discourse typically works, or subverting the discourse for their own purposes, these creators and users claim fluid and multiple identities and moments of power for themselves within the network.

Braidotti argues that people’s identities, while still being tied to their particular bodies, are thus essentially fluid and multiple because they depend on *where* people are located in a network, which by definition has access to multiple nodes and circuits. That is, who people perceive themselves to be, and who other people perceive them to be, rests on where they are situated in a particular network: it is not an absolute property of the person. For instance, someone may be a different person on a global human rights network than in a national citizen rights one. When nomadic subjects cross set conventions, then, they change identities, gaining or losing identities, depending on where they find themselves after their move or action. This move may be within a network (from node to node) or within a global system of networks (from network to network).

For Braidotti, when nomadic subjects move or act in ways that change their identities, they also alter their power; power that they do indeed have, even if not to the degree that utopian thinkers might desire. This is because, in a network system, people's identities and agency are tied to their subject positions within that particular network, rather than being absolute. As with their identities, Braidotti maintains that people's powers, again while still embodied, are shifting and multiple because they depend on *when* people connect with other nodes or networks, not just on the absolute position of their bodies. That is, someone's power rises at particular moments when one or more of the nodes within a network, or one or more of the power networks, allow him or her to emerge as a powerful presence. When nomadic subjects subvert custom, they transform their subject positions, gaining or losing power depending on when they forge with other power nodes, or other power networks, through their move or action. This connection may be recurring or a one-time affair; their *presence* on the network may, moreover, not be identical with their *location* on the globe.

Braidotti's ideas of fluid and multiple identities and power provide additional useful frameworks through which to rethink the way human rights discourse often divides people and the world into binary categories, and how various texts that document their acts may link up to propagate, create, or modify power. As mentioned earlier, Kennedy has argued that the particular discourse network of human rights typically labels people as victims, violators, bystanders or heroes (with the human rights defenders often playing the part of the saviors), thereby overlooking the rather more porous boundaries between these identity categories and their respective degrees of agency (*The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14). These victims are often "passive and innocent," while the violators are typically "abnormal" (examples of human beings that deviate from the "normal," the natural, way of being human) (Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14). As mentioned above also, Okafor and Agbakwa have discussed the binary logic of human rights discourse in terms of its classification of geographical places as "human rights heaven" and "human rights hell," whereby "'Western' societies are usually constructed as heavenly places that are without significant human rights violations, and are therefore as virtually heavenly

places” (“human rights respecting societies”) while “‘Third World’ states are almost always viewed as hellish places that are virtually constituted by incessant epidemics of the most horrendous sorts of human rights violations” (“human rights violating societies”) (566). Mutua has located the binary logic of human rights discourse in a “savages-victims-saviors (SVS)” framework that he argues is inscribed in the international human rights system.

By using Braidotti’s notion of nomadic subjects, it might be possible to model how different genres of texts (emerging from these various speaking positions) might function differently in this network. Texts on the network may interact with the agents who deal with them in ways that emerge as particularly significant in a network constituted around human rights. That is, people could emerge as more than either helpless victims or heroic saviors, and parts of the world could appear as more than either civilized, developed peace areas or violent, degenerate war zones. Moreover (and following logic such as Foucault’s in *Discipline and Punish*), the power I am describing here might also be exercised by particular textual acts in previously unconsidered ways. Braidotti’s more nuanced notions of identity and power as localized could therefore help challenge more rigid views of identity (innocent victims versus evil dictators, peaceful developed countries versus anarchic war zones in developing countries) often inscribed in human rights discourse for both people and places. *Human rights* might mean other things than the rights of particular individuals at all times.

Braidotti’s notion of fluid and multiple identities could help with this kind of critical work because it opens the possibility that people may have more than one identity at a time and have more than one power position at a time. To be sure, if people’s identity and power depend on their specific location at a particular time, that is, *where* and *when* they are in one or more interconnected networks, then it is indeed possible that they could be a “helpless victim” in a book about Ugandan child soldiers because they were once child soldiers. But they could also be, at another point in time and in another place, a “heroic savior” in a project working to help former child soldiers readjust to civilian life because they now speak about their experience to other members of the community.

Their identities and power rest not only on a physical time and place (that is, when they were child soldiers in a rebel camp, and when they are project workers in a community group) but also on a metaphysical time and place created by the biopower of a discourse network. That is, particular circumstances of history and geography make the identity of child soldier a helpless victim and the identity of community project worker a heroic savior.

This example would admittedly be an extreme case of network identity at work, but it is not unheard of. The story of Ismael Beah, captured in his memoir, *A Long Way Gone* (2007), charts just such a transition from child soldier to human rights defender. Beah, formerly a soldier in Sierra Leone is now a member of Human Rights Watch's Children's Rights Division Advisory Committee. In 2007, he spoke on a panel discussion, "Child Soldiers and Children's Rights" at the University of Illinois Chicago (Blauvelt).

One way to understand how such specific conditions arise is to entertain that various power networks intersect, shape the identities and powers of their actors, and push them into existence at different points of a global system of interconnecting networks. As such, people's identities and power depend as much upon their sense of themselves and of other people's senses of them. These percepts of identity and agency – these units of meaning that will eventually become part of the lexicon of a particular discourse – can both be understood as being created by the biopower of the global network. *Who* the globalizing world perceives someone to be, and *what power* it perceives that person to have or what power it concedes to him or her, depend on that person's subject position in a particular discursive event at different points of the network. Consequently, a person could enjoy a powerful identity at one discursive event, and a less powerful identity at another discursive event, even as she functions within the same network or in different networks.

Thus, the categories of victim, villain and human rights defender prescribed by the narrowest picture of human rights discourse cannot hold as part of a model of discourse as a network. By definition, it is not necessarily the case that people are only

helpless victims or heroic saviors, or that parts of the world are just peaceful paradises or hellish battlefields. Indeed, as the network logic inscribed in Hardt and Negri's "Empire," "multitude" and "agentic subjectivities," and Braidotti's "nomadic subjects" suggest, people can be survivors in one instance of discourse and perpetrators in another, within one or more networks. They have various locations to move among. And places can be civilized, developed and peaceful in one discursive event, and brutal, degenerate and in crisis in another, within one or more networks.

As with human rights discourse and power, if it is the case that people are the creators and users of discourse and networks, then it should follow that people, not the discourse, empower themselves by taking on particular identities or disempower others by defining their identities in de-authorizing ways. In other words, *people*, through human rights *discourse*, might be able to identify and represent, or misidentify and misrepresent, themselves and others. And *people*, through *networks*, have the means to shape their own and other people's identities, to become *agents*, and *subjects*, rather than essentialist biological entities alone.

To come at this concept of network identities and power in another way, it is helpful to turn again to Deleuze and Guattari's discussions, especially to their notions of the deterritorialization and reterritorialization that happens in a rhizome. Using the example of a wasp drawing pollen from an orchid, they observe that the meeting between wasp and orchid deterritorializes the wasp (it becomes a part of the flower's reproductive apparatus) and reterritorializes the orchid (its pollen is transported). At the same time, the authors note, this meeting between insect and flower is two acts of becomings – "a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp" (10). They suggest that the continuous lines of becomings, that involve ceaseless deterritorialization and reterritorialization, extends the rhizome of the wasp and orchid ever further, as the map that connects them changes in use and custom.⁹²

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari write: "Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.). But this is true only on the level of the

This example could be extrapolated to the actors in a global discourse network of human rights. When actors tap into or are hooked into the network (by using the discourse or connecting with other actors (institution, individual or text) in the circuit, their identities are deterritorialized and reterritorialized within the network. Each discursive instance could be understood as dual acts of becomings, where one actor's identities are influenced by the identities of another. It might even be the case, as Hoffmann and Speed have suggested (as discussed above), that the interpretations of one actor shape those of the other, thereby influencing, albeit in limited ways, the identities of the discourse itself and of its network. Each interaction extends new lines of communication, collaboration or cooperation across and through the network. This deterritorialization and reterritorialization of identities within the network would likely also affect the degrees of power individuals might secure at different times and places on the circuit.

The case studies that follow will take up the questions of agency and identity discussed here in more detail, and in this sense. These individual cases of actors in the network are chosen to exemplify how the identities and power of actors bump up against the tensions between the global and the local, the transnational and the national, inherent in human rights discourse, a language and ideology whose rhetoric of universality and equality so often is challenged by unavoidable structures of national identity and power on the ground.

strata—a parallelism between two strata such that a plant organization on one imitates an animal organization on the other. At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying” (10).

Although the concepts of human rights as discourse and of a global discourse network outlined here might too easily suggest a level playing field, an openness where anyone, whatever his or her specific identities and personal positions of power might be, may participate, the individual cases will also show how there may be limits to such openness. Following Braidotti, however, such limits will emerge not just as necessary limits of the network mechanism, but also the contradictions of human rights discourse such as the interrelated issues of “ahistorical validity and historical particularity, between cultural universality and relativity, and between political consensus and hegemony” (Hoffmann 407).

Some Caveats

Before I turn to the case studies that take on more specifically these issues of network power and identities, let me clarify some potential misunderstandings about this project. First, the value (if not the feasibility) of theorizing *globalizing* discourses might be questioned. Such objections might be grouped into two categories: questioning the existence of a globalizing discourse, and the possibility of creating a *general* theory of any sort to describe it.

It would, of course, not be possible to unfold any one theory of *all* concepts of human rights as a globalizing discourse or *all* forms of discourse globalization. Certainly, discourses (as product and process), even (or especially) *globalizing* discourses, come in many shapes and sizes, and one theory alone cannot account for each discourses’ unique complexities. Yet this does not preclude the possibility of theorizing the current proliferation of globalizing discourses through one set of examples, like human rights, in order to better understand what people *do* when they engage in such globalized and globalizing discourses, and *how* they might be using discourse globalization to achieve outcomes they desire. Taking one discourse domain as an example of a globalizing discourse allows us to begin to approach how it might work. This is my goal here.

To the first objection: is there such a thing as a globalizing (global, globalized, or globalizing – it is not so useful to distinguish them here since these terms refer to

different stages of the same process) discourse? There is evidence to suggest that the answer is yes. Governments (and their international and national agencies), professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers), activists and researchers, among others, are globalizing *many* discourses (like human rights, environmentalism, medicine, information technology), and many versions (dialects, if that helps) of these discourses, in ways that deeply affect every aspect of people's lives everywhere. They take what originates in one place and extend them across the globe (making them global), positing them as able to join individuals into supranational units (globalizing), and ultimately institutionalizing them in the forms of laws and institutions (globalized forms of existence). As such it is vital to have a better understanding of what these activities and effects of discourse globalization might mean. This project presents but one possible approach towards this end.

To the second objection: can there be a *general* theory of discourse globalization? The hope is that the approach developed in this project might, within limits, improve current understandings of the mechanisms incorporated in globalizing discourses in general, not just human rights discourse. That is, although the example of human rights discourse is invoked here to demonstrate how this concept of a global discourse network might be useful, it is hoped that this theory might deepen present understandings of other globalizing discourses, like environmentalism or development, as well. But more work will need to be done towards such adaptations.

At the same time, however, although this project hopes to suggest a useful start for an analysis of globalizing discourses, it acknowledges that any simple approach to analysis of a category of phenomena (texts or other speech acts) cannot be adopted wholesale. Although a large part of it will hopefully translate, adjustments will have to be made to the theory to account for the particular characteristics and conditions of the globalizing discourses other than human rights that are being analyzed. While it is likely that many globalizing discourses will share similar mechanisms, they will also probably not function identically. In the end, a heavily qualified "yes" is the best response available for the objection. This project presents only *one* such framework, albeit with all

the qualifications stated above. This may be an unsatisfying, but ultimately realistic, answer.

Aside from questions about the value and feasibility of such a discourse globalization project, there may also be objections about the selection of texts for analysis in this project. There might be disagreement about how to comprise an archive of “global” texts with which to analyze human rights as a globalizing discourse. Moreover, because the selected texts do not center on one nation, region or continent (or on *all* nations, regions and continents), it is easy to assume difficulty in drawing strong conclusions about globalization, discourse or human rights, or the problem of overlooking the local particularities of that place.

It is true that the texts selected here, which touch on events in various geographical locations like Rwanda and Sri Lanka, depart from the conventional design of many research projects in the humanities or social sciences, traditionally based on the area studies structure, or on national sites. That is, regardless of the home department (literature, history, or anthropology), research projects are often modeled by compartmentalizing the world into singular areas (nation, region and continent). For example, there are Rwandan history scholars, Sri Lankan politics scholars or Canadian literature scholars. It appears that the concern raised in this query about textual selection, ultimately, is the global reach of the research.

Certainly, more geographically contained studies, because they attend to local particularities, may yield stronger conclusions for questions of discourse, globalization and human rights within a national, regional or continental framework. However, given that this project seeks to better understand *globalizing* discourses and *global* discourse networks, focusing on only one geographical area (Rwanda, Sri Lanka, or Canada alone, for example), may not only distort the reality of globalizing discourses and their global networks but also miss the bigger picture of what is perhaps equally, if not more, significant – how these discourses and their networks can work globally, and what the footprints of various globalizing discourses and their networks look like for different parts of the world. These texts translate across national lines predictably and quickly,

almost straightforwardly overcoming, to a degree, language and cultural barriers. Some might say that this is one of the less than positive leveling effects of cultural globalization, whereby cultural products seem to be vacated of their particular local identifying qualities.

It may further be objected that the texts chosen are not actually globally representative: although the texts deal with various places and crises across the world, they are not really “global” because their creators are not always local (some would say “native”) to these places and crises. That is, because the authors are not nationals, citizens or residents of the places, or they are not perpetrators, victims and survivors of the crises, their texts do not really (some would say cannot possibly) represent these particular places and crises. For example, with the case study in Chapter Six, although *An Ordinary Man* is an autobiography by Paul Rusesabagina, a Rwandan national, it is co-authored with Tom Zoellner, an American. The assumption behind this objection seems to be that the way to theorize globalizing discourses is to look at a discourse not only as practiced in, of, and from places all over the world, but also *by* people local to each of these places. Similarly, a novel about Sri Lanka should have a Sri Lankan author. Accordingly, the texts analyzed here may not altogether pass the “global representation” test because their creators are not always local. What seems to be the issue behind this objection is the logic of representation in the project.

Admittedly, the simple clarity of such representational logic (“native” author equals “native,” or “authentic,” representation) is seductive. Yet it may not always be useful (if it was ever possible) to essentialize representation in this way, especially in a globalizing world. To assume that an author or a text from Rwanda is necessarily Rwandan, or indubitably represents Rwanda, in any predetermined way is to overly essentialize an author and a text’s identities. It may not be very helpful to insist that “native” (local or national) authors necessarily represent “native” or “authentic” perspectives. As Homi Bhabha’s work on hybrid identities in the colonial and postcolonial eras and Stuart Hall’s writings on cultural identity in the Caribbean have

shown, these categories will always be more fluid in reality than their terms suggest.⁹³ The degree to which political, economic and cultural dimensions of globalization have affected almost everyone's lives everywhere, highlights more acutely the fallacy of such representational logic.

My cases make clear what is at stake: although Rusesabagina is a Rwandan, he lives in Brussels. And although Michael Ondaatje is part Sri Lankan, he is also part Dutch, and influenced by his upbringing in Britain and his residence in Canada. Their situations raise a number of interesting questions. Is Rusesabagina still "native" to Rwanda if he never returns to the country? At what point does he become "native" to Belgium if he makes Brussels his home? Likewise, is Ondaatje no longer "authentic" to Sri Lanka (if he ever was) if he now lives in Canada? Of what is he "authentic" if he lives for years at a time in Sri Lanka, Britain and Canada? These questions point to the fallacy of essentializing identity and representation according to the overly simple logic of "native" author equals "native," or "authentic" representation. As people connect, communicate and move across the globe, it will likely be harder and harder to define who and what is "native" or "authentic" to when and where. Therefore, this somewhat reductive form of representational logic may not be suitable especially for projects with a global focus like this one.

Instead, it might be more appropriate to adopt types of representational logic that reflect the realities of a globalizing world. In terms of analyzing texts, it may be more useful to approach each text on a case-by-case basis, and treat each according to its (and its author's, publisher's, and market's) particular situations. In terms of selecting texts for analysis, it may be more helpful to create alternative logics of representation. For globally-focused analyses like that undertaken in this project, more nuanced logics for representing the global will likely be more suitable.

⁹³ See Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman's *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (1994), 392-403.

To try to achieve this different balance, this project combines two different logics of representation in order to capture its global nature. The first logic of representation is what might be called “global collage.” This method ultimately consists of pasting together many local snapshots in order to produce a global picture, thereby producing a “global collage.” This logic is not new: case studies from various parts of the world are often selected as a way to compile a global view. Fairclough’s book, *Language and Globalization* (2006), for instance, notes that, “as befits a book on globalization,” it includes examples and texts from various countries and transnational agencies including the European Union, the United Nations, the USA, Britain, Romania, Hungary, Malaysia, Austria, and Denmark (8). This logic of representation is used here, as one way, to shape this project. As noted in the chapter summaries in the Introduction, the authors and texts in this project focus on different parts of the world.

But “global collage” is not the only logic of representation at work here. More “global” authors and texts have been selected as case studies in order to make the archive of texts globally representative. The authors and texts are “global” in that they work above, below, beyond, across, outside, and past the national.⁹⁴ These authors are “global” writers, and these texts are instances of “global” literature because they seem to speak from perspectives, address themes, and reach audiences (or at least seek to reach audiences) that are not only national but also global. Indeed, some of these authors aim

⁹⁴ See Jan Aart Scholte’s “What is ‘Global’ about Globalization?” in Held and McGrew’s *The Global Transformations Reader* (2000), 84-91, for an excellent discussion of how globalization is not internationalization, liberalization, universalization or westernization. Rather it is an entirely distinct process, which Scholte’s defines as “deterritorialization,” or “the growth of ‘supraterritorial’ relations between people (85). Scholte explains, “In this usage, ‘globalization’ refers to a far-reaching change in the nature of social space. The proliferation and spread of supraterritorial – or what we can alternatively term ‘transworld’ or ‘transborder’ – connections brings an end to what could be called ‘territorialism,’ that is, a situation where social geography is entirely territorial. Although, as already stressed, territory still matters very much in our globalizing world, it no longer constitutes the whole of our geography” (85). As such, globalization is a process that moves us past the conventional social geographies of the state or nation and its traditional place and identity markers of borders and nationality or citizenship.

their texts directly at audiences outside the national. For example, Rusesabagina's autobiography, written in English and co-authored with an American, is likely not specifically targeted at Rwandans in Rwanda, where English is not as commonly spoken as French or Kinyarwanda. It would not be widely read unless it is translated into one of these more commonly read languages in that country.

The question of translation leads to a language clarification about why only Anglophone texts have been chosen for analysis in this project. This selection was made because English is becoming an increasingly dominant global language. As Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman observe in "Introduction: The Globalization of Fiction/ the Fiction of Globalization" (2001), English is a "global vernacular" (610). If the aim is to study globalizing discourses, it helps if that discourse travels in a globalizing language as well. Admittedly, such an Anglophone bias limits the textual archive of human rights discourse, and precludes the critical issues of different languages, translations and retranslations that commonly beset any globalizing discourse. Despite the value of such language analyses, it lies beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, it may still be that the notion of a global discourse network developed here could suggest one possible framework for future language analyses of discourse globalization.

There is one more clarification about the text selection that might be useful – the decision to choose these particular texts and arrange them in this particular series of case studies. As the chapter summaries show, this project includes a range of texts from a specific textual archive (that of human rights), a textual archive that needs to be recognized as the *actual* existence of human rights if "human rights" is to be conceived *as* discourse. The texts include a human rights defender's speech, a human rights survivor's autobiography, and a novel on a human rights crisis. This collection of texts (as data or content for analysis) has been picked to consider how individuals and groups construct their identities and power within the rhetorical field of human rights as a globalizing discourse. That is, these texts record a broad and visible range of ways in which people use the available concepts, reference posts, speaking positions and

language resources of human rights discourse to make other people across the globe heed, hear, or understand their actions, experiences, stories and critiques.

Ultimately, the texts come from different subject positions (the *personal positions* from which individual subjects may speak within the network) and genres (the *textual forms* and *conventions* through which individual subjects may speak within the network) because the network of human rights discourses that this project investigates seems to involve more than one subject position and genre. In fact, the network appears to encompass multiple subject positions and genres in a host of personal and textual performances and practices.

In terms of subject positions (the *personal positions* from which individual subjects may speak within the network), the texts range from a most “official” (in the sense of conventionally authorized through institutions, legal functions, or direct participation and experience) to least official speaking position. The authors move from an official speaking position of a president of an international humanitarian aid organization, to a quasi-official speaking position of a human rights survivor, and finally to an unofficial speaking position of a novelist. The case studies are arranged according to this rationale (from most conventionally authorized speaking position to least conventionally authorized speaking position) so as to establish upfront the dominant (if not hegemonic) human rights discourse used by actors in the international human rights regime (that is, international human rights legal instruments and institutions). The subsequent authors, of less official speaking positions (positions less clearly connected to conventionally recognized contexts and institutions), are meant to illustrate other forms of the reproduction, recirculation and reconsumption of this dominant human rights discourse.

This trajectory of “official” to less “official” sites of speaking was also chosen for the case studies so as to move from most to least degrees of “insider-ness.” “Inside” here refers to the international human rights system of declarations, covenants, commissions and courts. These documents and entities could be taken to represent points in the network where an actor’s speech and actions seem to be tied to hegemonic entities or

institutions, instead of appearing as the actor's individual speech and actions. This arc was selected because it allows the examination of the distance, or more precisely, the complications, between the commonly recognized discourse of human rights in the system's institutions and organizations, and its less conventional discourses on the ground. At the same time, the differences in the authors' speaking positions in a network anchored by such hegemonic (and collective) entities and institutes will likely implicate their national and ethnic positions, and their relationship to the international human rights system. These various subject positions will speak particularly to the power of human rights as discourse to construct speakers as different kinds of authorized experts or witnesses on a global stage.

In terms of genre (the *textual forms and conventions* through which individual subjects may speak within the network), the texts proceed from more direct to less direct sender-receiver relationships.⁹⁵ That is, they start from the more seemingly direct (or less mediated, but highly stylized or overdetermined) communication mode of speeches, to a less direct (or more mediated, but looser or freer) mode of autobiography, and finally to an even more mediated mode of a novel.

The term mediated here refers to the degrees of separation between sender and receiver in the communication process. For example, with a speech heard live and in-person, there is a direct link posited between sender and receiver no matter how

⁹⁵ According to the classic "transmission" model of communication, the most basic process of communication involves a sender transmitting a message to a receiver, with no account of the possible effects the channel of communication (the medium) may have on the sender, the message or the receiver. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication complicates the "transmission" model by theorizing that receivers respond to messages through their own modes of interpretation: they encode or decode the message in their own way for themselves ("Encoding Decoding" 507-17). For a concise overview of social scientific, linguistic, and cultural studies theories that are concerned with sender-receiver relationships especially from the perspective of the receiver in film, see Janet Staiger's *Media Reception Studies* (2005). Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin complicate the "transmission" model from the perspective of the medium. They consider how layers of mediation between the sender, message, and receiver must be reconceived for new media in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2002).

formalized (or highly stylized) their interaction. That is, the speaker directly addresses the audience. In contrast, when a book (memoir or novel) is read, the reader interfaces with the author *via* the text. The sender-receiver link is less direct because the interaction is mediated by the text. In the case of a film, the sender-receiver link is even less direct because the interaction is mediated by the text *and* its composite senders. Films often have a host of senders like producers, directors, cinematographers, cameramen, musicians and actors, whose choices are doubly constrained by considerations related to filmmaking, distribution, and screening.⁹⁶

The texts for analysis here are arranged from less mediated to more mediated so as to examine how degrees of mediation affect the power of human rights as a globalizing discourse. This trajectory should enable the investigation of how a speech, an autobiography and a novel seem to harness the moral power of this discourse for particular ends. It could also help study how an author might use the more mediated form of a novel as human rights discourse. In this way too, it could be possible to examine how very individualized utterances of human rights in discourse might affect the “official” human rights discourses emanating from hegemonic entities and institutions. It could further be possible to trace how mediation affects the identity and power of a text’s creator and subjects, be they human rights defenders, survivors or critics.

Finally, it is important to clarify the overall intentions for this dissertation in another way. The aim of this project is to study discourse globalization by using the case of the globalization of human rights discourse. To this end, it builds on the work of several theorists to describe how discourses may be globalizing (through global discourse networks) with the example of human rights discourse. Based on the work of particular scholars that are described in Part One (Chapters One to Four), this project suggests that discourses might be better seen as circulating in global networks, rather than as being tied exclusively to particular states or institutions. It also suggests that it might be useful to

⁹⁶ See Stephen Neale’s *Genre and Hollywood* (2000) for a discussion of how Hollywood films are made according to factors like the studios’ practices, financial considerations, and distribution and exhibition systems.

place a particular human rights crisis, its actors and its discourses (texts, discursive and social practices) within a global setting, a network of other human rights crises, their actors and their discourses.

Conclusion

To sum up, in this section, I have presented in three phases a discourse approach to human rights, together with a description of how a network framework can be used for analyzing human rights discourse.

The first chapter in this section discussed the idea of human rights as discourse in terms of language and language use. Following Fairclough, I outlined the main features of the discourse in order to lay the foundation for a network approach to it. The second chapter articulated a notion of human rights discourse as circulating through a supranational network of interconnected actors amidst a global system of circuits. Borrowing from Donnelly, Ishay, Hardt and Negri, MgLagan, Hoffmann, Speed, and Howard-Hassmann, among others, I sketched out some preliminary key characteristics of such a global human rights discourse network so as to suggest a hybrid approach for analyzing the globalization of this particular discourse. Finally, the present chapter discussed how such a network approach might help with analysis of the relationship between human rights discourse and people's power and identities. Drawing from Hardt and Negri, and Braidotti, I suggested that this discourse could affect people's identities and agency, depending on the time, place, and their subject position in one or more networks.

This chapter thus concludes Part I, the theoretical foundations, of this dissertation. Part II that follows expands on what such a network theory might bring to analyses of agency and identity. It takes up three case studies where individual people from different subject positions within the network have employed human rights discourse to generate network power and network identities for themselves and others. The subsequent case study chapters illustrate, in concrete terms, the ideas about discourse and the network outlined here. They also seek to test out the discourse and network approaches developed

in this chapter to see what such a framework for analysis might reveal about “speaking transnationally.” Human rights discourse is a paradigmatic choice here since it is a discourse that purports a postnational sentiment even as its structure is tied to a system of nation-states. These specific cases will hopefully suggest some implications about identity positions and agency available to a “postnational” subject and also begin to attend to an emerging archive of “global” texts.

Part Two

Case Studies:

The Positions of an NGO, a Survivor, and a Novelist in the Network

Chapter Five

Human Rights Discourse and a Humanitarian NGO:

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and its Nobel Peace Prize Lecture (1999)

This chapter marks the first of three case studies that analyze particular discursive events with the discourse and network approaches outlined in Part One. Each case study tests the model of a global discourse network sketched out earlier on actors speaking from different subject positions (nongovernmental organization, crisis survivor, and novelist) within the discourse of human rights. Each chapter will try to trace what happens to these actors when they speak in human rights terms in different text genres within the general domain of human rights discourse (a speech, an autobiography, and a novel). The hope is that each study will shed light on how actors from different speaking positions, and using different textual genres, might be affected by this discourse, and might be influencing it in turn. Of particular interest will be the effects on the actors' identities and agency as they move to speaking on a global network. The cases are also intended to extend the preliminary discussion of human rights discourse circulating through a global discourse network sketched out in Chapters Two to Four. The hope is that each study will reveal more about the key features and functions of the network outlined earlier.

The actors focused on in this chapter are those associated with an international humanitarian nongovernmental organization (NGO), *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF or Doctors Without Borders). As a humanitarian organization, MSF, like other human rights and humanitarian NGOs, has as its representatives individuals who speak from a more “official” subject position in the discourse. This more official speaking position for MSF emerges because over time, although they are non-state actors, humanitarian and human rights NGOs have come to be accepted as a critical component (often referred to the “civil society” component) of a global human rights framework and a complementary counterpart to the more state-oriented system of international human rights (Howard-Hassmann 34-38; Rieff and Myers 2).⁹⁷ That is, NGOs are increasingly seen as part of the official international, regional, national, and local systems of human rights norms monitoring, implementation, protection, and promotion (Global).⁹⁸ They have come to be

⁹⁷ In “The Second Great Transformation: Human Rights Leapfrogging in the Era of Globalization” (2005), Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann places human rights and humanitarian NGOs squarely within the existing global human rights framework when she includes in them “a global civil society” and “a global human rights social movement” (34-38). As discussed in more depth in Chapter Three, Howard-Hassmann identifies the following components of our current global human rights framework: an international human rights regime, a system of global governance, a global normative order premised on an ideology of human rights, a global communications and mass media network, a global civil society, and a global human rights social movement (34-38). Like Howard-Hassmann, David Rieff, in *At the Point of a Gun* (2005), also notes that human rights and humanitarian NGOs have become a part of the contemporary international human rights system under the classification of “civil society” (2).

⁹⁸ In “Conditioning the Right to Humanitarian Aid?” (2002), Fiona Fox observes that increasingly, people (and the press) in the U.S. and U.K. have come to expect international humanitarian NGOs, rather than national governments, to be the first and primary responders in any disaster or crisis (20). This reaction certainly highlights the integral part humanitarian NGOs have come to play in our contemporary global human rights framework and present global world order.

The NGO Working Group on the Security Council (referred to as the UN NGO group for short) also indicates the critical, if not quasi-governing, role human rights and humanitarian NGOs have come to hold in both these arenas (“NGO Working Group on the Security Council”). The UN NGO group was formed in 1995, and now holds “off-the-record briefings” almost weekly with one of the ambassadors on the UN Security Council (“Information Statement” par. 1). The UN Council members have come to rely

an integral part of the international human rights system of institutions, laws, and organizations; they help define and implement the charges and ethos of that discourse. Almost by default, then, any humanitarian or human rights NGO, just by its definition of being an NGO and thus a part of civil society, could potentially become an official speaker of the discourse, once it is generally accepted as an authorized agent of the ideology and allowed into the conversation. And all those associated with such an NGO could also speak from these more official positions than they might be able to on their own as individual actors. Despite these virtually blanket authorizations, the degree to which an NGO's voice is recognized and accepted by other actors in the human rights industry will of course depend on the organization's acts and statements, not just its self-applied status as an NGO working for human rights causes. That is, the NGO's authority must be exercised and claimed anew in salient address to human rights situations; it does not exist permanently or without being questioned.

This chapter will approach the central question of this project – the relationship between a globalizing human rights discourse and its subjects – by examining MSF and its 1999 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture in order to focus this question on speech acts that emanate from the more official speaking position of a humanitarian or human rights NGO. By analyzing the lecture and the materials on its MSF-USA website, I will explore how the moral power of human rights discourse, in the hands of an official user like MSF and those who speak from within it, influences not just the identity and agency of the organization, but possibly also the nature and power of the discourse itself.

on these NGOs' field information from crisis areas when they engage in the Council's policy-making process, while the UN's Department of Political Affairs often uses NGO sources to prepare Council briefing papers (par. 4). NGOs also sometimes directly implement UN field programs (par. 4). This close relationship between the UN and NGOs, especially through the UN NGO group, highlights how human rights and humanitarian NGOs have become a virtually official part of the global human rights framework and our global world order. For more information on this working group including a statement of purpose, brief history, list of 30-odd members (including MSF), and records of past and future meetings, see "NGO Working Group on the Security Council."

Why MSF?

Founded in 1971 by a group of French doctors and journalists, MSF describes itself as an independent international medical humanitarian organization (“What Is Doctors Without Borders?” par. 1). It is a “medical humanitarian organization” in that it provides emergency medical aid to people affected by “armed conflict, epidemics, natural or man-made disasters, or exclusion from healthcare” (“What Is Doctors Without Borders?” par. 1). It is an “international” organization in that its workers – “doctors, nurses, logisticians, water-and-sanitation experts, administrators, and other medical and non-medical professionals,” as well as local staff – come from at least 20 nations and work in over 80 countries (“Volunteer with MSF” par. 14; “What Is Doctors Without Borders?” pars. 1-2). It is an “independent” organization in that it claims not to be influenced politically or financially by national governments (“What Is Doctors Without Borders?” par. 9).⁹⁹

MSF has been singled out here from the many other human rights and humanitarian organizations to study the use of human rights discourse from an “official” subject position within the discourse because it is a paradigmatic case. The organization has been considered “the most important humanitarian NGO in the world” (Rieff qtd. in Bortolotti 12). It was awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its “pioneering humanitarian work in several continents” (“The Nobel Peace Prize 1999: Press Release” par. 1). What made it a pioneer, an innovator of humanitarianism, was the way it both created a new form of human rights-based humanitarian action and flaunted national sovereignty, covertly operating in countries without their governments’ consent

⁹⁹ As the section “What is Doctors Without Borders?” on the MSF-USA website states, “MSF’s decision to intervene in any country or crisis is based solely on an independent assessment of people’s needs — not on political, economic, or religious interests. MSF does not take sides or intervene according to the demands of governments or warring parties” (par. 9). Financially, almost 80 percent of MSF’s operating funds comes from the general public, while only 20 percent come from international agencies and governments (par. 15).

and publicly denouncing abusive governments.¹⁰⁰ These characteristics have come to be critical aspects of the ideas and practices in the contemporary international humanitarian aid industry, thereby making MSF an especially rich case with which to study the means and outcomes of human rights discourse globalization on people and the world.¹⁰¹

MSF's Nobel Lecture has been chosen as a primary text for analysis because it represents, arguably, the organization's most complete and public statement on what MSF believes in and stands for. Delivered by then MSF President James Orbinski while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the organization, the lecture has become a kind of MSF manifesto, widely disseminated and often echoed. Executive Director of MSF-USA Joelle Tanguy drew his entire conclusion virtually word-for-word from it when he spoke at the 2000 World Affairs Council. U.S. journalist Dan Bortolotti, too, used a hefty excerpt from it to end his book about MSF, *Hope in Hell: Inside the World of Doctors Without Borders* (2004). Thus, the 1999 Nobel Lecture is a kind of capstone of MSF's own discourse and ideology: it captures the tools and power the organization has chosen and forged to use as interveners.

Similarly, I have selected MSF's U.S. website (doctorwithoutborders.org) as another major text for analysis because it represents, arguably, the organization's most

¹⁰⁰ As Francis Sejersted of the Norwegian Nobel Committee states in his speech when presenting the Nobel Peace Prize to MSF in 1999, "*Médecins Sans Frontières* blazed new trails in international humanitarian work. The organization reserved the right to intervene to help people in need irrespective of prior political approval. The essential points for *Médecins Sans Frontières* are to reach those in need of help as quickly as possible, and to maintain impartiality. They demand freedom to carry out their medical mandate, and to decide for themselves whom to help according to purely humanitarian criteria. What is more, they insist on making human rights violations known. In addition to helping, in other words, they also seek to draw attention to the causes of humanitarian catastrophes. To alleviate distress one must also get to its roots. These were new principles in the field of aid, and have not been uncontroversial. Some said that this was to confuse the issues in ways which might block access to suffering people. *Médecins Sans Frontières* have been called emergency aid rebels" (par. 5). For the full text of the speech, see "The Nobel Peace Prize 1999: Presentation Speech."

¹⁰¹ See Appendix One for a description of MSF's form, function, and influence on the humanitarian and human rights industries.

comprehensive and public record of who MSF is, what it does, and how it functions, from the U.S. perspective.¹⁰² Besides the MSF-USA website, the organization also has an international website, and twenty national websites including Austria, Brazil, Japan, and the United Kingdom.¹⁰³ Each of these national websites offers its own interesting aspects for analysis, especially comparative rhetorical and representational analyses, but such analyses lie beyond the scope of this project. For the present, I am interested in MSF's websites because they archive what the organization does, and MSF's U.S. website, rather than the international or other national websites, seems to be the most comprehensive account of the organization's activities. This MSF-USA website contains a particularly revealing repository of the organization's discourse and practices.

By juxtaposing MSF's rhetoric and ideology in the 1999 Nobel Lecture with its discourse and practices in its MSF-USA website, I will argue that the organization's deployment of the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse seems to facilitate the organization's global presence and influence, often regardless of national sovereignty. The discourse seems to grant the organization a type of supranational status and a form of quasi-governing power. This effect opens the possibility that MSF may be consciously employing a kind of rhetoric of neutrality, playing up the moral aspect of its activities to downplay its institutional identity as an explicit political force across the world.

The Moral Power of Human Rights Discourse

There are many instances where human rights discourse and its ethos are invoked in MSF's 1999 Nobel Lecture in ways where the moral rhetoric of the discourse helps generate different kinds of identity and power, especially those pertaining to the moral, the human, and the global, rather than the political, the state, and the national. I will discuss two examples from the speech that relate to some key features of the organization – its pledge to defend people's human dignity and human rights, its dedication to aid

¹⁰² MSF's U.S. office in New York was opened in 1990 (Bortolotti 62).

¹⁰³ For access to these national sites, see "MSF-International." MSF has its international headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland (Bortolotti 63).

those in need regardless of government approval, and its commitment to testify against abusive governments.

In the organization's Nobel Lecture, Orbinski defines MSF's action as an inseparable union of both humanitarian and human rights work. He states:

Our action is to help people in situations of crisis...Bringing medical aid to people in distress is an attempt to defend them against what is aggressive to them as human beings. Humanitarian action is more than simple generosity, simple charity. It aims to build spaces of normalcy in the midst of what is abnormal. More than offering material assistance, we aim to enable individuals to regain their rights and dignity as human beings. (Orbinski par. 4)

In this passage, Orbinski explicitly references typical humanitarian matters like "bringing medical aid to people in distress" and "offering material assistance" (par. 4). But he also directly references traditionally human rights issues like "to defend them against what is aggressive to them as human beings" and "to enable individuals to regain their rights...as human beings" (par. 4). Orbinski's reference to building "spaces of normalcy," too, alludes not only to physical wellbeing (a common humanitarian concern), but also to a human rights-based notion of normalcy in terms of the civil and political status of individuals.

Moreover, Orbinski overtly links these humanitarian and human rights actions together, making them dependent upon, and inseparable from, each other. For instance, the sentence – "Bringing medical aid to people in distress [i.e., a humanitarian-based action] is an attempt to defend them against what is aggressive to them as human beings" [i.e., a human rights-centered action] – essentially defines humanitarian aid as a means to protect human rights in emergency cases (par. 4). This interdependent relationship between humanitarianism and human rights is signaled by the connective phrase "is an attempt" (par. 4).

Similarly, the sentence – "More than offering material assistance [i.e., another humanitarian-oriented practice], we aim to enable individuals to regain their rights [i.e., another human rights-premised notion] and dignity as human beings" – basically

describes humanitarian aid as at once a prerequisite for human rights, and inseparable from each other, in crisis situations (par. 4). The word “more” calls attention to the interdependent relationship between the practices of humanitarianism and human rights, while the conjunctive phrase “rights and dignity as human beings” signifies their inseparable, yet distinct, natures as philosophies. Thus, this small excerpt shows MSF’s pledge to conjoin humanitarian *and* human rights activities.

One of MSF’s most distinguishing characteristics is its combination of humanitarian and human rights work. Before MSF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) dominated the humanitarian aid field and set the standard for humanitarian action, emphasizing emergency medical and material aid to those in crisis situations. Although there were other aid agencies like U.S.-based Save the Children and U.K.-based Oxfam, the ICRC was the only organization providing medical relief to war victims and natural disaster survivors worldwide (Bortolotti 13). With the advent of MSF, however, humanitarian action came to be reframed as not just an issue of preserving human dignity, but also of protecting human rights. MSF still provided medical relief and material assistance to people in emergency situations, but the justification for this aid was no longer just a question of kindness and charity. Rather it became a matter of duty to fellow human beings, and of rights that these human beings possessed.

In the genesis story of MSF, the organization comes into being in part because its founders, a group of young French doctors working for a Red Cross hospital in Biafra, Nigeria, in 1968 could not just quietly aid the victims who they believed were being systematically killed (Bortolotti 11). Instead, they rejected the ICRC’s protocol of silent neutrality by very loudly and publicly denouncing the Nigerian government (Bortolotti 12). These French doctors, headed by Bernard Kouchner, returned to France to launch a campaign to raise awareness of what they considered to be a Biafran genocide, and to form a group of doctors dedicated to emergency medical aid (Bortolotti 12). This creation story reveals the combination of humanitarian and human rights agendas and activities that continues to drive MSF. It is devoted both to traditionally humanitarian activities like

bringing emergency medical aid, *and* to typically human rights activities like organizing campaigns to raise awareness about state violence. Both sets of activities are similar interventionist ones: they are just called by different names and pursued through different modes. Indeed, contrary to the ICRC, MSF insists that humanitarian activities cannot be purely about aid to preserve human dignity. Rather, they must also involve activism to protect human rights.

More important for my purpose here, however, is that this passage also reveals how MSF firmly grounds its actions in moral and human, rather than political and national, terms. It carefully avoids using terms with explicitly political overtones. For instance, it serves “people in situations of crisis,” “people in distress,” and “human beings” (par. 4). It does not distinguish “people” into citizen, resident, or alien, and illegal immigrant, refugee, or internally displaced person (IDP). It also acts in “situations of crisis” and circumstances of “distress” (par. 4). It does not differentiate between official government, rebel group, or militia, and national borders, rebel-held territory, or militia-protected zones. Its concern is “to build spaces of normalcy in the midst of what is abnormal” (par. 4). And it defines “normalcy” and the “abnormal” in moral and human terms. For MSF, “normalcy” is individuals having “their rights and dignity as human beings” (par. 4). The “abnormal” is “what is aggressive to [people] as human beings” (par. 4).

By characterizing its actions in moral and human terms like this, MSF establishes what seems to be a self-evident and potential supranational identity because neither morals nor humanity need necessarily be associated with national frameworks. Indeed, morality and humanity are terms that tend to circumvent the national, emphasizing instead the particular or the universal. That is, people mostly have their own unique notions of what is moral and what is human, yet they also believe these categories should apply universally, to all people everywhere regardless of nationality or national borders. Thus, by defining its agenda and activities in exclusively moral and human terms, that is, by describing its actions in human rights language, MSF associates itself with the particular or the universal, rather than with any interest groups, no matter how defined. In

identifying itself with specific moral crises and universal human norms, the organization's use of human rights discourse seems to constitute for it a potential *supranational identity* applicable to all human situations ("normal" and "abnormal") everywhere. Such deployment of the moral power of human rights discourse seems to allow the organization to become a global entity, active in any location regardless of national borders.

Along with such global presence, comes influence. The organization seems to acquire *supranational power* in a fairly similar manner. MSF's propensity to challenge national sovereignty appears in the organization's Nobel Lecture when Orbinski criticizes the Russian government for attacking Chechnya:

The people of Chechnya – and the people of Grozny – today and for more than three months are enduring indiscriminate bombing by the Russian army. For them humanitarian assistance is virtually unknown. It is the sick, the old, and the infirm who cannot escape Grozny...I appeal here today to his excellency the Ambassador of Russia and through him, to President Yeltsin, to stop the bombing of defenseless civilians in Chechnya. (par. 2)

In this passage, MSF is clearly testifying against the Russian government for its hand in the Chechnyan crisis. Orbinski explicitly identifies the wrongful act and the actors in the phrases "enduring indiscriminate bombing by the Russian army," and "to President Yeltsin, to stop the bombing of defenseless civilians" (par. 2). And he does so very boldly, since this excerpt marks the very beginning of Orbinski's speech: it comes immediately upon his opening address to his audience. Thus, this brief excerpt shows not only how MSF speaks out against governments regardless of their national authority but also how directly (and strategically) it does so.

After all, to open a Nobel Lecture (primarily an acceptance speech where one expects the usual gracious niceties) with such an explicit challenge is no small matter. The Nobel Peace Prize is a prestigious prize and its award ceremony, a very public event. Indeed, Nobel Prize historian Geir Lundestad, in "The Nobel Peace Prize 1901-2000" (2004), argues that the Nobel Peace Prize is one of the most prestigious peace prizes in

the world. He attributes this prestige to (1) the long history of the prize (awarded almost annually since 1901); (2) its place in the Nobel family of prizes (that is, as one of a set of interrelated prizes, each prize benefits from its relationship to the group); (3) the growing political independence of the Norwegian Nobel Committee that selects the laureate (which suggests an increase in the fairness of the selection process and the integrity of the selection itself); and (4) the substantial monetary value of the prize (10 million Swedish kronors, or almost 1.5 million U.S. dollars, in 2007) (par. 2).¹⁰⁴

With all this prestige, of course, comes great publicity. In *The Nobel Peace Prize and the Laureates* (2001), Irwin Abrams argues that, aside from instilling “a new sense of responsibility” in its laureates, the prize most impacts its laureates by conferring upon them a “new visibility” in an international public community (28-29).¹⁰⁵ The Nobel Peace Prize and its award ceremony is thus clearly not just a most prestigious but also a most public award and event that attracts and focuses global attention. MSF’s challenge to the Russian government and its message about the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Chechnya is, therefore, sure to reach (and leave a mark on) a broad international and politically-engaged (if not influential) audience. Orbinski’s bold opening challenge in the speech, hence, is calculated to generate an upsurge of bad international publicity for Russia, and a simultaneous rise in worldwide attention and sympathy for Chechnya as well as support for MSF.

Another of MSF’s unique characteristics is its general disregard for national sovereignty. This rebellious nature displays itself in the organization’s dedication to aid those in need regardless of government approval, and commitment to testify against abusive governments. Before MSF, the standard protocol, set by the ICRC, was for humanitarian organizations to defer to the sovereignty of the country in which they

¹⁰⁴ For more information on the historical developments of the prize, see Sejersted “From Peace Negotiations to Human Rights” (2004) and Lundestad “Reflections on the Nobel Peace Prize” (2004). For a list of the Nobel Peace Prize amount awarded each year, see “The Nobel Prize Amount.”

¹⁰⁵ For a history of the Nobel Peace Prize in terms of its laureates, see Irwin Abrams’ *The Nobel Peace Prize and the Laureates* (2001).

sought to work. The ICRC entered and aided people in a country only upon the country's governmental approval, and the organization held its tongue about the politics of the crisis itself and any role the government might play in it. This is the ICRC's policy of silent neutrality, adopted so as to enable the organization to reach and serve as many people in as many places as possible.¹⁰⁶

With the arrival of MSF however, humanitarian action begins to take precedence over national sovereignty. In its genesis story, for instance, MSF paid little heed to the national authority of the Nigerian government over its people and territory. Instead, the organization publicly denounced the government for perpetrating genocide (Bortolotti 11-12). Later on, as the organization developed, MSF also entered countries and aided people there with or without the blessings of the countries' governments. For example, its doctors secretly rode donkeys to aid those in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan in the 1980s (Bortolotti 33). In the mid-1970s, they quietly trekked through jungles to help people in newly independent Angola, and stealthily cared for Cambodians under the terror of the Khmer Rouge (Bortolotti 13-14). They seemed to function under a sort of Robin Hood mentality: although they were not robbing the rich, they were using the wealth from those who have to help the poor and have-nots. At the same time, MSF spoke publicly about the emergencies and any part governments had in exacerbating them. Besides chastising the Nigerian government during the Biafra incident in the late 1960s, for instance, MSF also criticized Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia and Colonel Mengistu's in Ethiopia during

¹⁰⁶ ICRC President, Jakob Kellenberger, in "Being Hard On Yourself" (2005), explains the warrant for the principle of silent neutrality, what he terms "confidentiality," thus, "Delegates know that the principle of confidentiality is not an end in itself. It's simply our most important means of ensuring access to the greatest number of people" (par. 3). He adds, "Access to every person in every conflict zone who needs protection or help, everywhere in the world, is our *raison d'être*. . . if parties to a conflict see us leaking what we know to the outside world, the chances of our operating effectively will shrink dramatically" (par. 4). At the same time, however, a legal adviser of ICRC's Legal Division, Gabor Rona, in "The ICRC Privilege Not To Testify: Confidentiality In Action" (2004), clarifies that the general perception that "the ICRC does not testify" stems not from the organization's policy itself but from the application of the policy (par. 18). The policy itself only maintains that "the ICRC *need* not testify" (par. 18).

the 1980s (Bortolotti 12, 14). As these examples illustrate, MSF transformed the typically deferential and cooperative relationship between governments and humanitarian aid NGOs, as set up by the ICRC, into a more rebellious, almost combative, one. In this new form of humanitarian ideology and practice, humanitarian action came to include explicitly political human rights activities like campaigns designed to publicize governmental abuse of human rights; activities, moreover, that clearly subvert the previously sacred grounds of national sovereignty.

More important than highlighting the rebellious character of MSF, however, this passage reveals how MSF resolutely plants its challenges against national governments in moral or human, not political or national, ground. Orbinski critiques the Russian government for endangering “the sick, the old, and the infirm,” vulnerable groups that most people would morally recognize as needing care and protection (par. 2). He emphasizes the moral wrong of the Russian government when he characterizes its actions as “indiscriminate bombings” and harming “defenseless civilians” (par. 2). In short, MSF criticizes the Russian government for its immoral disregard of human dignity and human rights. It makes no mention of the political power struggle – Chechnya’s armed struggle for independence from Russia and Russia’s counter-attacks – that feed the long-standing conflict between the two parties.¹⁰⁷ The closest MSF comes to referencing political power in the speech is when Orbinski identifies a state (Russia) as perpetrator against human victims. In so doing, he sets into play a clear political definition of state responsibilities to the human beings that live under its protection. This notion of state perpetrator and human victim (and its correlative, if not premise of, state duties and human rights) stems directly from a human rights ideology.

By framing its challenges to national sovereignty in moral and human terms like this, and in such a public venue, MSF calls a kind of supranational power into being because it separates morality and humanity from politics and national sovereignty.

¹⁰⁷ For a synopsis of the political situation between Chechnya and Russia, see “Regions and Territories: Chechnya” by BBC. For a brief historical timeline of this conflict, see “Timeline: Chechnya” by BBC.

Indeed, it elevates people's moral duties and human rights above governments' political agendas and national authority. That is, it justifies its disregard for governmental authority in the name of defending human dignity and protecting human rights. It insists that its agendas and activities are more important than those of national governments. Thus, by describing its challenges and critiques of governments in moral and human terms – that is by characterizing its rebellion in human rights language – MSF places itself above national governments. It empowers itself with moral authority that overrides any national authority. This, then, is the way that human rights discourse seems to enable MSF to claim and generate *supranational power*. This is how it appears to be developing into a global force, possibly more important than national sovereignty, transforming its basic moral authority into other sorts of global force.

The effect of such rhetoric has indeed been to create real power. One of the most important implications of MSF's claims to supranational identity and power is that the organization seems to take on a quasi-governing status and force. That is, because it knows no borders and recognizes no sovereignties, because it possesses moral force, it becomes a kind of global presence and influence that can exist and exert itself virtually everywhere and over almost everyone. *And* the agents of such rhetoric share in this outcome. They are widely considered to be political forces (in effect, even if they disclaim it in principle). MSF's Nobel Lecture again displays several telling examples of the organization's semi-governmental identity and influence.

MSF's quasi-governmental presence and power can be recognized in the many worldwide emergency situations Orbinski mentions in his speech. He notes MSF's engagement in not just Chechnya in 1999, but also Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 and Zaire in 1997 (par. 9), Kosovo in 1999 (par. 13), Rwanda in 1994 (par. 16-17), North Korea in 1995-98 (par. 23), and Sudan in 1999 (par. 24). Each of these events involved a crisis situation where a national government failed or faltered. This moment of state weakness or demise is when MSF steps in to take over the state's responsibilities to provide basic amenities for its people. In these instances, the organization clearly replaces some traditional state duties during an emergency like distributing food, providing

shelter, and offering medical care. The organization, in effect, *corrects* the state's shortcomings, as it charges the state's government with moral malfeasance. In an interesting asymmetry of moral force and long-term responsibility, MSF does not take on the more long-term role, usually held by states, of supporting and protecting those under its care.

Furthermore, these crisis situations highlight the truly worldwide presence of MSF's interventions. It is involved in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Indeed, the organization is active on almost all the world's continents, and it has offices in Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Spain, and Luxembourg, as well as sections in the United States, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia (Bortolotti 14-15). Each year alone, it sends out more than 3,000 volunteers to work in over 80 countries worldwide (Bortolotti 12). In these ways, by taking on government responsibilities in crisis situations all across the world and constructing a truly global organization, MSF comes not only to adopt but also to exercise a quasi-governmental identity and power globally. Significantly, too, its organization is de-centered, spread across the globe, without a single central command. Even though MSF has its international headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, its national offices run their respective programs more or less independently. Interestingly also, although MSF began in France, the organization has selected Switzerland as the site of their international headquarters, a choice that speaks not only to the impression of political neutrality it aims to convey, but also to the lack of national affiliation or its claims to supranational identity.

MSF's semi-governmental presence and influence can also be seen in the organization's longer-term activities that Orbinski refers to in his speech. These activities, in effect, extend an international definition (and potential allegation) of governmental malfeasance. That is, they highlight how governments tend to fail those under their general responsibility. Orbinski observes that MSF serves "street children" who have fallen out of the notice and care of the state (par. 3). It also provides for "illegal refugees" in Europe who are "denied political status" and cannot seek health care (par. 3). And it runs an Access To Essential Medicines campaign, launched in 1999, to increase

the production and accessibility of lifesaving medicines for “HIV/AIDS, TB and Sleeping Sickness” in the developing world (par. 11).¹⁰⁸ These activities reveal the public policy aspects of MSF’s work. In broad terms, these actions involve issues of legal status, citizenship, and discrimination, which are traditionally considered public policy matters. They signal particularly how the organization seems to have taken on responsibilities typically relegated to the state like child protection, immigration, and healthcare services.

Moreover, they highlight how the organization appears to play a more permanent part than expected from a medical relief NGO in organizing society. Rather than being a temporary stop-gap measure until the state government can get back on its feet to organize society (as the ICRC would present itself), MSF seems to have become a constant fixture in a global society’s governing system. For example, the organization runs small longer-term programs like “supporting rural health clinics, providing antiretroviral treatment for people with AIDS, bringing fresh water and sanitation to remote villages” and “may work in an area for several years” (Bortolotti 12). It also “invariably works closely with national health ministries and trains local staff” (Bortolotti 12). In these ways discussed above, in its adoption of more state-like and long-term responsibilities, MSF comes to take on a semi-state-like presence and influence globally, yet still without necessarily the complete planning responsibility that is the state’s.

Here, though, the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse masks an interesting result. Although the organization seems to hold quasi-governing presence and power, it largely obscures this particular status and authority. It prefers instead to downplay this quasi-governing identity and power by using a similar strategy to that which accrues this position and influence to it in the first place. That is, MSF insists on the human necessity of its actions and the moral purity of its agendas. It maintains that its humanitarian (and human rights) work is entirely separate from political (or power) motives and state (or governance) activities. In other words, the same strategy it uses to construct its state-like nature and influence is also employed to downplay this governing-esque identity and

¹⁰⁸ For more information on this campaign, see “Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines.”

power. Through its strategic use of human rights discourse, MSF dresses its agendas and activities in moral and human, rather than political and national, rhetoric in ways that often obscures its critical role in our present global world order.

There are several instances of MSF's explicit separation of its agendas and activities from the political or the state in its Nobel Lecture.¹⁰⁹ Two revealing examples from the speech will be discussed here to illustrate how the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse appears to diminish the organizations quasi-governmental identity and power. One such telling instance occurs when Orbinski insists that MSF enters the scene only because the state has faltered in its duties. He states, "Humanitarianism occurs where the political has failed or is in crisis. We act not to assume political responsibility, but firstly to relieve the inhuman suffering of failure. The act must be free of political influence, and the political must recognize its responsibility to ensure that the humanitarian can exist" (par. 6).

In this passage, Orbinski distances MSF's agenda and activities from that of the state or the political, even as he relates their structures. He pits humanitarianism (read: MSF) and the political (read: the state) as two separate but connected fields. For instance, the organization steps in only when the state "has failed or is in crisis," suggesting that if the state is functioning well, the organization need not exist (par. 6). Thus, MSF and the state are two separate entities. And MSF needs the state "to ensure that the humanitarian can exist," implies that the organization can function best if the state cooperates with it (par. 6). As such, MSF and the state are represented as two connected entities, but with MSF operating with oversight over the state, instead of the reverse. This excerpt thus shows how the organization's use of human rights discourse seems to allow it to isolate its identity from the political and the state, while accruing power over the state.

¹⁰⁹ For a more systematic inventory of the differences between humanitarianism and the state/ the political in the Nobel Lecture, see Extract One in Appendix Two. For emphasis, I have bolded the terms associated with humanitarianism and italicized those related to the state/ the political. For a summary of the different characteristics of humanitarianism, on the one hand, and the state/ the political, on the other hand, which Orbinski brings up in the speech, see Table One in Appendix Two.

More importantly, this passage suggests how human rights discourse might be used to separate a group's identity and actions from the political or the state. This can be observed in the way Orbinski isolates the organization from the state by stressing that its first interest is moral and human concerns, rather than political or governing matters. He insists that the organization seeks "firstly to relieve the inhuman suffering," "not to assume political responsibility" (par. 6). He maintains too that the organization's actions are "free of political influence" (par. 6). Thus by emphasizing the moral and human focus of MSF's actions, that is, by framing its intervention in political and state affairs in the moral rhetoric of human rights language rather than in terms echoing local political debates, the political nature and governing quality of its agendas and activities are downplayed. Such a deployment of discourse also reduces the implication that MSF, too, is conducting explicitly political interventions. The rhetoric of morality highlighted in Orbinski's speech elides the fact that MSF's actions often come close to replacing a state's responsibilities to its people, and tend to end up changing the course of political conflicts or public policy. Whether or not MSF is consciously deploying human rights discourse to downplay its quasi-governmental identity cannot be conclusively determined. Whatever the organization's intentions, the important point here is that the discourse has this potential that can be activated by its users, advertently or inadvertently, strategically or unselfconsciously, and hypocritically or sincerely, and that this potential can even come to compete on the level of nation-states, albeit in ways very different from traditional state power.

If this passage underscores how human rights discourse can downplay an organization's governing status, another excerpt from the Nobel Lecture highlights how this discourse can diminish the appearance of the quasi-governmental power human rights NGOs often exert. One revealing instance arises when Orbinski insists that humanitarian action alone can only achieve so much. He states:

There are limits to humanitarianism. No doctor can stop a genocide. No humanitarian can stop ethnic cleansing, just as no humanitarian can make war. And no humanitarian can make peace. These are political responsibilities, not

humanitarian imperatives. Let me say this very clearly: the humanitarian act is the most apolitical of acts, but if its actions and its morality are taken seriously, it has the most profound of political implications. And the fight against impunity is one of these implications. (par. 18)

Like the preceding passage, this one also finds Orbinski distancing humanitarianism (or MSF) from the overtly political (or the state). He explicitly distinguishes “humanitarian imperatives” from “political responsibilities” like stopping “a genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” and making “war” or “peace” (par. 18). He also differentiates the power of humanitarians from that of governments: he observes that “no doctor” and “no humanitarian” can achieve these “political responsibilities” (par. 18), thus perhaps eliding the function of witnessing as a political force in the age of media or recognizing the limits of such testimonial power. Earlier in the speech, he had noted that “only the state has the legitimacy and power” to accomplish such acts (par. 11). Thus, as in the earlier passage, this excerpt also implies that MSF seems to be insisting that its agendas and activities are separate from those of the political and the state.

More vitally, however, this passage demonstrates how human rights discourse can be used to stress an organization’s difference from the political or the state in terms of its power, and hence to cast that power as somehow of a different order from state politics. The way that Orbinski emphasizes the moral aims and apolitical purposes of MSF’s motives and actions is one example of this rhetoric of morality being deployed. He defines MSF’s activities as “the most apolitical of acts” and its interest as “morality” (par. 18). Its concerns are “humanitarian imperatives,” not “political responsibilities” (par. 18). He further describes MSF’s power as limited. Unlike the state that has the authority to stop mass killing and war, “no doctor” and “no humanitarian” can “stop a genocide,” “stop ethnic cleansing,” make war” or “make peace” (par. 18). Thus by stressing the moral and human agendas of MSF’s activities, that is, by couching its assumption of political and state activities in the moral language of human rights discourse, the organization’s political influence and governing power can be obscured. Such moral rhetoric covers the fact that MSF’s actions, however morally motivated, often

shape the organization's ability to govern people's lives in complex political, rather than simply moral, ways. It also diminishes the reality that MSF's agendas, however morally pure, tend to influence the organization's power to rule over people in somewhat state-like, rather than "merely" humanitarian, ways. To a degree, MSF can even affect the policies of states (in terms of their public policy and foreign policy choices), although the organization does not intervene directly in state functions. In this way, human rights discourse can be used to downplay a group's semi-state power.

The definition of MSF as a supranational actor or agent that develops from these discourse uses is particularly interesting. One of the most critical implications of MSF's use of human rights discourse in ways that end up downplaying its quasi-governmental identity and power is that it becomes released from standards of accountability, usually imposed on states by its people, for its state-like activities. That is, since it identifies itself as a humanitarian NGO, and it describes humanitarianism as a moral, not political idea, and since NGOs are by definition non-governmental entities, it cannot systematically be held accountable for its state-like actions or their political effects. Its actions are cast as self-evident or as global rights that are immediately recognizable for an undefined global everybody. Moreover, there is no one to whom it must officially answer, or for whom it must be responsible, because no one officially put it in charge.¹¹⁰ As such, it makes the consequences of its actions almost irrelevant. With the case of an organization like MSF, if it acts for the greater good that everyone agrees upon, then everyone cannot but accept

¹¹⁰ The question of accountability is one that the humanitarian aid industry is taking seriously. Some of the efforts to coordinate, standardize, and monitor aid action include the Sphere Project, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP). The Sphere Project was started by 400 NGOs and UN organizations working across 80 countries to develop a common purpose and handbook of standards for humanitarian NGOs ("The Sphere Project"). ALNAP was created to exchange ideas on accountability ("ALNAP"). HAP emerged from the Humanitarian Accountability Project and includes 18 NGO members. It centers on reporting back to those who received aid and were affected by disasters ("HAP"). For a brief overview of some of the actions some of the more powerful NGOs have taken towards this accountability end, see Robert Glasser's "Why We Need to Look Hard at the NGO's Flaws."

the consequences. In other words, humanitarian and human rights NGOs like MSF are, to a large extent, self-elected, self-legislated, and self-ruled. They decide where, when, whom, and how they will serve or rule. And, most critically, they place themselves out of question or challenge (to a large degree) by their appeal to “the human.”

The capacity, sometimes propensity, of humanitarian and human rights NGOs to downplay their semi-state identity and power, and the resulting lack of accountability, might ultimately jeopardize this circuit of NGOs’ admirably moral, if not always entirely altruistic (and they don’t have to be), agendas and activities. Human rights law scholar David Kennedy, in “International Humanitarianism: The Dark Sides” (2004), observes that, until humanitarian NGOs own up to their political influence and governing power, until they face the political outcomes and governing policies of their actions, they may actually do more harm than good. He writes, “[Humanitarians’] hesitation to see ourselves as powerful, as rulers, makes it difficult to look honestly at the consequences of our work and to take responsibility for the damage we sometimes do” (Kennedy, “International Humanitarianism” par. 6). Moreover, without external oversight for internal accountability, humanitarian and human rights NGOs like MSF could engage themselves in a crisis as they wish and disengage themselves from that crisis as they please. They are neither compelled to assess the outcomes nor deal with the effects of their intervention and withdrawal.

Kennedy’s critique is not purely theoretical. There have been several instances where the lack of humanitarian NGO accountability may have exacerbated the distress of people in need or heightened the crisis level of tense situations. Michael Maren, in *The Road to Hell* (1997), for instance, provides a particularly scathing critique of the abuse of power and resources in the international humanitarian aid industry. In his chapter “Running Toward Rwanda,” Maren describes how the Hutu leaders of the 1994 Rwandan genocide forced the surviving Rwandans into refugee camps only to use the food aid for the camps to finance their efforts to reclaim the country. Even if not specifically about MSF, Maren’s example is telling about the implication of NGOs in politics (in the traditional sense of state politics, and also in a broader sense of any exercise of power).

Based on his interview with a manager of a trucking company that delivered the supplies to the camps, Maren writes:

His truckers deliver all the food. The food is checked in at the camps. But, he tells me, his trucks don't leave empty. They leave the camps with some of the food they came in with. 'My drivers make what money they can on the return trip. They carry coffee or whatever they're paid to carry. So they truck food out of the refugee camps.' On the return trip, the drivers are working for the Hutu leaders, who steal the food and use the money to purchase guns and ammunition to retake the country. (260)

Maren states that the aid organizations were well aware of how the Hutu leaders were using the food aid and the camps. But, for the most part, these aid groups continued to provide aid because there was a lot of money (both governmental and private) for aid pouring into Rwanda. With no regulation of the NGOs (because aid was conceived as mere charity and not politics), NGOs were not held accountable for the consequences of their actions, no matter how foreseeable.¹¹¹

It seems only sensible for humanitarian and human rights NGOs to relinquish the role of "a meek David facing the Goliath of foreign policy establishments in a harsh world of power politics" even when it might seem like they are still at the mercy of states that hold most of the cards (Kennedy, "International Humanitarianism" par. 4). An organization like MSF runs a similar risk if it couches its actions in purely moral and human terms, insisting that it is innocent of politics and free of state-like responsibilities. Since such NGOs have worked to institutionalize humanitarianism and human rights agendas and activities into policy and have themselves entered the centers of governance as agents, if not as negotiating partners, they must acknowledge their role in politics and accept their responsibilities of rule, as a kind of fellow-traveler to overt state politics. If

¹¹¹ The pitfalls of the aid industry have led some critics to argue that its demise might not be so great a loss. For an example, see U.S. journalist Scott Peterson's *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda* (2000), especially Chapter 13, "Darwin Deceived" (229-46).

the aims of humanitarian and human rights ideals are to be achieved, all humanitarian and human rights agendas and activities, even when morally motivated and practiced, must be recognized to have political effects. It is quite astonishing, then, that on a stage as public and publicized as the Nobel Peace Prize dais, a speaker like Orbinski can still credibly assert MSF's position, agendas, and activities as non-political.

So far I have discussed how MSF has appealed to the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse in a speech act like the Nobel Lecture in ways that influence its public identity and global power. The focus of that discussion has been on how the moral rhetoric of human rights language seems to establish a kind of supranational identity and power for the organization, and helps elide its quasi-governmental presence and influence. Discourse, however, as Fairclough notes, is a two-way street: it is influenced by its users even as it influences them. I will now turn to how as an authorized discourse user, MSF might be influencing the discourse. This will open up the question on the organization's non-centralized global formation wherein various entities (agents or units) pop up and work in singularly unique ways in multiple local instances. MSF's mode of operation does not follow the traditional centralized system of command, whereby an organization has a head (or one control center) that imposes a top-down, uniform approach to all situations, and in so doing, propagates a kind of false universalism. Rather, the organization seems dedicated to working from the ground up, horizontally rather than vertically, and thus supports attention to local particularities even as it tries to provide what can seem like a universal notion of health care and medical needs.

MSF as Discourse Agent

In using human rights discourse, MSF implicates itself in a global web of human rights languages, discourse forms, users, and practices. As a part of this human rights discourse circuit (what I here call a global discourse network of human rights), the organization would likely be influenced by the existing languages, forms, users, and practices. But might MSF, as a more official user of the discourse, also be influencing the discourse and its component aspects? To what degree do the prevailing ideologies and

practices of a more hegemonic form of human rights language affect the actions of MSF? And to what extent does the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse supercede that of the dominant ideology? I will focus on the materials from the MSF-USA website to explore the relationship between human rights discourse and the organization.

One of the most prominent ways MSF seems to be affected by the discourse is through the evolutions in humanitarian ideas and practices. The development in the 1990s of government/military humanitarian intervention in reaction to gross human rights violations, for example, deeply impacted MSF's agendas and activities.¹¹² Orbinski calls attention to this development in the Nobel Lecture when he insists that humanitarianism must remain "independent" and "civilian" activities (par. 13).¹¹³ For Orbinski, the act of justifying force to preserve human dignity blurs the lines between military action and humanitarian aid in ways that may tarnish the moral purity of human rights. In more pragmatic terms, to authorize violence for the sake of protecting humanity, invasion as an act of relief, ends up endangering the image of pacifist humanitarian aid organizations like MSF, which in turn could jeopardize these NGOs' projects and their aid workers' lives.

An inkling of the problem this ambiguity between military intervention and humanitarian assistance can bring appeared during the U.S. war with Afghanistan in 2001 when, in a discourse move by the U.S. government, the one was used as a cover for the other. In operation "Enduring Freedom," initiated with aerial bombardments in October, 2001, the U.S. military dropped food, medicine, and supplies from planes in the same

¹¹² For a brief history of military humanitarian intervention, see Thomas Weiss and Cindy Collins's *Humanitarian Challenges & Intervention* (2000) (30-37).

¹¹³ Orbinski states, "Today there is a confusion and inherent ambiguity in the development of so-called 'military humanitarian operations.' We must reaffirm with vigor and clarity the principle of an independent civilian humanitarianism. And we must criticize those interventions called 'military-humanitarian.' Humanitarian action exists only to preserve life, not to eliminate it" (par. 13).

way as they deposited bombs in areas around the country (Calas and Salignon 80-83).¹¹⁴ The U.S. government also cloaked both their aid and bombing actions in human rights discourse as “humanitarian” efforts (Calas and Salignon 81). American Special Forces soldiers masqueraded as aid workers: They wore civilian clothes and introduced themselves as “humanitarian volunteers” (Calas and Salignon 82). Their external appearance and actions were virtually indistinguishable from those of aid workers, aside from their ever-present, albeit carefully concealed, machine gun (Kelly and Rostrup par. 1).

One of the results of such willful confusion between armies and NGOs is that some Afghan people came to identify aid workers with the invading soldiers, viewing them as malevolent threats rather than benevolent sources. In 2003, following the U.S. military operation, the Taliban shot an ICRC Salvadoran water engineer for being “a foreigner” (Bortolotti 125). This was the first aid worker killing in Afghanistan since 1998 (Bortolotti 125). For MSF, this change meant that, after working fairly safely in various parts of Afghanistan for over twenty years, it was forced to limit its program to Kabul alone, when five of its staff members were killed by Taliban fighters in 2004 (de Torrente par. 24).¹¹⁵ In this instance, one of an escalating number of instances, the persistence of a national identity undid the resilience of a local (and global) identity that MSF had been able to foster in the situation up to that point.

This threat to MSFers' lives may arise not just because the organization's identity and power is affected by the other languages, actors, and discourse forms in the network, that is, of military humanitarian intervention, soldiers, and military aid activities. It may also be exacerbated by the fact that, as an official entity in this network, it is very easily associated, however directly or indirectly, with other intersecting networks in the global web. For example, its aid workers can be re-assigned to their national slots as political

¹¹⁴ For a useful discussion of the role of humanitarian aid and military intervention in Afghanistan, see Francois Calas and Pierre Salignon's “From ‘Militant Monks’ to Crusaders.”

¹¹⁵ For more information on MSFers' security problems in Afghanistan, including the killings of its aid workers, see Bortolotti 123-29.

agents quite easily, and removed from their carefully crafted global positions as morally-driven humanitarian actors. This means that, despite its best efforts, as a globally authorized and authenticated actor in the network that links with other government, religious, and national networks, MSF, originating as it does in France, can become by extension affiliated with secular, instead of religious ideologies, Christian, rather than Islamic beliefs, and “Western,” as opposed to “Eastern” cultural customs. These affiliations, warranted or not, can change the shape of MSF’s identity and power back into something it had sought to overcome.

MSF started facing such an unsought network identity crisis in the 1990s in Afghanistan and the Middle East, regions where Islam dominates. For instance, when the Taliban still dominated ninety percent of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, they tended to group humanitarian aid organizations like MSF with the primarily Western, secular, and modern “international community,” with which it had poor relations (Calas and Salignon 75-77). Moreover, since its establishment in 1995, the MSF regional bureau in the United Arab Emirates has been constantly undermined by some Islamic NGOs based in the country (Ghandour 335-36). These Islamic counterparts repeatedly accuse MSF of helping the “Christian West” expand into Islamic territory, rather than subscribing to a definition of humanitarianism that could be seen as being outside religion (Ghandour 335-36).¹¹⁶

As the examples above show, as an “official” speaker of the discourse, and an actor in a global discourse network that intersects with a wider web of circuits, MSF’s network identity, its image that arises depending on where it is along the circuit, seems to have affected its agendas and activities. The idea of network identity was discussed in depth in Chapter Four. To recap this discussion briefly, this notion derives from Braidotti’s concept of “nomadic subjects” whose identities shift as they challenge conventions. Braidotti’s concept has here been adapted to actors traveling within a discourse space: they seem to adopt new identities and adapt their existing identities as

¹¹⁶ For an insightful discussion of the relationship between Western and Islamic humanitarian NGOs, see Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, “The Modern Missionaries of Islam.”

they move from node to node in a single circuit or travel to other intersecting networks. Their identities thus may vary depending on where they are located in this larger web of circuits. I refer to this kind of varying and multiple identities as network identity. For MSF, this means who MSF is perceived to be, and what power it is understood to have, relies, in part, on its particular position in the space of human rights discourse and in the larger global system of networks.

It is not the case, however, that MSF is simply at the mercy of these other aspects of human rights discourse. Influence is reciprocal, if not always exactly to the same degree, for discourse that has a dialogic relationship with its users and society. In a network situation, this two-way influence is even more so.

One of the ways MSF seems to be affecting the discourse is by introducing new human rights languages through its ever-developing agendas and activities. For example, the organization's novel combination of humanitarian and human rights work that was discussed earlier, has literally inserted new vocabulary into the official discourse of human rights, not just in terms of language but also ideology and policy. Taking a term more often associated with Holocaust survivor projects, MSF introduced the term *temoignage* or speaking out as a witness, adopting the slogan *Soigne et temoignez*, "Care for and testify," to signal its merging of humanitarian aid and human rights activism (Rieff, *A Bed for the Night* 345).¹¹⁷ "Testimony," of course, has several popular appeals, from the Rigoberta Menchú case to Holocaust survivor testimonies, to court cases.¹¹⁸ It is

¹¹⁷ Former Executive Director of MSF-USA Joelle Tanguy and President of MSF-Australia Fiona Terry explain: "*Temoignage* seeks to combat indifference to the plight of populations and to signal the need for local and international responsibility to uphold basic humanitarian and human rights principles" (par. 10).

¹¹⁸ The Rigoberta Menchú controversy arose when anthropologist David Stoll, in his book, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), challenged the truth of Rigoberta Menchú's story in *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), edited by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, which purported to testify to the poverty and oppression suffered by peasants in Guatemala at the hands of their corrupt government. Since this case, the truth-claim status of testimony in general, especially in non-judiciary situations as in autobiographies or memoirs, has been called into question. For a brief, but informative overview of the controversy, especially as played out in the

a term with an interesting valence, as well, because *participants* in situations (not less engaged participant observers) are generally granted pride of place in exerting the authority of witnessing. But here, MSF claims its right to testify, thereby insisting on its role as participants (or at least engaged participant observers) in the crises wherein they intervene, a role usually relegated to more “native” informants from the perpetrator or victim category. MSF has also incorporated the phrase “humanitarian space,” insisting on its freedom to provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of human need rather than political agendas (Tanguy and Terry par. 7).¹¹⁹ With MSF’s coining of such phrases and its manifestation of these concepts in its practices, the organization seems to urge the transformation of humanitarians into *participants* (no longer mere by-standers or passive on-lookers, but engaged actors or active observers) in all the situations in which it intervenes. Hence, the MSFers – doctors, engineers, logisticians, local staff – all come to be agents in these events.

Not surprisingly, then, besides including new vocabulary, MSF also integrates new ideas and practices of humanitarian and human rights norms and actions into the discourse. Where traditional humanitarianism used to limit itself to short-term emergency medical relief, MSF now builds in longer-term initiatives like training and supervising local medical personnel to help attend to those in need, and rehabilitating and re-equipping hospitals and clinics in crisis areas (“Field Operations” par. 2, 11). And where conventional humanitarian action used to attend strictly to people’s physical and material needs, MSF now caters to people’s psychological and emotional wants through mental health care programs and HIV/AIDS care and prevention projects (“Field Operations”

U.S. academic circles, see Robin Wilson’s “Anthropologist Challenges Veracity of Multicultural Icon” (1999). The fullest account of the Rigoberta Menchú case is provided in Arturo Arias’ edited book, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (2001).

¹¹⁹ Tanguy and Terry state: “‘Humanitarian space’ entails the ability to independently assess the needs of the population; retain unhindered access to the population; conduct, monitor and evaluate the distribution of aid commodities; and obtain security guarantees for local and expatriate aid personnel” (par. 7).

par. 10, 12).¹²⁰ Through these agendas and activities, the MSF humanitarian prototype emerges as one wherein an MSFer is *almost* (never fully, but close to being) a member of a particular community of need, without being its national subject. The organization's method of humanitarianism thus offers models for acting (or practicing) in a particular humanitarian situation, *as if* its agents were *in* and *of* the situation rather than simply outsiders, a traditional charge leveled against the foreign aid industry and its many workers.

As a result of inserting these new humanitarian and human rights ideas and practices into local events, MSF has introduced more discursive forms into the network. It has done so by making its MSFers the agents that represent the local instance in the global arena, and the global conduit in the local situation. For example, as part of its testifying and advocacy activities, the organization produces and distributes many texts including *Alert Magazine* (MSF-USA's newsletter); annual reports like the Activity Report by MSF-International and the U.S. Annual Reports by MSF-USA; special reports that highlight human rights abuse witnessed by MSF volunteers; and books and pamphlets by MSF-International. MSF staff members and volunteers also contribute speeches, open letters, op-ed columns, newspaper or journal articles, and first-hand accounts of their experiences in the field.¹²¹ The agency that MSFers claim thus is that of a conduit – not mere outsiders (although they may never claim full insider status in most people's eyes, especially hard-core nationalists), but virtual insiders with outside access. Unlike most of the national subjects they aid, these aid workers are neither limited in their access to information of the situation nor the international reaction to it. They are also not restricted in their access to providing information or perspective on the situation

¹²⁰ MSF launched its first mental health program in 1991. Since then, it has made “psychosocial care” a part of many of its short-term and long-term projects (“Field Operations” par. 10). The organization has embarked on HIV/AIDS treatment programs for 27 countries, providing “comprehensive care” for 25,000 people living with HIV/AIDS (“Field Operations” par. 12).

¹²¹ The website of MSF-USA showcases the numerous publications of the organization under “Publications.” For a series of first-hand accounts from the field by MSF volunteers, see “Voices from the Field.”

to an international audience. Again, such access often comes with no more than voluntary and self-organized oversight from peer organizations or states, which implies a heavy reliance on the organization's moral ethos.

This “quasi-insider with outside access” position seems to be a conscious role for MSF agents. Aside from the more traditional kinds of texts mentioned above, the organization produces more visual and aural forms of texts like videos, photographs, and podcasts.¹²² MSF creates brief videos, around 10 minutes each, that highlight the humanitarian needs it encounters and the human rights activities it initiates in places across the globe. These videos are clearly designed to represent the local instance in a global context and broadcast the local event from an “insider” view to a global “outsider” audience. These short films cover topics such as MSF's efforts during the Ethiopian famine (1984), its inflatable hospital in Pakistan (2005), and its U.S.-focused refugee camp awareness events in Atlanta, Georgia (2006), and Brooklyn, New York (2006).¹²³ Turning to a slightly different public, the organization also fashions photo essays that capture the challenges people face in crisis situations worldwide, and MSF's endeavors to alleviate such people's suffering. These slide shows range from issues like MSF's response to nutritional emergencies (2004), the mental health problems of the tsunami survivors in Aceh, Indonesia (2005), and the desperate conditions of the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority group from Burma, that live in refugee camps in Bangladesh (2006).¹²⁴

¹²² The MSF-USA website carries an archive of the organization's videos, photographs and podcasts under “Field News.”

¹²³ See “Video Gallery,” for a host of MSF's short films about worldwide crises situations and its responses to them. The earlier videos focus on MSF's efforts to treat Palestinian and Christian victims of the bombings in Beirut (1976), and the plight of the Cambodian refugees along the Khmer/Thai border (1979). The most recent video available (as of May 2007) attends to the attacks on civilians on the Chad-Sudan border (2007).

¹²⁴ See “Photo Galleries,” for a collection of MSF's photo essays on global crises and its programs to ameliorate the suffering of those affected by these crises. The first photo essay documented an MSF team's exploratory mission in September 2003 to assess the situation of Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad who had fled Darfur. It claims to

These photographs can presumably be used for MSF group presentations and in its other publications. Podcasts, entitled “MSF Frontline Reports,” are another discursive product of MSF that reaches yet another distinctive audience. The organization generates monthly 20-minute-odd podcasts that contain news and updates from MSF projects around the world.¹²⁵

As this large collection of MSF’s discourse forms suggests, the organization seems to influence the discourse by increasing the quantity and type of discourse forms in the network, and by tying more individuals and groups to it, each in their own voice and preferred medium. With this rise in discourse production, circulation, and consumption of course, comes an expansion of discourse users and creators. To synthesize this process in Hardt and Negri’s terms as discussed in Chapter Three, the organization’s “biopolitical production” (the discourse forms) generates new “agentic-subjectivities” (users and creators of the discourse) with the goal of creating a new multitude with agency.¹²⁶ As such, one more way MSF appears to affect human rights discourse is by introducing new discourse users.

showcase “a typical example of how MSF reacts to emergencies” (“MSF Emergency Response” slide 1).

¹²⁵ See “Podcasts,” for a series of monthly podcasts on news and updates from MSF’s projects around the world. The earliest podcast on the MSF-USA website began in May 2006.

¹²⁶ I discussed Hardt and Negri’s terms “biopolitical production” and “agentic-subjectivities” in detail in Chapter Three. To review quickly, the authors suggest that Empire’s power, a form of “biopower” (power that rules from within individual people rather than that imposes itself externally upon people) self-generates through processes of “biopolitical production,” which they define as the “production and reproduction of life itself” (*Empire* 24). That is, Empire creates and recreates itself by producing and reproducing people and the world on its pattern, physically and metaphysically. Hardt and Negri offer the example that one important way biopower self-generates is through the biopolitical production of “agentic subjectivities” (*Empire* 32). That is, it fashions “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds,” and it produces “producers” (*Empire* 32). For Hardt and Negri, biopower fashions what people *suppose* they need, how people *think* they should interact socially, what people *make* of their bodies, and what people *believe* in their minds and hearts. In short it creates people’s subjectivities by creating their “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds” (*Empire* 32).

When MSF generates and circulates the kinds of traditional and untraditional texts described above with the authority of its “official” subject position in the network, it effectively interpellates (Althusser’s term) new discourse users and creators into the network. The volunteers that serve on MSF projects and write up their experiences in MSF-USA’s “Voices from the Field” or MSF-Canada’s blogs become consumers and producers of the discourse, in a kind of viral marketing scheme.¹²⁷ The local staff that MSF trains to help in its programs develop into users and builders of the discourse when they adopt MSF’s practices of humanitarian and medical assistance.

MSF even includes the people it aids into the network as discourse consumers and creators. For one, it often incorporates their testimony into its publications in ways that tend to occlude national identities and local politics. Its July 2004 “Voices from the Field,” for instance, showcased five testimonies by HIV/AIDS patients on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment in Arua, Uganda (“Testimonies”). Its July 2002 “Field News” featured the testimony of a Kenyan HIV/AIDS patient who does not have access to antiretroviral treatment (“It’s a Different World”). Additionally, it often encourages those it serves to produce their own testimonial texts, especially photo essays. For example, in November 2005, the organization gave cameras to six of its HIV/AIDS treatment patients in Nairobi,

¹²⁷ Viral marketing, a concept usually associated with online advertising, generates a market for a particular product or service by encouraging an individual to pass the message about the product or service on to others. It is like a modern-day version of the traditional word-of-mouth form of advertising. Ralph Wilson, an e-commerce consultant, defines “viral marketing” as “any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions” (par. 3). Significantly, for my project that focuses on “network” theory, “viral marketing” is also known as “network marketing” because it works by tapping into each individual’s network of family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. As Wilson writes, “Like tiny waves spreading ever farther from a single pebble dropped into a pond, a carefully designed viral marketing strategy ripples outward extremely rapidly” (par. 6). In the case of MSF’s volunteers and local staff, as they become involved with MSF (as they become users of the organization’s discourse and ideology), they too disseminate MSF’s unique brand of humanitarianism through their own actions and speech in their own networks of friends, family, and communities.

Kenya, and asked them to “document their lives in photos and words” (“My Life with HIV/ AIDS”). In 2007, for instance, it urged four Burmese refugees in Malaysia to record the hardships of living as people without legal status, since Malaysia has not signed the Refugee Convention (“My Life as a Refugee”). All these texts are framed from within the humanitarian ideology of MSF, which serves broad moral and human concerns, but occludes the specifics of national and international political matters. For instance, the photo essay on the Burmese refugees focuses on the problems of being without legal status, but not on the national circumstances in Burma or the international political and economic systems that forced them to seek refuge outside of their nation-state. Their local instances are recast, in very limited ways, into a globally palatable image of humanitarian need, while their complex circumstances are flattened to fit into globally distributable and consumable notions of humanitarian assistance.

Through its discursive acts (publications and actions) as an official actor in the network, then, MSF can add this ever-evolving group of MSF volunteers, ever-expanding crew of local staff, and ever-shifting set of patients to the network. In doing so, it contributes to the constantly morphing nature of this global community of users and creators. It enables increases and decreases in the number and types of speakers, and in the kinds of discursive acts, in the global space of human rights discourse. At the same time, it can allow for these local discourse users and creators to become powerful actors in the system of global networks that organizes the world. The organization after all does not (and cannot) claim *all* the power generated for itself. It is in MSF’s interest to maintain the image of serving those who cannot, because of extenuating circumstances, help themselves. It is not in its interest to present itself as seeking to lord over the weak and the suffering. It will also serve MSF’s position to show itself extending agency to those it aids, not just assisting them back to their feet, but helping them help themselves. So, because of MSF’s globally authorized and authenticated publications and practices, these individuals (aid giver and aid receiver alike) can speak and be heard in a discourse network, and its intersecting circuits, through their production, circulation, and consumption of human rights discourse. They can adopt a globally recognized set of

identities and attain a globally acknowledged level of agency in terms that represent at least part of their local identities “authentically.” That is, they can testify to a particular event as and for themselves, with their local and global identities.

It is easy to see how MSF’s volunteers can become powerful actors in the discourse network and beyond because, as the human faces and hands of MSF, they come to embody the organization’s supranational identity and quasi-governmental power on the local level, and as agents in specific situations at particular moments. They are the ones who end up managing staff and patients, supplies and security, in crisis situation across the world. Moreover, since the organization is set up to accept *their* solutions on the ground, not always to impose a cookie-cutter set of solutions from above, these field workers have a lot of independence and authority. In fact, they are almost the short-term, and sometimes long-term, substitutes for the state when that governing body fails its people. As one MSF recruiter reveals, contrary to volunteers’ expectations, MSF doctors and nurses mostly spend their time administrating staff and patients rather than administering to the patients themselves: “It’s not going to be as hands-on as you think. You’re a lot more effective using ten local health-care workers than trying to do it all yourself...you’re suddenly entering management, computers, statistics, reports” (Bortolotti 73). As this job description implies, volunteering for MSF is not just about being a good Samaritan, it is also about being a ruler of sorts, a public figure with governing responsibilities, an organizer on the ground and at the local level.

The *subject* of humanitarianism thus tacitly has a very different part to play in MSF, compared to the more conventional roles (of aid worker and aid receiver) as defined by the ICRC. MSF volunteers may be taken on as doctors, nurses, logisticians, and engineers, but they are ultimately asked to play more authoritative state-like, even god-like, parts than these professional roles call for.¹²⁸ Often, they are entrusted

¹²⁸ For more information on the kinds of work MSF volunteers do, see Bortolotti. For surgery work particularly, see chapter four, “Doc in a Hard Place” (89-108). For basic medical care efforts, see especially chapter three, “Under the Angolan Sun” (17-40). For logistics and supplies endeavors, see chapter eight, “Best Performance in a Supporting

repeatedly with life-and-death decisions on a collective level – Who shall I let live? Who shall I let die? These are not just questions that arise in operating rooms, between one doctor and one patient. Rather, they come up in every aspect of social life for groups of people in each particular crisis situation. Indeed, the responsibilities aid workers are saddled with when they take on this job matches the power they inevitably inherit with the position. As former aid worker Michael Maren observes, the power aid workers have on the ground is tremendous: “You walk in there and you have life-and-death power over people’s lives. And all of a sudden you have a twenty-two-year-old aid worker telling twelve thousand refugees to get over here, to get in line. It gives you a real sense of power” (qtd. in Bortolotti 82).

Maren’s observation is by now typical, suggesting that aid workers draw immense power from their identity and agency as agents of a humanitarian NGO, and often at the expense of aid receivers. While the power of most aid workers may overshadow, and even override, that of some aid receivers, there is a second face to these powerful aid organizations – multitude building. With the case of MSF, some MSF aid receivers may actually gain new identities and renewed senses of agency from their inclusion into the network because MSF typically tries to engage and empower local actors instead of patronizing and infantilizing them. Some MSF patients may even become actors, not just passive aid receivers, in the network and beyond, once they become a part of MSF’s discursive acts. They might then improve their individual circumstances, and they might come into contact with other actors in the network and enhance their social conditions collectively. This has been the case especially with MSF patients receiving HIV/AIDS antiretroviral (ARV) therapy through the organization’s treatment programs. The aid framework in this situation is designed to respond to local situations, not to overpower those affected by them.

Role” (191-212). For more on MSF volunteer experiences, see two MSF volunteer memoirs, Leanne Olson’s *A Cruel Paradise* (1999) and Wei Cheng and Karin Moorhouse’s *No One Can Stop the Rain* (2005).

Rose Atibuni, Donna Aseni, Jack Kokole, Grace Ndazo, and Charles Ecegeri, for example, are all MSF patients receiving ARVs at MSF's Arua Hospital AIDS Project in Arua, Uganda ("Testimonies"). Without their interaction with MSF's project, these individuals, ostracized by their communities, would have suffered alone and died alone. Ecegeri describes his misery thus: "I realized I was finished – carrying a brick would take two hands and I would be completely breathless. From time to time food would disorganize my stomach and I got weaker...No one cared for me there. They think you're dying so no one helps you" ("Charles Ecegeri" par. 3). The painful lives of these five people would also have been brutally brief. With the help of MSF's ARV therapy program, however, they have been able to live healthier and longer lives. Ecegeri summarizes his improved condition as such: "My life before was ever disturbed. I would fall sick with rashes, diarrhea, fever, but these other sicknesses stopped and now I don't fall sick" (par. 6). Their encounter with MSF's ARV therapy practice, then, has undoubtedly enabled them to improve the length and quality of their lives. They bear witness to globally acknowledged solutions that work on a local level.

But perhaps, for some skeptics, the mere fact of survival and health, although necessary, is not sufficient, to transform an individual into an actor in the network. It may be true that simply surviving and not being sick constantly does not make a person an individual with agency as a member of a self-governing local community. However, it can also be true that because a person survives and is in good health, he or she can have more of a capacity to act, to claim and exercise agency, than a person who is always ill or already dying. Simply put, when people feel well, they are likely to accomplish more than when we feel sick, and they may also imagine achieving more too if they believe they will continue to live. This is what seems to have happened with Atibuni, Aseni, Kokle, Ndazo, and Ecegeri. Or at least, this is how the discourse of MSF encourages its various audiences to read the situation.

Translated into MSF-speak, the five MSF patients named above have not only managed to enjoy better and longer lives, they have also transformed themselves into network actors who form small congregations with the potential of being new nodes on

the MSF system. Atibuni helped organize two organizations in Arua in 1992 – the People with AIDS Family Support Association (WAFSA) and the Arua branch of the National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (NACWOLA). Aseni took on the position of General Secretary of NACWOLA. Kokole started a similar project to NACWOLA with men after participating as a representative in the 11th International Conference of People Living with AIDS (PLWAs). Ndazo helps counsel the women in the Prevention of Mother-To-Child-Transmission (PMTCT) program. Ecegeri is also an active member of NACWOLA, one of the few single men in the community for women (“Testimonies”). These individuals thus represent a form of viral advertising for MSF because they embody how the global organization’s practices served a local community and enabled individuals from that community to organize themselves at a grassroots level and form ties with national and international movements. They function as living examples (successful ones at that, by Western standards) that MSF has the best practices for the aid industry to follow.

After all, according to MSF-discourse, all this organizing happened, in part, because of these individuals’ interactions with MSF’s HIV/AIDS project in Arua. Atibuni attributes her capacity to influence HIV/AIDS patients’ lives through NACWOLA primarily to MSF’s program. She states:

We thank MSF very much for coming to this rural area in the North with free treatment because most services are concentrated in Kampala and the South. It has boosted us a lot...If it weren’t for ARVs so that people could see the benefit of being open, we would not have come this far. Now people form their own support groups, which is really due to free treatment because otherwise what is the benefit of being open. (“Rosi Atibuni” pars. 9-10)

For Atibuni then, MSF’s ARV therapy program encourages a social change in attitudes towards the disease and those who live with the disease. In Norman Fairclough’s terms as discussed in Chapter Two, MSF’s discursive acts (their publications and actions on HIV/AIDS and ARV therapy) are helping construct new social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief about HIV/AIDS for these individuals and their

communities (*Discourse and Social Change* 64).¹²⁹ It creates *new* forms of local agency, within the boundaries of existing national frameworks, yet under the philosophical oversight of a global (and purportedly universal ideology of) humanitarianism.

The humanitarian story of such local agents and their particular acts of agency (as refracted through the lens of MSF's humanitarian ideology and human rights discourse) is, however, at once simple, and problematic, because it is so removed from politics. Almost all traces of the complex political circumstances and situations that would complicate the clarity of MSF's aims are suppressed. What remains reveals what a global discourse (and its globalization) can achieve in terms of its effects on individuals and on society.

Admittedly, this global discourse appears to encourage several positive outcomes. Because of the organization's efforts to educate and treat, people with HIV/AIDS can become survivors (people who live with the disease), rather than victims (people who die from the disease). That is, their social identities can change. HIV/AIDS survivors can also become more open about their condition and seek medical and emotional help once their community members come to be more educated about the disease and the condition of its survivors. In this way, the social relations among those with HIV/AIDS and their communities can improve.

Moreover, as a result of these new social identities and social relationships, the individuals' and communities' knowledge and beliefs about themselves also can shift. Ndazo describes her new sense of empowerment from being a part of the PMTCT program thus:

The group has helped me so that now I can solve my problems myself. It makes me free to tell people my status and I feel no stigma and I am able to bring some people to the PMTCT group. I tell them what we are doing and what we are

¹²⁹ I discussed Fairclough's notion that discourse helps construct society in terms of constituting people's social identities (who they see themselves as and how others see them), their social relationships (how people treat and respond to each other), and their systems of knowledge and belief (people's ideas about the world and how it works) in detail in Chapter Two.

trying. When we started we were 21 and now we are 50 something. Some of the women still have this fear, but when we go as examples and say things are like this, things happen like this and things are going like this for me. They can pick that courage from us. So this is what we are doing now. (“Grace Ndazo” par. 6)

As Ndazo’s experience demonstrates, through their interaction with MSF’s practices, the organization’s aid receivers can re-form themselves as individuals with new social identities and renewed notions of social power. Kokole captures this sense of agency best when, referring to HIV/AIDS survivors, he states, “We are not a problem but a solution” (“Jack Kokole” par. 8).

Furthermore, MSF’s influence as an “official” actor in the network is not limited to that of incorporating aid givers and aid receivers as actors. The organization also introduces actors from other circuits into the discourse network, and new forms of local organizing into the global web, thereby increasing the reach and strength of the network by linking it to other power circuits. These individuals may not even be directly associated with MSF or with humanitarian or human rights work. Rather, they often come from other circuits like the media, the arts, or school systems. They link up with MSF in their consciousness of the organization’s agency as an *effective* humanitarian aid NGO. Through their connection with MSF, however tangential, these disparate individuals come to be integrated, however temporarily, into a discourse network.

For example, internationally-known VII Photo Agency photographers traveled with MSF through the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in mid-2000 to visually capture the suffering of the Congolese people who wrestle with a war largely forgotten by the international community (“Exhibits”). Their photographs have been exhibited at art galleries in New York, California, and Georgia in the United States (“Exhibits”).¹³⁰ The organization has also put together a special discussion session in 2007 wherein novelist and journalist Scott Anderson converses with MSFers about the challenges of

¹³⁰ For a preview of the photography exhibit, see “Exhibits.”

humanitarianism in war-torn Iraq (“Civilians under Fire”).¹³¹ It has, moreover, held a Refugee Camp event in New York City, Atlanta, and Nashville that exposes the U.S. public to refugee camp conditions in places like Afghanistan, Colombia, or Sudan (“Refugee Camp”).¹³² Silke Tudor, reporting for *The Village Voice* on the refugee camp in Central Park, New York City, characterizes the crowd at the event as comprising “schoolteachers, students, social workers, political activists, community volunteers, world travelers, would-be aid workers, and staunchly socially conscious folks” (par. 1).

In supporting each of these discursive acts that join the local and the global, MSF’s agendas and activities expose and invite actors from other networks to participate in and further expand the breadth of human rights discourse and the range of its network actors. The photography exhibits, for instance, especially draw in the artist communities and media circuits, while the special discussion sessions particularly pull in the academic and activist groups. And the refugee camp affairs attract the educationally-invested and socially-inclined members of the general public. In this way, MSF helps construct social identities and relations between people from different locales and life-situations with other people across the world. Through such public events, the organization helps elevate local crises to global attention, and raise the needs of particular groups of people to worldwide awareness. MSF is clearly at great pains to expand the scope of humanitarian action within more communities than just international governing agencies or national governments. Its public outreach activities appear to be aimed at drawing diverse individuals (regardless of their particular common identity markers like nationality, religion, or socioeconomic class) into its sphere of influence and into the discourse network, thereby engendering new multitudes and new interest groups locally and globally.

¹³¹ For more information on this special session, see “Civilians Under Fire from Iraq to Somalia: The Struggle for ‘Humanitarian Space.’”

¹³² For more information on MSF’s Refugee Camp events, including press reports on these events, see “Refugee Camp.”

The above discussion suggests that despite the limitations the existing discourse may impose upon MSF, the organization seems to be influencing the discourse in no small part. The degree to which the organization manages to influence the discourse arises not just because MSF (and its designates in any specific location) is an *actor* in the circuit, but also because the organization acts from an *official* subject position within the discourse. It has been globally authorized and acknowledged to act in the name of humanitarian ideals and human rights norms. The organization seems to have established a self-definition as “humanitarians” that sets itself next to national agents, enabling MSFers to speak as local (and global) agents, to testify from an “insider” position without necessarily being what most would consider to be native informants. It has forged for itself a fairly robust supranational status, even if this self-created identity is not always completely global in practice, and is not necessarily accepted by some actors on the ground.

As one of the largest independent international humanitarian NGOs, that is, as one of the most influential publicly authenticated actors in a discourse network of human rights, MSF’s voice and actions (embodied by almost interchangeable MSFers), indeed its mere presence, carries tremendous clout not only within the network but also within a larger global system of power circuits. The organization’s official subject position in a global discourse network; its supranational presence of volunteers, staff, and offices almost everywhere in the world; and its quasi-governing programs that rule over the most fundamental aspects of many people’s life and death in both short-term crises and long-term situations, suggests that MSF may be a part of the networked system of global power that rules our world today which Hardt and Negri call Empire. Through its use of human rights discourse, and its resulting network identities and network power, the organization appears to be one of Empire’s institutions of rule: its place in Empire may be as part of a human rights discourse circuit, or of an NGO web, or both. This case study of MSF thus far suggests that one more possible mechanism of contemporary global power might be revealing itself.

MSF as Empire/Multitude

MSF's supranational identity and quasi-governing power, and its authorized influence on a global discourse network within a larger web of power circuits raises the question of the organization's role in what Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2000) call "Empire," a networked system of global power that organizes and runs today's world, even as MSF does not have a position with a conventional nation state.¹³³ Could the organization be one of the institutions of Empire, and what kind of Empire-esque role might it be playing? Might this include the building of what Hardt and Negri term "multitudes," rhizomatic collectives of agent-subjects, individuals who have the productive and creative capacity to harness the networks of Empire, the networks they themselves produced and created, toward their particular interests?¹³⁴

MSF's reach (the presence of its offices, volunteers, and programs) throughout the world, almost without geographical limit, suggests Empire's feature of spatial totality. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri characterize Empire as having no spatial boundaries: "Empire's rule has no limits. First and foremost, then, the concept of Empire posits a regime [an ordered construct of power] that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire 'civilized' world" (xiv). In short, Empire dominates everywhere and everything. MSF's global reach in places worldwide makes it akin to the all-encompassing range of Empire, although it is not continuous or contiguous.

¹³³ I discussed Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire in detail in Chapter Three. To recap briefly, the authors argue that "Empire" – "the political subject that effectively regulates...global exchanges [of economics and culture]" – is the form of power that rules over our globalizing world (*Empire* xi). Their idea of Empire is a regime of power, not an imperial state. I expand on the key features of this global power in the last part of this chapter.

¹³⁴ I discussed Hardt and Negri's notion of "multitude" in detail in Chapter Four. To recap briefly, the authors identify *individuals*, and not infrastructure, juridical networks, or states as the source of Empire's power. Since individuals create Empire and have comprised and reinforced the contemporary form of Empire, then individuals could also recreate Empire and compose it in another form. Hardt and Negri call these new individuals as collective agents a "multitude;" individuals with "productive, creative subjectivities" (*Empire* 60). They are groups of agent-subjects, individuals with "agentic subjectivities," who create and recreate life, and thus produce and reproduce Empire.

The manner in which MSF characterizes its ideas and practices as the “true” and “natural” form of humanitarianism (especially as evidenced in its manifesto-like Nobel Lecture) resonates with Empire’s tendency to represent its rule and the conditions that arise from its rule as not just the proper norm (the natural way of things) but also the ideal standard (the desirable way of things). Its humanitarianism is also presented as having no origin (this is how things have always been): it is always already present. Hardt and Negri also maintain that Empire has no temporal boundaries. That is, it has no beginning and no end in the historical sense. It is in many ways outside history because it is not attached to an entity: “[T]he concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. From the perspective of Empire, this is the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be” (*Empire* xiv). In other words, Empire naturalizes an image of certain values as always (and already) in play. The way that MSF’s discursive actions (practices, publications, and websites) define its aims and activities as what is “natural” for being humane (what humanitarianism means and comprises) and being human (what human rights and human dignity mean and comprise), also echoes the ideological nature of Empire’s biopower.¹³⁵ That “always already present” quality, however, opens MSF to charges like that of some Islam-centered humanitarian aid NGOs that accuse MSF and other Western-based humanitarian aid organizations of propagating Christianity or, worst, secularism.

¹³⁵ I discussed Hardt and Negri’s concept of “biopower” in depth in Chapter Three. To recap briefly, they define “biopower” as “a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it” (*Empire* 24). That is, biopower is a form of power that works from within people, rather than simply being imposed upon people. It is *internal* to people and society, rather than *external*. As Hardt and Negri put it, with biopower, “power is not something that lords over us but something that we make” (*Empire* 165). They describe Empire’s form of power as biopower.

Moreover, for Hardt and Negri, since Empire has no geographical or historical boundaries, it also comes to have no limits of influence. That it operates everywhere and in everyone is another feature of Empire these authors identify. They state:

[T]he rule of Empire operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower. (*Empire* xiv)

In brief, Empire's power extends not only everywhere and every time, it also infiltrates every aspect of people's bodies and beings. And it aims to construct their social world and social lives. Interestingly, Empire's distinctive power for extending agency (the potential if not the actuality of performing speech acts) to almost everyone (at least in theory), therefore, actually rests in its unwillingness (or inherent inability because of its de-centered and networked structure) to allow one particular class of agents to emerge as the only authorized actors or speakers. It claims everyone as subjects of Empire.

The way that MSF is involved with the biology and psychology of those it cares for may not, at first glance, resemble the all-penetrating biopower of Empire. When the extent to which the organization has control over the physical, psychological, and social well-being of all the people it helps throughout the world is taken into account, however, there appears to be some resemblance to the pervasive nature of Empire's influence. The organization's quasi-governing presence and power over the very fibers of social life (for instance, which areas in a country gain access to HIV/AIDS ARV therapy), and the most basic threads of people's lives (for example, which patients receive the life-prolonging and community-altering pharmaceutical cocktail), suggest that, like Empire, the organization may have a more extensive influence over human life globally than originally presumed. MSF's influence is not only over people's life and death, and in some cases, their community's social well-being or destruction. It also shapes these people's way of being human and humane, and their community's mode of living with

dignity and humanity. In the organization's discourse production, circulation, and consumption that it uses to propagate its distinct ideology of humanitarianism and humanity, can be discerned the biopolitical processes that not only create and recreate the world in the image of Empire but also generate and regenerate Empire's biopower.

In light of MSF's (and other similar NGOs') increasingly powerful hold on human life and human society, questions arise about whether this particular ideology of humanitarianism (MSF's mode of human-rights based humanitarianism operation that has come to be the norm in the aid industry) is the *only*, much less the best way, to be humanitarian or to serve humanity. After all, although this system of humanitarian action allows HIV/AIDS survivors in certain countries to be heard (a positive outcome, from the Western perspective), it does *not* always reflect on (nor have to take responsibility for) what this agency does to the local terrain on which it operates. For instance, what work central to local sustainability (and future community development) is neglected or altered, because of the attention to HIV/AIDS paid by these patient groups? Might this not detract from prevention and treatment of other diseases like tuberculosis or malaria that equally, if not more significantly, affect large sections of the community or of other neighboring populations? Might all this attention to diseases and health shift the focus away from other fundamental issues like social and economic infrastructure (schools and teachers for education, training and opportunity for employment, the looming problem of Africa's debt to the World Bank)? And is all this concern with treating disease, prolonging life, and forming grassroots interest groups, what is really most needed and desired by these local populations? Or are these matters essentially Western values that MSF and other aid organizations have universalized as shared goals, and imposed upon the communities in which they operate?

Finally, according to Hardt and Negri, the fourth and final characteristic of Empire is its purported aim of peace. Empire is said to exist so as to maintain or bring about peace, an idealized and imaginary peace that is not attached to any physical or material entities. Because of its metaphysical form of peace, the authors note the contradictory way in which Empire's peaceful ideals are often sought through terribly

violent practices: “Although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace – a perpetual and universal peace outside of history” (*Empire* xvi). Here again, the question of where and when notions of globality become associated with ideas of undifferentiated universality or are necessarily conceived as a flattening of local particularities arises as an issue. Cultural visions of peace and conflict after all may very well differ, so too perceptions of peace and conflict related matters of what constitutes material well-being or physical discomfort.

This general description of Empire offered by Hardt and Negri, however, does seem to echo the MSF situation. The basic motivation for most humanitarian action is peace, even though such activities often arise from war. Although MSF’s humanitarian actions cannot directly bring peace or stop wars, it seeks to foster the social circumstances of care and well-being that some believe may pave an ideological path for peace. It aims to promote the psychological conditions of empathy and humanity that many hope may diminish the desire for wars. As with Empire, then, MSF’s actions are driven by reference to a vision of peace as a master signifier.¹³⁶ That is, the organization presents all its agendas and activities as being conducted in the name of peace, itself a concept that MSF defines. The organization thus makes its aims and actions recognizable and understood through a “master” notion of peace – it is “master” in that the word “peace” (the signifier) fixes the meaning (the signified) of the organization’s actions (the referents). Unfortunately, like Empire too, although the organization’s aims may be to bring peace (or at least cultivate a habitat for peace), its actions often involve brutal

¹³⁶ I am thinking here of the Lacanian notion of a “master signifier” or “empty signifier,” whereby one word sound or graphic mark (a signifier) forms and maintains the meaning (the signified) of an object or concept (a referent) by constructing a knot of definite meanings (Boucher pars. 12, 20). The master signifier is also an empty signifier because, for the word “peace” to fix particular meanings upon certain actions, the word itself cannot hold any particular meanings or concepts of its own. Geoff Boucher offers a helpful example to explain the concept of a signifier that is both “master” and “empty” when he writes that words like “God, nation, party or class are not characterized by a supreme density of meaning, but rather by an emptying of their contents, which facilitates their structural role of unifying a discursive terrain” (par. 20).

choices of triage (who to treat and who to leave sick, or who to feed and who to leave starved), and selective allocation of resources (when to pull out because of security threats or aid abuse, or when to interfere because of emergencies or long-term distress). That is, despite its agenda of peace, its discourse can occlude other important aspects of the situation in which it intervenes. Ultimately, MSF is waging a war of sorts, a war against poverty and disease, apathy and ignorance, governments and rebel groups, and first-world and third. As an official actor in the network, as an entity on the battlefields, MSF is involved, directly or indirectly, intentionally or accidentally, in all the crises and conflicts with which it engages. Thus, despite its peaceful vision, its actions force it to engage in a quite bloody and violent reality.

In all these ways then – its geographical scope (and its resulting supranational presence), its ideological range, its biological and psychological involvement (and its accompanying quasi-governing influence), and its peaceful aims, if war-like situations – MSF seems to be an institution of Empire. It is an NGO that seems to be redefining the locus and purpose of not just the practice of governance generally (especially global governance, that is, the supranational administration of power) but also the institution of government specifically (that is, the political structures of state power).

To say that MSF has transformed into an institution of Empire is not to insinuate that the organization is in any way fundamentally “power-hungry,” or intrinsically “evil.” It is simply to suggest that the organization, despite its protestations of independence, has, perhaps inadvertently, come to be inextricably tied, as an official human rights and humanitarian NGO, to other power networks in Empire that seem to govern individuals globally through their ideologies and practices. Religious groups or nation states, and their religious or nationalist rhetoric, come to mind as possible examples of other power networks and their ideological practices. To link MSF to Empire is to call attention to the fact that, in its supranational presence and quasi-governing influence, MSF has, perhaps unintentionally, come to prolong the conflicts or exacerbate the crises it involves itself in since the governments and parties that should act to resolve these problems all too often use aid organizations like MSF as an excuse to sit back and do nothing. These authorities

insist that, since aid is being administered, action is being taken. This is a profound abdication of state responsibility to a set of actors not intending to behave long-term like a state power. In a sense, these organizations also require conflict in order to continue to exist. The existence of these humanitarian aid NGOs thus may seem to harm those who bear the brunt in crisis situations two-fold. The fact that they specialize in humanitarian action territorializes aid outside the purview of government responsibility: it becomes easy for states not to take care of its own citizens and residents who are in need because states come to be rendered as non-experts when it comes to aid. Moreover, the interventions by NGOs to manage the survival of those suffering from violent conflicts (who without the interventions would likely perish) provide governments with convenient reasons not to do the hard political and diplomatic negotiations necessary to address the heart of the conflicts.¹³⁷

At the same time, to link MSF to Empire also calls into attention the organization's *potential* (and more positive) role as a power circuit in Empire – that of multitude builder. There may well be another way in which the organization might function as a global power network. To do so, attention would have to be paid to the other side (an even more positive face) of modeling the organization as a global network than I have presented so far. After all the very factors that give MSF the power to govern people can also make it able to let people govern themselves. In the 1970s, for example, MSF began as a small band of rebel doctors and revolutionary journalists who challenged the domineering forces of the ICRC's, then hegemonic, practice of silent neutrality, and of the world's, then dominant, ideology of national sovereignty. In other words, MSF *started* as part of the multitude, not as an NGO (normally-defined), but as a new kind of

¹³⁷ As Fiona Fox observes, “Aid agencies have come under fire from many quarters over the past ten years. It is now commonplace to hear humanitarian aid accused of prolonging wars, feeding killers, legitimizing corrupt regimes, strengthening perpetrators of genocide and creating new war economies. In short, for many, humanitarians have gone from being angels of mercy who can do no wrong to being part of the problem” (23). For classic examples of critiques of humanitarian aid, see Alex de Waal *Famine Crimes* (1997) and Michael Maren's *Road to Hell* (1997).

grassroots local aid organization. At heart, its ideals and image remains attached to the multitude, even if, its aims and practices have, through organizational restructuring, come to resemble those of Empire. If the organization can manage to maintain its multitude-centered ideals and channel them into its current Empire-focused practices, it might play a central role in creating new multitudes of human rights discourse subject-agents. Such a move might wrest at least *some* political power from the stranglehold of governmental structures and into more socially-equitable systems of governance. Or it might change the tenor of conversations in the corridors of government agencies from a *realpolitik* discourse to some kind of ethics discourse.

This challenge, however, is great. Its means remain, as yet, unknown, and its outcomes, wholly uncertain. The greatest difficulty has to do with the status of human rights discourse *vis a vis* humanitarianism. MSF seems to have, to date, successfully negotiated the difficult terrain of activism with aid, politics with neutrality, and governing without ruling, by emphasizing the moral and human(itarian) aspects of its work through its use of the overt *moral* rhetoric of human rights discourse, and of its covert political potential. Still if the developments in the aid industry and in connected networks like government, the media, and terrorist groups are anything to go by, even MSF may face an increasingly difficult time using the moral rhetoric and power of this discourse to pursue its agendas and activities.

As human rights discourse itself globalizes, its moral cachet among some groups seems to be dropping, even as its rhetorical power continues to magnify at other levels – government and grassroots. Among Western intellectuals, the idealism its advocates once had for this discourse seems to be fading.¹³⁸ For example, Rieff, who once saw the discourse as a means for saving the oppressed of the world, is now increasingly disenchanted with it.¹³⁹ These intellectuals are becoming disillusioned by the way the

¹³⁸ For a discussion of this increasing moral bankruptcy of human rights discourse, see Samuel Moyn's "On the Genealogy of Morals."

¹³⁹ For insight into Rieff's change of heart on human rights and humanitarian intervention, see *At the Point of a Gun* (2005). Also see the transcript of Rieff's

discourse has been so easily deployed by other state and non-state actors to dominate the world. The discourse, in the hands of these other actors, and through the globalization of the discourse itself, appears to be engendering entirely opposite effects from what these proponents originally imagined and intended. For instance, the recent U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have both been launched in the name of human rights, even women's rights, and humanitarianism (Moyn 26). At the same time, there are more and more counter human rights languages of equal if not more moral force and global influence such as the fundamentalist religious discourse that puts religious notions of morality before secular moral ideas of humanity, or even environmentalism that privileges the centrality of nature over the egotistic focus on man in human rights norms. In all these ways, other globally applicable types of rhetoric are arising to configure and reconfigure the NGO/government terrain in different ways. These rhetorical developments are no longer drawing the lines around the too simple (tenuous at best and non-existent at worst) difference between a state's political agendas and actions, and an aid organization's purportedly non-political aims and activities. Indeed, (as this chapter has shown) humanitarianism's primary dilemma is no longer vocal aid versus silent neutrality as it was when MSF first emerged in the 1970s. Although this "Is aid political or non-political, and should it be?" debate continues to resonate, the challenges humanitarianism faces today are much more diverse and complex because of the globalization of human rights and humanitarian discourse.

Any attempt to harness MSF's institutional power as part of Empire to build multitudes hence will certainly have to contend with the ever-evolving nature and influence of human rights discourse, and with this redefinition of what a global rhetoric can be. Thus, ironically, as this discourse globalizes, its power seems to be increasingly questioned and questionable. The mere use of human rights discourse, the simple association with its global discourse network, may eventually limit as much as help an individual or group through the two-edged mechanisms of network identity and network

conversation with Joanne J. Myers, "At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention."

power. Parties may gain or lose authority and legitimacy as the discourse and its network rise or fall in influence or favor in the system of global network power.

In the end, this chapter has sought to illuminate the tricky terrain that human rights discourse, circulating as it is today in a global network system, can (and often does) bring to its users and creators. As this MSF case study illustrates, the moral power of this discourse can, through the workings of network identities and power, elevate a rag-tag bunch of doctors and journalists into a billion dollar international humanitarian NGO with supranational presence and quasi-governmental influence globally. At the same time, this moral rhetoric can also, again through the mechanisms of network identities and power, advertently or not, co-opt an independent relief organization into a superpower's foreign policy agenda.

Ultimately, this MSF case study shows that, although the organization may have started off as a part of multitude, speaking truth to power, it seems today, through network identity and power, to more closely resemble Empire. Yet, as this form of power with certain Empire-esque tendencies, the organization seems to be fostering multitudes, generating identities and agency for its subjects, transforming them into agents, through its particular creation and use of human rights discourse. And while I am not focusing on this here, the organization begins to participate in the regime of global capitalism in its own way, as well, when aid implicates the sources of production and distribution outside state networks. Whether this growth can be regulated by the organization's ethos, or whether it will ultimately be transformed once a certain degree of development is to be reached, remains unclear, given that NGO organization on this scale has probably never been seen before.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tested the model of a global human rights discourse network on the first case study, MSF, which carries a more official subject position in the network in that, as an international humanitarian organization, it is commonly recognized as an authorized human rights discourse user and network actor. First, the Nobel Peace Prize

Lecture was analyzed to highlight the moral rhetoric of human rights discourse, and the way the moral power of this language and ideology seems to allow an authorized discourse user like MSF to amplify its authority. I argued that this discourse enables the organization to achieve this enhanced position of authority especially when MSF characterizes its agendas and activities in moral and human, rather than political and national, terms. It becomes a *global institution* in the sense of not being tied to one single nation. That is, since its agendas and activities are moral and human, MSF presents itself as potentially active in any nation state. The organization's presence seems to know no borders, lending MSF a supranational identity. At the same time, MSF also becomes an institution with *global power* in terms of being above all nations. That is, because of its moral and human agendas and activities, MSF almost supercedes the political authority of national governments. Its moral authority seems to override national sovereignty, allowing it to claim supranational power.

The effect of this increased power is that the organization seems to be transformed from an international organization working at different locales in different countries to a kind of supranational institution, one for whom national borders are not as important as the level of needs of the human beings within, on, or without those borders. MSF also seems to be elevated from a medical relief organization when it responds to crises that arise, emergencies to which states are normally responsible but may have neither the resources nor the will to handle. In such situations, MSF appears to become a kind of quasi-governing power, whereby the organization takes over more than the expected responsibilities of a state to care for and protect its citizens and residents: in the case of refugee camps, for example, the organization may be one of the few authorities that step up to take responsibility for the stateless. In the case of longer term medical care, the emergency relief organization may start to be a long term installment on the local horizon.

Then my analysis of the lecture was supplemented with further attention to the materials on MSF-USA's website. Together, these texts were analyzed to explore the impact MSF might have as an official human rights speaker on human rights discourse,

or at least what stories can be told by the organization that seem credible enough to emerge on a global stage like the World Wide Web (the lecture, for instance, is archived on the Noble Peace Prize website). Although the other languages, actors, and discourse forms in the network can affect the organization's identity and agency. Still, this does not mean that there is no wiggle room for MSF to affect the discourse in some way through its use and interaction with it and its affiliated networks. Building, in no small part, on the moral force of this discourse, MSF appears to be not simply expanding the vocabulary, ideas and practices, and textual forms of human rights, but also creating new agents for human rights, thereby possibly influencing the nature and power of the discourse itself: at the very least, there are plausible accounts of new language, ideas, practices, and actors of human rights that have found widespread credibility, as demonstrated by the organization's growth. Since MSF can introduce new *langue* and *parole*, actors, and discourse forms, it could be said that the organization is shaping the discourse as it globalizes. And it seems to do so in ways that suggest it may be building a kind of discourse empire of its own, one wherein the multitudes are healthy enough to administer to the needs of their own local groups. Although MSF, like a large number of its international human rights and humanitarian NGO counterparts, seem to be part of Empire, this very characteristic of being part of Empire, of being at once connected and influential globally and locally at very fundamental levels of individual and social life, enables MSF to build multitudes.

This chapter thus sought to complicate the claims by those like Makau Mutua (discussed briefly in Chapter Two) who insist that the globalization of human rights discourse is another facet of Western ideological domination of the world and like its sister phenomenon of globalization will further disempower those already disadvantaged by a globally inequitable world order. Instead, it suggests that human rights discourse globalization may not be as debilitating or homogenizing as those like Mutua might think: subjects of the discourse may be able to derive agency from the moral power of the discourse and the network system of discourse globalization, and they may be able to draw on the network situation in ways that might help them shape the discourse to have it

serve them, rather than simply have their values and cultures colonized or homogenized by a dominant form of human rights discourse. This chapter also tried to extend Hardt and Negri's notions of Empire and multitude by suggesting that some organizations like MSF may be building their own empires and multitudes. In MSF's case, there are a discourse empire and set of multitudes oriented around the increasingly interlinked ideologies of human rights and humanitarianism as understood by the organization.

In the next case study chapters, I will attend to *individuals* with less official subject positions in the discourse. These actors are less official in that they are not conventionally acknowledged as authorized discourse users or network actors, although they may have access to them. The next two chapters will examine how two individuals – a genocide survivor and a novelist – seem to draw from human rights discourse and how doing so appear to influence not just their identities and agency but also possibly the discourse itself. These individuals, I will argue, seem to comprise what Hardt and Negri call the multitude, the subjects of Empire. Each chapter that follows will explore how these individual subjects deploy one set of Empire's tools – the discourse and the power networks of human rights.

Chapter Six

Human Rights Discourse and a Genocide Survivor:

Paul Rusesabagina and *An Ordinary Man* (2006)

In this chapter, I offer another case study from a global human rights discourse network, analyzing a different actor and discursive event within the circuit. As with the preceding chapter, the overriding purpose remains to show how various actors, from distinct subject positions within the network, might be using human rights discourse in ways that fashion a global presence and agency for themselves and others. Unlike the previous chapter, however, the focus is now on an *individual* actor, rather than a group actor. I look at an individual who speaks from a less official position. That is, this case study explores how an individual might be using the power of the discourse without necessarily being identified as part of its official power structure. Instead of a humanitarian aid nongovernmental organization (NGO) like MSF that maintains a group identity and acts with group agency, the case here deals with a genocide survivor and his use of human rights discourse. It is quite common for a group of individuals, official discourse speakers or not, to be called upon to represent a particular group's experiences and improve that group's conditions. This is often the case with genocide survivors. But, as individuals, they usually act in their own capacity as individual persons within a

discourse network, and often emerge as agents on it, still as individuals. These individuals, especially genocide survivors, in fact, do more than testify to a discourse network's existence. They constitute its very *raison d'être*: victims of crimes against humanity are the main reason human rights discourse purports to exist, even if as individuals these genocide survivors do not constitute the discourse's official existence. They do not make up this discourse's official existence in that these survivors are not synonymous with the laws or norms of the international human rights system: they are often not directly empowered to make them, and in many cases they are typically only indirectly addressed by a body of law, custom, and usage oriented around human rights. This body of laws and norms are instead aimed more at entities (states, institutions) rather than individuals. The question I want to address in this chapter is whether an individual, especially one like a genocide survivor who is often talked about in the discourse but not commonly considered an agent of the discourse, may be using human rights discourse and its globalization in ways that project for him particular individual identities and help exercise his influence as a singular actor, and not that of a group.

Let me clarify this distinction a little further since the focus on an individual is central to the argument that will be developed in this chapter. Although human rights or humanitarian crisis survivors may be grouped according to identities determined by their particular participation in a specific crisis situation (for example, Rwandan *genocidaires* or organizers, Sudanese "lost boys," or Burmese "civilian porters"), when they act discursively (for instance, when they write a memoir, testify at the UN, or give a personal interview), they must emerge as speaking from a particular space, essentially speaking as individuals from sites within a more generalized discourse network of human rights. Even though they may speak *for* and *of* a specific group (those whom they and their speech acts are meant to represent), they fundamentally act as themselves within a globalized network, not just as a representative for a group or as a situated national subject. This condition of speaking from an individual position within a global discourse space is so even though these individuals may enter the discourse as a representative of a

group or originate explicitly from a particular national position. At the same time, even though they may speak from within a wider discourse network, they cannot shed their individual markers of identity and agency. They also do not necessarily speak with a completely homogeneous and disembodied voice from and in a vast web of circuits oriented around human rights discourse.

At times, therefore, each potential actor may speak (or claim to speak) as an individual appealing to his or her own representative *group's* subject position (for example, as Rwandan genocide survivor); at other times, he/ she may speak or claim to speak from his or her own *individual* subject position (for instance, as a Hutu Catholic priest Tutsi-sympathizer in a village outside Kigali, a more precisely and nationally situated speaking position); and sometimes he or she may even speak from both positions. But, always, in these personal speech acts, these individuals speak as themselves, including all the personal identities and agency that might entail. They act as individuals because they are not part of any official organization that might profit from their participation. They act primarily as a witness to a speaking position, as enacting that speaking position and bringing it into play – if not into existence – in the discourse and the various circuits oriented around the discourse.

Granted, the same may be said of activists and aid workers of NGOs, in that they may represent their NGO but, in the end, will necessarily act as individuals, as well. This may be an accurate observation about how NGO work plays out on the ground, but it is not the conventional wisdom, the normative expectation, or the presented image and ideology of activists and aid workers as they are conventionally recognized in human rights situations, where they are expected to fill certain typological roles. Nor is it an adequate representation of the additional power they acquire as subjects attached to an NGO as opposed to being attached only to an incident. These NGO actors serve not from their individual subject positions, but from their group subject position; they act from the authority of their respective NGOs, not upon their own individual authority. Thus, although NGOers may seem to speak independently at times, it is not the accepted

convention with activists and aid workers, nor can it be generally when the topic of purportedly individual speech is in common with the NGO's cause.

Speaking as an individual, however, is the expected procedure when it comes to human rights crisis survivors: they are by definition individuals more so than members of a collective. With NGOs, the organizations typically enforce a group identity that its members are supposed to uphold (individual NGOers speak from and of "their cause," for example). By contrast, with human rights crises survivors, they usually speak by bearing witness to their own experience and identity, albeit an identity that is recognized by others on the network to somehow be similar to others who have experienced the same crisis event.

Indeed, it is the very unique specificity of their individual experience (their *individual* identity), as well as its purportedly shared similarities to the experiences of others (their *group* identity), that are privileged in these survivors as defining of the crisis situation. This quality of being at once similar and different – a victim, but a victim of a very specific circumstance – is what makes these survivors and their experiences so valuable to the human rights and humanitarian aid industries. Unlike the NGOers, then, these survivors normally are neither expected to subscribe to any particular organized group identity nor act with any specific collective agency, but more straightforwardly as witnesses to their own humanity. Hence, they serve almost as guarantors of the humanist ideology on which human rights discourse is built. They also bring their specificity of local experience to validate the discourse as invoking a purportedly global set of ethical standards.

For all these reasons, human rights crises survivors and their speech acts will be treated in this project as individual, rather than group, actors and actions. Although they may be implicated in a network as a group (passive participants who are drawn into a circuit because of their coincidental association with a crisis), when they emerge as actors (active agents who consciously and purposefully use the discourse) in the network, they do so as individuals able to and even required to speak as individual witnesses. That is, they represent the particular cases that make a general ideology possible, the individual

subject defined by an experience with which “all” can identify globally. Hence, as speakers, they might be treated as individuals and their utterances as individualistic. They should be regarded as individual actors and actions even though their individuality is on the level of speaking, and not on that of the underlying ideology since they are all implicated in the discourse to varying degrees. And they should be treated as individual speakers even though they do so with a discourse that automatically universalizes the particular individual experience into the universal experiences of all humans. They are still individual actors and actions even though they and their individual speech acts tap into or are linked into a network that automatically decenters their individuality and renders them open to change.

At the same time, although they might act as individuals, they may end up as not always acting alone. In fact, through speaking as individuals they might come to have the capacity to act within a multitude of humans (in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s sense of a new collective agency) brought into global being by means of a discourse network and more. They seem to form these multitudes through a process of communication and collaboration with other actors that is facilitated by a global web of circuits that include a discourse network of human rights.

Because this chapter shifts its focus from a group-authorized speaking position to one tracing the individual actor not attached to a group, this chapter will also differ from the previous one in terms of subject positions within human rights discourse. While Chapter Five focused on MSF, a humanitarian aid NGO, that as part of the NGO world typically acts from a more “official” subject position in the discourse, this chapter centers on a genocide survivor who as part of the category of human rights crises survivors commonly speaks from a “quasi-official” subject position. Survivors act from quasi-official positions in that, although they are often officially *implicated* in the discourse because of their personal association with and experience of a particular human rights or humanitarian crisis, they are not recognized as official *actors* for the discourse. That is, in most instances of human rights speech acts, they possess only a passive, rather than active, presence when they speak, if that power is to pertain to the cause of human rights:

they are spoken *to* and *of* because they are by definition part of the discourse and so in the network, but they rarely speak *from* and *for* themselves as individuals because they are often only intelligible as representatives of “their situation.” This is the paradox that needs to be addressed: they enter the discourse and the network as individuals in ways that supposedly allow them to speak, yet they cannot speak for their own individual ends. Rather, they are usually conscripted to speak for the goals inscribed in the discourse and the network. Nor are they usually recognized when they speak from something other than their own experience as survivor or victim, leaving their other potential contributions to the global discussion often, if not silenced, at least unheard.

For example, refugees may be registered as such for their official protection under international law (hence implicating them in human rights discourse, in a position as “recognized object”), but this registration does not necessarily officially authorize them to speak on refugee issues on the available platforms within the international human rights regime. In fact, they may be said to only exist so that the human rights system may appear as an active force, when it registers them. They are not officially acknowledged to act as subjects in the name of human rights and humanitarianism in the same way that an NGO registration legitimizes a human rights or humanitarian aid group as an agent of the discourse and thus an authorized actor in the network.

At the same time, however, these survivors are very much official objects of the discourse in that, as the victims of human rights violations or man-made humanitarian crises, they are the very entities the discourse was created to protect. They are the very beings around which a discourse network of human rights revolves. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights emerged, after all, out of the dark shadow of the Jewish Holocaust and World War II. It was meant to protect potential and actual victims from human rights abuse. As human rights or humanitarian crises survivors, then, these individuals cannot help but represent a kind of official entity in this network, almost in the sense of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, where both subject and object positions need

to be present for the network to exist.¹⁴⁰ Yet, as discussed above, although they may be the official focus of the discourse, their presence in the network, their role in the discourse, is more often as object (passive participant acted upon by the discourse) than subject (active agent acting on, with, or through the discourse). As such, when they do act, they do so from what I am calling a quasi-official subject position within the network. They have official status as objects of the discourse, but not always official recognition as subjects of the discourse.

These differences between chapters have been constructed to approach the project's main question – the relationship between a globalizing human rights discourse and its subjects in its complexity, hopefully to contradict too-simple analyses of agency that have been used in many studies of globalization. Thus each chapter comes to this question from a different subject position possible within a global discourse network framework, including the choice for this chapter – the point of view of a human rights crisis survivor who is neither pure subject/agent nor pure object/victim in that world. If in the last chapter, I studied the human rights-based humanitarian aid organization *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and its Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, I examine here Rwandan genocide survivor Paul Rusesabagina and his autobiography *An Ordinary Man* (2006). The purpose in doing so is to hopefully recapture some of the dynamics between a discourse (especially one like human rights where the official language is rather hegemonic) and one of its individual speakers (particularly one who might try to remain

¹⁴⁰ In *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), Georg Hegel describes the interdependent relationship between a master and his slave, or lord (*Herr*) and bondsman (*Knecht*). He writes, “The lord is the consciousness that exists *for itself*, but no longer merely the Notion of such a consciousness. Rather, it is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general” (Houlgate 95). In the lord-bondsman relationship, the other “consciousness” to which the lord mediates is the bondsman. In other words, the lord’s consciousness of himself as lord depends on the bondsman’s consciousness of the lord as lord and of himself as bondsman.

individual, and deviate from the official language and ideology of the discourse, in ways that an official MSF speaker might not have done).

First, I will draw from three texts that tell Rusesabagina's story to explore the question of object and subject positions within a network scenario. An analysis of this small set of texts points to how a global discourse network might be granting Rusesabagina an ever-expanding set of network identities and power (albeit tightly constrained ones) that seem in particular circumstances to transform him from an object of human rights discourse to a potential subject of the discourse and possibly into an actor in the network. Then, I describe how, as a network actor, he appears to adopt and adapt the conventions of a global discourse network of human rights to further develop his network identities and power, and potentially change the network (as well as his own identity as a subject, but from within the network). By doing so, I aim to suggest that human rights crisis survivors like Rusesabagina may represent potential examples of what Hardt and Negri in *Multitude* (2004) term "multitude," the subjects who enable and could therefore potentially alter Empire's rule, especially in the arenas of human rights and humanitarianism, by forming new communities of discourse with inherent power.

Network Identities: Local Survivor, Global Hero, and Universal Everyman

Paul Rusesabagina is a Rwandan who, as temporary manager of the five star Hotel des Mille Collines in the capital city of Kigali, saved the lives of over 1,000 Tutsis and Tutsi-sympathizers who sought refuge in the Belgian corporation-owned hotel during the days of mass killing in 1994. He is, in short, a hero of the Rwandan genocide. As a Hutu, he did not succumb to hate-propaganda and kill Tutsis as other Hutus did during the Hutu-militia-led extermination of all Tutsis and Tutsi sympathizers. And he rescued several people from these targeted groups by sheltering and protecting them in the hotel. At least this is how Rusesabagina is portrayed in most of the texts or events that concern him.

There are several texts that have represented Rusesabagina and his role in the Rwandan genocide. Almost without exception, each of them identifies and publicizes

Rusesabagina as a remarkable individual. U.S. journalist Philip Gourevitch's non-fictional work on the killings, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (1998) is one. In it, Gourevitch presents Rusesabagina's story as one of several survivors of the genocide with remarkable stories to tell. However, Rusesabagina is not the main focus of Gourevitch's book. He is not introduced until the very end of Chapter Eight (107), and he is featured only in two chapters (Chapter Nine and Ten), in a book of twenty-two chapters. Nor is Rusesabagina heralded as a full-blown hero. He is characterized, at best, as a man with a strong conscience, and who, for a time, was blessed with the right balance of skill, resources, and luck to protect some people for a short time.¹⁴¹ At this point in time, Rusesabagina is but one of many Rwandan genocide survivors with his own interesting story to tell. He is not, as yet, a classic hero. He is still just a Rwandan survivor, who is ideologically perhaps more humane than others.

It was almost certainly not until Terry George's dramatization of Rusesabagina's story as one of heroism in his Hollywood film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) that Rusesabagina really came to be portrayed as a full-blown hero. In this docudrama, George focuses entirely on Rusesabagina's life-saving actions during the most intense days of massacre. From beginning to end, the film follows the trials and triumphs of Rusesabagina as the main protagonist, paying little heed to other people and events that occur outside the immediate world of the hotel. True to its title, then, *Hotel Rwanda* shortens the long history of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, of which the 1994 genocide was the most recent (if most devastating) eruption, and pares down the many and complex stories of Rwandans (before, during, and after 1994; genocide victims, perpetrators, and by-standers; as well

¹⁴¹ Gourevitch writes, "So Paul had a rare conscience and knew the loneliness that came with it, but there was nothing false about his modesty regarding his efforts on behalf of the refugees at the Mille Collines. He hadn't saved them, and he couldn't have saved them – not ultimately. Armed with nothing but a liquor cabinet, a phone line, an internationally famous address, and his spirit of resistance, he had merely been able to work for their protection until the time came when they were saved by someone else" (142).

as Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa) to a time period of just over a month (early April to mid-May), to a virtually single location of the five-star hotel in the city, and to one man, its hotel manager, to an active agent of humanitarian conscience.

Such a narrow focus is needed in a film, perhaps, if one wants to tell the tale of a hero, and there is little doubt that this is the focus of *Hotel Rwanda*. The film's publicity materials testify to this premise. The images for the film's advertising poster and DVD cover, for example, clearly highlight the centrality of Rusesabagina. Each prominently features Don Cheadle as Rusesabagina. On the DVD cover, the lone figure of Cheadle is standing in the foreground while the supporting character Sophie Okonedo as Tatiana, Rusesabagina's wife, appears as a small hazy image in the background with her on-screen children and nieces. Even the title of the film dwarfs their pictures. In the film poster, Cheadle's head, his face with a serious, anxious faraway look, looms large, overpowering the much smaller film shots of Okonedo and the children, as well as the screen stills of Nick Nolte (who plays Colonel Oliver, a figure primarily modeled after French Canadian Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire) and Joaquin Phoenix (who plays U.S. journalist Jack Daghish, a symbolic embodiment of the Western news media) ("Hotel Rwanda (2004)").¹⁴² These film publicity materials exemplify how the Hollywood film industry (perhaps a kind of discourse circuit in itself) requires actors of a certain kind of visibility to sell its product, thereby raising an interesting alternative to the kind of globalizing network I am exploring here, because a "box office," and not a humanist, ideology, drives it.

As if the message was not loud enough in the poster and DVD cover images, even the taglines for the film call attention to the fact that *Hotel Rwanda* is about Rusesabagina as a hero. For instance, one reads, "When a country descended into madness and the world turned its back, one man had to make a choice" ("Taglines"). Another declares, "A

¹⁴² In "The Struggle of Memory Against Forgetting," Anne Thompson writes, "Nolte's role is several generals and colonels rolled into one, but he is modeling his character mainly on French Canadian Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire, author of *Shake Hands with the Devil*" (53).

true story of a man who fought impossible odds to save everyone he could and created a place where hope survived” (“Taglines”). And yet another tagline announces, “When the world closed its eyes, he opened his arms” (“Taglines”). Each tagline clearly centers our attention on “one man,” Rusesabagina, and his heroism. The stories of Rwanda and of the genocide are almost only a setting, a backdrop, and the supporting characters but props, extras, for this drama of one man’s heroism. These others elements of setting and supporting characters are important (because they enable the film to portray Rusesabagina as a hero), but they are definitely not the focus of the film. Even the genocide plays second fiddle to Rusesabagina.

Here, a clear media effect is in play: George actually instructed script and screenplay writer Kier Pearson to rewrite his original draft that included multiple characters to just one, Rusesabagina (“A Message for Peace”). He wanted to focus on the love story between Paul and Tatiana and the individual heroic tale of Rusesabagina. George was, in fact, adamant that *Hotel Rwanda* be a tale of Rusesabagina’s humanity and of hope. He told film writer Anne Thompson:

The whole gore factor didn’t interest me in the slightest...I wanted people to feel a love story and an individual story rather than a docudrama about a massacre. I wanted to give more of a sense of the fear and craziness of it, an epic story shot in classic style told through the eyes of this man. This story needs to be chronicled, it’s one of the great acts of heroism of the twentieth-century. (Thompson 52)

As the uplifting ending to the film declares, the theme of *Hotel Rwanda* is ultimately not genocide (death, despair, or human destruction) but humanity (life, hope, or human compassion). In its filmic realization, the discourse of humanity and humanism is preserved. But it becomes clear that the film medium faces this type of restriction on what kind of messages it can send. Perhaps this limited range of messages arises in large-scale Hollywood films especially because it is more anonymous in its impact than some smaller independent films that may be made available to a narrower range of audiences and in more controlled environments like film festivals and group screenings. A big-budget, big-name, big-publicity film like *Hotel Rwanda* may be more of an unknown

entity in that it seems to be consumed in no-time and no-place and every-time and every-place. It thus seems to need a simple message in which a single “actor” (Cheadle) pretending to be an actor (Rusesabagina) within the world of human rights discourse embodies. This actor (Rusesabagina through Cheadle) is a simulation of a very basic human rights encounter for an audience who may themselves never be in one as drastic.

For the present discussion of a more complex array of network positions, Gourevitch’s representation of Rusesabagina as one of many Rwandan survivors, albeit one with remarkable courage, contrasts sharply to George’s portrayal of Rusesabagina as a hero of the Rwandan genocide. Each of these works adds to the construction of Rusesabagina’s public identity, as it is composed for global (and foreign) consumption. This construction is clearly in the hands of Gourevitch and George primarily, but it also involves Rusesabagina. After all, he agrees to the interview with Gourevitch, an act which claims his public position on this network, and he meets with Kier Pearson and consults on the film with George, adding a claim of authenticity to the representations which result. Although Gourevitch and George likely have the final say on how to represent Rusesabagina, then, he still plays a significant role in the construction of his public identity. Unlike a lot of human rights crisis survivors in such representations, he will not be further oppressed by either being depicted as a helpless victim or being characterized without his consultation. Indeed, Rusesabagina, in each of these texts, is shown to be acting resourcefully in the face of insurmountable odds, and is taking part in his own representation, made in terms of the humanist ethos of the discourse network presenting him as a hero.

By comparing these two representations of Rusesabagina, the presence of network identities, as I described them in Chapter Four, can be discerned to be at play, yielding in actuality more than one Rusesabagina on the global stage. In each of these texts, Rusesabagina emerges with two related, but different, public identities in a global discourse network. In Gourevitch’s text, he is a Rwandan survivor (and hence, in humanist ideology, a kind of hero), while in George’s film, he is an overt Rwandan hero. In both, however, he is portrayed, analyzed, and meant to be representative, not just as a

Rwandan (a national victim or hero), but a human being (a person – survivor or savior – regardless of nationality). These two additional identities are, of course, grafted onto his basic network identity of genocide survivor, perhaps at the cost of his identity as one particular kind of African national citizen, or as an employee in a certain kind of business.

That is, by being involved in the genocide at all, Rusesabagina is already implicated in the network, and so his identity becomes marked on it by Gourevitch's and George's uses of the labels available for Rusesabagina's position – two different versions of "hero," each dependent on its own medium, to at least some degree. In this sense, he has become an object of the discourse. However, this marking of identity need not be considered as an imposition necessarily. These labels of identity may open possibilities for more powerful kinds of speaking positions. For example, it is not until he is singled out by Gourevitch and George that Rusesabagina begins to form an individual identity that moves him from *object-identity created by the discourse and the network* into potential agent. In appearing in the singular out of a mass of equivalent victims, he transforms from being one of the statistics to an individual, a human face with family, history, personality, and, most importantly, a voice, at least of sorts. He becomes a subject of the discourse, authorized to speak for its ethics, in agreeing to be the face of its ideology (a decision that then MSF President James Orbinski who delivered the Nobel Peace Prize Lecture discussed in Chapter Five also did, albeit from a different starting position and to different effect, given his official role).

The collection of network identities attached to, or constructed about, Rusesabagina do not stop at those foregrounded by Gourevitch and George. The most recent incarnation of Rusesabagina's identity construction appears in his autobiography, *An Ordinary Man* (2006), co-authored with U.S. writer Tom Zoellner. In this version, as the book title emphatically declares, Rusesabagina is not (or not only) a remarkable Rwandan survivor or hero, but an average person. He is not a hero acting extraordinarily, heroically. Rather, he is just a human being, behaving ordinarily, humanly. This difference is again probably attributable to an effect of media: an autobiography is the

story of an individual. But the story of an individual within a discourse based on an ideology of humanism will require a specific speaking position that equates one subject on the network with all subjects, one human is at heart the same as all humans and should treat each other in the same way that he or she would treat his or herself. As Rusesabagina writes in his introduction to *An Ordinary Man*, “I am nothing more or less than a hotel manager...My job did not change in the genocide...I did what I believed to be the ordinary things that an ordinary man would do. I said no to outrageous actions the way I thought that anybody would, and it still mystifies me that so many others could say yes” (xvi). With this autobiography, then, Rusesabagina takes on an *everyman* identity and comes to represent the universal, as befits the ideological premise of a humanist discourse. In this sense, moreover, the construction of Rusesabagina’s public identity can be observed: this autobiography harkens back to Gourevitch’s quieter version of the man, albeit with a primary focus on Rusesabagina, and tames George’s heroic portrayal of him. If Gourevitch painted Rusesabagina as a local survivor among many, and George captured him as a lone hero in a sea of evil, then, Rusesabagina depicts himself as a universal everyman. He is purportedly no different from you and me.¹⁴³

The trajectory (or rather accumulation) of network identities in these three texts has been from one of many local or national survivors, to a singular global hero and now to a universal everyman. It represents a globalizing move of a very specific trajectory: it seems to be a very familiar example of how a local *object* of such a discourse achieves a global subject position within the ethos of the discourse network. Yet again, the situation may be more complicated than it first appears.

This latest construction of Rusesabagina’s public identity, as an autobiography, is purportedly and by definition of Rusesabagina’s own making, his own claiming of a subject position vis-à-vis his personal identity. The textual reality, however, makes this

¹⁴³ Despite these representational differences among the texts, there is across them a similar concern with the question of humanity. Like Gourevitch and George, Rusesabagina uses his figure and his actions, through his narrative, as a means through which to examine the meaning of being human and being humane.

claim more difficult: the link between subject and autobiography may not be as direct. For instance, this speech act is not the exact equivalent of an MSF official speaking to an audience of his own experience (the case study in Chapter Five). Rather, as a printed book and one that emerges after other books and films have told a similar story, it is a form of communication wherein more layers of mediation intrude between the sender and the receiver. There are more degrees of mediation in this printed book than for MSF's speech (especially when first delivered in person by Orbinski). More importantly, there is the matter of the circumstances that led to Rusesabagina writing his autobiography. To compare Rusesabagina's speech act to Orbinski's again, what a President of an international NGO and thus official spokesperson for an ethos can say will be quite different from what a genocide survivor who comes to write his autobiography largely because other actors have recognized his story as worth telling can write. In the former, MSF already has the authority to speak in human rights terms and be taken seriously: in the latter, Rusesabagina is granted that authority only when he is recognized by other network actors.

Some of the limits on the resulting speech act may seem quite conventional. Since Rusesabagina co-writes with Zoellner, for example, some may question how much of this autobiography is truly autobiographical. That is, in terms of authorship, how much of this text is actually conceived and written by Rusesabagina. And, in terms of authenticity, how much of this story is factually accurate or historically true. At least since the Rigoberta Menchú controversy discussed briefly in Chapter Five, such issues of authorship and authenticity overshadow all narratives by human rights or humanitarian crisis survivors that claim the status of autobiography.

While such questions are important, they are however not integral to my concerns here, nor do they speak to the point of discerning what a global discourse network might *do*, when it enables such stories to be debated as "accurate" or "credible." Although I am interested in how human rights survivors like Rusesabagina use the discourse, a network model *predicts* that they do not use it entirely on their own (just as even an MSF spokesman was not entirely free to innovate in an official situation). In fact, if discourse

functions as a network, it is exactly in keeping with a global network model that these actors use the discourse in collaboration with other actors, in different places, and with different national claims to speaking positions. Thus, that Zoellner co-writes Rusesabagina's autobiography actually precisely exemplifies the idea proposed here that this discourse functions globally and as a network. They both share knowledge of what kinds of stories the network will sustain. Another consideration thus also needs to be added to the preliminary characterization of a global discourse network presented in Part One: such a network also functions within the constraints of certain media (with media here defined not only as "written text versus film text," but also as different genres within textual media). I will turn to this issue of media and genre when discussing network conventions later in this chapter.

What is more important for my project, then, is not the purity of authorship or the levels of authenticity in Rusesabagina's autobiography, but the very lack of a single author and its very layers of artifice that are enacted within a discourse network as part of its *real* (in the Lacanian sense) – the larger set of power nodes and types of agency to which that discourse provides access.¹⁴⁴ That is, I am more interested in how and why Rusesabagina teams up with Zoellner, and how and why *An Ordinary Man* consciously constructs Rusesabagina's identity (as author and protagonist) and his story in the way it does. Such collaboration and artifice, often considered liabilities to individual expression and voice in some autobiographies by some purist standards, I see, by pragmatic standards, as assets for granting a kind of agency to life narratives by human rights survivors aimed at global audiences. Here are moments when a discourse network offers access to power other than that actualized locally.

¹⁴⁴ In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), Jacques Lacan identifies three orders that structure human existence: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. The real is pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic: it is that which resists representation, because it loses its "reality" once it is symbolized (made conscious) through language (Loos). The symbolic serves to organize the subject: it is associated with language, words, and writing (Loos). The imaginary aligns with the formation of the ego, which mediates the subject between the internal and external world (Loos).

As I will suggest in the next section of this chapter, it may be through such cooperation with other network actors and adoption of the various discursive practices localized in the network that human rights survivors may be creating for themselves not just a voice but an audience on the global stage: they seem to corner full positions as agents of epistemological consciousness-raising. By inserting themselves as actors into the network, they may potentially claim and exercise what I described in Chapter Three as network power. Although this claiming of network power may unfold at first in highly scripted situations, it might develop later in more independent ways.

Network Power: Generating and Regenerating Identities, Texts, Actors, and the Network

The concept and mechanisms of network power can be better understood by tracing how Rusesabagina comes to hold and exert a kind of global presence and influence once he becomes an actor in a global discourse network. That is, once he becomes a name recognizable across a set of texts as these that travel within a global space of human rights discourse. Although his interview with Gourevitch certainly brought his story to attention outside of Rwanda, it was undoubtedly the film *Hotel Rwanda* that truly launched Rusesabagina into the international spotlight. With this film, he came to be known and counted globally as an individual survivor and a hero. This recognition is not surprising, given the formation of film as an international medium. Virtually overnight in the United States, and arguably over the next two years in the rest of the world, he became known as “an African hero” (George, *Hotel Rwanda: Bringing the True Story*). The film was released in almost forty countries, from Austria to the United Arab Emirates, opening first at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2004 and, most recently, as a TV premiere in Argentina in May 2007 (“Release Dates”). On opening weekend alone, the film brought in about USD100,000 in the U.S box office, around EUR82,000 in Italy, and almost EUR40,000 in the Netherlands (“Box Office”). U.S. weekend ticket sales continued to grow, reaching over USD2.3 million in February 2005 (“Box Office”). These are relatively successful sales figures for a film about a man,

a country, and an event that few people outside of Africa would have heard of or been interested in. After all, a story set during a genocide, however heroically and hopefully told, is not most people's idea of an entertaining night out at the movies.

Since the release of the film, Rusesabagina, as the “real life hero of *Hotel Rwanda*,” has become somewhat of a celebrity, especially in the United States (George, *Hotel Rwanda: Bringing the True Story*). For one, he has received several awards including the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom and the U.S. National Civil Rights Museum's Freedom Award, both in 2005 (Rusesabagina and Zoellner). As the titles of these awards suggest, Rusesabagina has come to be acknowledged officially, not so much as a *local or national* hero of the Rwandan genocide (these are not Rwandan- or Kigali-based awards but American honors), but as a *global* defender of *universal* human freedom and a supranational protector of *universal* human rights. Each of these awards represents a kind of status promotion within the discourse toward positions with more agency *within the ideology and discourse of human rights*. Once Rusesabagina is a full participant, as subject and actor, in that discourse, he seems to accrue a kind of ability to use his access to human rights understanding in other situations. After all, what else explains the rationale for a Rwandan being conferred an American award? Setting aside the political move of assuaging U.S. guilt for not intervening during the genocide, or the American Right's way (President George W. Bush presented the award in 2005) to highlight the Left's failure (President Bill Clinton refused to take action in 1994), one cannot help but wonder what else but a recognition of Rusesabagina as a global being, a universal human, rather than a national citizen, a Rwandan, would justify these very American honors. (From the other side, such awards have been given that did *not* authorize their recipients as successfully. The candidates in question must fit the definition of subject and agent in the discourse for its power to be accessible to them. And Rusesabagina has done this exceptionally well.)

I raise this point not to argue that Rusesabagina does not deserve these awards, but to highlight the supranational nature of these honors and how they reveal the power of globalization in discourse. Now a member of a new supranational multitude, he is

being recognized outside of Rwanda as more than a Rwandan – perhaps even as a paradigmatic “human” of human rights discourse. Indeed, considering Rusesabagina’s criticism of President Kagame in Kigali, it would be surprising if he received similar accolades from his own country. Moreover, some Rwandans may no longer consider him “Rwandan” because he is removed from their national sphere, even as they may be forced, however begrudgingly, to acknowledge his new status. Rather, these U.S.-based awards suggest how a network has the power to confer a form of global identity and influence to its subjects, a transfer of his role as national subject into something else. Once Rusesabagina entered a global discourse network as a distinct subject of the discourse through Gourevitch’s and George’s works, he seems to have developed global recognition and supranational status, and hence a new kind of agent position. He became known as someone that mattered on the global stage, and not just as someone that mattered as a Rwandan national but as a supranational person, in a global network. His emergence in the network as a global discourse subject grants him this supranational presence and influence. This globalizing effect on an individual’s identity and power is but one instance of network power at work.

Other examples of network power emerge when one considers how else Rusesabagina’s identity and power (primarily outside of Rwanda) has changed since *Hotel Rwanda*. One significant change is that Rusesabagina has become a so-called motivational public speaker. He is especially popular in the U.S. university circuit, always speaking to fully packed halls of enthusiastic audience members (“Rave Reviews”). He is one of the speakers available on the American Program Bureau’s roster of speakers, along with world leaders like Desmond Tutu and celebrity figures like Ellen DeGeneres (“American Program Bureau”). In his speeches, he often talks not only of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, but also of the widows and orphans in Rwanda over a decade later, and of the killings taking place in present-day Darfur, Sudan. In his new role as public speaker for Rwanda and Africa, on platforms outside of Rwanda, Rusesabagina has come to be recognized publicly as not just a Rwandan survivor or hero, as Gourevitch’s and George’s works portray respectively, but also as a *supranational* public

figure speaking on *global* issues associated with humanitarianism and human rights, even those outside of his direct experience. Although he will always be remembered as a Rwandan genocide survivor and hero (indeed that is his claim to fame), he seems to be increasingly seen as a spokesperson for humanity. He now speaks first as a human being for other human beings, on the basis of a human rights discourse ideology. He no longer speaks primarily as a Rwandan for other Rwandans, on the basis of personal experience.

This new role of global public speaker emphasizes my point above that being in a global discourse network seems to confer upon its subjects a kind of supranational identity and power. They come to be known not necessarily by their individual nationality but by their universal humanity, or at least, the latter becomes more important than the former. Although Rusesabagina is nominally sought after in these lectures as a Rwandan, a representative of a specifically African catastrophe, he is ultimately received at them as more than just Rwandan. He seems to have been adopted by his non-Rwandan human rights audiences as one of them, a member of a human community where nationality apparently bows to humanity.

More importantly, such situations suggest that a global discourse network may be granting its subjects new identities and powers. Although Rusesabagina entered the network as a humanitarian crisis survivor and hero, he has taken on the presence and influence of a supranational public speaker. His inclusion into the discourse as a subject thus appears to be increasing his power as an actor in the network. He is now no longer just a survivor worthy of an interview or a film, or a hero deserving of an award, he is a public speaker authorized to deliver lectures on Rwanda, Africa, and beyond. This creation of new identities and power is another example of network power at work.

While his subject position may have been transformed to a supranational one, his position as a national subject has been modified, as well. This change is probably in reaction to his success in speaking/ acting in his new globalized position of agency, one that ultimately must impact his home nation, as well. Since *Hotel Rwanda*, Rusesabagina has also come to play the part of a pundit of Rwandan politics and international affairs -- an identity that is probably disjunctive with his prior Rwandan identity as national

subject. After the genocide, many journalists interviewed him about the story of the Hotel des Mille Collines (“A Message for Peace”). They even contacted him when he moved to Belgium in 1996 (“A Message for Peace”).

After the film, however, foreign journalists have repeatedly sought him out, not only to tell the story of Rwanda’s past, but also to comment on the country’s present and possible future in the context of the Great Lakes region specifically, and of Africa and international politics generally. Although he has lived in Brussels since 1996, and only made brief sojourns to Rwanda since his move, U.S. journalists like Stephen Kinzer of *The New York Review of Books* and Julia Klein of *Mother Jones*, for example, still have interviewed Rusesabagina to solicit his views on the current state of politics in Rwanda and the country’s place in the world.

Again, as with his public lectures, these news media interviews support my point that being a part of the network seems to confer global identity and power. Although Rusesabagina may have first risen to international public attention as a Rwandan hero and a humanitarian, he has come to be branded officially and taken seriously as a spokesperson for not just Rwandan but also African politics and international affairs. And, like his public lectures too, the attention from the international press bolsters my claim that being in the network creates new identities and power for its subjects. Rusesabagina can now add political pundit to his growing list of new-found identities and power as survivor, hero, and public speaker. And he can be assured that his speech acts, be they moral or political, private or public, are received with a level of weight and a degree of authority they would not have carried before. It is beyond the scope of this analysis to see whether that authority carries over into his redefined role as national subject, as well, but that would not be unthinkable, although that redefined role would open up an interesting case of the *limits* on globalized subject power, when confronted with a national subject identity. At home in Rwanda, it is unlikely that a hotel manager would appear as a legitimate commentator on anything more political than tourism and its economics.

Most significantly for the present, however, this news media interest suggests that being in the network opens for its subjects access to other intersecting power circuits, or other media within these circuits, like the international press. Once an individual is seen and heard on it, he or she can wander to other nodes and circuits, as one of Braidotti's nomadic subjects. A decade ago, no one outside of Rwanda had even heard of the man, and Rusesabagina would have been hard pressed to secure any face time with the international news media. Now, established newsmagazines call on him, asking him to comment, not so much on his past role in the genocide, but on the future of Rwandan and African politics. Some even seem to be offering him easy publicity by suggesting in their articles that he may return to Rwanda and run for President in the 2010 elections (Kinzer). His incorporation into the network as a subject then seems to be magnifying his power (at least one kind of power) as an actor not just within the circuit, but in other interlocking power circuits, even as it sets very specific limits to his use of those positions. Nonetheless, Rusesabagina's burgeoning set of network identities and power expands his presence and influence beyond his primary arena of human rights or humanitarian affairs into other fields like state politics and the news media, at least on a global staging of those identities, if not back in their possible national contexts. This extension of network identities and power into other power circuits is yet another instance of network power.

As I noted earlier in this project, a global network, like any power circuit, tends to form or accrue institutional forms when consolidating its power (and potentially ossifying it). After *Hotel Rwanda*, then, it is not surprising that Rusesabagina has also become something of a philanthropist-activist within the terms most valorized, most intelligible, on this network of human rights discourse. In 2005, he formed the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, an organization that provides financial assistance to the orphans and women in post-genocide Rwanda. The foundation acts as a conduit between Rwandan recipients and international donors. Donors contribute their funds to the foundation, which in turn decides which local groups in Rwanda will receive the

money and for what purposes.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, the foundation has more supranational goals. It seeks to assist other African nations experiencing violent conflicts.¹⁴⁶ To date, however, the foundation has only called attention to the mass killings in the Darfur region of Sudan.¹⁴⁷

Whatever the foundation's successes or failures over the long term, however selfless or self-serving Rusesabagina's intentions may be for the foundation, there is little doubt that the organization would never have existed if not for *Hotel Rwanda*. Here, the specific case of Rusesabagina's actions during the genocide, magnified by the discourse especially in George's speech act, and working in tandem with individual acts of will, summoned the foundation into existence. Rusesabagina himself admits that he capitalized on the attention the film gave to him and Rwanda to start the foundation (Klein).¹⁴⁸ The establishment of this foundation thus further supports my point about how being in a global discourse network grants its subjects new and supranational identities and power. Here appear the moments when the *globalization* aspect of the network perhaps begins to overtake the ideology of the specific global network in which an individual agent was

¹⁴⁵ The first part of the foundation's mission statement reads, "The Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation (HRRF) provides support, care, and assistance to children orphaned by, and women abused during, the genocide in Rwanda. HRRF provides funding to reputable organizations to meet specific educational, vocational, mental health, medical and other social needs of identified orphans and women refugees" ("Mission Statement").

¹⁴⁶ The second part of the foundation's mission statement states, "In conjunction with supporting the victims of genocide in the Republic of Rwanda, HRRF also strives to provide assistance to other African nations in conflict. Our mission is to eliminate the conditions and climate that lead to instances of hatred and genocide" ("Mission Statement").

¹⁴⁷ Generally, it is difficult to tell just what impact this foundation actually has. Its website offers no information on the organizational structure, administrative system, partner agencies, or financial records of its workings.

¹⁴⁸ In his interview with *Mother Jones*? Julia Klein, Rusesabagina states, "When *Hotel Rwanda* came out, it was then or never to create a foundation to help educate those kids and many others. The genocide left us with half a million orphans, and on top of that, AIDS keeps adding more and more. And all those kids need education. They need medical care and psychological solace. Someone, somewhere, has got to care for them."

created. Rusesabagina can now claim not only the title of foundation president but also the public presence and influence that comes with heading such an organization. More importantly, the creation of this foundation suggests that the network confers upon its actors the capacity to generate and regenerate themselves and the circuit by introducing new entities (in this case, institutions). With this foundation, Rusesabagina has, in effect, produced a potentially limitless version of himself – not of his personal identity, but of the identity he has on the network as a survivor-hero, albeit in a specifically Rwandan mode. By channeling his public identity and power into the form of an organization, he has made himself present everywhere without having to be physically present anywhere. The foundation can act even though Rusesabagina is unavailable to do so in person. If over the long term it becomes an established organization, it could even outlive Rusesabagina himself, acting despite its founder's absence. This generation and regeneration of the circuit and its actors is one more instance of network power.

Last, but not least, another significant effect of *Hotel Rwanda* on Rusesabagina's life is that he has written and published the autobiography that I discussed in the first section of this chapter. The publication of *An Ordinary Man*, of course, bolsters my claim that being in a network bestows its subjects new identities and power. With this autobiography, Rusesabagina has become, if not a professional author, at least a published writer, thereby adding another network identity to his growing collection. The book also provides evidence of Rusesabagina's ever-expanding network power (or at least adds the nodes associated with "author" to his possible positions on it, in another nomadic move). Without his initial appearance in the network through Gourevitch's book and especially George's film, and the supranational presence and influence that followed, *An Ordinary Man* might never have been published, much less as an autobiography.

The book's cover demonstrates how the publishers are evidently capitalizing on Rusesabagina's celebrity-like status and *Hotel Rwanda*'s popularity. It reads: "An Ordinary Man/ an Autobiography/ Paul Rusesabagina/ who inspired the film/ Hotel Rwanda/ with Tom Zoellner" (Rusesabagina and Zoellner). The term "Hotel Rwanda" is clearly meant to trigger interest in the book by hitching it to the movie, while the phrases,

“an autobiography” and “who inspired the film,” are certainly intended to call attention to the first-person, tell-all, appeal of an autobiography. If *Hotel Rwanda* gave the viewer Rusesabagina’s story through George’s eyes (Rusesabagina only inspired the film, and even if he served as a film consultant, he did not after all produce, direct, or act in it himself), then in this *autobiography*, the reader will encounter Rusesabagina’s story directly, as he sees it, and in “his own words,” albeit with the help of Zoellner. At least, this is the sales pitch the book cover hawks.

More significantly, the publication of this book suggests that being in a network conveys to its subjects the power to produce and reproduce its discourse, thereby generating and regenerating the network, as an individual story becomes told in a way that suggests it might be reproduced. *An Ordinary Man* is, in a way, a product of earlier textual incarnations of Rusesabagina’s story in Gourevitch’s *We Wish To Inform You* and George’s *Hotel Rwanda*, and its message is that any human might do the same, if circumstance allowed. These earlier texts begot this recent one, and each, carries bits and pieces of each other, literally and figuratively, and they might generate further ones, as others emulate Rusesabagina. Like Gourevitch who, once he heard of Rusesabagina’s story, interviewed the man because he wanted to know “what had made Paul strong,” *Hotel Rwanda*’s broadcast of Rusesabagina’s extraordinary courage seems to have solicited a strong public interest in a behind-the-scenes look at Rusesabagina himself (Gourevitch 141). Or at least this is what the editors at Viking, of the Penguin Group, appeared to believe, since they took it upon themselves to publish the book. This production and reproduction of the network through its discourse is yet another example of network power, this time allowing the object of one book to become the subject of another, as he writes his own story which at first had only been told by others.

What may be even more important about this book publication is that *An Ordinary Man* was now finally conceived and published as an autobiography, rather than a novel or a history. Although Rusesabagina would have had the same interesting story to tell after his experience in 1999, he would probably not have been able to publish it as an autobiography with the likes of Viking Press on his own. It is only through the network

identity and power conferred to him by his inclusion as a subject through Gourevitch and George that he garners the clout to carry off such a publishing feat. While Rusesabagina would not likely be deemed important enough, not a sufficiently authorized and powerful figure, by himself to deserve an autobiography before, once he becomes an influential presence in the discourse network, he was considered worthy not just in terms of his story (as is captured in Gourevitch and George), but in terms of himself as a storyteller. Thus, although it took a while, network power eventually brought Rusesabagina's story around not only to being heard by others. It also brought it around from being told of and through others to being told from and as the man himself, and for it to emerge as a story on the global network to reinforce the ideology of humanism and to create an institution on the global level.

Granted, although survivor stories like Rusesabagina's may be marketed as autobiographies or first-person memoirs, they are often co-authored or heavily edited. The survivors therefore may not be the main writers, or the principal storytellers, or have more control over what and how to tell their stories. There remains, of course, the potential for misrepresentation, exploitation, and victimization, which I will describe in the following section. Yet, to a degree, whether they do tell their stories on their own or not almost matters less from the perspective I am offering here than that they are now considered important enough to speak and be heard in their own person and their own voice, rather than through other people and other voices.

There is, moreover, also the possibility that the collaboration and communication between the survivor and the co-writer or editor will not only produce a profound representation that will activate its readers but also empower survivor and collaborator alike. This circular and expanding development of individual power is perhaps the most productive example of network power at work, especially for human rights crisis survivors who often first emerge in the network as discourse objects through the representations by more powerful actors than themselves. Through the process of spiraling, expanding network identity and power toward the global, they can become discourse subjects and network actors in the network and beyond, albeit with distinct

limitations *that have little to do with their claims as national subjects if they remain in the national space*. As actors in the global network, however, they are not simply singular subjects with their individual capacity to act from all the different subject positions of their various network identities. Rather, they are also a part of a potential multitude of subjects with multiple modes of collective agency.

Network Conventions: Discursive and Social Practices of Production, Circulation, and Consumption¹⁴⁹

Despite these advantages of network identities and network power, the fact that human rights discourse seems to be globalizing through a network also brings disadvantages, as can be seen in this comparatively short afterlife of Rusesabagina's tale. The very mechanisms that might elevate human rights crisis survivors from discourse objects to discourse subjects and network actors might also prevent them from speaking freely and being heard widely, if at all. Unlike an international NGO like MSF with the resources and access to produce, circulate, and control its own use of human rights discourse, human rights crisis survivors like Rusesabagina have to rely on the resources and access provided by other network actors like NGOs and other power circuits like the news media. Such other entities affect not only the production and circulation of stories like Rusesabagina's – that it is told at all, how it is told, to whom and for what purpose, and in what context. They also influence its consumption – how it is received and by whom. Most of these matters are virtually out of the hands of many human rights crisis survivors.

¹⁴⁹ I have written a more precise characterization of the conventions of genre (literary journalism, docudrama, and autobiography), media (printed book and feature film), and industry (news reporting, Hollywood filmmaking, and human rights industry storytelling) as they pertain to Rusesabagina's story in Gourevitch's non-fiction book, George's film, and Rusesabagina and Zoellner's autobiography in an unpublished manuscript "Network Identity, Power, and Conventions: How Human Rights Crisis Survivors Might Speak and Be Heard on a Global Level." This article outlines how each of these texts draw from the conventions of their respective genres, media, and industries to make Rusesabagina's story legible (recognizable) for their respective audiences.

It is worth, however, considering precisely what limitations and possibilities emerge when a national subject (or almost an object of a national discourse) takes a position in this kind of discourse web. One difficulty human rights crisis survivors face when contending with a global network system is emerging in the circuits at all, even as an object of the discourse. Without sufficient resources (technology, knowledge, language ability, access to global channels of communication), human rights crisis survivors depend heavily on global media organizations to produce and circulate their stories. Thus the ability of human rights crises survivors to publicize their stories lies at the mercy of what these organizations – national, international, and global – decide will be the crisis for the day and who will be the victim of the week. The global communications web that these media corporations dominate represents one of the most powerful circuits that intersects with a global discourse network of human rights. These corporate giants are not only media institutions, they are discourse circuits in their own right with their own ethos, as I intimated above.

One complaint about this media oligopoly situation is familiar. Since the handful of big media conglomerates (Viacom, AOL/TW, Disney, Clear Channel, and News Corp) tightly controls the content of their various companies' productions, it is no surprise that many human rights crises go unreported (Lessig 164). According to MSF-USA, the top most underreported crises in 2006 were emergencies in Somalia, Central African Republic, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Haiti, Central India, tuberculosis, and malnutrition ("Top Ten").¹⁵⁰ How many times have any one of these emergencies appeared on the evening news on television or in the morning newspapers? Clearly, many crisis fall outside the interest of the global media corporations and thus slide below the radar of the global media channels.

¹⁵⁰ MSF-USA has published an annual report on the top ten most underreported humanitarian stories in the world since 1998. In 2004, Reuters' AlertNet produced their own list of top ten "forgotten emergencies" including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Sudan, AIDS, West Africa (Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone), Colombia, Chechnya, Haiti, Nepal, and tuberculosis ("Factsheet: Alertnet").

The reasons for such “underreporting” are nothing new. They involve not just top-down media control, but also reporting conventions and audience expectations. As United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland observes in an interview with *Columbia Journalism Review* reporter Mariah Blake, not all humanitarian crises are created equal in the eyes of the press. Egeland explains that the press often avoid reporting on some emergencies because the crisis is endless, or because the situation is too complex (Blake 20-21).¹⁵¹ He adds that audience expectations also influence press coverage. Comparing the U.S. press silence on Uganda and the DRC to the press and publicity enjoyed by Darfur, the most recent African crisis to have taken hold of the U.S. public, he explains that stories about Uganda and the DRC are overlooked because they are almost too irrational for what the Western media believes its audience can (or wants to) accept (Blake 21).¹⁵² Thus, the (in)ability to coincide with the limited interests of the global media companies, the rigid conventions of press coverage, and the media’s preconceptions of audience expectations are one set of production and circulation problems human rights crisis survivors have to confront when faced with a global network system.

One must be careful not to attribute all the affects of globalization to the media, however. These restrictive criteria arise not only in the media industry, but in the human rights and humanitarian NGO fields, as well. Besides the news media, human rights

¹⁵¹ Comparing the flood of press interest and international public support for the victims of the 2003 tsunami in Southeast Asia to the dearth of media coverage and international public concern for the victims of conflict in Uganda and the DRC, Egeland states, “Number one, they’re in an endless cycle of misery and people *do not like* endless cycles. Number two, it’s not so clear who’s the good and the bad as it may be with the tsunami. Nature is bad, people are good, and aid workers succeed. It’s a good story to tell. In Uganda it’s incomprehensible terror carried out by an elusive rebel force that nobody knows. In eastern Congo, it’s even murkier. It’s not just one rebel movement, it’s twenty different armed groups” (Blake 20-21).

¹⁵² Egeland states about complex conflicts like those in Uganda and the DRC, “The challenge we have is exactly this: it’s a more complicated story to tell. Why is there a rebel movement killing it’s own people? Who’s behind it? The Western media want a story that is rational to Western minds. And this is not a rational story” (Blake 21).

survivors often rely on human rights and humanitarian organizations for the means and mediums to produce and circulate their stories among other communities, particularly those more skeptical of the electronic media under corporate control. These organizations represent key players in a global discourse network of human rights as realized in new kinds of multitudes. As with the news media, however, these NGOs have their own set of interests, conventions, and preconceptions of audience expectations that often determine which of the abused are championed and which of the abusers are condemned.

For instance, the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), one of the most prominent global human rights organizations, has 27 categories under “Global Issues,” where it classifies the key human rights issues in the world today (“Global Issues”).¹⁵³ Although these categories seem broadly conceived, human rights crises that fit neatly into one of these 27 categories will likely stand a better chance of having their stories heard and their crises campaigned against than those which fit poorly. This limitation may be a practical rather than a policy matter, but its power effects are undeniable, as its underlying idea acquires an administrative structure. HRW has fairly established conventions and trained staff members (researchers, translators, source contacts, lawyers, advisors, consultants, project developers, administrators, and assistants) in place to handle crises related to these 27 categories. They may not have time or people ready to represent a misfit violation until it becomes big enough to warrant a category of its own. Whatever the reasons, the (in)capacity to comply with the chosen crisis categories of human rights and humanitarian NGOs are another kind of norm-based challenge human rights crisis survivors cope with when trying to produce and circulate their stories in a networked system. No matter how broad an institution seems, therefore, it, too, will limit the subjects and agent positions that it sponsors.

¹⁵³ HRW’s “Global Issues” categories include traditional themes such as arms, labor and human rights, press freedom, and religious freedom. It also includes more contemporary human rights issues such as AIDS and human rights, corporations and human rights, free expression on the Internet, and lesbian and gay rights.

Even if a particular crisis is taken up by the news media network or by the NGO industry, it still faces another type of network convention – the codes of crisis storytelling in the news media and in the human rights field, the specific discourse effects of these media, their ethos. This set of network practices (discursive and social practices) affects not just the production and circulation, but also the consumption, of the crisis narrative. Jonathan Benthall, in *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (1993), articulates the recipe for telling disaster relief stories in the news media, while David Kennedy, in *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (2004), describes the code for telling crisis narratives in the human rights and humanitarian fields. Borrowing from Vladimir Propp’s systematic analysis of the stock characters that make up traditional fairy tales in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958), Benthall argues that the television news media model disaster relief stories after fairy tales with traveling heroes (aid workers) who with the help of dispatchers (foreign reporters), donors (governments), and princesses (philanthropists) who equip them with magical agents (technology) or magical helpers (volunteers) ultimately succeed in their quests to defeat the villain (oppressive state government, violent rebel armies) or eliminate the lack (drought, hunger, healthcare, education, development) or misfortune (conflict, massacre, rape, slavery) (188-91).¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Kennedy maintains that those in the human rights industry frame human rights crisis stories as dramas where people are “passive and innocent” victims, “abnormal” violators, “heroic” human rights professionals, or “ambivalent” bystanders (*The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14).¹⁵⁵

As with HRW’s categories for human rights issues, although these storytelling codes are fairly generic, crisis survivors whose stories fit easily into them will likely find

¹⁵⁴ For a summary of Benthall’s Propp-derived disaster relief story recipe, see Table Four in Appendix Two.

¹⁵⁵ Kennedy writes, “The human rights vocabulary makes us think of evil as a social machine, a theater of roles, in which people are “victims,” “violators,” and “bystanders.” At its most effective, human rights portrays victims as passive and innocent, violators as abnormal, and human rights professionals as heroic. Only the bystanders are figured in ambivalent or uncertain terms” (*The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14).

their crises more straightforwardly recognized and accepted (read: heard and attended to) than those whose tales do not. This selective storytelling is, paradoxically, the best-case scenario: the story with the best fit gets the most power from its exposure and entrance into the broader framework of discourse. What may also happen and may be less desirable is that, if the crisis stories must be told, the news media or human rights industry force them to fit the storytelling patterns whether they do or not. In such situations, complexities within crises are simplified, critical differences between crises participants are blurred, vital historical precedents are overlooked, because these industries refuse to find or use other ways to tell crisis stories. These storytelling conventions with which the news media (a crucial related power circuit) and the human rights and humanitarian NGOs (a key group of network entities) restrain crisis stories is one more type of network convention that limits the production and circulation of stories by human rights crisis survivors in a network framework.

Moreover, because the news media and the human rights industries typically (mis)represent crisis stories in this way, the audience may easily misunderstand the crisis – its causes and its developments. As such, they might take misplaced actions to aid or abet the emergency, and have unrealistic expectations for the outcome of their actions. As Benthall and Kennedy argue, since most crises are depicted in this pedantic and generic way (Benthall’s fairy-tale model and Kennedy’s four-character-drama formula), the audience commonly expects a particular type of ending to the story. For Benthall’s fairy-tale model that plays out in the news media, the plot can only end happily. The hero must conquer the villain or reverse the lack or misfortune and all must be well again.¹⁵⁶ For Kennedy’s four-character-drama formula that runs in the human rights field, the play can only close with hope. If certain steps that the organization proposes are taken, then goodness must ultimately triumph over evil. The fiction of these storytelling formulas perpetuate the audience’s expectations (or fantasy) that all’s well that ends well. These

¹⁵⁶ As Benthall observes, “Fairy tales, as everyone knows, have to have a happy ending. The agencies try to provide this, especially in their annual reports to donors and staff, with a favoured alternative to the image of distress: the image of gratitude” (189).

storytelling conventions for crisis stories in the news media and the human rights industries that predetermine the audience's reception (action and expectation) of the stories are one important network convention that influences the consumption of human rights crisis survivor narratives.

As scholars like Benthall and Kennedy bring attention to such network conventions, especially in crisis stories told by outsiders like the news media and the aid or activist fields, these industries have turned increasingly to using human rights crisis survivor life narratives like memoirs, autobiographies, and testimonies.¹⁵⁷ Instead of telling the crisis stories for the survivors, these media industries ask the survivors to, purportedly, tell “their own” stories in, supposedly, “their own” voices. Their premise for using survivor stories is that these life narratives will, presumably, be a more authentic representation of the crisis than that provided through a foreign correspondent or an expatriate aid worker. While this move purports to rectify the problem of reductive storytelling conventions in these industries, this may not really be the case. Even life narratives like memoirs, autobiographies, and testimonies have their own storytelling codes. And, when they are channeled through the news media and human rights industries, these life narratives may be influenced by the same codes the industries use to produce and circulate their own stories. This circumstance calls into question almost any premise of authenticity in story-telling within a discourse network, because compliance with conventions will *always* be among the conditions for the possibility of being heard. Claims of authenticity, like claims for the *inauthenticity* of media stories, thus depends on

¹⁵⁷ Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, in *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (2004), describe just how much crisis participant life narratives have come to dominate human rights activism. They identify various forms and venues of life narratives in the human rights field – from oral statements in fact-finding activities in the field to print, visual, and aural texts in human rights NGO handbooks and websites; from legal testimonies in human rights commissions and tribunals to more poetic renditions in rock concerts and literary festivals; and from more bureaucratic accounts like human rights commission reports to more cultural advocacy forms like blogs, photo essays, and video.

an image of communication as resting on individual volition rather than on discourse networks such as I am tracing here.

In the same vein, some scholars have raised the charge that the news media and human rights industries actually re-victimize the survivors when they use the survivors' stories.¹⁵⁸ By asking the survivors to re-count their horrific experiences, these industries effectively make them relive their trauma. And they often expose the survivors to future retaliation or social alienation – the particular challenge of the discourse network of human rights as opposed to a repeat of their public traumas. So even when human rights crisis survivors are privileged for their stories by the ideology underpinning the network, a move that should, in theory, enable them to produce and circulate their stories more easily, they still face, in practice, particular challenges that may prevent them from truly speaking and actually being heard.¹⁵⁹ Such is the situational limitation on the practice of their power. This re-presentation of survivors' stories by the news media and human rights industry, and the re-victimization of the survivors during the process of storytelling, are two more production and circulation problems survivors face in a network system. As I noted in the case of George's film version of Rusesabagina's story in comparison to Gourevitch's book version, limits on some facets of action (here: on what stories can be told, particularly) offer expansions on others (here: the potential to reach beyond the national context and the possibility of agency where there was none).

¹⁵⁸ Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol's *Just Advocacy? Women's Human Rights, Transnational Feminisms, and the Politics of Representation* (2005), as discussed in Chapter Four, is one of the more recent (and yet nuanced) incarnations of the argument that human rights crisis victims are often further victimized by the media and the human rights industries' exploitative uses of their life stories.

¹⁵⁹ To take the parallel example of smaller local NGOs trying to publicize their causes globally, Clifford Bob, in *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (2005), has analyzed the limitations these smaller organizations face in a "global morality market" from larger international NGOs, primarily ones located in the Global North. He observes that these local NGOs often must tailor their stories, their messages, and their marketability to obtain support for their projects, sometimes at the expense of their fundamental aims.

Although the international human rights system of lawyers and activists increasingly accept the authority of and capitalize on the pathos of human rights crisis survivors' stories in their courts and campaigns, this growing use of survivor life narratives also poses particular "consumption problems" that are probably generalizable network effects and limits. For one, the unrelenting use of survivor stories (one more tale of horrific torture, one more account of violent rape, one more picture of brutal murder) can induce, through compassion fatigue, a kind of unproductive apathy rather than any sort of productive sympathy.¹⁶⁰ Suffering from an overload of crisis stories, the audience on the network, whose attention contributes to the network's power effects, may simply refuse to consume (receive or respond to) any more stories. Or their receptiveness and reactions become duller as the number of narratives heaped upon them grows. As a result, survivors now have to manage the audience's jaded and lethargic responses to crisis stories. Suddenly it is not enough to have been tortured; you must be tortured in a novel way. It is not enough to have watched your son die from dehydration; you must also have had all your other children die, as well. The stakes are raised ever higher for these stories to make an impact. In short, if survivors want to have their stories told and heard, and to have these stories help change the conditions of the crisis, they need to have "better" stories to tell.

Additionally, this increased privileging of survivors telling their own stories has brought their authenticity under heightened scrutiny. Recent years have seen allegations of survivors falsifying parts of their narratives. The Rigoberta Menchú controversy discussed briefly in Chapter Five is again perhaps the classic example (Stoll). Such accusations, founded or not, have begun to cast doubt on the credibility of other survivors and their stories. (This development is a predictable network effect, as "traffic" on the network grows and its circuits become occupied.) Consequently, survivors now have to negotiate a rather skeptical, if not altogether hostile, climate for their stories. Today's public seems to demand that survivors be entirely brave, and victims wholly innocent.

¹⁶⁰ Susan Moeller makes this argument of suffering overload in *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death* (1999).

Any trace of human weakness or moral blemish in the survivor that is not ultimately overcome or overlooked by some subsequent show of strength and integrity pollutes the purity of the survivor and the story. The loss of purity seems to signal also the loss of the survivor as a credible storyteller and the story as one worth listening. In other words, the effects of an audience in this network have begun to pressure crisis survivors or victims to be perfect, idealized stereotypes of survivors and victims upon which the network is predicated – the network depends on these very notions of survivors and victims to reproduce itself. As Kennedy observes, this essentialist move, ironically, dehumanizes the very people the human rights industry seeks to humanize because it insists that these survivors not be flawed and err like all humans (or only do so in conventionally prescribed and acceptable ways) (*The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14-15).¹⁶¹ These discursive and social practices (the public’s jadedness and apathy, or skepticism and hostility) within the network are two more consumption conventions that human rights survivors face when trying to have their stories told and heard. Yet this social reaction is not so much (or not always only) a global failure of humanity (although there is some of that), but a specific network effect, a product of this network’s ethos.

Despite these network conventions that challenge human rights crisis survivors in the production, circulation, and consumption of their stories, there are also network patterns that work in their favor. One trend is the tendency for the book publishing industry to print autobiographies and memoirs once a human rights issue reaches critical mass in the general public. That is, the network reproduces itself positively, making space for more stories to be told. Such publication cycles appear to move from nonfiction

¹⁶¹ Kennedy criticizes the tendency for human rights language to idealize its victims, violators, heroes and bystanders, without ever seeing the people they force into these categories as complex human beings. He writes, “However many carefully elaborated ‘rights’ we offer to violators, we –and they – will find it difficult to recover a complex sense of their human possibility and ambivalent experience. Differences among, ‘victims,’ the experience of their particularity and the hope for their creative and surprising self-expression, are erased under the power of an internationally sanctified vocabulary for their self-understanding, self-preservation, and representation as ‘victims’ of human rights abuse” (*The Dark Sides of Virtue* 14-15).

reporting to fiction and life narratives, in a move from a more general and multiple narrative story to a more particular and singular narrative one. The Rwandan genocide is a particularly illuminating example of this pattern as it travels from Gourevitch's nonfiction work in 1994, to George's fictional film in 2004, and finally to Rusesabagina's autobiography in 2006. There have, of course, been several other books (fiction and nonfiction) and films (documentary and fiction) on the Rwandan genocide.¹⁶² But what is interesting is that the number of biographical representations actually seems to increase over time, presumably as the crisis becomes a matter of greater public interest, and even as complaints of compassion fatigue set in. After all, the psychological impacts (of which compassion fatigue is one) imprinted on subjects may not reflect all facets of the network's power. And an equivalent globalizing circuit that was *not* built on a moral ideology like human rights might (or might not) have a different set of psychological impacts.

A keyword search of "Rwanda" and "genocide" on *WorldCat* reveals that, as of July 2, 2007, the total number of records for all kinds of books (nonfiction including biography, and fiction) on the topic decrease as time passes but the number of biography records increase.¹⁶³ The same search run on Amazon.com reveals a similar trend of an

¹⁶² Nonfiction works include Scott Peterson's *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda: A Journalist Reports from the Battlefields of Africa* (2000) and Samantha Power's *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (2002), while fiction books include Andrew Brown's *Inyenzi: A Story of Love and Genocide* (2000) and Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* (2003). Fiction films include Nick Hughes' *100 Days* (2001), Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April* (2005), and Michael Caton-Jones' *Shooting Dogs* (2005). Nonfiction films include Anne Aghion's *Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda* (2002).

¹⁶³ See Table Two in Appendix Two. *WorldCat* includes biographies under their nonfiction category. There are often repeated records for one title in *WorldCat*. A similar search for films shows that *WorldCat* considers all the films made on the Rwandan genocide nonfiction, including obviously fictional recreations like George's *Hotel Rwanda*.

upward swing in biographies and memoirs.¹⁶⁴ Although the nonfiction productions (history, academic, and journalistic books, i.e., books presenting the “facts” of the event) overall dwarf the number of biographies, this upward trend in biographies suggests that human rights survivors may eventually get to tell their own stories to a wider audience once there is sufficient public interest generated about their crisis. This pattern means that individuals may actually gain considerable agency of a certain type (especially of public appearance) even as they accept the constraints of reproducing aspects of the various network systems. Publishers are not likely to support an autobiography or memoir that has no market. But once enough publicity about an issue like child soldiers or an event like a genocide is stirred up by the press and NGOs, editors seem more likely to bring a life narrative by a survivor into the world. Certainly this publication pattern may not comfort human rights survivors facing immediate dangers, but it may console those who hope to prevent current crises from escalating or future emergencies from flaring. This process suggests a chronological impact (over time) or dispersal effect (over place) of an evolving network that too many theories of global power have underplayed or overlooked.

Overall, I think the possibilities for human rights survivors to assert their agency as network actors persist, despite these potential barriers to entry, or perhaps because of these very formulaic yet flexible and permeable parameters of entry. In spite of these primarily limiting network conventions for production, circulation, and consumption of human rights survivor stories, the fact that these traditions are so ingrained in the network and so well known by established network actors may well be their saving grace. These network conventions may actually help survivors who seek to speak and be heard by a global audience because they serve as a kind of how-to-guide, a way in to available subject positions, a way out of a persistent object position.

¹⁶⁴ See Table Three in Appendix Two. Amazon.com separates nonfiction from biographies and memoirs. There are also often repeated records for one title in Amazon.com.

For example, for survivors trying to emerge in the network as discourse subject and eventually as a network actor, the first likely step is to enter the network as a discourse object. They must somehow include their crisis in the network by talking or working with a foreign correspondent, a human rights activist, or a humanitarian worker. For survivors already in the network as a discourse object, the next step is to somehow develop into a discourse subject by having a unique story to tell, by possessing a singular personality, or by being a good storyteller. They might do this by talking or working with an expatriate reporter, a human rights organization, an aid group, or other entities (in the network and in intersecting networks) such as universities, activist groups, and members of their diaspora. These actors could familiarize them with the storytelling conventions so that their stories can be recognized and understood by a global audience. They could also guide them through the other network conventions of production, circulation, and consumption so that their stories can be published, distributed, and received as productively as possible.

Once survivors emerge in the circuit as discourse subjects, the best way for them to establish themselves as network actors seems to be by harnessing network power and nurturing network identities so as to attain and exert global presence and influence through effective use of the circuit (at the cost of reproducing aspects of the network). Again, they can achieve this by communicating and collaborating with the various actors and entities mentioned above. With their help, the survivors can host websites, build foundations, speak at public lectures, give interviews, form organizations, partner with other organizations and institutions, and publicize crises and campaigns. Like the news media, the human rights and humanitarian organizations, and the book publishing industry, other circuits that often intersect with the human rights discourse network also have their own network conventions that are equally well established and well known. These other circuits' norms may be less formal and less regulated, yet still pose some limits. As their presence and influence grows within the network, the survivors might talk and work with other actors from other networks to further increase their identities and power as network actors. In particular, as Rusesabagina himself did, they might secure

more permanent nodes on the circuit to work from, in acts like starting foundations that will allow for actual resources to be administered or to support continued deployment of network power, even after the immediate urgency of the storytelling fades.

Each of these “how-to” steps from discourse object to discourse subject to network actor is well known too, although it may not have been articulated as I have done here *as a known cycle available to individual subjects at knowable costs*. They represent, in this case, the conditions of possibility for human rights survivors to become network actors. Many human rights crisis survivors including Rusesabagina have followed them to very successful ends. Other actors with fairly similar trajectories to Rusesabagina’s might include, among others, former Guantánamo detainee Moazzam Begg, a British-Muslim citizen, and former child soldier Ishmael Beah, a Sierra Leonean. Begg and Beah both published their survivor narratives – Begg in a nonfiction work, *Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment at Guantánamo, Bagram, and Kandahar* (2006) and Beah in a memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). Both have also become public speakers for human rights issues: Begg speaks widely in the U.K., his country of citizenship and residence, and also in the U.S., especially as part of the anti-war movement, while Beah speaks primarily in the U.S., his country of residence, but also at various U.N. venues internationally, about children affected by war.

What I will suggest in the next section, however, may not be as well established. Returning to the case under consideration from another perspective, I propose that once the survivors become network actors, they could potentially do more than subscribe to the same network conventions that brought them their global identities and power. They could potentially create new discursive and social practices in the network and beyond. For instance, they might gain enough status and clout to influence the interpretation of human rights language or affect the means through which survivors access the network. They might accomplish this by communicating and collaborating with other actors in the network and beyond to adapt the existing network conventions. They might harness network power and forge new network identities to alter the network and its discursive

and social practices, hopefully, in ways that empower rather than disempower the individual persons the discourse was meant to serve.

Rusesabagina as a “Quasi-Official” Actor in a Global Discourse Network of Human Rights

I have discussed so far how being in a network system seems to confer upon human rights crisis survivors like Rusesabagina an ever-expanding set of network identities and network power, even as it imposes a largely restrictive set of network conventions. It may seem, from the way I have been describing the concept and mechanisms of network identities, power, and conventions, that the network is the real force behind these creations. This conclusion would be at once inaccurate and accurate because as a circuit, composed of human rights language, speech acts, and actors, the network is basically as powerful as the sum of all its parts. This conclusion is thus inaccurate, to a degree, in that the network comprises actors like Gourevitch, George, and Rusesabagina; entities like *The New Yorker* that first printed Gourevitch’s reporting on Rwanda and Picador that eventually published his book, various film companies that sponsored George’s film production,¹⁶⁵ and Viking Press that published Rusesabagina’s autobiography; and speech acts like *We Wish To Inform You*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *An Ordinary Man*; as well as other actors, entities, texts, discursive, and social practices that went into producing, circulating, and consuming these discourses.¹⁶⁶ Under particular circumstances, *any* of these network entities may co-opt the power of others.

¹⁶⁵ Internet Movie Database (IMDB) lists 9 production companies, 16 distribution companies, 2 special effects companies, and 18 other companies that produced *Hotel Rwanda* (“Company Credits”).

¹⁶⁶ *An Ordinary Man* lists other texts that Rusesabagina and Zoellner drew from “for context and detail” in its “Selected Bibliography” (205). The list includes the usual U.S.-available sources on Rwanda such as Alison Des Forges’ *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (1999), Gourevitch’s *We Wish To Inform You*, Romeo Dallaire’s *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (2004), and Samantha Power’s *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (2004).

Yet this conclusion is also accurate, in part, because these actors, entities, and texts on their own would not (perhaps could not) have generated these particular network identities or network power. And they would not (certainly could not) have created them in the same way without this network of discursive and social practices that prescribe to a degree the management of human rights crisis survivors and their narratives.

Rusesabagina, for instance, transforms himself from an object of human rights discourse to a subject of the discourse and finally to a network actor because he communicates with Gourevitch, George, and Zoellner, and collaborates with *The New Yorker*, United Artists, and Viking. In short, network power seems to work through convention (adopting and adapting a known set of network practices) and collaboration (cooperation among actors in the circuit).

Overall, Rusesabagina garners network identity and power because he adopts, with the help of these circuit actors, the appropriate network conventions that would make his identity recognizable, and his story accessible, for a global audience. In his autobiography, for example, he collaborates with Zoellner and Viking Press to tailor his story mostly to the storytelling conventions of the network. Based on Benthall's fairy-tale model of disaster relief narratives and Kennedy's four-character drama of human rights crisis stories mentioned earlier, for example, Rusesabagina's autobiography follows the main conventions of Western humanitarian and human rights storytelling. That is, the book falls in line with the fundamental story grammar through which the human rights industry has typically related stories of humans in distress. To be sure, since Rusesabagina's story is "actually" the opposite of standard disaster relief stories (it is a disaster story where relief failed to come), his autobiography follows Benthall's recipe in reverse.¹⁶⁷ Still, it is nonetheless consistent in upholding its reference points. This story still follows the key premises of the savior logic of the human rights industry, as it shows how relief failed the victims during the Rwandan genocide. The situation lacks the

¹⁶⁷ See Table Four in Appendix Two.

necessary traveling hero, no dispatcher, no donor, no princess, and therefore no relief (no happy ending) is the necessary result, as any human rights analysts would expect.

Kennedy's human rights crisis story formula (clear stereotyping of victim, violator, and hero) too is used to good effect in Rusesabagina's autobiography. Even if the crisis represented is in the past (the moment for action to prevent the genocide has come and gone), Kennedy's formula is perfect for representing a crime against humanity like genocide where the extremity of the violation seems to invite equally extreme classifications of innocent victims, evil violators, courageous heroes, and ambivalent bystanders. To a degree, *An Ordinary Man* follows Kennedy's formula closely and clearly marks out its heroes, violators, victims, and bystanders.¹⁶⁸ In other words, Rusesabagina, with Zoellner, use Benthall's model of conventional storytelling about relief to illustrate how relief failed Rwanda, and employ Kennedy's formula for dramatizing human rights crises to demonstrate how the Rwandan genocide was indeed a human rights crisis to which the international community should have responded more appropriately.

In the ways discussed above, these network actors, a Rwandan survivor and an American writer, use particular storytelling conventions common in a human rights discourse network to make specific points about the Rwandan genocide heard and understood by the widest possible audience. They appeal to a kind of "conventional wisdom" actually established by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and help turn that declaration into conventional knowledge espoused by a new multitude (a global human rights community) that identifies itself in terms of a particular logic of humanitarianism and human dignity. Following anthropologist Sally Eagle Merry's discussion of "translation" and "vernacularization," it seems possible that tailoring Rusesabagina's story to the expectations of such an implied audience may even be a strategic move to try and bridge the gaps of culture, experience, and identity inherent in that discourse – a common stress in the discourse that Schaffer and Smith observe

¹⁶⁸ See Table Five in Appendix Two.

almost inevitably separates senders from receivers in life narratives, and especially life narratives of human rights violations.¹⁶⁹ That is, the logic of the UDHR (the notion of a global community of human beings united by their shared humanity, whatever their individual nation, race, gender, or creed) that informs acts of human rights storytelling like *An Ordinary Man* helps the autobiography of a national subject achieve a comprehensible presence beyond the nation. It also helps reach an audience interested in the general principle of human rights rather than a particular national history.

And yet, despite the way Rusesabagina's autobiography caters to these humanitarian and human rights storytelling conventions, it also seems to insert an idea arguably less conventional than those in traditional human rights narratives. Instead of privileging victims and vilify perpetrators, Rusesabagina's autobiography proposes that perpetrators should be recognized and treated as human beings, just like victims and survivors. Just as importantly, it seems that, although Rusesabagina and Zoellner adopt these network conventions, they do not do so wholesale. They also adapt these storytelling formulas to make other points about crisis representation, individual agency, and human rights discourse. In terms of crisis representation, for example, *An Ordinary Man*, as an autobiography, privileges the local survivor's insider point of view over the foreign reporter's outsider perspective typical of most global crisis storytelling. They may, in short, speak and be heard in their individual messages, if those messages are framed as the network recognizes.

The autobiography also particularly complicates the tendency of human rights discourse to reduce victims, violators, heroes, and bystanders into stereotypes rather than complex human beings. In the autobiography, killers may also be victims of history, and murderers may also show mercy. Rusesabagina and Zoellner bring ambiguity to the category of killers that are so often stereotyped as pure evil. Rusesabagina states:

George Orwell once said, "He who controls the past, controls the future," and nowhere is this more true than in Rwanda. I am fully convinced that when so

¹⁶⁹ See Merry, "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle" (2006).

many ordinary people were swinging machetes at their neighbors in that awful springtime of 1994 they were not striking out at those individual victims per se but at an historical phantom. They were trying not so much to take life as to actually take control of the past. (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 14)

He adds later, “Individual acts of courage happened every single day of the genocide. Some were *partial killers*, it is true, showing compassion to some and murdering others” (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 200, emphasis mine).

Genre conventions thus may work against the ideological ones most prevalent on a network such as this one, conditioned so heavily by the UDHR. Transposing a human rights story into one genre of life narrative (a survivor autobiography) shakes up the tradition in disaster relief stories and human rights crisis narratives for the heroes to come from the outside, maintaining instead a place for local and individual agency. In this autobiography, the reverse happens: most outsiders appear as passive, cowardly, and apathetic (the antithesis of a traditional hero), while some insiders are active, brave, and engaged, at great risk to their own safety (the epitome of heroism). This autobiography also emphasizes Rusesabagina’s actions as ordinary to capture possible individual agency, insisting that each person has the capacity to act, to behave humanly in the face of great inhumanity. By adjusting the storytelling conventions in human rights narratives in these ways, Rusesabagina and Zoellner can challenge readers’ horizons of expectations about human rights crises in small yet significant ways. They effectively suggest to their reading public that the setting, characters, and plot of these crises can change (or be changed), and these crises can have other kinds of endings. In short, by combining the conventions of human rights storytelling with those of genre (in this case, a survivor autobiography), Rusesabagina and Zoellner *vary* the formulae to tap into a combination of network circuits beyond those of the human rights industry, thereby also potentially influencing the form of survivor narratives and autobiographies. These writers remind their audience of the power they have as members of local, national, and global human rights communities to rewrite the script of relief stories and crisis dramas that are unfolding now and that will likely arise in the future.

Storytelling conventions are not the only aspect of the discursive and social practices of human rights available within its global discourse network that Rusesabagina and Zoellner adapt in *An Ordinary Man*. They also offer an alternative interpretation of human rights discourse by understanding it in a realist, rather than purely moralist, and pragmatic, rather than naively idealistic, way. For example, if the human rights industry often associates human rights language with treating the victims humanely and with dignity, in this autobiography, Rusesabagina seems to suggest that the industry would be better off also acknowledging the humanity and dignity of *violators*. This unusual interpretation of the discourse can be observed when Rusesabagina describes how he is friendly with *all* the guests at the hotel, “good friends” and “odious hate mongers” alike (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 203):

I was a good-natured fellow with the guests who came into the hotel, no matter if they were good friends or odious hate mongers. This was in my nature. There are very few people with whom I could not sit and enjoy a glass of cognac. Except in extreme circumstances it very rarely pays to show hostility to the people in your orbit. And so when evil dropped by for a drink I was able to have a conversation. I could find its weaknesses and seek out its soft spots. I could see the vanity and the insecurity and even the ghost of common decency inside the minds of killers that would allow me to save lives. I could quietly flip evil’s assets against itself. What happened at the Mille Collines was the most extreme form of pragmatism. We would go to any length and do whatever it took to save as many lives as possible. That was the basic ideology. That was the *only* ideology. There was nothing particularly special about this – it only seemed like the normal thing to do. (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 203-04)

Rusesabagina thus confronts the victim/perpetrator logic implicit in all human rights stories by recognizing the human in everyone, killers and victims alike; a kind of recognition that human rights discourse often overlooks in its norms and denies in its actions because its users usually must appear to be moralistic and cannot be seen as treating victim and violator alike. The very names the human rights industry has for these

categories – victim and violator – clearly privilege one and degrade the other, even though both groups are comprised of human beings. Rusesabagina’s re-told tale questions the ideology underlying the network, while using its tools. *An Ordinary Man* reveals the weakness of such a righteous and moralistic use of a discourse based on a too-simple dichotomy.

In this autobiography, Rusesabagina seems to recognize the humanity of perpetrators, suggesting that once one acknowledges the human, even in killers, one can better appeal to their human characteristics, not necessarily ideological or moral ones (such as compassion or empathy) or idealistic ones (like decency and righteousness), but equally powerful, if less moral, human qualities like power, greed, or vanity. These are the “soft spots” to which Rusesabagina refers, the ones that may make it possible to protect one’s friends by fraternizing with one’s foes (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 203). Rusesabagina explains this paradox: “I could see the vanity and the insecurity and even the ghost of common decency inside the minds of killers that would allow me to save lives. I could quietly flip evil’s assets against itself” (Rusesabagina and Zoellner 203-04). Rusesabagina’s move, once he emerges in an autobiographical voice, is a striking adaptation of human rights discourse, forcing it to acknowledge not only the victims’ humanity, but also the perpetrators’. This important variation on the discourse use reduces the discourse’s tendency to privilege the moral aspects of human beings and neglect the darker sides of humanity, which has its own place in defending victims.

This small, but significant, inclusion is slipped into the text under the guise of the conventional storytelling methods at a point where two sets of conventions converge, one from the genre of autobiography and one from a human rights discourse network. It raises the question of the overall influence texts like Rusesabagina’s might have on the language and ideology of human rights, possibly forcing them to deliver messages *other* than those seemingly hard-wired into the arguably “Western” logic of human rights. Might they perhaps even play a role in opening dialogues about human rights, instead of simply transmitting pre-established messages, in ways that might alter forms of Empire, as Hardt and Negri defined them?

Human Rights Crisis Survivors as Multitude

In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri envision multitude as “the living alternative that grows within Empire” (xiii). They see multitude as “singularities that act in common,” explaining that a “global multitude” would comprise “an open network of singularities that links together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce” (*Multitude* 105, 129). The “common” is what binds the “singularities” (individual people with different identities) together and what these individual people generate and regenerate together.¹⁷⁰ The common might include shared aspects like language, beliefs, bodies, and dreams. The problem (and promise) of these authors’ description of multitude is that it does not yet exist as a political form. There exists, they argue, traces of the multitude, which project how a fully formed multitude might look like as a political community. But for now, the multitude is principally a theoretical concept (an idealized form of it too) rather than a material reality (in all its possible manifestations – desirable and undesirable, becoming and unbecoming).

Hardt and Negri maintain, however, that the “flesh” of multitude, the element of multitude, is already (has always already been) available. According to them, each subject of Empire is a singular entity that has the potential to form a multitude; a political community that develops from a common set of norms, practices, and values, and produces other shared aspects (*Multitude* 198). Hence they characterize multitude as at

¹⁷⁰ Hardt and Negri explain their concept of the “common” thus: “Once we recognize singularity, the common begins to emerge. Singularities do communicate, and they are able to do so because of the common they share. We share bodies with two eyes, ten fingers, ten toes; we share life on this earth; we share capitalist regimes of production and exploitation; we share common dreams of a better future. Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation, furthermore, not only are based on the common that exists but also in turn produce the common. We make and remake the common we share everyday” (*Multitude* 128). They add. “Singularities interact and communicate socially on the basis of the common, and their social communication in turn produces the common. The multitude is the subjectivity that emerges from this dynamic of singularity and commonality” (*Multitude* 198).

once always-already present and not-yet formed. According to the authors, the always-already is the multitude's propensity to refuse authority. They write:

The faculty for freedom and the propensity to refuse authority, one might say, have become the most healthy and noble human instincts, the real signs of eternity. Perhaps rather than eternity we should say more precisely that this multitude acts always in the present, a perpetual present. This first multitude is ontological and we could not conceive our social being without it. (*Multitude* 221)

On the other hand, the not-yet is the multitude's potential to organize and rule themselves. This other multitude is "the historical multitude or, really, the not-yet multitude. This multitude has never yet existed... This second multitude is political, and it will require a political project to bring it into being on the basis of these emerging conditions" (*Multitude* 221). In their work, Hardt and Negri speculate on what might take the always-already aspect of multitude and realize its not-yet potential in order to revamp Empire into a full democracy. They mainly conceive of multitude from a class (or socioeconomic positions) perspective.

In this chapter, I have borrowed Hardt and Negri's concepts of the multitude and the common developed in *Multitude* to theorize the case of a global discourse network of human rights. Such a power circuit might transform (or might already be transforming) the always-already agency of human rights crisis survivors and develop their not-yet potential so as to reshape the presently more institutionalized (read: foreign, hero-focused) human rights system into a more open (read: local, victim-friendly) one. Approaching the multitude from the perspective of human rights subject positions (hero, victim, violator, and bystander, to use Kennedy's framework) and conceiving of them as the subjects that can influence the Empire of human rights discourse as it presently exists *extends* Hardt and Negri's model by accounting in one way at least for the participation of individuals, not necessarily as attached to a particular class position, within a globalizing dynamic of Empire and multitude.

This revising of Hardt and Negri's standard model has some very clear political implications. For example, it suggests that one possible remedy to the problem of a

human rights industry that often denies the very voices and agency of those it claims to serve may be to acknowledge and then deploy the very resources the network offers, to see how various points in the circuit are mutually predicating. This means tapping network identities, power, and conventions, managing these aspects of a network system towards empowering the human rights victims, enabling them to emerge in the circuit as discourse subjects and actors, rather than restricting them to simple discourse objects. Such a human rights discourse and network (and by implication industry) transformation might be pursued, as Rusesabagina's example suggests, by producing various speech acts that adopt the network conventions in order for the survivor's story to be recognized and accepted within the circuit, and for the survivor to gain a place in the network as a discourse subject and actor. Once the survivor has found a spot in the circuit, he or she can adapt the prevailing conventions so as to make alternative points (about the discourse, the event, the victims, the violators, the heroes, and the bystanders) known and heard in the network and beyond.

This network change can also be accomplished, again as Rusesabagina's example suggests, by collaborating with various actors from a global discourse network of human rights and other already intersecting circuits. The very telling and re-telling of Rusesabagina's story (from Gourevitch to George to Rusesabagina and Zoellner; from Picador to United Artists to Viking) reveal the various "singularities" that need to communicate and collaborate to produce such speech acts. It is not just Rwandans, but also non-Rwandans. It is not just survivors, but also journalists, editors, publishers, filmmakers, screenwriters, producers, publicists, social events organizers as well as marketing and advertising folks. It took all these individuals, and more, acting in their professional or personal capacity (or somewhere in between) to bring these various incarnations of Rusesabagina's story into production, circulation, and consumption. Most human rights crisis survivors, especially the ones with the least access to be heard locally or globally, will need to depend on other network actors and other interlocking networks to introduce them to the conventions so as to make their stories heard and understood. While this kind of capacity to act may not conform to a human rights ideal of individual

agency, it nonetheless is a situation that gives agency where earlier little was perceived to exist. It thus represents a potentially important and productive political impact.

To put these possibilities for increased survivor agency (and hopefully discourse, network, and industry change) in Hardt and Negri's terms, these survivors (as singularities) could tap into this power circuit by capitalizing on the shared network conventions (the common in the network such as the circuit's norms for representing human rights crises and their survivors; its discursive and social practices for producing, distributing, and consuming human rights crisis and survivor stories; and its traditional value systems of human rights discourse) and by communicating and collaborating with the network's actors (other singularities). By talking and working together in this way, these singularities (survivors and other network actors) could begin to produce shared speech acts (thereby building the common). Even if their personal goals are not shared (survivors may seek cultural advocacy or personal development agendas, while non-survivors like book publishers and the news media may be invested in profit margins, higher ratings or good publicity), these acts of communication and collaboration (and their products) could start to encourage the collaborators to identify each other as complex human beings who share commonalities despite their differences and vice versa.

Moreover, their collaborative products could begin to push the audience that receives them to recognize a similar reality. But for the accident of birth and upbringing, the reader could have been the survivor and vice versa. In these various ways, communication and collaboration could not only enable survivors to speak and be heard. It may also, from a more hopeful or idealistic viewpoint, encourage non-survivors to listen and recognize survivors as part of their own reality. At the very least, such practices and their resulting products may begin to channel the always-already present agency of the survivors (and possibly other non-crisis participants in and outside the network) and use it to develop the not-yet potential of these singularities to act. Whether all these survivors and non-crisis participants can or will act together toward a common goal as a multitude (as Hardt and Negri envision) remains to be seen.

What is clear, however, is that more and more survivors, with the help of other circuit actors, are taking advantage of network identities, power, and conventions to make their stories and their causes heard on the global stage. Rusesabagina is but one of many. One other example of a survivor who seems to have transformed himself from obscure object to notable subject is Burmese refugee Pascal Khoo Thwe who published his memoir, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (2002) with the editorial help of his “rescuer” British professor John Casey. Through Casey’s influence, Khoo Thwe manages to leave the Thai/Burmese jungle where he had been a fugitive fighter against the Burmese military to read English Literature at Cambridge University. In a distinct echo of the Rigoberta Menchú case, Casey encourages Khoo Thwe to write his thoughts and experiences, and eventually helps Khoo Thwe transform his writings into a published book that wins the Kiriya Pacific Rim Prize in 2002. In 1999, Khoo Thwe received the Human Rights Watch Hellman-Hammett Grant, a small emergency grant issued to writers in financial straits because of political persecution (“Hellman-Hammett Grants”). Following the book publication, Khoo Thwe, as is the convention in the book trade, went on a book tour in the U.K. and the U.S., meeting with members of the international press for interviews and with members of an international public for readings (Polo). He also reviewed Amy Tan’s novel on Burma, *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) for the *Guardian* (Khoo Thwe, “Burmese Haze”). He now lives in London and is working on a “jungle cookbook based on recipes collected from various tribes of Burma” (Khoo Thwe, “Burma Special”).

Other recent examples of such object-to-subject success stories might include Mawi Asgedom, a refugee of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, who described his story of living in a Sudanese refugee camp and immigrating to the U.S in *Of Beetles and Angels: A True Story of The American Dream* (2001) with the editor Dave Berger; Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, refugees of the crisis in the Sudan, who wrote *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* (2005) with the editorial assistance of their mentor in the U.S. Judy Bernstein; and

Ishmael Beah who recounted his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007).

Each of these survivors, like Rusesabagina and Khoo Thwe, seems to have gained global presence and influence because they harnessed network power to emerge and establish themselves in the power circuit as discourse subjects and network actors. For instance, Asgedom, like Rusesabagina, has become a popular public speaker for students, community groups, and even businesses. He also works with the HAT (Haileab and Tewolde) Foundation to provide resources and support for new Third-World immigrants in the U.S. and funds for AIDS and malaria relief in Ethiopia and Eritrea. One-third of all proceeds from Asgedom's memoir are donated to the HAT Foundation. Like Khoo Thwe, he also leveraged his past experiences to attend a prestigious university, Harvard University in the U.S. And much as Casey's friends and colleagues pooled resources to support Khoo Thwe financially, Harvard fully funded Asgedom's education (Asgedom; Khoo Thwe, *From the Land of Green Ghosts*). Asgedom lives in Chicago and runs a public speaking business, among other endeavors. Like Rusesabagina, Asgedom seems to become less of a national subject (or object of national discourse), and more of a type of global agent. Or at least his global identity appears now to dominate over his national identity.

Similarly, Beah secured himself a position at an elite school, Oberlin College in the U.S. He too has become a public speaker in the human rights world. He is an advisory committee member of Human Rights Watch's Children's Rights Division and has spoken before the Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, as well as other NGO panels on children affected by war (Beah). Beah lives in New York City and is an aspiring writer (Weich). Like Rusesabagina and Khoo Thwe, Asgedom and Beah both have carved out platforms from which they might speak, mostly in their own voice, and be heard, largely from their own viewpoints, by a global and often influential audience. In other words, they have positioned themselves to change, or at least affect the power imbalances within the international human rights system, if not the shortcomings of our

current global world order that seems intent on waging war and creating victims to maintain control and order. In their cases, the next question to be asked is not one of agency, but rather one of ethics: possessing network power, what do they do with it?

Such a cycle from testimonial-book to global presence and influence as seen in the cases of Rusesabagina, Khoo Thwe, and Beah, seems inherent in the notion of a global discourse network of human rights suggested here. The web of power thus deployed may be quite seductive, since it makes available to virtually any individual, with an experience that the human rights discourse would recognize as a victim, the potential to channel the conventions and power of this discourse and its various circuits into his or her personal life narratives in order to transform him or herself from an object of national and international politics to a transnational subject and actor in a larger global community. This kind of access to global presence and influence could nonetheless also lead to some questionable survivor narratives and possibly reduce their moral weight and power. Yet, without such powerful stories, created along conventions, packaged into genres, and transmitted across local and global discourse networks, there would likely be one less means towards making a global appeal for a more socially just world. There would likely be one less channel through which to form new types of transnational cooperation that could call check on the often inequitable logics of national power and imperial capitalism.

These survivors have also drawn from “the common” (Hardt and Negri’s term as discussed above to refer to the ideas, values, or materials shared by the multitude in their various communities of interest) of human rights discourse and its network to make and remake them, infusing the discourse and the network with their individual sense of what it means to be human and their particular sensibility of how a more humane world can best be achieved. To do so (and in doing so), they have established connections with other crisis and non-crisis participants, as well as with actors from the network and beyond. The communication and collaboration with other singularities (those they worked with during their crisis and after) of survivors like Rusesabagina, Khoo Thwe, and Beah can be traced in the haunting dedications and poignant acknowledgements in

their books. In their dedications, almost all of these survivors remember their fellow crisis participants (those who survived and those who did not survive, those who escaped and those who remained behind). Rusesabagina, for example, dedicates his autobiography not only to his family, but also “to all the victims of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, to their widows and orphans” (Rusesabagina and Zoellner). Similarly, Khoo Thwe, Beah, and Deng, Deng and Ajak remember not just other crisis participants they met (dead and living) but also crisis participants they have never (and may never) meet but with whom they share a common experience of war and a common aspiration for peace.¹⁷¹ As for the acknowledgements, Asgedom’s and Beah’s are among the most prolific: Asgedom’s acknowledgements go on for four pages with 31 separate entries, some of which include the names of multiple individuals. Beah’s is more modest, only a little over 2 pages (227-29). Both authors, however, identify various individuals and institutions (in official and unofficial capacities), in and outside the power circuit, that have helped them become network actors.¹⁷²

Such dedications and acknowledgements show the vast web of actors (family members, adopted family members, friends, editors, agents, case workers, teachers, professors, counselors, coaches, universities, foundations, NGOs, courts, and publishing houses) that share (or could share) common values, if not norms, practices, and goals. They reveal how common values (here: the ideology of humanism, humanitarianism, and

¹⁷¹ Khoo Thwe lists nine “green ghosts” – fellow friends and freedom fighters who died young, while Beah invokes not just his personal friends but also “all the children of Sierra Leone who were robbed of their childhoods” (Khoo Thwe, *From the Land of Green Ghosts*; Beah) Similarly, Deng, Deng and Ajak remember “all of the children throughout time who’ve been caught up in adult wars” (Deng et al.)

¹⁷² For instance, Asgedom acknowledges “Mrs. Benson, Viva Jones, and Myrtle Amundson, for being our American grandmothers,” his “American mother, Candi Olander,” and diverse individuals at institutions like Harvard University, School District 200, World Relief, and Bethel Presbyterian Church. Likewise, Beah recognizes his “mother, Laura Simms” and his “aunts, Heather Greer, Fran Silverberg, and Shantha Bloemen” and his “sister, Erica Henegen” and his “brother,” Bernard Matambo (227). He also thanks various individuals at different institutions like the Blue Ridge and Four Oaks Foundation, Oberlin College, and Farrar, Straus and Giroux (Beah 228).

human rights) could potentially be the basis for building common norms, practices, and goals. Although these connections undoubtedly increase the agency of the survivor, it more than likely affects the other parties productively as well.

Most importantly, for my concern with discourse and network change (especially reshaping the perceived imbalance in the human rights industry) these acts of communication and collaboration could potentially increase the position and power of these particular network actors. They also could potentially draw new actors and new languages into the network, thereby possibly changing the purportedly disempowering discourse Empire of human rights into a more empowering one. Thus, in all these ways discussed in this chapter, the always-already agency of multitude in these various singularities (crisis participant and non-crisis participant alike) could be harnessed to communicate and collaborate as multitude. It could also be one key to unlocking the not-yet potential of multitude, releasing a global network power that offers new subject positions cutting across the limitations in older ones, while acknowledging that *all* subject positions are by definition limited.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I applied the model of a global discourse network to another case study, Paul Rusesabagina, who occupies a quasi-official subject position in human rights discourse and its network in that, as a genocide survivor, he is commonly recognized as an object of the discourse rather than a subject, and is typically implicated in the network as a passive rather than active agent (his story is told long before he is able to tell it). This example is almost the diametric opposite to the MSF case presented in the last chapter. The first two sections of this chapter argued that being in a power circuit seems to confer upon Rusesabagina various types of network identities and power that enable him to transform from discourse object to discourse subject and finally network agent. To make this argument, I mainly traced the global presence and influence Rusesabagina had before and after his emergence in the network as a singular discourse subject. The next section of the chapter argued that although being in a network scenario could expand the agency

of survivors like Rusesabagina, it could also restrict their power because the network has existing production, distribution, and consumption conventions for crisis and survivor representations. Examples to characterize these network possibilities and limits were mostly drawn from the news media, human rights NGO, and book publishing industries. Next, I illustrated how Rusesabagina, as a “quasi-official” actor in a global web, seems to adopt the conventions of the discourse and the network in ways that make himself heard to audiences across national boundaries and sentiments. He also appears to adapt these conventions in ways that allow him to forward his own agendas, not just that of the human rights industry. Finally, based on these earlier discussions, I suggested that human rights crisis survivors could potentially become (or seem already to be) singularities of an empowered and productive multitude within a discourse Empire of human rights.

In writing this chapter, my goal has been to suggest that human rights crisis survivors, that is, individuals with quasi-official subject positions within the discourse and its network, need not be just used in but also may be using the discourse themselves. The common belief is that human rights survivors are usually victimized by the very discourse that purports to defend their rights. This in fact is how a discourse Empire exercises power over its discursive subjects: it determines who should be treated as human, how, when, where, and why. But the Rusesabagina case study discussed here shows how a single “survivor” seems to have become a powerful agent by using the very instruments of this discourse Empire’s rule (its languages, practices, and institutions such as human rights’ moral rhetoric, crisis storytelling conventions, the press, the film production circle, the book publishing industry, and the public lecture circuits). These are the very tools of this discourse Empire that some might argue have increasingly disempowered rather than empowered human rights crisis survivors.

This case study of Rusesabagina has thus contributed to my overall aim in this project – to explore how the globalization of human rights discourse might be affecting people (implicated in the discourse from different subject positions and in different textual genres) and vice versa. The “results” of this test suggest that he does seem to be acting on his “always-already” (to return to the term Hardt and Negri borrow from

Althusser) potential as a singularity of multitude. Moreover, he appears to be acting with other individuals, even individuals some might see as serving Empire, thus exemplifying multitude in action. To be sure, this increased range of agency and the possibility for influencing the discourse and network comes at a price. It depends to a large degree on his continued willingness to work within an ethos of the discourse and its network. His more local identities, for instance his identity as a Rwandan, may start to be questioned as his network identity as genocide survivor or African philanthropist gains ascendancy. Moreover, there are limits to this network power: while Rusesabagina may have become an actor on a global network of human rights discourse, but he may still be an object of discourse in another network. He may have little influence and presence in other power circuits that may not accept him as an actor until he adopts their respective ethos.

In modeling this relationship between a globalizing discourse and its subjects (especially Rusesabagina's transformation in identity and agency) in terms of a network model, this chapter has also helped suggest how a discourse and network approach (combined here into a model of human rights discourse globalizing as a network) might be used to explore more precisely how globalization (especially discourse globalization) affects individuals and groups of people and vice versa. This case study tested the model on an *individual*, Rusesabagina, with at best a quasi-official subject position (or even an object position) in the network. In the next case study chapter, I will attend to another subject position within human rights discourse – *individuals* with almost no official subject position in the network – artists. I look specifically at a novelist who taps into this discourse and network purportedly *without* the authorization of personal experience that seems to be so critical to this discourse, yet whose writings implicate him directly into the discourse and its network. The actor in my next case study, Canadian-Sri Lankan novelist Michael Ondaatje, speaks from an unofficial subject position in that he, like most novelists, is not conventionally acknowledged as an authorized discourse user or network actor, despite the fact that he too as a novelist, like human rights crisis survivors, has access to the discourse. The next chapter will examine how Ondaatje's use (and critique) of human rights discourse in *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and the reception of this novel by

various scholars reveal more clearly the possibilities and limits of a global discourse network. Its promises of network identities and power at the global level may face great challenges when the politics of local identities and power come into play at particular local (and national) sites.

Chapter Seven

Human Rights Discourse and a Global Novelist:

Michael Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* (2000)

This chapter presents the last case study for this project. Although, like the last two chapters, it analyzes another actor and discursive event in a global discourse network of human rights, it departs from my last two chapters in two significant ways. First, it differs in terms of the subject position being considered. If Chapters Five and Six looked at a group (a humanitarian aid NGO, MSF) and an individual (a genocide survivor, Paul Rusesabagina) who at least were directly involved in human rights and humanitarian crises, whether in official or quasi-official capacities (that is, in relation to a standard human rights network of actors), this chapter focuses on another type of individual, a novelist, who as an artist is generally not considered an official human rights actor in the traditional sense of the term. As a novelist, when this individual writes about a human rights topic or theme, regardless how informed, involved, or implicated he may or may not be in the crisis of which he writes, he does so from an unofficial subject position in the international human rights system.

Second, this chapter diverges from the last two in terms of its central focus. Chapters Five and Six approached the overarching question of this project – how various

individuals and groups from different subject positions within human rights discourse might be affecting and affected by its globalization – primarily from the side of the users or producers of the discourse, that is, in terms of what happens to the identity and agency of these speakers. In contrast, this chapter will come to this project’s driving question from the side of the audience or consumers of these speakers’ discursive acts. That is, it asks how different audience groups might be posited to respond to these speech acts, especially in terms of the personal identity and agency a speaker invariably evokes when speaking, and the production conventions as well as audience expectations these speech acts inevitably invoke.¹⁷³

These differences of subject position and central focus amongst the chapters are intended to introduce another angle from which to approach the overall question of this project – the relationship between a globalizing human rights discourse and its subjects. The shift from sites of production to possible sites of reception correlated with them, is adopted here especially to attend to the limits of individual or group manipulation of this discourse that advocates a global perspective but exists in a nationally-centered social, economic, and political system. If the cases of MSF and Rusesabagina in the previous case study chapters suggest the possibilities of using this universalist discourse to carve out global identities and agency that can free them from national constraints that impede their respective aims for social justice, this chapter looks at Sri Lankan-born, British-educated, and Canadian-resident artist Michael Ondaatje and his novel *Anil’s Ghost* (2000) to consider some aspects like personal identity, especially national identity, and audience expectations, again tied to nationalist agendas, that seem to limit the

¹⁷³ This premise is drawn from Wolfgang Iser’s notion of an “implied reader”: the idea that a text is structured with a particular audience linkage built in – a kind of “ideal audience,” based on the author’s intentions and the conventions of the audience, including habits of interpretation. I am not using survey data or reception data, beyond a brief survey of book reviews and scholarly articles, because I am drawing on this structure principle of texts in order to amplify the notion of a discourse network. Specifically, I am trying to gesture to another possible aspect of this space – the interactions between the actors (individuals and texts) across this discursive terrain, that is, the links that a text will necessarily seek between author and audience.

possibilities for developing supranational identities and agency enabled by human rights discourse in a network-powered world.

In looking at this project's question from both the side of the discourse producers (Chapters Five and Six) and consumers (Chapter Seven), I hope to delineate some possibilities and limits of acting and writing from a purportedly "global" (as opposed to purely "national") subject position in an increasingly globalized but still very nationally-organized world. This global subject position emerges each time one speaks of, within, or through human rights language or ideology: it is a position that an ideologically universalist discourse like human rights offers, even if this position is contradicted by its system of practice that is grounded in an *international* model. Such a global speaking position also arises, as Ondaatje's multinational background suggests, in the sense of situations where individuals may be more nationally ambiguous in their identities because of ongoing immigration or emigration for social, economic, or political reasons, or because of other processes of cultural globalization. These two avenues for "global" speaking positions and speech acts – human rights discourse and personal experience – raise critical questions about presentation and representation in human rights advocacy specifically (in their materials as acts of persuasion and contestation) and literature generally (in texts as acts of communication).

This chapter will begin by introducing Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost*, describing the somewhat multinational nature of the author's personal identity and the global quality of the novel in terms of its perspective and topics. It will then explore the ways in which the novel seems to be contributing to the language and ideology of human rights by examining the manner in which the different genres and approaches to human rights topics and practices put in play in the novel seem to be questioning the nature of human rights stories and storytelling and critiquing various premises and practices prevalent in human rights discourse and its network. Next, I will examine the degrees to which a global author like Ondaatje and a global text like *Anil's Ghost* can use and impact human rights discourse (a language and ideology that while global and universalist in orientation and purpose, remains tied to local sites of application and national systems of

implementation) in a network situation (a rhizome of circuits that though global in nature is nevertheless also always locally-situated in practice). To do so, I will analyze the critical reception to the novel, highlighting how the global-national tension inherent in this community of professional readers (scholars and reviewers, who also are potentially different nodes for multitude building) underscore a similar global-national tension inscribed in human rights discourse and its network.

An analysis of this critical reception reflects the struggle between global perspectives and national demands since most scholars and reviewers that celebrate the book highlight the novel's handling of global matters like transnational identities and human rights missions, while those that critique the work stress its lack of focus on the national issues plaguing Sri Lanka especially the past and present of the country's long-running civil war. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, this reception, especially by those who demand more attention to the national story of Sri Lanka, seems to be closely related to the identity of the text and its author. These readers' expectations for *Anil's Ghost* appear to be tightly linked to the genre of a historical novel or national allegory in which they locate the work, and even to their preconceptions about the national, ethnic, religious, and class identity of Ondaatje. In light of the close relationship between genre and reception seen in the critical reception to the novel, and how these two together triangulate clear limits on the agency of speech and speakers on the network, it may be that alternative modes of production and consumption (different ways of writing and reading, or even of characterizing genre) will be needed to address this global-national struggle in presentation and representation, especially in human rights themed texts wherein the universalist premise of human rights language and ideology often are challenged by the local and nationalist sentiments of a specific crisis.

The focus on the identity and speaking position of Ondaatje will allow me to return to the problem first raised in the context of the MSF Nobel Peace Prize Lecture: the clear limits on the speaking positions that an author can use within human rights contexts. The issue here is not so much whether a novel is that significantly *different* from a lecture in creating speaker agency, although this difference in genre and media is

also important, but rather that this particular novel seems to reflect again some problems that arise when an individual attempts to use the speaking positions availed by human rights discourse in a network situation. In doing so, I hope to point out some ways that the globalization of human rights discourse and its discourse users, even in a global discourse network system that may offer possibilities for network identity, power, and conventions, may have to consistently contend with, and not always overcome, the persistent pull of the national, despite the powerful push of the global.

Michael Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost*: Global Author, Global Literature

The case study for this chapter, as mentioned above, is Michael Ondaatje and his novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000). As an author, Ondaatje is perhaps best known as the winner of the Man Booker Prize, the British Commonwealth's highest honor, in 1992 for his novel *The English Patient* (1992).¹⁷⁴ Ondaatje shared the prize for the best novel of the year written by a citizen of the Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland with British-born, Italian-resident Barry Unsworth for his novel *Sacred Hunger* (1992).¹⁷⁵ Despite his fame as a novelist, Ondaatje initially came to prominence as a poet with early collections like *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), *Rat Jelly* (1973), and *The Man with Seven Toes* (1969). His work also includes some literary criticism and film.¹⁷⁶ As James Procter observes in his critical overview of Ondaatje's work, however, "Ondaatje is perhaps best understood not as poet or novelist, but as an artist who has drawn into question the very limits of such

¹⁷⁴ *The English Patient* was later (1996) adapted into a film of the same title by Anthony Minghella, who also wrote the screenplay. This film, starring Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, and Kristin Scott Thomas, won several Academy Awards including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Cinematography.

¹⁷⁵ For a short synopsis and biography of these novels and their authors as well as more information about the Man Booker Prize, see "Prize Archive: 1992."

¹⁷⁶ For a critical overview of Ondaatje's body of work, see "Michael Ondaatje" in the British Council's *Contemporary Writers*.

genres” (par. 2). Indeed, Ondaatje’s work often combines literary conventions, history, and myth.¹⁷⁷ This blurring of boundaries is not limited to his art.

Born in Sri Lanka in 1943, educated in Britain from 1954 until moving to Canada in 1962, and living in Toronto since 1970, Ondaatje also seems to combine, in his personal experience, aspects from various cultures. Born in Sri Lanka to a Sri Lankan father of mixed Indian and Portuguese descent and a Dutch mother, Ondaatje has a Dutch, Sinhalese, and Tamil blend of ancestry. Despite this eclectic family ethnic history, the Ondaatjes were staunchly British-colonial in their outlook. Ondaatje’s father ran the Kuttapitiya Tea Plantation and Ondaatje was educated in preparation for Cambridge or Oxford, and all this at a time when the sun was setting on the British empire. As Ed Jewinski writes of the Ondaatje’s life in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, in his biography of Ondaatje, “Theirs was a ‘foreign’ – a British-colonial – existence. The privilege of wealth and class, even though greatly eroded by the time he was born, made of Michael Ondaatje, as it did of many other members of his family, a stranger in a strange land, even the one he called home” (21).

This sense of being both insider and outside, being a stranger in a land one calls home, continued to plague Ondaatje when he moved to England to attend Dulwich College, a boarding school. His mother had moved to England in 1949 after divorcing his father in 1945. Her move may have been influenced by Ceylon’s independence and transition into Sri Lanka in 1948. Of his move to Britain, Ondaatje told Linda Hutcheon, “I *do* feel I have been allowed the migrant’s double perspective, in the way, say someone like Gertrude Stein was ‘re-focused’ by Paris” (Ondaatje, Interview, Hutcheon 197).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ For a quick overview of how genre-plays happen in Ondaatje’s work, especially *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), and *Running in the Family* (1982), see Procter’s “Michael Ondaatje: Critical Perspective” (2002). For a discussion of these literary convention-bendings in terms of Ondaatje’s influences from modernism to postmodernism to postcolonialism, see Douglas Barbour’s *Michael Ondaatje* (1993).

¹⁷⁸ To offer more context for this quote, to Hutcheon’s question of whether Ondaatje feels like a “Sri Lankan Canadian writer,” Ondaatje replies, “Sure, I guess I feel I’m *that* more

Ondaatje later moved to Canada for his undergraduate degree.¹⁷⁹ As this brief overview of Ondaatje's background indicates, his multinational experiences make him a paradigmatic case of a global author in terms of his personal identity and cultural experiences.

If it is Ondaatje's mixed background and experiences that seem to make him a global rather than national author, it is *Anil's Ghost's* range of issues (global and national) and characters (with multinational and transnational, as well as national identities) that appear to float the novel from national literature, or even world literature (*weltliteratur*) in Goethe's sense of the term, to global literature, or at least highlight the spaces wherein the local overlap with the global, what Robert Eric Livingston, following Roland Robertson's development of the term and concept of glocalization, has referred to as the glocal.¹⁸⁰

than anything else. I grew up in Sri Lanka and lived in England for about eight years, and then came here. But I don't feel much of 'England' in me. I *do* feel I have been allowed the migrant's double perspective, in the way, say, someone like Gertrude Stein was 'refocused' by Paris" (197).

¹⁷⁹ For more family and personal history and the development of Ondaatje's professional literary career, see Jewinski's biography on Ondaatje, *Michael Ondaatje: Express Yourself Beautifully* (1994). Barbour's *Michael Ondaatje* (1993) offers a briefer account of personal history, but an insightful one of Ondaatje's professional literary development in the context of modernism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, especially important figures and moments that influenced Ondaatje's artistic development. Barbour's book also has a convenient chronology for a quick overview of the dates of his residence and publications.

¹⁸⁰ See Hans Joachim Schulz and Philip H. Rhein's *Comparative Literature: The Early Years, An Anthology of Essays* (1973), especially their section on Goethe, "Some Passages Pertaining to the Concept of World Literature," 1-11, Livingston's "Glocal Knowledges: Agency and Place in Literary Studies" (2001), and Robertson's "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" (1995).

In their introduction to their Goethe section, Schulz and Rhein clarify the meaning of world literature: "Goethe's term *Weltliteratur* has been frequently misunderstood. It has as little to do with the standard histories of 'world literature' as it does with either the masterpieces of international literature, the universal substance in all great literature or those works which have exerted international influence. Although Goethe did not give any precise definition of the term, its meaning is clearly demonstrated by the frequent remarks in his letters, conversations and journals, as well as his own practice of *Weltliteratur*. To Goethe the term was applicable to 1) all forms of mediation between the

literatures of different nations, to 2) all means to achieve knowledge, understanding, tolerance, acceptance and love of the literature of other peoples; and finally to 3) the concern with the foreign reception to one's own literature. *Weltliteratur*, then, to Goethe, was the marketplace of international literary traffic: translations, criticism, journals devoted to foreign literatures, the foreign receptions of one's own works, letters, journeys, meetings, circles" (3).

In "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," Robertson rearticulates the concept and discourse of globalization in terms of glocalization – a meeting or awareness of the local in the global and vice versa. He writes, "From my own analytic and interpretative standpoint the concept of globalization has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or – in more abstract vein – the universal and the particular" (30). He briefly traces the genealogy of the term in *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (1991) wherein the term is "formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend" and said to be "modeled on Japanese dochakuka (deriving from dochaku 'living on one's own land'), originally the agricultural principle of adapting one's farming techniques to local conditions, but also adopted in Japanese business for global localization, a global outlook adapted to local conditions" (134). Robertson adds, "The idea of globalization in its business sense is closely related to what in some contexts is called, in more straightforwardly economic terms, micro-marketing: the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets" (28).

Following Robertson's framework of "glocalization" for thinking about globalization, Livingston, in "Glocal Knowledges: Agency and Place in Literary Studies," suggests that the phenomenon of globalization as it affects literary studies should be considered in terms of the "glocal." He writes, "The figure of the glocal has the advantage not only of making visible the mutual articulation of our two spatial coordinates but also of insisting, neologically, on the need for a careful rereading of the means of articulation. The sheer awkwardness of the term, meanwhile, should slow down its assimilation to more familiar positional schemes" (147). To this end, Livingston attends to how literary studies developed as a discipline from particular locations and through historical developments.

Livingston basically approaches the question of globalization in literary studies from the perspective of place. For a look at this question from the perspective of time, see Ursula Heise's *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (1997). Heise suggests that the different way in which time is experienced in a globalized world from developments in transportation, communication, and information technologies has led to a new culture of time in Western societies. This new culture of time has also affected novels. She argues that postmodern novels focusing on the experience of time in such shortened temporalities enables new conceptions of history and posthistory.

For more discussion of globalization and its relationship to literary studies, see the 2001 *PMLA* issue "Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies," which includes thoughts on this topic by Edward Said who in *Orientalism* (1978) specifically criticizes Goethe's

Anil's Ghost relates the story of Anil Tissera, an independent-minded and strong-willed female forensic pathologist, born and raised in Colombo, Sri Lanka, until leaving for higher education in the U.K. and then the U.S., who returns to Colombo to investigate allegations of organized campaigns of murder on the island as part of a seven-week international human rights investigative mission organized by the Center for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland. Upon the invitation of the Sri Lankan government to pair outside consultants with local officials for this project, Anil is partnered with Sarath Diyasena, a male archeologist whose silence about his position within the government makes Anil uncertain about how much she should trust him. As they explore the government-protected archeological preserve outside of the Bandarawela caves, where new skeletons were alleged to be found, Anil finds that one of the four full skeletons they had unearthed, which she nicknames Sailor, appears to be recent. If they can prove the identity of Sailor, they can implicate the government as being involved in the murder since only the government and police have access to this sacred site. This, at least, is the rationale offered by the novel.

To assist with Anil's quest, Sarath enlists the help of his former teacher Palipana, an internationally-reknowned Sri Lankan epigraphist, whose reputation in his later years was tarnished when some interpretations of rock graffiti that archeologists and historians had celebrated were discredited by Palipana's protégé who questioned the very existence of these texts. When Sarath and Anil approach him, Palipana had become blind and long retreated from society, living with his niece, Lakma, in the remnants of a forest monastery. Although Palipana had lost his physical sight, he had not lost his insight into Sri Lanka's history and myth. Anil and Sarath seek Palipana out to help them identify Sailor by situating him in his locale, his time and place. Based on Palipana's recommendation, Anil and Sarath also solicit the aid of Ananda Udugama, a gem miner

notion of world literature, linking it to another form of Eurocentricism. See also *South Atlantic Quarterly's* Summer 2001 special issue on this topic, especially Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman's introduction to the issue, "The Globalization of Fiction/ the Fiction of Globalization."

who turned to drink after his wife, Sirissa, disappeared and was presumed to have been killed. Sarath and Anil need Ananda to recreate the head of Sailor from his skeletal remains: they hope the model of a face might help others recognize him and reveal his identity, especially his locale, where he lived, in order to link it with incidents of mass killings. Ananda, ironically thickly-spectacled, is also a special artist who paints the eyes of a holy statue in the tradition of Netra Mangala, “a ritual of the eyes,” whereby the statue or image is brought to life, given light, with the gift of sight (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 97).

Along the way, Anil and Sarath are also assisted by Sarath’s brother, Gamini, a doctor traumatized by the brutalities of war that he sees daily and by the destructive drugs he consumes to keep him working, treating the injured and officiating over the dead. Other characters in the book include Anil’s American friend Leaf, a forensic specialist who seems to be struggling with Alzheimer’s disease, Anil’s ex-husband, a Sri Lankan she met as a student in London, and her lover Cullis, a science writer who she came to know while at a conference in Montreal, and Chitra Abeysekera, a Sri Lankan pupae research scholar whom Anil seeks out in Colombo. These characters lead to the development of other storylines oriented around Anil’s past and present. One also meets Gamini’s wife, Chrishanti, and Sarath’s wife, as the lives of Gamini and Sarath spin out into similarly independent and interdependent webs of personal and professional relationships like Anil’s.

These rhizomatic outgrowths of storylines involve not just characters of different nationalities but also events in different times (medieval and twentieth century) and places (from different cities in the U.S., the U.K., Sri Lanka, and also Canada and Central America). Each of these nodes in the novel hint at other stories at local, national, regional, transnational, and global levels. The novel itself, by gesturing to all of these nodes simultaneously, seems to try and hold all these local, national, and global levels at once. It is possible to trace one level, as some scholars and reviewers have done as will be discussed below, throughout the book. These odd movements across time and space, between past and present, between East and West, captured in both the content and form

of the novel makes *Anil's Ghost*, like Ondaatje, a paradigmatic case of a global text, gesturing towards a kind of global literature. That it takes up these time-space continuums within the context of a human rights crisis and mission makes the novel an even more intriguing case since the language and ideology of human rights adopts a kind of timeless, universal perspective while its practice functions within an acutely historical national and international setting.

I take up the case of Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* in this last case study chapter because, in their respective uneasy mixes of the national and the global, this author and text closely capture the central problem of human rights discourse in terms of crisis presentation (who or what can best speak about what particular crisis) and cause representation (who or what can best advocate what specific cause). This central problem is a product of the paradox in which human rights discourse is simultaneously premised on ideas of universality and a common humanity, on the one hand, while human rights crises are situated in particular locales and grounded in notions of an *uncommon* humanity (often centered on various politics of difference), on the other hand. To articulate the possibilities and limits of Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* as a (re)presenter and (re)presentation of a particular human rights crisis, as I will try to do so below, is thus also one way to identify the possibilities and limits of presenting and representing human rights concepts and crises from the universal, common humanity, perspective of the discourse.

***Anil's Ghost* and Human Rights Discourse: Human Rights Stories and Storytelling**

Let's start with the possibilities. In this section, I will attempt to think through some contributions a novel like *Anil's Ghost* might bring to the language and ideology of human rights and to the various individual and group actors that comprise a human rights discourse network. One important contribution of Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* to the question of presentation and representation of human rights ideas and issues is that it raises the question of what a "human rights" story is. A cursory look at the critical reception *Anil's Ghost* has received reveals the wide range of themes and topics, global and national, that

the novel appears to take on or at least seems to touch on, successfully or not – positivist history, empirical truth, systems of justice, Buddhism, transnational identity, and Sri Lanka’s civil war, to name a few (I will discuss specific critical receptions later in this chapter). The novel seems to make the case that the material and topics for human rights narratives are wide ranging and perhaps all encompassing. That one can find traces of the forensic thriller, detective mystery, historical novel, terrorist novel, story of return, and story of redemption, as the readers that I will survey below have done, suggests that a “human rights” story is and can be many things. By incorporating parts of all these different genres in unexpected ways (that is, setting up the plot, characters, and setting to be constructed around them, and then changing the trajectory or rejecting the norms), *Anil’s Ghost* underscores how human rights issues (and their stories), because of their complexities, cannot be framed as only one kind of story. Each human rights story is at once, and perhaps should be represented, as Jeet Thayil observes about *Anil’s Ghost*, as “part forensic thriller, part anthropological field journal, part love story and part historical detective mystery” (par. 5).

The novel also opens up the complexity of a human rights narrative by telling its story from various characters’ points of view and shifts in time and place, which also telescopes the temporal dimension of human rights experience in certain ways. In *Anil’s Ghost*, the most obvious example of narrating from a different character’s perspective is in the relationship between Sarath and his brother Gamini. In the section entitled, “The Mouse,” one learns about Gamini’s perspective on growing up in the same family as Sarath. Sarath himself shares little of his family’s past and personal present, a silence and secrecy that for Anil makes her doubt Sarath’s motives and actions – is he genuinely interested in solving the case of Sailor’s identity, or is he a tool of the government, and simply patronizing her investigations? This revealed history of Gamini’s childhood, kept quiet by Sarath, suggests that a human rights story can be, maybe must be pursued from more than one perspective. And that when the story is told from one person’s experience, it invariably includes the experiences of others, especially family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. One has a better sense of who Gamini is and why he continues to hurl himself

in his work at the hospital in self-destructive ways because he reveals his story. But one also develops a deeper understanding of the closed-book Sarath through Gamini's story. In each instance of a closer view of these characters, especially how the prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka has affected their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, one begins to see a more personal aspect of a crisis than that often offered in a human rights report.

As for an example of a shift in time and place, often overtly marked by a change in script (from italics to plain text), in the novel, the most obvious instance, and most perplexing, is the story of the man who strangles another man in the train and throws the body out the window (31-32). This man never returns in the novel and the scene is never explained in the context of Anil's quest. This puzzling snippet of a subplot might suggest the multiple stories of human rights violations that can arise in one time and place that perhaps go unnoticed because of other more dominant and recognized abuses. Or it might be a specific instance of violence associated with the conflict, an act of violence so quickly administered, so anonymously characterized, and so promptly forgotten, as to highlight this particular character of such everyday violence in a conflict situation, that the violence is at once more brutal (for its callousness) and less brutal (because one is desensitized to its daily nature). One cannot know for sure what Ondaatje wanted to convey with this semblance of a secondary story, and even if one could ascertain this, there is no certainty that his message will be decoded in the way that he intended it.

In the context of human rights discourse and its network of actors and speech acts, these unusual narrative devices in *Anil's Ghost* seem designed to sensitize the readers to different kinds of violence (public and private, physical and psychological) associated with human rights crises (and their narratives). They also appear to be highlighting how these complex webs of violence that occur under the rubric of a national conflict that is more likely to secure international media attention involve multiple parties with various and varying agendas. They further foreground how human rights stories usually cannot be told or understood from only one perspective or only one time and place. In so doing, the novel seems to suggest that human rights language and ideas should not be conceived as a simple moral code of what should or should not be done to and by human beings, but

be understood as essentially a *framework* of event analysis grounded in moral, political, and legal philosophies. As the philosophy and laws pursuant from starting points like the UDHR have evolved, the average participant in human rights discourses, the novel seems to suggest, has to recognize that each human rights crisis emerges from a labyrinth of issues – historical, cultural, political, social, and economic, as well as local, national, regional, and international. It suggests, therefore, that thinking of the crisis from only one perspective, or in only one context, will never be nearly enough, and it begins to offer nuances to a sometimes too-simple discourse of right and wrong invoked in speech acts for human rights protection that potentially reduce human rights concerns to a single moral code, thus unfairly universalizing certain types of moral judgments.

A similar conclusion may also be drawn from the way Ondaatje includes multiple layers of involvement and investment in the plot of *Anil's Ghost*. Although the principle story may seem to be Sri Lanka and the human rights abuses that arise from the civil war, Ondaatje spins off the story in various directions and levels. There is the personal level that involves a national stage in the stories of Sarath, Gamini, Ananda, and Palipana, (all of these people's lives are destroyed in some way by the conflict, but also by their personal failings). There is also the personal level that includes a global arena and other national territories in the stories of Anil and her various friends, family, and lovers. This multi-level and multi-directional narrative mode suggests that there is more to Sri Lanka than just the human rights abuses and the conflict, and that this small country and its inhabitants and visitors are implicated in a global network of concerns. And that even as these conflict-related events influence every aspect of people's lives, there may be other aspects to their beings that seem separate from it, or that perhaps people want to keep separate from it. The novel thus makes explicit the kinds of interactions in a networked system that may not be immediately evident to its readers at specific national and local sites.

Aside from making these potentially productive critiques and clarifications about human rights stories and storytelling, the novel also offers the possibility of reaching out to different communities of people and perhaps bringing them into dialogue within the

discourse network as actors. This is a move of some potential for empowering and mobilizing the multitude in the network, to use Hardt and Negri's term. By virtue of being fiction, *Anil's Ghost* claims the poetic license to represent one story, or in this case, several stories, oriented around sociopolitical issues like globalization, diaspora, ethnic conflict, and human rights practices. Pulling together several topics that are often explicitly handled in isolation invites a diverse readership for the novel, possibly tapping into hitherto latent actors for human rights, thereby inciting, to use Hardt and Negri's terms, new multitudes from the always-already present possibilities of the subject-agents that comprise Empire. The numerous perspectives on the global, national, and local issues made available in the novel also could possibly offer some topics for discussion among existing human rights communities, again expanding the multitude.

This reading of *Anil's Ghost* situates the text on a *global* discourse network as opposed to a national and international one. Specifically, such a technique might be read as countering a tendency of some human rights discourse users to reductively frame and interpret a country and its people only through the frameworks of the prevailing (often defining) human rights crisis for that particular country and people, or as a local situation that might be seen as immediately transparent for outsiders who approach that country through the lens of human rights. So, for example, Burma is associated predominantly in an international framework with a lack of democracy, but less with illegal gem smuggling, even though this trade is almost as egregious there as the blood diamonds trade in various African countries. Similarly, South Africa, in an international system, is forever marked by apartheid and now HIV/AIDS, and Northern Ireland eternally drawn by religious conflict. The international face of these sites on the human rights network threaten to occlude other analyses of the human rights situations there, such as their economic problems. A global approach that looks at each local event as tied to global structures, not just national and international systems, should help because it offers another important perspective on human rights crisis presentation and cause representation.

Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* seems to move in this direction. It takes its representation of Sri Lanka and its conflict onto a global network of human rights, wherein its use of multiple voices and reverberations from local incidences allow these real events to be understood in more than purely national or international terms. Indeed, through these unique forms of storytelling, the novel appears to reclaim a kind of particularity and individuality for a nation and its various people that need to be understood less as a "case" and more as a complex set of causes and effects. This emphasis on particularity and individuality may help challenge the tendency in some human rights practices, as discussed earlier in this project, of labeling people simply as victims, saviors, or savages in the dramas of human rights crisis and of places as human rights hells or heavens.

This reading of the novel as a different kind of human rights story and mode of storytelling, an alternative form of presenting and representing human rights investigations and violations, also seems to suggest that almost anything goes with human rights narratives, anything counts as a human rights violation or mode of action. It is not my intention to bring anarchy to a project that has strived to gain legitimacy and authority to important ends or to diminish the movement for human rights by emptying the term and concept of any real meaning. However, it does seem that when it comes to human lives, it is difficult to isolate one aspect from another. Perhaps this open quality of a human rights story has much to do with the all-encompassing and ever-expanding definition of human rights from civil and political to social, economic, and cultural rights – a condition that allows for a global discourse space that can be, at its best, globally relevant and locally specific without being universalizing in a way that occludes the specifics of any situation. As the discourse of human rights embraces more and more oppressed groups and oppressive acts, the plots, characters, settings, and themes of human rights stories will likely grow, maybe to the point where one might conclude that the very phrase "human rights" seems meaningless because everything can be framed in these terms. This may lead to a circumstance where there is no longer a standard understanding of human rights or a set of norms that are relevant to all human beings. Or perhaps this inclusive nature of a human rights story simply has more to do with the way

in which all stories about human beings, because of their human dimension, cannot help but be, at some level, a human rights story.

Whatever its contributing factors, one result of this open-ended all-inclusive aspect of human rights stories presented here might lead some to argue that everything should be about human rights, and so every story is a human rights story. And what is important, then, is not to try and define a human rights narrative model, as I am suggesting here, but to trace each story for what it can tell us about human life and lives. While this position makes a good point, there is also value in trying to theorize the typical characteristics of a human rights story – its conventions of production and consumption – especially the way aspects of a human rights narrative and its form of narrativizing are often constructed from elements of the UDHR’s philosophy of the conditions of humanity. In a way, as seen with survivor narratives like Rusesabagina’s *An Ordinary Man*, these elements of the UDHR’s logic seem to emerge as plausible slots in the story grammar of human rights narratives, to be recombined at will by various speakers with the particularities of their local sites. And as the reception to *Anil’s Ghost* will show, when these recombinations are altered in unexpected ways, they can lead to negative reactions to the text.

Another reason for thinking systematically about the nature of human rights narratives – their genre, form, and content – then relates to expectations of the audience. As the critical reception to *Anil’s Ghost* that I will review later in this chapter will show, genre (the identity of a text) apparently matters, in the sense that what the author seems to be building into a text (its content and form) does not necessarily guarantee what is taken out of it. Instead, what readers *think* a text is (its genre) plays a big part in how they will read it. Thus a study on the evolution of UDHR logics into textual genre forms – how the philosophy of the UDHR influences the form and content of texts in their sites of reception can have much to offer, if only to better solicit particular kinds of reader responses for activism purposes, or to better understand certain developments in literary genre because of this discourse’s globalization.

As human rights discourse globalizes and its body of texts, especially literary texts, grows, it will be vital to sketch out the conventions that start to identify, if not govern, these texts in *more than one dimension*. That is, to return to the case study of *Anil's Ghost*, at least two sets of conventions will be at play in texts like *Anil's Ghost*: one, the moral logics of human right philosophies as realized in the discourses referenced to official documents like the UDHR, and the other, imposed by genre conventions (especially those of biography, autobiography, and realist prose fiction) because of readers' familiarity with the genre forms as used in other ideologies, particularly in nineteenth-century nationalism. Studying how these two sets of conventions combine and clash in human rights oriented texts in the interpretive strategies of various communities of readers gesture to the adjustments being made in the social life of human rights discourse and in literary texts as a result of the globalization of human rights in a network scenario. These differences in text and reception of the text also point to the difference between being *on* a globalizing network (the presence of a text), and being *an agent* on such a network (the power or action of the text, the reception of the text by other actors on the network) in terms of influencing the discourse or expanding the network through multitude building, for example.

***Anil's Ghost* and Human Rights Discourse: Critiques of Human Rights Practices**

Besides opening up questions about human rights stories and storytelling, *Anil's Ghost* also critiques the practices of the international human rights system, a move that could potentially influence the understanding its readers may have of this system. As I will elaborate in the next section, much work has already been done in this area or reading the novel's aspects of human rights critique. Some critics have eloquently demonstrated how the novel questions the assumptions of positivist history, empirical truth, and retributive justice, while others have persuasively illustrated how the text challenges the theory and practice of human rights discourse when used in a specific national context. Thus while I will reference their work, I will not repeat their arguments again here. Instead, my focus here is to draw from and nuance some of these critiques and

to consider how their work in fact reveals the difficulties faced by a globally-oriented and universalist discourse like human rights in a nationally-centered and culturally-diverse world.

One illustrative example of such difficulties concerns the questioning of empirical truth and the presence of Buddhist philosophy in *Anil's Ghost*. Antoinette Burton's "Archive of Bones: *Anil's Ghost* and the Ends of History," Teresa Derrickson's "Will the 'Un-truth' Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," and John Bolland's "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*: Civil Wars, Mystics, and Rationalists" each deal with this topic.¹⁸¹ In different ways, they all

¹⁸¹ In "Archive of Bones: *Anil's Ghost* and the Ends of History," Burton claims that Ondaatje questions the relative merits of a devotion to empiricism and a positivist approach to history, which she finds to be standard protocol in the practices of the international human rights system. Burton writes, "It is this contest between the alleged certainties of social and physical science and the claims of 'other knowledges' that Ondaatje engages in his novel, *Anil's Ghost* (2000) – offering us not just a narrative about the dangers of excessive faith in empiricism ('hard' evidence), but a reflection on the continued possibility of History itself as an exclusively western epistemological form" (40). Burton sees Anil personifying this excessive faith in empiricism and positivist history, and Palipana as the antithesis. She writes: "Ondaatje uses Palipana's story expressly to set up a dichotomy between western epistemological presumptions and practices – to which Anil is so attached – and those derived from non-western experiences and sources. In this sense, Palipana is an anti-colonialist who does not reject history, but seeks to re-imagine it on new procedural grounds: a kind of fictional Subaltern Studies hero, albeit a fallen one" (40).

In "Will the 'Un-truth' Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," Derrickson suggests that *Anil's Ghost* troubles the notions of empirical truth and the assumption that discovering the truth will lead to justice, two notions that underlie the practices of the international human rights system of reporting and publicizing human rights abuses in order to stop them. Derrickson writes, "Of concern in *Anil's Ghost* is not so much the issue of whether or not global human rights should be stipulated, but the approach by which those rights are legislated through means of international intervention. Specifically, *Anil's Ghost* troubles the idea that the 'truth' of human rights violations is both, on the one hand, *discoverable*, and, on the other hand, *desirable*" (122).

In "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*: Civil Wars, Mystics, and Rationalists," Bolland focuses on the Buddhist principles incorporated into the novel, arguing that these philosophies challenge the Enlightenment rationalism ingrained in human rights

argue that the focus on non-empirical forms of truth and on Buddhist ideas represents a counter to the Enlightenment ideals of science and reason that inform the human rights practices like Anil's discipline of forensic anthropology and her human rights organization-inspired investigation. What these articles gesture towards, but do not explicitly investigate, is precisely the limits of the dominant human rights ideology when faced with religious beliefs, especially Buddhism, that seem entirely antithetical to the specific doctrines, if not the basic principles, of Christianity that seem to inform the standard human rights ideology, even if the UDHR drafters were careful not to use explicitly religious terms like God or faith. Typically, these critics suggest that Ondaatje opposes Buddhism and Christianity to favor an Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, over Western religion, Christianity (Bolland especially seems to adopt this position), or Enlightenment "truth" against Buddhism "untruth" and then privileging one as the "indigenous" choice, over the other as a "foreign" concept (Burton and Derrickson particularly appear to take on this framework).

While these observations about the novel and these critiques about the human right system are well taken, there seems to be some room for finessing these scholars' conclusions, if not their arguments themselves. Manav Ratti, in "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and the Aestheticization of Human Rights," to me comes closer to identifying what seems to be really at work in *Anil's Ghost's* use of Buddhism when she suggests that Ondaatje highlights the difficulties of translating ideology to nation, and ideas to a particular place and time.¹⁸² Ratti's reading of the novel supports my claims for

practices. Like Burton and Derrickson, Bolland identifies Anil as the personification of Enlightenment rationalism. He writes that, for Anil, her work with the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva becomes "an enlightenment project: the establishment of empirical truth will lay the foundations of a legal process through which a just social order can be established. It is in the conflict between Anil's enlightenment rationalism and Sarath's religio-philosophical apprehension of the significance of 'Sailor,' as the dead man comes to be known, that the novel's debate between mystic and rationalist, Buddhist and secular perceptions of the world is conducted" (103).

¹⁸² In "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and the Aestheticization of Human Rights," Ratti suggests that "it is the malleability of the aesthetic space of literature that will allow

the possibility of resistance on a global network, exercised by individual texts, even as they need to comply to the network's conventions if they are to be heard. In this reading of the situation, the issue is not so much whether the dominant human rights discourse is "Western" or "Christian" or whether the main ideology in Sri Lanka is Eastern or Buddhist. As Ondaatje's narrative stages its human-rights-related events, such binary logic reveals itself as faltering in a place like Sri Lanka where different religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity), languages (Sinhala, Tamil, and English), and ethnicities (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers) coexist. Neither is it the novel's point that one "indigenous" form should be privileged over a "foreign" one.

Instead, the issue is that there are so many factors and traditions involved even in one nation that a discourse like human rights, even one as "universal" (that strives to be and purports to be) as the dominant human rights language, must recognize (and yet cannot hope to fully grasp and interpellate) if it is to adequately intervene in cases of human rights violations. And the point is that both "foreign" and "native" modes – better said in terms of a discourse network, the "local" and the "global" approaches – may be productive and may already be coexisting together. The images of the pieta (traditionally associated with Catholicism) and the life wheel (traditionally associated with Buddhism) that reoccur throughout the novel suggest this kind of coexistence and mutual intelligibility, even though none of the characters appear to be especially religious, suggesting further a prevalent secularism even in the midst of these conflicting religions and traditions. That said, the characters' seeming lack of religiosity or apparent leanings

Ondaatje the opportunity to explore the ways in which human rights may both succeed *and* break down in differing nation-state contexts, a 'literarization' that helps to address questions of law concerning precisely the application and enforcement of such rights" (127). Ratti refers to this space as the "polyphonous space of literature," a space that she finds Ondaatje using to challenge what Ranajit Guha calls the "abstract univocality" of law, a condition that affects human rights discourse which is generally a legal discourse in its official form (122). See Ranajit Guha's "Chandra's Death" (1987) for his discussion of the abstract univocality of law, basically the severely rigid way in which legal language characterizes and interprets events.

towards secularism at least philosophically does not preclude their recognition or understanding of the moral weight or cultural purchase of such religious iconography.

Besides the criticisms of the Enlightenment premises that inform the practices of the international human rights system that Burton, Bolland, Derrickson and Ratti identify in the novel, there is another kind of critique that *Anil's Ghost* seems to make – that this system sometimes glosses over the lived experiences of human rights crisis at the individual level in its push to document, publicize, and adjudicate the act of violence itself. In an interview with Tom LeClair, Ondaatje observes that the term “human rights” tends to erase the individual human stories of individuals. He states:

Certain words, certain phrases are said so often that they come to have no reverberation. “Human rights,” the phrase is indivisible, but the words mean nothing to me. When I hear the word “politics” I roll my eyes, or if I hear a political speech I can’t listen to it. And so in a way I burrow underneath these words, and I try not to refer to them. The words are like old coins. They just don’t feel real. (LeClair par. 15)

True to Ondaatje’s inclinations, the novel seems to highlight the importance of these individual lived experiences by focusing on its individual characters, their stories, and their lives, rather than the national conflict and its international connections. Ondaatje tells Maya Jaggi in an interview, “I didn’t want to write the public portrait of the place, but the situation of the individual in a country like this. I was more interested in how people live: how does fear affect you, and denial?” (Ondaatje, Interview, Jaggi 6).¹⁸³

¹⁸³ In this same interview with Jaggi, Ondaatje elaborates on his individual lived experience approach to the novel several times. He states that the novel “isn’t a statement about the war, as though this is the ‘true and only story.’ It’s my individual take on four or five characters, a personal tunneling into it” (Ondaatje, Interview, Jaggi 6). He adds, “Even though the book deals with a world that’s familiar to some of us, most of it takes place in private. The public events are very brief, and there is a huge gap between the public and the private” (7). He continues, “Our newspapers are full of official stories, and what the novelist is responsible for is something unhistorical, unofficial – what goes on in private. That’s what interests me” (7).

One way that *Anil's Ghost* seems to raise this critique is by strategically withholding concrete context and details of the Sri Lankan civil war.¹⁸⁴ This is admittedly a counterintuitive statement in itself, and even more so, for all the critics who faulted the novel for its lack of focus on the historical specificity of Sri Lanka. Yet notice that the novel is careful about who withholds the details (the local characters, Sarath and Gamini) and who seems to fail to grasp the specifics (the global character, Anil). These strategic character developments actually make the novel more representative of conflict situations and revealing of discursive practices in typical human rights speech acts, even if it is rather politically incorrect.

The withholding of concrete information comes, significantly, from the “local” characters of Sarath and Gamini. Although they make general statements about the civil war, it is often in the context of how it affected their lives and the lives of those they know, rather than offering the readers an education in any explicitly official or oppositional, hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, narrative of Sri Lankan history. It is seldom a mini-lecture on the history of the conflict nationally or of the involvement of other states in it internationally. The closest form of a synopsis one gets happens when Sarath first meets Anil and he describes the situation in brief and broad terms.¹⁸⁵ To have

¹⁸⁴ In the same interview with Jaggi, Ondaatje explicitly states that he avoided trying to make the novel a historical and political statement only about Sri Lanka. He states, that the novel is “not a historical novel; it’s a very fictional world” (7). He also wanted to avoid the branding that *Anil's Ghost* “is a book ‘about Sri Lanka’” or “a statement about the war” there (7, 6). Rather he wanted to call attention to several individual human experiences of war, violence, and terror. He states, “the book isn’t just about Sri Lanka; it could be Guatemala or Bosnia or Ireland. The stories are very familiar in other parts of the world” (7).

¹⁸⁵ Sarath states: “The bodies turn up weekly now. The height of the terror was ’eighty-eight and ’eighty-nine, but of course it was going on long before that. Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. *Every side*. This is an unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So it’s secret gangs and squads. Not like Central America. The government was not the only one doing the killing. You had, and still have, three camps of enemies – one in the north, two in the south – using weapons, propaganda, fear, sophisticated posters, censorship. Importing state-of-the-art weapons from the West, or manufacturing homemade weapons. A couple of years ago people just started

Sarath speak of the conflict in such nondescript terms is in fact quite close to what Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have called “truth in correspondence,” and which I would like to equate with a represented *human experience* of history that is posited as a truth superceding any official or partisan-oppositional narrative. It perhaps takes one who has lived with a conflict for a long time (either as local “native” or as “participant-observer”) to be worn down by the protracted violence and adopt a level of cynicism and detachment, a state of being and experiencing nonetheless characteristic of one particular site of conflict. The crisis stops being an emergency and becomes a daily affair that one lives with (and lives with *in local terms*) rather than passionately lectures about or obsessively analyzes through abstraction. This, of course, is but one possible response to prolonged experiences of crisis.

If the withholding of specificities come from the local characters, the lack of awareness of local particularities is presented by the global characters (that is, the representatives in the novel of a more transnational point of view), thereby putting into play again the tensions between the local and the global of a universalist discourse and globalizing network like that of human rights when applied to specific situations. One of the most contentious examples, often cited by critics who disapprove of the novel, of eliding the details of a local situation is Anil’s observation that the facts of death, the physical signs on the corpse of how someone died, are the “same for Colombo as for Troy” (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 64). Yet the novel’s meaning is again more nuanced than this statement might suggest. Significantly, this remark comes from the global character Anil.

As with the case of Sarath, to have Anil see the similarities across deaths in ways that seem to overlook the local specificities is also in keeping with such truth in correspondence. In her statement, one recognizes the tendencies of moral interpretations from a global perspective. It often takes one who comes from “outside” a conflict (either as globalized “foreigner” or as a “non-participant-observer”) to make such comparisons

disappearing. Or bodies kept being found burned beyond recognition. There’s no hope of affixing blame. And no one can tell who the victims are” (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 17).

across conflicts, comparisons that the localized “native” or “participant observer” is unlikely to make because he or she is too “close” to the event, to make “general sense” of an experience. In terms more specific to discursive and social practices in the human rights field, it takes someone like Anil who has worked on various “human rights” assignments, who like the big-time foreign news correspondents, only engage with limited aspects of the crisis to which their professions bring them, to have such reactions. In this, *Anil’s Ghost* seems to suggest that the category or label of global is itself actually plural, and local in a disciplinary way, if not local in a geographical one. If the foreign correspondents fly in only to plot the present and speculate on the future of the crisis, the forensic anthropologists arrive only to trace the past of the crisis in its tragic remains, thereby facing one mass grave after another.

Again, this perspective might be strategic rather than straightforward. It seems to echo prevailing critiques about the human rights project as practiced by some representatives of the international system, thereby incorporating a lack of faith in or at least a troubled sense of how a particular language and ideology of human rights might adequately address a national conflict like a civil war, if at all, and whether sufficient attention is paid by human rights professionals when they try to do so. The novel’s lack of historical specificity that some scholars find so troubling might then be seen as an expression of the very insensitivity to historical specificity in some human rights missions that Ondaatje claims to critique with *Anil’s Ghost*.

Here, my methodological concerns with human rights language and ideology and the related speech acts that emerge in its global plain of discourse offer another view of what the novel may be attempting. Rather than attribute this ahistorical fault to Ondaatje personally, and thus equate (naively) an author with his main protagonist, it might be more useful to entertain the idea that the novel represents this failing within itself and in one character in order to critique it. And that character – Anil – is well-chosen. As the principle protagonist, the perspective from which most of the story is told and interpreted, and as a representative of a profession (forensic anthropology) often concerned (like *Médecins Sans Frontières* is) with bearing a kind of professional witness to human crisis,

often in opposition to national hegemonies, Anil is a precise figure from which to embody and critique the practices of some human rights missions. The novel's intentionally less than nationally-specific and historically-situated perspective allows it to call into question how human rights language can be used and its practices implemented in sometimes less than locally-sensitive ways in various sites worldwide.¹⁸⁶

At the same time Ondaatje's globalizing move in this novel need not be taken as simplistically universalizing: he is anything but equating these different national locations. Instead, *Anil's Ghost* may well be offering a more productive critique of the international human rights system, one which might invite its readers to see more of the local as an expression of "the human" rather than "the indigenous," and "the local" as opposed to any too-simple abstractions about capitalism or state power. Through the figure of Anil, Ondaatje critiques not only nationally-orchestrated killings, but also internationally-sponsored missions, especially the process and effects of such missions on the local situation. This critique comes most clearly in the way Sarath dies at the end of the novel, in part, because Anil was so insistent about displaying her findings in the hearing. The hesitation Sarath has about collaborating with Anil, especially his disdain for international reporters who fly in and fly out, also makes explicit this critique of how although the foreign and global human rights actor insisting on the rightful conditions of being human may be doing more good for the human rights of the people in that country in general than a national government that denies or fails to protect the rights of those under its care, these same global actors can also sometimes do more harm than good, whatever their understanding of particular national crises, and hurt the very local actors whom they seek to help. Their actions may exacerbate the very conditions they seek to alleviate and jeopardize the very people they aim to aid. The channeling of the novel's events through Anil's point of view may thus have been conceived by Ondaatje

¹⁸⁶ Ondaatje himself insisted that he specifically wanted to obscure the national in favor of the global in *Anil's Ghost* so as to comment on not just Sri Lanka but also on other crises around the world. In his interview with Jaggi, Ondaatje says he did "backflips" to avoid having *Anil's Ghost* be "taken as representative" (6, 7).

specifically to point out the limits of her understanding about the networks on which she, like many other human rights agents, operates.

In addition to presenting a rather ahistorical representation of a human rights crisis from the globalized perspective of a somewhat typical agent of an international human rights system, the novel also critiques this system, especially its moral calls most commonly seen in human rights campaign literature, by not advocating a particular cause. Some critics like Tom LeClair in “The Sri Lankan Patients” and Kanishka Goonewardena in “*Anil’s Ghost: History/Politics/Ideology*” have criticized the novel for not paying enough attention to the dead of Sri Lanka, all those fallen because of the political violence. LeClair, for instance, concludes his review of the novel thus:

In *Anil’s Ghost* Ondaatje chooses to write his ‘real’ words and beautiful sentences for the walking ghosts of Sri Lanka, the traumatized apolitical survivors. But what about the dead? The tens of thousands of dead – the women and men, Tamils and Sinhalese, poor and rich, the loved and unloved, who died or murdered for political causes, however misguided, necessary or crazy – deserve more understanding and respect than Ondaatje gives them. (par. 8)

Such critique in fact expresses a frustration with the novel for failing to be a “proper” human rights story, in that it does not forward or support a cause politically and morally.

As with the previous observations about a lack of specific national history, I want to suggest that this refusal to conform to a moral message for human rights is also strategic. In a novel that seems intent on questioning the form and content of human rights stories and storytelling and on challenging the conventional practices and norms of the international human rights system, this very lack of a cause (a crisis campaign), a denial of a straightforward moral message of outrage or support, awareness or advocacy, publicity or propaganda, appears to challenge the very moral premises and rhetorical techniques that are often used to emotionally charge human rights narratives, offer easy catharsis in some forms of human rights storytelling, and to justify a variety of actions, including military and humanitarian interventions, in the name of human rights.

At one level, one might read this lack of moral imperative in the novel as a comment on the bankrupt morality of those professionally involved in the human rights field or of the cause itself as it is practiced professionally. One sees hints of this sense of moral bankruptcy when the novel tells us that “nobody at the Center for Human Rights was hopeful” about Anil’s mission (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 16). As for Anil, although she is a member of one of those international missions, she does not start off this mission with a particular “cause,” a specific moral imperative. Indeed, her task is a more seemingly simple, material one: to identify the dead. Along the way, however, Anil develops her own mission, her own cause, to discover the identity of Sailor and in doing so to reveal the government’s killings and terrorizing of its own citizens. Such a quest is directly in keeping with the conventions of human rights practices whereby state-directed violations are brought to international attention through forensic evidence. But while this may be Anil’s cause and even though she is the main protagonist of the novel, the text itself does not support this cause. It makes clear that the quest is a personal one for Anil, rather than one attached to the mission upon which she was sent. And the novel ends Anil’s quest in failure – her attempts to upstage the government is impotent even once she has Sailor’s identity in hand. It also emphasizes that this failure, a personal loss for Anil, brings about the loss of Sarath’s life. If there were a moral message in *Anil’s Ghost*, it seems it would be one entirely antithetical to typical messages in human rights stories. Instead of speaking truth to power for social justice and human rights, the message rather seems to be that speaking truth to power may not bring justice but more injustice, not the protection of life but the instigation of death.

On another level, one might also interpret this absence of moral compass in the novel as a critique of the moral basis in human rights discourse, a basis that is supposed to unite all human beings, to outrage our moral sensibilities when we see our fellow humankind treated inhumanely, and compel us to prevent human rights abuses and promote the protection of human rights, but a basis nonetheless that has failed again and again as crimes against humanity continue unabated despite years of human rights promotion. In fact, the long view of history that *Anil’s Ghost* takes, especially through the

viewpoints of Sarath and Palipana, reminds us of the long history of human rights violations that preceded the widespread use of the term “human rights.” The sixth century graves, the court ladies buried along with the king, presumably before their time, these too are examples of “human rights” abuses, that basic notions of morality not only did not prevent, but actually supported as “right” and “righteous.” Perhaps, Ondaatje seems to suggest, the impetus should not be so much morality but politics, perhaps the focus should not be so much an international audience, but a national one. Presumably a local matter is best understood by local people, and the most just solutions might best be crafted by those closest to the problem. In this sense, *Anil’s Ghost* is not to be chastised for overlooking the specificities of the local and national situation of Sri Lanka as some scholars like LeClair and Goonewardena have done.

The Problems and Ethics of Global Representation in a Network

Entering a network of human rights discourse, however globalized, with such a tightly constructed entry aimed at deconstructing some of the discourse’s and network’s most cherished premises is, however, not without its risks. Despite these contributions the novel seems to strive to make to human rights discourse, especially its important critiques of the premises and practices of the international human rights system, this mode of representation has proved itself to be not without problems. These problems start to take us into the territory of limits, the boundaries of group identity or barriers of national sentiment against which a global network and universalist discourse of human rights must contend when being applied to local situations. More specifically, they begin to reveal the limits of what is acceptable in human rights stories and storytelling, in acts of presentation and representation within a discursive space that though global in character, is always locally situated, or that because it is global is always present in more than one local site.

The most pressing of problems with Ondaatje’s mode of presentation and representation in *Anil’s Ghost* is what some Sri Lankan scholars, “locals” to the crisis, have identified as its over-simplification of Sri Lanka’s civil war. Sri Lankan scholar

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke captures this frustration best when he writes about Anglophone writings about Sri Lanka like *Anil's Ghost* in "Sri Lanka's 'Ethnic' Conflict in its Literature in English":

We are never permitted by the writers in English, whether they be Sinhalese, Tamil, or Burgher, to see a presentation of the actual conflict in all its complexity, with its tangled web of wrongs – economic, political, and physical – perpetrated not by one side or the other but both. It is as though prudence, moral cowardice, or sheer superficiality has prevented writers of all communities from analyzing or even facing the complexity of the situation. (453)

While this might be an overstatement, Goonetilleke expresses a common and often justified frustration by "locals" about "global" texts dealing with national topics. Such a nationalist objection is easily leveled against what I have defined as a text pitched onto a global network – a text aimed at a global audience and focusing on global perspectives will invariably, if regrettably, tend to gloss some aspects of the national while incorporating the transnational. Still, such a charge of oversimplifying a complicated conflict should not be taken lightly. As with the earlier arguments by various critics on *Anil's Ghost*, I wonder whether this critique might pivot on genre and reader expectations. Might this novel be addressing the complexity of the Sri Lankan conflict in unexpected and thus unrecognized ways? Such a reading is indeed possible, and needs to be considered as actively questioning the boundaries of such categories like the national, transnational, international, and global, and the different modes of representation conventionally adopted for each.

It is indeed possible to recover from the text overt representations of Ondaatje dealing with the complexity of the Sri Lankan conflict, at least to a degree: he shows how the conflict is *felt* as, even if he does not show how the conflict *is*, a "tangled web of wrongs – economic, political, and physical" (453). However, he does so in such an abstract way, and only through the experiences of his main characters, that one only sees very particular aspects of the conflict and not *all* parts of it from *all* perspectives as Goonetilleke seems to call for. Tools from the realist novel (Leo Tolstoy's *War and*

Peace (1886), for example), register with the reader as claiming representation of reality, a claim frustrated by the purported lack of details (at least of *official* details) in *Anil's Ghost*. At the same time, it could be argued that Ondaatje was quite aware of the limits on any globalized and hence limited perspective, and so he builds into his novel the abstract, perhaps superficial, understanding of a complex conflict in the form of Anil, the protagonist in the book. A sense of this technique can be discerned from Sarath's demand that Anil keep their investigations into Sailor secret. He states:

“You don't understand how bad things were. Whatever the government is possibly doing now it was worse when there was real chaos. You were not here for that – the law abandoned by everyone, save a few good lawyers. Terror everywhere, from all sides. We wouldn't have survived with your rules of Westminster then. So illegal government forces rose up in retaliation. And we were caught in the middle.” (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 153-54)

Through Sarath's statement, Ondaatje makes clear that as a foreigner making a quick trip into Colombo, even if as a participant-observer, there is only so much Anil can comprehend, a limitation Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (2004) have identified as a gap of incommensurability.

It is also possible to see Ondaatje referencing in passing, if not showing in detail, that the wrongs are “perpetrated not by one side or the other but both” as Goonetilleke advocates, which is its own critique of the purported universalism of human rights (453). Ondaatje makes this point when he has Sarath explain that the terror is the work of “three camps of enemies – one in the north, two in the south,” including the government (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 17). He also states that all sides use “weapons, propaganda, fear, sophisticated posters, censorship” to wage their battles (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 17). Later in the novel, Sarath says that, at the height of the violence, being in Sri Lanka felt “like being in a room with three suitors, all of whom had blood on their hands” (Ondaatje,

Anil's Ghost 154).¹⁸⁷ In these ways, one might make a case that *Anil's Ghost* does seem to capture the complex web of economic, social, and political wrongs involved in the Sri Lankan crisis. Indeed one might even argue that the novel, by focusing on the personal lives of a few characters like Sarath and Gamini expands the often purely political focus of national allegorical novels to a more complete picture of how national problems affect individuals in different locales.¹⁸⁸

One particularly revealing instance of such individual experience illuminating the lived experience and impact of conflict and terror occurs midway through the book, ironically not in the form of straight facts but a story. It is a story that Sarath tells Anil to try and have her understand what it was like to live in a state of terror. He says:

“In nearly every house, in nearly every family, there was knowledge of someone’s murder or abduction by one side of another. I’ll tell you a thing I saw...”

Sarath was speaking in the empty offices, but he looked around.

“I was in the south...It was almost evening, the markets closed. Two men, insurgents I suppose, had caught a man. I don’t know what he had done. Maybe

¹⁸⁷ In “‘A Flame Against a Sleeping Lake of Petrol’: Form and the Sympathetic Witness in Selvadurais’ *Funny Boy* and Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*” (2006), Patricia Chu makes a similar argument about the novel placing equal blame on all parties in the conflict, ironically to support her point that *Anil’s Ghost* is an apolitical novel, one disinterested in political analysis and adopting a stance. This raises again the dilemma of assumptions about neutrality and being political or apolitical, issues brought up by Orbinski in the MSF lecture in Chapter Five and the ordinary position of a human being in Rusesabagina’s autobiography in Chapter Six. It calls to mind the central paradox of human rights that presumes cosmopolitan visions and feelings while existing in a less than cosmopolitan world.

¹⁸⁸ Ondaatje tells Jaggi that the private moments of individual lives are what he is fascinated by and reveals his favorite scene in the book: “I was thinking, what do I like most about *Anil’s Ghost*? It was a scene when Gamini doesn’t want to embrace Sarath’s wife because she’d discover how thin he is. For me, that was a heartbreaking moment, light years away from the official stories, it’s little things like that; how characters decipher things and move in the world. There is a political surround to the story, but it is mostly to do with families and relationships” (7).

he had betrayed them, maybe he had killed someone, or disobeyed an order, or not agreed quickly enough. In those days the justice of death came in at any level. I don't know if he was to be executed, or harassed and lectured at, or in the most unlikely scenario, forgiven. He was wearing a sarong, a white shirt, the long sleeves rolled up. His shirt hung outside the sarong. He had no shoes on. He was blindfolded. They propped him up, made him sit awkwardly on the crossbar of the bicycle. One of the captors sat on the saddle, the one with the rifle stood by his side. When I saw them they were about to leave. The man could see nothing that was going on around him or where he would be going.

“When they took off, the blindfolded man had to somehow hang on. One hand on the handlebars, but the other he had to put around the neck of his captor. It was this necessary intimacy that was disturbing. They wobbled off, the man with the rifle following on another bike.

“It would have been easier if they had all walked. But this felt in an odd way ceremonial. Perhaps a bike was a form of status for them and they wished to use it. Why transport a blindfolded victim on a bicycle? It made all life seem precarious. It made all of them more equal. Like drunk university students. The blindfolded man had to balance his body in tune with his possible killer. They cycled off and at the far end of the street, beyond the market buildings, they turned and disappeared. Of course the reason they did it that way was so none of us would forget it.”

[Anil asks] “What did you do?”

[Sarath answers] “Nothing.” (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 154-55)

And on that eerie note of uncomfortable awareness of this odd mix of Sarath's impotence and apathy, stemming perhaps from the contesting emotions of fear and frustration, shame and rage, guilt and anger, of the unequal states of power, the lack of control, the forced intimacy with one's antagonizers, the uncertainty and confusion of a multi-partied conflict staged through acts of terrorism, the story and the chapter ends. This personal story told by Sarath, in a rare moment of disclosure about his personal experience of the

conflict comes in the form of a parable of sorts and is intended to reverberate through the novel as it develops. Ironically then, for a novel that does not live up to readings of straightforward national allegory, this little story powerfully represents what it feels like to live in a state of terror and what it does to people locally and how such experiences may never be grasped by outsiders, since it still puzzles intuitively those who lived through it.

Yet is a sophisticated critique of human rights discourse enough? Or must such a novel that deals with a human rights issue also advocate a specific cause? My own view on the ethics of representation in this novel is divided. *Anil's Ghost* perhaps attempts to accomplish a lot as a text to be consumed on a global network of human rights, but it achieves possibly much less. Although, on the one hand, *Anil's Ghost* does stand as a critique of human rights discourse in its texts, its discursive practices, and its social norms, such a critique, while valuable, does seem immediately irrelevant to the dead and living victims of the conflict, as LeClair puts it so pithily in his review of the book referenced earlier. One way to look at this ethical debate is to ask perhaps what harm or good *Anil's Ghost* does to or for Sri Lanka or to the globalization of human rights norms? There are no easy ways to answer such a question. This reflects perhaps one outcome of this novel, to complicate any simple reactions readers may have on such issues. In this sense, such a story and mode of storytelling about human rights matters could be tremendously productive. But if the effect is that a simplistic story is told and a simplified understanding of the conflict is received, then this kind of narrative and form of narrativizing could be quite harmful. To come at this question from a slightly different angle, on the one hand, *Anil's Ghost* could be the worst way to tell a human rights story (erasing all differences). On the other hand, it could also be the best (uniting all humanity, focusing on emotional truth, rather than historical accuracy).

If Richard Rorty is right when he suggests that what the oppressed need, in a way, is for others to recognize them, their brutalized humanity, so that these others will care about them, then *Anil's Ghost* could be an effective way to tell human rights stories – a fictional story of universal struggle and tenderness, laid upon a real story of violence and

hate (the Sri Lankan civil war), to stake out the positions of both the universal and the local on the global network, as negotiating positions used by the interested parties within this discourse.¹⁸⁹ I cannot presume to know what victims may need or want, much less what they might need or want from a novel. It is impossible to accurately know who, in fact, the readers of a novel like *Anil's Ghost* might be, or what they might take away from reading it, based on their experience. Some may not need truth that corresponds with a reality they already know, and certainly not from an outside author like Ondaatje. They may need instead a way to rethink or re-feel their reality in a way that reports may not provide. Others may demand historical truth from any representation of their struggle, even or perhaps especially from novels largely aimed at a readership quite disconnected from the real crisis. The same may be said for the implied readership for *Anil's Ghost*. Yet, my sense is that the person who buys or borrows *Anil's Ghost* to read is not looking for historical accuracy. It would be unusual for them to expect "history" from literature, even if literature can often render the "sense" of history better than most history books. What a novel can offer, what literature does best, is offer an emotional truth, as *Anil's Ghost* tries to do, if not for the Sri Lankan crisis exactly, then for international human rights endeavors, understandings of diasporic identity, and transnational communication and collaboration generally.

Predictably, however, as the critical reception of the novel shows, there is much resistance to such a polyvalent text, thereby revealing the fissures between global and national readings of a global text like *Anil's Ghost*.

¹⁸⁹ In "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" (1993), Rorty argues that what is needed to mobilize "rich, safe, powerful, people" to recognize the humanity in others unlike themselves or even contribute towards the protection of the humanity of others is "sentimental education," a kind of education that "sufficiently acquaints people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms 'our kind of people' and 'people like us'" (255, 248). With this kind of development of sentiment, there might be basis for recognition of the humanity in and of others, the first step in the protection and promotion of rightful conditions of being human.

Global versus National Readings: Divided Reception and Fissures in the Network

The critical reception to Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* can be classified very broadly into two camps: those who see the novel as doing productive things for politics with its approach to form and content, and those who see the novel as doing destructive things for politics with its play on form and content. The majority of critics in the first camp are, unsurprisingly "foreign" to the national event and the human rights crisis, although there are a few "native" critics here as well. The first camp mostly reads the novel from a global perspective based on an awareness of the philosophical content and contexts of human rights philosophy and discourse. And most of the scholars in the second camp are, also unsurprisingly, "native" to the national event and the human rights crisis, although again, there are a handful of "foreign" critics here also. They largely read the work from a national point of view and hence in resistance to what they feel are the leveling forces of a global network system.

Those of the global readings camp often commend Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* for thinking critically about the assumptions and practices that inform the international human rights system. For example, they find the novel questioning the traditional "Western" notions of history, truth, and justice, a critique that they claim is a much needed challenge to the conventional wisdom of European Enlightenment that informs Western interactions with their Eastern counterparts generally and that is inscribed in standard human rights discourse specifically. The primary assumption underlying the practices of the international human rights system being that "empirical truth will lay the foundations of a legal process through which a just social order can be established" (Bolland 103). Exemplars of this mode of thinking include, as discussed earlier, Burton, Derrickson, and Bolland. Ratti, also referenced above, extends this idea and so argues that Ondaatje "invokes the discourse of human rights in order not only to elicit political and ethical responses to Sri Lanka, but also to show the discourse itself can break down and become frustrated by its application to a particular nation-state context" (122).

Besides this critique of the premises of human rights discourse, some globally-

focused readings of *Anil's Ghost* also tend to favor the way *Anil's Ghost* takes up vital transnational issues. Victoria Cook and Amitava Kumar, for instance, find Ondaatje to be recognizing and celebrating transnational identities when, despite or perhaps because of increased processes of globalization, national identities are ever more important. In "Exploring Transnational Identities in Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," Cook takes Anil as the quintessential transnational figure with a postcolonial history, and finds in Anil's story the tensions of being multinational in local and national situations. She writes, "*Anil's Ghost* provides a forum for the expression of a range of cultural identities...one in which the postcolonial voice does not simply speak from the margins, but is represented as an integrated component of a transnational identity" (par. 7).¹⁹⁰ In the same vein, if in slightly more colorful language, Kumar, in "Notes of an NRI [Non-Resident Indian]: Michael Ondaatje: Skeletons in Sri Lanka's Cupboards," writes that, as a "desi" writer "based in the West," and thus a fellow traveler amidst those trapped (or freed) by transnational identities, he appreciates the way the novel accepts their condition of being "always, and forever, - part Mohandas Gandhi and part Richard Attenborough" (par. 21).

Globally-focused readings also applaud the novel's attempts to form global connections between the work's implied readers (North American and European) and the conflict in Sri Lanka. For example, Margaret Scanlan and Patricia Chu find *Anil's Ghost* trying to transcend the geographical, cultural, and experiential distance between a crisis

¹⁹⁰ Cook writes, "In the character of Anil Tissera, Ondaatje inscribes a cultural formation that could, in many ways, be described as postmodern, in that she transgresses the conventional notions of identity and boundaries of gender and position. However, neither a postmodern, nor a postcolonial perspective or indeed the point of intersection between, is sufficient to encompass the multivalent integration of ideologies and cultures that form the fluid whole that is Anil Tissera. Hers is, more accurately, a transnational perspective; she does indeed cross and re-cross many ideological boundaries, but she does so as a migrant returning to her once colonial homeland. This is not to say that Anil is empty of any national identity at all, but rather that her multiculturalism demonstrates the possibility of a fundamental parity between various nationalist discourses, ascribing multivalency to each of the cultures she encounters. The examination of Ondaatje's work from a transnational approach uncovers some of the clashes that occur between national cultures and the ambivalence inherent in a multicultural identity such as that of Anil's" (par. 4).

situation and a distant audience in *Anil's Ghost*. In "Anil's Ghost and Terrorism's Time," Scanlan argues that the novel seeks to form this connection through its narrative structure that "replicates the experience of terror" (302). It asks the reader to piece together a story from different bits and pieces even as these moments and events seem to resist such sense-making, thereby mimicking the experience of living in a state of terror where one's efforts to build a secure life are consistently challenged.¹⁹¹ Chu, in "'A Flame Against a Sleeping Lake of Petrol': Form and the Sympathetic Witness in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," suggests that the acts of compassion shown and learned by the characters in the novel for each other and their personal crosses may (or are intended to) elicit forms of empathy and action from the distanced reader.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Scanlan writes: "Written in even more tightly condensed fragments than his earlier books, the novel asks the reader to engage in an act of reconstruction, piecing together stories and psychologies as the Sri Lankan artist, Ananda, will piece together the ruined Buddha. Like Ananda's reconstruction, the reader's will be imperfect, a human artifact with visible sutures. But though this narrative structure lends itself to a spatial metaphor, the 'little bits of mosaic' to which Ondaatje compared *The English Patient* and his earlier novels (Ondaatje, Interview, Wachtel 256), its temporal dimension is perhaps even more critical. The novel is characterized by those abrupt breaks in time that Ursula Heise calls 'chronoschisms,' ruptures that postmodern novelists, unlike their modernist predecessors, refuse to assimilate to the 'unifying time of the individual mind' (7). The chronoschisms in *Anil's Ghost* create a sense of time experience through terror, by people living in fear that they can be blown away in an instant, to whom historical perspective is an alien luxury. What human beings of good will and intelligence, to use Forster's phrase, might accomplish in such a time, becomes the novel's central question" (302-03).

¹⁹² Chu writes, "In place of a literary plot of individual *bildung*, reform of mass or official institutions, or individual justice, *Anil* uses the tropes of the pieta, artistic creation, and individual transformation to signal that acts of compassionate witnessing can renew shattered spirits, inspire commitments to change, and lead to new relationships between individuals and their communities. Yet the utopian gesture of using art to signify personal and social healing leaves open a narrative gap that challenges Western readers to consider their own responses to the story of Anil's act of witnessing. The novel offers both a readerly (classic) and a writerly (unwritten) ending: in the first, the collective completion of two Buddha statues signifies the possibility of continuation and renewal in the public, but not the political, sphere; in the second, the novel challenges readers to frame a suitable response as witness to the events of the novel" (94).

As these favorable responses to the novel show, the reasons these scholars celebrate *Anil's Ghost* point overwhelmingly to the novel's treatment of more global or at least international issues like human rights, transnational identities, and cross-cultural and cross-national connection and communication. Despite these strengths on handling transnational matters, the novel seems to be lacking in the ways it addresses national issues. On the subject of national Sri Lankan politics, for example, aside from Marlene Goldman, who in "Representations of Buddhism in Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" reads *Anil's Ghost*'s focus on Buddhism as a political statement of "the problematic fusion among religion, history, and politics in Sri Lanka" since it "calls into question the long-standing ties between Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism," few scholars reading the novel from the national perspective have such positive reactions (par. 4).

Nationally-centered readings of the novel tend to find that *Anil's Ghost* fails to adequately represent and accurately present the on-going civil war in Sri Lanka that has resulted in such brutal abuses of human rights.¹⁹³ Scholars in this camp often see

¹⁹³ It is true that *Anil's Ghost* offers very little detail about the past and present of the conflict. See Ratti's "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and the Aestheticization of Human Rights" (2004) for a detailed account of the various parties involved in this conflict, the politics of ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity as well as socioeconomic class, history, and geography involved in this conflict, and the ways in which almost any description of the "crisis" of Sri Lanka is invariably overly simplistic and politicized. Ratti writes, "Conventional descriptions reify the war as one between ethnicities ('Tamils,' 'Sinhalese,' that thus constitute a country, 'Sri Lanka'), whereas such 'ethnicities' are not so stable, homogenous, and pure as some members of both ethnicities may wish to assert – and for which they are prepared to die" (125). She then presents a "story" about the crisis that she refers to as a "palimpsest of sorts" of the "Sri Lankan war" (125). I will present it here in full because it captures the very complex situation of this Sri Lankan conflict, and because it fills in some of the details that the novel occludes.

Ratti writes, "Officially gaining independence from Britain in 1948, Sri Lanka found itself marked by a postcolonial condition with each of its two dominant ethnic groups, the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese, enforcing their own brands of ethnic nationalism. The Sinhalese used the Sinhala language and Buddhism as markers for amplifying 'their' particular ethnicity. The Tamil communities, concentrated mainly in the north and east of the island, looked to the neighboring south Indian state of Tamil Nadu for cultural and social support. Indeed, Tamils had been brought from southern India by the British in order to provide labour for the tea plantations. Sri Lanka's first

Ondaatje's artistic preoccupations with form as a distraction from the national violence of

Prime Minister, R. Bandaranaike, actively promoted Sinhalese nationalism. Perhaps his most aggressive move was the 1956 "Sinhala Language Act," making Sinhala the official national language (Bandaranaike had promised to do so within 24 hours of election). The Tamils claimed systematic discriminations, not just linguistically, but also socio-economically, particularly through the introduction of university entrance quotas in the early 1970s which further limited opportunities for personal advancement. Although Sinhalese-Tamil violence in postcolonial Sri Lanka has occurred since at least 1956, the greatest eruption took place in July 1983, precipitated after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [(LTTE)] committed a suicide attack in the northern town of Jaffna, which killed thirteen Sinhalese soldiers. As a backlash, Sinhalese mobs stormed Colombo, burning and destroying Tamil homes. Three major actants continue to operate in the ongoing war: (1) the LTTE, concentrated in the north and the east; (2) the Government itself; and (3) the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP, or People's Liberation Front), an anti-State socialist group formed in the south to attack the government for its political and economic policies" (125-126).

According to the BBC's "Country Profile: Sri Lanka," the violence on Sri Lankan society from this civil war in the 1980s was exacerbated by suicide bombings by the LTTE in Colombo in the 1990s, killing more than 60,000 people (pars. 6-8). In late 2002, the government and Tamil Tiger rebels agreed to a ceasefire and peace talks (par. 9). As Ratti states, "Since September 2002, six international rounds of peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government have been held in Thailand, Germany, and Japan, mediated throughout by Norway. In December 2002, a Canadian group formed the Forum of Federations to help both the government and LTTE establish a federal solution" (126). According to the BBC, violence between the two sides increased in 2006, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The government withdrew from the 2002 ceasefire agreement in January 2008, and the ceasefire expired two weeks later (pars. 10-11).

Importantly, true to Ratti's critique, *BBC News* does not reference the JVP as one of the parties in the crisis, only defining the conflict as one between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE rebel group. The news organization did however publish an analysis on the JVP in 2001, "Analysis: Sworn Enemy Turned Ally" when the country's strongest Marxist party agreed to support the minority government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga (Jayasinghe).

Interestingly, in a case of life imitating art (*Anil's Ghost*), the *BBC News* reports that in March 2008, an "international panel, invited by the government to monitor investigations into alleged human rights abuses, announces that it is leaving the country. Panel member Sir Nigel Rodley says the authorities were hindering its work. Government rejects the criticism" ("Timeline: Sri Lanka"). For an interesting account of the conflict from a foreign perspective, see William McGowan's *Only Man is Vile: The Tragedy of Sri Lanka* (1992). Also see Jonathan Spencer's *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (1990) for another more academic historical source.

the current civil war, thereby reading *Anil's Ghost* as an irrelevant (if not insulting) statement on the Sri Lankan conflict. Perhaps the two most forthright instances of this line of criticism are Arun Murkhejee's essay and LeClair's review that each finds fault with Ondaatje for privileging aesthetics at the expense of history and politics. In "The Sri Lankan Poets in Canada: An Alternative View," Murkhejee criticizes Ondaatje for caring more about art and artists instead of human beings and human problems of poverty, injustice, exploitation, racism and sexism. Although Murkhejee writes of Ondaatje as a poet and not specifically about *Anil's Ghost*, his sentiments have been echoed by other scholars like LeClair in their comments on the novel. As discussed above, in "The Sri Lankan Patients," LeClair condemns Ondaatje for not caring enough about the dead of Sri Lanka. Similarly, Kanishka Goonewardena takes Ondaatje to task for representing the human rights violations and the violent conflict of Sri Lanka in such a de-historicized, de-contextualized way that it fails to capture the "truth of history" (qtd. in Goldman, par. 2).¹⁹⁴ Goonewardena states, "*Anil's Ghost* reads like a story about people dragging a constant flow of dead bodies out of a river that has no hint of what's happening upstream. Who is throwing the bodies in? Why? Is that not worth knowing?" (qtd. in Goldman, par. 2). As these critiques of the novel show, scholars and reviewers who focus on the national aspects of the novel are dissatisfied with the lack of history, specificity, and even concern for the local and the human in *Anil's Ghost*.

This quick survey of major trends in the novel's critical reception uncovers the pervasive global-national fault-line between those that support and criticize it. In broad terms, those who find fault with the work quarrel with the way it purportedly addresses national (Sri Lankan-specific) issues while those who review the book positively praise it for the manner in which it handles more "global" themes. Thus, what the divided reception to *Anil's Ghost* reflects is a set of seemingly divided interests (global versus

¹⁹⁴ I tried to but could not obtain a copy of Goonewardena's conference paper since it is not publicly available. Goldman cites the paper as follows: Goonewardena, Kanishka. "*Anil's Ghost: History/Politics/Ideology.*" Paper presentation, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Université Laval, Québec, Canada, 24-26 May 2001.

national, perhaps foreign versus native) and perspectives (again global versus national, and possibly foreign versus native), even though none of those who favor the book as a global narrative likely intend to discount the serious national subject in the book and vice versa.

One of the factors behind this fissured reception to the novel seems to be the problem some scholars have with Ondaatje's multinational identity. Born in Sri Lanka, schooled in Britain, and raised in Canada, Ondaatje sits in an ambiguous spot on the spectrum of identity and its associated political implications. Simultaneously claimed and rejected by Sri Lanka, Canada, and the British Commonwealth, Ondaatje seems authenticated to speak from, of, and to several traditions, cultures, and nationalities, or perhaps none at all. This complication from personal identity emerges clearly when one tracks the scholarly and book review receptions of *Anil's Ghost*, especially among critics of the novel.

From the critiques of the novel's apparent lack of concern for Sri Lankans, their history, and their politics, referenced above, it becomes but a short step to the critique of Ondaatje's apparent personal capacity to know or care about Sri Lanka's people, history, and politics. For instance, Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri seems to find Ondaatje's personal identity markers of nationality, race, religion, class, and ethnicity to inhibit his ability to understand the situation in Sri Lanka and represent it well. She observes that since Ondaatje is Eurasian and bourgeois, he is "ignorant of history, culture and the myth of the land and its people, and seem[s] unable to relate to such sensibility" (Sugunasiri 75). In other words, Ondaatje is not Sri Lankan enough to understand Sri Lanka. Such statements about a national "sensibility" echo the rather essentialist notions of culture and human rights present in the earlier stages of the universalist-relativist debate still going on in the human rights field. But Sugunasiri also does not fault Ondaatje for not having this sensibility because he does not pretend to be Sri Lankan. Rather she advocates seeing him as being a kind of transnational artist.

Conversely, other critics like Ranjini Mendis and Quadri Ismail have faulted Ondaatje for being too Sri Lankan. They accuse Ondaatje of being biased politically:

Mendis claims that *Anil's Ghost* is against the cause of Buddhist Sinhala nationalism, while Ismail insists that the novel supports it.¹⁹⁵ Ismail writes, “nowhere in the entire novel...do we find any engagement with the Tamil claim to being oppressed, or with the liberal/ human rights/ leftist argument that Sinhala (Buddhist) nationalism in Sri Lanka has an extremely repressive, criminal perhaps even genocidal record” (qtd. in Goldman par. 3). Moreover, according to Ismail, all the principle characters are Sinhala: “all the men have names that resonate deeply within Buddhist iconography” (par. 3). Clearly, this challenge of prevailing identity markers that become barriers of sorts to communication is another problem of presentation and representation critical to human rights activism and literary studies.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Four, identity may be more fluid, if not still situated, then traditionally conceived. As Indian-Canadian writer Ven Begamudre puts it, “Can any of us truly say what we are? It depends on the time, on the place, on the context. It depends on who asks the question and why?” (9). Begamudre’s statement recalls Braidotti’s notion of nomadic subjects upon which this project develops its idea of network identity. One can be one or more identities at different times and places, depending on the context. Begamudre’s statement and Braidotti’s theory may be very helpful in opening up rigid boundaries of identity to reflect a multiplicity of interconnected and yet contradictory identities, wherein perhaps at times one aspect of identity is shown more strongly than others. Such ideas about identity are needed especially as people travel across borders more and trade cultures more intensely.

Yet Begamudre and Braidotti also point to the potential limits of such fluid identities – time, place, context, and others. By this I mean, to a degree, one is not

¹⁹⁵ Chelva Kanaganayakam’s article provides the clearest articulation of one reason for these different, seemingly contradictory, critiques of *Anil's Ghost* among these Sri Lankan critics. My argument about genre and reader expectations here is much influenced by Kanaganayakam’s ideas of literature as mimetic versus literature as allegorical in his article, as well as in his book, *Counterrealism and Indo-Anglian Fiction* (2002). I tried but could not secure a copy of Qadri Ismail’s article “A Flippant Gesture Towards Sri Lanka: A Review of Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil's Ghost*” (2000) and Ranjini Mendis’ review of *Anil's Ghost* (2000).

entirely in control of one's identity. One may know who one is, but others might choose to identify one differently. The identification by others is somewhat out of one's control. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje brings up this identity issue when Anil refuses to accept external definitions of herself, seeking to create her own identities, but must repeatedly contend with other people's characterization of her. She chooses, for instance, to change her names from those her parents gave her (we are not told what these are) to take her brother's name, Anil (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 67-68). Her response to the officer who meets her upon her arrival in Colombo and remarks, "The return of the prodigal," is to say, "I'm not a prodigal" (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 10). And her response to other officials who greet her with "So – you are the swimmer!" since Anil had won the annual Mount Lavinia Hotel two-mile swimming race when she was sixteen, is "not a swimmer" (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 16-17).

This multiple national identities and no single national identity of Anil's and Ondaatje's, a condition that appears to hamper the effectiveness of his novel's message, is also the dilemma of human rights discourse (and those who use it) to speak from, of, and to various cultures, nations, and traditions. How does a discourse, premised upon universality, properly cope with the specificity of regional, national, or local crises?

National Historical Novel and/or Global Human Rights Narrative?: Genre Matters

This tension between global and national perspectives, transnational and local matters, reflects the two-fold presentation and representation problem I referenced in the introduction to this chapter – the difficulties of attending to the global and the national in representation launched onto a global discourse network, and the challenge of applying the universal promise and premise of human rights language and ideology to particular national and local human rights crises. The crux of the problem as I have been tracing it is that such global texts, much like human rights discourse in general, need to or sometimes aim to serve at least two potentially opposite interest groups (global and national or local) and perhaps to contradictory ends (global solidarity and national or

local agency). This chapter has gestured to some of the factors that contribute to these tensions between the global and the national in presenting and representing human rights crises – identities of the author, the text, and the topic.

For now, I want to focus on the identity of the text in very traditional terms. That is, I turn to the question of what kind of novel *Anil's Ghost* might be, in order to open up a discussion of genre and related conventions of writing and reading as affected by globalizing networks, because the positive and negative reactions of the scholars and reviewers to the novel seem to depend heavily on what kind of novel they perceive it to be and consequently what they expect the text to do. This link between perception and expectation is especially important in light of the *local/national* standards against which some critics seem to measure texts like *Anil's Ghost*. When their expectations are met or countered in ways acceptable and productive for them, they tend to view the work favorably. When their expectations are frustrated or rejected in ways unacceptable and destructive for them, they tend to see the work unfavorably. The question then becomes, what factors might be influencing and could possibly be adjusted to nuance this set of reactions?

First, professional readers will be affected most clearly by their horizons of education within specific national and international literary contexts. Scholars and reviewers often characterize *Anil's Ghost* as either participating in a specific genre or combining conventions from several genres. In terms of working within one genre, for instance, Derrickson identifies the novel as a “narrative of justice” with Anil as a “Western hero” on a quest to bring justice through truth (137) while Cook defines the work as a narrative of return with Anil as a “migrant returning to her once colonial homeland” (par. 4). Meanwhile, Dave Weich, in “Michael Ondaatje’s Cubist Civil War,” classifies the work as a “forensic thriller” (par. 3) and Scanlan as a “novel of terrorism” (Ondaatje, Interview, Weich 302). Perhaps the strangest one (to me because of my own horizon of expectations) is Annick Hillger’s description of the novel as “an archaeological quest for the forgotten mother” (201). When it comes to mixing conventions from several genres, scholars and reviewers either see the resulting novel as

resisting particular genres or find it combining conventions from various genres. For example, Rachel Cusk, in “Sri Lankan Skeletons,” finds that the novel confounds the traditional arch of redemption narratives inscribed in stories of return and of truth, while Jeet Thayil sees the text as a combination of genre conventions, “part forensic thriller, part anthropological field journal, part love story and part historical detective mystery” (par. 5).

Such genre-plays and combos are usually found to be productive. Some like Cusk and Thayil commonly suggest that such genre-bending techniques serve to startle (or at least are intended to surprise) readers into particular revelations. That is, by denying readers what they have come to expect from a particular kind of work, they may arrive at an unexpected (and thus presumably more impactful) insight or at least ponder a hitherto unrealized question. Chu, for example, provides perhaps the most extended discussion of genre-play and its effects, arguing that *Anil’s Ghost* rejects the “classic realist” mode of the detective novel or historical novel genres that its plot and setting invite, privileging instead a “modernist, non-linear narration,” thereby seeming to challenge “the progressive assumptions of the realist novel” (95).¹⁹⁶ For these scholars, the way *Anil’s Ghost* counters readers’ expectations of a realist, historical novel is celebrated. They find the challenge to their expectations, the move away from the traditional realist mode to represent national, historical events, opens new territory for representation – representation more appropriate for a world where national borders and identities are important, but blurring.

Yet others like Murkhejee, LeClair, and Goonewardena, as discussed above, find Ondaatje’s attention to genre-play overshadows his attention to what they see as the more important subject matter – Sri Lanka’s civil war and the human rights abuses that arise from it. Although they do not explicitly identify a genre for *Anil’s Ghost*, their critiques

¹⁹⁶ Burton also suggests that Ondaatje is calling attention to the explicit connection between forensic science and detective fiction when he borrows “Tinker, Tailor and Soldier” for the skeletons on which Anil works from John le Carre’s 1975 thriller *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (44).

suggest that they seem to be situating it in the genre of a realist, historical novel. Some of their reactions also suggest that they might be associating the novel within an emerging genre that I will call a human rights advocacy narrative.

The dissatisfaction these scholars have with the novel reveal their horizon of expectations for the text – the work they expect the text to perform, in large part because of the identity they impose upon the text. Some of their quarrel with the novel has to do with the ways that it does not adequately present the historical context for the conflict that forms the backdrop for the novel's plot, thereby revealing a desire perhaps for a realist, historical novel mode of storytelling that privileges the national often in the form of national allegory. Others demand from the novel a foregrounding of the human troubles and trauma that result as people live with such violence everyday over a long period of time, thus suggesting a desire for the mode of storytelling common in human rights advocacy campaigns. The conventions of this genre of human rights advocacy narrative typically couples the representation of victims and their sufferings with a clear moral effect or at least a moral purpose of raising awareness, eliciting sympathy or empathy, and possibly or hopefully action, on the part of the audience.

This cursory overview of the scholarly and book review reception of *Anil's Ghost* reveals that genre matters. But does it matter simply because readers' expectations are surprised in positive and negative ways, or does it matter more specifically because certain types of texts are expected to perform particular kinds of roles, and their failure to do so hurts specific political projects and desires? The evidence from this divided reception of the novel suggests the latter. It also points to clear limitations of such deployments of genres and genre-mixing when received at particular nodes on this global discourse network (nodes associated with professional positions and institutions like academic disciplines and universities in this case). These communities with specific power interests, bring particular horizons of expectations that may sometimes seem to be restricting artistic innovation, but may also be understood as striving for a more stringent ethics of artistic representation.

One reason why *Anil's Ghost* might be held to the genre conventions of a historical

novel, therefore, may lie in the way that much of Anglophone literature of, by, and from, the “Third World” that makes its way to the European-North American readership seem often to be from this genre or are packaged accordingly for this global audience. In making this statement, I recognize that *Anil’s Ghost*, being a product of a Sri Lankan-Canadian and first published by Bloomsbury in London, may not fit neatly into this contested category of Third World literature. Still, one might think, for example, of Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer, Salman Rushdie, and Anita Desai, household names as authors of Third-World oriented Anglophone texts. As Fredric Jameson has controversially observed in his essay, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), “all third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical...they are to be read as...*national allegories*,” that is, “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (69). I do not wish to support the aspects of Jameson’s argument that Aijaz Ahmad, in “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” (1987), critiques as essentializing and homogenizing third-world literature or third-world novelists.¹⁹⁷ But I would like to use Jameson’s argument to suggest, not as Jameson does that this is how third-world texts “are to be read,” but perhaps *are being read* (69). That is, I take Jameson’s theory about reading third-world literature as national allegory not in a prescriptive sense but in a descriptive sense.¹⁹⁸ It may be that these expectations of

¹⁹⁷ Jameson responds to Ahmad’s critiques in the same issue in “A Brief Response” (1987). For more on this issue of Third World texts between Jameson and Ahmad, see Neil Lazarus’ “Postcolonialism and the Dilemma of Nationalism: Aijaz Ahmad’s Critique of Third-Worldism” (1993). On Third World Literature, genre, and postcolonialism, see the special issues “Third World and Post-Colonial Issues,” 31-32 (1992) and “The Genres of Postcolonialism,” 22.1 (2004) of *Social Text*.

¹⁹⁸ In drawing on Jameson’s essay in this way, I do not mean to affirm or deny Jameson’s argument that all third world literature are national allegories or should be read as such. I only want to suggest that Jameson, in positing this mode of reading, seems to reveal the presence of such an interpretation strategy. For an astute development of Jameson’s comment on reading Third World literature in the context of globalization, see Imre Szeman’s “Who’s Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization” (2001).

national allegory, or at least, of a historical novel devoted to the story of the nation will continue to be the specter with which all Anglophone writings of, by, and from, the Third World have to contend. Rightly or wrongly, some scholars and reviewers appear to hold this set of expectations for *Anil's Ghost* when they expect a more historical novel and a more central place for the national issues of Sri Lanka.

But even this literary expectation for a text from the First World with content from the Third World, and with genre conventions mainly drawn from the First World (especially that of historical novel or national allegory) may not be as important as the political expectations imposed on the text and its readings because of the way the novel's content associates itself as belonging to human rights discourse. That is, as a politically correct form of human rights discourse, the novel should be on the side of the local and the national in terms of paying attention to these specificities, rather than the global or the universal in the sense of leveling the local histories and cultural particularities.

Jameson's troubled arguments may once more be useful. He suggests that Third World writers are often understood to be political intellectuals, thereby implying that their texts are to be received as political works.¹⁹⁹ Again, rather than taking Jameson's statements as prescriptive, I consider them descriptively to move this line of thinking a little further, especially since Ondaatje is "Third World" mainly by descent, not necessarily by education. It appears that, as with the case of *Anil's Ghost*, whether or not such authors and texts typically marketed as World Literature or Third World Literature intend it or desire it, these writers and their work are often regarded as political actors and political statements, *of the national kind*.²⁰⁰ For an author like Ondaatje, now residing in

¹⁹⁹ Ondaatje seems aware of this problem of himself and the novel being taken as somehow representative of Sri Lanka when he tells Jaggi that he approached the topic of Sri Lanka's civil war with caution because "part of the problem is that I'm well known in the west, and not may Sri Lankan novelists are. What worried me is that this book would get taken as representative" (6).

²⁰⁰ It is possible, I would suggest, to read this novel from a national perspective and arrive at a more positive take on the novel. It could be read, for example, as a post-independence novel, wherein the main characters, especially Sarath and Gamini, face the

Canada, the great immigration nation of the West, that kind of assumption becomes particularly fraught.

Nevertheless, in respect to such tacit assumptions about national address for “Third World” authors, scholars and reviewers are almost compelled to find that *Anil’s Ghost* simply falls short. Not only does the novel reject the conventions of a historical novel or national allegory, it also does not seem to champion the local (in its characters and its settings, which seem strangely unanchored in specificity) or the national (in its themes and topics, which adopt a view wherein the local is foregrounded when the global encounters it, rather than highlighting the global aspects of local events and incidents) politically.²⁰¹ Rather, it attends to politics at the global level, most especially in its handling of transnational identities and critiques of the international human rights system, as discussed above. While these global matters are indeed relevant to the local and the national, as most critics allow, they do not sufficiently privilege the specificities of the local and the national over the vagaries of the global and the universal for those invested in nationally-centered political projects. In terms of a Third World text, then, *Anil’s Ghost* seems to turn its nose on both its readers’ genre and political expectations, expectations that are, as discussed above, closely linked.

Yet it is not just those who want to read the text as a piece of Third World literature whose expectations are frustrated. Those who seek to view the novel as a human rights advocacy campaign type narrative are also denied satisfaction. *Anil’s Ghost* seems at once to invite and resist this other group of critic-readers’ expectations to identify it as a work of human rights crisis awareness and advocacy. Because of the main storyline, Anil’s human rights mission, it is straightforward to characterize *Anil’s Ghost* as belonging to a growing body of literature on human rights. In terms of basic content, then, *Anil’s Ghost* has all the overt makings of a “human rights” story. Its plot, character,

hardships of growing older and more weary in a country that continues to struggle in the face of the failed promises of independence.

²⁰¹ Clearly, this focus on the global has much to do with Anil, returning to Sri Lanka after a long hiatus, being the central protagonist. But it also has a lot to do with Ondaatje and his perspective, as he tells Jaggi, “I’m also seeing it from the Western point of view” (7).

setting, and theme each seem directly to tie it to human rights discourse. Set in various parts of Sri Lanka (with flashbacks to Guatemala and the U.S.), the plot revolves around two scholars, Anil (a Sri Lankan living in the U.S.), Sarath (a Sri Lankan), who enlist the help of another scholar, Palipana (a Sri Lankan), a doctor, Gamini (Sarath's brother), and an artist, Ananda (a Sri Lankan), in order to identify the remains of a body (which they nickname, Sailor) that they suspect is the victim of the government in the Sri Lankan civil war. In such a reading, the novel's goal, it seems, is to bring the truth of the murder to light and the killer of Sailor to justice. In its plot, character, setting, and theme, then, *Anil's Ghost* could be a near-perfect example of a "human rights" story.

Yet, upon closer examination, *Anil's Ghost* rejects all these conventions of human rights narratives. It is almost the antithesis of a "human rights" narrative, in form and content. If we recall the discussion in Chapter Six of David Kennedy's four-character human rights dramas and Jonathan Benthall's disaster relief narrative, we know that human rights stories are often presented as a tragedy that offers the possibility for redemption, usually ending with a call to action or a happy ending because those calls were answered. Their overriding purpose, then, rather like human rights campaigns, is usually to inform, to raise awareness, and to create productive empathy. *Anil's Ghost*, however, does not deliver on these accounts in the conventional way readers might expect.

Contrary to these genre conventions, *Anil's Ghost* begins with a profound sense of jadedness, insists throughout that ideas of redemption are futile, and closes with unresolved and irresolvable tragedy. No one involved in Anil's mission to Sri Lanka (not the International Center for Human Rights in Geneva that sends her there, nor the Sri Lankan government, and those assigned to help Anil), we are told early on in the novel were optimistic about the mission.²⁰² Throughout the novel, we are constantly reminded

²⁰² Ondaatje writes, "The application [Anil] had made to the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva, when a call had gone out for a forensic anthropologist to go to Sri Lanka, had originally been halfhearted. She did not expect to be chosen, because she had been born on the island, even though she now traveled with a British passport. And it seemed

of the futility of Anil's quest as means and ends to truth or justice. And at the end, we are left uncertain whether Anil's mission is successful: although Anil manages to leave Sri Lanka with evidence to incriminate the Sri Lankan government for Sailor's death, we do not know whether this action is taken. We are also left with the cost of Anil's quest – Sarath's death. Thus the story repeatedly questions the goal and the method of Anil's human rights mission by problematizing any simple notions of truth and justice, effectively turning the standard "human rights" story on its head, if that standard is confined to the four-character drama.

Moreover, although the novel is, for the most part, set in Sri Lanka, it does not follow the conventions of realist or historical novels by offering much information or awareness about the nature or history of the crisis. We are given little in the way of the context for Sailor's death and Anil's mission to Sri Lanka – the long-running civil war.²⁰³

somewhat unlikely that human rights specialists would be allowed in at all. Over the years complaints from Amnesty International and other civil rights groups had been sent to Switzerland and resided there, glacierlike. President Katagula claimed no knowledge of organized campaigns of murder on the island. But under pressure, and to placate trading partners in the West, the government eventually made the gesture of an offer to pair local officials with outside consultants, and Anil Tissera was chosen as the Geneva organization's forensic specialist, to be teamed with an archeologist in Colombo. It was to be a seven-week project. Nobody at the Center for Human Rights was hopeful about it (*Anil's Ghost* 15-16).

²⁰³ In an "Author's Note" to the novel, Ondaatje offers a very brief synopsis of the conflict. He writes:

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Sri Lanka was in a crisis that involved three essential groups: the government, the antigovernment insurgents in the south and the separatist guerrillas in the north. Both the insurgents and the separatists had declared war on the government. Eventually, in response, legal and illegal government squads were known to have been sent out to hunt down the separatists and the insurgents.

Anil's Ghost is a fictional work set during this political time and historical moment. And while there existed organizations similar to those in this story, and similar events took place, the characters and incidents in the novel are invented.

Today the war in Sri Lanka continues in a different form. (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost*) Despite the brevity of this historical context, one suspects that Ondaatje is more informed about the conflict than the details in his novel let on. He did spend some time researching his subject matter, as the three pages of acknowledgements to "the doctors and nurses, archaeologists, forensic anthropologists, and members of the human rights and civil

And the various tragic-comic characters, all half victim, half villain, half hero, half bystander, yet all portrayed with sympathy, do not extend easy figures that we can happily love to loath, but rather appear as complex figures we rather loath to love.²⁰⁴ In its approach to its theme, then, *Anil's Ghost* again appears to go against the conventions of human rights narratives. It lacks (or rejects) the moral imperative of most human rights narratives – to raise awareness about a crisis and provoke action through sympathy or empathy in overt ways.

Because of the ways that *Anil's Ghost* shies away from perhaps the most important aspects of these genres (the history in a historical novel, and the moral purpose in a human rights story), it is also understandable why scholars and reviewers who see the particularities of history and purpose of truth, justice, or humanity in Third World and in

rights organizations” that he met in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, and the bibliography would attest (309). Ondaatje is often meticulous in his research especially the history and setting in which he situates his novels. For instance, speaking about writing *The English Patient*, he states, “By that point I was seeing everything in terms of Italy, 1945 (the way I saw Toronto in 1932, living here while writing *In the Skin of a Lion*). So the villa was complete in my mind, absolutely. Even if I only used three or four rooms, everything was there. That is very important to me as a writer, to have that very tactile landscape for my choreography, for moving people around a room” (Ondaatje, Interview, Wachtel 252). Moreover, his previous research on Sri Lanka for writing *Running in the Family* would likely also have helped pave the way for this novel. For more about Ondaatje’s writing process and insight into *Anil's Ghost*, see “Michael Ondaatje in Conversation with Maya Jaggi” (Ondaatje, Interview, Jaggi).

²⁰⁴ Ondaatje explains some of his approach to writing relevant to this discussion of history and politics in literature in his interview with Hutcheon. Speaking about the semi-autobiographical work *Running in the Family* (1982) he states: *Running in the Family* is a book about a family and a father, essentially. It would have been very easy to make the whole thing an ironic or even sarcastic look at a generation. But why bother? When characters in books are ‘lesser’ than the writer, these seems to be a great loss in the subtleties and truths being discovered or discussed. Obviously the politics of the time is important. But it *is* a book about a family. Also the thing about writing is that you want to represent or make characters who are believable, who are fully rounded, and that stops you from making them just politically good or politically vicious. I’m more interested, I guess, in making people as believable and complex and intricate as possible than in making an argument in a novel or even a memoir – which is also a kind of political statement, I think. I think if you enter a novel with just an argument, you reduce the book. (198).

human rights literatures as politically important would be upset and disappointed by Ondaatje's treatment of the Sri Lankan civil war and human rights abuses in *Anil's Ghost*. The point I have tried to make in these last deliberations is that the reactions, especially the negative reactions, these scholars and reviewers surveyed have to the novel, lie, in large part, to the kind of novel they perceive it to be and the kinds of expectations they associate with such works. In the case of *Anil's Ghost*, this novel's genre identity seems to be characterized as a split identity between a global human rights critique text and a national crisis text.

Representing Human Rights Crises in a Global Discourse Network: The Politics of Reading

This apparent gap between global interests and perspectives and national interests and perspectives needs to be interrogated because it points to a fundamental (and not merely theoretical) dilemma for human rights advocates and literary scholars alike which will be elaborated on below. Moreover, this disconnect between how a text is conceived and how it might be received, far from its site of conception, calls for study because it raises difficult questions about writing and reading literature, and for presenting and representing human rights crises and causes, in a globalizing world. This is especially so in light of what a global discourse network does to affect how texts and their genres are read, in the sense that once one realizes that there are alternative readings to various texts and genres, indeed a variety of other similar type texts and genres at play in the network, then one reads these texts and their genres differently: one reads them in a sense against and with these other texts and genres in the network in a kind of intertextual (intercircuit, or in the network?) mode of engagement and interpretation.

One such set of questions about representing human rights crises globally might be, how might one present and represent a crisis and cause, which is almost by default local or national (particular), to an audience that may be increasingly globalized in some ways yet increasingly isolated and insular in other ways? And how might one do so through human rights or even just humanist language that in its universal premise of

humanity at once presumes and demands commonality among all human beings and thus almost necessarily precludes and elides difference and particularity? I have sketched here what appears to be Ondaatje's response to this conundrum – to de-sensationalize the affective content of human rights situations, while de-authorizing widely available master narratives by rendering the perspectives from which they are sometimes filtered (through the viewpoint of the main protagonist, the human rights activist or investigator) as limited. Looking at the receptions of the work, that potential may not have taken hold with some of the professional critical readers (scholars and reviewers). If it is afoot among other communities of readers remains to be investigated. Likewise, whether professional readers will start to read differently as post-nationalisms emerge as the purported norms for culture also remains to be studied.

Another set of questions about representing human rights crises globally that arises, at least in this chapter of my project as I have framed it, is how might one present and represent a crisis and a cause when one's personal identity (of nation, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class) is in the background (or brought to the foreground by others), always already influencing (negatively or positively) everything that one produces and how these productions are received? If with James Orbinski and MSF in Chapter Five and Paul Rusesabagina in Chapter Six, the identity and subject position of the speakers often seemed to be working in their favor, in this chapter, the opposite appears to be true.

It is important to remember that Orbinski and other MSFers take on their organization's humanitarian aid NGO identity, a well-respected one in the field of humanitarianism and an important one in the arena of human rights protection, that effectively supports their speech and actions. Alternately, Rusesabagina's identity and subject position as a human rights crisis survivor (albeit from the "villain" category since Rusesabagina is a Hutu and not a Tutsi) is, likewise, highlighted productively in his speech acts. But Ondaatje, as a mixed-race Sri Lankan living a fairly privileged life outside of Sri Lanka, and a novelist (not a typical subject position of authority in human rights discourse) writes from a somewhat handicapped set of identities and subject positions. Unlike Orbinski, other MSFers, and Rusesabagina who can claim the power of

being native or at least a participant-observer to the crisis in their respective speech acts, Ondaatje has neither the complete authenticity of a native nor the full authority of a participant-observer. And unlike these other actors who are recognized more officially as actors in the human rights field, Ondaatje, as a novelist, does not enjoy such acceptance. If anything, Ondaatje's bi-national, multi-cultural identity, and his nomadic subject position within the global discourse of human rights and the national discourse of Sri Lankan conflict appears, for some scholars, to delegitimize, or at least detract from, the critiques of human rights discourse and the comments on Sri Lanka's national conflict that *Anil's Ghost* seem to make.

These are just two groups of questions centered on a novel's identity (genre) and an author's identity that complicate any acts of presentation and representation, especially of human rights crisis, in a global environment. In the case of Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost*, these dilemmas are present in the novel itself and in the critical reception surrounding it. It seems then that there are two levels at which Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* presents and represents the dilemma of presenting and representing human rights issues in literature. On the level of what Ondaatje seems to be doing in the novel, he shows the problem of translating, transposing, human rights ideology in practice, and the limits of a universalized discourse in a national conflict unfolding in a globalized world. On the level of what Ondaatje ends up doing with the novel, the life the novel takes once it is released into the world, out of the control of its author, the reactions of critics (scholars and reviewers) shows the difficulties of transliterating (or presenting and representing) human rights issues in art, literature, specifically in novels, and the limits of a universalized humanist ideology (in writing and reading novels) for nationalized identities and events in a globalized environment/ setting.

These problems and limits are symptoms of deeper tensions between the global and the national in a globalizing world. They reveal the clash of demands upon literature (what literature can or must be) – apolitical art or political propaganda, aesthetically moving or politically mobilizing. And they disclose the proliferation (at once conflicting and confused) of desires about literature (what literature can or must do, its purposes in

the world) – transcend the material world, invoke beauty, entertain, or transliterate the material world, recreate reality, politicize. These either-or-frameworks are not to say that literature can and must be or do only one or the other. Nor are they meant to suggest that literature cannot or must not be both or do both. Rather they are meant to call attention to the horizon of expectations in which literary texts (struggle to) emerge and are (contested when) received.

If the site of production is one that is ruled, more than anything, by market forces, both in the types of texts that are produced, and the kinds of authors that produce them,²⁰⁵ then the site of reception seems to offer some ground for intervention to ameliorate these global-national tensions in human rights oriented literary texts. One possible approach to this predicament of presentation and representation, especially in human rights and literature, seems to be to open up ways of responding to identities and texts by introducing new ways of reading them – by creating more categories (or highlighting more deviants that transcend the existing categories of identities and interpretations). It is in this spirit that the terms “human rights” narrative, “global literature,” “global” author, “global” text, or even “global” readership may be useful. New terms are needed to capture the new forms of writing and issues that emerge with increased processes of

²⁰⁵ In his interview with Hutcheon, Ondaatje states that he feels little pressure to succumb to the demands of scholars and reviewers that he be a voice for ethnic writers and write more politicized stories. To Hutcheon’s question, “How do you feel about readers and critics who don’t want you to write in this kind of international context, who want you to write ‘Canadian’ or ‘ethnic’ novels?” Ondaatje responds, “I guess I like being a writer because of the freedom that is allowed me: I can write about whatever I want to write about. Those demands seem to be more to do with the world of sociologists or motivated by political usefulness. I feel little responsibility to that sort of demand” (202).

Earlier in the interview, when asked to comment on criticisms by scholars and reviewers that his work is too preoccupied with “‘aesthetic’ issues – art, art’s design, or the artist – than with the specific social and cultural conditions of being a Sri Lankan writing in Canada,” Ondaatje replies, “As a writer I don’t think I’m concerned with art and aesthetic issues, any more than I would want to be just concerned with making the subject of being a Sri Lankan in Canada my one and only subject. I go to writing to discover as many aspects of myself and the world around me as I can. I go to discover, to explore, not to state the case I already know” (198).

globalization. Some “global literature” type texts that come to mind include perhaps Nuruddin Farah’s *Knots* (2007), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), or Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2005). To use national-centered terms upon globally-focused texts may be doing these innovative texts a disservice in the way they are received. Although I use the singular, I conceive of each category as a composite, rather than a homogenous category. A similar logic underwrites my use of “global” author and “global” readership.

This turn to the site of reception, to the process of interpretation, the act and art of reading, is not new. Some literary scholars have recently paid much attention to the acts and arts of consuming literature – reading – as much as previous literary study have centered on those of producing literature – writing.²⁰⁶ They seek to find more productive ways of reading (and as teachers, of teaching) literature within these struggles of the national and the global, functioning presumably along the premise that regardless what literature can or must be, what it can or must do depends largely on what writers and readers do with it and to it. In a way, if writers are in control of what literature can or must be, readers drive what literature can or must do. And in a market-driven economy that affects no less writers and their artistic production, than readers and their artistic consumption, readers may even have some sway in what literature can or must be.

²⁰⁶ See for example, Sarah Nuttall’s “Reading, Recognition, and the Postcolonial” (2001). In her article, Nuttall examines characters in various non-canonical African novels like those by Amos Tutuola, Yvonne Vera, and Nuruddin Farah and observes how, in these novels, the characters read (experience, encounter, interpret) not just written texts, but themselves and others, through these texts. Nuttall observes that although “reading may often be about recognizing the self as known, identifiable or acknowledged by a text, as if for the first time,” indeed this has been the mode of reading dominant in post-colonial theorizing, she suggests that these non-canonical African texts emphasize the “unexpectedness in reading” rather than recognition (391). She writes, “The act of reading, these texts imply, is about being taken beyond or outside of the self, and occurs in a register of the abandonment of the known self” (391). She argues that African literature is increasingly characterized by plurality, and thus calls for a plurality of modes of reading as well. See also Barbara Hernstein Smith’s *Contingencies of Value* (1988).

These endeavors are important, and so I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, not a special method of reading global texts, but possible ways of reading one such polyvalent text, shifting through various perspectives that could interpret *Anil's Ghost* from its “global” identity as a story of the limits of human rights as a universal ideology, alongside its “national” identity as a story of war in Sri Lanka. I have done so not to privilege one of these textual identities over the other, but to show how each seem equally valid and each at once connect with and contradict each other.

These observations, in turn, are critical to the study of human rights discourse globalization because they address the question of the form of utterances on a global discourse network, rather than just author agency as a personal force. If with the first two case studies, for MSF and Rusesabagina, the focus was on the speakers and the ways in which the discourse and the network enabled certain forms of global presence and influence for this organization and this individual, here with this case study of Ondaatje and his novel, the central concern has been on the genre of the text and how this genre identity influences the reception of this text at various nodes in the network, that is, different communities of professionalized readers – scholars and reviewers – who while perhaps not central to this discourse circuit in any official capacity, are deeply implicated in it when it comes to literary texts oriented around human rights topics.

From the less positive reactions to *Anil's Ghost*, reactions due in large part to expectations for forms of utterances on this discourse network, one might recoup another function of this global circuit – professional resistance to its free usage. These readers reject the particular practice of human rights discourse in this text and its emergence in the network because it fails to comply with what they hold to be foundational to the philosophies and practices of the language and ideology in form and content. This resistance factor is quite different from the kinds of limitations Rusesabagina met as an author or authorized speaker on the network. Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* is thus more of a limit case than either MSF and Orbinski's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture or Rusesabagina and his autobiography in the ongoing explorations of the mechanisms of a global discourse network. It seems that although this discourse network may be at the service of

an ideology not tied specifically to national contexts, it also has more definite national nodes (local dialects, as it were, of global speech) and thus appears to come in particular instances under the purported control of various local expert readers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tested the model of a global discourse network on yet another case study, Michael Ondaatje, who claims a less than official subject position in the network in that, as a novelist, he is typically not recognized as an authorized human rights discourse user and network agent, no matter that he uses facts and situations familiar to the discourse. His novel *Anil's Ghost* carries little of the organization-speak of MSF's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture nor the weight of eyewitness testimony of Rusesabagina's *An Ordinary Man*. In terms of direct association with the international human rights system, Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* seem very far removed, and as such appear to be unlikely actors in a global communication circuit oriented around human rights. Yet by their respective natures – Ondaatje's of being human and thus necessarily an object if not subject of human rights discourse, and *Anil's Ghost's* of taking up the practices and concerns of the human rights industry – this author and novel inevitably enter this global discursive space. This chapter sought to understand the ways in which the unofficial subject positions of the author and the novel might influence their speech acts, and how these actions might impact or be impacted by the discourse and its network.

After introducing Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* in the first section, the next two sections of the chapter argued that the novel contributed to the language and ideology of human rights by (1) questioning the content and form of human rights stories and storytelling and (2) critiquing particular premises and practices foundational to and prevalent in human rights discourse. For the first claim, I mostly drew evidence from the construction of the novel itself – the way its form and content borrowed from multiple genre conventions and used different character's perspectives to tell a multi-dimensional story or several rhizomatic narratives, thereby seeming to offer one view, and an

uncommon one at that, of what human rights stories and storytelling might look like and involve.

For the second claim, I mainly offered alternative readings of the work to nuance some of the arguments scholars like Burton, Derrickson, and Bolland have made about the work as a critique of the Enlightenment premises of human rights like empirical truth, to counter some critiques by scholars like Goonewardena and reviewers like LeClair of the novel's lack of interest in the specific situations of the national crisis and those killed by the fighting. I argued that the way the novel introduces seeming Eastern counterparts to the Western premises of the Enlightenment, obscures some of the crisis specifics but highlights others, and withholds a moral message or call typical of human rights campaigns can be seen as strategic, and read, not as failings of the novel as some critics have done, but as strategic and important critiques of human rights practices. These critiques, I tried to show, are implicit rather than explicit, having been internalized in the novel through the reactions and actions of its main characters, global ones like Anil and local ones like Sarath and Gamini.

These two sections just discussed focused on the possibilities offered by more global authors and texts like Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* that draw upon the more transnational discourse of human rights to present and represent particular human rights crises. In other words, it clarified some possibilities of presenting and representing often very locally-situated human rights concerns and crimes from the more universal, less locally or nationally based, perspective of the discourse.

The next two sections of this chapter turned from the possibilities to the limits of such globalized presentation and representation of very local matters. In these sections, I suggested that despite the novel's attempts to challenge this universalist discourse and critique its network practices internationally, *Anil's Ghost* was met with some resistance by scholars and reviewers that expected and demanded a more nationalist focus on Sri Lanka. To do so, I analyzed the critical reception to the novel and identified some fissures between globally-oriented readings and nationally-centered interpretations of the work. I tried to show how the more globally-based and unconventional story and

storytelling of *Anil's Ghost*, a narrative and form of narrativizing using a discourse at once universalist in its outlook and reach, failed to pass the standards of some more nationally-focused readings by scholars and reviewers, in part, because of their presumptions about Ondaatje's personal identity (too Sri Lankan or not Sri Lankan enough) and the novel's genre identity (of historical novel or national allegory).

Because of this close association between genre and reading (how readers react to a work has a lot to do with what they think the work is, its genre identity), the next two sections attended to the politics of genre and reading. In these sections, I argued that because of the novel's setting of Sri Lanka (Third World) and engagement with human rights crisis and discourse, the text invites two kinds of conditioned readings, one identified by Jameson as interpreting Third-World literature as national allegories, and the other of processing human rights stories in literature as acts of advocacy. To do so, I revisited the text and the critical reception to the work to show how the novel at once, and paradoxically but also strategically, fosters and frustrates both of these conventional modes of interpretation.

Taking together the discussion in these six sections of the chapter, this case study of Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* has added to my overriding purpose in this project – to understand how a globalizing discourse of human rights might be affecting people (implicated in the language and ideology from varying subject positions and in various textual genres) and vice versa. The “outcomes” of this test case suggests some of the contributions Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* seem to make to human rights language and ideology (questioning of human rights stories and storytelling, critique of human rights practices) as unofficial actors in a global discursive space of human rights, and their possibilities of engagement as agents of the network, that is, of being not just present but active in this circuit.

But this test case also reveal some of the barriers to their influence and engagement: these limits to their contributions appear often times to extend from perceptions other network actors (be they more official ones or less official ones like the scholars and reviewers discussed here) might have towards Ondaatje's personal identity

or *Anil's Ghost's* genre identity. Thus, it seems that the multinational, multicultural aspects of Ondaatje's personal identity and the global perspective of the novel, despite its use of a rhetorically and ideologically universalist discourse like human rights, struggled to overcome the demands of some readers for a more nationalist discourse and perspective. In light of this limitation to the universalist rhetoric and global aims of human rights discourse, limitations in part due to the transnational nature of Ondaatje's identity and global orientation of the novel (again another two instances where the push of the more global or transnational entity is striving to overcome the pull of the more local or national), this case study suggests that different strategies of reading may be needed for such global authors and global texts at various locally-situated and nationally-dominated sites of literary reception and consumption.

Ultimately, this chapter has tried to shed some light on the possibilities and limits of network identity, power, and convention for an unofficial actor like an artist and for a rather inanimate actor like *Anil's Ghost*. By inanimate actor here, I mean that the text is, in one view, a limited speech act in that it works through the endeavors of its readers. On its own, its actions are restricted. It needs to be read for it to work. In a way, the case study in this chapter has been more a text, the novel, rather than Ondaatje. But since that text is Ondaatje's speech act, I have considered the two in tandem. If the last case study of Rusesabagina seemed to reveal the possibilities of harnessing these forces of the discourse and the network to secure particular forms of global identity and agency that move beyond identities and power associated with markers of group identity centered around difference like nationality, race, gender, ethnicity, or religion, this test case of Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* displays the limits to network identity, power, and convention, as well as the fissures (global-versus-national) in even this seemingly (or aspiringly) equal, open, and global space of human rights discourse. In doing so, this chapter has also called attention to the global and national tensions inherent in every act of presenting and representing human rights crises and causes.

These tensions emerge from the central paradox of human rights discourse and the human rights project's main problematic – how to apply a global and universal language

and ideology to local and particular situations in a nation-centered system. The novel itself is inscribed with this paradox and problematic in at least two ways: (1) the characters in the novel struggle to negotiate their various global and local perspectives and purposes, and (2) expanding this contestation to the “real world,” the professional community of interpreters (literary scholars and critical reviewers) also wrestle with these tensions in their respective readings and expectations for the work.

While this case study has clearly shown this particular set of limits and fissures in the discourse and the network, it has little to offer in the way of answer or resolutions to these problems. What it has gestured to as but one possible approach to easing the global-national tension at least in the professional community of literary interpreters is to suggest different readings of a polyvalent and globally-oriented text like *Anil's Ghost*. If texts by themselves are limited in their impact on a global discourse network of human rights, and it is up to its readers to activate the work, then it seems reasonable, if not important, to explore different strategies of reading (interpretation, engagement, contestation) in varying modes (direct, ironic, strategic, critical) from various perspectives (local, global, national, transnational) especially for such global texts like Ondaatje's novel, and especially because human rights philosophies can be spread informally through such texts, as well as formally through laws.

This is the last case study of this project and concludes Part Two, the case study portion of this dissertation. The following chapter, the Conclusion, will review the research questions, starting hypotheses, and deliberate on the outcomes of this experiment of a global discourse network of human rights that has constituted this project. It will also discuss the limitations of this global discourse network model and suggest some directions for future research.

Conclusion

The Experiment of a Global Discourse Network of Human Rights

This project has been, from the start, an experiment of sorts wherein the central question, broadly defined, was the link between globalization and human rights, especially as discourse. More specifically, it sought to explore how people, the subjects of human rights, are influenced by or influence this language and ideology in the context of globalization, especially the worldwide proliferation of human rights norms through official and unofficial mechanisms. It did so in the context of the universalist-relativist debate that has surrounded the project of human rights at least since the drafting of the UDHR.

As discussed in the Introduction, “Rethinking the Ties Between Globalization and Human Rights Through Discourse,” even as the issue of the universal applicability or human rights norms for all people in all parts of the world has developed in increasingly nuanced ways sixty years after the UDHR, the question remains pertinent in contemporary times, especially in light of economic, political, and cultural globalization. On the one hand, primarily Western-based and liberal-derived human rights norms codified in international legal instruments are being promoted as the commonsense standard for being human and being humane across the world, thereby making human rights language and ideology seem akin to a form of cultural imposition by the West upon

the Rest. Seen from this perspective, the project of human rights, especially when embodied by the international human rights system of courts, agencies, and laws, seem like a “bad” case of what Hardt and Negri call Empire. In this situation, one set of human rights philosophies and practices are being imposed by a powerful system upon those with less control in ways that threaten to overlook and erase particularities of history, geography, religion, philosophy, and culture in different people and places.

On the other hand, such imposition of human rights standards seem to offer those with less power the means to combat other pernicious aspects of globalization, as argued by Ignatieff and Donnelly (as discussed in the Introduction). The legal and moral language of human rights is increasingly seen and used as the means to speak truth to power, to resist state oppression, to protest multinational corporation exploitation, to provoke military or humanitarian intervention, and to maintain threatened cultural practices. When viewed from this perspective, the movement of human rights, particularly when mobilized by grassroots activists, appears to be a “good” example of the other side of Hardt and Negri’s globalization paradigm, “multitude,” a countervailing force to neutralize the forces of a dominant system of globalization. In this scenario, individuals and groups recognize the authority and legitimacy human rights language and ideology have in influential parts of the world, and adopt and adapt them to improve their status as human beings and their conditions of living.

Such a countermove of human rights discourse “globalizing from above” to “globalizing from below,” to borrow Richard Falk’s terminology, seems, if not desirable for some, at least perhaps inevitable (Spencer).²⁰⁷ If under the economic, political, and cultural processes of globalization, local actions are influenced by and also influence global schemes through a networked system of Empire where there is no “outside,” as

²⁰⁷ Also see Richard Falk’s “Interpreting the Interaction of Global Markets and Human Rights” in Alison Byrsk’ *Globalization and Human Rights* (2002). Falk sees state-imposed globalization as a top-down imposition, thus the phrase, “globalization from above,” and argues that a counter force to this, a “globalization from below” is needed to improve the conditions of people living under the inequitable structures of economic globalization.

Hardt and Negri observe, then the arenas for debate and contestation too cannot remain only at local or national levels, but must engage with other local, national, or transnational actors on a global stage as well. A language with universalist inflections and moral cadences like human rights discourse, whatever its “origins,” seems well suited for such globally-oriented acts of communication, persuasion, and contestation. On what other terms might the divisions of difference-centered communities (solidarities formed around identity markers of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, or class) be at once recognized and superseded? Human rights discourse, in theory at least, if not always in practice, offers some space for building global human communities, multitudes of humans organized around ideas and ideals of humanity and the humane. Yet critical questions remain about the cost of using a primarily legal and state-centered system of resistance, especially if the state itself is the source of oppression.

This project has not pretended to try to resolve this thorny universalist-relativist debate, or to answer the related question of whether human rights is “good” or “bad” for globalization and vice versa. Such questions would involve multi-faceted approaches and analyses that lie beyond the scope of this dissertation and my scholarly expertise. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One, “Setting the Stage: Defining Globalization, Human Rights, and Discourse,” what I have tried to do instead is bring to these complex issues of the link between globalization and human rights, and the universalism versus cultural relativism of human rights debate, what I hope is a more nuanced understanding of the globalization of human rights. This project has sought to do so by thinking of human rights globalizing as a discourse through a network system, a prototype model I have called a global discourse network of human rights.

Building on the work of Hoffmann and Speed, this project has tried to conceptualize human rights, not as a fixed entity, but a fluid collection of vocabularies, texts, practices, and philosophies. As discussed in Chapter Two, “A Global Discourse Network, I: A Discourse Approach to Human Rights,” borrowing from Fairclough’s work on discourse which fruitfully combines Saussure’s distinction between language (*langue*) and language use (*parole*), Bakhtin’s concept of the dialectic nature of

discourse, Bakhtin and Kristeva's notions of intertextuality, Foucault's idea of biopower, and Gramsci's notion of power through hegemony, I have tried to expand on the work of Speed and Hoffmann by characterizing human rights as a changeable and changing archive of languages and languages in use that manifest itself as discourse. Borrowing from Fairclough's sociolinguistic theory of discourse, I sought to show how as discourse, human rights materializes as a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. And that as discourse, this language and ideology have intertextual aspects, are not just modes of representation but also modes of action, share a dialectical relationship with social structures, help construct (or enact) society, and affect power in society.

This project also has sought to narrow the broad nature of these two interrelated topics (the universalist-relativist debate and the effects of human rights on globalization and vice versa) by asking a more simplified, but no less difficult or important, question of what individuals and groups do with and to human rights as and in discourse. In other words, instead of taking just the globalization from above view, I tried to explore these two debates from the globalization from below perspective, from the bottom up, or perhaps more horizontal, people point of view, rather than the top down, or perhaps more vertical, human rights system position, through the model of a global discourse network of human rights.

The concept of a global discourse network arose, in part because, in the early research stage of this project, I observed that various kind of communities were involved in different texts oriented around human rights language and ideas. It became clear that these texts were products of numerous intersecting networks of production, distribution, and consumption. Indeed, in themselves, these texts seemed like nodes wherein several circuits met. As a literary scholar, I have, in this project, as per the biases of this discipline, followed the text, but as a rhetoric student, I have also, attended to the performance aspect of these texts, treating them as speech-acts influenced by the ethos of the speaker, the pathos of the performance, and the logos of the ideology, for example. But one could easily follow the speakers or the readers to equally interesting ends.

Influenced by McLagan's work on circuits of suffering in the human rights industry and by Hardt and Negri's network power concepts of Empire and multitude, I brought together their work and my observation about texts as nodal points of intersecting networks to propose that human rights discourse could be understood as globalizing through a global discourse network. As discussed in Chapter Three, "A Global Discourse Network II: A Network Approach to Human Rights as Discourse," I described this network as probably having the following characteristics: it would be a web integrating diverse local and global discourses that cooperate and contest with each other; that circulates power locally and globally; that is premised on values, thereby carrying moral power; that has multiple individual and group creators and users; that affects the social, cultural, and political identities and thus power of individuals and groups across the globe; that generates its own power through discourse production, circulation, and consumption; and that has many sites of power but no center of command.

This global discourse network, it seemed to me, was the space in which these instances of discourse, these speech acts involving human rights language or ideas, entered and evolved. And if one wanted to explore how people interacted with this discourse, one would need to characterize the social environment in which this discourse interaction took place. The crude sketch of some characteristics of a model of human rights discourse circulating in a network system as offered in this project is but one such preliminary attempt to describe this social environment, this discursive space. Certainly, more work needs to be done to finetune and develop an understanding of this global space of discourse.

In this project, I have been concerned primarily with how human rights discourse affects the identity and agency of its subjects who use it, its subject-actors. The already narrowed question of what individuals and groups do with and to human rights as and in discourse has thus been further refined to their interactions with the discourse with respect to their identities and power as subjects of the discourse, actors in the network, and their individual and group identities. Borrowing from Hardt and Negri's work on

Empire and multitude, and on Braidotti's idea of nomadic subjects, I tried in Chapter Four, "Applying Network Theory to Questions of Power and Identity: Some Conclusions on Human Rights Discourse, Power, and Identities," to consider how identity and agency might work in a network and discourse system. I hypothesized that in a network situation and with a fluid phenomenon like discourse, particular norms associated with human rights (network conventions like the universal premise and moral rhetoric of human rights language) might confer particular forms of supranational identity (network identity) and global-level agency (network power) on those that use it. Part One of this dissertation came this far. It sought to theorize, albeit rather sketchily, how the interactions between human rights subjects and the discourse might be studied.

In Part Two, I tested these ideas of network identity, power, and conventions on three case studies, each analyzing particular discursive events emerging from a different subject position within the discourse of human rights. These three case studies were: (1) the Nobel Peace Prize Lecture (1999) delivered by James Orbinski, then President of MSF, an international medical aid NGO; (2) the autobiography *An Ordinary Man* (2006) by a 1994 Rwandan genocide survivor, Paul Rusesabagina, with the help of Tom Zoellner; and (3) a novel, *Anil's Ghost* (2000), by a literary author, Michael Ondaatje. The hope was that each study would illuminate how actors from different speaking positions, and using different textual genres, might be affected by this discourse, and might be influencing it in turn. The cases were also aimed at extending the preliminary discussion of human rights discourse circulating through a global discourse network as sketched out in the first part of this dissertation.

The main question in each of these case studies was what happens to these actors, particularly their forms of identities and degrees of agency, when they speak in human rights terms (a mode of speaking that invariably places them in a global space of human rights discourse) from different subject positions. These different subject positions ranged from (1) a more official (i.e. recognized as authorized human rights actor in the international human rights system) one of an NGO as is the case with Orbinski and MSF; (2) a quasi-official (i.e. recognized as human rights subject but not necessarily as an

authorized actor in the system) one of a human rights crisis survivor like Rusesabagina; and (3) an un-official (i.e. not recognized as a human rights actor in the official system) one of a novelist like Ondaatje.

A secondary, but no less important, question in each of the case studies was the influence of different text genres on these discursive acts. What are the effects of these genres on the process of communication, in terms of these speech-acts' sites and processes of production, distribution, or consumption? With the first case, the Nobel Peace Prize lecture was originally delivered at the Peace Prize award ceremony in Oslo in 1999, but has been archived on the Internet on the Nobel Peace Prize website, and excerpts of the speech have been quoted in other texts. For instance, Executive Director of MSF-USA Joelle Tanguy drew his entire conclusion virtually word-for-word from it when he spoke at the 2000 World Affairs Council, and U.S. journalist Dan Bortolotti, used a hefty excerpt from it to end his book, *Hope in Hell: Inside the World of Doctors Without Borders* (2004). For the second case study, Rusesabagina's autobiography seems to have grown out of Terry George's film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and the conventions of survivor narratives, stemming perhaps from the history of testimony and human rights violation efforts to privilege the story of the survivor in the form of a life narrative, be it autobiography or memoir. With the third case, Ondaatje's novel has had a more limited textual afterlife, but the conversations, at least in the academic arena to which that work has entered, have been, if not numerous, at least sustained and influential in questions of literary studies and genre analysis.

Some Results from the Experiment of a Global Discourse Network of Human Rights

The results of this experiment have been mixed. In terms of the first question – what happens to these actors' identities and agency when they use human rights discourse – it appears that, for the three discourse users in this study, the discursive aspect of human rights, especially the universalist and moral rhetoric of the language and ideology, do open certain possibilities. Generally, these possibilities include (1) access to a larger global audience because a local issue is framed in a globally-recognizable language and

ideology; (2) means to a global identity aside from national and personal identities because human rights discourse equalizes all people as humans, thereby eliding their personal identity markers like race, nationality, gender, and sexuality; and (3) an avenue to a global agency because the moral rhetoric of the language carries persuasive power. It also appears that for these discourse users, the network of actors that has grown around the discourse also creates particular possibilities. The most important possibility perhaps is access to a larger global community of human rights advocates and systems, including their respective industry conventions, which can be deployed to promote or publicize ones particular cause.

The case of MSF in Chapter Five, “Human Rights Discourse and a Humanitarian NGO: *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and its Nobel Peace Prize Lecture (1999),” suggests all four of these possibilities at work in and for the organization. When MSF takes up local concerns and frames them in the universalist and moral rhetoric of their version of human rights-based humanitarianism, the local issues they take on become global ones that a larger audience is now implicated in. Moreover, when the organization identifies itself and its staff and volunteers as neutral humanitarians, as separate from the state and from politics, it adopts a transnational identity that allows it, to a degree, to argue for, if not, override, national sovereignty in the name of the human and the humanitarian. And when such a supranational identity of the organization as humanitarian comes to be recognized, the organization and its agents acquire increased power to act. Additionally, the power of human rights discourse and its network not only confers these possibilities onto MSF and its actors, this power also creates opportunities for the organization to do the same. The practices of the organization featured in the MSF-USA website indicate how MSF constructs its own vision of human rights-based humanitarianism and creates as well as attracts actors to foster communities locally, nationally, and globally around its vision. All of these possibilities for identity, agency, and multitude enhancement and development are enabled in large part by the discursive nature of human rights and its networked system of power.

Likewise, the case of Rusesabagina in Chapter Six, “Human Rights Discourse and a Genocide Survivor: Paul Rusesabagina and *An Ordinary Man* (2006),” also suggests each of these four possibilities at work. For one thing, the use of human rights language and ideology to describe Rusesabagina’s actions during the 1994 Rwandan genocide plugged him into the network in ways that enabled him to acquire different kinds of individual network identity and agency. His presence and influence globally grew from object to subject to actor as his story emerged in various textual forms – a nonfiction work of literary journalism, a docudrama, and an autobiography. Rusesabagina’s transformation was also prompted in large part through a process of collaboration with other actors in a networked system of power and their strategic deployment of the conventions in various circuits including the human rights movement, news reporting, Hollywood film, and survivor life narratives. As with MSF then, Rusesabagina’s ability to develop different forms of identity and agency at the global level, and to act through collaboration with other actors associated with human rights discourse came, to a great degree, from the discursive aspect and networked space of human rights.

Although these two case studies suggest some productive possibilities from the globalization of human rights, there have been limits to these possibilities, especially in terms of changes in the discourse users’ identities and agency. Broadly speaking, the two most critical limits may be the discourse’s inability to overcome (1) preconceptions about human rights; and (2) other modes of affiliation. That is, the language and ideology, however universalist or moral, cannot win over those skeptical of its language and ideology. And there are situations where the personal identity and national concerns dominates over the universal identity of humanity and the global perspective of human rights. For instance, with the case of MSF, while the organization’s deployment of the universalist and moral rhetoric of the discourse may persuade some, for others like some Muslim-based aid organizations, this language only heightens the gap between a Christian or secular world and Islam. In such situations, the MSF logo cannot project the neutrality it claims. The organization’s identity cannot supersede the personal identities of its aid workers, the national identity of the organization, or the Western identity of

humanitarian and human rights discourse as deployed by MSF. This case underscored the limitations of personal identities and agency, and other forms of community affiliations, that restrict the supranational identities and power offered by a globalizing and universalist language and ideology of human rights.

There have also been costs to the possibilities held out by the globalization of human rights: the most important perhaps being the loss of some causes in place of others more amenable to human rights and a global audience. In the case of Rusesabagina, for example, the frame of human rights discourse, especially the language of genocide as a crime against humanity, and the conventions of Hollywood film or autobiography limit what may be represented about Rwanda and Rusesabagina. The presentation and representation of this country, Rusesabagina's story and his identity is bound to a degree by the norms, the conventions, of the language and ideology of human rights, and its affiliated networks. This case highlighted the restrictions placed on the identities and agency of the discourse users by the conventions that dominate the genres, media, and industries involved in the network.

Both of these limitations (personal identities and network conventions) were attended to in more detail in Chapter Seven, "Human Rights Discourse and a Global Novelist: Michael Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost* (2000)." In this case, the identity of the text (its presumed genre of national allegory), the personal national and cultural identity of the author (part Sri Lankan, part British, part Canadian; part colonizer, part immigrant, part decolonized), and its audience (global readers, national audience, diasporic consumers) posed barriers to *Anil's Ghost's* message (a critique of the human rights project as administered from above) from being heard. In short, the bi-national personal identity of Ondaatje and the less-than-nationally-focused novel of *Anil's Ghost* interfered with the globally-focused critique in the novel. A large part of this problem had to do with the genre different audiences identified for a text, and their accompanying horizon of expectations for their respective genres. This case foregrounded the role of the speaker, the medium, and the audience, in this globally-oriented act of communication. The possibilities opened by a network scenario of networked identity, agency, and

convention, thus also faces the problems of a networked situation. That is, these speech acts, their actors, and their audiences, do not exist in purely local and isolated contexts, but are linked to other contexts including the text's, author's, and audience's particular personal and group identities and affiliations. This case especially addressed the second main question of this project – the role of genre in this global space of human rights discourse.

In terms of the second question – what the effects are of the genres in which these speech acts emerge – the results were again mixed. It seems that for the discursive acts analyzed in the three case studies, their form and content is affected not just by the conventions of human rights discourse, but also by those of their respective genres, media, and industry. In fact, it is in the ways these texts adopt and adapt these conventions that their message comes to be heard. For instance, MSF President, James Orbinski, can make certain points overt by drawing from the conventions of human rights discourse, award acceptance speeches (textual genre), public real-time delivery of his speech (media), and of NGOs, humanitarianism, and medical aid relief (industries). Similarly, Rusesabagina's story can (perhaps, must) go through particular formulations in Gourevitch's piece of literary journalism and George's docudrama, before it can stand on its own in Rusesabagina and Zoellner's autobiography. Ondaatje, however, working in the more poetically-licensed realm of fiction, can draw from a variety of textual genres (historical novel, mystery, and detective fiction, to name a few). And even as the novel is unambiguously a printed text (media) and rooted in the book-publishing world (industry), its identity, as its divided reception shows, is much debated.

The role these conventions play in interpretation and communication of these speech acts suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the structures of production, distribution, and reception as much as to the words in the text and its paratextual parts. This project has focused a little on the sites of production in Chapters Five (MSF) and Six (Rusesabagina) and a bit on sites of reception in Chapter Seven (Ondaatje). It has paid scant attention to the structures of distribution that inevitably affect the production and consumption of these speech acts. It was beyond the scope of this project, but would be

an important area for future research. This might involve a more systematic study of the structures of cultural production, circulation, and reception, such as that initiated by Meg McLagan in human rights-oriented film. Some questions to pursue might include, what kind of person typically accesses MSF's websites and watches their short films or listens to their Podcasts? Is this only a small community of already indoctrinated consumers? Similarly, what are the mechanisms for collaborating with another writer as is the case with Rusesabagina and Zoellner in writing his autobiography? What book covers accompany novels like *Anil's Ghost* as they enter different national markets? How might these forms of marketing, the packaging, frame the text and how it should be read?

Possible Revisions for the Model of a Global Discourse Network

Besides exploring some specific responses to these questions, these case studies had also been examined to shed some light on the proposed model of a global discourse network. The contributions of these case studies suggest that some adjustments may be necessary to the characterization of discourse and its network as previously described. One such adjustment is to perhaps reconsider the level playing field promised by the discourse and offered by a network system. In my original conception of these terms for this project, I had thought that the moral power and global reach of the discourse and the network respectively could have substantial power, enough to override the dominant form of human rights (the official version incorporated in the international human rights system) and the most powerful actor in this network (the state). The model of a global discourse network as first conceived thus appeared like a smooth space that did not account for the unequal power dynamics within this global space. This has been a criticism of this model proffered by some of its readers, and it is a good one. It is similar to the critique Speed makes of Hoffmann's article and is well taken here.

There are of course reasons why this conception of a smoothed space emerged, as some readers have pointed out. One reason, as Neville Hoad, Speed, and Elizabeth Hedrick have observed, has to do with the way the project is focused on discourse, and how a discursive view often attends to language more and social structure less.

Fairclough does not come under this category, and in fact, I was attracted to his work, and found it useful for this project, specifically because he focused on discourse and social structure, or even discourse as social structure. This is to say, that the limitation of the original model is not in anyway associated with Fairclough's theory but just my original reading of his work. This could perhaps be an area for future research - how might one theorize the mechanisms of human rights discourse at a global level and still take into account the power of individual states.

Another possible reason for this lack of attention to the state, as Speed notes, is the project's discussion of power through the lens of Foucault's biopower, through Hardt and Negri. Since biopower is power exercised from within societies rather than from without, the hand of the state is often not as obvious. Again, this observation is made not to fault Hardt and Negri, although their theorizing of Empire and multitude, as global systems of power generated and regenerated by individuals does seem to reflect a similar overlooking of the state. This, indeed, is their premise, that there is no longer a state and non-state situation. Rather, all actors, state and non-state, are implicated in the network of Empire. In a project about human rights, a system authorized, regularized, and adjudicated primarily through states and sometimes an international system (still state-centered), this oversight on my part clearly needs addressing.²⁰⁸ Again, this could be another area for future study – in a situation of Empire where there is no state versus non-

²⁰⁸ In "Is the Human Rights Era Ending?" (2002), Ignatieff makes a strong case for focusing on the state in any efforts to promote human rights since the way to protect human rights is to "construct strong civil societies and viable states" (par. 13). In his conclusion to this article, he writes:

If the [human rights] movement hopes to have a future, it has to advocate its objectives – freedom, participation, due process – in a way that addresses the necessity to create political stability. This doesn't mean suddenly going silent about arbitrary arrests and military courts. It means moving from denunciation alone to engagement, working with local activists, and with the parts of the government that will listen, moving these societies back from the precipice.

The movement aims at defending the rights of ordinary people. To do this, it has to help them construct strong civil societies and viable states. If it can't find new ways to achieving that goal, it will be remembered as a fashionable cause of the dim and distant 1990's" (pars. 12-13).

state, no inside versus outside, how does a universalist project like human rights that paradoxically depends on the structure of state power unfold?

While these criticisms are well taken and need to be accounted for in this model of a global discourse network, it also seems to be the case that it is this very smooth space that the discourse seems to promote and desire. This is another reason why this project has not paid sufficient attention to the unequal power relations between state actors and non-state actors as examined here. The texts that I examined here critique their respective state or states in indirect ways. This does not mean that the speakers may not be challenging the state in more direct ways, MSF certainly, in their campaigns and collaborations with states, have quite direct access to members of government. The sections of the network, the discourse users, and the discursive acts with which this project is most concerned are not oriented around the state, but around publics, mostly global ones, but also local ones. Their sites of production, distribution, and reception, thus are more non-state oriented than state-oriented. Since their sites of production are also based in North America or Europe, there is less of a question of state intervention in the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural products. This issue would need to be considered more carefully in the situations where government censorship is prevalent, for instance in Burma, China, or North Korea. In terms of the characterization of the discourse and its network then, more attention than originally given in this project needs to be paid to unequal power dynamics and the role of the state.

Despite this limitation of the model, the basic discourse and network premise of the model has been productive. It has been especially useful in analyzing Rusesabagina's case, showing how network power, identity, and convention come together to turn him from object to subject to agent of human rights. It has also been fruitful for considering how multitudes are built transnationally around a discourse, as with the case of MSF, and how the universalist bend of human rights discourse must contend with the nationalist streak of more nation-oriented groups, as seen in the case of *Anil's Ghost*.

Because of the possibilities for analysis offered by this model, it could also be useful to apply this model to speakers from other subject positions within the discourse or

other actors in the network.²⁰⁹ This project has looked at only one case of an NGO, MSF, and it is an organization known primarily as a humanitarian organization at that. It might be instructive to examine the ways the discourse affects a straight human rights organization like Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, or even a more localized grassroots organization like one of the groups supported by WITNESS (a U.S.-based group that seeks to help local human rights groups worldwide promote their causes through video advocacy), and especially corporate actors like Reebok and Shell who have set up human rights agendas to respond to criticism that their corporate policies exploit those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.²¹⁰

Besides the types of speakers, another aspect of this project that could be developed with this model of a global discourse network has to do with the genre of these speech acts. This study focused largely on written texts from various genres – speech, autobiography, and novel. It would be useful to explore how the discourse functions in other instances of these genres, especially novels that take on more overtly humanitarianism and human rights issues like Philip Caputo's *Acts of Faith* (2005) or even more unconventional genres like comic books, for example Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001). It might further be productive to study how the discourse functions in other media like film, both documentary (e.g. Zana Briski and Ross Kaffman's *Born Into Brothels* (2004)) and fiction, or on the Internet, like ezines or blogs. These studies of other subject positions and genres are important because they could add to the understanding of the

²⁰⁹ In his afterword to the special issue on human rights in *American Anthropologist*. Richard Ashby Wilson succinctly introduces the many state and non-state actors, and their degrees of difference, involved in human rights projects.

²¹⁰ For Shell's statement and activities for human rights promotion, see "Human Rights." For Reebok's position and work on human rights including the company's business practices and history, the Reebok Human Rights Foundation, and the Reebok Human Rights Award, see "Reebok Human Rights."

For an interesting discursive instance of human rights language and ideology at work in a global network scenario wherein the corporate actor Reebok and an Indonesian human rights activist face tensions between their respective network identities and agency, see the Indonesian human rights activist Dita Sari's "Why I Rejected the Reebok Human Rights Award" (2002).

relationship between human rights discourse and its subjects as well as the developments of cultural texts and structures oriented around this discourse.

Some Contributions to the Study of Globalization, Human Rights, and Discourse

This project began by surveying briefly the work in three broad fields of study – globalization, human rights, and discourse. In the human rights field, a very large and diverse arena in itself, this project focused on the universalist-relativist debate where rights were pitted against culture, a debate that has been aggravated by economic, political, and cultural globalization, and the globalization of human rights norms. Against some existing conceptions of human rights as fixed, this project has sought to show that as a discourse, human rights is anything but fixed. Rather, it is changeable and always in flux as to its languages, meanings, norms, and practices. As such, as opposed to some prevailing arguments that human rights imposes itself upon other cultures, this project has tried to argue that the direction of action need not always be only one-way – top-down, from a dominant system of international human rights laws and norms to people. The case studies of MSF, Rusesabagina, and Ondaatje, all non-state actors, exemplify the possibility of a two-way interaction, whereby people also adopt and adapt this language and ideology according to their own needs: MSF, to formulate their own vision of human rights-based humanitarianism and to generate multitudes with agency for the improvement of human health worldwide; Rusesabagina, to garner global audibility, presence, and influence in order to work for the betterment of human lives in Rwanda and Sudan and perhaps to publicize an alternative view of the victim-savior-savage paradigm prevalent in the human rights industry; and Ondaatje, to question the premises and practices of the international human rights system and possibly to bridge the distance between distant readers and faraway crises.

Such a fluid, vertical, and two-way interaction view of human rights also has implications for the study of globalization studies. If human rights is a mutable discourse, globalizing in a network system to which almost everyone has access, albeit to different degrees, then the globalization of human rights discourse need not be seen as only an

imposition upon culture, a form of cultural imperialism and domination. Indeed, the official discourse of human rights need not always be top-down and an imposition. It could also be bottom-up, a kind of globalization of human rights from below, to return to Falk's term, whereby individuals and groups, new multitudes, might generate and regenerate their own languages and ideologies of human rights to challenge the official discourse Empire of human rights propagated by the international human rights system, to use Hardt and Negri's terms. Against the persistent arguments that globalization tends to mean cultural imperialism and homogenization, this study has tried to argue with the case of the globalizing discourse of human rights that globalization need not always be an erasure of local differences or an oppression of individual agency. MSF, Rusesabagina, and Ondaatje suggest three instances where the tools and systems of globalization have been harnessed to impress the particularities of local situations upon the consciousness of people globally. Each of these actors has harnessed the circuits of production, distribution, and consumption (circuits enabled by the very processes of economic, political, and cultural globalization, to launch their specific concerns – forgotten crises in different parts of the world for MSF, the Rwandan genocide for Rusesabagina, and the Sri Lankan conflict as well as the human, lived experiences of conflict and terror for Ondaatje) to audiences across the world, where they might otherwise have fallen below the radar.

The attempts of this project to theorize human rights as discourse and as globalizing in a network situation have also some relevant implications for the field of discourse analysis. It has tried to characterize human rights discourse not just in terms of language use (Saussure's *parole*) as Fairclough does (that is, discourse as a text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice), but also in terms of the structure of this language (Saussure's *langue*). That is, to think of the full phenomenon of human rights language (Saussure's *langage*) – a specific lexicon of human rights terms, the way these terms are deployed, and the systems of this lexicon that shape how the terms can be used. As the case studies with MSF, Rusesabagina, and Ondaatje suggest, the strong moral tone of human rights language determines what forms and manner of

speech acts are possible for these individuals in the network and their respective subject positions within the discourse.

For example, a humanitarian like Orbinski, with the moral authority of a medical relief NGO like MSF, must consistently declare their neutrality, emphasize their altruistic qualities, to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their funders, their fellow NGOers, and their aid receivers. Orbinski and MSF cannot, for instance, appear to be self-serving or biased towards a particular country or government's policy. This unspoken rule is one of the prerequisites of human rights action; it is one of the systems of this lexicon. Similarly, a genocide survivor like Rusesabagina, with the favorable status of Hutu savior for Tutsis in a Hutu-inspired massacre of Tutsis, can tap into a global audience through a film and/or a survivor narrative that in turn can support a named humanitarian/ philanthropic NGO. This pathway from memoir or autobiography to personal website to solicit charitable funds is what is deemed appropriate for crisis survivors. This too is another system of human rights discourse. In a way, one of the reasons for the divided reception Ondaatje faced with *Anil's Ghost* may have been that that speech act failed to conform to the systems of this language. Ondaatje, arguably, lacked the legitimacy of a "native" like Rusesabagina or even "participant-observer" like Orbinski or any MSFer working in the field to speak authoritatively about the conflict in Sri Lanka. And *Anil's Ghost* fell short of the expected moral agenda in human rights-oriented texts. The assumptions about what can be said and how with human rights discourse in these three case studies has begun to clarify a little the dialectical relationship between language and language use – that the one influences the other and vice versa and how. It has especially started to better articulate the dialectical relationship between human rights language and ideology with the identity and agency of individuals when they use this discourse in a global network system.

These then were three areas in which this project intersected and the ways in which this study has hopefully made some modest contributions. Aside from drawing out these critical implications for the related fields of globalization, human rights, and discourse studies, this experiment has also raised some vital questions about how issues

of representation are influenced by the processes of globalization and how identity and power are implicated in new constellations of postnational hegemony like human rights.

Some Future Directions for Study: Postnational Identities, Glocal Texts

In considering the case studies of MSF, Rusesabagina, and Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* as speech acts in a global discursive space of human rights, it seemed that these actors and texts also embodied the troubled process of speaking from and/or to a subject position that travels back and forth between nationally-grounded yet transnationally-focused situations or locally-situated yet globally-oriented sites. These texts, because of the networked environments generated by globalization, could be considered glocal, to borrow Roland Roberston's term, while the actors could be seen as having postnational identities, that is, the identities foregrounded in their speech acts are not precisely nationally-rooted or focused. Each case study appears to represent a kind of glocal node in a postnational landscape: they each capture the tensions between the sometimes competing, sometimes complimentary, paradigms of the local and the global, the national and the transnational, that surround and inhabit such acts of textual representation, acts that seek to represent the same tensions unfolding in different places and people around the world. Let me explain this postnational nature of the actors and the glocal character of these texts a little more below by returning to the characteristics of the three case studies of this project.

The three case studies involved an individual or group that acts, speaks, or writes from a rhetorically less distinctly national subject position. These nation-sponsored or nation-sited (yet also nation-diffused) speaking positions are what I am calling postnational. Admittedly not a new or uncontroversial term, its invocation here is intended to foreground the very contested nature of the national as a locus of identity, rather than to serve as any definitive statement on the nation as a political, cultural, or social construct. The prefix "post" is used here to highlight, not the end of the nation system which is very much present still, but the condition of being influenced by a

national system while also being affected by transnational and global forms of social organization.

MSF, Rusesabagina, and Ondaatje, in their particular speech acts, each speaks from a different kind of postnational subject position. To develop MSF as an example, the organization is one of many international humanitarian NGOs that are largely based in the First World and mainly serve the Third World by combining experienced officers and novice volunteers chiefly from the developed countries with staff from the developing country in which it works. Its particular origin in a national site (France), its development into an international organization with several national sites (Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong, Italy, U.S.A to name a few), and its foreigner-native collaborative model of work makes MSF and MSFers function from (or *claim* to function from) a complex position of being at once local, national, international, and transnational actors.

This already multi-dimensional speaking situation is further complicated by the universalist rhetoric and global focus of humanitarianism and human rights that informs MSF's ideology and practices. As Rorty observes in "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality" (1993), such humanitarian and human rights discourses are often designed to evoke solidarity by appealing to a common bond of global humanity that transcends exclusionary group identities like nation, race, or ethnicity, as well as particular differences of local cultures and practices. The deployment of such universalist rhetoric adds the title of global actor to MSF and MSFers' growing list of geopolitical identities. Thus, when one of its members like Orbinski delivers a lecture at the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony, he speaks from a kind of postnational subject position (national, not-quite-national enough, and yet not-just-national alone). Similarly, Rusesabagina's autobiography is a co-authored production with a U.S. writer Tom Zoellner, thereby rendering the text a collaborative product of Rusesabagina's Rwandan and Belgium experiences and Zoellner's American (and whatever other cultural experiences he may have had) perspective. Likewise, Ondaatje's writing of *Anil's Ghost* also emerges from his mix of Sri Lankan, British, and Canadian sojourns. It is in this sense that each of these speech acts stems from a postnational subject position.

The postnational nature of such subject positions however, are not clearly defined. To take MSF as an example, on the one hand, MSF's actions and speech acts appear to challenge the nation-state paradigm in that its members seem to affiliate themselves more to the organization than to their respective nation-states. This dimension of their globalizing power has led some like Appadurai, in "Patriotism and Its Futures" (1993), to declare such NGOs to be "postnational social formations" that are "both instances and incubators of a postnational global order" (421). On the other hand, the organization's activities are still organized according to national frameworks. As such, Appadurai's label of "postnational" for NGOs like MSF may be premature. Peng Cheah's observation in *Inhuman Conditions* (2006) that those who seek redress for human rights claims must do so through a national or international system of law and justice applies similarly to NGOs like MSF who strive to serve humanitarian needs. They too must do so through a national or international system of government. Moreover, as the kidnappings of various aid workers by terrorist groups demonstrate, despite the universalist rhetoric of humanitarianism, humanitarians are still seen as nationals through nationalist eyes. To describe this situation in the terms used here, MSF's *speech acts* seem to emanate from a postnational paradigm, while their *political action* falls into more traditional national frameworks. The national then is still very much present in the practice of humanitarianism and human rights NGOs, despite their national-transcending rhetoric.

Although Appadurai's pronouncement of the "postnational" may be too hasty, the multiple forms of nation-centered and de-centered identities represented by MSF and its workers does force one to think of their identities as being somehow at once national and not-quite-so-national. This condition makes terms like national, international, postnational, and even transnational seem not quite accurate. This then is the multi-dimensional set of identities from which MSF and MSFers act: part local, part global, part foreign, part national, part transnational, part international, part postnational, depending on time and place. They are paradigmatic of what, as discussed in Chapter Four, Braidotti calls "nomadic subjects." This complex collection of nation-centered and de-centered identities is the archive of various subject positions from which the NGO and

its workers function, and which tends to allow them to speak or not to speak (depending on the situation and the audience) with global force when spreading their world view and values. The question then becomes how as a kind of “nomadic subject,” MSF negotiates its multiple identities, especially its overt claim of a kind of postnational identity, through its strategic use of the universalist rhetoric of humanitarianism and human rights.

What is the nature of a postnational identity, especially of this sort that Orbinski performs in the Nobel Lecture? Unhinged as it is from national affiliations, it seems to suggest a kind of cosmopolitanism and carry all the critiques of cosmopolitanism where individuals are at once without roots and without loyalties. But, as a look at its practices as represented in the MSF websites suggest, the organization seems to put its postnational identity to good work in various national locales, suggesting a more locally-grounded mode of cosmopolitanism as argued for by Cheah and Beck. The organization appears to channel its power, derived from its strategic deployment of the universalist rhetoric of humanitarianism and human rights, to those with whom it comes into contact, pulling in more actors from different national sites and putting them in touch with each other, in order to widen the network of actors and scope of aid distribution globally. This postnational identity seems to breed more postnational actors and subject positions.

While their creators appear to be speaking from postnational positions, the texts themselves seem to be glocal speech acts. By this I mean that although they are certainly locally situated, they seem to be directed to a range of globalized, albeit still nation-centered audiences. That is, although the authors write from their particular local perspectives, the audiences they anticipate for their works are understood to function at once as individuals within a national framework and are presumed to be sensitive to the ways in which notions of the national are rapidly changing. These texts thus often engage with audiences elsewhere, outside the nation-state, and often without knowing clearly whom they might be addressing (as is often the case with websites or blogs), even if they have clear intended audiences in mind. MSF’s Nobel Peace Prize Lecture and its websites, Gourevitch’s work of literary journalism, George’s film, Rusesabagina’s autobiography, and Ondaatje’s novel are each glocal texts in these senses of the phrase.

The Nobel Lecture, for instance, is local to MSF, the organization and its ideology of human rights-based humanitarianism, but global in its message of neutral humanitarianism. Rusesabagina's autobiography too is local to his experience of Rwanda and of the genocide in 1994, but global in its intended audience of people outside of Rwanda. And Ondaatje's novel is also local in his outsider-perspective representation of Sri Lanka, but global in its critique of human rights. This is what I mean by these speech acts seem to be glocal ones.

The question of audience is quite an intriguing one for these glocal texts and others like them that travel in postnational terrains. There seem to be several factors that could influence the audience for such texts. On the one hand, at least for the three case studies here, the media through which these rhetorical performances are made public – Internet, and printed book – mean that these texts are available, within the limits of technological access and literacy, to a wide variety of audiences internationally. On the other hand, the particular genre in which these speech acts situate themselves – Nobel Lecture, autobiography, and prose fiction – suggests that the kinds of audiences worldwide who are likely to access them are those who already have an interest in these specific textual genres. That is, they function for a diffuse and self-defining community of choice, rather than for any existent community present in one place or institution.

Similarly, the humanitarian and human rights-centered themes of the speech acts contained in these texts (a very common set of themes in such globalizing networked communities) implies an all-encompassing appeal, quite seemingly liberal and Western in inspiration, to a potential audience of “all” human beings, since their underlying ideologies presuppose a common bond among all humanity. Yet the Third World-located contexts in which these humanitarian and human rights concerns function suggest that these texts will most likely attract those who have some interest in, what the Western and world governments call, developing countries or at least in their issues.

To this list of factors that affect the range of possible receivers of such texts is added the rhetorical techniques strategically employed in these texts that indirectly identify their intended audiences, or what Iser has called the “implied reader.” Each of

the three texts examined here seems to be composed for a particular but undefined sets of audiences distinctly located in the First World or Third World. Each of them, too, in some way or other, seems to presume an audience for whom the topic or setting of the text is, as Hesford says, “distant” (“Documenting Violations”). Their subject matter is usually not about these audiences’ country or culture, but somehow situated beyond their horizon of vision, while simultaneously, as the text often appeals, urgently needs to be included in it. This kind of “transnational storytelling,” to use Gregory’s phrase, suggests that their creators seem to imagine their audience as being somehow concerned about, if not necessarily aware of or affected by, events outside their national realm. It also presupposes a rather cosmopolitan sensibility, whereby the audience shares, as Beck suggests, some sense of connection with others beyond their national group – an imagined community, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase, beyond local experience.²¹¹

Such rhetorical moves imply the types of audiences the creators have in mind. When deployed successfully, these techniques are expected to achieve the intended effects on the targeted receivers: they ought to create a community of interest around an issue “needing attention” by all inhabitants of the globe. They may also, however, produce quite unintended effects on the non-targeted audiences who are networked into channels that give them access to these discussions. Such unsolicited outcomes from unintended audiences seem to render these nationally-promiscuous speech acts quite volatile.

This issue of unintended consequences opens up further the question of audience for the universalist rhetoric of humanitarian and human rights discourses and the networks of actors including NGOs like MSF that orient themselves around such

²¹¹ I am using Anderson’s phrase only loosely after him, pointing out that the affective dimension of experience helps create the space of a nation. In this case, it is the creation of a nowhere and everywhere of global humanity. For an interesting read of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Franco Moretti’s *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (1998) on the relationship between the nation and the novel, especially in the context of world literature and comparative readings, see Mario Ortiz-Robles’s “Local Speech, Global Acts: Performative Violence and the Novelization of the World” (2007).

discourses. To take the MSF case as an example again, in each rhetorical instance wherein MSF and its workers act, which of their various identities (national, international, transnational, postnational, or just human) do their audiences recognize? While the Nobel Lecture as a particular rhetorical event seems to have an arguably stable rhetorical situation – there is a speaker (Orbinski), delivering his address to a receiver (the audience present in the hall), in the context of an acceptance speech – this purported stability falls away once the lecture is archived on the Nobel Peace Prize website. On the website, the lecture remains, seemingly in perpetuity, as the public memory of or even a monument to, a paradigmatic speech act, with no further need to prove its power. Its very existence has been guaranteed by its archive, sanctioned as it were by one of the most prestigious of world prizes.

The question of how a multiplicity of audiences might react to such statements is particularly pervasive in web-based materials that are accessible to virtually anyone with a computer, access to the Internet, and some kind of language or technology literacy. Gregory, in “Transnational Storytelling: Human Rights, WITNESS, and Video Advocacy” (2006), identifies a range of potential audiences for such web-based materials by humanitarian and human rights NGO – “the judicial and quasi-judicial, solidarity, activist, and community groups, as well as decision makers and ad hoc audiences created via the World Wide Web” (196). How MSF’s online materials are received and how the organization is identified by each of these potential audiences will be affected by a host of factors, not the least of which is the national identity of the audience member and his or her relationship to the organization, its ideology and discourse of humanitarianism and human rights, and the particular causes it promotes. This question of audience reception and recognition for the MSF case is clearly too vast a question for this modest project, now in its conclusion stage, to take on, but I raise it here because it reveals the kind of difficulties faced when a nomadic subject tries to act from a postnational subject position and through glocal texts.

By looking at various producers (based in the First World) – a humanitarian aid NGO, a genocide survivor, and a global novelist – and their cultural products (produced

in the First World) – speech and website, autobiography, and novel – that delve into human rights and humanitarian stories of the Third World, this project has gestured towards some tensions between global and national identities and power that arise when a national event is translated into a global human rights or humanitarian crisis, and when a universalist human rights discourse is transplanted unto a particular national setting. In other words, it points towards the problematic of the postnational and the glocal in a paradoxically nation-centered and transnational system of economics, politics, and culture.

One particular area of inquiry in literary studies that emerges from this project and its resulting questions about presentation and representation in a glocal and postnational situation is the question of how to read texts like MSF's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, Rusesabagina's autobiography, and Ondaatje's novel. Some thought has been put to this question in terms of the relationship between literature and globalization, for instance in *The South Atlantic Quarterly's* special issue called "The Globalization of Fiction/ the Fiction of Globalization" (2001). In their introduction to this special issue, the co-editors, O'Brien and Szeman ask, "Does it make sense to speak about a literature of globalization?" (603). They remind us – literary scholars – of Giles Gunn's observation in *PMLA's* special issue on the topic, "Introduction: Globalizing Literary Studies" (2001), that "literature was global...before it was ever national" (604). They suggest that "literature in general, and Anglophone literature in particular, is – and perhaps always has been – globalized" (604).

O'Brien and Szeman's observation seems appropriate: literary texts travel in various forms – in its original language, in different translations, in modes of intertextuality and mediation – in ways that invariably involve processes of interpretation – reading, viewing, writing, presenting, and representing. So although there seems to be emerging types of texts that take on topics oriented around globalization, issues of living in a globally-connected environment, there is no real need to create a formal category of a literature of globalization or even glocal texts as I have been using here. As I use it here, it is only as a convenient shorthand to refer to texts that seem to target audiences on the

grounds of their membership in a global community more so than their particular nationalities, without overriding these identity markers. It is also used to refer to texts that appear to address issues on a global level, rather than a purely national one.²¹² The term is further used to refer to texts that seem to be produced by creators of mixed national origin, signifying a perhaps less-than-stable-national identity and perspective. But I do not mean to suggest that a rigid category of glocal or globalization literature or genre of glocal literature should be carved in stone against which to judge various texts. I think of this term “glocal text” in much the same way, and probably no less contested way, in which the term postcolonial literature is sometimes used, to refer to a mode of interpretation (in the acts of representation/ writing and reading) rather than a set of texts.

It seems that such glocal texts like MSF’s Nobel Lecture, Rusesabagina’s autobiography, and Ondaatje’s novel are dealing with different ways of interpreting the world, a world at once transnational and national, global and local, and as such, alternative ways of reading, ones not tied just to national frameworks, but also transnational ones, may be needed as well. O’Brien and Szeman make this point when they observe that:

To ask the question of whether there is a literature of globalization is thus also to ask whether it is possible to think of literature outside the framework of national literatures, and correspondingly, to try to imagine what critical tools might be used to make sense of such literatures, and what in turn might be learned from and about them, in ways that open up new perspectives on the problems and possibilities that we face at the present time. (605)

They suggest that some tools are already available for such challenges, particularly the

²¹² In *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (1996), Franco Moretti has made a similar argument about such texts, calling them ‘world texts’ because their frame of reference is “no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity – a continent, or the world-system as a whole” (50). Other interesting attempts to deal with literary texts in a global context can be found in the *PMLA* special issue “Globalizing Literary Studies” (2001) including Livingston’s “Glocal Knowledges: Agency and Place in Literary Studies,” Ian Baucom’s “Globalit, Inc.; Or, the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies,” and Wai Chee Dimock’s “Literature for the Planet.”

critical discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism. But, as we have seen with some postcolonial readings of *Anil's Ghost*, there seems to be a disjunct between postcolonial concerns of the nationalist readers and the postmodern perspectives of the globalist readers. O'Brien and Szeman suggest that the trouble lies in part with the implicit assumption of globalization as neoimperialism prevalent in postcolonial studies. They see this assumption as limiting, acting as a barrier to moving away from another dichotomous situation of us versus them, insider versus outside, or center versus periphery.

If the condition of the world is one where there is no longer an outside, as Hardt and Negri describe, then there is a need to rethink the modes of reading and critique scholars bring and teach about literature, broadly conceived. It seems that texts may need to be read, taught, and critiqued from different perspectives, reading them as rhetorical acts for intended audiences, in ways that reveal assumptions about this global audience and about global identities. That is, to study these texts not just as literary texts, but as rhetorical instances of performance, persuasion, and community building.²¹³ What I have tried to do in this project is experiment with one way of studying such texts for what Richard Wilson calls "the social life of human rights" (77) I have done so by looking at the social life of these human rights discourse-oriented texts. These discursive, textual, and rhetorical lives and afterlives of individual speech acts in the name of human rights have much to reveal about the different visions and understandings that people have about the conditions of possibility for the human.

²¹³ This is a call also made by Wendy Hesford in her observations about new paradigms needed to address globalization not just in rhetoric and composition studies but also for the various departments within the humanities and across other disciplines. See Hesford's *PMLA* article "Global Turns and Cautions in Rhetoric and Composition Studies" (2006).

Appendices

Appendix One

MSF's Form, Function, and Influence on Humanitarianism: A Brief History

MSF itself seems proud of its pioneering ways. It presents itself as the first NGO to combine humanitarian and human rights activities (“What Is Doctors Without Borders?” par. 5).²¹⁴ Before MSF, humanitarian NGOs, following the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) model, focused largely on humanitarian work like providing emergency medical assistance.²¹⁵ And human rights NGOs concentrated primarily on human rights work including publicizing rights violations and advocating for rights protection and promotion. After MSF however, the scope of humanitarianism seems to have expanded. Humanitarian NGOs began to take on human rights work (that is, advocacy for laws and other rights legislation) in addition to their humanitarian activities.²¹⁶ The way the organization yoked the related ideologies of humanitarianism and human rights makes it a rich case of an NGO that seems to be extending the purview of human rights discourse into other fields.

²¹⁴ As the MSF-USA website states, “MSF was founded in 1971 as the first nongovernmental organization to both provide emergency medical assistance and bear witness publicly to the plight of the people it assists” (“What Is Doctors Without Borders?” par. 5).

²¹⁵ For a history of the ICRC, see “History of the International Committee of the Red Cross.” For an overview of the developments in the ICRC from a non-ICRC perspective, but still very sympathetic to the ICRC position, see Ivar Libæk’s “The Red Cross: Three-time Recipient of the Peace Prize.”

²¹⁶ For an overview of the circumstances that led to this human rights-based humanitarianism and the problems that might ensue from this “new humanitarianism,” see Fox’s “Conditioning the Right to Humanitarian Aid? Human Rights and the ‘New Humanitarianism.’” For an argument against such politicized humanitarian action in the international humanitarian aid industry, see Rieff’s *A Bed for the Night* (2002).

One of these newer fields seems to have been the responsibilities of state governments. The organization appears to have drawn from the nationally-transcendent rhetoric of human rights discourse to emphasize its right, if not duty, to intervene in the national affairs of a state when the lives of human beings are at stake. MSF purports to be one of the pioneering NGOs to disregard national sovereignty (Benthall 132).²¹⁷ Before MSF, humanitarian NGOs like the ICRC generally worked with the permission of national governments. When MSF arrived on the humanitarian aid scene, it worked regardless of national government approval or disapproval.²¹⁸ It functions under what one of its founders, French doctor Bernard Kouchner calls “the duty to interfere” (Bortolotti

²¹⁷ As MSF leaders Rony Brauman and Joelle Tanguy in “The *Médecins Sans Frontières* Experience,” write, MSF was born as a result of the realization that “deference to the will of individual nations obstructed efforts to provide medical relief quickly and effectively” (par. 2). One of MSF’s founding members, Bernard Kouchner, maintained that the ICRC restricted its potential by accepting that it needed the consent of national governments before it could administer aid (Benthall 132).

²¹⁸ MSF may have helped establish the current humanitarian practice of intervention regardless of national borders based on Kouchner’s concept of “the duty to interfere” (Bortolotti 44). James Traub makes this argument in “A Statesman Without Borders,” tracing the historical development of this duty to interfere as the brainchild of Kouchner (pars. 30-32). According to Traub, in 1987, Kouchner convinced French President Francois Mitterand and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac to propose the “right of ‘humanitarian access’” to the UN. On December 8, 1988, the United Nations recognized a limited version of this right. It passed Resolution 43/131 that legitimized the crossing of state borders by NGOs to help victims of natural disasters and other emergencies (Benthall 132). For the full text of the UN resolution, see “United Nations General Assembly A/Res/43/131.” As Traub notes, “Humanitarian access proved to be the thin edge of the wedge” (par. 31). In 2005, the UN, under the leadership of its Secretary General Kofi Annan, transformed the “right of ‘humanitarian access’” into “the responsibility to protect” (also known as the R2P doctrine) (Traub par. 31). The R2P doctrine was first introduced in the 2005 UN report, “In Larger Freedom: Towards Security, Development, and Human Rights for All,” and subsequently adopted in the 2005 UN World Summit. For the full text of these two documents, see “In Larger Freedom” and “Overview UN World Summit” respectively. In this way, through the efforts of Kouchner, MSF’s doctrine of intervention (*ingérence* in French) made its move from an organization-specific idea and practice into a globally-authorized idea and practice in the UN.

44).²¹⁹ As such, MSF represents a particularly interesting case of an NGO that seems to have benefited from human rights discourse in that the moral and universal rhetoric of the discourse has helped the organization transcend national borders. Because of the power of this language, the organization is able to claim a supranational identity, an identity that allows it, to a degree, to override the sovereign power of national governments. And it can do so without itself being tied to any nation-state, becoming rather an institution of Empire, a node or circuit in a global system of power networks.

MSF further presents itself as one of the first NGOs to harness media power (Benthall 126).²²⁰ Before MSF, humanitarian NGOs like the ICRC often functioned with little publicity. MSF, however, especially during the days of Kouchner, publicized itself and its activities so as to gain support for its work, and to change the social conditions that brought about the human rights violations it sought to ameliorate. The special relationship MSF seems to have with the media makes it a particularly interesting case of an NGO that seems to harness the network power of global communication channels like the news media (an important circuit for a global discourse network of human rights) to expand its public identity and power.²²¹ For all the reasons discussed above, MSF is a paradigmatic case with which to explore how a globalizing human rights discourse seems

²¹⁹ In a speech at the Harvard School of Public Health in 2003, Kouchner described MSF's birth in the Biafra, Nigeria, incident thus: "To give medical care and keep quiet, to give medical care and let children die, for me it was clearly complicity... Neutrality led to complicity. The duty to interfere was born" (qtd. in Bortolotti 43-44). For a video of Kouchner's lecture, see "Doctors Without Borders Founder Bernard Kouchner Gives Jonathan Mann Lecture."

²²⁰ As Kouchner writes in *Charité Business* (1986), "We were using the media before it became fashionable" (qtd. in Benthall 126).

²²¹ MSF's media savvy should come as no surprise since its founders were not just doctors from the medical relief organization *Group d'Intervention Médico-Chirurgical d'Urgence* (GIMCU), but also journalists from the medical journal *Tonus*. When Kouchner, the French doctor, galvanized a group of other French doctors to form GIMCU, Raymond Borel, the journal editor, also initiated a project *Sécours Médical Français* (SMF), putting out a call for doctors interested in emergency relief work. GIMCU and SMF came together to form MSF in 1971 (Bortolotti 46). For more information on the birth and growth of MSF, see especially chapter two, "Biafra and the Bumblebee," in Bortolotti 41-68.

to be influencing and be influenced by an NGO, an “official,” authorized speaker, of the discourse.

Appendix Two

Supporting Data Analyses

Extract One: James Orbinski, “The Nobel Peace Prize 1999: Nobel Lecture”

- P1 **Humanitarianism** occurs where *the political* has *failed* or is in *crisis*. **We act** not to assume *political* responsibility, but firstly to **relieve the inhuman suffering** of failure. **The act** must be free of *political* influence, and the *political* must recognize its *responsibility* to ensure that the **humanitarian** can exist (par. 6)
- P2 **[W]e will speak out** to push the *political* to assume its inescapable *responsibility*. **Humanitarianism** is not a tool to *end war* or to *create peace*. It is a **citizen’s response** to *political failure*. It is an **immediate, short term act** that cannot erase the *long term necessity of political* responsibility. (par. 8)
- P3 **As civil society we** exist relative to *the state, to its institutions and its power*. **We** also exist relative to other non-state actors such as the private sector. **Ours** is not to displace *the responsibility of the state*...If **civil society identifies a problem**, it is not theirs to provide a solution, but it is theirs to expect that states will translate this into concrete and just solutions. Only *the state has the legitimacy and power* to do this. (par. 11)
- P4 **We affirm the independence of the humanitarian** from the *political*...But these convergences should not mask the distinctions that exist between the *political* and the **humanitarian**. **Humanitarian action** takes place in the **short term, for limited groups and for limited objectives**...The *political* can only be conceived in the *long term*, which itself is *the movement of societies*. **Humanitarian action** is by definition **universal**, or it is not. **Humanitarian responsibility** has **no**

frontiers...By contrast, the *political* knows borders, and where crisis occurs, *political response* will vary because *historical relations, balance of power, and the interests of one or the other* must be considered. The time and space of the **humanitarian** are not those of the *political*. (par. 12)

P5 There are **limits to humanitarianism**. No **doctor** can stop a *genocide*. No **humanitarian** can stop *ethnic cleansing*, just as no **humanitarian** can make *war*. And no **humanitarian** can make *peace*. These are *political responsibilities*, not **humanitarian imperatives**. Let me say this very clearly: the **humanitarian act** is the most *apolitical* of all acts, but if its **actions** and its **morality** are taken seriously, it has the most profound of *political implications*. And the **fight against impunity** is one of these implications. (par. 18)

Table One: Different Characteristics of Humanitarianism vs. the State/ the Political Expressed in James Orbinski’s “The Nobel Peace Prize 1999: Nobel Lecture”

Paragraphs from Orbinski’s Lecture	Humanitarianism	The State/ the Political
Pars. 8 and 11	Citizen, civil society	State, government
Par. 11	Identify problem	Provide solution
Par. 8 and 12	Immediate, short term	Long term
Par. 12	Limited groups	Multiple groups – local, national, regional, global
Pars. 8 and 12	Limited objectives	Multiple objectives – “historical relations,” “balance of power,” “interests of one or the other”
Par. 12	Universal	National
Par. 12	No frontiers	Knows borders
Pars. 6 and 18	Apolitical	Political
Pars. 6 and 18	Humanitarian imperative	Political responsibility
Par. 18	Morality	Power

**Table Two: Number of Records on *WorldCat* for “Rwanda” and “Genocide”
by Genre and Year (as of 2 July 2007)**

Genre/ Years	1994-1999	2000-2004	2005-2007
Nonfiction (Biography)	452 (5)	392 (22)	202 (25)
Fiction	1	5	11
Total	453	402	213

Table Three: Number of Records on Amazon.com for “Rwanda” and “Genocide” by Genre and Year (as of 2 July 2007)

Genre/ Years	1994-1999	2000-2004	2005-2007
Nonfiction	48	30	18
Biographies and memoirs	1	2	4
Literature and fiction	2	2	4
Total	51	34	26

Table Four: How Paul Rusesabagina’s *An Ordinary Man* Uses Jonathan Benthall’s Fairy-Tale Formula for Disaster Relief Stories to Tell an *Anti-Relief* Narrative

Benthall/ Propp’s Folktale Characters (and their Functions) in Traditional Disaster Relief Stories	Benthall/ Propp’s Folktale Characters (and their Functions) in <i>An Ordinary Man</i>
<p>Traveling hero (189) – “After the hero has undergone various ordeals and solved difficult tasks, the misfortune or lack is liquidated” (189)</p> <p>E.g. “An expatriate fieldworker, such as an officer of Oxfam or MSF, or a foreign correspondent” (189)</p>	<p>No traveling hero</p> <p>Although Rusesabagina’s actions are portrayed as heroic, as a local hero embroiled in the disaster, he cannot provide true relief. He is not a <i>traveling</i> hero from the outside. Although Rusesabagina goes through various trials and fairs well, because he is not a conventional hero, the disaster cannot be relieved.</p>
<p>Villain or lack (misfortune)</p> <p>E.g. “A Pol Pot in the Cambodian crisis of the late 1970s, Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War” (189)</p> <p>Examples of lack might include famine, tsunami, lack of access to healthcare or education</p>	<p>Many villains</p> <p>The organizers of the genocide including military leaders such as General Bizimungu, George Rutaganda, and state powers like President Habyarimana’s wife Madame Agathe; racial discrimination and segregation imposed by the Belgians during colonization</p>
<p>Dispatcher (searcher) – “prior to the beginning of the action, the situation has lasted for years, but the moment comes when the dispatcher or searcher suddenly realizes that something is lacking” (Propp qtd. in Benthall 189)</p> <p>Examples of dispatchers might include foreign aid organizations, development project managers, or foreign correspondent</p>	<p>No dispatcher</p> <p>No real foreign news media coverage to rouse outrage and intervention; instead local news media (radio station like RTLM and newspaper like <i>Kangura (Wake It Up)</i> rouse anti-Tutsi sentiment through propaganda)</p>
<p>Donor – “The donor provides the hero with a magical agent sometimes in the form of a magical helper” (189)</p>	<p>No donor</p> <p>The United Nations fails to provide military intervention or successful peace</p>

<p>E.g. “The embodiments of Western abundance and technology in its various forms...Hence we learn from an Oxfam <i>Bulletin</i>...of an Indian peasant sighing that the drought ‘may be too big a problem for God; but perhaps OXFAM can do something’” (189)</p>	<p>agreement</p>
<p>False hero “who presents unfounded claims and is eventually exposed” (189)</p> <p>E.g. “The impostors who start fake charities, or the incompetents who dissipate funds and send grotesquely wrong medicines” (189)</p>	<p>Many false heroes</p> <p>The United Nations for not intervening during the genocide; state governments for pretending to care by sending aid only after the main massacre</p>
<p>Princess who “may be any person of rank and/ or charisma who intervenes and rewards” (189)</p> <p>E.g. Save the Children (UK) flourished once a real Princess, Princess Anne, became its President (189)</p>	<p>No princess</p> <p>The United Nations and other powerful states fail to intervene during the time of crisis</p>
<p>Happy ending – “Fairy tales, as everyone knows, have to have a happy ending” (189)</p> <p>E.g. “The agencies try to provide this, especially in their annual reports to donors and staff, with a favoured alternative to the image of distress: the image of gratitude” (189)</p>	<p>No happy ending</p> <p>The aftermath of the genocide is presented as long-lasting – people are traumatized, justice cannot be served, economy is in shambles, society is distrustful</p>

Table Five: How Paul Rusesabagina’s *An Ordinary Man* Adopts and Adapts David Kennedy’s Four-Character-Drama Recipe for Human Rights Crisis Stories

Kennedy’s Characters (and their Representation) in Traditional Human Rights Crisis Stories	Kennedy’s Characters (and their Representation) in <i>An Ordinary Man</i>
<p>Hero</p> <p>Portrayed as professional human rights worker</p>	<p>Mainly Rusesabagina; but also other people who saved lives during the genocide, e.g. a Muslim man, a farmer, school teachers (200-01)</p> <p>None of the heroes are professional human rights workers</p>
<p>Victim</p> <p>Portrayed as innocent and helpless; victims usually are presented as an indistinguishable mass</p>	<p>Many survivors associated with Rusesabagina, e.g. Rusesabagina’s best friend in childhood, Gerard (19), freelance driver at the Hotel Mille Collines, Emerita (68-69), Rusesabagina’s journalist friend, Edward Mutsinzi (184)</p> <p>Portrayed as not entirely innocent and not always helpless; most of the survivors are shown as trying to save themselves; quite a number have names, but not speeches or faces; most of the killers are presented as victims of years of hate, despair, and injustice brought on by racist colonial policies</p> <p>Victims (survivors and killers) are both represented as groups and individuals</p>
<p>Violator</p> <p>Portrayed as abnormal embodiment of evil; the true villain is evil; evil is a social machine, nameless, speechless, and faceless</p>	<p>Many violators, e.g. Rwandan military and government for organizing the genocide; Rwandan media for propagating the killings; Rwandan priests for assisting in the killings; Rwandans for killing others; foreign governments like France and China for arming the genocide</p>

	<p>Portrayed as embodiment of evil; individual people and groups with names, speech, and faces</p>
<p>Bystander</p> <p>Portrayed ambivalently; the only character that is not stereotyped or well characterized</p>	<p>Many bystanders, e.g. United Nations and powerful foreign governments that stood by while people died, world community (195)</p> <p>Portrayed as violators, complicit in the genocide by their inaction, and victims, struggling to change a system more powerful than themselves – includes crisis participant General Romeo Dallaire (186) who as part of the UN is a violator according to the moral universe of the autobiography, but the book also presents Dallaire as trying, if in vain, to help the survivors</p>

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