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The challenges of human rights video making in the global network: the case of WITNESS

Ben Lenzner¹ and Craig Hight

Abstract

This paper uses the New York-based human rights organization WITNESS as a case study in examining the technological factors that complicate the pursuit of a human rights agenda, in an era of video making characterized by networked mobilities. The organization has developed a sophisticated understanding of the need to adapt and embed video making within localized assemblages of social, political, economic and technological elements. Their primary focus is on developing human capital, in particular facilitating the fostering of skills and awareness around the possibilities of video as a tool for social and political change. A key part of WITNESS' strategic thinking (and the focus of this paper) also centres on a necessary critical understanding of the opportunities and challenges of operating within the configuration of technologies which characterise a globalized, networked media environment. The experience of WITNESS, then, suggests many of the technological complications of video making in the contemporary era.

¹ This paper was completed as part of post-doctoral research at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, September-October 2015.

Introduction

For over twenty years, a period which includes the emergence of the Worldwide Web as a global medium, the popularisation of software for the easy creation and remix of digital images, and the explosive growth of YouTube as a video distribution platform, WITNESS, the Brooklyn based human rights organisation, has persevered in its struggle to help facilitate the fostering of skills and awareness around the possibilities of video as an instrument for social and political change. Birthed in response to George Holliday's VHS documentation of the beating of Los Angeles motorist Rodney King in 1991, WITNESS has developed a sophisticated understanding of the need to craft strategies for using video-based forms of evidence within localized assemblages of social, political, economic and technological elements. In the contemporary digital ecology, image making is embedded within ubiquitous handheld sensor-laden devices, providing an unprecedented capability to capture forms of visual evidence of human rights abuses. A dilemma for human rights campaigners is that while digital video has become easily accessible, to actually make use of video footage requires a multi-layered strategic approach tailored to specific contexts. Utilizing visual documentation in the context of human rights presents a balancing act, exploiting socio-technical possibilities while recognising the implications that releasing video within globalised networks has for control over the nature and integrity of any rhetorical agenda the footage is intended to serve. Consequently, the human rights video making methodologies of WITNESS are fluid processes.

In the current era of digital networks and mobile technologies, the complications that surround the digital refashioning of indexicality are symptomatic of the broader challenges facing human rights video. To assemble human rights video into meaningful witnessing requires a confluence of factors in which WITNESS quite deliberately acts as a catalyst. This paper, one outcome of a wider research project analyzing the emergence of human rights video in the United States, India and New Zealand, examines the forming and re-forming of WITNESS as a case study to demonstrate the complexity of factors an organization involved in human rights video must engage with in designing socially and politically effective strategies for video-centred forms of activism.

Bearing WITNESS

WITNESS is a video advocacy organization founded in 1992 by the British musician, Peter Gabriel. Although the beating of Rodney King was captured on grainy VHS footage and soon became iconic imagery throughout the United States, the aftermath of the video and subsequent legal proceedings amplify problems innate to human rights video. In 1992 when the officers implicated were acquitted, much of South Central Los Angeles, incensed by what could be interpreted as a very clear miscarriage of justice, responded with fury and rioting that lasted six days. The course of events that followed the dissemination of the video is itself a case study in the many dilemmas of human rights video. In court, prosecutors framed Holliday's video footage as incontrovertible evidence of violent police brutality, while the defence counsel successfully reframed the footage as appropriate use of force against a civilian perceived as a threat to law enforcement. Writing about the King video, Leshu Torchin observes:

Viewing conditions, audiences, narrative context, and the very shape of the video contributed to registers of efficacy (one could say the tape became “effective” for the defense) and failure as these devices found different ways of anchoring an otherwise indeterminate image. There was a lesson from this event: what was necessary was not merely the exposure of abuse, but strategies to place video within a promotional movement that took into account multiple factors in order to best direct attention and to produce action. (Torchin 2012, p. 144)

As is already well known, the extensive circulation of footage on news channels in the United States produced important lasting effects within the psyche of American culture. Both the video and verdict sparked dialogue about racial inequality and the role of police in minority neighbourhoods throughout the United States. The dissemination of the video unequivocally highlighted the apparent potency of “amateur” footage and its potential for raising public consciousness of social-political issues. Holliday’s video opened up possibilities for non-professional video practices, suggesting a new political capability for VHS and the multiple forms of digital audio-visual formats that came after. Video became the latest technology to attract rhetoric claiming its ability to subvert the discursive power of dominant media structures or law enforcement organisations.

In an environment of rapid socio-technical change, WITNESS strives to remain politically effective while retaining a set of ethical practices grounded in long-standing principles of human justice. Offering strategies towards working methodologies across multiple political, geographic, cultural and linguistic spaces of possibility presents a variety of challenges that shift, change, disappear and alternate as language, culture,

politics and environments lay distinct impediments in the pathway of human rights video practices. Crucially, WITNESS has no fixed methodology but has instead developed a multi-layered strategy that can be adjusted as working variables change.

Digital video practices centred on human rights can have far reaching impacts on the representation of human rights injustices throughout the globe. Although war crimes, crimes against humanity, interactions with police and armed forces, forced evictions, sex trafficking and many other human rights abuses are captured on mobile phone cameras and then often published on the Internet, the increasing diffusion of these mobile tools (hardware and software) does not easily translate into social and political change. One result of three years of research into digital video practices rooted in human rights, social justice and protest movements² has been the development of a critical framework that clarifies the elements crucial to the sustainability of human rights video practices and the maturation of a 'meaningful witnessing'. The concept of meaningful witnessing is the ability to take video footage and deploy it in politically effective ways, towards political and social change that benefits the subjects and communities documented. In practice this means using footage to tell a story in ways that produce meaningful results (which could include wider dissemination of a human rights issue, engagement with government to propel change or supportive evidence within a legal circumstance). The five parameters of the framework offered here

² Much of this article focuses on a three year PhD project by co-author, Ben Lenzner, which examined emerging video practices within the context of human rights, social justice and activist movements. Lenzner's research was under the umbrella of a Marsden Grant by the Royal Society of New Zealand awarded to Dr. Craig Hight.

highlight factors that are intimately related to emerging technologies and decisive to the impact and sustainability of human rights video practices. These critical elements are:

1. Technological capacities (appropriate to the practice and context), especially the relationship to the network (the Internet and mainstream media),
2. Power structures (language, literacy, political and economic situation),
3. Formal and informal support systems (manifested through training, dissemination, community),
4. Creative capacities in individual and collective forms (specifically those exhibiting commitment, adaptation, sustainability),
5. Territory. (Lenzner 2015, p. 73)

These factors are always present yet shifting throughout the human rights video practices that organisations such as WITNESS foster. However, their impact ebbs and flows depending on specificities of each context. Furthermore, these video practices do not come to fruition as technologies are invented, but via meticulous engagement with technological capacities, through comprehension of power structures in localized environments, by way of the critical work of support structures such as WITNESS, and with the development of the creative capacities of media makers through unique and meaningful experimentation of video creation across territories of possibility.³ Utilizing, understanding, comprehending, experimenting and playing with the above factors

³ Derived from the work of DeLanda (2006), this term suggests the contextual matrices formed through spaces of shifting geographies, languages, culture, religions, political situations, access to technologies and infrastructural limitations.

found in the framework, along with acknowledging the risks and ethical predicaments that can emerge, are at the core of WITNESS' evolving multi-layered practice.

As a catalyst for video advocacy, WITNESS partners with local activists and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to foster video making centred on gathering and presenting evidence of human rights issues. As WITNESS will attest to, their methodology is not broad and all encompassing. Their approaches are mobile (in more than one sense). In an environment of tremendous change, including the constant flux and wide variety of technologies for capturing and disseminating footage, WITNESS has always sought to exploit the potential for diffusion of new technologies in order to open space for emerging forms of political advocacy, while remaining flexible, strategically aware and reflexive. They tailor their support and organizational training in order to best address localized circumstances. Undoubtedly there are overlaps between WITNESS' practices that exist across territories and working conditions; however, the multiple variables within global possibility spaces contrast and often change at ground level. Discussing mobilities, Mimi Sheller writes:

[...] it is not a question of privileging flows, speed, or a cosmopolitan or nomadic subjectivity, but rather of tracking the power of discourses, practices and infrastructures of mobility in creating the effects of both movement and stasis. Mobilities are of course the *sine qua non* of globalization; without extensive systems of mobility – and globalist, or neoliberal, claims for opening markets and states to external flows – social processes could not take place at a global scale nor be imagined as such. Yet mobilities research is neither a claim that all the world is mobile now, nor a forgetting that the colonial world economy has long entailed

extensive global mobilities – e.g. of slaves, of commodities, of print and images and of capital – and, crucially, continues to entail many forms of immobility, both voluntary and forced. (Sheller 2011, p. 2)

Sheller's point is explicit, the proliferation of mobilities have the ability to encourage communication, creativity and networks, even as they are reimagined within different historical eras. She reinforces how essential it is to try to understand how these traces of communication, emerging forms of creativity and networked platforms evolve and speak to each other in contemporary forms of globalization. Just as with earlier incarnation of mobilities, we need to acknowledge processes which involve multiple mobilities and immobilities. Although the use of mobile video tools might allow for witnessing to be documented and then potentially transformed into a human rights video practice, this lineage confronts numerous roadblocks on its path to formation. If the networked infrastructure of New York City allows digital video to be uploaded with ease to the Internet, conversely in parts of rural India, the speed of mobile networks are either much too slow or non-existent to offer video upload on the go, or for that matter, at all. Subsequently, it is the distinctive configurations of these surfacing creative practices that must be examined.

At WITNESS' core is an awareness of the importance of committed activists; the organization tends to offer video advocacy training and support for existing political movements and long-term forms of activism. As Sam Gregory and Patricia Zimmermann write:

Within circulatory networks, a new skill set emerges for human rights workers:
deploying a variety of media technologies and citizen-generated human rights work

to explain and to connect. WITNESS has grappled with a powerful conundrum between cultivating new producers to spread access, and aggregating disparate content. Cultivation and training of others to film and then engage the multiple circulatory networks emerges as more urgent than being the image-maker oneself.

(Gregory & Zimmermann 2011, 2)

The puzzle to supporting human rights organizations and aiding them in the production of meaningful witnessing is complicated. Although WITNESS supports NGOs in their training of human rights activists and simultaneously strategizes methods for meaningful dissemination, these issues and the content that emerges provide no easy routes. How are these mobile and online technologies best utilized to support unfolding local and global human rights issues? Discussing WITNESS' evolution, Gregory explained:

[...] the other starting point was Peter Gabriel's experience of meeting human rights advocates who worked often in long-term struggles and saying why are their stories not being heard? So actually, we started from a place that was actually about really kind of both universes, the accidental or the citizen witness and then the human rights advocate who maybe has spent thirty years trying to make people aware about the struggle for education or housing or water in their community, or you know, police violence, whatever it might be. (Sam Gregory in conversation with Ben Lenzner, digital audio recording. Brooklyn, NY., July 12, 2012)

As Gregory notes, there was and still are distinct tensions between the different kinds of practices that the organization engages with. There are those, for example, who have used their mobile phone to record without a predetermined agenda. These individuals are often looking for a space to feature footage and thus have it translated by a third party into politically effective rhetoric. Then there are the activists who need video skills

to complement and enhance their political activity. The organization goes to great efforts to provide resources for both groups of people. WITNESS helps to generate not just specific activist practices, but also to more broadly raise awareness of the possibilities for committed, ethical, and strategic use of such evidence. These competing foci have the potential to stretch resources, as they require quite distinct strategies on the ground; from entering a perhaps unknown context in order to collaborate in shaping a meaningful message, to conveying the dangers of networking and retaining an ethical integrity of the message itself within a globalised context. As Gregory writes:

This transnational advocacy storytelling carries with it some distinct challenges: of contextualization, of the dilemmas of moving testimony between differing advocacy and media arenas, and of the difficulties of establishing an ethical relationship, a community of witnesses at a distance. (Gregory 2012a, 527)

Developing and supporting the skill sets integral to media makers as well as the organizations that encourage human rights video are crucial to the sustainability and impact of the international storytelling vital to human rights campaigns. WITNESS' deliberate three-tiered methodology delineates influence and provides foundational relationships critical to sustaining impactful human rights video. Our own analysis highlights how these three tiers can at times work against each other, offering different kinds of opportunities and dangers within different locations and contexts. Taken together they illustrate the pitfalls of applying resources in difficult and shifting social, political, and technological terrain. Again, maintaining ethical practices are at the core of the organization's work. In environments of war and conflict, scrutinizing the ethical considerations of decisions of what to record and not record, what to publish and not to publish, who to show and who not to show (how to guarantee anonymity or to capture

information that aids later verification), how to edit and frame certain circumstances are all important factors to consider in crafting localised practices. These concerns continually challenge WITNESS, the organizations they support and the human rights activists with cameras and mobile phones in hand, on the front lines of activism.

Fostering international linkages, strategic partnerships and collaborations at a variety of levels is very much the campaign work of WITNESS. This comprises the first tier of WITNESS' strategy. This element involves "network campaigns which are particular sort of focal areas where we work with multiple groups who work on the same issue and help them reinforce each other, share lessons learned, create material that can be used on a local and a global level" (Sam Gregory in conversation with Ben Lenzner, digital audio recording. Brooklyn, NY., July 12, 2012). Presently, WITNESS supports collaborative human rights video work throughout the globe – including video practices that engage with recent political situations from Burkina Faso to Brazil, from Mumbai to Baltimore.⁴

The second tier to WITNESS' current methodology involves identifying techniques and resources for human rights advocacy and documentation at a time when there are accelerating changes at a technological level. This work relates to both activists and citizen witnesses and is not just a case of publicising well-established practices and codifying ethics. Practical applications that support these layers of work include the development of online toolkits that can be seen by both individuals and NGOs. These

⁴ To get a sense of WITNESS' perspectives on recent use of video within human rights campaigns and fluid political situations, see - <http://blog.witness.org/>. Additional information on their involvement in current political movements can be explored here - <https://witness.org/news/>. Both accessed March 2016.

online resources are accessed through the WITNESS homepage and include a Video Action Plan Toolkit, the 2011 *Cameras Everywhere Report*, online training curricula, and documentation of best practices with tips on recording protests, as well as guidelines for using mobile phones for video within conflict zones. Additionally, WITNESS provides a *Video As Evidence Field Guide* that anyone can read online or download. Some of the more comprehensive curricula are available in multiple languages such as Arabic, French & Russian.⁵ These materials are intended for both NGOs and individual media-makers. The challenge for WITNESS is to assess the best integration of digital tools, platforms, networks and support systems critical to the development of robust and effective human rights video making, to publicise best practices that can remain effective within quite different socio-technical possibilities. Subsequently, the organization periodically publishes new online toolkits that address emerging methods and ethical dilemmas pertinent to the work of media-makers throughout their networks.

In 2012, WITNESS along with a number of human rights organizations founded the Video4Change network which links organizations in order to share resources about video advocacy, promote research into human rights video and organize regional gatherings for partners and affiliates of the network (Video4Change 2015).⁶ The birth of this network was also part recognition of the relative weakness and marginalisation of the individual organizations within a global context. As such, there was a need to

⁵ Links to these resources are available on the WITNESS homepage – witness.org, specifically here - <https://witness.org/resources/>.

⁶ See - <https://www.v4c.org/en/content/about-video4change-network>. Accessed March 2016.

provide a more coherent and common voice when engaging with global media platforms. Network partners include: the Kenyan based InformAction; the Malaysian human rights centre, Pusat KOMAS; the Portland, Oregon based Small World News, which has worked on projects and conducted trainings in places such as Iraq, Uganda and Libya; and the Indian organization, Video Volunteers, which supports community correspondents in both rural and urban India. Additionally, the Australia based EngageMedia works throughout the Asia-Pacific and B'tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) are also affiliated with the network.⁷ These organizations are just a few that share knowledge and contribute resources to the Video4Change network. Furthermore, the Video4Change website makes available training materials, information about approaches to specific forms of human rights campaigns, research and critical thought about methodologies to human rights video, links and support for technological partnerships, and online guidance for strategies in respect to the digital video workflow. The end result of the Video4Change network is to provide resources in the use of mobile video tools by human rights activists.

Although comprising of a formal network of organizations as well as a comprehensive web-based platform, the Video4Change network is also situated as a way to think about utilizing video for change. As Gregory and Zimmermann write:

[...] Video for Change is an alternative and potentially more inclusive, umbrella term that refers to any initiative that consciously wants to use video as an approach to change-making. For example, Video for Change may include: personal

⁷ See - <https://www.v4c.org/en/partners> - for a list of partners and affiliates.

storytelling and behaviour change projects that are designed to support people to break addictions or alter practices that are adversely impacting upon their lives; development initiatives that use video to document personal reflections or community discussions; or, the implementation of video-based community or oral history or storytelling initiatives that seek to empower marginalised groups and communities to tell, record or archive their own stories. These kinds of video projects would not fit easily into many definitions of “video advocacy” or “video activism.” (Gregory & Zimmermann 2011, 4-5)

The ideology behind Video for Change and the Video4Change network necessitates community dialogue, offering both a philosophical and methodological approach to video making that transcends language, technologies and regions. Yet Gregory and Zimmermann’s description also hints at the possibility of diluting the core manifesto of WITNESS itself, of weakening its political effectiveness as it becomes distracted by more peripheral practices.

Leveraging technology within the assemblage

The third tier of WITNESS’ methodology involves directed collaborative partnerships and strategic interventions specifically in regards to technological capabilities associated with audio-visual evidence. As with many other human rights organisations, WITNESS has sought to be an early but critical adopter of technologies in different ways, via multiple approaches and through key interventions. WITNESS has supported the use of certain types of camera technologies. One example was the Cisco owned and now defunct, Flip Cam - a device marketed in the West as a social toy but appropriated by

WITNESS as an entry-level tool for video capture of human rights abuses.⁸ The Flip Cam was valuable as a device. It was an affordable and simple video camera that opened up the use of video to a wider breadth of human rights activists.⁹ However, working to broaden the base of practitioners, to lower the threshold for activists to utilise technology in their own contexts, also means finding effective ways of conveying the ethical implications of the use of those technologies. WITNESS consistently reinforces the fundamental value of the development of human capital and the supportive structures vital to the use of these emerging digital tools. As Notley, Lowenthal and Gregory write:

We believe that these ethical considerations require that we push far beyond measuring outreach and audience numbers as sole indicators of social impact; rather, they imply that we need to define and evaluate the impact of important modes of participation through the entire video-making workflow including research and planning, pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, outreach engagement on-going assessment, and communication results and impacts. (Notley, Lowenthal & Gregory 2015, 10)

WITNESS continually fosters internal and external debate over the ethical implications and best methods to disseminate human rights video. In 2007, WITNESS went live with an online platform that it hoped would be a central nerve centre where human rights

⁸ See - <https://blog.witness.org/2011/04/the-flip-and-kodak-z18-a-good-bye/>. Accessed March 2016.

⁹ Video Volunteers, for example, secured more than 500 Flip Cameras just as Cisco shut down their manufacturing. As Video Volunteers co-director, Jessica Mayberry, explained, “So there is still a need for those hundred dollar flip-cams here. But they are not available anymore. But we did get seven, six, five hundred and thirty two flip-cams from Flip when they shut down. So, we’re safe for a little while.” (Jessica Mayberry in conversation with Ben Lenzner, digital audio recording. Goa, India, January 23, 2013)

video could be curated and featured. This platform, the Hub, was created as an effort to control the distribution of footage and as a way to frame messages for video content. The Hub was first envisioned in 2005 (the year YouTube went live). The creation of the Hub was driven by a need to control human rights content within a (initially) comparatively uncontrolled virtual frontier, a space where the ease of appropriation and remix of video footage challenged the ethical practices adhered to by the organization as a whole.

Although the Hub went online in 2007, its content uploads originated in late 2006 and ended in late 2010 when the website no longer continued to accept videos and WITNESS began to direct resources elsewhere. During the time it was live, the Hub offered a platform where users would feel comfortable and safe uploading videos to a community that would support the nurturing dissemination of a vast array of human rights video from around the world.

The Hub was an experimental space that WITNESS intended to evolve into a platform that might spark dialogue and further conversations about human rights issues through key citizen produced videos. At the time, WITNESS believed that a platform for curation could offer a carefully crafted and stable frame for meaning. When the Hub was live, the individual pages for each video contained links to “Take Action,” as well as links to “Related Media.”¹⁰ As the digital ecology became increasingly dominated by a small number of major digital players looking to monetise online activity, WITNESS realized

¹⁰ The Hub can still be viewed and explored at this website: <http://hub.witness.org/>. Accessed March 2016.

that they would need to revise their strategy in order to look to influence and inflect the development of tools and affordances from *within* dominant media platforms. A WITNESS blog post from the middle of 2010 summarised their shift in strategy as ‘we will more proactively go where people are, as opposed to asking them to come to us’, a change in strategy that included an effort to:

[...] engage social media platforms and technology providers to adopt policies and practices that enhance the safety, security, and effectiveness of human rights defenders using video for change. Furthermore, we will collaborate with existing technology developers to ensure the needs of human rights defenders are taken into consideration as tools and platforms continue to proliferate. (Thijm, WITNESS Blog 2010)

This shift meant that WITNESS would invest in more concrete relationships with established media spaces, companies, platforms and hardware, rather than attempt to build infrastructure from the ground up. The organization recognized that it would need to adjust its work and develop a different curation model, but one which was inherently more fraught as it placed resources within the realm of rapidly changing platforms increasingly centred on commercial agendas.

WITNESS’ commitment to retaining an ethical approach to video advocacy has encouraged them to work with others to integrate software tools into pre-existing online platforms. The organization is both an early adopter of new technologies and an active participant in co-creating new technologies that can help to generate new assemblages. As Gregory and Zimmermann write, to move beyond mere rhetoric “A new, multiplatformed palette of media for human rights documentary, spanning the old and

the new, the analog and the digital, is necessary and urgent” (Gregory & Zimmermann 2011, 2-3). The organization recognizes the necessary fusion of multiple layers of these growing assemblages, from content to online platforms, from software to hardware to more traditional methods and technologies. There are obvious challenges within this fluid environment in how ethical practices might be configured and operationalized within the digital realm. As Sam Gregory asks:

How could support for human rights defenders be better integrated into the ‘terms of service’ built into user interfaces and integrated into the institutional policies of online video platforms? What steps could online service providers and facilitators of video take to enable human rights content and to address key emerging concerns about anonymity, dignity, and avoiding revictimization? More broadly, how could we place key human rights values front and center as people film, share, comment, remix, and annotate footage from the front lines of human rights crises, large and small, in the Global North and Global South? (Gregory 2012b, 552)

WITNESS’ lobbying of YouTube aided in the development of the YouTube face blurring tool, which allows faces within a video to be obscured before publication and thus in essence, also the possibility for individuals who appear on camera to remain anonymous without the need for time consuming post-production. As Sam Gregory acknowledged, “I don’t think we’re the only reason that it’s taking place but we’ve certainly been part of explaining the human rights case scenario for why you might want to allow people some options there, in terms of blurring faces” (Sam Gregory in conversation with Ben Lenzner, digital audio recording. Brooklyn, NY., July 12, 2012). This YouTube anonymisation technology went live in July 2012. In February 2016, YouTube launched a Custom Blurring Tool that allows for more specific anonymisation control prior to

uploading online. Seeking to also develop mobile tools that might be applied in flexible ways, WITNESS also pursued collaborative work with The Guardian Project.

Here WITNESS helped to launch *ObscuraCam*, a photo and video app for Android smartphones that allows users to automatically pixelate faces after taking a photograph or digital video. This partnership also generated *InformaCam*, which utilizes a plethora of metadata to authenticate citizen-produced footage (the smartphone app that evolved from this project is called CameraV). These attempts by WITNESS, to integrate a multi-layered approach to human rights video, emphasize the complexities innate within the sphere of human rights video; at different times, the immediate priority might be ensuring anonymity or aiding later verification. CameraV is designed for an era of easy distribution of misinformation, where there is an imperative to have clear and defensible protocols for verifying footage. Indexicality is perhaps more unstable in digital environments, given the ease of being able to invent and manipulate photographic and videographic forms of evidence. At the same time, the inability to keep evidence under control once it is released into the globalized media flow, also entails a need to be able to remove identifying information about people offering testimony, to be able to promise and ensure anonymity for people in real physical and emotional danger. The overall challenge is how to retain privacy in an era when dataveillance is central to the digital economy and subject to appropriation from political regimes (not least in the West) for their own purposes. As the project's information page states:

CameraV is easy to learn and simple to use (and insanely secure & powerful under the covers...). All photos and videos you take are password-protected and 100%

encrypted on your device. You can also add private notes and tags to any photo or video, and choose who you share them with. CameraV also privately stores data from your device sensors and provides built-in tools to see and share it. Finally, it has a built-in secure camera that is simple, streamlined and even supports selfies. CameraV is based on the InformaCam platform, and was developed for use by activists, journalists, advocates and others, working in very difficult and high-risk situations, to capture and gather visual evidence and proof of abuse and rights violations.¹¹ (The Guardian Project 2015)

WITNESS is adamant that these technologies should not be taken for granted and inherent risks are nevertheless still very present when shooting within human rights contexts. They insist that footage is prone to seizure from the moment it is created. As well, multiple identifiers can be extracted and include but are not limited to distinctive voices, clothing or locations. Furthermore, extracting digital fingerprints present in a mobile phone or via a computer upload is also a very real concern.¹² These digital fingerprints can be deployed toward contrasting ends. Automated and user-defined metadata linked to footage and used for authentication purposes can aid in the authentication of credible evidence yet can also reveal the identity, locations and actions of activists.¹³

¹¹ For more information see the official page of the *InformaCam* project's CameraV app - <https://guardianproject.info/apps/camerav/>. Accessed March 2016.

¹² Many of these potential problems are discussed on this WITNESS blog post, "Tips for Activists Using the YouTube Face Blur Tool," which is available at this link: <http://blog.witness.org/2012/08/tips-for-activists-using-the-youtube-face-blur-tool/>. Accessed March 2016.

¹³ The Verification Handbook (<http://verificationhandbook.com/>) is a useful collation of techniques originally derived from investigative journalism, which use widely available software-based tools for collating and triangulating data from different sources.

Recording, verification and curation are all part of the human rights digital video workflow. In May 2012, WITNESS launched a human rights channel on YouTube in collaboration with the verification services hosted by the website Storyful. The channel works in a similar way to the Hub and allows for WITNESS to position crafted documentary narratives, interviews and video documentation within the circumstances of localized human rights issues. Contextualizing this footage involves everything from writing summaries about the human rights abuses within specific frameworks to curating videos to providing supportive documentation. The presence of a human rights channel on YouTube gives WITNESS control over the narrative framing of footage while also allowing the organization to verify that uploaded footage is true to its description. The dilemma inherent to these kinds of channels however is that their video content inevitably becomes part of the streams of material surfaced to users through YouTube's recommendation engine. Any attempt to carefully frame such footage within this platform is fundamentally unstable because of its hugely complex, sophisticated and perpetually updated automated mechanisms for ranking, linking and circulating content. WITNESS is still acutely aware of the need for more localised and directly functional forms of targeting viewers (such as collaborating with lawyers and human rights organizations to better understand ways of integrating video as evidence within regional, national and global courts of law).¹⁴ Through this approach, WITNESS aims to identify and publicise effective precedents for the use of video as evidence within legal assemblages.

¹⁴ See WITNESS' field notes on video work specific to courtrooms - <https://vae.witness.org/case-studies-field-notes/>. Accessed March 2016.

Conclusion: WITNESS, Human Rights & An Evolving Framework

WITNESS recognizes its precarious position within a digital media ecology characterised by technological changes that have refashioned the nature and significance of photographic and videographic images. Digital video practices and visual evidence embedded in the moving image retain their potency, but also need to operate in tandem with sophisticated understandings of the demands and dangers of verification protocols for networked content and the dataveillance mechanisms they are embedded within. WITNESS has consequently evolved into an organization that mitigates the vulnerabilities of human rights practice in such an environment through a three-tiered multi-layered methodology. Their methodology might be more accurately reframed as a) concentrated investment in better comprehension of the technological capacities of networks (appropriate to each practice, geographic local and political context), b) more directed support focusing on the development of human capital (identifying the right individuals, training them in video advocacy and maturing the creative capacities of media makers, activists and NGOs), c) building up WITNESS as a strong formal support system which provides structure, training and both formal and informal assistance to NGOs and individuals around the globe, and d) evolving the organization's comprehension in regards to the complexities that surround power structures (language, literacy, political and economic situations within particular human rights contexts).

As has been argued here, these might entail contrasting strategies being applied at the level of localised human rights practices. The organization also remains perpetually at risk of losing its relevance in an environment where political gains can be marginalized and erased at the global level by any number of socio-technical forces beyond its control. Changes in technology may render earlier practices obsolete or engender new dilemmas that play out in contrasting ways in different contexts around the globe, continually challenging their work. The organization must consistently strategize best practices and methodological approaches in a variety of political and cultural contexts, an immense task in the midst of mobile documentation and witnessing which can be captured and uploaded in mere minutes.

WITNESS' approach to encouraging the production of human rights based video deliberately adjusts to different situations, recent technologies, evolving online platforms, methods of both broadcasting and narrowcasting, and the confluence and disappearance of many new socio-technical assemblings. Conscious of the ethical questions that emerge with new technologies, the organization does not rely on technology as the sole solution. The circumstances and geographies WITNESS engages with produce intricate ethical dilemmas pertinent to human rights situations and require care in the way they approach the use of video tools in a wider global perspective.

The organization carefully cultivates the relationships between digital video technologies, creative capacities and supportive structures, while providing specific frameworks and particular methodologies to distinct campaigns and geographic

settings. The experience of WITNESS illustrates that although organizations and practitioners can intentionally generate multiple methodologies in order to spark creative video practices, variables persist that are far beyond the control of the practice and the assemblage. This constant changeability and the organization or practitioner's ability to adjust to shifting assemblages is critical to the surfacing, influence and sustainability of mobile human rights digital video practices. WITNESS' field of practices, which remain responsive to changes in the nature of technology, are derived from an understanding of the implications of operating in ethically challenging terrain where technological development offers persistent opportunities and challenges.

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