The Stories We Tell

Television and Humanitarian Aid

by Michael Ignatieff

There are strict limits to human empathy. We make some people's troubles our business while we ignore the troubles of others. We are more likely to care about kin than about strangers, to feel closest to those connected to us by bonds of history, tradition, creed, ethnicity, and race. Indeed, because moral impingement is always a burden, we may use these differences as an excuse to avoid or evade obligation.

It is disagreeable to admit that instincts play a relatively small role in our moral reactions. We would prefer to suppose that the mere sight of suffering victims on television would be enough to rouse us to pity. In fact, there is nothing instinctive about the emotions stirred in us by television pictures of atrocity or suffering. Our pity is structured by history and culture.

The idea, for example, that we owe an obligation to all human beings by simple virtue of the fact that they are human is a modern conception. We still encounter tribal cultures in the world in which such an idea seems nonsensical. Universality comes late in the moral history of humankind, once Judeo-Christian monotheism and natural law have done their work. Even when these traditions have established themselves, people go on finding ingenious ways to evade their implications.

When we do make the misfortunes, miseries, or injustices suffered by others into our business, some narrative is telling us why these strangers and their problems matter to us. These narratives — political, historical, ethical — turn strangers into neighbors, aliens into kin. They also suggest some idea of reciprocal obligation: if we do not help them, these stories imply, they will not help us when our turn with adversity comes around.

Storytelling gives us pleasure, and the pleasures of moral stories are just as suspect as or at least as complex as the pleasures of, say, a dirty joke. Our moral stories usually tell us what we want to hear: that we are decent folk trying to do our best and that we can make good the harms of the world. We would hardly tell these stories if they did not make us feel better, and they make us feel better even when they make us feel guilty, because guilt endows us with capacity — it suggests that we have the power to make a difference and are failing to do so. The truth might be grimmer, after all: that we have less power than we suppose; far from being able to save others, we may be barely able to save ourselves.

Thus, if moral activity always involves the imagination, it is as much about imagining "us" as it is about imagining "them"; the stories we create always place us as their chief subject, and to the degree that this is so, our imagination is always susceptible to moral narcissism. The stories we tell lead us to think better of ourselves than we deserve.

Beside moral stories linking us and them, there are metastories governing the larger relationship between zones of safety and zones of danger. In the nineteenth century there were the stories of empire: the nexus of interest, economic, geopolitical, religious, and ideological, which bound the metropolis to the periphery. The imperial narrative — bringing civilization to the world of savagery — gave the media a metanarrative, a grand story into which each local event could be fitted and given its meaning.[1]

With the passage of the nineteenth-century empires and the creation of the postwar Soviet and American hegemony, the story that linked the two zones was the superpower rivalry for power and influence. What brought television to the war zones of these areas was the prospect of witnessing the proxy wars in which the world balance of power would be shifted. Now the

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superpower rivalry is over; "we" are no longer there, because "they" are no longer there, either. The proxy wars are no longer fed from Washington and Moscow, and while they continue — as in Angola — their salience and interest to the developed world has diminished. As for the parallel narrative of decolonization, some ex-colonies have made a successful transition to genuine independence and some degree of economic development, whereas others have foundered into tribalism, oligarchy, or civil war. Either way, there is no simple narrative to tell anymore. Instead, the narrative that has become most pervasive and persuasive has been the "chaos narrative," the widely held belief, only reinforced by the end of direct colonialism, that large sections of the globe, especially in Central Africa and the fiery southern edges of the former Soviet empire, have collapsed into a meaningless disorder, upon which no coherent pattern can be discerned.[2] The "chaos narrative" demotivates: it is an antinarrative, a story that claims there is no story to tell and therefore no reason to get involved. Since the end of the Cold War, television has simply reproduced the chaos narrative. As it does so, it undermines even its own limited engagement in zones of danger.

These demotivating elements are reinforced by the collapse of two other narratives. In the first of these, liberals were interested in Africa and Asia because the narrative of colonial nations achieving freedom after years of struggle seemed to confirm the liberal story of progress. Now that a generation or two has passed and many of these societies have either achieved independence or thrown away its advantages, the story has lost its moral gleam. There are few partisans of African and Asian independence left, and more than a few who are overtly nostalgic for the return of colonial rule.

Another metanarrative that sustained interest in the third world after World War II was socialist internationalism, the faith that newly independent states were a test bed for the possibilities of a socialist economy and way of life. Generations of Western leftists were lured to Cuba, Vietnam, and other places in the hopes of finding their dreams confirmed. The collapse of the Marxist and socialist project has ended this metanarrative of hope, and as it does, disillusioned and demotivated socialists turn away from developing societies altogether.

No new sinews of economic interdependence have been created to link zones of safety and zones of danger together. In the heyday of empire, there was at least ivory and copper, gold and timber. As the developed world entered the phase of permanent postindustrial revolution, based in knowledge and computers, it appears to stand in less need of the raw materials of the developing world. Large sectors of the world's population are not being drawn into globalized commerce but banished backward into sustained underdevelopment. The developed world is tied in ever-tighter linkage — the Internet, twenty-four-hour global trading, jet travel, global hotels, resorts, credit card networks, and so on — while sections of central Africa, Asia, Latin America, since they no longer even supply vital raw materials, cease to be of either economic or strategic concern.

This leaves only one metanarrative drawing zones of safety and zones of danger together: the humanitarian narrative. We are in one world; we must shoulder each other's fate; the value of life is indivisible. What happens to the starving in Africa and the homeless in Asia must concern us all because we belong to one species. This narrative, with its charter document — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — and its agencies of diffusion — the nongovernmental humanitarian agencies and the UN system — puts a strong priority on moral linkages over economic and strategic ones. The question is how television mediates this moral linkage.

We should consider the possibility, first, that the media change little at all. Our best stories — from King Lear to Peter Pan — seem to survive any number of retellings. Why *should* the technology of storytelling change the story? We should beware of technological determinism in thinking about the moral impact of media. The claim that global media globalizes the conscience might be an example of technological determinism at work. It is certainly true that modern real-time television news-gathering technology has shortened both the time and the distance separating zones of safety — the small number of liberal capitalist democracies that possess power, influence, and wealth — from the zones of danger — the small number of collapsing states in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America — where refugees and war victims stand in need of aid and assistance.

But it does not follow that media technology has reduced the "moral distance" between these zones. Real and moral distance are not the same. Real distance is abolished by technology; moral distance is only abolished

by a persuasive story. Technology enables us to tell stories differently, but it does not necessarily change the story we want to tell. Indeed, one could say that the media follow where the moral story leads. To the extent that television takes any notice whatever of zones of danger, it does so in terms of a moral narrative of concern that antedates the arrival of television by several centuries. This narrative: that we are our brothers' keeper; that human beings belong to one species; that if we "can" help, we "must" help — all of this emerges out of the Judeo-Christian idea of human universality secularized in European natural law beginning in the sixteenth century. At best television merely allows us to tell this old moral story more efficiently. The medium is just a medium. The modern conscience had written its moral charter — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — before television had even entered most of our living rooms. Television would not be in Kosovo or Kabul at all, if it were not for these antecedent moral narratives.

It may be the case that television cannot *create* any moral relationship between audience and victim where none exists already. If television's moral gaze is partial and promiscuous, it is because ours is no less so. The TV crews go where we were already looking. We intervene morally where we already can tell a story about a place. To care about one place is necessarily to cast another into shadow. There is no morally adequate reply to the charge that Europeans and North Americans, to the degree that they cared at all, cared more about Bosnia than Rwanda. The sources of our partiality were only too obvious. One was in Europe, the other in Africa; one was a frequent holiday destination, the other was off most people's map. For most white Europeans and North Americans this partiality was transparently a function of race, history, and tradition. But how can it be otherwise? Our knowledge is partial and incomplete; our narratives of engagement are bound to be inconsistent and biased. To lament this point is understandable, except when it is supposed that we *should* be capable of moral omniscience. We cannot be. It is simply unrealistic to expect that each of us should feel connection to every place in the world where victims are in danger. We are bound to care more about places and people we already know something about. It is certainly invidious to believe that white victims matter more than black ones, that coreligionists are more naturally a matter of our concern than nonbelievers; and we can counteract these biases where we can, but at the end of the day, we will care more about what we know something about, and if this is Bosnia, so be it. The media will simply reflect the biases intrinsic to their own audience: their coverage may indeed exacerbate them, but in itself, they are not responsible for them. Indeed, television coverage can do relatively little to counteract the inherent moral biases of its viewers. It follows where it and other media lead.

What is more to the point is that media ownership concentrates media power in mostly white European and North American hands, and their angle of vision determines the focus of world media coverage. For these reasons, natural partiality is grossly magnified, and the world's majority — nonwhite, non-North American, non-European — is forced to take the minority's moral priorities. This bias cannot be corrected by well-meaning gestures. It will only change as the majority takes economic power into its own hands and creates media institutions that reflect its own moral priorities. This is already occurring across southeast Asia, and there is no reason to suppose that it cannot happen eventually in Africa and Latin America.

The fact that television reflects but does not create moral relationships does not exclude the possibility that it may also distort these relationships. Three possible distortions are evident. First, television turns moral narratives into entertainment; second, television turns political narratives into humanitarian drama; third, television individualizes — it takes the part for the whole. All three forms of bias are interrelated yet distinct. Television news is an entertainment medium. It derives its revenue and influence from its capacity to make the delivery of information pleasurable. Pleasurable story lines are generally simple, gripping, and easy to understand. Now all moral life requires simplification, and all forms of moral identification proceed by way of fictions. In framing up our moral world, we all seek for good guys and bad guys, innocent victims and evil perpetrators. Nothing is intrinsically wrong about this resort to fictions and simplifications. It is also puritanical to suppose that moral problems should never be mixed with entertainment values. Moral drama is always compelling, and television can be easily forgiven for seeking to build revenue and ratings on the production of moral drama out of news.

Dramatization only becomes problematic when the actors in our moral dramas stop playing the roles on

which our identification with them depends. For moral roles frequently reverse: innocent victims turn perpetrators; perpetrators turn victims. In such circumstances, it may become difficult to alter the story line in the public mind. Serbs who were perpetrators of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in 1993 turned out to be victims of ethnic cleansing in Croatia in 1995. But their demonization in 1993 foreclosed the possibility of empathy — and the assistance that rightly follows empathy — in 1995.

The distorting bias here is sentimentalization, because sentimental art, by definition, sacrifices nuance, ambivalence, and complexity in favor of strong emotion. Hence, it is art that prefers identification over truth. To the degree that television is an art form whose revenue stream depends on creating strong identifications, it is axiomatic that it will occasionally sacrifice moral truth. Occasionally, but not always: there are times when the sentimental is true, when we identify strongly with a story that happens to have got its facts straight.

The second distortion flows from the visual bias of the medium. Television is better at focusing on the consequences of political decisions than the rationale for the decisions themselves: hence on the thunder of the guns rather than the battle plans; the corpses in the ditch rather than the strategic goals of the ethnic cleansers. The visual bias of television has certain obvious advantages; it enables any viewer to measure the guilt that separates intentions from consequences; it allows a viewer to move, shot by shot, from the prevarications of politicians to the grimy realities these prevarications attempt to conceal. But the very intensity of the visual impact of television pictures obscures its limitations as a medium for telling stories. Every picture is *not* worth a thousand words. Pictures without words are meaningless. Even when pictures are accompanied by words, they can only tell certain stories. Television is relatively incoherent when it comes to establishing the political and diplomatic context in which humanitarian disaster, war crime, or famine take shape. It has a tendency to turn these into examples of man's inhumanity to man; it turns them from political into natural disasters, and in doing so, it actively obscures the context responsible for their occurrence. Its natural bias, therefore, is to create sentimental stories that by making viewers feel pity also, and not accidentally, makes them feel better about themselves.

Thus, television pictures from the Ethiopian famine in 1984 focused naturally on the pathos of the victims, not on the machinations of the elites who manufactured famine as an instrument of ethnic oppression or other long-term failures of the African economy or ecology. It did so simply because it chooses identification over insight, and it did so because television depends for revenue and influence on the heightened drama of this visual mimesis of one-to-one contact between the watching spectator and the suffering victim.

The third related difficulty is that television, like all forms of journalism, makes up its stories by means of *synecdoche*, by taking the part for the whole. Journalism is closer to fiction than to social science: its stories focus on exemplary individuals and makes large and usually tacit assumptions about their typicality. This is synecdoche: the starving widow and her suffering children who stand for the whole famished community of Somalia; the mute victim behind the barbed wire at Tranopole who stands for the suffering of the Bosnian people as a whole. Given that victims are numberless, it is natural that identification should proceed by means of focusing on single individuals. Synecdoche has the virtues of making the abstractions of exile, expulsion, starvation, and other forms of suffering into an experience sufficiently concrete and real to make empathy possible. But there are evident dangers. First, is the individual typical? Notoriously, television chooses exemplary victims, ones whose sufferings are spectacular and whose articulacy remains undiminished. Viewers trust experienced reporters to make these exemplary choices, but when viewers begin to question the typicality of the witness, they also begin to question the terms of their identification. When they feel that human suffering has been turned into entertainment cliche, they begin to feel manipulated: the ward full of abandoned orphans; the star-crossed Romeos and Juliets who loved each other across the ethnic divide and whose love shows up the folly of ethnic hatred; the plucky journalists who keep on publishing right through the shelling; the war-torn child whom the journalist adopts and spirits back to safety and endless interviews.[3] These forms of synecdoche forfeit any kind of complex identification with the whole panorama they are supposed to evoke.

The identification that synecdoche creates is intense but shallow. We feel for a particular victim, without understanding why or how he or she has come to be a victim; and empathy without understanding is bound to

fritter away when the next plausible victim makes his or her appearance on our screen or when we learn something that apparently contradicts the image of simple innocence that the structure of synecdoche invited us to expect.

It may be, therefore, that television itself has something to do with the shallowness of forms of identification between victims and donors in zones of safety. Television personalizes, humanizes, but also depoliticizes moral relations, and in so doing, it weakens the understanding on which sustained empathy — and moral commitment — depend. The visual biases of television thus deserve some place in our explanation of "compassion fatigue" and "donor fatigue" — growing reluctance by rich and well-fed publics to give to humanitarian charities or support governmental foreign aid. Real distance has been drastically shortened by visual technology, but moral distance remains undiminished. If we are fatigued, it is because we feel assailed by heterodox and promiscuous visual claims and appeals for help coming from all corners of the world. Moral narratives have been banalized by repetition and in repetition have lost their impact and force.

Aid agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), are waking up to the erosion of the narratives of moral engagement on which they depend to sustain both the morale of their field staff and the political support of donor governments. For aid agencies are moral storytellers: they tell stories to mediate and motivate, and they typically use television to get these stories and messages to pass from the zones of danger back to the zones of safety.

Typically the stories aid agencies tell are different from the ones television journalists tell, and these differences illustrate the moral dilemmas aid agencies characteristically encounter. Unlike journalists, aid agencies cannot point the finger of blame. They can name victims, but they cannot identify perpetrators, or if they do so, they must be careful not to do so in such a way as to jeopardize their access to victims. This limitation is especially the case for the ICRC, which has made moral neutrality its touchstone; but even groups such as Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), that have explicitly contested moral neutrality have learned that if they do engage in blame, they may gain credibility among victims, but they lose it among perpetrators and consequently lose the capacity to work in the field. If tables are turned, and victims become perpetrators and perpetrators victims, aid agencies that have told a blame-heavy story may find it impossible to change their line of response to the disaster.

Yet, if aid agencies refuse to tell a political story — one that attributes causation and consequences for the disaster they are helping to relieve — they risk falling back on a narrative of simple victimhood, empty of context and meaning. This disempowers the agencies when they appeal to governments and ordinary people for support. For purely sentimental, purely humanitarian stories create shallow identifications in the audiences they are intended to sway; such stories deny the audience the deeper understanding — bitter, contradictory, political, complex — on which a durable commitment depends. In the recourse to the pure humanitarian narrative of support for innocent victims, the aid agencies actively contribute to the compassion fatigue they purport to deplore.

Getting out of this contradiction is not easy. The pure humanitarian narrative preserves neutrality, and with it the agencies' autonomy and capacity to act. A political narrative commits the agency to a point of view that compromises its credibility with the group it has accused.

Aid agencies such as the ICRC have responded to this dilemma, in effect, by telling two moral stories, one in public, the other in private. The one reserved for public consumption preserves the neutrality of the organization and avoids attributing political responsibility for the disaster, war, or conflict in which it is intervening. The private message is more political: it is directed to governments, donors, and sympathetic journalists and does point the finger of blame. In the former Yugoslavia, the ICRC's public story offered emotionally charged but ethnically neutral descriptions of humanitarian tragedy, whereas the private back-channel story, told by its delegates and high officials, did not hesitate to attribute blame and responsibility and recommend political action. Its public statements about the Serbian camps in central Bosnia in 1992 preserved ethical neutrality; the private messages of its delegates on the ground did not mince words.[4]

Organizations that split their message in this way risk appearing duplicitous and hypocritical. The objective may be laudable: to preserve sufficient credit with perpetrators that access to victims can be preserved. But inevitably a certain credit is lost with victims and those

who side with victims, notably journalists.

Faced with these challenges to their moral integrity, some agencies have tried to harmonize both public and private storytelling. Médecins sans Frontières has been most explicit: refusing to be evenhanded as between perpetrator and victim; refusing to offer humanitarian assistance when the political conditions are unacceptable; denouncing both perpetrators and outside powers when they obstruct humanitarian efforts. In Afghanistan, likewise, Oxfam and UNICEF have refused to split their messages about Taliban treatment of women, publicly denouncing Taliban attitudes toward women. There are risks in this outspokenness — not merely that the Taliban may shut these agencies out but that these agencies themselves become more enamored of the politics of moral gesture than of reaching and assisting female victims themselves. So if the ICRC runs the moral risk of duplicity and hypocrisy by sharply distinguishing between what it says in public and what it says in private, agencies that refuse this distinction run the risk of moral narcissism: doing what feels right in preference to what makes a genuine difference.[5]

But these are not the only dilemmas that occur when aid agencies try to tell moral stories. Their humanitarian action is frequently exploited as a moral alibi. Aid agencies become victim of a certain moral synecdoche of their own. Thus, the fact that the ICRC has been doing humanitarian work in Afghanistan for a decade is taken, by the watching world, as a sign that "at least" "we" are doing something about the human misery there. The "we" in question is the moral audience of the civilized world, and this "we" has proven adept at taking moral credit for humanitarian interventions in which it has strictly no right to take credit at all. For there is no "we"; the so-called civilized world has no such moral unity, no such concentrated vision, and if politicians who represent its concerns claim credit for the humanitarian work of agencies in the field, they do so illegitimately.

Anyone engaged in humanitarian action in the field is indignantly aware of the extent to which his or her individual efforts are incorporated by the watching moral audience on television as proof of the West's unfailing moral benevolence. For television does not like to depict misery without also showing that someone is doing something about it. We cannot have misery without aid workers. They conjure away the horror by suggesting that help is at hand. This is synecdoche at its most deceiving, for if help is getting through in this instance, it may not be getting through in others, and sometimes help may actually make a bad situation worse — for example, if food assistance falls into the hands of combatants and enables them to continue a civil war. Television coverage of humanitarian assistance allows the West the illusion that it is doing something; in this way, coverage becomes an alternative to more serious political engagement. The Afghan civil war cannot be stopped by humanitarian assistance; in many ways, humanitarian assistance prolongs the war by sustaining the populations who submit to its horrors. Only active political intervention by the Great Powers forcing the regional powers bordering Afghanistan to shut off their assistance to the factions is likely to end the war. Aid workers in the region indignantly believe — and with reason — that their humanitarian presence allows the West the moral alibi to abstain from serious political engagement with the problem.

Thus, when humanitarian agencies bring television to a conflict site, they may not get what they bargained for. They may have wanted to generate stories that would focus the attention of policy makers on the need for substantive diplomatic or political intervention; what they get instead is the production of moral drama: sentimental tales of suffering, using a poor country as a backdrop, which, by stimulating exercises in generosity, simply reinforces donors' sensation of moral superiority.

This idea certainly goes against the received wisdom about the impact of television on foreign policy and humanitarian intervention. It has been generally supposed that television coverage drives policy and intervention alike, the pictures creating a demand that "something must be done." We have already questioned the technological determinism implicit in these assumptions, by arguing that it is not the pictures that have the impact but the particular story — moral or otherwise — that we happen to tell about these pictures. Where stories are wanting, television cannot supply them. Those who have examined the impact of television coverage on the propensity of governments to intervene in zones of danger would take this argument still further. After closely studying cases such as the Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia interventions, most analysts come away with a marked degree of skepticism about the efficacy of the so-called "CNN effect."[6] Policy makers insist that they decide whether to commit their countries to action not

according to what they see on the screen but according to whether it is in the stable, long-term national interest of their countries. According to these studies, three years of drastic and sometimes ghastly television footage did little to move European policy makers away from their reluctance to commit troops and planes to bring the Bosnian war to an end. At most, the television images stimulated a humanitarian response: aid agencies moved in, donations flowed, and some of the misery on the screen was alleviated. But television did little or nothing to drive the Bosnia policy of Whitehall or the White House. Here the determinant factor against intervention was Vietnam-bred caution about sinking into a quagmire. No amount of sentimental coverage of humanitarian disaster was able to shift the policy makers' and military analysts' basic perception that this was a "lose-lose" situation.

Both the victims themselves and the humanitarian agencies in Bosnia supposed that getting the cameras there would help trigger decisive military and political action. Both were angrily disillusioned when this action was not forthcoming. It was as if both believed that misery tells its own story, that pictures inevitably suggest the moral conclusions to be drawn from them. But, as I have argued, pictures do not tell their own story, and misery does not motivate on its own.

Yet skeptics go too far when they claim that television pictures had no impact on the foreign policy of states or the conscience of a watching public. Policy makers and military planners have an institutional stake in denying that they are at the mercy of television images and public pressure. It is essential to their *amour propre* and professional detachment to believe that they make policy on grounds of rational interest rather than on the basis of inflammatory and sentimental television reports. Yet their disclaimers on this score are not entirely to be believed. What the pictures from Bosnia undoubtedly did engage was a small but vocal constituency of people who felt disgust and shame and were roused to put pressure on the politicians who stood by and did nothing. It was not the pictures themselves that made the difference but the small political constituency in favor of intervention that they helped to call into being. Television itself did not create this constituency; rather, the images helped the constituency widen its basis of support; it could point to these images and draw in others who felt the same outrage and disgust as they did.

The numbers who care about foreign issues will always be much smaller than for domestic ones, but their influence is out of all proportion to their numbers. Most of them — in the press, the humanitarian agencies, the think tanks — have the power to create and mold public opinion.[7] For three years, a small constituency pounded away at the shame of Bosnia, and in the end their campaign worked — not, I hasten to add, because political leaders themselves felt any great shame but because, in time, they were made to feel that they were failing to exercise "leadership." Once a political leader feels his or her legitimacy and authority are put under sustained moral question, he or she is bound to act sooner or later. Added to this, in the Bosnian case, was the undoubted fact that prolonged inaction was beginning to erode the cohesiveness of the NATO alliance and open up important splits between Europe and America. In the end, the Clinton administration intervened and set the Dayton process in motion, not because it had been shamed by television but because it felt, with good reason, that at last an overriding political interest was at stake in Bosnia: the coherence of the alliance structure and the continued hegemony of America in European affairs. In other words, humanitarian pressure, in the form of outraged editorials and gruesome television footage, set up a train of consequences that only three years later eventually helped to generate a national interest basis for intervention. This national interest drove policy, but it does not follow that the intervention was motivated solely by national interest considerations. The humanitarian, moral pressure was integral to the process by which a reason for intervention was eventually discerned and acted on.

All of this suggests that the moral stories we tell through television are less influential than their visual impact would suggest, but they are not as unimportant as skeptics would imply; and that they do play a continuing role in structuring the interventions, humanitarian and otherwise, through which the zones of safety attempt to regulate and assist the zones of danger.

As humanitarian agencies confront the question of how to use television more effectively to sustain engagement, by donors and governments, and to counter "donor fatigue," they need to address the general breakdown of metanarratives linking the developed and developing worlds. We have two metanarratives on offer, globalization and the chaos narrative: economic

integration and collapsing time and distance constraints for the wealthy few in the northern world; state fragmentation, ethnic war, and economic disintegration for the unfortunate citizens of as many as twenty-five nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The rhetoric of globalization — and especially the globalization of media — altogether conceals the fact that this promise is withheld from the majority of the world's population. Indeed, as the developed world integrates still further, it is reducing, not extending, its contacts with the worlds of danger. Highly mediatized relief operations, such as Somalia, Goma, and Afghanistan, conceal the shrinking percentages of national income devoted to foreign aid, just as highly mediatized charitable campaigns such as Live Aid conceal the shrinkage of private donations to international humanitarian charities. The metanarrative — the big story — is one of disengagement, while the moral lullaby we allow our humanitarian consciences to sing is that we are coming closer and closer. TSC

NOTES

[1] See my *Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), chap. 4.

[2] See Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

[3] Gilbert Holleufer, "Images of Humanitarian Crises: Ethical Implications," *International Review of the Red Cross* (November-December 1996): 609-13.

[4] See Roy Gutman, *Witness to Genocide* (Middleton, Wisc.: Lisa Drew, 1993).

[5] Michael Keating, "The Reality Gap," *Geographical Magazine*, September 1996, 23-24; also M. Keating, "Painting It Black: Who's to Blame?" *Crosslines* 18-19 (December 1995): 21-22.

[6] Nik Gowing, "Real-Time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does It Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?" Joan Shorenstein Center, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, occasional paper, June 1994; see also Steven Livingston, "Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention," Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, occasional paper, June 1997; see also Nik Gowing "Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention?" report for the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, New York, 1997.

[7] Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss, *The News Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 1996).