Witnessing Wootton Bassett: An Exploration in Cultural Victimology

'In the desperation of grief, there can be an undeniable impulse to follow the dead, who are still somehow so much alive' (Woodward 2009: 234).

Introduction

Wootton Bassett is a small town in the county of Wiltshire, south west England. It is situated close to the Royal Air Force Lyneham base where service personnel killed in Iraq and Afghanistan are repatriated. On July 4th 2010 many newspapers presented the poignant image of Helen Fisher, a mourning relative of a young British soldier killed in Afghanistan. Carrying a small bunch of flowers, she is running towards the funeral cortege carrying the repatriated body of her twenty year old cousin through Wootton Bassett. Her grief is palpable; the image depicting an intensely private moment that was also very public. Such media reporting and similar visual witnessing of repatriations has become a frequent occurrence since the first spontaneous saluting of what was then a small procession, by Royal British Legion members in Wootton Bassett in 2007. Since that time UK military deaths from the war in Afghanistan have reached over 350, with the 100th repatriation of 2010 taking place during November of that year. However, despite the spontaneity that characterised the original mourning of these repatriations, media outlets have now begun speculating which entry point will replace Wootton Bassett when RAF Lyneham closes in August 2011. Thus it is perhaps an apt moment to reflect upon the cultural phenomenon of Wootton Bassett and to ask what the wider significance of these repatriation parades might be underneath and beyond the processions and grief.

Following Woodward (2009) it is plausible to suggest that the Wootton Bassett phenomenon enables and invites us to engage with the 'impulse to follow the dead'.

However, as the number of people present at Wootton Bassett repatriations has steadily increased, it would seem that this is an impulse expressing a collective grief; what Valier (2002: 321) calls 'the public performance of collective acts of mourning'. Our purpose in this paper is to explore this 'public performance' through two 'lenses': the literal via the stimulus of photography and the theoretical through the tools of victimology. To do this we will deploy pictures taken by the photographer Stuart Griffiths (see www.stuartgriffiths.net) in order to elucidate three cultural trends suggested by his pictures of Wootton Bassett: the compression of private and public grief; the emergence of 'dark tourism' (Foley and Lennon, 1996) and displays of resistance. Prior to mapping out these trends, we wish to begin by emphasizing the value of the visual to criminology and victimology.

Photography, Visual Culture and Criminology

Photographs have been an important source of social narrative since the nineteenth century. Ferrell and de Voorde (2010: 39) comment that 'photojournalism and documentary photography are widely recognised as legitimate tools for the representation of people and events'. Moreover, Sontag (2003) observes the skills of photography are not solely confined to the professionally trained; illustrated by the 'Here is New York' photographic exhibition in November 2001 documenting the events following the terrorist attacks in New York on the 11th September 2001 (9/11), using images by both professional and amateur photographers. The power of the image has been differently commented on by Valier (2004), Valier and Lippens (2004), Young (2007), and Hamm (2007) amongst others, in the context of crime and criminal victimisation, with cultural criminology in particular embracing the visual along with a renewed commitment to ethnographic work.

Ferrell and de Voorde (2010: 41) make a powerful case for criminology - and, for the purposes of this paper, victimology - to take account of the fact that what 'a photograph captures is not that of the people in front of the lens, nor that of the photographer, but of the *shared cultural meaning* created between photographer and those photographed in a particular context'. Indeed, photographs, and their ever-increasing availability by digital and other means, are an important part of the ever-present visual culture characteristic of contemporary social life. As Bolt et al (2008: 5) state:

> Theorists have long understood that the visual image far outlives the spoken argument. Moreover with the passage of time visual images gain potency as the more the audience reflects on them, the more meaning they acquire.

This is vital since to fully appreciate the power of the image, generally and specifically, it is important to embrace the fact that - unlike pictures kept in the traditional photo album - digital images do not fade. Their material presence remains clear and focused, despite the fact that, with the passage of time, the meanings attached to them may vary.

The images that are used in this paper endeavour to capture and document an event that has grown as a cultural emblem over time: the repatriation of dead soldiers at Wootton Bassett. Of course, we cannot assess the extent to which media coverage of Wootton Bassett and the availability of photographs like the ones used here are linked with the increased attendance at repatriation parades, but we can use these images to explore some of the social and cultural processes that may underpin these events. In this sense, as criminologists, we are perhaps attending to the witnessing practices identified by Quinney (1998: 359):

> Criminologists, for instruction on the bearing of witness, can become familiar with the many kinds of witnessing that are evident in a host of sources. Journalists, photographers, artists, social scientists, and many other writers report the sufferings throughout the world.

In this way photographs can provide us with all kinds of 'data', of framing, inclusion, exclusion, seeing and suffering, that are not necessarily available in other forms of representation or data transfer. This is especially the case with 'everyday photography' (Morrison, 2004; see also some of the observations made by Hamm, 2007 on the photographs taken by soldiers at Abu Graib). The mundane and ordinary nature of everyday photography, pictures that capture faces and events that have not been posed for - pictures in which the subjects are not seeking to steer representation - carry powerful messages about 'what is going on here'. From them it is possible to explore some of the key social, cultural and political meanings associated with the context in which they have been produced. Ferrell and de Voorde (2010) suggest that documentary photographs - the kind of photographs we are endeavouring to comment on here - put to the fore the tensions between objective inquiry and subjective analysis. Pictures, taken with a camera at highly charged events that the photographer chooses to capture, attempt to make the viewer witness the emotion of the events. However they do not do this objectively. The photographer chooses, fixes and frames subjects, locations, and the moment at which to take the picture. Thus Sears and Cairns (2010: 47) reason: 'the photograph does not really give you first-hand access. Every photograph involves processes of selection, freezing a particular moment in time and space'. Despite these forms of filtering and selection, the meanings produced from documentary photographs are not fixed by the author but are made by the consumer. Ferrell and de Voorde (2010: 41) point out:

> The documentary photograph is neither the objective reproduction of an external reality nor the subjective construction of the photographer, but

rather a visual documentation of the relationship between photographer, photographic subject, and the larger orbits of meaning they both occupy.

The photographs we draw upon for this analysis have all been taken by Stuart Griffiths, a former member of the British Parachute Regiment, and veteran of the Northern Ireland conflict. Following his military service, part of his civilian career as a professional photographer has been dedicated to documenting the injuries of soldiers returning from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The expressed desire of the photographer in recording the events associated with Wootton Bassett is to capture both an evolving trajectory and a sense of extra-ordinary ordinariness:

> Wootton Bassett has become one of these rather strange places where it's a bizarre mix of grief and mass press hysteria ... I think that was why I was interested in the whole journey rather than just Wootton Bassett because it was the small pockets of people on the route which I feel say more about a collective grief. It is something more 'British' I feel because of its redundancy (Griffiths, 2010).

So the photographs presented here are not necessarily those that might be found in mainstream newspapers. In his desire to capture 'the whole journey' and to seek out pictorial sites and opportunities away from the 'paparazzi' we get a sense of the photographer's framing process. However, if the photograph is a product of an inter-relationship capturing 'shared cultural meanings' then a further methodological dilemma is posed in how we (as lay people and academics) make sense of these images. Sontag (2003: 6) observes in the context of war photography: 'The photographs are a means of making "real" (or more "real") matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore'. This issue is raised by the war photographer Don McCullin (himself a former member of the RAF) who foregrounds the confrontational and political nature of his work. For McCullin it is the duty of the photographer to compel the public to engage with the horrors of war: 'you have to bear witness. You cannot just look away' (McCullin, n.d. cited in O'Hagan, 2010).

The photographs presented here capture the impacts of a war 'brought home' to a nation that is not itself at war (see also Sontag, 2003). Similarly the desire to capture the ordinary, the mundane, away from the flash of the mass media carries with it a particular political viewpoint: one situated within the 'wider orbits of meaning' of Wootton Bassett. These meanings are overlaid by our own personal interpretations, and the connections we have made with the academic commentaries available to us. At best, our endeavours offer an admittedly subjective but nonetheless critical analysis, possibly a 'decisive moment', for a cultural victimology (following Ferrell and de Voorde, 2010 on cultural criminology). At a general level, we shall consider what might be learned by the victimologist - socially, culturally, and politically - by witnessing the world through the photographer's lens. More specifically, we will be using photographic images to propose several ways in which to understanding what it is that Wootton Bassett reflects about attitudes towards victims and the nature of public grief in the contemporary UK. To be clear, we are not attempting to conduct semiotic analyses of the pictures selected. Rather, in the spirit of exploration we are utilising the medium of photography as a portal through which we can inspect broader cultural trends as they emerge and embed.

The Soldier as Victim: From Afghanistan to Wootton Bassett (via Iraq)

Almost ten years have passed since 9/11. At the time, opinion polls and academic commentaries alike indicated that these events were both transgressive and historically remarkable (see Worcester, 2001; Jenks, 2001). The events of 9/11 undoubtedly set in train a sequence of (il)legal interventions, military processes and geopolitical practices that have become defining features of the social history of the

first decade of the 21st century. As a reaction to these attacks, on October 7th 2001 the United States Government launched 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan (the British military effort is known as Operation Herrick); formally an attempt to eradicate the terrorist group Al Qaeda and to disempower its Taliban supporters. Following these incursions George Bush Junior and Tony Blair embarked upon a second military campaign that sought to justify war against Iraq on the basis of a belief that Saddam Hussein supported the activities of Al Qaeda and was stockpiling 'weapons of mass destruction' to be directed against 'the West'. The invasion of Iraq began on March 20th 2003 under the rubicon 'Operation New Dawn,' starting a military conflict which lasted almost seven years (similarly British military efforts here are known as Operation Telic). These events have already been subjected in various ways to political, economic and criminological analysis.

In particular certain criminologists have responded to the challenge set by Kramer and Michalowski (2005) to engage in critical scrutiny of the war in Iraq and related events; see for example, Whyte (2007), Hudson and Walters (eds) (2009) and Karstedt, Levi and Ruggiero (eds) (2010). Whilst such interventions are illustrative of a rising criminological interest in these events, much of this work has been either concerned to demonstrate the criminal nature of the 'Iraq War' and its consequences, or to explain the motivations for either terrorism or state involvement. Little of this work has been concerned with socio-cultural side effects. An exception to this is the work focused on the impact of these events on those belonging to ethnic minorities that have been rendered 'suspect communities' (see for example, Hudson 2003; Spalek, 2008, Mythen, Walkate and Khan, 2009). However, it is important to note that it is not our intention to add to these specific debates here. Instead we wish to

explore other aspects of the socio-cultural that have ensued in the UK - some of which are suggested and reflected in the photographs of Wootton Bassett used here. In order to better understand this socio-cultural context, it is necessary to develop an appreciation of the way in which soldiers engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq are being depicted contemporarily in media and policy processes in the UK.

British soldiers who fought and perished in the First and Second World Wars were cast predominantly as heroes and liberators. In stark contrast, those engaged in combat in what Beck (2009) has dubbed the 'risk wars' in Afghanistan and Iraq have been party to a broader and more ambiguous range of constructions. It must be remembered that the conflict in Iraq was executed without the support of the United Nations or the international community and its legality has always been in question. Public support for the Iraq war was mixed, with an unprecedented number of people - estimated at over one million - marching against it in the UK. Given the protracted nature of the conflict, the economic cost to a state seeking to cut back on expenditure, the admission that such conflicts are 'unwinnable', and the ceasing of British military operations in Iraq, public opinion towards the war in Afghanistan appears to have shifted (Merrick, et al, 2009). Throughout both war efforts the way in which the media has assembled mixed narratives of soldiers perishing or severely injured in these two conflicts is of particular interest here; whilst the narrative of the soldier as hero remains, it has been twinned with a seemingly paradoxical emphasis on the soldier as victim.

The soldier as victim poses a number of conundrums and contradictions. A soldier is normatively framed as the epitome of masculinity endowed with the capacity for the

use of brute force and resilience. So situating the soldier as a victim, with all that such a term connotes, is figuratively problematic (see McGarry 2009; McGarry 2010; McGarry, Walklate & Mythen, 2011). In mainstream victimological thinking the white, heterosexual male (which soldiers most often are; see Ministry of Defence, 2009) is 'the other' (Walklate 2007). Often outside of the conceptual framework of victimhood though not necessarily outside of the experience of victimisation, the harm that males experience are consequently reduced to a 'latent invisibility' (Walklate, 2007). Certainly the social and cultural expectations traditionally associated with soldiering do not lend themselves easily to the connotations of victimisation that imply vulnerability, weakness and passivity. However it would be unfair to suggest that the harms faced by modern soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq are hidden or invisible. Television documentaries regularly present a range of harms including: family separation, the social consequences of war post-conflict and the long-term psychological effects of war. Such is the popularity of these types of programmes, *Wounded* (see Aldous, 2009) - documenting the recovery of two young amputee British soldiers from Afghanistan - won a BAFTA for Best Single Documentary in 2010. Therefore, considering the experiences of a modern soldier in the context of the invisible other - given recent interests in documenting the hardships experienced by British troops in Afghanistan and Iraq - poses some interesting questions, since the harms experienced by soldiers are not 'invisible' as scenes at Wootton Bassett would testify.

Some interventions within radical victimology have attempted to challenge these conventional exclusions. For example, researchers have suggested that 'civilians and soldiers in conflict' can be considered as victims of state crime' (Kauzlarich et. al.

2001: 175), with Ruggiero (2005: 251) adding that 'soldiers ... while 'doing their unpleasant, ennobling duty', are being 'victimised by State and corporate actors'. More dramatically, Keegan and Holmes (1985: 266) assert that 'the soldier is both victim and executioner. Not only does he run the risk of being killed and wounded himself, but he also kills and wounds others'. Similar observations can be found in more popular autobiographical and journalistic literature (see, for example, McNab 2009; Kemp 2009).

Moreover, labeling the soldier as a victim has become increasingly common in media reporting. Take, for instance, the death of the 126th British soldier in Afghanistan in November 2008 described as 'Helmand victim' (Cramb 2008: 10); the most senior officer to be killed in Afghanistan, Lieutenant Colonel Thorneloe, called one of the 'many victims of the Taliban' (Steele 2009: 11); and one of the most recent soldiers to die in Afghanistan in June 2010 displayed on the front of *The Sunday Telegraph* below the title '299th victim' (Hennessy 2010: 1). The shift toward identifying the soldier as a victim is also reflected in political exchanges and enshrined in law. In 2006 *The Daily Telegraph* led with the story of British soldiers being defined as 'victims of crime' for compensation purposes when injured in Afghanistan and Iraq due to the asymmetrical tactics being employed on them by insurgents which fall outside the confines of the rules of a 'just war' (Rayment, 2006). Added to this, there is an increasing tendency to refer to soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome as victims (Kean 2009) and wider recognition of the failures on the part of the state to meet with the expectations of the Military Covenant (Ministry of Defence, 2001 & 2005) which promises to provide justice and fairness for those who serve, "especially victims of conflict" (Ministry of Defence, 2005, p. 153, para. 0732). The

psychological problems faced by soldiers have long been known - even if they have historically been muted and/or resisted and there is evidence to suggest that these problems are exacerbated when the soldiers are themselves engaged in 'morally ambivalent' conflicts (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). As greater public prominence has been afforded to the idea of the soldier as victim, and given the morally ambivalent nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is perhaps reasonable to ask: if military trained soldiers struggle with the after effects of these recent conflicts, what of their families, their widows, their sons and daughters; and what, indeed, of the observing public?

An early contribution to this debate has been offered by King (2010). He points to the 'public fascination' with Helmand and the 'ever more emotive announcements of combat fatalities' (2010: 2) in which 'the weekly ritual of notification and remembrance has become an unignorable part of contemporary British culture' (ibid. 3). King's analysis of soldiers' obituaries suggests that contemporarily these put to the fore soldiers as husbands, fathers, men - with particular personalities - who lost their lives engaged in a job they loved doing. In other words they are remembered primarily in terms of their domestic role and it is in this respect, rather than through a notion of national sacrifice, that their death is given meaning. King (2010) situates his analysis within the wider social context of individualization captured by the centring of personality. Indeed there may be some resonance here with the use of the term 'victim' commented on above and in the presence of soldiers' families at the repatriation events at Wootton Bassett. King (2010: 21) goes on to argue that:

> It is very difficult to be drawn into the now personalized process of mourning, valuing the individuality of each soldier, while simultaneously rejecting the strategic purpose of their deaths outright. To deny the sacrifice of British soldiers is to denigrate the personal memory of the

soldier and disparage the grief of the family (which is simulated in the obituaries).

If we consider that the process of repatriation has simultaneously become a subject of public fascination - that King (2010) suggests is evident in relation to the dead of Helmand - our hypothesis is that it is possible to mourn the loss of individually valuable men and to simultaneously reject the purpose of their death. Distant war on television is one thing (Bourke, 1999), but when distant harms are paraded through the streets of the UK this creates a void for public sentiment; arguably one which has been filled by the mourners of Wootton Bassett.

Understanding Wootton Bassett: Beyond Mourning?

We are using the images displayed here as vignettes. As such, we are interested in what they imply about the wider world rather than what they 'mean' in and of themselves. In the following, we wish to suggest a number of themes through which we can ponder the cultural significance of Wootton Bassett. As a backdrop to our observations are the ongoing hostilities in the 'War on Terror', typified by the 'propaganda of the deed' through which terrorist networks aim to recruit sympathizers to engage in attacks against the West in the name of Islam (Bolt, et al, 2008). We contend that what we are witnessing at Wootton Bassett is an unforeseen outcome of this strategy. This is exampled in our three themes which we speak to in turn.

The compression of private and public grief

Figure 1.1 depicts the coming together of a grief that is private being displayed in public. This disruption of the separation between public and private operates at multiple levels in the picture. In the foreground is the unrestrained private sorrow of

the couple mourning: she, displaying evident personal emotions causing her to grieve in public, and he - perhaps with the subtle markings of a soldier (short hair, high sideburns and squared neckline) reflecting inwardly, privately. As a backdrop – to this public and private sorrow - is the striking and regimented formality of British soldiers. Lurking over the shoulders of the mourning couple, but out of their peripheral vision, we are visually presented with identical, seemingly emotionless figures, perhaps symbolically representing the dead and injured who experience harm 'behind our backs'. There are other poignant features that can be read into this picture. The lifelessness of the limp flowers scattered on the ground are discordant with the animate grief expressed in the young woman's tears for someone now passed away.

Figure 1.1

Giddens (1991) discusses the way in which modernity demands the sequestration of day-to-day life: the separation of the individual from experiences that might raise problematic existential questions for them such as those concerning sickness, madness, sexuality, criminality and death. While protecting the self to an extent, the unspeakable nature of these experiences renders them socially inexpressible and they

become, 'squeezed into the sidelines' (Giddens, 1991: 157). This process of separation goes hand in hand with the separation of the public from the private and removes events like death from everyday life leaving individuals alone with the task of making sense of such events. Overall this picture is suggesting that Wootton Bassett itself is providing an outlet for the expression of otherwise privatised meaning: a mechanism to breech sequestration; to reach out for some public recognition and consolation. In confronting the private death of a soldier in this public way, the threat that this poses to the routine daily life of the individuals exposed to grief, serves to facilitate the restoration of order to people's lives; re-establishing an ontological security displaced by the propaganda of the deed.

As Giddens (1991) observes, such individualised sense making activities may be part of what is captured in the photograph above. These are simultaneously wrapped up in and by, the mediated popularity of 'experiences' and the images that bring individuals 'face to face with existential demands' (ibid. 169). Echoing the sentiments of McCullin, this image both compels us to look *and* makes us witnesses. Barthes (1981) refers to the compelling nature of existentially unsettling images as a 'punctum'; recognizable and retrievable through the images we recall of particular events: for example the 'falling man' who chose to jump to his death from the North Tower in New York on 9/11 rather than to perish from fire and smoke. These are images of transgressive events that cannot be denied, but which are also wedded to broader political, economic and social happenings. So, whilst there is nothing on offer overtly to be looked at per se in figure 1.1 - as resonant of other more memorable historical images - we are compelled to look since the punctum here transports us to Afghanistan and Iraq. In the presumed private expression of grief in a public place,

the now discredited 'War on Terror', Afghanistan, Iraq and the ongoing Chilcot Inquiry come into range. Both the photograph - and, moreover, the event itself - would not exist without these precursory and surrounding events. What might be private - as with the reflexive mourning of the young man in the picture - is also always public. The grief of the young woman symbolizes 'our' grief as we are compelled to look, to feel and are extolled to put ourselves in her place.

The Emergence of Dark Tourism

In figure 2.1 we are invited to participate in the collective expression of mourning, but in a very specific way. The funeral cortege disturbs the everyday order of the main street and its everyday shops. The ordered presence of collective mourning is disturbing the order of a public street. Simultaneously the picture fractures the demarcation of the public from the private. As our eyes move from left to right across the page we are drawn from the (dark) order of the public to the (colourful) world of the private, the coffin, draped with the Union Flag. Despite the image's inherent inertia, the motion of the coffin as it passes by - suggested by slight blurring - contrasts sharply with the mournful stillness of the crowd. This is Gothicism, not of the cinema, but typified by the experiences of soldiers in the shadows of war made public by the presence of a coffin and flags bowed in tribute. This compression of the public and the private is one way in which we can utilise photographic images to try to grasp the nature and meaning of Wootton Bassett.

Figure 2.1

Valier (2004) and Godfrey and Kearon (2007) have alluded to the increasing presence of the Gothic in public responses to victimisation. The excavation of feelings in newspaper headlines, television programmes, social networking sites and bulletin boards has been one important component in the symbolic use of the victim and the centring of the victim in criminal justice policy. Indeed Aradau (2004: 258) posits, 'what suffering becomes recognised in the public domain is a question of struggle and construction and not of inherent "merit: it is informed by a 'politics of pity'. Thus what kind of suffering is recognised, empathised with, and responded to by 'us' as spectators is subject to social and political conditioning. The suffering of some is recognised and legitimated while that of others goes all but unnoticed (see for example Tombs and Whyte, 2010). To be recognised as suffering requires being recognised as deserving of pity: being a victim. Whilst this resonates with Christie's (1986) exploration of the 'ideal victim' (and, as has already been observed, soldiers are not 'ideal' victims), it nevertheless affords the opportunity to link the collective expression of grief captured in figure 1.1 with the increasing use of the term 'victim' in the repatriation of dead soldiers in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.2

It is evident from the number of people present at Wootton Bassett at repatriation events that the spectacle of repatriation is drawing more than the families of the bereaved together. In figure 2.2, most of those on view are sporting casual clothing. The visual clues suggest that they are public onlookers - they are not dressed in mourning attire and neither do they wear sombre faces of loss. Save one. This person walks alone and strides with purpose through the crowds. Conspicuous grief, as illustrated here, arguably emerges in a context where death is recent; however for the individual in this picture mourning perhaps expresses separation from an 'object' which is no longer physically present (Salecl, 2004): the loss of a friend. Such loss requires the mourner to unpack the 'ties that bind them' to a physical being and come to terms with letting go of something which no longer exists in an existential sense (ibid: 29): gaining an angel.

Foley and Lennon (1996) offer further insight here by developing an association between tourist attractions, sites of death and human suffering: coined as 'dark tourism'. Arguably, the phenomenon may not be novel and is historically expressed in

many ways from public fascination with the gallows to tours of First World War battlefields. Yet, it can be argued that the number of sites of death and commemoration has increased over time alongside the desire of people to visit places such as Auschwitz and Ground Zero. The appeal of such 'attractions' has been variously attributed to factors such as morose curiosity to a 'collective sense of survival' (Stone and Shapley 2008: 575) in the aftermath of conflict or some other transgressive event compelling a sense of empathy with victims. The motivation for the presence of so many others is obviously an empirical question and media coverage might be one factor in answering that question. However Stone and Shapley (2008: 587) suggest that dark tourism, 'allows individuals to (uncomfortably) indulge their curiosity and fascination with thanatological concerns in a socially acceptable and, indeed, often sanctioned environment, thus providing them with an opportunity to construct their own contemplations of mortality'.

Whilst dark tourism may let death back in and facilitate reflexive consideration of an individual's mortality, Rojek's (1993) identification of 'black spots' perhaps adds something more to the debate about dark tourism. Used initially to refer to the commercial development of sites of mourning; Rojek's (1993) formulation of 'black spots' is created purposively, in that they may emerge accidentally as in the case of Wootton Bassett, or be 'produced' specifically (and perhaps politically) in the case of Wootton Bassett's successor (Stone and Shapley, 2008). Either way, it is within these discussions of 'dark tourism', 'black spots' and military repatriations that we can begin to recognise a disquieting and uncomfortable site of morbid engagement.

Displays of Resistance

The deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan are an everyday mediated reality, so much so that national television news coverage of the conflicts in these two countries rarely ventures to engage with the content of missions or current military strategy. The constant presence of these deaths taps into not only individual pre-occupations with ontological security but also, arguably, collective concerns about how and why these deaths are being produced. Therefore, our third - and final - frame through which we might seek to consider the Wootton Bassett phenomenon is that of resistance. In the context of a political harnessing of fear (of terrorism), and an increasingly restrictive legislative framework post 9/11, the call for an appreciation of a cultural victimology carries some weight (Furedi, 2007; Mythen, 2007).

Figure 3.1

In figure 3.1 we see a group of young people present to witness the repatriation, one assumes, of someone who was known to them. Some are carrying flowers, some holding the placard bearing their friends name with messages from others there to be seen on the placard itself. Here one is left with a sense of regard and commemoration of the dead. One tinged with sadness, but not victimhood. Whilst the presence of these young people might be motivated by private grief and a wish to grapple with the

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horror of death, there is also a sense of optimism here, of resistance, and a refusal to be labelled. Figure 3.1 also presents young people in what looks at first glance like school uniforms. On closer inspection it becomes apparent that this group are respectfully - albeit untidily - dressed in mourning attire, complete with loose flowers to throw over the oncoming procession. This young group understand the ritual; and for that reason aligned with their resistance is perhaps evidence of a young generation's natural reaction to mourning, emblematic of what Rock (2007) has termed a 'victim slanted culture'. Not only might this represent a young generation ready to take their grief to the streets, an act perhaps discordant with their grandparents experiences of loss and grieving during the First and Second World War's, but it might also demonstrate a cultural shift in public demonstrations of grief experienced by their parents; those who would have been exposed to the mass public mourning at the death of Princess Diana.

This cultural approach to victimisation, whist appreciating the increasing conceptual power of the universal victim, is also sensitive to both the individual and collective resistance to that power. Insofar as Furedi's (2007) observations reflect something important about the contemporary social world, it is important too to note the contingencies and complexities involved in being dubbed a victim. We can see, for example, in John Tulloch's (2006) personal testimony of being a victim of 7/7, victims pass through a number of phases demonstrated in the ways in which they are re-presented by the media. The narrativisation of deceased soldiers as victims - and, arguably, as 'wasted' victims so far as the credibility of the military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are concerned - has been a cumulative process. Nevertheless, such labelling can be resisted, contested and, arguably, celebrated. Here we have a cultural

willingness to not only profess sorrow for another, but also to perhaps accept - in terms of the 'War on Terror' - that 'we are all victims now' (Mythen, 2007). This sense of resistance is arguably captured in quite a different way in our final photograph (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2

This image is differently constituted. A photograph taken away from the main street where, it would appear, local people have decided to take time out of their day to witness a repatriation: silently awaiting the passing of a cortege. The presence of the Union Flag may be used as a mark of respect but may also function as an emblem of national identity. The evident silence and the sadness - as indicated by their bowed heads and posture - is perhaps suggestive of a more traditional 'Britishness' than that in the previous photograph. However the presence of these people, arguably more 'ordinary' in the representation of themselves, also speaks of resistance: of a silent protest. Stuart Griffiths (2010) himself says:

> Wootton Bassett has become unfortunately a 'double sided sword' which I interpret as a media spectacle and circus and a focal point for people whom are dictated by a media (such as the Daily Mail and Sun) on how we should live our lives - but also there is a sense of honour and confusion (to the current British troop involvement overseas) which is very much a reflection of the real state of the UK at present.

It may just be that it is this 'double sided sword', sharpened by both the cultural and political processes that underpin Wootton Bassett, is captured in the photographs presented in our discussion.

Conclusion: Visual Witnessing and Cultural Victimology

In this article it has been our intention to provoke debate around what the events that take place at Wootton Bassett might symbolise, speak of and suggest about both contemporary cultural trends and underlying human needs and motivations. We have used the photographs of Stuart Griffiths as touchstones through which we have ventured to explore three processes that appear salient to us, namely compression of the public/private, dark tourism and cultural resistance. By way of caveat, we make no claims to being right or wrong in our observations, nor to claim that our analysis is representative nor systematic. The meanings we have attributed to the images are partial and our musings are not neutral, objective or outside of ideology. We wish to conclude the article by pointing to the potential visual witnessing offers as a tool for victimological analysis in documenting and analysing grief, pain and suffering.

It would be easy to dismiss the issues discussed that we have discussed here as being divorced from the concerns of criminology and victimology; but this is simply not the case. On receiving his 'Outstanding Achievement Award' from the British Society of Criminology, Cohen (2009) stated:

> Taking off from denial theory, I'm continuing to work on the "particular problem" of public response to representations (by humanitarian organisations and the mass media) of the suffering of distant others. This might be a long way from criminology. But so be it. It might seem strange, but for many of us, criminology has been the best starting point to arrive at these wider questions.

In this paper we have been concerned, not with the distant suffering of others, but with the suffering of those close to home, and, like Cohen, we have come to these questions not so much from taking criminology as our starting point, but victimology. This is not intended to imply that we take the backcloth of Wootton Bassett not to have any criminological elements; it most certainly does. However our pre-occupations have been with some of the connected cultural consequences of events that have a contentious legal status. These consequences have arguably contributed to wider connotations of who may and who may not be considered a victim. As Quinney (1972: 316) asserted four decades ago, 'conceptions of the victim become more complicated when removed from the criminal law'. Moreover - in what Elias (1994) dubbed 'newsmaking victimology' - the visual and vocal way in which the media has covered the deaths of British soldiers stands in marked contrast to the largely 'invisible' and untold stories of the estimated 98,000 civilians killed in Iraq (for a contemporary figure see iraqbodycount.org) and 19,000 in Afghanistan since the commencement of the conflicts. By problematising the assertion that soldiers are eligible to achieve victim status, this paper has been concerned to track the associated and underlying processes and practices that both enable and contest this shift. In particular we have considered the cultural ramifications of UK involvement in a 'morally ambivalent' conflict as exemplified by the images discussed here. In this sense we are making two further claims about the practice of witnessing and the broader criminological and victimological functions this may have: the first theoretical, the second political.

The first theoretical claim supports the position adopted by Quinney (1998) on the power of being a witness. In offering a recommendation to students, he had this to say:

> Begin now to read the books by social scientists in the light of being a witness. Your list will rapidly develop, and you will appreciate both new and older works in a new way…[y]ou may even begin to consider anew what is to be done as a witness in our times - a witness to our sufferings, and to our joys (Quinney, 1998: 359-360).

Witnessing is a central academic activity for Quinney, since without it whatever we endeavour to engage in remains unfocused and without purpose. Here we have taken the act of witnessing to embrace the visual: an exploration of images that we are routinely exposed to. Rather than taking that exposure for granted or consigning our response to it as an impulse we have endeavoured to see beneath the surface. In so doing we have brought to a victimological analysis to this and a sense of the wider cultural process of which it is a part. The photographs we have utilised have enabled us to engage in this activity in a way that no other medium would allow. The moments they captured are raw and instant. The feelings they tap into are uncontaminated by words. They can generally 'speak' more profoundly of the scenes they capture than the commentary that surrounds them (Stanley, 1999). Moreover, they pose deep challenges for conventional victimology not only theoretically and methodologically but also politically. This is the second claim made here.

Ferrell and de Voorde (2010: 37) suggest cultural criminology 'is inevitably and intentionally *political* as well, at times granting agency and voice to those otherwise excluded from public debate at other times exposing the contradictions that those in power work to mask'. The photographs here, the event that they reflect and our analysis of them also exposes the contradictions that those in power work to mask. In

the case of Wootton Bassett, silence speaks louder than words. The commitment that those being repatriated are not forgotten - across the range of personal motivations and inclinations - is framed here as a silent protest to a war that most ordinary people did not support nor want. Putting this at centre stage inevitably renders our cultural victimology, political.

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