

Victim or Survivor? Emerging Narratives from Experiences of Terrorism

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This paper explores the impacts of terrorism, and of consequent disability, on three people. Two participants have a direct, and one has an indirect, experience of terrorism, but all have been deeply impacted by their encounter in the physicality of everyday existence. Using storytelling, as described by Hannah Arendt (1998), as the medium for exploring the daily lives of people directly affected by a terrorist attack, I choose here to focus on the ways in which they describe their disability, or their relationship to disability, and the meanings they create around their direct experience of terrorism. I seek to understand the ethical struggles of life after a terrorist attack. I ask how does one live an ethical life, a life that seems ‘right’ in the eyes of the person concerned? Through two stories, that of “Phoenix”, a victim of the 2002 Bali Bombings, and of Gill Hicks, a survivor of the 2005 London bombings, and her partner Karl Falzon, I explore how the long-term physical effects of terrorism play a significant role in the ways victims and survivors reassert themselves into their social world. Part of the agency implicit in the storytelling shared by these participants is encapsulated in the perceptions that these people are survivors, not victims; and this also impacts upon the various ways in which they approach living a good life with a disability and as a visible reminder of the randomness and extraordinary ferocity of terrorist attacks.

Introduction

This paper explores the impacts of terrorism on the everyday lives of ordinary people¹. In many ways I mirror the approach taken by Jackson (2013b) in his book *The Wherewithal of Life*, when he converses with three immigrants from the Global South who have moved to the Global North. He does so in order to understand their experiences better—their daily struggles with living elsewhere, the cultural, religious and economic differences between there and here, and most significantly for me, he also asks, how does one live an ethical life in this new environment? How does one maintain a sense of well-being? I transmute the experiential field of immigration to terrorism.

Schmid (2012) places victims of terrorism into the following categories: direct/primary (involved in the attack) and indirect/secondary (family members of those who died; first responders etc.)². I will explore the everyday effects of terrorism through the narratives of two people (“Phoenix” and Gill Hicks) from the first category and one from the second (Karl Falzon—Gill’s partner). It is important to note that Gill and Phoenix consider themselves to be *survivors* of terrorism, which in turn sets up a dichotomy between victim and survivor. This paper will explore how this dichotomy is traversed like a tightrope where one is always trying to keep the two modes of experience in balance.

¹ ‘Ordinary’ in this sense is not meant in a derogatory or negative way; as Michael Jackson (2013b, p. 13) notes, studies concerned with the ways in which people live everyday ethical lives are usually focussed on extra-ordinary humans like Ghandi and Tolstoy.

² Aly (2014) also includes, the resonant mass (general viewing public – could be a person in another country witnessing the event via television)

I am using a collaborative ethnographic methodology which allows for a conversational mode of interaction rather than formal interviewing, which in turn allows for an emergent and particular engagement with each participant. Rather than the researcher simply analysing data, researcher and participant collect evidence together and co-create knowledge³. Through the stories each participant tells me, we hope to build a picture of the realities of living with terrorism in daily life. I do this, again in light of the way Jackson (2013a, 2013b, 2005, 2008) realises Hannah Arendt (1998), not to explain the present as causally related to the past (i.e. to the act of terrorism), but rather to explore and better understand the way in which that act is being (re)interpreted and experienced and how that event is being responded to over time.

Like Jackson I do not want to “describe a literary trope” or a clinical condition, such as disability, but to “describe a modality of extreme experience that will help elucidate the conditions under which sociality and storytelling become possible or impossible” (2013a, p. 62). Thus, in this paper, it is not my aim to describe the clinical conditions which inform my participants lives—the specific medical details of their injuries and disabilities—rather I want to explore the ways in which they talk about their conditions: as limiting, inspiring and/or connecting. Thus as Jackson states,

If we are to avoid the trap of becoming infatuated with our own intellectual-cum-magical capacity to render the world intelligible, then the vocabulary “we” all too glibly project onto “them” must be tested continually against the various and changing experiences of actual lives. Otherwise we risk becoming complicit in the social violence that reduces the other to a mere object—a drudge, a victim, a number, assimilated to a category, a class, or a global phenomenon. (2013a, pp. 4–5)

So rather than describe a disability, in its fullest medical sense, in this paper I seek to understand the ways in which the disabilities caused by an act of terrorism are understood, felt, made meaningful and lived in the everyday life of a person with a direct experience of terrorism⁴. I do so in light of Luria’s (1987) work with Zazetsky who suffered a catastrophic brain injury. Instead of reducing Zazetsky to his brain injury, Luria reveals Zazetsky’s dynamic *relationship* with his condition over time, his struggle to make good what he had lost (M. D. Jackson, 2008). Luria’s approach is similar to the one outlined by Frank (2013) where he argued that when a person is ill they have lost a sense of identity both due to the isolation of being treated for said illness in places such as hospitals (Ullyatt, 2015, p. 6) and the fact that the world feels as though it is moving along without them while they are suffering alone (Holmes, 2015). For Frank (1995, p. 40) the illness

³ The collaborative process includes sending the transcribed interviews back to each participant to review and edit as they see fit. I also invite them to provide feedback on my analysis, including this paper. This allows for each participant to engage with the research in a productive way and to the extent that they wish. For a deeper understanding of my methods please refer to the following texts (to name a few): Benson and Nagar (2006); Lassiter (2005); Mosher (2013); Narayan (2015); Rappaport (2008); Rouse, Lederman and Borneman (2012).

⁴ As Jane Gilmore (Anna*, 2017) recognises through Anna’s story, there is a danger in survivor stories of having to emulate the “good survivor”: in other words, why can’t you be like Anna who ‘transformed her life for the better’ after years of domestic abuse/violence? I tread with the same wariness here—while there are inspirational moments/themes woven throughout Gill, Karl and Phoenix’s stories, I do not offer them up here as such a one track/hegemonic trope; I offer them here so that we might understand that surviving is a struggle for well-being and that we might all go ‘visiting’ in the Arendtian sense—that we might find ourselves more open to a different way of being in the world.

narrative is transformative in that it allows the teller to assert a sense of themselves and their suffering back into the world from which they feel removed.

In this paper, I will briefly describe the theoretical bases of storytelling and everyday ethics. I will then move through particular aspects of Phoenix, Gill and Karl's stories as they relate to the focus of this paper, which is to explore the descriptions of everyday pain and difficulties, motivations, helping others, and more specifically what Gill, Karl and Phoenix are trying to get others to understand or change. This paper is my first attempt to bring the words and everyday lives of participants to the forefront of academic knowledge pertaining to the human capacity to recover (or not) from violence. Through acts of storytelling I seek to understand how those who have experienced terrorism reinterpret that act in order to make it meaningful in their present day life.

Storytelling

Jackson pays homage to Arendt's notions of storytelling in his book *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*, through a recognition "that storytelling is a mode of purposeful action (praxis) that simultaneously discloses our subjective uniqueness and our intersubjective connectedness to others, as well as the environmental forces to which we are all subject" (2013a, p. 13). Jackson (2013a) argues that stories provide the teller with a sense of agency (as we rework and recount events that 'happened' to us) and as a way to reaffirm 'our sense of belonging' to a social group (as we retell our private experience in a way that others can relate or respond to). For Jackson (2013a, 2013b), and Arendt (1998), this is how stories enable us to live—by connecting us to others and giving us a voice and a sense of individuality amongst the many with whom we belong.

Visiting

The 'critical' aspect of storytelling lies in Arendt's notion of visiting. According to Disch, "visiting means imagining what the world would look like to me from another position..." (1993, p. 687). This is not to be confused with empathy, which 'obstructs' understanding by 'erasing all difference'. Visiting, on the other hand, promotes understanding, as we experience the world from different perspectives, imagining what we might look like from within this different world and realising how we might define our principles differently if we normally stood in this position. Arendt argues this critical perspective lies in "being and thinking in my own identity where I am not" (1954, p. 241).

Everyday Ethics

Jackson (2013b) expands this notion of visiting through the lens of Sartre (1983) by including the notion of ethics. According to Jackson, visiting via storytelling provides an opportunity for us to become something more than our conditioning allows. Ethics and storytelling, for Jackson, are "synonymous with freedom" as they provide an opportunity for us to go visiting and in the process not quite render back to who we are. Jackson explains:

Stories are redemptive, then, not because they preserve or represent the truth of any individual life but because they offer the perennial possibility that one sees oneself as, and discovers oneself through, another, despite the barriers of space, time, and difference. (2013a, p. 244)

Thus, after the telling and the listening, both narrator and audience gain something for and of themselves in the process. We are redeemed and made ethically free as the narrator asserts a sense of themselves as one amongst many. Simultaneously the audience gains a sense of agency by visiting an alternate way of being and not quite rendering back to who they were before the telling.

Lambek argued for a hermeneutical approach to ethics and suggested living is a process of “... interpretation and self-interpretation as people make their way in the world, with the human capacities, cultural resources, and historical circumstances given them” (2015, p. 8). In other words, an ethical approach allows us to explore the challenges faced in the everyday lives of human beings as made choices (within the confines afforded to us by our position and place in the world), which give our lives meaning and make them feel worthwhile. Although people are often struggling to live well, Das (2015, 2007; Zengin, 2010) and Jackson (2013a) would add that the dimension of violence can offer a confounding complication. For both Das and Jackson violence is considered to be one of many choices available to us as human beings in order that we might make our way in the world. Through her fieldwork, Das (in Zengin, 2010) was confronted by the fact that violence is in fact a normal part of everyday life for a large proportion of the world’s populations. Das then asked: “...how can ordinary, everyday acts stand up to the horrors of ethnic, sectarian sexual violence and at the same time be capable of morphing into these very acts of violence?” (Zengin, 2010, no page). In other words, how in the face of everyday violence does one live a ‘good’ life, a life worth living, yet also find in oneself the propensity to be violent?⁵ And does one ever truly find oneself released from violence? Or does one find a way to live with violence, alongside it, just making do?

Victim/Survivor

It is significant whether a person with an experience of terrorism recognises themselves as a victim or survivor. Phoenix chose his moniker for this research, and I find the imagery of the phoenix arising anew from the fire particularly potent. As Phoenix was extensively burned in the attack and while he has taken part in many medical studies, he has only done a few interviews and has never taken part in social research like the kind we are conducting together. The victim/survivor question also came to the fore after the 2014 Boston bombing. Adrienne Haslet-Davis walked off the set of *Meet the Press* in the US as the show did not comply with her two conditions (Block, 2014):

- a. Not to refer to her as a victim but as a survivor
- b. Not to mention the names of the perpetrators as she did not want primacy given to their story, rather she wanted the survivor stories to be the main thread of conversation.

⁵ Jackson refers to Katherine Boo’s experiences in the slum of Annawadi (near Mumbai) where Boo found (seemingly much to her surprise) that despite living in abject poverty there was still a sense of hope and a life worth living. This sits in direct opposition to the way the ‘West’ portrays people living in poverty (Boo, 2012 cited in Jackson, 2013b).

What do the monikers of ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ do in such circumstances? Does one give a sense of being in control while the other does not? Does one lend itself to vulnerability while the other equates to resilience? Lastly, just how ‘real’ is this survivor/victim dichotomy?

Private Pain/Shared Narrative

Frank’s (1995) work in *The Wounded Storyteller*, according to Holmes (2015), marginalises the caregivers and focuses on those who are suffering and the cultural narratives available to them. By linking the personal private experience of illness to the cultural narratives available to the sufferer, Frank (1995) builds a tension akin to the one illuminated by Arendt (1998) when she argued that through storytelling the narrator is able to assert a sense of uniqueness among many. In other words, the private pain, which can never be fully shared, is only understood/related in terms of how the experience can be shared in a mutually convened cultural narrative. I now turn to Phoenix, Gill and Karl’s stories in order to further explore these themes.

Phoenix’s Story

I have visited Phoenix at his house on three separate occasions to conduct our face-to-face interviews. We have also conversed via email and in a limited fashion through Facebook (Phoenix thought it the best place for me to view his photos and observe his travels). Phoenix was inside the Sari Club on October 12, 2002, when a huge bomb was detonated by terrorists from Jemaah Islamiyah. This was the second bomb of the evening; the first was detonated by a suicide bomber across the road at Paddy’s bar. In our first interview Phoenix told me about how he awoke with burning rubble and roofing materials on top of him, and that he was disoriented but knew he had to move if he was to survive. He removed the rubble, stood up and saw a white light to his side. As he moved toward the light he noticed a

young Asian girl and she was sort of curled up in a very awkward position and as white as a ghost and she just lay there you know wasn’t moving or anything and I didn’t have really time to go and check on her or anything like that because there was just fire everywhere...

Phoenix, upon seeing other people, collapsed against a wall shortly after he made it outside. He said his lungs were filled with smoke, he was gasping for breath, and desperately dehydrated. Phoenix was eventually stretchered off to the makeshift triage where travelling doctors, medics and tourists were administering what little cares they could. Forty-four days later Phoenix awoke in hospital in Perth. By the time he awoke from his medically induced coma, many of the other patients, victims and survivors of the Bali bombing had already left the hospital. Phoenix had suffered burns to 64% of his body.

Fifteen years later, Phoenix finds himself ready to tell his story. Phoenix does not describe himself as disabled; his relationship to disability is one of giving and receiving. Recently losing his job, Phoenix decided to do some volunteer work and ended up working with Fishability, helping disabled people to fish in different locations around Perth. He takes pleasure in the simple task of baiting a hook for someone who can’t do that for themselves; he enjoys the company and the scenery. He doesn’t consider himself disabled in any way; he can after all still use and move his hands, despite the loss of many fingertips. I asked Phoenix to describe the way he saw his injuries:

Well look, I guess there's different degrees of disability, I mean you know if you couldn't move your arm or clench your first and grab a drink then you know I'd probably say yeah well, you're disabled, you can't – doesn't have that function or motor skills to do you know daily tasks but I guess I'm pretty lucky that I can – most of my movement's really good, that's about the worst. You—you know I do get chronic back and neck pain but so do a lot of other people as well so you know I don't see myself as being disabled and you know with the work that I do with Fishability, I mean I see people there that are disabled. A person in a wheelchair is disabled. There's a guy that had a stroke, can't move anything down his left side, the guy's disabled. That's what I would class as a disability but I don't think my injuries would you know would meet that criteria [...] when you're suffering from PTSD one of the issues is there's a lot of focus on yourself and your own issues and so to recover from it you've really got to change your thinking to more an outward perspective and help – and by helping other people you're doing that.

Phoenix stresses the importance of helping others to aid in his own recovery; that reaching out beyond his own internal or private pain is a vital part of living with a violent event such as terrorism⁶.

Significantly, Phoenix realises his identity as *both* victim *and* survivor. Phoenix's narrative has challenged my assumption that those with an experience of terrorism see themselves as survivor (an agent taking control of/responsibility for one's life in a social world post-attack) *or* victim (a vulnerable individual unable to physically or mentally move beyond the experience itself). This has allowed me to better understand the ways in which Phoenix claims agency through his narratives. Phoenix reaches outwardly in three ways: as a member of the BPPAI to promote peace and understanding at the Sari Club site where the 2002 attack occurred; as a volunteer for Fishability; and as a would-be travel blogger, who intends to relate his travel experiences prior to, since, and in light of the 2002 attack. In direct opposition to what Phoenix assumes the terrorists wanted—to stop him living a life of worldly travel and engagements with others—Phoenix continues to be “the person he was before.” Phoenix has created a sense of agency by reinterpreting his past experience of terrorism and using it to make sense of the present.

Indeed, Phoenix argues that his physical scarring is “a conversation starter [...] it tends to lead into more—wider topics like terrorism in general”. Something which is often presumed as weakness, as isolating, and as a sign of fragility is also simultaneously something which is connecting, resilient and strengthening. In this sense, Phoenix reaffirms Jackson's (2013a, p. 17) notion that stories provide the teller with a sense of agency (as we rework and recount events that ‘happened’ to us) and as a way to reaffirm ‘our sense of belonging’ to a social group (as we retell our private experience in a way that other than can relate or respond to). Thus, Phoenix has transformed his experience of terrorism from isolating to one which connects him to his social milieu.

⁶ Jackson (2013b, pp. 102–103) does note that traumatised persons are often unable to narrate their own story. He argues that this is due to the fact that that which unifies “... space, time and character on which narrative coherence depends are broken.” Furthermore, Jackson argues that when narratives are possible they are not like other narratives we ‘ordinarily tell’—they are often without closure. Thus, I do not want to suggest ‘recovery from’, rather I use the term ‘to live with’, terror.

Gill's and Karl's Story

I first met Gill and Karl at a social innovation Hackathon run in Perth in December 2016. They arrived with their daughter Amelie after a long-haul flight from Europe, jet lagged and in desperate need of coffee. There was no coffee. I offered to go to the nearest shops and bring some coffee back as I needed to pick up a visiting overseas colleague. Amelie, who had completely misheard what I said and thought I was going to meet some magical clowns, jumped at the chance to come with me. I was willing but hesitant: would these strangers allow me to take their only child? Yes. I felt the trust build easily from this point, although I was nervous to approach Gill and Karl to ask them to participate in the research. It became quickly apparent to me on the first day we met that Gill and Karl were an interdependent couple and that he was involved in Gill's activities with countering violent extremism (CVE) as much as she was. It felt disingenuous to interview one without the other, as I believed their ethical lives were intertwined. Thus far I have conducted one interview with Gill and Karl via Skype and make regular contact with Gill via Facebook. I also have my fieldnotes from the conversations we had during the Hackathon. The following is in part taken from the above interactions and sourced from some online news articles (referenced when needed).

Gill was involved in the 2005 London bombings. Gill had caught the tube at Tufnell Park and was in the same carriage as Germaine Lindsay, a suicide bomber, who blew himself up along with the train they were travelling in. Hovering in and out of consciousness, Gill and the other survivors talked to one another for over an hour before their rescuers arrived. Gill was the last person to be removed from the train; covered in soot and ash, she was completely unrecognisable (Dapin, 2015). For Gill this moment of terror is also a shining moment of our humanity. She was rescued by people who had no idea who she was; all they knew was that she was another human and therefore worth saving, worth putting their own lives at risk for. Gill lost both legs from the knees down in this attack. She now walks with the aid of stumps which fall off during hot sweaty weather, stumps which cause her endless amounts of pain. The nerve endings in her knees were not properly cauterized during her operation, the situation was too desperate and her life was hanging in the balance. These nerve endings continue to grow and every time she puts on her stumps they are forced into cups and weighed upon by her body. Gill told me that her daily life has become one of pain management (or coping with extreme pain without medication), working meetings around physiotherapy appointments, pre-planning and routine: none of which naturally gel with Gill.

Gill met Karl years after the terror attack. Gill had returned to Adelaide for a family event and was simultaneously looking to escape the pressures of an acrimonious divorce. Karl was recently divorced with three children. Neither was looking for a new relationship. They met in a jazz club, Gill talked about her desire to have a child, and they fell in love. Karl is very much a part of Gill's life and her mission; they describe themselves as an interdependent unit.

Gill has now dedicated her life to CVE: to showing and providing an alternative platform to violence. Gill knew what she wanted to do even before she left the hospital. She walked the route that the bombers had taken to get to London, through 22 towns and cities over a period of a month. She walked alongside Muslims and the broader community and encouraged people affected by the bombing, suspicious of their neighbours, hostile and fearful, to join the walk for a while and talk to someone they wouldn't usually meet with. Gill says, "If someone's got a head scarf or piercings or tattoos or whatever our outer you know look is, how do we find that the inner that's the same as everyone else in your life?" Gill used her story in order to find her new place in the world, in order to bring people together after that moment that literally tore people apart. I asked

Gill and Karl now—some 12 years on—what is your daily life like? How does this attack reach into the present? I ask this in respect of the ethics of everyday life, as a question of well-being and how one lives a good life. What we've found so far—Gill, Karl and I—is that Gill is frustrated by, and Karl is concerned with, the way in which Gill's pain and disability affect their everyday life.⁷

K: I guess particularly in the last year more than the previous years, Gill's mobility is really limited. So for Gill to get to the shops—

G: Alone, yeah.

K: Alone is a real—okay so the stretch when you do that is when I'm not here. When I'm not here Gill's forced to do it.

G: But if the weather's too hot—

K: Then you're stuck.

G: Then I'm stuck because my legs fall off literally in the hot weather so I'm absolutely stuffed, yeah. And I haven't yet got a way of—Amelie's still too young for me to have the wheelchair and have her in the wheelchair with me and me operate a chair in the types of footpaths and things that we have, it's just horrific so it's just – that's not going to happen either. So yeah, so I have to be super-organised and plan ahead and that's something that I've found really difficult because my brain doesn't work like that so that has increased a lot of anxiety if unexpected things land on the day of say you know heat or Karl not around or I've forgotten to get milk or just those sorts of things.

I asked Gill and Karl what drives them to continue working to counter violent extremism every day when even basic activities can cause huge stress:

G: For me what keeps me going is the anger, I think—

K: It's not the quality of the work you're doing?

G: I think I'm so angry at—and the senselessness of violent extremism and terrorism as a channel in which you know a growing group feel that that's their way of being able to make a difference and I'm angry, I'm frustrated, every incident fuels me even more but then that also adds to my growing frustration of you know I can't work many more hours than I already do and you know then we see – what I see reflected back is a world that's changing not for a sense of evolving but to a sense I see as regressing back into an us and them frame and I get frustrated over how - what else I could be doing and that's when I think the positivity of the motivation of anger keeps me thinking of maybe there's another way, maybe there's a different way to communicate this, maybe there's a different project I need to deal with that—

[...] I don't really feel that my purpose in life is to motivate people to have a better life, I feel that my purpose is to actually stop someone becoming a violent extremist and so that's where it's been difficult because I've been put into a framework of motivational [speaker] and I feel anything but...

Gill's motivational speaking engagements are a practical way for her to finance her work with would-be violent extremists. Simultaneously they are a form of frustration, as she sees less value in

⁷ Since this interview, Gill has embarked on a journey of reducing her pain levels through/with medicine. At the time of this interview, Gill was adamant she would not take such a journey.

sharing her story with mainstream audiences. In this sense, Gill's frustration could be a result of her story falling on deaf ears. Gill's story is simultaneously a source of strength, resilience and connection as well as frustration, loneliness, and fragility. Sharing her story is a way to survive financially while trying to make 'the work' and her life meaningful which in turn provides a sense of hope and well-being.

Gill described her disability during our conversation as life-long, as something that she will never be without or ever be able to fully heal from (Phoenix's injuries and on-going medical care were revealed in much the same way). Gill perceives her disability as simultaneously adding a point of significance in connection within her relationship to Karl (they've only known each other since Gill became disabled and Karl related to her despite this fact), and as adding a detracting layer of work as if she is a chore for Karl (he fits his life around Gill and her needs and schedules). Karl does not perceive their relationship in the same way.

K: We have to think about Gill and health and—

G: So I've got to be—I think for me it's about—there's no freedom for me because I need to be near some sort of prosthetics hospital outlet and then I also need to you know so we've been looking at leaving South Australia for example and okay so where do we go? What do we do? And again I'm completely governed by the prosthetics care from state to state—[...] that's like ... this other layer of the ongoing implications to the injuries that completely impact life. I can't actually you know when—if I'm ever asked oh it's amazing how you've recovered, actually no, there is no recovery. This is—it will always continue to shape my life until my last day. [...] I don't take any medication so it's been a process of retraining my thoughts to associate pain with how lucky I am that I'm even here. So, it's yeah.

I: No medication whatsoever?

G: Not to—Karl would quite like me to be medicated.

K: The amount of discomfort she feels for no gain is—it's debilitating. It's really hard to watch. So, you know and—yeah, there's a level of comfort I'd like Gill to have in life. So even just this thing about the legs slipping off you know, that alone is difficult, you know, that alone, it hugely limits Gill's mobility and what can we do to fix that? You know and then you just start looking at the different possibilities. Look, there's stuff there that can happen so with Gill's stumps, Gill's stumps are very short so they're very short and as short as they could possibly be so that means that a liner has to come up over the knee joint and halfway up her thigh, most of the way up her thigh so Gill doesn't then have any cooling effect from her lower limb. All her biology's messed up because of the way things are so you know the inconvenience of it all, it's huge.

According to Karl, doctors are unsure exactly how the nerves are growing back, and won't know exactly what is happening until they "open Gill up." The surgery will be complicated by the damaged tissue surrounding the nerves, leading to a high risk of infection. Karl stated that there has even been talk of "losing knees". Karl recognises that "it bears on Gill a lot."

G: I absolutely do not want anyone else to experience what I do, both in this country or anywhere, and I'm so acutely aware that you know my peers in other countries don't even have it as good as I do and for me to feel this shit then I can only imagine what their lives are like in Pakistan or Iraq or—and to me it's just—yeah, I'm finding that very hard, of particularly being

back in Australia. I'm feeling so far away from people who absolutely understand that—the full impact of the experience. [...] But just to answer the question of how my situation impacts you?

K: I don't know, our lives are so immersed and merged together that that is just normal. [...] I've never seen as a situation of 'you're disabled'. And it comes with all this extra stuff, the extra stuff just comes with being with you, it's part of what is normal.

I return to Jackson here:

I want to resist explaining away the indeterminate relationship that seems to exist, on the one hand, between the conditions that frame our fate, set our course and determine our identity and, on the other, the unforeseen events, adventitious encounters and improbable developments that characterize the course of an actual life... These are mysteries... (2005, p. 393)

In light of Jackson's words, to describe their relationship with each other and with Gill's disabilities in biological terms, would miss what has been borne out of this fire: the natality of this terror event. Gill and Karl describe their relationship to each other and Gill's disability in strikingly different ways: Gill sees herself as a burden that pushes Karl's life out to "the edges of the day"⁸; Karl, having known Gill only as disabled, describes attending to Gill's needs as their version of 'normal'. He celebrates Gill's purpose and only seems to find life difficult when Gill is in pain, frustrated and unable to work to her purpose. If we return to Arendt's concept of visiting here we can understand the ways in which both Gill and Karl view their interdependence by visiting each other's perspectives. Gill says she makes a clear distinction between the Gill before the bombing and the Gill after the bombing; it is the only way she can make sense of the changes and the impact of the attack. I think this relates not only to the Gill who was career focussed and couldn't imagine such violence ever touching her life, but also to the Gill who was fiercely independent and reliant upon no-one, whose partner did not have to sacrifice his time and needs to cater for her own. This is the fragility I have been referring to for Gill: the fact that she cannot escape her own body and that it places demands not only on her, but also on her intimate partner. It affects their everyday existence. And yet it also fires her soul: the pain; the limitations; the things she would not share with others; the things she does not want anyone else to suffer are the very reminders that keep her going. Gill transforms the past into the present by listening to her body and using it to make a difference, using it to stem violence.

For Phoenix, Gill and Karl, I would argue along with Jackson (2008, pp. 389–390), that there is a struggle-for-being that reflects a desire to be recognised as an acting subject who influences, and makes a difference to, the lives of others. Gill has used her story to 'fund' the work, meaning that Gill does not always find herself sated by the telling. If narratives, as Jackson and Arendt suggest, are a way to insert oneself back into a social world, and if we are concerned with well-being, then we must pay attention to when, where and to whom these stories are performed.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to bring the words and everyday lives of participants to the forefront of academic knowledge pertaining to the human capacity to recover (or not) from violence. Through

⁸ Karl often begins working on his business at 2am after Gill has gone to bed and finishes around 4am.

acts of storytelling I hope to understand how those who have experienced terrorism reinterpret that act to make it meaningful in their present-day life. A common thread revealed by these stories is one of being driven to help other people. Phoenix and Gill both talk of the embodied repercussions of terrorism, as a catalyst to act and reach out to others, rather than an excuse to focus inwardly on their problems. Gill does so at times with little regard for her own comfort. In these cases, the survivor living an ethical life is not just living a comfortable, isolated life but connecting with others and helping those who are less able in some way (Phoenix's disabled anglers, Gill's audience to whom she offers a non-violent pathway, Karl's love for and dedication to Gill).

There is a nuanced relationship between being victim or survivor: as Phoenix said, "we are both". The injuries sustained and disabilities now being lived in the everyday and over time create a form of resilience and vulnerability that is traversed at times like a tightrope: a struggle for well-being that requires Phoenix, Gill and Karl to find a constant balance between that which befalls them and that which they can control. The violence which inexorably changed their lives is now a catalyst for action; it has been reinterpreted as their life's mission to make the world a better place. I would argue that both Gill and Phoenix have realised a sense of humanity, one which they would share with others, as giving and peaceful (non-violent) beings.

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