

Witnessing / Testimony*

Michal Givoni

Since the 1980s, testimony has formed the subject of or provided the analytical framework for numerous books and essays in continental philosophy, cultural studies, literature, art theory and historiography. This prolific literature has canonized testimony as the subversive idiom of oppressed and subaltern groups and as the primary medium of moral sensibility towards victims of atrocities. While these works should be credited for spelling out the ethical stakes and implications of testimony, for the most part they treated testimony as a model of a general crisis of representation and did not venture to probe the concept of witnessing and testimony per se. This essay strives to go beyond existing theorizations of witnessing and testimony and provide a more politicized and historicized account of these notions. Following a discussion of the shortcomings of the current theorization of witnessing and testimony, my aim will be to explicate, by analyzing manifold practices of witnessing and testimony in the 20th century, the ways in which they have become so prominent a mode of moral and political subjectivization.

Testimony, to quote Shoshana Felman, one of its most eminent scholars, is not simply what we think we know it is.¹ With this caveat in mind, I would like to begin by presenting a testimony, a seemingly straightforward one. This testimony was made public by the Israeli group *Breaking the Silence* in July 2009, a few months after Israel's latest attack on Gaza, known as Operation Cast Lead. It was included in a compilation of soldiers' testimonies released by this group of veterans in an attempt "to bring into question the credibility of the official IDF versions" of the war.² This video testimony – one of several accompanying a booklet in which the bulk of the taped testimonies are reproduced – partakes in a particular economy of witnessing. The vast majority of the witnesses whose voices *Breaking the Silence* works to bring to the public discourse remain anonymous. In the group's publication, their testimonies are broken down into thematic fragments, so that often several testimonies, though not explicitly related to one another, have actually been produced by one sole eyewitness. The witnesses, comprising both active duty and reserve soldiers, rarely voice any opposition to Israel's actions during the attack on the Gaza strip or to the occupation at large. They also typically do not divulge feelings and only occasionally express revulsion, shame, remorse, or any critical attitude towards the actions in which they partook. Their testimonies are replete with military jargon and the witnesses never once proclaim an intention to refuse to serve in the occupied territories if they are called upon again to do so.

* I am grateful to Ariella Azoulay, Adi Ophir, and the anonymous reviewer for *Mafté'akh* for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this essay.

Michal Givoni, The department of Politics and Government, Ben Gurion University, and the department of International Relations, the Hebrew University



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49ReWkv0k5U>

What is so curious about this testimony and others of its kind is that their immediate grip seems to be little affected by the compelling critiques they provoke. This first-person account attests to the fact that testimony is an utterance whose message lies less in what is said than in what transpires. This is clearly borne out by Israel's dual response to *Breaking the Silence's* report: while IDF spokespersons rejected the testimonies for their lack of credibility, claiming that they can neither be corroborated nor refuted, Israeli officials nonetheless pressured the group's international donors to cut their funding for what was obviously regarded as a dangerous venture. This is the enigma of testimony in a nutshell: though the soldiers' testimonies could easily be dismissed as either epistemically invalid or aesthetically dull and insufficiently engaged, depending on one's political position; and although, coming in the wake of a military campaign whose excessive use of violence was deliberately framed as an open secret, these testimonies revealed very little that was not already professed by Israeli politicians, broadcast live on Israeli television, and thoroughly justified by Israeli philosophers; still, these testimonies worked – as a powerful reminder of horrible crimes for some, and an ominous sign of dissension for others.

The anxious response elicited by these seemingly innocuous testimonies reveals an elementary truth about testimony. No matter what it recounts and how it is performed, testimony is an event in which the responsibility of the witness – and only rarely his or hers alone – is at play. Testimony is a speech-act that brings moral and political subjects into being, sometimes almost in spite of themselves; it is one of the most prevalent devices available today for individuals to come to grips with moral obligations. Before it is a transmission of a message – of a story, of values, or of critique – testimony puts in motion a rather minimalist operational code that consists in drawing victims, perpetrators, and spectators or hearers into direct confrontation with political evil. The result of this

confrontation and the particular modes in which it is processed (i.e. denial, concealment, repression, or affirmation) matter less: what turns testimony into a distinct form of action is the multilayered bonds that it effects between a witness, a public and an (often internal) other.³ This explains why testimony is rarely considered redundant even if the event it describes has been thoroughly documented, and why the best way to neutralize it is not to counter its factual assertions but rather to set another testimony against it. More than just a piece of evidence, testimony marks the inscription of the political in an array of truth games, in which truth is conceived not as an end in itself but as a medium for ethical and political transformation.

In our so-called “era of the witness”,⁴ then, testimony is a ritual whose moral and political meaning is, at least to some extent, given in advance. Bold or laconic, informative or subversive, testimony is ineluctably the idiom in which individuals speak back to power. If testimony is often exploited and mimicked by states and perpetrators this is because it is one of the main terrains of confrontation between government and the governed and one of the most prevalent formats of dissident claims. More than just a political instrument put to use by individuals, testimony is a practice that forges new concerns, commitments, and identities. It lies beyond good and evil and operates in similar ways on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, as well as on direct and second-degree witnesses insofar as its performance is geared to generate a certain attentiveness – often ephemeral and unpredictable – that forms a necessary condition for moral concern and political engagement, though by no means a sufficient one.

The effort to connect a witness, a public, and an other distinguishes what can be referred to as acts of testimony from more familiar eyewitness accounts that rarely address the public in its capacity to act and whose scope is limited to that which is immediately tangible, comprehensible, and verifiable. With respect to this ubiquitous form of testimony, which was qualified by some observers as our primary source of empirical knowledge,⁵ testimonies that bear witness to the inhuman, the atrocious, and the elusive have come to form a distinct kind of practice. For our purposes, it matters less whether public acts of testimony derive from a social archetype of eyewitnessing or are incommensurable with it;⁶ it is enough to note the institutionalization of the distinction between these two types of testimony and their disparate *modi operandi*.

From this analytic perspective, testimony crosses the threshold of politicization when it is not just an act that realizes a singular instance of witnessing but rather, and primarily, a vehicle for creating witnesses, in the plural. It rises above the mass of ordinary first-person accounts when the physical presence of the witness, whether concrete or virtual, is assigned the task of rendering an event disturbing, rather than merely tangible. Testimony becomes more than a routinized social institution when it does not presuppose the existence of an audience that may receive the deposition and of a dialogic encounter in which it can be interpreted so much as it aims to create and expand these.⁷ In this sense, politicized testimony is a phrase whose addressees and addressors alike are always in the making, even when its reception has not been favorable or when its publicity is – temporally – restricted.

It ceases to be a trivial report when the witness and the public she addresses morph into one another, with the witness incarnating an entire group of citizens, and her audience caught up in an obligation to relate and respond to and to reproduce her testimony.

This intrinsic logic of testimony – the minimal formal requisites that may be activated by its consumers as much as by its producers but must be set in motion in order for this practice to have any political meaning – becomes fully decipherable when testimony is considered alongside the notion of indifference, which forms its backdrop and *raison-d'être*. Testimony, which is often accompanied by slogans such as “that the world may know”, is ascribed the unending task of expanding the political imagination that indifference depletes and retying the social bonds it has undone. It is first and foremost an act of moral weaving, an attempt to (re)establish a human relation where one is denied or presumed to be nonexistent.

Testimony, in other words, has an objective quality. The particular rationality encoded in it is paradoxically reaffirmed not only by its most ardent enemies but also by its most resounding failures. If testimonies end up fueling discursive hegemonies instead of undermining them this is because they translate the political into an empirical, infinitely minute, and all-too-human scale, which overshadows structures of power and domination; they are easily co-opted because of their underlying commitment, in the concise phrasing of Alain Brossat, to bring to light the reality of the “waste of the historical and political Order”.⁸ If testimonies are prone to spread indifference instead of dissipating it this is because they fall victim to the response that they so forcefully demand and numb the moral sense of hyper-irritated spectators; their moral effect is diluted because they now interpellate ever-growing audiences in a globalized public space, in an ever-increasing intensity and pace.

Integral as testimony has become to our tacit moral and political knowledge, it remains a rather murky concept. Since the last third of the twentieth century testimony has enjoyed unprecedented popularity as a philosophical theme, an artistic gesture, and a political strategy. The label ‘testimony’ is currently in inflated use, designating much more than eyewitness accounts: it is attached to literary genres, to informative reports on distant atrocities, and to works of art. Nor is there any immediate similarity between the various first-person relations that have come to be regarded as legitimate testimonies: they are both fictional and documentary, composed by a direct witness or by a distant spectator; some of them push the witness to the fore and others cross her out. The notion of testimony seems to have spilled into its semantic field and become indistinguishable from notions such as witnessing and bearing witness. Although it is one of the most prominent concepts in the toolkit of critical thought, the actual contours of testimony as a political operation remain vague.

The successful takeover by witnessing of other modes of political agency calls for a conceptual reconsideration of testimony that is both sensitive to the open-ended nature of this concept and more meticulous in spelling out its political workings. Testimony without

a witness imposes itself as the point of departure of such an inquiry into testimony and the political because it forces us to revisit “what we think we know” about testimony. What is at issue is not just the familiar form of eyewitnessing, which relies on the witness’ proclamation of presence as a procedure of factual validation and on his self-exposure as a guarantee of truthfulness. The withdrawal of the figure of the witness discernable in some public acts of testimony by, for example, veteran soldiers, aid workers, and human rights practitioners also casts critical light on more elaborate conceptualizations of testimony. It is, more specifically, at odds with sociological and cultural analyses of testimony, such as those advanced by Renaud Dulong and Annette Wieviorka, which set the aesthetics of testimony as a key to its political operation. The diminishing of the witness indicates that the corporal presence of the witness, valuable as it may be in bridging past occurrences and their present narration and in bringing distant spectators into “retro-contact” with the event, cannot alone account for making testimony so compelling.⁹ Similarly, it acts as a reminder of the fact that so much as it relies on the exaltation of the individual, testimony is more than just a carrier of an “ideology of intimacy” that “transforms political categories into psychological ones”.¹⁰ But even more significantly, the claim that the effects of testimony are not necessarily tethered to an idiosyncratic figure of a witness calls into question the theoretical paradigm that reinvented testimony as a moral act and was most keenly aware of its political implications. It invites a closer examination of the attempt made by poststructuralist thinkers to unravel the harmfulness of testimony construed as evidence and to contest its epistemic domination by articulating the moral, literary, and psychic performativity of witnessing.

I. Testimony Theory and the Political

For poststructuralist thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Shoshana Felman, and Giorgio Agamben and for psychoanalysts such as Dori Laub, testimony represented an impossible and yet a necessary act. Rather than a form of evidence or a source of information, it was a gesture that laid bare the limits of knowledge, representation, and justice by enacting traumatic and ineffable experiences. In the shadow of the Holocaust and under its moral onus, testimony was seen as an incarnation of a loss: the loss, as Felman has put it, “of voice, of life, of knowledge, of awareness, of truth, of the capacity to feel, of the capacity to speak”.¹¹ Testimony was not to be confounded with traditional forms of storytelling whose assumption of perfect correspondence between history, memory, and narrative was invalidated in the face of limit experiences of violence and destitution. It aimed less at a reconstruction of historical occurrences than at the disclosure of their existential, moral, and psychic repercussions. The crux of testimony was to be extracted from its margins: from narration gaps, lapses of memory, and tremblings of voice that provided a glimpse of the catastrophe as an event that precludes witnessing.

Heavily inspired by the psychoanalytic notion of trauma (and its host of related notions, such as symptom, return, and compulsion), Felman and Laub’s approach to testimony, and

to a certain extent Lyotard's, abolished the temporal and ontological gap that is usually presumed to separate testimony from the event. For them, acts of testimony both staged and set in motion the crisis of witnessing that formed the distinctive feature of genocide and other atrocities. Testimony disclosed the attack on the human capacity to comprehend, to render meaningful, and to share the experience, which, by virtue of the unique perspective put forward by survivors' accounts, came to pass as the kernel of the catastrophe and its most destructive weapon. Testimony was a material trace of the disaster – a “performative speech act”¹² that brought buried memories into being and represented forgotten or mute victims as such. It was a vestige of the psychic and social destruction wrought by violence and oppression, rather than a mere depiction of their horrors. Ontologically reconfigured, testimony was the moral reaction that corresponded to the never-ending character of a political violence that strove to obliterate its own traces. A private, even intimate gesture of memory, it was nevertheless construed as the primary form of struggle against the always-imminent realization of murderous political projects.

In this theoretical construction, testimonies and eyewitness accounts did not necessarily overlap. Testimonies were not to be authenticated on the basis of actual presence, unhindered observation, and comprehensive reporting. Instead, the validity of testimony and the authority of the witness stemmed, in the words of Agamben, from the “capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak”.¹³ Testimony was to give voice to a certain lacuna of representation that was generated by the moral and political order that reigned in the concentration camps, and has since then lurked in the horizon of contemporary politics. For Agamben, this lacuna carried the name of the *Muselmann*, a human being who was stripped of his capacities of speech and comprehension and led a deplorable existence of “bare life”; his conjuring now stood for the mission and *raison d'être* of testimony. By bringing such a laden silence to the fore, testimony was supposed to capture an ontological predicament and not just a political constellation. Bearing witness to the catastrophe was at the same time a recalling of the boundaries of discursive genres (Lyotard), of the false promise of universality (Lyotard and Felman), and of the fragile intimacy between the speaking being and the living being (Agamben). For this reason, testimony could be construed as an action that wedded the memory of past atrocities to the anticipation of future ones – as a therapeutic device that was inescapably also “a critical activity”.¹⁴

Since according to testimony theory it was the resurrection of unfathomable wrongs rather than physical proximity to the events that granted the witness her claim to truth, the right and the obligation to bear witness fell equally on eyewitnesses and indirect ones. Elevated from a private and discrete deed to a social configuration, and construed as the foundation of a new pedagogy, testimony was conceived to be operating both as an arena of witnessing and as its medium. The aim of testimonial communications for Felman and Laub was not to transmit judgments but primarily to generate transference of unsettling experiences. In becoming witnesses, the hearers and spectators of testimony were to relive the disintegration – and the recovery – of the voice of the victims, whose testimonies were ascribed a visceral, contaminating effect.¹⁵ Testimonies by direct witnesses and secondhand

ones alike could, in principle, preserve a trace of the traumatic event.¹⁶ Both were taken to exemplify the way in which “[t]he witness, confronted with the sublime object [i.e. the horrible reality of oppression or violence] is rendered...speechless and is nonetheless compelled to speak...”¹⁷

Thus, testimony theory constructed witnessing and testimony as imperatives that drew their force from other intimations, signs, and testimonies. More radically still, it cast them as the sole remnants (in Agamben’s words) of ethics, and as the scene of its epochal metamorphosis. In Agamben’s view, witnessing and testimony marked the shattering of traditional ethical doctrines by the radical moral ambiguity that characterized the world of the concentration camps, whose emblem was the grey zone described by Primo Levi. Confronted by a political space in which the human and the inhuman, and innocence and guilt had become indistinguishable, normative ethics, premised on a clear distinction between good and evil and on an essentialist qualification of the human, was irrecoverably invalidated. For Agamben (as, in a different theoretical register, for Lyotard), the morally adequate response to the impotence of ethics after Auschwitz was to bear witness to its failure. This was to be done by shifting the weight of ethics to acts of testimony, a “new ethical territory” guided solely by concern for the victims while at the same time not grounded in any firm principles or rules.¹⁸

While this theoretical paradigm should be credited for bringing the moral and the political closer together, it has largely left out some of the most crucial aspects of the contemporary politics of testimony. For the most part, poststructuralist thinkers ignored the procedures, stakes, and dilemmas of witnessing in less consensual contexts and, more particularly, the political economy of witnessing in postcolonial settings, where testimony still involved traditional forms of storytelling and where the claim to cognitive truth had a much larger share. Conspicuously absent from this theoretical account were, for example, first-person narratives by members of indigenous groups, which came to constitute the most prolific literary genre in Latin America, known as *testimonio*.¹⁹ Transcribed, edited, and brought to press by journalists and writers, these testimonies were increasingly used since the nineteen sixties to mobilize support for the cause of oppressed minorities. A simulacrum of an oral narrative, *testimonio* was a literary fabrication as much as a truthful document.²⁰ Unlike the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, it did not seek identification and empathy so much as solidarity and action, setting the stakes placed on the accuracy of the life story at a much higher level than testimony theory was willing to admit.

Moreover, since its notion of testimony was premised on the notion of trauma and presupposed that witnessing was precluded while atrocities raged and could only take place retroactively, testimony theory could not grasp the new forms of humanitarian witnessing that took place in real time, and ventured to curb violent events. The ethics of witnessing that drew its impetus from the Holocaust and set this event as a philosophical and political paradigm was incapable of conceiving of, let alone addressing, the challenges involved in a global formation of witnessing, which was contemporaneous to the emergency and

faced not one singular catastrophe but a host of political disasters all at once. Testimony theory made no attempt to draw out the stakes and implications of the new role of witnessing as the infrastructure of a cosmopolitical citizenship.²¹ Rather than engaging with global practices of testimony that burgeoned at precisely the same moment when the theorization of testimony was taking shape, it carried on alongside them, as though on a parallel track.

From the poststructuralist perspective, the question of testimony, as Adi Ophir has noted in a slightly different context, was primarily “a metonym for the [problem of the] representation of reality in general”, a problem that the Holocaust both modeled and epitomized.²² It might be said that while this approach may be open to criticism for its affirmation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its disregard for actually existing testimony is excusable, as it never set out to analyze testimony per se, let alone its intrinsic political and public dimensions. Yet testimony theory has been cut off from the political in a more fundamental and more disturbing way. In its attempt to highlight the idiosyncratic voice of the witness and the visceral character of testimony, it has turned a blind eye to the rationalities with which testimony itself is permeated. By regarding testimony as, in Felman’s words, “the uniqueness of the *performance of a story* which... cannot be carried out by anybody else”, it ignored the routinization of testimony as a practice whose meaning is immediately transparent to its producers and audience.²³ While striving to rescue a moral singularity not only from the rule of normative ethics but also from the regulation of discursive structures (as illustrated notably in Agamben’s positioning of testimony “between *langue* and its taking place”, as the potentiality to speak, and to speak otherwise),²⁴ this philosophical project thus failed to account for the contemporary prominence of testimony as the ethical paradigm of our political culture.

Obscuring the institutionalization of testimony was not only its portrayal as an autobiographical exception – to knowledge and power, to discourse and the archive; to no lesser extent, the advent of testimony as a major political strategy and mode of interpellation was eclipsed by a theoretical drifting that equated testimony with the basic structure of subjectivity. This was most explicitly articulated by Agamben’s claim that the subject was always-already a witness to the loss of a unique corporeality that the appropriation of language entailed, and that consequently, to be a subject and to be a witness meant one and the same thing.²⁵ The appropriation of the notions of witnessing and testimony as an analytical framework but also as a heuristic tool designed to put forward an alternative to the metaphysics of the subject (which also underlay the work of Kelly Oliver and, more subtly, Felman and Laub’s book), blurred the political specificity of testimony.²⁶ By setting witnessing and testimony as a metonym for the (deconstructed) subject, this philosophical argument drew attention away from their role as a *particular* mode of political subjectivization and public action.

This failure to conceive of testimony as a political institution calls for a more nuanced theorization that endorses the view of testimony as an archetype of moral action and as

the place of ethics in contemporary culture, and yet restores the moral turn that testimony has taken to its place in history and politics. Instead of construing testimony as either the basis for history and law or as their limit, such an approach will examine how it has become a moral-political practice in its own right and how it has come to occupy such an entrenched position in the public sphere. This theoretical shift is necessary because the political dimension of testimony is not calcified in a basic structure; it is made and remade, defended and reinvented, by agents who perform and produce testimonies. Moreover, a strictly philosophical definition of testimony risks obscuring some of the most crucial consequences of testimony's politicization in the twentieth century: its status as a contested concept, a multifarious practice, but also an increasingly regulated gesture.

In what follows I will trace the broad outlines of an alternative inquiry that does not seek to provide a definition of testimony so much as to pry open its black box. But first, it is necessary to take a short detour through the etymologies of the terms 'witnessing' and 'testimony' and the more remote practices with which they have been associated. The ancient forms of witnessing and testimony, I argue, shed light on the matrix in which political witnessing have taken shape and have been rendered both meaningful and problematic.

II. The Genealogies of Witnessing and Testimony

Witnessing and testimony have a glorious genealogy spanning religion, historiography, law, and science. The word 'testimony' evolved from the Latin root *testis*, whose literal meaning is "one present as a third party". In Roman law, the word *testis* referred both to the witness who was present in a legal transaction in order to validate it, and to the witness who testified in court. It was only at a much later stage, however, that this external, third-party position of the juridical witness morphed into the familiar institution of eyewitnessing and was invested with the latter's rigid epistemic guarantees. Until the fifteenth century, juridical witnesses were held to testify "to their faith in the person in question" rather than, or in addition to, the facts of the case at hand.²⁷ Following the colonial conquests and the diffusion of travel accounts about The New World, the interpretation of testimony as a truthful report whose unique source of validity was its underlying first-hand experience gained priority over this ethical modality of testimony. The center of gravity of testimony shifted from the public appearance of the witness in the moment of testifying, to the past occurrence that his discourse was supposed to reconstruct.²⁸ With the emergence of experimental science in the seventeenth century, the juridical model of factual witnessing migrated, together with its elaborate methods for the evaluation of testimonies, to the laboratories and forums of the new savants.²⁹

The polysemy of testimony is reinforced by other archaic notions that pertain to its semantic field. Another Latin word for witness, *superstes*, construed the witness as the one who attends an event and subsists beyond it, thus merging the witness and the survivor

into one figure.³⁰ The paradigmatic witness in this context would not be the third party who remains untarnished by a conflict she observes from the sidelines, but rather the one who lives through an ordeal and testifies to her own experience of anxiety and loss. As Didier Fassin writes in relation to the original distinction between the *testis* and the *superstes*, “The truth of the *testis*, expressed in the third person, is deemed objective. The truth of the *superstes*, expressed in the first person, is deemed subjective. The latter has merit by virtue of the affects it involves, the former by virtue of those it eliminates”.³¹ *Arbiter* is yet another ancient appellation, associating the witness with the arbitrator who adjudicates in a dispute that was not foreseen and regulated by the law. Used to denote a clandestine witness who sees without been seen, the term *arbiter* was related to a particular form of judgment, which, in the absence of a legal rule, was to be guided solely by the circumstances of the case.³²

The Greek word for witness, *martus* (*martyr*), evinces yet another set of relations between truth and action, body and sign. The testimony of the martyr, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, inverts the meaning of testimony insofar as it does not “designate an action of speech, the oral report of an eyewitness about a fact to which he was witness”, becoming instead “the action itself as it attests outside of himself, to the interior man, to his conviction, to his faith”.³³ In early Christianity, the notion of martyrdom was associated with the “blood witnesses”, killed for their confessions of faith.³⁴ With the coming of peace to the church in the fourth and fifth centuries, martyrdom was spiritualized and correlated with the asceticism of monks and bishops, while the cult of the historic martyrs prospered.

These various etymologies of the witness demonstrate, as Didier Fassin claims, that the “witness figure is less homogeneous than is often suggested”.³⁵ Yet although there are analogies between contemporary testimonies and historical ones, testimonies in the public sphere are not simply permutations of these elementary types of witnessing. The contemporary relevance of these archaic forms stems from the fact that the gaps between *testis*, *superstes*, *arbiter*, and *martyr* reflect the hermeneutic space in which political testimonies are enacted, rather than their final form. Once testimonial discourses are examined alongside the prolific literature on testimony, it becomes apparent that testimonies are bound to and defined by structural ambiguities that were to some extent prefigured in the multiple renditions of witnessing in the classical age. They vacillate between a detached reporting and a thick narration of experience; between the transmission of facts and the expression of suspicion; between the precision of the statement and the visibility of the act; between prolonged observation that sets the conditions for the production of truth-claims, and self-destruction that is perceived as the ultimate sign of truth. This clash between conflicting interpretations of what witnessing entails, which unsettles any form of witnessing that is based on fact (*testis*), experience (*superstes*) or action (*martyr*) alone, is the distinguishing feature of the political practice of testimony, setting it apart from other forms of witnessing. Indeed, it is one of the most important consequences of the migration of testimony from the legal and scientific domains to the political public sphere.

The unsettled nature of testimonial truth is not immediately visible in the text of political testimonies. It transpires in the ethical reflection that has accompanied the politicization of testimony in the twentieth century and in the public controversies that build on and feed it. These controversies pertain not only to particular testimonies and their assertions; triggered by attempts to undermine the credibility of specific testimonies, they concern the very presuppositions of the practice of testimony – its *saying* and not only its *said*. These controversies stem not – as Renauld Dulong observed – from the fact that the truth-claim of testimonies is at odds with the plurality characteristic of the public sphere,³⁶ but rather from the manifold interpretations to which the notion and the practice of testimony are susceptible.

The history of political witnessing is, therefore, the history of its construction as a problem – whether as a form of documentation that runs the risk of hyperbole, a narrative that cannot be articulated, an act that aggravates the evil it sets out to counter, or an impossible but unavoidable utterance. The ascent of testimony has been inseparable from the sustained analysis of its intrinsic quandaries and from the invention of literary, artistic, and political devices designed to contain the troubles of witnessing. The practice of political testimony presupposed that the presence in and observation and reporting of wars and atrocities are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for witnessing: additional requirements need to be satisfied for someone to become a genuine and worthy witness to horrible political events. This is not to say that spontaneous testimonies, unencumbered by the predicaments of witnessing, were no longer in circulation, but rather that testimonies guided by a moral and political ambition were framed, designed, and reflected upon in an unprecedented manner.

The democratization of testimony and its transformation, following the spread of literacy, into an action that crosses class boundaries have been regulated by regimes of witnessing that prescribe, in manifold ways, how one becomes a witness, what an authentic testimony is, and what it strives to achieve. Though engaging in the most personal and idiosyncratic intervention in the public sphere, she who bears witness also thereby inscribes herself in a codified tradition that not only exalts witnessing but also lays down the conventional modes of performing and interpreting it. The contemporary witness is rarely the sole author of her testimony: her deposition is shaped by experts and institutions that record, classify, archive, publish, and disseminate testimonies, and by tacit norms, aesthetic models, and political expectations that inform both the production of testimony and its reception. The witness and his immediate witness – the one who brings testimony into existence and often frames the conditions for its extraction, publication, and circulation – are therefore not so far apart: they occupy two closely related positions in a formation of witnessing encompassing implicit rules of testimony that shape particular depositions and acts of witnessing in advance.

While the prominence that testimony currently enjoys is often related to the evolution of media technologies that support and expand witnessing and of culture of self-exposure

that make first-person narratives so appealing, it is also the outcome of testimony's transformation into a collective, reflected-upon, and more rationalized endeavor. In addition to the more apparent factors outlined above, testimony owes its prominence as a political tool to the interpretative apparatuses in which it has been embedded and to the ethical reasoning to which it has given rise, which evolved hand in hand with the quandaries of witnessing and the controversies that it unleashed. A close examination of the ethics of testimony in the twentieth century reveals that the culture of testimony is a juxtaposition of disparate paradigms of witnessing, which are often lost behind the homogenous and hegemonic image of the "age of testimony". These paradigms incarnate various meanings of witnessing and testimony, but they diverge above all in the challenges and quandaries that they seek to address. It is to these paradigms that I wish to turn now by describing the broad outlines of three major formations of witnessing and their underlying tensions.

III. The Predicaments of Witnessing and Testimony

As that period in which testimonies have not only been produced in greater numbers and rates but also in more sophisticated, reflexive, and contested forms, the age of testimony began with the First World War and reached its apotheosis in humanitarian action and human rights activism following the end of the cold war. The Great War generated a flood of veterans' writings that turned testimony into a collective phenomenon and marked it as a new literary genre. At the same time, it also brought about the first attempt to demarcate a corpus of testimonies that included both fictional narratives and eyewitness accounts of the war; to formulate a method for their evaluation; to substantiate the truth value of testimony; and to define its distinctive position in the public sphere. Published in 1929, Jean Norton Cru's monumental tome *Témoins* [*Witnesses*] was an annotated compilation and a methodical review of some three hundred combatants' books that were published in French during and after WWI.³⁷ Conceived as a service to future historians, Cru's classification of witnesses' accounts had an immediate political resonance by virtue of bringing witnesses together for the first time as a public that shared not just memories and experiences but also an ethos and a mode of address. The mission Cru had set himself was to reinforce the distinction between "relations of narrators who acted and lived the facts", and "stories of spectators", whose glorification of war was to be outbalanced by the combatants' depiction of its grim reality.³⁸ By elevating the impressions of individual witnesses into a collective voice, his catalog of testimonies would, he believed, "impart to them the force and the influence that they cannot have but by the grouping of voices from the front, the only ones authorized to speak of the war not as an art but as a human phenomenon".³⁹

Himself an ex-combatant, Cru formulated a set of criteria for evaluating the quality and credibility of war testimonies. Charged with the mission of imparting the combatants' experience of the war, testimonies were not to be evaluated by their documentary qualities

or their literary value alone but rather by their ability to transmit “a faithful image of a life that was lived”.⁴⁰ While engaging in a painstaking corroboration of facts, Cru condemned the drift towards the sensational and the legendary in war accounts, and on this ground rejected some of the most admired war novels of the period. Yet factual veracity as embodied in the accuracy of details – places, times, and events – was for him only a guarantee of the quality of testimony, whose true substance lay in the “psychological facts” that it was capable of transmitting – perceived as “the very essence of the war”.⁴¹ Ranked at the top of Cru’s scale were the diary notes taken in the heat of events, as well as accounts written by physicians and other medical workers who, by virtue of their proximity to the wounded, “could provide precious documents on the psychology of man in war”.⁴²

The naturalistic model of testimony put forward by Cru did not reflect the combatants’ own aesthetic priorities. Indeed, Cru’s attempt to work out a politically effective concept of testimony clashed with the literary frame of judgment within which the combatants’ books were usually received. In the debate that followed the publication of *Témoins* in 1929, some of Cru’s disqualified witnesses denigrated his esteem for “dated and certified facts” and “bare documents”, upholding instead the creative liberty and mobilizing potential of art.⁴³ Most of the combatant-writers, intellectuals, and literary critics involved in “Jean Norton Cru’s affair”, to use the suggestive phrase of Frédéric Rousseau, regarded testimony and literature as mutually exclusive and either rejected or simply ignored the subtleties of Cru’s position, namely, that literary works provided legitimate testimony as long as they remained loyal to the actual experience of their authors. What underlay the critics’ defense of literature – which shared in Cru’s basic assumption that witness accounts could play a significant role in the prevention of war – was actually one of the first interrogations of the fundamentals of public testimony: What can be counted a (truthful) testimony? What is the relation between testimony’s veracity and its efficacy? And where does the force of testimony reside?⁴⁴

The sifting and classification of testimonies that were central to Cru’s project would be inconceivable in the realm of survivors’ testimonies, in which every testimony is considered valuable either as a therapeutic, a pedagogical, or a political instrument.⁴⁵ For Holocaust survivor witnesses, who have engaged with the challenges of witnessing in their testimonies and reflexive essays, as well as for the experts and institutions involved in the production, collection, or dissemination of survivors’ testimonies, the anxieties associated with witnessing were of an altogether different sort. Rather than to the falsifications of an eager speech, they related to the silences forced by death, trauma, and torture – silences that were said to last long after the violence subsided, haunting the survivors, protracting their suffering, and reaffirming the campaign of annihilation that had been waged against them. It was mainly in relation to these silences that testimony was variably perceived as a moral duty, a means of survival, a mode of resistance, and a strategy of prevention.

Charged with the mission of sustaining, rather than undoing this enduring mark of the catastrophe, survivors’ accounts gave rise to a new modality of testimony. Survivors’

witnessing has brought the figure of the witness to the fore, casting the content of the testimony and the information relayed in it as secondary to the act of bearing witness.⁴⁶ Prominent witnesses-writers such as Primo Levi, Charlot Delbo, and Paul Celan shared a certain understanding of witnessing as a tormented, morally ambiguous, and yet inevitable gesture that could not remain transparent and had to be made present in testimonial writing. They often interpreted their testimonies as witnessing by proxy – as a debt paid to the dead, the most well-informed witnesses, whose testimony was forever lost. In the famous words of Primo Levi,

We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses... We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the 'Muslims,' the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance.⁴⁷

Further enhanced by the adoption of video technologies that made it possible to record testimony as it unfolded, the process of witnessing was likewise established as the main preoccupation of a vast institutional apparatus. Whereas the regulation of testimony had previously concentrated, as Cru's case makes manifest, on the evaluation of testimonial accounts, this apparatus of witnessing sought to regulate the modes of becoming a witness rather than their end products. Concomitantly, initiatives specializing in the collection of testimonies, Holocaust museums, and educational projects similarly framed the witness as a lone figure, insulating her testimony from other testimonies and rendering it ethically and pedagogically meaningful in its own right.⁴⁸ Designed to preserve and transmit what was perceived as a unique story, or, alternatively, to enact the cracks and fissures that erode epistemic communality and the very institution of witnessing, survivors' accounts were rarely cast as instances of one collective voice. In those cases in which testimonies were used to shore up a political claim they were usually given over to non-witness interpreters in a way that precluded their coalescence into an autonomous public position.

In the shadow of the Holocaust, then, testimony has been reinterpreted as a performance that was elicited by psychotherapists, staged by filmmakers and curators, and utilized by politicians and ideological apparatuses. This evolution followed several parallel trajectories, leading to divergent conceptualizations of the challenges and merits of survivors' testimonies and of their adequate modes of execution.⁴⁹ The Eichmann trial (1961) marked the first strategic exploitation of Holocaust testimonies in the political sphere. Survivors whose testimonies had no direct bearing on the deeds of the accused, who were carefully selected to represent various social classes and Jewish diasporas, were called to testify for the prosecution in an attempt to convey a tangible, concrete image of the Holocaust to the world and to the younger Israeli generation – or in the words of the prosecutor Gideon Hausner “to superimpose on a phantom a dimension of reality”.⁵⁰

The personification of the Holocaust was further enhanced by the foundation in 1979 of what would become the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University. Much like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, filmed around the same period, the Fortunoff Archive embodied and fostered a prolific exchange between the theory and the practice of testimony. Inspired by psychoanalytic insights regarding the mechanisms of trauma and the therapeutic potential of testimony, the founders of the Yale project conceived the latter as a clinical device, which, if adequately crafted, would let the past "emerge and be dealt with".⁵¹ Through video interviews carried out by psychotherapists who would act as emphatic listeners, witnessing, they assumed, "could itself become a historical event".⁵² Rather than simply reproducing painful memories, testimony would be the unpredictable process in which "the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the event [would be] given birth to".⁵³

While similarly severing testimony from the realm of evidence, the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994 following his work on the film *Schindler's List*, advanced a different and more popular variation of witnessing. Animated by the effort to collect as many testimonies as possible as survivors die out, and maintaining that each survivor has a unique story to tell, this witnessing endeavor acquired industrial dimensions, producing nearly fifty two thousand video testimonies in thirty two languages.⁵⁴ The interviews conducted by the Foundation in many different parts of the world followed a strict protocol and evinced a similar format. They were to culminate in a message addressed to the next generations, a scene which the survivor's family members were invited to join. Reminiscent of the closing scene of *Schindler's List*, the happy-end towards which the testimonial narration was designed to lead set recovery and salvation as its leitmotiv.⁵⁵

Thus, the debate about the usefulness of survivors' testimonies – featuring skeptical historians who maintained that the hegemony of testimony obstructs knowledge of the Holocaust – concealed another debate, in which the merit of testimony was presupposed while the appropriate modes of its translation into practice was contested.⁵⁶ A small part of a vast and eclectic endeavor, the projects described above nonetheless represent the major competing archetypes of survivors' witnessing, variably cast as a political spectacle, an acting out and working through of traumatic memories, or a Hollywood-style melodrama.

Relative to this modality of testimony based on eyewitnessing, the forms and concerns of humanitarian witnessing were of an altogether different order. When humanitarian organizations and human rights activists set witnessing and testimony as one of their guiding principles in the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies, this commitment was too readily associated with the mediatized exposure of underreported facts about distant crises. In fact, humanitarian witnessing has encompassed a much subtler, more ambitious and multilayered set of practices than its association with truth-telling implies. Rather than unfolding as one single action, it has consisted of an assemblage of deeds, statements, and representations undertaken by various agents – a heterogeneous and often conflicting combination of proximity to and emphatic encounter with distant victims, collection and

dissemination of epidemiological data and forensic findings, documentation of human rights violations, autobiographical writing, and the production and circulation of images of suffering and outspoken statements. Translated into a broad array of practices, witnessing in the humanitarian sphere was more openly reflexive and controversial, but also less firmly bound to one singular witness, than other forms of public witnessing.⁵⁷ While establishing witnessing as the primary ethical configuration of the age of globalization, and while allocating the public an active and essential role in its actualization, transnational humanitarianism at the same time also completed the transition of witnessing into a standardized and constructed action. Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman have claimed that humanitarian organizations “replace the first-hand witness, who speaks of his or her direct experience, with second-hand testimony by parties who report what they have seen and heard”.⁵⁸ But even when it transmitted indirect impressions, witnessing in the humanitarian version no longer had the eyewitness as its centerpiece. Indeed, it only occasionally involved a single eyewitness acting in the capacity of an author and narrator of testimony.

Humanitarian testimony emerged in tandem with legal, medical, logistic, and other kinds of expertise that broadened the scope of Western intervention in Third World emergencies and distant atrocities. It was, as the humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières would later put it, “an inseparable supplement to the medical action” as well as to other Western techniques exported to the global borderlands.⁵⁹ Through their association with the practice of medicine, nutrition, law, education, and engineering, witnessing and testimony were invested with an ethical function – ethical in the Foucauldian sense of pertaining to the care for and cultivation of the self – which was inseparable from their moral-political one. For the castigated liberal professions, they provided a conduit for the fashioning and cultivation of the self – a tested procedure for the duplication of the expert-technician by a sensitive and humanized persona. During the nineteen seventies, when the non-governmental humanitarian endeavor was just starting to gather momentum, going on a mission to an underdeveloped country or a crisis zone, observing firsthand the plight of the victims, getting to know their culture and their cause, and reporting on one’s impressions upon one’s return were construed by aid workers as the elementary forms of witnessing.⁶⁰ Broken down into this set of standard practices, humanitarian witnessing played a part in the re-enchantment of the liberal professions, as it was starting to claim itself a place in the political sphere.

The expert-witness was therefore the pivot of the humanitarian regime of witnessing; its product as well as its presupposition. Accordingly, when human rights groups and later humanitarian organizations started to testify more regularly about distant crises and cases of oppression, their testimonies were constructed, more often than not, as factual reports that alluded to, and sometimes squarely adopted, the scientific discourse. The documentation of basic needs, raw suffering, and individual and collective distress, which was formatted to fit human rights or humanitarian claims, has been the most prevalent form of humanitarian testimony. In terms of the latter’s public profile, these carefully crafted

reports, whose production and dissemination made growing use of media consultants, overshadowed the eyewitness accounts delivered by volunteers to more limited audiences. Criticized for depoliticizing crises and producing an a-historic, simplified, and denigrating image of their victims – treated and portrayed, as Liisa Malkki has put it, as “anonymous corporeality”⁶¹ – these humanitarian truth-claims were nonetheless immersed in politics. Reenacting the “humanitarian narrative” that dated from the eighteenth century, their factual commitment took on a particular meaning vis-à-vis the contemporary political discourse of the cold war.⁶² Indeed, the attempt to create a counterweight to the Manichean worldview and the ideological bias characteristic of the cold war may explain why empirical reports on distant suffering were framed as acts of testimony in the first place. Closely related to liberal critiques of totalitarianism, the humanitarian practice of bearing witness did more than simply reflect the shift from a programmatic and ideological politics to a confined and concrete concern with the alleviation of social and political evils. By virtue of their affiliation with specialized practices of rescue and administration of life, with organized spaces such as the refugee camp, and with new logistic and media technologies, witnessing and testimony have served as the primary technique for rendering this emerging concern morally and politically operational.

The richness, but also the instability of humanitarian witnessing stemmed from the fact that it operated as the relay between ethical, moral, and political concerns. Setting the care for the self and the cultivation of the moral persona of the expert as the medium of concern for suffering victims, and placing this concern at the baseline of political claims, humanitarian witnessing operated as a mediator between ethical, moral, and political registers. It was precisely this interdependence between the fashioning of the self, the care for the other, and the representation of the victim embodied in humanitarian witnessing that made it particularly disposed to frictions of the kind that became apparent following the so-called complex emergencies of the nineteen nineties. The failure of the UN forces stationed in Rwanda and Bosnia to protect the civilian population, the impotence of the reports and images that flowed from Bosnia to propel Western governments to undertake a military intervention, and the manipulation of humanitarian aid by the Hutu génocidaires in Zaire were the events around which crystallized the malaise of humanitarian witnessing. In light of these events, witnessing in its traditional senses as active presence, monitoring, documentation, and reporting was deemed an insufficient and inadequate response to mass suffering.

What triggered the problematization of humanitarian witnessing and allowed for one of the first systematic probings of concerns that practitioners and activists were previously facing on a more dispersed and haphazard manner was Médecins Sans Frontières' controversial decision, in November 1994, to withdraw its teams from the Hutu refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania, controlled by the men responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. In the debate that preceded this decision and carried on for years after it, humanitarian practitioners from various organizations cast proximity, monitoring, and documentation on the one hand, and speaking out on the other hand, as two competing facets of the humanitarian

commitment to bear witness to the victims. Upholding the view that humanitarian organizations must speak out when their actions are manipulated, and setting its declaration on the cessation of aid operations in the Hutu refugee camps as a paradigmatic example for such an action, the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières maintained, against the view of the majority of humanitarian organizations, that such “denunciation[s] in which our own action is brought into play” constituted the most authentic form of testimony.⁶³ Testimony itself, therefore, albeit under a particular, opinionated, and analytical guise, emerged as a possible response to the limitations and negative side-effects entailed by active proximity to and close observation of victims. Inscribed in struggles for symbolic capital and recognition in the humanitarian field and employed by humanitarian actors as one of their primary operators of distinction, testimony, in its contested meaning as a denunciatory and perilous speech-act, was portrayed as the only available solution to the quandaries of witnessing and of humanitarian action more broadly.

Testimony in this latter sense has been one of the major issues on the agenda of a growing body of humanitarian reflection that studies and seeks to address the paradoxes and dilemmas of humanitarianism. As part of this reflexive effort, Médecins Sans Frontières, one of the main champions of humanitarian testimony but also the organization most responsible for its destabilizing, initiated the writing of a series of case-studies on the history of humanitarian testimony whose purpose was to “help volunteers understand and adopt the organization’s culture of speaking out”.⁶⁴ Focusing on cases in which “speaking out posed a dilemma for MSF and, thus, meant taking a risk”, the series sought to impart the practice of humanitarian testimony while also presupposing that “[t]émoignage cannot be reduced to a mechanical application of rules and procedures”, and rather involves “an understanding of the dilemmas inherent in every humanitarian action”.⁶⁵

Becoming a witness to distant emergencies, as the series of case-studies made apparent, was not just a matter of being knowledgeable of one particular set of events. Requiring a familiarity with the history of humanitarian action and its attendant ambivalences as well as a certain amount of training or experience in exercising operational discernment and moral judgment, testimony was anything but an easy, quasi-natural, and spontaneous action that anyone could carry out. Médecins Sans Frontières’ reflection on testimony therefore provides a convenient conclusion to the non-exhaustive analysis of the ethics and politics of testimony whose main paradigms I have traced here. It sheds crude light on a condition of witnessing in which the gaze is no longer trusted, the form of testimony is not taken for granted, the witness is no longer presupposed, and the process by which an individual becomes one is open to increasing intervention and contestation.

The manifold practices of witnessing presented here in broad outlines demonstrate that the questions “what is testimony” and “what does witnessing mean” have no straightforward answers. The discussion of some of the main chapters in the political history of witnessing and testimony in the twentieth century has shown that combatants, survivors, and

humanitarian aid workers inhabit disparate moral and political universes, in which the practice of testimony and the responsibilities that it forges are invested with different meanings. Witnessing and testimony defy a clear-cut definition because the appropriate form, purpose, and style of testimony, like the authentic modes and stakes of witnessing, are deeply contested issues. This contentious character of testimony is, in fact, a symptom and a consequence of its contemporary migration to the moral-political sphere. For this reason, the attempt to probe witnessing and testimony as political notions and practices cannot rest with their consideration as instruments for the creation of public issues. Witnessing and testimony are, or rather have become, public issues in and of themselves; this must be the point of departure for any conceptual weaving together of testimony and the political.

If testimony is indeed the hallmark of the historical present, the definition of this contemporary era as the “age of the witness” is nonetheless misleading. Ours is an era of *becoming a witness*, a time in which individuals are called, in greater numbers and intensity and at a growing rate, to fashion themselves as witnesses, while their witness position is never guaranteed and their mode of witnessing is questioned. Political testimony, if one must define it, is a way to say “we” without dissolving the “I” and without excluding the other. And it is every bit as tentative, unsettled, and bound to failure as it sounds.

Endnotes

1. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.
2. Breaking The Silence, “Soldiers’ Testimonies from Operation Cast Lead, Gaza 2009” (Jerusalem, June 2009), Available at http://www.shovrimshatika.org/oferet/ENGLISH_oferet.pdf, p. 5.
3. The object of testimonial practices is a fellow human being, or fellow human beings, who often do not belong to the same community as the audience of testimony or have undergone a limit experience of violence or deprivation that shatters what is perceived as common to the human condition. Sometimes those fellow human beings are ‘othered’ in both senses at once.
4. Annette Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin* (Paris : Hachette Littératures, 2002). A similar definition (“the age of testimony”) is employed by Felman in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, pp. 113-4.
5. C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony. A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
6. The former approach is expressed by Renaud Dulong, “Transmettre de corps à corps,” in *Esthétique du témoignage*, edited by Carole Dornier and Renaud Dulong (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 2005), pp. 241-252, while the latter is reflected most neatly in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
7. Compare with the thoughtful analysis of eyewitnessing in Renaud Dulong, *Le Témoin Oculaire*.

Les conditions sociales de l'attestation personnelle (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1998), especially Introduction, Chapter 5, and Chapter 8.

8. Alain Brossat, *Le Paix Barbare, Essais sur la politique contemporaine* (L'Harmattan, 2001), p. 46.

9. Dulong, *Le témoin oculaire*, pp. 185-210, 193.

10. Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, p. 179. In her analysis of what she describes as the most accomplished phase of the culture of testimony, Wieviorka deplors the dislodgment of the professional historiography of the Holocaust in favor of survivors' testimonies that transmit fragmented, sentimental, and often overly pedagogic accounts of the Holocaust. She draws the above quotations from Richard Sennet.

11. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 231.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

13. Giorgio Agamben, *The Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 158.

14. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 206 (in a slightly different context).

15. The secondary trauma of indirect witnesses is vividly illustrated by Felman in her discussion of the crisis undergone by her Yale students during her course on testimony. See Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, Chapter 1.

16. See Michael Bernard-Donals, "Beyond the Question of Authenticity: Witness and Testimony in the *Fragments* Controversy," *PMLA* 116, October 2001, pp. 1302-1315, 1311.

17. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (New York: State University Press of New York, 2001), p. xi.

Quoted in Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 64.

18. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 13.

19. Marie-Louise Ollé, "Re-présenter l'horreur. Témoignage sur la Guerre des 36 ans au Guatemala", in *Esthétique du témoignage*, edited by Carole Dornier and Renaud Dulong (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2005), pp. 107-122, 109.

20. John Beverley, *Testimonio – On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 33.

21. Fuyuki Kurasawa analyzed bearing witness as one of the principal "modes of practice" that undergird the work of global justice and provide it with substance. See Fuyuki Kurasawa, *The Work of Global Justice: Human Rights as Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 1, Conclusion.

22. Adi Ophir, *The Order of Evils: Toward an Ontology of Morals* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p. 152.

23. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 206.

24. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, pp. 144-145.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

26. Kelly, Oliver, *Witnessing – Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis & London: University of

Minneapolis Press, 2001).

27. Andrea Frisch, "The ethics of testimony: a genealogical perspective," *Discourse* 25 (2003), pp. 36-54, 44.
28. Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 131.
29. Barbara Shapiro, "The Concept 'Fact': Legal Origins and Cultural Diffusion," *Albion* 26 (Spring 1994), pp. 1-26.
30. Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, vol. 2: Pouvoirs, droit, religion* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), pp. 276-7.
31. Didier Fassin, "The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008), pp. 531-558, 535.
32. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, pp. 119-122.
33. Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Lewis S. Mudge (London: SPCK, 1981), pp. 119-154, 130.
34. "Martyr, Martyrdom", in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York and London: Garland, 1990).
35. Fassin, "The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony," p. 552. Fassin relies on an etymological inquiry in order to provide a typology of witness figures in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While this essay subscribes to Fassin's conclusion regarding the "polysemy and instability of the configuration of testimony" (Ibid., p. 553), its argument is grounded in the contemporary plurality of regimes of witnessing rather than in the "semantic plurality" (Ibid., p. 553) of the notion of the witness. Instead of highlighting the similarities between contemporary and historical forms of witnessing, this essay seeks to emphasize the reconfigurations that witnessing and testimony undergo as they are reinvented as moral and political practices. As I demonstrate in the next section, witnessing and testimony have, since World War I, been problematized and reflected upon in ways that both rationalize and challenge their original meanings. The paradigms of witnessing that have resulted from this questioning cannot be reduced to a single notion of witnessing; they differ not just in the meanings they attribute to it, but also in the rationalities that they ascribe to witnessing and in the concerns that they seek to address.
36. Dulong, *Le témoin oculaire*, p. 134.
37. Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins. Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1993[1929]).
38. Ibid., p. 9; Jean Norton Cru, *Du Témoignage* (Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1967 [1930]), p. 35.
39. Cru, *Du Témoignage*, p. 35.
40. Cru, *Témoins*, p. 145.
41. Ibid., p. 50.
42. Ibid., p. 594.
43. Quoted in Frédéric Rousseau, "Comment écrire la guerre? L'affaire Norton Cru," in *Esthétique du témoignage*, edited by Carole Dornier et Renaud Dulong (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 2005), pp. 3-17.

44. See Ruth Amossy, "L'éloquence du témoignage. La polemique des Nouvelles littéraires autour de Norton Cru," in *Actes de la colloque Sur les traces de Norton Cru* (Bruxelles: Musée Royal de l'Armée, 2000), pp. 99-112.
45. It is interesting to note that Cru was cited by the French Holocaust denier Paul Rassinier as one of his main sources of inspiration.
46. Some of the more radical commentators on testimony went as far as maintaining that even testimonies delivered under a fake identity, such as Binjamin Wilkomirski's pseudo-autobiographical narrative *Fragments*, may be considered valid and effective ones. See Bernard-Donals, "Beyond the Question of Authenticity".
47. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (Vintage, 1989), pp. 83-4.
48. On the melodramatic bent of contemporary Holocaust testimonies and on the individualizing framing of witnessing in Holocaust scholarship, see Amos Goldberg, "The victim's voice and melodramatic aesthetics in history," *History & Theory* 48 (2009), pp. 220-237.
49. The trajectories outlined here follow those discussed by Annette Wieviorka in *L'ère du témoin*.
50. Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row., 1966). Cited in Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Cornell University Press: 2006), pp. 69-70.
51. Dori Laub, "Testimonies in the Treatment of Genocidal Trauma," *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* (January 2002), pp. 63-87, 78.
52. Ibid.
53. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 57.
54. Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, p. 144. For current figures on the Foundation's archive (now operating under the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education), see <http://college.usc.edu/vhi/aboutus>.
55. Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, pp. 144-160.
56. Wieviorka, as I mentioned earlier, is a firm opponent of the substitution of survivors' memory for professional history; other historians, most notably Shaul Friedländer in his *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination*, seek to combine testimonies in historical research.
57. The collective nature of humanitarian witnessing was analyzed in Peter Redfield, "A less modest witness: Collective advocacy and motivated truth in a medical humanitarian movement," *American Ethnologist* 33 (2006), pp. 3-26.
58. Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 193.
59. Médecins Sans Frontières, Principes de référence du mouvement Médecins Sans Frontières ["Document de Chantilly"], 1995.
60. I discuss this form of witnessing at length elsewhere. See Michal Givoni, "Witnessing and Testimony in Action: Ethics and Politics in Sans Frontières Humanitarianism". (Thesis submitted to Tel Aviv University, March 2008), Chapter 3 (in Hebrew).
61. Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996), pp. 377-404: 388.

62. On the characteristics of the humanitarian narrative, see Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in *The New Cultural History*, edited by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 176-204.
63. Médecins Sans Frontières-France, Procès verbal, Réunion du Conseil d'Administration de MSF-France. 13 Janvier 1995 (Médecins Sans Frontières, Internal document).
64. Laurence Binet, *Genocide of Rwandan Tutsis (1994)* (MSF, Internal document), Introduction.
65. Ibid.



