

Introduction: Complicit Testimonies

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The term ‘testimony’ can be employed to describe a wide variety of phenomena: it can refer to written, oral, and in some cases visual accounts, and these can range in length from short statements to extended narratives. Moreover, while the term generally implies factual accounts of events, more creative and imaginative forms can also be described as testimony. For these reasons, as Axel Gelfert notes, testimony functions as ‘an umbrella term covering the various ways in which the word of others can serve as a source of knowledge’,¹ although it tends to pertain to legal, religious, and other formal contexts.² Since the ‘memory boom’ of the 1980s,³ however, it has increasingly become involved in debates around the relationship between history and memory that have pervaded the humanities.

Given the significant weight afforded to testimony in matters of law, it is unsurprising that scholars in this field have been concerned with its nature and reliability. Elizabeth F. Loftus’s influential *Eyewitness Testimony* (1979)⁴ drew on empirical research to reveal the lack of credibility of eyewitness testimony, noting that many juries convict defendants on precisely this evidence. More recently, Brandon L. Garrett’s *Convicting the Innocent: Where Criminal Prosecutions Go Wrong* (2011)⁵ examined the first 250 exonerations resulting from postconviction DNA testing in the US since the late 1980s. In both cases, the authors’ suspicion towards testimony is founded on the justified concern that its unreliability may lead to wrongful convictions – and in some cases, to wrongful executions. Furthermore, Garrett’s discussion of the way that DNA testing often contradicts testimony implies that narrative must be balanced against – and should perhaps remain subordinate to – the authority of physical and forensic evidence.

1 Axel Gelfert, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 8.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 David W. Blight, ‘The Memory Boom: Why and Why Now?’ in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. by Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 238–51 (p. 241).

4 Elizabeth F. Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979).

5 Brandon L. Garrett, *Convicting the Innocent: Where Criminal Prosecutions Go Wrong* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

In fields other than law, however, the status of testimony has in fact risen. In his *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (1992), C. A. J. Coady noted the ‘neglect’ of serious philosophical discussion of testimony, and argued that ‘our trust in the word of others is fundamental to the very idea of serious cognitive activity’.⁶ Gelfert similarly acknowledges the fact that ‘much of our knowledge has a social component’;⁷ but notes that our increasing capacity for communication involves a trade-off, suggesting that ‘this expansion of readily available knowledge – there for the taking, as it were, by accepting the testimony of others – comes at the price of an increased epistemic dependence on others’.⁸ For this reason, philosophical interest in testimony tends to focus on its epistemological status.

The publication of Coady’s monograph coincided with Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub’s seminal *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), itself part of a wave of scholarly interest in the nature and ethics of memory across the humanities. The strand of memory scholarship concerned with witnessing and testimony has overwhelmingly been concerned with the experiences of victims of atrocity and violence: the Holocaust is central to such considerations, although the Latin American genre of *testimonio* has also been influential.

In much of the scholarship in the humanities since the onset of the memory boom, the suspicion towards testimony in legal scholarship noted above has been replaced by a generally laudatory tone, resulting from the perceived potential for testimony to provide a voice for subaltern groups. For example, Kimberly A. Nance defines *testimonio* as ‘the body of works in which speaking subjects who present themselves as somehow “ordinary” represent a personal experience of injustice, whether directly to the reader or through the offices of a collaborating writer, with the goal of inducing readers to participate in a project of social justice’;⁹ a view supported by John Beverley’s assertion that *testimonio* ‘is a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative’.¹⁰ Holocaust scholarship, as will be discussed below, tends to focus on victimhood and trauma. While this elevation in value of

6 C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. vii.

7 Gelfert, p. 8.

8 Ibid., p. 11.

9 Kimberly A. Nance, *Can Literature Promote Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).

10 John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 34.

testimony as a source of knowledge has not been universally accepted – and indeed debates around its status have been folded into the wider academic culture wars¹¹ – the general premise of much contemporary research remains that value of testimony lies in its potential for victims of violence and oppression to give voice to their experiences. This is, in part, a result of theories of testimony having often been developed through discussion of *prima facie* historical cases in which the roles of victim and perpetrator are clear. Felman and Laub's book, for example, was written in response to their experiences working with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. This focus has resulted in a tendency to adjectivize testimony with particular subject positions. As such it is commonplace to read of 'victim testimony' and 'survivor testimony' while a strand of research on 'perpetrator testimony' has emerged more recently.

However, as Primo Levi's discussion of the 'gray zone' in Auschwitz shows, the blurring of boundaries between victims and perpetrators was not only a feature of the totalitarian mass violence, but a crucial mechanism by which it functioned. As Levi writes, in order to 'bind' collaborators to their project, a key strategy of the Nazis was 'to burden them with guilt, cover them with blood, compromise them as much as possible, thus establishing a bond of complicity so that they can no longer turn back'.¹² For this reason, this special issue of the *Journal of Perpetrator Research* presents an overdue discussion of testimonies authored by complicit parties. This introduction seeks to set out this rationale in detail, first describing the shared lineage of testimony and trauma studies, as well as the ways in which existing research has linked testimony to particular subject positions, before describing some of the consequences – and attendant problems – with doing so. On this basis, it then makes the case for examining testimony in the light of complicity, before introducing the articles and giving an overview of some of the insights these provide.

11 The fate of Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984) exemplifies these tendencies. Initially celebrated and widely read in U.S. universities, the veracity of this testimonio was then called into question. As a result, the text became a touchstone in culture wars debates around the teaching of history. For a succinct account of these events, see Robert Strauss, 'Truth and Consequences', *Stanford Magazine*, May/June 1999 <<https://stanfordmag.org/contents/truth-and-consequences>> [accessed 25 April 2025].

12 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal, (New York: Vintage International, 1989), p. 43.

Testimony, Victimhood, and Trauma

In academic theorisations of testimony produced since the onset of the memory boom, there has been a tendency to associate witnessing with victimhood and trauma. This relationship was central to discussions of Latin American *testimonio*¹³ and to studies of Holocaust testimony; much scholarship since has retained this connection. Taking Felman and Laub's research as an exemplar of this tendency, while the term 'trauma' does not feature in the book's title, it is evident from the outset that they are concerned to address the possibilities and difficulties involved with testimony in the context of traumatised subjects. For example, in their foreword, they note that the majority of texts that they analyse were 'written and produced consequent to the historical trauma of the Second World War, a trauma we consider as the watershed of our times'.¹⁴ Similarly, Laub begins his first chapter, 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening',¹⁵ with the claim that 'the victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its existence'.¹⁶ In this sentence, the narrator of testimony is explicitly identified both as a victim and a traumatised subject, while it also introduces the paradoxical struggle to express an experience suppressed due to its very extremity.

This characterisation of testimony has been influential and has since been revisited numerous times in the explosion of trauma theory from the 1990s onwards. An illustrative example is that fact that Cathy Caruth, a key figure in bringing together literary studies and trauma, was a keynote speaker at a conference held at the University of Salford to celebrate twenty years of the publication of *Testimony*. Felman was her respondent, and the edited volume that was published subsequently retained this structure,¹⁷ placing their chapters next to each other. As

13 Nance suggests that *testimonio* can be regarded as a 'Latin American subset of trauma narrative'. Nance, p. 9.

14 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. xiv.

15 Each of the seven of the book's chapters are attributed to one or other of the two authors, with Laub contributing two and Felman seven.

16 Felman and Laub, p. 57.

17 *The Future of Testimony: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witnessing*, ed. by Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

such, the book brought into dialogue major figures in testimony and trauma, and this relationship was further cemented by the fact that other leading figures in literary trauma studies also contributed to the volume, notably Stef Craps, author of *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013) and Michael Rothberg, author of *Traumatic Realism: the Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000), the latter also being a keynote speaker at the conference.

The way that these connections have solidified into a set of generic expectations, and as a mode of framing particular types of experience, is indicated by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson when they list victimhood as one of the five 'metrics of authenticity' that they identify as consistently-recurring rhetorical features of testimony.¹⁸ The connection between victimhood and witnessing is thus part of a rhetoric of authenticity upon which testimony relies for its power. The continued strength of these connections in contemporary academic discourse is indicated by Sara Jones and Roger Woods writing in the introduction to the recent *Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture* (2023) of 'the urge to communicate the unique experience is the impulse behind much testimony from survivors of trauma',¹⁹ and asking whether 'the existence of testimony from an ever greater range of voices, coupled with the expanding range of forums at which to present it, enhance[s] the agency of survivors of trauma and help them process that trauma?'.²⁰ The influence of this tripartite model, in which testimony, victimhood and trauma are intertwined, can be seen in the way that it informs many of the chapters in the *Palgrave Handbook*.

The purpose of listing these connections is not to critique any of this work itself: analysis of the testimonies of victims, and the effect of trauma on these testimonies, is necessary and valuable. What this special issue seeks to challenge, rather, is the assumption of an assumed or inherent relationship between the three terms – testimony, victimhood, and trauma – that has persisted into present research.

18 The others are: a 'you-are-there' sense of immediacy; the invocation of a discourse of rights; a sense of duty to narrate a collectively experienced event or situation; and the documentation of that experience as culturally specific. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Witness or False Witness?: Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-formations, and the Ethic of Verification in First-Person Testimony', *Biography*, 35.4 (2012), 590-626 (pp. 593-94).

19 Sara Jones and Roger Woods, 'Introduction: Testimony in Culture and Cultures of Testimony', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture*, ed. by Sara Jones and Roger Woods (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).

20 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Exceptions to this model can be found in recent work on perpetrator testimony, although the strength of the connection between victimhood and witnessing is evident in the fact that writing of the perpetrator in connection with witnessing often requires a degree of qualification. For example, Sumner B. Twiss begins his article 'Can a Perpetrator Write a *Testimonio*?' by acknowledging that this is a 'provocative question'.²¹ Similarly, Sibylle Schmidt suggests that 'witnesses are endowed with moral authority' and that it therefore 'seems morally highly problematic and even conceptually contradictory to attribute the capacity of bearing witness to the perpetrators'.²² Ute Hirsekorn and Sue Vice also note a hesitancy to use the term to describe perpetrators' accounts, with 'confession' generally being favoured.²³ They elaborate that 'the latter term implies that the subject is disclosing and regretting the immoral nature of their acts in hindsight, perhaps in order to seek absolution or forgiveness in the wake of an unburdening'.²⁴ Here the reference to the 'immoral' nature of perpetrators indicates that an ethical value judgement has already been made with respect to the testifying party. They also note that perpetrator testimony is likely to cause 'ethical or emotional unease'.²⁵ Leigh Payne makes a similar point in her discussion of perpetrator testimony, although she regards this sense of discomfort as politically and ethically useful. The title of her monograph *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (2008) refers to the central premise that perpetrators' testimonies can 'unsettle, or compel, audiences of victims, survivors, and human-rights activists to assert their own, often contending, interpretations of the past'.²⁶ While listening to or reading these accounts may be unappealing, and risks providing perpetrators with a public platform, Payne argues that they contribute to 'contentious coexistence', itself part of dialogic practice of democracy.²⁷

21 Sumner B. Twiss, 'Can a Perpetrator Write a *Testimonio*? Moral Lessons from the Dark Side', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 38.1 (2010), 5-42 (p. 5). The *testimonio*, as Twiss notes, is a specific genre of testimony (Twiss, p. 7). His discussion is nevertheless indicative of the general unease involved in connecting testimony with perpetration.

22 Sibylle Schmidt, 'Perpetrators' Knowledge: What and How Can We Learn from Perpetrator Testimony?', *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 1.1 (2017), 85-104 (p. 87).

23 Hirsekorn, Ute and Sue Vice, 'Perpetrator Testimony', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture*, ed. by Sara Jones and Roger Woods (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 567-95 (p. 571).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 2.

27 Ibid., p. 3.

These discussions of perpetrators' accounts are a starting point for undoing any innate connection between testimony, victimhood and trauma. However, even the continued use of a wider range of subject positions – whether victim, perpetrator, or another category – to qualify particular types of testimony continues to present a different set of problems. The adjectivisation of testimony with any ethically-loaded subject position, whether 'victim' or 'perpetrator', generally involves a moral judgement. The tendency and desire to reserve a particular ethical position for the victim-witness reaches its apex in the 'moral witness', a figure elaborated by Avishai Margalit in response to his notion that the central question of the ethics of memory is 'what we should remember and what, if anything, we should forget'.²⁸ He answers this question by using the figure of the moral witness as an exemplar of these ethics, suggesting that 'he or she should witness – indeed, they should experience – suffering inflicted by an unmitigated evil regime ... one has to witness the combination of evil and the suffering it produces: witnessing only evil or only suffering is not enough'.²⁹ In addition to these qualifications, Margalit writes that 'a moral purpose' is an essential attribute of the moral witness,³⁰ but there remains some ambiguity as to whether the adjective 'moral' means that witnessing itself is a moral act as defined by this purpose, or if the quality of being moral is something that can be ascribed to the witness themselves. Margalit suggests the latter when he writes that 'a paradigmatic case of a moral witness should be someone whose morality is not in question' before reluctantly qualifying this statement by adding that 'a moral witness may still be one who compromises his morality for the sake of surviving, especially if the aim is to survive as a witness'.³¹

Yet it is difficult to see how Margalit's desire for a pure moral position can survive contact with the reality of Levi's gray zone. To return to his description of the camp, Levi strips the way that it functions down to its barest biological basis, stating that

The food ration was decisively insufficient for even the most frugal prisoner: the physiological reserves of the organism were depleted in two or three months, and death by hunger, or by diseases induced by hunger, was the prisoner's normal destiny, avoidable only with additional food.³²

28 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 147.

29 Ibid., p. 148.

30 Ibid., p. 151.

31 Ibid., p. 162.

32 Levi, p. 41.

Death was therefore only avoidable through the acquisition of extra food, which required the prisoner to obtain a degree of privilege. Such privilege was granted though the prisoners' cooperation and assistance in the running of the camp – in other words, through their complicity. While Levi's account anticipates the possibility of bearing witness, it emphasises that internees' overwhelming concern was towards survival, and towards making the compromises and exchanges that elevated the prisoner's level of privilege so as to obtain enough food and clothing to survive. Margalit acknowledges Levi's arguments, paraphrasing these by noting that the 'best historians' of Auschwitz were the more privileged prisoners, before stating that this did not make them the best moral witnesses.³³ The question as to whether the concept of the moral witness can survive contact with the pressures and compromises demanded by the real world remains unresolved; it is unclear whether the moral witness, as Margalit conceives of this figure, refers to real individuals or remains a purely hypothetical construct.

Carolyn J. Dean's genealogy of the moral witness offers a useful additional angle by which to examine these issues at this point. Her work questions the notion of purity because her historicisation of this concept shows it to be one that is constructed and contextually contingent. The ideas imputed onto the role of the moral witness have evolved from 'righteous avenger' in the period between the two World Wars, through concentration camp and Holocaust survivor in the aftermath of World War Two, and into the 'global victim' and 'counterwitness' in the present, postcolonial period.³⁴ Dean's narrative thus reveals the figure of the moral witness to be 'deeply political' and to be one that 'makes cultural concerns about victims' suffering central to narratives of justice and right but also articulates the cultural and ethical limits of those concerns'.³⁵ In other words, the types of witness figures that come to occupy a privileged position at a given historical moment tell us as much about the political and cultural agendas within which witnessing takes place, as they do about the witnesses themselves.

Dean also argues that

witnesses are symbols of darkness and hope that have an ideological and memorial function, erase some realities and distort others; most

³³ Margalit, pp. 167–68.

³⁴ Carolyn J. Dean, *The Moral Witness: Trials and Testimony After Genocide* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

problematically, especially after the 1970s, witnesses transfigured victims into quasi-sacred signs.³⁶

Implicit in this critique is the idea that witnesses are not in fact sacred and do not therefore occupy a position of moral purity. By extension, we might ask what complicities – both on the part of the witness and on those who are eager to interpret their testimony in a particular way – are masked by the erasure and distortion of history to which Dean alludes; I address this point in the next section, below.

Another problem with the tendency to adjectivize testimony with an ethically-charged subject position is related to the role and status of testimony as a source of knowledge. Testimony is often one of the primary means by which an event comes to be known. As Margalit notes, the vast majority of our understanding of the world is mediated in various ways rather than being directly observed and as such, ‘testimony, not direct observation, is our basic source of evidence and knowledge’.³⁷ He elaborates that our position in the world is determined by a ‘network of witnesses’, the testimonies of whom we often take on trust as a result of our relationships with them. Indeed, our belief in a witness (that is, in their reliability and trustworthiness as a person) will often precede our belief in the content of their testimony itself. However, as Margalit also notes of this network of witnesses, ‘my trust in them can serve me badly’ because ‘they can, with the best intentions, inject me with prejudices, superstitions, mistakes, and indoctrination of and ideologies and wrong values’.³⁸

If our knowledge of the world is primarily mediated through testimony, and if the network of witnesses in which we are embedded shapes our ideology and biases, this ideological position will in turn colour the way in which we view subsequent testimonies. In other words, Margalit posits the figure of the moral witness as a primary source of knowledge, this status established by having experienced suffering at the hands of ‘unmitigated evil’.³⁹ Yet the kind of ethical judgement involved in attributing a label such as ‘evil’ to particular events or people can only be arrived at through the knowledge created

³⁶ Dean, p. 5.

³⁷ Margalit, pp. 179–80; see also Schmidt, p. 91; Felman and Laub, p. 57; Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 145.

³⁸ Margalit, p. 180.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

by a process of testimony and witnessing. To rephrase this problem in simpler terms: if testimony is the means by which the facts of historical events are established, this understanding must surely precede, rather than follow, the implicit ethical judgements involved in the attribution of ethically-loaded labels such as ‘victim’, ‘perpetrator’, and indeed ‘moral witness’.

The Case for Complicity

The sections above have set out the case for scepticism towards using the subject positions of perpetrator and victim as a basis for framing testimony. Hirsekorn and Vice offer a succinct statement of this position when they argue that

The dichotomy of perpetrator and victim is by no means always helpful in analysis, not least because perpetrators may turn into victims of violence, and vice-versa: victims of one act of perpetration may end up engaging in another act of perpetration in a different situation.⁴⁰

Subject positions are mutable rather than fixed: they are labels imputed onto individuals and groups rather than inhering in them. Schmidt suggests that examining the testimonies of perpetrators, rather than victims, requires ‘tak[ing] on the stance that testimony is not per se “good” or ethically valuable but normatively ambivalent, depending on what purpose it serves’.⁴¹ This is a useful first step, but discussing perpetrator testimony still retains the tendency to adjectivize the act of witnessing with a subject position that implies a value judgement.

For these reasons, this special issue seeks to move away from the polarised positions of victim and perpetrator, and to examine testimony through the lens of complicity. The case for complicity as a useful starting point for analysis is made by Alexis Shotwell in *Against Purity: Living in Ethically Compromised Times* (2016), in which she argues that, ‘since it is not possible to avoid complicity, we do better to start from an assumption that everyone is implicated in situations we (at least in some way) repudiate’.⁴² More specifically with respect to the politics of

⁴⁰ Hirsekorn and Vice, p. 588.

⁴¹ Schmidt, p. 90.

⁴² Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 5.

collective memory, Mihaela Mihai argues that clearly delineated subject positions produce a form of historical erasure:

national myths normally capture political violence in antagonistic, dichotomic terms, of 'us' versus 'them,' reducing history's cast of characters to 'perpetrators,' 'victims,' and 'heroes,' to the exclusion of those who do not neatly fit any of these reductive roles.⁴³

For this reason, Mihai holds that interpreting the past in terms of complicity can counteract the erasures enacted by 'conveniently palatable accounts';⁴⁴ in other words, a stance that acknowledges complicity might be a more ethical position than one that unreservedly elevates victimhood.

Mihai is therefore concerned that testimony, if misused, may itself contribute to the process of myth-making that produces historical erasure. This aspect of her argument in some ways parallels the observations made Smith and Watson regarding the political effects of the generic crystallisation of witness narratives around a core of victimhood, and their argument that the tropes of victim testimony have produced a 'culture of rescue as a neo-imperial formation supporting global Northern hegemony'.⁴⁵ The implication of this line of reasoning is that not only can testifying individuals be complicit with wrongdoing, but that testimony itself may be complicit in promoting hegemonic structures and discursive erasures that in turn create suffering.

A focus on complicity can therefore bring into relief particular aspects of testimony that might otherwise remain unseen. This move does not simply reproduce the epistemological suspicion towards testimony seen in some legal and philosophical scholarship as noted at the beginning of this introduction (although this suspicion is certainly part of the picture): complicity does not restrict discussion to a focus on epistemology, but rather acts as a tool of reflexive critique with respect to the broader mnemonic politics of witnessing. Moving from conceptualising testimony in terms of victims and perpetrators to the middle ground of complicity does not necessarily solve all of the problems described above, but it does enable a useful step away from any presupposition of the ethical position of testimony or the witnesses who provide it. This special issue therefore examines the broader and

43 Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), p. 6.

44 Ibid., p. 23.

45 Smith and Watson, p. 620.

looser category of 'complicit testimonies'. What this concept lacks in precision, it makes up for in its ability to shift the terms of discussion away from value judgements that precede and determine the reception of the knowledge created by testimony. Moreover, to speak of 'complicit testimonies' rather than 'the testimonies of complicit parties' shifts the focus from the status and identity of the witness, and instead towards the actions of individuals; and these complicit behaviours can potentially include actions that precede later witnessing, or the act of witnessing itself.

The Articles

This extended special issue contains eight articles that utilise various disciplinary approaches, and span a wide range of geographical locations. The articles address a mixture of real-world testimony and artistic forms – fiction and visual art – that mimic, integrate, and otherwise employ testimony and other documentary forms. Those concerned with real-world testimony employ approaches from the disciplines of history, psychology, media studies, and politics, while those examining artistic forms tend to employ approaches from literary criticism, complemented by other interdisciplinary sub-fields of the humanities, notably memory studies and perpetrator studies. The locations addressed in the special issue include Indonesia, Australia, South Africa, Argentina, Eastern Europe, Italy, the UK, and Vietnam. It is hoped that this combination of disciplinary approaches and the broad scope of subject matter will initiate considerations of testimony through the lens of complicity in a wide range of contexts.

The special issue begins with three articles that comprise case studies of complicit testimonies. The first, by Eunike Mutiara Himawan, Annie Pohlman and Winnifred R. Louis, is titled 'Conflicted Reflections Amongst Civilian Participants in the May 1998 Race Riots in Indonesia'. Combining social psychological and historical (or historiographical) approaches, their article presents primary research in the form of perpetrators' testimonies regarding their participation in the May 1998 race riots in Indonesia. It describes how a feeling of 'going along with it' provided a form of affective alignment that secured their willing complicity in the persecution of an ethnic minority. It also illustrates how these testimonies generally employ narrative techniques to avoid acknowledgement of complicity. The second article, by historian Jayne Persian, is titled 'Complicit Testimonies in the Australian Investigative

Archive' and it discusses the investigations conducted by the Australian Special Investigation Unit in the late 1980s and early 1990s into the activities of former Central and Eastern European displaced persons with respect to the Holocaust. As with the first article, Persian identifies the way that testimonies of perpetrators and complicit parties exhibit a number of identifiable narrative traits that seek to minimise personal responsibility. Michelle Anderson's article, 'Complicit and Implicated Testimonies: Exploring Limits and Opportunities for Transitional and Transformational Justice through South Africa's Institutional Hearings', combines media and historical studies approaches to argue that the framing of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which focused on clearly defined categories of victims and perpetrators, effaced widespread complicity across various social groups and professions. On the basis of her examination of the documentary series *Special Report*, aired in South Africa between 1996 and 1998, she suggests that the concept of complicity can enable and encourage a process of self-reflection.

The next two articles, "'Every Reader is Guilty, Every Text is Murderous': Witnessing Femicide Through Complicity and Perpetration' by Sofía Forchieri and 'Facing the Heritage of Mass Violence in Neoliberalism: On Denemarková and Jelinek' by Juliane Prade-Weiss, both discuss examples of artistic forms that employ and integrate documentary and testimonial elements. Forchieri's article employs approaches from memory studies and perpetrator research to analyse Argentinian artist María Eugenia Cerutti's multi-modal work *Con toda la muerte al aire* (*With All the Death Laid Bare*, 2021) as a commentary on memory culture surrounding femicide, and argues for the value of 'unfamiliar, deeply uncomfortable and therefore potentially self-reflexive modes of witnessing ... from positions of complicity and implication' (p. 131). Prade-Weiss's article uses literary-critical approaches supplemented by concepts from the social sciences to examine two examples of documentary fiction, Radka Denemarková's 2006 *Peníze od Hitlera* (*Money from Hitler*, 2009) and Elfriede Jelinek's 2022 *Angabe der Person* (*Indication/Ostentation of the Person*). She argues that both texts make visible continuities of complicity that connect, through a process of normalisation, totalitarian and neoliberal cultures.

The final three articles discuss fictional representations of complicit testimonies, all of which suggest that fiction – both popular and literary – has the capacity to induce a process of reflection on the part of the reader; all employ literary-critical approaches and close textual analysis in

doing so. Sue Vice's contribution, "Guilt ran through me like lightning": Holocaust Complicity in Popular Fiction' discusses three novels, Mandy Robotham's *A Woman of War* (2018), Louise Fein's *People Like Us* (2020) and John Boyne's *All the Broken Places* (2022) in which a combination of first-person narration and tropes from genre fiction, together with structures that suggest connections between the past and the present, ask the reader to consider their own position with respect to complicity. Guido Bartolini's article, 'Responsible Testimony: The Memory of Fascism in Carlo Lucarelli's Detective De Luca Series (1990-2020) between Complicity and Implication' brings to light the way that Italian memory discourse has tended to minimise complicity with Fascism and argues that Lucarelli's series also poses discomfiting ethical questions to its readers. Finally, like the two other pieces discussed in this section, my own article, 'Testimony and Impure Subjects: Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*', shows how the formal possibilities of fiction permit a degree of reflection, rather than judgement, with respect to representations of complicity. Moreover, my article argues that *The Sympathizer* shows testimony not to be so much a mode of access to truth as it is a means of constructing normative framework that in turn serves to justify self-interested and ideologically-invested truth-claims.

Rethinking Testimony and Complicity

Across the eight articles in this special issue, a number of themes recur that are worthy of note in terms of how both testimony and complicity are conceived. In this final section of the introduction, I identify three of the most pertinent and thought-provoking.

The first of these is that the articles often bring into question the discrete nature of moral and legal categories of judgement. While this is unsurprising given that this special issue is premised on a questioning of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, what also emerges is an interesting and important blurring between complicity and perpetration in several of the cases discussed. For example, Himawan, Pohlman and Louis's article analyses interviews with individuals directly involved in ethnic violence. In other words, their interviewees can be identified as perpetrators of violence. However, their article also argues that these participants 'were not the primary actors in inciting or driving the riots' (p. 24) and they identify the Indonesian state and security forces under General Suharto as the 'primary perpetrators' (p. 29). Similarly, Persian's

discussion focuses on 'low-agency' (p. 51) perpetrators of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, and also identifies such perpetration as a form of complicity with a larger event. She thus argues that 'all perpetrators were complicit in the outcome – the (transnational) Holocaust under German occupation' (ibid.).

Theories of complicity distinguish between 'principal' and 'secondary' agents and wrongdoings.⁴⁶ Yet, as the cases discussed in the two articles mentioned here show, individual acts of perpetration are nested in larger instances of mass violence. Determining what constitutes the principal and secondary wrongdoing is therefore far from straightforward. For example, in instances of mass violence, the state may be regarded as the principal agent, but in discussions of specific and distinct instances where state policy is implemented, local actors may appear as the principal wrongdoer, with other individuals contributing to violence through various complicit behaviours. Given that complicity generally occurs under a degree of pressure, understanding these complex relationships therefore requires attention to the multiple sources of pressure – whether local or distant, personal or structural – that induce and compel complicit behaviours. Moreover, and to return to Mihai's argument that a focus on reified subject positions produces historical erasure, the difficulty in identifying principal and secondary contributions also indicates that definitively attributing these labels to one particular party may result in blindness towards complicity elsewhere.

A second notable feature of the case studies in particular, is a tendency of complicit parties to minimise personal responsibility in their testimonies. The articles by Himawan, Pohlman and Louis and by Persian both identify this characteristic in the testimonies they examine. In other words, in these cases, testimony is employed in an attempt to disavow rather than acknowledge complicity. By contrast, Anderson's chapter shows that a framework premised on a binary distinction between victims and perpetrators resulted in the omission – and consequent failure to acknowledge – implicated positions and complicit behaviours. As these examples show, both the content and framework in which testimony is delivered can result in failures to acknowledge complicity, and it is to be hoped that this special issue goes some way to redressing such absences. Indeed, and now moving from the case studies to the articles focussing on art and fiction, the presence of complicity can be used to induce a process of reflection. Forchieri suggests that Cerutti's

46 Chiara Lepora and Robert E. Goodin, *On Complicity and Compromise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 8, 33.

work invites readers to ‘encounter the perpetrator’s testimony ... not as uninvolved, neutral parties, but as implicated, self-aware witnesses’ (p. 129), while Vice argues that the ‘subjective viewpoint’ in each of the three novels she examines ‘enlists the reader’s investment while also engaging their judgement of the characters and their construction’ (p. 171). Bartolini argues that the De Luca series that he examines can be considered a ‘responsible act of testimony’ (p. 199), and my own article claims that Nguyen’s novel induces ‘a process of reflexivity’ (p. 230) with respect to complicit testimonies. As these examples show, while complicit parties may be invested in using testimony to minimise complicity, the framing of testimony in terms of complicity may result in the creation of productively ‘unsettling accounts’, to return to Payne’s term.⁴⁷ The fact that such ethical reflections are present to a greater extent in the fictional examples than they are in the real-world case studies can, I suggest, be taken as evidence that the frameworks in which testimony is delivered exert substantial pressure on the testifying individual. To make this observation is not intended to elevate fiction over real-world testimony; rather, acknowledging the potential of each form, and recognising the pressures generated (or alleviated) by each form, can contribute to further understanding of accounts of complicity and perpetration.

A final significant aspect of the articles is their willingness to expand the temporal scope of acts of violence, and in some cases to make connections between events that have hitherto been regarded as discrete, in order to make complicity visible. For example, Bartolini’s article discusses a series published between 1990 and 2020, and the diegetic events of which span the years 1943 and 1954. The series thus addresses shifting contexts – and consequent changing pressures that result in complicity – in Italy between Mussolini’s fall and the Cold War, while at the same time responding to changes in memory culture in Italy between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The most striking and explicit example of a willingness to connect events across time and space is noted by Prade-Weiss in her discussion of Jelinek’s *Angabe der Person*, which transgresses the consensus in German memory culture ‘that National Socialist crimes shall not be viewed in context with other forms of violence lest they are relativized’ (p. 145). Prade-Weiss argues that such connections are important because they reveal structural and historical continuities between mass violence committed under totalitarianism, and ‘humanitarian, political, [and] ecological wrongs’

⁴⁷ Payne, p. 3.

(p. 140) under neoliberalism. In terms of how complicity is conceptualised, the continuities and connections brought to light in and through these fictions do not efface the importance of discrete acts, but shift emphasis towards structural forces that are produced by continuities as much as they are by ruptures or states of exception.

This special issue is not intended to suggest that the categories victim and perpetrator are in any way obsolete. However, it does make the case for complicity as a useful tool in the analysis of testimony. Complicity requires a nuanced understanding of connection and causality, and for this reason the overall tenor of these articles is that boundaries separating moral or legal categories, or indeed historical events, begin to break down under scrutiny. It is hoped that this special issue therefore makes a useful contribution to the study of both complicity and testimony, and to the fields of memory studies and perpetrator studies more broadly.

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