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Testimony: Beyond the Language of Truth

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ABSTRACT

"Tension exists between the ways in which testimonies voice their truth, and the expectations readers or listeners have regarding what truth means and how it should be voiced. Society favors systematizing testimony as a collection of facts whereas testimony after genocide does not abide by the rules established by the scientific/academic/legal apparatus. Rather, it voices the intimate, subjective, deep dimension of horror. Having witnessed the abyss of atrocity, survivors can no longer rely on knowledge or facts as the basis for thinking. It is mostly in the realm of literature where recounting becomes an elaboration of language so that it can invoke the true nature of the "event." Based on authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Ariel Dorfman, Shoshana Felman, Dominique LaCapra, Dori Laub, and Walter Benjamin, this article underscores the role of testimony as a means for working through traumatic memories and for social and cultural resistance - a must for the ethical recovery of a community after the experience of utmost exclusion."