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Alexandra S. Moore • Elizabeth Swanson  
Editors

# Witnessing Torture

Perspectives of Torture Survivors and Human  
Rights Workers

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macmillan

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*In memory of Patricio Rice and Orlando Tizon, indefatigable fighters for justice, and in honor of Sister Dianna Ortiz, beacon for the abolition of torture.*

*This volume is dedicated to the global community of torture survivors and to those who work with them toward restoration, redress, and an end to the practice of torture, everywhere.  
For Chloë, Samantha, and Marcelle*

# ALONE AT NIGHT

Orlando P. Tizon

Alone at night in my cell  
I look for the stars through  
the dark hair of night.  
I hear the waves of the sea  
Beating, beating martial music,  
Calling  
And the wind brings the salt  
Spray of the sea, the tang  
Of the islands,  
Fishes, rocks, corals, mangrove,  
Salty moon  
Nets, boats, bamboo poles  
The sweet sharp, salty wind  
Brings back fishermen's songs  
Voices  
Friends calling in the night  
Patient but awake.

Davao Detention Center  
Davao, Philippines  
June 5, 1984

# PROLOGUE

Elizabeth Swanson

## RHETORICS OF TORTURE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

I became involved with human rights activism at the age of fourteen, but it would be twenty-five years before I met a person who had survived torture. Many human rights activists and academics never meet someone who has survived a grave violation such as disappearance, torture, rape, or genocide, and certainly the vast majority of survivors never meet those who speak on their behalf in the arena of international human rights advocacy. Indeed, at its highest institutional levels, and in spite of the intrepid on-the-ground work of advocates and humanitarian agents, much human rights work is divorced from the intimate struggles, pain, and trauma experienced by individual humans, focused instead upon reporting on and negotiating with governments, armed resistance groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations, diplomats, and others about the treatment of groups of people: dissidents living under repressive regimes; ethnic minorities mistreated by state apparatuses; detainees confined without trial in the “war on terror”; women and girls violated and oppressed the world over.

In spite of the fact that I had been an activist with Amnesty International’s Urgent Action Network for more than twenty years, and although my professional life was focused upon teaching and writing about human rights from a cultural perspective, it was not until I was invited to participate in a panel at a One Day Forum on Torture at Catholic University in Washington, DC in June 2003 that I met a group of people who had

survived torture.<sup>1</sup> The events of this day illuminated significant issues regarding the relationship between survivors of human rights violations and the community of human rights activists/academics/clinicians who have not experienced such violations; such issues can best be identified through the Cartesian split between mind and body that marks the construction of these two groups in the public sphere, and that also informs the rhetorical modes in which they are known to speak most frequently. In spite of all we have learned about the limits of the philosophical division between mind and body (also responsible for separating emotion from intellect, and public from private space) from postmodernists, feminists, and multiculturalists, among others, it remains surprisingly conventional in the human rights arena in ways that correspond predictably to national, racial, and gendered identity positions.

My own introduction to the issue of torture came in 1981, when I read a small ad at the back of *Writer's Digest*, a journal for poets and writers. The ad, from the writer's organization PEN International, asked for letters on behalf of a dissident writer, currently imprisoned and suffering torture for his work. An aspiring writer and naïve US teenager, I was properly shocked and promptly ordered further materials on the subject from PEN. The descriptions I read of writers persecuted for expressing their ideas in a variety of literary and journalistic forms were accompanied by a reference to Amnesty International, which I also contacted. Receiving my first Urgent Action Network member kit, I began the letter writing that I have continued ever since.

Years later, as an assistant professor of English at a small college of management and entrepreneurship in the Boston area, I found a supportive home for my joint interests in literature and human rights, and was engaged in teaching courses in both areas, when a colleague forwarded to me a call for a panelist with expertise in the cultural representation of torture. The panel, "Torture: From Clandestine Prison to Popular Culture," was part of a One Day Forum on Torture sponsored by the Torture

<sup>1</sup>The terminology of "survivor" and "non-survivor" is complicated by the fact that within the community of torture survivors, "non-survivor" may refer to one who died as a result of his or her torture, rather than one who has not been tortured. For the purposes of defining its membership, the Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition International (TASSC) includes anyone who has been tortured, or who is the family member or partner of one who has been tortured, as a "survivor." In this essay, I will use the term "non-survivor" to refer to human rights workers who have not experienced torture, and "victim" to describe those who did not survive their torture.

Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition International (TASSC), an international human rights NGO founded and run by survivors of torture. I was eager to share my work with the diverse community of survivors and human rights workers (journalists, legislators, physicians, psychologists, attorneys, advocates, academics) participating in the conference. The make-up of my panel is worthy of mention: chaired by an historian who was the life-partner of a torture survivor, the panel also included a young academic who, like me, had never shared her work on human rights and literature with an audience that included torture survivors. Prior to our session, this woman articulated her nervousness about the presentation, and her sense that it was presumptuous to speak as an academic about torture to those who have survived it. This is one common mark of the tenuous relationship between survivors and non-survivors who are concerned with human rights: the sense that one who has not experienced torture has no right to speak about it—at least not in front of or directly to those who have. The sentiment comes from a healthy desire to honor the painful experiences of others that may seem unimaginable to one who has not had similar experiences, and to defer to the knowledge that comes with that experience. It also bears traces of the kind of guilt that marks positions of relative privilege and/or authenticity in any context, but particularly in terms of race, class, and, in this case, painful experience.

In my presentation, I discussed a genre of film that I identified as the *counter-historical drama*, a mode of popular film that gained prominence in the 1980s, dedicated to telling stories of mass human rights violations in global “hotspots” using a combination of documentary and classical Hollywood film conventions.<sup>2</sup> The hallmark of the genre is its focus upon a white, western, usually male protagonist who journeys through a global political danger zone such as El Salvador (Oliver Stone’s *Salvador*, 1981); Chile (Costa Gravas’ *Missing*, 1982); Indonesia (Peter Weir’s *The Year of Living Dangerously*, 1982); South Africa (Richard Attenborough’s *Cry Freedom*, 1987); Burma (John Boorman’s *Beyond Rangoon*, 1995); Tibet (Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *Seven Years in Tibet*, 1997); China (Jon Avnet’s *Red Corner*, 1997); and so on. The plot is split in classical Hollywood style between the foreground story of the individual protagonist and the backdrop plot of the oppressed national collective. While the films overtly claim to protest the rights violations that occur in the sites of the films’

<sup>2</sup>This work was published as the first chapter of my book *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

settings, either by countering an official version of events or by restoring a lost or suppressed account, audience identification is paradoxically directed to the fate of the protagonist, who not only manages to maintain bodily safety even while the “natives” around him are brutalized and killed, but whose storyline typically achieves closure while the narrative of rights violations and those who suffer them is left open, unresolved. I showed clips from *Salvador* and *Cry Freedom* to illustrate these points, and made the claim that while such successful films could potentially inform mass audiences of the causes and effects of specific human rights violations, and even stimulate historical consciousness and political activism, they relinquish that potential to the demands of the box office and the notion that audiences in the west require a white protagonist with “star power” as a lens through which to identify with the events in the film.

The first response to my talk came from a survivor from Central America, who articulated that he appreciated the reading of *Salvador*, as it had been one of his favorite films, and, inasmuch as he felt gratified that a film that addressed US intervention in El Salvador in the early 1980s had even been made, he had not at the time considered the kinds of critiques that I offered in my analysis. The substance of his remark, however, was to draw a parallel between my reading of the films and the One Day Forum itself: survivors, mostly people of color, many from the so-called third world, speaking mostly in testimonial mode, stuck in the endless repetition of testifying to the atrocity they had experienced without achieving closure. Academics and activists on a dais, mostly of European descent and from the United States or Europe, speaking in analytical modes, and achieving a measure of closure in being able to “walk away with a book.”

Not surprisingly, his comment generated heated discussion. Several points are worth noting; foremost among them, that his assessment was factually correct in its address of the demographic of the room, the structure of the conference, and the division in modes of speech between survivors and non-survivor human rights workers. Less clear, however, was the accuracy or usefulness of the kinds of investments or distances he attributed to survivors and academics, respectively. The first person to respond to his comment was an historian who expressed outrage at the assumptions contained in his assessment. This woman testified to having lost her marriage as a result of the work she undertook to document the recent history of US intervention in—coincidentally—El Salvador. She challenged the assumption that academics do not invest emotion in their work, even if the product of that work is most often delivered in analytical form. At the same time, the woman who shared my panel whispered in my

ear, “I knew I shouldn’t have come.” When the panel ended, the survivor who had made the comment approached me to say that he hadn’t meant so much to critique the academics (and lawyers, journalists, clinicians, legislators, activists) in the room as to invite *survivors* to move beyond the testimonial mode to advance *analyses* about human rights goals and problems from a variety of perspectives. He wondered why the panels at the Forum had not comprised a mix of survivors and non-survivors.

This comment and the dialogues it generated illuminate a great deal that can help us to make better sense of the relationship between human rights workers and those who have survived human rights violations, as well as of the rhetorical modes in which their work is most often delivered to a wider public. They reveal significant aspects of the investments and identifications made by people with different relations to human rights work, and they offer ideas about how to move forward more productively and ethically with the shared goal of eradicating torture and other grave abuses of human rights.

Survivors of human rights violations are well accustomed to being the objects of others’ discourse: the discourse of the governments or non-governmental agents who rendered them vulnerable to torture or other violence; the discourse of politicians and diplomats who may talk about and make policies related to events that comprise their experiences; the discourse of human rights activists who presumably work on their behalf; the discourse of lawyers and judges who may be assigned to or, alternatively, dismiss their cases; the discourse of physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers whom they may encounter in the traumatic aftermath of their violation; the discourse of academics who research, theorize, and write about the violation of rights in general, and perhaps even the particular rights violations that produced their pain. Some of those discourses have been sensitive to their experiences and knowledge, and have approached them in ethical, inclusive terms; others have not.

What would it mean for torture survivors to know something about the emotional, ethical, and professional investments of those who work on their behalf, who speak about them? How might it help a torture survivor, who in order to gain a measure of justice and/or personal healing has been compelled to expose the most intimate, personal, painful details of her life, to be met with accounts from those who speak and write about her that also offer some measure of personal vulnerability and exposure? Acknowledging that the distribution of pain and violence remains unbearably uneven in the global sphere, what would it mean for those who are enabled by the privilege of professional status to retain a protective

shield in the discursive realm (which likely accrues from a range of other privileges) to shed that armor and to share some part of their personal, intimate, vulnerable investments? And what would it mean for activists and professionals who work with torture survivors to understand them not solely as patients, clients, or objects of study, but as agents of their own lives? How might human rights workers who are non-survivors learn from survivors' expertise, not solely in the realms of pain, trauma, and suffering, but often in the same disciplines—history, health, law, policy-making, education—in which they encounter one another?

This volume—the proceeds of which are donated to TASSC—collects a group of essays from a variety of disciplines that address these questions. In blurring the rhetorical divide that often separates survivors and non-survivors, while maintaining a careful sense of their relative positionings, the authors offer an expanded idiom of witnessing torture that we explore more fully in the introduction that follows. First, however, a word on the shape of the book. The process of soliciting essays for this volume began at that One Day Forum on Torture in 2003, and has continued since. We worked closely with TASSC to identify survivors and human rights workers who would be interested in participating with the express rhetorical and discursive goals of the volume in mind. Bringing together a group of writers so diverse in nationality, life and work experience, language, and other identity characteristics presents a set of challenges that can be said to mirror the challenging contexts of torture itself: people in various circumstances with relation to their national and/or immigration status, their professional or disciplinary backgrounds, and—not least—their ability to speak or to write publicly about such issues. TASSC figures prominently in the book's genesis and in its contents, and we recognize the organization as one among *many* such efforts to support survivors in determining the paths of their own futures and in the ongoing campaign to abolish torture. The work assembled here does not make any claim to be geographically or politically representative of torture as a global phenomenon, but rather results from the evolving circumstances and exigencies of networks of survivors and advocates. Some who would have liked to write for this volume could not because of ongoing legal or political issues; however, the voices represented here, as with much life writing, gesture toward the larger collectives and communities of which they are part.

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Alexandra S. Moore and Elizabeth Swanson

### ON THE SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF WITNESSING: EXPANDING THE FRAME OF LIFE WRITING ABOUT TORTURE

Henri Alleg, the journalist arrested, interrogated, and tortured by French paratroopers during the Battle of Algiers, begins his memoir of the experience with self-effacement: “In this enormous prison, where each cell houses a quantity of human suffering, it is almost indecent to talk about oneself.”<sup>1</sup> The statement reflects key aspects of survivor testimony and points to the need for an expansive and nuanced reading of witnessing torture. Alleg’s sense of what is “almost indecent” captures the paradoxical necessity and inevitable inadequacy of sharing his story. On the one hand, first-person witnessing brings the abhorrent workings of the torture chamber to light, providing evidence to refute the claims perpetrators regularly make to their victims that “no one will hear, believe, or remember you.” On the other hand, as many scholars and witnesses have demonstrated, even when first-person accounts reveal what was ostensibly hidden, they are also always partial—freighted with the challenge of making pain and traumatic experience legible, of representing a singular experience that (because there are identifiable patterns to torture) may also be generalizable, of remembering through the prism of trauma, and of the speaker’s possible re-traumatization in the telling. Life writing about torture, then,

<sup>1</sup>Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006 [1958]), 33.

is at once marked by and resistant to the dissolution of the subject that torture tries to accomplish. What follows the decision to “talk about oneself” is thus not a simple recounting of experience, but a complex meditation on how one reconstitutes oneself as a speaking subject, and how one’s psychological and physical experience might be represented and understood within a matrix of social relations, linguistic conventions, and, not least, egregious harms.

To stop there, however, would be to restrict the reading of Alleg’s account, to relegate the torture survivor solely to the realm of suffering, and to delimit that realm from full emplacement within the larger social and political contexts in which torture and its aftermath take place. It also would reinforce the rhetorical divide between survivors—who, as the Prologue to this volume discusses, are often called upon to attest to phenomenological “truths” of torture—and those with professional expertise—lawyers, policy-makers, health-care workers, teachers, and human rights activists and observers—who are authorized to analyze torture in specific historical, legal, cultural, and institutional contexts. We can see this divide between the personal and affective testimonial discourse of witnessing on the one hand, and analytical discourses of professional expertise on the other, and also reflected in the standard form of the human rights report, in which individual stories are set apart typographically from more neutral documentary and analytical language in order that individualized stories of atrocity might animate the data. Although there are obvious reasons that human rights literature, reporting, and public discourse have remained divided between the testimonial literature of survivors and analytical academic/activist work, this division presents the following problems and limitations that this volume aims to address:

- First, the divide in genre, however inadvertently, constructs torture victims and survivors, and their life writing, as objects of political and analytical discourse, exacerbating the silencing and loss of agency that are a hallmark of survivor experience. Such a divide might unwittingly contribute to social blindness about what Darius Rejali has called *stealth torture*—that is, torture that does not leave any mark, such as techniques of sensory deprivation, stress and duress, or mock executions, as opposed to premodern forms of torture that scarred

and maimed—particularly when it involves democratic regimes.<sup>2</sup> It also elides those persons who occupy multiple subject positions, as survivor, as activist/academic/clinician working on human rights, and as citizen.

- Second, the lack of analytical commentary from survivors in the literature about torture reinforces assumptions about the necessity, attainability, and value of scholarly neutrality and objectivity, ostensibly achieved by maintaining a certain distance from one's subject, that have been challenged by postmodern philosophies and methodologies across disciplines, and that remain to be critically examined in the arena of human rights.
- Third, the absence of analytical commentary from those who have themselves experienced such grave violations of rights means that a major intellectual and activist resource for the prohibition of torture remains unmined. In parallel, ignoring the affective, psychological, and phenomenological dimensions of the work of (non-survivor) human rights workers curtails a fuller understanding of the sociality of torture and healing, and of solidarities and divergences in the struggle against torture. When life narratives of torture comprise solely survivors' testimonies of pain, our understanding of the broad interpersonal and socio-political dimensions of torture is greatly diminished.
- Fourth, as we confront the use of torture as a tool used by democratic and authoritarian, state and non-state actors, it is crucial to ground our understanding of torture in political and social contexts in order to examine the ideologies that sustain it. If the only recognized witnesses to torture are its victims and perpetrators, our understanding of its ideological and institutional foundations, and thus our capacity to dismantle those foundations, is severely limited.

Striving for such an expansive contextual apparatus for witnessing torture, survivor, performance artist, and activist Hector Aristizábal emphasizes

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Rejali's larger argument about the coupling of stealth torture and democracy, as well as his more specific argument that "Stealth torture denies precisely this home in the body, tangling victims and their communities in doubts, uncertainties, and illusions" (see Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007], 32).

the importance of multiple forms of life narratives. Because one of the techniques of torture is to convey its ostensible secrecy and unknowability, for torture's victim, Aristizábal writes, "[i]n that moment of utter surrender, when everyone else had abandoned me, when my own body and mind had betrayed me, only he [the perpetrator] was there."<sup>3</sup> Dismantling the lasting power of the dark chamber for Aristizábal necessitates de-personalizing it, not to evacuate himself from but to re-situate himself within the scene: "I need to think of that man as *the* torturer, not *my* torturer, and to understand that he belonged to the army, to the system of repression, and not to me."<sup>4</sup> Aristizábal effects that transformation by re-narrativizing and performing his own experiences, and we follow his lead here by expanding the scope of life writing about torture to include voices that reflect personally and analytically on those systems of repression, as well as on pathways of healing and redress.

\* \* \*

This volume responds to the limitations of the conventional divide between life writing and analysis described above through fourteen essays insisting that complex modes of witnessing torture can only take place through attention to torture's combined phenomenological and political effects; to the relationship between torture and its larger social and institutional contexts; to torture's prolonged impact on the individual and society; and to the relationship between survivors and other social actors working within institutions of torture, repression, recovery, redress, cultural representation, and education. Our authors demonstrate that torture can be neither adequately represented nor countered by the archetypal scene described by Stephanie Athey that features "an isolated subject, a torturer, and an array of graphic techniques."<sup>5</sup> In this model, there are only two witnesses—victim and perpetrator, each of whom represents a kind of limit case for humanity: the human capacity to bear pain and the human capacity to inflict pain directly upon another person. When torture is imagined to take place solely through this dyad, witnessing is similarly

<sup>3</sup> Hector Aristizábal and Diane Lefer, "Out of the Inner Wilderness: Torture and Healing," in *We Shall Bear Witness: Life Narratives and Human Rights*, ed. Meg Jensen and Margaretta Jolly (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Original emphases.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Athey, "The Torture Device: Debate and Archetype," in *Torture: Power, Democracy, and the Human Body*, ed. Shampa Biswas and Zahi Zallouia (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 139.

limited to the perpetrator's justifications for torture and the survivor's attempt to document experience and to withstand the sense Jean Améry has described that "with the very first blow that descends on him he loses something we will perhaps temporarily call 'trust in the world.'"<sup>6</sup> Scholars focused on this emblematic model of torture, Athey argues, "lift the practice out of its historical, social, and institutional complexity."<sup>7</sup> The fact that much testimonial literature is rich with analysis of the larger contexts in which the survivor's torture occurred is often discounted, as is the fact that frequently the survivor has in fact been targeted *because* he or she is an intellectual, activist, or professional.<sup>8</sup> The degree to which human rights literature is split between survivor testimonials and academics', activists', or clinicians' analyses represents the harmful reduction of survivors' identity to the category of "survivor," erasing that which they do and are before, after, and beyond their experience of torture.

To expand the register of witnessing torture in the chapters that follow, survivors (from Argentina, Ireland, the Philippines, Sudan, and the United States) analyze their experiences in historical, religious, legal, and institutional contexts, and non-survivor human rights workers (psychologists, lawyers, artists, activists, and teachers who have worked with survivors from across the globe) offer self-reflective examinations of the institutional, political, and emotional dimensions of their work. These rhetorical and generic shifts make possible forms of witnessing torture within its multifaceted contexts that are otherwise foreclosed. In doing so, the authors included in this volume underscore the uses of and responses to torture as profoundly socio-political, implicating the broad polities in whose name torture occurs. More specifically, the chapters that follow understand torture not as a series of isolated anomalies from within the

<sup>6</sup>Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>7</sup>Athey, "The Torture Device," 141.

<sup>8</sup>An example is the "testimonial" of Jacobo Timerman, journalist and editor of the well-respected Argentine newspaper *La Opinión*, whose persistence in publishing writs of habeas corpus during the "Dirty War" resulted in his disappearance and torture by the Argentine military. His *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (1981) is considered a classic of testimonial literature; however, passages related to his torture and ill-treatment are out-numbered by chapters analyzing the rise of fascism in Argentina and its parallel to the Nazi era in Germany. In many senses, the book is more a political analysis than a testimonial, or is at least an even mix of the two; however, it is known—and arguably taught—as testimonial. Améry's account cited earlier similarly includes extensive social and political commentary.

flow of civilization, but rather as an age-old political tool tied to institutions that may seem autonomous or even at odds, but that are themselves often linked to one another through personnel, politics, and ideology. Just as the authors recognize the long history of torture's use by political regimes, so, too, do they draw attention to what Carolyn Forché has described as the *longue durée* of atrocity—its aftermath.<sup>9</sup>

As opposed to what comes *after* torture, as though its ending may be clearly demarcated, *aftermath* implies the lasting effects of torture on its participants and on the societies in which they exist, effects which are non-teleological and cannot be known in advance. The authors also write self-reflectively from their various geopolitical, disciplinary, and institutional positions, noting that the norms governing these positions give shape to the very definitions of what torture and enforced disappearance might mean, as well as to the kinds of recovery and forms of redress that might be possible. Writing from within and about various institutions (such as a network of survivors, the academy, or a professional association) also makes possible collective witnessing of the uses and effects of torture and the role of different institutions in supporting torture, struggling against torture, or promoting healing and redress for survivors. Collective witnessing in this volume does not take the form of a single author combining multiple experiences under the sign of her own "I," as in Rigoberta Menchú's life writing, but rather of life writing that is firmly rooted in larger institutions and systems of harm, representation, and redress. Significantly, as several essays point out, such redress must begin simply with acknowledgment of the occurrence of torture, given that, as Elaine Scarry taught long ago, the denial of torture by its perpetrators and the larger societies in which they operate is one of the central components of torture itself.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the essays here underscore the importance of both imagination and affect in ethically witnessing torture and its scalar effects: on the individual, on the communities to which the tortured and the perpetrators belong(ed), and on the large social contexts in which aftermaths of torture take shape. Our contributors do not argue for imagination and affect

<sup>9</sup>Carolyn Forché, "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art," in *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore (New York: Routledge, 2012), 137.

<sup>10</sup>Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 9.

simply to secure empathic identification with torture's victims, but rather to recognize that torture always occurs within a social matrix and, thus, always implicates a polity—and that both its perpetration and its eradication are grounded in personal and collective imaginaries.

\* \* \*

In Alleg's initial reluctance to tell his story, we hear reverberations of the title of his book, *The Question*. Resisting disclosure both refuses violent interrogation and seems to anticipate inquiry by someone other than an interrogator into the value of one man's story, in this case a story of survival of a month-long torture regime. To build upon the connection (more pronounced in the original French) between torture and interrogation that Alleg's title invokes, if "the question" is designed to elicit an ostensible truth that the subject withholds but the tortured body (once subjectivity has been wounded or destroyed) releases, then the narrative of its aftermath would also seem to reveal something authentic and otherwise buried about the human condition: the ability to survive, the process of living-with, the manifestation of an everyday life again after the massive disruption of torture.

First, then, *The Question* has a juridical function: it testifies to the fact of torture. Alleg's credibility as a French journalist and editor, his anticolonial politics notwithstanding, amplifies the book's message that the French forces used torture as a tactic during Algeria's liberation war. Indeed, as Alleg states later in the book, "My particular case is exceptional in that it has attracted public attention. It is not in any way unique."<sup>11</sup> In other words, its exceptionality is rooted in the use of torture against a European rather than an Algerian target of French forces, revealing the potent identity politics that have always informed the perpetration, visibility, and redress of torture. The book stands with texts such as Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limit*, and Alicia Partnoy's *Little School*, among others, that also resonate philosophically to characterize torture, in Diana Taylor's words, as that which "attacks personhood, suspends the rules, and unmakes the world of the victim,"<sup>12</sup> and as that which

<sup>11</sup> Alleg, *The Question*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Taylor, "Double Blind: The Torture Case," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 710.

crosses the limit, threatening to corrode Enlightenment distinctions between the human and inhuman and eviscerating international agreements differentiating between the legitimate and illegitimate use of force [...] overrid[ing] the rule of law and [...] nullif[y]ing] all legal mechanisms designed precisely to safeguard against cruelty and violence.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these texts, then, provides testimony to the fact of torture, its mechanics, while also exploring the multiple registers of its individual, social, and institutional effects.

In her important argument about how witnessing can offer a model for understanding subjectivity and ethical relations, Kelly Oliver focuses on these two forms of witnessing—evidentiary and philosophical—in relation to truth:

There is a tension inherent in the notion of witnessing in the sense of eye-witness to historical facts or accuracy on the one hand, and witnessing in the sense of bearing witness to a truth about humanity and suffering that transcends those facts. It is important to note that witnessing has both the juridical connotations of seeing with one's own eyes and the religious or now political connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen, or *bearing witness*. It is this double meaning that makes witnessing such a powerful alternative to recognition in reconceiving subjectivity and thereby ethical relations. The tension between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness, between historical facts and what we might call psychoanalytic or phenomenological truth, between subject position and subjectivity is the dynamic operator that moves us beyond the melancholic choice between either dead historical facts or traumatic repetition of violence.<sup>14</sup>

In Oliver's account, it is the relationship between *witnessing* (in the evidentiary or juridical sense) and *bearing witness* (in the ethical, socio-psychological sense) that provides the foundation for understanding subjectivity in terms of one's potential for social meaning, as well as for ethical relations among subjects. Rather than conceptualizing subjectivity as taking place through the act of recognition—such that one becomes a subject when one is recognized by the Other—Oliver develops a model that distributes subjectivity across relations of witnessing and the “response-ability” that witnessing demands. According to this formulation,

<sup>13</sup>Taylor, “Double Blind,” 711.

<sup>14</sup>Kelly Oliver, “Witnessing and Testimony,” *Parallax* 10, no. 1 (2004): 81.

witness as “response-ability” is foundational to the construction and maintenance of subjectivity itself, inasmuch as it enables the following three categories of interaction: (1) the subject’s right and ability to address others; (2) the subject’s right and ability to respond to others; and (3) others’ responsibility to respond to her “in a way that opens up rather than closes off the possibility of recognition by others.”<sup>15</sup>

This notion of response-ability helpfully addresses Alleg’s anxiety about speaking of his own experience of torture, given how it is situated within the malevolent psychodynamics of the secret prison. In more general terms, this expanded notion of bearing witness can help to negotiate the proprietary registers of pain, suffering, and authenticity when it comes to both survivors’ and non-survivor advocates’ positioning in relation to the larger field of “torture.” Work in this arena is plagued with anxiety (visible or not) about the legitimacy of one’s own pain in relation to that of others; the legitimacy of emotional, as opposed to physical, suffering; and the legitimacy of “secondary” trauma in the act of witnessing another’s pain. Overall, such anxieties are enflamed by the delimiting idea of authenticity in which hierarchies of pain, suffering, and experience are made and remade, opening or foreclosing upon opportunities to articulate or to share in the social field of torture.

Oliver’s concept of response-ability provides language and a map for negotiating these various anxieties in order to allow multiple relations to the phenomenon, experience, and subject of torture to emerge, relations that move beyond psychoanalytic or political recognition. It is an ethical rejoinder (a combination of responsibility toward and response to the speaker and what she discloses) that acknowledges the speaker, narrative, and context, and implicates the reader/listener/spectator in the situation at hand. Response-ability, in other words, can potentially unlock the hierarchy implicit in recognition, which figures as a choice one may or may not make about the Other, with the Other’s subjectivity dependent in some way upon the outcome of that choice. It can also intervene in the self-censoring, such as that to which Alleg alludes, that can result from consciousness of such a hierarchy. Because witnessing and responding are multiple, layered, dynamic, and contextualized processes, according to Oliver, subjectivity itself is a process of social making among diverse actors, rather than a singular occurrence that takes place between self and Other.

<sup>15</sup>Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.

This conception of subjectivity dramatically alters the reading and reception of a text like *The Question*, recasting readers as stakeholders in the consciousness of torture, and redistributing vulnerability from Alleg alone to those who share response-ability for his testimonial.

Whereas witnessing of atrocity serves as a model for understanding subjectivity for Oliver—who emphasizes that her purpose is not “extolling the virtues of testimony per se”<sup>16</sup>—we build on her account of witnessing to focus its implications for understanding torture. More specifically, we emphasize the processes (interpersonal, institutional, ideological) within which witnessing and response-ability take place—such as through the messy personal–professional tasks of translation, psychological therapy, artistic creation, teaching, and legal activism—as well as broadening the range of participants in those processes who are usually considered witnesses. Each of these endeavors requires interpersonal and collective effort (among survivors and in partnership with non-survivor human rights workers) as well as a personal and professional will to witness torture’s aftermath in order to countermand it. Stated slightly differently, the chapters demonstrate how historical, clinical, juridical, translational, artistic, and academic responses to torture bear traces of torture’s assaults on both the individual and society, and not just on those who have been tortured. The essays here encourage us to read these traces as other forms of witnessing torture’s effects by destabilizing the rhetorical separation between survivors and human rights workers in their disciplines.

How do we understand Alleg’s narrative in relation to this argument? As already noted, Alleg’s account might read solely as the reluctant disclosure of the individual’s almost unbearable suffering, leaving Jean-Paul Sartre’s Preface to place Alleg’s story in its political and philosophical contexts. Sartre refers to *The Question* as the “proof” France has needed to confront the moral challenge that the use of torture in the name of patriotism and anticolonialism presents:

Up to now it was only those returning from military service, particularly priests, who have been able to bear witness [...] With the publication of *La Question*, everything is changed.<sup>17</sup>

Sartre considers the devastating effects of torture on its perpetrators and what it reveals about human nature, as well as how torture fits within the French military arsenal—and that of other democratic governments.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver, “Witnessing and Testimony,” 80.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface to Henri Alleg, *The Question*, xxx, xxxi.

“Disavowed—sometimes very quietly—but systematically practiced behind a façade of democratic legality,” he writes, “torture has now acquired the status of a semi-clandestine institution.”<sup>18</sup> For Sartre, *The Question* reveals the “indissoluble partnership”<sup>19</sup> between the colonizer and the executioner and, thus, the moral vacuum within France’s claims to Algeria. Yet it is precisely by citing details of rank, training, procedure, and so forth from Alleg’s narrative that Sartre makes his argument. Thus, the Preface directs us to Alleg’s text itself as providing witness *and* context: for his suffering (including beatings, electric shocks, and waterboarding) and for the workings of the military force that utilized torture to try to stop the Algerian liberation movement.

Whereas readers traditionally turn to Sartre’s Preface to consider the political *question* (that is, “what is the role of torture in contemporary politics?”), leaving Alleg to testify to his personal experience of suffering, we submit that Alleg’s narrative in and of itself offers a substantive and rigorous discussion of the political and institutional contexts of that experience. Indeed, Alleg emphasized this larger reading of the title in a 2007 interview with *Democracy Now!*’s Amy Goodman. As the headline of the interview, “French Journalist Henri Alleg Describes His Torture Being Waterboarded by French Forces During the Algerian War,” makes clear, the 86-year-old Alleg is being called upon to describe his suffering in order to support the arguments against the legality of waterboarding as a so-called “enhanced interrogation” technique in the war on terror. The lead-in to the story is President George W. Bush’s nomination of Judge Michael Mukasey to become Attorney General of the United States in light of Mukasey’s “refusal to condemn waterboarding as a form of torture.” Although Goodman prompts Alleg, whom she calls a “real-life survivor of torture,” to describe how waterboarding feels and what he experienced, Alleg quickly rejects the question—is waterboarding torture?—as neither appropriate nor necessary:

So I am really astonished that this is a big question in the States about this, because the real question is not waterboarding or not waterboarding, it is the use of torture in such a war, and this use of torture, torture in general.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xliii.

<sup>20</sup> “French Journalist Henri Alleg Describes His Torture Being Waterboarded by French Forces During the Algerian War,” Interview with Henri Alleg by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!* (5 November 2007), [https://www.democracynow.org/2007/11/5/french\\_journalist\\_henri\\_alleg\\_describes\\_his](https://www.democracynow.org/2007/11/5/french_journalist_henri_alleg_describes_his), accessed 27 February 2017.

Indeed, the argument might cogently be made that the continued exclusion of survivors of torture from nearly all mainstream national and international scholarly and policy debates on human rights constitutes a major detriment to these fields. The passage of the Military Commissions Act (2006), which removed the right of habeas corpus and the presumption of innocence for so-called enemy and unlawful combatants, and which altered the definition of torture codified in the United Nations Convention against Torture (to which the United States is signatory), is a case in point.<sup>21</sup> Aside from US Senator John McCain, no survivor of torture was consulted in the drafting and ratification of that bill, which, as legal scholars have overwhelmingly asserted, not only gutted a foundational legal principle (habeas corpus) and further degraded the United States' standing in the international arena by abrogating standards in the Third Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, but also virtually ensured that more persons—regardless of the status of “guilt” or “innocence,” notoriously difficult to discern and assign in the slippery arenas of terrorism and counter-terrorism—would be subjected to the unconscionable harm of torture by expanding the definition of allowable methods of coercive interrogation.

Perhaps the vast body of “expertise” so unwillingly acquired by torture survivors might have had an important place in this debate, had one or more of them been consulted.<sup>22</sup> And perhaps it would be considered efficacious to consult one or more survivor as an “expert” in such cases if the

<sup>21</sup> See Military Commissions Act of 2006, S3930.

<sup>22</sup> TASSC International issued the following statement with regard to the Military Commissions Act:

The Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC), each member of which is a survivor of torture, denounces the Military Commissions Act of 2006 and calls for its repeal. This legislation constitutes an attack on the constitutional right to habeas corpus the Geneva Conventions, the War Crimes Act, the U.N. Convention Against Torture and protection from punishment derived from coerced testimony. In addition, it grants immunity to those who have ordered and practiced torture. It is a disgrace to the basic values proclaimed by the people of the United States.

The members of TASSC know torture from the inside out. We also know from our own lived experience what it means to have a friend or family member disappeared or held by a government that permits no avenue of return.

We know as well what it is to live where government officials are granted impunity, rather than held accountable for the crimes they have committed.

literature by survivors were not so neatly cordoned into the generic category “testimonial”: an untheorized, affective account of physical and psychic pain. And perhaps it would be more difficult to write and support such legislation if non-survivor experts on torture had also been invited to share their work with survivors, articulating how it has shaped their understanding of both individual worth and national identity.

Of course, any collection of life writing about torture will be necessarily, productively partial and incomplete. We make no claims on behalf of a coverage model of the subject; rather, we hope this collection will expand the public conversation about torture by broadening its forms and participants, especially in emphasizing that witnessing torture need not solely transform the speaker “from the position of victim to that of plaintiff” to be meaningful and effective.<sup>23</sup> In addition, we hope the essays assembled here demonstrate the rich potential of conceptualizing life writing in inter-related analytical, affective, and often collective registers.

One additional aspect of the perspectives—and lack of perspectives—in this volume deserves attention. Although techniques of torture are often traceable across specific geopolitical alliances that indicate how regimes learn to torture in particular ways, those patterns are tailored to their immediate contexts and subjects. A crucial aspect of that tailoring concerns the sexualization of torture and the gendering of its targets, particularly when rape, sexual assault, and sexual humiliation are employed to feminize persons of all genders. For instance, Diana Taylor has analyzed the sexualized violence of the Argentinian Dirty War in ways that we can compare to other contexts by examining the gendered ideologies that fuel torture: “the gendered violence taking place in the discourse of the symbolic *Patria* was being played out on the ‘real’ bodies of the victims in order to shape a new symbolic entity: the national being.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the prevalence of sexualized torture techniques and the substantial literature devoted to gender and torture, and perhaps because of the difficulty of crossing rhetorical divides regarding such intimate violence, our volume does not include an essay on this topic.

We who are survivors of torture call upon all those who believe in justice and human decency to work on behalf of human decency and against the undemocratic, anti-human rights provisions of the Military Commissions Act of 2006 enacted by the U.S. Congress.

Statement issued September 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Cubilić, *Women Witnessing Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>24</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 151.

However, we understand the gendering of torture and the ideologies that inform its perpetration as warrants undergirding all of the life writing contained in this volume.

Finally, the expanded register of witnessing and life writing that we propose here does not simply divulge a truth about the individual's experience, nor give voice to the human capacity to inflict and endure pain, so much as it deepens our understanding of how torture works in its larger social matrix and, following the lead of survivors, what might be done to prevent or to respond to it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, this book would not exist were it not for the life, work, and example of Sister Dianna Ortiz, OSU, founder and long-time director of the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC), the United States' only NGO founded and run by survivors of torture. Sister Dianna's testimonial to her torture at the hands of North American and Guatemalan agents in a Guatemalan torture chamber can be read in her searing memoir, *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth* (Orbis Books, 2002). TASSC continues to be on the forefront of the struggle against torture and in support of survivors internationally.

The idea for this volume came into being in 2003, as the US-led "war on terror" was ramping up, and it became clear that Coalition forces were engaging in torture. Sister Dianna, the late Orlando Tizon, who served for many years as Associate Director of TASSC, and Judy B. Okawa, a psychologist who has devoted her career to supporting survivors, and who ran the Program for Survivors of Torture and Severe Trauma in Washington, DC, have guided the work from the beginning, and we gratefully acknowledge their contributions.

Our cover image, Untitled (Crying Eye), 2016, was painted by former Guantánamo prisoner Muhammad Ansi, after the Periodic Review Board initially denied his application for release. Originally from Yemen, Ansi spent nearly fifteen years without charge in Guantánamo before he was sent to Oman in 2017. Although Guantánamo artists are careful to depict images that will not jeopardize their chances of repatriation, Ansi later revealed that he imagined his mother's eye, crying when his first hearing was unsuccessful. We are grateful to Erin

Thompson, curator of *Ode to the Sea: Art from Guantánamo*, for her dedication to exhibiting Guantánamo artwork and for her assistance in the use of this image.

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**Jennifer Harbury** began her career in a small legal aid bureau on the Texas–Mexican border, which led to her involvement in the Mayan resistance to the Guatemalan oligarchy’s brutal repression of its indigenous people. Her husband, Efraim Bamaca Velasquez (known as Commandante Everardo), was captured in 1992, tortured for two and a half years, then murdered without trial. Harbury conducted hunger strikes in Guatemala and in front of the White House in Washington, DC to try to force officials in both countries to tell her the truth about what had happened to her husband. Her efforts uncovered information about Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involvement in torture throughout Latin America. She is the author of *Bridge to Courage: Life Stories of Guatemalan Compañeros & Compañeras* (Common Courage

Press, 1995); *Searching for Everardo: A Story of Love, War, and the CIA in Guatemala* (Warner Books, 1997); and *Truth, Torture, and the American Way* (Beacon Press, 2005), which documents the long-time use of torture by the CIA. In 1995, Harbury received a Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award, and in 1997 the Cavallo Award for Moral Courage, which she shared with Richard Nuccio, the US State Department official who leaked the information about the CIA's cover-up of and complicity in the torture and murder of her husband Everardo.

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**Judy B. Okawa** is a licensed clinical psychologist who established and directed the Program for Survivors of Torture and Severe Trauma in the Washington, DC area in 1998. She testified a number of times before congressional subcommittees on the impact of torture on the individual, and served as an expert witness in court for numerous asylum cases. Okawa has provided trauma training at the international and national level to profes-

sionals in many fields on how to cope with vicarious trauma and how to assist survivors in recovering from torture. She served on the Executive Council of the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs and on the board of the Pacific Survivor Center in Honolulu. She consulted for several years for the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC). Her work with asylum seekers was recognized with a Human Rights award from the United Nations Association in Washington, DC.

**Linda A. Piwowarczyk** is a co-founder and Director of the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights. She specializes in the mental health evaluation and treatment of refugees and torture survivors. This has been her life work for over twenty years. Since 2002, Piwowarczyk has served on the Executive Committee of the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs (NCTTP) and is currently its President. In May 2017, she accepted the Human Rights Award on behalf of the NCTTP from the American Psychiatric Association. She is a recipient of the Sarah Haley Memorial Award for Clinical Excellence from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, and the Local Legends Award from the National Library of Medicine that honors female physicians. A Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, she has presented on the topic of torture locally, nationally, and internationally, and has published articles on the subject in various medical journals.

**Patricio Rice\*** is originally from Ireland, and served as a Catholic priest among the poor in Buenos Aires, where he was abducted and tortured by the military regime in 1976. With pressure from the Irish government, his religious order, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, he was released and deported. He returned to Argentina, however, to continue his pastoral mission among the poor, and he remained an active voice against human rights violations and an advocate for the disappeared in Latin America. As co-founder and Executive Secretary of FEDEFAM, the Executive Latin American Federation of Families of the Disappeared, between 1981 and 1987, Rice was instrumental in crafting the UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

**Elizabeth Swanson** is Professor of English at Babson College and has published widely on the subject of literature and human rights. Author of *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), she is co-editor, with Alexandra Schultheis Moore, of

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**Orlando P. Tizon\*** was arrested on September 21, 1982 in Davao City, on the island of Mindanao, southern Philippines, during the regime of President Marcos. At that time, he was working as a community organizer and educator among the rural poor in the Philippines. During the first three weeks of his imprisonment, the military who arrested him kept him blindfolded and incommunicado in a military camp outside Davao City. He suffered beatings, endless interrogations, mock execution, and solitary confinement for more than three months. In April 1986, after the people power revolution, the Aquino government granted him amnesty and released him from prison. Soon after, he emigrated to the United States, attended graduate school, and earned a doctorate in Sociology. Tizon served as a staff member of the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC) in Washington, DC, and as Coordinator of the Helping Hands program for torture survivors.

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