

Testimony after Catastrophe

Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence

Stevan Weine

Survivors of political violence give testimonies in families and communities, trials and truth commissions, religious institutions, psychotherapies, newspapers, documentaries, artworks, and even in solitude. Through spoken, written, and visual images, survivors' testimonies tell stories that may change history, politics, and life itself. In this book Stevan Weine, a psychiatrist and scholar in the field of mental health and human rights, focuses on the testimony of survivors for the hope it might hold—hope expressed by survivors again and again that, no matter what horrors or humiliations they have endured, some good might come of their stories. It is through the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin, and his approach to narrative, that Weine seeks to read the testimony of survivors of political violence from four different twentieth-century historical nightmares—and to read them as the stories they are meant to be, fully conveying their legitimacy, resourcefulness, power—and, finally, hope.

A deeply involving, compassionate, occasionally confrontational blend of practical hands-on experience and dialogic theory, emerging from the author's decade-long work in Europe and Chicago with survivors of the Balkan wars, this book is committed to the proposition that efforts to use testimony to address the consequences of political violence can be strengthened—though by no means guaranteed—if they are based on a fuller acknowledgment of the personal and ethical elements embodied in the narrative essence of testimony. These elements are what *Testimony after Catastrophe* seeks to reveal.

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Exploring the aftermath of historical violence by reading survivors' testimonies in Bakhtinian terms

CONTENTS

I. Testimonies in Four Spaces

Chapter One: Torture Testimonies

Chapter Two: Holocaust Testimonies

Chapter Three: Testimonies from Wartime Bosnia-Herzegovina

Chapter Four: Kosovar Testimonies

II. Testimony as Dialogic Work

Introducing Bakhtin's Dialogic Work

Chapter Five: Diminishing Suffering

Chapter Six: Creating Cultures of Peace and Reconciliation

Chapter Seven: Documenting Histories