

“Desire for Justice, Desire for Law: An Ethnography of Peoples’ Tribunals” edited by Chowra Makaremi and Pardis Shafafi, **PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review**, Vol. 42, Number 2, pp. 181–243, November 2019

Ethnography of Witnessing and Ethnography as Witnessing: Topographies of Two Court Hearings*

Shahla Talebi

Arizona State University

[p. 226] *In this article, I attend to two forms of hearings (or nonhearings) in two distinctive courts of law, both involving the persecution of Iranian dissidents in the 1980s. Drawing on my ethnographic and archival research, inside and outside of Iran, I ponder the conditions of possibility of confessions/testimonies and their affects and after-lives. The first case involves the Islamic Republic’s televised trials of a group of leftist prisoners. The second one is a symbolic court in The Hague, known as the Iran Tribunal, organized by some dissidents in diaspora, where witnesses testified against the Iranian regime. I meditate on the relationship between these two different spaces of the “law” in their differing milieus, and the divergent modes of speaking and hearing they render possible or impossible. I contemplate the kinds of ethical subjectivities they produce or shatter and reflect on the conditions and modes of speaking and hearing in relation to these topographies of coercive and sympathetic courts. [Iran, revolution, people’s tribunals, witnessing, testimony]*

* For quotation purpose, the original page numbers are indicated [in bracket] in the text.

Anthropological Calling

In speaking of anthropology as “vocation,” James W. Fernandez (1987) draws on the etymological sense of the Latin word, *vocatio*, and defines vocation as “a calling, a sense of an urging or an obligation to respond to a situation because of a strong predisposition.” Fernandez argues that anthropologists should feel “called by human voices distinctly ‘other’ and characteristically little listened to.” In his view, anthropologists’ “significant endeavor” is “paying attention to the voices of those among whom we live and study.” This requires them not only “to be there, to listen, to negotiate, to transcend, and to formulate” but also to “amplify the scale of interlocution and grant to other voices their commentary on the subject.” These invocations were very much in the spirit of the *Writing Culture* era (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Anthropologists have debated myriad issues concerning voice, including whose voice ethnography is rendering audible, for whom, and in what context (Appadurai 1988); can one truly speak for others? Can others be actually heard/received when channeled through our ethnography or from the confinement of our epistemological terrains (Abu-Lughod 2013; Kohn 2013; Mahmood 2005)? Several anthropologists have pointed out our common failure to imagine, see, or relate to others because of an inability or unwillingness to open up to different epistemes and sensibilities. Dominant “problem- spaces” (Scott 2004) often delimit the boundaries of the problems and possible questions anthropologists ask.

Toward a more complex perspective, scholars have refuted the illusion of an autonomous subject (Mahmood 2005; Keane 2007; High 2010; Greenberg 2011; Degelder 2012; Muhanna 2016; Sehlkoglu 2018). More recent ethnographies have even questioned the subject-centered approaches and reckoned with the surrendered, afflicted, waning, or waned subjectivities: in dreams and in maladies of the soul (Mittermaier 2010; Pandolfo 2018), and in experiences of limit (Talebi 2011). Such an ethnography requires one to open oneself, [p. 227] even if momentarily, to living life at its limits, at the thresholds of dream, madness, and death.

Ethnography is an intersubjective endeavor, which means to repudiate the idea that subjects are formed and/or survive in isolation as autonomous selves. In speaking of inter- subjectivity, Johannes Fabian argues that anthropologists’ task “is to figure out how we can produce knowledge by bridging *Lebenswelten*” (lifeworld) and “preserve . . . epistemological signification” of

intersubjectivity. For Fabian, intersubjectivity is neither “an ethical concept” nor “a prescription for moral conduct” but the “condition of communication” (2014, 206).

Yet even dialogue, which Fabian refers to as “arguably a softer version of intersubjectivity,” is “unequivocally positive” (2014, 206). No communication takes place in a neutral zone, bereft of power; dialogues too can “be manipulative and deceptive” (Fabian 2014, 206). What Habermas sees as “the ideal circumstance,” or “the pragmatic presuppositions of an inclusive and non-coercive rational discourse between free and equal participants,” is almost always precisely that: an ideal (1999, 58). Any dialogue can be channeled to a particular direction or agenda through “selective emphasis, secretiveness, withholding information, and outright lying” (Fabian 2014, 206). Thus, while intersubjectivity is central to the production of a more reliable ethnographic knowledge, the uneven relations of power cannot be obscured (Habermas 1999).

I see intersubjectivity also as an ontological and ethical worldview that demands recognition of the entwinement of subjects, things, and the world. Such a view is mindful of “soul blindness,” a notion Eduardo Kohn borrows from Stanley Cavell to refer to the lack of insight about the “ecology of selves,” acknowledging that “all selves have souls” (Kohn 2013, 117). Kohn argues that “soul blindness is not just a human problem” but “a cosmic one” (117).

Navigating the genealogy of trace in anthropology, Valentina Napolitano “invites us to explore the mattering of things (as forms becoming of importance), new ways of conjuring and operationalizing ethnographic ‘details’ and to broaden our debate of an anthropology beyond the subject, in the light of the mattering of histories” (2015, 47). This notion of mattering has a double connotation. On the one hand, it implies seeking the materiality of history not only in the narratives but also “at the intersection of the seen and the unseen, sound and silence” and in “the coming into being of the social and its recession” (47). On the other hand, it emphasizes the importance of history, especially to and of the marginalized or silenced. It means unearthing the obscured or fading traces not merely in individuals’ stories and voices but also in images, imaginaries, sounds, spaces, times, and stage(ings). For Napolitano, traces are at once “an analytical tool and an ethnographic site for inquiry” (2015, 47). Anthropology of trace requires searching for the seemingly vanished or ruined, imagining the yet not there. It is to see continuity in ruptures, similarity in difference, and vice versa.

Through an ethnography of trace and ruination (Navaro-Yashin 2009), I seek to high- light the silences and erasures of a

crucial period in recent Iranian history. I draw on two kinds of courts, focusing on the case of two Iranian political prisoners from the 1980s. As this ethnographic account will show, the figure of witness in both cases is multivalent and ambiguous, as are the meanings of witness(ing) and testimony (testifying). These ambivalences allow the obscured histories to be conjured beyond what appears obvious (Giovoni 2016). In excavating the bits and pieces of stories buried in these trials and their unwritten histories (Wilson 2011) I hope to listen, observe, and sense what seems entirely lost or is yet to come. What follows is a small step toward such an ethnography.

[p. 228] **Defenders and Witnesses**

In 1983, Nasrin Jazaeri, a leftist woman, was sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Court of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Revolutionary Court of the IRI). Her trial was one among many in which those affiliated with a leftist organization *Ettehadieh-ye Comonistha ye Iran* (Union of the Communists of Iran) and its militant subgroup *Sarbedaran* (Heads on Gallows) were tried, and most were sentenced to death. I have chosen Nasrin's case for various reasons, the most obvious being its availability on the Internet.¹ Reading between noises and silences, I hope to bring her voice back to life as a witness rather than as a trapped confessor/defender.

The second person, Mehdi Memarpour, also arrested in the early 1980s, is a self-identified Muslim who currently resides in Europe. Memarpour appeared in two courts; in the 1980s, he was tried in the court of the IRI, and in 2012, he testified as a witness in a people's tribunal against IRI (in absentia) held in the Peace Palace in The Hague.² His testimony was among many others offered in the *hearings* in London and The Hague. Memarpour spent six months in Evin Prison, a short period if compared with many other witnesses who were imprisoned for several years. I selected Memarpour's testimony because in a different setting it would have proven much harder for many former political prisoners to actually hear him; relating to his experience requires an openness to radical alterity. But first, of the courts.

The Courts

¹ For Nasrin Jazaeri's trial, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvyxXYxI0DY&ab_

² For information on Iran-Tribunal, including a list of witnesses see <http://www.irantribunal.com/index.php/en/sessions/court>.

The Revolutionary Court of the IRI was established very soon after the 1979 revolution, and had a significant role in political suppression during the 1980s. The Revolutionary Court was constituted by many small courtrooms, which in Tehran were located in Evin Prison. At times, prisoners were tried in groups in a huge hall called Hosseiniyeh, also in Evin Prison. There were no lawyers or juries present in these courts; most trials lasted no more than a few minutes.

In 2007, about three decades after the revolution, a group of Iranian political dissidents who reside in Europe, Canada, and North America founded the Iran Tribunal (IT). Initially, its founders contemplated pursuing some form of truth and reconciliation. However, they soon realized that, with IRI still in power and unwilling to acknowledge any violation of human rights, no reconciliation could be achieved. Identifying as a people's tribunal, the IT took after the Russell Tribunal, also known as the International War Crimes Tribunal, the Russell-Sartre Tribunal, and the Stockholm Tribunal (Caron 2006; Mosley 1978; Zunino 2016). Yet, as Shafafi points out, "The IT was not a product of intellectual outcry and organization and unlike the Russell Tribunal the panel did not consist of foreign intellectuals. This was an exercise of justice from within the survivors' communities themselves" (2015). It was also different from World Tribunal on Iraq (Cubukçu 2018) where the old regime was toppled. IT was trying a regime still in power. Even its finding IRA guilty of "torturing and killing political prisoners," its verdict, had no legal standing (Petrou 2013). Yet while the main founders of IT were Iranians, non-Iranians were involved as consultants in its formative stage and as judges and attorneys during the hearings. Saman Dory, a member of the IT's public Facebook group, posted the following on July 2, 2012:

The Truth Commission [in London] was composed of internationally prominent human rights experts Eric David (Belgian Professor Emeritus of Public International Law), Marie Louise Asmal (Author, Scholar and Activist), Professor Daniel Turp (Professor Université de Montréal), Anne Burley (Former Director of the European Region of Amnesty International), Professor William [p. 229] A. Schabas (Chairman of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway) and Professor Maurice Copithorne (Professor and former Special Rapporteur on Iran 1995–2002). The witnesses, originally from forty cities and provinces in Iran and from diverse political affiliations and views, travelled to London

from around the world to appear before the Truth Commission.³

Indeed, Professor John Cooper, chair of the IT's steering committee, opened the Truth Commission, whose remarks were followed by Bishop Desmond Tutu's video message to the assembly. The presence of these non-Iranian figures was important both for the IT's appeal and, in some cases, for its contentious reception.

After five years of extensive discussions and planning, the tribunal began mainly to “fact find, document, raise public consciousness, allow for those who suffered to voice their grievances, and finally symbolically try the Iranian regime for its atrocities against political prisoners,” especially for “the massacre of the summer of 1988” (Shafafi 2015). The first sets of testimonies were heard in a truth commission held at Amnesty International's headquarters in London, in June 2012; this was followed by the hearings convened in October 2012 in the Peace Palace in The Hague, to seek symbolic deliberations (Tahzib 2013). Defining itself as “a social movement” and “a tribunal of conscience,”⁴ the IT assumed the role of assisting the victims (Fassin 2012) by providing a testimonial venue for silenced voices. Invoking Reinhart Koselleck, one may conjure the hearings as a political act, and on behalf of, the vanquished “to rework and understand their negative experiences . . . to develop new methodological tools and thereby reveal new insights into history” (quoted in Nelson 2009, 34).

Yet, the IT also faced renunciations and sabotage from the IRI, and accusations and boycotts from various dissident organizations and individuals. Some opponents argued that the IT was giving fuel to the United States in its constant threat of attack on Iran. While these reactions affected the impact and public reach of the IT, its pertinence here concerns the questions of witnessing, trauma, and recognition. The negative reception could be emotionally injurious to the witnesses. That the regime still holds the power to persecute these witnesses adds salt to their wounds.

Space, Time, and Political Landscapes

While both Jazaeri and Memarpour were tried in the Revolutionary Court of the IRI, Jazaeri did not survive to decide whether to offer her testimony years later. Memarpour did. The condition of their trials in the 1980s and the IT hearing, in which Memarpour appeared as a

³ Saman Dory, Facebook page, accessed July 2, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/>

⁴ See <http://www.irantribunal.com/index.php/en/sessions/court>.

witness, could not have been more different. The Revolutionary Court of the IRI saw the summary prosecution, informalities, and absence of defense attorneys and juries as intrinsic to its revolutionary nature, whereas the IT attempted to create an ambiance of “humane” and “lawful” formality. The Revolutionary Court of the IRI was in an unnerving proximity to where the prisoners were interrogated and tortured. Nasrin Jazaeri’s trial, along with those of others accused of, or affiliated with, *Sarbedaran* took place in Hosseiniyeh, where prisoners were often forced to collectively witness other prisoners’ recantations. The trials began with, and were often interrupted by, the chants and slogans shouted at those on trial and against their political affiliations.

Conversely, the IT “worked to construct a national process of justice seeking away from the spatio-temporal site of its occurrence, over three decades and five thousand kilometers away from the prisons of the Islamic state” (Shafafi 2015). For the IRI, the urgency to control and fortify its power was mirrored in its trials, convened with no due process and [p. 230] with little to no legal justification for long sentences or summary executions. Inversely, the IT was “compounded by the fact that there has been no political transition within which to conduct a process of truth-telling” (Shafafi 2015). It thus tried to give a sense of legal process. The witnesses “were telling their truth directly to and at the law” (Shafafi 2015). While the Revolutionary Court of the IRI had the power to indict and execute the sentences it issued, the IT had no executive authority; its hearings were mainly symbolic gestures, as well as a means of documenting witnesses’ accounts and bringing silenced sufferings to public attention and historical record.⁵

There were also similarities between Jazaeri’s court and the one in which Memarpour testified. In analyzing their differences and similarities, I seek to tackle the questions of multilayered registers of witnessing, of voice (speaking, listening, and hearing), of sight (seeing, being, and making invisible), and of history. This ethnography is itself a form of witnessing, which draws much from intersubjective imaginings and fading traces. Its imaginative and imaginary approach (Elliott and Culhane 2017; Schwab 2012) requires going beyond listening to the easily audible or seeing the overtly visible. It also seeks to make sense of the barely visible and envision that which may potentially come. This means navigating across time and space for what has passed or is coming, as well as their wherefrom and whereto. As Catherine Malabou suggests, in her reading of Hegel:

⁵ A series of these testimonies are available online at <https://vimeo.com/104945194>. For Iran-Tribunal site see <http://www.irantribunal.com/index.php/en/>.

“To see (what is) coming” denotes at once the visibility and the invisibility of whatever comes. The future is not the absolutely invisible, a subject of pure transcendence objecting to any anticipation at all, to any knowledge, to any speech. Nor is the future the absolutely visible, an object clearly and absolutely foreseen. . . . “To see (what is) coming” thus means to see without seeing— await without awaiting—a future which is neither present to the gaze nor hidden from it (Malabou 2005, 184).

Similarly, ethnography, both as it reads others and is itself read by others, must see with different eyes. In Rumi’s poetic expression, an ethnographer must also see with the eyes of the soul: that is, at once historical and cosmic, contextually singular yet linked to other souls. In reading these court hearings, I at times insert my own senses and stipulations to render imaginable what appears vanished or intangible. I, nevertheless, subdue my voice to let other voices claim their significance to the matter(ing) of histories. Yet, as this account will show, the line between visibility and invisibility, audibility and inaudibility, present and vanished, and life and death is quite porous.

The Ethnographer

As an anthropologist and former political prisoner, my outsider/insider position allows me a multivalent perspective on my ethnographic “sites” and unsettles the conventions of participant observation. That my imprisonment makes me an insider to Jazaeri’s and Memarpour’s stories is only partially true. I too was tried in the Revolutionary Court of the IRI, in a trial that lasted no more than ten minutes and had no jury or lawyers. I too was forced to watch some of those trials, including those of the affiliates of the Union of the Communists of Iran—at times for hours, day after day. Deemed mandatory, prisoners either were taken to Hosseiniyeh to witness these trials or had to watch them on the prison television channel. To provide a better sense of these trials, I also use my own embodied experiences and recollections. In recalling or watching some of the televised trials, now on the Internet, and with my anthropological eyes, the past and present become conjoined, creating a fusion of histories with no predictable futures. I also draw on participant observation and extensive conversations with former political prisoners and their families, [p. 231] both while attending the hearing sessions in The Hague and beyond. I declined to testify as a witness but sought and was granted permission to observe these hearings. My reason for

declining was to retain enough distance for a critical analysis and for my anthropological inquiry.

In addition to sitting through all the hearings in Hague, I was in the same hotel at which most of the witnesses, journalists, and other participants stayed. I had informal conversations with many participants, interviewed some of the witnesses, and observed what went on around me. I followed the discussions that led to the formation of IT from its early stages. I navigated the debates, surveyed the related visual and reading materials, and watched many televised trials of the IRI and IT hearings available on the Internet; here I focus on those of Jazayeri and Memarpour.

Methodologically, this multi-sited ethnography traverses variegated times and spaces, seeks out memories, traces, and imaginings of what has passed or could not enter the pages of official history. Here the ethnographer and the object of her inquiry keep morphing, shifting, sinking and resurfacing, in scarce traces, entrenched in memories, bodies, things, and matters, in the mattering of history. This approach anticipates the future, not to conjure a path of progress but to respond to an ethical, epistemological, and anthropological calling. It realizes that the past is never really past; it remains haunting. It reckons with the untold histories of the dead, the lost souls, and the wounded, not merely for their sake but because by losing sight of these histories our soul and world shrinks.

As Stefania Pandolfo points out, anthropological calling may necessitate probing the images that linger on, “morphing into the landscape and becoming a map that could not be read” (2018, 2). This means seeing beyond the forming, collapsing, and recuperating of others and one’s own subjectivities. Ethnographic observation and cogitation may demand one to step onto dangerous grounds or walk over crumpling roofs to trace the unreadable maps of disastrous worlds; it urges attentiveness to the potential pulses of incipient subjectivities, their resisting, struggling, and surviving souls (Pandolfo 2018). Such anthropology must build on and yet move beyond that which Sherry Ortner (2016) calls “dark anthropology” by striving to produce an ethnography of alterity. It perceives alterity not necessarily outside of one’s self but also within. One may invoke here the spirit of the verses by Sa’di, the thirteenth-century Iranian poet: “Human beings are one another’s limbs; when the condition of the time brings pain to one organ (one limb), all other organs grow restless [with pain]” (Sa’di 2003, 20).⁶

⁶ My translation.

Both the court in which Nasrin was sentenced to death and the tribunal that gave Memarpour a chance to expose his long-kept secret and his sufferings are filled with such moments of invisible traces and crumpling subjectivities. To avoid hiding gaps and absences with words (hooks 1999, 151), I neither offer overwhelming explanation nor decisive conclusions. I hope to accentuate the gaps so the reader may imagine not only what is not seen or said, but what may transpire with deeper reflection and intuitive sensing. I approach Jazaeri's and Memarpour's "testimonies" as a demand on myself, both as an anthropologist and as a human being, to observe, absorb, and bring to light the historical disjunctures that underpin their experiences, and their ramifications for being in and with the world, and with others.

Gaps and silences are also created and revealed in the inevitable fractures in translation. Add to this the impossibility of providing a conclusive account of the self (Butler 2005, 8), which means acknowledging that no absolute assemblage or reconstruction would capture the heterogeneity of voices, within or without. Thus, at its best, my ethnographic reading of these trials may reveal the conditions of the collapsing or hibernating inter subjectivities and even if momentarily, shed light on the perished, forsaken, and precarious lives. [p. 232]

The 1980s, the Emerging Polity, and Necropolitics

With the inception of the IRI, various parties that had fought against the Shah became opponents of the new state. The war with Iraq and the strong dissidence within marked the early life of the new polity. The solidification of the new state's power was characterized by its necropolitics, which was put to most detrimental effect, particularly in prisons. Following a series of assassinations of high-ranking state officials, allegedly committed by two militant organizations, *Forghan* (the name of the Quranic Sura, the Criterion) and *Mujahedine-Khalgh Iran* (People's Warriors), the regime has turned to a full-fledged suppression of its dissidents. Both groups identified with Islam and initially supported Khomeini. Yet Khomeini disagreed with their interpretation of Islam and their militancy; soon they were his abhorred opponents. The leftist organizations diverged on various issues, including in their analysis of the regime. While some leftists saw the state as anti-imperialist, others called for continuing the revolution; there were still other leftist organizations that advocated armed struggle. Yet unlike *Mujahedin* or *Forghan* they disagreed with

assassination or bombing of state buildings. In this vein, *Sabedaran* launched their armed struggle by attacking Amol, a city in Northern Province of Mazandaran, close to the forest and Caspian Sea.

In the intense atmosphere created by the Iran–Iraq War, the state carried out a relentless crushing of its opponents, which occasionally extended even to those barely involved with dissidence or simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet the historical condition of the 1980s must be conjured also in relation to the global politics, the necropolitics and state of precarity on a larger global scale. Established by a popular revolution and in the midst of a devastating war with Iraq, the Iranian regime turned the massive arrests and summary executions into a norm, especially between 1981 and 1984. Every morning began with the news of new arrests, and the state appealing to people to report those appearing suspicious. Every night a new series of executions were announced. In political prisons, individuals lived within the narrow zones of limit-experience, with their lives often hanging on one or a few words. The interrogators had usually decided prisoners' fates before their trials. The judges were often involved in ordering the torture of prisoners. It is within this ambiance that I now turn to Jazaeri's and Memarpour's trials. Only through sensible and imaginative attention to the said and unsaid may we hear echoes of Jazaeri's words or Memarpour's testimony beyond the victim/villain dichotomy.

Zooming in on these trials may allow the reader to imagine those zones of limit experience in which the boundaries of life and death are blurred, and the subjects feel simultaneously detached inside and outside their bodies. Such experiences unsettle the meaning of testimony and the witness. This ethnography traces both the crumbling of these souls and the potential for their reemergence in life and in history. Extremely violent situations may induce a sharp split in the self, a drastic "breach in the ego ideal" (Salonen 2016, 78), which is normally construed as psychosis. Yet, as Memarpour's case shows, such a split could also be a means of surviving the experiences of the limit, physically and/or psychologically.

Background to the First Case

In January 1982, *Sarbedaran*, a group of about one hundred individuals, seized the city of Amol. To maintain their hold, they hoped for the people's support, which did not occur. Instead, the regime used an "assemblage of armed forces," constituting "up to 3,000 members of the regular armed forces, the Revolutionary Guards, the gendarmes, and the militia known as the *Basiji* (the Mobilized). . . . [They] recaptured the city, only after two days of house-to-house, street-to-street battle" (Zabir 2012, 163).

Except for two of its leaders who managed to escape, nearly everyone else was killed; ten were arrested and executed on the spot while all the others were killed during the fight. This [p. 233] means that those prisoners accused of fighting in Amol and tried in the courts as *Sarbedaran* were not involved in the attack. Nevertheless, the information gathered from confiscated documents led to the arrest of almost all those affiliated with the organization. Among them were some who had squarely opposed *Sarbedaran's* militancy. In a series of trials held between late 1982 and early 1983, most members, and those even only loosely affiliated with the organization, received death sentences and were executed (Zabir 2012, 163). Many of these trials were televised and repeatedly broadcast on Evin Prison's television channel. One such trial was that of Nasrin Jazayeri.

Because Nasrin was executed shortly after the trial, the silences in her story require even more imaginative reading than Memarpour's. Can this ethnographic witnessing offer Nasrin a chance to be heard, even if discursively and spectrally? Can it bring it to the mattering of history, and allow her to reemerge as a witness, not as a criminal forced to offer her confession and recantations as she was in her trial? Naïve as it may be, this is my hope.

The Stage: The Revolutionary Court of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The camera is zoomed in on the courtroom's stage, which, saved for the audience, stands a few inches higher than the rest of the large hall. If it were not in a prison, it could have been a stage for dance, music, or theater. On this day, prisoners are brought in to witness the trial. The stage is set for this trial today; from the ceiling to the floor, on the wall behind the stage, is a larger-than-life unframed image of Khomeini, the IRI's first supreme leader. Under the menacing size of his photo, with his gravely somber face and penetrating eyes, the

defendant, a young, skinny, woman, sits on a metal chair behind a small metal desk located near center stage. With Khomeini's huge image hovering over, she looks particularly diminutive and fragile—wrapped in a black chador, it is hard to read her body language. On the wall behind and to her left is a smaller framed photo of another clergy, perhaps of Ayatollah Beheshti or Ayatollah Ardabili; at the time, both were high-ranking penal system state officials.⁷

Under this photo are two rows of chairs on which sit the male family members of those allegedly killed by the members of *Sarbedaran*. On the left of the hall are three chairs occupied by the judge, court secretary, and chief prosecutor, from the farthest to the closest to the defendant, respectively. The distance between them and the defendant is filled with a large banner and a few printed IRI slogans and symbols. Stretched from the middle of Khomeini's image to above the heads of the judge, secretary, and prosecutor is a white banner that reads: "Did you see what the people of Amol afflicted you with?" Written in large letters with a black marker, these words from Khomeini refer both to *Sarbedaran's* failed attack in Amol and the state's claim that the people themselves had fought and defeated them.

The front of the stage is covered with framed photos of those allegedly killed by the *Sarbedaran*. In the middle is another photo of Khomeini, this one framed, and larger than all the photos of the martyrs. On the small lower wall, which separates the main hall from the stage, is yet another large white banner that reads: "We, the families of Amol's martyrs in the *jangal* [forest] conflict, demand *ghesas* [retribution] for our innocent martyrs' blood." Prisoners sit on the floor, shoulder to shoulder, facing the stage. Women, all covered in black chadors, are separated from men by a narrow space between their rows. The presence of the martyrs' families and the repented (or pretending to be repented) inmates further intensifies the vulnerability and precarity of the defendant's position.

The court begins with the usual chants of prisoners and guards, accompanied by martyrs' families shouting in choir death to several countries and a long list of oppositional organizations. With every mention of these names, the chanting choir declares its willingness to [p. 234] die for Khomeini and for Islam. The repeating stanza brags about the strength of *Hezbollah* (Party of God) and Khomeini's leadership. Finally, the public prosecutor, Asadollah Lajavardi, stands up and reads, "In the name of God, the subjugator of the oppressors, the mighty of the mighty." He follows this with a

⁷ Beheshti was assassinated in 1981; Ardabili died in 2016.

long list of indictments against the defendant, Nasrin Jazayeri,⁸ alleging her to be a member of the Union of the Communists of Iran. Throughout this, Nasrin's head is lowered, even when the prosecutor refers to her as anti-God, antirevolutionary, and devoted to the enemy. Lajavardi points out Nasrin's role in distributing the organization's pamphlets and holding meetings with other members. While in her indictments there is no mention of any connection to Amol, the prosecutor claims her support for *Sarbedaran* is certain, and asks for the death penalty.

The presiding judge, Ayatollah Mohammad Gilani, referring to the defendant as Lady Nasrin begins with basic questions: "Where were you born?" Nasrin responds, "Tehran." She is asked to repeat her answer. He then asks her which family of Jazayeris she is connected to; "Mousavi" she says, but again is told to repeat. Both Jazayeri families are related to prominent ayatollahs: Ayatollah Jazayeri and Ayatollah Mousavi-e Jazayeri. Nasrin's response confirms her connection to the latter family. The question from Gilani is significant on many levels. Being a leftist who comes from the family of a high-ranking clergy further complicates Nasrin's situation. In those years, being connected to the clergy did not mean more leniency in sentencing. In fact, in the early years following the revolution, many powerful clergy took pride in turning in, or even ordering the execution of, their own children for diverting from the path of the revolution and Islam, terms often used interchangeably. Moreover, according to a dominant interpretation, the leftists with non-Muslim, or non-observant Muslim, families were considered less sinful than those with greater exposure to Islam in their families.

Interim

Ayatollah Gilani is, of course, well aware that disagreements over the revolutionary aspirations among the parties fighting the shah had torn apart even members of the same family and shaken the conventions of familial relations. This was particularly true for conservative families, which saw their children's obedience and respect toward their fathers undermined by political and ideological divides. A notable number of high-ranking clergy and state officials found themselves against their own children or close relatives. It is commonly rumored that Gilani ordered the execution of two of his own sons (Abrahamian 1992, 179; Secor 2016, 363). Such acts were praised by the state supporters as an indication of genuine devotion

⁸ For information about her arrest and trial see <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/35629/nasrin-jazayeri>.

to Islam and the state. Thus, in establishing a connection between Nasrin and the prominent “household” of Ayatollah Mousavi-e Jazayeri, her deviance is emphasized not only in political and religious senses but also in a familial one.

Gilani begins now with questions about Nasrin’s husband, his name, whether he too was affiliated with her organization, arrested, and in the court. Nasrin relates his name and answers affirmatively to the other questions. In each case, she is asked to repeat her answers. Only then does Gilani read the indictments and tell Nasrin to respond. Softly, Nasrin explains how after two and a half years of living in the United States and becoming affiliated with the Iranian Students’ Confederation, in 1979 she returns to Iran, implying that—like many other Iranians—she too came back to join the revolution.

Reading Signs

Under her chador, Nasrin wears a black scarf so low that it nearly covers her eyes. Even when she looks up—which she rarely does—it is hard to read her feelings in her eyes. Early in her confession/defense, she is interrupted when a male prisoner brings a note to the court [p. 235] secretary. It apparently concerns her low voice, for the secretary interjects: “Our brothers and sisters of the families of martyrs who are here want to hear you and also all those in prison should be able to hear you better, so speak louder.” Although asked in a nonhostile tone, mentioning the martyrs’ families and prisoners wanting to “hear” her emphasizes the ambiance of her trial and highlights the multifarious meanings and condition of “hearing”. Thus one begins to wonder whether Gilani’s constantly asking her to repeat herself is to subject her to self-defacement and self-shaming or simply so she can be heard. Ironically, speaking firmer or louder would mean Nasrin is not remorseful. Raising her head high could also imply she is not humbled, rueful, or modest enough.

But how does one read Nasrin’s hesitance, her self-silencing, in her speaking in a low voice and in her body gestures (e.g., head down, no eye contact, so tightly covered)? Is she conveying conformity with the religio-political expectations of many of those present in her trial and the polity? Is she gesturing remorse toward the martyrs’ families? Or is this a subtle expression of her unwillingness to be complicit in her own indictment, an implicit resistance? How may an imaginative ethnography crack open such ambivalences and silences and allow for embracing multivalent possibilities?

Nasrin seems to suggest she will comply, when she asks if she should start over, but she barely speaks louder. The judge continues asking her to repeat herself. At times, Nasrin too seems to have a problem understanding the judge, who speaks with a mixture of a thick Gilaki accent and a dialect common to the Iranian clergy. Sometimes the exchanges between Gilani and Nasrin are quite confusing. At one point he asks her why, according to the prosecutor, she has refused to collaborate and give information to her interrogators. Nasrin replies: “It is true that initially I resisted and refused to give information. But then when the person higher than me [in the organization] gave his information, they already knew everything. I then provided other things I knew.” Let me try to unpack her words.

Nasrin knows that many of the prisoners are forced to witness these trials—though she could not have known that one day her trial would be available on the Internet, beyond the national boundaries, and turn into an object of anthropological inquiry. She is aware of prisoners turned collaborators, whom prison officials, deploying a religious term, call *tavvab* (repentant). She realizes that collaboration often, if not always, leads to milder sentences or to greater chance of surviving the death penalty. Yet she too, like all activists of the era, knows of the demoralizing impact of collaborating prisoners both inside and outside prison, and the inspiration resistance invokes. The ambivalence in her response indicates both her attempt to, and the impossibility of, simultaneously, capturing these incongruities.

However unsuccessfully, Nasrin seems at once to try to save herself from execution by claiming that, even if late, she collaborated, while avoiding being seen by her comrades and many others as a traitor. She stretches herself in different directions: disclaiming true collaboration to shield herself from the shame and abjection of being a traitor, on the one hand, and playing down her resistance to survive death and/or torture, on the other hand. Note her contradiction in her statement, “they already knew everything” and “I told them other things.” She is negotiating her condition while now and then the martyrs’ families and *tavvab* prisoners shout chants calling for her execution. Nasrin offers her confession/defense under their vindictive gaze.

Nasrin may be trying to appear neither a true collaborator in the eyes of her comrades nor a resistant prisoner to the regime. She appears to have failed both goals. The regime does not see her as a true *tavvab* while most resistant prisoners of the era would have seen her, if not as a collaborator, then as a broken prisoner. Although she suggests that she offered the information already given, her phrase “but then I offered other things” leaves one to [p. 236] wonder about

the nature of those other things. She has not survived to tell us more; she has no chance of seeing how she is viewed today, in light of the shift of attitudes among most dissidents. Her organic death becomes the limit of her experience. One must go beyond her physical existence to bring her words and her fragmented story back to life and to the mattering of history.

Almost four decades later, Nasrin's confession may be read as a testimony, a historical matter demanding to be read both for what she says and what she does not and could not have said. Hers is a story of a "true witness" (Levi 1989, 83) who does not return and hence the survivors "speak in their stead, by proxy". She also speaks beyond the trial, now in the spectral mode through new form of media. Giorgio Agamben traces the etymology of the term "witness" to the Greek word "martus" (1999, 31), becoming martyr later in Christianity. In Arabic and Farsi, two terms—"shahid" and "shahed"—capture the meanings of true witness/martyr and the witness in legal terms, respectively. In tracing the barely visible vestiges in Nasrin's story, and later in my analysis of Memarpour's testimony, the illusion of their single subjectivity is negated and the fixed meaning of testimony and witness(ing) and the boundaries of life and death are unsettled.

Nasrin epitomizes the figure of shahid. Yet, in another sense, her ambivalent stance in her trial impedes this straightforward assertion. What if other true witnesses negotiated for their lives, like Nasrin but to no avail, yet unlike her without traces? With social media now allowing for revisitation of Nasrin's trial, she returns as a witness, now offering testimony, lending itself to this ethnography to bear witness to her experience in a still disjointed time.

A True or In-Proxy Witness?

Memarpour does not die a physical death; in the IT hearings, he testifies as a shahed (in a legal sense). Although organically alive, he too was seized by death. However, unlike Nasrin, his physical existence allows life to linger on, as paling traces, as a shadow, but still pregnant with the potential to become enlivened. The Memarpour of the hearings is not the Memarpour who dies in prison following the events of his trial. The Memarpour of 2012 speaks, in proxy, on behalf of his old dead self. In *Remembering Akbar*, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi (2016) suggests that Akbar, his old self whom he remembers, died in prison after his arrest: the one who writes about those experiences is not the same person. The old Memarpour may be imagined as a fragmented, even somewhat ruinous, form. Does this make him a true witness? His testimony reveals the complexity

of voice, intersubjectivity, and witnessing. “My hands pulled the trigger. Was I there? . . . In the minibus, on the way back, our eyes could no longer see. The guards seemed to know this too for we were not blindfolded” (implying the guards did not ask them to put their blindfolds back on).

These words are from Memarpour’s testimony in October 2012 at the IT hearings at The Hague. In a gray suit, long white hair in a ponytail, Memarpour is a man in his late fifties. He testifies that at the time of his arrest in 1981 he was not affiliated with any political organization, and that his inmates advised him to save himself or even be possibly freed by pretending to support the regime: “Just say yes to whatever they ask you to say or do, I was told by my inmates.” In a trial that lasts no more than five minutes, the judge asks him whether he supports the Islamic Republic, is a Muslim, and prays. He answers yes to all of these questions. But what he does not see coming next falls on him like an avalanche. The judge asks if he will participate in the execution of other prisoners. “I was shocked, in disbelief. I answered yes, as my inmates had advised me. I thought they were bluffing. How could they even trust us with a gun? What if we just turned the gun towards them?”

Memarpour’s question sounds more like an explanation to himself, as if trying to convince himself of the “logic” behind his “yes” more than those in the court or the virtual audience. [p. 237] Does his question “how could they trust us with their guns” tend to rationalize the irrational and justify his failing to see more intuitively what was to come, or perhaps obscure what led him to respond “yes”? Is this how one often comes to deny one’s inability to envision what cannot be seen but could, or should, have been sensed, anticipated, even expected all along? Is this “inability” to see what is coming the result of one’s “soul blindness” (Kohn 2013), the lack of insight? His failing to foresee such a ruinous future leads to Memarpour’s responding yes followed by the shattering, the split of his self, and to the collapse of time and space, to sinking into a void.

“I was shocked. I did not expect this. I said yes as my inmates had advised.” Memarpour’s testimony urges one to contemplate the intricacies of tormented and tormenting subjectivities in relation to the limit-experience, a mode of inhabiting a liminal space, between life and death, between different states of death, a condition of falling into the elusive space of neither here nor there, of *barzakh*. Memarpour tells of the horrific experience of abjection that follows his “yes.” He narrates how he is taken directly from the court to join a line, which keeps growing as more male prisoners are added. Riding on minibuses, they arrive at a huge hall, which they see when told to remove their blindfolds.

“In front of us, about a meter apart, a large number of prisoners were lined up. So long was this line that I could not see its beginning or end,” Memarpour recounts. He maintains that his memory from that moment on is vague: “My sight was foggy.” His memory and his senses are submerged in fog, sedated. Still he claims he remembers seeing several young teenagers in that opposite line about to be executed. A guard, standing behind Memarpour, puts his hand over Memarpour’s finger, which is on the trigger of a gun, and tells him to pull it: “I was too shocked to see clearly but there are things which remained with me, which I still see even with my eyes closed.” He reminisces seeing a man from his line, who, realizing this is not a bluff, screams and collapses on the floor. “Unable” to participate in this mass execution, he is dragged out. Memarpour also recalls a woman from the opposite line who seems to be whispering something he cannot hear. He remembers the bodies falling and the blood washing the floor when the shooting is over. By this point in his testimony, Memarpour is sobbing. The attorney asks if he wants to take a break. He wants to continue. Fighting back his tears, he relates how once before his imprisonment he had gone fishing but had felt so guilty for killing a fish. Once again, he sobs, now louder as he interjects: “And now I had partaken in the killing of my comrades.”

From here through the rest of his testimony, Memarpour’s tone shifts. He sounds more distant. In passing, he tells the court at The Hague how afterward the revolutionary guard who stood behind him during the shooting complains that Memarpour had not actually pulled the trigger, at least not hard enough. Does this passing memory offer a coy consolation to him, allowing him to assume an ineffective, or even no role, in the killing? Is he trying not to sink into an irreversible utter abjection and self-disgust? Is he avoiding crossing the threshold of the limit-experience? How is one to account for the gaps and silences buried under what he says?

Memarpour’s testimony is occasionally disrupted by his sobs. He struggles to fight his tears while his tone remains sober nearly throughout. Even so, except occasional sobbing, his voice sounds extremely distant, as if coming from elsewhere or is someone else’s, when he describes how it takes about fifteen minutes for the bullets to be picked up from the floor: a sign of the massiveness of execution. He relates how, after the killings, their eyes could no longer see. Even the guards know it for on their way back to the ward, they are not even ordered to put on their blindfolds. Someone must have died in him that day, yet this is not an absolute annihilation. Something of him must have remained, some traces of his former self, even in the form of ruins; something always remains.

[p. 238] Following the killing, it is not their eyesight that those partaking in the execution have lost but the life within them, turning the eyes into empty sockets. They can stare without seeing or can only look into the abyss. That is why prison guards see no need for blindfolding—prisoners to be executed were often allowed to see the interrogators for with their imminent death, the interrogators saw no danger in being seen. The prisoners who partake in the bloodshed with Memarpour also appear to be dead. As dissidents, they die both to the regime and to themselves. Their “seeing” thus poses no threat. It is not trivial that Memarpour speaks of “our” eyes and of the “we” who could not see, rather than saying “my” eyes or “I” could not see. I find the shift in pronouns crucial here. The singular “I” seems to be no more.

Those who ride on the minibus back to the ward, after the execution, are empty vessels. The unseeing is not only metaphorical but also ontological. Yet something has survived; some traces of the person may live on if a connection to other souls is not entirely severed, or if one could shield oneself from total self-denigration, waiting long enough, though not too long, to find one’s way back to life. To see yet again, the eyes and the person behind them will have to transfigure. But before then is the grave and the living, between life-death, in *barzakh*.

“From then on I created a wall between myself and the world around me,” Memarpour testifies. In fact, those of us who saw him before his testimony, without knowing him or of his experience, sensed something like a wall around him. It was as if he was living in a shell. You could see him but could not reach him; at least this was how some of us felt whenever we ran into him at the lobby of the funky hotel in which many of us stayed. The atmosphere was already intense and somewhat eerie. Most people were there to testify; they walked around as if carrying ghosts with them. Still, in the evenings, they immersed themselves in noise by chatting, laughing, and singing in large groups, bringing the ghosts into their midst.

Memarpour, however, passed by, silently and cautiously, as if walking on eggshells. This compelled me to ask those with whom I was sitting if they knew him. While nobody did, a woman said he seemed to have a glass wall around him; others nodded in affirmation. The shield he had created was materialized and visible to others. Yet if he intended invisibility, his erected wall seemed to be made of glass, suggestive of possibilities of being seen through and of being broken. The testimonies, his own and those of others, poked holes in it. Indeed, when I saw him the day after his testimony, something had changed in his demeanor, as if there was an opening,

a breaking into the wall within which he had hidden for all those years.

Reading through the Gaps

How should one read Memarpour's testimony? How we are to understand the two disclaimers that underlie his explanation about his "yes" answer? The first disclaimer undermines his agentiveness by mentioning how his inmates advised him to say yes to everything. This disclaimer puts the weight of the decision on the shoulders of the collective nameless "inmates" and their poor advice. The second one highlights his naïveté both in trusting his inmates' advice and in assuming that the judge's question about his participation in the execution must be a bluff. This shows the lack insight of the severity of state violence. Similarly, his speculation that prisoners could not be trusted with guns underestimates the control prison officials exercised over prisoners. He foregrounds his naïveté early on when he mentions that when arrested, he was just a dissident intellectual with no party affiliation.

Yet to interpret these explanations as a straightforward denial of his agentiveness would ignore that he also mentions those who refuse, or in his words, "find themselves unable," to shoot. He speaks of his experience as a psychological rape, but cries of remorse for [p. 239] participating in the killing. He seems at once to act as a victim and as a political subject whose subjection to horrific conditions has led him to make undesirable choices with disastrous consequences. Reading between these lines of ambivalences and silences is not to pass judgment on Memarpour but to understand the epistemological and ethical significance of recognizing intersubjectivity and the interconnected "ecology of the selves" that allows one to see beyond the overtly visible, to see the seemingly unseeable.

In *Giving An Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler argues that "dispossession may well be the condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which morality itself emerges" (2005, 7–8). In the editorial review of Butler's book Hent de Vries writes: "Judith Butler compellingly demonstrates that questions of ethics cannot avoid addressing the moral self's complicity with violence." Memarpour sees himself as a victim but is tormented by his decision to say yes to executing others. In choosing to bear witness to this period in Iranian history, and to his own and others' experiences and actions, he becomes alive. If his decision to say yes, however naïvely, was destructive, his choice to testify at The Hague is productive of a new self. He bears witness to the horror he has lived, remembers those who were killed that day when he let his finger touch the trigger, and

those who refused to do so. Even if inaudible, his testimony gives life to the whisper of a woman about to be killed. He too dies to himself that day, when he recognizes his failure to see what is coming, when he chooses to keep his finger on the trigger after learning that there is no bluff. And yet this man testifying in The Hague is and is not the same man who died on that day. It seems as if he is watching himself from the outside, at once in and out of his body, a split self. He testifies, “My hand pulled the trigger; was I there?” How does he survive this abyss into which he has fallen? Memarpour recalls: “When I returned to the ward, I stood for the longest and sincerest, in fact the only truly sincere, prayers of my life.” He explains:

I have always been a religious person and still am but I always prayed as most of us do, out of obligation. . . but that day I truly prayed for I thought it was only He, the one up there [he points to the ceiling with his finger. Is this the same finger on the trigger?] who really knew and understood what went on within and to me. Only He knew why I had done what I had done. I went on a long prostration and cried.

Right at that moment, during his longest and most sincere prayer, Memarpour takes two significant steps in two opposite yet interrelated directions: in connecting with God, he creates an alternative world to compensate for his social isolation and a protective shield to save himself from his self-alienation; he also erects a wall, in his words, “between himself and the world.”

The connection with God keeps him from drowning, from sinking deeper; it holds a new life in him, as if in a womb; his testimony cuts its navel cord. It brings him into the realm of language and sociality, to materiality, to the here and now, to matters and mattering of histories. Taking refuge in God also puts him in a state of death; he closes the door to the living and the world, to which he returns years later, as a witness, a newborn, as if resurrected from death. He speaks as a *murtus* (martyr/witness). He remembers the scars, the old self. But he sees with new eyes. He speaks of the dead, of his old self and of others, meanwhile revealing historical secrets.

Didier Fassin, citing Emile Benveniste, recalls Latin had two words for witness: *testis* (a “third party,” a witness of a conflict who may help “resolve the dispute”) and *superstes* (one who has personally “experienced the event.”) Supposedly with no “vested interest” in the situation, *testis*’ truth “expressed in the third person, is deemed objective”; its virtue “is [p. 240] due to the emotions it

eliminates” (2008, 535). This neutrality is “the ground for hearing and believing.” Inversely, the power of the superstes’ testimony rests in having lived through the event . . . as its victim and hence as a survivor” (535). Superstes’ truth “expressed in the first person, is deemed subjective” and “has merit by virtue of the affects it involves” (535). Fassin suggests, “In today’s usage, the boundary between the two figures is tending to become blurred” (535). The testimonies of the survivors and the families of those persecuted in the 1980s show the intricacies of witnessing and the blurring of boundaries.

The time-lapse between the experiences of witnesses that occurred in the 1980s and their recollection in their testimonies offered in IT hearings further complicates the way witnesses remember and their attitude toward the past and the state. But the difference between Nasrin’s and Memarpour’s cases is not simply about time. Nasrin does not appear as a witness in her trial. She is a defendant whose fate has already been decided. In the IT hearing, Memarpour is a witness who offers his testimony in a sympathetic ambiance of the court. Nasrin is surrounded by photos of state officials, state martyrs, and hostile chants, and she is in a prison building. In The Hague, the neutrality of international judges, lawyers, and prosecutors gestures towards lawfulness and credibility of the tribunal and gives a sense of recognition for the witnesses. The audience, mostly witnesses themselves, express their support through tears and gasps for air. During the hearings, the families of those killed are present, but unlike the martyrs’ families in Nasrin’s trial, they are not chanting against Memarpour. In Nasrin’s trial, the families’ expressions of emotions are to legitimize the severity of prosecution. The tears and gasps from the audience on hearing witnesses’ stories, though integral to the trial, acknowledge witnesses’ suffering. In the Revolutionary Court of Iran, the families of martyrs, not Nasrin, are seen as witnesses. But in the hearing, Memarpour testifies as a witness, whose story, under different circumstances, could have been perceived as too abjectionable to be heard.

Limit-Experience, Survival, and History

An experience, in Foucault’s words, “is something that one comes out of transformed” (2001, 239). An ethnography of the experience of limit, while recognizing the limit of witnessing, is about transformed selves and the ethical demand to recover and write them into history,

not in pages left to dust, but as the matter of our daily lives, as multidimensional, complex, and dynamic realities.

The shift in Memarpour's tone after he reminisces about the scene of shooting may be attributed to the death, if not the killing, of the other within. He thus speaks on behalf of his old self, in his stead, in proxy. Can he be seen, simultaneously, as the drowned and the saved, as one that has and has not hit the bottom, even though, unlike Nasrin, he has biologically survived (Levi 2017)? Yet to say that Memarpour of the 1980s has not survived may undermine his role in accepting to partake in the execution of others. These paradoxes illustrate the limits and the potentialities of witnessing, testifying, and survival.

Organically dead, Nasrin has no chance to testify in any trial. Yet her words reverberate in testimonies of the witnesses in IT hearings, and demand an anthropological and ethical query about what she could not explicitly say.

During the hearings at The Hague, as one listens to testimony after testimony, it feels as if the floor is shaking under one's feet, as if one could hear the roof crumbling. The infliction of violence haunts, urging recognition that, as Sa'di tells us, as the limbs of the same body we will all suffer when any of our limbs is wounded. Memarpour returns to life to testify for himself and those who have not survived. Nasrin cannot return, but this imaginary ethnography takes a form of witnessing. In seizing fleeting moments, in attempting to recover fading traces and ruinous pieces, this intuitive ethnography offers [p. 241] itself as a body to her ghost. It realizes the unfixed and heterogeneous nature of the figure of witness in excavating the ruins and the traces of the history of the vanquished.

References Cited

- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1992. *The Iranian Mujahedin*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 1999. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1988. "Introduction: Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory." *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1): 16–20.

- Butler, Judith. 2005. *Giving An Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Caron, David D. 2006. "Towards a Political Theory of International Courts and Tribunals." *Berkeley Journal of International Law* no. 24: 401–23.
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Çubukçu, Ayca. 2018. *For the Love of Humanity: The World Tribunal on Iraq*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Degelder, Mieke. "Ways of Dying: AIDS Care and Agency in Contemporary Urban South Africa." *Ethnography* 13.2 (2012): 189–212.
- Elliott and Culhane. 2017. *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fabian, Johannes. 2014. "Ethnography and Intersubjectivity: Loose Ends." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (1): 199–209.
- Fassin, Didier. 2008. The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict. *Cultural Anthropology*, 23: 531–558. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00017.x>
- . 2012. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fernandez, James W. 1987. "Anthropology as a Vocation: Listening to Voices" (online guest editorial). In *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*, edited by Emily A. Shultz and Robert Lavenda. http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199350841/inst/pdf/GE_14.pdf
- Foucault, Michel. 2001. *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 3. edited by James D. Faubion. New York: New Press.
- Ghamari-Tabrizi, Behrooz. 2016. *Remembering Akbar: Inside the Iranian Revolution*. New York: O/R Books (Counterpoint).

- Givoni, Michael. 2016. *The Care of the Witness: A Contemporary History of Testimony in Crises*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenberg, Jessica. "On the Road to Normal: Negotiating Agency and State Sovereignty in Postsocialist Serbia." *American Anthropologist* 113.1 (2011): 88–100.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1999. "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason." In *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, edited by Ciraran P. Cronin and Pablo De Greiff, 49–74. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- High, Casey. 2010. "Warriors, hunters, and Bruce Lee: Gendered agency and the transformation of Amazonian masculinity". *American Ethnologist*, 37: 753–770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01283.x>.
- Hooks, bell. 1999. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish In the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. 2002. *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward An Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: California University Press.
- Levi, Primo. 1989. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Vintage.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2005. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic* London: Routledge Taylor/Francis.
- Mittermaier, Amira. 2010. *Dreams That Matter: Egyptian Landscape of the Imagination*. Berkeley: University of Southern California Press.
- Mosley, Hugh. 1978. "Third International Russell Tribunal on Civil Liberties in West Germany." *New German Critique* no. 14: 178–184. doi: 10.2307/488068.

Ethnography of Witnessing and Ethnography as Witnessing: Topographies of Two Court Hearings by Shahla Talebi, initially published in « Desire for Justice, Desire for Law: An Ethnography of Peoples' Tribunals », **PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review**, [Vol. 42, Number 2](#), pp. 226–243, November 2019

Muhanna, Aitemad. 2016. *Agency and Gender in Gaza: Masculinity, Femininity and Family during the Second Intifada*. London and New York: Routledge.

Napolitano, Valentina. 2015. "Anthropology and Trace." [Anthropological Theory](#) 15 (1): 47–67. doi:10.1177/1463499614554239.

Nelson, Niklas. 2009. Beyond utopianism and relativism: History in the plural in the work of Reinhart Koselleck. Dissertation. Florence: *European University Institute*. https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/12015/Olsen_2009.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

Ortner, Sherry B. 2016. "Dark Anthropology: Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the Eighties." *Journal of Ethnographic Theory (HUA)* 6 (1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau6.1.004>.

Pandolfo, Stefania. 2018. *Knots of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Petrou, Michael. 2013. "Tribunal Finds Iran Guilty of Torture and Murder of Political Prisoners." *Macleans*, January 14. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/world/bringing-torture-to-light/>

Sa'di Shirazi, Sheikh Muslih-uddin. [1382] 2003. *Golestan (The Rose Garden)*, edited by Manouchehr Adamiyyat. Tehran: Ateliyeh-ye Honar Publications.

Salonen, Simo. 2016. "Humiliation and Dignity: Reflection on Ego Integrity." In *The Seed of Madness: Constitution, Environment, and Fantasy in the Organization of Psychotic Core*, edited by Vamik D. Volkan and Salman Akhtar, 59–80. London: Karnac Books,.

Schwab, Gabriele. 2012. *Imaginary Ethnographies: Literature, Culture and Subjectivity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Secor, Laura. 2016. *Children of Paradise: The Struggle for the Soul of Iran*. New York: Penguin.

Ethnography of Witnessing and Ethnography as Witnessing: Topographies of Two Court Hearings by Shahla Talebi, initially published in « Desire for Justice, Desire for Law: An Ethnography of Peoples' Tribunals », **PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review**, [Vol. 42, Number 2](#), pp. 226–243, November 2019

Sehlikoglu, Sertac. "Revisited: Muslim Women's Agency and Feminist Anthropology of the Middle East." *Contemporary Islam* 12.1 (2018): 73–92. Web.

Shafafi, Pardis. 2015. "The Iran Tribunal: defying international silence." *States of Impunity, Open Security* (special series, edited by Shilpa Jinda, Chowra Makaremi and Pardis Shafafi). <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/pardis-shafafi/iran-tribunal-in-defiance-of-international-silence>.

Tahzib, Olinga. 2013. "The Iran Tribunal: The Case of the Court with Neither Power Nor Jurisdiction." *Oxford Human Rights Hub*, April 16. <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/the-iran-tribunal-the-case-of-the-court-with-neither-power-nor-jurisdiction/>

Talebi, Shahla. 2011. *Ghosts of Revolution: Rekindled Memories of Imprisonment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Wilson, Richard Ashby. 2011. *Writing History in International Criminal Trials*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yashin-Navaro, Yael. 2009. "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.01527.x>

Zabir, Sepehr. 2012. *The Left In Contemporary Iran*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Zunino, Marcos. 2016. "Subversive Justice: The Russell Vietnam War Crimes Tribunal and Transitional Justice." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10 (2): 211–229. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijw007>.