



### Voices of the Oppressed and Oppressors First, History and Theory Last

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#### Abstract

The authors illustrate the process of a radical pedagogical paradigm shift from the teaching of oppression within historical and theoretical frameworks to a focus on the voices and experiences of the oppressed and oppressors uninterrupted by voices of the experts. This paradigmatic change evolved as a result of co-teaching a fourth-year global studies course with a month-long seminar on the Holocaust. More specifically, this paper explores the journey of moving away from a traditional method of teaching genocide and racism in which the voices of victims and perpetrators of oppression are situated within historical and theoretical or expert frames of reference to a focus on such voices and student responses to them — “survivors by proxy” — first, while introducing history and theory after students have formulated their own dialogically-based frames of understanding systemic forms of oppression.

#### Introduction

Based on our experience teaching first-hand accounts of oppression or what we call “first voices” in university sociology and English courses, we propose a radical alteration of the conventional pedagogical model of teaching about genocide, homophobia, racism and other forms of oppression in a post-secondary context. University courses of different disciplines normally stress the historical and theoretical. Indeed, within the post-secondary context, first voices—whether in written, audio-visual, or in-person form—often operate as secondary, excerpted, supplementary material, if they are heard at all. In the following discussion we illustrate the process whereby we came to believe in the need to turn the traditional postsecondary educational approach to the teaching of different forms of oppression on its head, with uninterrupted first voices first.

This approach is to some extent already adopted within primary and secondary school environments when teaching the Holocaust. For example, Low and Sonntag (2013) documented their attempt to develop curricula devoted to teaching the Holocaust through oral history in the secondary school system. Low and Sonntag state:

The classroom must . . . establish the conditions for remembering in the form of re-telling; in order to ‘re-present that story in the concrete form to others,’ students must develop a ‘nuanced vocabulary of witnessing’ that can take many forms, including non-verbal ones . . . This retelling forges a link in the chain of testimony. (p. 774)

Dossa (2004) also highlights the importance of “*testimonio*” as a powerful discourse of analysis and as a foundation for building theory. She

argues this point in the context of her study of Iranian women's immigration to Canada after the Revolution of 1978-79. Dossa (2004) maintains that the narrative genre and how social actors reinterpret and reconfigure their life worlds is an important element of the collective story of marginalized peoples (p. 13). More specifically, Dossa adopts the term "*testimonio*" from Joan Beverley's chapter (in *De/Colonizing the Subject*); *The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)*," citing Beverley to make the point that *testimonio* highlights the intersection of personal and collective experiences, voices and narratives that are expressed "in the first person 'by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (Dossa, 2004, p. 76). However, like many other scholars and teachers, in her account of the dynamics of *testimonio*, Dossa represents the narratives of Iranian women immigrants—and their voices—only partially in excerpts as segmented subjects of analysis rather than uninterrupted selves with subjectivities reflecting on themselves as the other through whole individual self-narratives. The irony is that this tendency to cut off and interrupt the stories of those who are oppressed has not been fully understood and analyzed for the purposes of studying the forces of oppression. Indeed, in both primary and secondary pedagogical contexts, the history of the horrors of the Holocaust are often broached by way of forwarding partial or abridged stories and selected artifacts of specific individuals persecuted and killed during the Nazi scourge in Europe in the 30s and 40s. Whether a first voice narrative artifact or a physical artifact (like a passport or a prisoner's uniform), these objects of analysis are framed within specific theoretical, historical and pedagogical frames of reference. What if we as teachers interested in studying the dynamics of oppression do not provide such frames?

We are not the first (nor do we expect to be the last) to argue for the forwarding and inherent value of individual narratives or voices of the oppressed within scholarly and post-secondary pedagogical circles. Scholars of different stripes have traversed and explored this essential terrain, for example, Zinn (2005) in history or Felman and Laub (1991), Young (1990), or Greenspan (2010) in Holocaust studies in particular. Indeed, Dewey (1971a, 1971b) was one of the main philosophers and educational thinkers at the turn of the century who promoted education based on the experiences and interests of students (student/child centered education). He believed that the role of education is to promote critical thinking and democracy. Critical pedagogues like Henry Giroux have also highlighted the importance of teaching critical thinking and linking it to democratic values in socializing and preparing youth as public intellectuals (Giroux, 2000, 1999, 1994, 1988; Au, 2012; Freire, 1995, 1993; Apple, 2004, 1999, 1986; Hooks, 2003, 1994, 1989; Dei, 1996). Anti-racist educators and critical multiculturalists have also emphasized the central aspect of being a public intellectual as the ability to see the world and act upon the world through the lenses of marginalized people. From postcolonial and feminist perspectives, a public intellectual's approach to and understanding of socio-economic issues includes the experiences of the subaltern and women. It is in light of these approaches to education and our own experiences teaching a four week session on the Holocaust as part of the broader course content on nationalism and racism that we posit a radical re-evaluation and re-formulation of *pedagogical praxis* whereby the voices of the oppressed and their oppressors function as the primary

subjects or texts of knowledge, unobstructed and uninterrupted by historical or theoretical approaches and viewpoints of experts. What we are proposing is influenced by the aforementioned authors and thinkers, but with a twist. Freire, in his famous book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (1993) highlights the importance of starting with the oppressed experiences of the students to teach critical thinking and to make students conscious of the exploitation that they, as subaltern or marginalized people, face and how to resist the system systematically—how to be in the world, with the world, and act upon the world critically. However, in the context of teaching in a post-secondary setting in which students are, relatively speaking, often privileged, it is important that the victims and perpetrators of oppression speak first, before the students. Of course, the students' privileged biases or perspectives will shape what they hear, but at least those who were "there" get a chance to speak first. Although Dewey and others emphasize starting with the experiences of students—and we agree that such experiences are central—we propose that by starting with the first voices we can offer a broader, polyphonic experiential understanding from the outset that will, after the first voices are heard, incorporate student experiences or perspectives. Nobody that we know of, Dewey and the above included, have ever proposed that the voices of the oppressed and their oppressors be heard within the post-secondary context without being contextualized or framed within history or theory. Despite the admirable efforts of historians and theorists to understand, conceptualize, and contextualize the multiplicity of forces at work on individuals and communities caught within larger socio-economic forces that dehumanize and annihilate individuals and groups, these forms of academic study and discourse more often than not serve to further marginalize and silence the voices of those who were there or their ancestors.

What follows is our story of problematizing this methodological and theoretical silencing of the value of first voices as sources of ultimate knowledge and as primary texts of learning within the post-secondary context. We conclude with our emerging story of an alternative to this paradigm of university study of atrocity and oppression.

### **The Story Behind a Paradigm Shift**

The anomaly that precipitated this pedagogical paradigm shift materialized in the context of a four-week portion of a fourth-year global studies in race and ethnicity sociology course taught by Amir and devoted to the Holocaust. During this period of the course, Fred gave a lecture and took part in each of the four three-hour classes. Prior to the month-long study of the Holocaust, Amir began this upper-level course the way he usually does, by providing students with theoretical, thematic and conceptual approaches to the issues to be explored, namely race, gender, ability and ethnic relations from a global perspective. As far as Amir was concerned, this approach had been working for himself and his students, so why alter it? He never questioned it. In his classes, Amir always emphasized contextual understandings and theoretical perspectives. He nevertheless also relied heavily on first-hand accounts, personal experiences, and life-histories of various forms of otherness, but they often were supplementary and secondary to the main theoretical concerns of his courses.

This approach to teaching sociology had, however, become more or

less meaningless for Amir since the summer semester of 2014 when he and Fred collaborated during the four-week period devoted to understanding the Holocaust. Previous to this collaboration, Amir had taught the Holocaust within the context of other sociology classes examining various atrocities and forms of oppression with an emphasis on theoretical understandings of such issues, whereas Fred had taught literature courses with a focus on literary, first-person survivor accounts of Auschwitz supplemented by survivor video-testimony and a final talk by a survivor after the students read and discussed the required readings. Indeed, in the spring semester preceding this summer collaboration Fred had taught a first-year literature course on literary and cinematic representations of genocide, culminating in a visit by a child survivor of the Holocaust, Louise Sorensen, on the final day of class. Amir attended this final talk and both Fred and Amir found it altogether exceptional, largely due to the sense of humour exhibited by this speaker whose experiences of oppression and loss were integrated into a very positive outlook on life and the future. Moreover, the course content of the collaborative four-week summer symposium arose out of this mutual act of witnessing on Amir and Fred's part, as well as a previous mutual act of witnessing the talk of another child survivor, Alex Buckman. Mr. Buckman spoke in the context of Fred's third-year English course on diasporic literatures and delivered a highly evocative and emotionally charged story of his overwhelming experiences as a child separated from his family and living in hiding while caught within the maelstrom of Nazi occupation of Belgium. And yet, ultimately, the penetrating and altogether unique stories of these two survivors were not given the attention they deserved (as they were heard after absorbing all other material) and as such functioned as secondary sources of knowledge—a point raised by students during the debriefing session following Mr. Buckman's talk. This did not sit right with either of us, but we were at a loss to pinpoint the root of the problem and its solution.

Nonetheless, we were compelled to put together and focus on the four-week summer collaboration on the Holocaust intended to examine this seminal historical event—and the mass murder of European Jewry in particular—and, more specifically, how it is imagined, remembered, and made sense of by scholars, artists, and survivors. But we still had not learned our lesson: we introduced scholars first, and focused on survivors last. This month long portion of the course was intended as an interdisciplinary experiment that included four weeks of intense study of the Holocaust from multiple perspectives. Thus, four guest speakers presented their research or, in the case of the final speaker, personal story. The first speaker, Janice Morris, a multidisciplinary scholar who has published on cinematic representations of the Armenian genocide and is completing her Ph.D. dissertation on Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, analyzed *Maus* in the context of the debates surrounding the representation of the Holocaust in literary and comic book forms. Following this talk, Adara Goldberg, a Ph.D. in genocide studies and administrator working for the *Vancouver Education Holocaust Centre*, lectured on the experience of survivors living in Canada after the war and explored the racism and anti-Semitism endemic to Canada in the post-war period. Her presentation focused on her experience interviewing and researching individual survivors living in different parts of Canada and struggling to adapt to this country. In the next lecture, in light of Zygmunt Bauman's conception of instrumental rationality in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (cited in Samoleit,

2008) Fred read from and analyzed memoirs written by survivors of Auschwitz, specifically Primo Levi and Charlotte Delbo, as well as a chapter from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and, we should add, Arendt's chapter and its explication ended up taking up much of the lecture. We ended this part of the course with a presentation by Alex Buckman, the survivor speaker that both of us had heard in the context of Fred's diasporic literatures course.

As he had done on that previous occasion of a visit to our post-secondary institution, Mr. Buckman spoke on his experiences before, during, and after World War Two, while in Europe and Canada. Although the content of his talk was much the same as his previous one, we both agreed after hearing him speak again that this time his delivery of his story was less overtly emotional, as he seemed to be less immersed in the emotions attached to his past experiences, and more concerned with conveying the implications of his story for the students listening to it. Indeed, it became clear to both of us that Alex's transnational lens and voice captured the imagination, hearts, and minds of students. In fact, if any of the material for the course left a lasting impression or, rather, to use Langer's (1995) more telling term, "imprint," on the psyche of students, it was the mixture of emotionally charged and analytical content in Mr. Buckman's first-person account of his experiences of the past and present. In his introduction to the English translation of survivor Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, Langer (1995) states:

When memory imprints on us the meaning of the presence of 'absence' and animates the ghost that such a burden has imposed on our lives, then the heritage of the Holocaust will have begun to acquire some authenticity in our postwar culture. (p. xviii)

It is this very ghost which Mr. Buckman managed to transmit in his one hour visit to our class. Indeed, it is the pedagogical power of firsthand accounts that often gets lost and ignored when the emphasis of the course is on expert analyses of such historical events. In hindsight, after witnessing and re-witnessing Mr. Buckman's tale and the humorous and self-reflexive story of Louise Sorensen's experiences, it became clear to us that these stories are far more than conveyors of personal experience integral to the historical record: they are the foundation upon which critical reflection on knowledge about oppression must be built.

### **The Paradigm Shift: Education as a Means to Witnessing and Survivors by Proxy**

Following Alex Buckman's one-hour talk and departure in the second part of the final class on the Holocaust, students discussed issues raised during the last four weeks, but the focus of discussion was on the significance of Alex's visit. One student suggested that his firsthand account served to make sense of or tie together and embody all of the more abstract material on the Holocaust, nationalism, and racialization studied previously. In fact, this student commented directly upon the appropriateness of the order of the four speakers, with the speakers increasingly getting "closer" to the events of the Holocaust, as *Maus*, explored by Janice Morris, is a second generation account by a son of a father's story of survival, while Adara's interviews with and primary research on first voices living in Canada brought the impact of the

Holocaust even closer to home, and Primo Levi and Charlotte Delbo's firsthand accounts of Auschwitz provided insiders' views of the dehumanizing and traumatic effects of concentration and death camps, with all of these talks culminating in Alex's live, first-person narrative of his own feelings and thoughts associated with his and his family's struggle to survive and the overwhelming losses and ongoing impacts of such experiences. For the students, and for us, the instructors, Alex Buckman came to embody the Holocaust. His every word and gesture and answer seemed to speak for all victims of the Holocaust (and given the focus of the course, all victims of oppression) and live on in us, a complex imprint of multiple forces, experiences and relations inaccessible to the language of modernity that attempts to compartmentalize and categorize into binary oppositions.

In fact, it was Mr. Buckman himself who concluded his talk by stating that we, the audience members, but specifically the students who heard his story, are now witnesses to his family's story, and thus responsible for communicating it and building a better future with it. And we all accepted this responsibility, however impossible or unrealistic it seemed and seems to live up to it. We were, Alex suggested, "survivors by proxy," to adopt the Holocaust scholar and psychotherapist Lifton's phrase. In an interview with Cathy Caruth, Lifton (1995) describes survivors by proxy as those who,

in some significant psychological way experience what they [survivors] experience. You can never do that quite . . . You're not doing what they did, you're not exposed to what they were exposed to, but you must take your mind through, take your feelings through what they went through, and allow that in. (p. 145)

It should be noted that prior to Alex assigning us the role of witness, or witness by proxy, he pointed out that most of the survivors of the Holocaust—who were adults at the time of the Shoah—have died, and that he, as a child survivor (who managed to survive in hiding), is among the last eye-witnesses to the everyday particulars of this modern-day genocide. Alex made it perfectly clear that he felt that the act of witnessing, either as a first voice or as a survivor by proxy, is essential to the process of remembering and accounting for this genocidal past and thus avoiding future atrocities of this kind, or racism and oppression more generally. Indeed, while telling his story Alex made a point of illustrating the impact of the small, insidious forms of oppression on himself and his family, as well as the larger Jewish community. Moreover, his first voice story served to unearth the hegemonic forces of power at work on all kinds of individuals and groups—the powerless and the powerful, as well as those who, although victimized themselves, served the fascist state by informing on others—living in Europe during and after the war, as well as in Canada after emigration, and even as an adult living in this country in the present.

The following week students submitted their talking notes and reflections on the issues and topics covered during the previous four weeks. Without exception, they all commented that Alex's presentation provided them with a context to better understand the theoretical and more impersonal analyses of nationalism and genocide studied previous to Alex's visit. It is at this juncture that we, the instructors, realized our approach to the course, and for that matter all of our courses, had been morally and pedagogically inadequate: we had been silencing the voices of

marginalized peoples by having first voices appear last, or as supplementary material, as opposed to first, as the most revealing and richest of educational materials upon which to foster student learning and awareness. We came to the conclusion that any real understanding of social issues must start with the voices of the social actors involved, without any initial analysis and deconstruction, and without historical context and theoretical postulations by experts, as these first voice accounts often include rich historical and political analysis from the perspective of the eye witnesses. As the students pointed out to us, the experts' historical analyses and theoretical reflections framed the way through which students were supposed to listen to Alex; however, as they highlighted for us, it should have been Alex's reflections on his life-history that became the reflective lens to tackle the historical and theoretical literature. These voices as *testimonio* also evoke "an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences" (Beverley, as cited in Dossa, 2004, p. 76). This last point, that in the future we would not immediately provide students with historical and theoretical readings within which to situate first voices represents our most radical proposal. The suggestion that we should not immediately provide students with our preconceived historical and theoretical frameworks as tools of analysis is still a framework and discourse of representation. However, through this approach, we hope to allow students to develop their own structures of analysis that later in the course can be revised and rethought in light of existing historical and theoretical positions.

Indeed, we intend to put this new approach to the teaching of oppression and atrocity to the test and into action this upcoming Fall, 2015 semester when we will be team-teaching a combined first-year sociology and English course. This team-taught course will include history and theory, but only once students have had the opportunity to read, listen to, and explore first voices by documenting and analyzing their own responses to such voices. The process of writing this paper and reflecting on our own and students' experiences has been central in envisioning and approaching how this future course will be taught and structured, as we outline below.

This is, we recognize, a highly problematic pedagogical plan. For instance, one might argue that without historical context and theoretical framing of issues provided by experts, students are operating in the dark and left to channel first voices through the students' own biases or limited experiences, and this is a real problem. But it is also a problem that can be turned into a learning opportunity if students are faced with the limits of their own experiences and viewpoints within the context of classroom discussion and encouraged to explore their own views in relation to those of other students and the instructors with alternate views, as well as within self-reflexive written form. In other words, if class discussion of first voice stories is open and students' written responses are examined critically, in the context of such discussion and in the light of different student and instructor responses and real life experiences, such limits can be integrated into potentially limitless learning opportunities which will feed into an overall examination of the root social and psychological causes of oppression to be examined critically as a larger group later in the course in light of later explorations of theory and histories of oppression. This is neither an inductive nor a deductive approach. The first voice story operates as a metanarrative that functions as both deductive framework and inductive

experiential example. Again, our proposal is that the hands on experience of listening to first voices (whose narratives embody macrostructures as they make visible the experiences of social actors) first leads to theory building.

This is all to say that we should have started the four weeks on the Holocaust with a series of first voice accounts—in written, audio-visual, or in-person formats—of the events in Germany and Europe, highlighting the experiences of the victims, the perpetrators, and those caught in-between, while also accessing and exploring student responses to this often disturbing, emotionally charged, animate course material.

To be clear, we are recommending that a series of first voices be heard and allowed to resonate with one another without any theoretical and contextual material to frame them, and especially without any questions posed by the instructors that would inevitably limit and direct student reactions to such volatile material. To frame student experience of first voices in any of these traditional manners would be to set-up and interrupt such first voices and student responses to them, voices and responses that could act as the basis of constructing highly critical and sophisticated forms of self-analytical, self-reflexive student discourses.

Indeed, how can we pretend to understand any forms of oppression and violence at any level without listening to and witnessing those who were there and thinking critically about our individual responses to them? For example, how can we claim to know anything about violence against women without listening to a first voice on what it means to experience beatings by the hands of one's own husband or partner? Listening to such voices necessitates the documenting of our own emotional and intellectual responses and assessing such responses in light of different first voices and the responses of others. How can we comprehend any of the cultural and social causes of violence against women and children without hearing first voices describe experiences of pain, misery, reliance, and resistance and then monitoring our own limits in understanding them?

Some may argue that the act of comparing and contrasting individual or communal violence across cultures and periods is inherently problematic and unethical. But once again, it is only by allowing students to confront such problems and the limits of any approach to the understanding of the lives and deaths of others in light of limited individual perspectives and responses based upon personal experience and a given set of culturally determined values that students have a chance of truly grasping the underlying prejudices and systemic forces that shape history and that need to change if history is not to repeat itself.

The four-week long summer session on the Holocaust was an attempt to facilitate acts of witness, in scholarly or first voice or “by proxy” forms that serve to account for the complexity and subjectivity of oppression and its incommensurable impact, as well as its insidious structural underpinnings. In other words, education is first and foremost a means to witnessing; it is that simple, and yet the educational system is not generally organized and utilized to reflect this fact and we intend to remedy it, at least in our own classes.



We maintain that the whole educational model deserves to be re-oriented or turned upside-down: that is, the starting point should become the voices of the oppressed and oppressors, in their multiple and diametrically varied forms highlighting conflicted and ambivalent individual emotions and sometimes irreconcilable or incomprehensible actions, embodied voices, and activities of those involved in the processes of witnessing and perpetuating domination and anti-hegemonic movements, an intersectional and intersubjective approach to how varied voices diverge and converge. These first voices, and “survivor by proxy” student responses to them, must form the primary texts of teaching and learning about social justice. The theory and scholarship and academic debates and arguments should be approached and presented as secondary texts, as complementary knowledge produced by the “expert system” that at times limit and silence the voices of those affected by or responsible for injustices. The western educational model, like the judicial system, is adversarial, as is the political arena, even and especially the democratic arena, but is there another way, the middle way, a way of empathy generated, at least ideally, from first voices? The idea is that one does not, should not, cannot, broach a question like “Do the actions of the Israeli state in the summer of 2014 constitute genocide?” without first listening to and, ideally, empathizing with, the voices of those who have witnessed (at different levels) events on the ground or, for that matter, in the air. It is only when armed with such resonating and conflicting and conflicted voices that a student or scholar is best prepared to approach such questions which may—in light of such varied voices—be deemed inappropriate or simplistic or irrelevant. It is only after immersing oneself in these stories, as opposed to the silencing of such voices situated within dominant academic discourses that one is able to engage in an ethical approach to understanding the polyphonic characteristics of historical events. In her ground-breaking essay, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” Felman (1995) said:

In the era of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima, of Vietnam—in the age of testimony—teaching, I would venture to suggest, must in turn testify, make something happen, and not just transmit a passive knowledge, pass on information that is preconceived, substantiated, believed to be known in advance, misguidedly believed, that is, to be (exclusively) a given. (p. 56)

If we, as educators, wish to develop an “educated imagination,” to adopt Northrop Frye’s concept, we will, first and foremost, have to account for and integrate first voice stories to the extent that such first voices determine the shape of academic discourse, and not the other way around.

We propose a new way of conceptualizing humanities and social science education and pedagogy: education as a means to witnessing which highlights how the memories, words, and life-histories of the survivors and perpetrators who recount their experiences of genocide, mass-killing, marginalization, domination, and discrimination can function as metanarratives to give meaning to theoretical, methodological, and textual analyses of social justice issues that are also produced by the first voices. This approach is based on an important pedagogical and curricular question of how we should link the discourse of hope, witness “by proxy,” and the process of witnessing to a collective approach to teaching and learning about inequalities. We have come to the conclusion that we need

to focus on the value of the personal, political, individual narrations as all-encompassing frameworks that explain, structure, and contextualize intellectual and academic approaches to such issues for students in the classroom.

Indeed, in his talk the survivor Alex Buckman presented us with a framework to seriously consider the implications of academic approaches to genocide as he literally embodied and continues to embody a meta-narrative, although his personal story remained specific, within the limits of his own life history and experiences. It was in the context of this locality, through his personal narrative of the larger events of the Holocaust and the events before and after it, that he made us aware of the multiplicities of the larger socio-economic-political contexts of pre- and post-Holocaust events and hegemonic and anti-hegemonic structures. His survival took shape in the context of contradictory relations, in paradoxical spaces where the enemy other and the self were constantly re-emerging and reconstituting the spaces available for constructing one's identity.

In other words, Mr. Buckman went from being a Jew living with his family to believing he was a Catholic while hidden in a monastery. He saw himself as a Catholic only to become a Jew again after liberation. He faced anti-Semitism as a young boy and teenager in Belgium and a teenager and a man in Canada. While walking the streets in Belgium, his aunt and he came face-to-face with the woman who initially helped them to hide Mr. Buckman but later informed on his parents to the Germans, leading to his parents' deaths in concentration camps. When he arrived in Montreal, he lived in a Jewish enclave and attended a high school with over 90 percent Jewish student body. According to Alex, he did not experience direct anti-Semitism while living in Montreal. It is not until he moved to North Vancouver, British Columbia, and was exposed to the anti-Semitism of Doug Collins as expressed in his articles published in the *North Shore News* that the ghost of the Holocaust fully emerged in a Canadian context. This experience was pivotal in Mr. Buckman becoming a narrator of his and his family's experiences in the Holocaust. Despite all the ordeals, all the triumphs in his life, he expressed the deep pain in his soul that has been the driving force to tell the story of his parents and their murderers. It is this testimonial pain that has become the driving force behind his attempts to educate others by making them witnesses by proxy to his parents' pain and the events that constructed them as subhuman. He escapes his pain and deals with it through running, literally. As he informed us in his talk at the end of the four-week seminar on the Holocaust, running, training for and running marathons, saved him from the sometimes unbearable ghost of the Holocaust, often manifested in feelings of rage.

Prior to Mr. Buckman giving his presentation for this four-week seminar, we had no idea that running was such an integral part of his life—he did not mention this the first time we heard him speak. However, as a token of our thanks, after his presentation Amir presented Mr. Buckman with a gift, a Kwantlen Polytechnic University (the institution at which we both teach situated on the lands of the Kwantlen First Nation) t-shirt that read, "Tireless Runner," a translation of what it means to be a member of the Kwantlen First Nation. Mr. Buckman's involvement in keeping the memories of his parents and the events of the Holocaust alive has made him a kind of proxy member of the Kwantlen First Nation, while his story has made the

students of Kwantlen Polytechnic University witness to the Holocaust by proxy and members of a community of listeners who promise to be tireless in pursuit of truth, clarity, and justice; moreover, Mr. Buckman made us all proxies to his parents' *intertextual survival* by reconstructing their ordeals and eventual deaths through his voice as a survivor in the midst of a group of academic listeners in pursuit of not only truth and justice, but also an ethical and pedagogical means to witnessing justice and injustice.

As we became witnesses to his parents' demise and his life-history, his meta-narrative became the framework of an anti-hegemonic, intertextual, and proxy-making narrative that allowed the histories of all marginalized peoples we studied in the course to live in our consciousness forever. As a Canadian born secular Jew who grew up with little to no Holocaust education and gradually became more and more compelled to learn and teach about this history through survivor narratives, Fred became a survivor by proxy, and as an Iranian born secular Muslim teaching social justice issues, Amir also became a survivor by proxy, as did our students who come from their own varied backgrounds. On the other hand, this proxy experience was limited by the way in which Mr. Buckman's voice and other first voices were framed within a largely traditional post-secondary pedagogical methodology that included the contextualization of Alex's story within given historical and theoretical contexts of genocide and oppression as the product of hegemonic forces.

Yet, despite this pedagogical context, to some extent we all became tireless runners because we became witnesses to how various forms of inequality affect people and nations, and the consequences of remaining silent. As one student from the four-week seminar suggested, she learned how racist she has been and how whiteness has privileged her. She had now become conscious of her prejudices and privileges by virtue of acting as a witness to Mr. Buckman's narration of how racism affects people.

After we listened to Mr. Buckman's voice, we were forced to ask ourselves, "What is the function of the educational system and our roles as teachers within it?" The answer, in the fields of humanities and social sciences, is, we argue, that the primary function of education should be as a means to witnessing and enabling students to form self-reflexive discourses that are the end result of engagement with first voices first: the experiences, theories, and explanations offered by those who speak about their experiences of marginalization, oppression and inequality, and those who perpetrated such injustices, must, we propose, operate as the foundational evocative, embodied, textual and intellectual material for all other stories or histories woven into the fabric of post-secondary study. Without such a basis, theory and history are prone to distortion and dissociation, if not further silencing, marginalizing, and re-traumatizing of victims. However significant Alex Buckman's personal story became, by saving his visit to the end of the course students and instructors alike missed out on a form of first-hand, intimate and foundational knowledge capable of penetrating the hearts and minds of those listening to the extent they too bear the responsibility inherent to the act of witnessing, thus enabling the development of a more sensitized, ethical, intertextual, interpersonal and organic theoretical frame through which to process the past in the present.

Essentially, education as a means to witnessing is a conceptual tool of forwarding and incorporating empathy into curriculum. Witnessing is a way to instill a sense of pain, joy, and anger into the self that does not belong to the self, but is part of the experiences of many forms of otherness that have been absent in the construction of self-identity. Uninterrupted witnessing is a textual and intertextual praxis-oriented space to objectify the subjectivities of otherness in such a way that distant relations, events, practices, and experiences become perceivable and experienced by the witnesses. It is about one's consciousness becoming at once a space for the otherness to relive lives with different outcomes and also a space for the memories of genocide and persecution to reassert themselves in the actions of the living, resulting in a constant struggle to end mass-killing and oppression of different forms. It is a way to become alive through the bodies, minds, and actions of the living-dead with an outlook to the future that enables them to live-on forever. It is a space for others to be "reincarnated" and see their dreams materialize: dreams of social justice, happiness, freedom, and tranquility.

It is through the—as much as possible—unadulterated experience of writings, memories, feelings, and experiences of those killed, raped, dislocated, and removed that witnessing enables the living to become a full self in its broadest sense. The discontinuities, dislocations, and fragmentations of modernity become part of the whole, yet they retain their distinctiveness, reminding the living that freedom, democracy, and happiness are achievable not through singular solutions, ways of being and seeing, but through attending to a polyphony of witnesses speaking through frames of reference shaped within a dialogical context initially free of expert forms of history and theory.

In this context, witnessing is about the realization that who we are and what we are cannot be detached from the lives of those who live presently or have in the past. It highlights how contradictions, conflicts, and harmonious relations simultaneously make, devalue, privilege, and dehumanize us. It is a critique of the myth of modernity and the reality that we have not achieved the ideals of modernity, but that it is still possible to achieve them through a reconceptualization of Eurocentric, nationalistic, patriarchal, able-ist, homophobic and ethnocentric views and dreams of social actors. Witnessing of this kind implies acting upon the world through and based upon the un-realized hopes of those who dared to dream of a better world, for example, slaves who revolted, women who organized against fundamentalist movements, gay and lesbian groups who did not sit back to witness their political and social bodies become victimized and dominated, and, for that matter, anyone who chose and chooses to speak about their experiences of oppression.

In order to put this vision into practice, in the first seven weeks of our co-taught first-year 14-week sociology and English course on oppression students will first read and become exposed to the writings, memoirs, and autobiographies of historical others without interruptions by experts and theorists. During this period, students will read and analyze a diverse spectrum of first voices as primary sources. They will produce their own voices and discourses that reflect upon the experiences of the first voices as the primary witnesses. Students' analyses, then, become additional primary sources by proxy, that in conjunction with the first voices, are re-

read in light of theoretical analysis of the same issues by the experts, who may or not be first voices themselves. The discourses students develop and create will be a discursive formation of witness by proxy that decentres theory, re-centers first voices, and re-conceptualizes multiple voices as meta-narratives, which become the basis of theory-building.

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◀ Contents

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