The Limits of Atrocity Witnessing in Constituting a Democratic Public

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ABSTRACT

The practice of public atrocity witnessing emerged in the 20th century as a public forum for those who suffered and were silenced under a discriminatory system to speak about their experiences. Advocates emphasize the value of the practice for giving voice to the voiceless, which is seen as essential to promoting equality and democratization. In this paper, I examine the practice as a means for the constitution of public memory and as a form of public interaction in order to better understand how the practice defines the structure and circumstances of deliberation. I utilize a detailed ethnographic study of the use of public atrocity witnessing by a group of US military veterans in an event referred to as Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan (WSIA), which occurred in March of 2008. Through this case study, I consider how the practice may actually produce new silences that hinder open and democratic deliberation through the selection of participants; the polarizing dichotomy of victim and perpetrator; and the inaccessibility of both testifiers and testimonies. I conclude with an examination of the various reactions to and representations of WSIA to demonstrate how these limitations affect the ways in which the public responds to public atrocity witnessing.

The Limits of Atrocity Witnessing in Constituting a Democratic Public

Since the latter half of the 20th century, a practice of social remembering has emerged in which individuals who suffered as a result of systemic discrimination and violence publicly presented their accounts of the past. Most prominently connected to the presentation of testimony by Holocaust survivors, the practice, which I refer to as "public atrocity witnessing." has also come to be widely adopted by truth commissions in post-conflict communities as a means of giving "voice to the voiceless" and delegitimizing discriminatory systems and authoritarian narratives of the past. While the model of the truth commission has been subject to broad criticism (Buur 2001; Crocker 2002; Nagy 2002; Wilson 2003b), "to a wide academic and professional community, the general democratic value of testimony and public hearings seems to be a matter of common sense" (Winter 2009:91). A few scholars have begun to interrogate the assumed social value of the practice by demonstrating how the selection process and narrative structure have the potential to constrain and disempower those who testify as victims of atrocity (Coxshall 2005; Hayner 2001; Ross 2001; Verdoolaege 2008; Winter 2009). However, the assumption that public atrocity witnessing is "essential to the process of democraticization" remains largely unquestioned (Wilson 2003a:267). By turning our attention to the way in which public atrocity witnessing serves as a mnemonic practice that serves to constitute a public's identity and the norms of social interaction, the following paper reveals the ways in which the practice creates new silences and inhibits deliberation, serving as a reminder of the need for alternative efforts to address the effect of the mnemonic practice on public dialogue.

In order to examine the ways in which public atrocity witnessing, as a means of constituting a public's identity through the collective recollection of the past, might affect democratic deliberation more broadly, I utilize a survey of cases of public atrocity witnessing. These include the inclusion of Holocaust survivors' testimonies in the 1961 trial of Nazi SS Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann (Jelin 2003; Wieviorka 2006); the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) between 1995 and 1998 (Hayner 1994, 2006); 2004-06 Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Commission (Magarrell and Wesley 2008); and the 2008 series of events, organized by US military service members, known as Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan. This study is guided by the question: if events of public remembering serve as mechanism for defining the circumstances under which deliberation is

possible, what structure and circumstances does the practice of public atrocity witnessing promote?

I utilize a detailed ethnographic study of the particular case of the use of public atrocity witnessing by a group of US military veterans in an event referred to as Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan (WSIA), which occurred in March of 2008. Placing this event within the context of a more general survey of the practice, I examine how the format of public atrocity witnessing not only shapes the range of acceptable testimony, but also sets a precedent for future public interactions. I demonstrate how the practice, even as it provides a forum for more inclusive public speech, hinders the potential for open democratic deliberation by producing new silences and polarizing groups through a stigmatizing moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. The practice can have the effect of giving rise to a degree of veneration for suffering that leads to "trauma envy" (Mowitt 2000) or a "wound culture" (Seltzer 1997). While the practice has value in providing a public forum for recognizing previously silenced suffering, it is limited in its ability to promote constructive deliberation. Therefore, we ought to be sensitive to the ways in which public atrocity witnessing defines social order and constitutes public interactions.

ATROCITY WITNESSING AS A PROCESS OF PUBLIC REMEMBERING

Public atrocity witnessing is principally a social practice that utilizes individual memories of the past in order to constitute a narrative of a shared identity. In presenting these memories in a public forum, the practice produces, through the relation of memories in personal narrative, an event that is subsequently collectively remembered. This type of interaction in a public space, while constrained by institutional power and social discourse, is notable because it serves to define the social reality of a defined public body. Even in cases where an interaction involves a struggle over meaning, "when [the] participants in a social situation define something as being real, it is real in its consequences" (Goldfarb 2006:8). Thus, the process of democraticization is dependent upon institutional authority and structures of power, yet the "state" of democracy must be continuously produced through those practices in which individuals appear and interact in public spaces. A dynamic and healthy democracy is understood as one in which these individuals are recognized as "equals in distinction" and engage in debate over those issues common to the public (Arendt 1958).

In the case of public atrocity witnessing, its success in delegitimizing discriminatory systems may be contingent on the support of institutional, political and social authorities;

however, the practice also plays a critical role in furthering the process of democraticization because it is an event of public appearance that defines how people interact with one another through a powerful moral framework of suffering and victimhood. Public memory is constituted through the selected individual accounts of suffering and loss that are, in turn, witnessed by others as a public body. The element of individual remembrance distinguishes the narrative of the past constructed through public atrocity witnessing from an historical account, which lacks an organic relation to individuals (Halbwachs 1992). By contrast, as constituted by and of memory, the past becomes personal and plays an active role in the formation of identity. Such an event of public memory thus defines the frame for remembering the past and acting in the future.

By delineating the memory constituted through public atrocity witnessing as *collective* and *public*, I give emphasis to ways in which memory occurs in front of and with others within the public sphere. As such, it is defined not in a simple opposition to that which is private, but in its engagement in deliberations over the "common good." A distinction is made between a public in this context and other types of collectives that may form in a public space, such as crowds, audiences, communities, and activists (Dayan 2005). For example, a group of individuals gathered as an audience to watch a theater performance may participate in a shared collective remembering as a result of participating in the event, but they do not constitute a public. By contrast, a public reflexively understands itself as a collective with a shared identity and engages in deliberation over issues that affect that collective. Furthermore, a public is a type of community – in that it shares an imagined identity, is social, and persists through time – but it is distinct from communities that are grounded in affect and tradition and based on a subjective feeling of belonging. Whereas belonging to a community may precede or preclude choice, "joining a public…involves a political, ethical or aesthetic decision" (Dayan 2005:49). When individuals engage in the process of public memory, they do so as a plurality united through the shared identity of the collective, which is framed by that memory.

With a flexible notion of publics, I define them in relation to their manifestations through the interactions of individuals in the public sphere. As Habermas (1996) notes, the public sphere:

> is characterized by open, permeable, and shifting horizons…. [T]he public sphere distinguishes itself through a *communication structure*…: it refers neither to the *functions* nor to the *contents* of everyday communication but to the *social space* generated in communicative action (Habermas 1996:360).

Thus, the public sphere is the space in which individuals engage in deliberation through reason giving. "A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public…. Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion" (Habermas 1996:231). Arendt draws a similar distinction in her conception of the public sphere, which based on the ancient Greek *polis*: "To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence" (Arendt 1958:26). In its ideal, a public is based on equality among its members, which both Habermas and Arendt contend is essential to the successful functioning of the public sphere. The realization of equality, which is a complex process that involves multiple relations, is not, however, necessary for the formation of a public except to the extent all members of the collective are identified as equal in their membership in the public. Thus, we are able to recognize the ways in which one of the concerns of a public may be the realization of equality in other relations (for example, economic or legal), as well as the ways in which existing unequal relations of power and authoritative discourses affect participation and the reception of reasons and opinions communicated through the public sphere. Furthermore, while there is a conventional tendency to view the public sphere as situated in a particular place in which individuals physically gather, a less determined conception of the public sphere is necessary in order to allow for the ways in which media technology has increased the capacity for the public sphere to transcend fixed spatial locations (Dayan and Katz 1992).

The public sphere thus serves as the field for the process of remembering, through which the constitution of the public memory involves dialogue around the "fundamental issues…of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present…. [I]t is an argument about the interpretation of reality" (Bodnar 1992:14). The emphasis on the *process of remembering* is central to the concept of public memory in order to avoid the transcendentalist assumption that has dominated collective memory studies and depicts memory as a distinct, unitary, and consensual entity that is representative of a prerepresentative past and autonomous from individual memory. The traditional approach to the study of collective memory, a legacy of Halbwachs' work on collective memory (1992, 1996), tends to focus on "two distinct, and not obviously complementary, sorts of phenomena: socially framed individual memories and collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces" (Olick 2007:20). However, when one avoids a process-reductive perspective, it is possible to identify "the process

of social remembering in time and the varieties of retrospective practices in such a way that does not oppose individual and collective memory to each other" (Olick 2007:10). This dynamic approach focuses on the mnemonic practices that compose collective memory in the process of remembering. The four "pernicious postulates" that have troubled sociological thought (Tilly 1984) - unity; mimetic directness; tangibility; and independence – are replaced by four "process-relational counterconcepts" – field (the space in which multiple memories are contested); medium (the representational forms of memory that mediate experience); genre (the textuality – and intertextuality – of memory); and profile (the political meaning systems that make it possible for a period to be represented) (Olick 2007). In this approach to public memory, emphasis is given to the process of remembering, in contrast to studies of public memory that focus on the forms of public commemoration or the "products" of the construction of a common history or identity. Thus, the goal is not to show how public memory is "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past" (Bodnar 1992:15), but to examine the process by which shared memories are constituted in a present moment through the public sphere.

Public atrocity witnessing presents us with a useful case for exemplifying public memory as a process of remembering in the public sphere because it intentionally utilizes individual remembrance in the constitution of public memory. As a Janus-faced practice, it is located in the present moment of witnessing, yet "is both attached to a past…*and* acts to ensure a future of further remembering of the same event" (Casey 2004:17). Specific efforts may be made in this process to resolve conflicting memories and establish an "authoritative" public memory that may be used to constitute a shared public identity and provide a sense of belonging for the members of the group and the group's imagining of itself (Anderson 1991; Bodnar 1992; Burke 1989; Gillis 1994). However, "[b]eing public does not guarantee constancy over time: to be public is to be subject to continual reassessment and revision" (Casey 2004:29). Public memory is never fixed but exists in a constant state of construction in individual acts of remembering, where the various versions of remembrance are contested. In public atrocity witnessing, for example, there are often conflicts between and within official and vernacular expressions of memory. At the same time, certain images, ideas and narratives acquire greater authority than others, and these established images, ideas and narratives provide the basis in which public remembering occurs and is contested. Thus, it is crucial to locate the process of remembering in specific social,

political and historical contexts and give attention to the how social interactions shape the constitution of public memories.

A CASE OF PUBLIC ATROCITY WITNESSING

The practice of public atrocity witnessing is based on the presentation of personal accounts of the past with the intention of bringing those experiences into the present in order to reveal systemic inequity and establish an ethical order based on the recognition of human equality in the future. Testifiers serve as witnesses not just in the legal sense of reporting events that they observed, but also in the moral sense of using one's body as a spectacle of pain to affect the conscience of the listeners, transforming them into witnesses *of* the witness and motivating them to action (Peters 2000). Even though it emerged out of post-World War II war crimes trials, the practice has developed outside of legal institutions and is not intended as a means to judge the guilt of individuals.[1] The focus of public atrocity witnessing is on the victims of discrimination and violence, not the perpetrators.

> In contrast to criminal proceedings, which seek to *restore* a normative social order, truth commissions (at least officially) aspire to *change* society in its hitherto existing condition. The aim a truth commissions seeks to achieve is a broad social sensitization and identification of the 'Other's' suffering, rather than the deterrence of potential wrongdoers (Winter 2009:93 emphasis in original).

Practitioners seek "a golden mean, some 'proper' degree of collective memory appropriate for bearing in mind the cruelties and lessons of a troubled past, while not so consuming as to stifle the possibilities of reconciliation and growth (Steiner 1997:3). The event of public atrocity witnessing thus serves as a liminal period in which both witness and audience (re)experience the suffering of the past, recognize a shared humanity in that experience, and construct a vision for a future in which such suffering will not recur. As an event within the public sphere, it is meant to delegitimize discriminatory political, social, and/or economic orders through this process.

While the particular manifestations of public atrocity witnessing will vary according to specific historical, political and social circumstances, the practice is defined by the public presentation of personal memories of suffering as testimony to past injustice. In addition, events

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[1] It is the case that, while public atrocity witnessing does not occur within a legal context, it may occur in tandem with legal proceedings or its finding might be used in later legal proceedings.

of public atrocity witnessing, in general, conform to a set of conventions. For example, organizers clearly demarcate the time period and types of activities that are the focus of the event; questionnaires, which are designed to gather stories that illustrate the claim of past injustices, are used to collect potential testimonies; testifiers are preselected through an interview and verification process; moderators, typically selected from among the organizers of the event, are used to facilitate the process of testifying; the immediate audience to the event is prohibited from direct interaction with the testifiers; and media are integral to expanding the public reach of the testimonies beyond those immediately present. In examining the extent to which public atrocity witnessing fosters democratic practices, I utilize a survey of events that fall within this structure as a means of framing the context of an ethnographic study of a particular case of public atrocity witnessing: the presentation of testimonies of US veterans at Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan (WSIA). The findings presented here are based on participant observation, a content analysis of the testimonies, and semi-structured interviews with a subset of the event's organizers and testifiers.

WSIA consists of over a dozen events across the United States, as well as one in Freiburg, Germany. The focus here is on a detailed study of the largest of the WSIA gatherings, a national-level event that occurred from 13-16 March 2008, in the suburbs of Washington, DC.[2] The event included testimonies from 50 members of the US Army, Army Reserves, Army National Guard, Marine Corps, Marine Reserves, and Navy; two Iraqi nationals; four military family members; and 17 experts on the military and US foreign policy.[3] The organizers of the event, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), promoted three objectives that the event was intended to justify: the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, adequate healthcare for returning veterans, and reparations to the Iraqis. During the event, veterans testified to their experiences in the military and in combat, addressing a number of issues including proper healthcare for veterans, gender and sexual discrimination in the military, and the political and economic aspects of US foreign policy; however, the event centered around four

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[2] The other Winter Soldier events, which were regional, were held in Gainesville, FL; Seattle, WA; Madison, WI; Amherst, MA; Rochester, NY; Portland, OR; Baltimore, MD; Champaign-Urbana, IL; Austin, TX; Berkeley, CA; Pasadena, CA; and Freiburg, Germany.

[3] The organizers attempted to bring more Iraqi nationals to the event; however, difficulties with obtaining visas and arranging travel prevented the Iraqis from attending. In place of in person testimonies, the event included the taped testimonies of ten Iraqi nationals.

panels that focused on the themes of racism and dehumanization in the military and the absence of clear rules of engagement.[4] During these four panels, 33 veterans spoke about their personal experiences in deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The event was organized into thirteen panels, each addressing a specific theme and typically lasting between one and a half to two hours.[5] With anywhere from two to nine speakers, the amount of time that each speaker was allotted could range from 5 to 30 minutes, although the average amount of time was between 15 and 20 minutes. While each panel had a moderator, typically one of the event organizers, their role was marginal, with the time devoted almost entirely to the speakers. Questions were not permitted during any of the panels on which veterans provided testimony.[6] In addition, the news media were required to arrange all interviews through the event's media team. Access to the event was restricted and attendees had to register with the organizers in order to acquire an entry pass. As a result, the immediate audience of several hundred people was restricted almost entirely to military service members and veterans, friends and family of military service members, and members of veteran and antiwar organizations. Given the restricted access, the event achieved its status as a *public* presentation of atrocity witnessing through the use of the Internet and news media. The testimonies were broadcast via alternative media outlets, such as Pacifica Radio, and streamed on-line through IVAW's website.

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[4] The use of panels during WSIA is reflective of the significant influence of a similar event that occurred 37 years earlier that was organized by US veterans of the Vietnam War, known as the Winter Soldier Investigation (WSI). WSI was designed to mimic a Congressional hearing, a strategy intended to gather support for an official Congressional hearing on war crimes. However, whereas testifiers during WSI were generally limited to answering direct questions from panel moderators, the testifiers at WSIA presented their experiences in self-initiated narratives, more akin to the individual testimonies of public atrocity witnessing.

[5] The titles and schedule for the thirteen panels are as follows: Thursday, March 13, 2008: *Winter Soldier and the Legacy of GI Resistance*. Friday, March 14, 2008: *Rules of Engagement: Part 1*; *The Crisis in Veterans' Healthcare*; *Corporate Pillaging and Military Contractors*; *Rules of Engagement: Part 2*; *The Aims of the Global War on Terror: The Political, Legal, and Economic Context of Iraq and Afghanistan*. Saturday, March 15, 2008: *Divide To Conquer: Gender and Sexuality in the Military*; *Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy: Part 1*; *Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy: Part 2*; *Civilian Testimony: The Cost of War in Iraq and Afghanistan*; *The Cost of the War at Home*. Sunday, March 16, 2008: *Breakdown of the Military*; *The Future of GI Resistance.*

[6] Questions from the audience were permitted for two of the panels: one that dealt with the history of US military policies and included a journalist and an academic; and another that presented Iraqi perspectives on US actions in Iraq.

In addition, the organizers have published edited versions of the testimonies in the book, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations* (2008), and produced a documentary of the event.[7]

WSIA provides a public forum for enlisted service members, who are typically censured when they publicly criticize the military, to speak directly about issues within the military, such as racism, which are generally excluded from the public deliberation. Yet, in what follows, I demonstrate through an ethnographic study of the event, including a detailed qualitative analysis of the individual testimonies of the enlisted service members [See Table 1], how new silences are simultaneously produced that hinder open and democratic deliberation. These silences emerge from several aspects of the form and content of public atrocity witnessing: the selection and screening of participants, which imposes a metanarrative on the content of testimonies; the polarizing and stigmatizing moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator; and the inaccessibility of both testifiers and testimonies. I conclude with an examination of the various reactions to and representations of WSIA to illustrate how these limitations affect the ways in which the public responds to public atrocity witnessing.

SPEECH AND SILENCE IN PUBLIC ATROCITY WITNESSING

Central to the argument that public atrocity witnessing can serve to promote democratization is the notion that in providing previously silenced groups a public forum to speak, the practice promotes the democratic principles of equality and self-determination. The authoritarian use of systemic discrimination and violence denies the experiences and basic human rights of the discriminated group. Thus, the practice of public atrocity witnessing counters the ultimate effect of systemic discrimination and violence to deprive a group "not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion" (Arendt 1968a:296). The denial of action, understood in the Arendtian sense, is the denial to speak and be heard, which is the highest expression of what it means to be human. "Through [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men" (Arendt 1958:176). With systemic discrimination, not only is there a

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[7] Video recordings of the testimonies can be viewed at www.ivaw.org/wintersoldier.

public denial of the discriminated group's humanity, but an internalization of the sense of otherness and inhumanity among the members of the group. "This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (Felman and Laub 1992:82). The act of giving testimony to one's experience of the event, even if achieved retroactively, therefore, serves to restore the victim's humanity. Public atrocity witnessing is seen as a constructive means toward democraticization because, in giving voice to those who had been previously silenced, there is a rectification of inequality in the public arena.

The appearance of the testifiers in the public sphere is not merely symbolic; it constitutes a reality for the participants in which the suffering of the testifiers is formerly recognized. Public atrocity witnessing is a subversive act to the extent that it undermines an established discourse or authoritative system and alters the criteria of who is authorized to speak. It is the actualization of the counter-discourse and an alternative system of relations. In the case of WSIA, the aim is to provide a public forum for two groups to speak: enlisted service members and Iraqi civilians. The claim is made that not only are these two groups denied a space to speak and be heard, but that this silencing is part of a broader system of systemic discrimination. In the case of the Iraqis, this discrimination is manifest in a pervasive racism within the military. For the enlisted service members, a military culture that is hierarchical, insular and hypermasculine stigmatizes those service members who dissent from military authorities or experience post-traumatic stress disorder and other forms of anxiety or unease as a result of their time in the military. The prevailing hypermasculinity further nurtures escalating forms of aggression and the castigation of behavior seen as "weak" or stereotypically feminine. In addition, organizers and testifiers alike assert that mainstream news media outlets, in promoting the narrative put forward by the Department of Defense, present a misleading picture of the actions of the US military, such as interpreting cases of abuse and unjustified violence by military service members as the result of a "few bad apples" instead of a systemic problem within the military.

Public atrocity witnessing has provided a recognized public forum for silenced individuals to speak about suffering caused by discriminatory systems. However, the claim that the practice is important to the process of democraticization focuses attention on its ability to give greater equalization in the opportunity to speak. While not denying the importance of providing opportunities for the marginalized to speak, such a focus fails to give adequate

attention to the environment in which such speech occurs and the effect that these circumstances have on democratic deliberation and the constitution of a public's identity through the mnemonic practice. An empirical examination of the practice shows how the public identity is influenced by testimony and the production of new silences. The silence referred to here is distinct from that which scholars and practitioners of public atrocity witnessing have identified as the inability to articulate the experience of trauma fully. Instead of concentrating on the appearance of the testifiers in a public forum, we look at the mutual appearance of individuals as a group. This focus on the *interaction* of individuals allows for a broader perspective that does not isolate the action of speech by a single individual. As a result, we are able to examine how silences are constituted through the practice, which produces a metanarrative that frames and constrains which memories are recounted. That is to say, public atrocity witnessing places limitations not only on who is allowed to speak but what is permissible to say. The metanarrative of public atrocity witnessing presents an authoritative interpretation of the past that is based on a moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, which polarizes and stigmatizes group identities. Furthermore, the form and content of public atrocity witnessing, through the isolation of testifiers and a focus on personal suffering, creates an inaccessibility of testifier and testimony and inhibits possibilities for open and democratic deliberation. While such a practice may be effective in delegitimizing an established narrative of the past, it can also have the effect of inhibiting a model of public deliberation that allows for the exchange of conflicting opinions.

The Use of Screening Procedures and Semantic Macrostructures

Public atrocity witnessing is a mnemonic practice in which those who participate engage in a collective remembrance through the memories of *particular and intentionally selected* individuals, specifically those who suffered physically and psychologically from the systemic discrimination and violence. Organizers of public atrocity witnessing typically screen potential witnesses prior to the event, use questionnaires to structure the testimonies, and enforce certain "semantic macrostructures" through titles and summaries that provide frames for participants to remember and manage the details of the testimonies (van Dijk 2001). Several astute critical analyses of events of public atrocity witnessing have demonstrated how these elements constrain who is allowed to speak and what they are permitted to say (Coxshall 2005; Ross 2001; Verdoolaege 2008; Winter 2009). For example, Verdoolaege (2008) has shown how some testifiers at the SATRC struggled against the imposition of a discourse of forgiveness and

reconciliation, and Winter (2009) has examined how unequal power relations were reinforced during the hearings at the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Furthermore, it is common for truth commissions to limit the time period and types of crimes for public hearings, such that the focus on "gross human rights violations" and "politically motivated crimes" excludes nonviolent acts of discrimination. Mundane discriminatory policies and practices, which may be less obvious yet more insidious, are thus excluded and apt to contribute to continued inequality and suffering.

The organizers of WSIA used the standard screening procedures found in events of public atrocity witnessing. Through a questionnaire, they conducted in-person interviews with potential testifiers. The questionnaire was designed to elicit experiences of illegal or abusive military practices, particularly in relation to violent or abusive encounters with civilians, detainees, and combatants. While the questionnaire specifically asked for events in which the veterans were either witnesses of or participants in the actions, the form also explicitly directed the veterans not to name any individuals below the rank of O-3 (equivalent to the rank of Captain in the Army, Marines, and Air Force). The prohibition on giving names of individuals was carried through to public testimonies, where it was not uncommon for testifiers to correct themselves when they inadvertently identified individuals in their accounts. Although this approach was intended to highlight the way in which military policies and practices can foster an environment in which violence and abuse become normalized, it also has the effect of obfuscating responsibility and fetishizing the institution of the military. Ultimately, blame falls on the nature of military occupation, which the organizers insist inevitably leads to atrocities because of the uncertainty and fear that service members experience when there are no clear battle lines. As a result, enlisted service members and lower-ranking officers are characterized as unwitting participants in atrocity, and personal responsibility, including the acceptance of risk, tends to be displaced.

The dominant semantic macrostructure for the event, which is central to the way in which individuals process the various details of the testimonies, focuses the metanarrative on the way in which the institution of the military and the structural circumstances of military actions in the "war on terror" produce atrocity. This macroperspective frames the panels at the event, which focus on the pervasiveness of racist attitudes within the military and the inconsistent and unstructured way in which rules of engagement were employed on the ground. The immoral

practices in combat are combined with a lack of proper support for service members, including inadequate physical and psychological health care, insufficient armor and weaponry, and disapproval of any service member who voices criticism. These experiences, the metanarrative holds, are indicative of the ways in which service members are exploited and harmed. At the same time, by opening and closing the event with two panels that deal with historical and contemporary incidents of GI resistance, the metanarrative is intended to assert that the solution to the problem lies in the ability of enlisted service members to challenge military authorities and to speak openly about their experiences in the military and in war.

It is not unusual in events of public atrocity witnessing for individual testifiers to have disagreements with the dominant narrative in an event of public atrocity witnessing. Thus, among the individual testimonies at WSIA, we find various and, at times, conflicting perspectives. For example, where one testifier asserts that there is the potential for an occupation to succeed when the rules of engagement enforce a policy that places the lives of civilians above that of the service members, another insists that the difficulty that service members encounter in distinguishing between civilians and combatants inevitably leads to dehumanizing attitudes toward all Iraqis. Similarly, whereas some testifiers portray acts of violence that lead to the deaths of noncombatants as justified by external circumstances and committed by honorable service members, others cast such events as the result of the arrogance and aggression of the most "hardcore" service members. In addition, over a quarter (27%) of those veterans who spoke directly about their experiences in combat[8] countered the overwhelming focus on negative aspects of the military with disclaimers and positive qualifying statements, such as:

- "These were men who risked everything for a cause which they believe was just and true…. I am no judge and I have not come here to pass judgment" (Cliff H.)
- "Nothing I'm sharing with you today should be misconstrued as an attack on the military" (Logan L.)
- "I'm not here to say anything bad about the US soldier" (Jesse H.)

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[8] In limiting testimonies to those of veterans who spoke directly about their experiences during combat deployments, the sample under analysis includes testimonies presented during *Rules of Engagement: Part 1*; *Rules of Engagement: Part 2*; *Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy: Part 1*; *Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy: Part 2*; *Breakdown of the Military*; and *Corporate Pillaging and Military Contractors*.

- "The men I served with were honorable soldiers" (Garrett R.)

Nevertheless, even with these incidents of dissent, the macrostructure, which organizes the testimony around systemic discrimination and posits that US military actions may be in violation of international and national law, serves as effective means for organizing the content of the event and influencing the interpretation of the testimony by the audience.

The Moral Dichotomy of Victim and Perpetrator

The metanarrative of public atrocity witnessing is based on a secular-religious discourse of human rights and the moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator that attributes wrongdoing to an "evil system" of discrimination (Wilson 2001:54). The victim, who speaks as the atrocity witness, is one who suffers (physically, emotionally or psychologically) from violence and abuse, committed by perpetrators and sanctioned by a discriminatory system. Conventionally, the victim is defined as the disenfranchised civilian who has been marginalized and persecuted by unjust and repressive institutions, while the perpetrator is the one who carries out the institutionalized violence and abuse as a member of a military or police unit. The use of this dichotomy, which is derived from the emergence of the practice in war crimes trials, has the effect of imposing judgments of guilt and innocence, not from within the legal system, but within the public sphere. The potential for a "public conviction" without the possibility of due process had led many advocates of public atrocity witnessing to argue for the need for testifiers to refrain from identifying specific individuals as perpetrators. The decision to refrain from attributing guilt to specific individuals reinforces the prominence given to the experiences of the victims in events of public atrocity witnessing; however, the testifier's position as victim necessitates the presence of a perpetrator, such that the perpetrator always remains present in the testimony. The inability to speak directly about perpetrators may frustrate testifiers, and the guilt of perpetration may be identified with a certain population, stigmatizing persons who are associated with the group regardless of their personal behavior.

In the case of WSIA, the standard classification of victim and perpetrator is complicated by the dual positioning of the veterans as both the ones who carry out acts of violence and abuse against the Iraqis and the ones who suffer from a military system that subjects them to violence and abuse. The positioning of military service members as atrocity witness is a contentious issue, both for those who refute the notion that the military and its members are part of a discriminatory

system that engages in acts of unjust violence and those who deny that perpetrators of violence have the right to claim status as victims. Nevertheless, the characterization of enlisted soldiers in democratic regimes as apolitical and self-sacrificing provides a certain space for veterans to claim a degree of autonomy from the military, a space that is typically denied to military service members who offer confessions of remorse in authoritarian contexts (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002; Payne 2008; Peters 2001). There are several narrative techniques, used singularly or in combination, which the veterans utilize in order to achieve disassociation with the military. The testifiers are most likely to establish this disassociation either by positioning themselves as resisters who have a history of struggle against the military leadership and culture or establishing an episode of self-realization in which their previous allegiance to the military is shattered by an awareness of the consequences of their actions. Less common techniques involve expressions of remorse and personal suffering that result from their involvement in the military.

The stigma associated with the military as perpetrator, as well as the proscription against identifying specific individuals, produces an indistinct attribution of responsibility. The metanarrative, represented by the moderators' statements, locates the cause of violence and atrocity either in the "nature of military occupation" or the "totalizing culture of dehumanization in the military." Both of these causes are deemed as deterministic, shifting the locus of responsibility to the extent that committing unjust acts of violence is not dependent upon individual will or moral conscience. To the contrary, the testifiers are "just ordinary people that […] decided to pick up a uniform" (Jesse H.) who were put into situation in which they were forced to commit atrocities. The majority of testifiers who spoke about their experiences in combat (27 out of 33) provided justifications for criminal or immoral actions committed by themselves or other members of the military. In contrast to the moderators, the testifiers were more likely to utilize justifications that focused on individual attributes, either having to do with personal emotional states or the example set by specific unit leaders. For example, over half of the testifiers explained acts of violence and abuse as the result of anger, fear, or apathy. Over half also cited cases where the orders and actions of superiors set expectations for the excessive use of violence. While several testifiers also provided explanations similar to that of the moderators, there was only one case where a testifier relied solely on the metanarrative justification. Even as the testifiers tended to give more personalized justifications for acts of violence and abuse, these

justifications displaced blame for the actions by contending that the service members behaved the way they did because they "had to."

The testifiers at WSIA are particular among public atrocity witnesses because of their affiliation with the military as perpetrator; however, even in more conventional cases of public atrocity witnessing, it is not uncommon to find that testifiers' past actions are far more ambiguous than the simplified binary of victim and perpetrator allows. In order to adopt the discourse of atrocity witnessing and maintain positive self-presentation, therefore, testifiers may conceal or deny past actions that might indicate even passive association with those identified as the perpetrators (Verdoolaege 2008; Winter 2009). This has the effect of limiting opportunities for grappling with the complexity of social relations and actions.

The category of victim, with its connotations of weakness, passivity and injury, can be as stigmatizing as that of perpetrator, and it is not uncommon for those identified as victims to refuse to participate in events of public atrocity witnessing or argue for an alternate designation, such as survivor or hero, as a means of overcoming this stigma. The focus of public atrocity witnessing on acts of violence and abuse, however, necessitates that these individuals be identified as victims, as the commissions of the SATRC noted in their final report that "the person against whom [a] violation is committed can only be described as a victim…. [T]he state of mind and survival of the person is irrelevant" (TRC of South Africa 1999:59). The testifiers at WSIA tend to struggle against the categorization of victim and exhibit a preference for the more positive association of testifier as hero, a label that is particularly salient within military culture. However, as conveyed through the testimonies, the veterans were frustrated by their inability to act as hero in the conventional military sense. For example, eight of the testifiers declare that they enlisted "to defend [the] country" (Abby H.) and are "sacrificing […] to protect [our] rights" (Garrett R.). Yet, without a well-defined adversary, they find themselves unable to realize their ideal of the military hero.

The WSIA metanarrative modifies the conventional military dichotomy of hero and enemy so that instead of the opposition of military soldier and external adversary, we find the hero as the autonomous resister who struggles against an internal enemy. The idea of an internal enemy brings the hero/enemy dichotomy into greater alignment with that of victim/perpetrator. In the conventional narrative form that utilizes a moral dichotomy of hero/enemy, the enemy is an outsider to both hero and victim. The narrative form for victim and perpetrator, by contrast,

relies on the assumption of a common legal framework, whereby the perpetrator engages in a criminal act of violence or discrimination against another within the group. The codification of international human rights and war crimes following World War II, thus becomes central to the propagation of narratives that utilize the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, and frames the contemporary differentiation between the "innocent civilian" and the "enemy combatant." Thus, the idea that one might justify the bombing of Japanese cities during World War II because the enemy is defined through the nation-state becomes unacceptable in the globalizing framework of international human rights, where individuals are judged according to their actions in reference to a legal system. In this context, those deemed "innocent" of violations of the law are deserving of protection regardless of their citizenship, and military action, such as the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, can be justified when the actions of an individual or group are judged to be criminal.

In the testimonies at WSIA, the veterans convey the tension experienced by service members as they attempted to distinguish between the conventional identification of an enemy and that of the innocent civilian. This uncertainty, when combined with the adoption of the discourse of public atrocity witnessing, which locates the perpetrators as those who promote internal systemic discrimination, leads the testifiers to claim that all Iraqis, whether friendly or hostile to the US presence, are victims of US aggression and the disproportionate use of force.[9] Thus, in a total of 127 references to Iraqis, only 46 references (36%) describe incidents with combatants. Furthermore, in only 13 of these cases is the combatant status left uncontested by the testifiers. In a third of the references, the testifiers raise doubts about the attribution of combatant status through qualifying language:

- "Over a hundred enemy quote unquote" (Jason L.)
- "My platoon sergeant […] claimed that he saw an insurgent" (Kris G.)
- "They complained that these six were participants in the actions the night before" (Mike T.)

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[9] While the WSIA event intended to deal with US military action in both Iraq and Afghanistan, only two of the testifiers had been on deployments to Afghanistan, and only one spoke about his experiences there. In addition, civilian testimony was limited to Iraqi nationals. Therefore, I will limit my analysis here to references to Iraqis.

It also is not uncommon for the testifiers to challenge the idea that the combatants should be understood as legitimate enemies by characterizing the Iraqi combatants as ineffective or untrained.

- "These insurgents didn't appear to me to look like, y'know, the hardened terrorists that everyone y'know says that […] that they are" (Jeffrey S.)
- "If I died in Iraq, it was not going to be because, you know, some barely educated Muslim teenager with a weapon he was never shown how to use was able to outsmart me" (Lars E.)
- "I had my sight on the dude in the doorway, RPG on his back […] but when I looked at his face, he wasn't a boogeyman, he wasn't the enemy, he was scared and confused" (Hart V.)

The effect of the diminishment of Iraqi combatants as legitimate enemies is intensified by other stories in which the testifiers relate how Iraqi civilians are often falsely perceived as potential threats. Together, these narratives contribute to a metanarrative that holds that all Iraqis suffer as victims of a military system that unjustly turns them into enemies by dehumanizing them. The veterans frequently attempt to counter this dehumanization by giving emphasis to familial relationships, such that Iraqis are most commonly characterized as mothers, fathers, wives, sons, or brothers. The Iraqis are also typically described as vulnerable; when faced with violent encounters with US troops, they are innocent, unsuspecting, afraid, unarmed, friendly, or seeking help. In just a few cases (3), the testifiers describe the Iraqis as angry or assertive.

In emphasizing the "innocence" of the Iraqis, and thereby their status as victims, the testimonies at WSIA have the consequence of portraying an Iraqi population that lacks agency and control. This characterization is reinforced to the extent that the veterans' speak *for* the Iraqis. The inclusion of Iraqi testimony at the event was a contested issue, with some of the organizers of WSIA believed that providing space for the Iraqis to speak was essential and other arguing that priority should be given to US veterans. The debate, along with obstacles to acquiring the visas and resources necessary to bring Iraqi nationals to the event, led to the marginalization of the Iraqi perspective. During the event, two Iraqi-nationals gave in-person testimony, while video testimonies of ten Iraqis were presented either during the event or via IVAW's website. The Iraqis who provided testimony via video recording were constrained by the interviewers' questions, which focused the narratives on incidents of victimization. The in-

person testifiers had greater latitude, as their testimonies were not guided by questions. While the two Iraqis gave testimony that showed Iraqis as victims, they also challenged the characterization of Iraqis as incapable. For example, one illustrated the expertise available in Iraq by noting that both he and the other testifier were engineers. The other testifier spoke of the democratic capability of Iraqis by noting that he and others had elected a parliament that passed a resolution that set a timetable for US withdrawal because they did not need anyone to "babysit" or "protect" them from themselves. In emphasizing the skill and capability of Iraqis, these testimonies respond to the pro-occupation patriarchal narrative that holds that it is necessary to keep US troops in Iraq because the Iraqis are not (yet) capable of self-governance. However, the testimonies also provide a counter to the dominant portrayal of Iraqis as vulnerable victims.

Inaccessibility of Testifier and Testimony

While the discourse of public atrocity witnessing may contrapose groups and hinder open communication, the structure of an event of public atrocity witnessing can also inhibit public deliberation. Typically, the arrangement of the event is based on a combination of two conventional practices: courtroom testimony and psychotherapy. As with courtroom testimony, public atrocity witnesses are "called" to present testimony before an audience; however, whereas in a conventional courtroom setting, the witness is called on behalf of the prosecution or defense and is subject to questioning by the opposing counsels in order to test the veracity of her claims, the witness for public atrocity witnessing is given greater latitude to tell "her story" and, in contrast to opposing counsels, the moderators act in a role more akin to a therapist than an investigator. The moderators, like the testifiers, are selected based on their affinity to the aims of the event, thereby excluding those who might challenge the substance of the testimonies. While the moderators may pose questions, those questions tend to be nonconfrontational and intended to gain clarifications or prompt the testifier's story. The nonconfrontational approach of the moderators is part of a more general attempt to construct a "safe space" in which victims may speak about past trauma. The need for a safe space also leads to restrictions on audience interactions with the testifiers, which is reinforced through physical separation. For example, at WSIA, the testifiers entered and exited from a separate entrance and sat at a raised platform that was surrounded by guards to prevent people from approaching the testifiers. In addition, the moderators' roles were largely limited to introducing individual testifiers and providing

explanatory comments, while the audience was prohibited from asking questions and several times explicitly instructed to be respectful of the testifiers.

While the audience is prohibited from interacting directly with the testifiers, it is not uncommon for audience members to interact indirectly. Most often this indirect interaction is of a supportive form, such as applause, laughter, or tears. However, the prohibition can also lead to heckling in cases where members of the audience disagree with or are skeptical of the testimony. In the case of WSIA, the organizers sought to prevent such negative interactions by limiting entrance to those who were considered either allies or neutral observers (such as journalists and researchers). Access to the event was closely monitored to ensure that only those who had been given permission were allowed entry. As a result, there was only one case of heckling, when one man approached a panel of testifiers and accused them of lying and betraying the nation; he was quickly removed from the building and not permitted to return. Neither the organizers nor testifiers responded directly to the heckler or the presence of a group of protesters outside of the event, although several testifiers did speak, as one stated, "to those who would judge" the veterans (Steve M.). Consequently, those who are identified in the testimonies as perpetrators, as well as those who might hold opposing viewpoints, are only given a presence at the event through the speech of the testifiers. One may make the moral argument that perpetrators ought to be excluded because of the criminality of their past actions. However, their exclusion also polarizes groups by denying perpetrators the space to explain themselves and prevents the possibility for mutual recognition that is central for a deliberative democracy.[10]

In addition to the physical organization during events of public atrocity witnessing, the content of the testimonies produces a level of inaccessibility. Scholars and practitioners often refer to the difficulty in the ability both for the testifier to recount memories of suffering and for the hearer to comprehend the experience of another's suffering. However, advocates of the practice contend that the interaction between testifiers and audience, in which the listener experiences the act of the *testifiers* re-experiencing the emotional and psychological pain of the

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[10] Some events of public atrocity witnessing attempt to counter further polarization; for example, the hearings on human rights violations during the SATRC gave emphasis to reconciliation and forgiveness as means of giving recognition to the perpetrators while maintaining the space for victims. The emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness, however, has also been criticized for inhibiting the important role of contention in democratic deliberation (Buur 2001; Crocker 2002; Gutmann and Thompson 2000; Nagy 2002; Wilson, 2003b).

past opens up the possibility for mutual recognition of past injustice. This interpretation of the past is based, therefore, not on a presentation of facts but subjective experience. The priority given to subjective memories, which are partial and potentially unreliable, has led to conflicts with historical accounts from the same period. For example, the validity of the testimony of a Holocaust survivor was disputed when she claimed that four chimneys were destroyed in the prisoner uprising at Auschwitz, instead of only one, as the historical records maintain. In defense of her account, advocates of the practice contend that the testimony is valid because it is evidence of the extraordinary significance of the event that made the destruction of one chimney *appear* to the woman as four. Thus, the subjective truth of the account is not found in the facts of the event but in the human experience of "survival and resistance to extermination" (Felman and Laub 1992:62).

While the communication of "experiential truth" is an indispensable aspect of events of public atrocity witnessing, the potential for a conflict with factual truth presents a challenge if the practice is intended to foster democraticization. "[F]acts and events…constitute the very texture of the political realm" (Arendt 1968b:231). Factual truth is necessary to prevent the exchange of opinions from becoming a farce and to combat the tyrant and the liar. Advocates (Felman and Laub 1992; Stone 2000) of the value of experiential truth acknowledge that factual truth is necessary in order to understand the meaning of experiential truth. However, when there are conflicting interpretations of the past, the case where democratic disputation is most essential, the subjective and emotional qualities of experiential truth hinder the possibility for open deliberation of underlying social and political issues. To debate the factual substance of the testimony runs the risk of appearing to devalue the physical and psychological suffering of the testifier, while the acceptance of a testifier's claim to suffering is dependent on a subjective assessment of the sincerity and trustworthiness of the testifier's performance. In the case of WSIA, the substantiation of the claim that US military policies and practices lead to unjustified violence against the civilians is ultimately based, not on legal argumentation, but the physical, emotional and psychological suffering of service members and Iraqis. The force of this position is manifest in the physical expression of suffering by the testifiers, so that one is persuaded, not by the factuality of US military policies and practices, but by the pain experienced by the veterans, which must be convincingly displayed in the act of testifying.

REPRESENTATIONS OF WSIA

The challenges in engaging in open deliberation over testimonies presented in events of public atrocity witnessing can be evidenced in the responses to WSIA. We find that those who wish to debate the metanarrative of WSIA do not engage directly with the content of the testimonies, but either look for the means to attack the integrity the testifiers or contend that that the testimonies are simply subjective accounts that cannot be generalized. Given that those who would challenge the testifiers were not permitted into the event, their opposition is manifest through protests outside of the event and through Internet missives. Often, when attacking the testifiers' integrity, opponents do so through association by pointing to a few cases where individuals, who make similar claims, were found to have misrepresented their military record. The assertion that the testifiers are untrustworthy is not based on the reliability of their specific testimony, but the suggestion that criticizing service members is a betrayal that is indicative of a deeper duplicity. Criticisms, like the testimonies, tend to rely on emotional assertions that the act of testifying itself causes suffering for service members, both as a betrayal and as a cause for the intensification of the insurgency in Iraq. The polarizing binary of victim and perpetrator is thus intensified in the struggle over justifying who deserves the labels.

Coverage of the WSIA event was generally limited, despite the efforts of the organizers to notify and draw in new media outlets. While news outlets and journalists with antiwar perspectives, such as Pacifica radio, Amy Goodman's Democracy Now, and the Huffington Post, gave substantial coverage, most major US news outlets refrained from reporting on the event.[11] The coverage (and lack thereof) by news media illustrates the tension between factual and experiential truth, as outlets must deal with the difficulty in representing allegations of crimes and the suffering of the testifiers. The public editor for The New York Times later defended the paper's choice not to cover the event by emphasizing the unsubstantiated allegations and asserting that the paper gives preference to independent and on-scene accounts, "rather than relying on charges and counter-charges…by organizations with strongly held political viewpoints about the war" (FAIR Update, April 8, 2008). Those conventional news outlets that did cover the event sought to fulfill their role as mediators in the deliberative process, presenting

[11] It is noteworthy that the event received greater coverage internationally (e.g. The London Sunday Times, The Guardian, Agence France Presse and Tagesspiegel), where public perception of the policies and practices of the US military are generally unfavorable.

an account of the testimonies and allegations of criminal actions along with citations from either the Department of Defense or protestors to the event; however, the media coverage of the opposing groups does little to move beyond accusations toward substantive debate.[12] In covering the testimony, the news coverage tended to personalize the stories, focusing on the "torment of returning soldiers" and the anguish of the testifiers, who were "sad-eyed," "grim faced" and "sorrowful." Thus, media accounts give recognition to the subjective truth of the testimonies without addressing the social and political issues of the war on terror.

In part, the lack of media engagement resulted from the particular social and political circumstances in which WSIA occurred, which differed from most other events of public atrocity witnessing. WSIA was held in the midst of the conflict, without official endorsement, and outside of the community in which the atrocities occurred. Whereas events of public atrocity witnessing that occur as an activity of officially authorized truth commissions are part of a broader institutional effort to legitimize a transition of governance, the organizers of WSIA envisioned the event as a means of building opposition to the existing authority. However, if public atrocity witnessing were an effective means of promoting democraticization, than the circumstances in which WSIA occurred would be an ideal situation for public atrocity witnessing. However, the organizers had to work to establish legitimacy, largely by claiming that the testifiers had authority as principled veterans who could provide first-hand accounts of "what is *really happening*, day in and day out in Iraq and Afghanistan" (*Winter Soldier Fact Sheet*, emphasis added). However, without official endorsement, the testimonies were particularly vulnerable to assertions that they were only partial and subjective accounts, thereby problematizing the claim by the organizers that the experiences of the testifiers were representative of a widespread discriminatory violence and abuse. In a public statement, the Department of Defense characterized the events described in the testimonies as atypical of military actions and suggested that "isolated allegations" ought to be investigated "to determine the facts and [hold] individuals accountable" (Washington Post 03/15/2008). In emphasizing the legal avenue for addressing the events raised in WSIA, the Department of Defense asserts that unjustified casualties that result from US military actions are not supported by institutionally

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[12] Conventional news outlets that covered WSIA include the Washington Post, the Baltimore Chronicle, the Boston Globe, the Houston Chronicle, Time, and Christian Science Monitor.

sanctioned discrimination. In giving primacy to establishing factual truth, the agency also avoids the issue of the suffering of service members.

CONCLUSION

Public atrocity witnessing has become a popular practice for groups attempting to come to terms with systemic discrimination and conflict. As a means of promoting democraticization, it is seen by practitioners and advocates as an effective means of giving voice to the formerly voiceless and recognizing past injustices in a public forum. However, when we take a closer look at the form and content of public atrocity witnessing, it becomes apparent that at the same time that it provides a public space for the marginalized to speak, it also produces new silences that can hinder open deliberation. Public atrocity witnessing places limitations on who is allowed to speak and what is to be said. It separates "speakers" from "listeners," producing not a public but an audience. By utilizing a moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, it polarizes and stigmatizes group identities. Finally, the testimony itself is inaccessible to deliberation, both in terms of the imposed isolation of the testifiers and the inviolability of the experience of suffering. The idea of providing a space for both victims and perpetrators to speak and be heard is understandably problematic given the inequality and brutalities of a shared past. As a practice, public atrocity witnessing may be effective in delegitimizing an established social and political order (and legitimizing a new one), which can explain its popularity in post-conflict situations such as post-apartheid South Africa; however, as we see in the case of WSIA, where an ongoing conflict and social division would benefit from open deliberation, public atrocity witnessing is unsuccessful in fostering dialogue.

Public atrocity witnessing is a means for utilizing individual memories of the past to constitute a public memory, and thereby, an identity for the public body. This memory and this identity are not static entities; they are continuously reconstituted and contested in public interactions. However, the experience of public atrocity witnessing has the capacity to shape those future interactions. Because it utilizes the compelling moral dichotomy of victim and perpetrator and the emotionally powerful memories of suffering, public atrocity witnessing has the tendency to censure dissent. Thus, at the same time that it promotes equality by opening up opportunities for individuals to speak publicly, it imposes group identity and limits the public capacity for the Arendtian notion of equality in distinction. My aim is not to discredit the constructive role that public atrocity witnessing may play in coming to terms with past injustice

and discriminatory systems that not only produce violence but deny a group the right to be recognized and heard. In the case of WSIA, for example, we see how the practice provides a public space for service members and veterans to speak openly about the emotional and psychological costs of war and the daily practices that produce discrimination, which are otherwise suppressed in the authoritarian structure of the military. Nevertheless, it is also imperative to acknowledge the ways in which the practice might actually hinder democraticization and open deliberation, to recognize its limitations as well as its benefits.

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TABLES

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS FOR WSIA ENLISTED TESTIFIERS[†]

MILITARY RANK		N
	Lower Enlisted (E1-E3)	8
	Specialist (E4)	16
	Junior NCO (E4)	9
	NCO (E5-E6)	16
MILITARY BRANCH		
	Army	16
	Army Reserves	4
	Army National Guard	12
	Marines	12
	Marine Reserves	3
	Navy	2
GENDER		
	Male	42
	Female	7
AGE		
	21-23	11
	24-26	12
	27-30	11
	31-34	7
	35 and older	2
	Unknown	6
MAIN TESTIMONY TOPIC[††]		
	Combat Experience	33
	Gender & Sexual Discrimination	9
	Military & Veteran Healthcare	4
	GI Resistance Movement	5

[†]One officer, at the rank of captain, also gave testimony at WSI

[††]Two of the testifiers provided two separate testimonies that covered different topics