

the martyr or the historical witness (Assmann 2006: 88ff). Through her or his testimony, the moral witness performatively brings about a moral community that does not have a concrete shape or institution (Assmann 2006: 90f). This moral community in turn takes up a discourse that was begun in the courtroom during the trials against the perpetrators, but 'that can only be worked through in fragments and imperfectly by the means of criminal prosecution' (Assmann 2006: 90). For Assmann (2006: 91), giving testimony is therefore a moral imperative: 'Forgetting protects the perpetrators and weakens the victims, which is why remembering in the form of giving testimony has become an ethical obligation and a form of retroactive resistance.'

To create a moral community is, as I will show in the following chapters, one of the most desired goals of the use of video testimonies in exhibitions. Human rights and ethics are now an important part of the didactics of all Holocaust and Second World War exhibitions. One of the main messages that Holocaust and Second World War exhibitions want to communicate is 'never again'. However, not all Holocaust survivors are ipso facto moral witnesses. If I prefer here to use the concept 'witness to history' instead of the concept 'moral witness', this is because I believe the concept of 'moral witness' does not give full credit to the exact nature and functions of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. First, I understand the concept of 'moral witness' to put too much pressure on the individual Holocaust survivor. The interpretation of testimony as an ethical duty puts all of those Holocaust survivors who decided not to give testimony – the majority in fact – into moral debt. If we take Assmann's concept of the moral witness to its limits, then the decision of Holocaust survivors not to give testimony entails a betrayal of their survival.

Second, I take the concept of 'moral witness' to concentrate too much on the agency of the figure of the moral witness and not enough on that of the audience. More than the moral witness creating a moral community, it is the witness' audience that creates the moral witness. A Holocaust survivor can only issue a moral message if her or his primary audience presents her or his testimony in a way in which the secondary audience can – and does – interpret it from a moral perspective. As we will see, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors also meet with an audience that interprets them as anything but moral messages; for example, video testimonies are used by right-wing extremist groups to transmit revisionism and hate messages.

Finally, the concept of 'moral witness' disregards the fact that the functions of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors surpass merely giving moral lessons. With their testimonies, witnesses to history also, and probably most importantly, construct and consolidate a certain narrative of the

past. In fact, as I will show in Chapter 3, although it was always in the back of the interviewers' minds, not all video testimonies with Holocaust survivors were recorded with the primary goal of giving a moral lesson to the secondary audience.

Interpreting death during the Nazi mass murder as martyrdom and/or survival as a moral obligation is ultimately a question of political positioning. It is a question of the starting point for representation. Yad Vashem's insistence on martyrdom and heroism is also a consequence of the fact that the institution puts the fate of the victims into the centre of its representation. As we will see, many Western European museums start their interpretation with the deeds of the perpetrators. The aim is here not so much to show the heroism of the victims, but the enormity and senselessness of the suffering caused by the perpetrators. An interpretation of suffering as martyrdom would call this senselessness into question. The use of video testimonies in all of these museums has an educational function. The witnesses to history are in this way given a moral role. However, this role is not necessarily coterminous with a moral obligation that comes with survival. In the interview projects, the wish of witnesses of the past not to give testimony was unilaterally accepted.

Conclusion

Although most of the witnesses to history whose video testimonies I will analyse in this study are Holocaust survivors, I will also consider video testimonies with bystanders and members of the local population. The personal experiences and the traces that those experiences have left of course differ from one witness to history to another. The fate of somebody who, like Emilio Jona in the Museo Diffuso, spent the war years as a refugee in a mansion in the countryside can scarcely be compared to that of an Auschwitz survivor. However, this does not mean that the testimonies of both cannot and would not be used in similar ways and that both are part of the global assemblage of the musealization of video testimonies. The concepts of 'witness to history' and 'witness of the past' will allow me to analyse the process of giving testimony of the past and the use of this testimony in a public domain, without – in a first instance – considering the differences in the experiences of the different witnesses. These differences do of course play a role in the actual representation of witnesses to history in exhibitions, but they are secondary to the phenomenon of the musealization of video testimonies that is under scrutiny here. The next chapter will look at how the process of becoming a witness to history has changed

over the years. It will analyse the foundations of the musealization of witnesses to history. Looking at public history and academic scholarship, it will answer the questions why and how witnesses to history have become authoritative representatives of the past.

Notes

1. The website of the Zeitzeugenbörse can be found at: <http://www.zeitzeugenboerse.de>.
2. Until the 1970s, the term 'sannhetsvitner' (witnesses of truth) was used in Norway. The term 'tidsvitner' is a direct translation from the German 'Zeitzeuge', which was introduced by Helga Arntzen of the Norwegian foundation 'Hvite Busser til Auschwitz', which organizes study tours for schoolchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (Kverndokk 2011: 156). In 2006, Jakob Lothe and Anette Homlong Storeide published the book *Tidsvitner – Fortellinger fra Auschwitz og Sachsenhausen* (2006), an edited collection of testimonies by survivors of the Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz concentration camps. I thank my colleague Anette Homlong Storeide for this information.
3. Visual history has of course also been used to refer more generally to the use of pictures as sources and as objects of historical research.
4. See: <http://www.zeitzeugenboerse.de/zeitzeugen/werden.html>.
5. As seen before, secondary witnessing has of course also been given a different meaning. In the context of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, secondary witnessing refers to the ethics of actively listening to those testimonies and passing them on.
6. This part can only be found in the German version of Klüger's autobiography, not in the English translation *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2003).