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INTRODUCTION: WITNESS

KATHRYN ABRAMS & IRENE KACANDES

Two young women sat in a café. Two who had met each other and interacted in a mainly social way years earlier as undergraduates now had their heads bent over a very different task: an analysis. An analysis of a complicated literary text that was supposed to constitute a dissertation chapter. But the argument wasn’t clear yet, and the legal scholar, a fledgling academic with interests beyond her disciplinary ken, was helping the literary-scholar-still-in-training clarify what she was trying to say. Several hours passed. The legal scholar succeeded not only in assisting her friend articulate the most compelling aspects of her thinking on the text, but also in reviving her hope that one day, maybe even soon, she could complete the chapter draft, and another and another could follow.

There are at least three aspects of this otherwise mundane event that merit our attention. In an age of “postfeminism” it seems worth remembering that women completing advanced degrees and leading academic careers were not common occurrences until recently. When the two had first met at Harvard, there were only 13 tenured women on a faculty of 640. It also merits recalling that a mere twenty years ago intellectual exchange across disciplines was rare. The two women felt this: the one requested aid timidly; the other offered feedback gingerly. The third aspect is one that neither woman could have even fantasized at the time: that they were practicing for the future. One day they would be working together on an even more sustained intellectual project, and that project would take up some of the very themes at stake in the discussion in the café that day. For what the literary scholar eventually realized, with the help of the legal scholar, was that her interpretation of the structure of the text in question was the most interesting contribution she could make with her chapter. At the heart of that structure were acts of accusation, defense, witnessing, and what that scholar would eventually term literary cowitnessing, acts that shaped the relationships within the text, but also that implicated the reader of the text in its

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moral dilemmas. The work of literature in question was Günter Grass’s novella *Cat and Mouse* (*Katz und Maus*); the rhetorical device was apostrophe; and as you may have guessed by now, the two women were Kathy Abrams and Irene Kacandes.

When we exchanged e-mail two decades later about whether we would guest coedit an issue of *WSQ* on the topic witness, we did not wonder whether the other person was up to the task, or whether our disciplinary differences would be fruitful. We knew the answers to those questions. In fact, we took them for granted. No, what we debated was whether an intellectually coherent issue could be crafted if we cast our net for submissions very broadly. Fairly quickly, we came to the decision that our call for papers would raise as many issues as we could fit on the page, and that we would take the temperature of current interest in this huge topic by seeing what would come back to us in the content of the abstracts. Those proposals would witness to us things that we maybe did not know about the state of current feminist scholarship on witness.

We were delighted, in the fundamental sense of the word, by what we received: the diversity of topics, especially in terms of geography and history, seemed promising, if not as wide as we’d dreamed of. Reflecting this breadth seemed in and of itself a worthwhile contribution that we could make, and we quickly determined to ask for shorter-than-standard-length essays, so that we could include as many voices as possible. In a similar vein, we decided to use all parts of the issue, including the memoir, fiction, poetry, and book review sections, to illuminate our theme from various angles.

As diverse as the topics seemed, we were a bit surprised to discover the aspects of our call for papers to which prospective authors responded and, by the same token, the parts to which no one did. To take the most dramatic example, despite the fact that Holocaust studies has led the way in recent discussions of the concept of witness, we did not originally receive a single proposal on the Shoah. Similarly unexpected was the absence of interest in parsing the diversity of terms that the overlapping fields of memory and trauma studies have developed and circulated in the past fifteen years. When we looked at the abstracts as a group, it became clear that the invitation that the largest number of would-be submitters accepted was to share examples of feminists—past or present—bearing witness. In a sense, every contribution to this issue (and many more we could not include) constitutes a response to that call. It makes sense, we
realized in retrospect, for we are living in a society that, as Brecht lamented through his protagonist Galileo, has need of heroes: (“Unglücklich das Land, das Helden nötig hat” [Brecht 1955/1972, part 13, 114]).

We decided to foreground the prominence of the act of bearing witness in this issue by selecting a cover photo that did the same. In Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock’s art project The City as Text: Jewish Munich, the city is viewed through an unusual cultural perspective, that is to say, through the prism of its Jewish past. To view the city thus, however, the viewer must play an active role. The photo itself shows one of several ways the artists challenge viewers to do so: a visitor to the museum must physically carry a (large and relatively heavy) marker through the special carpet-map of the city the artists installed in the Jewish museum—a map on which no street names are listed—to learn about the particular point of interest a place may have had at a specific time in the city’s history. Through a special brochure-map they can take with them, individuals are invited to carry out a similar act by walking through the city itself. Stih and Schnock’s previous installations, such as their project on the Nuremberg Laws installed in Berlin’s Bavarian Quarter, have similarly foregrounded active viewing. Their demonstrated interest in incorporating into their installations the complex interactions of gender, religion, race, class, and ethnicity for individuals and societies make our choice of them a particularly appropriate one, we believe, for this issue and this journal.

Some other discernable patterns of interest among the abstracts included a number of submissions on “graphic narrative,” and specifically multiple proposals to analyze Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home. We were also intrigued by a cluster of pieces on how material objects can function as catalysts of witness. Numerous proposals on rape testified to our continued need to understand and combat the ubiquitous problem of violence against women.

The various elements we ultimately decided to include in this issue do not function as pieces in a single puzzle that we can present to you as a coherent whole. Nevertheless, we perceive several compelling topics running through these essays, which we would like to explore with readers of WSQ, and around which we structure the comments that follow. The pieces speak so well for themselves, and we count this opportunity to explore these issues with feminist readers as so precious that—much as
we consciously determined to include particularly diverse types of writing in this issue—we have decided, in this Introduction, to eschew the traditional task of enumerating the contents of this volume in favor of a more topical organization. To make more apparent what we find urgent about the issues highlighted by the selected essays, we turn first to some background on the concept of “witness” that is not explicitly provided by any of our contributors.

While religious and legal discourse has inflected notions of testifying for millennia, the role of witness today in societies as different as those of North America, Europe, Argentina, South Africa, and Rwanda has been shaped by the personal and professional processing of the Holocaust. It is difficult to assess exactly why this should be so; however, the scale and ignominy of the way these state-sponsored crimes were perpetrated begin to point to one explanation. Early eyewitnesses from among the targeted victims of the Nazis tried to tell and were not believed; it seemed impossible to many contemporaries that large groups of people were being murdered just because they were Jews. Meanwhile, those who were doing the murdering were told they were performing glorious work about which they must remain silent precisely because the world could not (yet) understand its importance ([Himmler speech to the SS at Posen, October 4, 1943 [see Dawidowicz 1976, 132–33]). Despite these barriers to dissemination, the perpetration of Judeocide became more widely known when it was testified to by the eventual victors, the conquering Allied armies that came upon the extermination and concentration camps as they proceeded East and West toward Germany. Although the large number of victim-eyewitnesses to the atrocities became increasingly apparent and signs of the crimes were documented through photography and film, the ability to take in what had happened was short lived on all sides. It persisted just long enough for the war to reach its conclusion and some major criminals to be prosecuted at Nuremberg. The overwhelming desire to leave the war behind, and talk of its victims and perpetrators with it, made itself manifest through rebuilding efforts, new political alliances, and countless admonishments to survivors to forget and move on.

While we do not have the space here to present all the major stages of witnessing to the Holocaust, we have highlighted the impediments at these early stages to make clear why it is that when eyewitness testimony was solicited—most dramatically in the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961,
but also in the series of trials known as the Frankfurt trials in Germany several years later—it had such a powerful effect. Annette Wieviorka surveys the transformation from ignoring to interviewing to celebrating victims of the Shoah over the past half century in her slender but provocative and helpful volume, published in French as L’Ere du témoin in 1998, translated into English by Jared Stark (The Era of the Witness, 2006), and insightfully reviewed in this issue by Judith Greenberg. Recording eyewitnesses to the Holocaust by (originally) local projects such as that in the New Haven, Connecticut area (archived at Yale University and now referred to as the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Video Testimony) or that in Israel at Yad Vashem seems to have precipitated or at least coincided with a powerful new interest in trauma theory and witnessing to trauma that has resulted in numerous studies cited repeatedly by this issue’s contributors (those of Caruth on trauma and memory, Felman and Laub on testimony, Hirsch on postmemory, and La Capra on writing trauma). Recent developments in concepts of witnessing that have come through Holocaust studies are discussed more explicitly in several reviews of important new studies. (In addition to Greenberg on Wieviorka, see Carrard on Suleiman’s Crises of Memory and the Second World War; Kligerman on Kaplan’s Unwanted Beauty; and Bladek’s review of the more personal document, Mendelsohn’s The Lost.)

Given the primacy of the belated processing of the Holocaust for new types of thinking about witness, we want to draw attention to the fact that the Holocaust, trauma, and gender relate in complex ways. On the one hand, violence against European Jews was anticipated by its soon-to-be targets, and indeed was often perpetrated, in gendered fashion. To cite just two of many possible examples: in early forced-labor details the Nazis humiliated Orthodox Jewish men by, among other actions, cutting off their beards; later in the war, at death camps the Nazis sent pregnant women and women with young children immediately to the gas chambers. On the other hand, Nazi race ideology trumped most aspects of the program (including winning the war); that is to say, Jews were killed foremost because they were Jews. Accordingly, many Holocaust survivors and scholars have been uncomfortable with, or have outright rejected, the very idea of Holocaust gender studies. Scholars committed to gender analysis have nonetheless managed to make some critical contributions, both to uncovering the salience of gender during the perpetration of the Judeocide and to witnessing to it. For
instance, one of the ways in which victims tried to leave a trace of what was happening to them was in the creation or refashioning of material objects. The milk cans into which Emmanuel Ringelblum and his Oneg Shabbat organization placed documentation about what was happening in the Warsaw Ghetto and that they then buried are a well-known example. To what exactly other found objects testify may not be immediately apparent, especially without taking into consideration the gender of the fashioners and the receivers. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2006) have explored a cookbook compiled in Terezin (Theresienstadt) and a tiny picture book created in Varpnijarka, a concentration camp in Transnistria. They have proposed theories about how these “testimonial objects” came into being in places of extreme deprivation, what they may tell us about their creators’ sense of identity both in their prewar lives and in their circumscribed lives in the camps, and how projected and actual acts of transfer of such objects may themselves be gendered and can engender feminist readings. Although none of the essays takes up the topic of the Shoah directly, we are gratified to be able to include some contributions about objects, gender, and memory from a small conference Hirsch organized at Columbia University in spring 2007. We have grouped these essays under the rubric Object Lessons, a phrase coined by Sonali Thakkar for her closing remarks at the colloquium. These short pieces take up objects as diverse as an armoire (Kate Stanley), a car transmission (Patricia Dailey), and a knitting manual (Thakkar). They take their readers to places as different as early twentieth-century Russia (Nancy Miller), mid-twentieth-century Mississippi and Chicago (Valerie Smith), and early twenty-first-century Chernivtsi, Ukraine (Hirsch and Spitzer). Each of these essayists tries to discern what objects might tell us about the complexly gendered ways in which individuals, families, communities, and cultures interact across time and space.

For Irene, coming mainly from the field of Holocaust studies, one of the attractions of editing this issue, then, was precisely to pursue a gendered examination of witness. For Kathy, working in the field of feminist legal theory, witnessing has been more consistently intertwined with considerations of gender. Yet from this disciplinary lens, too, there is ample room for interrogation. For example, feminist scholars and activists have sometimes participated in the orientalizing assumption that witness is the native tongue of women, that testifying to the truth of our experience flows naturally from our mouths. Our experience in edit-
ing this issue has persuaded us, to the contrary, that witnessing involves reflection, mediation, and much conscious effort. It is, as another of our section titles suggests, an “act,” not an emanation from women’s essence. The essay by Mikhal Dekel demonstrates both the familiar assumption about women’s witnessing and the more effortful experience we have observed in the articles that make up this issue. Narrating her assault at Kishinev, Rivka Schiff labored very hard at trying to communicate her experience: her detailed, colloquial account traces the movements of the perpetrators’ hands, the terse exchanges through which one “honest goy” tried to persuade the assailants to spare the victims, the locations of those in the attic who witnessed the multiple rapes. Yet the prominent Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik, who journeyed to Kishinev to take the testimony of the survivors, could not repeat this testimony without orientalizing Schiff (prefacing her narrative with the reifying heading “From the Mouth of the Raped Woman Rivka Schiff”) or heroicizing the survivors (with his epic, faintly pornographic poem “On the Slaughter”). Dekel acknowledges these issues, recognizing as well her own place in the complicated act of making them apparent.

The work involved in witnessing is also illuminated in several other pieces in this issue: for example, the contributions of Rachel Kranz (on the slave trader Creswell), of Nancy Miller (on trying to understand an unusual object found among her father’s possessions), of Amy Hungerford (reviewing Susan Gubar’s Rooms of Our Own), and of Susan Brison. This last witness not only shares the account of her brutal rape and attempted murder; she also reflects on the many reasons that she has, over time, born witness to violence against women. Moreover, Brison’s essay illustrates the subtle changes in the iteration of her experiential narrative that have emerged—changes in emphasis, tone, and the ways in which she contextualizes the account of her attack—as she has moved from devastating trauma to healing.

Our experience as editors, moreover, replicates the labor of witnessing we see in these essays: as we put together this issue we found that our project, compared with other editing jobs we had undertaken, required unusually intensive collaborations between ourselves and many of the authors to achieve pieces that “spoke” to the subject of witness. Sometimes we even needed to negotiate between ourselves over the use of particular terms—such as the word “narrative”—that have different resonances in our distinct disciplinary communities.
If, in fact, witnessing does not come effortlessly to women’s lips, a second question arises: what configures narratives of witness? What we can witness is affected by a complex circuit between what the witness feels that she can tell; what (she believes) others can hear; and what, once others have heard, they can apprehend and repeat. Many factors help to construct this circuit. Cultural taboos may, in the first instance, shape the things to which women can witness. Women who have sought to speak of their sexualized coercion initially had to overcome social conventions—strongly enforced by a sense of shame—about the public discussion, or even acknowledgment, of women’s sexuality. Tamar Hess communicates one such instance in the efforts of Henya Pekelman to witness to her own life, and rape, in the context of the Palestine Mandate, and the ability of her memoir to bear witness for her in contemporary Israel. Christine Cynn evokes a similar set of constraints, these from late twentieth-century Haiti: when Rosiane Profil, a survivor of the Raboteau massacre, lifted her skirts above her waist to show where her legs had been pockmarked by her assailants’ bullets, jurors and spectators became agitated, and the presiding judge had to ring his bell repeatedly to call the proceedings to order. What listeners can hear, and witnesses can say, may also be powerfully configured by circulating political discourses. In reporting the deep reluctance of abortion clinic workers in the contemporary United States to acknowledge the ordinary reasons that women seek abortions, Jeannie Ludlow describes a political terrain in which pro-choice forces emphasize dramatic circumstances of rape, incest, or (to a lesser degree) contraceptive failure, while more commonplace factors of financial constraint or doubts about one’s ability to parent appear only in the condemnations of abortion issued by the political Right. Even when witnesses are able to relate a crucial dimension of their experience—often at great cost—those to whom they have reported it may be unable to hear it. Susan Brison notes that when she emerged from the ravine to tell passersby of her rape and attempted murder, they insisted that she must have been hit by a car.

Institutional structures and their rhetorical scripts also play a potent role in configuring narratives of witnesses. Allison Tait explains how the possibility of women’s citizenship in the early modern constitutionalism that preceded the resumption of absolute monarchy in seventeenth-century France produced powerful effects on women’s capacity to witness. The fact that “aristocratic and judicial privilege [enabled] female
political engagement” transformed the way that women’s witness was able to function, both on the stage—where the politically potent female witnessing of Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Les Femmes illustres* replaced the tragic neoclassical female witnesses of Corneille’s *Le Cid* and *Rodogune*—and in the Fronde, where noble women joined with officials of the judiciary to resist the challenge of absolute monarchy. Yet the opportunity to bear witness within the formal institutional structures of the state has not always been enabling for women witnesses. In her essay, Christine Cynn describes how the political agency of women, fostered through engagement in the collective, nongendered mobilizations of the Raboteau Victims’ Association and the September 30th Foundation, was constrained and domesticated in the course of the very trial for which the activists had fought, in order to meet the prosecution’s rhetorical need for innocent, gendered victims of the Raboteau Massacre. (Richard Mollica’s review of Eric Stover’s *The Witnesses* explores another context, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, in which witnesses did not always fare well in institutions designed for legal redress.)

Finally, the forms of witness themselves can configure the narratives that women and other witnesses are able to offer. The experiential narrative, whose quotidian details challenge listeners to glimpse the political in what might be seen as the ordinary dramas of personal life, was a form of women’s witnessing pioneered through consciousness-raising. Feminist scholars have introduced such narratives in a range of academic contexts, sometimes unsettling deeply held assumptions that privilege objective rationality over engaged, affective, perspectival argumentation. (Reviewing a recent conference, “Law and the Emotions,” Tucker Culbertson explores one trajectory of this critique of objectivity. As for the quotidian details of daily life, see Kamy Wicoff’s *I Do But I Don’t*, reviewed by Irene Kacandes.) Over time, and in response to the varied challenges of witnessing, new forms of witness have emerged. Most scholars agree that, in *Maus*, Art Spiegelman invented a form that allowed postmemorial witnessing to occur: the artist son is able to represent not only the story of his parents’ survival in the Holocaust, but also and simultaneously his own struggle with the monumentality of that past in his more ordinary life. We discovered, through the works that we received on “graphic narrative,” that women artists have built upon Spiegelman’s accomplishment to extend this form as a container for
witnessing to other kinds of traumas, including those relating to gender or queer sexualities. The graphic narrative’s juxtaposition of visual images, with written dialogue and a retrospective narrative, create layers of meaning, interpretation, or ambiguity, which feminist witnesses deploying a single narrative line often struggle to convey. The contrast and confluence of these multiple narrative lines can underscore the fault lines between past and present, public and private, epic and ordinary, hidden and revealed that figure prominently in works such as Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (see Chute’s essay) and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (discussed by Cvetkovich and Lemberg). These contrasting narrative forms may be further enriched by pluralization within each narrative line, for example, the “documentary archive” of quasi-photographic images within Bechdel’s larger visual narrative or by forms of representation that provocatively merge word and image, such as Bechdel’s “curvy circumflex” (see Cvetkovich). The three essays in this issue devoted to the graphic narrative—and by including three we editors mean to witness to the remarkable development of the genre—attest to the reasons that this form has become a rich and supple resource for contemporary witnessing by women artists. (This question of forms of expression taken up by women artists is extended through a report on recent interest in feminist art; see the contribution by Siona Wilson.)

This backdrop ultimately leads us full circle to reflect on our own implication as feminist scholars in the configuring of gendered narratives of witness. If we, as feminists, aim to create a space for women’s witnessing—to enact as a broader political project what we have attempted, on a small scale, to achieve in this issue—what kinds of witness do we want to enable, and how might we propose to do it? Although this is a large question that must, in many cases, be answered contextually, the essays in this issue gesture toward several points of departure.

First, we see value in making room for witnessing that attests to ordinariness, both in the constraints, injuries, and possibilities that witnesses relate and in the manner of reporting them. Speaking of abortion rhetoric, Jeannie Ludlow attests powerfully to the tendency to construct women seeking abortions as victims who struggle heroically with the consequences of rape or incest, when far more often they come to clinics because they lack the financial means to raise a(nother) child, doubt their abilities to function as parents, or seek to make a new start in their lives. The “trauma-tization” of women seeking abortion—perpetuated by
pro-choice activists’ own discourse—touches all women, engendering shame and self-doubt in those who seek abortion for more ordinary, and far more prevalent, reasons. Further, Dekel’s essay reveals the effects of the heroic lens through which women’s testimony is often refracted. Dekel permits us, as readers, to witness the power of Rivka Schiff’s richly textured yet quotidian discourse—a form of address that almost assumes that we know who the “Zichec daughter” is, or where the stairs are located in the attic where the assault occurred—as compared with the momentous, yet somehow generic, rendering of the event in Bialik’s poem. As feminists’ earliest experiences with narratives have taught us, the power of many forms of witness lies in that texture, those details: they help us relate the jarring injury to our own lives, help us see the way that we too could move in an instant from the familiar details of our lives to an unimagined horror, or to be confronted with the kind of searing choice that we would like to deny. Reclaiming that ordinariness in relation to both the subjects of gendered testimony and the styles in which women render it seems to us a worthy object of feminist efforts. Activist Byllye Avery’s account of the founding of a birthing clinic in Gainesville, Florida, offers in straightforward narrative language not only a success story that we are happy to share here, but also a claiming of joy in the fundamental, ordinary event of birth when it can happen in a safe, clean, welcoming, and life-affirming environment.

Second, we believe that feminists should make a space for witnessing to recovery from victimization. Susan Brison’s account is not simply a narrative of a sense of self lost or obliterated through traumatic injury; it is also a narrative of the regaining of self, often at a seemingly glacial pace and with incalculable shifts between forward movement and painful regression. The role that bearing witness to sexual violence plays in that recovery is one of the most important lessons that we draw from her essay. Yet another lesson, which can be glimpsed in the interstices, is what it might mean to have a more mature, or more realistic, notion of recovery itself. Brison’s effortful, incremental rediscovery of her “old” self, in part through the surprising vehicle of jazz and the blues, is illuminating in the trajectory that it holds out as uncertain yet possible and in the texture and detail of that trajectory. Moreover, it is not the only rendering of what a mature vision of recovery might mean that we find in these pages. We see, too, at least a bit of what recovery meant in the lives of the women of Raboteau, who were also galvanized by music, in their
case protest songs; in the lives of specific “lost generation” daughters who found cowitnesses in their innovative and resourceful lawyers (see Rosanne Kennedy’s essay); in the dignified yet subversive witnessing of Mamie Till, who demanded that the nation see what had been done to her child (discussed by Smith).

The tragic journey of Mamie Till came to one kind of end in fall 2007, when the county of Tallahatchie (encompassing the town of Sumner, Mississippi), where an all-white jury had previously acquitted two men of the murder of Emmett Till, offered an apology to the few surviving members of the Till family. This apology, offered long after most of those family members who might have heard it had passed away, takes us from the realm of individual to collective recovery. As Irene has suggested in her work on cowitnessing, following leads by scholars as diverse as Martha Minow, Judith Herman, and Cathy Caruth, “transcultural and transhistorical cowitnessing”—even if it does not aid the original victims—can benefit the health and healing of the society in which those victims suffered and we continue to live. When a trauma has yet to be cowitnessed to, on a collective level, it still exists. When we acknowledge that certain kinds of acts were wrong, that we no longer condone their perpetration, and that we wish the outcome of the original event for the victim(s) and the perpetrators had been different, we become, in a sense, a different society (Kacandes 2001, 138–40).

Part of this individual and collective movement toward recovery may be a willingness to loosen our hold on victimization and the work that victimization has done for us. The pioneering research and writing of Judith Herman, to which we return in this issue, makes clear how witnessing to victimization has contributed to feminist claim-making and social transformation—and can form a crucial step in the recovery of individual victims. Yet in her response to Herman, Susan Suleiman sounds a note of caution, citing the possibility of a clinical, and a broader social, investment in victimization, which makes ongoing care and vigilance about how we hear and engender narratives of trauma essential. A similar debate has echoed in the realms of law and political theory, where Wendy Brown (1995), among others, has argued that the dominance of feminism’s focus on sexual violence as the paradigmatic form of gendered (and gendering) injury may foster a kind of resentiment, a continued moral and political investment in one’s victimization, which not only distorts remediation when it is embraced on a social scale, but also
can make the relinquishment of the victimized self difficult. This critique has not been easy for feminist lawyers and legal scholars to hear; recognizing women’s victimization through law has not only been critical for fostering social understanding of gender inequality, it has also been the predicate for forms of legal recovery that call perpetrators to account. Yet slowly, and often painfully, feminist lawyers are beginning to reconsider the law’s relationship to victimization. One step, which Kathy has sought to initiate in her own work, has been to rethink the way that we characterize women as victims (Abrams 1995). (For another view of how feminism might be reenergized by more plural or fluid understandings of those who are its subjects, see Angela Harris’s review of two books on the transgender movement.) Feminist legal scholars such as Elizabeth Schneider (2000) and Martha Mahoney (1991) have argued that advocates must help courts to see the partial agency (and the struggle for power and control) in the lives of battered women, rather than seeing these women as wholly compromised victims. And the U.S. Supreme Court, at best an ambivalent advocate of women’s rights, held in 1993 that women did not have to prove “serious psychological injury” to prevail in a claim of sexual harassment, a decision that helped to foster a new image of what it might mean to be a victim of sexualized injury. Another part of this effort has been to develop forms of lawyering that support the self-direction, and in subtle ways contribute to the healing, of the clients themselves. In her essay in this issue, Rosanne Kennedy is not wholly sanguine about the law, noting how courts have frequently denied remedies to “stolen generation” children in Australia; yet she eloquently documents how lawyers have served as cowitnesses for clients seeking redress for the state-authorized destruction of their Indigenous families. Similarly, lawyers assisting Thai and Mexican workers in the sweatshops of El Monte, California, have pioneered an innovative form of representation that uses the lawsuit as a vehicle to create sustaining solidarity among these women and fosters their sense of capacity by supporting their ability to bear witness—both inside and outside the courtroom—to coercion in the garment industry (see Su 1998). These efforts remain far from typical; yet, echoing the forceful and trenchant witnessing of many authors in this issue, they may suggest that we are at the threshold of a change. Feminists may be willing to take the lead in fashioning a more complete and nuanced account of the movement through victimization and forward.
These points about eschewing the orientalizing of women as natural witnesses, embracing narratives of ordinariness or healing, and transforming and supplementing claims of victimhood with more agentic accounts of women’s lives are not, we think, ones with which every reader of or even contributor to this issue of *WSQ* agrees. However, as we two women sat at yet another café, this time in Berkeley, California, in October 2007, they were ones that we believed were ripe for debate. We wanted to risk putting them out into the feminist public sphere through this discussion. For, as so many of the acts of witnessing recounted and performed in this issue make clear, to witness is to risk.

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**IRENE KACANDES** is an associate professor of comparative literature and German studies at Dartmouth College, where she also teaches women’s and gender studies and war and peace studies. Author of *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (University of Nebraska Press, 2001) and coeditor of *A User’s Guide to German Cultural Studies* (University of Michigan Press, 1997) and *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust* (Modern Language Association of America, 2004), Kacandes has a book manuscript called *Daddy’s War* about family remembrance of World War II that is forthcoming from University of Nebraska Press.

**WORKS CITED**


