

**No apologies. Unfinished business and the pact to forget.**  
**Ruth Lijtmaer, Ph.D.**

This presentation considered the theme of the movie, “The Silence of Others” (2019). The documentary film reveals the epic struggle of victims of Spain’s 40-year dictatorship under General Francisco Franco, who was in power from 1939 until his death in 1975. The population continues to seek justice to this day. Filmed over six years, the documentary follows the survivors as they organize the groundbreaking fight against a state-imposed amnesia of crimes against humanity.

This movie shows how massive group trauma is transmitted intergenerationally (consciously) and transgenerationally (unconsciously through psychological mechanisms such as identification with the traumatized aspects of the person’s psyche). We see how massive trauma involves experiencing unbearably painful emotions, such as helplessness, intense fear, terror, humiliation, overwhelming loss and rage over the fact that the voices of each victim’s family are silenced — preventing them from more fully mourning the dead. From the beginning, they could not fully mourn the dead because there was no physical body to process the loss. It was an unfinished business for them that the silence perpetuates.

“As we understand more deeply both the intergenerational transmissions and the demands of mourning, we can easily appreciate the presence of the dead among the living, the survival of melancholic presences long after loss” (Harris, 2007, in Salberg, 2019, p. 664). Palpable in the film was the profound and often nonverbal, unconscious or preconscious intersubjective processes through which powerful and often dangerous silences and secrets were transmitted across the generations.

“El Pacto del Olvido” (The Pact to Forget) was a political decision in Spain, fostered by parties on the left and on the right, to repress the abuses of the past and move past the Civil War. The decision gave amnesty to people who committed the crimes against humanity and no judgments toward them were made because, supposedly, too much time had elapsed for punishment. Even after years of lawsuits against the perpetrators, nothing has happened. The pact to forget, perpetuated by the government, tried to silence the population in order to repress memories of the horrors that were perpetrated, supposedly for the sake of national harmony. This repression created more emotional damage to the victims of the Franco regime. Society as a whole, or as represented by the government, supported the victimization and people were, and still are, unable to openly and fully mourn. There was no closure for the victims’ families.

This is an example of widespread social trauma. Social trauma can be conceived of as the result of an intentional, malignant act, committed or designed by persons, organizations or states in order to cause damage to the individual, thereby producing a state of fear and helplessness while destroying social links. It is implemented within a context of suppression and oppression, often with a background of state-organized terror and political violence aimed at specific groups (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). In this kind of

trauma, society (as a whole or as represented by the government) actually supports and perpetuates the victimization. When a person deliberately inflicts pain upon another, the resulting symptomatology in the victim, as well as coping strategies and outcomes, is inextricably linked to the interpersonal and moral aspects of the traumatic violation. When the victimization is supported by the social structure, the interpersonal violation becomes generalized to the larger social context, impinging on the victim's basic self-other representation (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989; Lijtmaer, 2013).

The Franco government, as in other dictatorships, blatantly and openly abused human rights. However, there is another type of accomplice to such abuse. Rothberg (2019, p. 12) calls this sort of accomplice the "implicated subject," someone who occupies a position aligned with power and privilege, who has indirectly benefited from systemic racism, colonialism and historical injustices without themselves being a direct agent of harm. But nevertheless, they are participants in and beneficiaries of a system that is a direct agent of injury, one that generates dispersed and unequal experiences of trauma. The bystander is a key component to sustain the coercive actions of the authority (Lijtmaer, 2022).

State-sponsored human rights violations terrify and silence the population, causing this bystander phenomenon to appear. Elliot (2001, in Beritzhoff, 2021) said that, "Few topics can be as disquieting as the strategies we use to shield ourselves from administered atrocities, torture, political massacres, and genocides. From the shadow cast by Auschwitz to terrors in Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Kosovo, China, South America, and now Ukraine, the apparent indifference of the Western public to mass suffering is shocking, disturbing, and haunting" (p. 38). Now, fortunately, many countries are involved in helping Ukraine. However, most citizens of the world are paralyzed by a global "evasion" (Levinas, 1947/1978) in which large populations are incapable of seeing and responding to violence committed by governments, a collective dissociation and the type of dissociation that Donnel Stern (2010) refers to "as an active defensive refusal to formulate experience" (p. 646, Beritzhoff, p. 82); the kind that blinds eyes to dehumanizing atrocities and neglect. Indifference may only be apparent and may only be one way to account for lack of action. Fear of reprisals and losing one's privileges may be among the other reasons.

"The Silence of Others" is a movie that documents an example of the failures in the social system that produce trauma. This failure is reflected in:

- 1) The social system failing the individual to contain, care for and protect them, as in the case of the lack of assistance toward the victims of poverty, disease, economic crisis, violence, war or natural catastrophe;
- 2) A blatant attack on the part of the ruling authorities perpetrated upon minorities ("Mexicans are rapists," for example) or even upon the bulk of the population, as in the case of social repression, war, racism, genocide or persecution;

3) A perversion of the social system, which fails to uphold current social values and laws, while in actuality breaking them, as in the case of corruption and deceit on the part of the authorities (lies of a past president of the United States and clearly in the case of Franco's regime) (De Tubert, 2006). The familiar defenses of disavowal, dissociation and denial are employed at an individual and collective level to deal with these societal failures, to name the truth, to acknowledge the violence that is being perpetuated against each other, and to take responsibility for social and political discourse.

When there is a lack of an empathic response, faith in the possibility of communication dies. Accordingly, I propose that another essential feature of the trauma suffered by a survivor of discrimination, abuse and repression is the victim's feeling of helplessness to affect the environment interpersonally — a feeling that blocks a sense of mutuality and justice (Lijtmaer, 2012; 2013; 2022). Therefore, the link between self and other has been effaced by the failure of empathy (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). The traumatized person, in order to "survive" and live on among the riches of life around him or her, has to take flight into a certain kind of deadness. What gets killed off is imagination, empathy, curiosity, desire and kindness. The traumatic state operates like a black hole in the person's mind, because in the absence of representations of need-satisfying interactions, there is no basis for symbolic, goal-directed behavior and connections. These experiences of the lack of trust in society can be described using Gerson's (2009) concept of the "dead third."

The dead third is conceptualized as the loss of the "live third" upon which the individual had previously relied, and in relation to which had developed a sense of personal continuity and meaning. In this regard, the third (whether a person, a relationship or an institution) serves the elemental function of solidifying an individual's sense of person, place and purpose. External traumas call forth for our need to be contained and make meaning of all "thirds" in which we live. When such needs are ignored, we face the internal traumas of living with the absence of that which made life comprehensible and more bearable.

Under such circumstances, the living thirds in which the person was nested now, horrifyingly, become a nest of dead thirds from which he or she cannot escape. So, when the third is dead, psychic numbness is the balm against unbearable affects. *The individual experiences the presence of an absence.* There also is the overwhelming experience that there is an absence of concern about one's plights, not only on the part of the perpetrators but also in the silent others' witnessing, be they individuals or nations, that allows violence and repression to proceed. Living with a "dead third" is a testimonial of the failures of the other, and of the world, to repair the damage done to the experience of goodness. If what is lost is faith in an empathic world, what is found in its place is the reality of an indifferent "dead" world.

Silence for catastrophic events is traumatic. Time, space and history collide to create symptoms (not all necessarily pathological and, at times, they are adaptive dissociation), whether or not the person experienced it themselves or due to a legacy passed down

through generations. Hidden experiences suffered by our ancestors are present in the consulting room as Faimberg (1988/2013) mentions in “telescoping generations.”

In traumatized subjects, expectations of reparation, recognition and social validation of the damage suffered are frustrated by society’s silence and by the lack of justice. This leads to deeper feelings of impotence, helplessness and marginalization from society. Sometimes it can be a sound, a smell or a sight that reminds the victim of the trauma suffered. The consequences of trauma persist even after wars, dictatorial regimes or political repression have ended (Lijtmaer, 2018).

State-supported torture and other human rights violations have, in some horrible ways, become the touchstone for what some consider “unforgivable,” raising the question of what can and cannot be forgiven. Demands for restitution, and complete forgiveness, are two different strategies. No betrayal, however venal, should be allowed to shadow all the days of one’s future. We may be able to forgive, but we cannot forget. The ethics of memory is the claim that we have obligations to remember on ethical grounds. Therefore, I believe that not forgetting encompasses witnessing as a social process. It is the combination of suffering and evil as a feature of moral witnessing. Another component of witnessing is personal risk.

We as psychoanalysts can become moral witnesses of these atrocities. An eyewitness who is personally safe and sheltered is not a moral witness. The risk may be the result of belonging to the category of people toward whom the evil deed was directed, or it may be inherent in the effort to document and report. In the clinical setting, ethical non-neutrality should include the imperative to bear witness to the details of our patients’ stories, to the traumas acknowledged and unacknowledged by them, attesting to the wrongdoings as well as their suffering (Ullman, 2011). As Stern (1997, in Grand, 2008) suggested, “To be a psychoanalyst is inevitably to take a political and moral stand” (p. 686).

I feel it is fitting to end this paper with a quote by Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015, Uruguayan). I translated it from its original Spanish. It says:

“There is no way to mute history. Even if people try to burn, break and lie, the history of humanity refuses to be silent.”

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Ruth Lijtmaer may be contacted @ rlijt123@gmail.com