

The Audacious Searching of Spanish Mothers: The Appropriation of Babies During and After the Dictatorship

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the dictatorship in Spain, many strategies were used to manipulate and silence mothers' voices. During this period (1940-1975) and also in later times of democracy, a total of 300,000 babies were stolen (Anadir, 2011). Currently, family organizations are looking for their children, stolen between 1940 and 1999. Their calls for memory, justice and reparation found a space for action in social media as the campaigns "We Are Looking for You" (2017, 2018), where they could their search after surviving obstetric violence and stigmatization. Transcending these deeds from a space of action, the precepts proposed by Frankl –on accepting pain, taking responsibility for what they feel in order to give meaning to the tragedy– are observed. Through this ethnographic study, carried out during the recording of two social media campaigns, we will endeavor to confirm the following hypothesis: their active participation in the campaigns, the members of SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia are developing the virtue of audacity. This audacity is linked to Frankl's theory of assuming suffering, asserting destiny and taking a stand before it (1987). This study used participant observation and interviews of the 20 families belonging to the Catalan organization.

Keywords: audacity, stolen babies, TEB campaigns, appropriations

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of this ethnographic study, we are interested in demonstrating the relationship between the victims of the theft of babies and their process of giving meaning to their pain -through their active participation in media campaigns- and how this process is closely related to Frankl's theory about the importance of recognizing and taking responsibility for pain, giving it meaning. Faced with the acceptance of pain (and tragedy), a decision is made to adopt an attitude and begin a process of transcendence in which we can observe their audacity.

For a better understanding of the political and social context in which the theft of babies was conceived, in this introduction we will present the controls and the type of manipulation of ideas that were employed in the framework of the dictatorship in Spain; we will also specify the gender roles imposed by the regime that will allow us to advance towards the concepts of motherhood and eugenics used by the representatives of the regime to justify the "Appropriation" of babies through networks linked to the regime. Faced with all these devices of appropriation and domination, the first organizations of the families of stolen babies and the "Public Testimonials" appeared, allowing us to broach the notion of "Learning and Sense of

pain” that the studied population gave to their stories, and leading us to the idea of “Audacious search” and the “Conclusion”.

During the dictatorship that took place in Spain under Francisco Franco, there was not only the control and manipulation of the ideas, thoughts and actions of the population in general, but special attention was given to the behavior of women, considered as potential mothers and bearers of the future population of the country. Along these lines, drastic changes were carried out to the way the Spanish population could live, think and act, in accordance with the religious precepts imposed by the regime from 1939 until 1975.

For a better understanding of the historical facts, Franco came to power after winning the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and established a dictatorship. In this socio-political context, its victims lived under repression; more precisely, the Republicans (known as the Reds) were terrorized under Francoism. Extra-judicial executions had taken place once the Civil War was over, making the Republicans very weary of exposing themselves by denouncing human rights abuses (Valverde, 2012).

As far as women are concerned, which is what we are interested in reflecting in this work, during the dictatorship, women were ordered to preserve their chastity and re-conquer the household. Various books were made available to women on this role imposed by the state, such as: “The Wisdom of the Home. Before you get Married” (1946).

Women’s chastity was to be considered the most valuable of all feminine virtues, and those women violating in any way these public morals were to be considered a danger to the social order (Morcillo Gómez, 2015).

More specifically, throughout the dictatorship women were silenced and subordinated to men, medical doctors, church representatives and the State. As the authors Bueno-Morales and González-Besteiro suggest: “Women not related to the dictatorship were persecuted, imprisoned and murdered - like many men- but at the same time they also had to face sexual violence, electric shocks and the theft of their children” (2018, p.48).

To manipulate, control and silence women, various instruments were used, such as the pathologization of their emotions through medical writings as well as their marginalization within the educational, political and labor spheres through “moralist” messages. In Franco's propaganda, women were treated as superior beings to men thanks to their physical virtues (motherhood) and for their moral attributes (sweetness, protection, understanding) dedicated to the providing man, who had little patience for listening.

Even gender roles, justifying male domination, were presented as law; article 57 of the Civil Code sanctioned, even within marriage, that: “The husband must protect the woman and she must obey him.” Until 1958, a woman was not authorized by law to be a guardian or a witness in wills, and a married woman still needed her husband's permission.

Women's freedom of professional choice was also subordinate to the patriarchal control imposed by the state: women were obliged to stop working once they got married, and only after 1961 were they allowed to continue working, with their husband’s permission. And while

many women were financially independent since they earned their own money, even in these cases, they also needed marital permission for certain business transactions (Barrenechea Lopez, 2018).

Until 1973, single women could not leave the paternal home and become independent before the age of twenty-five. Hence, the marginalization of women in the labor market may be understood and more so if it was to obtain positions in the administration of justice. In these cases, it was considered that a woman would jeopardize certain attributes that she should not give up, such as tenderness, delicacy and sensitivity (Women's Political, Professional and Labor Rights Act, 1961; in Ortiz-Heras, 2006, p.9).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given all the mechanisms of control that were implemented throughout the dictatorship, the control of the body and women's health was of great interest since it was aligned with the theory of eugenics that in certain aspects shared the aims of Lamarckian or Mendelian eugenics: the homogenization of the population. Historically, the term has been used to refer to anything comprised between prenatal care of mothers to forced sterilization and genocide.

The modern formulation of eugenics stems from the work of Sir Francis Galton in the 1860s. According to him, eugenics was the science of improving the human race. For this, it would be necessary, on the one hand, to detect the best physically and mentally endowed beings and promote their marriages (positive eugenics) and, on the other, to detect all those who, with their various defects, could contribute to the deterioration of the human race and avoid their marriage and, therefore, their reproduction (negative eugenics) (Álvarez Peláez, 1999). Eugenics arrived in Spain thanks to Ignacio Valentí y Vivó, professor of Legal Medicine and Toxicology at the University of Barcelona (who attended the First International Eugenics Congress, organized in London in 1912 by the Eugenics Education Society as Spanish representative), and Nicolás Amador, also a doctor and member of said society. In 1928, the First Spanish Eugenic Course was held, becoming the first public platform for discussion of eugenics in the country. The repression of the Primo de Rivera regime, alleging pornography and public scandal, prevented the continuation of the activities planned in this field (Nash, 1984).

This eugenicist vision had already been adopted and applied in countries such as Nazi Germany, and led to a rigid and utopian notion of the human body as stable, controllable and beautiful, racially and gender determined (López-Durán, 2018).

The Franco regime made institutional use of eugenic theories designed by the psychiatrist Vallejo Nagera to denigrate and to disqualify the losing side in the war and to justify repression. Nájera would make his theories known through various publications such as: "Eugenics of Hispanity and Regeneration of the Race" (1937), "Social Medicine and Mental Hygiene" (1943), "The Wisdom of the Home. Before you get Married" (1946). In the first book Nájera explained that in his veins runs inquisitor blood that he had inherited genetically from his parents and justified his position; in the second book he justified why the race needed to be cleansed and improved, and how to achieve this goal; and in the last specifies: "It is impossible to achieve a strong race without a thorough preparation of the youth for marriage thanks to Catholic

morality. This short booklet is a minuscule contribution to the exaltation of the country" (Nájera in Morcillo Gómez, 2015, p.139) .

In particular, concentration camps and prisons were used to carry out tests and collect information that "scientifically" proved that Republicans, Brigade members, communists or anarchists were weak-minded, or that anti-Franco women were insane genetically-deficient nymphomaniacs (Quiñonero, 2002).

In this context, there were two basic hypotheses that Vallejo Nájera wanted to demonstrate: (a) the mental inferiority of the supporters of social and political equality, also called disaffected (taken as any person loyal to the Republic and contrary to the Franco uprising); (b) the perversion of democratic regimes, which, by promoting social failures through public policies, favored resentment, something that does not happen in aristocratic regimes where only the socially best triumph. The Third Reich and all the fascist dictatorships of Europe at the time were therefore aristocratic regimes.

In August 1938, Franco authorized the creation of the Psychological Research Cabinet proposed by Vallejo-Nájera, who became director of psychological research in concentration camps (Quiñonero, 2002). Hundreds of prisoners were analyzed, with the collaboration of agents of the German Gestapo.

In summary, Franco, Vallejo Nájera and several of the representatives of the Catholic Church worked together to define women's lifestyle by telling them what was good and acceptable in order to become a perfect wife and mother. In accordance with Gonzalez-Duro (2008), those instructions were the steps prior to psychological brainwashing; having people believe that Republicans and people who were not Catholic deserved to be cast aside and even experimented on, so that the "red gene" and other forms of opposition could be eradicated from the community and therefore not infect the Spanish population. Vallejo admired the progress of German geneticists and cited the works of Dubitscher, Luxemburger or Stumpf, praised in Gütt's manual (1937). However, he had special interest in distancing himself from German eugenics and highlighting the Catholic orthodoxy of his Eugamy:

Our concept of Eugamy separates it very clearly from Eugenics, since it considers the psychic facet of personality in the choice of spouse, so that genotypes of the best qualities result from the crosses (...). Eugenics selects genotypes from biological points of view, with the sole purpose of preventing the transmission of hereditary lines. The Eugamy establishes rules so that the characterological selection of the bride and groom is not made randomly and blindly and in such a way that they transmit to the offspring the characterological qualities suitable for the social prosperity of parents and children. (Vallejo Nájera, 1946, p.201)

In accordance with the above, another influential publication from Nájera was entitled "Marxist fanaticism psychism. Psychological investigations of female criminal Marxists" (1939). In this publication, the psychiatrist cites cases in which the women were found guilty of having been active in the socio-political sphere and did not have the capacity of adjusting to the traditional model of the woman of the house, submissive, sacrificed and the guardian of the family order. This concept of female criminal Marxists included the women of the "Reds" - wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, friends - guilty of not having avoided the moral and political ideas of their

men. Vallejo tested his studies with the group of prisoners from Malaga Psychological Investigations in delinquent female Marxists. The study was carried out in the Malaga women's prison:

Remember to understand the very active participation of the female sex in the Marxist revolution, its characteristic weakness of mental balance, the least resistance to environmental influences, the insecurity of control over the personality (...) When the brakes that socially contain women disappear (...) then the instinct of cruelty is awakened in the female sex and exceeds all imagined possibilities, precisely because it lacks intelligent and logical inhibitions, a characteristic of female cruelty that is not satisfied with the execution of the crime, but increases during his commission" (Vallejo & Martínez, 1939, pp. 398-399)

Appropriation

At the beginning of the Civil War, in 1936, the Francoist authorities tried to punish the Republicans by killing their children or letting them starve. However, the psychiatrist Vallejo-Nájera, from Nazi Germany, thought that Spain was depopulating and that children were needed. Nájera implemented a new vision about mothers "unwanted by the regime" and decided to leave the children up to three years with their biological mothers. When they turned three years old, the children were taken from their mothers and given to families of recognized catholicity and, and in tune with the Franco regime.

At the end of the 1930s, there were several documents that confirmed that the theft of children became legal, taking place mainly in prisons with Republican mothers who were detained and deprived of any rights; the government's policy was based on separating babies and children from the "red gene" families implementing the methodologies suggested by Nájera. From then on, the practice of stealing babies only became easier and more straightforward.

Records show that 9,000 children of political enemies were taken in 1943, and another 12,000 were taken in 1944 (Fotheringham, 2011). For a better understanding of how the appropriation system worked (accompanied by the manipulation, domination and silencing of mothers) the stolen babies' period can be divided into three phases: the first is the repressive stage and focuses on Republican prisons, the second phase is from 1952 to around 1977 when the appropriation of babies was extended to include single mothers and young people. It is a phase of repression in which a clear emphasis is placed on the moral reeducation of women and the very young.

From 1977, the thefts were not focused so much on single or "red" mothers, it was no longer about ideological repression or moral education but responded to an economic motivation and easy and reliable targets were sought: young, healthy mothers, about to give birth for the first time. This last stage would last until the 1990s, that is, under democracy. The theft of babies, for different reasons, would occur systematically throughout the country. At the time of their birth, the mothers of these babies were told that they had died from various causes (malformations, respiratory problems, unknown causes that warranted autopsies and that allowed the body of the supposed dead baby to be retained for in-depth tests and studies) while mothers were advised to forget about what had happened because they were young and could soon become pregnant again.

Nevertheless, between 2010-2012 about twenty associations of the families of stolen babies were created. One of the first that would set a precedent was Anadir (National Association of People Affected by Irregular Adoptions), SOS Stolen Babies that was represented in the various autonomous communities. In January 2012, the first demonstration of the families took place before the State Attorney General's Office and the first collective complaint made up of 261 families was presented. A long period of silence came to an end.

According to victims' testimonies and literature, the theft of babies in hospitals during and after Franco was not committed directly by State agents. The individuals involved were: doctors, midwives, anesthetists, nuns. They were capable of performing acts that infringed on basic human values and rights following a systematic methodology.

In the case of stolen babies, the term systematic has been understood as either an organized plan in furtherance of a common policy, which follows a regular pattern and results in a continuous commission of acts, or as "patterns of crimes" such that the crimes constitute a "non-accidental repetition of similar criminal conduct on a regular basis" (Katanga & Ngudjolo Chii, Barrenechea-López, 2017, p.48).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This paper is based on an ethnographic study, carried out during the recording of two social media campaigns. The study used participant observation and interviews of the 20 families belonging to the organization SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia who actively participated in the "We Are Looking for You "campaigns, known as TEB, presented in 2017 and 2018 through social networks. Although members of other organizations of the families of stolen babies also participated in both campaigns, this study takes as a population the families from Catalonia belonging to the aforementioned organization during the years 2017 and 2018.

As ethnographic research and in accordance with what is stated by González and Hernández, it consists of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and behaviors that are observable. It incorporates what the participants say, their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and reflections as they are expressed by themselves and not as one describes them (González & Hernández, 2003; in Barbolla Diz et al., 2010). Through this qualitative research, the aim is to capture the meaning that people give to their actions, in this case, participation in a campaign in which they make public their testimonies, their ideas, and the world around them.

Sense and Pain: Individual Experiences

As we have stated, the families of SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia have positioned themselves by launching their search for their babies, giving this search a present meaning. "I am looking for my sister. Sometimes I lose all hope, but in activities like these with the group, I regain my strength, I recharge my energy to keep looking for her" (R.L.P, 2017); "When I saw the first TEB campaign, I told my parents that we had to get in contact with this organization. Here we are, they are looking for their daughter and I for my sister" (M.C; 2018); "We are more and more involved families. We are not going to abdicate so easily. Rather, we are not going to abdicate, because when we say 'I am looking for you; We are looking for you' as relatives, as a group, we are already saying everything" (A.R., 2018).

And on this subject, Frankl points out: "There is no situation in life that is really meaningless." With this, he anticipates that the apparently negative aspects of human existence, and especially the tragic triad that includes pain, guilt and death, can also "become something positive when faced with the correct posture and attitude" (1977, p.108). When Frankl refers to this triad, he in turn refers to a triple challenge since a meaning can be extracted from these aspects by transforming them with attitudes into something positive: pain in service, guilt in change and death as a stimulus for responsible action (1994, pp. 64-65).

Although the families of stolen babies have experienced and still experience in a sense the tragic triad exposed by Frankl, they have been learning from each other, as one of the victims expresses: "These people who are here are my family. Because we are all the same" (TEB, 2017). The concept is of learning from the other, the other as a model. In this sense, Frankl suggests that in line with the most effective learning, which is "learning by model", the suffering of one homo patients can benefit another, setting in motion an existential "recycling" (2015, p.68). "Only we mothers know what we have been through" (during the recording of the second campaign, 2018). And it is through this existential recycling that advances take place in the community. Individual and collective pain takes form outside the bodies with voices that unify and diversify, with the same goal: to find their children.

As Frankl argues: "We cannot free a human being from his pain at the cost of his own abdication. And it would be to abdicate oneself to radically avoid displeasure, to unconditionally change pain, including discontent and the pain of suffering loaded with existential meaning. So it could happen that man, losing his pain, loses his own individuality" (2015, p.211). What we observe in the families of stolen babies is that they have not abdicated their pain nor their individuality. "We look for them and we will always look for them", as one of the grandmothers says (TEB, 2017); "As long as I breathe, I will keep looking for my son" (96-year-old mother, during the recording of TEB 2018). Finding the meaning of life through joint, shared searching, in various formats and through social platforms, is to give life a meaning. It is giving a voice (looking at the camera and telling those who are watching) accompanied by an action (accepting the pain experienced and making it public), it is being part of a movement (adding one's voice and action to a group of other families), it is being present and taking responsibility for what has happened to them and at the same time choosing with what attitude they decide to continue moving forward.

The attitude does not respond to fear, but rather to an act of individual and collective audacity in which the cases are exposed, their names are made known, they become visible, recognizable in the eyes of a society in which they have not been recognized. A society which has not elaborated a process of recognition of the victims nor of their reparation.

ANALYSIS

Through this research, a daring attitude in the search for their children is observed in the population studied. In this section we will define audacity, set forth Frankl's view of audacity as a virtue and explain how audacity occurs in the stolen babies' searches.

The word audacity has its roots in Latin." Its lexical components are: *audare* (dare to, eagerly try something), plus the suffix *-ia* (quality). Frankl considers audacity a virtue, a means to encourage a person to transcend pain. It is in this movement of the transcendence of pain, a

pain that has already been recognized, that we observe how participating in a search campaign for stolen babies such as TEB has given them a meaning to their present existence, a new objective, a new place in society which, following the second campaign, is at a global level, just as the voice-over of one of the victims of SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia points out: "England, Ireland, Germany" (TEB, 2018).

As Frankl highlights, this audacity, the boldness when faced with suffering, is what matters. It is a question of assuming suffering, asserting fate and taking a stand before it. Only in this way can we come approach the truth, sense the truth; this way and not the way of flight or fear of suffering (1987, pp.124, 125). To achieve this, the families have started along a path to which they have brought in different types of knowledge, including that of the Ubuntu philosophy (Escudero, 2020) that has allowed them to recognize and accept what they have in common as families who are victims of the theft of babies, as well as those aspects, ideas and beliefs that separate them. The possibility of taking part in a search in which the characteristics of each member of the association are accepted and respected and where common factors are united has allowed them to advance towards a new space of the knowledge of their various painful and traumatic stories, and its possible significance.

When taking into account, as stated in this paper, the political and social context in which these babies were stolen, we must include a present in which this issue does not have broad social support or spaces for attention to victims. Through this study we argue that this population has known how to stay active and transcend the various democratic governments, and their slow work in terms of historical reparation. To which is added the ability to persevere despite the passage of time and the lack of response, two factors that undermine the simple optimism or commitment of a population made up mostly of older adults. Faced with all these difficulties, they have focused on themselves, on uniting their voices, looking into a camera and narrating their tales of searching.

As Frankl puts it, this type of audacity is about assuming suffering, affirming destiny, taking a stand before it. Only in this way we can approach the truth, this way and not the way of flight and fear of suffering (1987).

DISCUSSION

Faced with past events and the consequences of forty years of dictatorship for the social fabric of Spain, the first social movements integrated by families who expressed the need to initiate searches for their children were stereotyped and discredited by the mass media and discouraged by various institutions. However, neither stigma nor discredit has silenced them. Since the advent of a new activism envisioned through social networks and the meetings of organizations of relatives of the victims of the theft of babies throughout Spain, our paper is based on the organization SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia and its participation in the TEB campaigns 2017 and 2018 (Escudero). In both campaigns, this organization made their searches known through testimonies in a tone that demonstrates a new step (individual and collective) in the approach to the theft of their babies, giving new meaning to the cause, the type of search and their role in the organization. The testimonies recorded in both campaigns show a mother or a family group in front of the camera holding a sign that says "We Are Looking for You" and the narrataive is as follows: "I am (mother's or relative's name), you were born in the hospital (name of the institution), the day... of the year... I'm looking for you; We are looking for

you". In this last sentence, the organization manifests the passage from individual search, each with their own stories, to collective search. Both searches are intertwined, and move in the same direction: towards finding them. As Manzor-Coats indicates: "the collective character of modern-day testimonials brings silence and personal ordeals to the public sphere. The once fragmented or nonexistent subject becomes a public figure in a common collective struggle" (1990, p.171).

"When I finished saying 'I am looking for you; We are looking for you' I felt a great weight lift off my shoulders, like something heavy that had been on my body for a long time, vanished. It was about that, putting words to it. Our own words" (Interview, A.P.G, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The audacious searching of the families of stolen babies corresponds to a virtue as set forth by Frankl, as it is a way of transcending suffering and pain, and giving meaning to their life stories. In this particular case, audacity through actions and testimonies exposed in TEB campaigns not only brings reparation, but rather refers to a collective commitment that takes more strength and impacts the audience with greater intensity, summons more people (both victims and the population interested in learning more about the subject).

This study has been limited to one organization, which shows the need to extend the analysis to other organizations in order to delve into what the individuals and groups they belong to do in order to make sense, or not, of the pain experienced. Being able to know if the testimonies presented in campaign format are leading a high number of these families to transcend the pain is part of the continuity of this investigation.

In addition, from the verification of the hypothesis related to the presence of audacity in the active members of the association SOS Stolen Babies of Catalonia, a path of investigation is opened to verify how this audacity gives rise to new actions sustained by the process of communication and activism of the group.

Likewise, the audacity observed in this population represents a new voice for the reconstruction of the social fabric and historical memory of the country, where it is necessary to recognize, name and spread make known the crimes against humanity.

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