RESEARCH

The Fiction of Invulnerability. Silence and Otherness in Francoist Spain

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The normative understanding of the subject is based on a fiction of invulnerability, a fantasy of mastery that considers vulnerability as an accidental feature, often associated with passivity and the susceptibility to being harmed, and that is usually disavowed and projected onto other with whom one disidentifies and who are othered. In a similar fashion, as Judith Butler's work of grief has shown, the fiction of invulnerability also governs the action of individual states as national subjects. Nations and states as subjects engage in political processes that reproduce the hegemonic discourses based on performative practices of repetition and exclusion. In this article I discuss how the Spanish state has engaged in politics of forgetting and silencing, which created hegemonic frameworks that feeds the victor's narrative and the creation of an ungrievable other. The lives and deaths of thousands were kept silent during decades through *la desmemoria*, the performative process of forgetting that uses silence as a mechanism to foster willful ignorance and create unitary narratives. Against *la desmemoria*, a labor of remembrance is being done as a counter mechanism that helps recognizing each other's precariousness and interconnectedness.

Keywords: vulnerability; invulnerability; silence; otherness; Franco; Spain

Introduction

The standard understanding of the subject is based on a fiction of invulnerability, a fantasy of mastery that considers vulnerability as an accidental feature, often associated with passivity and the susceptibility to being harmed, and that is usually disavowed and projected onto other with whom one disidentifies and who are othered.

The fable of invulnerability fosters ignorance about ourselves as others, because it is based on willful ignorance of vulnerability that is, as a matter of fact, a constitutive feature of the subject. Vulnerability is both constitutive, ontological, and politically distributed: it is a fact that there are populations that endure a more precarious situation than others; nonetheless, we are all precarious subjects: interdependent and responsive to others. The fantasy of invulnerability is created and sustained by a performative denial of vulnerability that turns ignoring our constitutive vulnerability into the standard mode of existence.

Ignoring vulnerability reinforces certain aspects of our identities that feed the fantasy of mastery while it disavows vulnerability and projects it onto others whose lives are then precarized. This leads to asking questions about people's grievability: whose lives are considered grievable? (Butler 2003; Butler 2009). Grievability conforms a normative hegemonic and uniforming framework that dictates whose lives are worthy of being lived and whose lives can be forgotten, as Judith Butler reminds while linking the framework of grievability to issues of national identity (Butler & Spivak 2007; Butler 2009; Cavarero & Tordi 2011). As Judith Butler's work of grief and mourning has shown, the fiction of invulnerability also governs the action of individual states as national subjects. In this article I discuss how the Spanish state has engaged in politics of forgetting and silencing, which created hegemonic frameworks that feeds the victor's narrative and the creation of an ungrievable other. One of the mechanisms that shape the frameworks of grievability is silence. Whose deaths are being kept silent? Silence in the contemporary Spanish state can be considered as a way of creating normative, hegemonic framework through a politics of forgetting that has had a powerful impact on the lives and deaths of thousands of people.

In the following pages I consider the fiction of invulnerability, connecting it to how one particular state, Spain, as a national subject, has engaged with the wound of its history of Civil War, Francoist Dictatorship, and the transition to democracy. In the first part of the article, I will analyze the fiction of invulnerability as it is accounted for by several theorists in present discussions. In the second part of the article, I will discuss the politics of silence as a particular way in which this fiction comes to be played out in the hegemonic practices of contemporary Spanish state. By bringing these two discussions together I wish to point out that the fiction of invulnerability is a real force in political life, which shapes the life of generations of people.

The Fiction of Invulnerability

The hegemonic understanding of the subject is based on a 'fiction of invulnerability' (Ferrarese 2016, 152), a 'fantasy of mastery' (Butler 2004, 29) that considers vulnerability as an accidental feature. Vulnerability is often associated with passivity, weakness, lack of mastery and agency. In its more common use, this concept refers to different ways in which individuals or groups are susceptible to suffer various damages, violence, or injustices. According to this perspective, to be vulnerable is thus to be exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally (Schroeder & Gefenas 2009, 114). There is a common understanding of vulnerability as 'the state of susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from the absence of capacity to adapt' (Adger 2006, 268). This conception is only negative: it considers vulnerability as the appearance of cracks on an otherwise strong armor that protects most of us. This conception is also patronizing: the vulnerable ones are others, that is, those who are weaker or live under limiting life conditions. Nonetheless, as we will see, there is been an effort to define vulnerability outside of this framework and along more positive lines: as a universally shared feature of humanity that is more defined by interdependency, in all its complexity, than by weakness or lack of agency.

The negative conception of vulnerability is embedded in the fiction of the invulnerability of the subject: most of us are invulnerable, while there are some that are living under certain circumstances that make them vulnerable. This fable creates a narrow understanding not only of vulnerability but also of the political subject as invincible and all-powerful – in this sense, it fosters ignorance about ourselves and others. Furthermore, as we will see, it operates within a binary framework that both presupposes and reinforces an asymmetric relationship with the other.

Invulnerability can be understood, following Erinn Gilson (2011), as willful ignorance of vulnerability, as a closure to being affected by others. Underneath this fiction of invulnerability lay, as Seyla Benhabib (1992, 4) puts it: 'the illusion of a self-transparent and self-grounding reason, the illusion of a disembedded and disembodied subject, and the illusion of having found an Archimedean standpoint, situated beyond historical and cultural contingency'. According to the fable of the invulnerable subject, as the possessor of one's own person and attributes, one owes nothing to others or to one's relations with them. This fable is related to a consideration of the subject that is invulnerable to its surroundings, impermeable and self-contained, never dependent on others.

Within this fable, the abstract individual is mainly conceived as solitary and independent. This individualistic bias underestimates our dependence on relations of care and denies our relations to others (Keller 1997, 154). The assumption of solitariness, independence, and invulnerability also leads to ignoring the importance of basic human affective life, which affects social relations, and the design of social institutions and considerations of equality of individuals (Crosthwaite 1987).

The claim that underlies our political imaginary is that of an invulnerable subject. The political subject is alienated from its own vulnerability, that is thus considered as an accident (Ferrarese 2016), something that affects certain subjects and populations that, following a logic of identity (Young 1986) are considered as otherness. The conception underlying the political imaginary of contemporary societies, in which the subject's vulnerability is seen as an unfortunate accident, plays the part of a necessary fiction that renders viable a certain social and political order, bolsters exclusions based on the creation of otherness, and perpetuates the confinement of care – and mourning, as Butler (2003) highlights – to the private sphere.

One of the effects of the presumed understanding of vulnerability as susceptibility to harm is that vulnerability is often disavowed and projected onto others with whom one disidentifies. The subject is thus alienated from its own vulnerability, as it understands that the susceptibility of being harmed is suffered by others, by the subalterns. As Gilson states (2011, 312): 'The projection of vulnerability onto others and disidentification with those vulnerable others goes hand in hand with the idea of vulnerability as a negative state.' Conceiving vulnerability as solely negative, then, is part of maintaining ignorance of vulnerability in its more fundamental sense.

As stated before, invulnerability can be understood as willful ignorance of vulnerability. Gilson follows Tuana's conception of willful ignorance as an actively sought, cultivated ignorance that is part of a systematic process of truth formation. We are willfully ignorant of vulnerability. What does this mean? Let us introduce here some feminist contemporary considerations on the concept of vulnerability to fully understand what is it that is being ignored in the formation of the subject.

Vulnerability

There are philosophical perspectives that highlight vulnerability as a fundamental and constitutive feature of the subject that oppose those conceptions of vulnerability as a negative state that only others possess and the consideration of a subject that is invulnerable and a master of oneself. According to this perspective, the achievement of full mastery, understood as complete control over oneself, is an impossibility. On the contrary, vulnerability is at the core of the organization of our own subjective structure and, thus, vulnerability is constitutive.

Going beyond the traditional, negative consideration of vulnerability, Butler (2006) proposes to differentiate between ontological vulnerability – precariousness – and socially and

culturally produced vulnerability – precarity. Precariousness is an ontological shared state of humanity, a condition of susceptibility to being affected by others. This consideration is a consequence of her stance on the relationality of subjects: we are all interdependent, thus, we are affected by others, and we affect others; thus, affectability is a crucial part of vulnerability. We are vulnerable to others, we are open to others.

Of course, there is also a more contextual and negative lived experience of vulnerability that cannot be denied and that is linked to a differential exposure to others. Vulnerability is politically distributed. Butler refers to it with the term *precarity.* As she defines it (Butler 2009, 28), precarity is the 'politically induced condition that would deny equal exposure through the radically unequal distribution of wealth and the differential ways of exposing certain populations [...] to greater violence.' With this distinction between a constitutive feature of our human condition and a differential distribution of this general condition, Butler shows that vulnerability is systematically enhanced and geopolitically distributed by differing socioeconomic conditions that should be addressed in order to understand the precarisation of certain (gendered, sexualized, racialised) populations.

Butler (2009) points out how helpless we are without one another when we are born: we need the others to thrive as human beings at the most basic and raw level of our existence. In Butler's words (2009, 14): 'It is not that we are born and then later become precarious, but rather that precariousness is coextensive with birth itself (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands.'

Gilson also considers this dual dimension of vulnerability, and she distinguishes between ontological and situational vulnerability. For her 'ontological vulnerability is an unavoidable receptivity, openness, and the ability to affect and be affected. Situated vulnerabilities are the specific forms that vulnerability takes in the social world of which we have a differential experience because we are differently situated' (Gilson 2014, 37).

Fineman has furthermore proposed to consider vulnerability and the vulnerable subject as a starting point for moral and political philosophy. Vulnerability is for her 'a characteristic that positions us in relation to each other as human beings and also suggests a relationship of responsibility between state and the individual' (Fineman 2010, 1). She distinguishes between the two aforementioned levels of vulnerability, that she conceptualizes as inevitable dependency and derivative dependency. Inevitable dependency is universally experienced, detached from groups, and constant, as it arises from embodiment; nonetheless, it has been often ignored as 'a stage that the liberal subject has long ago transcended or left behind' (Fineman 2010, 25). Derivative dependency, on the other hand, is socially imposed through institutions, roles, and relationships that are usually defined along gendered lines. For her, derivative dependency has been dismissed by a liberal tradition that focuses in individual choice and personal responsibility.

Boublil (2018, 183) defines vulnerability as follows: 'A multifaceted concept depicting our relational and embodied nature (ontological vulnerability) and our necessarily situated and unpredictable existence (situational vulnerabilities).' For her, vulnerability describes the very structure of subjectivity, its 'trascendental condition, pointing to an openness and plasticity that makes possible transformation' (Gilson 2014, 10). Vulnerability is always relational – it always presupposes openness and exposure to the world and to others. This relationality, this openness, structures the subject's experience of the world. That being so, vulnerability is not only a susceptibility to being affected; it is also a capacity to be sensitive to the world and to others. Vulnerability is a mutual experience: one is always vulnerable to others, vulnerable before somebody else.

According to these authors, we can argue that we are all interdependent, thus, we are affected by others, and we affect others. The human body is understood as radically relational and interdependent. This interdependence conforms the grounds to affirm vulnerability: both the capacity to affect and be affected. As Butler states: 'The body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition' (Butler 2009, 33). Vulnerability is understood as exposability. This vulnerability is not thus reducible to injurability; rather, it is a response to exteriority, an affectability that precisely animates responsiveness to the world. Our own survivability depends on our relationality. In this sense, it is crucial to develop a conception of ourselves that focuses on recognising how we are bound up with others.

We are thus open to being affected through this interdependence and responsiveness to others. We are vulnerable to being changed through our interactions with others, to undergo a process of re-making through our engagements with others. Vulnerability is an ontological openness: it unfolds the resources of the lived body and the creative potential of its finitude. The recognition of our own radical precariousness and interdependency calls for individual and collective responsibility because of the correlation between interpersonal relations and the flourishing of the embodied self. The development of the self and of intersubjective relations are concurrent: inter-affective relations are coextensive with the subject's individuation because one is always already affected at a pre-reflective level, by the world and by others.

Embracing vulnerability, in this sense, is enabling, as it brings us closer together. The fantasy of invulnerability is paralysing and isolating; working with vulnerability animates a struggle to make life more bearable. Realising how the life of others, our own life, is not sustainable, not bearable, in solitude is already an act of transformation – it transforms our affective economy. In this sense, vulnerability can be understood as 'a structure of our relational nature that needs to be taken care of in order to create the best possible intersubjective setting in which it can flourish and overcome itself while striving toward creativity, political harmony and genuine compassion up against the violence of our finite condition' (Boublil 2018, 190).

Butler considers (Burgos & Prado Ballarín 2008, 410) that the greatest political danger is that of the autonomous and monolithic subject who tries to establish absolute limits and impermeabilities, because that is the subject who refuses to recognize its fundamentally social character and interdependence. She asserts that no solid ethics or politics can be built on that basis. By contrast, she proposes to understand that we are not only vulnerable to one another but also to institutions and economic, social, and cultural relations (Butler 2016). For Butler, the starting point for morality is not the self-transparent, invulnerable self; rather, it is a subject that is always constitutively entangled with others. The acceptance of vulnerability as constitutive fosters modesty, generosity, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness (Butler 2003, 54–56), virtues that work against ethical violence that results from complete self-coherence and fictions of invulnerability that do not consider our constitutive relationships with others.

Performative invulnerability, logic of identity, and otherness

The fantasy of invulnerability reinforces this differential allocation of precariousness and the creation of lives that do not matter. Vulnerability is disavowed and projected onto others with whom one disidentifies and who become radical otherness, abjection. Invulnerability is a desired trait for our subjectivity:

> The denial of vulnerability can be understood to be motivated by the desire—conscious or not—to maintain a certain kind of subjectivity privileged in capitalist socioeconomic systems, namely, that of the prototypical, arrogantly self-sufficient, independent, invulnerable master subject. Invulnerability is a central feature of masterful

subjectivity because it solidifies a sense of control, indeed, an illusion of control (Gilson 2011, 312).

By refusing to acknowledge the condition of being susceptible to others' actions and of being both involved in and responsible for social and material relations of dependency, its vulnerability is disavowed and displaced upon others: it lays elsewhere and it is affecting precarious groups that, in this view, are in need of protection because lacking the possibility of agency. Invulnerability is learned discourses, practices, and habits that foster invulnerability and the consideration of others as the vulnerable subjects. Nonetheless, invulnerability is a fantasy, an impossibility, and illusory ideal: vulnerability is persistent and inevitable. If vulnerability is openness to affecting others and being affected upon, then invulnerability is a closure to, a protection against, certain modes of being affected (in particular, those ways of being affected that would compel us to recognize our own vulnerability). Without the persistence of vulnerability such closure is unnecessary; but because vulnerability is an unavoidable feature of our existence, invulnerability must be continually sought and, as it is never really achieved, masterful identity must be continually emphasized.

For Gilson, precisely because of the pervasiveness of vulnerability, invulnerability has to be sought: mechanisms are put in place to solidify the practices that foster invulnerability. Invulnerability can be then understood as part of the performative process of subject formation. Just as gender performativity is based on the repetition of certain norms and the exclusion of other possibilities (Butler, 1990), invulnerability is actively sought by the repetition of certain codes, fostering reductionism, uniformity, and a narrow understanding of the subject. This way, hegemonic and unitary narratives are created to willfully reinforce ignorance. At the same time, it is based on the exclusion of any kind of vulnerability or feature that suggests weakness or lack of mastery. Invulnerability, accordingly, is a stance that enables us to ignore those aspects of existence that are inconvenient, disadvantageous, or uncomfortable for us, such as vulnerability's persistence. As invulnerable, we cannot be affected by what might unsettle us. It can be even comforting to not be confronted and affected by others and, thus, seeking invulnerability is linked to maintaining the status quo. In this sense, 'invulnerability is made an unacknowledged norm, the standard mode of existence' (Gilson 2011, 320).

Gilson (2011, 314) emphasizes the social utility and the performative dimension of the fiction of invulnerability:

> We learn the habits of invulnerability in social contexts. I learn, for instance, that if I demonstrate that I am in control, self-possessed, then I get taken seriously. I might learn to exhibit this self-control in myriad ways depending on context, ranging from suppressing emotion to manifesting a generally assertive, aggressive demeanor to engaging in all my activities in a competitive manner.

Furthermore, the denial of vulnerability underlies other types of ignorance, such as the ignorance of one's complicity in racial oppression, in colonial violence, or in fascist repression, because to admit such complicity is to open oneself to features of one's social world and one's way of inhabiting that world that are discomforting and thus to make oneself vulnerable. To know, to escape willful ignorance about oppression, is to be vulnerable, to be susceptible to being altered by others, whereas to ignore is to seek invulnerability. The fiction of invulnerability, the ignorance of one's vulnerability, and the creation of otherness upon who to project one's alienated vulnerability foster hegemonic discourses.

The fiction of invulnerability lays on the same logic that Iris Marion Young criticized in her paper 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference.' She argues that Western

thought exhibits what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence and what Adorno calls a logic of identity. This metaphysics consists in a desire to think things together in a unity, to formulate a representation of a whole, a totality. This urge to unity seeks to think everything that is as a whole, or to describe some ontological region, such as social life or the subject, as a whole, a system. In this sense the contemporary subject has been constructed as a totalizing unity: a master of its own, self-sufficient, and self-contained.

The downside is that this logic of identity is accompanied by a hierarchical and binary movement: 'The desire to bring things into unity generates a logic of hierarchical opposition. Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure' (Young 1995, 235). This logic of identity shapes the narratives on what is considered as a subject and what is considered as otherness, shaping the basis of a systematized model of recognisability. With this hierarchical move, the logic of identity represses heterogeneity. Politically, this also translates into a need to reinforce unity by repressing anything that goes against this self-contained illusion that tries to deny vulnerability and, at the same time, distributes it hierarchically.

The differential allocation of precariousness invites us to ask certain questions: whose lives are considered valuable? Whose lives are considered grievable? For Butler (2009), precarity divides population into those who are grievable and those who are not. What is an ungrievable life? One that cannot be mourned or grieved because has never even counted as a life in the first place. Ungrievable lives are lives that do not matter, that are easily discarded, whose suffering does not count, whose lives are not worth being protected; deaths without name, deaths treated like numbers, bodies that do not matter and are abandoned (dead or alive), testimonies that are silenced, realities that are erased from memory.

Grievability is being able to say that a life is worth being lived; that if (when) that life is lost, it will be mourned (Butler 2003). There is no life without grievability, states Butler (2009), and thus, the question of the differential distribution of public grieving becomes an important political issue that affects our consideration on the worthiness of lives. The differential allocation of worthiness has a performative effect on the formation of our identity. For Butler, we consider ourselves bound up with others with whom we find national or political affinity, people who are recognizable to us or who conform to certain cultural and political notions of what a human is. Grievability, the recognition of the precariousness of other lives, is an interpretative framework that differentiates between those who are my people and will sustain my life, and those who pose a direct threat to my existence.

Butler connects grievability to nations and to their relationship with other nations (Butler & Spivak 2007, Butler 2009). Entire nations project vulnerability onto another, where disavowal and asymmetry go together (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016). Political conflicts seek to deny constitutive vulnerability, to ignore the ways in which we are subject to one another. Our shared precariousness and interdependence are actively ignored, and a sense of invulnerability is constructed. There is an active denial of the fact that the subject that I am is also the subject that I am not, that I am also the other, and that if I destroy the other I am destroying myself as well. Applying this to nations, Butler explains why nations err when attacking each other and when stating that their survival depends on war on others. Their survival, instead, depends on taking care of their constitutive vulnerability and on establishing relations of care that would strengthen the mutual dependency that conform what they are.

Nations can be considered – as Butler often does – as subjects that also act in the conditions of vulnerability and that often maintain the willful ignorance of vulnerability and the fiction of invulnerability. In this sense, Butler analyzes the actions of nations as those of subjects. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Butler (2009) considers the attitude of the United States as coming from a wounded supposed invulnerability (Cavarero & Tordi 2011)

that was part of national identity. The fiction of invulnerability of the USA was exposed by a terrible attack that proved that they were, indeed, vulnerable to their interactions, often violent, with others. Butler pays attention to the performance of national acts (specially, to acts of mourning and grieving) that give meaning to national identity through the constitution of a narrative and normative frameworks. This way understood, national identity is performed. There are other authors that have also delved in this application of the notion of performativity to national identity, proposing that it is continually constituted through repetitive acts of belonging, identification (Calhoun 1997; Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008; Wodak et al. 2009) and exclusion (Handelman 2004). National identity is, for these authors, a result of repeated acts and lacks thus ontological origin. It cannot achieve stability and coherence: it is a never-ending, open-ended process that is open to failure. The fantasy of invulnerability participates also of this fantasy of stability and coherence: a fable about the mastery and sovereignty of a solid and steady subject/nation.

In *The Force of Non Violence*, Butler links the fantasies of individualism and sovereignty of the subject to the theories of social contract. Throughout the text we can observe how Butler uses parallel considerations of the (in)vulnerability of subjects and nations and applies to both the same political and ethical consequences. Butler considers (2020, 39) that the ideal of a self-sufficient, isolated, invulnerable man is the 'influential phantasmatic scene in political theory.' Here, Butler counteracts this phantasmatic scene with her views on our constitutive dependency and interdependency, that carry a global obligation to take care of each other and reject violence.

Silence: Othering and Forgetting

Nations and states as subjects engage in political processes which reproduce the hegemonic discourses based on performative practices of repetition and exclusion. I will here take up the Spanish state and its practice of othering through a politics of forgetting during the Civil War, the dictatorship, and the transition to democracy that, I argue, reinforces the fantasy of invulnerability, stability, and coherence of national identity.

Silence can be considered one of the mechanisms that shape the fiction of invulnerability and the subsequent creation of heterogeneity. Silence is a mechanism of differential allocation of grievability and recognisability: which conflicts are being silenced? Whose realities are being ignored under a veil of silence? Whose deaths have been kept in the dark: buried in unmarked graveyards and denied memorials?

Silence is an armor. Silence hinders communication of affects, it creates a distance, a space of unspeakability. Silence atrophies any sense of community, empathy, or compassion. It makes feeling our interdependency more difficult and, in this sense, it feeds the fantasy of independence and self-mastery. Silence also makes the deaths of the dead unmournable, unspeakable, ungrievable; grief becomes unperformable.

Silence is also used as a mechanism to create hegemonic discourses that, as we have seen, follow a logic of identity and create a sense of unity that, through its performative repetition, enables a fantasy of mastery and invulnerability. Silencing others is a tool of mastery: a way of creating unique narratives that performatively create what can be said and what has to be kept silent.

In the Spanish state, a crushing silence about the Civil War and Franco Dictatorship is shaping a fantasy of invulnerability and mastery that hides an injury, a deep political wound. This silence keeps certain discourses and practices buried under hegemonic discourses that are stagnant. Silence keeps the Spanish state in a state of denial, in an illusion of mastery that feeds the fantasy that nothing had happened, that the status quo goes on undisturbed. Silence reinforced the normative framework and the creation of an enemy: the Reds, a term

with which the Francoist rebels against the legitimate democratic government of the Second Republic labeled socialists, anarchists, communists, and republicans.

During the Civil War and the dictatorship, opinions were violently silenced; during the so-called transition to democracy, a pact of silence was signed between the relevant political agents in order to avoid conversations about fascist crimes, and a full amnesty was granted. Silence has meant the impossibility of healing the wounds and the impossibility of reparations, especially given the juridical erasure of Franco-era crimes.

Silence has been installed in the Spanish State as a fundamental part of our subjectification process through an exercise of politics of forgetting. A politics of forgetting is 'a political-discursive process in which specific marginalised social groups are rendered invisible and forgotten within the dominant political culture' (Fernandes 2014, 2416). During the Civil War and the dictatorship, republicans and people who were considered as 'the Reds' were rendered invisible both physically and symbolically. Their otherness was radical.

As Butler states (2006), when a population appears as a direct threat to our own existence, they do not appear as lives at all. Their lives are derealized and do not count as lives. They are not recognizable as human but rather as a threat that has to be eliminated. When those lives are dead, mourning them is not only unnecessary (since they were not even fully alive in the first place) but also a threat to national identity. Mourning outside of the normative framework of grievability can then have a powerful political impact (Athanasiou 2016).

The Reds then were considered, during the Civil War and the Dictatorship, as a threat that had to be eliminated, not as people with lives worth being lived. Spanish national identity was formed by reducing the Reds to radical otherness, to an enemy that had to be eliminated. The political Spanish subject was unified, hegemonic, invulnerable, master of itself and of others, capable of staying in control and to eliminate any threat. On the other hand, the Reds were an abject other, not worthy of being alive. Physically, they were killed or exiled; symbolically, they were terrified into silencing themselves, or they were erased from existence by other people who also silenced them. Furthermore: they were erased from death; their deaths were forgotten in unmarked mass graveyards. As a matter of fact, Spain is the country in the world with the most mass graves after Cambodia.[1] The conflict is still literally latent under the surface.

Forgetting has been used in Spain as a collective act in the creation of a shared identity and a hegemonic narrative. The Spanish population that remained in Spain after the Civil War (those who were not killed or exiled) was forced to forget in order to construct the victors' narrative – to forget parts of history, part of their family history, parts of their own subjectivities. In this sense, Franco's 'manipulation of Spanish history aimed to confuse and obscure the facts about the Civil War' (Encarnación 2014, 42), and the victors' narrative was then taught to the Spanish population through indoctrination, extensive use of propaganda, and the silencing of certain facts and opinions (Richards 1998).

After Franco died in 1975 and during the so-called transition to democracy, there was a tacit Pact of Forgetting about the crimes of fascism in Spain. There was an unwritten agreement between the political elites, both from the left and from the right, to forget the past in order to create a new political order based on mutual tolerance and respect (Juliá 2006). This 'accepted collective amnesia' (Rigby 2000, 73) had consequently the elimination of public discussions about fascist crimes and it enabled the avoidance of dealing with the legacy of Francoism. It contributed to send a message of national unity. The price to pay was to keep the memory of those who suffered from political violence buried in silence, once again. This

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[1] 2,246, according to data from the Ministry of Justice in 2011. 1,203 of them were unopened. Since 2011, almost all efforts to open the graves or discover new ones have been stopped. See: https://mapadefosas.mjusticia.es/exovi_externo/CargarMapaFosas.htm.

was an active and performative act of willful ignorance that reinforced the oppression of the othered Reds as well as the hegemonic discourse of the fascist victors.

The pact of silence and forgetting was accompanied by a forgiving movement. The Amnesty Law of 1977 pardoned acts of political violence committed during the Civil War and the forty-year Francoist Dictatorship that followed (Boyd 2008, 135). In this sense, there was no prosecution of war criminals and fascist criminals, and there was a full amnesty that led to politically induced amnesia about fascism. In the context of the so-called transition to democracy, 'those who had been obliged to be silent for nearly 40 years were once again required to accept that there would not be public recognition of their past lives or memories' (Graham 2004, 30).

With this politics of forgetting and the full amnesty granted by the Transition Government, the idea that it was not possible to ask for justice for the victims of fascism took hold. There was an invitation to forget the past and any attempt to shed light on fascist violence has been perceived as a tinderbox movement to disturb the established peace. This all created a society that tolerates the existence of thousands of mass graveyards without having massive, collective outrage about it. This is a democratic anomaly that keeps the crimes of Francoism unpunished, thanks to the Amnesty Law, but which condemns to oblivion and to willful ignorance those who have been repressed.

Public and collective processing of trauma through grieving was prohibited, and all the painful memories of those who suffered under the fascist regime were expected to be kept, once again, in private. Thus, this pact of silence that prevented people from mourning perpetuated Franco's presence in the public sphere. Although memorials to victims of fascism can almost not be seen, Franco statues and other fascist imagery are still visible. The silencing process only silenced some people's stories and memories, the stories and memories of the abject others, and perpetuated the victors' narrative that stated that Franco saved Spain from the clutches of the Reds. The Reds, who became ungrievable, whose lives could not be protected and whose deaths could not be mourned.

Silence was imposed by the dictatorship in order to try to finally defeat the survivors of the Civil War and their descendants. For Baquero (2020), silence put the victims of fascism in purgatory and punished them for not belonging to the side of the victors. Silence was a mechanism of derealization that rendered the experiences of millions of people unreal.

Breaking the silence

In order to work against this derealization mechanism that made the lives of certain population unlivable and their deaths ungrievable, a labor of remembrance is needed nowadays in Spain; a labor of remembrance that works against what has been called *la desmemoria*, the disremembering: an active process of forgetting or, better said, of preventing people from remembering what happened (Davis 2005). *La desmemoria* is a performative process that uses silence and forgetting to foster willful ignorance and create a hegemonic, unitary narrative. *La desmemoria* is, for Barquero, the abandonment of the defeated by trying to bury all their names, and the creation of a false reality using strategic forgetting. A labor of remembrance is thus needed to unearth historical representations that confront the hegemonic discourses about the Second Republic, the Civil War, and Francoism. Baquero (2020) advocates the reconstruction of testimonies from *la desmemoria.* Breaking the pact of silence is fundamental in order to create and organize a struggle against forgetting, against the erasure of the past. The selective forgetting of the past reinforces hegemonic narratives on whose lives matter, on who is the enemy that needs to be eliminated. Remembering can be a counter mechanism that helps to recognize each other's precariousness and broaden our normative frameworks of grievability.

The Historical Memory Law (that dates from 2007) was a first step towards this direction. Unearthing testimonies and talking about personal and collective lived experiences of fascism work against their derealization: it defines their shape again, it makes them real again. It would be desirable to create spaces in which it would be possible to listen to words that have been kept inside of hearts for too long, and to ensure they can have a place in the public space again. Remembering *la desmemoria* and putting it into words can have the performative power to create new counter-hegemonic narratives about what happened.

A cultural milestone in the collective labor of recovering from the politics of forgetting is the documentary *The Silence of Others,* released in 2018. The title speaks volumes: it is a testimony of the silence that others had to keep for decades. The documentary reveals the struggle of victims of Francoism as they organize a groundbreaking international lawsuit and fight the pact of forgetting around the crimes they suffered. It shows the courage that has been necessary to keep memories alive, the relief that is felt when being able to voice the injustice, the frustration that is felt when having to voice the injustice once again, the pain of still being unheard after being buried in silence for so many decades.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that the standard understanding of the subject is based on a fiction of invulnerability. The fantasy of mastery of a subject that is self-sufficient, autonomous, and independent conforms a normative framework for the understanding of the subject. Vulnerability is, within this framework, something accidental, often associated with passivity and the susceptibility to being harmed. In this sense, it is undesirable, and invulnerability is, conversely, sought as one of the desired characteristics of the subject. Vulnerability is thus considered as something that nobody wants to have and is then disavowed and projected onto others with whom one disidentifies and who are othered. The vulnerable ones are always others that are poorer, more subject to violence and injustice than us. A logic of us versus them, a logic of identity and othering, is at the core of the fiction of invulnerability and mastery, and the disavowal of vulnerability.

The normative framework for the understanding of the subject has as a canon a self-sufficient, coherent, stable subject that is master of oneself. This normative framework produces the understanding of that counts as human (us) and what does not (the others): lives that matter and lives that do not. In this sense, Judith Butler's work on grievability is key to understanding how this disavowal of vulnerability works. To grieve others is to recognize the effect of their disappearance has on us. It is to recognize that the others are precarious, but so are we. The lives and deaths of others are interconnected with mine, and grieving is a recognition of that interconnectedness; the lack of grieving, on the other hand, is trying to deny it, to feed the disconnection that the fantasy of invulnerability allows. Grieving only certain lives and willfully ignoring our interconnectedness and shared vulnerability reinforces the normativity that frames which lives matter and fosters hegemonic, homogenous discourses.

Butler suggests that this fiction of invulnerability also governs the action of individual states, that are considered as national subjects: nations and states as subjects that engage in political processes which reproduce the normative discourses based on performative practices of repetition and exclusion.

Silence and the politics of forgetting of the Spanish state have contributed to reinforcing a national identity based on stability, coherence, and mastery and that feeds the fantasy of invulnerability. Silence can be considered as one of the mechanisms that reinforce the fantasy of invulnerability, the hegemonic discourses, and homogeneity. The lives and deaths of thousands were kept silent during decades through *la desmemoria*, the performative process of forgetting that uses silence and silencing as mechanisms to foster willful ignorance

and create unitary narratives. Against *la desmemoria*, a labor of remembrance is being done: active and activist performative acts that foster remembering as a counter mechanism that helps recognizing each other's precariousness and interconnectedness, as well as broadening our normative frameworks of grievability.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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