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Collective and Family Silence and Concealment of the Shoah and Argentinean dictatorship: Two Case reports

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Abstract

In the collective and individual healing of traumatic events, narratives contribute to recovering, processing, and integrating fragmented memories, and to improve awareness and regulation of the related emotions. This study aimed at analysing the attachment narratives of both a child of a Desaparecida and a child of a Birkenau survivor, exploring what is and is not said by parents about their traumatic experiences. Methods: The Adult Attachment interview was administered and analysed. Results. In both families, the traumatic experiences were not fully narrated during childhood, but two different emotional patterns have been found: one includes unexpressed emotions about traumatic experiences, protection, and acceptance of their and others' vulnerabilities, and the other is characterized by emotional dysregulation and lack of empathic communication. The first pattern corresponds to the full expression of feelings in the child's narrative, the other to the child's emotional distance and laughter to the pain.

Keywords: narratives, trauma processing, Shoah, Argentinean dictatorship, attachment experiences

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"Even if someone were to survive the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidences together with you.
And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed"
(Levi, 1986, prefazione)

Introduction

The Shoah and Argentine genocide are two different historical events, at thirty years of distance, with some parallels between them. Indeed, even if these events are unique, comparisons allow to examine similarities in the silence and concealment efforts (Feierstein, 2014). As Actis and colleagues claim: "A quilt of collective memory could be woven from these tiny bits of memory or sayings, fragmented, scattered, which the witnesses and the victims store away for themselves" (Actis et al., 2001, p. 31). What is not said (silence, lies and truth manipulation) is part of collective and individual trauma, and what is said (on revealing, explaining and helping to understand) contribute to its processing.

In the collective and individual healing of traumatic events, narrations and sharing of traumatic experiences foster awareness about these events. The regulation of the related emotions, as the memories retrieval, enhances the integration of the fragmented past (van der Kolk, 2015). Forty years ago, Bowlby (1979) highlighted the relevance of the narratives and the psychopathological consequences of the secrets and lies about trauma, in his famous article *On knowing what you are not supposed to know and feeling what you are not supposed to feel*.

This study aimed at exploring how the analysis of speech or its absence narrating traumatic events could represent a key of the interpretation of trauma experiences and their collective and individual processing. Indeed, the individual memories of traumatic experiences range from a temptation to keep silent about their experience, to an effort to reveal the truth.

Particularly, we intended to highlight that silence and manipulation of the truth that have characterized the history of the Jewish and Argentine genocides, analogously characterised the memories of two children of witnesses of the Shoah and Argentine genocide: a child of a *Desaparecida* and a child of Birkenau survivor.

The Power of Language and Silence in the two Genocides

Between 1933 and 1938, the policy of selection of the *pure race* was promoted by the Nazi party and resulted in a fierce persecution culminating in the genocide of the Jews (Hilberg, 1985). In Argentina, from 1976 to 1983, the authoritarian regime destroyed all forms of dissent and led to the disappearance of estimated 30,000 people (Arditti, 1999). The two political contexts were characterised by: (a) the search of information for strengthening power, (b) the silence about the crimes, (c) the absence of thought, and (d) the manipulation of the truth.

First, for the persecutors, the search for information included lists of names and information on persons to be eliminated obtained through torture and extortion (Arditti, 1999). If the names were not given, the torture became more and more ferocious to the point of death (Feierstein, 2014). Second, silence was part of the destiny of the victims: in both contexts, the victims were dragged away without any explanation. After the kidnappings, family members were denied any information about their loved ones and the destination of their corpses. Between the prisoner and the outside world there was a barrier to communication. Indeed, in Argentina, the term *desaparecido* in itself refers to the absolute disappearance of the subject and of any information concerning him/her. The victims lost stable references and disconnected themselves from their own feelings and perception (Feierstein, 2014). The absence of language contributed to the fragmentation of perception, sense of coherence in their life stories, and their relationships to the wider human community (Laub, 2002; Peleg et al., 2014). Third, the processes of elimination would be automated, and favoured the absence of thought about what was perpetrated: in the Shoah, shooting (which not all German soldiers were able to tolerate) was replaced with the more automatic method of the gas chambers; in Argentina, forms of group torture were used (Crenzel, 2019). Fourth, the concealment of the truth was part of the two genocides. Nazis used code names such as "East" for camps, and Skuderkeller (special cellars) for gas chambers. In Argentina, a clandestine system was built for hiding the disappearance operations. In order to hide the genocide, whole buildings were razed to the ground, documents burned; military forces even destroyed birth certificates from the civil registrar's office, and corpses were eliminated (Arditti, 1999).

The processes of denial and the Pursuit of the Truth

Both perpetrators made strong efforts towards the denial of the genocides in order to create a "bond of silence" as a deep psychological alteration to ensure a permanent silence (Peleg et al., 2014). Victims and witnesses shared the idea that these events were so horrible that they became untellable, silencing any attempt to understand and process events (Feierstein, 2014). On the other hand, people needed to deny the traumatic events to postpone the trauma responses (Robben, 2005).

Indeed, the denial of the past was achieved effectively in Argentina (Feierstein, 2014). The reconstruction of the facts was hampered by public opinion, which reflected an unwillingness to acknowledge the events. With the pardon of the 1990 promulgated by President Menem, executors of the dictatorship, policemen, soldiers and jailers were granted unconditional pardons and continued to occupy their positions of power.

The collective and individual demand for the truth braves the coldness of silence and forgetfulness and implies the search for the meaning of past suffering (Robben, 2005). From 1945 to 1946, *Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal* looked for undeniable proofs of the Nazi crimes and prosecuted Nazi leaders, accusing them of "crimes against humanity". In Argentina, responsibility for keeping the memory alive

is entrusted to the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Grandparents of Plaza de Mayo) and the H.I.J.O.S. (meaning "Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice and Against Forgetting and Silence") who organized the *escraches,* public outing of former perpetrators of state terror, served as public shaming of the oppressors, who lived undisturbed in the community (Bravo, 2012). Furthermore, the CONADEP (1984), assumed the task of shedding light on all available documents, information and testimonies and published the "Argentine National Truth Commission's report", a detailed report evidencing the cruelties of the repressive system.

The case report

We explored if silence and concealment characterised also the narratives of traumatic events of two genocides victims according to their children, taking into account the relationship between trauma processing, emotion regulation and quality of the narratives. The case report methodology allows participants to describe their views of reality, and the interviewers to deeply investigate these events in their complexity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The interviewees have been voluntarily recruited by the Jewish community and via the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.* The University Roma Tre Ethics Committee approval was granted and participants' information has been de-identified.

Procedure

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI, Main & Goldwyn, 1998) was administered. This instrument explores autobiographical narrative and current perspective on attachment. Its psychometric properties have been confirmed (Hesse, 2016). Two global dimensional scales evaluate the coherence of the transcript and the coherence of the speaker's mind. An extensive scoring system allows to categorize dismissing (Ds), preoccupied (E), autonomous/secure (F), or unresolved (U) state of mind regarding attachment. Interviews have been transcribed and coded by the fist author who has been certified by Mary Main and Erik Hesse. Attachment and traumatic experiences, Parents' narrative, and States of Mind regarding Childhood attachment have been analysed.

Carlos child of a Desaparecida

When Carlos was nine months old, his mother, who was pregnant at the time, was kidnapped and disappeared. The father escaped with Carlos and his sister to Nicaragua where, with his mates, he was located and incarcerated; then, when Carlos was nine years old, they went to Spain, together with his father's new Spanish partner.

Carlos says: "We had been in many places-- until I was eight years old. I've never been in the same school, in the same town: I've been all the time going around, changing houses, changing towns, changing locations--we were nomads! (laughs)".

To protect himself from experiencing further abandonment, Carlos did not invest in new friendships: *"…*I did not desire to take part in common activities because I knew that there was not a big future in these relationships*".* After turning seventeen and following his father's divorce, Carlos returned to Argentina indefinitely, to be near his father and maternal grandmother, who had been searching all that time for her disappeared grandchild. Carlos became a member of H.I.J.O.S. and participated in the actions of *escraches*:

"[...] I felt that I was cooperating with the reconstruction of a collective history--not only my own or of my mates', but socially. We have come to bring something, [...] Our parents' persecutors cannot stay on the street; if no one sees to it, somebody must see to it! [...] For the first time, it allowed me to think of myself as a protagonist, and at the same time, to decide on my story, and not only to be a victim."

Following his grandmother last will, Carlos threw her remains into *Rio de la Plata*, because it was hypothesized that her daughter had been thrown into the river, thus, his grandmother had said: "I hope to meet my daughter again!".

Attachment Experiences

Carlos' father is described as cultured, important, distant, dedicated, and respectable:

"I saw him on the news on television--a photo--that spoke of him as one of the perpetrators of an action that had taken place in Nicaragua, and the fact of seeing him on television and hearing his name made me understand that he was a person who transcended everyday life. [...] He always had more important things to do. [...] He was an important person in the party, a leader for the other comrades".

Carlos describes him as distant, but at the same time he says, "I always felt the freedom to be able to say what I wanted. [...] I always loved him a lot--I always respected him very much". He describes his father's limitations while justifying them:

"[He was] a very selfish person, let's say emotionally, who thought much more of himself than others […]. In his education, there was a little bit of this lack of relationship... no, no, no, I think he was much more emotionally self-sufficient and independent […]. No, no, no, I think my father did everything he could--I don't have a negative judgment. I don't expect him to compliment me if I do something well, no? But yes, I know that if I need something and I ask him, he would do it. There is a debate, there is a rapport, and I know that everything is fine".

The stepmother was affectionate, a person "who I could count on, who I could talk to more, who knew me". She had a strong character. Carlos claims to have had an "addictive" relationship with her. He reports episodes of concrete care. Similar to his description of his father, Carlos describes his stepmother's limitations while justifying them with circumstances. When the divorce came, she left home and Carlos couldn't follow her. She was always justifying herself to him for leaving. He says, "She didn't fight for me".

"With my [step-]mother it's all more complicated also because we are now two grown-up people, with the awareness that she's not my mother and we won't come back to live together, and a set of things--and one tries to keep the beautiful memory and all that there was, and then I owe a lot to her

because, for goodness sake, if I turned out well (laughs), let's say I owe it to her. But honestly the relationship I have with her is much more conflicting. In my opinion, because with her I went through a new abandonment".

Traumatic Experiences

Carlos lived in a climate of violence and trauma outside the family, which in various circumstances invaded family life and especially interposed in the relationships and made them frightening. Anything hidden from his parents could be dangerous for the whole family.

"...The situation was very chaotic, there was a lot of violence around us. Usually, the violence didn't come into the house, even if—oh, well it's all relative, isn't it? Because (laughs) even if we all took beatings a bit--both my brother and me--in specific cases for situations of having ... for behaving badly, but in the context which it could be dangerous, but we did not know it…".

"In Nicaragua they kidnapped the children. I… white and light-eyed, for the context of my peers I was, let's say, prey, no? And so, my (step) mother always said to me: 'Never go with anyone, don't talk to anyone, don't take this...!'. Once I accepted from an old lady--I had threaded a needle that she couldn't see well--I accepted some candy. Then I felt guilty, because my parents told me this all the time, and I tried to hide this information, and my father understood that I was hiding something. He was afraid that it was something serious, that could compromise him, or their activities, and I didn't want to tell him, and he practically beat me up. [...] I was in the shower and I was talking to my sister and I was saying: 'Please don't say anything, don't say anything!' and he heard me and said: 'What don't you have to say?' 'I can't say it or you'll beat me up!'. I remember he slapped me and I fell in the shower. Then I started crying and he said: 'Say it! Say it! 'No! no!' and he gave me another slap. 'Are you gonna tell me or not?' Then finally I told him. Then: 'Whatever, you're an idiot!'. It is not a problem, but I remember he hit me in the shower and I was crying and he was worried about what I wasn't telling him'.

There is an oscillation in the attribution of violent behaviours to his parents: at times throughout the interview, he denies the presence of violent behaviour, while at others he describes it explicitly:

"My [step-] mother who thrashed my brother, my father thrashed me, let's say the violence in my family (laughs) ... in the general equilibrium, my [step-] mother was more ready with her hands than my father, but my father was the one who got pissed off once in a while, and he said: "Well, I'm running away!" because whenever there was a blizzard, the thunderstorm came [...]".

Regarding the losses, Carlos reports a perception of altered consciousness when he was ten and his great-grandmother died, and again later on when his grandmother died:

"[...] The next day (laughs) she died; I felt a strange thing. I remember it was as if I was on a seesaw and I felt this feeling of being twenty centimetres above the floor that, for me, I don't know why, I make the comparison to the feeling of death--to this feeling that I'm walking on … above the floor, no? [...] This, I feel that I do not really have my feet on the ground--I feel that I'm floating a little, it's a… I don't even know myself… feeling that you're walking (laughs)".

"[...] With my grandmother, though, it happened to me before she died; rather, it happened in those months when I was very down, it's a feeling like that: a bit of disorientation, but like feeling that one is--I don't say 'dissociated from the body'-- but in that sense, that somehow you don't have all your equal perceptions. I don't know, you perceive it differently (laughs)".

Parents' narrative.

Regarding his biological mother and her pregnancy during captivity, Carlos' narrative is not always consistent. Carlos claims that he always knew that his biological mother was a missing person, without even knowing what it meant. But at the same time, Carlos explains that his father revealed the existence of his biological mother only when his step-mother became pregnant.

"It was my father, with his lack of delicacy, who told me--and I was processing that situation for a couple of days--until, when she [his step-mother] was pregnant, with her belly and everything, I said: "Ah, but then I came from here too?" "No!", he said: "You're from someone else!" and I felt hurt by that, but I didn't say anything".

Furthermore, he knew to have lost a brother only as an adult by his grandmother. A possible reason for his father's avoidance of the subject could be related to his grief about the unborn child.

"My father and my [step-] mother, all of them, have always been--even if I couldn't understand--they always told me the truth: We were part of a movement that opposed the government and they were killed because the military government is made of violent people. I didn't know what that meant, but, well, he explained it to me, he didn't tell me that she died in a car accident […] or I've always known it, I've always lived it with naturalness. […] Strange but explicit, and the situation my family was a part of (laughs)… normal in Argentina means not having parents!".

He didn't know much else about his biological mother:

"[…] they told me that she was always a very protective girl with my brother, very brilliant, but normal, without being neither a genius or a thing […] But, a very quiet image! Unfortunately, most of the information I have, is about her kidnapping, torture--the hard part, where she wasn't even herself anymore! That is, a very dark part of her! The suffering… no? Several things tormented my grandmother, she always told me: "I don't know what she ate?", who knows if they fed her! (laughs).

States of Mind regarding Childhood Attachment

Carlos appears collaborative, he claims: "When I started talking to you, it's a responsibility; it's not for me, it's the ability to make of my experience something that can be useful". Carlos' description is characterised by a sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of his parents, and a balance between their virtues and vices. He

is ready to speak, giving the impression that he had considered this topic for a long time prior to the interview.

It could be inferred, however, that an attempt is being made to convey a positive impression of his father, minimizing the difficulties in the relationship and the repercussions on himself. The speaker shows some restrictions in attention, deflecting the emotions related to his harsh and sometimes traumatic experiences. Oftentimes he describes his difficult experiences as normal. Carlos tries to stay a little outside of the emotions through humour; when speaking of particularly painful events, he laughs or tells jokes. He also affirms that he is not able to cry. During the discussion of loss or other potentially traumatic events, he reports alterations in consciousness which represent interference from normally dissociated memory (Hesse & Main, 2006). Carlos' father, being frightened himself, became frightening, thus transmitting his fear to his son, whether or not Carlos understood the source of the fear. This parent attitude can cause dissociative disorders in their offspring (Hesse & Main, 2006).

Anselmo, Child of a Birkenau Survivor

Anselmo's father survived Birkenau. During internment, his father, who had also been a partisan, had often made gestures of solidarity, such as sharing the little food he had with other prisoners. After 20 years of silence, his father wrote a very resonating book about his traumatic experience. In 2000, Anselmo and his father went to Birkenau together, where his father describes the events with great nuance and balance: "The fact that he was saying 'Nazis' and not 'Germans', for me, there is … a remarkable relevance!".

Anselmo's mother sought refuge in France during the war. He explains: "[...] [the Nazis] stole everything my grandfather had and exiled them". Anselmo's parents met following the Second World War. Not having relatives, the four brothers spent their childhood at home and in the shared garden, with many other children of the neighbourhood. Anselmo never had problems making friends.

Attachment experiences.

Anselmo describes his father as present but reserved, saying: "His being introverted was a way of life, the way he was--obviously dictated by his conditions--it's logical." He spoke very little, but "these words he pronounced had a weight." Sometimes, he was unavailable because of his migraines.
Anselmo recalls joyful moments together, even if parental authority was recognized at home:

"Every Sunday we would go out. [...] I have memories of XXX's pine forest, and then we would go to the beach and my mother would pack a lunch, we would have a picnic [...]. I remember that my father taught us a game with a strange name--*cilic-ciloc* it was called—yes, because it is a Turkish name. [...] These wonderful memories of every Sunday... in summary, we were together..." [...]

"At that time, dad or mom would say: 'do this' and you would do it, there wasn't much room to talk back because that's the way it worked... however, at my house there were no slaps, there were no threats bandied about, no cursing, absolutely it was due to parental authority." "There is one thing that sticks to mind... not towards me, but toward my brother--I don't know, he did something stupid, who knows what it was--we were at dinner, I remember perfectly. My father looked at him, one look and my brother said: 'No dad, I will never do it again, never again'. (laughs) I repeat no one ever laid a hand on us, a punishment, nothing. You have to tell me: 'How is it possible? He only looked at him!'"

Describing his mother as the "glue that holds the family together," Anselmo uses positive adjectives: loving, protective, present, a woman capable of taking care of every family member in the best possible way.

"I will show you pictures of when we were little with bowties, with short pants. [...] My mother prepared the clothes for my older brother who was going to university, [...] I, with my disposition, when I was already 9, 10 years old, I would say, 'No mom, I can do it myself" (laughs). [...] My mother would prepare his clothes every night for the next day, all neat and tidy!".

Regarding the term 'protective', Anselmo doesn't offer any evidence to support that word, but he explains: "She was always present so I never worried: 'Oh God! What's happening? What should I do now?' I always felt as if my shoulders were covered".

More than remembering episodes of physical affection, he cites examples of when his mother defended him from the harmful behaviour of others, or helped him when he was going through a negative experience.

"There was this doorman of the other, the other building--a person with low cultural level underdeveloped really. He was from a small village, and he was always mean to all children in general, because we liked to play soccer--and he really didn't like that, kicking the ball at the window shutters--but particularly with us, with our family. One time, I don't remember what happened, always with this ball, and he said something about Jews... there was something to do with Jews and I didn't even know what he was saying. [...] When we told my mother [...] she went up to him, to that doorman, and she said, 'Look, if you say--if you do it again, I'm going to the police' etcetera, and she protected us. From that point of view, we felt very protected."

Parents' Narratives.

The father suffered from tuberculosis sequelae, which he contracted at Birkenau:

"[...] You say that it is not possible, but my mother woke up in the night to listen to how my father was breathing. My father had some breathing problems, and therefore it had always been a disabling thing because, when one does not breathe well … and my mother woke up in the night to listen…"

"My father suffered migraines very often, therefore, maybe: 'Shhhhh! Let's speak softly' or 'Don't make noise', or poor guy woke up in the night because he was dreaming that…. about Nazis".

"The few times I spoke, I tell it because, at that time [...] It was rare to see men with a tattoo, the men didn't get tattoos. The men who got tattoos were only and exclusively the jailbirds, the felons--and my father had a tattoo. He had the

number, and me, one time, I asked him: 'Dad, what is?' He told me: 'My telephone number' (laughs)".

The father is silent about his traumatic experiences and lies about the motivations of the tattoo; only painful echoes remain - the shortness of breath, the nightmares, the migraines, and the tattoo: "Only these were the things that were told, it was only this message that transpired for us kids". Even the mother is silent about her traumatic experiences: "She-- paradoxically--about the events of my mother's family, absolutely, she really does not talk--she does not talk about--about her mother".

If his father's drama is not mentioned at home, neither is it mentioned publicly: he once attempted to explain it to a friend, who made a gesture like he was crazy. Anselmo first heard the word "camp" when was seven years old, then "concentration camp" and "Nazi". His father gave details of Birkenau only in response to stimulus, such as a movie. Anselmo ascribes the silence to the wish to protect the children: "It was all very muffled, all very protected". "[...] The family really as protection--as, as if it would be a seed protected by a shell". When Anselmo is adult, his father goes with him to Birkenau.

States of Mind regarding Childhood attachment.

The interviewee is open, and ready to trust the interviewers. He is deeply moved and often unable to hold back tears. He says: "It's like Pandora's box". He describes his childhood as happy, with an emphasis on its normality: "I received a very normal childhood, there was a serene happy childhood. I've never had the burden of what it could be, which events both my father and mother lived [...] From these two dramas, from these two tragedies, luckily, not… this atmosphere was never breathed at home".

Anselmo ascribes a deep value to the relationship with his parents and shows affection, compassion and humour when describing it – somewhat idealizing their loving and protecting attitude, grounded on their moral stature. There is no hint of anger or attachment derogation. His father's loss is described with difficulty but coherency. In remembering it, an intense sorrow is present and renewed: "I remember that when I had the news that he had been admitted to the hospital, it was as a li… thunder."

Analysis and Comparison

As observed by Bowers and Yehuda (2016), in both cases, parents and offspring shared constant, long-term environmental stressors; for Carlos, violence and persecution, and for Anselmo, scepticism and stigmatization. Environmental stress may simultaneously have an impact on their parents' capability to care for and protect them, and may have had a direct influence on Carlos and Anselmo's psychological functioning. Anselmo perceived only the indirect impact of the traumatic events, whereas Carlos was directly exposed to the trauma, such as, the imprisonment of his father and the loss of his mother and brother.

Circumstances were very different: Carlos reports continual movement, whereas Anselmo always lived in the same house. One was isolated and couldn't have steady friendships; the other had the habit of playing with neighbourhood children in the shared garden. However, many aspects are similar: the mothers were both strong women, very busy and fundamental benchmarks, and with their minds more pointed toward caring for their husbands, who were worn out by their traumatic experiences, than to their children. Both took care of their children concretely, but physical affection like hugging is not described. Both the fathers were public personalities; one an Argentinean militant, the other a famous author. In private, both are depicted as removed, with their minds still pointed toward their traumatic experiences; even if Anselmo also remembers playful and joyful moments with his father and describes his father valuing the relationship with his children, dedicating time, love and attention, and showing a tendency to "normalize" their experiences. Bender (2004) describes traumatized parents' strong effort to guarantee children normalcy and happiness, as in Anselmo's story.

In both families, narratives about trauma are scarce. In Anselmo's childhood, there was an unspoken family agreement to keep traumatic events undiscussed and detached from everyday life. In this way, children are protected from the horror, and parents are respected in their need to forget, in a reciprocal attempt to protect each other. To this purpose, in the families of Shoah survivors, Danieli et al. (2017) talks about a 'conspiracy of silence'. Anselmo's parents desired to nurture their offspring as normally as possible; they lied about trauma and they felt that they could not talk to others, because people did not believe or care to listen. Trauma experiences only transpire from clues such as the nightmares, the migraines, the shortness of breath and the tattoo. Then, the family climate progressively changes when the father begins to testify to his experience and to share it with his children.

On the other hand, Carlos claims that he could talk about everything with his father. Nevertheless, when he was five years old, he learned without any emotional connotation that his mother was a *Desaparecida* and there was no further discussion about her. Only many years later Carlos will learn some particulars about his mother's life from his grandmother and that his mother was pregnant when she disappeared, and that consequently, he had a disappeared brother. Despite it, Carlos asserts that knowing the truth had helped him to accept his condition.

Traumatic experiences can disrupt the emotional regulation processes and, as a consequence, traumatized individuals may experience intense and unsettled emotional responses and transmit them to their offspring (see Villalta et al., 2018). The narratives about trauma help victims find a language for understanding and communicating their experiences, and may constitute a tool to regulate emotions, especially if those who listen contain and comfort (Laub, 2002).

However, as van der Kolk (2015) affirms, trauma victims have biological difficulties in formulating narratives about their experiences. Memories of trauma initially tend to have few autobiographical elements without much of a storyline, because the emotional arousal of traumatic memories leads to a failure to synthesize the sensations related to the trauma into an integrated semantic memory. Conversely, a damaged narrative function enhances the difficulties in emotion regulation (van

der Kolk, 2015). Even if silence seems to allow the control of the pain, fear and shame, the unspoken fosters psychological stress and psychosomatic pathologies.

Indeed, emotion regulation in the two narratives differs, according to the different levels of trauma processing, and so different emotional patterns may be observed. Following Main and Goldwyn's coding (1998), Carlos appears to still suffer from traumatic consequences whereas Anselmo seems to have processed them, even if he shows a renewed sorrow.

Carlos' interview reveals an unsettled mind with respect to his traumatic memories, with which he copes by making an effort to emotionally distance himself from the painful topic. The climate of external violence engenders fear within Carlos' family, which is always alert and alarmed. Indeed, Carlos was sometimes exposed to it rather than protected: the episode of his father's violence toward Carlos in the shower, caused by his father's fear, constitutes an example of this. This further source of trauma may be related to his difficulty to regulate emotions, his dissociative symptoms and his unresolved state of mind regarding traumatic events. Carlos' muted emotional expression could correspond to his psychosomatic symptoms, his teenage tendency to put himself in dangerous situations as a means to feel emotions, and his dissociative experiences during the losses.

The emotional distance in Carlo's narrative is consisted with their Carlos's description of his father as having troubles with empathic communication and suffering from outbursts of anger.

Currently, Carlos claims to be unable to cry. He tends to be ironic and sometimes laughs during the narration. This same attitude has been described in *Ese infierno* (Actis et al., 2001), where the authors consider that the humour frequently found in the Argentinean survivors' narratives are a means for offering resistance, a healing mechanism. Lyons–Ruth et al. (2005) claim that in a darkly humorous presentation of traumatic or painful experiences, the vulnerability and pain related to them is largely unacknowledged, and is distanced by laughter, in such a way that conveys the impression of being "tough" or resilient in the face of traumatic experiences.

On the other hand, Anselmo is deeply moved and often unable to hold back tears: a deep sorrow is renewed. He describes himself and his father as having no problem expressing their vulnerabilities, even if both always preserve their dignity. The full expression of feelings in Anselmo's narrative contrasts with his family's characteristics of unexpressed emotions about traumatic experiences, and protection from eventual environmental prejudices, but is consistent with acceptance of one's own and others' vulnerabilities. In particular, Anselmo's father seems to not externally express negative emotions. He is described as reserved and distant. Angry outbursts are totally absent, even if his migraines and nightmares are clues of serious emotional distress. The absence of violence within the family corresponds to an absence of violence without, in the social context.

Anselmos's father appears to have come to terms with his experience and as a consequence could help Anselmo to process it. He coped with his memories by helping others to know the truth, and the attitude to forgive, that is a powerful instrument of emotion regulation (see Barcaccia et al., 2019; Barcaccia et al., 2022). Anselmo claims: "In such a situation one is either scum and becomes arid and angry with all the world or if not, this love comes out, and one gives it to the closest people".

Conclusions

The AAI methodology allows us to infer the different level of emotion regulation both in parents than in the children and the level of trauma processing. Carlo's father sometimes expressed dysregulated feeling whereas the emotional difficulties of the Anselmo's father are withheld. These aspects result in the sometime dismissing style in the expression of emotions in Carlos, and in the open expression of emotions in Anselmo, as well as in their different levels of trauma processing. The AAI analysis also shows an inferable frightening/ frightened dynamic between Carlos and his father, typically related to their traumatic experiences (Hesse & Main, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is astonishing to note that despite the AAI methodology allows to explore trauma processing, despite the relevant role of the narratives, the interview does not include questions about parents' narrative about trauma, such as what parents said, if there were clues that challenged their version, if the interviewee believed it or if he/she had doubts, and if he/she directly asked parents. Further studies could deal with these aspects.

Finally, both Carlos and Anselmo's fathers are depicted to ground their resiliency in their commitment: Both felt the need to bear witness, to be heard and thus to re-join the human community, also exemplifying Frankl's (1997) idea that man's search for a purpose has a healing power, an idea further evidenced in other studies (see Sagi-Schwartz, et al., 2003). The militancy of both Carlos' father and Carlos and the testimony of Anselmo's father and Anselmo help them to feel that they are not powerless against the trauma.

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Ethical approval

The procedures followed were approved by the "University of Rome Tre Ethics Committee" and were in accordance with ethical standards of the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000.

Data availability statement

Data are available upon email request to the authors.

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Authors' contribution
SP and CdB contributed to conception and design of the study and supervised it. SP, CdB and RP collected data and contributed to the interpretations of the results. SP organized the database. SP and CdB wrote the first draft of the manuscript SP and CdB wrote and edited sections of the study. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no competing interests.

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