

'The Silence of Others'

A film by Almudena Carracedo and Robert Baha

A review by Simon Martinez

This documentary film had its British Premiere on Saturday 9 June at the Sheffield Annual Documentary Festival – *Sheffdoc*. The film opens with the slow walk, along a quiet country road, of a very elderly woman carrying flowers to tie carefully to the crash barrier at the side of the road. She is carrying the flowers to the site of the mass grave which contains the body of her mother who was taken from her and shot by firing squad when she was six years old. This happened in 1936 in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. As the sun beats down on her she explains that people in the village in which she lives turned on her mother and shot her without trial for her socialist beliefs. And that the village then turned on the rest of the family making their lives one of fear.

The film continues with the stories told by the relatives of the victims how the Franco Dictatorship continued to commit Human Rights abuses through it's almost forty year reign of terror. With face to camera perhaps for the first time the individuals who suffered this terror tell their stories. The student who was beaten by the secret police for setting up and supporting an independent student union in 1966 takes us to the prison where he was held and the building where he was tortured. The mother tells us in tears of her baby being taken from her at birth and adopted into a 'good Catholic family'. The sister tells us of her twin being stolen in the same way.

Despair and hurt of these victims, and the victims of Human Rights abuses in Chile and Argentina are shown, and then lead us as we know to the death of Franco in 1975 and the divisions in Spain which were allowed to remain and continue to this day. We are taken into the Cortes by the filmmakers Almudena and Robert using newsreel film of the time for the passing of the 'Pact of Silence' or forgetting where the victims in the jails of the dictatorship were amnestied but the murderers and torturers were given immunity from prosecution.

The work of ARMH and in particular Emilio Silva in getting the mass graves opened and the bones of the dead returned to their relatives for burial and memorial is a phenomenal movement in all villages, towns, and cities in Spain. Each small step is painfully shown in the film.

The light of truth and justice for the victims is lit and we are taken to the detention of Pinochet following Balthasar Garçon's brave actions in the Spanish Courts, and the actions of the investigating judge from Argentina who brings requests for extradition to the courts in Madrid to interview under caution the torturer 'Billy the Kid' and others. What burns brightly through the film is the quiet and determined search for truth and justice of the victims and their supporters set against the silence of those with guilty secrets.

Research into the lives of those Basque Children who returned to Spain from Britain is hidden from them and their descendants because of the obstruction of the archivists of the records of the Catholic Church and of the Asistencia Social. I hope that the wide showing of this film will encourage them to open up their papers to researchers. There will be no justice without truth and no truth without justice.



The directors Robert Baha and Almudena Carracedo and Simon Martinez of the Association of the Basque Children.

I had the very great pleasure in asking a question about Archives and the failure of Spain to eradicate the vestiges of Franco to the directors and those victims' relatives who had travelled from Spain for the British Premiere. I met and talked with the directors Almudena and Robert, and José Galante one of the victims who features centrally in the film afterwards.

The film will I am sure be shown throughout Britain. The next showing is in London on the 7 July. The film deserves a very wide audience and perhaps the time is now right with a new government of Pedro Sanchez in Spain to address some of the issues raised by this wonderful film.

Details on the website <http://thesilenceofothers.com/>