

Silencing Trauma Survivor in Timor-Leste: Women's Domestication in Beatriz's War

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Abstract

Indonesian occupation in Timor-Leste caused a destructive damage upon Timorese, especially women. Beatriz's War (2013) presents a representation of multiple violence experienced by Beatriz, the main character of the film throughout her life. This study aims to analyze the multiple violence experienced by Beatriz and how domestication of women contributes to the silencing of her traumatic testimony based on Felman and Laub (1992) framework on witnessing and testimony. The data were collected through visual and narrative analysis of selected excerpts. The result of this study shows that Beatriz undergoes fourfold violence such as physical, psychological, gendered, and structural violence during and post-conflict throughout the film. The result of this study shows that domestication within patriarchal society, such as limiting women within domestic roles, contributes to the misrecognition of her trauma. This study highlights how patriarchal norms and women confinement to domestic sphere serve to disregard the voices of survivors in post-war community.

Keywords: *Women, violence, trauma, testimony, witnessing.*

Abstrak

Pendudukan Indonesia di Timor-Leste menyebabkan dampak yang destruktif kepada rakyat Timor-Leste, terutama para wanita. Beatriz's War (2013) menggambarkan representasi berbagai bentuk kekerasan yang dialami Beatriz, karakter utama dari film tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kekerasan-kekerasan dan bagaimana domestikasi wanita berdampak terhadap pembungkaman kesaksian Beatriz atas traumanya berdasarkan dengan teori milik Felman dan Laub mengenai witnessing dan testimony. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis naratif dan visual terhadap cuplikan film yang terpilih. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Beatriz mengalami empat bentuk kekerasan, yakni kekerasan berbasis gender,

fisik, psikologis, dan structural selama dan pasca-konflik. Selain itu, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa domestikasi wanita dalam masyarakat yang menganut nilai-nilai patriarkal, seperti pembatasan peran wanita dalam publik, berkontribusi pada ketidakakuan terhadap trauma yang dialami oleh Beatriz sebagai seorang wanita, bahkan dalam komunitas penyintas wanita. Penelitian ini menemukan bagaimana norma-norma patriarki dan penempatan wanita pada ranah domestik berdampak pada pengabaian kesaksian para penyintas kekerasan di masyarakat pasca-konflik.

Kata Kunci: Wanita, kekerasan, trauma, testimony, penyaksian.

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1. Introduction

The Indonesian occupation in Timor Leste during 1975-1999 has left the country devastated in the wake of the departing military (De Acolhimento Verdade E Reconciliação Timor Leste, 2013). CAVR's final report, *Chega!* reveals that throughout the Indonesian occupation, around 100,000 and 200,000 civilians lost their lives as a result of direct assaults, disease, and gradual starvation. The extensive human rights violations have left a significant impact that, according to Martins (2026), is reflected in Timorese literary works, which engage with the theme of violence, betrayal, and silencing. This theme could be seen in *Memoria* (2016), *Beatriz's War* (2013), and Timorese poetry such as *Esperanças Rasgadas* (Martins, 2026; Smail, 2018; Saputro, 2019).

In *Beatriz's War* (2013), producers Luigi Acquisto and Bety Reis present a female experience amid the occupation as partly fictionalized of a historical event. The central event in *Beatriz's War* (2013) is the Krarás Massacre in 1983 which the soldiers murdered around 200 to 300 Timorese after the wave of Timor-Leste resistance forces killed 16 Indonesian soldiers as an outrage of the sexual violence towards Timorese women. Beatriz, a witness of Krarás massacre who struggles with multiple violence as she tries to comprehend the sudden re-occurrence of her long lost husband. Within this narrative, the producers highlight not only the psychological but also the social consequences of an armed conflict in *Beatriz's War* (2013).

Felman and Laub (1992) denote a witness as someone who occupies a unique and irreplaceable position in relation to the event, derived from “the act of seeing”. Felman in Ibrisim (2022) shows that witnessing is not merely about the act of seeing or hearing but extends to the act of transmission. Beatriz can be defined as a witness to Krarás Massacre as she occupies an irreplaceable and direct position to the violence of the massacre. As someone who witness the event firsthand, she qualifies the fundamental definition of a witness, which is grounded by “the act of seeing” with her own eyes (Felman & Laub, 1992).

However, witnessing a traumatic event does not offer a stabilized statement of the event. Felman (1992) reveals that testimony does not occur in a coherent narrative but emerges in “bits and pieces” of the survivor’s memory that has not been processed into a complete understanding. This could happen due to the traumatic event that takes place outside of “the parameters of normal reality”, thus the traumatic event does not have any beginning, during, or ending. Moreover, the violence imposed on the survivor of a traumatic event could eliminate the witness’s ability to give testimony; this is what Laub refers to as “an event eliminating its own witness” (Felman & Laub, 1992).

Furthermore, they also conceptualize the role of addressable other, other people who could be an empathic listener to one's agony and recognize the realness of the traumatic experience (Felman & Laub, 1992). The absence of an addressable other could result in the entrapment of the survivor in their own anguish and re-living the traumatic event. Felman and Laub (1992) point out that a survivor's testimony is dialogic as they could not unfold in isolation; this means that witnessing requires a listener. Laub states that giving testimony is a relational process that needs the presence of the listener to be the participant of the event in order to explore the survivor's elusive past.

However, during an extreme event, a potential "outside witnesses" failed to occupy their place as a witness to the extent that there is no one left to take to witness the traumatic event (Felman & Laub, 1992). Moreover, it is not only the absence of responsiveness that contributes to the failed listening of the event, but rather the circumstances of being an inside witness itself is unthinkable to the very notion that a witness could exist. Laub then emphasizes on the impossibility to find other people in the light of being recognized as a subject. Hence, a witness' testimony could not be fully transferred to other people due to its unique and solitary burden (Felman & Laub, 1992).

Through *East Timor's first film: Beatriz's War, history and remediation*, Callahan (2016) indicates the correlation between *Beatriz's War* (2013) and the women's film; he redeploys the melodrama of classical Hollywood. The researcher reveals that the community's desire to accept fake Tomas derive from its attempt to achieve psychological restoration by favoring "useful" narrative over a painful reality, thereby functioning as the coping mechanism for a post-conflict society. However, Callahan (2016) states that re-writing past stories couldn't construct narratives that are useful if the community alters identifiable facts even when how helpful and convenient the alteration may seem. This study aligns with how Beatriz's testimony is altered by her community to fit with patriarchal values, thus showing the failed listening from the community towards Beatriz's traumatic event. The altered narrative, instead of serves as useful and stabilize the community, it rebounds negatively as it creates fracture between Beatriz and the community.

Niner (2011) examines that patriarchal values in Timor-Leste is deeply embedded in their cultural values as reflected in the Timorese adage *feto hakat klot; mane hakat luan*, which indicates that women are "born for narrow steps" meanwhile men are born for wider steps. This cultural belief reinforces that women's role revolves around a simple and "more traditional" that focuses on maternalism and domesticity (Niner, 2011). The scholar argues that Timorese women and their fertility are often positioned as the property of their family and husband; that leads to pressuring women to produce children. These practices have been identified as undermining women's rights, as these responsibilities for large families often limit women from participating in public decision-making. While these studies recognize the significance of highlighting Timorese women's suffering and emotional struggles during armed conflict, the investigation of the relation between domesticating women and the silencing of their testimony in *Beatriz's War* (2013) remains overlooked.

Atkinson (2023) in *Witnessing, Trans-"Species" Trauma Testimony, and Sticky Wounds in Contemporary Australian Poetry* reveals that trauma might be a "sticky wound" that lingers as an emotion, sensation, and feeling states that could occur onto its "marker". This indicates that the impact of trauma could remain despite the fact that the event has ended long before. Through Caruth's framework, the researcher shows that trauma is an overwhelming event that could result in a fragmented manifestation of its return, yet the trauma itself demands to be witnessed as a necessary process of its healing. This study underscores the concept of "disjointed fragments" of the survivor's memory, positioning that trauma takes place out of "normal reality" of sequence, place, and time.

Singh (2026) employs Felman's concept where the act of giving testimony could become a site of power and violence in *A Little Life* (2015). Through this framework, Singh reveals how one's testimony is used as a weapon of control rather than expressing the truth. The researcher argues that the verbal abuse imposed on the victim could manifest in the inability to voice their suffering, emphasizing how trauma occurs and is silenced through language. This analysis highlights the silencing survivors' testimony in *Beatriz's War* (2013) by others.

Current studies on *Beatriz's War* (2013) often explore the movie's role in representing and offering a localized perspective on historical events. While other studies also explore women's roles in building amongst Timorese local communities. However, there's a limited amount of research that explores women's experiences as a witness and the lack of support in their own community in *Beatriz's War* (2013). This study aims to fill the gap in the destructive impact of false witnessing on Beatriz. The primary objectives of this study will address the following: 1) How does Beatriz experience violence as a witness to the Krarás massacre in *Beatriz's War* (2013)? 2) How does domestication of women within the Krarás community contribute to the misrecognition and silencing of Beatriz's trauma?

2. Methods

This research adopts Felman and Laub's framework on witnessing and testimony as its primary theory. This is followed by a textual analysis that centers on a detailed analysis revolving around how violence is experienced by Beatriz as a witness, the impossibility of articulating trauma, and the compulsion to repress her ability to deliver testimony. The researcher employs this approach as it provides reliability in earlier studies, such as Alothman (2026) and other studies through a similar theoretical lens to explore the theme of trauma and witnessing.

Therefore, this study selects excerpts from *Beatriz's War* (2013) as its primary source. The process first involves collecting data from the film to determine the main character's struggle as a witness throughout wartime and the post-conflict period. These collected data would be divided into two strands. The first strand focuses on narrative where Beatriz experiences psychological, structural, physical, and gender based violence. The second strand focuses on how Beatriz undergoes women's domestication and misrecognition of her testimony by her own community, including how Beatriz is positioned in relation to traditional women's roles.

The study then examines these multiple forms of violence that are portrayed within the film. These portrayals are then analyzed by examining narrative elements such as dialogue, narration, and silence in order to unveil how violence manifests throughout the film. The examination rationalizes Beatriz's testimony as portrayed by the narratives, while a socio-cultural constraint shapes the recognition of women's voices in *Beatriz's War* (2013).

These findings are interpreted through Felman and Laub's framework, particularly witnessing and role of the role of addressable others. This aims to highlight that witnessing a traumatic event does not always lead to testimony, how the trauma remains fragmented, and how domesticating women could impact one's ability to give testimony. Through this approach, the research also analyzes how social beliefs shape the community's perception and recognition of Beatriz's trauma and determine whose voice is acknowledged as a legitimate witness. By correlating Felman and Laub's framework with the violence experienced by the main character, this research reveals the connection between personal testimony and collective recognition, where the legitimacy of testimony is impacted by social norms.

3. Findings and Discussion

Violence, Trauma, and Silence in Beatriz's War

Beatriz's War (2013) portrays that violence survivors are not always victims of direct violence, but could be represented by being a witness to a traumatic event. Beatriz, for example, survives a direct violence through her sexual assault in refugee camp committed by Captain Sumitro, an Indonesian military officer. Moreover, she witnesses Krarás Massacre from a distance before attempting to flee and subsequently being captured. Beatriz's position within this narrative reflects the dual role of a direct victim of violence and a witness of a collective violence imposed on the Timorese in this film. This section explores these manifestations and representation of violences through Beatriz's experiences as both a direct victim and a witness to traumatic events. The film demonstrates that witnessing violence could extend beyond physical harm, resulting in psychological consequences. Through the film's dialogues, narration, and visual representation, this study collects 20 main data that will be classified into four categories of violence in order to reveal the correlation between the violence imposed on Beatriz and how it impacts her ability to articulate her traumatic experiences. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics, this study situates Beatriz's experiences within social and cultural contexts.

In *Beatriz's War* (2013), violence appears fourfold such as physical, structural, psychological, and gender-based violence. The first and most visible is physical violence, which is illustrated through acts of direct bodily harm, coercive force, and military brutality during Indonesian occupation. In this film, physical violence is predominantly depicted through Beatriz's position as a witness to Indonesian soldiers' brutality and Timorese people as the direct victim. She is repeatedly exposed to threats, intimidation, and physical harm inflicted upon the Timorese community such as Krarás Massacre.



Figure 1: Beatriz witnessing Krarás Massacre

Figure 1 shows one of the most significant acts of physical violence witnessed by Beatriz which is Krarás Massacre. Although she is not a direct victim, she witnesses the violence from a distance as Indonesian soldiers kill Timorese. By witnessing this event, Beatriz is exposed to physical violence imposed to Timorese. Moreover, Beatriz's reaction towards the massacre shows how physical violence also impacts the witness and not only the people who got physically

violated. Besides witnessing physical violence, Beatriz also experience violence first-hand after Krarás Massacre as she narrates, “*I hid in the mountains for months until I was captured.*” (Acquisto & Reis, 2013). The capture indicates the loss of bodily autonomy under Indonesian occupation, where Timorese are subjected to coercion that resulting to Beatriz’s experience of violence extends beyond a mere witness of atrocities to undergo physical consequences of armed conflict.



Figure 2 : The remaining villagers gather in a barren camp

In contrast, structural violence operates through the social system. Pratiwi et al (2026) suggest that violence is built into social systems, where unequal power relations prevent civilians from fulfilling their basic needs. Figure 2 unveils Beatriz and the remaining villagers gathering in a barren refugee camp under the supervision of Indonesian troops. Beatriz’s narration shows how Indonesian military imposes a structural violence by forcing them to live and survive in a harsh environment after forcibly relocate the survivors of Kraras Massacre.

“We had to try and grow food in the dry, salty earth. We were told to plant seeds and build houses. But the Indonesians took away all our tools, our machetes, axes, spades” (Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

This narrative along with the scene where the remaining villagers sit still without protesting the order marks how structural constraint, especially under an occupation, negatively impacts an individual's ability to speak their voice. The shortage of resources drive the community to focus more on securing foods rather than recognizes this as a consequences of their previous retaliation. As Pratiwi et al. (2026) argue, structural violence operates through persistent condition that controls people’s lives. In this film, after the massacre that kills all the men in the film, the remaining villagers no longer posses the capacity to overthrow the occupying force as they previously had done. The removal of men that are culturally positioned as the primary protectors within the society weakened their resistance (Niner, 2020).

Consequently, the shortage of resources and removal of men impacts their sense of autonomy and collective power, resulting in their ability to retaliate, thus showing how structural violence impacts people’s behaviour. Moreover, prolonged armed conflict could disrupt the livelihood of

the local community. Under an occupation, civilians are often deprived of resources and security; this phenomenon is forcing them to live in a condition of vulnerability (Pratiwi et al., 2026).

Meanwhile, gender-based violence revolves around coercion and the use of force against someone's will due to unequal status (Dahal et al., 2025). War increases gender-based violence due to the view of women being "spoils of war" (Trindande, n.d). Sexual violence is not only committed out of lust, but also out of power and violence to impose fear and dominance as a war strategy. Moreover, Toth (2020) states that the probability of women being abused by the occupying force is higher than men. In *Beatriz's War* (2013), Beatriz is portrayed experiencing sexual assault several times, and her recurring reaction is silence.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, but I've slept too long. You're late." (Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

Even though Beatriz's own husband, Tomas, is the one who asks her about her condition after learning of the assault, Beatriz chooses to divert the subject instead of expressing her distress. Her seemingly detached response reflects her unwillingness to articulate the violence she experiences. She similarly demonstrates the same response when she gets assaulted for the second time, where she keeps staying still within Teresa's arms. This shows that gender-based violence manifests in "silencing" as Beatriz does not dare to state the assault due to fear and shame.

Beatriz and other Timorese women throughout the film never once brings up the fact that they have been sexually assaulted or that they have a sexual relation with Indonesian troops because of the stigmatization within their own community. This is also evident when Teresa calls herself a "whore" because she has a sexual relationship with Captain Sumitro. Teresa's word is not just an expression of resentment, but also reveals her internalized self-disgust, reflecting the society's belief attached to women associated with the occupying force. This reflects what Lipton (2019) argues as being shamed of being regressed due to the sexual relation with the occupying force.

Psychological violence, however, is the most prevalent type of violence among the previously categorized types. Consequently, the occupation's threats create a long-lasting psychological violence, resulting in the survivors trapped in fear (Ullah, 2020). Beatriz is experiencing psychological violence multiple times throughout the film.

"Tomas, what have they done? What happened, Tomas?"

"I need a clean shirt."

"What for? Explain, Tomas!" (Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

This dialogue between Beatriz and Tomas shows how Beatriz's anxiety amplifies due to Tomas' sudden act to look neat after being summoned forcefully by the military. In this context, Beatriz's paranoid reaction reflects more than just a personal concern for Tomas' safety, but a fear that stems from the psychological impacts of living in an environment where violence could happen unpredictably. This uncertainty and threats resonate with Ullah's (2020) argument where the survivor is "continuously haunted by the traumatic experience" and staying in a "continuous state of fear and tragedy". As the film reveals, Beatriz continues to be haunted by the event years after it occurs, suggesting that the trauma emerges belatedly through fear and psychological suffering.



Figure 3: Beatriz looking for her husband



Figure 4: The villagers take off their mourning clothes

“In the weeks after independence, many men came down from the mountains and passed through our village. Tomas was not amongst them.” (Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

This narrative demonstrates that the massacre and idea of Tomas is still continuing to haunt Beatriz even after she and Teresa perform *Doku Bikan*, a ritual intended for a closure after the death of a loved one by symbolically accepting that the deceased is no longer eaten at their family table (Asia Justice & Rights (AJAR), 2025). In Figure 4, Beatriz refuses to believe that her husband is dead and accepts his death, symbolized by her continued use of mourning clothes while other widowed women in the village have taken off their black clothes as a sign that their mourning period has ended.

Beatriz's War (2013) illustrates that trauma appears not in a static moment from the past, but unfolds gradually through a fragmented and delayed testimony. Felman and Laub (1992) conceptualize that extreme violence disrupts the witness's ability to comprehend and articulate traumatic events as trauma becomes "a horror ... whose effects explode any capacity for explanation or rationalization". In this film, Beatriz is depicted to lose the capability several times to fully understand her explosive emotions during the event, but later will come back in a fragmented testimony.

For instance, Beatriz is unable to form a word for her distress when she gets assaulted by Captain Sumitro. Besides the stigma for women who have sexual relationships with the occupier, her silence indicates the incomprehensibility of the event. Rather than articulating her emotional distress or mentioning the assault, the trauma resurfaces through silence, fear, and emotional isolation. This phenomenon reflects the belated nature of traumatic experiences in which the survivor itself could not grasp its meaning when the event occurs because the event is beyond the range of one's understanding (Felman & Laub, 1992).

This is evident through Beatriz's silence after being assaulted by Captain Sumitro, showing that gender-based violence manifests its belatedness in "silencing" as Beatriz does not dare to state the assault due to fear and shame. In addition, this gendered violence also affected Timorese women socially. Timorese women who are associated with the occupying forces are prone to be subjected to negative stigma and moral judgement causing survivors to remain silent out of fear of social rejection from their own communities (Trindade, n.d; Kent, 2014).

Beatriz then again undergoes this belatedness as the Kraras Massacre unfolds and she is witnessing the massacre occur. However, rather than stopping the massacre, Beatriz remains silent, illustrating the impact of trauma towards its witness. Her inability to react during the occurrence demonstrates how violence could disrupt the survivor's capacity to process the event. This continuous witnessing positions Beatriz as a witness whose prolonged confrontation with violence manifested in her fear and psychological distress. This position is evident throughout the film in her consistent silence to the occupiers, as she never openly resists their authority despite the oppression imposed on her. In the case of armed conflict that lasts for a long period of time, her fear stems from a chronic feeling of being threatened (Williams et al., 2018).

They killed our men to punish us for their defection to the resistance. That day the river turned red with the blood of our fathers, our brothers, sons, and husbands."
(Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

This passage shows that when the event unfolds, she does not comprehend or realize that this event would haunt her for years, instead she is trying to find her husband amongst the bodies left. Therefore, Beatriz's silence during Kraras Massacre is a manifestation of a response caused by witnessing the unimaginable horror and violence. As the film later reveals, Beatriz continues to be haunted by the event years after it occurs, suggesting that the trauma emerges belatedly through fear and psychological suffering.

Besides silence, the film shows how the disoriented memory of her husband's disappearance keeps re-occurring. Beatriz searching for her husband amidst FALINTIL demonstrates that the massacre and idea of Tomas is still haunting Beatriz even after performing *Doku Bikan*. Her behaviour shows that trauma could not be fully resolved through one act of "closure" as the experience is psychologically embedded within Beatriz. Within Felman and Laub's (1992) framework, the survivor is not in touch with either "the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments" that could result in entrapment.

Moreover, the statement that Tomas is not with FALINTIL reflects Beatriz's inability to detach herself from the possibility of his return. As Felman & Laub (1992) argue, trauma survivors do not live within the memory of the past, instead in an "has no ending". Furthermore, having witnessed the violence is long-lasting and hard to shift from its stickiness, especially when the

witness also sees and hears its impact on other women (McAlister et al., 2021). Therefore, Beatriz's attachment portrays how trauma is embedded within reality that is outside of the "normal reality" and the wound sticks with her for a long period of time (Atkinson, 2020; Felman & Laub, 1992).

Within Felman and Laub's framework, Beatriz's silence is taken as a response to the violences she has witnessed or experienced. This highlights the intricate nature of trauma survivors and their ability to give testimony, showing that traumatic experiences do not always lead to the survivor's ability to articulate and comprehend their suffering immediately (Felman & Laub, 1992). Instead, trauma disrupts Beatriz's capacity to comprehend the event, causing silence, and fragmented response to an overwhelming violence.

Women Domestication and Misrecognition of Trauma

Throughout *Beatriz's War* (2013), Beatriz is frequently positioned as a wife or a mother by her own community. However, at times she also positions herself as a wife or even puts someone else in that position. This perception of women's domesticity stems from a constraining view of femininity that positions women's proper place is within the domestic rather than the public sphere (Niner, 2014; O'Keeffe, 2017).

"You think I resent him."

"Yes, because you've lost your place here. Because you're pregnant and a mother again, just like the rest of us." (Acquisto & Reis, 2013).

Within this dialogue, Teresa interprets Beatriz's resistance as jealousy towards Tomas caused by the changing of social position as a woman and a mother. Her statement that Beatriz has lost her place reveals that women's value is socially confined to reproductive roles, as Beatriz's pregnancy becomes a tool to silence her. This accusation of Beatriz's hatred to fake Tomas is due to the fact that she will lose her position as Tomas' substitute show+s that women's leadership and decision-making roles are only occupied temporarily in the absence of men.

Moreover, Beatriz has internalized this belief by mentioning her position as Tomas' wife during her argument with Teresa—"I'm Tomas dos Anjos's wife... And in his absence, you'll do what I say." (Acquisto & Reis, 2013). By positioning her as Tomas' wife, Beatriz depicts how women are internalizing being constructed as secondary and have limited public roles, requiring them to conjure male authority in order to achieve social recognition and obedience within their community (Kent, 2014).

This belief is further amplified by her survival strategy, in which she forces Teresa to marry Sumitro in order to secure their community's safety. This aligns with what Kent and Naomi (2015) explain as the militarized construction of gender roles, where women are perceived as natural nurturers who require men as their protectors. Her confinement of Teresa—"You'll become Sumitro's wife. You have no choice." (Acquisto & Reis, 2013)—is not a mere response to ensure her community's safety after witnessing Krarás Massacre but an underlying perception of women being confined within the domestic sphere. This internalization of oppression shapes how the villagers react to violence during the Indonesian occupation and seeps into their ability to openly resist the perpetrator's dehumanizing actions.



Figure 5: The remaining villagers pay respect for the dead

A year after the Krarás Massacre, Beatriz and the remaining villagers are shown to pay respect for the dead for the first time. Prohibiting burying the dead and performing mourning rituals illustrates how the military rejects basic human values and the villagers' right to express their grief publicly. The military treats their suffering not as a legitimate catastrophic outcome of armed conflict and political subjugation, but something that could be silenced through social control (McAlister et al., 2021).

Having been exposed and being treated as "subhumans" during the occupation, the villagers do not show any fight against the military's prohibitions as described by Felman and Laub (1992), where the survivors experience the feeling that they have sworn to silence as a result of years living under propagated truth. In this context, the villagers have accepted their identity as subhumans that have no rights to protest. This is fostered by the "delusional quality" of occupation that lives as an "unconscious" truth imposed by the perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (Felman & Laub, 1992).



Figure 6: Beatriz stands alone during the trial



Figure 7: The remaining villagers stand with Fake Tomas

Nearing the end of the movie, Beatriz and Teresa agree to hold a trial to prove Tomas' identity, with Beatriz standing before the community to accuse Tomas of being an impostor. Teresa and the other women's defiance should not only be seen as an act of disbelief towards Beatriz, but also as an active attempt to deter Beatriz's experience. The community's desire to accept fake Tomas is an attempt to reach social and psychological restoration by favouring "useful" narrative over a painful and verifiable community (Callahan, 2016).

This behaviour explains that women's individual recognition and emotional safety are being sacrificed for the comfort of their community, as acknowledging Beatriz's testimony would threaten the sense of normalcy of male being the leader that the community seeks to rebuild after

war. Moreover, the scene visually highlights Beatriz's isolation as she stands alone while Tomas is positioned with the villagers behind him. This scene further reveals that women's personnel recognitions are sacrificed for communal comfort, showing that male is preferred compared to female authority.

Beatriz's trauma fails being recognized as trauma due to its incompatibility with dominant social structures and contradicts their "ideological beliefs and expectations (Felman & Laub, 1992). For instance, throughout the film Beatriz is expected to accept Tomas' return calmly and continue her role as a loyal wife rather than expressing her emotional distress and mistrust towards her husband. Consequently, her emotional turmoil is interpreted as a personal inability to adapt towards post-war impacts, such as Tomas' change of character, instead of being recognized as a legitimate response to a traumatic event.

This aligns with Felman and Laub's (1992) argument that people could not comprehend concepts out of their "frame of reference". Beatriz's trauma, however, due to its existence, exceeds all normal categories and has no place within the community's understanding, hence could not be integrated into any existing "cultural frame of reference" (Felman & Laub, 1992). Furthermore, the perpetrators also contribute in this failed understanding of trauma as the occupying military attempts to impose social control through intimidation, such as prohibiting the remaining villagers from mourning and sexually assaulting the women. This brutal coercive pressure eliminates the probability of an unviolated point of reference from the witness, in this case. Beatriz's trauma (Felman & Laub, 1992).

In wartime and post-conflict periods, women suffer the devastating consequences of gendered oppression through fear, power control, and violence by the military (McAlister et al., 2021). This fear and intimidation seeps into their internal community, resulting in powerlessness that sustains silence amongst civilians as the military's strategy to maintain power structure between them and the civilians. However, the impact becomes even more amplified when the oppressed community normalizes this culture of silence, such as normalizing marginalizing women's experiences and provokes further suffering within the private and public sphere.

According to Felman and Laub (1992), testimony requires a social and symbolic framework that allows the emotional distress to be recognized as a legitimate witness rather than dismissed as a mere grief. They explain that testimony needs to be addressed to others and therefore depends on cultural recognition, listeners, and institutional structures that the testimony could be accepted as the truth. However, Beatriz does not meet these forms of recognition. Instead of being provided with an addressee, her testimony that the return of Tomas is a fraud, she is met with defiance both in private and public space even among women. The community's preference to side with Tomas shows what Dalt (2021) describes as "lack of solidarity" amongst Timorese women due to male-dominated value of Timorese society that causes suspicion towards other women.

As a result of this lack of acknowledgement as a legitimate survivor, her trauma is reduced to a woman's grief, her trauma remains unrecognized. This phenomenon happens due to her community prioritizing post-conflict stability and maintaining traditional expectations and roles of womanhood over the acknowledgment of women's suffering. For example, Teresa and the remaining villagers siding with Tomas during the trial of Tomas' identity and encouraging Beatriz to accept his return and suppress her trauma for the comfort of their own community.

Furthermore, Mighetto (2022) argues that having the trauma misrecognized devalues what people stand for, especially if they're fighting for something. This misrecognition happens due to trauma being in the realm of unhearable, in which the denial and falsification of the survivor's testimony stems from other people's choice to remain deaf to the survivor's narrative (Mighetto, 2022).

In *Beatriz's War* (2013), Teresa often indicates that she is disregarding Beatriz's repeated uncertainty by interpreting it merely as her new form of love for Tomas. Instead of recognizing

Beatriz's emotional distress as a legitimate psychological struggle, she diverts the conversation towards Beatriz's role as Tomas' disoriented wife and urges her not to create a "new battle" in her life. This reflects what Harber (2023) argues as the listener's tendency to actively dismiss traumatic testimony by directing the attention away from the survivor's distress towards socially acceptable contents of their stories.

Teresa, as the listener of Beatriz's testimony, understates Beatriz's psychological distortion by encouraging her to consider the positive aspects of her traumatic experience, as Teresa is disturbed by the content of Beatriz's narrative. This portrays what Harber (2023) illustrates as Teresa as a listener of Beatriz's testimony, actively dismiss Beatriz's distortion by forcing her to consider the positive aspects of her own struggle as she is disturbed "by the content" of Beatriz's stories. Rather than acknowledging Beatriz as a legitimate witness to violence, she reduces it to Beatriz's inability to adapt, reflecting how testimony is silenced.

Furthermore, having no audience to her traumatic experiences disrupt the relation between witness and the listener as it needs the two of them in order to witness the traumatic event (Felman & Laub, 1992). This emphasizes that witnessing is a relational process that requires recognition from others. However, Beatriz does not experience this relational process throughout the film as her trauma is dismissed by her community. The repeated dismissal of her own community is further reinforced by the confinement of women to the domestic sphere that contributes to the marginalization and overlooking women's voices and distress (Felman & Laub, 1992; McAlister et al, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Luigi Acquisto and Bety Reis' *Beatriz's War* (2013) demonstrates that witnessing a traumatic event psychologically prevents the survivor from immediately articulating testimony, highlighting the importance of the listener. Through Felman and Laub's witnessing framework, the study unveils that violence could manifest through multiple forms, such as physical, structural, gendered, and psychological violence, which contribute to Beatriz's ability to articulate her trauma as a survivor. Notably, gender-based and psychological violence she undergoes manifests as a wound that lasts long even after the event has ended, confining the survivor in a state that disrupts the capacity of reality.

Moreover, the social constraints, specifically the domestication of women, contribute to the silencing of Beatriz's traumatic testimony. During and in post-war within her community, women are confined within the domestic sphere to reproductive and secondary roles, and this form of domesticity constructs a tool to misrecognize Beatriz's trauma. The findings show that the community favors a "useful" narrative that facilitates social stability and male authority over a verifiable truth of female suffering and post-conflict period of time, women suffer the devastating consequences of gendered oppression through fear, power control, and violence by the military (McAlister et al., 2021). This fear and intimidation seeps into their internal community, resulting

in powerlessness that sustains silence amongst civilians as the military's strategy to maintain power structure between them and the civilians. However, the impact becomes even more amplified when the oppressed community normalizes this culture of silence, such as normalizing marginalizing women's experiences, and provokes further suffering within the private and public spheres.

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