

A Recent Evolution of the “War Neurosis” Concept

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In France, since 1988, and especially since the 1994 Congress of psychiatry in Toulouse, military psychiatrists of Lacanian inspiration have proposed a renewed vision of traumatic neurosis from the war neurosis concept, by exceeding the limits of the Freudian quantitative model. According to the authors of the Congress report, a trauma corresponds to an encounter with the Real [1].

In everyday life, the subject is only in contact with “selected pieces of reality” embellished by his fantasies and illusions, without being confronted with the harsh and threatening “Real”. For Lacan, the “Real” is not reality but the name he gives to “the impossible” or what is hurting us without notice. During a traumatic experience, the subject is brutally confronted with the raw reality. Thus, his “existential dream” turns into a nightmare. The traumatic reality corresponds to what is impossible to represent and to say. It provokes a “hole” in the signifying capacities of the subject, who faces anguish now he is overwhelmed by the disaster. Moreover, if pleasure or displeasure is known to the subject, the “enjoyment experienced at the onset of fright” is unknown to him. Suffering pain, horror, even death is complete, dramatically real. Moreover, every traumatism reveals and awakens the first trauma constituting the subject: this “you are” from elsewhere who breaks in and intrudes into him when he arrives in the world, a world of language, and is already prearranged by others, even before he is able to say “I am” [1].

French psychoanalyst Patrick Pouyaud summarizes this conception: “In the trauma, the language is not able to express the irruption of the Real. All traumas is not automatically followed by an acting out, but an acting out is a response to what causes trauma for the subject: a breaking or storming of the Real. Where the language fails, there is only an act to cross it. Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure what is traumatic for everyone. Only the subject can say something about it, not events nor facts nor theories”.

Guy Briole belongs to these Lacanian psychoanalysts. At a recent conference entitled “The Unchanged Wars”, he declared that every war is fratricidal: there are only civil wars. War deprives of death; it tears the being from its history. War is a clash of bodies, a pitiless fight in which “it is inevitably him or me”: there will be a dead and a survivor. “Extermination is not death, but a tear of time, an exclusion from one own history. It puts the subject in exile of himself”. This exile corresponds to both, a disappearance, a shameful absence and a part torn from oneself. The tear is durable: it continues in a “war after the war”, including heavy secrets. After the soldiers are back home, it is particularly difficult for them to return to an ordinary life. They cannot forget what they lived and cannot be forgiven as well. “The glance is central in any trauma. The shame of the soldier is accentuated by social ambivalence towards the military. The human being is the weakest link in the war” [2].

According to Guy Briole, self-loathing is even stronger for the drone pilot, who kills from a distance. In his ultra-sophisticated machine, he becomes a fighting robot, a hero without effect, without any limit to put a stop to the horror. His evil, cruelty and destructiveness face legal and intimate impunity. Then, it is impossible for him to free himself from his guilt. Torn from human history, these shadow fighters can no longer return from hell.

War is detached from the body, as another reality, in another dimension, which induces psychosomatic disorders for these

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soldiers. Science and technology have further dehumanized what is already inhuman in nature. The world has become a battleground, out of bounds and out of control, leaving the door open to barbarism. Wars no longer respect international conventions. “The Name of the father does not hold any more. The model becomes that of organized gangs and deregulation. We live in an augmented reality, a virtual surreal, which potentially puts the threat of war all over. From near and far, we are all concerned by these phenomena” [2].

Today, terrorist attacks, massacres in Africa and wars in the Middle East reactivate and renew the confrontation with barbarous mutilations of the body, attacks on its unity and non-respect of the person in death, disfiguring the human being by attacking precisely his integrity.

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