

Chapter 8

The Bleak Visions of *Literary Justice* for Survivors of Srebrenica: Examining the Fictional Narratives of Srebrenica Genocide in Light of the Insights from Transitional Justice

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The (Un)Reality of Genocide and the Truth of Fiction: An Introduction

Among the core justifications for, and underlying ideas behind, transitional justice are enabling a society devastated by mass violence to move forward, at the same time honouring the victims and remembering the past injustices or atrocious crimes as a means of preventing their occurrence in the future.¹ While the principal goal remains producing a societal shift from patterns of human rights violations and heinous crimes towards the future founded on the rule of law and universal condemnation of past atrocities, a goal perhaps conducted in the spirit of reconciliation, text and narrative seems to be the primary medium. Storytelling in transition is commonly accorded important, often gigantic, functions:

By means of story, we can learn the terrible and noble dimensions of what happened, we can put names to faces, dimension to places and events, gain a sense of the humanity of the victims and the victimizers, relive the events of history in their fearsome detail: story provides that.²

¹ See generally Neil J. Kritz, ed., *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, Vol. 1 (Washington: USIP Press, 1995); see also Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

² Harold Scheub, 'Now for a Story', in *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule*, ed. Ksenija Bilbija et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 13.

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Indeed, '[w]e read [transitional narratives] not only to discover truth, but also to discover order' in the chaos of past experiences.³ Ultimately, as Ruti Teitel aptly explains, transitional justice narratives are structured as forward-looking tragedies with a resolution whereby '[t]he country's past suffering is somehow reversed, culminating in a happy ending of peace and reconciliation'.⁴

One of the principal characteristics of transition from the violent past towards a peaceful future is often the sheer cacophony of narratives: court decisions, truth-telling bodies' reports, historians' accounts, testimonial literature, media reports, documentaries, and works of literary or cinematic fiction—they all coexist, mutually communicate, often collide. In such a multitude of stories of the violent past, even the conventional distinction that is often postulated—that between document and fiction, between transitional justice mechanisms *per se* and artistic engagements with past atrocities—does not seem to be entirely plausible, at least when seen from inside the transition itself. Indeed, at the level of the medium of text, '[a]ny representation of trauma is to a certain degree "fictitious" in its attempt to recreate a narration beyond the collapse of language and meaning the traumatic experience originally produced'.⁵ Moreover, even horrors described in court rulings and reports of various truth-telling institutions are often rightfully described as *unspeakable*,⁶ unimaginable, even beyond the human condition.⁷

Leaving this ontological uncertainty of transitional stories aside, the relationship between *dealing with the past* and *fictionalizing the past* is generally described as beneficial and complementary. Indeed, fiction is seen as particularly suitable for serving the goals of transitional justice: the *untimeliness* of literature gives it a 'unique ability to look back and look forward simultaneously, reinterpreting the past and forecasting possible futures'.⁸ Shoshana Felman also speaks of the post-WWII 'historical necessity of involving literature in action, of creating a new form of *narrative as testimony* [however imperfect] not merely to record, but to rethink and, in the act of its rethinking, in effect to transform history by bearing literary witness to the Holocaust'.⁹

³ Theresa Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices: Language, Violence, and the Work of Truth Commissions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 125.

⁴ Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.

⁵ Martina Kopf, 'The Ethics of Fiction: African Writers on the Genocide in Rwanda', *Journal of Literary Theory* 6 (2012), 72.

⁶ See e.g. Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

⁷ Writing about the possible tasks of the Holocaust fiction, for example, Lang asserts that the 'Holocaust seems so thoroughly unreal that we need to bring it down to the human realm'. Berel Lang ed., *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 92, quoted in Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 37.

⁸ Oscar Hemer, 'Writing Transition: Fiction and Truth in South Africa and Argentina' (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2011), 13.

⁹ Shoshana Felman, 'Crisis of Witnessing: Albert Camus' Postwar Writings', *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 2 (1991), 198.

Fictional narratives are seen as having the potential to support transitional justice efforts, in that they may open and shape public discourse regarding the causes and consequences of grave violence. As a characteristic voice of this understanding of the specific social role of fiction, Nadine Gordimer writes ecstatically about a new form of critical realism that is necessary in South Africa in that it can ‘describe a situation so truthfully ... that the reader can no longer evade it’.¹⁰ It is also argued that fictional narratives can bring about richer, more complex and more disturbing forms of justice unburdened by the demands and limitations of the juridical or normative realm and by the dual imperatives of truth and reconciliation that permeate transitional justice discourse.¹¹ In this vein, it is indeed important to note a certain level of contradiction, or at least potential contradiction, between the legal and the literary means of dealing with the past. As Felman so perceptively explains, while juridical approaches to societal trauma aim to bring about *closure*, fiction is there to further open up the horrifying events and explore them in their deeper meaning and implications.¹²

It is also contended that fiction can fill the gaps and shortcomings in the core design of the transitional justice toolbox, illuminating the often neglected, complex questions of the ‘here and now’ of a transition, or the ‘reality of the transitional’.¹³ This is where fiction can make a major contribution, as it can ‘offer polysemic descriptions of transitional moments, thereby bearing witness to these moments’ complicated nature’.¹⁴ Finally, fictional narratives can also function as transitional justice mechanisms in their own right. Apart from their truth-telling function, they can also be conceived as specific, disturbing artistic memorials of the atrocious past. Furthermore, one can imagine that fiction, just like any normative transitional justice mechanism, can serve the goal of translating and representing the victims’ (otherwise unshareable) pain in language, thereby reversing the silencing that was the principal mechanism of oppression.¹⁵ As African writer Boubacar Boris Diop put it, ‘perhaps *only* fiction can treat this subject [of

¹⁰ Nadine Gordimer, *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*, ed. Stephen Clingman (New York: Knopf, 1988), 298–299.

¹¹ Some of these virtues of fiction, both assumed and neglected, are usefully reviewed and illustrated in Sephiwe Ignatius Dube, ‘Transitional Justice beyond the Normative: Towards a Literary Theory of Political Transitions’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2 (2011), 177–197.

¹² She writes: ‘Literature is a dimension of concrete embodiment and a language of infinitude that, in contrast to the language of the law, encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given legal case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed. It is to this refusal of the trauma to be closed that literature does justice’. Shoshana Felman, *Juridical Unconscious. Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 8.

¹³ Dube, ‘Transitional Justice’, 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵ Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices*, 45–51.

genocide], by engaging the power of human imagination to make a move towards understanding, something which the reading of bare facts perhaps cannot do'.¹⁶

Ultimately, in this perspective, works of fiction thematizing past violence can contribute to providing a basis for a statewide dialogue on the past, which is, according to Osiel, the principal criterion for evaluating a country's transitional justice efforts.¹⁷ Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that these potential or assumed 'functions' of fiction in transition are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Martha Minow contends, the '(a)rt of the unthinkable should disturb as well as commemorate'.¹⁸

A Note on Focus and Main Questions

Against the background of such a rich spectrum of assumed functions of fiction in transitional justice contexts, in this chapter, we examine how fictional literature speaks to transitional justice efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH). We do this by looking at a set of narratives that have emerged after the genocide in Srebrenica. In particular, one of the crucial questions we ask is: What are the visions of *survivors*—those located between, even defining the space between, the past and the future¹⁹? Admittedly, our principal question seems ill-founded at first glance. After all, '[t]his is genocide, this incomprehensible loss of past and future life, individual and collective'.²⁰ Nonetheless, we focus on examining literary elaborations of transitional justice for those who survived, for their place between past and present, between memory and forgetting.

This chapter is by no means an exhaustive examination of literary production thematizing Srebrenica genocide, which is indeed extremely rich, ever increasing and often hard to trace.²¹ The narratives we have selected belong to the *literature*

¹⁶ Boniface Mongo-Mobussa, *Désir d'Afrique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 189, quoted in Audrey Small, 'The Duty of Memory: A Solidarity of Voices after the Rwandan Genocide', *Paragraph* 30 (2007), 88.

¹⁷ Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 3.

¹⁸ Minow, *Between Vengeance*, 142.

¹⁹ Indeed, '...the body of the witness is the ultimate site of memory of individual and collective trauma...', Felman, *Juridical Unconscious*, 9.

²⁰ Aleksandar Hemon, 'Srebrenica Web', *Dani*, July 1, 2005, accessed 21 January 2012, <http://www.ex-yupress.com/dani/dani121.html>.

²¹ Very often, these works are published by their authors or in very limited number of copies. In addition, the system of legal deposit in national libraries of BiH and Republika Srpska is not fully effective, so the current national bibliography of BiH is incomplete and has rather limited coverage.

of trauma and, for the purposes of our analysis and interpretation, are treated above all as ‘social products’,²² that is, they are stories that are capable of producing certain societal effects and participating in the formation of post-war identities. Naturally, not all of these narratives participate equally in the process of public ‘standardization’ of the story of Srebrenica. With some notable exceptions,²³ the majority of these narratives remain relatively unknown in the public sphere of BiH. Although we consulted the entire body of literary works on Srebrenica known to us, we engage primarily with those being closest to ‘social products’ in the above sense. In addition, a crucial factor in selecting the works to be examined in this paper is our thematic focus: we analyze the works that describe and explore the fates of survivors, visions of forgiveness, violent past and better future, as well as the ideas of justice *after* genocide.

Although extremely important autobiographical prose works on the Srebrenica genocide have been produced,²⁴ we do not examine testimonial literature as such. We interrogate first and foremost how arts, literature and film in particular, responded to the challenges of witnessing the unimaginable and utterly undecipherable horror of the Srebrenica genocide, as well as, more importantly for our purposes, the ‘afterlife’ of the survivors. At the same time, we endeavour to tackle a crucial question formulated by Kali Tal: ‘What happens when a survivor’s story is retold (and revised) by a writer who is not a survivor? How are survivor’s stories adapted to fit and then contained within the dominant structure of social, cultural and political discourse?’²⁵

²² Advancing their thesis of ‘social life as storied’, Margaret Somers and Gloria D. Gibson emphasize that narratives need to be treated as social products, in that ‘... stories guide action; that people construct identities (however, multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that “experience” is constituted through narrative...’. M. Somers and G. Gibson, ‘Reclaiming the epistemological “Other”’: Narrative and the social constitution of Identity’, in *Social Theory and Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 38–39, quoted in Steph Lawler, ‘Narrative in Social research’, in *Qualitative research in action* ed. Tim May (London: Sage publication, 2002), 244.

²³ Such as the oratorio *Srebrenica Inferno*, which has been featuring prominently during the central July commemoration and burial of the newly identified victims of genocide, Abdulah Sidran’s poem *Tears of the Mothers of Srebrenica*, which was initially published in the most widely circulated newspaper in the Federation of BiH, or a bestselling novel *When it Was July*.

²⁴ Examples include writings by Emir Suljagić *Razglednica iz groba* (Postcards from the Grave) (Sarajevo: Civitas, 2005) or (factual) novels based on survivors’ testimonies such as Mihrija Feković-Kulović’s *Živjeti i umirati za Srebrenicu* (Living and Dying for Srebrenica) (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2009) or Sadik Salimović’s *Put smrti: Srebrenica-Tuzla: prema istinitim događajima* (The Path of Death: Srebrenica-Tuzla: Based on True Events) (Sarajevo: Udruženje pokret majki enklava Srebrenica i Žepa, 2008).

²⁵ Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, accessed 15 April 2011, <http://www.kalital.com/Text/Worlds/Chap1.html>

A Brief Note on Normative Transitional Justice in BiH

What does it mean to examine fictional works in the context of transitional justice, in particular in BiH? In many other states, including South Africa and Argentina, fictional accounts of the violent past can, and indeed sometimes are, compared with normative, official narratives, such as those of truth commissions.²⁶ In BiH, however, fiction can mostly be seen as an anticipation of normative transitional justice, having in mind that a Bosnia-specific, comprehensive and ambitious transitional justice strategy has just been drafted, with still uncertain prospects of its being adopted, let alone consistently implemented.²⁷ In such circumstances, fictional works that thematize the 1992–1995 war and its consequences are necessarily set against the background of the uncertain, cacophonous and ethnically divided field of Bosnia's transitional justice.

Despite more than 15 years of engagement of a wide range of actors in this field, progress is still not substantial in BiH, at least when seen from the perspective of the goals of transitional justice. While prosecutions, with a myriad of problems and delays, continue at all levels,²⁸ truth telling beyond the courts is still underdeveloped and mostly unofficial, confined to individual, mainly mono-ethnic initiatives of various NGOs.²⁹ Disputes even over minimal, forensic truth still permeate public discourse and manipulation with numbers of victims on all sides continues, along with negationism and denial of genocide in Srebrenica in particular.³⁰ Divisions permeate the field of cultural production as well, in particular when it comes to artistic works thematizing the recent war in BiH. Such works, as a rule, remain confined to the parts of the state where they were produced (Federation of BiH or Republika Srpska).³¹

Genocide in Srebrenica undoubtedly and understandably received most attention in the various justice and documentation efforts. Nonetheless, most, if not all,

²⁶ See generally Hemer, *Writing Transition*.

²⁷ For full text of a working draft of the strategy (in local languages), see Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH and Ministry of Justice of BiH, *Transitional Justice Strategy for BiH 2012–2016*, 2012, accessed 08 July 2012, <http://www.mpr.gov.ba/aktuelnosti/propisi/konsultacije/Strategija%20TP%20-%20bosanski%20jezik%20fin%20doc.pdf>.

²⁸ See e.g. Alejandro Chehtman, 'Developing Bosnia and Herzegovina's Capacity to Process War Crimes Cases: Critical Notes on a "Success Story"', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 3 (2011), 547–570.

²⁹ See generally Graeme Simpson, Edin Hodžić and Louis Bickford, Looking Back, *Looking Forward: Promoting Dialogue through Truth-Seeking in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, accessed 8 July 2012, <http://www.undp.ba/upload/publications/Looking%20back,%20looking%20forward.pdf>. See also Dragan Popović, *Transitional Justice Guidebook for BiH*, UNDP BiH (2009), esp. 147–151, accessed 27 February 2012, <http://www.undp.ba/upload/publications/Vodic%20kroz%20tranzicijsku%20pravdu%20u%20BiH.pdf>.

³⁰ See e.g. Paul B. Miller, 'Contested Memories: The Bosnian Genocide in Serb and Muslim Minds', *Journal of Genocide Research* 3 (2006), 311–324.

³¹ See e.g. Jasmila Zbanić, 'Filmovi, zabrane i radost', accessed 28 February 2012, Radio Sarajevo <http://www.radiosarajevo.ba/novost/74532/jasmila-zbanic-filmovi-zabrane-i-radost>.

non-fiction or normative documents on Srebrenica have a typically narrow, investigative focus on clarifying the chain of events in the massacre of more than 8,000 Bosniak men in this former Bosniak enclave in mid-July 1995. They are prevalently concerned with examining the role of particular actors—such as the role of the UN in the Report of the Secretary General,³² the role of the Dutch battalion within the UN forces in the case of the NIOD report,³³ or the responsibility of the Republika Srpska military and police in the report of the Government of Republika Srpska's Srebrenica Commission.³⁴ Perhaps surprisingly, it was only the ICTY Trial Chamber in the Krstic case that devoted some attention to considering, however, cursorily, the visions of survivors and their future after genocide. The Krstic chamber established that '[i]n a patriarchal society, such as the one in which the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica lived, the elimination of virtually all the men has made it almost impossible for the Bosnian Muslim women who survived the take-over of Srebrenica to successfully re-establish their lives'.³⁵ Furthermore, '[b]y killing all the military aged men, the Bosnian Serb forces effectively destroyed the community of the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica as such and eliminated all likelihood that it could ever reestablish itself on that territory'.³⁶ And, even more disturbingly, the Trial chamber in Krstic prophetically states that:

'by killing the leaders and defenders of the group and deporting the remainder of it, the VRS and General Krstic had assured that the Bosnian Muslim community of Srebrenica and its surrounds would not return to Srebrenica nor would it reconstitute itself in that region or indeed, anywhere else'. Moreover, 'what remains of the Srebrenica community survives in many cases only in the biological sense, nothing more. It's a community in despair; it's a community clinging to memories; it's a community that is lacking leadership; it's a community that's a shadow of what it once was'.³⁷

The ICTY's portrayal of the survivors is a monolithic vision of community, even of its individual members, as entities without future. In this sense, while transitional justice is perhaps forward-looking at the level of the meta-narrative, in which the ICTY is one of the principal actors providing for justice, even truth and reconciliation,³⁸ the future of the survivors themselves seems deprived of any felicitous resolution. In a search for possible literary alternatives, in the next

³² UN General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35, 'The Fall of Srebrenica', 15 November 1999, A/54/549.

³³ See e.g. Alexander Moens, 'Lessons for Peacekeepers: Srebrenica and the NIOD Report', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 3 (2003), 141–158.

³⁴ See Popović, *Transitional Justice*, 60–63.

³⁵ Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić, ICTY Case No. IT-98-33-T, (2 August 2001), para. 91.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 597.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 592. In text quotes refer to the prosecution argument.

³⁸ See e.g. Diane F. Orentlicher, *That Someone Guilty Be Punished: The Impact of the ICTY in Bosnia* (New York: Open Society Institute, 2011), 39–42, accessed 21 January 2012, http://www.soros.org/initiatives/justice/articles_publications/publications/that-someone-guilty-20100707/that-someone-guilty-20100708.pdf.

section, we examine if, and in what ways, the literary imagination of the Srebrenica genocide and its aftermath is different, deeper, more elaborate or more disturbing than this legal imagining of the ICTY.

Reflections of Genocide in Bosnian Fiction

Introductory Remarks

Although Srebrenica remains ‘an obsessive topic of the public space in Bosnia and Herzegovina on which political myths are built’,³⁹ it appears that the grand theme of genocide has been introduced into the BiH cultural and artistic realm gradually and rather cautiously. Once it became a matter of artistic production, however, the topic of the genocide in Srebrenica experienced a literary boom of a sort. After *Novel on Srebrenica*⁴⁰ was published in 1999, the next decade witnessed the publication of such diverse literary works as the poem *The Srebrenica Inferno*,⁴¹ the novels *When it Was July*,⁴² *Srebrenica City*,⁴³ *People, be Wondered*,⁴⁴ several prose works of Mirsad Mustafić,⁴⁵ a collection of children’s stories *The Father’s Embrace: Stories on Srebrenica*,⁴⁶ works of poetry such as Abdulah Sidran’s *Tears of the Mothers of Srebrenica*,⁴⁷ *Srebrenica* by Ferida Duraković, *Potočari, Bosnia* by Ajla Terzić, *Srebrenica, Potočari* by Šejla Šehabović, as well as a number of collections of poems⁴⁸; finally, the topic of Srebrenica was explored in

³⁹ Enver Kazaz, interview by Omer Karabeg, *Magazin plus*, 26 June 2010, accessed 20 May 2011, <http://www.magazinplus.eu/index.php.kultura/2482-kada-ce-bit-i-napisan-prvi-roman-o-srebrenici>

⁴⁰ Isnam Taljić, *Roman o Srebrenici*, 5th ed. (Srebrenica: Općina Srebrenica, 2007).

⁴¹ Džemaludin Latić, *Srebrenički inferno: pismo Danteu Alighieriju iz Bosne*, 3rd ed. (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2006).

⁴² Nura Bazdulj-Hubijar, *Kad je bio juli* (Zagreb, VBZ, 2005).

⁴³ Osman Arnautović, *Srebrenica city* (Tuzla: Infograf, 2007).

⁴⁴ Đidana Sarić, *Čudi se, svijete* (Sarajevo: Grafički promet d.o.o, 2006).

⁴⁵ Mirsad Mustafić, *Krvava šamija* (Tuzla: Off-Set, 2006), *Rastanak u Potočarima* (Tuzla: Off-Set, 2007), *Samrtni zvuci srebrenog grada* (Tuzla: Off-set, 2009), *Posljednji vapaj enklave* (Tuzla: Off-set, 2012).

⁴⁶ Fuad Kovač, ed., *Očev zagrljaj: priče o Srebrenici* (Sarajevo: Behar, 2006).

⁴⁷ Abdulah Sidran, *Suze majki Srebrenice* (Sarajevo: Bemust, 2009).

⁴⁸ For example, V. Bajramović, *Srebrenica nakraj srca* (Sarajevo: self-publishing, 2010.); Z. Muratović, *Srebrenica je vrisak do neba* (Sarajevo: self-publishing, 2005); M. Salihbeg Bosnawi, *Srebrenica je zvijezda padalica* (Sarajevo: self-publishing, 2000); S. Šahović, *Krvava Srebrenica*. (Sarajevo: Zonex ex Libris, 2006).

two plays—*Apparitions from the Silver Age*⁴⁹ and *Crocodile ‘Lacoste’*,⁵⁰ and in one film—*Belvedere*,⁵¹ directed by Ahmed Imamović.

As was the case with many fictional narratives on the Shoah,⁵² the vast majority of literary works on Srebrenica could also be said to be plagued with the necessity of offering a realistic depiction of the traumatic event and its aftermath. Nonetheless, when speaking of the imperative of using ‘the appropriate “genre”’,⁵³ one can note a rather interesting formal diversity in terms of genre, a mixing of the so-called high and low literary forms, and the presence of a rather diverse set of fictional models. It was relatively early in the development of this specific sub-genre of *literature of genocide* that the radically stylized and aestheticized literary forms depicting the tragedy of Srebrenica have been produced: for example, the poem *Srebrenica Inferno*, written in Dante-like tercines, or the play *Apparitions from the Silver Age*, with a complex metaphorical apparatus and rather challenging intertextual connections. On the other end of the spectrum lie the narratives belonging to popular fiction, such as the epistolary novel *When it Was July* or the crime novel *Srebrenica City*.

Despite this richness of form, what marks the majority of narratives on Srebrenica is a certain ideological–aesthetical uniformity, manifested in the lack of critical reconceptualizations of given ethno-national and other identity roles. Although some of these narratives are attempted to be built as polyphonic, dialogical forms in the Bakhtinian sense,⁵⁴ they are rarely such as they are fixed within clear ethno-ideological identities and points of view. In most instances, focalization as well as the narrative perspective is fixed. The commonly used narration in first person suggests a clear relationship between the narrator and the character. Although narration in this manner should create the mask of an authentic, truthful survivor’s account, such a storytelling strategy is more often than not burdened by a predefined, one-dimensional role model of a victim with which to emotionally identify.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Almir Bašović, *Prividenja iz srebrnog vijeka* (Sarajevo: Oko, 2004).

⁵⁰ This award-winning play by Zlatko Topčić has still not been published, but it was set on scene in 2011 at The Chamber Theatre 55 from Sarajevo and directed by Sulejman Kupusović.

⁵¹ *Belvedere*, directed by Ahmed Imamović (Sarajevo: Compnex, 2010), DVD.

⁵² See generally Schwarz, *Imagining Holocaust*.

⁵³ Examining, inter alia, the issue of viability of representing Holocaust in a different narrative model, Hayden White identifies the prevalence of ‘the kind of rule that stipulates that a serious theme—such as mass murder or genocide—demands a noble genre, such as epic or tragedy, for its proper representation’. *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), 31.

⁵⁴ See generally Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Ed. and trans. C. Emerson. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵⁵ As Renata Jambrešić Kirin explains, analysing testimonial literature on the war in Croatia, ‘[p]ersonal experience relies on ideological patterns in order to get an acceptable interpretation within a wider community, whereas the reception of these interpretations, adaptations, artistic works etc. is often realized through intensive emotional identification, which forms the basis for building the common identity markers’. ‘Svjedočenje i povijesno pamćenje: o pripovjednom posredovanju osobnog iskustva’, *Narodna umjetnost* 2 (1995), 180.

This overwhelming uniformity is best seen in the presentation of characters. Consider the image of survivors. As will be shown below, almost all narratives on Srebrenica portray them in accordance with the dominant media representations, primarily in a superficial and one-dimensional way. This is clearly not in accordance with the ‘reality of the transitional’ in Bosnia, where the community of survivors of Srebrenica, just like any victim community, is heterogeneous and diverse, displaying various degrees of political contextualization, and mobilization, of their individual and collective traumas.⁵⁶

Common Characteristics and Narrative Patterns

Survivors of Srebrenica in these narratives are typically women, elderly and children. However, women in particular are depicted using the same pattern: an unnamed Bosniak woman (or a woman with a typical ethnic name) who is inevitably a mother and a wife, that is, a widow. They are presented as figures of survivors who barely live, mechanically performing routine everyday functions, deformed mentally and physically by the devastating loss. They are deeply melancholic,⁵⁷ essentially incapable of terminating the never-ending mourning process and starting to heal. Nonetheless, there is an important nuance to this one-dimensionality of characters, especially when seen through the lens of transitional justice. In some narratives, they are depicted as being *above* earthly considerations of transitional justice, not merely incarnating the ‘social value of suffering’.⁵⁸ In such perspectives, the loss and the figure of a victim/survivor are extremely idealized: Fatima as righteous⁵⁹ in the *Apparitions from the Silver Age*, Ruvejda as a patient and self-sacrificing sister who tirelessly takes care of her disabled brother and her sick sister in *Belvedere*. Alternatively, the characters of (female) survivors are depicted as having lost any trace of scruple, while almost the only characteristic that is left in them is the animalistic instinct of survival and self-protection; a scene from *The Novel on Srebrenica* is particularly telling:

⁵⁶ See e.g. Craig Evan Pollack, ‘Intentions of Burial: Mourning, Politics, and Memorials Following the Massacre at Srebrenica’, *Death Studies* 2 (2003), 125–142.

⁵⁷ In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud describes melancholia ‘as an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object. A mourning without end, melancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place, or ideal’ as cited in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, ‘Introduction’, in *Loss. The Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 3.

⁵⁸ Ruti Teitel, ‘Transitional Justice as Liberal Narrative’, in *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Process of Truth and Reconciliation: Documenta 11, Platform 2*, ed. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 241, as cited in Dube, ‘Transitional Justice’, 185.

⁵⁹ Bašović, *Prividenja iz*, 9.

I am looking at the female creatures in a hurry. These creatures have after a long, too long period of waiting, tasted real food. They gained strength to attack the trucks which brought food to them. No one can handle them ... Instinct of survival rules over the mass of women who for too long only had death before their eyes. They step on each other. They choke. They let their children's hands leave their fists. They even throw their babies away from their chests. It is not known that a female dog would discard her puppies.⁶⁰

Most characters in this subgenre are depicted as holders of patriarchal and ethno-national values. For example, in the introductory verses of *Srebrenica Inferno*, depicting the horrific scene of suffering of the unnamed Bosniak woman and her family and of her little girl being taken away from her, the woman speaks out the last message to her daughter: 'My dear child, save the face of your proud father'.⁶¹ In *When it Was July*, aunt Zejna will condemn Mirza's decision to get engaged to Biljana, a Serb: 'Poor Mirza, you must be out of your mind, you do not intend seriously to marry a chetnik, you know how much suffering they inflicted upon us...'.⁶²

At the same time, the narratives often portray women as uneducated housewives. Even if they had a career before the war, they do not wish or cannot work anymore. In the opening scene of *Belvedere*, at her sister's suggestion that she should apply for the post of a teacher at the local school, Ruvejda replies: 'I'm no good for a teacher or children anymore and children are not what they used to be'. The main characters are usually reduced to caregivers—apart from their duties of care for others and the search for their missing men, they have no function or purpose whatsoever. This is not to be confused with feminist reconceptualizations of the notion of caring labour, which comes to be understood as an active principle giving rise to 'a "rationality of care", exemplifying many alternative ideals of reason recently formulated by feminists'.⁶³ Rather, the taking care of others in these narratives is usually described as a set of mechanical, automatic gestures, empty skills deprived of any value in a patriarchal scheme, not least because they are necessary and taken for granted.

In the majority of these narratives, then, most of, primarily female, the characters of survivors of Srebrenica are portrayed as those to whom 'nothing, either bad or good, can happen any more'.⁶⁴ They are 'more dead than all the dead of

⁶⁰ Taljić, *Roman o*, 150–151 (Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from selected narratives are translated by the authors).

⁶¹ Latić, *Srebrenica Inferno*, 11–12.

⁶² Bazdulj-Hubijar, *Kad je bio*, 153.

⁶³ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking. Toward the Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 46.

⁶⁴ The verse from Abdulah Sidran's acclaimed poem *Uzevši kost i meso* (Taking the Bone and Flesh Away), from his collection of poems *Sarajevski tabut* (The Coffin of Sarajevo), published in 1993 in besieged Sarajevo.

their kin',⁶⁵ while Srebrenica 'resembles an open grave the most',⁶⁶ in which 'neither dead nor living can dwell...'.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, an important contradiction can be noted: that between the survivors' general lack of interest in life and future after genocide, on the one hand, and their painstaking efforts at identifying the mortal remains of their missing family members. The identifications and burial are, however, normally not depicted as potentially opening the way towards healing and a new future for survivors. Rather, the struggle to find the information on mortal remains of their loved ones is often presented as the single remaining issue worth living for.

A generational motif also dominates the narratives of the Srebrenica genocide. Commonly, there is a tension, sometimes even a conflict, between the survivors and the first *post-memory generation*—those who were born after the trauma, as well as those who experienced the traumatic event as children. They are depicted as facing a double marginalization, because they are excluded not only from the wider society, but also from the small community of survivors.⁶⁸ At the same time, they are normally accorded the role of those who carry the desire for change and for life that would not be entirely organized around the routine activities of remembrance and the search for the missing relatives. Such a wish, however, turns out to be ill-founded, as it most often ends up in another form of futile escapism, as in the case of Adnan, the young son of Zejna in *Belvedere*, who decides to change his life by entering a reality show⁶⁹ or the young girl Zarfa from *Srebrenica City*, who chooses the desperate path of revenge.

The motif of isolation of survivors from wider society is another dominant characteristic of literature on Srebrenica genocide. In most of these works, the story is set in the space of a refugee camp⁷⁰ or abandoned houses. Such closed semantic spaces do not allow for transformation of characters to occur. They are typically located at the periphery or even in very isolated, distant places becoming ghettos of a sort, unwanted reminders of the war and its disturbing heritage. In such a milieu, except for the novels *When it Was July* and, to a certain extent, *Srebrenica City*, the majority of the depicted characters do not cherish any hope for the future. In this sense, the verses of the poem *The Tears of the Mothers of Srebrenica* are more than illustrative:

⁶⁵ *Belvedere*, dir. Imamović. accessed 10 January 2012, <http://belvederemovie.com/>.

⁶⁶ Taljić, *Roman o Srebrenici*, 33.

⁶⁷ Sidran, *Tears of*, 5.

⁶⁸ This tension is particularly thematized in novels *When it was July* and *Srebrenica City*, where the respective central characters are a young boy Mirza and a teenager girl Zarfa.

⁶⁹ In particular, through a series of contrapuntal scenes his attempt to live a life of an ordinary teenager is presented in parallel with his aunt's painstaking search for the truth. For example, while the women are visiting the post-mortem identification centre, he is making a set of weights; while they are attending a silent protest they participate in every month on the eleventh day, he is going to an internet café.

⁷⁰ For example, the very title of Imamović's movie is taken from the name of the real refugee camp near Gorazde in eastern Bosnia.

... And you say:
 Look to the future!
 And we
 Do not see it at all
 At any place in any way
 Nor do we see that it
 Watches us
 By any eye
 Let alone that it sees us
 And cares about us
 We do not have a future
 Of any kind
 We have the present
 Which a human eye
 Cannot even look at⁷¹

Finally, another set of motifs in the fictional narratives of Srebrenica genocide is the overwhelming sense of distrust in justice and its mechanisms, and the emphasis on what transitional justice fails to achieve, rather than on its possible successes. The majority of these literary works exhibit a considerable distrust in the very possibility of closure. In all these narratives, achieving a form of closure is conceived as possible, if at all, only on the micro-level, be it a necessity to forgive and move on against all odds⁷² or blind revenge replicating the cruelty of the crime.⁷³ Except for *When it Was July* and, to a certain extent, *Srebrenica Inferno* and its motif of an inter-religious dialogue as a way out from vicious cycles of victimization, no other narrative suggests the strategies of ‘dealing with the past’. Rather, they force the protagonists of the story to remain indefinitely trapped in the nightmares and the incorrigible losses of the past, or to undertake the desperate path of the final self-destruction as the only way of ending the hopeless transition.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Sidran, *Tears of*, 11.

⁷² Examples are the main character of *When it Was July*, Mirza and his decision to marry a Serb girl as a somewhat simplistic and superficial step towards restoring ‘brotherhood and unity’, or the illustrative conversation of the woman survivor of Srebrenica with Maria in Ravenna, at the end of *Srebrenica Inferno*.

⁷³ In *Srebrenica City*, the main female character chooses the path of revenge as the only viable form of justice.

⁷⁴ In *Belvedere*, for example, the main character Rujejda activates a bomb to kill both herself and the man she suspects to be connected with the slaughter of her family; in *Crocodile Lacoste*, the killing of both herself and her father is the only way out for the woman who had found out about the heinous crimes her father committed.

The Realities and the Fiction of the ‘Transitional’

How, then, do these fictional narratives of Srebrenica speak to normative transitional justice and, in particular, *the reality of the transitional* in Bosnia?

As a first step, one should critically reassess the omnipresent motif of the powerlessness of the victims in literature of Srebrenica genocide, with its many layers and paradoxes. In contrast to the literary images of the powerless community of survivors of Srebrenica, one can note a still vital symbolic power they enjoy in the divided public sphere of BiH, in particular in relation to cultural production. Indeed, among the fictional narratives of Srebrenica, there seems to be a tendency of confirming their ‘authenticity’ or ‘adequacy’ by getting either formal support or recognition from leading victim associations. This was the case, for example, with *Belvedere*, which was, as the introductory credits show, supported not only by various state institutions, but also by the women from the Movement of the Mothers from the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa.⁷⁵ The latter have not only symbolically supported the film, but also took part in it as actors in various scenes of protests and gatherings in support of the search for the missing. This fictionalization of real characters adds another dimension to the imperative of a realistic and truthful presentation of trauma of Srebrenica. Moreover, another victim association⁷⁶ has proven to be a very efficient censorship institution of a sort when it managed to urge state authorities not to allow Angelina Jolie to film her *In the Land of Blood and Honey* on original locations in BiH.⁷⁷ These seemingly symbolic gestures are at the same time an expression of a somewhat counterintuitive and paradoxical control of otherwise powerless survivors over both their traumatic experience and its fictional reconstructions, which also comes to be seen as a deeply politicized act.

In effect, the majority of fictional narratives on Srebrenica have participated in the process of memorialization of, and testifying about, genocide using strategies of cultural coping that lead to the codification of trauma, but also to its

⁷⁵ The association was officially formed in 1999, but their activism goes back to 1996, when they organized their first protests demanding serious investigations into the fate of their missing men. On this association and their trajectory from a small grass root organization to a powerful transitional justice actor see Olivera Simic, ‘What Remains of Srebrenica? Motherhood, Transitional Justice and Yearning for the Truth’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 4 (2009).

⁷⁶ Association ‘Women-Victims of War’. See more about the organization at www.zena-zrtvarata.ba.

⁷⁷ Initially, after a fierce protest by a representative of The Association of Women-Victims of War over the then still unconfirmed information that the film would feature a love story between an imprisoned Bosniak woman and a Serb army officer, the Ministry of Culture of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has refused to issue an authorization for shooting the film on the territory of this Bosnia’s entity. See e.g. Belma Bećirbašić ‘Trgovanje emocijama žrtve’ *Dani*, 22 October 2010, 30.

‘mythologization’.⁷⁸ Indeed, as Jasmina Husanović explains, ‘the challenges of mythologization are understandably considerable: it is necessary to protect, in the state of an overwhelming block, an immense loss of life and meaning, and mythologization does that grandiosely, at the same time hiding the still present political trauma’.⁷⁹

In an attempt at drawing the contours of a framework for understanding and explaining the endurance of dominant thematic patterns and motifs in fictional prose of Srebrenica, one should consider the important issue of the sequencing or timing of normative transitional justice in relation to fictionalizing the horrifying past. Normative transitional justice interventions are usually undertaken as soon after the tragic event as possible, with a temporally limited mandate and in a hopeful attempt to urgently shape and sanitize the public sphere and set the boundaries of the unacceptable discourse on the past in transition.⁸⁰ In BiH, especially having in mind the limited reach and societal impact of war crimes trials at all levels,⁸¹ an official, coordinated and concerted project of dealing with the past has not yet been conceived of, let alone initiated. In such circumstances, trapped between the extremes of political appropriation of Srebrenica genocide by Bosniak political elites, and denial and revisionism among the Bosnian Serb leadership,⁸² the extra-literary imperative of simplistic, repetitive, even screaming *truthfulness* becomes hard to ignore and resist.

A second dimension of the problematic of timing is that it may well be that different and diverse approaches to storytelling about genocide necessarily emerge over time. Such diversification of storytelling on the violent past is particularly important. While it is true that the above-mentioned broader, political considerations necessarily influence and shape cultural production in this field, different, more imaginative approaches would, in turn, be much more effective at the individual level. Writing about the literature of Holocaust, Daniel Schwarz reminds that ‘as we move from the Holocaust, the matrix of naturalistic verisimilitude becomes less effective ... than illuminating distortions, parables, and mythic history *because* the memoirs and diaries for survivors and historical novels have become part of our felt knowledge’.⁸³ It is, however, questionable that the Srebrenica genocide, which is dealt with in a complex web of juridical proceedings, scattered documentary evidence, competing documentation efforts and fully

⁷⁸ Kali Tal considers ‘mythologization’, along with ‘medicalization’ and ‘disappearance’, one of the principal strategies of cultural coping with a traumatic event: ‘Mythologization works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives (twice- and thrice-told tales that come to represent “the story” of the trauma) turning it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable narrative’. Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, Chap. 1.

⁷⁹ Husanović, *Između traume*, 65.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 215–216.

⁸¹ See e.g. Lara Nettelld, *Courting Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Hague Tribunal’s Impact in a Postwar State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chap. 5.

⁸² See e.g. Miller, *Contested Memories*.

⁸³ Schwarz, *Imagining Holocaust*, 141.

fledged denial projects, has indeed become part of the universally ‘felt knowledge’ in BiH. Hence, however strong and counterproductive the numbing effect of the repeated and horrifying stories of Srebrenica, it is probably still early for symbolism and parables about the Bosnian genocide.

Instead of a Conclusion: Towards Literary Transitional Justice

Can transitional justice for Srebrenica begin in fiction? As things stand now, fictional narratives on Srebrenica genocide remain painful, descriptive and repetitive. They do not only resist closure implicit in transitional justice efforts; they seem to go even deeper into hopelessness. The above-elaborated patterns in literary and cinematic representations of Srebrenica can be said to be the fictional reflections of the actual building blocks in the project of mythologization of genocide which permeates public discourse in BiH, in particular among Bosniaks. This is why it is not surprising that in such fictional narratives, there are no imaginary conversations between perpetrators and survivors, there is no single survivor who carries hope, at least for future generations, the time does not pass by for Srebrenica, while the survivors, at least in the ‘reality of fiction’, are hopelessly murdered with a delayed effect. In other words, in fictional accounts of Srebrenica, surviving genocide is still, as a rule, understood as a contradiction in terms.

Fiction on Srebrenica has not managed to distort, explore and dissect, or to critically examine the juridical approaches to genocide, but have merely and passively reproduced it in an artistic form. Even more so, fictional narratives of Srebrenica continue to depict survivors almost exclusively as prisoners of the past, incapable of healing. What they in effect do is not give voice to those deprived of the voice, as Teresa Godwin Phelps would suggest,⁸⁴ but rather offer a very limited insight into their overwhelming voicelessness. In many ways, then, one of the somewhat neglected victims of genocide in Srebrenica is also literary imagination. This is why fictional literature of Srebrenica can be seen primarily as a potential area and subject of transitional justice interventions, rather than as the often assumed field of freedom of artistic imagery and exploration of both the unspoken and taken for granted in transition.

Epilogue

Fiction could perhaps, as a first step at least, indicate ways out of the overwhelming voicelessness and incorrigible ‘otherness’ of the victims of Srebrenica, towards more constructive engagements with the past, literary empathy, voice and agency. One could, with Damir Arsenijević, identify rare examples of works that

⁸⁴ See generally Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices*.

could be considered different, innovative, perhaps even emancipatory literary practices.⁸⁵ For example, Šejla Šehabović portrays survivors in a way that enables us to see them in a different light—as human beings, emphasizing their ‘normalcy’, closeness and familiarity (whereby the poet also actively participates in the act of commemoration)—and to feel connection and solidarity with them. In this way, the dominant narratives of incorrigible distance and ghettoization of the survivors are reversed.⁸⁶ In his novel thematizing war in Bosnia generally, Mirsad Sijarić⁸⁷ also offers an alternative strategy, in that he dissects the mind and soul of the likes of Radovan Karadžić, writing even in first person in a valuable attempt to explore the main character’s earthly, everyday and possibly diabolic dimensions, both the banality and the peculiarity of evil. However important, these examples remain rare, marginal and marginalized exceptions with limited relevance to approaches to dealing with Srebrenica genocide itself. In this sense, we would have to agree with Enver Kazaz that a novel on Srebrenica still needs to be written,⁸⁸ i.e., that a new, richer and more imaginative practice of literary and artistic transposition of Srebrenica still needs to emerge.

A comprehensive account of the possible innovative literary approaches to Srebrenica and *literary transitional justice* in BiH is beyond the scope of this paper. However, let us conclude by indicating some of the contours of such a possible paradigm shift.

First, it would be necessary for such narratives to follow the lines of the above-noted exceptions and start emphasizing the notions of empathy, solidarity with, and humanity of the victims in order to combat the overwhelming feeling of numbness towards the atrocities of Srebrenica.⁸⁹ Moreover, what is needed is not only ‘emphatic witnessing’, but also and no less important, promoting and cultivating emphatic *reading* and *listening*—keeping in mind that the literature of trauma is not only ‘unspeakable’ but also often ‘unreadable’, or impossible to be heard.⁹⁰

Second, organized efforts at the level of cultural production and cultural policy should be undertaken in order to both cultivate this kind of writing, reading and

⁸⁵ See generally Damir Arsenijević, *Forgotten Future: The Politics of Poetry in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

⁸⁶ Šehabović, *Srebrenica. Potočari*, English translation and a convincing analysis of the poem are found in: Damir Arsenijević ‘Mobilising Unbribable Life: The Politics of Contemporary Poetry of Bosnia and Herzegovina’, in *Toward a New Literary Humanism*, ed. Andy Mousley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 166–180.

⁸⁷ Mirsad Sijarić, *Još jedna pjesma o ljubavi i ratu* (Another Song of Love and War) (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2008).

⁸⁸ Kazaz, interview by Omer Karabeg.

⁸⁹ For example, as Titus Levy elaborates, this kind of an emphatic response in what essentially is a trauma narrative is one of the notable qualities of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go*. See Titus Levy, ‘Human Rights Storytelling and Trauma Narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*’, *Journal of Human Rights* 10 (2011), 1–16.

⁹⁰ Cf. Martina Kopf, ‘Trauma, Narrative and the Art of Witnessing’, in *Slavery in Art and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality*, eds. Birgit Haehnel and Melanie Ulz (Berlin: Frank and Timme, 2010).

listening and pose and thematize the difficult questions regarding the relationship of fiction with the realities of survivors, their diverse stories and experiences.⁹¹

Thirdly, and in the same vein, thematic variety in the literature of genocide and transition in general should be supported. Such an intervention would enable writers to go beyond repetitive, descriptive and painful variations of hopelessness.

And finally, literary projects thematizing more complex embodiments of femininity and masculinity—and not only one-dimensional mothers, soldiers and war veterans—would also be beneficial as they would enable literary steps beyond the often ethno-centric narratives of hopelessness and continuous victimization.

All in all, the diversification of narratives on Srebrenica genocide would be welcome not only for the sake of the future, but also and above all for the seemingly indefinite here and now of transition which still remains imprisoned in the same concentration camp, almost 20 years after the end of hostilities in BiH.

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