

***Merhaba*¹ to Memories**
An Essay on Recovering Memories and
Identity through Narrative

A BA Thesis in Creative Writing

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¹ It means *Hello* in Bosnian, it is a Turkism.

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Introduction

This paper is about memory and how storytelling can influence that memory. I decided to write a story where I explore the notions of identity and how memory can affect it. As a Bosnian from ex-Yugoslavia, I have had quite a colourful childhood. I was only four at the time of the war though, so I have very little memories about this period. Please note that I classify memories as the flashes of clear images we have whenever we remember anything. The problem lies in the fact that we can still tell stories, whether about our entire lives or about a certain event, even though we only have these flashes. I try to find out how this exactly happens. I postulate that it is due to the narrative we give to any situation which we come in contact with. As my parents and family has always told me about our flight from a civil war as if it were a story, or more likely a memoir, I have always believed it to be true. They have therefore constructed the narrative of my childhood *for* me. However, as I research more into the creation of false memories, I begin to wonder how much of the identity we create through our narrative memories is real.

In my story, I also explore memory; in fact, the entire story is told through a memory. The story is like autobiographical fiction, in that all of this of course did not happen, but the person telling the story is me. I arrive in Sarajevo, searching for a missing piece of the puzzle of my life, as the years me and my mother spent being refugees were very hectic, and I barely have any pictures, and certainly no film footage. That immediately led me to remember that I was in a movie about the war, made by the Iranian director Ebrahim Hatamikia, and especially the fact that the director saved my life. He simply gave me, my mother and some of the family members we were with, some money for a small role as extras in his film. This money helped us leave the refugee camp in Croatia, and eventually go to Slovakia, where my aunt had some family we could stay with. In the end, this is actually the only piece of footage of me during our flight, so it has always intrigued me what I looked like. I have found the film

on YouTube, but I think the shot of me and my cousins waving goodbye at the camera was cut out. In the story however, I do see myself, and because I was led to believe I was an unhappy child at the time, it seemed perfectly logical to me the child on the movie would be unhappy. However the child on the footage is actually very happy and bubbly. This leads to my protagonist feeling more uprooted than ever, because though everyone I know had suffered through that war, I seem not to have been affected by it. This severs one of the few connections I had with ex-Yugoslavia to begin with. When you have filled in the blanks of your life, realising that it was not true to begin with, you are left with very little. So my thesis for this paper is that our memories can be severely affected by the narrativity of a story.

Theory

An Essay on Recovering Memories and Identity through Narrative

Memory has been one of the most important aspects of any culture. Through memory we create our cultural histories and our personal life stories. Yet the question arises of how our memories craft the narrative of our lives. After all, few people remember their whole lives in vivid images; yet we all have enough narrative in that memory to create autobiographies. So the narrative of memories creates what is -in essence- our identity. Very few people have a photographic memory, yet every single human can, if asked, produce a very vivid description of their life. It seems that we have life narratives, and consequentially identities, ready despite not remembering everything in our lives in vivid detail. Our memories, and consequentially, our identities can be influenced by narrative.

Much of our memory consists of flashes of clear images which we connect through narrative association. This means that we tell and remember our stories the same way we read them: as if they were a plot to a book with an exposition, initial incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. After all, stories, legends, and myths are often connected to the theory of euhemerism, a theory that says that myths spring from the initial person or persons telling a narrative about a historic event and subsequent generations elaborating on these events until they became myth or legend (Honko 45).

A good narrative is a universal human need, as it helps us understand the world around us and assists our imagination with creating a whole range of realities. In a world with an ever increasing need for hard facts and data, narrative seems to become progressively nonessential. Yet there is no denying that narrative is still a necessity for all of humanity. After all, however exotic or alien another culture might be, we still understand the structure and meaning of its stories (White 5-6). Hayden White's "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" suggests that narrative is a code that any culture needs in order to

convey meaning from one human to another. It creates a human universal through which transcultural realities can be conveyed. It is any human's narrative goal to translate an event into words and to convey meaning. White postulates that the absence or refusal of this narrativity constitutes an absence or refusal of meaning, and consequentially, reality itself (6). Therefore, as White feels that history epitomises the field of conveying realities in the past, he questions historians, who have to convey the truth about proven dates and facts but are constricted by narrativity; the absence of narrative renders history meaningless. White goes into great detail of how annals, chronicles fail because of their lack of narrativity, and that "the history proper" is the only proper way to convey history (9). Annals represent only dates and events, without any reason or meaning behind them. Because of this lack of meaning, the historian who writes them fails to convey the importance of these events, or to help the reader understand why they have happened. On the other hand, the chronicle tries to add meaning to events, adding a narrative with a plot, answering the question *why*; why did these events happen? However, as is the problem of these chronicles, the storyteller is forced to cut off the story *in medias res*. After all, the person writing the chronicle lives in the same era as the history he is conveying, so the story ends where the chronicler's memory ends. This takes a reader out of the story and removes all philosophical meaning the story might hold if it had been written in retrospection. Furthermore, because the chronicler has a patron looking over his shoulder, it leaves very little room for multiple interpretations and reflections. So White says that the ideal history is what he terms as "the history proper", which encapsulates it as a full story, with facts and dates, accompanied by plot and, most importantly, a resolution (9). In essence, this creates the most relatable and most believable story, as the focus is shifted to the reader rather than to the annalist, the chronicler, or the chronicler's patron (most chronicles were written by scribes detailing the lives of their patrons), and in doing so brings history closer to reality (White 5-27). However, White also states that the only logical way to end a

proper history is to end it on a moralising note. It requires a reflection from the authors on *why* they decide on a specific cut-off point; what meaning are they trying to convey by ending the event? The problem this addresses is that the history could run *ad infinitum* because the actions of great leaders and kings can sometimes reverberate through history in analogies and allegories, leaving the author no other option *but* to end abruptly. However, I feel this theory is flawed an historic tale abruptly would not present a problem if the historian were a skilled narrator who has already created ideas and morals throughout the story and ends the history skilfully. It is narrative that creates a more realistic world, whereas reading a summary or an unfinished diary leaves the reader wanting.

On the other hand David Carr's "Narrative Explanation and its Malcontents" states that we are simply being forced into using narrative, as there is no other option for history and even reality. Carr does make an excellent point in saying that the realities of history can be warped and changed according to the whims of writers. Modes of narration therefore have the power to dangerously alter histories. Carr postulates that while narration creates the reality around us in everyday life, it actually has a muddling effect if used for history. Narrative is used most in literature, and an author can make us biased through the use of that narrative. The same is therefore true for a historian writing with narrative, because they might opt to leave out details, or embellish actions or events that were inconsequential in the original event. However, Carr notes that despite historians having the *possibility* of altering history it does not mean they do. After all, the author of a history is not wilfully ignoring events, and narrative structures are simply necessary to create coherent and imaginable circumstances for the reader to investigate (Carr 19-30). "It is because of this closeness of structure between human action and narrative that we can genuinely be said to explain an action by telling a story about it"(Carr 29). And in the same way that any person is likely to reassess their actions and change their opinions over the course of time, historians are in the perfect position to

create the most detailed reality possible. It is through the narration of historic events, and through the revision and review of their peers, that good historians can create the most complete history possible. Only good storytellers can weave the tapestry of reality, but they should be careful since their mode of narration can change the meaning of history.

Storytelling, however, is problematic in that our memories change every time we remember them. For example, witnesses of a violent crime change their testimony when they are questioned repeatedly. In this 1988 study by Scrivner and Safer, participants witnessed a film in which a bank robbery was taking place. The outcome of the movie for the first group was the robber shooting a bystander, and for the control group it was a neutral scene in the empty bank building. This led to varying results in recalling the movie among the test groups. The control group remembered more details about film in its entirety. The other group remembered the murder in much more vivid detail, while at the same time failing to recall many details from the rest of the film. Subsequent questioning resulted in participants of both groups adding more and more details to their version of the story (Bornstein et al. 127). This leads to the conclusion that if details are forgotten or omitted, it blurs our memories and makes a situation seem less believable, in other words, our minds fabricate or recall parts of our memory to construct a plausible narrative situation.

The question is how our memory relates to a situation where we are at the centre of attention. After all, the devil is in the details, and while details make a story sound more probable they also makes lies more credible. How much of our life story is attributable to false memories is a poignant question. In experiments on imagination inflation, which requires subjects to repeatedly recount a fake event over and over, when they recall the event in a later memory test, they will believe that the event actually occurred (Goff and Roediger 31). In their 2011 article "False memories for suggestions: The impact of conceptual elaboration" Zaragoza et al. extrapolate from several studies that:

... imagining fictitious events involves more than simply creating a perceptually detailed representation. Imagining how a fictitious event might have transpired also likely involves more abstract sorts of reasoning about the meaning and implications of the fictitious event, and the creation of a plausible scenario that fits with other information in memory (Zaragoza et al. 19).

Because our brains subconsciously try to make logical sense of events we remember regardless of whether these events are true or not, we consciously aim to make more and stronger connections between the events and the information we have stored in our actual memory, eventually leading to the creation of a false memory. This is, again, achieved through repetition.

In their 2004 article "Spinning the Stories of our Lives", Marsh and Tversky presented the results of a case study on how people tell stories based on facts. They show that participants tell stories differently depending on their audience. Participants read a story about two roommates who were in some respects sociable, but also caused nuisance. Afterwards, some participants were asked to write a letter of recommendation about the roommates to a fictional social club. Others were asked to write a complaint about them to a housing authority. The subsequent letters went beyond the facts presented in the original story. Participants treated the information selectively and even added or subtracted personal traits that the roommates did not have in the original story (e.g., "Rachel is bubbly"). Participants were finally asked to recall the story they had read, with as much accuracy as possible. (Tversky and Marsh 1-5). Participants remembered the story with accuracy, but also had a bias towards the roommate they had written a letter about. This leads to the conclusion that a different situation creates the need for a different narrative, which in turn contaminates the memory. Repetition and suggestion seems to be at the root of this problem. As was seen in the previous three experiments, repetition results in more details. In turn, because our memory

creates or recalls more and more details, essentially creating a better narrative or filling up the holes, we are more ready to believe an event. Simply put, we engage in doublethink, or brainwash ourselves.

For all intents and purposes, autobiographies and memoirs, are a perfect example of memories come to life through narrative. Yet when our memory seems to work against us from the beginning, how true could these works of non-fiction be? Autobiographies and memoirs are often a hotbed of debate, since writers of memoirs were prone to fabricating or omitting facts to make their story sound more interesting. This almost seems a necessity with memoirs today; without a touching or overly dramatic life story, no one will care. The publication of James Frey's memoir *A Million Little Pieces* caused major controversy when it came to light that he had lied about his time in prison and his subsequent redemption, he himself had referred to the memoir as a "subjective retelling of events". (Fogarty 780). He writes about his three month long imprisonment, when in fact he had only been detained for one night in a police station cell. In another instance a Dutch author, Boudewijn Büch, wrote a semi-autobiographical book called *De Kleine Blonde Dood*², where the drive of his main protagonist, a mirror image of himself, was fuelled by his hatred for his father, who had verbally and emotionally abused him. He mentioned in an interview that his own father was a Jewish refugee from Danzig, who joined the RAF and eventually had to bomb his own hometown. It was these events that had made him abuse Boudewijn and eventually commit suicide because of his traumas. This incited rage from his fans towards his father, but when it turned out his father was a public servant from The Hague and had died of a heart attack, the public turned on Büch and he was made out to be a fraud. Another, even more jarring example is the story of *The Angel at the Fence*, in which Herman Rosenblat writes how he survived Buchenwald thanks to a young girl who threw apples over the fence for him on a

² The Little Blonde Death

daily basis. He even stated that he eventually met her on a blind date in America in 1957, where he recognised her as the girl who had thrown him the apples that saved his life. Most of his story proved false, especially his description of Buchenwald. This causes one to wonder whether these memoirists are telling the truth, or just fabricating their stories to sell books. Yet in the light of the previous studies (Bornstein et al, Goff and Roedinger, Scrivner and Safer, Tversky and Marsh, Zaragoza et al), the people who write these false memoirs do in fact see the truth, but it is their own truth. So when they produce works of literature about their identity they may in fact be recounting their own vision of the events that transpired. However, some believe that the fantasies that writers of memoirs and autobiographies create are simply the result of laziness, a lust for attention, or money, and that these stories can be very dangerous for these reasons.

In her 2006 article "His So-called Life", Mary Karr writes about what memoirs entail. She wrote it in the wake of two memoirists revealing their stories to be a lie, one being James Frey and the other being JT Leroy, a fake identity created by American writer Laura Albert who she used to write a story filled with child prostitution, homelessness, and drug abuse. She explains that to become a proper memoirist you have to go way beyond the surface, way beyond your own identity, to look at yourself as an unbiased person (Karr 14). She reasons that this is most likely a shift from objective truth in writing to subjective experience. As an example she gives Michael Herr's Vietnam memoir *Dispatches* in which he describes the war in such a jumbled and confused narrative that it has been regarded as a better account of the war than the original reports (Karr 15). She also explains how the objective truth in memoirs is often a more boring read, but can be a true eye opener to a deeper understanding of the life and personality of the author (Karr 23). Karr explains that she, at one point, wrote a farewell scene with her father in it to show how he had abandoned her when she hit puberty. However, when she looked objectively at her own memories, she saw that it was herself that was

pushing him away; while her father had constantly tried to connect to her, and he was taking proper care of her every day, she herself was the one who "left him for Mexico and California with a posse of drug dealers, and then for college (Karr 21-22)." She says she pities James Frey, as his memoirs were picked apart on the spot on national television, something she suggests is left to the author in private (Karr 24).

Every memoir and autobiography is a reflection of the self, of our own identity, but a problem arises when our perceived identities are fabricated. After all, memories can be muddled and we could perceive events in a different light. Where one person would see a political assassination as a horrid and unforgivable thing, another would see it as a necessary evil. Who is to say that Büch did not see his father as an RAF pilot, or that Frey had warped an overnight stay in a cell into a three month long sentence? This is a very grey area, and the danger persists that the narrative we have created for ourselves could be false, but it is still our life story. A created memory presents the philosophical problem of whether a person who creates a reality for themselves - either to cope with an event or to make themselves more interesting, whether consciously or subconsciously - is entitled to their reality. Would disproving their reality cause their identity to be disproven? Would that lead to a personality breakdown, or would they even blatantly deny everything but their own reality? In the best case scenario, that person could come to terms with their imagined memory and accept the truth while, at the same time, understanding that it will not change or destroy their identity and personality. Whether we like it or not, the identity we have created for ourselves will always contain biased opinions and flawed arguments, simply because *we* are flawed and biased. Having said that, a work that deals with life's history, in the same way as any piece of historical narrative, requires close scrutiny. Any person who wishes to write an autobiography or memoir should consider the possibility that some of their memories of events could be biased, which means a need to go through records and documents to uncover the truth; not for

the sake of sales or attention, but to uncover the truth about themselves. It takes a discerning and honest mind to recognise that our identities are the product of memories which have been altered significantly through narrative; which means that to some extent, we are all the product of fiction.

“Diaspora”

Chapter 1: Memories I have

I was finally going to see the bigger picture, finally going to finish the puzzle. The final piece was right around the corner, in between the communist *Dom Sindikata* building and the Austro-Hungarian post office. This whole situation is certainly not what I had planned for my summer.

Birthdays at my parents house were always embarrassing. Much more so whenever they felt nostalgic and decided to show whatever friends had come over videos of me as a child. My friends were always more amazed at the radical difference between how I was as a child and how I am now - the best way I could describe myself as a child was... lively. A bane on my parents' nerves as I was always climbing on walls, tables and cupboards, and subsequently falling on my head. A little live wire, who would squirm and nervously tug and hit everything that was nearby whenever I was ordered to sit still, my parents had tried to pacify me with treats or trinkets, but that never lasted long. A hamster on cocaine who furiously wanted to cuddle with everything and everybody, but not for too long, as it meant I would have to sit still for longer than a few seconds. I was so energetic, my mother would always joke that when I was a baby I would crawl on my belly around the house so much that she never needed to sweep. However, that bane, that live wire, that cocaine-fuelled hamster would grow up to become a safe, slow and lazy young man, and the only thing that made my inner child shine through would be my inability to ever sit still. Anyway, back to my birthdays. My parents would always show films of my birthdays - films of when I turned three, four, and five. The films were family videos like any other, except that of course the little boy, that is, me, never changed in personality. Which is of course very peculiar when you realise that between my fourth and fifth birthday I had gone through a lot: I was uprooted

from my home and we became refugees in Croatia. I had lost my father (who was in a prisoner of war camp, and who we would later ransom back out thanks to my mother's rich uncle from Germany) and would not see him for another eleven months. After Croatia, we would buy our way across the border and go into Slovakia, where my aunt had some family we could stay with. Not for long though as we were forced to leave soon, and this time my mother decided to flee as far west as possible. It was only when we arrived in the Netherlands that we stopped running. By the time we did arrive there I was underfed (not that my mother did not try feeding me, she even blames herself for my present pudginess, but simply that I refused to eat because of the stresses of constantly relocating), I was underfed and I was two thousand kilometres away from my home and my dad. He actually arrived the day after my fifth birthday, bearing lots and lots of presents. That's as far as my actual memory of the war goes.

It seemed peculiar to me that while the Balkan wars affected me physically, it was almost as if they had never affected my personality. At least, it never showed on film, I seemed just as happy on my fourth birthday as I was on my fifth. My mother told me some very sad stories of course, especially about how sick I was all the time and how distraught and sad I was. I could not be anything else really. Yet, the scars I bore I could only remember, I could not see them. I really had no idea what kind of a child I was during those years. I had very few of my own memories of that time, only shards of meaningless, incoherent events. There were no photographs of me during that time, and no one to make a video of me. I soon dismissed the thought and came back to the real world.

I didn't give it another thought until a few months later my cousin Azra called on the phone: "Hey Hare, are you coming to Sarajevo for the film festival this year?" I had really not

felt like going to Bosnia this summer. The countryside, where my parents always want to stay, tends to be very boring in summer, and my parents hate staying in the big cities.

"I'm not sure, it was a lot of a fun a few years ago, but I might just work this whole summer, I am a poor student after all," I lied.

"Oh come on, are you still mad at me because I laughed at you when you accidentally asked a waiter for a dick."

"It's not my fault *kusur*³ and *kurac*⁴ sounded the same to me, god damn it. But what about when you asked that Australian hiker 'Do you want to eat out for me?' He sure seemed pleasantly surprised, more so than my waiter, that's for sure."

"Alright, enough with the funny business, the real reason I want you to come is that there is a film showing that you might be interested in. After all, you're in it..." she said.

"What do you mean" I asked. Immediately my mind flitted to the possibility that my parents had made a film about me, using my childhood videos and were going to show it to hundreds of people at once causing some sort of an infinite vortex of embarrassment for me.

"Well, you might remember that when we were in Croatia, there was a filmmaker who gave us some money so he could put us in his film, you remember that?" Well of course I did not remember, but I have heard the story plenty of times from my mother.

"Yes, it's called *Zeleni Biber*⁵ or something, right?"

"No you donkey, it was called *Zeleni Pepeo*⁶, and the director is Iranian, who wanted to make a film about the killing of Muslims in ex-Yugoslavia. All very meta and self-referential, it's a movie about a director who's making a movie about the suffering of Muslims in the Balkans.

I'm not sure if you're very interested in the movie itself, but you can see yourself as a kid, you might find that interesting."

³ Receipt

⁴ Dick

⁵ Green Pepper

⁶ Green Ashes

"Also, I've arranged an interview with him, but I won't be able to be there, as I have to write an article for the festival newspaper about another film that is playing at the same time." She sounded disappointed. "So if you want, you can meet him and ask him questions."

"Alright, that sounds great." I meant it. "Well, we can still catch some movies together along the way. I guess I will be coming to Bosnia this summer."

Chapter 2: Memories I made

Sarajevo has always been a very multicultural city, and it shows. The city is as eclectic as its populace, no two buildings that stand next to one another look alike. For example, on the river Miljacka is the old Ottoman library, which doubles as the university library, and right next to it is an Bavarian-style embassy and across the street is a German communist townhouse. On the other side of the river there is a giant communist shopping mall, created to commemorate the 1988 winter Olympics. The main police office is a giant Austro-Hungarian neo-classicist building, where every wall, floor and ceiling is paved with multi-coloured marble and polished granite. All through the city there are kiosks dressed out in Turkish tradition, made of copper and shaped like little mosques, temples dedicated to cigarettes. The streets are peppered with coffee houses, where delicious Turkish coffee is brewed in copper *Dzezeve*⁷ and where you get Turkish delights as a snack to accompany your coffee. The culture of the whole town, the whole country really, is based on cigarettes and coffee. I will forever remember my roots when I smell roasted coffee beans mixed with the acrid smoke of cigarettes. Sarajevo most reminds me of a town that simply grew to enormous proportions, but where everybody still knows everyone else and where kids on the street have fights over where you can eat the best *pita*⁸. The people in Sarajevo, *Sarajlije* as they're called, are a dichotomy in themselves. They say they don't care much for religion, but the mosques,

⁷ A coffee pot

⁸ A filled pastry, that can be filled with everything from minced meat to apples.

churches and synagogues are always filled to the brim with people. They're very proud of being a big cosmopolitan metropolis, but the only thing the only McDonalds there serves is *pita* and *Ćevapčići*⁹. Whatever the situation, *Sarajlije* have shown to be able to like everything and everybody, with a twinkle in their eye, an offering of cigarettes in their hand and a song at the ready. This is why I think that the embodiment of Sarajevo is Dino Merlin, a Sarajevo-born folk singer who is well renowned in the whole of ex-Yugoslavia for his songs about Belgrade, Zagreb, Split, Mostar and many other cities of the old socialist republic. Dominating all this is a giant graveyard on the slope of a hill overlooking the city, as if to sternly remind both visitors and townspeople of what transpired here.

Anyway, while smoking in the airport parking lot, I marvelled on how much Sarajevo has changed in the past few years. New buildings are popping up all over the place, reflective glass giants, office buildings of multi-nationals and great salmon-coloured apartment buildings. Yet when I got onto the tram going to the centre, the deep scars of the war overtook me with a melancholia only a *sevdalinka*¹⁰ could. A wounded war veteran, a medal on his chest, missing one arm, his other hand missing was two fingers, got on the tram and begged for any pittance I could spare. I only had larger bills, so I gave him twenty Marks, I guess I was willing to smoke a few packets less so he could drink a few bottles more. The buildings throughout the city show bullet wounds, but sometimes I think that the city refuses to fix them, either as a form of emotional blackmail, or wears them proudly as if they were some kind of award.

I sent my cousin a text that I was in town, and to ask when the interview was going to happen. She sent back a reply that I was to meet his manager at one o'clock at the square in *Baščaršija*, which was in the middle of the Old Town, comprised of only little Ottoman-style shops and coffee houses. The little shops and houses mostly sell all sorts of traditional (read:

⁹ Grilled minced meat, served with roasted flatbread and condiments like raw onion and sour cream.

¹⁰ These are very melancholic songs traditionally sung by women. They deal with the death of husbands, sons, family, famine, heartbreak, religious crises, and more recently the war.

Chinese made) wares like pipes, coffee pots, cups, flags, football jerseys, hats and the odd store was even selling war memorabilia, like pens made from bullets or lamps made from tank shells. Every hundred metres or so, there is a proper smith, who beats and engraves coffee pots, platters and even the odd pen knife. I wanted to get a nice coffee set for one of my friends, so I went to one of these little artificers' shops. Through the open window I could already see a large stone table, with copper shavings strewn across the floor. A hundred little chisels, nails and files laid on the table, of a hundred different sizes with a hundred different heads to make a hundred different patterns in thousands of different items the coppersmith would have made so far. As I walked into the shop I felt I should have rephrased that to millions, as the smith seemed to be older than time itself. The lines on his bronze face seemed so deep that I almost imagined he engraved himself. He shuffled over to me, a black beret on his head, the head covering most old Bosnian men wear for some reason unknown to me, with a dinky old hammer in his left hand and a rolled up cigarette in the left. His wife, who seemed even older than he was, with a hunched back that was higher than her head, asked if I needed anything. Her voice seemed to creak like an ancient wooden sailing barge.

"Yes, I'm looking for a nice coffee set for a Dutch friend of mine," I said, picking up and looking over some coffee pots.

"There's no point in buying any of these, you're better off buying antiques" the smith said decidedly.

"Why? What's wrong with these?" I asked.

"The metal's wrong," the smith's wife said. "Isn't that right Irfan?"

"Wife, you don't know what you're talking about," Irfan said when he turned to me. "The copper, brass and bronze used to be a lot harder when Tito was in charge. These days, I break more plates and pots than I can earn back. The metal used to be better, I'm sure of it."

"Or maybe you used to be better!" said his wife snidely. "This is why our son doesn't call us anymore."

"Selma, shut up, not in front of customer!" Irfan growled. "Anyway sir, these coffee sets used to be a lot better, but nothing is good any more. The metal used to be harder, sons used to call their parents, the city used to be cleaner and there weren't this many of these goddamned tourists in our city. Ever since the war there are also these weird religious nuts who claim they own whole quarters of these cities. What are they called again, diorama or something."

"I think they call themselves Diaspora." Selma said. "They had better stay away from Sarajevo, we already have enough to deal with, the Winter Olympics are coming here, don't you know?" Self-consciously, I said goodbye and slinked out of their shop as soon as possible.

In the distance I heard church bells chime that is was one o'clock. Fuck. I was going to be late for the meeting with the director. I ran as quickly as I could through the mass of people. Hundreds if not thousands of people go to *Baščaršia* every day, not only for the food, the coffee and the wares, but mostly for the music, every now and then there is a band on the streets. So leave it to me to run around a corner, right into the stage of the band was playing on that day, knocking over the drummer breaking his cymbals and puncturing his bass drum. Awkwardly I picked myself up and helped the drummer up, who was of course furious and ready to punch me. The whole crowd was looking on and a police officer rushed to the stage. "Everybody calm down, it will be all right," he turned to the drummer, "I'm sure this sir here will pay for any damages, wont you?" He turned to me sternly.

"Of course, I can pay it now, please, I don't have much time, I have an appointment I'm late for." I pleaded to both the drummer and the police officer.

"I'm sure all of this can be dealt properly at the police station," the officer said. "Don't worry sir, I will make sure this delinquent does not bother you anymore, and that he pays all

expenses. I just need your contact details so he can pay you back." My heart sank, I wasn't going to talk to the director, and I would probably be detained long enough to even miss seeing the film.

Chapter 3: Memories I am left with

I was waiting at the police station, waiting to be processed, sporadically glancing at the clock, cringing every time I saw it had sprung forward another ten minutes. After a few hours (the municipal and governmental organ in Bosnia and Herzegovina tends to be an out-of-tune, slow-grinding mess of gears) the police officer led me into a small room that smelled faintly like a crypt. He beckoned to a table with chairs opposite each other. As I sat down, I noticed the walls looked exactly the same as in my room back in Utrecht: the bottom half of the wall was painted in a drab olive green, the top half was whitewashed. There was only one window, and it made the sun shine directly into my face.

"You're lucky you know, Haris," he said suddenly, sitting down in front of me. I was surprised he knew my name, because I had not given him any form of identification. He noticed the surprise on my face and said: "I'm a friend of your uncle Fahrudin, and I used to know you as a child, you probably don't remember me. I got you out of there so you wouldn't be beaten up by that Gypsy shit. My name is Janko Vuković, by the way." I felt a mixed wave of both relief and disgust overtake me. I was most likely not going to have to pay the drummer, but it was only thanks to a corrupt racist. A racist who expected me to tell my uncle, who, as an ex-minister, still had some clout in the government. And even though I knew my uncle would not do anything to help this cockroach, I would still never tell him about this police officer. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible, but a dark urge overtook me.

"Your name is peculiar, " I said enquiringly. "You're half Serbian and half Croatian, aren't you? Did you fight in the war then?" A dark shadow passed over his face. I immediately feared I had opened a door I shouldn't have.

"That is none of your business!" he barked at me. His hands slightly shaking, he lit a cigarette, "Besides, you're too young to remember anything about that war, let alone understand it. It's best if you, and your whole generation, forgets. I know I did!"

"How can you forget something like that?" I blurted out, I didn't know what was coming over me, but I had already lost all respect for this man and any gratitude I might have felt evaporated., All I could think of was to fight him. His eyes seem to spurt more and more rage.

"Because I am constantly reminded of it, that's how I forget. You don't seem to realise the horrors I've committed, why would I want to remember that when I can start a new life? He seemed on the verge of tears. "You're just Diaspora, you visit maybe once every few years, and complain about the direction a country you don't even live in is going. You don't even know anything that happened to yourself in the war. I've killed dozens of women and children, I was never at the front fighting *men*, I was at the back in the goddamn death squads." You can read it in books, you can listen to songs, even watch the news, but that all means nothing if you haven't lived in it. At least I'm not so self-righteous as to assume that I know everything about a war I don't remember. All you Diaspora do is live in history, while the rest of us are stuck living in the ruins!"

He sat down in the dinky chair and released a sigh that seemed to me to both release a burden and accept a new guilty conscious. "Can I go?" I asked sheepishly.

"Yes, go ahead, go fuck yourself or whatever..." he responded in a defeated tone. I got up and walked to the door, and as I went out I looked back and asked:

"Who side *did* you fight for?"

He looked me in the eye and said: "The side that lost..."

I walked out of the police station, and looked at my watch on the way out. I still had time! I could still see the movie at the very least. So I walked down the street towards the tenement buildings, toward the entrance to the open-air movie theatre.

Chapter 4: Memories I missed

I was finally going to see the bigger picture, finally going to finish the puzzle. The final piece was right around the corner, in between the communist *Dom Sindikata* building and the Austro-Hungarian post office. This whole situation is certainly not what I had planned for my summer.

The open air theatre was in the courtyard of some tenement buildings that used to be for community gardens. There were over four hundred seats there, and it was already almost full, but somehow I found a good seat close to the middle. As I tried to get to the seat a girl dressed like a 50's stewardess handed me a packet of cigarettes. A promotion for Aura, Sarajevo's own personal cigarette brand. Happily accepting something to calm my nerves I sat down and lit up. As the movie started I saw hundreds of little red-orange dots lighting up all around me. I had never felt more Bosnian.

The movie was nothing special, it was somewhat of a boring mess rather than some kind of high art film. It was both a love story and a metafictional piece about a movie director who wants to make a documentary about the suffering of Muslims in the Balkans while helping his friend's fiancé escape the country. In the back of my head I did remember that this director had saved me and my family as the money he had given us helped us get across the Croatian border.

Then finally, after the love interest had to stay behind so her children could flee the war, I saw myself. I was one of the children on the boat, waving goodbye. For a full minute the movie focussed on the children, and focussed on me...

There was Haris, a child who was going to be happy no matter what, who knew something was wrong, but who was not going to let it get him down. The war would not impact him, he was impervious to shells, bullets and shrapnel. He had no idea of the suffering that laid ahead, how he would not see his father for another eleven months, how he would battle sickness for months to come, how he would eventually flee through Europe and how he would end up in refugee camp after refugee camp. And even if he knew, it would still not faze him, he would be strong. But Haris in the open-air theatre knew, he knew what waited for that little child at the end of his path, but he couldn't believe that he was never going to be hurt by the war. He was not going to get any scars. He had no scars. Not like Sarajevo. Not like *Bosna...*

Short Story Analysis

I have tried to incorporate theory on the creation of memories into my own work. The short story references memory and memories a lot. In fact, the majority of the story is written through a flashback. In a way, it is an autobiographical fiction. I felt it was important to actually try and make the entire story a memory of the main protagonist. It is therefore mostly written in the first person. The story is divided into four chapters, with titles that indicate a central theme for the type of memory I reference.

"Chapter one: Memories I Have" focuses mainly on how my protagonist remembers memories I really do have, and especially how incomplete they are. I describe myself as a child and I write down the conversation I have with my cousin Azra. My actual cousin Azra works for a newspaper that writes articles on the movies shown during the film festival. I have used Bosnian words every now and then throughout my story, with footnotes of what they mean. The reason for this is so I can try and render, sometimes, crass Bosnian humour into English. Of course, many of the jokes I make with my cousin would not be possible if I wrote them in English. This first chapter I feel is pretty straightforward, it simply works as both an introduction to my driving force, my personality and my story. Here I put into words the initial longing of my protagonist to 'find' memories he has lost.

"Chapter 2: Memories I Made" focuses on my arrival in Sarajevo, and especially on describing the city, and its people. I especially focus on how eclectic Sarajevo is, the reasoning behind that is so that it is hard to remember. As a city, Sarajevo has been through many different architectural styles, mostly because it has always been occupied by some form of foreign power. So the buildings all date from different eras, and it can be very hard to find your way around, as there are no clear neighbourhoods (like many old European cities tend to have a Latin quarter, an Old Town quarter, an Artists' quarter and so on) the city can be very confusing and disorientating. I also extensively describe Sarajevo and its people so the reader

can get an overall idea for how the city looks, feels and even smells. The old couple in the story are the first instance of how memory can fail you. They are flat characters, there is very little room for their development. I wrote them with the idea that the couple is stuck in their memory, that they are stagnant. However, they have deluded themselves because they live with only their memories. I even wrote them with the idea that their son *does* call them every week, or even several times a week, but that in their idea of reality, nothing is worthwhile in the present, only their past matters to them. The next segment, me running into a band that was playing on the streets, is really nothing more than a plot-device to have me miss the director and to meet my next character. The reasoning behind me never meeting the director is that it creates an obstacle in the story, but it also creates the crisis. The crisis being in that it would seem as if my protagonist has missed the possibility of satisfying his longing: he has missed the interview with the director, and he will most likely miss the movie too.

"Chapter 3: Memories I am Left With" focuses on my very short arrest, and the destruction of my protagonists' ideas. The whole procedure I go through is, I am sorry to say, very common in Bosnia. Corruption, even about minor disputes like a broken drum set, is never good, but it does happen. My character resist it though, and goes against the police officer. I made the police officer a racist because I felt that you cannot change who you really are. You cannot force fake memories on yourself, especially when the memories you have are so very powerful. The officer says that he wants to forget his past life and get on with the one he has now, but it is quite obvious that he cannot help *but* remember the war. His own identity is still based on him *not* fighting in the war. So when I confront him with this, he goes berserk. In a way he is still a flat character, just like the old couple, because in the end his character will not change. He will still be corrupt, and he will still live with the memories of what he has done. However, he will now live with his past actions consciously, rather than trying to circumvent them by actively trying *not* to think of them. In the progress of asking

this police officer some very personal questions, my protagonist discovers a lot about what it really means to be Diaspora, and especially how uprooted he actually is. I leave it implied in the end of the chapter though that my protagonist still feels attached to Sarajevo and to Bosnia, because as far as he knows, he still has his scars.

"Chapter 4: Memories I Missed" starts out with some simple exposition, but it ends on a very sour note. In the beginning of the chapter I repeat what I wrote in the beginning of the story, hopefully with a little bit more clarity as to both my elation (I was still on time for the movie) as well as my comment on what I expected for this summer (an arrest was not planned of course). My description of the open-air theatre, and how it used to be a community garden is simply a reference that during the siege of Sarajevo, some of the people who lived in the tenement buildings used to use the courtyards as community gardens, as they were safe from shelling and sniper fire. I added the comments about the cigarettes because this had actually happened to me when I last visited the Sarajevo film festival, there really were girls dressed as stewardesses handing out packets of cigarettes. I put this in especially to add to the atmosphere of being in a country where smoking is such a large part of the culture. I say that I had never felt more Bosnian for a very good reason, because it creates a somewhat false sense of belonging, both in the reader as well as my protagonist. Which is of course ripped apart by the end. I think that the shock of not feeling like a victim, when everywhere around you people are suffering creates a whole void, a whole sense of detachment. So to indicate how detached my protagonist actually felt, I wrote this last passage in a passive voice. I also shift the point of view from first person to third person. But while the point of view has shifted, the level of the narrator has not, as it has become a narrator with limited omniscience, I still only portray the thoughts and feelings of my protagonist. I felt this was important because firstly, it shows the detachment the protagonist feels as he has his epiphany. Secondly I had hoped to

create a feeling of the reader being more detached, and as if the reader the reader would be leaving the head of my protagonist and zooming out of the scene.

In the end, I had a lot of fun playing with memory and identity. I think that leaving the ending somewhat open makes it stronger, as I leave it to the reader to decide whether my protagonist would just go back to being himself, feeling scarred and victimised, or would he look deep into himself and realise that his past might change, but that does not mean that he will.

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