Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne
An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

At the Beginning Love, in Life Hatred, at the End Remembrance

Bojana Vuković

I remember it as clear as day – my pre-war buddies and I running barefoot to and fro over the dusty macadam in front of the building. Together, time and again, we raised sand castles, made mud-cakes, played hide-and-seek, hopscotch, marbles, four square, jumpsies, and, together, we sang some beloved and merry nursery rhymes. I remember old man Simbad too. How many times we fell for his harmless jokes! "Listen, a helicopter landed up the street, and they're handing out candies and chocolates to children." Just how fast we ran, holding hands, all together, to greet the helicopter which never was there.

I remember too father's explanation following the first shot and the echo of a fired shell in the distance, which also led to the wailing of the siren at the salt factory opposite our building. "Do not be afraid. Some important people are having a little argument, that is all," he said, "but uncle is there on the other side and he knows where our building is; he won't send shells our way." My war buddies and I continued to run to and fro, albeit vigilant and fearful, listening for that sound of a fired shell in the distance which would sound the wailing siren and send us running towards the nearest shelter. Our past games of hide-and-seek were slowly turning into an everyday reality in the shelter. Marbles we replaced with hot pieces of shrapnel we would find upon exiting the shelter. The sand castles we raised, those important people who were having a little argument daily razed. After having once removed a piece of shrapnel out of the door to our apartment, I commented to my father how I found those important people very wicked, that they apparently had a grave argument, and that our uncle had forgotten where our building was. In the evening they told us that our uncle, at nineteen years of age, had died.

Old man Simbad never fooled with us again. He told me, one day, how he was in great sorrow as his wife, Mrs. Nada, had fled with their children over to the "enemy side," somewhere he could not follow as she is a Serb, and he a Muslim. That was the first time I heard those two words; I did not know what they meant and I did not care… It appears, however, that some people did… Everyone called my father the Montenegrin. I knew what the word meant. Father is from Montenegro, hence the sobriquet. In those days, the word Croat could be quite frequently heard and always when my parents argued so I assumed that it is something bad. As for me… me they called a "hybrid." Even then, the word seemed derogatory to me.

Afterwards, my childhood came down to refugeeism, to protracted waiting for a Red Cross aid package in lengthy queues, to the flicks I felt inflicted while being called an Ustasha and “Artuković Junior,” and after the war was over and I returned to my native Tuzla, to the “epithet” Chetnik.

***

Should I speak out, only to speak no more? Should I do something, only to never do anything again? Should I remain silent, content that I am living?

Time passed and I grew up… I grew up in silence… I have been silent for all those shells, for shrapnel, for the shelter, for my uncle, for the refugeeism, for the flicks, for everything! Today, I do not want to be silent, not today or ever more. The unity and brotherhood of those “important people” who have had “a little argument” came down to torture, rape, desolation, killing, multitudes of mass graves, hatred, pain, and the tears of an innocent people. Such unity and brotherhood which, in truth, did not ever exist – I do not want. I am here, content that I am living; however, furious over everything that had happened. I am here and I will not be silent so that another may not have to relive my childhood.

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.