

SARAJEVO – TRAUMA REVISITED

The scandal of the double survivor

“If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of the testimony”¹.

As film maker and belated doctoral student in Holocaust Film I have watched hours of filmed testimony by Holocaust survivors, and beyond the overwhelming emotional response of the informed viewer, one must consider the entire genre with a certain lucidity. What is the apparent purpose of the testimony for the testifier? Why has s/he remained silent till now? Is it wise to attempt to recover trauma after several decades, or may the emotional cost not outweigh the potential benefit? How far can delayed testimony be viewed as faithful, unclouded by subsequent replay or acting out? What will be understood from these fragments by an uninformed viewer today and by future generations as the Holocaust recedes? How can these personal traumata be pieced together into a coherent account, and indeed should they be? Lastly, and most pressingly: I am forced to ask myself what motivates our latter-day urge to record the tribulations of half a century ago, when the world around us is repeating its old mistakes.

This unease was brought sharply into focus by two little known documentary films I discovered in a city not primarily associated with the Holocaust (though it suffered comparable losses to any under Nazi occupation) namely Sarajevo, where for the last four years I have served as Script Consultant for the film festival’s pan-Balkan screenplay competition Cinelink, which brings together leading film makers from across South East Europe to work together on their next project.

In any one group I have had a Serb working with a Bosnian, or a Croat with Serb and Albanian alike, and it wasn’t long before I realized that most of these writers were attempting to deal with the trauma of the recent Balkan wars and their chaotic aftermath, in tones that varied from social realist docu-fiction to surreal, scrambled

¹ Elie Wiesel 1977,9 quoted by Shoshana Felman ‘Education and Crisis’, in Cathy Caruth (ed), *Trauma, Explorations in Memory* The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1995 p.17

autobiography. These were my contemporaries, many of whom were conscripted or volunteered, often on opposite sides, and I was struck by the lack of rancour with which they addressed their shared wounds in this creative forum; equally however, by their silences, which seemed as meaningful as their dialogue, suggesting that much of what might have been told remains inaccessible to the teller or recoverable only in flashes of sudden release, an admittedly normal pattern of recall made problematic by deep-rooted denial and unconsciously willed amnesia.

Without wishing it I found myself in the position of a father confessor or therapist, teasing out lost meaning and occasionally launching a provocative challenge, hoping to dislodge some psychic block or loosen some deep-rooted resistance. In soliciting this testimony, however, I had constantly to bear in mind the dangers of transference and over-identification, especially given a putative colonial dimension: these were their stories, not mine; the Balkan region has a rich cinematic tradition of its own.

In the process I gradually became aware that I was skating on thin ice in terms of my own subject position. For instance, while I could recite my anti-Vietnam demonstrations and the draft dodgers I had supported, where had I been, what had I been doing, during the Balkan war that ended barely ten years ago? I had been making a film about the Holocaust, or more specifically about the genesis of Christian anti-semitism without which the Holocaust is hard to imagine, and a biopic on the Nazi-resisting theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But I had written nothing about the Balkans, let alone about the siege of Sarajevo which carried all the hallmarks of genocide but which was ignored by large sections of the western public and most certainly by western governments.

Contrariwise, it is perhaps a sign of how recent trauma tends to efface the inner and outer signs of an earlier trauma, that I had inspected the shell-scarred, pock-marked masonry of Sarajevo and toured the city's defences on a guided tour now offered by the former Bosnian Commander-in-Chief (ethnically a Serb, one of the many ironies of that conflict), before coming upon the abandoned, desolate Jewish cemetery and finally enquiring about the Jewish community here and its fate under the Nazis, only to realize that my young colleague who organized the writers workshop was himself Jewish, that his colleagues were Muslim and together with the city's non-

fundamentalist Christians they represent an indigenous, integrated culture of the monotheisms of which western Europe remains largely ignorant, in which Muslims protected Jews from Nazi persecution and fifty years later each stood by the other through the longest siege in history.

My discomfort increased when I realized that amongst the victims of the recent siege had been survivors of the earlier horrors. One Auschwitz survivor had been forced to flee her home before the first mortar shells struck and never returned. Another had spent four years under siege in constant fear for her life, four times as long as she had spent in the death camp.

By now my reluctance to think historically, to move beyond the hallowed fence that rings the Holocaust from any previous or subsequent event, was being challenged by the living evidence, namely by the unbearable irony that while the Holocaust was being memorialised, discussed, possessed and even fought over, one of its few surviving victims was being subjected to another assault on her very identity and existence (not as a Jew, but as a Bosnian) without a finger being lifted to save her.

And this brings me to my central preoccupation:

How can the Holocaust be understood as “a transformative event”² that galvanizes and locates, rather than fetishizing and displacing, trauma, in order to use it as a model, a warning, an augury, an omen even, and not just as a source of impotent wondering and despair, and this without indulging in self-perpetuating and potentially self-fulfilling prophecies of doom or unwittingly contributing to or feeding off the “ghost of the Holocaust”³. Surely this is a ghost that should never be exorcised but continue to haunt us. The dangers of emulation are outweighed and counterbalanced by a duty of memory.

² J.R.Watson quoting Hegel’s *Camera Lucida*:115 “the transformative event that has yet transformed nothing” in F.C.Decoste & Bernard Schwartz (ed) *The Holocaust’s Ghost, Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education* University of Alberta Press 2000 p.xvi

³ Zygmunt Baumann ed Decoste and Schwartz p.9. “Can one exorcise the ghost of the Holocaust?...a different (question) from making the world Holocaust-proof”

While fully accepting that the Holocaust occupies a place of unique horror and metaphysical anguish in the modern world, while acknowledging that “comparison” can serve revisionists as a tool for euphemism or even denial, this study takes as its point of departure that “unique” does not necessarily connote “unrepeatable”. Unique thus far. But reverence should not leave one blind or complacent to the growing, not diminishing, temptations of radical answers in a world where diplomacy is so easily overtaken by aggression.

It is in this spirit that I hope to extend my enquiry into Balkan genocide by means of two documentary films which emerged from this cauldron, neither of them released in the west, both of which I introduce here with the permission of the film makers:

RIKICA, a student graduation film of approximately twenty minutes by Marko Mamuzic which was made entirely in Sarajevo in 1991/92 with the participation of a local television station on the eve of the war in honour of Rikica Slosberg, who was deported from Sarajevo in 1941, spent four years in Nazi concentration camps, was forced from Sarajevo a second time just as the Yugoslav wars were starting and died in Switzerland in 2002;

And:

GRETA, a longer piece of one hour and fifteen minutes shot after the present ceasefire principally in Sarajevo but also in Paris, Auschwitz and Yad Vashem by Haris Pasovic, on Professor Greta Farusic, who was deported from Sarajevo to Auschwitz, liberated in January 1945, graduated in Architecture in Belgrade and taught at the University in Sarajevo, endured the entire four-year siege of that city and still lives there.

In stressing that I have met neither Rikica Slosberg nor Greta Farusic personally, I put myself in a position we will all share as the generation of survivors gradually leaves us, obliging us to rely on recorded testimony rather than on direct oral transmission.

Reflecting on Elie Wiesel's lapidary statement (above), Shoshana Felman reports of her student group exposed to testimonial films from the Fortunoff Video Archive⁴ that they were first harrowed, then galvanized, and I can corroborate such an experience through my own viewing, but nonetheless I must also ask: to what extent can film testimony convey the reality of actual experience and thereby assist the transmuting of memory into history?

In a single scene shot in the devastated Jewish cemetery of Sarajevo, RIKICA shows an old lady taking farewell of her home on the eve of the siege, visiting for the last time her father's grave, where she expresses a feeling known to all Holocaust survivors (and echoed by Greta Farusic) "thank God he died before seeing all this", a grave she can at least identify, while her mother and brother lie in unknown lands, the latter probably in Jasenovac the Nazi Croatian concentration camp. Her words are as jagged and lop-sided as the tombstones, her grief overwhelming, uncomprehended, a trauma from which she has clearly never recovered.

Speaking of her violent arrest, she evokes in vivid detail her first imprisonment, separated by a thin partition from the men in the adjacent cell:

"Somebody was playing something...a guitar or violin. I asked who was playing there. I was told 'Liechtenstein'. 'Do you know how to sing?' he asked me.

'I know some.'

'Ok, show what you can sing!'

So I sang just a bit, just to show I could.

He said: 'Fine, I see you know how to sing. I'm composer, I'll write some music and we can sing all together.'

After three or four days, he said: 'I wrote one song for you and tonight we can now sing all together'."

This is the only memory she gives us of four years' captivity, and one might deduce that the rest is too appalling to narrate or even that traumatic repression has wiped the

⁴ Felman 'Education and Crisis' in Caruth (ed) *Trauma* p.17

slate clean. She either cannot or does not wish to dwell on it, and gives us instead this luminous fragment of restored experience which clearly has sustained her for decades past, though whether she consciously remembered Liechtenstein and his spirited musical resistance during her following four years in the camps, or has retrieved (or even conjured) them more recently, one cannot know. The perversion of music by the Nazis is often dwelled on, so much so that any more positive reference risks seeming sentimental or artificial, but nonetheless Rikica's luminous-because-fragmentary account convinces one that this moment of shared song is indeed first-hand experience, clearly remembered, even if (or rather, especially since) it also serves as a threshold memory, a bourn, a limit, beyond which her mind is not prepared to return, beyond which nothing more in her epic of suffering is recoverable or redeemable.

Some survivors speak of the desire, the absolute imperative, to outlive their persecutors and bring them to justice. What kept Rikica alive, she says, was love of life and of her child:

“Every morning I woke up, I opened my eyes and I was thinking of him. I was saying to myself ‘oh god, how is he, where is he, what does he eat, how does he look?’ But I never thought he might not be alive. I always knew he was alive. I knew I had to see him.”

The compulsive repetition in her speech patterns conveys the acting-out of a scenario never truly laid to rest, which haunts her even as she speaks so many decades later, contemplating her flight from a second ordeal. “I believe in love. I don't believe in God,” she says, then stutteringly adds: “If God wanted...If there was a God, then he would never have done what he did. Then, *but also now.*”

In this simple *also now* we feel the weight of the second trauma about to overtake her, despair at lessons unlearned, at man's compulsive re-infliction of wounds, and one harbours doubts perhaps about her readiness for this testimony she has just given in such formless authenticity: her memories are so partial, so fractured and so painful, that one wonders (with van der Kolk/van der Hart) “Can the Auschwitz experience and the loss of innumerable family members during the Holocaust really be

integrated, be made part of one's autobiography?"⁵ and Saul Friedlander adds, quoting Lawrence Langer: "The efforts of memory in these testimonies liberate a subtext of loss...chagrin... vexation that coexists with whatever relief (is thus achieved, which may be) less substantial than we have been led to believe"⁶.

Others including Caruth have elaborated on "the betrayal of trauma" by which the object of trauma is lost, travestied and traduced by its naming, leaving the "patient", or the "beneficiary of therapy", with a hollow and often guilty resentment at having been stripped even of her suffering via a testimony that can never adequately convey the experience⁷. Can trauma ever be recovered, one might ask, or is the very recovery an act of abandonment? "The question arises", ask van der Kolk/van der Hart "whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?"⁸

However it is worth returning to Shoshana Felman on this:

"Psychoanalysis... profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of the testimony, by...recognizing for the first time in the history of culture that one does not have to *possess*, or *own* the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker"⁹.

Even respecting the need to counterbalance this approach with Ruth Leys' warning that trauma theory is "fundamentally unstable"¹⁰, and remembering that psychoanalysis constantly runs the risk of arrogating experience from analysand to analyst with unconscious and sometimes mutual collusion, it is worth listening to the

⁵ van der Kolk/van der Hart 'The Intrusive Past', in Caruth (ed) *Trauma* p.178

⁶ Friedlander 'Trauma, Memory and Transference' ed Hartman 1994

⁷ "Telling the story of her love affair... is for the woman a betrayal of the loved one...a betrayal precisely in the act of telling, in the very transmission of an understanding that erases the specificity of a death. The possibility of knowing history, in this film (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), is thus also raised as a deeply ethical dilemma: the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*." Cathy Caruth *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History* The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1996 p. 27

⁸ van der Kolk/van der Hart in Caruth (ed) *Trauma* p.179

⁹ Felman ed Caruth 1995 p.24

¹⁰ Ruth Leys, Presentation at University of London 7th June 2006

empathetic depth of Cathy Caruth's approach when she writes in *Unclaimed Experience* of "the way in which trauma may lead...to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound"¹¹. It was always in this hope that I have offered script consultancy, and that I now attempt the analysis of these two films:

If *RIKICA* reveals the suffering of its subject in startlingly unmediated form, in fragments and explosions which reflect the unhealed trauma of the speaker, *GRETA* unfolds with majestic self-control of both witness and filmmaker. A single interview in unwavering mid-shot interspersed with very rare close-ups from an identical angle shows us the corner of a comfortable, elegant living room with the subject composed, reflective, dominant even as she recounts the salient moments of her life with the conscious accuracy of a court witness wishing no trace of hyperbole to cloud her credibility. As if to sober up the viewer also, the film starts with several minutes of post-siege Sarajevo unadorned by music or commentary, the snow on mountain bunkers, the graveyards, the burned-out parliament, the ravaged post office, objects which tell their own story in silence finally broken when Greta's voice picks up almost eerily eloquent where Rikica left off so speechless:

"We who have survived not just one war but this war too have started to think that the idea of justice is very abstract... it takes various forms and is interpreted very differently".

As if to warn the viewer against easy identifications, this bitter opening salvo is mitigated by a glimpse of a startlingly youthful, radiant Greta exchanging banter with friends on a street corner, a moment of affectionate levity amongst countless others in this most resilient, witty, sophisticated of cities. Only after cutaways to a pair of crutches amidst the crowds, the silence of the mountains which recently rained down more firepower than was concentrated on Berlin in 1945, and a thoughtful visual disquisition on synagogue, mosque and church, do we rediscover Greta heading home, unaware of the camera watching as she pulls her strap bag more firmly over her

¹¹ Caruth extends her listening metaphor through Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's narrative of the dream of the burning child who cries out to his sleeping father: "this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken" *Unclaimed Experience* p.9

shoulder, her face closing in a lonely mask of resistance and (who knows?) repression, denial, suffering – as if the film maker were alerting us to the immense dignity that would stop us in our tracks if we ventured to close. And then the interview starts, Greta immaculate, proud, unfaltering, not one syllable out of place as she tells her story from start to finish, as if determined not to let her persecutors get the better of her composure even for a second, relying on sober good humour to exclude any trace of the shame notoriously ascribed to survivors¹².

The signals that betray this composure are fractional and easily missed: the merest flutter of her hands immediately suppressed as she speaks of the family's removal to Subotica; the slight clearing of the throat as she mentions the *Schutzpolizei*; the vertical movement of the hand as she demonstrates the red stripe behind the Auschwitz uniform, her fingers immediately stifling the gesture as inappropriate. "Everything is my personal experience, I don't want to discuss other people's experiences" she says with almost patrician disdain, underlining on the one hand her veracity, her refusal to speculate or demean by vulgar retailing of commonplaces, and on the other her detachment from even her own suffering.

"In that confusion the men were separated so I didn't see my father any more. My mother and I walked side by side, I went right, she went left, I stopped and turned at the same time as she stopped and turned, and we looked at each other but they hurried us on. Those who went to the left, we never saw them again."

This moment shared in anguish by thousands upon thousands has been told and retold so often but rarely with such absolute self-control, enabling the viewer a glimpse of the horror, the extreme, suppressed even prohibited emotions precisely through the re-enactment of the same suppression in the telling. The clue lies in the infinite extension of that single moment – surely a few minutes at most – between the losing of her father and the losing of her mother, a double loss she stretches almost to infinity in the recollecting.

¹² see Ruth Leys *From Guilt to Shame* Princeton 2006 (forthcoming); also Giorgio Agamben *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* Zone Books, New York Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen 1999

Later, when she tells us: “Other girls saw their mothers decline, I remember my mother as a healthy woman...how much worse it must have been for them” – her compassion asks for no more attention than her suffering, perhaps for fear of self-pity.

And while the rain drums endlessly on block house corrugated roofs in slow pans reminiscent of Claude Lanzmann, one cannot help but consider also the contrasts with that monolithic filmmaker. Wholly absent from the screen, the interviewer/film maker of GRETA has left no personal trace, clearly considering himself an irrelevance to his narrative. At no point does one sense that Greta has been pushed or pressured, let alone interrogated, and what emerges is arguably, paradoxically more horrific and more real than any evocation Lanzmann achieves with his intrusive questioning, his insistence on the release of long-buried trauma in and through the interview itself¹³. By the time Greta reports “there was a very bad smell in the camp” her matter-of-fact tone is becoming nearly unbearable and one realizes it is precisely this factual unbearable-ness which best represents the original experience. The very factuality betrays the reality of the experience and simultaneously the unresolved trauma of the survivor. One is in the presence. But the presence veils itself, so as not to destroy the beholder, and in the process becomes more visible.

She remembers the faithful Jews, mainly from traditional, uneducated families: “the worst thing was their belief that the camp was God’s punishment for their so-called sins”, and notes with the merest glimmer of humour “it was a sin not to know Yiddish, that’s why we’re here”. But despite this apparent rejection of the holy in its usual forms, this is a testimony which shines not just with personal conviction but with a secret perception of meaning, even of transcendence, suggesting that Lanzmann’s insistence on “transmission” unadulterated by “interpretation”, on forced utterance recreating the original event in all its terrible penetration is not the only model for such enquiries. The restraint of Greta’s testimony tells us far more than a chaotic unburdening, while leaving the witness arguably more intact, more whole, less traumatized and indeed less victimized, than a compulsive, re-enactive rambling that misses its therapeutic mark.

¹³ Claude Lanzmann *Shoah* Parts 1 & 2, produced by Aleph/Historia France 1985

Of course one asks what she might have left out, forgotten, repressed or occulted. She remembers the screaming of the murdered gypsies, but strangely (or not) it is impending liberation that brings a slight perspiration to her face and scrambles her chronology, her finger movements tense, her head occasionally flicking as she comes to “one very ugly, difficult picture” of the Soviet “mercy killings” of incapacitated prisoners whose bodies were allowed to lie where they fell. “Normally they would have been taken away”, she almost tuts, and suddenly with a terrible falling sensation one realizes she is back in the Camp, within all its rules and regulations; after an hour or more of solid concentration she has regressed, “gone under” in an almost hypnotic sense and with this “normally” she is still in thrall to the perpetrators who administered this hell, evoking, of course terror and pity but also doubts about the defiant sanity she is trying to project. Through this latency made fleetingly visible, the whole interview, and the very technique of film testimony, is suddenly thrown into question, a courageous “working out” in danger of reverting to a ghastly “acting out”, a ritual re-enactment and re-infliction of psychic scarring that can never be healed, and certainly not by the simple fresh air of speech.

Not once does she mention “the Holocaust” as an historical event. She offers no overview and no interpretation, and this raises questions of form and presentation for future generations deprived of frames of reference we take for granted – will the iconic barracks and railway lines still hit the mark once memory fades?

She calmly refuses an apology for having resumed her life immediately afterwards: “My reasoning was, and it was what others thought too, that it was better to think about the future than to mourn...” and here for the first time her eyes are lowered from camera with a tone of regret, maybe remorse, as if knowing that her mourning had been too short for its complex causes, and that this in itself was a source of shame, though youthful vivacity returns with a hint of vanity as she recalls her triumphs as a student, achieved despite psychic damage inflicted by Auschwitz, particularly the serious impairment of her ability to retain new information, a post-war hangover, perhaps, of that form of self-defence against trauma by which extraneous sensory experience is blocked and denied, a “closing down” against the physical reality of the camps which in extreme cases was known to lead to total numbing and even psychogenic death (for whose victims the Nazis coined the ineffably offensive

pseudonym of Muselman or Muslim) a condition which Greta clearly avoided or recovered from, though as to how, we are given no clue.

It is a sign of this first-time survivor's almost unbelievable resilience that she saw the second ordeal approaching and refused to take the lifeline offered. "Once in my life already I had been forced to leave my home. So let the fate of the city and its inhabitants also be my fate." This almost biblical utterance, this apocalyptic foreshadowing, could scarcely come from another, as if in this second visitation she searches for a reckoning, a chance to confront her ghosts and live down both her past and her persecutors. But the siege rapidly gets much worse than she or anyone else had ever expected, and one wonders whether her initial confidence wasn't based on an assumption we all tacitly share, namely that horrors once experienced to such an overwhelming degree can never be repeated.

From just above her rooftop, artillery bombards the town, week after week, month after month, year after year, "the Yugoslav so-called people's army, the army we had created ourselves, with our own taxes"; her son cracks up, her grand-children are evacuated, a tank shell crashes through her window without exploding just after she has left the room. "That day I became superstitious... it shook me from 'my previous balance'", she wouldn't again use the cups or tray she had used that day, nor allow three people to sit in that room. "Now we use those things again", she reveals with a huge smile (the first of the interview), a smile she suddenly tires of and wipes from her face without warning - a gesture that leaves one worrying that she has underestimated her entire life's trajectory and that even now, in the telling (in the recollection even in tranquillity) it might catch up with her and overwhelm her, as warned by Judith Herman in her diagnosis of PTDS or post-traumatic stress disorder:

"With the passage of time, as these negative symptoms become the most prominent feature of the post-traumatic disorder, the diagnosis becomes increasingly easy to overlook. Because post-traumatic symptoms are so persistent and so wide-ranging, they may be mistaken for enduring characteristics of the victim's personality. This is a costly error, for the person with unrecognised post-traumatic stress disorder is condemned to a

diminished life, tormented by memory and bounded by helplessness and fear”¹⁴.

“Everything that happened here was genocide again”, Greta says starkly over shots of snow-covered cemeteries “because the only fault of the Bosniaks was that they were Bosniaks”. She wouldn’t go out, she had a dreadful feeling of inferiority. “Once again I wasn’t in control of my own destiny, once again I was an instrument in other peoples’ hands”. She speaks again of the shell through the window, repeating “we were lucky” and suddenly a carefully crafted delivery crumbles before one’s eyes with her speech patterns as she remembers: “For three months I was psychologically unbalanced. Though I wasn’t crazy!” she adds with a merry laugh which despite scepticism I take at face value, knowing that it is born of the everyday resilience of siege-bound Sarajevo, which she goes on to mention: the concerts, the education, the fashion events and the founding of the Sarajevo Film Festival amidst the hail of artillery, each of these an act of culture defying the barbarism set to destroy an entire city, a barbarism perpetrated “by people we lived with and students I had so carefully nurtured”, and she continues:

“When I look back now on these four years of war, although I cannot say one could compare this with the death camp, nor do I want to, but I can say that this was more difficult for me to bear, than those years 1941-45 apart from the camp year. It was more difficult to survive”.

The reasons she adduces are her greater age, the constant uncertainty about how it would end, and the fact that all the suffering was concentrated in a small area.

“It hurts to know that this part of Europe has suffered such horrors and injustice while everyone else enjoyed peace... while only one hundred kilometres away as the crow flies people were living normal lives, unaffected and not noticing.”

¹⁴ Judith Lewis Herman *Trauma and Recovery From domestic abuse to political terror* Basic Books, USA 1992 Pandora, UK 1994, 1998 Reprinted with a new afterword p.200

The mingled wit, stoicism, anger and hurt that speak through this testimony leave one in no doubt that if Sarajevo is in some senses a symbol of western shame, of an unacceptable complacency that allowed the unspeakable to recur, Sarajevo is also a place where humanity has asserted itself to its fullest and in some unspecifiable way redeemed the horrors of passivity and reification of the Holocaust, as exemplified in the testimony of this one courageous double survivor who learned to face down one trauma by living through a second.

Even if Greta's testimony is not unclouded by elements of "acting out", of compulsive repetition which she does so much to censor and to filter, it is possible to understand this very "acting out" as being (in part at least) a deep-seated, inextinguishable craving for justice and an unconscious effort to retain the necessary evidence (the motivation which saved many survivors being to outlive and confront their persecutors), evidence which would be lost with a fully therapeutic "working through" whose feasibility or even desirability many doubt, amongst them Dominick LaCapra:

"One may maintain that anyone severely traumatized cannot fully transcend trauma but must to some extent act it out or relive it. Moreover, one may insist that any attentive secondary witness to, or acceptable account of, traumatic experiences must in some significant way be marked by trauma or allow trauma to register in its own procedures"¹⁵.

The function of testimony for the testifier must be balanced against its purpose for the receiver. It is all very well to respect the victim's privacy, to insist on the therapeutic dialogue and the healing power of association and recovery. It is perfectly admissible to weigh the cost and consequences of secondary witness and second generation trauma. No doubt these are important issues.

But while we are searching for cures, history continues and truth can simply get lost. Diagnosis is needed early, as a matter of urgency. Testimony is vital, and preferably

¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra *History and Memory after Auschwitz* Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1998 p.110

long before the comfortable approach of old age, for the time lag in traumatic absorption can mean that understanding never catches up with experience. Evidence loses presence and legal power. Memory turns to myth – in the reception by others if not in the ever-present experiencing of it by the witness. And in this gap of understanding lies the potential for further traumatizing catastrophe.

The challenge is to match the pace of human absorption of experience with the redoubled speed of that experience. At any one moment in time we are not just living (or avoiding) the present, we are also assimilating (or denying) the past, rendering several periods psychologically contemporaneous, indeed synchronous. History continues unstoppably without us, whether we experience it or not, and this creates a disjunction, a space in which events can be not just repressed but forgotten or entirely suppressed, leaving second or third generation “survivors” to deal with the post-traumatic residue, obliged to process the guilt of ancestors they never knew whose experience is now closed to them. The sins of the fathers are indeed visited upon the sons, often in ways they cannot possibly understand or interpret.

The delayed reaction to trauma is something humankind can ill afford, for while one traumatic event is being suppressed, denied or acted out, another is in the preparing or execution: between 1960 and 1979 alone, arguably the heyday of Holocaust suppression, there were at least a dozen genocides or genocidal massacres¹⁶ and the number has accelerated exponentially since then. Genocide is *not* “an event outside the range of human experience” (the US legal definition of trauma till very recently) any more than rape or child abuse¹⁷. It happens daily in societies we simply do not scrutinize as closely, and it could recur in our own. Until this question of balance and expectation is redressed in scholarship, until the tone of surprise and grief in scholarship itself is addressed, we will continue to flatter readers into a false sense of security; and this is not to suggest that the academy should abandon aspirations inherited from the Enlightenment and much earlier, nor that commentators should coarsen their expectations and intuitions of human achievement at its highest and most sensitive, merely that our own sensibilities should be tempered with an

¹⁶ Helen Fein *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* 1993 p.6 quoted by Zygmunt Bauman ‘The Holocaust’s Life as a Ghost’ in Decoste and Schwarz (eds) *The Holocaust’s Ghost*.

¹⁷ see Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*

awareness of the omnipresence of crisis and the resultant attractions of trauma-inflicting behaviour, which one might characterize through Hannah Arendt's much-abused dictum on "the banality of evil", in other words its everyday availability.

There have recently been efforts made to "step back from purely loyalist positions"¹⁸ on the Holocaust. Eva Hoffmann for instance addresses "the task of unfreezing myths and unpacking stereotypes" by combining personal reflections on the burdens inherited by "second generation" Holocaust survivors with vivid responses to more recent atrocities and genocides in South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia, as well as the Balkans¹⁹, all of them now receding from the public mind. "Who now remembers the Armenians?" she chillingly quotes Hitler, contemplating his own genocide and its future irrelevance to history.

Noting that for the current cult of memory as an undisputed "source of value and virtue" the Holocaust is a "central pillar and paradigm of tragic and exalted memory", she also detects that compassion has become too easy, too self-referential: "It is easy to mistake keening for ourselves for keening for the Shoah". Searching for a function, a dynamic perspective for "the Shoah business", she recounts her meeting at a London garden party with a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, with whom she exchanged "the balm of recognition", taking consolation in the fact that he could find "the meditations on memory and trauma emerging from the Holocaust helpful for his own thinking and coming to terms with his catastrophe", concluding:

"...if the Holocaust has become the sometimes abstract paradigm of all atrocity, it has also served as a template for the study of analogous events and certain fundamental problems"²⁰

While the Holocaust is undoubtedly a unique event in many of its primary features, the possibilities of recurrence (either in modified or, yes, in heightened form) demand and deserve our vigilance. The origin, direction and pseudo-justifications of genocide

¹⁸ Eva Hoffman *After Such Knowledge Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* Secker and Warburg, London 2004 p.146

¹⁹ "in the recent Yugoslav wars, the less reliable soldiers of mercilessness were plied with vodka or even drugs to deaden whatever inklings of compassion they might still have harboured" *ibid* 113

²⁰ *ibid* p.164

are various, but the temptations to impose radical “solutions” by extreme violence, to solve a “problem” by effacing it, to dismantle a binary opposition rather than deconstruct it, are ever-present and increasingly seductive in a world confronting new challenges such as population explosion, water shortage, climate change and fuel exhaustion as well as the older ones of religious bigotry and race hatred, any one of which could provide the breeding ground for action which might consign the Holocaust to a footnote in our history.

So let us remember the *mitzvah* of Sarajevo, that our fixation on the Holocaust as the eternal *nec plus ultra* of horror not prove sadly short-lived.

Gareth Jones 27th December 2005, Rev 7th June 2006

Short Biography

Gareth Jones is a writer/director of film and television, focussing especially on Jewish and Holocaust concerns with **The Trial of Klaus Barbie** (BBC, 1987); **Shalom Salaam** (BBC, *Best Actress & Screenplay Cannes 1989*); three-hour documentary on Christianity and Judaism **Au Nom du Même Père** (Channel Four, TF1 1991); and feature film **Bonhoeffer – Die Letzte Stufe** (*Nymphe D'Or, Monte Carlo; Bronze Worldmedal, NY; Deutsche Angestellengewerkschaft Fernsehpreis*). A Film Consultant working in four languages for institutes across Europe and with his own production company Scenario Films Ltd (www.scenariofilms.com), he is also a part-time Ph D student in Holocaust Film at Cambridge University.

Abstract

SARAJEVO – TRAUMA REVISITED

The scandal of the double survivor

To have survived the Holocaust is already a miracle; to have narrowly escaped a second genocide might be deemed implausible. Drawing on concepts of trauma theory derived from Freud and elaborated by such as LaCapra and Caruth, this paper touches on the ethical and aesthetic challenges posed by the Holocaust for filmic recovery, particularly in the light of two documentary films uncovered by the author in Bosnia-Herzegovina which convey the personal testimony of two “double survivors”, who returned from Auschwitz only to be trapped in the longest siege of military history, that of Sarajevo from 1990 to 1994, a genocidal assault permitted by a conniving world with an indifference one can only consider scandalous.