

The Scar: A Srebrenica Story

JOSH MACHAMER

Uvod

Pozorište je memorija – prizivajući ritam prošlosti koja se onda kao kazna nađe u sadašnjem trenutku. To je čin sjećanja, oslobađanja i otkrivanja koji dozvoljava osjetljivu vezu sa intuitivnim memorijama naše ljudske egzistencije. U njenom prezentiranju leži mogućnost za mijenjanje percepcije, ne samo prošlosti nego također sadašnjosti i budućnosti.

Strašni događaji u nekoj stranoj zemlji, preneseni glasom stranca, prevazilaze objektivne historijske zapise perioda u kome je Balkan bio aktuelan. Ovdje se ne radi samo o glumi i imitaciji. Nada nije samo u tome da se kreira ili zapiše jedan moment zamrznut u vremenu, nego da se koriste istinite ljudske priče koje se nalaze u ožiljcima naših susjeda te da se kao takve primjene na naše osobno društveno postojanje. Radi se o tzv oralnom pomirenju; o nadi. Radi se o potrebi da se čuje šta drugi imaju reći, potrebi da se ispriča priča ukorijenjena u domaćim i regionalnim tragedijama koje imaju dugoročne univerzalne i globalne implikacije.

Ukoliko je pozorište kodificirano ovom idejom o priči, ili specifičnije, priči koju jedna zajednica pripovijeda samoj sebi i o sebi, onda ima smisla da realiziranje ovog svjedočanstva tragičnog događaja koji se desio u Srebrenici može biti pripovijedano puno široj globalnoj zajednici, o problemima oko pravde, nepravde, preživljavanja, zla i humanosti kojima smo svi svakodneвно izloženi.

Historija ne pripada samo jednoj grupi, društvu ili kulturi. Historija je živa mogućnost za svakoga i ona čeka da bude razotkrivena od strane svakoga ko je odluču prizvati u sadašnjost.

Introduction

Theatre is memory – invoking a rhythm of pastness that then forfeits itself into a present moment. It is an act of remembering, reliving, rediscovering that allows for palpable connection to the very visceral accounts of our own human existence. In its presentation lies the ability to change perception, not just of the past but that of the present and future as well.

The horrific event described here – from a foreign country told via a foreign voice – goes beyond an objective historical account of a very topical period in the Balkans. This is not about mimesis or mimicry. The hope is not to create and transcribe a frozen moment in time, but to use the very human stories found within the scars of our neighbours and then apply them to our own fabric of societal existence. It is about oral reconciliation; it is about hope. It is about the need to hear what other people have to say, the need to tell a story rooted in domestic and regional tragedy that has lasting universal and global implications.

If theatre is codified by this idea of story – more specifically, a story that a community tells itself about itself – then it makes sense that the realization of this witness' account of the tragic events that took place in Srebrenica can speak to a much broader global community about issues of justice, injustice, survival, evil and humanity that we all face on a daily basis.

History does not belong solely to one group or society or culture. History is a living possibility for everyone, waiting to be unearthed by any and all who determine the necessity to invite it into the present.

Note: *The Scar is constructed from four days of actual testimony from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), The Scar is a theatrical docudrama in monologue form, which gives a first person account of an anonymous witness's chilling story of survival. Any attempt to do anything other than tell a story will create insensitivity and cliché.*

First performed in San Luis Obispo, California, in August 2005.

Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living ... storytelling may be said to humanise time by transforming it from an impersonal passing of fragmented moments into a pattern, a plot, a mythos.

Richard Kearney (*On Stories* 3–4)

Opening. A chair downstage centre, isolated in light. A man enters and sits. Breath.

Man: I have a small scar, here – probably a stone that ricocheted. Do you want me to sit here and tell you the history as it happened, the whole story?

I was a construction worker – a skilled worker for reinforced concrete. I moved to Srebrenica on the 14th of March, 1993. When I came, there was no fighting at that time. Srebrenica was supposed to be proclaimed a safe area. So I don't know anything about the situation before that. If somebody did conduct any act of sabotage, I don't know that.

In Srebrenica, we lived off the land, we farmed the land, and we also received some humanitarian aid. On the 11th of July, 1995, I was living in Srebrenica.

On July the 11th, when Srebrenica fell, we decided to travel towards the free territory of Tuzla, through the woods. We decided to go through the woods because we were afraid of retaliation from them – we saw the situation, that they had threatened us that if Srebrenica fell, that they would settle accounts with the able-bodied men, and that is, anyway, what they did – because they retaliated everywhere without exception. Not only Srebrenica but everywhere else.

When we left Srebrenica, I was in the last column on the 12th. Maybe four o'clock or half past four we left the territory. It was a large column, there were lots of people. Some were ten kilometres ahead. So I didn't know at all what was going on. People who were going in front of me saw some dead bodies and they became afraid. We continued for as long as we could see, while the daylight lasted. And then when darkness fell, I spent the night under an oak tree, and then the next day I found a group of people, among whom was my brother.

When we were captured, we were surrounded. Soldiers started calling out over the loudspeakers for us to surrender. As we thought that the situation was hopeless, the men decided to surrender. As we were coming down, soldiers came onto the road. They were all in uniform, camouflage uniform, and first they asked us to give them any money we had, German marks or dollars or any other foreign currency. Those who had anything gave it up; those who didn't, they didn't. They didn't shoot at us on that meadow. They ordered us to sit down and form lines and rows and, once we did, a soldier with a scarf on his head – he was somewhere between twenty and twenty-two – he told me that the governments were negotiating an exchange on the principle 'all for all'. According to my estimate, it was about 2,000 to 2,500 people. They said we would go to some hangars and be given water, although not dinner, but the other man said we would be getting dinner too. They asked us to surrender, they guaranteed our safety, and you know what happened when we surrendered, you know what happened to us. Everyone knows.

There were two soldiers to each row. One of those soldiers was a young man of twenty-five, not more. They forced us to lie down on our stomachs and then shout, 'Long live the King', and we did. Then again they told us to sit up. When we sat up normally, then it was about an hour or an hour and a half before nightfall. I didn't have a watch. It would be about half past seven because it was summertime.

I don't know how many were evacuated. Women, children, and men. I know until the command came to separate the men, men passed through and some younger men could pass. And when they started separating, they separated all the men, and they didn't hurt children under fifteen. The vehicles that had taken the women and children to free territory returned. Then we were ordered for the first row to get up and to board the vehicle. Then the first row got up, then the second row, and row by row, I don't remember which row I was in, my turn came. I boarded a trailer of a truck. You know what a truck is and a trailer. One usually transports coal because the sides were rather high, the kind used for coal or agricultural produce that is light so to avoid it spilling over. There were trucks, trailers, buses, trucks with trailers. The moment I entered the truck, I didn't know what was happening with other people. My brother had stayed

behind, and I never saw him after that. Since the 13th of July, 1995, I haven't heard of him. Since that – from the time when we were sitting together in the meadow. He was maybe ten to fifteen rows behind me sitting on that meadow.

And they drove us ...

When we stopped, it was in the evening at about half past nine. It was already dark. Soldiers were looking for men who were on those buses. I could hear them. They were talking in loud voices. They would ask for the man's name, surname, and father's name, and then they would take the man to a garage, on which the door was open. At that moment we would hear thuds and people screaming. The man would start to scream, to cry, and then they would shout at him, they would yell at him, and then we could hear fire from an automatic weapon, and then everything would go quiet. This went on throughout the night.

When it dawned, the trucks started to move. We drove for a short while, and then at one point the truck turned right. I was a little bit familiar with the area, I knew it somewhat better, and I realized that it was moving in the direction of the village of Grbovci. The vehicles were traveling at a very slow pace. One by one they reached a schoolyard. When we were outside the entrance, I was ordered by one of their soldiers to take off my leather jacket. There was a large pile of clothes there. So when I got to the hall, we were ordered to sit down. We were crowded; we were pressed against each other. It was a gymnasium. At least 700 or 800 people must have been there. We sat there for about two or three hours, perhaps, and then some soldiers came and we were ordered to keep silent. So we stopped talking. Then one of those men at the door, I don't know who it was, he ordered four rows at the end of the hall to get up. These were mostly elderly men. Then they ordered them to turn around to the right and face the wall. This went on roughly until they reached my part, and they told us to turn our backs to the exit and to face the wall next to us.

It was very warm, people were demanding water.

There were people passing out, mostly because they were thirsty.

There was a bucket that was used as a toilet in the right-hand corner.

At least 700 or 800 people must have been there.

At the opening to the left, there were two soldiers standing there and a woman in uniform. They brought a pile of rags with which they tied our eyes. Enough to blindfold everybody in the gym. There were these pieces of cloth: they were about sixty centimetres long, five or six centimetres wide; they were mostly patterned so you couldn't see through them. The order was about turn to the right and to turn their back to the door. And when they were taking people out and blindfolding them, they told the others to turn their back to the door so that they wouldn't see what was going on. My eyes were tied. And then they took me to the execution site.

The truck drove for a very short while.

When they lined us up for execution, I was looking down, looking down in front of myself and all you could do was see underneath you. I happened to see a dead man. They first opened with a burst of fire from my right-hand side, and then

men were falling to the left. I fell because the men fell on top of me. Men brought me down, so that a man covered this part of my face, and he fell before me and my arm was over his chest. When we had all fallen to the ground, then one of them came and fired single shots at the people who were probably moving. A stone injured me slightly that probably jumped off of the road. My right hand. Here, between these two fingers – my scar. It was a small injury and it didn't hurt. If it had been a bullet, it would have been more painful.

When the men had been killed, I heard a group getting together who called each other by name, and they were talking. I then recognized one of them, who used to work with me in the same company for at least fifteen years. He was a colleague of mine who worked in Belgrade. I recognized his voice. I knew him, the way he spoke ... his accent. He said that he should kiss those of us who had been killed because he thought we were all dead. There was a lisp in his voice. He wanted to see whether anyone was alive and, of course, he would kill that person. He wouldn't kiss him. We'd known each other for fifteen to eighteen years. We never argued. We were always on good terms with one another. And even if he was in another office and I would hear him, I would know who he was, not to mention right next to me. I don't know whether he's alive now or not.

Other trucks arrived. They went further away from me. Then another truck came, and again you only heard shots, and people were probably falling but there weren't many cries or screams. I still had the blindfold, and I was lying on my stomach. I didn't look up. I didn't dare because I didn't know what was behind my back. I didn't dare move.

So we come to almost nightfall.

I took the blindfold off. It was really dark and the soldiers had moved away from me. The loader arrived, and the man who was driving the excavator, he was digging there, and this loader lit us all up. One man was alive close to me, he jumped off and ran into the woods. They shot after him and the person on the loader turned the lights around towards the woods, probably to light him up, and at that moment, I moved. I crawled from under the bodies that were on top of me. There were a lot of bodies and clothes. And then he said, 'We have another one here'. However, they didn't shoot again.

I crawled away towards this embankment, and I felt the rocks from the railway tracks. I looked around. No one was following. I got onto my feet, and I climbed up to the railway track. Someone opened fire. Whether it was in the air or somewhere, I don't know. Anyway, it was a burst of fire. I didn't feel any bullet hitting me. I ran into a maize field on the other side of the track. Then I went on my knees through the cornfield, and I reached some bushes. I could feel the sound of water, but I didn't see any water. Then soldiers came. They shot around in the cornfield, but they didn't hit me.

When I came out of the corn, I was terribly afraid I might come across them somewhere. So I climbed on to the rail track and started walking along it slowly. I reached a railway station. There was an office that was open there. There was nothing inside. So I concluded I was going in the wrong direction. I could see a village down there. Then I went back again. I retraced my steps and I kept thinking where I should go. I came across a road where I saw that other location

where men had been executed in the meadow. There was moonlight so I could see them, but I didn't get closer than twenty metres away so I couldn't tell you how many there were. There was one group one side of the tracks and another on the other side of the tracks. And there was no-one there except for the dead bodies, no-one. It seemed to me that one of them showed signs of life, but there was no hope. He was squealing like an animal, and he was slightly removed from the others. There were a lot, because the killing went on for a long time. It started around three o'clock or four o'clock in the afternoon, and it lasted until after midnight. I think about 7,000 or 8,000 people. Only they know how many people they killed. I don't know.

I still didn't know where I was. So I thought I should go into the woods. I didn't escape to the free territory on that night. I could have reached the area within two hours, if I had known, if I had known it, if I had known my way, but I kept wandering for at least ten days.

We must tell the world, those who have lived through these experiences, that we should do everything to prevent a repetition of such acts.

I suppose I was just lucky. They had killed all the people there.

They shot at everyone, but they missed me.

They shot at me and missed me.

The shooting stopped, and then I went to save my own head.

When I put my glasses on, I see this little scar and that's all.

Source Material

Radislav Krstic Criminal Trial, ICTY Transcripts (April 11–12 2000).

Slobodon Milošević Criminal Trial, ICTY Transcripts (November 11–12 2003).