

‘And I knew them all’

A Study of Trauma in Two Bosnian Books

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the portrayal of trauma in the two Bosnian books *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) by Joe Sacco and *The Bosnia List* (2014) by Kenan Trebinčević and Susan Shapiro. Both books are set to and revolve around the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-95. The books depict individual struggles with coming to terms with traumatic experiences of war, devastation, and betrayal. The aim of this thesis is to investigate how trauma is portrayed in the two different genres, as well as looking into how different literary tools have been employed in the narrative and how they affect the reading of the books. The reading of the texts is conducted through the frames of trauma theory, and the analyses focus on identifying these elements of trauma in the books. This thesis will also show that even though the characters experience individual trauma, the element of collective trauma is also present in the narratives.

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Introduction

In his 1951 novel *Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner wrote: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”. Writing a thesis on the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past year, I have come to understand and agree with this quote. Born and raised in Norway to Bosnian refugees, I have been shielded from the seriousness of the situation in my parents’ home country. What from a Norwegian viewpoint has appeared as a controlled, calm situation in Bosnia, where war and ethnic differences have been set aside, turns out to be a picture which does not mirror the truth. 26 years after the war, tensions have yet again risen and the situation in the country has further escalated in the years of 2021 and 2022. In November of 2021, the High Representative in Bosnia stated in a UN report that: “At the time of writing, Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing the greatest existential threat of the post-war period” (Schmidt 3).

The report mentions Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska, as denying there ever was a genocide in Srebrenica in 1995, glorifying war criminals, and wishing for a separation of the two entities which make up the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina (together with the Brčko district). Murals glorifying war criminals, refusal to partake in discussions and political meetings with other representatives, in addition to throwing aside the regulations of the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 are all indications of ethnic division still being a highly relevant issue in the region. The issue of ethnic division was also the main reasons for the war in Bosnia in 1992-95. What I have considered to be a part of the past, a traumatic experience put behind and left as a part of history, is evidently very much alive. It only comes to prove that Faulkner was right; “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”.

This thesis takes a deep dive into depictions of war and betrayal during the Bosnian War of 1992-95, through the reading of two books: Joe Sacco’s graphic novel *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000), and the memoir *The Bosnia List* (2014) by Kenan Trebinčević and Susan Shapiro. These literary works both center around the war and stories from survivors. While Sacco’s novel is narrated by himself, and the majority of the information presented is by accounts from survivors through interviews conducted by Sacco, Trebinčević’s memoir depicts his own, personal experiences and his working with coming to terms with growing up in a war-torn country and as a refugee. Both works are presented from a Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) point of view, and they both include depictions and descriptions of being betrayed by one’s

neighbor and friends. In a country where the slogan was “brotherhood and unity”, coexisting with other ethnic and religious groups was – before the conflict – widely accepted and not considered an issue. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not visibly discriminate against any of its peoples. As revealed in the two books, ethnic heritage was not a determining factor in forming friendships. Bonds were established irrespective of them: Bosniaks would for instance attend Christmas parties, and Christians would attend Muslim weddings. They were all part of one country.

How, then, could war all suddenly break out? While some have spoken of everlasting tensions and differences in the Balkans, war came as a surprise to many. While there had been some indications of uprisings and political unrest in the time before 1992, most people did not consider war to be imminent. How could the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia, namely Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs, so suddenly turn on each other, when they had all recently been such good friends and neighbors? In this thesis, I will look at how trauma is represented in Trebinčević’s *The Bosnia List* and Sacco’s *Safe Area Gorazde*, focusing on the Bosniak point of view. The analyses will be based on trauma theory as well as the use of literary tools and narrative techniques. Finally, I will examine the idea of collective trauma, focusing on the social aspect of trauma, in addition to the psychological aspect of individual trauma.

While the focus of this thesis is to look into individual and collective trauma, from the viewpoint of the victims of war, it could be interesting to look into other aspects of trauma from the same event.¹ As Alan Gibbs mentions, the issue regarding perpetrator trauma could be an interesting point of view to the same situation (19). While he has looked into perpetrator trauma with American soldiers in the Vietnam war and the Gulf wars, there is no doubt that the topic is divisive in its nature. Gibbs mentions that “Holocaust scholars are much more reluctant to countenance the traumatic experience of the perpetrator” (Gibbs 18-19), a statement which is probable to hold agreement with the general public. To contest this general view, this thesis could have included the viewpoint of Serb characters, in order to compare and contrast two opposing points of view. Nevertheless, I did not deem this to be useful for this thesis. Many authors have attempted to attend to two differing sides of one

¹ I am here referring to the entire war as one event, although I am aware that it can be considered as a series of different events.

conflict. These attempts, with the intent of retaining a neutral perspective and preserve ethical aspects have nevertheless not resulted in anything revolutionary. Both sides have their own viewpoints and stories, and both sides can be traumatized. In this thesis, I did not consider it realistic that the results would be conclusive if I were to compare two differing views. Therefore, due to the scope of the thesis, I have decided to narrow the traumatic focal point to include individual and collective trauma with Bosniak characters, commonly regarded as the victims of the war in Bosnia.

Historical Context

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a country still suffering from scars of war from the 1990s. Taking a walk through the streets of Sarajevo, it is not unusual to see 25-year-old bullet holes in building walls, or to meet victims of war who are still both physically and mentally traumatized. The political system in Bosnia is characterized by ethnic differences. It is a country which consists of different ethnic groups and religions, and ethnic tensions still persist to some extent today. While one could argue that there have been tensions and clashes in the Balkans since the beginning of time, it is the Bosnian War which will be the focus here, as it provides the historical background of the two novels I am analyzing. However, in order to understand the reasons for the Bosnian War of 1992-95, it is important to look at the history and themes of identity and ethnic backgrounds in Bosnia.

After the annexation of Bosnia by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, many Bosnian Christians converted to Islam, and Islam gradually became the dominant religion in the country (Malcolm 52-53). Religious groups including Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Jews lived side by side, somewhat peacefully during the Ottoman Era. The country was subject to a new occupation in 1878, and Bosnia formally became a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908. The people of Bosnia were deeply dissatisfied with the Empire, and out of the multiple ethnic groups in the region, many Serbs wished to unite Bosnia with a “Great Serbia”. This goal was so important that it eventually led to the Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip’s assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which launched Europe into the First World War.

Towards the end of the First World War, Bosnian Serbs and Croats issued for a monarchy “inhabited by Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs” (Malcolm 160). Bosnian Muslims appealed for

autonomy, while still under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in fear of being swallowed up by other countries such as Croatia or Serbia (160). The Empire's delayed response also meant that the decision would come too late. The Great War ended, and subsequently the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was established. The name was in 1929 changed to the more unitary "The Kingdom of Yugoslavia", meaning the Kingdom of South Slavic Land. Bosnia became partitioned into new regions, and the Muslims became minorities in all regions, in addition to facing discrimination in politics (Malcolm 169). Further partition of Bosnian land continued in the next years, until Yugoslavia was invaded and occupied by Nazi German forces in 1941.

Under Nazi rule in Yugoslavia, Malcolm estimates that a minimum of one million people died, and he argues that the majority of deaths were a result of the different Yugoslav ethnic groups killing each other (174). As a result of the Ustasha (Croatian Nazi sympathizers) genocidal policies, many Bosnian Serbs chose to join one of two rival resistance movements operating on Bosnian soil – the Chetniks or the Partisans. The latter movement was led by Josip Broz, commonly known as "Tito". In addition to stopping the Nazi rule in the Balkans, Tito aimed to implement communism in Yugoslavia, and everything he did was with the motive of eventually seizing power (Malcolm 177-178). While the leading Chetniks wished to absorb, among others, the territory of Bosnia into a large Serbia, and conduct ethnic cleansing of both Croats and Muslims, the Partisans never clearly expressed such an agenda (Malcolm 178-180).

Following Stalin's communist ideas, the notion of one national identity stood strong with Tito and the Partisans. The Muslims were by the Partisans recognized as an 'ethnic group', yet they were not listed as one of the Yugoslav nationalities, leaving the classification of Bosnian Muslims deliberately vague (181). The Partisans won the war against the Chetniks, which led to the creation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a communist state with Tito as President from 1953 until 1980. During Tito's Yugoslavia, tensions between the different ethnic groups were somewhat suppressed, largely due to the secularization of the society. However, over the course of Tito's presidency and after, many Serbs felt like they were being treated unfairly, and Serb nationalism started to blossom again (206). With Tito's death in 1980, nationalism, and a contempt for the communist politics, the Republic would soon begin to fall apart.

Slobodan Milošević became President of Serbia in 1989 and later committed a coup to become the Federal President. Propaganda targeted towards Croats and violence ensued in Croatia, and in 1991, both Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence, which led to war against the Serbs (217). For Bosnia as well, it became necessary to seek independence, and the declaration came in 1992 (230-231). Milošević pronounced the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. This also meant that the Socialist Yugoslav Army fell into Milošević's hands, leaving Bosnia without an official defense. The UN also refused to lift the arms embargo it had imposed on the Bosnian government, as well as on Yugoslavia, even though it had recognized Bosnia as a sovereign member-state, no longer a part of Yugoslavia (242-243). The world was watching the war in Bosnia, deeming it a civil war. Upon the slow realization by the international community that the Serbs were conducting ethnic cleansing, not as a by-product of war, but as a means in achieving a Great Serbia, talks between European and American foreign ministers began about air strikes (246, 250). This idea was later abandoned, and it was decided that the UN would create 'safe areas' for Muslims in Bosnia (250).

Six such safe areas were established: Srebrenica, Bihać, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Žepa, and Goražde. The safe zones would become perhaps the most unsafe areas in the country (Silber & Little 274). The problem with these UN zones was that the UN forces only had mandate to defend themselves if the Serbs were to attack them, however they were not permitted to return fire if the Serbs attacked Muslims in these areas (Malcolm 250). This, in fact, meant that large groups of Bosnian Muslims would gather in these enclaves, only figuratively protected, with nothing stopping Serbs from attacking, and making them an easy target. Unlike the safe area of Srebrenica, Goražde was successful in holding off the Serb invasion all through the war (Malcolm 264).

Prior to the war, the dominant ethnic group in Goražde municipality was Bosnian Muslim, with Bosnian Serbs making up around one fourth of the population (FZS 17)². Effectively, Bosnian Serbs were the second largest ethnic group in the city. Goražde was important to the Serbs in its strategic location, as it was situated between two newly Serb-occupied towns. The city was considered a threat to Serbs if held by Muslims, as it could function as a bridge

² The statistics are retrieved from the Bosnian Federal Institute of Statistics, which has published the results from the 1991 Census. In the census, a certain percentage of the population answered that they were 'Yugoslav'.

from Sarajevo into Serbia and Montenegro (Silber & Little 324-325). Goražde was under siege by Serbian forces from 1992-1995, and although the Serbs never managed to take the city, they managed to surround it and launch frequent attacks. On several occasions, general Ratko Mladić was warned that attacks would result in NATO air strikes, some of which were carried out. Uncertainty, fighting, and attacks characterized the everyday lives of the Goraždans for three and a half years. It was not until NATO bombed Serbian military supply depots, weapon factories, and artillery posts in August 1995 that Mladić and the Serbs stepped down, giving up on the attempt to conquer Goražde (Udovički and Ridgeway 197).

Like Goražde, the city of Brčko held a strategic position, close to the intersection of the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian borders. The Serbs labelled the city a ‘corridor’, seeing as it was vital in connecting Serb-dominated areas in Bosnia to Serbia (Malcolm 244). Brčko’s story during the war is one similar to that of many Bosnian towns with mixed ethnic demographics. The 1991 Census shows that Bosnian Serbs made up 20% of the population in Brčko, Bosnian Muslims around 44%, and Bosnian Croats 25% in the year before the war (FZS 11). Brčko, together with Bijeljina, was one of the first cities Serb militias were ordered to ethnically cleanse of non-Serbs, marking the beginning of the violence and atrocities of the war as a whole (Moore 46).

Lenard Cohen argues that although there was a peaceful coexistence between the ethnic groups in Bosnia during Tito’s era and some years after, interethnic hatred was always looming just under the surface of this peaceful façade (238-239). Malcolm on the other hand, having travelled widely in Bosnia, staying with different ethnic groups “cannot believe the claim that the country was forever seething with ethnic hatred” (252). Disagreeing with Cohen, he denies that it was all a façade, and that the coexistence between Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs must to some extent have been harmonious. In that case, the experience of having your community turn on you, must have a devastating effect. Having former friends and good neighbors turn into the enemy overnight must be a traumatic experience, leaving lasting scars with the individual, but also with the community.

Theory

The word *trauma* originally referred to a wound sustained due to physical injury. Over the years, and especially following the two world wars, the term has changed meaning into referring to mental wounds of the mind. With industrialization in the late 19th century, came the need to justify, explain, and diagnose frights and distorted feelings people experienced. Writers and artists used art to address the sense of meaninglessness which surged through the population. Along with the First World War and shell-shocked soldiers, the psychological field saw a need to understand and identify the mental processes which came into play due to traumatizing events. The field of trauma studies has rapidly expanded over the course of the last century. It can be a challenging field to navigate, as it typically concerns subjective feelings and experiences, making general conclusions risky to draw.

Trauma has become a popular theme in literature, art, and films. A traumatic incident was originally characterized as "outside the range of normal human experience," which might similarly be understood as "a gap between impact and understanding, influx and assimilation" (Luckhurst 79). Armed conflicts, natural disasters, and instances of abuse are only some examples of the many contributors to traumatization. An inclining focus on psychology and mental processes, especially in the Western world, trauma and traumatizing experiences are high on the agenda. There is a need and desire to understand and analyze it. Today, it is usual to consider an event as traumatizing, whereas the traumatized victim usually receives a diagnosis similar to the diagnosis soldiers in the First World War received.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

After the First World War, soldiers were diagnosed with shell shock. Today, this term has been replaced with the term "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD). PTSD is a diagnosis often given to victims struggling with trauma from events such as war and different types of abuse. The term was first included in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnosis manual in the 1980s (Luckhurst 1). The need to define PTSD arose from the many American soldiers returning home from war in Vietnam, clearly scarred by experiences and observations from abroad. Cathy Caruth, a leading figure in the field of trauma studies, has attempted to define PTSD;

While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.

(Caruth 4)

Caruth defines traumatic events as “overwhelming events” which are processed in hindsight. A characteristic of a traumatic experience is therefore, according to Caruth, a latency in processing the event, also called a belatedness. This belatedness was first introduced by Sigmund Freud as the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, believing that a person who suffers a trauma will often repress his or her memories into almost forgetting them. However, the memories will resurface, after the event has passed, issuing a belated response after temporary amnesia. With trauma victims, this belated response and resurfacing of the traumatic memory will often result in “hallucinations, dreams, thought or behavior” as well as leading to other reactions in recollection of the event. In one sense, one could say that the event is “haunting” the person.

While agreeing with this, Luckhurst also mentions that an avoidance of stimuli resembling or reminding the survivor of the event are similarly common symptoms of PTSD (Luckhurst 1). Citing the American Psychiatric Association, symptoms of PTSD can also include “increased arousal”, pointing at a loss of temper and anger as common reactions (Luckhurst 1). The symptoms of PTSD can thereby range in variety and degree. As Erikson puts it, typical symptoms can vary from “restlessness and agitation” on one hand, to “feelings of numbness and bleakness” on the other (Erikson 183). He further elaborates on feelings of anxiousness, physical and mental triggers to sounds and sights reminding the victim of the trauma, as well as depression, as common elements in recognizing trauma (183-184). Avoidance or the seeking out of such reminders are both common behaviors in trauma victims. Furthermore, like Caruth, Erikson mentions the important symptoms of daydreams, nightmares, flashbacks, and hallucinations, as well as a compulsive need “of seeking out similar circumstances” (Erikson 184).

Alan Gibbs criticizes the “Caruthian-PTSD critical perspective on trauma” (Gibbs 3). He considers her definition PTSD and trauma too wide, claiming that Caruth is unclear and too general in her statements. He problematizes her large following in the field, claiming that her definitions are only assertions, and do not provide a definite answer. He quotes Richard McNally in questioning the nature of what he calls the “constructed” PTSD, emphasizing that it is not discovered, problematizing the fact that the diagnosis was introduced after the Vietnam War. McNally insinuates that the diagnosis came as a “political or social construct” rather than existing in nature (McNally in Gibbs 3). Furthermore, Gibbs points to the identification of flashbacks as a symptom in the clinical sense of trauma, as well as in the literary sense. He explains that trauma literature from the early 1900s does not mention flashbacks, and citing McNally again, explains how it has become a constructed symptom of trauma after it started being used in movies (Gibbs 4). However, a flashback can be considered synonymous with reliving an event, and as Caruth, Erikson, and Luckhurst all mention, repeated hallucinations, dreams, and the recollection of the event have all been symptoms of PTSD for a long time, as it could be observed with, for instance, shell-shocked soldiers.

However, as Erikson, Caruth, Gibbs and others point out, both the definition of trauma and the symptoms of it are quite vague in nature. There are numerous different symptoms to look for in a victim in order to decide whether or not they are traumatized. Erikson writes that a victim can experience feelings from different ends of the emotional scale, making it likely that not all victims might experience flashbacks and hallucinations. These symptoms are common, however they do not provide a recipe in diagnosing a trauma victim. Therefore, trauma and symptoms of trauma contain a shifting and fluid variety of behavioral patterns, making each experience and reaction unique. Nevertheless, common symptoms and behavioral patterns can function as guidelines in identifying trauma with victims, and especially literary characters.

In either case, the concept of traumatization and PTSD as a diagnosis in trauma victims is widely acknowledged in the trauma field. While the definition of the diagnosis is vague in its phrasing, and the symptoms are many and can oftentimes be contradicting, trauma and overwhelming experiences are subjective and personal in nature. Symptoms, reaction patterns, and coping mechanisms can differ greatly from one individual to the other. However, symptoms are grouped together in order to identify a behavioral pattern. The

clearest criterion for a victim to be considered traumatized is *nachträglichkeit*, the delayed response within the individual in order to grasp and remember the event which has passed.

In his work with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, psychiatrist Dori Laub draws forward a statement provided by a female trauma victim. She states that the goal of the victims of the Holocaust was to survive at least one day past Hitler, “in order to be able to tell [their] story” (Fortunoff, T58 in Laub 63). Laub draws parallels to other victims he has worked with and identifies the importance of the telling of stories in the healing process. While it is important that the voices of the victims are being heard, it is the story which is the main focus, and as Laub sees it, the victims need “to tell their stories in order to survive” (Laub 63). The victim has of course survived, seeing as they are telling their stories after the traumatic event, however the need to survive can here indicate a need to remain sane, and let their truth be known. Laub also points out that a story becomes more distorted with the victim the longer it remains untold (Laub 63). Similarly, Luckhurst mentions that trauma can disrupt memory (Luckhurst 1). It is therefore not unlikely that witness accounts by trauma victims can be factually false or remembered incorrectly regardless of how much time has passed since the event. While this may serve as a warning to be cautious in the analysis of traumatic accounts, it is nevertheless the individual and his or her experience of the event which should be the focus in such an exploration.

Collective Trauma

Collective trauma is by Kai Erikson defined as “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson 187). It does not stand in opposition to individual trauma, rather it looks at the aspect of a community being collectively traumatized by a shared event. As Lucy Bond and Stef Craps point out, Erikson is distinguishing “between the *psychological* nature of individual trauma and the *social* nature of collective trauma” (Bond and Craps 99, original emphases). While individual trauma is oftentimes experienced suddenly and as an instant blow, collective trauma works more slowly, working its way into the victims conscious and finally resulting in a belated response and realization of the experience. Erikson states that the damaged and changed self continues to exist, as well as the distant and unrelatable other (Erikson 187). The two individual components making up ‘we’ do no longer exist as a part of the shared community (Erikson 187).

While collective trauma does not appear as sudden as individual trauma, it is nevertheless considered equally traumatizing. An upheaval of the structures, systems, and customs of the community which binds people together makes people question how such a thing could be possible and makes them feel unsafe. Erikson writes that “the community no longer exists as an effective source of support” (Erikson 187), emphasizing the feelings of restlessness and agitation, or on the other hand, numbness and bleakness, which are considered classic symptoms of trauma (Erikson 183-184). It is therefore reasonable to consider collective trauma just as much trauma as individual trauma, although they are of different character (psychological and social).

Furthermore, disasters or crises which impact a community can activate underlying fault lines which have previously been present, but kept in check for a longer period, causing in a clear fragmentation of the society (Erikson 189). The result of this becomes two contrasting sides, simply dividing people into those who were spared, versus those who were affected by the event. It becomes difficult for one side to relate to the other. Erikson finds that those affected, whom I will now refer to as victims, find it easier to relate to other victims who have gone through either the same or similar events. A fellowship and a “spiritual kinship” (Erikson 186) are formed. Seeing as a traumatic event is so personal and intimate, many victims are able to relate to unconnected persons who share similar experiences, due to the simple fact that “they know one another in ways that the most intimate of friends never will” (Erikson 187). Understanding can therefore be gained in groups where experiences are relatable, and recovery can begin in a way it cannot with the unaffected group.

For the purpose of this thesis, collective trauma provides an interesting aspect in the analyses of the Bosnian communities where the two books are set. Both cities are ethnically mixed, and so were the neighborhoods, with rare instances of areas reserved for just one group. As both the communities which are analyzed in this thesis existed together intertwined, not just side by side, the concept of collective trauma becomes even more interesting to look at. As has been mentioned above, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats all lived together in what appeared to be harmony, helping each other and attending each other’s parties and being friendly in general. When this changed overnight, it was experienced as an unsuspected punch. The community was no longer safe, and everything the affected thought he knew and could count on was no longer certain. The affected could no longer rely on the community for support, as the entire community shifted. The safety net was removed.

Furthermore, while the fault lines are enforced by such a blow, dividing the society into two opposing sides, the traumatizing event carries results even long after the event. Several years after the war, the two opposing sides cannot find common ground and relate to each other, seeing as their experiences have been vastly different. One side is considered “the affected”, being persecuted, isolated from the community, and largely considered the “losers” of the war. The other side, while having its own experiences, does not share the same experiences with “the affected”. Erikson mentions that “victims rarely forget” who was in charge of the accidents, and who directly or indirectly caused the traumatization (192-193). While he uses large companies and corporate decisions in his explanation, this is easily transferrable to the war. Not taking responsibility and showing a sense of humanity post a conflict, presents a difficult path to the recovery of the community. When groups “deny responsibility, offer no apology, [and] express no regrets” (Erikson 193), it is extremely painful to the affected group, as it does not feel their trauma and experiences are acknowledged. The affected group is yearning for something which is “so elementary a feature of social life that its absence becomes inhuman” (Erikson 193). The refusal to show this is devastating and will often lead to an anger with the affected.

In Literature

When it comes to literature and other cultural products, Gibbs argues that the clinical diagnosis of PTSD, as well as the symptoms of it, have shaped trauma literature. He claims that “an identifiable ‘trauma genre’ emerged”, inhabiting a structure and specific (but not specified) guidelines on how to write it (Gibbs 2). He goes on, writing that Luckhurst in recognizing and analyzing trauma fiction looks for certain specific elements originating from postmodernism; “[...] most familiarly, perhaps, fragmented, non-linear chronologies, repetition, shifts in narrating voice, and a resultantly decentred subjectivity” (Gibbs 27). Luckhurst acknowledges that it can be problematic to look for key components in trauma literature, stating that an alignment has emerged, containing the same tropes and narratives (Luckhurst 88). It is regrettable that there seems to have been created a recipe for writing traumatic fiction, however the purpose of the use of these literary tools is rooted in the attempt to mimic the traumatic effect. As previously mentioned, while trauma is subjective and personal, there are key elements and common denominators with, if not all then many trauma victims. What Gibbs identifies as elements from postmodernism are all characteristics

mimicking the mind of a victim, creating a confusing and distorted effect. The goal of the author is to give insight into the struggle within the mind of the traumatized character.

Chapter Overview

In the introduction, an update of the current political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been provided. The focus and aims of this thesis have been introduced, as well as an explanation regard the selection of literature. Other aspects which would have been interesting to investigate have been provided, however due to the scope of the thesis, the chosen aspects and literature have been selected here. A concise historical account of the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the inhabitants in the country has been given. The theoretical frameworks of trauma theory have also been introduced and explained. Definitions of trauma, PTSD, and collective trauma have been provided, as well as disagreement in the field. Key concepts in trauma theory, as well as common symptoms of traumatization have been identified, marking the foundation for the ensuing analyses.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the first chosen book, which is a memoir. In this chapter, the literary genre will be presented, along with traumatic elements which are often utilized in such books. Common denominators within the trauma memoir will be introduced and explained to illustrate the process of identifying trauma in *The Bosnia List*. The background information for the creation of the book, as well as information on the author, will be provided here, something which will be particularly useful considering this narrative is not a work of fiction. Afterwards, an analysis of two different relationships from the books will be provided, focusing on how trauma is conveyed in this memoir. Ensuing will be a short reflection where the analysis is viewed in the light of the trauma and genre theory provided.

Chapter two starts off with diving into the graphic novel as a genre and looks at how it portrays trauma using its different literary tools. A brief overview of the graphic novel as a genre will be followed by what identifiers and implemented tools to look for in the analysis of a trauma graphic novel. After this, the background for the chosen graphic novel, Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Gorazde* will be provided, as well as a brief summary of the story's plot. Form and content are components which will be explained in this part, followed by an analysis of three different chapters from the novel, all focusing on individual trauma, as well

as collective trauma. The analyses will be followed by a brief reflection where they are viewed in light of the theoretical framework.

The third chapter centers around a discussion of the findings from the analyses, comparing and contrasting aspects such as content, form, use of literary tools as well as traumatization. The different components utilized in the books will be explained in terms of their affect, and arguments regarding the possibilities and limits of these tools will be provided.

Finally, a conclusion drawing upon the analyses and discussion will be presented, summarizing the findings from the research conducted. These findings will provide a concise answer to the thesis question of how trauma is portrayed in *The Bosnia List* and *Safe Area Gorazde*.

Chapter 1: *The Bosnia List*

1.1 Trauma in the Memoir

The genre of the memoir is defined in the *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* under the entry for autobiography as “an account of a persons life by him- or herself” (Cuddon 60). A memoir is a personal retelling of the author’s life or significant parts of the author’s life, and “a hybrid of history and personal narrative” (Luckhurst 118). The memoir genre experienced a boom in the 1990s, and trauma became a popular theme to include and center around. Accounts of traumatic events can be observed in many contemporary memoirs. However, Luckhurst notes that the trauma memoir distances itself from the autobiographical style, as it centers around the event where the protagonist can break through self-apprehensive thoughts (Luckhurst 118). This shows that the protagonist of the memoir must have goals and obstacles to overcome, indicating that a journey within the self must be made, often relating to the notion of finding redemption or reaching self-realization. Typically, the protagonist will tell the story chronologically, starting at one point of view, with a particular state of mind, urges, and goals. Toward the ending of the story, these urges or goals have either been fulfilled or been changed, indicating a turning point and shift in the state of mind, as well as the attitudes and motives.

Being a witness to trauma can happen in different ways and to different extents. Dori Laub separates witnessing in the Holocaust experience into three distinct levels: “the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (61). While he speaks specifically about his own testimony from the Holocaust, this separation of witnessing into three levels is applicable to other traumatizing events. Similar to Laub, Trebinčević experienced being “a witness to [him]self within the experience”, and also was a child when the traumatizing events were happening. Drawing a parallel between Laub’s experience and Trebinčević’s testimony in his memoir is therefore useful in understanding narration, memory, and child traumatization as well as in adults.

1.2 *The Bosnia List*

The Bosnia List is written by Kenan Trebinčević and co-authored by Susan Shapiro. Shapiro is an experienced writer and teaches at the New School University in New York, whereas Trebinčević works as a physical therapist. Trebinčević is ethnically a Bosnian Muslim who

fled the war in Bosnia 1993, and is today an American citizen residing in New York. This is his first book, and it details his experiences of war and his coping with trauma in the decades following the war. His second book, *World In Between: Based on a True Refugee Story*, was published in 2021 and centers around his growing up in the United States, after being exiled from Bosnia. Although *The Bosnia List* has two authors, I will be referring to Trebinčević as the primary author of the book, seeing as it is his story which is being told. As the title explains, *The Bosnia List* is “a memoir of war, exile, and return”, and all these events are experienced by Trebinčević himself at different stages of his life.

Trebinčević grew up in Brčko in the north-eastern part of Bosnia, a town bordering Croatia and not too far from the Serbian border. Being one of the last Bosniak families to flee the town during the war, Trebinčević and his family got to experience the war up close. After several failed attempts at fleeing, the family finally escaped the war in 1993, seeking refuge in Connecticut in the United States. Remembering their previous lives from their safe homes in the States, Kenan and his brother Eldin look back at their time in Bosnia as a period with many bad memories. Kenan’s father Keka and Eldin were both interned in a concentration camp, and Kenan himself was almost killed on several occasions. Remembering the betrayal of their ethnically mixed community, neither of the two brothers wish to journey back to the country of their origin, and perhaps particularly not Kenan. However, following the death of his mother, and a conversation with Eldin, Kenan realizes that his father wishes to make one final trip back to their homeland, before he becomes too old and ill. Thus, the father and his two sons venture back to their motherland for the first time since fleeing 18 years earlier.

The title of the memoir alludes to a physical list which Trebinčević creates before traveling to Bosnia. It includes twelve goals he wishes to complete during his journey. The twelfth goal reveals the motive for the writing of the memoir: “Finish the story my mother wanted to write about how we survived” (Trebinčević xi). All the items on the list are of a personal character, and they reflect aspects of his childhood which have bothered him well into his adulthood. It seems like the list is made up of obstacles Trebinčević must overcome in order to leave his traumatic experiences behind in the past, and in order to make sense of the events he has witnessed and been subjected to. As he states himself: “My items on the list involved confrontation” (Trebinčević 132). Kenan needs to gain closure. The book concludes with “The New Bosnia List”, a set of twelve new points which Trebinčević has to go through.

In comparing the two lists, it is clear that the narrator has gone through a formative journey, and that his trip to Bosnia has raised new questions and created a new perspective. While the initial list is mainly phrased in a way which reflects Kenan's hatred and vengefulness, the new list indicates that Kenan has gained a new perspective – a perspective of being grateful for all the good things that happened during the war. In the new list, he makes a point out of thanking all those who helped him and his family during the war, and those who helped them escape the country. This could seem like an indication of Trebinčević having realized that there are nuances to the world and to people – everything is not black and white. We follow a protagonist who is negatively inclined towards the Serbs, yet who ends up realizing they were not all bad – some the neighbors whom he considered to have betrayed his family at the start of the book, had ultimately contributed to saving their lives. This shift in perspective indicates that the protagonist gains closure.

Fragmentation

The chapters in *The Bosnia List* jump back and forth in time, however there is a structure as there as two timelines to the book. One timeline, making up the odd-numbered chapters, starts in 1991 and continues until 2007. These chapters tell the story of Young Kenan, from age ten, growing up in Bosnia before and during the war. It concludes when his mother dies 16 years later. The other timeline, which makes up the prologue, even-numbered chapters, and postscript, begins in 2009 and finishes in 2012. This timeline mainly describes the returning journey to Bosnia, and Kenan completing his Bosnia List. The division of the timelines is necessary to show the different thinking of young Kenan versus adult Kenan. While the timelines never directly overlap, some events are described in both timelines. The events which are described are rarely told in their full account all at once. The memoir is infused with fragmentation, and the pieces of important events are scattered throughout the plot. The employment of fragmentation is used to mimic a traumatic effect, leaving the reader to connect the pieces and solve the puzzle. Elements of the story are deliberately excluded by the author so that the truth, which often results in closure, is reached together with the protagonist.

Narration

Examining the narrative technique in the novel, one would assume that the author is the narrator. However, as the sectioning of the chapters indicate, there are two narrators to the

story. While Kenan narrates both timelines, it is important to distinguish between Young Kenan and Adult Kenan. The two narrators have different experiences and different perspectives. Young Kenan is standing amidst the event which will ultimately traumatize him, yet he has not gained a wider perspective. Additionally, he has not had the chance to distance himself from the event both physically, but also in time. Keeping in mind Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, traumatization occurs as a belated response. Young Kenan has not yet had the chance to process the events he has been subjected to, making his story and motives of his storytelling different from his counterpart.

Adult Kenan has gained significant distance from the traumatizing event. Physically, he is located on the other side of the world, and in terms of time, almost two decades have passed. Gaining distance has allowed him to experience and dwell on the trauma he was subjected to during the war. The trauma changes him as a person, and also affects his thoughts and attitudes. The novel reveals that he projects different symptoms of PTSD, mainly hallucinations and dreams. Additionally, Kenan exhibits anger and hate towards his perpetrators, adhering to Luckhurst's theory of extremity in feelings. Furthermore, Kenan seeks out settings and persons which remind him of his trauma, seemingly looking for trouble. He experiences several triggers throughout the book, most of which result in flashbacks from Bosnia, forcing him to relive and recall events he cannot seem to lay to rest. As Laub argues, it is important to distinguish between the memories and understandings of the adult and child versions of a person (61-62), making the separation of the two narrators in *The Bosnia List* therefore important to maintain.

In terms of narration, the genre of the memoir required the reader to be careful and on-guard while reading the accounts and memories. The entire book is subjective, as it is an autobiographical account. It is based on the author's personal memory and recollections of different events. Such events might be factually incorrect, and the truth might be withheld. Biased accounts and attitudes might very well be present, demonizing the enemies and making them out as worse than they actually were. While perhaps not deliberate, such an extremity or polarization can also occur due to false memory with the author and narrator. In *The Bosnia List*, one example of such a false memory could be Adult Kenan recalling the event where his karate coach evicts Kenan's family. In one account, it is the karate coach who is evicting them (Trebinčević 7), whereas in another recollection, the coach never even enters the building, sending one of his colleagues up to evict the family (46).

1.3 Analysis of *The Bosnia List*

The next subchapter will analyze the portrayal of Kenan's relationship with Pero, a red thread in the memoir. A brief context will be provided, as well as an analysis of the language and literary tools being employed. The relationship will be read through trauma theories, and symptoms and characteristics of trauma being applied in the narration will be highlighted. As *The Bosnia List* is a fragmented piece of literature, the analysis of selected chapters would not be as useful in locating trauma and traumatic representation. The analysis of relation and relationship, portrayed in different parts of the book, will provide more useful and relevant information in the exploration of traumatic elements and collective trauma. The narrative technique is an important element in the conveying of trauma and traumatic symptoms, and the literary tools implemented will therefore be relevant in the exploration.

Kenan's Relationship with Pero

In the first chapter of the book, Young Kenan remembers being ten years old and earning his brown belt in karate. Ecstatic and proud of himself, he looks for his beloved karate coach Pero, with whom he shares a special bond. Spotting him, Young Kenan describes a happy Pero, awaiting Kenan's embrace. Running into his arms, Pero triumphantly lifts Kenan to show him off. "'Super job, Keno baby,' Pero said, draping my new brown belt around my neck. Then he tossed me over his shoulder, holding me by my feet, carrying me like a backpack. I laughed, happier than I'd ever been. Pero loved me most. I was special" (16). This description of the friendliness and good relationship Kenan and Pero share is contrasted shortly after. Tensions are brewing in Brčko, and the Serbs are starting to take control of the town, persecuting Bosniaks. One year after receiving his brown belt, Kenan notices Pero arriving outside of the Trebinčevićs' apartment complex. While Kenan's mother goes out to speak with him, she swiftly returns, shocked and upset. She had received a cold shoulder from the coach, following an order to return inside. Pero is observed handing his soldiers a list, which leads to the soldiers confronting the Trebinčevićs. A Serb soldier enters and orders the family to leave within the hour. "Leave or we kill you. One hour" (Trebinčević 46) the soldier shouts at Kenan's mother.

Following this recollection, Young Kenan reflects on his relationship with Pero. "How dumb I was to think [...] Pero had ever loved me" (Trebinčević 46), before realizing him and his family can be killed by him at any point. As revealed in the prologue, Pero's accomplices

were the ones who brought Eldin and Keka to Luka, a concentration camp “infamous for rape, torture, and mass murder” (7). Both Young and Adult Kenan blame Pero for bringing his family there, something which is shown when all the different accounts and memories are puzzled together. Kenan’s relationship and feelings regarding Pero are not assembled in a specific account or chapter of the memoir. The relation is fragmented, sporadically providing scattered glimpses of detail. It is up to the reader to assemble and connect the different pieces of information. Utilizing this fragmentation in the narrative serves the purpose of confusing the reader, and makes the reader invested in the story. Kenan possesses a myriad of different feelings in regard to Pero. These vary from love and affection, to idolizing him and projecting a protective instinct, to hate and contempt. Just as Kenan is portrayed as confused in his feelings regarding Pero, the reader also becomes unsure as to whether the character is a good or bad person. While Pero’s character does not become a “ghost”, the fragmentation makes it so that he haunts the narrative, frequently appearing in Kenan’s intrusive flashbacks.

The flashbacks Kenan experiences are primarily reserved to the even-numbered chapters and to the prologue. This is unsurprising, as it is the traumatized Adult Kenan who is the narrator of these chapters. As previously stated, symptoms of trauma are shown in the aftermath of the traumatic event, issuing a belated response. Kenan’s flashbacks are intrusive and triggered by associations. One example of this can be observed in the prologue. Visiting a new, Ex-Yugoslav nightclub called Marshall’s with his brother in New York in 2009, Kenan is reminded of the war. As Luckhurst mentions, the trauma victim often seeks out events and situations reminding them of the traumatic event, and this is exactly what Kenan does. He states that by visiting the nightclub, he “was traveling back in time to a life [he] never got to live but desperately wanted to reclaim” (Trebinčević 7). In a different visit to Marshall’s, Kenan notices a change in the atmosphere. Young Serbs, men and women, are visiting the nightclub, which almost immediately triggers Kenan’s flashback. It is the Serb dialect of the customers which triggers his memory, pulling him back in time to 1992 (7). The memory of Pero and his men threatening Kenan’s family, as well as taking his brother and father away to Luka resurfaces. Kenan’s blood is boiling and his pulse is rising, clearly angry with the Serb clientele. The provocation Kenan feels in this scene could indicate that he holds these customers responsible for the war atrocities, although he does not know them.

As an adult, Kenan is angry with his former karate coach, remembering him with disgust. While the flashbacks vary in positive and negative recollections of memories, Kenan’s

attitudes and how he chooses to communicate his opinions reflect his negative feelings. Firstly, the second number on his Bosnia list states: “Stand at Pero’s grave to make sure he’s really dead” (Trebinčević xi). The phrasing of this goal insinuates bad terms between the protagonist and Pero, seeing as the words “make sure” can mean “make certain” or “ensure”. The author deliberately refrains from using phrasing like “see if”, “see that”, or “check that” Pero is dead. His contempt for Pero is further confirmed in Kenan’s statement that he “needed to see for [himself] that the *bastard* was really dead” (Trebinčević 130 emphasis added). Keka and Eldin are surprised, and question why Kenan is choosing to pay his respects to Pero, a man whom he seemingly cannot stand the thought of. “I am not being respectful. I need to take a picture of Pero’s grave” (Trebinčević 132-133), Kenan says, continuing by telling his brother how he wants to walk over Pero’s grave, with the purpose of disturbing his spirit. This plan reveals Kenan’s need for self-assertion and a desire to confront the karate coach who betrayed him.

Standing over Pero’s grave, Adult Kenan wishes to feel like a victor. He is alive and standing, and Pero is not. However, he is haunted by the flashback from gaining his brown belt as a child, haunted by Pero’s embrace, excitement and words (135). Kenan is clearly affected by the flashback, as “the idea of peeing or jumping on his grave seemed primitive, the foolish and immature fantasy of a twelve-year-old” (135). While he wishes to feel victorious through confronting Pero, or at least his grave, Kenan does not feel as if he has won anything. “I still couldn’t reconcile what I’d lost, that my onetime idol had returned to cleanse our building of Bosniaks and take my father and brother away to die” (135). Kenan is here depicted as struggling with the idea that Pero could behave in these contrasting manners. One the one hand, Pero was kind, a true friend, and Kenan’s idol, while on the other, he was a nationalist, threatening to murder Kenan’s family and other Bosniaks. He also refers to Pero as something he had lost, indicating a sense of collective trauma seeing as Pero was a part of Kenan’s community and had ultimately betrayed him.

Visiting Brčko, in July of 2011, Adult Kenan is yet again haunted by the ghost of Pero. Kenan is triggered by his visit to the Partizan Sports Hall, the place where he used to attend karate practice. Flashbacks to the acquiring of the brown belt ensue, followed by “the image of Pero standing over dead Muslim bodies” (Trebinčević 281). Kenan is dwelling on the memory of his coach, struggling to grasp how Pero could seemingly have two polar opposite personalities, seeking to unify and to some extent even explain his actions. Kenan is looking

for meaning, which seems necessary in order for him to gain closure. Initiating a conversation about Pero with Eldin, Kenan's struggle to accept Pero as evil is clear: "I couldn't accept that our closeness was a lie" (286), he states, after recalling a nice memory of Pero joining Kenan's family for dinner. "It still didn't make sense to me" (286), Kenan continues. To his brother, Kenan indirectly suggests that there must be a reason for Pero never killing them. He gives several examples of opportunities where they could have been killed, yet Kenan suggests that Pero must have chosen to not kill them, due to their personal relationship. Kenan is choosing to see the good in Pero, and it can almost seem like he is excusing his actions, at least justifying and explaining them. Keeping in mind that these are the thoughts of Adult Kenan, almost two decades after the betrayal, it becomes all the clearer that he is struggling with coming to terms with the traumatic event, still searching for an explanation and reasoning.

Ensuing is an account from Eldin, who remembers Pero differently. Eldin, being a young adult when the war broke out, was close to Pero in age, and they frequently crossed paths in social settings. Eldin remembers him as constantly angry and arrogant, calling him a second-rate karate champion (286). This shatters Kenan's perception and breaks with his memory of Pero. In Kenan's mind, this was his childhood hero and idol, the best at martial arts, and a person who loved Kenan. This positive picture of his coach has been engraved in his mind, and hearing of Pero's different side seems impossible to come to terms with. Kenan's not being familiar with his idol's bad side and constant bad mood, could be due to lack of exposure on the matter, seeing as their interactions were mostly confined to karate practice. However, living in the same town, they must have crossed paths in public life, and thus this lack of memory could indicate false memory, or at least an exclusion of memory. As previously stated, Erikson and Luckhurst draw on the importance of traumatic memory. They also emphasize the fact that traumatic memory can become distorted in the mind, often omitting details or extremifying events. It is therefore never certain that the facts are correct, and that the full truth in its realest form is presented in the account.

The journeys, both the physical journey to Bosnia, as well as the mental journey within himself, seem to have provided Adult Kenan with closure. In the final chapter, the way Pero died is revealed. It turns out that his death was the result of an accident, and he was killed by a Serb comrade. This prompts Adult Kenan to start reflecting on the relationship again. Still struggling to find meaning, he contacts his friend Brian, who works as a forensic

psychotherapist. Kenan tells Brian all about Pero, their relationship, about all the bad things Pero did as well as how many people he had murdered. At the end, Kenan admits to Brian that he is struggling to understand why Pero spared the lives of his family. Not being able to arrive at a conclusion himself, Brian shares a reflection which initiates Kenan's process of gaining closure. The fact that Kenan gains closure is clearly depicted in the next scene. One week after returning from Bosnia, Kenan is again haunted by Pero in his dream. Happy to see Kenan, Pero waves at him. However, Kenan now decides to take charge of the interaction, confronting his coach. "It's over Pero. There's no way to fix this. You can't be our coach anymore" (Trebinčević 291), Kenan states. Seemingly ashamed, Pero leaves the sports hall. Waking up, Kenan reflects on the dream, and on his journey to Bosnia. His thoughts reveal that he accepts that his relationship with Pero was complicated, and that he now feels pity for his karate coach (292). This marks a big shift in Kenan's feelings and attitudes. He is no longer angry, but rather content having discovered and come to terms with the results from his journey. Kenan has gained closure.

1.4 Reflections on *The Bosnia List*

In line with the theoretical framework provided, it is clear that Trebinčević adheres to the characteristics of the memoir genre. As mentioned, the book follows two different plot lines with two narrators. The form of Trebinčević's memoir reveals a structure where the final destination of the plot is the important point of the story. As Luckhurst mentions, the protagonist of the trauma memoir must go through a journey, realize his or her self-apprehensive thoughts, and break free of them. In *The Bosnia List*, this is particularly evident in the change of Adult Kenan's physical list. While the initial Bosnia list is dominated by negative and vengeful thoughts, emphasizing the divide between Bosniaks and Serbs, the new Bosnia list is different. The new list is filled with words of gratitude and celebration, despite ethnic differences. Adult Kenan has gained a new perspective of the traumatic events him and his family experienced during the war, and has broken free from the self-apprehensive thoughts. While his goal seemed to be confrontation and vengeance, Kenan has found redemption, and ultimately gained closure, something which is explicitly revealed in the final chapter of the book.

In terms of literary tools, Trebinčević has utilized several of them in his attempt to portray trauma. The use of two narrators functions as a means in creating fragmentation of the story.

Trebinčević employs symptoms of PTSD to portray a traumatized Kenan. Feelings of anger and hate are dominating in Kenan's interactions with Serbs. Similarly, the seeking out of problematic situations, as well as reacting to triggers are common symptoms which can cause flashbacks. In addition to flashbacks, the author makes use of memories and dreams in order to highlight the notion of being haunted by the past. In Kenan's case, it is a specific person from his past, and this sense of haunting reveals that he is struggling to come to terms with his trauma, meaning both traumatic events as well as collective trauma. Kenan's friends, neighbors, and karate coach Pero were all an important part of his community. As this community shattered during the war, Kenan struggles, looking for a reason for how this could be.

Chapter 2: *Safe Area Goražde*

2.1 Trauma in the Graphic Novel

The graphic novel is in form a hybrid between words and images. Although the graphic novel/comic book has existed since the mid-20th century, a new type of graphic novel emerged during the 1990s. This type of literature has been labelled in various ways: 'the travel comic' (Walker 69), 'graphic journalism', 'cartoon journalism', and 'documentary graphic novel' (Romero-Jódar 71). Common for all these labels is the result of a graphic novel which culminates out of documentary journalism conducted in conflicted areas, often outside of the Western world. The goal is to give an impressionable, autobiographical account of the situation in the oppressed community studied, and it is the journalist who records these experiences (71). Due to the fact that such documentary graphic novels are set in places where conflict is raging or oppression is ongoing, it is only natural that the tone of the novel becomes somber, and at times gruesome, often dealing with the experience of trauma. The strength in the graphic novel as a medium is the ability to combine written word and imagery to convey a message.

In addition to 'collective trauma', 'massive trauma' is also worth mentioning in this setting. While closely related, Antonius Robben states that massive trauma "applies to any society, ethnic group, social category or class which has been exposed to extreme circumstances of traumatization, such as natural disasters, technological catastrophes, and social, political, cultural, gender, ethnic or religious persecutions that leave them life-long problems" (Romero-Jódar 75). Rather than focusing on social structures and communal cohesion, massive trauma centers around the degree of extremity and violence of the traumatizing event (75). In contrast, collective trauma looks at the after-effects of the traumatizing event, which in this case is war, killing, and what seems like a sense of betrayal by friends. While Sacco's novel does portray massive trauma, it is done carefully. As primary focus is to show the effects of collective trauma, the scenes which deal with massive trauma are suppressed, and when included, they are effectful, however paired with a break in reading. As Tristram Walker notes, this novel does not serve to fulfill the need for 'wound culture', portraying explicit scenes containing blood and violence. Sacco's goal is to work as a force to understand and realize the human experience and human suffering (Walker 70).

2.2 *Safe Area Goražde*

The author of the graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde* is Joe Sacco, a Maltese-American journalist and cartoonist. Sacco graduated from the University of Oregon with a bachelor's degree in journalism (Walker 72). Fascinated with travel and conflicts, Sacco left the United States in 1988 to observe the Gulf War firsthand. He later travelled to Israel and Palestinian territories to conduct research. Being this close to war and conflict, his stay in the region resulted in the publishing of his first documentary graphic novel *Palestine* (1993-95). While working on *Palestine*, war was raging in the Balkans in Europe, and Sacco decided to visit the war-ridden region. His journey to Bosnia resulted in *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), a journalistic graphic novel in the same style as *Palestine*.

In September 1995, some months before the war ended in Bosnia in December the same year, Sacco arrived in Sarajevo. This city was special to Sacco, as it had hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics, as well as being the place where the first World War began. While fascinated and impressed with the Sarajevans and their desire to coexist despite ethnic differences, Sacco witnessed Sarajevan prejudice towards a different group – the rural Bosnians who had sought refuge in the capital. About a month and a half after his arrival in Sarajevo, Sacco was offered a chance to travel to the rural East Bosnia. He joined a United Nations (UN) convoy on its way to Goražde, the last remaining eastern Bosnian enclave outside of Serb control (Sacco viii). Upon his arrival, Sacco found the people in Goražde to be different from the Sarajevans. The Goraždans had experienced little media coverage over the last three years, and being surrounded by Serb forces made them literally and figuratively isolated from the surrounding world. Shortly after his arrival, he became acquainted with Edin – the main character of this graphic novel. It was through Edin that Sacco was able to interview different Goraždans and be told accounts of how the war had hit Goražde. Sacco spent only the final three months of the war in Bosnia, making him largely rely on witness accounts and stories to produce the plot of his novel.

Sacco stated that if the story was to be a regular novel, it would have been too long. The decision to fit the story into the form of a graphic novel was important to show the readers the setting of the book. The town and all its buildings, as well as the characters and their facial expressions, are all important parts of the story as a whole. The use of visual maps in the novel to explain distances and directions proved to be easier than writing out descriptions

of roads and what seemed like everchanging borders. Sacco illustrated the entire book himself, based upon memory and photographs he took while visiting the town. In addition, Sacco has made use of witness accounts and descriptions from the interviews he conducted, particularly in the dark chapters, as he was not present during these events.

Two Types of Chapters

Safe Area Gorazde is divided into two types of chapters whose distinction is based both on graphical layout and on thematic content. The first type of chapter uses a white gutter (background) to the panels on the pages. These “white chapters” are Sacco’s firsthand accounts, meaning he is present himself in the scenes, hearing the conversations being carried out, and witnessing the events happening. Scanning the pages of these chapters, it is easy to spot Sacco himself, who is illustrated in the settings among the other characters. In these chapters, the author is present as an extradiegetic-homodiegetic visual narrator (Romero-Jódar 83; Walsh 498). Being an extradiegetic narrator places Sacco outside of the story in a sense, distancing both Sacco and the reader from the situation as if they do not belong in the setting. Sacco is however also a homodiegetic narrator, as he is a character in the story as opposed to an omniscient narrator. The extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrative technique is employed to show that Sacco, the narrator, is a part of the story being told, yet the story is not about him. Considering that the white chapters only tell the stories which Sacco is there for himself, they are somewhat easier, and at times more amusing, to read than their counterpart, as they do not detail specific atrocities of traumatizing events from the war.

In these white chapters, which are the only chapters where Sacco’s character is depicted, he is portrayed wearing blank glasses. While the author does in fact wear glasses, the reader of the book is not able to see his eyes, anonymizing him in the story. This could be an indication of Sacco attempting to distance himself from the story, and restricting his level of interaction with the story, while not choosing to switch to a heterodiegetic narrative (Walsh 500). He is an innocent³ bystander, there to tell a story – their story. Sacco is not the one being attacked, and he even mentions this on page 7: “As for me, don’t you worry. I was privy to exclusive exits, all cleary [sic] marked- If the noose got tight again, I could flash my UN-issued Blue Card and get out of here and back to Sarajevo... ..back home to mommy if things really

³ Sacco’s glasses are white. This stands in contrast to a Serb soldier’s black glasses on page 43, utilizing the power of colors in depicting innocence versus evilness.

slipped back to unthinkable” (Sacco). Sacco’s presence in the story has a purpose, especially when it comes to making the story relatable and reaching through to the audience, yet it must be balanced not to outshine the voices of the victims.

The other type of chapter can be called “dark chapters”, as the pages are displayed with black gutter. They are always testimonies from Sacco’s interviewees: their firsthand experiences of the war, and at times include a historical background prior to the war. The drawings are thus made, in these chapters, based on the accounts of the interviewees. Each dark chapter begins with a panel containing a portrait-drawing of the interviewee looking straight ahead (en face), at whom the reader would presume to be Sacco, the interviewer. Additionally, each en face-illustration includes one speech bubble which marks the beginning of the interview, together with the name of the interviewee. In the dark chapters, the narrator is present, but not seen. While forfeiting his narratorial role in favor of the interviewee, Sacco still supplies explanations and context in the panels where necessary. This way, the reader will understand the story better, yet the character account is not directly interrupted. The gaze shifts to the inside the panel. The narration shifts from extradiegetic-homodiegetic in the white chapters, to intradiegetic-homodiegetic. In the dark chapters, the interviewees are narrating, telling stories of different parts and experiences during the war. All illustrations of characters are done at eye-level or following an object, and the use of this style, as opposed to a bird’s-eye-view, draws the reader into the story, and closer to the characters and events taking place the panels. The en face portraits furthermore contribute to the reader’s involvement in the story, something which will be presented in the analyses.

The use of black panels in graphic novels is not uncommon. Writing about the trauma graphic novel, Romero-Jódar states that black panels have in recent times been used to “reinforce the unrepresentability of traumatic events” (59) such as recent terrorist attacks. In terms of *Safe Area Goražde*, Dong states that the use of black gutters calls “the reader’s attention to the disruption of space and time and ultimately to this dark chapter of Eastern Bosnian history” (Dong 42). As Sacco’s dark chapters contain graphically detailed depictions of historical atrocities, such as murder, slaughter, and mutilation, it is clear that the black panels and a black gutter are employed to emphasize the traumatic experiences the characters have lived through. The text on the other hand “conveys the intertwining of the past and present” (Dong 42), which could be seen as an attempt to make the text fragmented and confusing to the reader, thereby mimicking trauma. Framing the narrative in black gutter, the

reader becomes more alert, as the focus is drawn to the panels and the contents of the frames. As already mentioned, the dark chapters contain retellings of the witness' accounts, and they function to some extent as flashbacks. The reader is granted insight into the mind of the witness, providing the reader with more detail of the trauma, provoking understanding and to some extent sympathy with the narrator.

Sacco, the Narrator

In an attempt to gain and retain credibility with the reader, Sacco makes use of ironic authentication in order to seem believable and relatable. Romero-Jódar states that a characteristic feature of a journalistic graphic novel is “the creation of a meek and feeble alter ego that talks to the readership honestly and freely about his fears and flaws” (86). Sacco's character is often depicted with a worried expression on his face, which can be seen by looking at his eyebrows and mouth, as his eyes are not visible. He is shown as shorter than most of the other characters, and often depicted as walking behind the others, as well as slouching: these are all visual effects which contribute to this portrayal. Additionally, he is most often depicted towards the side of the panel, with few utterances and little dialogue. What we do learn about his character is through his mind, and even his thoughts are subject to the ironic authentication. While Sacco the author explains in the appendices and descriptive text how annoyed he was with the French UN-soldiers who could not give him a definite answer as to when he would be able to join them on the Blue Road, the character Sacco is depicted differently.

In the chapter *The Blue Road: An Aside*, he is talking on the phone with a Frenchman in charge: “The French suspended journalists from their convoys and that left me stranded in Sarajevo. And you shoulda heard me, alternately bad-mouthing the Frogs and snivelling for updates from their captains and colonels” (Sacco 66). While Sacco in the descriptive balloon in the graphic novel tells of how he on the one hand spoke badly of the French, while on the other hand was being “snivelling”, the speech bubbles and illustration of a hunched-over, sweating and worried Sacco shows him as meek and feeble. This sort of ironic authentication, which can and should be viewed as humorous, generates a sense of trust with the audience. Sacco is seemingly being honest with his readers about his cowardice, although he could have portrayed himself as a demanding and brave character with a straight back and brows furrowed. Sacco is dumbing down his character to appear relatable to the readers. The ironic

authentication implies that the narrator is being honest with his audience by exposing himself, and as a consequence of this, the reader will believe that because Sacco is honest about this, the rest of the story must also be a truthful testimonial. While this literary tool is useful to convince the reader, some critics state that this could be used as a tool in promoting a political agenda. “Sacco may be said to employ the ironic authentication of his cartoon self in order to convince the readers of the rightfulness and honesty of his political ideas” (Romero-Jódar 86).

Due to the nature of the plot of the novel, Sacco has been accused of taking sides. Romero-Jódar claims that Sacco, as an author, has an ethical responsibility to appear as objective and unbiased as possible, and that this should be done through the exploration of “both sides of the story” (73-74). The viewpoint of the Bosnian Serbs is lacking in Sacco’s novel, and it is one-sided as it only depicts the conflict from the Muslim side. Romero-Jódar goes so far as to claim that Sacco has a political agenda in his works, depicting the “others” as evil. This demonization of the other party can for instance be interpreted in the illustrative depictions of some Serb characters, such as a Serb neighbor who smuggled weapons to two snipers, as well as the soldier of a notorious military group. Nevertheless, one could argue that these two characters in fact proved to be contributors to murders and other war atrocities, justifying their depictions in the novel.

On the other hand, as pointed out in the introduction of Sacco’s special edition, the “bile” depicted and presented in the novel “is not directed at ‘the Serbs’” (Hitchens in Sacco vi). The hate towards the fascists by the Bosniaks in the novel is directed towards “Chetniks”, showing that there is a distinction being made between the ethnic group and the Serbo-fascists who committed the war atrocities and supported their hateful views. Furthermore, Sacco does not depict all Serb characters in his novel as “evil”. On the contrary, there are several instances in the recounts of his interviewees, and thus in his illustrations and depictions, where Serb acquaintances express sorrow and fear regarding the situation, and even empathize and help Muslim characters (For example Rasim on pages 113 and 116 & Munira on page 118). Nevertheless, Sacco’s novel is a testimony of the Bosnian War experienced through the Bosnian Muslim point of view, and while Romero-Jódar insists that the author has an ethical responsibility to present both sides of a conflict, I find that the ongoing remarks on the historical and political background throughout the novel, as well as

the portrayal of Bosnian Serbs as “human” weighs up for the one-sided account the book presents.

2.3 Analysis of *Safe Area Gorazde*

Following are analyses of three different chapters from Sacco’s *Safe Area Gorazde* which portray the shift in the relationship between the Bosniaks and the Serbs prior to and throughout the Bosnian War. In each analysis there will be provided a short summary of the plot, which will then be divided into different components which are interesting and important to look at in order to grasp the portrayal of trauma in these chapters. Looking at form, content, literary tools, as well as tools utilized in the graphic novel genre, this subchapter serves to illustrate and navigate how Sacco has attempted to portray trauma and collective trauma in his book.

Disintegration (pp. 36-43)

Sacco’s seventh chapter is dark and titled *Disintegration*. The reader is here firstly introduced to Dr. Alija Begović and his story. Dr. Begović introduces the chapter by telling how he talked to one of his childhood neighbors prior to the war erupting. Sacco interrupts Dr. Begović’s short introduction and puts forward a historical and political context of the time between Tito’s death in 1980 and the start of the war. This historical backdrop Sacco provides explains Dr. Begović’s friend’s answer in their conversation. The focus shifts to Edin’s story. Upon his arrival home, he is surprised by the treatment he receives from his Serb childhood friend. Edin explains how trouble is brewing, and tensions are high in his hometown. Bahra’s character is then introduced. Similarly, Bahra is surprised by the cold shoulder she receives from Serb friends, and she notices tensions are rising. Afraid of what is in stow, Bahra decides to flee to Sarajevo with her mother and son.

Dr. Begović’s short introduction to the chapter consists of four panels. In the first panel, a tired Dr. Begović is looking at the reader from a portrait point of view. He opens the chapter by recollecting how, some days before the war breaks out, his Serb childhood friend asks him of his opinion on whether the situation can be solved. The next three panels are aligned side by side, illustrating the conversation and walk the two characters are on. In the first frame, Dr. Begović states that they must stay together. The next frame cuts closer to the two men. The Serb friend can be seen with furrowed brows, and a hand raised in a rejective manner in

front of him, palm out. He claims it is impossible for them to live together, and “that the only solution is to separate the peoples” (Sacco 36). Another close-up follows in the final panel, this time only including an apprehensive Dr. Begović who realizes that the Serb agenda is to clear Goražde of its Muslim population. Sacco’s following historical account shows that the rhetoric and ideas of Dr. Begović’s Serb friend are anchored and mirrored in his nationalist political leader.

Tensions are shown to brew even more when Edin presents his perspective. Upon his return home to Goražde, he calls up an old friend from school and from the neighborhood, asking if they can meet up. His friend is dismissive, saying he is afraid of being made fun of by “[his] people”, further indicating that there is a separation. Edin is pictured upset and in despair, his hand on his head, and lines on his forehead indicating distress and worry (Sacco 39). He continues describing the following division and unease in society, pointing out that even coffee shops became ethnically divided. When Edin questions this cold treatment, his Serb friends explain and justify it due to the Bosniak wish to separate from Yugoslavia. In one panel, on page 40, Edin’s Serb friend is depicted as angry. This matches well with his words: “You can’t expect good relations between us in the near future. You will try to kill all the Serbs in Bosnia and make a Muslim country” (Sacco 40). His friend refuses to look at Edin, who in the next panel attempts to reassure his friend that this is not the case and not what Edin wants. He looks to the side, arms crossed on his chest, clearly dismissive in body language, in contrast to Edin’s arms which are seemingly hanging straight down.

The third and final testimony in this chapter is from Bahra. As the bombardment of Sarajevo has commenced, she is understandably anxious it will spread. While her husband assures her that there will be no war in Goražde, Bahra listens to her gut and seeks out her boss at the factory where she works. After echoing the two other Serb characters I have mentioned in this chapter (the friends of Dr. Begović and Edin), Bahra’s manager advises her to send her family somewhere safe. While guards are patrolling the streets at night, fear is spreading in the community, and people are preparing for the worst. On page 41, Sacco shows how a Serb in the neighborhood is stocking up on weapons and hiding them in the cellar. When confronted about this shipment, he refuses and claims the contents were food.

This neighbor is depicted in the first panel on page 42. He is situated in the foreground of the frame, facing the reader directly. The entire panel is siphoned with a dark color, creating little

contrast and focal points within the frame. He is equipped with a smile which is difficult to interpret, as his eyes are not visible. This hiding of his eyes also serves as a means of dehumanizing him. As previously mentioned, the eyes of Sacco's character are not visible to the reader either, however, Sacco is wearing glasses which are blank, i.e. they are white. The colors black and white are contrasts, or opposite if you will, with white in many ways symbolizing light, goodness, and innocence and black symbolizing power, sadness, and anger. The Serb neighbor's eyes are not pitch black, however they are *shaded* black, making it look like his eyes are hidden by a shadow or a darkness. The eyes are the window to the soul, and this man appears soulless. The supplementing text at the bottom of the frame reveals: "The daughter and son-in-law of that guy later turned out to be snipers in Goražde" (Sacco 42).

The final two pages of the chapter depict Bahra's journey to Sarajevo with her son and mother. The bus they are travelling with is being stopped at several Serb checkpoints, finally at Sokolac. Bahra recalls "one guy... from Arkan's unit⁴" (Sacco 43). Like the Serb neighbor mentioned above, the eyes of Arkan's man are not visible. They are hidden behind a pair of black sunglasses, anonymizing him. When his eyes are not available to the reader, or to Bahra's mother, his mood becomes more difficult to read, and the eyewear hardens his expression, making him lose his humanity. The man questions Bahra's mother, asking what would happen if someone were to burn down her two houses in Višegrad. "I think I was good with all my neighbors, and no one will burn my house down", she answers (Sacco 43). While her answer is diplomatic and to some extent symbolizes belief in the good of people, her next interaction with her grandchild exposes her fear and realization of the dangerous situation which has developed. She tells her grandson to hide behind the curtain and claim to be eleven years old if prompted about his age. She explains there is a danger he can be taken from the bus if the Serbs realize he is considered an adult. Upon the arrival in Sarajevo, and taking up shelter at a refugee center, Bahra receives news from home. On the list of casualties, her husband's is the first on the list. She stares blankly into the room, the two children around her depicted with similar emptiness of emotion.

⁴ Željko 'Arkan' Ražnatović was an infamous criminal and paramilitary leader of 'Arkan's Tigers' during the wars in Bosnia and Croatia. The group was well known for their brutality, and for raping, torturing and murdering Muslims and Croats.

The chapter *Disintegration* draws on accounts from three different perspectives in the time before war breaks out in Goražde. All accounts show what from the Bosniak side is perceived as friendly interactions with their Serb friends and neighbors, whereas the Serb characters are acting suspicious, preparing for something. In Dr. Begović and Edin's dialogues with their Serb friends, they are met with cold shoulders and nationalist views. In all accounts, as well as in society (with the separation of cafés for instance), the nationalist views of the Serb leader are echoed. The chapter tells of how naïve the Bosniaks were, refusing to believe war would break out, up until the very end. They believed their friendships and communities were stronger than the dividing force of political and ethnic views, attempting to maintain their relations to Serb neighbors and believe the best of them. Mirrored in Dr. Begović, Edin, and Bahra's mother, we can clearly read and see the justifying argument that they were all such good friends, and of course it would be possible for them to live together as they had done up until this point. Nothing would change. Yet slowly but surely, the reader is told and shown how something is brewing. Serbs and Bosniaks do not spend time together like they used to. Suspicion is growing on both sides.

Neighbors (pp. 76-77)

The chapter *Neighbors* is not a dark chapter, but it contains some of the same elements that a dark chapter does. Edin shows a video of the state of their home after a Serb attack, and it turns out he has taped over an old cassette. Sacco, at first, believes this is a cassette taken from a Serb house, however it turns out it is Edin's cassette originally. The original cassette shows a Serb wedding, drunk wedding guests and avid celebration. "Edin's mother recognized faces and called out names" (76). Edin's mother tells Sacco and the reader of the time before the war, and of the friendship between Muslims and Serbs. They had celebrated Orthodox Christmas together, attended each other's weddings and visited each other for coffee. "She said she could live with them again, that they could come back if they wanted, that everyone must go back to his or her place... but that it could never be the same. Never" (77). In speech bubbles different than the others in that they do not have a clear geometrical shape, rather are wavy, she twice repeats the word *neighbors*.

The three final panels of the chapter all focus on Edin's mother. In the first panel, she is close up, her face barely fitting inside the frame. Her mouth is open, however she is not saying anything. Sacco is narrating the story, sharing her words. In the next frame, she is situated en

face, zoomed out so that her shoulders are visible. Her look is faltering, eyes disappearing. In the final panel, the “camera” is zoomed even further out, revealing Edin’s mother as sitting on a couch, her hands in her lap. Her head is bowed, and eyes have disappeared, leaving behind only a white shadow beneath her eyebrows. Her arms are not crossed, indicating she is not angry. Her head being bowed also indicates that she is disappointed and sad, as well as the lack of vision, here substituted with the color white. Finally, the speech balloons reveal her mental state of mind/her mood as being thoughtful. Two separate speech balloons, both wavy in form indicate that she is repeating the word with a pause in between. This is also emphasized by the use of punctuation.

The First Attack (pp. 78-93)

In Sacco’s chapter titled *The First Attack*, several characters recount the start of the war in Goražde in Bosnia. Edin, Sacco’s main character recollects the events which took place after the first attack, how he and other Bosniaks searched houses and found several bodies of murdered Muslims. He tells Sacco (and the reader) how surprised he is that his Serb neighbors could commit such atrocities. Upon being questioned by Sacco whether he is certain that his Serb neighbors were at fault, Edin presents different evidence, mentioning a list the Serbs left behind. The list is detailed with names, surnames, as well as an overview over weapons carried by Serb soldiers. Edin further recalls that almost 60 of the names on the list were people from his own neighborhood. Then he utters: “And I knew them all”, while looking thoughtfully into the distance. (Sacco 91).

He never once turns to look at anyone – not Sacco, not the reader. He keeps staring into the distance as he answers Sacco’s question and gives his answer and reasoning. He lifts his cigarette ever so more closely to his mouth, all the time glancing thoughtfully into the distance. He is in deep thought. In disbelief. Hurt perhaps, as he does not want anyone to see his face. There is a pause between him recalling that there were almost 60 names on the list and his recollection of him knowing them all. This is indicated by the separation of sentences. There is a punctuation mark between the two sentences. Additionally, the two sentences are separated into two bubbles. Compared to his recollection prior to Sacco posing his question, there are here five utterances (I will not claim they are full sentences), divided by the period mark. However, all the five utterances are assembled into one collective speech bubble. The reflection around Edin’s knowing the perpetrators, the backstabbers, is divided into two

speech bubbles, precisely indicating that these are reflections, paused by punctuation marks and divided into separate bubbles.

While several characters are interviewed in the chapter *The First Attack*, I am here focusing on Edin's story of the event, and especially the moments after the attack. Usually in these testimonies, the witness is depicted sitting en face, looking straight ahead at what one presumes to be Sacco. Typically, as the testimony is shared, the story is illustrated on the pages, complementing and visualizing it. Often there are breaches every few pages, including the face of the witness in portrait mode, looking at the reader. This use of portrayal of the witness as he is recounting his story, serves as a reminder that it not just a story. It is therefore noteworthy that Edin is not seated in the same manner in this chapter. In the frames containing Edin as he is telling the story, he is sitting at what seems like a hilltop, holding a cigarette in his hand. As previously mentioned, he never once turns around. Only the profile of his face is seen, something which is rare for this character. The hiding of the face could symbolize Edin not wishing to face Sacco. It is not unusual to avoid eye contact in vulnerable situations. Edin usually faces the reader, and so this looking away while talking about his traumatic experience hints at this being a difficult and painful event to remember. Additionally, the cigarette in Edin's hand suggests a need to calm his nerves.

2.4 Reflections on *Safe Area Gorazde*

All the chapters analyzed above convey traumatic experience through testimony, written word, as well as visual elements. Repetition, ellipses, and punctuation are some tools which are applied to convey trauma. Shapes and placement of speech bubbles are important in conveying tone, or in marking what are character thoughts, questions from Sacco, lines, or background information. The placement of speech bubbles is strategic in that it can pull the attention of the eye precisely where the author wishes. However, the combination of written text together with illustration is very powerful in itself, as it manages to convey feelings of trauma and invoke sympathy with the reader.

In the chapters with the black gutter, Sacco removes his own character from the literal pages of the book. Additionally, his function as narrator is almost entirely forfeited to give space for the interviewees to inhabit the narratorial role. The introductory page of each dark chapter starts in a manner replicating what can be assumed to be the way in which the interviews

were conducted by Sacco. Shortly after, the drawings unfolding on the next pages, combined with the words of the victims, not just tell, but *show* the witness accounts in the way they happened. The visual element of the graphic novel carries great power. It adds another layer to the accounts, explaining the event in detail while stimulating the visual sense.

Using illustrations in his novel, Sacco utilizes the form of the text to visualize the traumatic symptoms of flashbacks. These flashbacks are portrayed in great detail, and the use of black and white on the pages enhances focal points and aspects of the story. Further, the illustrations manage to convey feelings and atmosphere through visualization. Facial expressions, body language, and close-ups are all examples of how the genre adds another layer to the story. The depiction of character's eyes seems to be an important part of Sacco's book. There are instances of white shades, black shades, and eyes disappearing, leaving only shadow. While individual trauma is important here, all the testimonies also project collective trauma. All the characters analyzed above speak about at least one Serb acquaintance (usually a former friend), who ended up betraying him or her.

Chapter 3: Discussion

After exploring *Safe Area Goražde* and *The Bosnia List* through the lens of the theoretical frameworks of trauma, collective trauma, and narrative, it is time to reflect and conclude on the findings of the analyses and comparisons. Firstly, it is important to mention that it is clear that the loss of a community can be a traumatic experience. With a community comes security, and when this safety is removed from the foundational grounds of a society, the victim experiences it as an upheaval of the structures and framework of social life. Safety and social needs are, respectively, the second and third steps in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When such fundamental structures are suddenly removed from the individual's life, it can be experienced as their world collapsing.

3.1 The Unrepresentability of Trauma

As Laub has pointed out, trauma victims have a need to tell their story. This sharing of their testimony is vital for their mental survival, and a means of coping with trauma (63). As shown at the start of *Safe Area Goražde*, the people of the town are happy Sacco is there to report on them, giving them a chance to tell their story. They feel forgotten. If their stories are never told, the world will never know. The truth will never come out, and their reality will be suppressed. Similarly, Trebinčević's reason for writing the memoir is given at the start of the book. The final point of his original Bosnia list is: "Finish the story my mother wanted to write about how we survived" (Trebinčević xi). Although the family survived, this is not enough. The point on the list is alluding to the fact that Kenan's mother struggled with surviving mentally, as she clearly had a need to share their story with the world. Witnesses are important in the verification of a story, validating the victim's truth. What both authors have in common is their attempt of representing the unrepresentability of trauma, a difficult task to handle.

The Bosnia List is far more fragmented in its structure than its counterpart. This is a common feature of the trauma memoir, as it exhibits the traumatic effect. While fragmentation serves a purpose in prompting curiosity with the reader, it also mimics the traumatic effect. The recollection of a traumatic event can be difficult for a victim, as the assembling of different information and pieces proves to be a challenging task. Memories might have been suppressed by the unconscious, making answers and meaning difficult to retrieve. The author is here attempting to mimic Freud's concept of *nachträglichkeit*, where memories are stored

unavailable to the victim. The memories will however return, but there is a delay in this process. In *The Bosnia List*, fragmentation is implemented in order to reflect the narrator's struggle with traumatization. The fragmentation of the story is carried out well in Trebinčević's book, as some pieces are not assembled until the very end, leading the reader to find the answers and gain closure together with the protagonist.

While several sections, mainly witness accounts, in *Safe Area Gorazde* can be read as fragmented in their form, there is a notable difference in the fragmentation. It is not Sacco, the main narrator of the novel who is traumatized, and the traumatic elements are therefore not conveyed through his narration. Trauma in the narrative can nevertheless be seen in the interviews, where the witnesses are to some extent inhabiting the role of intradiegetic narrator. Fragmentation can be seen in the textual evidence, such as in ellipses, which indicate a thoughtfulness or loss of words, repetition which emphasizes points, and through dash-marks, which can at times symbolize stuttering. Sacco's characters have gained some distance from the event, at least in time if not in space. This means that the belated response has affected Adult Kenan and Sacco's characters differently. Additionally, the illustrations portray the different moods and feelings which the witnesses are conveying in their interviews. Their stories are nevertheless framed in a way which Kenan's story is not. Sacco's presence and directing of the interviews serves as a means of containing the stories within the narrative, disallowing it to drift out due to digressions. The accounts are at times diverted "back on track" by Sacco through asking follow-up questions, indicating he is eager to learn, but not allowing the interviewees to fade out and divert from their stories.

The characters from both books are eliciting symptoms of PTSD. Adult Kenan is at the start of the memoir clearly scarred by his experiences from the war in Bosnia. He is clearly angry with all Serbs, and especially the ones who make themselves at home at Marshall's, the new nightclub in New York. This is the sort of anger and loss of temper which Luckhurst discusses (1). Provoked by their dialect, as well as the nationalist salute, Kenan seeks out conflict, prepared to resort to violence. The Serb dialect also works as a trigger to Kenan's trauma, prompting flashbacks and remembering episodes from the war. Furthermore, Kenan's vengeful spirit and the grudge he is holding, is obvious in the contents of the first Bosnia list. As mentioned previously, the list contains several actions and confrontations with previous Serb acquaintances and friends, illustrating a need Kenan has of asserting himself. Kenan's triggers in this scenes, are closely related to Erikson's explanation of physical and

mental triggers for flashbacks of the traumatic event (183-184). Similarly, Erikson mentions the “compulsive need to seek” (Erikson 184), a need Adult Kenan clearly has, seeing as he chooses to visit Marshall’s while it is filled with Serbs.

In the emotional response to trauma, feelings may vary greatly (Erikson 183). It is no surprise that Kenan’s feeling is mainly anger. The characters in *Safe Area Gorazde* almost unitarily react to the trauma on the different end of the emotional scale to Kenan. As mentioned, Erikson argues that the feelings and mood Kenan elicits are just as common as “feelings of numbness and bleakness” (Erikson 183). Edin, Munira, Dr. Alija Begović, and Edin’s mother, all project a feeling of disbelief and numbness. This feeling and mood is retained in all the accounts. While one exception could be Edin’s mother being angry with the Serbs at the start of the chapter *Neighbors*, she soon returns to being mute, at a loss for words, and numb. She still fails to grasp how and why her neighbors turned on her.

There is an advantage in using the genre of the graphic novel in conveying trauma in literature. While the memoir is limited in its components, restricted to the use of words to convey feeling and creating atmosphere, the graphic novel can utilize visual elements. Illustrations in the graphic novel add another level in storytelling as it requires the reader to look at components which are not included in the text. Half of the story is in the panels. Depictions and information are anchored in the illustrations on the page, which emphasize important points which the author is attempting to convey. The use of colors, shading, facial expressions, and showing body language, all contribute to adding another level to the graphic novel, and in *Safe Area Gorazde*, these tools are utilized in mimicking traumatic responses. Another way of mimicking traumatic symptoms and responses is the manner in which the graphic novel can illustrate the flashbacks the characters experience, *showing* the reader the trauma.

What both books have in common are the aims of the stories: to tell the reader what it was like to be caught up in the Bosnian war, while providing context of the preceding community. The need to canvas the communities in the Bosnian towns stresses the shock the Bosniaks experienced when war ultimately broke out and their neighbors became their enemies overnight. This instance of collective trauma is present in both texts, and an important characteristic of the Bosnian War. Both texts also seek to portray individual trauma within different characters, and through the storytelling show the devastating effects of the war.

Additionally, both texts seek to provide an insight into how personal and unsafe war and conflict can be.

Collective trauma is represented in both books, although perhaps somewhat more clearly in the graphic novel. In all three chapters analyzed from this novel, the characters are showing signs trauma in regard to the loss of their community. The characters recount different instances where their former friends and neighbors have turned on them. The examples vary from nationalist speech, refusal to socialize, ending of friendships, or even just refusal to support the Muslim characters like a good friend. It starts off with a cold treatment, plotting, and exclusion, and expands into stealing, murder, and rape. In their accounts, Sacco's characters often mention these betrayals they experienced from their Serb friends. Their sudden shifts in attitudes came as a sudden shock, and Sacco's characters struggle to understand why. In the illustrations where the characters are giving their accounts of these betrayals, they are often portrayed as confused, sad, and disappointed. *The Bosnia List* does not portray collective trauma in the same manner. It is implicitly stated through some of the accounts. Most notable is Kenan's relationship with Pero. Kenan struggles to understand how good friend and idol could so quickly turn into a nationalist murderer. Kenan struggles through the entire book with coming to terms with Pero's duality. It is obvious that Pero was important to Kenan, and this betrayal by his friend is as difficult for Kenan to understand as it is for Sacco's character Edin losing his Serb friends. As Erikson has mentioned, "victims rarely forget" (192-193) the person in charge of ruining friendships and the bonds of the community.

Conclusion

The focus of the thesis was to look at how trauma was portrayed in the memoir *The Bosnia List* and the graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde*, both books centering around the Bosnian War of 1992-95. The two literary texts I chose to compare are of differing genres and have a different registry of tools to use in their form. It is notable that the authors of the two texts have differing starting points and relationships to the war. Both are personal, yet they differ in their degree of privacy. Sacco interviews survivors of war, listening to first-hand testimonies of the war. Trebinčević, on the other hand, is a part of the group of whom the cleansing campaign is being carried out against. Trebinčević also experienced the war differently to Sacco, seeing as Sacco arrived in Goražde towards the end of the war, and also states himself that “he could just flash his blue UN-card to go home”. Trebinčević’s experience was different, but also documented later after the event.

Both books employ literary devices in order to convey trauma. In textual evidence, this is found in a scattered narrative, the experience of flashbacks, or being haunted by a ghost. *Safe Area Goražde*, being a different genre and inhabiting a different form than the novel or memoir, allows for further possibilities in representing trauma. Illustrations and depictions help highlight trauma and create moods with the audience. Depictions of character faces, whether they are smiling, or frowning can, together with the analysis of body language provide the reader with indications of feelings, without them being explicitly states. Similarly, the use of color, text placement, and zoom affects the reading of the story.

Collective trauma is represented primarily through the written word, whether this is dialogue, descriptive text, or access to a character’s inner thoughts. Collective trauma is in this sense *told*. However, the strength of the graphic novel lies in its hybridity, making it possible to supply this text with illustrations. This way, trauma is *shown* and emphasized further. Aspects can be granted more emphasis without the use of more text. Shading, coloring, placement, facial expression, body language are all examples of elements which reveal the mood of the characters or of a situation. Without writing out descriptive passages/paragraphs, the graphic novel manages to portray several aspects using illustrations.

Erikson states in his article that “victims rarely forget” who was the cause of the event which directly or indirectly caused traumatization (192-193). He uses large companies and

corporate decisions in his example of explaining this, however this can easily be applied to the war in Bosnia. While many perpetrators have chosen to hide behind what they called 'orders from above' the victims are aware of there being human forces behind all orders. Even today, many Serbs, previous members of the Serb military and the Yugoslav People's Army, and even the Bosnian-Serb president of the Republic of Srpska, all deny there ever was a genocide in Srebrenica, that atrocities were carried out during the war, and that what happened was wrong. Effectively, these groups "deny responsibility, offer no apology [and] express no regrets" (Erikson 193). This is hurtful to the Bosniak people, as it does not acknowledge their trauma, experiences, and their pain. This speaks volumes in terms of collective trauma and enforces the hate against the perpetrators as well as strengthening the community between the victims, even in 2022.

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