

# MAŠO MEHMEDOVIĆ

## SREBRENİK, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### A BOSNIAN ESSAY

*or A Shame that Grows*

To me pictures of the destruction of the Berlin Wall were never quite clear or sharp... I needed time for my own true feelings to penetrate them. I grew, and slowly that feeling gained content. In time that material I had imagined as “bricks” found its place... And when I thought the bricks would never see the architect’s hands again, nor that anyone would lean against them again, something happened that hurt me deeply. Initially less, but then with every day more and more... And I’m not sure whether or not it will continue and last. I had the impression that soldiers who had come with the best of intentions, as they used to say, had dragged the remains of that wall and encircled me, but what was happening around us could not have been worse. While the war raged in Bosnia and Herzegovina I was a child and observed all these people roaring through my house and telling horror stories from the front line. Hunger knocked on our door and we began to raise rabbits, to sow maize by hand; we dreamed about chocolate, sugar, oil, flour... But we held firmly together. Hunger didn’t weaken us at all but united us so strongly that it drove us to cultivate every tiny piece of available land and sow something on it. I observed how the city parks were all planted in rows right up to the buildings themselves. My aunt lived in one of these buildings and never took her eyes away from the window in case somebody stole her string beans or tore down her courgettes which hung there in fear. Fat people melted as if made of snow and I had fun watching their clothes flapping about. They were cheerful and their new appearance imbued them with a childish joy. Foreign soldiers with machine guns on the roofs of their jeeps and fingers on triggers were constantly

passing our house. We didn’t dare share a joke with them (the older people told us that) but we often waved and in return we got things from their parcels. Those were the years when I played the most football with children of my own age and was good at slides, even on asphalt.

Everything that happened then now seems shocking to us and smells of a deception encompassing everyone and which overlooked how we destroyed ourselves, killed, felt hatred and locked ourselves in national pens. I feel we had been brainwashed and were incapable of understanding things more deeply than, say, the assertion that “they” are all guilty and we are not guilty of anything. All this in an enchanted circle that no one dares break out from. We have fully accepted the “psychology of the pen” and our greatest fear is to be sheep-like – it’s said that sheep aren’t afraid of being slaughtered but of being outcasts from the flock... That’s the psychology I see people living under in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However many years I’ve studied the past I’ve not been able to find any trace of a forced division like the “entities” we have today. Presumably it’s some organism that is only now being born or something that’s just been born... Something whose status is defined by its swaddling clothes, something which has not yet begun to see, that is helpless, unconscious of itself... I do not think that at present we are a society but I find it hard to accept that at the time when I was born we were not a society either. I simply dare not go back further because that brings pain and deep sighs. Imagine: just five years before my birth Sarajevo was an Olympic city. Perhaps the most valuable thing about it is that all the

former Yugoslav republics “accepted” Sarajevo for the Olympic Games – even affectionately. Or if I go back another five years when the KK Bosna basketball club were European champions. It’s not like now when somebody is European champion. The championship wasn’t won by any basketball superpowers. It was won by students whose grants were so small that they worked out how much they could earn by playing basketball. The secret wasn’t in the money and the benefit but in something called the strength of the collective, i.e. a belief in each other; nobody was interested in what religion or nationality you belonged to... Even if I go back as far as 1978 when the “Indexi”\* issued their first album “Blue River”, an album with elements of rock-opera, based on the song collection “The Stone Sleeper” which celebrates the lives of the Bosnian Bogomils in the Serbian Middle Ages when standing stone necropolises were erected as an architectural phenomenon.

I do not dare turn to my father’s generation because I am overcome by some anxiety and complication of that time which witnessed the death of many positive trends. One of them was the shining tradition of the struggle against fascism which is also dying out. It is collapsing, or is trying to re-design the monuments to anti-fascism, to those people who were the witnesses of that time and who consciously chose their revolutionary path. One can only be inspired by the fate of two pre-war writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina who were intellectuals and writers – both played the violin. One was Hasan Kikić, the other Zija Dizdarević. The first was killed in a Chetnik ambush in 1942, the other was taken to Jasenovac camp that same year. Both had social leanings, both in their deeds and in their spirit. Kikić, a lecturer and a lawyer, and Dizdarević, also a lecturer and a pedagogue. I seem to hear their violins urging us to have strength in our constant fight against evil... **But sometimes I am overwhelmed by a feeling like that of Josef K., who was ashamed before his tormentors for acting in a monstrous way. Kafka prophesied the deaths of millions of people and of his two sisters who met their end in the camp. But camps didn’t end with World War II...**

Actually I don’t know what I would say about the Berlin Wall, destroyed in the year I was born, but I know how difficult it is to fight “internal” walls, invisible to the eye, but definitely present in our everyday life. So these days I’ve been fighting to “vault the wall” and I tell my colleague that I’m fully aware his father is a corrupt tycoon and that he got him a scholarship illegally... But they’re very happy when each year they prepare to go to the seaside and only talk about the sea in front of us, because they know we aren’t going,

and after their tales, father and mother regularly quarrel. So far I’ve spent so many nights cursing Europe to come at once that it seems to me it’s made my return long delayed.

I have completely forgotten about the Berlin Wall, but I dream so much about hitting my head against the wall that it hurts, just like “my time” hurts, although I don’t think people thought other times were any happier... This is what the proverb also says which most probably characterised the impasse man fell into: “Neither steps to heaven, nor a hole in the earth!” Or the proverb that talks of a paradise and a hell it simply points to, and for which the same scenario is needed; even the equipment with which her heroes serve are unusually long spoons which you can’t eat with... Those in hell are in despair because in their efforts to feed themselves they are all hungrier, more nervous and dangerous because they can’t find their own mouths, and naturally their agony is never ending and is repeated ad infinitum... But those in heaven are quite calm, just because they feed each other generously and find boundless satisfaction... just simply... But to man it seems Josef K. is not yet dead, that the shame is still growing...



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**\* Translator’s note**

Indexi: Bosnian rock band of the 1960’s

# MAŠO MEHMEDOVIĆ

## SREBRENİK, BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

### BOSANSKI ESEJ

*ili stid koji raste*

Nikad mi slike rušenja Berlinskog zida nisu bile sasvim jasne niti određene... Trebalo mi je neko vrijeme da proniknem u taj svoj iskreni osjećaj. Rastao sam i tom osjećaju pomalo davao sadržaj. Vremenom je taj materijal, koji sam zamišljao da su „cigle“, pronalazio svoje mjesto... I kada sam pomislio da one više nikada neće vidjeti ruke neimara, niti će se na njih više iko naslanjati, desilo se nešto što me duboko unesrećilo. U početku manje, a onda svakim danom sve više... i nisam siguran da se to neće nastaviti i trajati. Stekao sam utisak da je ostatke tog zida u moje okruženje dovukla vojska koja je došla u najboljim namjerama, kako su govorili, ali ono što se oko nas dešavalo bilo je da ne može biti gore. Dok je rat u Bosni i Hercegovini bjesnio ja sam bio dijete i posmatrao sam sve te ljude koji su kroz moju kuću tutnjali i pričali zastrašujuće priče s fronta. Glad je zakucala na naša vrata i mi smo počeli uzgajati zečeve, sijati kukuruz ručno „pod šiljak“, sanjali smo čokolade, šećer, ulje, brašno...ali smo se držali čvrsto jedni uz druge. Glad nas nimalo nije oslabila, već toliko ujedinila i natjerala da svaki djelić slobodne površine obradimo i nečim zasijemo. Posmatrao sam gradske parkove, svi su bili zasijani redom, sve do samih zgrada. Moja strina je živjela u jednoj takvoj zgradi i nije skidala očiju s prozora da joj ko ne obere buraniju ili ne pootkida sakriske koje su sa strahom visile. Debeli ljudi su se topili kao da su od snijega i bilo mi je smiješno gledati njihova odijela koja su oko njih letjela. Oni su bili čili i nosili su dječju radost zbog tog svog novog izgleda. Kraj moje kuće stalno su prolazili strani vojnici s mitraljezima na krovu svojih džipova i s prstima na obaračima. Nismo se s njima smjeli šaliti (to su nam stariji govorili), ali mi smo im često mahali i zauzvrat dobivali

ponešto iz njihovih paketa. Bile su to godine kada sam sa svojim vršnjacima najviše igrao nogomet i dobro izvodio klizeći, čak i na asfaltu.

Sve mi to što nam se događalo sada sablasno izgleda i miriše na jednu ujdurmu u kojoj je sve namješteno i ispalo kako smo mi sami sebe porušili, poubijali, zamrzili, i u nacionalne torove pozatvarali. Naši mozgovi mi se čine ispranim i nesposobnim da išta dublje razumiju od recimo konstatacije da su za sve krivi „oni“, a da mi nismo krivi nizašto. Sve je to u jednom začaranom krugu iz koga se niti može niti smije izići. Potpuno smo poprimili „psihologiju tora“ i naš najveći strah je potpuno „ovčji“ – kažu da se ovce ne boje da će ih zaklati, već da ih ne izopće iz stada... Eto, čini mi se da se u takvoj psihologiji živi u BiH.

Koliko god proučavao njezinu prošlost nisam mogao pronaći da ju je neko ovako nasilnički podijelio kao sada na „entitete“. Valjda je to nekakav organizam koji se tek rađa, ili nešto tek rođeno... Ono, dakle, kome pelene određuju stanje, ono što još nije progledalo, što je bespomoćno, bez svijesti o sebi... Ne mislim da mi u sadašnjem trenutku sve to kao društvo nismo, ali mi to teško pada što mi, u vrijeme kad sam se rodio, nismo to bili. Prosto ne smijem da se vraćam dalje jer mi to donosi bol i teške uzdahe. Zamislite, samo 5 godina prije mog rođenja Sarajevo je bilo olimpijski grad. Možda je u tome najvrednije to što su Sarajevo za Olimpijadu „pripremale“ sve bivše jugoslavenske republike, i to s ljubavlju. Ili zar da se vratim još 5 godina unazad kad je Košarkaški klub Bosna bio prvak Evrope. Nije to kao sada što je neko prvak Evrope. Nisu to prvenstvo osvojile nikakve „košarkaške velesile“. To su osvojili studenti čije su stipendije

bile toliko male da su okolo izmišljali kako oni mnogo zarađuju igrajući košarku. Znači da tajna nije bila u novcu i koristi, već u nečemu što se zove snaga kolektiva, tj. vjera jednih u druge, nikog nije zanimala vjerska i nacionalna pripadnost... Zar da smijem zastati u toj 1978. godini kad su „Indexi“ izdali svoj album „Modra rijeka“, album s elementima rock-opere, napisan na temu pjesničke zbirke „Kameni spavač“, koja slavi život bosanskih bogumila u srednjem vijeku, kad su podizane nekropole stećaka kao fenomen umjetničkog graditeljstva. Ja se ne smijem okretati za generacijom svog oca jer me spopada nekakva tjeskoba i kompleks ovog vremena, koje je svjedok gašenju mnogih pozitivnih tekovina. Jedna od njih je ta svijetla tradicija antifašističke borbe koja je također na izdisaju. Ruše se, ili nastoje redizajnirati, spomenici antifašistima, onim ljudima koji su bili svjetionici svog vremena i koji su svjesno izabrali svoj revolucionarni put. Kako ne uzdahnuti nad sudbinom dvojice predratnih književnika u BiH koji su bili intelektualci – pisci i obojca svirali violinu. Jedan je Hasan Kikić, a drugi je Zija Dizdarević, prvi ubijen u četničkoj zasjedi 1942., a drugi odveden u logor Jasenovac iste godine. Oba su bili socijalne orijentacije, kako svojim djelom, tako i dušom. Kikić, učitelj i pravnik, a Dizdarević, također, učitelj i pedagog. Na momente mi se javi osjećaj da čujem njihove violine koje nam trebaju dati snage da se protiv zla čovjek mora stalno boriti... Ali me ponekad preplavi osjećaj poput onoga kod Jozefa K., koji se stidi ispred svojih dželata što onako neljudski završava. Kafka je proročki osjetio smrt miliona ljudi i svojih dviju sestara koje će završiti u logoru. Ali logori nisu završili s drugim svjetskim ratom...

Stvarno ne znam šta bih kazao o Berlinskom zidu koji je srušen te godine kad sam se rodio, ali mi je jasno koliko se teško boriti sa „unutrašnjim“, oku nevidljivim zidovima, ali, itekako prisutnim u našoj svakodnevnicu. Ja sam se, tako, ovih dana borio da „preskočim zid“ i kažem svom kolegi da mi je sasvim jasno koliko je njegov otac korumpirani tajkun koji je svome sinu još obezbijedio stipendiju za fakultet... A najsretniji su kad se svake godine pripremaju na more i pred nama samo o moru pričaju, jer znaju da mi ne idemo, i da se poslije tih njihovih priča otac i mati redovno posvađaju. Koliko sam noći dosad proklinjao Evropu da već jednom dođe, čini mi se da mi je vrat baš od toga ovoliko dug.

Potpuno sam zaboravio na Berlinski zid, a toliko mi se spava da ću udariti glavom o zid da će me zaboljeti, baš kao što me boli ovo „moje vrijeme“, mada ne mislim da su i druga vremena bila po ljude sretnija...To govori i narodna izreka koja, najvjerojatnije, karakteriše bezizlaz u koji je čovjek upadao: „Nit na nebu stupe, nit u zemlji rupe! Ili ona priča o raj u paklu koja ih sasvim jednostavno pokazuje i za koju

treba potpuno ista scenografija, čak i rekvizita kojom se njezini junaci služe, a to su neobično duge kašike pomoću kojih je nemoguće jesti... Oni u paklu su zbog toga očajni, jer u nastojanju da se nahrane sve su gladniji, nervozniji i opasniji, jer ne mogu da pronađu vlastita usta, naravno, toj njihovoj patnji nema kraja i to se ponavlja u nedogled... A oni u raj u sasvim mirni, samo zato jer nesebično hrane jedni druge i u tome nalaze beskrajno zadovoljstvo... baš jednostavno... Ali čovjeku se čini da ni Jozef K. još nije mrtav, i da stid još uvijek raste...



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