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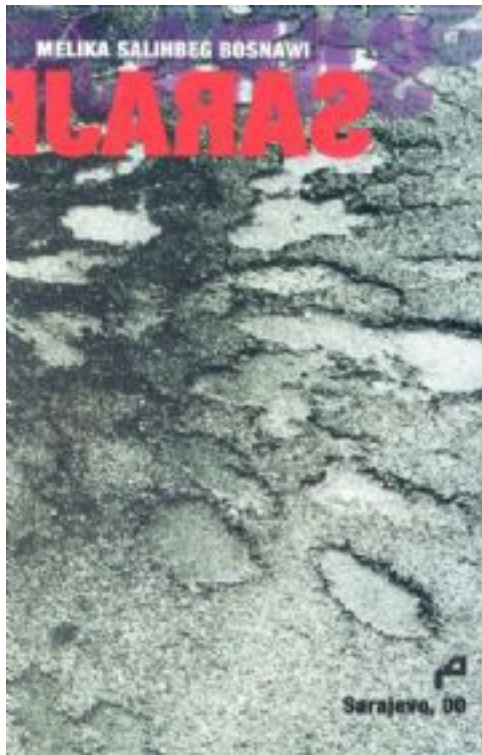
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"Sarajevo Rose / War Rhymes" by Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi

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Background: On 1 March, Bosnians celebrated something of an Independence Day. I say something because it still does not feel like there is an independent Bosnia, rather a creature with a couple of heads knocking each other unconscious from time to time. I am speaking of course of the head called the Federation in which all constitutive peoples are legitimate citizens. The other head is so-called Serbian republic stretching from the North and deep down almost to Sarajevo. It is very much ethnically cleansed. I should know because I come from its largest city, Banja-Luka. The other day, the American representatives came visiting Bosnia, but instead of respecting the international view that Bosnia is sovereign within its historical borders, the delegation found it necessary to meet over coffee and baklava with the leadership of the Bosnian Federation, and then separately with the illegitimate leadership of Republika Srpska, over I don't know what, maybe brandy. Such a move gives further political power to those who have done everything to use every ounce of their creativity to kill and

steal.

I say creativity because I'm thinking of the art of war, art of deception, art of politics, which Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi so brilliantly, and subtly dramatizes in her book <http://bosnawi.ba/en/prose-poetry/172-sarajevo-rose-war-rhymes>. This is a perennial book, prose-poetry of high aesthetic and intellectual quality.

Particularly striking is the poem about Lady Hate and her Happening. Lady hate, to Melika is an artist, a trend-setter, someone who does not look back in shame or to learn something from history, but always looks forward using her creative powers to invent new ways to humiliate with brilliance, maim with a sting, shed blood with passion, introduce some extra twisted twists into the story of everyday lives of city/village people.

Art, imagination, creativity – which are normally considered positive human faculties, that is what makes us human in the first place – are in Bosnawi's dirge weapons of mass destruction, much like in Kubric's 2001 Space Odyssey, where creativity is first employed in the production of a weapon. There are loads of creativity in these works of art, complex aesthetics used to criticize and draw our attention to the art of war, which in the end amounts to one and the same, quite uncreative thing, murder. I'm thinking of the Twin Towers and the way we were stunned because it was innovative, we'd never seen that before, very modern, very trendy, and yet essentially the same as murder of Srebrenica population, Rwanda, Gaza, you name it. I wonder how much creativity went into the production of smart bombs. I'm thinking of kids painting drawings on bombs, sending artistic messages to those who will never see them, never get a chance of using their creative imagination to interpret that art.

Bosnawi does not stop there. She explores creative imagination and the aesthetics of everyday living, of mundane choices in contrast to the creativity or rather clichés of war. take a look at these lines:

**I was among the rare ones who never sped,
or shuddered,
or never went underground
when sirens were warning...**

[...]

**It was simply my aesthetic choice,
rather to be slaughtered under daylight,
while making a human pace,**

**or under the light of the moon, while sleeping in,
as clean as possible,
bed linen
(240)**

Bosnawi chooses to interpret her war-days decisions in terms of aesthetics, arty creativity. How you die seems just as important as how you live. Are you shot while waiting in a line for bread and water, or in a school yard, or in a dump, in a gas chamber, or by a bullet in a presidential motorcade? Mostly there is no choice. Death is a surprise. But to Bosnawi, in her anti-war artistic imagination, the art of dying, the choice of one's aesthetic appearance, the aesthetics of existence in the face of death is as important as it is ironic.

Bosnawi's books can be ordered directly from the author. This is her web site.

In addition, this is what the critic Zoran Mutic wrote:

TESTIMONIES TO THE GENOCIDE

The War Rhymes were neither. They stand alone, unique and separate, and that is perhaps their foremost quality. As with most writers, life can rarely be detached from their work. And with The War Rhymes it has been proved again: Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi has made a remarkable contribution to poetry as such and, consequently, her work defies classification into genres. In an astonishing amalgam of erudition, technique and talent, with mastery of images and occasional inventive plays on words, this fragile witness from the slaughterhouse has produced a volume of about 8.500 lines that tell the saga about a city, about its both heroic and tragic, forlorn populace, but above all about a woman: a lonely "zoon politikon", whose faith helps her not only survive but also discover tender characters in the "House Of Urchins", the children abandoned within total abandonment, as well as miserable political games of professional patriots. "Sarajevo Kids War-Chorus" is a horrifying reading experience, lived over and over again every time we read it – and in fact it is a simple rendering of everyday reality, therefore even more horrid. Names, statistic data, facts and figures given in an off-hand manner only reinforce the horror, while the paradox of twisted delicate imagery, so normal for ordinary lyrical poetry, makes us shudder with awe.

A poet once commented on the futility of arguments about the form and contents in poetry. "They are the same", he claimed. "By changing

the subject-matter we necessarily change the form.” And this is not to poet’s disadvantage. The contents in which regular events (be they episodes from personal recollections or information from the city mortuary) get entwined with historical data, characters and quotations from the Holy Book, could only be rendered in the present form. And with this we come to the question of the language.

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