



FROM HOMELAND TO HOST LAND: THE JOURNEY OF THE REFUGEE IN GOODBYE SARAJEVO

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Abstract

Forced displacement is one of the most traumatic consequences of war because it separates individuals from their homes, families, communities, and established identities. Refugee narratives provide an important literary space for representing the human consequences of such displacement. Atka Reid and Hana Schofield's *Goodbye Sarajevo: A True Story of Courage, Love and Survival* presents the experience of displacement through the lives of two sisters during the Bosnian War. The memoir particularly foregrounds the journey of Hana, who is evacuated from Sarajevo and subsequently experiences life as a refugee in Croatia. This article examines the refugee journey in *Goodbye Sarajevo* through three interconnected stages: homeland, journey, and host land. It argues that the refugee journey is not merely a physical movement across geographical borders but a continuing psychological and emotional process involving the loss of home, family separation, uncertainty, identity transformation, and the reconstruction of belonging.

Keywords

Refugee Literature, Forced Displacement, Identity, Belonging, and Memory, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

War transforms geographical spaces into sites of fear, uncertainty, and displacement. When violence makes it impossible for individuals to remain in their homes, leaving becomes a necessity rather than a choice. The resulting refugee journey involves not only physical movement but also the loss of familiar relationships, cultural surroundings, personal security, and established identity. Refugee narratives are therefore important literary records because they reveal the human dimensions of forced migration that cannot be fully understood through political or statistical accounts.

Atka Reid and Hana Schofield's *Goodbye Sarajevo: A True Story of Courage, Love and Survival* is an important narrative of war-induced displacement. The memoir emerges from the experiences of two sisters during the Bosnian War. While Atka remains in Sarajevo, Hana is evacuated from the besieged city and subsequently becomes a refugee in Croatia. The separation of the sisters provides the narrative with a distinctive perspective on the relationship between homeland and displacement.

The central argument of this article is that *Goodbye Sarajevo* represents refugeehood as a journey through three interconnected spaces: homeland, journey, and host land. Sarajevo functions as the emotional and cultural homeland; forced evacuation initiates a journey marked by uncertainty and family separation; and Croatia becomes a host land in which the refugee must negotiate safety, identity, memory, and belonging. The refugee journey therefore continues even after physical arrival because the displaced individual carries memories of the homeland into the host environment.



Homeland: Sarajevo as Home and Identity:

The concept of homeland forms the foundation of the refugee experience in *Goodbye Sarajevo*. Sarajevo is not merely the geographical setting of the narrative. It is connected with childhood, family, community, memory, and identity. The emotional significance of the city becomes clear when Atka reflects, “This was my city, my home, my identity” (Reid and Schofield, 89). The three concepts—“city,” “home,” and “identity”—are deliberately connected. Sarajevo constitutes part of Atka’s understanding of herself. The homeland is therefore represented as a space in which individual identity is rooted. The expression of deep roots is particularly significant in the context of displacement. To leave one’s homeland is not simply to change one’s address. It involves the disruption of the cultural and emotional relationships through which identity has been formed. In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, the war attacks precisely this relationship between person and place.

The transformation of Sarajevo under siege also complicates the meaning of home. A place that once provided familiarity and security becomes associated with danger and destruction. The homeland remains emotionally significant even as its physical reality changes. This understanding of homeland is supported by Loung Ung’s *First They Killed My Father*, where the destruction of Cambodia’s social and familial order similarly transforms the meaning of home. Ung’s narrative demonstrates how political violence can dismantle the ordinary structures through which a child understands family and security. Her experience reinforces the central point that displacement begins with the destruction of the conditions that make home a secure space. Thus, in *Goodbye Sarajevo*, homeland should be understood as both a physical location and an emotional foundation of identity.

Forced Departure: The Beginning of Displacement:

The refugee journey begins when remaining in the homeland becomes impossible. Hana’s evacuation from Sarajevo represents this transition. Her departure is not motivated by a desire to seek a different lifestyle; it is imposed by the circumstances of war.

Her emotional response to departure is expressed through the words, “I don’t want to go. I don’t want to leave you” (Reid and Schofield, 152). The statement is particularly significant because it presents displacement from the perspective of a child. Hana’s understanding of refugeehood is initially expressed through the language of family separation rather than political terminology. She does not want to leave because leaving means separation from those who constitute her emotional security.

The evacuation therefore creates two forms of displacement. First, Hana is geographically separated from Sarajevo. Second, she is emotionally separated from her family. The refugee journey consequently begins as both a physical and psychological rupture.

A similar pattern of forced childhood displacement can be observed in *First They Killed My Father*. Loung Ung’s childhood is disrupted by political violence, and movement becomes something imposed upon her rather than something chosen by her. This supporting narrative reinforces the significance of childhood displacement as an experience in which the individual has little control over decisions concerning movement, safety, or destination.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, therefore, the refugee journey begins with the loss of agency. Hana does not determine when she leaves, where she goes, or when she will return.

The Journey: Between Homeland and Host Land:

The journey itself represents a transitional phase between two geographical and psychological conditions. Once Hana leaves Sarajevo, she enters a state of uncertainty. The familiar structures of home are no longer available, while the destination remains unfamiliar.



The journey is consequently a liminal experience. Hana is no longer securely situated within her homeland, but she has not yet established a stable relationship with the host land.

Gulwali Passarlay's *The Lightless Sky* provides useful support for understanding this dimension of refugeehood. Passarlay's journey through multiple locations demonstrates the instability associated with forced migration. Movement does not necessarily lead immediately to safety or belonging. Instead, each stage can produce new uncertainties concerning shelter, security, identity, and the future.

This observation helps illuminate Hana's experience without turning Passarlay's memoir into a comparative text. His narrative simply reinforces the broader understanding that the refugee journey is characterized by uncertainty and transition.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, the journey also alters Hana's relationship with time. A departure that may initially appear temporary becomes prolonged. The refugee cannot easily predict when the journey will end or whether return to the homeland will be possible.

Thus, the journey becomes a condition of waiting, uncertainty, and suspended belonging.

Crossing the Border: The Emergence of Refugee Identity:

The crossing from Bosnia into Croatia marks a significant transformation in Hana's identity. The geographical border becomes a symbolic boundary between her former life and her new condition. Hana recognizes Croatia as a foreign country, signalling the transformation of the political and geographical environment surrounding her. More importantly, she becomes identified as a Bosnian refugee.

The designation "Bosnian refugees" is important because it demonstrates how displacement creates a new social identity. Before the war, Hana is primarily understood through her relationships with family, school, community, and homeland. After crossing the border, the category of refugee becomes central to how she is perceived.

This distinction between personal identity and refugee identity is important to the analysis of *Goodbye Sarajevo*. Refugeehood is not the totality of Hana's identity. It is a condition imposed upon her by circumstances beyond her control. The same issue appears as a supporting theme in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. Clemantine Wamariya's narrative illustrates how the experience of displacement continues to influence identity long after physical movement has ended. Her experience demonstrates that refugeehood can remain psychologically significant even after the immediate condition of flight has changed.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, therefore, crossing the border produces not only geographical displacement but also identity displacement.

Host Land: Croatia as a Transitional Space:

Croatia represents the first significant host environment in Hana's journey. It provides an escape from the immediate dangers of Sarajevo, but physical safety does not automatically create emotional belonging. The memoir's representation of refugee accommodation is important in this context. The refugee hotel functions as a temporary space. It provides shelter, but its temporary nature reminds Hana that she has not yet established a permanent home.

The host land can consequently be understood as an in-between space. Hana is protected from the immediate violence of Sarajevo, yet she remains emotionally connected to her homeland. This distinction between refuge and belonging is central to refugee experience. A refugee may have shelter without having a home in the emotional sense. Safety answers the question of physical survival, whereas belonging requires emotional, social, and cultural connection.

The hospitality encountered by Hana also becomes important. The chapter "The Kindness of Strangers" demonstrates that human relationships can soften the experience of displacement.



Compassion, friendship, and support provide forms of emotional security within an unfamiliar environment. The host land therefore has a dual function: it is a place of refuge and transition.

Family Separation and Emotional Displacement:

Family separation is one of the most significant consequences of Hana's displacement. The physical distance between the sisters creates emotional uncertainty and longing.

Hana's desire for Sarajevo is inseparable from her desire for the family members who remain there. This connection demonstrates that homeland is frequently experienced through relationships rather than geography alone.

Family separation also complicates the idea of refugee return. Even when a displaced person hopes to return, return cannot restore the past exactly as it was. War may have transformed the homeland, while separation may have transformed the individuals themselves. This theme receives additional support from *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, where family fragmentation becomes one of the enduring consequences of genocide and displacement. The supporting narrative demonstrates how separation can continue to shape identity and memory long after the initial flight.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, family consequently functions as both a source of pain and a source of resilience. The emotional connection to family keeps the homeland alive in Hana's consciousness while also intensifying her sense of displacement.

Memory and the Persistence of Homeland:

Physical distance does not eliminate the homeland. Memory allows Sarajevo to remain present in Hana's consciousness even when she is living elsewhere.

Memories of family, childhood, ordinary life, and Sarajevo preserve a connection with the homeland. The refugee therefore carries the homeland psychologically into the host land.

Memory has an ambivalent function. It provides continuity, but it can also generate nostalgia and emotional pain. Remembering home can offer comfort while simultaneously emphasizing the distance from it.

This aspect of refugee identity can be supported through Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, where memory becomes an important means of negotiating the relationship between past and present. The supporting text helps establish that displacement does not necessarily remove the homeland from an individual's identity.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, memory therefore functions as a form of portable homeland. Sarajevo remains present through recollection even when it is physically inaccessible.

Resilience and the Reconstruction of Belonging:

A refugee narrative should not be understood solely through suffering. *Goodbye Sarajevo* also demonstrates the capacity of displaced individuals to survive, adapt, and rebuild. Hana's experiences reveal that resilience develops through family relationships, friendship, education, human kindness, and hope. The host land gradually becomes a space in which possibilities for a future life emerge.

Gulwali Passarlay's *The Lightless Sky* provides a supporting example of how education, perseverance, and adaptation can contribute to rebuilding life after displacement. His narrative reinforces the broader argument that refugeehood does not have to remain permanently associated with victimhood. Similarly, Loung Ung's transformation of childhood trauma into written testimony demonstrates the role of memory and narrative in reconstructing identity. Her memoir itself becomes an act of remembrance and survival.



These supporting texts are not being compared with *Goodbye Sarajevo*; rather, they help contextualize the concept of resilience that is central to understanding Hana's journey.

In *Goodbye Sarajevo*, resilience does not mean forgetting Sarajevo. Instead, it involves carrying memories of the homeland while developing the ability to live in a new environment.

Conclusion:

Goodbye Sarajevo presents the refugee experience as a continuing journey from homeland to host land. Sarajevo represents more than a geographical location; it is a space of family, memory, identity, and belonging. The violence of war disrupts this relationship and makes departure necessary. Hana's evacuation marks the beginning of a journey characterized by uncertainty, family separation, and loss of agency. Crossing into Croatia transforms her geographical position and introduces the socially imposed identity of the refugee. Croatia offers safety and hospitality, but it initially functions as a transitional space rather than a complete replacement for homeland.

The memoir demonstrates that physical arrival does not bring an immediate end to displacement. Hana continues to carry Sarajevo through memory and emotional attachment. Her experience therefore illustrates the difference between physical refuge and psychological belonging.

The supporting refugee narratives of Loung Ung, Gulwali Passarlay, and Clemantine Wamariya further illuminate specific dimensions of this experience—childhood displacement, prolonged uncertainty, memory, and resilience. They are employed here not as comparative texts but as additional literary voices that help contextualize the broader phenomenon of forced displacement.

Ultimately, *Goodbye Sarajevo* reveals that the refugee journey is neither a simple departure from one country nor an uncomplicated arrival in another. It is an ongoing process of negotiating loss, memory, identity, family, safety, and belonging. The movement from homeland to host land is therefore both geographical and psychological. The refugee crosses a border physically, but the homeland continues to travel with the refugee through memory, identity, and emotional attachment. At the same time, the host land can gradually become a space in which new forms of belonging and hope are constructed.

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