

**Short Film and Discussion-Interpreting in Conflict Areas with Eliane Esther Bots
(Filmmaker, lecturer, and director of *In Flow of Words*)**

Summary by Sybil Gilchrist

Breaking with the traditional Endnote Address, the Dutch film, *In Flow of Words*, was shown at the final session of the 27th Annual NETA Conference. The anguish of interpreting in the aftermath of the early 1990 conflicts on the Yugoslavia Peninsula permeates the award-winning short documentary. To prosecute perpetrators and provide a forum for victims of these war crimes, the United Nations established the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) in The Hague, in 1993. From its inception to 2017, the Tribunal oversaw legal proceedings regarding carnage in the Balkans. *In Flow of Words* hauntingly and painfully reveals the toll taken on three interpreters who served as liaisons between investigators and victims/witnesses at the ICTY.

The concept of *In Flow of Words* originated from a meeting between filmmakers Alma Imamović and Eliane Esther Bots. Prior to their encounter, Alma was an interpreter for the ICTY. She was able to convince Eliane that interpreters for war crime cases suffer from horrifying traumatic experiences. In this documentary, Bots has cast three real-life ICTY interpreters to play themselves: Nenad Popović Pops, Besmir Fidhadić, and Alma Imamović. The riveting flow of their respective words alternates throughout the twenty-two-minute film.

The reflections of the three language experts reveal the depth of their anxiety. They are expected to be neutral facilitators. However, they are not able to disconnect human emotion from a paid routine assignment. Because their roots are embedded in the soil of the former Yugoslavia, they identify as victims; they **ARE** Bosnian, Serbian, and Croat. Often in the role of consecutive interpreters, they are seated between the investigator and the victim. The proximity of a breathing victim makes it impossible for interpreters to deny the humanity of their compatriots. They constantly deal with cases regarding ethnic cleansing and violence against Muslims. They pose unanswerable questions: “Why would an official drive 45 minutes to kill a Muslim boy? How can a couple, whose two sons were taken to a concentration camp eight years ago, believe that they are still alive?” Interpreters are also devastated by stories of tearful mothers who are searching for the dead bodies of their sons so that they can give their loved ones a proper burial. Paying respects to corpses at the excavation of the mass grave at Srebrenica is equally agonizing. Repeated viewings of court videos of atrocities, and recurring dark dreams only add to the layers of torment endured by these linguists. Praying, drinking, crying, and encouraging words from family and friends only provide temporary comfort.

While watching the video in horror and disbelief, NETA attendees commented in the chat: ‘heart wrenching,’ ‘dirty war in Argentina,’ interpreters of Nuremberg,’ and ‘interpreters-invisible in the process.’

During the Q&A session following the film, Alma Imamović and Besmir Fidhadić updated their current activities. After 15 years of cumulative stress due to involvement in cases tried in the ICTY, Alma left the courts to pursue her passion for filmmaking. She now has time to spend with family and friends. She focuses on raising awareness for International Interpreters, especially when it comes to their mental health. Besmir has been with the UN for 30 years and continues to work as an interpreter. He avoids war crime cases. He fights for policies and regulations that protect interpreters. He wants to ensure that interpreters will enjoy the same rights as those given to journalists.

In Flow of Words is available on several platforms including YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook.

