

SARAJEVO IS NO MORE

by *Hamza Baksic*

Mr Baksic is a journalist for a daily "Oslobodjenje." The paper with 60 years of tradition, it was published every day throughout the war in Bosnia between 1992-1995, regardless of shortages of the paper, ink chemicals, electricity, staff, etc., while coping with all other problems that followed the siege of Sarajevo.

If you like to comment on the content, you may forward an e-mail directly to Mr. Baksic at hamba@bih.net.ba

Translated by Igor Knezevic

PROLOGUE

This book is a record of a nightmarish struggle for survival in besieged Sarajevo. Since the autumn of 1991 I had been getting the impression that my journalistic scribblings had begun to stink of history. With the passage of days and weeks, history began to penetrate into our homes, to kick people out of their houses, to kill and wound.

I hadn't been successful in understanding events, meetings, statements, but they remained recorded (as the war was drawing closer, the notes were resembling a diary).

Then, Sarajevo was attacked.

I noted down days and events, only to succumb for a day or two. Time, the calendar, in the siege was meaningless. The day passes in expectation of the next one, supposedly better. Why should time or date matter in a city in which human life meant nothing? Keeping a diary is, however, like an addiction. Diary notes always come back to haunt the one who tries to record them. For me and for many Sarajevans who are not writers by trade, were drawn to keeping a diary by the abyss of free time, and the vertigo, which we felt facing it.

We were separated from the past by explosions and the future was not visible. Only in besieged Sarajevo did I fully understand the meaning of the message in the Nazi inscription above the entrance to a concentration camp: *Arbeit macht frei*. Freedom through work.

Within a shelled system of values, one notes down what in that moment seems important. So in a day during which thirty people were killed, it seemed to me that the most significant event was the arrival of the water truck in front of my house. The day after the most important thing was to find a pen to write with and some paper. The next day a candle and some oil to fill a jar and to keep a cotton thread alight. Then it was a kilo of flour.

In such a diary nothing should be changed in retrospect. Not the dates in mixed-up papers several times removed to the shelter and brought back to the flat again, not the facts, not the impressions. The diary was started by a certain Hamza Baksic, a confused fiftysomething who, fortunately, understood Dante's message that those who enter should leave all hope behind. That's how one gets through hell easier. The diary was finished by a man who inherited only an identity card, a family and surviving friends from that pre-war one. Those surviving friends also only retained their name and surname.

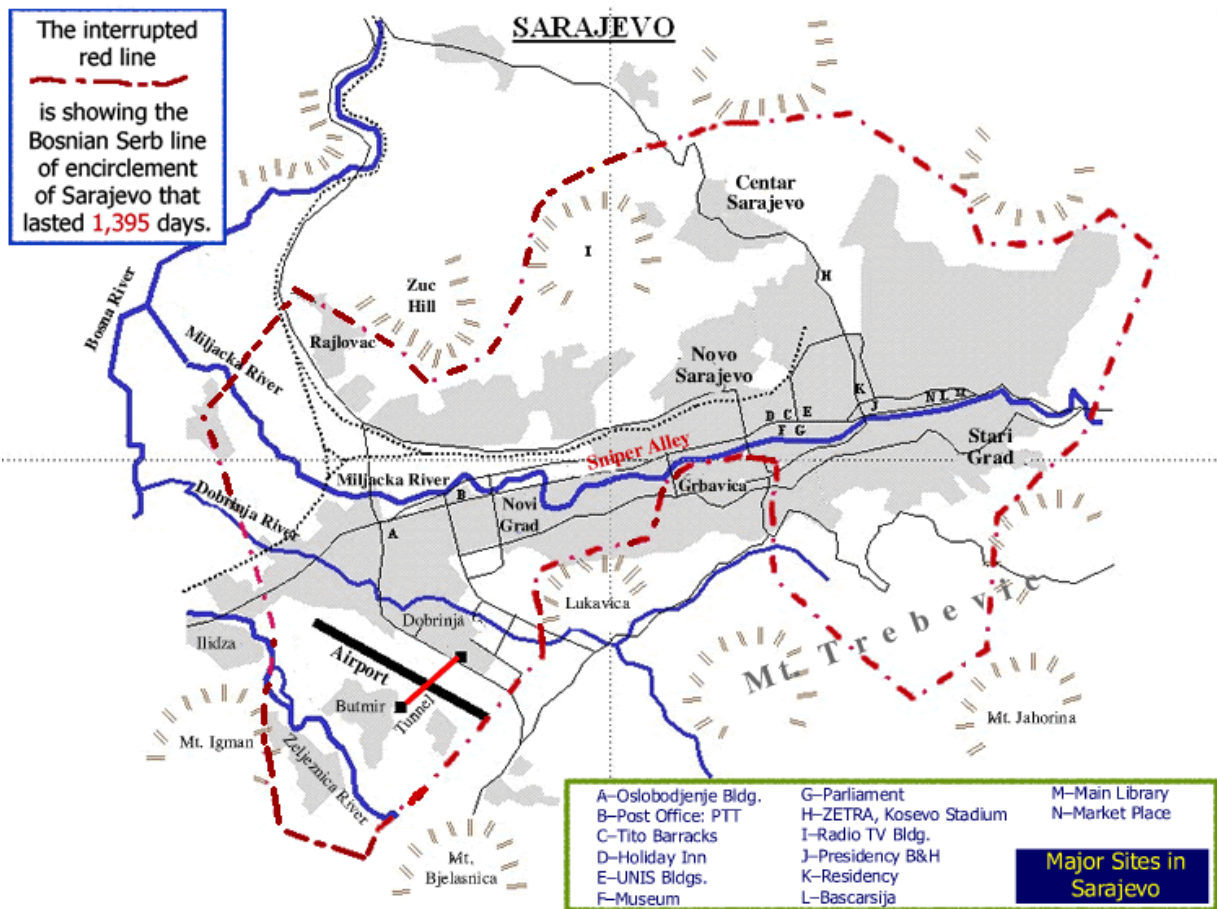
We no longer exist. We are all dead. There is no Sarajevo any longer either, a city about which the world was so concerned only to abandon it to shells for forty months. If one day someone feels any shame because of all that happened, that might only happen because shame is a part of civic decency. That shame will not rebuild destroyed Bosnian towns and villages, it will not resurrect the dead, will not give back a pride to raped women, nor will it make us, the survivors, any less dead.

Only once we—who have lived through the days of the Sarajevo siege—are buried, will the layer of coagulated blood begin to peel off the pavements of the city once called Sarajevo. The Sarajevo of my generation.

Three of my friends were dismembered so that it was hard to identify their bodies. This book is dedicated to the memory of their symbolic death.

Where Sarajevo once was,
December, 1995

Hamza Baksic



Preface to the North American e-book issue

On May 2, 1992, Sarajevo was encircled by the forces of Bosnian Serbs and the JNA (*Yugoslav People's Army*), and the siege was finally lifted on February 29, 1996. According to known data, the siege was the longest in the history of mankind.

For 1,395 days, sarajevans had lived in appalling conditions and fear while being shelled and shot at, and while living the most of time without things that we all consider the basic: running water—or any water for that matter—electricity, gas, food, heat...

As a reminder, when we in North America have a 24-hour blackout, we talk about it for weeks. Now, try to imagine individual dwellings or apartment buildings without the heat and running water: no shower or toilet flushing, no laundry washing, no warmth when is cold, no cooking on a stove, no reading in the evenings or listening to radio or TV, no elevators, no Internet... and so on.

During that period, about 12,000 of Sarajevans died by the sniper's bullet or by shelling. Among the dead, 1,600 were children. They were Moslems, Croats, Serbs... bullets and mortars do not discriminate.

Using search engines, you may find many sites describing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is just one of those links that you may follow:

http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Siege_of_Sarajevo

While I'm a Sarajevan, at the time of war I was living in Canada. However, my family and many friends had to endure four cold winters in—as they put it—the largest concentration camp ever conceived.

I am very proud that Mr. Hamza Baksic, a decent man and a good friend, provided me with the opportunity to marginally adapt this material that was already translated. It is a translation of his original book "*Sarajeva vise nema.*" (*Sarajevo is no longer*). Mr. Baksic wants more people to better understand the aspects of life in times of wars. For this reason, this e-book is distributed free of charge.

I wish also to thank an unknown author who made the map of Sarajevo indicating the Bosnian Serbs positions during the encirclement of Sarajevo, so that the reader can better understand the circumstances.

Branislav Bujic
Aurora, Canada

31st December 1991

A thick, New Year's issue of "Oslobodjenje"¹. Fear and hope wrestle in most of the articles. Behind each letter lurks misery like quicksand. Alija Izetbegovic declares that Serbs in Bosnia have no reason to go to war. He also says Bosnia is one big secret.

I ran into neighbour Ilija Guzina in the supermarket. He's now a local TV star and always on the move; he's in the caucus of the Serbian Democratic Party, and well informed. Another neighbour Ramiz and I ask almost at unison: "Ilija, are we going to have a war, what do you think...?"

Ilija and I have known each other for far too long to lie to one another. "If there is war everywhere, it'll be here as well." says Ilija.

And war is everywhere. Bosnia resists. The people are anxious and it seems to me that they would take arms to fight those who would go to war. We have seen Vukovar¹², we have seen people in black *chetnik*³ uniforms flying the flag with the skull, walking the streets destroyed by JNA⁴ tanks and artillery. Still, I cannot believe that the whole JNA is like that, that so much has changed since the time when I served. Is someone mobilising reserve forces creating a new army with the aim of paralyzing the JNA as it used to be? Azra and I are alone for New Year's Eve. Our daughter is going out with her friends. We've given up the idea of going to Azra's brother Sead's in Grbavica⁵. It's my fault: I am unable to drink when everybody else does. Especially this year. What is it that awaits me, what should I hope for? But I do hope: I hope that things won't get worse. I'm tired. I didn't go to the Adriatic coast last summer. I can't sunbathe in front of the house of a man whose son might be on the front line, on the Serb or the Croat side. I haven't been outside Sarajevo for some time. In fact the last time was back in October when my uncle Enver Baksic died in Zenica⁶. He was a metal worker, and from a dirty occupation he carried on with the habit of bathing several times a day into his retirement. The washing machine was going through its cycle in the bathroom at the same time and the hot water scalded him. There were complications. Enver fought hard. He was a strong person.

¹ The daily paper.

² City in eastern Croatia, flattened by the Yugoslav People's Army in 1991

³ Formed during the Second World War from the remnants of the old Royal Yugoslav Army. Initially the Serb national defence forces in time of Nazi occupation of the country. Soon turned to collaborating with the Nazis. Resurrected in the 1990s as irregular Serb nationalist units attached to the Yugoslav People's Army, fighting for a Greater Serbia.

⁴ Yugoslav People's Army, the armed forces of the former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s placed itself at the disposal of Slobodan Milosevic and the cause of Serb nationalism

⁵ Suburb of Sarajevo controlled by Serbs throughout the war, 1992-1995

⁶ Industrial city in central Bosnia

In 1941, when the *chetniks* were slaughtering the Baksics in Ljubinje⁷, some victims had a choice: would they rather have their throat cut or jump into a deep cave. Enver and his older brother Sulejman chose the cave. They survived the fall, and finding their way through some holes in the rocky terrain they emerged on the other side of the hill. Enver went to Zenica and found employment in a steel mill, while Sulejman remained in Sarajevo, got married again and was mobilised when the city was liberated. All trace of him disappeared after that. He probably caught the eye of one of the Ljubinje *partisans*⁸ who had previously been with the *chetniks* and had taken part in the slaughter of the Baksics.

After the war, Enver served for a while as the secretary of the Communist Party's iron workers committee. They expelled him when he circumcised his son. He was an exceptionally skilled craftsman and in 1991, after four decades of hard work, he passed away because he hadn't pressed the button that switches off the washing machine in the bathroom. This is the first New Year since I became the oldest in the Baksic line. I was born in 1939 in a village near Ljubinje, where my father Esad, the second of three brothers, had been posted as a teacher. We moved to Bosnia before the war.

31st December 1992

It's cold, very cold. Two hundred seventy first day of the siege.

I am lighting a fire with my books. Sometimes I create off-prints, separating those parts that I am most fond of or those that are the most useful.

Azra's brother Sead has remained trapped in Grbavica. His daughter Alma Pavlovic and grandson Adnan have arrived from Dobrinja. Dobrinja is still virtually a siege for itself and a world of its own. I am looking forward to spending some time with Adnan. The boy, however, is constantly cold, yet always wants to go out of the house and play so that even the little heat from the burning books and newspapers blows out in the time that the doors open and close.

Indoors, it is plus 10, maybe 11 degrees⁹. When I increase the flames as much as I can it goes up to +13C for a short time. I can't remember when there was electricity or when we had water last. The more skilled and smarter ones have installed gas and they are warm now. I often think of the summer: it wasn't cold then and I picked herbs outside the house: I learned which ones are edible from books, and I even tried some which are marked as scarcely advisable—clover, for

⁷ Village in eastern Herzegovina

⁸ Second World War anti-Nazi guerrilla fighters in Yugoslavia

⁹ Celsius temperature scale

example—and I was satisfied. Now I'm thinking about spring. It'll be warm and I'll eat the first leaves of primrose as soon as they appear. Yesterday we boiled for Adnan the last bag of nettles that was saved for winter. All he said was “phooey”.

Azra brought fifteen litres of water to Kosevsko Brdo¹⁰ from Skenderija¹¹, across a bridge that is being a shooting area by snipers from a building in Lenin Street. Buckets and containers mustn't be put down on the ground for long. They freeze and cannot be lifted again. Either that or the bottom gives way. Azra still has her strength while I've just recovered from a minor bout of pneumonia so I can't even lift ten litres. Afterwards she went to our neighbours to make a telephone call. The oldest of the sisters, Asija, had a heart attack and now she is with the third sister, Saida. She felt ill yesterday but she's better today.

My sister Dzenana doesn't have a phone any more. She lives in the city centre, near 'Sipad'¹², and those numbers were connected to the main telephone exchange of the old post office, which was demolished by the *chetniks* sometime in early May, in their great assault on Sarajevo. However, I still know what my sister is up to. This morning she went to fetch water and my brother-in-law, Mustafa, goes every day with an axe to his family home in Bascarsija¹³, near *Vijecnica*, the National Library, to chop up some wood. It was a beautiful, intimate Bosnian house. A shell destroyed the roof, and Mustafa and Dzenana are now burning off their inheritance in order to survive. Mujo's house and Dzenana's furniture and books from the flat, and recently even the parquet in the large room. Good old Austro-Hungarian parquet.

Boutros Boutros Ghali¹⁴ is here. When I hear his name, waves of hatred emerge from within me.

¹⁰ Residential suburb of Sarajevo with about 10,000 inhabitants before the war

¹¹ Shopping mall and sports centre in central Sarajevo. Also the place where medal awarding ceremonies took place during the '84 Winter Olympics

¹² Sarajevo based furniture and wood processing company. Highly ranked in former Yugoslavia. A portion of their furniture production was exported to the USA

¹³ The old part of town of Sarajevo. Where crafts and the appearance of the quarter had best preserved their Ottoman character

¹⁴ The former head of the United Nations

31st December 1993

The last hours of an ugly and painful year. It's cold and the gas pressure is weak. Azra and I are sitting in the hallway. We've enclosed a part of the flat with blankets and so reduced the area which is being heated to some fifteen square meters.

Days pass rather quickly. They are short: I couldn't have known that as long as I still had power and a television, and the city lights. In war one learns the extent to which winter nights are chasms in which a man loses every notion of himself. It's pitch-dark from 5 p.m. until about 8:00 in the morning. There's no electricity to re-charge the battery. The little charge that's left is kept for the radio, for the naive expectation of a news item which would be good for us or bad for the enemy. Batteries are expensive: 20 DM¹⁵ for four small ones. Gasoline and oil, for the lamps, cost about 30 DM per litre so 2 DM for a night. That's about the same as what candles would cost. I bought three candles for 10DM just for New Years Eve. For that money I could have bought 100 g of minced meat.

I just hope that shelling doesn't drive us into the shelter. There's hardly a holiday which the *chetniks* don't mark with mass killings.

I am writing a letter to my daughter whom I haven't seen since mid-April of 1992. She is in Rovinj, in the house of our friends Krajger and Hoz. She's safe, but she has reached one of life's impasses. For her Rovinj was a beautiful hideaway from the thunder of the guns that had begun shaking Sarajevo. That's when I resolved that enough Baksics had died in the previous war and that she had a right to remain alive, and *I* won't retreat because all I've got behind me is a wall. In the winter desolation of a small town she's killing time. She's a very good student, a step away from graduation yet a thousand kilometres from graduation.

I would like to summarise this Sarajevan year, a year of fast and silent dying. A year in which I lost so many friends and the year in which the tears dried up in Sarajevo. The event I remember most vividly: I was going to work one day when, some fifty metres in front of me, a mortar shell hit the roof of a garage at the beginning of Mitra Trifunovica Street, where I live. It seems to me that I saw the cloud of smoke rather than heard the explosion. I remember a man falling on the ground and a small fragile figure of a girl in a light-coloured coat, at first rooted to the spot and then throwing herself on top of the corpse of the man on the ground: "Daddy, daddy...."

The shell has its caprices: the child was unharmed by shrapnel but the father was hit. I threw myself on the ground because usually after the first shell that wounds

¹⁵ Deutsche Marks (German marks); the only acceptable currency during the war.

someone, they send another to kill those who had come to the victim's aid. People braver than me ran over and carried away the body of the wounded man while the girl walked behind them, dumbfounded.

Among all the thousands of shells that have fallen on Sarajevo, that is the one I remember the most. Most of the others have melted into one unified roar and it is difficult to pluck them from memory individually. From the year that is coming to an end Azra and I remember the death of her sister Asija. After one of those major bombardments that lasted all night, Asija passed away. We buried her in the *harem*¹⁶ of the mosque in Logavina Street. There were a few people at the *dzenaza*¹⁷, and I tried to study the *fatiha*¹⁸ instead of her brother Sead who was trapped in Grbavica. I couldn't do it all, I forgot, but I tried in that way to do a favour for Sead who was there, a kilometre away, yet unable to come to see his sister off to the *mezar*¹⁹.

Not mentioning that death I ask Azra which shell she remembers most.

She recalls one that hit the building of the former Music Academy, where now there is a high school. When the shell hit the school, Emina, the granddaughter of Azra's sister Saida, was attending classes. Azra happened to be nearby and on hearing the explosion she estimated that it came from the direction of the school and ran, almost stepping on a part of somebody's cracked head: The shell hit the outside wall a meter below the classroom where Emina was and the shrapnel tore the passers-by to shreds. The children in the classroom were in a state of shock, deafened by the explosion, but in one piece.

We are giving up on writing to our daughter. Most of the letters never arrive anyway. I am going out for a walk. The air in Sarajevo is exceptionally clear. From afar, in the park I see my friend from Grbavica Muhamed Babic with his wife Hatida. They've fled. He's over seventy. They've only got the clothes they are wearing, everything else has been left across, in one of the most beautifully arranged flats I've ever been inside. Their son Haris is severely wounded. Shrapnel. Most wounds are from shrapnel.

I visit my sisters. They are purple from the cold as they have even less gas than I do. Afterwards it's back home. I have a set path down which I descend and another for the return trip. That's where I feel more secure by a simple calculation: On this route it hasn't hit me yet so it won't today either. On that return path I find two fresh rosettes, last night's or this morning's mortar hits. That means that by some calculation today they've used up as much as probably goes for my kilometre of road from the centre to the house.

¹⁶ Mosque cemetery

¹⁷ Muslim funeral

¹⁸ Opening prayer at Muslim funeral

¹⁹ Grave

I call Gordana Knezevic to ask if Oslobodjenje has enough gasoline for the generator. We've bought some fifty litres so we have enough for one issue. But life resembles a newspaper—it's day to day.

31st December 1994

There was a thaw this morning, tiring and depressing, but it's warm. Half the city is without gas and some haven't had it for a month; up above Bascarsija.

Markale is consumed by shopping euphoria. The last Deutsch Marks are being spent to fashion this New Year's Eve into a moment when one can relax, empty oneself. At the market, the hole from the February explosion is hardly visible and nobody pays attention to it.

I've bought a valve—I would like to mount a gas lamp. I can't work at night, and I can't allow myself not to work. I should have handed in the manuscript two months ago, and I've already started work on a new one: *"The Battle of Sarajevo"*. Endless winter nights are swallowing up time. I've been waiting to see who would utter the famous phrase: *"Another difficult year is behind us"* which, in its various forms, I have been hearing at the end of December for the past decade. The culprit this time was Alija Izetbegovic, in his measured New Year's message. During the airing of the message there was power interruption, so they ran it again after the news. Another cease-fire has been agreed.

Why is it that "another difficult year" is behind me? Firstly, because of those who have died, been killed or wounded; then because of those who have left. I am feeling increasingly lonely both in Sarajevo and in the newsroom. Young people have taken their place, mainly young women because the men are on the frontlines. They are good workers but my generation, and even the one after it—at least in the eyes of that youth—belongs for the most part among the fossilised remains of the pre-war times. They often see us as dreamers or fanatics who didn't want to leave, and could have done so. Kemal Kurspahic is no longer in 'Oslobodjenje', and is now officially our New York correspondent after securing some fantastic grant or something. Gordana Knezevic is no longer here having remained in Zagreb as a part of the AFP newsroom because she couldn't stand her daughter growing up without her and see her son, fifteen year old Boris, stupefied by the Sarajevan house arrest. Gojko Beric is gone too; he left for the promotion of his book in Ljubljana and found a way to remain there. No more Branko Tomic, Midhat Plivcic, Zlatko Dizdarevic, and Tihomir Loza... all long gone...

Many of my friends are no longer here. No acquaintances, people from public life, to whom I had been connected by the some sort of membership in the secret

society organisation called the City of Sarajevo, now for the most part disbanded. The majority of the new tenants from my building have moved on, into newer flats, and even some of the older tenants have moved away, while others are getting ready to do so. People are exhausted. I run into neighbour Hivzija, he's moving with difficulty, going for his injection, he's been dragging pneumonia around for a month and a half. Hivzija is older than me, he used to have good stamina I still remember him by the pleasant evenings in front of the garage, where a few of them used to meet before the war, everyone with a dish of *meze*²⁰ and a bottle of *rakija*²¹. Immediately after that I run into neighbour Stanislav Bota. His son, who'd been wounded in the spine somewhere near Vares and relieved of duty, slammed the bathroom door at a friend's house: the glass broke and cut his eye. It's doubtful whether they'll be able to save it. Stanko's wife Anka was on her way to visit her son and while she was lost in thought a car drove into her and now she's in plaster. Next door to them is my colleague Fahro Radoncic. His wife Azra's brother was killed earlier, and the other was listed as missing. A few days ago they say the *chetniks* returned the bodies of our soldiers killed on Trebevic in 1992, and among them was that of Azra's brother. And so on, one sorrow catching up with another, and lodged between them are the New Year's festivities, a desperate attempt by Sarajevans to break the siege at least in that way.

This is the thousand and first night since Sarajevo was surrounded, or the thousand and second, if we start with the fourth of April, which would be more precise. I spent nearly four months outside of the siege last summer, in the Ljubljana newsroom. My daughter is in Ljubljana too. In those four months, for barely a few minutes everything seemed like the old days.

1st January 1992

Last night the firing went on for a long time after midnight, single shots and bursts of fire, from all sides. Azra and I lay on the floor for some time. There's no point in turning off the light. The firing is random. This is the twentieth or thirtieth time in the past few months that we are lying on the ground when, late at night, the firing begins. I could give the police an exact location of the owners of those weapons. Why? The police, should they wish to, know that already. They know even if they don't wish to. Maybe they still register the owners of the weapons, at least the more active ones. Since last fall, it has been rather easy to purchase weapons in the city: at the market on Stup, while I was shopping for chilli peppers, a man came up to me and asked if I wanted any hand grenades. I

²⁰ servings of smoked meat, cheeses and pickles served as appetisers or on their own

²¹ plum brandy

don't recall the price, but they were cheap. For twenty years now I've illegally had a CZ pistol in my possession, which I've never fired a bullet from. I don't even know if I'd be capable of it. I wanted to try last night, but then I thought that they would start guessing about which side I was on, and they would all think that I got the weapon from the other one. Cool down, Baksic!

1st January 1993

A dusting of snow this morning. Silence. Cold.

The snipers have killed neighbour Ramiz from the neighbouring building. They shot him while he was crossing the Skenderija Bridge loaded with canisters.

1st January 1994

There is no passage of time in Sarajevo, it is not measured in days, weeks or years. It is measured in explosions and deaths. It was thundering again last night. They were pounding somewhere around the city centre.

I woke before six—it was still dark. I lit a candle and drank coffee. I've exchanged a tin of meat, 420 grams of beef, for 100 grams of raw coffee. I can go hungry, but I don't want to be without coffee. I can't prepare anything that would resemble a meal. I've no money for a bottle of wine. Yesterday it cost 40 Marks. I can drink coffee though. For lunch and dinner I dip bread into a little seasoned oil to which we've added a little garlic.

The *chetnik* gunners are asleep, after a night during which they rarely ceased firing on the city. They'll start again around noon, one at the latest.

In the silence of what still has to become morning, I think about the world and the people beyond the siege, the outside world. *Outer space*. That's how I call it. Everything may be divided into Sarajevo and outer space. Not one norm from that life of before the fourth April 1992 is worth anything any more. Once it dawns, from my balcony and I will be able to see the *chetnik* positions on Poljine and Trebevic; from in front of the house I can see a *chetnik* tank in Vrace. I can recognise every howitzer from Poljine by the sound it makes. My building has been hit by five shells. Four tank shells and one mortar. One flat has been totally demolished, one badly damaged, the terrace railing broken. On a direct hit, the building seems to move a few centimetres. I was inside the flat when the shell hit the terrace railing. I lay on the floor and felt the house move.

This winter we are a little better at preserving heat. We've received thicker plastic sheets for the windows, with the UNHCR²² logo printed across them. They're reinforced with thin wire and they are a lot better than simple plastic bags or sheets which would once have been bought to cover the floor when painting the apartment.

A wartime New Year in an already settled daily schedule. The power is out, no water, virtually no natural gas. A few days ago, while cleaning out a drawer I came upon an electric bill. Since the summer of 1992 until today I've used up 36 kilowatts in total. The natural gas is our saviour. Three weeks ago that gas which we all conduct through rubber hoses and put them together as best we can, killed an old woman in the second building along from mine. She got up early so that she could take her place in the water queue immediately after the expiration of the police curfew. She got out of bed and lit a candle. Fortunately, she died the same day.

I have a working telephone. I got it through some of my connections in the Army, after being connected to the railway switchboard for some time. Last summer, Oslobodjenje paid in the then unattainable 80 German Marks, and so now I have a telephone. It is not as valuable as it once was - many of those whom I would call couldn't put together the necessary eighty marks - but it diminishes the sense of confined space. One can only call within Sarajevo as the HVO²³ is not allowing the signal from inside the siege to pass through.

I call a friend of mine Emir Fazlagic, hoping to hear something about last night's shelling. Emir was at his daughter Alma's in Miss Irbina Street near FIS (Sporting and Cultural Centre). A shell hit just in front of the stairway of the building. They're all alive. Later I found out that another shell hit the flat of Enver Mehmedbasic. I go to town to see all this for myself. I find huge holes in the walls in the centre of town. With concentrated firing the *chetniks* wanted to leave the most visible scars possible in that part of town where people move around the most.

²² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

²³ Croatian Defence Council, the military wing of the Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ)

1st January 1995

The firing that started just after midnight last night and went on for two hours, is still ringing in my ears. It seems that UNPROFOR²⁴ boldly joined in this firing. Solitude and alcohol are weapons and ammunition. Very nice – let them take these habits home with them. It would be interesting if, for example, Paris were celebrating New Years Eve this way.

Azra and I are talking over last night's television program. We watched Belgrade and Sarajevo. Nothing new in folk music. Belgrade was meanwhile impudently stealing, so that the song "Jecam zele Tuzlanke djevojke" is now Serbian, and Tuzlan girls are now "devojke". There were even some Rock tunes by Croatian songwriters, completely unchanged, but with Serbian signatures. Amongst the folk "Magnificent Ten" (Top Ten) there were Saban Saulic, Lepa Brena, Nada Topcagic and then Dzej Ramadanovski, and even one Albanian born in Bijeljina...

Afterwards we talk about our friend F. who is again suffering from heavy depression and has been moved to the clinic. I haven't the strength to go and see her as I am myself often in low, very low spirits.

2nd January 1992

Azra and I are going, slowly, on foot, to Grbavica to see Sejo. He's nearing seventy. His wife Nevzeta is half a decade younger, and Nevzeta's mother Dudija is there too. Dudija is a wonder of a woman: she remembers everything from the First World War until today. Too much even for one long human life—even for several lives; Dudija is close to ninety. There's a feast on the table, our answer to the threat of war. Nevzeta always buys good turkey. She makes splendid cakes.

Dudija speaks to me of pre-war Banja Luka. Her husband went blind so she single-handedly raised her son Nerkez, an exceptionally talented philosopher and translator. Through various misfortunes she's managed to keep all that a person needs: spirit, appetite and memory.

New Year's Eve belongs to Azra's family as they are the ones who keep track of dates having lived in Teslic. That was an Austro-Hungarian colony where craftsmen from all parts of the Monarchy used to come, bringing with them their habits and their sense of time. Birthdays, New Years—things which in my family

²⁴ United Nations Protection Force

didn't exist.

I was reading an English essay on the passage of time. An animal is in a permanent state of the present (time). That's the state of struggle for survival. When man, *hominus*, waded into civilisation, he arrived at a cyclical conception of time: Nile floods etc. That lasted until the Renaissance. The author says that frescoes, that painstaking technology, came into being only because people didn't know that time is irretrievable. From the Renaissance onwards it's beginning to be understood that time follows a linear pattern. Once it's gone it never comes back. There, that's the reason why I always spend New Year's Eves and birthdays with Azra's family. They are at the stage of cyclical, and I at that of the animal conception of time, as a permanent present. Although we all know that days and lives flow beyond recovery.

In the evening, Mira and Neso Mihajlovic come by our place. They live on the floor above us. They have two sons. Nikola, the six-year-old, feels at home here, while little Marko hasn't even reached his first birthday. Neso works in Zetra²⁵ and Mira is a professor at a military school in Rajlovac. It's New Year's Eve but we can't avoid politics. I am trying to convince Mira that the officers voted for the SDS²⁶, in other words Karadzic, and she claims that they're all for the Reformists, in other words for Ante Markovic. Then we change the subject. Together we hope that the truce in Croatia will hold this time. The first fourteen haven't. Neso's father is a Serb, a partisan from the support battalion, and his mother is a Croat. His brother is in Croatia. As soon as the next day they could be firing at each other.

It doesn't matter who they voted for, what matters rather is that to a man they turned out for Karadzic's plebiscite. A question for myself – dare I publish that having in mind that I wouldn't be able to document it.

I know it's true enough. The day the plebiscite was being held I was walking in the slush from one polling station to the other. The only familiar faces in front of the polling booths were officers from Ciglane²⁷ in civilian clothing. As far as other places are concerned, it was a case of clear forgery. No more than 15 000 voted in Sarajevo. One colleague, a photographer, took pictures of one man voting five times.

The war in Croatia is seemingly nearing an end. Or is it moving here, along with the Army?

²⁵ Sporting Arena built for the '84 Winter Olympics

²⁶ Serb Democratic Party in Bosnia

²⁷ Elite residential area of Sarajevo

2nd January 1993

More days separate us from real life than from death. In the wider world there are once again some negotiations over Bosnia. They chose a nice place, the Palace of Nations in Geneva, where in their time Westerners so elegantly stood on the side of Mussolini while he was dropping poison gas on Ethiopian villages and exterminated every literate Ethiopian in order to destroy the national identity of the people. So now they're killing Bosnian Muslim intellectuals. I hear little from Geneva; the batteries in the radio are weak. I don't have 100 DM for a generator but I have to find a way.

Boutros Boutros Ghali said that there are ten cities in the world which are worse off than Sarajevo. Nobody asked him to name these other cities.

It's fifteen below zero outside.

I am lighting books, burning away my curiosity. In order to be curious a man has to be alive. To stay alive I have to be warm enough, and to stay warm I have to burn books. Books are also some sort of memories. Shopping for books has always been a highly personal act for me. Burning them is but a painful version of the same thing.

2nd January 1994

This morning I am talking over the humanitarian aid from the last years onwards, with neighbour Behka Filipovic. Behka is a construction technician, very educated. In Steiner's notes from Stalin's gulags, *'7000 Days in Siberia'*, she stumbled upon the fact according to which the prisoners of the High Inquisitor ate better food than us here, under the siege.

It goes like this:

On 10th September we got a kilogram of flour and 800 grams of rice.

18th:September, again a kilo of flour, 200 g of sugar, a can of meat, mackerels or herrings. On the 30th, again a kilo of flour, 330 g sugar, one mackerel or herring, and one bar of soap for the laundry.

The next distribution was on the 16th October: 2.5 kg flour, 2 dl cooking oil, 200 g salt and a can of herrings. German herrings in tomato sauce are a happening on the tables of Sarajevans, on which there remain only the eating utensils and tablecloths from the good times. This quality can was immediately followed up by a reaction from Sarajevans, who'd eat a single can for two days. Apparently they

asked one of us what he'd order to eat if he found himself outside the siege. "A whole can of herrings". Two hundred grams.

The last day of October: 2 kg flour, 0.25 kg rice, one or two potatoes, one can of meat and one of fish.

Afterwards, on the 11th November, we got quite a lot of flour - 3.3 kg, 400 g potatoes and one can of meat. During the former November holidays, The 25th used to be the Bosnia-Herzegovina Independence Day, we got 1.7 kg flour, 2 dl cooking oil, one can of meat and one of fish, and 200 g Feta cheese—the latter was a holiday for our emptied stomachs—then yeast for the bread and a bar of soap which seemed like a surplus because through all this time there hasn't been enough water. All these quantities are per person.

Since the autumn the women have learned that the baking tray doesn't have to be greased, but that it can be sprinkled with flour and the bread placed on top of that. The children have learned that one can do without sweets. The only one who hasn't learnt that is little Anel who always asks me: "*Mr. Hamza, do you have a candy?*"

The next feast in our gulag was on 9th December. A little less than a kilo of flour, 200 g sugar, 300 g beans - which is enough for three meals, as long as there is sufficient bread to go with the beans; a can of fish, a little washing detergent, and two 8 cm candles.

The last distribution was last week. A kilogram each of beans and flour, 0.3 litres of oil, a can of herrings and some detergent. Small candles once again; for the New Year's Eve festivities.

A hundred twenty-seven days. Apart from bread, of which one gets 0.25 kg daily, humanitarian assistance comprised 114 g flour per day, 9 g rice and 5.5 g sugar. During October and November, around the time when Anel asked me for candy, the price of one saccharin tablet on the black market rose to one DM (Deutsch Mark). A colour television could have been bought for the price of a hundred or so of these tablets.

10 g cooking oil per day...

A huge experiment is being conducted on us. Somebody wants to see how long a man can last without sugar, cooking oil, on bare beans which must be as watery as possible. And still, the U.N. is boasting to the whole world as if this was a great accomplishment.

We've stopped losing weight for some time now. The organism has used up all the particles that have some bearing on bodily weight. Now it's burning off microparticles. It's drawing on its last reserves in order to survive. Our powers of reasoning are weaker, we find it harder to perceive things. I started reading some

articles on *avitaminosis* (vitamin deficiency), and promptly gave it up, fearful upon recognising the symptoms. This food is changing us psychologically as well. They could at least have shipped us some vitamin or mineral tablets: there aren't any transportational obstacles with those.

However, there's a joke that easily replaces all tablets. Mujo is walking along, our famous Mujo, loaded with water-containers. He meets—who else—but Suljo:

-What for are those dentures around your neck?

-There are my wife Fata's so that she won't eat the humanitarian aid while I'm hauling the water

2nd January 1995

A wet, heavy snow fell last night. This morning the streets are swarming with broken wires which were used to take electricity from those who found themselves on the priority list – there are around ten thousand of them. The city is still in a festive mood, even though it's a work day. Peacetime habits stubbornly survive. There are only a few people at the market and I can't find the parts I need to mount the gas-lamp. I buy candles.

I meet Cedo Kapor²⁸, I think he's around eighty but he's holding out well. He walks faster than me, straight as an arrow. Later I meet Braco Kosovac²⁹ – all of them people from the pre-war time.

I'm having a cup of coffee with Nele and Mersa, and I meet neighbour Fako there. Azra says that our generation met with two great misfortunes at the same time – old age and poverty.

- “It's good, having in mind what could have been” says Fako.

According to the SDS master plan, we from Kosevsko Brdo would have been interned on the premises of a pharmaceutical company, 'Bosnalijek', on the way to the Bare cemetery.

Hatidza Babic, an old friend of ours, phones me to ask how F. is doing, having heard that she's in hospital. She asks us to send her regards. “Hamza,” she says “her neighbour told me how F. was bruised and cut, not to mention anything else. I hope she pulls through.”

The Russians are continuing their slaughter in Chechnya.

²⁸ Second World War partisan and politician from the Tito era

²⁹ Former Bosnian Prime Minister and President of 'Energoinvest', Sarajevo-based electrical engineering company, one of the biggest in former Yugoslavia

3rd January 1992

I am trying to get a rest today, to switch off from politics. It's not easy. The war in Croatia seems to be coming to an end. The Conference on Yugoslavia is in progress. Funeral circus.

I am hounded by one fear, one question that refuses to go away. Are we on the threshold of the greatest mass manipulation since the beginning of recorded time? Is the theory of the end of history an euphemism for the realisation that the mass media are a far better tool for controlling people than police or the use of force? Are the government's appetites in relation to 'Oslobodjenje' also based on that concept? I cannot forget: the Ukraine voted twice in as many weeks to determine its future within the USSR, the first time an overwhelming majority was for staying in the Union, the second time —against it. Nothing significant happened in the meantime between the two ballots. Is Bosnia being manipulated with?

3rd January 1993

Snow is falling; a cold wind is tearing about.

I'm looking for pipes for gas installation. It's a question of survival. I'm working with the neighbours and everybody is taking their time. I can't rid myself of the assumption that cooperative behaviour is a normal state of human relations.

It's cold. I went to see my sister this morning. Her hands are swollen. No matter how much one feeds the fire it's still impossible to heat those old apartments with the high ceilings. One can't spend all day wrapped up in a blanket either. I'm walking around the city looking to pinch a sufficient amount of writing paper from somewhere. I found a place, 7 or 8 kg of commercial documentation in a firm where a friend of mine works. I share it with my sister, 50-50.

A few apples were left over from the New Year's Eve reception for the families of *sehids* in the brigade headquarters, and they're being distributed to us for lunch, at the barracks. As I put an apple in my pocket I recall Emira Fazlagic telling me the other day how she dreamt that she's passing by a newsstand, and in the window there are stacks of apples, apples...

Azra got one apple from Adra in November. I don't remember which one of the children we gave it to.

My legs are frozen, my fingers purple, and they're itching...

3rd January 1994

The dogs were barking all last night and I couldn't get a wink of sleep until exhaustion finally broke me down. There are more and more dogs, packs of them. Firstly they concluded their war with the cats. They dismembered every cat that found itself outside the house. Then they began devouring each other, as they couldn't even find enough food in the garbage containers. In the mornings one finds large smears of blood and bones scattered about.

Some dogs have found refuge in the homes. In this desolation some people take in a small dog and begin sharing food with it. It's an event of note in the street when the bitches bring forth. The women take milk to them, though I don't know where they get it from. The women marvel at motherhood. The puppies are life, the thing we are fighting for, that which we are defending.

Night-time barking drags people of weaker nerves out of bed. A handful go out and shoot at some snarling dog and the barking quietens down. The next day that man is looked at with contempt. One neighbour, still sleepy, tried to kill a dog during the day, but he couldn't summon the strength. On the battlefield he shoots faultlessly. However, shooting at a *chetnik* who wants to kill you is one thing, while shooting at a dog who won't let you sleep because he's hungry, is quite another.

This morning, sniper shots and massive, exploding bullets from anti-aircraft guns are darting above the treetops of the few remaining trees in my street.

Young Jasmin, a brilliant rogue from the neighbouring building, and a friend of his, are chopping down the poplar-tree that's been shading my window from the sun. I try to shout at him, but then I break into a laugh. Jasmin laughs back. He'll give me, he says, a bundle of the wood, but wet poplar is of no use to anyone.

The trunk of the poplar-tree has fallen.

An old woman is standing a bit further away along the pavement, alone.

"Let them hit me, I couldn't care less!" she says as soon as our eyes meet. We understand each other perfectly; I'd gone out for a walk in the same frame of mind.

I suddenly think of the WWI Serbian major Gavrilovic whose regiment had been left to cover the retreat of the army on the left bank of the Sava river and facing a far superior Austro-Hungarian force, when he told his men in the formation:

- "Heroes, you don't have to worry about your lives. Supreme Command has already erased our regiment from the numerical state of affairs..."

The Supreme Command of this civilisation has erased Sarajevo from the numerical state of affairs. Not because it is covering its retreat, and it is, but because the Supreme Command of this civilisation is gorging and guzzling. They're not mad to exchange their caviar for principles. Only someone who's never eaten caviar can stand for something like that.

I call on the Fazlagics. We talk about their daughter Alma. A shell recently smashed into the 'Energopetrol' office tower where Alma works, and the force of the impact threw her off the chair she was sitting in. Last year her husband happened to be in the Sarajevo Brewery head office, in a room which was to be blown up by a shell barely ten minutes after he walked out. He, by the way, returned from exile in order to get married. They're beautiful, they encourage one just by existing, by the fact that the shell steers clear of them.

I meet a friend of mine, Ismet, a 70 year-old originally from Bileca. We've been seeing each other quite often in the past few months, reconciled with the fateful fact that we'll never be able to go back to the places of our birth. The *chetniks* are there, and we're both old enough to know that we won't live to see a possible generation of Serbs from Bileca or Ljubinje that isn't *chetnik*. Ismet remembers *chetnik* crimes in Herzegovina during the previous war (WWII). There has been less blood spilt this time around, at least in Bileca and Trebinje. It was a different story in Gacko.

By all accounts there were fewer dead Muslims in those places where the Serb leadership comprised fewer intellectuals. Thus one mustn't attribute the *chetnik* crime to hicks. Only in the mind of an intellectual may a myth be transformed into an unquestionable right to kill. Bozidar Vucurevic is a transport company manager who grew up in the midst of a true *chetnik* family. He's uneducated, but a skilful demagogue and leader, and he understood the myth of a Greater Serbia in a much more pragmatic sense. There's no reason to butcher his neighbours with a knife, it's quite sufficient to banish them, and exile will do the rest. Bilecans and Trebinjans are withering away in refugee camps across Northern Europe. My neighbour Dina Dortbucuk was telling me how her brother, who's in Denmark, sent his daughter, who'd escaped to Sarajevo in time, a bundle of sage and other herbs from Herzegovina which he'd taken with him, so that he may sense the scent of his home in a foreign land. Neither the father nor the daughter has a chance of ever picking those herbs again on their property in Trebinje.

Ismet tells me of Bileca. They say, or rather it's being talked about, that the *chetniks* made all the Muslim residents undress completely and then run through the town naked before they were finally banished. The town's Serbs turned their heads away, not wanting to watch the humiliation of men until recently their neighbours, and their own shame.

That's one of the stories from this war floating somewhere between truth and legend.

Another, better known, is the one about the Aladza mosque in Foca, noted down and published by Dzejlana Pecanin. The mosque was demolished (by the Serbs), but in the evenings, says the legend, one can still hear the *ezan* emanating from the ruins.

That legend is necessary to the Muslims in order to survive.

3rd January 1995

It's cold and slippery, but these are no longer those previous two wartime winters. We have water and gas every second day, and the temperature in the flat never falls below 14 or 15 degrees, at least not in the hallway where we spend our time.

I called on our best man Pero Pilic to pick up a letter for his wife. He expects his family to be back by mid-February— it seems that his wife and daughter have been trying to come back since the autumn. I'm taking the letter to Rasim Cerimagic, along with a letter to my daughter, letters for Catovics exiled from Trebinje, and then letters for Canada, USA, Germany and France. Rasim is travelling to Ljubljana tomorrow.

Azra and I are trying to speed up the exit from Grbavica of her brother Sead, his wife and mother-in-law.

My brother-in-law Mustafa comes over to wait for a call from his daughter who's in London.

In the flat opposite us, Merso and Nela are waiting for a call from Merso's son Anel, who'd accompanied his grandparents to stay with his uncle in Germany, just before New Year's Eve. A clever twelve-year-old, and I too miss his racket in the hallway.

In the early evening, along slippery streets, I go to say goodbye to Rasim. We're commenting on the state of affairs in 'Oslobodjenje' and we're asking ourselves will the paper survive? How should we prepare for peace and post-war poverty?

4th January 1992

I heard this somewhere last year: 2% of extremists are sufficient to start a war, no matter what the rest think or do. If that theory is correct then the war is coming to

Bosnia. Here there are on the whole a hundred thousand extremists among four and a half million people. Some are that because they want to be, some react to accumulated fear with extremism, some from sheer recalcitrance, some from a feeling of personal failure and a wish to take revenge on a society which has marginalized them, and some because they have entangled themselves in some shady ideology that doesn't contain sufficient intellectual or ethical potential so that it has to be realised through war, with the blood of its followers and opponents alike.

And the spilling of blood here in Bosnia is equally as traditional as tolerance, alternating with it.

I remember a story from the previous war about the fatalistic conception of our cyclical slaughters which I heard from Boro Pistalo. A man is butchering his neighbour on the side of a ditch. The one below says: "Listen, I have some money in my purse, so take it to my family at home, the orphans will need it." The murderer (executioner) kills him, and then takes the wallet to the victim's family.

I also recall another story, through which I experience war as a concept. My mother, Dzihka, had a brother, Esad Misic, a *partisan*³⁰ who left Sarajevo for the forests and whose grave was never found. Our first neighbour in the village of Cajno, near Visoko³¹, where my father taught in the local school, had a brother who'd joined the *ustashas*, the Croatian fascist allies of the Axis. The two of them would sit together, silently sharing sisterly worry and sadness.

³⁰ Second World War anti-Nazi guerrilla fighters in Yugoslavia

³¹ A town just north of Sarajevo

4th January 1993

For the first time in a long time there's bread in Sarajevo again. For weeks we'd been baking bread on top of a large can on the balcony, with burning paper underneath. Small, thin breads were made so that they would be done sooner. Hunger makes them sweet.

Bad news from Jajce. That's where I went to high school and spent the most beautiful years of my life. I don't know why, but I'm most concerned about my childhood friend Zijad Zulic. He was the best student in the high school, all straight A's. He went to university in Zagreb, an impoverished orphan with a modest scholarship. Then his nerves gave in and nobody could put Zijad back together again.

His soul was wounded and he spent years walking around the city. Whenever I'd find myself in Jajce I'd spend a long, long time talking with him, trying to penetrate the curtain which was separating him from my world. I wasn't succeeding.

How is he coping now, beneath *chetink* blows to the landscapes of our childhood and youth?

4th January 1994

I've finished writing my column titled "*The end of the century*", and I'm taking it to the newsroom.

The newsroom is on the deserted premises of a planning and design company, near the cathedral, so we're no longer in that freezing room in the Railway company offices (ZTO), which I could barely enter because of the cold. This place is being heated, which costs 30 DM a day, but at least one can have a talk with one's colleagues, which means we've become a real newsroom. There's even gossip - that fine peacetime journalistic genre. Here the most prominent position is, naturally, occupied by the editor-in-chief, Kemo Kurspahic. He's been in the USA for quite a long time already, and by all accounts is not intending to return. He showed great personal courage during the first months of the war, but the compliments which are due him begin working against him if his absence is prolonged. Whenever the subject of the new editor-in-chief is brought up, as Kemo is obviously settled in the United States, the virtually unanimous choice is Mehmed Halilovic. We're of the same age, and I know him well, he's a very stable personality. However, Meho isn't keen on accepting that job. I'm trying to

convince him to do it, but at the same time I understand why he shuns it.

The artillery is giving us a heavy battering today. Explosions can be heard from Trebevic. I'm not rushing. Marko Vesovic said it well: if you run, you could be running towards a shell. I drop by my sister and brother-in-law. They're burning up the hardwood floor. Dzenana didn't go to work at 'Bosnalijek'³² today. Snipers and anti-aircraft guns are battering Jukiceva Street mercilessly and without pause. UN Generals Cot and Briquemont are requesting a stronger engagement of UN troops in the defence of civilians.

My sister's colleague from work and namesake Dzenana Tatarevic was killed. My sister is sad - because of her namesake from 'Bosnalijek' and a tragedy that virtually symbolises the happenings in the centre of town, in the funnel of the artillery tornadoes: six of them were killed while eating lunch.

Maybe what they were eating hardly merits being called lunch, but what happened to them was a real, final and only thing that is assured us - death.

I'm working with colleague Fahro Memic on the preparation of the next issue of 'Nedjelja', a weekly newsmagazine published by "Oslobodjenje".

Fahro's life was changed forever by a shell fired on the 27th August 1992.

- "It was a beautiful summer morning. They'd been shelling Sarajevo quite a lot in those few days. Around eight in the morning I started walking towards Otoka, some two-three hundred metres from my house, to wait for a car that was supposed to take me to Nedjarici, to the 'Oslobodjenje' building. I was half-way there when a shell flew just above my colleague Slavko Santic and me - I found out later that it was a 150 mm howitzer shell. I saw it fall just next to my building. I turned around and saw smoke in front of the entrance, and the panic of people who'd found themselves in the vicinity.

I rushed back, because I'd left my wife Zeljka in front of the entrance with her friends, having previously brought her the newspaper and bread, just like every other morning. Although I had a wound on my left leg just below the knee, and my leg was all bandaged up, I managed to run towards the house.

In front of the entrance, on the asphalt, Zeljka was lying motionless. A few metres from her our neighbour Dragan Kadjevic, and scattered about—I still wasn't sure whether they were dead or wounded—another ten or so people whom I didn't know. I heard my son who'd seen it all from the window on the seventh floor:

- "Dad, is Mom alive?"

I felt for the pulse on Zeljka's neck and I didn't feel any signs of life. I answered Damir that she was seriously wounded.

³² The biggest Bosnian pharmaceutical company

The neighbours brought the civil guard stretchers from the building, some small communal service truck pulled over and they threw into it Zeljka's body and the body of a soldier who found himself there at the time of the blast, all in pieces. They drove us to the State Hospital. Sadly, the first look in the eyes of doctors Avdo Nakas and Jasna Gutic told me that it was all over. Two or three minutes later they left the casualty ward and told me that Zeljka was dead. I was conscious of that already, but there's always a hope...

I wanted to prepare Damir for the news so I called him and told him that Mom was severely wounded and that it's unlikely she'll make it. He answered: "Dad, I'll tell grandma and granddad that mom was killed". Zeljka's parents were at mine at the time and they remained there for the next year. During that time Zeljka's father died of sorrow... For his only daughter and her mother is still bedridden, immobile.

4th January 1995

We've received all the necessary approvals so that Sejo, his wife and mother-in-law can cross over from Grbavica, while three Serbs are supposed to go the other way in exchange.

Something we'd been waiting for a long time is now turning into an organisational nightmare: how to transport granny Duda to the bridge and the ramp, where we would take a taxi; how to secure the flat so that someone doesn't force their way in during the three or four hours between the departure of the Dimitrijevic family and the arrival of the Ferizbegovics...

A storm in a teacup is brewing in Bosnian politics. Radio 99 chose Haris Silajdzic as the personality of the year in honour of which he was handed a plaque by the station editor, Adil Kulenovic. The state television announced that the Prime Minister received the latter and that they spoke about the importance of the independent media, but the choice of Silajdzic as the personality of the year wasn't mentioned in the report.

5th January 1992

It's Saturday, yet a real work day. That means that I am off to the 'Oslobodjenje' club to have a drink with Miroslav Jankovic, with whom I don't agree on anything, but we do discuss things openly. Jankovic thinks predominantly on the national and I predominantly on a class-social plane. National division in the newsroom has in the meantime become very apparent. It started a long time ago, when Ljiljana Smajlovic and Jankovic made a real fuss about getting hold of the Knin psychiatrist Raskovic for an interview. Personally, that Raskovic struck me as a laughable figure, probably because I'd already read the books from whence come his speeches and interviews, lexis and aims.

I had a nice long talk with Vladimir Srebrov. We have nothing in common except the wish that all this should pass by without war, and that's a fateful crossroads. We were sitting in the office of Gordan Matrak, the chief of the correspondent service, famous for his assertion that he's in a mixed marriage. His wife is a Serb, he says, while he's a Greater Serb. Is there some truth in that jest? That he's crazy about Milosevic, that's indisputable. Meanwhile, Tudjman is the one being talked about today. He declared that the partition of Bosnia is the only solution. And the headline in our paper today reads: "*The finger is still on the trigger*" and it refers to the truce in Croatia.

5th January 1993

Today I received a parcel from Omer Karabeg in Belgrade. It's a feast for the whole family. Everyone got a piece of yellow cheese, there are real cans of meat which, in comparison with those from the humanitarian aid, is top-grade meat. There were also sweets for the kids.

In many houses throughout the city the sewage system has frozen up. The tenants from the lower floors are taking flight. Everything in their rooms will be destroyed even without the shells.

5th January 1994

Hunger has struck, great hunger, which might be the reason why there is so much talk of parcels which are expected to arrive or those which never reached their destination. Senada Kreso was telling me how she managed to get in touch with

her bridesmaid via a satellite phone and found out that in the period since the beginning of the war until last year the latter has sent her nineteen packages. That's two hundred kilograms of good food for Senada and her mother. Not a single one ever arrived. Most of them ended up in Kiseljak where the local HVO (the irregular Croatian Territorial Defence) undoubtedly enjoyed the treat. The Sarajevo Croats estimate that around a hundred thousand parcels disappeared over there.

If God wills, doctors will be needed to remove all that they ate from their insides.

My cousin Lila phoned me from Zenica. Hunger is beginning to take hold there as well. Azra spoke with her cousin from Tuzla. They're living on beans and corn bread. I remember food like that from my childhood, from the world war, unless this war proves to be a world one as well.

Our water reserves have fallen to ten litres. It's impossible to make one's way to the Brewery, which is three kilometres away and the nearest place where one could fill up.

Emira Fazlagic, a friend of my daughter's, drops by. They were the four graces. Two of them, Emira and Alma Jelkic are here. Duska Zagorac left and is presently in London. Amra is in Rovinj. They're keeping in touch with each other and with their childhood.

I ask Emira about which one of the shells will she be talking about when she's a grandma, when all this is past.

- “The first shell that hit really near me, it was I think July 1992, struck when I was in Ciglane. I was completely covered in dust from the bricks that were scattered all around the square. Later, when I'd seen all that a shell can do to a man, I couldn't understand quite how I'd stayed alive in Ciglane. That time it took me four and a half hours to return home to Kosevsko Brdo from the City Hall (about 2 km). Altogether, twenty shells hit Ciglane that day. I arrived home traumatised only to find out that in the meantime one shell struck just below my room...”

Emira remembers another shell, which hit our street.

- “It was the beginning of July 1993, a year after my baptism of fire. I was sitting down with a friend some 50 metres from the place where it exploded, and the entrance to my house was about as far away but in the opposite direction. It fell exactly on the place where I stop to talk to my friend whenever I'm coming back home. The smoke hadn't dispersed yet when I saw my father, barefoot, running and shouting my name. Our first neighbour was killed, and Alma's wedding was scheduled for the next day. The dead man's wife wouldn't let the wedding be postponed”.

I ask Emira what else, apart from dying, remains in her memory as the image of this war, this strange, Sarajevan war against civilians, flats, and children.

- “It happened last January. There was no water so it was being shipped in tank trucks at -15°C or -20°C . At that time we were paying a litre of gasoline for a 100 litres of water. During the journey from the Brewery to our building the tank truck froze so much that they couldn't separate the hose for pouring out the water. The lads from the tank truck lit a fire to defrost the hose. Everybody was standing around waiting, numb, with frozen stares. We'd been waiting for two hours just for the truck to arrive, and if you aren't there when it arrives, you won't get the water. When the hose was finally defrosted, I was expecting to see some expression of relief in the faces around me. Nothing changed. The people started moving like robots. In that same dumb manner they dispersed on their way back to their homes”.

Later, we end up talking about the good old times. We're relaxed and suddenly, we're cheerful.

5th January 1995

Azra's relatives have left Grbavica. Since crossings such as this are known about in advance, the flat has to be guarded so that someone doesn't take advantage of the situation and force their way in: the resulting process of eviction costs around 700 DM. While Azra went with the others to the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge to wait for the crossing, my brother-in-law Mustafa and I remained behind to guard the flat.

It seems like one can still feel the warmth of the presence of the previous tenants. This morning's coffee-pot, a pile of papers beneath a badly put together tin-plate heater, a pair of lonely slippers, newly washed eating utensils next to the sink. They are an elderly couple, engineers, and their son has long been working in Algeria (there too the dead number some 40 thousand already). A hundred details (trifles) which make up a person's biography.

On the table there's a key chain, an ashtray made of light purple glass, outlines of tens of pictures all over the wallpaper. A stand with pre-war newspapers – ‘Our Home’ and ‘Burda’. On the shelf, The Encyclopaedia of the Lexicographical Academy, Educational Encyclopaedia, four of some twenty volumes on the history of civilisation, a few books on botany, ten or so on history, then Oriana Fallaci, Graham Greene in English, Corneille in French, the collected works of Tin Ujevic...

All the more valuable things from the house have been sold. While we were

waiting for the former Grbavicans to come, two women came to inquire after some Persian carpet that was no longer in the house.

I know that Sejo's flat in Grbavica is modest in comparison—it's been looted twice: they come, take whatever they want, and leave. Once they came to take Sejo away to kill him and he was only saved by the fact that he had a stroke on his doorstep so they transferred him to a hospital instead.

They didn't arrive until after three so Azra had had to wait at the bridge for over four hours. Even though they knew about it the day before, those in Grbavica only informed Sejo at 10:30 that the exchange was scheduled for 11:00. They packed in a hurry and their neighbours over there provided a car so that Grandma Dudija could be transported to the ramp. She crossed with the others.

We meet again after thirty-two months, a month of months, without pathos, just as my summer encounter with my daughter went by without pathos. After fifteen minutes with her in Ljubljana we were bickering as if we'd never been apart, and later, like people immersed in literature, we were judging the value of descriptions of various similar scenes from books which we'd read.

There's no pathos in war. Emotions are too violent for one to abandon oneself to them. We were chatting in roughly the same manner in which we'd talk whenever the Ferizbegovics would return from a holiday on the Adriatic coast before the war. Only Dudija is in tears: nine decades of her life are spinning around in front of her, many states, countless wars, many cities, homes, everything including this flat which is cold today because on odd-numbered days the centre of town is without gas.

6th January 1992

The winter vacation is upon us. Whoever wants to send their child skiing in the mountains would be well advised to buy it a Kalasnikov first (AK-47). They're going for 1,500 DM, I hear.

A round table on the future of Bosnia is being held, organised by the popular new review 'Slobodna Bosna' ('Free Bosnia'), edited by Senad Avdic. Senad never minces his words and he's been through many different phases of orientation and penmanship, and in these troubled times he stood out for being more preoccupied with his profession rather than an ideology. For the first time since the election both the new and the old leaders have gathered together. An unusual situation. It's noticeable that the Croats, both the old and new crews, are undoubtedly in favour of the creation of a Bosnian armed forces.

Is that a national experience from the scarcely abated war in Croatia, or does Zagreb want to move the war to Bosnia?

Or, on the other hand, is this meeting a signal for the possibility of the formation of an all-Bosnian people's front...

Sarajevo is encircled by guns, the barrels of which are pointed towards the city, roughly according to the blueprints used by the Austro-Hungarian army that besieged the city in 1878. These are the general rules for the placement of artillery and there is neither politics nor national criteria in them. My cousin Mensur Causevic saw them gleaming in the winter sun while he was flying a 'Cesna' plane above Sarajevo recently. Most people don't mind this as the general feeling is that in the decisive moment the JNA will step in and force a peaceful solution.

In Croatia, however, it hasn't done so.

6th January 1993

There's firing again. The armies have dug into the frozen ground and I don't think anyone is trying to secure a significant shift in the frontlines, but the attackers have a surplus of ammunition. Our boys, on the other hand, have very little of it. Some of the positions I surveyed resemble an assortment of collectable weaponry.

It's fifteen below zero.

In the old people's home (retirement home) where there's nothing to light a fire with, a few people have frozen to death.

In the former high school building in the Djure Djakovica Street, where since the first day of the war the refugees from Jarcedol have been housed, the city authorities haven't found a way to install gas for which they would have needed some 50 or so metres of rubber hose, so there they're burning old attendance registers. In the high school at Obala, so I hear as I can't go there because of the snipers, they've burnt away the desks and the wooden floor.

My column for this Wednesday, my "End of the century", to which time has given a wholly different meaning to the one I had meant to convey, is very bland. I console myself with the fact that our circulation is low, as we haven't enough paper, thus the shame is diminished.

6th January 1994

They're attacking Sarajevo from all sides today. They're hitting us from Lukavica, from Vrace, from Borija. Artillery, tanks and mobile artillery pieces are only ceasing fire long enough to cool down their barrels. In Grbavica, it seems, our boys are trying to move the frontline. It's unlikely that they'll succeed - the *chetniks* have had enough time, material and work force to fortify their positions well.

Movement around the city is forbidden and for the first time since the beginning of the war the police are chasing passerbys. That also happened in October during the mutiny by Caco and Celo's units, but only a part of the city was sealed off then.

In the midst of that firing I am lying down in some sort of hibernation. We've learnt to lessen the receptiveness of all the senses, to drag our thoughts away to some distant place. I'm even trying to read, so I've taken Ilf and Petrov³³ down from the shelf. Only now do I realise what a brilliant obituary they'd written in advance for a certain brand of socialism. I find it easier to bear all this firing because I've recently recovered from a kind of pneumonia. I am weak so my survival abilities have been reduced, apathy allows me not to go mad in this cannonade.

There's often a quarrel among Sarajevans over the question which, besieged as we are, we are searching for an answer to: have we remained normal? Measured by the habits of people who found themselves outside the siege, we are certainly not normal: every normal person would have grabbed a thermos bottle and gone down to the shelter today. Nobody, however, is down there now. We are afraid of death only by the way just as we are living by the way. Only hatred is somewhat more intense, but we haven't got anything to realise (substantiate) it with.

Another thing - violent hatred calls for a healthy and a strong organism, to hate, a man must be fully fed. Hatred burns up many calories.

I go out on the balcony and see a group of soldiers from my street, gathered for the departure to the front (line). I knew each of them only in passing before the war. As the war has reduced the radius of possible movement, it has in turn strengthened the friendships and acquaintances within that diminished circle. During the first summer, all of us who weren't at the front would socialise on the benches in the yard. These benches were used for the fire last winter, as was the plum orchard where we used to shelter from the heat and eat the fruit during that first summer, when there was nothing to eat but rice. Later we begun to assemble

³³ Pseudonyms, respectively, of Ilya Arnoldovich Faynzilberg and Yevgeny Petrovich Katayev, Russian satirists

in front of the supermarket waiting for the bread, in front of the cistern truck waiting for the water; and finally at the meeting place whence from the next shift would depart for the frontline. Some have been killed. The house I can see through my window was left without Amra's friend Sead Hamamdžić. He was killed on the front near Ilidza, and we buried him next to the small mosque in Gorica. When in the summer of 1992 a shell set fire to the trailer of neighbour Hamo Avdić, the same one he'd been tinkering with for 11 months of the year so that he could go on holiday during the twelfth, neighbour Osman Kapetanović ran to help. He lived in the house opposite, above Zeljko and Behka Filipović. The second shell—which the *chetniks* aimed at the rescuers—killed Osman on the spot, while the strong, young guardsman (soldier) Abdulah Fetahović and my contemporary Avdić, who'd leaned out of the window to see what had happened to his trailer, drew their last breath not long afterwards. This is only the death toll from the nearest three buildings. Osman's wallet, stuffed with Deutsch Marks, was removed somewhere on the way to the morgue. Thus the family at once found itself without the father and the money.

Now my soldier neighbours are advancing through the frost towards Poljine. They're marching in a group. It's more dangerous that way no doubt, but a group does lend a certain feeling of security in this roaring and blazing.

Smajo's brother was killed in the first assault on Poljine, while his wife also died later. I remember Marinko from the first days when he was chasing snipers with nothing but a revolver in hand. Dragan has a beautiful 5-year-old daughter; she looks like both him and her mother Aida. Neither of them has a uniform. They've taken along the warmest things they had at home. The trench is a home away from home, closeness reigns there. This is not a normal army; these are citizens who somehow got their hands on some weapons to defend their homes.

On the other side they are neighbours too, from the villages in Poljine. Those here, on our side, and the ones over there, with the enemy, often even know each other. My friend Esad, a fighter since the first days of April 1992, said to me the other day: "Hamza, what I won't say to them once the war is over..."

"You won't Esad, tell them anything. Everybody has already said his piece in this war."

Not long ago a Serb boy from Poljine took a lunch to the frontline. He got lost and found himself in our trench. He runs into one of our soldiers who, wanting to help the child, asks him for whom he was carrying the lunch.

- "It's for my father".

- "And what's your father's name?"

The boy told them and our soldiers gathered around and decided not to report the

incident to their superiors. Shouting from the trench, they called out to the boy's father. When they told him that his child was in the trenches on our side, the father offered himself: "Let the kid go - take me, I'm coming over!"

Our guys said that they don't trade in children, they let the boy go and he crossed a no-man's land. After about half an hour, the same man is calling over to them.

- "Don't shoot, I'm sending you my son!"

The boy goes across a no-man's land once again. He's carrying a bottle of *rakija*, opens it in the trench and drinks the first sip himself.

- "My dad told me that I had to take the first sip in front of you".

They drank the *rakija* with the boy, in silence, who knows what was going through whose mind.

There is however, another story about children in Poljine. The *chetniks* would take children for trips to the trenches and showed them how to shoot at the city from anti-aircraft guns.

6th January 1995

Last night, on Radio Free Europe, I heard that the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina has withdrawn its confidence in the state television.

Battles are still raging around Bihac, as well as around Krupa, where we are having to abandon the positions we'd held since the start of the war. The front, in fact, is still active, now with less noise, less dead and wounded, but no less dangerous.

Sejo and Nevzeta are getting used to the new flat, Sejo still hasn't the strength to go out into the street. Our friend Almasa Kajtaz from Grbavica has been expelled: either go or you won't be any longer.

Sarajevo is covered in snow, we have gas every other day, and classes in schools are also scheduled. A sack of poorer quality firewood costs fifteen marks; for better ones—twenty. The opening of the 'blue roads' is being talked about. The price of food at the market is somewhat lower.

A joke is going around after all the mishaps with the gas:

The house has blown up, so the son runs to the hospital, and despairingly tells his mother:

- "Dear mother, didn't I tell you: first you light the match, you bring it closer to the burner, and then you turn the gas on..."

- "Well, that's what I did. I turned the gas on, and then I looked; I didn't have a match. I go into the kitchen, but there isn't one there either. So, I go over to the neighbours, take a match, light the gas, when suddenly a shell hits directly in the heater."

7th January 1992

In our '*U Zizi*' ('in focus' front page editorial) column, Patriarch Paul is calling for peace.

The SDS has stolen four thousand tonnes of oil and three thousand tonnes of gasoline from a warehouse in Bihac, I suppose in order to give children their Christmas presents. Forests are being cut down mercilessly as well; it's hard to say which of the three nations which had inherited Bosnia and Herzegovina is foremost in that.

People are talking about the resignation of Veljko Kadijevic³⁴. Blagoje Adzic³⁵ is obviously the agent of the hardest line in Belgrade. I remember him from the time when he was in the Sarajevo Army Sector - a large man, looking straight ahead, through his interlocutor. Adzic's family perished in an *ustasha*³⁶ slaughter during the previous war, he was lucky to have survived, he happened to be visiting a cousin in another village at the time. I think that his entire life philosophy originates in that bloody experience. If a war were to be fought in Bosnia, it would be the previous war. Someone said a long time ago that generals are always fighting the previous war, but I don't even see a politician who would fight a new one, with a new idea or objective. They're all turned to the past. Some fifty, some a hundred years back.

There is a difference: in any future war in Bosnia there wouldn't be any partisans.

In the 'Oslobodjenje' club, I sat with two colleagues today, Mirko Sagolj and Mile Duvnjak. Mile is a Serb from Kupres, Mirko a Croat from Konjic. A routine Serbo-Croat discussion about Bosnia, its future and independence ensues. I tried to join in, you know, as a Muslim. I didn't succeed. Maybe because Mile and Mirko are old friends, and I to some extent a newcomer in the newsroom and in their friendship. Maybe, on the other hand, because the break-up of Yugoslavia is above all a Serbo-Croat dispute.

Where is the place of the Muslims, and how will they enter that bloody dialogue?

³⁴ Yugoslav People's Army general and the last Federal Minister of Defence of former Yugoslavia

³⁵ Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA)

³⁶ Croatian fascists in the Second World War

The body of Abdulah Kovacevic, the president of the Muslim Bosniac Organisation in Bijeljina, has been discovered. Some hunters found him in the mountains. It's being rumoured that he'd been thrown out of a helicopter.

7th January 1993

A burst from a machine-gun simply slaughtered a girl in Sedrenik.

Europe and the world are giving different slants on another round of negotiations in Geneva. In 'Oslobodjenje' I wrote that it is the continuation of ethnic cleansing, through other means and from other directions.

I listen to RFI³⁷ in the evening. That station has gained an audience here in the course of the war, the more educated people tune in almost without exception. They have an objective view of Bosnia, and they have good journalists. So, since I already have to eat bad food, when I'm making a wartime newspaper on eight pages of poster paper, when I have no electricity, I can at least listen to a good journalist. Tonight they are quoting some parisian paper which says that in the event of any sort of intervention, the big problem would be language. All the warring parties speak the same language. That is true, though it wouldn't be difficult to spot the difference. In Sarajevo, there's barely a hundred or so of our soldiers who actually have a uniform, while the *chetniks* are dressed like Hitler's army. They have helmets, and we not even a cap.

Today we broke the record set last fall in the complete interruption of the power supply for Sarajevo. We haven't had any electricity for thirty-one days already. Quite how we'd managed to publish our paper during that time, I think we'd find it difficult to explain ourselves. The main problem wasn't how and what to write about, but what to start the rotary press with. All this time I've been carrying my scripts with some dread that the article will remain in my hands, unpublished. I am not so much sorry for the article. I've been writing for thirty-something years and even I couldn't say how many 'headings' I have amassed (there are already several tens of wartime ones). But, I am afraid of us skipping one day when we've come this far. We are all living with that knot inside: how to come out. We borrow, buy, beg UNPROFOR, and all that is older and more important than the article. Our people who put together the newspaper, and the typography staff are exactly fifty six metres from the *chetnik* frontline. I didn't have the courage to go over there. Besides, I loath to see buildings I'd spent many a beautiful year in demolished, and 'Oslobodjenje' was one of those. I watched from Kosevsko Brdo when flames were devouring the building. I have seen other great fires and when I

³⁷ Radio France Internationale

pass by burnt-out high-rises I try not to look.

7th January 1994

Recently I've started suddenly switching off from listening, completely unexpectedly. Thus only after the third listening I registered Azra's story of the shell which hit below her sister Saida's house, I think just at the time when Cardinal Kuharic was giving mass there. It struck the foot of the hill and the force of the blast drove uphill so that it shattered Saida's windows, while tiny shreds of glass cut into the wallpaper. Emina left the room a few moments earlier.

We slept fully clothed last night, ready to make for the shelter. If memory serves me right, lots of gun and shellfire during the night is the *chetnik* way of marking holidays. Last night was the orthodox Christmas Eve.

I write the editorial and take it to Gordana Knezevic who'll be going to the newsroom.

We're drugged by death which is filling up the Sarajevo graveyards and by the desire for the paper to come out every day.

I'd barely managed to persuade the policeman to let me go at least as far as Gordana's house, as I'd feel really shabby submitting the piece over the phone to the colleagues at newsdesk who are the focal (fixed) point at which the newsroom has gone through its most difficult ordeals. Later I telephone the newsroom. A few younger colleagues are there. The older ones, it seems, value their life more.

I'm immersing into my books again. I open up '*Modern Serbian Poetry*', compiled on the eve of the war by Stevan Tontic, with the subtitle '*The Great Book of Modern Serbian Poetry from Kostic and Ilic until today*'. Somewhere past the first quarter of the book start the poets with whom I've been in direct or indirect contact. I'd listened to Dusan Matic and Desanka Maksimovic at literary evenings and platforms. I know so much about Zogovic that it feels as if we'd been friends, and I'd often meet up with Oskar Davico during the short time that he lived in Sarajevo. I've listened to Copic and Vasko Popa; Miodrag Zalica is a friend of mine, Dara Sekulic an acquaintance; Dusko Trifunovic a friend with whom I've had long conversations, the magnificent Branko Miljkovic I remember from my student days, from smoky lecture halls of the late sixties; Vladimir Nastic worked in 'Oslobodjenje' before the war, Branko Marceta is my friend from university (later hung himself), Vito Markovic, another friend from my year and a good friend; there's also an acquaintance from my youth Bozidar Zujica, and then poets and journalists from Sarajevo Slavko Santic and Veljo Milosevic, the brightest light of his generation Miso Danojlic, then Brana Petrovic Pajsije, my

acquaintance and bohemian; then the quiet Nenad Radanovic, the shy Dragan Kolundzija from Kozara, and then another student of world literature from Belgrade - Milan Komnenic, now a prominent *chetnik*, and after him an even more famous countryman of mine and *chetnik* from the very top, Gojko Djogo; the talented Kolja Micevic, the elusive Rajko Nogo with whom I've led hours-long political and literary discussions, then the lucid and sceptical Marko Vesovic... and immediately following Marko, Radovan Karadzic. I read his poem. Tontic probably included it so as not to offend SDS and the other two parties then in power. The poem is rather feeble, similar ones can be heard at any provincial high school literary evening. I read on - Vuk Krnjevic and Vladimir Srebrov. I got to know Krnjevic and we were getting closer, until we got to the stage of sincere discussion. Now we are distant once again, Vuk has turned *chetnik*, more for materialistic than ideological reasons, I believe. Srebrov tried to reconcile Serbs and Muslims and so now he's in prison in Ilidza. Neither the more liberal Serbs of a civic orientation nor the government, nor the Pen Club are concerned about him...whatever has he done to them?

If I've actually personally been acquainted with at least half of this anthology, how can I possibly, and I must, be surprised by what's happening? I browse through the book but it doesn't answer my question: What happened to the Serbs?

7th January 1995

The Orthodox Christmas. This year, the police curfew is abolished even for the orthodox Christmas. It wasn't so last year.

Everyone is present for the reception at the Presidency as the Serbs are counted on to turn up once again. Isn't it just a little bit too late? 'Never Again Together' - that is the title of the exceptional book of reports by Vlado Mrkic. Vlado is, I think, the best reporter of the post-Yugoslav wars.

I run into a man with whom it's not too late to socialise, Marko Vesovic. Vesovic has earned a bright reputation in this war, both because of what he has written and the way he has written it. A beautiful sentence, a precise observation.

The neighbour from across the street, an older woman whose name I don't even know, but we take care of each other well - I simply call her 'nan' - had a son in Germany working as a taxi driver who was killed in a car accident. Such deaths which deviate from the Sarajevan way of dying we experience differently, with surprise.

Jasna Fazlagic is telling Azra how she was speaking with her daughter Emina who is married in Turkey. Emina met her husband, Hakan, in Sarajevo while he

was working for some humanitarian organisation. A great guy.

The war brings us closer to those far-off and distances us from those close-by.

8th January 1992

I've written a rather good but pessimistic column. I'm discussing it with Miroslav Jankovic, the deputy editor-in-chief. Jankovic's objection is that I'm trying to achieve cheap effects by playing the apocalyptic card.

“Miro, I grew up in one of apocalypses (WW-I). You, who've had the luck to be born during the longest peace, you don't know what you have”.

Then Miro follows me to the club. There we find a large gathering, turning over economic subjects. Mile Duvnjak is right: if it goes on like this for much longer, even without war we'll end up getting 100 DM a month. The present chiefs of the post-Yugoslav states have a lower salary than what I was getting in the time of Ante Markovic³⁸, while Alija Izetbegovic's pay is currently at the level of the per capita income from the time when he came to power. In addition, Serbia won't even let us have the wheat we've already paid for. I'm advocating that we cease the salt deliveries. Most people look at me with surprise. However, I know that in order to achieve anything, Bosnia has always had to bare its teeth. I learnt that from Mikulic³⁹, Pozderac⁴⁰ and Bijedic⁴¹.

Milenko Jergovic, Ivo Komsic, Ivan Kordic, Ivan Lovrenovic and Mile Stojic⁴² are forwarding an open letter (public) to Franjo Tudjman: Don't partition Bosnia, Bosnia still exists. I ask Jankovic could a letter of this sort possibly happen to the Bosnian Serbs?

Nikola Koljevic⁴³ has gone to Zagreb for talks with president Tudjman.

In Mostar, a drunk army reservist crossed the Old Bridge⁴⁴ in an APC (Armoured Personnel Carrier), which is seen as sacrilege by the local people.

³⁸ The last Federal Prime Minister of former Yugoslavia

³⁹ Branko Mikulic, former federal Prime Minister in former Yugoslavia and one of the most powerful politicians in Bosnia, also former president of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia

⁴⁰ Hamdija Pozderac, Bosnian Communist Party official. Removed by Milosevic from his post as President of the Federal Committee for Constitutional Changes. Only after his removal was Milosevic able to take autonomy from Kosovo and Vojvodina in 1989. Died in suspicious circumstances one year later. Ethnic Muslim.

⁴¹ Dzemal Bijedic, former partisan, first Bosnian to be Federal Prime Minister in former Yugoslavia. Killed in a plane crash in late seventies. Ethnic Muslim.

⁴² Bosnian Croat writers and journalists who opposed the HDZ party, and were against the partition of Bosnia

⁴³ Bosnian Serb Party (SDS) official. Former professor of English literature at Sarajevo University. Committed suicide after the Bosnian war.

⁴⁴ 16th Century Ottoman stone bridge over the River Neretva, in Mostar. UNESCO World Heritage Site. destroyed by Croats in 1993.

8th January 1993

I found out that about a month ago my aunt Nazifa Niksic died while taking refuge in the mountains near Olovo. The *chetniks* attacked the village, set fire to it, and the villagers took to the mountains where the attackers wouldn't dare follow them even armed as they were.

Nazifa was born in 1906 and her whole life has been marked by wars. After the first one, they took the land away from the Baksics and in return gave us bonds which later couldn't be cashed in. Nazifa married Mustafa Niksic, a tradesman, and moved to Bosnia, so that in '41 she didn't find a *chetnik* knife at her throat (she escaped the *chetnik* slaughter). During the previous war she had a house in Sarajevo which was hit by an English bomb. Another English bomb killed one of her daughters. After the war she would only come to Sarajevo in the winter. She liked it better in the village. That's where this war found her.

She succumbed to sleep in refuge and the next day they found her dead. Uncle Mustafa died a long time ago.

Nazifa always kept her Herzegovian accent as if she'd only arrived yesterday from Ljubinje. When she would meet someone from down there, she was known to shed a tear.

8th January 1994

I've managed to get hold of a ten-litre canister of drinking water. I feel dirt on every part of my body, on every piece of my clothing, even more than I really am dirty.

Once again I pass the day in lethargy. I hear some two explosions coming from the direction of the Kralja Tomislava Street. I call my best man Pero Pilic. He's alive and well.

Later they tell me that my friend Tomo Sikic was killed. He was one of the first-generation technicians at RTV Sarajevo⁴⁵. His wife Marija, a Serb, was my daughter's first grade teacher. A good teacher and a pleasant woman.

Tomo was hit directly by a mortar shell, it blew him to pieces and they could only tell it was him by his wristwatch. He ended his life on the walls of the houses, on

⁴⁵ Radio-Television Sarajevo, the state broadcasting service.

the roofs. Annihilation. His journey to eternity lasted only a thousandth of a second.

There were five dead in the city today, even though there were fewer shells than usual and the police were limiting movement along the streets. However, that figure is not final. It's always the case that the ones talked about are only those who die on the spot, while the others are not mentioned, the ones who don't succumb to (are overcome by) their wounds until the next day, or the one after. They belong to the category of those who passed away.

Dzejlana Pecanin is telling me about the shell that changed her life:

- It happened on the 5th October 1992. That shell which I will remember the most, regardless of the fact that a thousands already fallen, isn't one of those which have endangered my own life. I remember ones like that too, the feeling of the proximity of death. However, those are all alike.

When the shell that I'm talking about hit, I was safe at home, drinking coffee with a friend. Unfortunately, at that moment my father was in the wrong place.

I knew that that shell would mean something to me as soon as it exploded, even though there were a lot of explosions that day. Someone who has never been amongst shells, someone who hasn't gone through what I have, will not believe that I recognised the shell whose shrapnel killed my father. It was as if my heart had stopped and something contracted inside of me.

think that the worst shell for a person cannot ever be the one that kills him, because in that moment he is dead. In any case, the dead cannot say which shell was the worst for them. I think that the shells that leave the biggest marks on people are the ones that kill someone close, a relation or a friend. Many mothers will say that their most terrible shells were the ones they didn't even hear or feel, but which somewhere, maybe even 20 kilometres away, killed their son.

The only thing that was important to me after that, which made it easier, was when I heard that my father was killed on the spot and wasn't torn to pieces like many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He remained in one piece, and later they even told us that when they drove him to the emergency room the doctor kept pouring water on him thinking that he had only passed out. There was very little blood but he was already dead.

Actually, I'd managed to convince myself that my father was killed on the spot, even though some people later told me some nasty things which I hid from my mother, and which I later convinced myself were untrue. Naturally, I dare not think that there could be an even worse shell or at least one as bad as that.

8th January 1995

Throughout the war, running away from shells, from the cold, from memories, from habits which have become anachronistic. I've been moving things around the flat, preserving only in the living room some form that resembles the peacetime one, while creating a chaotic warehouse of paper everywhere else.

Today I am searching for the first volume of Churchill's memoirs amongst the piles of books, and I can't recall exactly what he wrote about Hitler. Two of my books on fascism are on loan to others, one is in the apartment where Gordana Knezevic used to live, while the other is lost forever as I can't even remember whom I gave it to. I stumble upon my old notes, on international trade and the prices of raw materials, from two-three years before the war.

Did that time of sweet naïveté really exist or is it a mirage for us trapped in the siege?

9th January 1992

The "Republika Srpska"⁴⁶ has been proclaimed. The people behind that proclamation are of the type that such an act was only to be expected from them: Milorad Ekmecic, for example, the originator of Serb chauvinism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a typical example of a man who achieves extraordinary results in the scientific substantiation of a theory which he'd used as a starting point and which he'd never bothered to re-examine. But also involved in that proclamation is one Nenad Kecmanovic, as long ago as yesterday an aggressive civic liberal and leader of the Reformists (Reform Party)⁴⁷.

There too are Radovan Karadzic and Momcilo Krajisnik, the heroes of the Pale robbery affair, an affair that was cut short after the election by a withdrawal of all charges, which was also done for Fikret Abdic⁴⁸. My acquaintance Dr. Dragan Kalinic is among them as well, a man who a few months ago was trying to convince me that the SDA⁴⁹ is the only real, natural ally of the Reformists, because they stand for an independent Bosnia, while I was telling him that there are no natural alliances in politics.

⁴⁶ Territory declared by the SDS (Serb Democratic Party) leadership as a separate entity within Bosnia and controlled by the Yugoslav Army.

⁴⁷ Pro-Bosnian unity party

⁴⁸ Bosnian businessman. Former manager of 'Agrokompleks', a food processing company involved in the biggest fraud trial in the 1980s, in Yugoslavia. Abdic was accused of undermining the monetary system of the country.

⁴⁹ Party of Democratic Action. Representing the Muslims in Bosnia.

Also there are some rather raw chauvinists, such as Vojo Maksimovic or Velibor Ostojic. Then some who were until very recently my party comrades, and even some who vehemently insisted that I be punished when I wanted to interview Mahmut Bakali⁵⁰ for 'Svijet' magazine. They insisted upon it in the name of brotherhood and unity, and in the name of Bosnia and Herzegovina's status within Yugoslavia.

So, some Serb assembly, which is not founded upon political authority or the disposition of the majority of Serbs that I know, today says that a united Bosnia no longer exists.

“The moment has come for the Serb people in the Balkans to organise globally”...

The famous Aleksa Buha⁵¹:

“When the Muslims and Croats get their paper sovereignty... it's up to them how they'll make it a reality”.

The assembly was held, one hears from reliable Serb sources, after Nikola Koljevic had agreed on the main points with Franjo Tudjman, the Croatian president.

The present autonomous districts and regions—so they say in the assembly—and likewise other ethnically Serb areas, those where Serbs are a majority as well as the ones where they aren't because of the genocide committed during the Second World War, are considered Serb, regardless of the outcome of the possible requests for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

9th January 1993

Trees are being chopped down within the city without mercy or pause. Some do it because they have to, some, all of them men in uniform, so that they could sell the firewood. A cubic metre goes for 400 DM, and for a trunk in reasonably good shape you can get a decent VW Golf. Tires are being burnt as well; the stench and the thick smoke are everywhere.

Thus Sarajevo is enveloped in a shroud.

Vice-president Hakija Turajlic was killed near the airport. The *chetniks* stopped the UN armoured vehicle and shot him in front of the UNPROFOR soldiers who were his escort. Turajlic was a man who was putting the state in order. Many

⁵⁰ The most prominent Albanian politician on the Yugoslav federal stage. Ejected from the Communist party after the death of President Tito in 1980.

⁵¹ Former Philosophy professor at Sarajevo University who joined the leadership of the SDS (Serb Democratic Party) before the war.

disliked him precisely because of that. But the man immediately responsible for his death was a reputable man among journalists who are familiar with the state of affairs within the UNPROFOR. French colonel Sartre hadn't judged correctly just how far the *chetniks* were prepared to go. My cousin, the father of little Emina, Mensur Causevic, was in the second armoured vehicle. Late that night we found out that he was alive and well and that he was on his way.

Little Amar, Mensur's son says to his grandma:

“Grandma, I would like to die so that I can go to that paradise of yours - they've got something to eat there.”

9th January 1994

I'm at home all day. It's cold. I went out for a walk in front of the house as I'm sick of enclosed spaces, but everything is frighteningly empty. Shells are fizzing up above; they're going in the direction of Zuc⁵², one after the other, without pause. They're going to kill all our children there.

I remember that I have four litres of paint thinner in the garage, so I call my friend Mustafa Cemalovic-Cakan from the nearby unit as I know they haven't any gasoline: “Cakane, send someone over here!”

It'll come in handy for the transport of food to Zuc. When it's taken on foot, the fighters get it cold, nearly frozen. Or they might need it for the transfer of the wounded from Zuc.

I was with the army for ten months, alongside my obligations to the newsroom. I was working on matters of propaganda in the 7th Highland Brigade, and I didn't achieve anything significant. I am too much of an individualist for working in one giant mechanism. I am not sure what sort of an impact I would have had on the frontline, assuming that I even survived in the trenches at minus 15C degrees, not to mention the shells and fear in general. This is the bill for three decades of endeavours as journalist, bar-fly and a smoker. I don't even know if I am fit for the pen any longer.

I'm back on the phone, calling Nedžad Ibrisimovic. I like to have a talk with him from time to time, but on this occasion my excuse is an attempt to get him to write for ‘Nedjelja’⁵³.

⁵² A hill near Sarajevo where fierce battles raged for three years between the Yugoslav Army and their Bosnian Serb allies on one side and the defenders of Sarajevo, the BH Army, made up of all citizens of the city, Muslims, Serbs and Croats on the other.

⁵³ A Sunday magazine supplement to ‘Oslobodjenje’.

Whenever I am speaking with Nedžad I always think about that phenomenon that is Dobrinja. That is a part of town which has the strong army base Lukavica to one side and on the other the well fortified *chetnik* stronghold Nedjarici, and then the hills which are crawling with *chetnik* artillery and tanks, and yet in spite of all this has managed to defend itself. And its defence was begun with less than thirty guns, stacked against such might. There has always been a lot more order and sincerity over there than in this part of the city.

I remember one of the heroes, a psychologist from RTS, Adnan Tetaric. In the hardest days, he instilled fear into *chetnik* lines via the waves of the local radio. Once he thought up a story about mouse fever which had supposedly been found out in Dobrinja, but will certainly spread on other sides, wherever there is uncollected garbage. A real panic ensued among the *chetniks* in Lukavica, but it caught on in Sarajevo as well, and then some idiot publicly denied the story. Later he started the rumour that Dobrinja had acquired some 'cat's eyes' night-vision binoculars which survey the terrain and report any sort of movement to the centre. The *chetniks* didn't dare move across open spaces which the Dobrinja defenders had nothing to defend with. In their advance into the Aerodrom suburb⁵⁴ the *chetniks* caught Tetaric and killed him.

My cousin Nafa, the daughter of aunt Nazifa, used to live in the Aerodrom suburb and survived the assault. She told me about her neighbour, a gypsy, who went to face a tank with a pistol in his hand and started firing until they mowed him down with a machinegun.

Nedžad is an important personality in Dobrinja, with a pen and a gun he built up the morale of the defenders. That is one of the reasons why he is dear to me. But he was dear to me before that.

In the evening, nervous again, I go outside for a smoke.

A lot of fire in the twilight. I cannot see Sarajevo. It's nothing but a corpse of a city in a ravine.

I recall how once these streets would be teeming with life, or am I only imagining that I remember.

⁵⁴ A residential area of Sarajevo near the city's airport.

9th January 1995

There is on average one suicide a day in Sarajevo, says Vlado Raguz, the director of 'Pokop'⁵⁵.

10th January 1992

I run into colleague Mehmed Husic in front of café *Park*. He lives in Dobrinja, we see each other on a daily basis in Oslobodjenje, but a meeting in town is something altogether different.

We go for a drink. Husic talks about his last vacation, about the return from the seaside from the family home in Podace; it was for the 29th November⁵⁶ holiday. In some other times that might even have been forgotten, but trips are rare, and since last September when Herzegovina was flooded with reservists, people have been going to the coast less often.

Spending time with his dad, Mehmed's son Omar always listened to the HRT⁵⁷ news in Podace. Everyone knows how they begin. On the way back, sometime after going past Mostar Mehmed switched to Radio Sarajevo. One news item, and then another, and then Omar asks:

"Daddy, what is Mr. President doing today?"

In a news stand in Ciglane I come upon a brochure titled *"BH Muslims facing a fateful examination"*. The author is Midhat Muradbegovic, and the publisher, 'Politika'⁵⁸.

"BH Muslims are facing a historical responsibility for their own national survival in the agreements about the new arrangement of Yugoslavia. With the acceptance of the exit of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the federation, the Bosnian Muslims are surely jeopardising the survival of their national name and body, because such an orientation creates the possibility of the Bosnian Muslims turning into "Islamicised Croats" or a "Croatian Islamic populace". Only within a federal Bosnia and Herzegovina and within a federal Yugoslavia can the B-H Muslims be as they already are a constitutional people with equal rights, sure of their national survival and their national future."

⁵⁵ A burial company (there are no funeral homes in Bosnia)

⁵⁶ The most important National Holiday in former Yugoslavia, marking the birth of Tito's Yugoslavia in the northern Bosnian town of Jajce, on 29th November 1943.

⁵⁷ Croatian state television

⁵⁸ The main Belgrade-based Serbian daily newspaper

The fifty pages of this brochure is more a settling of accounts with Tudjman from the point of view of 'Politika's' politics rather than a serious discussion of the fateful crossroads at which Bosnia and the Muslims find themselves. There's not a word about the *chetniks*, about the partition of Bosnia, the SAOs⁵⁹ and everything else that is going on.

However, the author also does mention some indisputable facts. For example, Tudjman's assertion that Croatia needs to have a hundred thousand square kilometres, which is approximately the sum of the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the Sarajevo Muslims, meanwhile, a saying that's making the rounds goes as follows: "If you want to know what the Serbs are like, ask the Croats, and if you want to hear what the Croats are like, ask the Serbs."

Muradbegovic also makes use of the opportunity to take a swipe at the Sarajevo media for using the term "antibureaucratic revolution" for Milosevic's rise in 1987 and because they "slandered the leadership of the Republic of Serbia as supposedly nationalistic, Stalinist, unitaristic and hegemonistic and as the main source of danger for the so-called AVNOJ, Tito's Yugoslavia."

And what is it that Zika Minovic and Midhat Muradbegovic are promising?

"Nearly 40% of the B-H population are Serbs and they occupy 64% of its area. The Serb people cannot accept a confederate solution, because that way they would be split up among several independent states and would end up in the role of a national minority... It can be safely expected that the Serbs in Bosnia, as one of the three sovereign peoples, would use their right for self-determination and raise the question of their secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the Bosnian Croats choose to exercise that same right, what will remain of the independent state of Bosnia and what is then the position of the Muslims?"

10th January 1993

Today I'm writing the diary with a fountain pen - the last ballpoint has ceased leaving a mark. I have a bottle of ink, but I'd already forgotten how to use a fountain pen, and it has dried up as well. The hands are getting dirty, and there's no water. Still, the handwriting is somewhat more legible, a little old-fashioned; each letter has to be realised individually. The words seem somehow more serious, more responsible, than yesterday's.

It's cold. I'm making the rounds of the windows around the flat and checking the

⁵⁹ Self-proclaimed Serb autonomous districts within Bosnia, immediately before the war.

plastic sheets that have replaced the glass panes. Around noon a shell hits the terrace railing on the neighbouring building. Chunks of concrete scattered about and two larger pieces shattered the window in the dining room. It broke, splintering the glass pane which I'd managed to save for this winter as back up, and fitted it in only ten days ago so that I could have more light and conserve more heat. Fortunately, I have enough sheets.

I run into a friend who's been in the army since the first days of the resistance. He went on his own, he didn't belong to any organisation or party. He was simply defending his home, street, city and country. I ask him how he is.

"I'm hungry Hamza, I'm chronically hungry. If I only could go somewhere for four days so that I could eat a decent lunch with a salad."

He's suffering from heavy bronchitis but he never misses his shift on the positions near Poljine. We're contemporaries, but while he's got ankle-high sneakers on his feet. I'm wearing winter shoes and I feel ashamed for that.

10th January 1994

In the newsroom I'm working on the manuscripts for the new issue of 'Nedjelja'. It's not going well. I had the intention of putting together a review of human destinies in the war. Most of my colleagues, however, are offering, and some even handing in, commentaries. I don't think that the readers are so eager to read commentaries, nor that we have too many people who are capable of writing them.

This whole generation still bears the mark of Stalinist journalism according to which journalists, just like writers, are the "engineers of human souls", some sort of media sermonisers. The younger ones have seen that some of their older colleagues who devote themselves to such things have gained respectability, so they've all hurtled themselves into commentary. Now I have a problem of creating a review where human destinies would be recorded neatly and in writing. Everyone who lives in Sarajevo has a story to tell worthy of a news report, as this is an heinous tragedy which lasts. There is so much death and misery that it has become an everyday occurrence. Tomorrow it might well be forgotten what life was like here, if one day the siege is broken.

Looking for a way to authentic stories, I assigned one younger colleague of mine, Jasmina K., to have a talk with Dr. Javoric about the work of the team that went to Mostar to help in the local hospital.

The girl brought back a nice story, along with the request from the doctor that

every word he said be printed, especially the passage where he recounts how the commander of the Mostar BH Army Corps made him a present of a canister of *lozovaca*⁶⁰ on his departure, which he managed to get to Sarajevo in spite of all the obstacles, and how upon entering the city, the military police promptly poured it out. Naturally, I print the whole story. In the press, at layout, precisely that passage is somehow lost. In addition, the young colleague turns the orthopaedic doctor into a paediatrician and the whole effort to come out with a juicy issue falls apart. The doubt also remains: how is it that at layout it was that particular passage that got lost? After 1992 I am obliged to suspect everything and everyone.

UN General Cot has been replaced; it seems he'd been too friendly and sincere.

10th January 1995

I'm talking with Kerim Lucarevic—also known as Doctor—one of the legends of the defence of Sarajevo from the spring of 1992. He's a strong personality, not aggressive or importunate in conversation, because he has sufficient self-confidence, even though he's long been out of favour politically.

We were talking about a subject which I will probably focus on in my next book: about the battle for Sarajevo. That is if I ever finish this one and I'm still alive and well by then.

He reminds me of the problems that I've faced already: victories have many fathers but defeats are orphans.

“Nobody will tell you anything about Igman⁶¹ or the loss of Trnovo⁶².”

11th January 1992

The strategy for the breaking-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single unit and the efforts to partition it between Belgrade and Zagreb, an act with which both centres would create the impression in front of their people that they had been fighting a winning war, is based on its federalisation, in order that the Yugoslav model for the “deconstruction of the federation” might subsequently be applied.

⁶⁰ Grape brandy; grappa

⁶¹ Igman is one of the mountains surrounding Sarajevo. For the majority of the war it had been in the hands of the Bosnian BH Army, but taken in an offensive by the Yugoslav Army, though later reoccupied by the Bosnians.

⁶² A village on the road to Igman.

The Assembly of the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina was constituted in October as the “highest representative and legislative organ of the Serb nation in B-H.”

A characteristic statement from the founding document reads: “Serb representatives are continuing with their work in the councils and working bodies of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina into which they were elected, apart from in the cases where it is judged that the acts of the assembly councils which are being debated and adopted are jeopardising the equality and the national interest of the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

One should add to this the “Serb Autonomous Districts”, where in reality power has been reduced to one-national, Serb government. One should also add the situation in western Herzegovina, which is almost half annexed into the tissue of the republic of Croatia. And to all this should be added the fundamental statement from the insufficiently carefully read findings of the Badenter Commission⁶³:

“The commission considers that the answer to the question should be based upon the principles of public international law, which serve to define the conditions under which a state can be constituted; that in this respect the existence or the abolition of the state is a question of facts; that the recognition on the part of other states is of purely declarative nature; That the state is jointly defined as a community which incorporates the territory and the populace subject to organised political authority; that such a state is characterised as sovereign.”

11th January 1993

It’s cold and dark, the hallways and the flat seem even darker because of the cold. Morning coffee is modest, pale. We’re drinking it with neighbour Hamo: he’s a refugee, banished from the Aerordom suburb.

He lives on the second floor, in a flat vacated this summer by Jagoda Vukadin - she left for Split while it was still possible to leave the city with the help of the HVO. I’ve learnt one thing from Hamo that is significant for the war: a scarf is a priceless item of clothing. One has to tie a woollen scarf around the neck, in a knot. It’s as good as a decent sweater. It protects the neck and the chest.

I’m all out of tobacco this morning, so I tried smoking walnut leaves but it gave me a headache. That’s some sort of a drug, and it’s a real wonder that the youth aren't getting high in this way as well.

⁶³ An EU commission set up in 1991 to determine the eligibility of each of the emerging states in Former Yugoslavia for international recognition as independent countries.

When we were done with the coffee, some gypsy woman knocks on the door. She's begging. At first I was about to laugh out of anguish, but somehow I managed to control myself. That's her circumstantial reflex—she's hungry so she goes out to beg. That's how she solved the problem of nourishment in peacetime, so she's trying to solve it in the same way in war. We, who've learnt to solve the problem of nourishment through work, have approximately the same chances of survival as this woman of uncertain age, shrivelled skin, wrapped in a blanket, a thick scarf around her neck, wearing rubber boots which are slippery on the ice and which don't prevent the feet from freezing.

I haven't anything to give her. Everything I have in the house we could easily finish off by tomorrow afternoon. I take a little of a old bread that's a war reserve for the darkest days: the remains of bread collected by leaving aside a slice or two every day.

The woman looks at those couple of slices on my sooty palm: she was expecting that we in the brick houses somehow still live better, and can give more. She then moves on to the next door.

I'm going to work with neighbour Ferid, who works in the hospital. He's telling me how the cats have begun to drag out from hospital containers body parts amputated during operations.

11th January 1994

When the tobacco factory ran out of paper for packaging cigarettes, they first started using old books, which provoked a rather sanctimonious reaction from the Sarajevan cultural crowd. Then they started using hospital records. I ended up with a packet of cigarettes wrapped inside the death certificate of some boy from Tuzla who died as a hydrocephalous. Another packet, the death certificate of a diabetic. I offer it to Asim Dortbudzuk; his sugar levels are slightly high.

11th January 1995

I dedicated my column today to the Bosnia-Chechnya comparison. "The volume (amount) of expended means of extermination in Chechnya is gradually but surely approaching the destructive level of the bomb which, in August '45, was dropped on Hiroshima, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina it's been long surpassed, and the destruction and number of victims is also higher... Because of everything that is going on in the Caucasuses, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and what has happened in

Rwanda and Somalia, wars will be rather common and more frequent. They will be fought with a hitherto unprecedented level of cruelty, because experience shows that cruelty is the pinnacle of the military technology of our century.”

Davorin Popovic⁶⁴, on being asked the question, which shell he remembers the most, answers:

- "I best remember the shell that hit just around this past New Year's Eve, on the first of January at precisely 12:05 in front of the entrance to my house. I'd left the house an hour earlier. When it struck, I was across the street, in the FIS⁶⁵ bar and from there I actually witnessed the carnage. I also remember the shell that killed the sister of Senad Hadjifejzovic⁶⁶. The shell hit the house next to mine and the shrapnel hurt Senad's sister who was on the opposite side of the street,

In fact, every shell wounded me a little. The ones that were killing the people as well as the ones that were killing Sarajevo. One that hit *Vijecnica* (The National Library), the one hitting Post Office; these cannot be built twice, much like a man cannot be born twice."

The little electricity that gets to Sarajevo is distributed in a way that is a reflection of the state of things in the city. There's a priority list - public and private. Near its top end, it's quite logical, but as one goes further down, there is less and less logic, more and more ingenuity.

The first to hook on to the institutions and flats of esteemed citizens who've found themselves on the priority list is the first neighbour, then the next, and then his cousin who lives three houses further down and is able to get the wire through, and so on. The people from the 'Elektrodistribucija'⁶⁷ walk around with penknives cutting up these wires, which later appear for sale on the market. I heard that they caught a man who was stealing electricity from some foreign embassy, and it almost became a big security issue until it was established that he wasn't a terrorist but simply a man who wanted, like everyone else, to watch television.

Haris Silajdzic⁶⁸ refused to get electricity through the priority list.

⁶⁴ Vocalist for one of the most popular Sarajevo rock-groups, 'Indexi', a local answer to sixties Beatlemania. Spent the entire war in Sarajevo.

⁶⁵ Sports centre and cafe in downtown Sarajevo. Fifty metres away from the Bosnian Presidency.

⁶⁶ Popular TV Sarajevo anchorman.

⁶⁷ Communal electrical services

⁶⁸ Bosnian Foreign and later Prime Minister during the war.

12th January 1992

I met Avdo Hebib⁶⁹ in Titova Street today.

It's been six months already since the weapons convoy which had been organised by the SDS Member of Parliament Dusan Kojic was stopped in Bileca⁷⁰. Kojic didn't lose the immunity guaranteed him as an MP. Transports of weapons are still moving across Bosnia. Sarajevo has bristled up and won't let the weapons pass through the city, as many people believe that as soon as tomorrow they could be turned in our direction.

At the same time the government of the republic is obliged to compromise. In late November, in Bistrik⁷¹, people blocked a truck carrying rockets. The most difficult role in the whole matter was played by the police, and its chief, Avdo Hebib, was replaced immediately afterwards. This was presented by Izetbegovic as a 'roccade (castling'⁷²,) while also taking the opportunity to tell Hebib that he wasn't energetic enough to be at the head of an army of 20, 000 people - that is what the units of BH MUP⁷³ number in total. But in reality it was a concession to the Yugoslav Army, a kind of compromise. The Bistrik case was one of the most volatile situations in all the transports of weapons so far, an indication that the atmosphere in the outskirts of Sarajevo is far more charged than in the comfortable, optimistically disposed and cosmopolitan centre of the city.

12th January 1993

In the cold I am reading Rabindranath Tagore's political essay, "Nationalism". On the last day of the last century, Tagore wrote the "The sunset of the century":

"The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its

⁶⁹ Bosnian Minister of Internal Affairs.

⁷⁰ Town in eastern Herzegovina

⁷¹ A quarter of Sarajevo close to the old town. The site of a Yugoslav Army barracks and the HQ of its Sarajevo Corps

⁷² The author implies an inconsequential change in the Ministry of the Interior

⁷³ Bosnian Police Forces

*drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the
clash of steel and the howling verses of
vengeance.*

*The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a
violence of fury from its own shameless
feeding.*

For it has made the world its food...”

(Macmillan, New York, September 1917)

12th January 1994

The economic calculation in knocking on Sarajevo’s door. People are having to think how much is cost of electricity, gas, the streetcar. The poverty remains the same, but now one has to calculate precisely its actual extent. Amidst this hunger it should be considered whether, for example, humanitarian aid should also be received by the owners of upscale restaurants where even fresh trout is served—they certainly didn’t get it from the Miljacka River—and likewise the patrons of those restaurants, some of whom are not receiving the assistance from the distribution centre, but haven’t asked to be taken off the list either. The value of Bosnian product is less than a dollar *per capita* daily.

The value of shells *per capita* here in Sarajevo is far, far higher. Every bullet from small arms costs just slightly under a dollar - one German Mark, while a shell of larger calibre, with cost of transportation to the weapon site, often amounts to the yearly income of an average inhabitant of this country.

Mehmed Pajevic remembers one of the shells that hit the 'Oslobodjenje' building:

- "I saw Mirko Sagolj and Adil Hajric standing next to a column in the restaurant and talking about something so I started walking towards them, when a shell hit the other part of 'Bijeli Restoran', which is facing the *chetnik* lines. Everything was hurled towards us, all the furniture, the partitions, but we stayed alive.

The second explosion that I will never forget was in the Alipasino Polje⁷⁴. I was

⁷⁴ A newer suburb of Sarajevo, made up of modern high-rise apartment buildings

in the car with Vlado Mrkic⁷⁵, and we pulled over to settle some business. I heard the whistle; we threw ourselves on the ground and heard the explosion in the vicinity. The shell hit on the other side of the building, in front of the news stand. It killed four men, and they were picking up pieces of them all the way up to the third floor."

Vlado Staka remembers the shell that fell in the vicinity of his flat.

- "I know that it happened in 1992, either August or September I'm not sure which exactly. Dubravka was nearing the end of her pregnancy. There wasn't any electricity or gas. We were chopping up the furniture to feed the fire. Using an old washing pot and a barbecue grill, my father-in-law made me a burner and Dubravka was making doughnuts on the balcony. She was sweating and toiling and I helped as much as I could. It was quiet and one could hear children outside of the building.

We heard the whistle of the shell and we both jumped away from where we were. I was at the door of the balcony, handing Dubravka the salt shaker. Instinctively I jumped back into the house. Later I felt guilty for not jumping towards my wife, to protect her: I've dreamt that scene many times, always dreaming that I am throwing myself to protect Dubravka.

However, when I found myself next to the wall, she was already there, meaning that she'd been faster than me and had squeezed past without me noticing. I suppose that is motherly care for the child. We were next to the wall already when the shell exploded on the other side of the building. I rushed to the window and Dubravka shouted - 'don't, the second one is coming now.' I threw myself on the floor. At that moment I remember looking between the ribs of the radiator thinking that it needs cleaning.

The second shell never came. We heard screams and I looked through the window anyway and saw people gathering around someone.

Our neighbour's daughter Amra was lying on the pavement and the shell had hit the treetop just above her, splitting the tree in half.

I saw them carrying her and immediately thought that she was dead. Fortunately she was merely in a state of shock, deafened by the explosion, while a piece of shrapnel had grazed her left hand slightly.

When the dust from the explosion settled, there wasn't a trace of the wood left. People had rushed out of their houses and taken it away as firewood. At the time it was still forbidden to chop down trees in the parks.

⁷⁵ Senior 'Oslobodjenje' reporter – a Serb who opposed the Serb attack on the city

12th January 1995

I've done a lot of writing in the past few days, always switching spasmodically between the increasingly relevant social topics, and national ones which are forcing themselves from above and below. Listening to stories from Grbavica, sad stories, I don't have the answer to the question: will people ever again live together in Bosnia? During my life cycle, certainly not. However, that is not so much a question of principles, but an existential one: if they continue with the partitions eventually nothing will be produced here. There was, first of all, Yugoslavia, not an overly big country for today's economic demands. Then Bosnia remained, and if even the Bosnian economy is divided into three national ones - that leads only to hopeless poverty which will give rise to new isolation and a primitive Balkan conservatism which won't be ready to accept new technology and especially not new habits.

13th January 1992

Both, the TV news from RTV Sarajevo and Yutel⁷⁶ are trying to strengthen resistance to the war while at the same time trying not to create panic. We in 'Oslobodjenje' are trying to place ourselves somewhere in between. It is to the great credit of Kemal Kurspahic that he opened up the opportunities for investigative journalism in time. If it weren't for the commentaries and investigative articles, if the newspaper were based solely on reporting, the readers would be abandoned to some extremely confusing interpretations of life which originate from the government and the Assembly.

In the government, and in the Assembly, at party conventions and during the "Government-opposition" meeting the possibility of war was being openly discussed. The most prominent among the speakers on the subject, above all, are the people from the SDS leadership. On the republican level they are limiting themselves to generalised threats, but from what our correspondents are sending us, especially the Muslims among them, points to the fact that things are being handled in a far more particular manner down there. In Ilijas they are counting the guns, Romanija is under arms, one shouldn't turn off the main road when going through there.

⁷⁶ A new TV broadcasting station backed by the last Federal Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic, who supported economic reforms and a peaceful transition to a market economy

13th January 1993

There's a report on the radio that cases of cannibalism have been recorded in besieged Zepa. That might be true, or it might not, but one thing that is certain is that there's terrible hunger up there. There's hunger here too, I wouldn't have believed that one could get through the day with so little food. Azra tried her best to give the kitchen some identity. She must give up now. One type of mash replaces another.

Many people don't have salt. In the previous war salt was approximately equal in value to gold. That's an additional fear - I still recall unsalted cornbread. Unsalted food is worse than hunger because it induces vomiting.

I met Afan Ramic⁷⁷. We talked about the exhibition he's currently preparing. His son Damjan was killed in Otes and there are people who consider that it's not good for a father after the death of his only son to continue doing his job with as much vigour as Afan does.

I knew Damjan when he was a little boy, when his mother Ljiljana Pejcinovic would bring him to the TV broadcasting centre always immaculately dressed, and I would give him a pile of carbon paper to play with. Now I am sorry. Actually, I know that I am sorry because Damjan was killed, and that game with the carbon paper was a shared pleasure. For me, so that I could get closer to the boy, and for him, so that I could be his protector in that forbidden game.

Damjan was a fighter. Afan's exhibition is a memorial to his son. The father must prove that at least he is alive, he must do it defiantly, and that's exactly what Afan will do.

The *chetniks* were battering the buildings in Kosevo with a tank-fire. I passed through there this afternoon but I didn't notice anything, one doesn't pay attention to fresh traces of shelling. However, I did notice two partially burnt pieces of wood in the garbage container, wrapped them in a newspaper which was in my pocket and joyfully went on my way back home. My habit of looking in the garbage and stopping beside refuse containers is becoming settled. Looking in the containers, I noticed that in one house in Ciglane suburb, bottles of 'Martel' are being consumed, and I've seen that they're still throwing away books and winter coats. It's enough to see in the container a can of food of the type which doesn't come as part of the humanitarian aid to know that you are in front of the house of a man who's received a parcel or had managed to leave the siege as a part of some delegation or using the UNPROFOR press-pass.

⁷⁷ A prominent Sarajevo painter

13th January 1994

Last night, during a lull in the shelling, I went to see Gordana Knezevic, who was entertaining two British journalists. Such encounters are interesting, but it is tantamount to professional humiliation when a foreigner is telling Hamza Baksic what's happening in his own country and in his city, on the other side of the Miljacka River. I cannot leave; I can't go through the tunnel with my bronchitis. I can, with my press-pass, go to Italy or Denmark, but I can't move around Bosnia. I, who used to know what sort of food was being served in every Bosnian hotel and restaurant, who as a TV reporter travelled many tens of thousands of kilometres across Bosnia, live in a city where in 2 minutes, five at the most, one can arrive to the line of separation.

Well, here are notes from my survey about the shelling which my colleagues and friends remember the most:

Mirko Sagolj is the editor of the foreign affairs section, one of those who've spent a lot of time at the newsdesk of the paper where 'Oslobodjenje' was saved so many times.

"I most remember the shell which struck right under my feet, on the balcony, in September 1993. My house faces the Zuc hill, which was liberated at the time and we thought that it was for good and that the *chetnik* artillery had been removed. However, a *chetnik* gun appeared near the Zivkovici cemetery, near Smiljevici, after the *chetniks* had retaken a part of the liberated territories. One day I notice it's blazing from that direction again and I tell my wife that they're shooting towards us. I dragged her by the hand from the balcony and just as we had gone behind a wall in the hallway, the shell hit the balcony."

Nagorka Idrizovic's⁷⁸ flat was also hit by the *chetniks*.

- "I was saved by the dog. I went into the kitchen to make the morning coffee when suddenly he jumped up and started barking and scratching on the door, wanting to go out. Finally, I open the door and see a neighbour coming up the stairs from below. The bitch likes that man and I'd thought that she had heard him and was happy. While I was saying hello to him we heard the blast of the shell. My neighbour observed that this this was somewhere close-by. I turned around and saw dust and smoke coming out of my bedroom. Sure it was close! The entire fridge was riddled with shrapnel, and if I'd stayed by the coffee-pot, It would have cut me. That was last year in August."

⁷⁸ 'Oslobodjenje' journalist

Muhamed Dzemic⁷⁹ lived with his family first in Dobrinja and then near Skenderija.

- “I clearly remember the shell which wounded my son, even though I wasn’t there when it hit. One of those 120 mm ones struck right in front of the entrance. It was October 1992. Vesna was in front of the building baking bread, when the first shell hit somewhere near. Vedran ran to see what had happened. Then the second one hit and killed two people in the doorway. He started running back up the stairs, reached the landing and then still tried to see where the last shell hit. Then another one hit. He was leaning over the railing which was shattered by the shrapnel while grazing his head. The wall behind him was full of holes, some as large as a fist.

On the 27th of July 1992 I was remained alone in our flat in Dobrinja as the family had gone to Skenderija. While they’d still been there we slept in the bathroom and the hallway. Vesna in the hallway, and we used to put the children in the bathroom, head to head, because it seemed to me they were safest there. That day, the 27th July, a tank shell went through two flats, flew into my flat, passed through the heater, through the pantry and the fridge and then into the bathroom where we sheltered the children. There it finally came to rest inside the washing machine. Had Vesna not gone to town with the children for a birthday party, it would have felled all four of us.

I remember another, which wounded me. I was in the Dobrinja press-centre and to get to the place where dinner was being distributed, we had to cross a clearing. You wait all day for dinner and then when the time comes, you lose your appetite. That evening we decided to run, but you never know if there is any good in running as you might just be running toward a shell. It exploded nearby. Fortunately it only wounded me in the arm”.

13th January 1995

The snow is falling virtually incessantly. The night before last we had freezing rain, yesterday it cleared up a little at first and then snow again, and this morning—snow.

Michael Rose is holding his farewell press conference in the Kamerni Teatar⁸⁰. In the course of the year Rose has become the symbol of our misunderstandings with the West and our misunderstandings with ourselves. He was received with hope. He was the victor from the Falklands, a capable officer. His formal immediate

⁷⁹ ‘Oslobodjenje’ news desk editor

⁸⁰ Chamber Theatre. Famous for hosting the Experimental theatre festival.

subordinate, general Laprelle was formerly commander of the Foreign Legion. Staff changes had the look of a more energetic approach by UNPROFOR. Nothing happened, and Rose was even left with the shadow of having collaborated with Karadzic hanging over him.

We had gas again in the afternoon, in a very cold house : it' is about 10C degrees anywhere.

I'm writing a commentary for 'Oslobodjenje', to be published next week—after thirty or so months of war, Bosnia and Herzegovina has dropped from \$ 2000 annual income *per capita* to \$350, the level of Pakistan, and behind Kenya, Togo, Haiti and Ghana. That is assuming that the war comes to an end.

14th January 1992

Orthodox New Year's Eve; that's the official name for it. All of us privately say Serbian New Year's Eve. Once, a long time ago, when I had just returned from a trip to Ethiopia, a friend of mine, a French teacher called Milena, while I was telling her about the religious composition of the population of that country, interrupted my story of the trip with the interjection: "Well I didn't know that the Ethiopians were Serbs too".

It's being vehemently celebrated this year, Orthodoxy and Serbness have blended together to an equal extent to which Catholicism and Croatness are becoming one. That distinction between faith and nation never really became clear in this part of this world.

Once, long ago, at a reception in the Kremlin, when Tito was visiting Brezhnev, I started a discussion with one of their high officials about whether the Muslims are a nation or not. The Russians didn't recognise us as a people as they feared the Yugoslav precedent concerning the release of national energies. "Name at least one member of that nation who is not of the Mohammedan faith!" - the Russian said to me.

A sort of a silence descended on the four or five of us who were gathered in a group. I thought that it was because of the importance of the question which had been put to me. However something more serious had just happened - our group was approached by Suslov, the "gray eminence" of the Soviet political leadership, the man who signed the famous Inform-bureau resolution of 1948 attacking Tito's form of communism, and welcomed Tito at the Kremlin again in 1972.

- *"One should think over whether the Russians of Islamic religion are really the Russians, or if they have another reason to declare themselves as such"* I had

managed to throw this remark into the silence caused by the approach of the person from the very top of the political nomenclature.

At the time, thirty-three years old, I was ready to start an argument with Brezhnev if necessary. With Suslov, however, it was possible to start a dialogue only when and if he wanted to.

“Our young Yugoslav friend is showing interest in the Soviet reality?” he asked politely. Then he proceeded to speak about the Soviet Union what he felt like saying, and even more probably to my temporary audience.

That was a summer of twenty years ago. Suslov is no longer with us, there is no more Soviet Union, no Yugoslavia, the “young Yugoslav friend” has gone past fifty, my heater is buzzing, it’s cold outside, there’s a lot of fasting. It’s probably the same in Moscow.

In the evening they are showing on TV the film “Ko to tamo peva” (“Who’s that singing over there?”). The film ends with the beginning of the war. “What’s this happening to us?”

14th January 1993

Last night the *chetniks* thoroughly marked the Orthodox New Year. The artillery was roaring, the sky was lit up with the bright bursts of anti-aircraft guns and machine-guns, and then they would turn around to the city again and hit upon the houses. It’s getting worse; as Skender Kulenovic⁸¹ would say: *Sito, pijano*⁸². Vast quantities of arms have given them a feeling of power. Sarajevans are left with only one possible weapon - accepting the situation.

I’d been observing that fireworks and those bursts from my balcony, and Azra joined me later. We went back into the flat soon after as it was very cold.

In the morning I went to see my sister. She wasn’t home as she’d prepared the dough and gone to bake the bread. She carries the dough in a plastic bag, it must be prepared the day before as it won’t rise in the cold.

Dzenana and Mustafa are blue from the cold and they haven’t slept either. The parquet from the large room is gone, and I’ve brought some paper. The whole archives are disappearing as well as libraries, memories. Even precious family photographs are being used for the fire: our vacation memories from not so long ago are leaving through the chimney.

⁸¹ Famous Bosnian poet

⁸² Well fed; drunk

14th January 1994

Last night at midnight we lived through one of the hardest moments of this war. A few minutes before midnight, the *chetniks* used the might of all their small arms and artillery weapons to lash out at Sarajevo, not ceasing fire for some three-quarters of an hour. The sky was lit up, scarred by the bursts from anti-aircraft guns and machine-guns, the eardrums could no longer stand that series of detonations which was melting into one monotonous thud.

I bent against the wall of the room in which we sleep, stuck to the concrete broken by fear. I'd never been this afraid since the beginning of the war. During the major bombardments I would go down to the basement or the shelter. The blast of the explosions is heard somewhat less down there, and the shelter also spares the nerves, unless there are some hysterical persons in the immediate vicinity, and there weren't any in mine. I didn't feel like going last night, but I regretted it in the end; I would have heard less of all the thundering even though it's cold down there and I would probably have been freezing.

They wanted to show the might of their arms. This is not wanton behaviour but the carrying out of orders, a revenge for our attempts to retake at least some street in Grbavica. Our boys there managed to take back some of what used to be no-man's land.

That piece of no-man's land is inseparably connected to the life drama of one of Azra's acquaintances, whose name I will not mention. His parents lived in one of the streets below the Jewish cemetery, and as the wartime days and months passed by, he wasn't getting a word from them so he slowly began to realise that they must have perished in their flat. He managed to get in touch with people from the army and the police who were willing to explore a no-man's land together, as far as his parents apartment. The house and the flat were burnt down. The charred corpses still in the same place where their last hour had found them. They couldn't get them out as the *chetnik* positions were only a few metres away at the time.

Now he's waiting for the frontlines to shift again, to get them out and bury his parents' bodies. He lives with that nightmare.

14th January 1995

Last night the Orthodox New Year passed by without too much firing in this part

of town. It was dangerous in Dobrinja, however, where it blared, and houses there are fifty metres from the *chetnik* lines.

I recall how once, in the cellar bar of the Sarajevo Radio, in the Danijela Ozme Street, we'd celebrate the Orthodox New Year. For the first New Year's Eve, everyone would have family celebration. Later, for the Orthodox one, which no one really took very seriously, we would all have some fun together: there would even hardly be and Serbs and Montenegrins on that night.

Once we were severely reprimanded by Vojo Savic, who was then the General Manager of the Sarajevo Radio-Television network.

A few years ago, when Yugoslavia began rocking, I met Savic in the Markale market. We commented on the political situation.

"Now, Hamza, I see that the *chetniks* had been right." I managed to maintain an unchanged expression, but I guess Vojo realised just what he'd said, and in front of whom, so that he quickly changed the subject.

That sentence has been echoing around my head for a long time: Savic is from Drvar, and was one of those who joined Tito's partisans at the very beginning, in 1941, a sometime high party official, he had the reputation of a good and honest man, he's never shown a trace of chauvinism. Later events suppressed the memory of that encounter and that sentence, only for other events to bring it back.

15th January 1992

The president of Croatia Franjo Tudjman met with a representative of the German government thus formally establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries.

If until this morning there had still been some lingering doubts about whether Yugoslavia still existed, they have surely been cleared up by now. The only thing is that I, while writing this, am not sure in which country I am living.

A man of my years must say goodbye to Yugoslavia with some sadness. I was born in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, lived in the NDH⁸³, and then in post-war Yugoslavia which went through many name-changes - Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Where am I now?

I spend the evening in the company of the short wave radio - that's my best source

⁸³ Independent State of Croatia, the Nazi puppet state (1941-45) under the leadership of Croatian fascist Ante Pavelic and his *ustasha* supporters

of information, at a time when everybody else is focused on the television. Short waves are a reflection of world politics. The Voice of America newscasts in Serbian and Croatian languages seem as if they are from two different countries, one of which is siding with Belgrade and the other with independent Croatia.

All that is past, there is no more Yugoslavia, even though this rump would still like to retain that name, and what remains is in fact the most important question - what will happen to the people? States exist only so that they could later disappear, at least here, in the Balkans, where there are no empires with a British expiry date, nor people with a Persian tradition. However, for each of us this is our only life. Just like for any Englishman, for example.

The new issue of 'Javnost'⁸⁴ found its way into my hands. In it is the Constitution of the *Republika Srpska* (self-proclaimed Serb republic within Bosnia and Herzegovina). Their capital city - Sarajevo. The armed forces of the republic - the Yugoslav People's Army.

I've been re-reading Svetozar Markovic⁸⁵ recently, his 'Srbija na istoku' (Serbia in the East), and 'Srpske obmane' (Serbian Delusions). 'Serbia in the East' is 122 years old. Only truly great works don't give the impression of a mere evocation of the past after so much time, but can also serve as a guide through the present. Unfortunately, through the discernible future as well, as things stand with the state of the Serbian spirit. These chance readings sometimes offer insights that make the mind spin. In one of Milorad Ekmecic⁸⁶'s works I came upon the fact that at the end of the last century in Macedonia there lived 800.000 adherents of Islam, of which one third was of Asian origin. Thus two-thirds, or approximately around half a million people were Muslims of Slav descent.

Although the entire Serbian national myth is focused on the period during which Serbia was under Ottoman rule, this country has inherited far more from the Turks than any other, and is probably the only living remainder of the Ottoman empire in terms of its mentality and social structure, I conclude from Markovic's text. As far back as the 18th century Turkish society could no longer live off military expansion, and it couldn't rival the Western states economically. The sultan and the nobles lived a lifestyle straight out of the Thousand and One Nights while palaces built under the influence of French architecture were cropping up around Istanbul. The extensive network of the bureaucratic-feudal mechanism could no longer be sustained by either the Turks or any of the other peoples within the Empire. Pashas and viziers, the representatives of the court were invariably under the complete influence (sway) of the local strongmen (power-wielders). Local

⁸⁴ Serb nationalist paper

⁸⁵ Serbian writer and essayist from the first half of the nineteenth century, one of the originators of the idea of a common state for all South Slavs - Yugoslavia

⁸⁶ History professor from Sarajevo who joined the SDS

dynasties sprang up in different parts of Turkey. Strongmen unilaterally introduced illegal levies while central authority increased taxes. All this in vain, naturally, viewed over a longer period of time, because such burdens were objectively inhibiting development, and on a more subjective level destroying the motivation of the producers and traders.

Independent Serbia in the previous century did what the African nations have done in this one by mimicking the lifestyle of a colonial power. In the Turco-Serbian case this implied that what was being copied was a spent model which had functioned only in the time of military expansion, and was already tottering by the time that expansion had reached its pinnacle. The *knjaz* replaced the sultan while the local *gospodari* replaced pashas and viziers, tax burdens remained the same and territorial aspirations—based upon the concept of a greater Serbia—repeatedly brought the country to the point of exhaustion from military expenses which could be paid for only by war, or in other words fresh military expenditure. Throughout Serb history, from the second uprising⁸⁷ until today, only the post of a public official or a uniform ever brought any sort of social security.

15th January 1993

After the night before last's attack on the length of the Titova Street, I'm staring at the damaged 'Energopetrol'⁸⁸ building and the *vakuf* palace next to it, across the street from 'Sipad'. The upper floors have been blown apart. Dzenana and Mustafa spent that night in the basement, they were freezing.

I drop by the room in the ZTO⁸⁹ building that is being used by 'Oslobodjenje'. Colleague Dragan Stanojlovic's wife was killed by a sniper in her home. Through the neck and into the spine. She was dead on the spot.

Colleague Ahmed Pasalic's cousin was wounded at the market near Ciglane. She succumbed to her wounds.

In the evening, after more than five weeks, a larger quantity of electric power has made its way into Sarajevo, down there around Cengic Vila. I only heard about it on the radio - six people were killed and twenty or so wounded while queuing for water at the Brewery. While they were transporting the wounded to the hospital, the casualty ward was being shelled. One shell in the Djure Djakovica Street killed a bank teller in her workplace. They were falling elsewhere as well. There's no report on the sum total as the phones are not working, except the ones starting

⁸⁷ Serb uprising against Ottoman rule, first half of the 19th Century

⁸⁸ A company belonging to the 'Energoinvest' corporation, dealing only with the distribution of oil and derivatives

⁸⁹ HQ of the Bosnian Railway company

with the numbers 663 and 664. They're being fed separately, from a generator. Today and yesterday people are depressed. Geneva always awakens some hope, which is invariably followed by resignation. We are neither capable nor do we have any wish to preserve ourselves, I personally considered it the most significant fact today that I will be receiving a ration of cigarettes in the newsroom, and for that reason I didn't even hear half of the shells. Why, finally, shouldn't I take a little walk; it's a beautiful day, and the war looks like it's going to be some time.

15th January 1994

The final tally of the *chetnik* celebrations of the Orthodox New Year: 11 killed and 15 wounded. Bosko Livnjak, Robert Radic, Milutin Banjac, Mirsad Hodzic, Mirsad Mrehic, Lirinka Mladjen, Stevo Filipovic, Ismet Basic, Izet Brkic, Hasan Camdzic, Marin Nuic.⁹⁰

The shells don't discriminate between nationalities, and in any case the *chetniks* are trying to do away with living together.

However, on the streets and in tomorrow's newspapers different obituaries will appear. The Muslims invariably do not miss the opportunity to say: Killed by a criminals' shell. Serbs on the other hand mostly stick to very neutral wordings. In this case there is also the influence of the undertakers. But there is also something of that well-known phrase, which can still heard even today: "I don't know where the shells are coming from".

There's lots of dead and wounded on the frontlines today, and among the wounded is the son of our friends, Vesna and Miso. A hand-grenade exploded above his head and the blast dented the skull. Still, he's recovering. Vesna is, by the way, a Croat and Miso a Serb. Their son is now by nationality a severely wounded man. To which nation belongs a young man who is not regaining consciousness, to which one will he belong if he doesn't win this exclusively personal battle for an exclusively personal life?

Today I spoke to photographer Fuad Foco about shells that stick in the memory.

"I remember when we were up there on Grdonj:⁹¹ Henry Levy⁹², Jovan Divjak⁹³, a TV crew and I. They were French journalists. We climbed out of a trench and

⁹⁰ 3 of the victims of the shell are Serbs, 3 Croats, and 5 Muslims

⁹¹ A hill near Sarajevo

⁹² French philosopher

⁹³ Former JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) general, a Serbian who joined the Bosnian BH Army from the first day of the war, and opposed the Serbian military aggression against Bosnia

started scarping the mud off our shoes. I was lost in thought when a tank shell exploded next to me, some fifteen metres away. It threw me into the trench. Six or seven followed. They were going for us. I understood that they had spotted me, that I had been noticed, that the barrel is looking for no one but me. That was the difference between this and a normal situation when they are firing on everyone indiscriminately. As soon as they ceased fire, I ran from the trench to some demolished house, into the basement.

I also remember the shell that hit my house. I was outside and only a thin wall separated me from the explosion, and suddenly the wall wasn't there any longer".

In the basement of the 'Arhitekt' building⁹⁴ where the 'Oslobodjenje' now has its offices, there is a small, improvised bar. We call it "At Tito's", because hanging on the wall, just like in many Sarajevo businesses and other premises, is a picture of Tito.

It was lively there this morning. Srdjan Dizdarevic came by collecting signatures for the founding of the Sarajevo branch of the Helsinki Committee. I join in, that's always advisable.

I take a piece of the hose used for gas which happened to be in my bag and gave it to Srdjan: "Gas is a basic human right, and we don't have any gas".

Manojlo Tomic is receiving a female journalist from the Zagreb weekly 'Gloбус'. Her assignment is to find some eccentrics in Sarajevo: she has a list, probably prepared by our people who've dropped anchor far away from this rock. On this list there are people who would be cranks if they were doing in peacetime the things they are doing now, but in Sarajevo it's hard not to be a crank.

Nevertheless it's obvious that the subject of Sarajevo sorrows has been exhausted. Everyone who comes now is looking for new twists - how the Sarajevans are suffering in this cold, what are the fortune-tellers doing, and how about the fundamentalists...

15th January 1995

I'm clearing out a pile of newspapers. That is always an evocative process as one lives through and judges events anew, sees new points of view. Cropping up from somewhere is also the biweekly 'Le Monde Diplomatique' from February of 1990. They're describing the state of affairs in Yugoslavia: 15% of the working-age population is unemployed, inflation has risen to 2500 %, violent flaring-up of irredentism. Serbia, which is controlled by the charismatic Slobodan Milosevic,

⁹⁴ Architectural company, run by Dragan Bijedic, the son of former Yugoslav Prime Minister Dzemal Bijedic

lives in a constant nationalistic elation. Croatia and Slovenia are resisting Milosevic's pan-Serbian ambitions. The army is looking on and biding its time."

Then the paper goes on to talk about the positive trends: the rise in exports since '83, about the foreign reserves of six billion dollars that make the debt of 16 billion at least bearable.

There's nothing one could add to this. It was precisely those positive developments that broke up Yugoslavia and resulted in the all out war - all against all. Had those trends continued, the ruling elites, old and new, been expropriated (removed from power)...

16th January 1992

States, of course, have never had ceremonious burials, in this case only the worst possible things are said and will be said about the deceased.

Still, the worst things about the state of affairs in Yugoslavia are being said by its remains. The constitutional court of the SFRJ found it fitting to announce, just at the moment when Croatia is leaving the federation with international recognition tucked away in the pocket and without a third of the territory for which it is hard to say whether and how it will get it back, its judgement about the unconstitutionality of a series of laws passed by the Croatian *Sabor*⁹⁵ last year.

One new means of payment has virtually overtaken the dinar—the vouchers. Azra and I have agreed to use the 'Vemex'⁹⁶ vouchers, which I received in the newsroom, to buy meat at their butcher's in Vogosca. I've only rarely been to this little town near Sarajevo. I only know the main street. We didn't find the butcher's, it seems it's somewhere up the hill, but we don't know whether it's open or not. In this cold and slush it's not even worth trying to find out. We return to Sarajevo in a cold, dirty trolley-bus, and all I can remember about the place are the SDS signs across the walls, one broken into newsstand, and in two places a graffiti which read: "This is Serbia".

16th January 1993

Following the massacre at the Brewery, few people walk through the Titova Street. The faces are gloomy, worried, sad... Only those who had some urgent

⁹⁵ Croatian parliament

⁹⁶ Trade corporation

business that couldn't wait or who were left without a drop of water have gone outside. The latter ones had to go to the Brewery, across smears of blood.

Battles are continuing in Gornji Vakuf. My mother is from there originally. That's a quiet place where the hardworking hosts never concerned themselves too much with politics. When in the previous war Pavelic⁹⁷ tried to form an *ustasha* unit there, the most distinguished among the hosts, Croats and Muslims, were against it and quietly threatened that mass of the poor who were enlisting in Pavelic's elite army. The latter for their part knew that states are changing while masters are eternal, so the unit dispersed.

Now blood flows there, houses are burning. I don't believe that it is the work of the natives.

The Minister of defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina came forward on behalf of the HVO requesting that in Croat provinces, whose borders he is redrawing, the B&H Army should "subordinate" itself to the HVO. That is another, the third of three possible wars in Bosnia. Or maybe the second as the HVO has stopped fighting the *chetniks*.

These happenings are weighing down on people as much as the shells.

And the siege is lasting far too long; nerves are giving in.

16th January 1994

Incessantly and with thousands of shells, the *chetnik* artillery is battering our positions in Zuc, behind Hum. I'm unable to think about anything else. Journalistic tasks and socialising, conversations, I take care of by the way, mechanically.

16th January 1995

The period of apathy has passed, I'm becoming irritable.

It's snowing, and I've always hated snow, even as a boy. It's cold so only closed spaces exist, where it is also cold. I'm staring at the gas heater, which has gas every second day at one in the afternoon, and even then the gas pressure is weak. I stare like cavemen at a tiny flame.

⁹⁷ Ante Pavelic, leader of the Croatian fascist *ustashe* during the Second World War, installed as president of the Independent State of Croatia (1941-45) by the Nazis

The arrival of Azra's relatives from Grbavica didn't bring me the relief that I was expecting: they're suggesting to me again to work for the TV, and that means to jump straight into a tub of hot wax.

'The Blue Roads'⁹⁸ are not open yet, which might well be the result of an agreement between the Sarajevo and Ilidza mafia.

The diet is monotonous, winter food, wartime food. Fortunately I can buy one or two things. Those who live just on the humanitarian aid—and that is the overwhelming majority—apart from the bread made from flour which stinks of a humid warehouse, they get two cans of minced meat (horse-meat judging by all accounts, or maybe catfood), one kilogram of pasta and half a kilo of rice - to last them for seven to ten days.

There was a gas explosion at Trg Heroja (Heroes Square); some thirty flats were damaged.

17th January 1992

We're telling jokes in the newsroom, bitter ones, but typical. A Serb colleague tells a joke about a boy from a mixed marriage. His father is Serb and mother Jewish. The lad has a friend who's got a bike.

- "Daddy, what am I by nationality?"

- "Come on Sasha, have you gone mad like the rest of the world. You're nothing, but if you really want to, you can be anything you wish."

- "But daddy that's so important to me. Am I a Serb or a Jew?"

- "I'm telling you; It's not important..."

- "What do you mean it's not important? If I am a Jew, I want to haggle for that bicycle, and if I am a Serb, I'm going to take it by force..."

17th January 1993

Today Sarajevo is in a state that is relatively peaceful. An odd shell hits, suddenly, here and there; but people are in the streets again.

They've announced that water will, finally, arrive. I am so dirty that I'm disgusted by myself.

⁹⁸ The UN ("blue helmets") provided escort to civilians in certain public buses leaving the city, whence the name 'Blue Roads'

Humanitarian assistance is being distributed: a kilo of flour each. Queuing up in front of me are two young women whose fathers have both been killed, one last fall and the other a little over a month ago. Not a trace of sadness. Maybe because the loss of one father makes the loss of the other easier to bear? Will they begin after the war, if the war ever ends, to grieve for their fathers?

The streets are crawling with excrements. As there is no water for flushing the toilet, people are using newspapers, and some throw it out the window, into the street. From higher buildings, higher floors, they do so almost without fail.

The Police are warning citizens to avoid large gatherings, because the *chetniks* are always looking for the appearance of a more wholesome target. Nevertheless, wherever the water cistern shows up, people gather at once and wait until they get their ten or fifteen litres of water. Sometimes there is swearing, fights, but the worst is when everyone is silent.

One is struck with real fear at the sight of so many children around the truck. Their parents send them because children cut into the queue more easily.

17th January 1994

About ten days ago I heard a story about a Serb woman from this part of Sarajevo who received, through one of the humanitarian associations, a New Year's parcel from Grbavica, and in the coffee was a note: "be careful, be very careful until January 15th." The first part of the message was correct, but nothing happened on January 15th. On the newsroom table I'm looking at a photograph by Danilo Krstanovic⁹⁹ taken in Alipasino Polje: a woman killed by shrapnel is lying on the street, and people are passing by without looking round. Danilo's photograph is one of the best stories about the manner of living and dying in Sarajevo.

We get a family message from Grbavica on a Red Cross letterhead (I don't know why no one calls it the Red Crescent?). They are alive and well. What should one interpret that as, no one knows. They are living in one world and we in another. I'm trying to picture them over in Grbavica, a kilometre from here, or my daughter, a few hundred kilometres further away. Images are fading. When I think of my child, a feeling of warmth overcomes me, of contentment because she is not here, being shelled. But whenever I enter her room, when I must wipe the dust off the books and the records, then it seems to me like I am in some soundproof chamber, where no noise can reach me.

Everything ends with the consoling thought: they're alive, I'm alive. For everyone

⁹⁹ 'Oslobodjenje' staff photographer

outside, that is a starting position, for us it is the goal. Hence the question: when will the war end, when will the danger begin to subside? What will happen to Bosnia?

I think that Bosnia is but a part of our memory, along with Yugoslavia. It's not partitioned by percentages but hatred, which is being fuelled by this attack on us, and the attack which feeds upon the hatred of us. I often ask myself whether I am biased towards the Muslim side, is my patriotism and necessary sense of national belonging pushing me into self-delusion, and as I am a journalist, into the delusion of others? Still I think such temptations are negligible for the Muslims, as long as one maintains a critical distance in regards to two kinds of people - the big losers in the war on the one hand, and the big winners on the other. Some of the former, who've lost families, property, their home, would drag everything and everyone down with them. The latter, however, for whom the war has made it possible to make money and attain power, want the war to go on, as they say, until "final victory" is achieved.

Losers at least can be dissuaded. With the winners it's harder, because while defending their own interests they hit hard and below the belt, branding their counterpart firstly as a traitor, and then accusing him of being a *chetnik*.

Today in the street I ask one such, who was insisting on the propaganda of "final victory":

"Do you know how long it takes to get to Bosanska Gradiska¹⁰⁰ by car?"

He struggled to remember.

"I know, and so what?"

"How long will the army need to cover that distance, having in mind all the opposition that can be expected, and on how many casualties are you counting?"

That man has never been in a trench, nor does he have a son. He went on his way down the street, probably angry. Probably with me, and not with reality.

17th January 1995

Zerina is a beautiful, smart young woman. She's from Mostar. People from Mostar can strike a spark of humour from virtually anything. She's telling me how she had a neighbour called Anka over there who would, in passing, on her way to the butchers, say to her - I'm going to Adza. Zerina, for her part, when she realised what was going on, asked her neighbour one day - how are you Hanka?

¹⁰⁰ A Bosnian town on the border with Croatia, around 200 kilometres from Sarajevo

Zerina found herself in her Mostar when all hell broke loose there. While the Blue Roads were still open, they transported her to hospital in Sarajevo: she had completely lost her sight.

At the Eye clinic they were unable to ascertain anything after a check-up. It turned out that Zerina had gone blind from fear and anguish. She refused to see that which was happening around her with Mostar and its inhabitants.

She was firstly supposed to be transferred to the Psychiatric clinic, but her doctor from the Eye clinic was aware how many patients the Sarajevan psychiatrists already had on their plate. He made Zerina stay put, talked with her, gradually relaxed her, and one day she again saw the world around her. He let her walk to Cengic Vila¹⁰¹ by herself, following her at a distance.

Zerina no longer shows any trace of the trauma that she's endured. The Mostar sense of humour is sparkling once again, she has managed to rearrange her personality.

18th January 1992

Today for the first time I had a long, open conversation with one of the more prominent SDA activists. He's in his thirties, educated, resourceful, self-confident and, which surprised me, devoid of that militant anti-communism which distinguishes many of the grass-roots statements coming out of his party. The conversation was friendly in nature; it turned out that he is the son of one of my teachers from high school. We drifted from topic to topic, he questioned me and I him in turn, and he showed a lot of political awareness, having in mind that his points of view had been virtually forbidden until very recently. He gave the impression of someone who'd hung up his boots and no longer supports anyone. The left in Bosnia, it seems to me, really has hung up its boots. It didn't merely lose an election here, but everything - Bosnian communists had the lowest percentage of the vote of all Communist parties in the former socialist countries.

18th January 1993

Dramatic news are still arriving from Zepa. Not even the UN officials are denying any longer that people are dying of hunger over there. Highly probable are, in that case, even those incidents of cannibalism which were being talked about.

¹⁰¹ One of the quarters of Sarajevo

About halfway through December I told myself, survive for the next hundred days and you will live through this war. Since then I've had one bout of pneumonia, frostbite on my feet, several days of exhausting starvation and chronic hunger, but I've got through a third of those hundred days.

A friend from the brigade had just returned from a *dzenaza* and he's telling us how his cousin, fourteen-year-old Berin, was killed. In the midst of this slaughter, cold and hunger, the boy went to the library to exchange his book for another. The shell found him near the City Hall. His mother was left alone as her husband had died earlier.

18th January 1994

A sudden peace after infernal attacks which, it seems to me, hadn't ceased since the Catholic Christmas. There are still shells, the snipers are still operating, but the streets are overflowing with people, the faces look more cheerful, the lull has quickly revived people's strength.

If you ask how I'm doing...¹⁰²

I ask Kemal Monteno. In a certain Sarajevan circle of people to which both Kemal and I belong, it's as if I'd met a cousin of mine. No secrets between us.

There is a secret.

For the first time since we've known each other, I must ask Kemo something concerning our professions. I have never written about him until now nor has he ever had sung about me.

- "Kemal, which shell do you remember the most?"

- "They say that everyone has their own shell. I have several shells. Two of them I remember above all others".

- "One, two..."

• "Two. The first up there near 'Bujrum'¹⁰³. It was the very beginning of the war. We still didn't know anything about shells, their whistle, what calibre they are... We were sitting in a bar when one hit nearby, and we all rushed for the door, like children. Then another hit. A man standing next to me asks what's wrong with my arm. I glance at my arm – it's in one piece. Then we went back inside to safety. That's when I learnt what a shell really is."

¹⁰² A line from a wartime song sung by popular Sarajevan vocalist Kemal Monteno

¹⁰³ A restaurant in Bascarsija, the old part of town

- "The second one was at FIS, in the FIS bar. Goran Milic and I were sitting together, that was just when beer had first appeared, the kind that was sold in canisters. There's a toilet in the bar, but it's filthy, so I decide to go outside. Just then the waiter brings the next round - it's on the house. I give up on going out, at least until I drink another. In that moment, when I should have been outside already, a shell hits right in front of the FIS building. Goran threw himself on the floor, a scream was heard. One lad, Kemo Bisic, who sat in the corner, was standing in the doorway when the shell hit. He died on the way to the hospital. I can't recall the exact date, but the day before I'd recorded a music video on the stairway in front of FIS."

18th January 1995

It's still fifteen below zero, a dazzling winter sun is striking the valley.

The regular supplying (provisioning) of the city with electricity began last night, 100 Kw for every household per month. If it continues, I'll even be able to write without a candle. The same amount of electricity is making its way into the city as it has until now, but it was previously all being used up by those on the priority list.

The *chetniks* have diminished the inflow of gas, it didn't make it at all to Carsija¹⁰⁴. A bag of wood is going for 20 DM, which lasts for about a day, day and a half. The Blue Roads remain closed, The UNPROFOR is behaving like the meeting minutes keeper of the Bosnian crisis. A few days ago NATO refused to pass on the flight plans of their aircraft to the UNPROFOR's Sarajevo HQ, because someone had been leaking them to Pale¹⁰⁵.

19th January 1992

Today in the newsroom I was talking about the latest political lyrics.

Somewhere near the river Neretva, while digging up the bones of their dead from the last war, the Serbs were singing the well-known, Vukovar song: "Druze Slobo, posalji salate, bice mesa, klacemo Hrvate" ("*Comrade Slobo, send us some salad, there'll be meat as we'll be butchering Croats*"). From the other side they

¹⁰⁴ Bascarsija, the old town of Sarajevo

¹⁰⁵ A former winter holiday resort, 17 km north-east from Sarajevo, used by the Yugoslav Army and Serbian nationalists as their Headquarters, and the capital of their self-proclaimed state

replied with a *ganga*¹⁰⁶: "*Vadi ove, da bacimo nove...*" ("Take these out so that we can throw in fresh ones...")

The market in Ciglane is the microcosm of events in Europe and Yugoslavia during the last two or three years. The first to appear were the Romanians and the Russians, after the regimes in those countries were liberalised to the extent that one could obtain a passport.

Every day, on my way back from work, I would stop by that market and I would always buy something at bargain prices. A box of 'Orvo' film, a set of drills, *cilibar*¹⁰⁷ whose almost fleshy colour I like, a classic fly-catcher such as I hadn't seen since my childhood. They were also selling old Soviet army caps and belts, electric saws, crystal and fused glass...

Thus the October Revolution came to an end, here in Ciglane.

Then fighting started around Yugoslavia and the Russians and Romanians stopped coming, even though the odd Romanian can still be found among our black-marketeters.

For a time, looted goods from Slavonija¹⁰⁸ were being sold here. I warned our police about a woman who'd been appearing with a new VCR and TV every other day, and they chased her away.

That was last fall, when Bosnian Christians bought loads of cheap pigs, just shipped from Panonija. In Sokolac, one such buyer found a human hand with a ring on it inside of the dead pig. He probably sold the ring and the pig ended up costing him nothing.

Now one goes to Ciglane for cigarettes. For some time now, since the start of the reign of Marko Ceranic¹⁰⁹, virtually no one buys them at news-stands any longer. They're cheaper by a third at the market because they're duty free. The supply is handled by strongmen, and it seems that even some people from the government are involved. In front of the café "London", for example, trucks full of Macedonian cigarettes seem to arriving all the time.

Still, everything is gradually, on the face of it at least, returning to the former state of affairs. That is precisely the absurdity of this situation. There was peace, and then smaller incidents began cropping up, and then we accepted that as the normal state of affairs. Then, last summer, men in black uniforms, with beards, long hair and guns began walking around Romanija¹¹⁰, and even that, after a period of time,

¹⁰⁶ A primitive folk song from Herzegovina

¹⁰⁷ Amber pearl

¹⁰⁸ A province of Croatia, taken by the Serbs in 1991, later re-captured by the Croatian Army

¹⁰⁹ Prime Minister of Bosnia just before the first democratic elections in Bosnia in 1990

¹¹⁰ A mountain north-east of Sarajevo, a *chetnik* hideout during both the Second World War and the Bosnian war of the 1990s

we accepted as normal. We considered as normal firstly the Serb Autonomous Districts (SAOs), then Serb municipalities, then the territorial defence of those districts and municipalities. Now the existence of a proclaimed Serb republic is considered normal.

19th January 1993

Conversations around Sarajevo boil down to commenting on the conflict with Croatia. Morale has not plunged. We've been desperate for a long time already. As far back as last summer the HVO stopped and confiscated a shipment of weapons meant for the (BH) Army and which would have been sufficient to break the siege. It's no different now, only without masks.

Near Veliki Park, by an old army highrise, I run into an old acquaintance of mine, Drago Cuckovic. A tall, lean man from Herzegovina, and in all our contacts we've maintained some kind of warmth accorded to countrymen. Cuckovic and many other inhabitants of this military building have remained in Sarajevo. Many former officers of the JNA are struggling to recognise in this army from the hills that in which they'd served. I run into Dzemil Sarac, Milan Acic, Mirko Vranic... Cuckovic wasn't quite of their rank having been retired as a colonel. He's a lawyer and his wife a university professor.

He asks me how I am doing, and how the family are. I tell him how Azra and I are wrestling with the war, and how our daughter is in our friends' house in Rovinj.

"Hamza, I have my own house in Umag¹¹¹, but I didn't send my daughter there. She was killed, says Cuckovic, and points somewhere up above with his hand, towards the place where the shell killed the child.

I stay silent. I'm searching for a word. I have no words. I light a cigarette.

We bring our silences to an end and we say goodbye. I rush to the newsroom, to find something, anything to do.

Explosions can be heard around the city. In the evening I listen to the debate from Karadzic's parliament in Pale. There is political drama in these discussions which originates in the existential dilemmas into which the war has thrust the participants, there's lots of Kosovo myth and cheap rhetoric, because the deputies know that the session is being transmitted live. However, at the core of it all is selfishness. If they accept what is being asked of them, or what is supposedly being asked of them by international peace-plans, the result would be the self-dissolution of the assembly. I can't recall a case of someone so easily reaching a

¹¹¹ A popular summer holiday spot in Istria, Croatia

decision to relieve oneself of power. If it is true that, for example, Vojo Maksimovic¹¹² has done even half of the things which he has been accused of in various stories, how will he ever accept international control of human rights? Who's been playing with peace plans?

In 'Oslobodjenje' I write about how Bosnia has a knife placed at its throat, in the hope that the annexation of its territories would create opportunity for an agreement between Belgrade and Zagreb and thus calm the Serbo-Croatian war. Djulijeta Ljuma, born in 1986, and her brother Elvedin, born 1988, were killed today.

19th January 1994

The government has decided, and it really looks like it's going to happen: pensions will be paid out in kind. That's a severalfold increase which won't move its beneficiaries much further away from the threshold of hunger, which is where most Sarajevans are surviving, but five kilograms of flour per month is 30 DM, while pensions weren't higher than a single German Mark (DM).

There's no gas, I'm paying 30 DM for a sack of wood. I'll save some books at least. Still, half of the winter has gone by already. I'm counting the days; will I survive?

We go over for coffee at Ivo and Gordana Knezevic's. Also there is their neighbour Suada Begeta who was wounded. I didn't want to ask her about it before. Now she talks about it:

- "I don't even remember it any more, I can't recall the details. In the Djure Djakovica Street, next to the former premises of 'Sarajevo-stan'¹¹³, I think I lost consciousness. The first thing I was aware of was that I was lying on the ground and asking a friend next to me what had happened. She gets up, I see my bloodied glasses lying on the ground. My friend helps me up and I see blood on my shawl and blazer and I conclude that it must have got me in the neck. I folded a handkerchief and stopped the bleeding. Someone found a car, came to get us, and then straight to check-in at surgery. There were seven or eight wounded there, and as I'd covered up my wound they put me aside at first. Then one of the doctors approached, and as soon as he heard that I'd been wounded in the neck, they took me for an x-ray, and then to the operating theatre."

¹¹² Former professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Sarajevo, became a prominent member of the SDS and is held responsible for ethnic cleansing in Foca, a town in eastern Bosnia completely cleared of its majority Muslim population

¹¹³ The state housing company

"More than my own, I remember the open wounds, arms and legs dangling freely. All that time I also feared what would happen when my bloodied purse and blazer are taken home, when they give them to my daughter."

Suada tells me that, apart from the one that wounded her, she recalls another shell, from the very beginning of the war.

It hit the City Hall building —Suada works as an inspector —and killed her colleague Fatima Dzemic. Suada was at the door, just about to enter.

Another guest, Sutka Mujacic, had her encounter with the shell in March 1993, in the gynaecological clinic.

- "I wasn't even that afraid. I was in the hallway and my husband was visiting. The shell hit the neighbouring room, where the pregnant women were. They were receiving their infusions at the time. When the shell demolished the wall, they pulled off the needles and rushed into the hallway in panic, bloody from the needles that they'd just pulled off. The doctors and nurses moved us to a safer place after that".

19th January 1995

Since one yesterday afternoon the old town is without gas. In Alipasino Polje they get it, I hear over the phone, only sporadically. Dina Dortbudzuk is talking with her cousin who lives there —the latter had just been cutting up old winter coats and lighting a fire with them..

Siberian cold snap finally came to an end this morning, but a freezing rain fell. I'm not going out, I'm trying to find something to do at home. It's hard. The brain doesn't function in this cold. You're trying to drive away thoughts of the cold, and other ones flash by in disorder. Fortunately, I don't have to prepare the column. I could only have taken on some topic on that I could write in one breath, in half an hour.

I'm burning the newspapers from my personal archives. The last Serb from my building, Dobrivojevic, has moved away. He's even sold the heaters which were there when he moved in. However, the Muslims aren't completely blameless either.

20th January 1992

Salaries are going down from month to month. People went into this winter well provisioned because the market in Sarajevo had been cheaper than ever: vegetables from Serbia and Macedonia can't go west any longer, this is their western-most market. However, the provisions are thawing already, re-provisioning has started, electricity bills are arriving. I had to set aside an entire month's pay for overconsumption, but the staff of 'Oslobodjenje' are actually among the lucky ones who get their salary every month, and on time. On the other hand, from 2000 DM during the time of Ante Markovic it has dropped to the present 400. The economy is in the grips of some sort of 'white' strike, and political discussions have replaced life. In the Parliament sessions of Pelivan's¹¹⁴ government they're beating a dead horse, and they're not capable of getting anything done. Progress in any direction does not suit the SDS. HDZ is looking to Zagreb, and if they are concerned about the economy at all then it would be that of western Herzegovina. They're not in favour of any fundamental Bosnia and Herzegovina-wide solutions, because this party's view of Bosnia is: Let it happen and bide your time. SDA would at least be expected to have some interest, but its people are either incapable—Muhammed Cengic¹¹⁵, for example—or it has to contend with the obstruction of its partners. In any case, it's going downhill, faster and faster...

20th January 1993

Finally, water has arrived in the city again. In truth, not as far as my house, but it hasn't got to be dragged along in view of snipers, nor have we got to pay for shipping it on the tank truck. In recent times, a cubic metre of water, when purchased from the tank truck, would cost 40 DM. There are lots of problems with the heating of hospitals. Even cancer patients are sleeping two to a bed just to stay warm.

Ever since last fall, or summer, I've developed the habit, with the aim of saving tobacco, whereby I hold the cigarette in my hand, between the fingers, for up to a whole hour before I light it. Contact with the cigarette and the entire ritual of rolling it around in one's hands is an integral part of smoking. Thus, today I went from Kosevsko Brdo to the newsroom, and then the Vase Miskina Street, all with

¹¹⁴ Jure Pelivan, HDZ Member of the Bosnian Parliament and Bosnian Prime Minister in the year leading up to the war and for the first three months of the war

¹¹⁵ Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister and SDA party member. Left Bosnia for Turkey at the beginning of the war

one cigarette. I noticed that a middle-aged man was following me. I stop in front of a shop-window, he stops in front of the one next to it. Then the same again. Finally he approaches:

"Comrade, could you please spare a cigarette?"

I had three left so I give him one. He thanks me, and I feel guilty for having awakened his desire to light up with my habit. We're both slightly uncomfortable.

20th January 1994

The armed and political conflict with Croatia has reached boiling point.

The road which has led to the conflict is muddled and contradictory, above all in the behaviour of the Muslim side. It began with the formation of the parties that are now in power. As long ago as the founding assembly of the SDA, Dalibor Brozovic, speaking on behalf of Zagreb, proclaimed that Croatia is being defended on the Drina River, which was obviously misunderstood by all present, who were incapable of drawing conclusions about who exactly will be defending Croatia on the Drina, and didn't ask themselves what that defence should be carried out with.

Despite the official triple alliance, SDA and HDZ formed some sort of internal bloc against the SDS, because the latter was backed by the Serbia's aggressive policy towards both Croatia and Bosnia.

Even though still a part of Yugoslavia at the time, Bosnia provided assistance to Croatia, Bosnians weren't forced to join the JNA; many volunteers, Croats and Muslims, fought with the *zenge*¹¹⁶, and among them were also people who'd been sent by the SDA for some sort of real war training. On the other hand, many Serbs from here fought for the other side. Coffins were arriving in Bosnian towns from two sides of the front, often on the same day, parents would meet knowing that their children had died in two opposing armies.

The immediate consequence was that Muslim soldiers from the *zenge*, after joint warfare against the Serbs, transferred the same blueprint to Bosnia, where it really wasn't true. Neither were the relations with the Serbs the same as they were in Croatia, nor did the interests of Croats and Muslims coincide as they did while they waited in the trenches for the fierce retaliation from the so-called JNA (Yugoslav People's Army). That's a military simplification of things. However it

¹¹⁶ First military forces established by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman within the then federal state of Yugoslavia, considered paramilitary so long as the Yugoslav Federal Army (JNA) was still the only official regular Army

also affected a part of the SDA which at one time behaved as if it were dealing with crypto-Catholics. The famous binding of the flags, so it proved, was really the tying of the SDA flag to the HDZ one, and not an equal knot.

There followed a war in which Muslims were, through Croatia, relatively well supplied with small arm, but they didn't have any guns. Thus they were awarded the role which allowed them to take part in street fighting, to heroically clear the terrain or to heroically defend it, while the HVO, or the HDZ, had tanks, mortars, artillery, a good logistical base, and means for the occupation of territory. The HVO general staff strained to stop the shipment of heavier weaponry to the Muslims, and in some cases it even stopped the flow of ammunition in critical moments. That's how Srebrenica and Jajce fell. With empty barrels.

That is probably what happens when one tries to understand history on the basis of a few hastily gleaned lessons. Some great Muslims from Bosnia either don't know or don't want to know the history of their people. It's true that there's been bitter conflict with the Serbs ever since the first Serb uprising¹¹⁷ and the beginning of the *chetnik* cleansing of Serbia, but it is equally true that the Bosniacs¹¹⁸ have for the past five hundred years fought wars in the west and against the west, a fact which the elephantine memory of the institutions over there hasn't left in some corner of oblivion.

20th January 1995

After two days, I go to the newsroom around noon. The gas will soon be shut off again, and I've been heating as much as I could: I've got it up to +15C degrees.

I spoke on the phone to Ivana Tomic, a pathologist. She's telling me how her sister called from Alipasino Polje in tears from the cold and the sorrow that overtakes her while she's looking at the frozen members of her household.

On the door of the clinic that I'm passing by, in the old part of town, it is written: "Patients are asked to bring a piece of wood each if at all possible". The queue is long, people are standing in the cold, most of them with the wood under the arms.

On the way back from the newsroom I run into Mladen Paunovic¹¹⁹. He's been suspended recently because in his closing statement of the live transmission of the Zenica sitting of the Parliament; he called it a fiasco. We sit in a bar; we've got fifteen DM between us.

¹¹⁷ First Serb uprising against Ottoman rule in the 19th Century

¹¹⁸ A term for the Bosnian Muslims widely used since the outbreak of war in 1992

¹¹⁹ Senior reporter of Sarajevo Television. A Serbian-born ethnic Serb who stood against the SDS. Wounded twice during the war and currently still a reporter with Sarajevo TV

We're swapping stories of our mutual friends from the RTV¹²⁰. Cameraman Edo Bogdanic, the legend of Bosnian film, has a son who served in the Army, and after two years—while he was on the frontline—somebody looted his flat, and later another family moved into it. The son writes to Edo from New Zealand: I'll see if there's something even farther than Bosnia.

Zoran Vukmanic's¹²¹ wife who's in Germany, had managed through some Grbavica connection to sort out for him to get to Belgrade, and then continue on from there. Zoran even got the permission to leave with his car! When he crossed, they took his car, and for four months held him in a forced labour platoon. Through some TV connections in Pale he arranged to be transported to Belgrade, and he arrived there without a single document of identification, found his father on his deathbed, wandered about there for four months while his weight dropped to 40 kilograms. He then heard that some journalist in Prnjavor (Macva) was forging papers, so he went to see him. He was too late. The man had finished making papers for himself the day before and left. Zoran remained for two months doing fieldwork, and then he somehow managed to get an UNPROFOR passport. The policeman on the train tells him that he can piss on that passport. Zoran answers that he will kill himself, so the policeman lets him go. When he arrived in Germany, he ate so much that they had to take him to the hospital.

Later, we're joined in the bar by Zekerijah Djezic¹²². He'd recently been to Italy, and he didn't know that over there, unprovided for, was Jasminka Sipka¹²³, whose husband, as it was officially announced, was killed near the beginning of the war by an HVO soldier, somewhere near the RTV headquarters¹²⁴. Now Jasminka is there with two children, they say she is hardly recognisable – a beauty such as there were few in Sarajevo.

21st January 1992

I run into a friend, a guy from Montenegro. His relatives have arrived, two from Kninska Krajina. He's telling me how over there lookouts are posted to some positions to announce with shots if the Croats are seen coming. It's winter, so they usually take some rakija with them. These two relatives of his once got quite drunk, and started shooting in the air for fun. The ones behind took that as a warning, passed it on, and some ten thousand people spent the night in refuge, in

¹²⁰ Radio-Television Sarajevo

¹²¹ Sound man at RTV Sarajevo

¹²² Popular folk singer and host at Sarajevo Radio

¹²³ Popular TV Sarajevo anchor

¹²⁴ Headquarters of the Sarajevo Radio and Television, half-way between the airport and down-town Sarajevo. More than 60 RTV employees were killed during the war 1992-1995 and about 200 wounded

the mountains. Naturally, they could never admit that they were drunk.

Yutel had a survey on the future of Bosnia—sovereignty or not? Eight to one for the sovereign republic. Bosnia and Herzegovina has actually been condemned to sovereignty – either that or it won't exist any longer. An entirely natural part of the old Yugoslavia, in which different peoples lived together, it became a model of living together. Now that the Yugoslav marriage has broken up, Bosnia can either go it alone, or take one or the other side and thus disintegrate along ethnic cracks, which are tens of kilometres wide and where tens of thousands of people would perish.

The TV program is being brought to us on three channels, nobody has any control, and the only thing that is known about the general director Neso Miljanovic, is that he is the brother of Mitar Miljanovic, one of the most prominent members of the SDS. The break between Mitar and me came while he was still in the SKBiH¹²⁵. In one meeting Mitar vehemently criticised nationalism, but mentioned only Croatian examples. I then reminded him of some very similar cases on the other side. That was our last political dialogue. Mitar has moved on to the sphere of nationalist monologues, from the League of Communists to the SDS.

I don't know where my friends, the director of the TV Besim Cerić and the editor-in-chief Nenad Pejić, stand now. I am a little older than they are, so I view them also as people I had helped, something with which, probably, neither of them would agree. About the attitudes of the director and the editor-in-chief of the Sarajevo TV little can be judged from the program itself which, it seems to me, is beyond all control.

21st January 1993

Insomnia. At two-thirty in the morning I am listening to the *chetnik* radio from Pale. The guest in the studio is the 'Politika' correspondent from Knin¹²⁶; his last name is Chetnik—“*Chetnik* since birth”—boasting in his own words. Brankica Stanisić is also there, my former colleague from 'Komunist'¹²⁷.

Chetnik is bitter about everything, including Slobodan Milošević. He says that the latter defeated Panic¹²⁸, but that he took over Panic's agenda. He blames

¹²⁵ The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina

¹²⁶ A stronghold of Croatian Serbs in Krajina, in eastern Croatia, until it was liberated by the Croatian Army in 1995

¹²⁷ Weekly newspaper. The mouthpiece of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia

¹²⁸ Milan Panic. Serbian Prime Minister, came from the US as an entrepreneur and failed in his attempt to reform the Serbian economy

Milosevic for the fact that the latter is holding a hundred thousand Bosnian Serbs in Serbia proper, instead of sending them here, to the frontline. He's drunk, and he's most likely repeating things that are being talked about behind the curtain over there. Stanistic is more measured in her statements, clearly closer to Belgrade sources. She was a close friend of the Draskovic¹²⁹ family after she suddenly switched to the right following her departure from Sarajevo for the Belgrade office of 'Komunist'. This was at the time when Draskovic was a greater extremist than Milosevic.

So, thanks to insomnia, I became witness to one sincere conversation, outside of the usual guidelines of the Pale propaganda. Chetnik claims that the former officers of the JNA—and former Communists—are to blame for everything. He probably managed to smuggle in a bottle of *rakija* into the studio somehow, as from one moment to the next his tone is getting sharper and his words are getting entangled a little.

The editor puts an end to the conversation with some music.

I go to bed and try to get some sleep once again. It's not working.

In the morning, I feel exhausted. The news reaches me that, somewhere in the occupied part of town, Miodrag Zalica¹³⁰ had died. A few days ago, Zlatko Danis¹³¹ passed away. Zalica had long been at the very heart of theatrical and literary Sarajevo, and Danis at the centre of musical life. Besides that, both had been radio and television editors. Notable participants in the birth of pre-war Bosnia.

I run into Eso Lukac, a friend from the Brigade. Last night he'd been woken up by a powerful bang on the upper floor of his house. Having overcome their fear, they went out to see what had happened. The radiator had exploded; some water was left inside. There's a lot of that going on. The cold is still strong. In the mornings, while listening to the radio, for more than two weeks now one can sense the people in the studio shivering from the cold.

21st January 1994

It's as if the whole war had been condensed in one day. The delegation from Geneva is on its way back: another round of negotiations has failed, from which nobody had expected anything anyway. There is no longer any disappointment.

¹²⁹ Vuk Draskovic, Serbian opposition leader, during the last ten years has repeatedly shifted his position from being anti-Milosevic to pro-Milosevic

¹³⁰ A TV Sarajevo dramatist and the editor of the TV Drama section

¹³¹ Radio Sarajevo journalist

Battles raging all around. Maglaj, Doboj, Tesanj, Olovo, Gorazde, Vitez.¹³²

The Banja Luka Muslims are being persecuted—systematically and brutally. The Croats also are suffering, though somewhat less. Sarajevo is mostly quiet on the subject. That is the fate of the so-called 'minority-Muslims', those from the cities and towns where the Serbs had been a majority. While at least some sort of struggle is being put up for the cities where the Muslims had been the dominant population, albeit symbolic, Banja Luka has been written off in Geneva.

Chetniks in Banja Luka come and tell some elderly Muslim who remains by his home that they will rape his daughter. The latter departs immediately, leaving everything behind.

The newsroom receives official confirmation of the news that Juka Prazina has been killed. He is, without doubt, a personality from the first row of the heroes of the Battle for Sarajevo. He was supposed to have been our Robin Hood. Things had begun turning out differently. Conflicts with the Army leadership started erupting, and partly because Juka knew how to fight, and war on occasion requires restraint; partly because he didn't want to subordinate himself to any sort of authority, partly also because nobody here has succeeded in growing into a genuine hero. Heroes and legends, are what Bosnia badly needs at the moment.

All sorts of stories are being spun around Juka Prazina. Those of heroism are, almost without exception, true. Those about the looting of shops, mostly so. However, it is at the same time being forgotten that the resistance movement in the city could only have built up its logistics in such a way - robbing shops and collecting supplies. That was extended to include collecting for its own sake, in which some of Juka's men were among the most prominent. My neighbour Ramiz Bajic, whose son had been killed together with a friend in Nedzarici¹³³ when a mortar shell fell into our battle armoured vehicle (the one that was improvised in the workshops of Sarajevo), wrote to me about that. The father of that friend of Bajic's was on his way to a *dzenaza*, carrying meat for his son's companions - a shell had wounded his cow that morning so that he was forced to slaughter it. Some of Juka's people ran into him, or people who presented themselves as such, beat up the man and took his meat. He didn't even make it to the *dzenaza*. As far as the public is concerned, Juka is held accountable for that. As most likely does Mostar¹³⁴. If he hasn't been killed, the people of Mostar would have pursued him as long as they exist. However, the first two months of the defence of Sarajevo were a miracle and he has a place in that miracle; nobody can uproot him from being a legend.

¹³² Towns and in central Bosnia

¹³³ Suburb of Sarajevo

¹³⁴ A city 140 km south of Sarajevo. A multi-ethnic city before the war divided by Croats into a Croat and a Muslim half

The story of Juka is the story of the transition from urban guerrilla to higher forms of military organisation, about the blending of tens of units and groups into smaller and then bigger brigades, whereby these units wouldn't disappear through the very act of reorganisation, but would often place themselves above the brigades and higher commands. Such was the case with the units of Ramiz Delalic–Celo and Musan Topalovic. When they came into conflict with the Corps Command, these two began meeting the needs of their logistics by collecting ransom fees for exemption from trench-digging duties, to which they again took people without being authorized to do. On one hand they had been in the right—it is totally unacceptable that soldiers who are defending Sarajevo should also have to dig the trenches. We're at war, and the whole city needs to understand that. On the other hand, however, money collected in this way remains completely beyond control. It becomes a part of the huge amounts of live money wandering around)Bosnia in suitcases, changing owners without signature or receipt...

Juka, too, had a lot of money when he left Sarajevo. I hope that he is alive, and that he will grow old somewhere far away as the proud breeder of pedigree dogs, which he dreamt about while defending this city.

The joke in Sarajevo is:

"In Tito's¹³⁵ time, the lead roles used to die at the end of the film. With Alija¹³⁶ they've all been killed while a newsreel is being shown."

21st January, 1995

Waking up in a freezing house; -13⁰C, and winter fog.

The newsroom is full of people - there's heating here. Vlado Mrkic has handed in his resignation, Manojlo Tomic has suddenly departed for Zagreb with plans for continuing on, to Canada. As Gordana Knezevic has remained in Zagreb and Gojko Beric is still in Ljubljana where is hestill reporting from (but now lacking that insightfulness which he used to sexpress), the Serb part of the newsroom has been significantly reduced.

We who remain behind are tired out, my average contribution works out to eight articles per month, which for a journalist without archives, without access to foreign press, a journalist who lives in a cold flat, and has no social life, is the way to scribomania.

¹³⁵ Josip Broz Tito, b 1892 d 1980. Leader of the Yugoslav Communists who united the country after the Second World War, and served as President from 1945 until his death in 1980. He provided the country with four decades of peace and prosperity

¹³⁶ Alija Izetbegovic, Bosnian President since 1990. One of the founders and leader of the SDA party

Senad Avdic comments on the departure of our friend Manojlo for Canada, via Zagreb where his wife and child are without means to have a livelihood, thus:

- Mujo arrives in Canada and wants to stay:

"What skills do you have?"

"Everything."

"Can you cut trees and chop wood?"

"Of course."

"And where did you do that before?"

"In the Sahara."

"But there are no forests there?"

"Well, that's why."

Manojlo is a born journalist; I have a feeling that in his thirties he won't be able to adjust to not only another country but another job as well.

On the way home I meet a friend, Mustafa Beganovic, a university professor in dentistry, and former Minister of Health. He's been abroad and has now returned. Meanwhile stories had been circling Sarajevo that he'd run away with 250.000 DM of government money. Had Mustafa not come back, it would even have been true. He is, by the way, an exceptional professional; he could have found a job in Germany where he would command an excellent salary.

Goods from the humanitarian parcels are long being sold at the market. Flour is 1 DM, powdered milk 6 DM.

Tomorrow Mehmed Halilovic is getting out and I haven't prepared a letter for my daughter—I found about out too late. That remains like a lump in the throat, those unspoken words which are being suffocated every day.

22nd January 1992

The Portuguese Joao de Deus Pinheiro ¹³⁷ has stated that the EC will recognise Bosnia and Herzegovina as soon as a referendum is held. Momcilo Grahovac from the SDS says - "If the referendum leads to independence, we'll take up arms".

Meanwhile, the northern part of the republic has been hermetically sealed, on orders from the JNA headquarters. It's been proclaimed a "frontline zone". UN observers have been in Banja Luka since the day before yesterday, but they too have been threatened and told to keep quiet.

¹³⁷ The EC representative during the peace talks in Lisbon

An ultimatum has arrived from Belgrade: war reserves must be placed at the Army's disposal. I was in the 'robna kuca' shopping centre this afternoon: people are feverishly buying up food. Buying on credit, of course.

Last fall I brought some old issues of 'Duga'¹³⁸ back from the newsroom. 'Duga' had been the most popularizing vehicle for Arkan¹³⁹ and Captain Dragan¹⁴⁰.

I was driven to this digging up of the past by the view of the house once occupied by Oskar Davico¹⁴¹, when he was practically exiled from Serbia. I came by to see him two or three times. He was a man pulled from his roots: When he refused to side with the wave of Serbian nationalism, they began returning his books to his home address, just like the Norwegians did to their famous Knut Hamsun after the latter's Hitlerite episode in 1945. Davico was never admitted into SANU¹⁴² because he is a Jew. Nor was there place for Vasko Popa - he's got some Romanian blood. I'm browsing through 'Duga' - two pages of drawings of Turks raping Serb women. That too is necessary for the awakening of national consciousness and a revival of the stale Kosovo myth.

I'm watching Yutel, presently the most popular TV show in Sarajevo. Yugoslavia has manifestly stopped existing as the kind of homeland that I used to love. It's not only that a war is being fought, but also, as far as I know, human heads are being hung on meat-hooks in 'liberated places'. It is certain that Yugoslavia no longer exists, and thus all those who feel themselves to be great Yugoslavs, people who are terrified that they might be struck by nationalist claustrophobia, are now supporters of some asymmetrical federation, i.e., in any case supporters of life in the lands that once made up Yugoslavia. Life, and not death.

Yutel is a TV refuge.

The imposing Goran Milic is the figure who dominates, and after him are Zekerijah Smajic, one of the lead anchors of the TV Sarajevo News, then Dzevad Sabljakovic, who has suddenly switched to *jekavica* here and cannot find his way around in it. He reminds one of Bosnian peasants who after the war learnt the *ekavica*¹⁴³ in the JNA, but not the lighter vowels as they are spoken by Serbians, so they spoke some dark version of the *ekavica*...then there is my friend, the cosmopolitan Sasa Mlac, then Gordana Susa - after all her Belgrade adventures.

¹³⁸ Belgrade-based magazine which inflamed Serbian nationalist passions with its chauvinistic reporting in the years leading up to the outbreak of the war in 1992

¹³⁹ Zeljko-Raznjatovic Arkan. Indicted war-criminal. Wanted by Interpol even before the war. Leader of paramilitary units which carried out some of the worst atrocities in the Bosnian war. Assassinated in Belgrade.

¹⁴⁰ One of the Serb paramilitary commanders

¹⁴¹ Prominent Yugoslav writer and Second World War partisan

¹⁴² Serbian Academy of Arts and Science. In 1986 SANU published a memorandum which is the Serbian Nationalist Movement's equivalent of 'Mein Kampf', providing the theoretical basis for ethnic cleansing

¹⁴³ In time of Tito's Yugoslavia *jekavica* and *ekavica* were considered two dialects within the Serbo-Croatian language, spoken in Croatia and Serbia respectively. Now promoted as separate languages by the parties concerned, Croatian and Serbian

Yutel is the world we love. However, that world which we love, following Ante Markovic's fall from power, and the dismantling of Yugoslavia by way of a Serbo-Croatian diversion, seems a bit like Sci-Fi. The danger of war hangs over Sarajevo. Yutel is organising gatherings. The question remains - after all that are we drawing closer to war or further away from it?

Yutel is a fairy-tale.

Those people in the studio are the best TV professionals from the former Yugoslavia. However, I know that in Zagreb and Belgrade professionalism is no longer thought of as a virtue. The first to be crushed and removed from the scene are the top professionals as they have the ability to put up a competent resistance to something which is brewing, and whose name we no longer dare utter. I used to be a JRT¹⁴⁴ panellist, at the festival that had moved from Portoroz¹⁴⁵ to Neum¹⁴⁶. The leading names of the time, key writers from Belgrade and Zagreb, are no longer in contention. I remember a conversation I had with one of them. We asked each other will Tudjman¹⁴⁷, once in power, replace the Zagreb TV News team, then an equal to any European rival? We both reached the conclusion that the new government doesn't have at its disposal a good, nor even a satisfactory, reserve Croatian national team, and that the replacement of the (Zagreb) News editor would amount to the 'Berge Istra'¹⁴⁸ case for political life. Nevertheless, the new political masters in Croatia have quietly proceeded to remove firstly all those who actually knew something, apart from a handful who showed readiness to take part in that removal. Milosevic has gone even further of course – that's how Yutel has managed to assemble such a team of professionals.

One shouldn't entertain illusions about the decisive power of the media, even when it comes to the power of television. A ship of drunks – as the poet said. A ship of drunks, with the best team of sober reporters, which is Yutel.

22nd January 1993

I am watching from my balcony as the shells are falling on Hrasno and Kobilja Glava¹⁴⁹ – the roar is coming from all parts of the city.

¹⁴⁴ Yugoslav Radio-Television

¹⁴⁵ A town on the Slovenian Adriatic coast. Slovenia declared its independence from Federal Yugoslavia in 1991

¹⁴⁶ The only Bosnian town on the Adriatic coast

¹⁴⁷ Former Yugoslav Army (JNA) general and president of the Belgrade soccer club 'Partizan'. Since 1991 the President of Croatia

¹⁴⁸ 'Berge Istra', a brand-new oil-tanker built at the Rijeka shipyards, in the northern part of the then Yugoslav Adriatic coast, at the time one of the most advanced in its category. It was built for a foreign buyer but disappeared without trace on its first journey

¹⁴⁹ Suburbs of Sarajevo

I am breaking through the wall in the hallway for the gas installation. When it came to breaking the panel between the floors, my neighbour Zeljko Filipovic helped out; I couldn't have done it without him. I've been working on this second, horizontal hole, for two days already and I almost missed and hit into the connecting wall. I am one of those people who cut three times and measure once. I somehow managed to make a curve, so that the rubber hose will fit through, but a pipe certainly wouldn't.

In the meantime, neighbours from the next building showed up – candidates for the hook-up. It's all right, I can't turn anybody down, and in any case the costs will be lower that way, but if only someone would have helped me break the panel, he can keep his DM.

22nd January 1994

Today they've been killing children again. Six were killed in Alipasino, while sleighing on a nice and relatively peaceful day. The oldest child, Nermin Rizvanovic, was born in '81. Indira Brkovic was only four. One can now expect once again the usual accusation that the Bosnians are shelling themselves.

In my front yard children are playing peacefully, their parents are not calling for them to come home.

The *chetnik* calculation with the murder of children is clear. They're at war in order to kill us all, root us out. Nermin was fourteen – in four years he would have been a soldier. He should, therefore, be killed now. Little Indira is fifteen, and by the age of twenty she could have been a mother to a boy who would twenty years later become a soldier. Thus Indira has to be killed. This is a war whose objective is the physical destruction of the Bosniacs.

There is no madness. There is no madness in anything that has happened since the spring of 1992 or in fact the fall of 1991. Perfect order: shelling, electricity being cut off, water being cut off, food supply being stopped, telephone lines cut off and the postal service prevented from being operated, so that no one would know what was going on here.

Had the mail been able to reach Serbia and Croatia from here, the big state TV networks would have been unable to construct such a mass deception that would eventually grow into self-deception. When the BH Army units entered Fojnica they found in one place that the river had been blocked up by discarded letters from Sarajevo. In Split¹⁵⁰ they would throw sacks packed with letters into the sea.

¹⁵⁰ A major port on the Croatian Adriatic coast. Built around the palace of Roman Emperor Diocletian

A new round of humanitarian aid was distributed today, the thirty-fifth since the July of 1992, when we stood in the queue at the commissioner's for the first time. We received 60 dkg of beans and a 3 dcl of cooking oil per person. Nothing more. It's been two months since the last tin of meat.

General Briquemont has been replaced today; even he spoke out too much. He has handed over his duties to a British counterpart, general Rose¹⁵¹.

In the evening we had a visit from Gordana Verona. She awaiting a convoy for her exit. Her husband Mario (Majo) has died; he was the closest friend of Omer Karabeg¹⁵². Majo had a pacemaker. He was supposed to leave the siege for a treatment. He could have as he had all the medical papers. I couldn't persuade him to go to his school-friend, Dr. Naim Kadic, influential enough to speed up the process. It was too late, Majo fell victim to war apathy. Faced with so much death and destruction, he no longer had any strength left to fight for his own life, he didn't want to leave the siege.

One of their daughters is now in the USA, the other in Zagreb. Gordana has no reason to remain here, and if she finds a way to leave, let her go after the children. Now she's handing out her and Majo's things. In one of the Croat national institutions they offered her 30 kilograms of sugar for a concert piano. Fortunately, the Franciscans offered to help her out: they'll look after the most valuable things and return them to her, if she or either of her daughters ever returns to Sarajevo.

After hearing about one such human gesture, one feels an urge to put out the candle, lie down and fall asleep happy.

22nd January 1995

Somewhere, out there in the world, the fiftieth anniversary of Auschwitz is being commemorated. Here, in Sarajevo, an international gathering marking a thousand days of the siege of the city has the task of drawing attention to the obvious: Sarajevo is a concentration camp. A city through which life once flowed so amply and vigorously now endures the longest siege in history.

I'm writing an editorial on the subject of an act by Lech Walensa, who invited representatives from Belgrade, among others, to the Auschwitz commemoration. Belgrade has become the Berlin of the end of the twentieth century; Munich beer-

¹⁵¹ UNPROFOR commanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina

¹⁵² A Bosnian journalist who built his career in Belgrade, but left there once nationalism took hold in Serbia. During the war was a reporter with Radio 'Brod' (Ship), transmitting from a ship in the Adriatic Sea and financed by the European Community. Currently an editor with Radio Free Europe

halls have long since moved to Skadarlija¹⁵³. Walensa's action reminds me of my disagreement with my godson, the director Gorcin Stojanovic. Gorcin was like a son to me, but when I heard that during the most intense round of killing in Sarajevo, where he grew up, he was directing a documentary in commemoration of victims of Nazism in Kragujevac¹⁵⁴, he became a stranger for me. Kragujevac is here today, as is Auschwitz.

Here in Sarajevo, the battle for gas is all but being waged with weapons. In the lower part of town people force the valves open with machine-guns. Thus the gas reaches them, and none gets to the old part of the city.

General Rose began a farewell walk around Sarajevo today.

He has played a dirty role. Not even Mackenzie¹⁵⁵ left so much hatred in his wake. It can hardly be said that Sarajevans didn't show him plenty of confidence, that they didn't lay their hopes in front of him.

23rd January 1992

"We have to bare our teeth to the whole world", said Radovan Karadzic on Radio Belgrade.

Most of us older journalists of 'Oslobodjenje' bear the stamp of the former, one-party way of thinking. Even though one-partyism is, as I can see, a political dream of every party, and although in Bosnia-Herzegovina we have replaced one ideological one-partyism with three national ones, in spite of all the compliments and prizes 'Oslobodjenje' is finding it hard to steer the road of pluralism. It is not pluralism when one knows in advance that Ljiljana Smajlovic will take the side of Karadzic¹⁵⁶, and one of us Muslims that of Izetbegovic, even if the SDA has fewer adherents among the Oslobodjenje journalists than the SDS. We would have some sort of pluralism if here, in the newsroom, at least one person converted into an aggressive supporter of Rasim Kadic, the youthful leader of the local Liberals. It would be even better if that Kadic supporter weren't a Muslim, but a Liberal.

A real newspaper, which I await as a refreshment and a corrective for my own way of thinking, has been and remained 'Nasi Dani'. It's published by a group of enthusiasts, but with them are such names as Ivan Lovrenovic, probably the most competent Bosnian Catholic journalist. He has succeeded in being both a Bosnian

¹⁵³ Restaurant and entertainment district of Belgrade

¹⁵⁴ A city in Serbia which suffered a lot during the Second World War

¹⁵⁵ Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, Canadian commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia, replaced in the early days of the war (August 1992) after relations between the UN and the city of Sarajevo had deteriorated too far

¹⁵⁶ Radovan Karadzic, SDS leader and indicted war-criminal currently in hiding.

and a Catholic, which has eluded many others in recent times.

'Nasi Dani' was used to be a student newspaper, where once my friend and excellent journalist Vlastimir Mijovic worked—someone who I had managed to persuade Kemo Kurspahic¹⁵⁷ would be a great acquisition for the newsroom. They never achieved large circulation, but they are now making some headway in terms of influence.

The youth are the only solution. My generation and I are certainly no longer it, even though we might sometimes appear like it because of our experience. We have one disadvantage. The future is behind us.

23rd January 1993

The parents of the arrested co-fighters of Juka Prazina are trying to find out what has happened with their children. They will find it hard to get to the bottom of things, as a number of Juka's people have been arrested outside of the city. How to prove to the parents that they are still alive?

23rd January 1994

As one could have expected, now it is 'unclear' where from came the shell that killed the children in Alipasino Polje. This is another one of the ways in which the UNPROFOR is contributing to the creation of the image of the 'three warring factions', which may not be equally guilty, but are not in the right either. The doubt is being systematically sustained, so that the shelling which has gone on for nearly two years in sight of the world, may be put into perspective. In the consciousness of some distant person, inattentive viewer of an evening news programme, the doubt pertaining to this particular shell will evolve into a general doubt in relation to the crime in its entirety, and thus will not find anything amiss in UNPROFOR's phlegmatic conduct.

From the time the first cannon was made, roughly half the effort has been expended in finding the target and the other half has gone towards discovering the positions whence the enemy artillery is firing. Those from the UN have at their

¹⁵⁷ Kemal Kurspahic, editor-in-chief of 'Oslobodjenje' throughout most of the war, 1992-1994. During this period 'Oslobodjenje' received a number of prestigious international awards for maintaining its independence and continuing to publish every day despite the fighting that reduced its Headquarters to rubble and the chronic lack of newsprint due to the siege. Kemal's account of that time and those achievements in impossible conditions may be found in his book, "*As long as Sarajevo exists*"

disposal everything: the technology, optimal reconnaissance positions, trained people and an uninterrupted supply of electricity. There is nothing they may have doubts about. They should know.

Milosevic judged well when he invited the UN into Yugoslavia. The UN is a *status quo* organisation. Wherever he wishes to alter the *status quo*, for example by hounding the Muslims out of Banja-Luka, Milosevic denies access to the UN. He brusquely turned back a Canadian battalion. He searches and harasses every patrol sent by general Rose. When necessary he even shoots at the 'blue helmets'.

Last summer I had an all but open dispute with people from the highest level of our government. I claimed that time is working in the aggressor's favour. I received the following reply, indirectly, but publicly: *It's not true that time is working for the aggressor. Time always works for the stronger.*

In the newsroom, next to a wooden stove thundering with a full blast, I say to my colleague Rasim Cerimagic:

"All we need now is to go to war with the Russians."

"Shut up, someone might steal your idea".

I fall silent, and smoke a cigarette next to the heater glowing with fire.

From the survey about the shell which is most remembered: One explosion that changed the world of Senka Kurtovic:

- "Fifteenth of October, Ninety-two. The day seemed unlike others. It was peaceful. After August, after September, suddenly a peaceful day. I met a friend from work and told her: not a single shell today.

That was when we still had those duties, taking turns to guard our residential building entrances. I am not sure why, even today: what can one woman do in that situation. My building is twenty metres from the frontline in Mojnilo¹⁵⁸, towards Nedzarici, somewhat further than Dobrinja Five. I was supposed to have been on duty from four in the afternoon, but when I came back from work, my mom said that she would take my place.

I still have this childhood habit of kissing my mom and dad—at that time, I was twenty-six—before going to sleep, after coming back from work and before going to work. I came home and it will never be quite clear to me why I didn't kiss mom that day. We passed each other by walking in opposite directions. She looked wonderful: she had managed to wash her hair. She had beautiful red hair and a new hairdo.

Ten minutes later, I've heard a thud. I ran to the window and heard someone

¹⁵⁸ Suburb of Sarajevo built for the 1984 Winter Olympics. Used as the Olympic Village for athletes during the event, later converted into a residential area

calling out for help. A neighbour made it to the door and told dad that mom had been wounded. I ran down to the third floor, they didn't let me go any further. Dad went all the way down and I went back into the flat. I saw the ambulance van arrive.

We didn't have power at the time and the phones were out too. There was a fog outside. I stayed at home and until nine-thirty not knowing what's going on. That's when dad turned up and said that everything was all right with mom. I don't know why I didn't believe it. I spent the night thinking: if I sleep, then dad will get up early and by the time I wake up he'll be here with good news. And if I don't sleep, he'll still leave early and if he's back quickly, then things aren't all that good with mom, and if he takes some time, mom is all right... and if, and if...

Dad came back from the hospital around eight in the morning. He said that mom had died, a few minutes after he left the hospital the previous night. The piece of shrapnel was two-and-a-half centimetres long, as thin as a needle and the doctor said that not even in the best, peacetime conditions, would there be any possibility for starting a battle for mom's life. It went in at the eye-socket and ended up in the brain.

The little I slept that night—about two hours—I dreamt that mom had returned from hospital and that she's standing in the doorway saying: "What's wrong with you, as if anything could ever happen to me?"

Now mom was no longer there. What followed was the running to and fro between the hospital, the City Hall, 'Pokop'¹⁵⁹...I don't even remember any more..."

23rd January 1995

In the newsroom I'm sitting with Sead Fetahagic¹⁶⁰. Sejo, as we call him, has managed to get back on his feet in the course of the war, after the misfortunes that haunted him in the beginning. He's a powerful writer, with a forceful pen, aware of the fact that our real advantage lies in that we have nothing to lose.

It's pleasant having coffee with people like that. Usually without a word - what could we possibly say to each other when the most important things are quite clear.

It's warm in the office, outside it's cold, and it's seems to me that those who live in

¹⁵⁹ The funeral company

¹⁶⁰ Sarajevo-based writer and journalist. His house was hit in one of the first shellings of Sarajevo. Both of his sons were wounded on the frontlines as soldiers in the BH Army

parts of town that are without gas at any given time are present (here) more frequently: once it's those from Alipasino, another time it is us from the Centre. This is, of course, not the case, but those who are without gas hang in the office more, probably keeping in mind the freezing house that is waiting for them. The sewage pipes are freezing up again in several places.

24th January 1992

Amra is unusually nervous today. Her program on the Student Radio is being targeted for a takeover by politics—discreetly but through the pressure. The Student Radio has become a legend in Sarajevo. It's as if they'd applied the Olympic motto: *higher, stronger, further* – Senad Hadzifezovic, Neven Andjelic, Mladen Sancanin are suddenly finding themselves at the centre of things. Their editor is legendary Boro Kontic.

We of the older generation are tied down by stereotypes, we are tied down by the fact that the most of our lives is past, and that we are—above all—defending the past. We are risking what has been. The youth, whose well-being is at stake, are risking the future.

Bosnian politicians yield to separation into two generations. The first is historic and those who fall in that category are Alija Izetbegovic and Milorad Ekmečić, doubtless the two strongest personalities among the Muslims and the Serbs respectively. They live in history; the persistent Ekmečić far more than the clever and elusive Izetbegovic. The following generation are the executors, and the foremost among those is Radovan Karadžić. He, along with the other interesting personality of his generation, Haris Silajđić, was born immediately following the war. Their knowledge of the wartime atrocities comes mainly from school textbooks and stories.

My generation, born on the eve of the war, has developed a resistance towards history and great events. The war took our early childhood. Liberation came, but then followed the clash with Stalin, which we recall as a new series of shortages, hunger, a harsh social atmosphere of which we were reminded later as well, encounters with people who'd been the political inmates imprisoned on Goli Otok¹⁶¹. I would have met some of those people and hear about the torture. I was one of the few in front of which they would open up, maybe because my sincere personal curiosity would open them up, and my wish that I should once write a really good article about those events, considered and unrushed. I think that I've

¹⁶¹ An island in the Adriatic Sea on which a prison was built in 1948 where the opponents of Tito's break with Stalin were incarcerated, politically "re-educated", and endured forced labor and harsh punishments

managed to grasp the essence of Goli Otok. The dilemma was: will the whole of Yugoslavia become Stalin's Goli Otok, or will the firmest human substance that existed in Europe at the time be broken by the methods which were necessary for its breaking.

After the Inform Bureau Resolution and the resulting blockade, there followed a sequence of years where every one was a little better than the last. A little more bread, a little more meat, the first butter, the first bananas, always a little more freedom, which has to be won and learned. Thus my generation is a little more patient than the ones that followed, especially that of Karadzic.

My daughter's generation, probably because mine had endured so much, doesn't have the same historical landmarks before its eyes, such as the ones that I had to have. To them the story of history comes as a semi-mythic telling. Amra had been in her own time,—as a first-grader—very surprised on meeting her first national hero in person who happened to be my friend Nisim Albahari, a typical anti-hero judging by his demeanour. However, that generation is aware that 'something terrible' had happened to their fathers and grandfathers, something that cannot be defined in everyday terms. What perhaps helps them more than anything is the silence of their parents and grandparents. We didn't want the living memories of our generation to pass into the remembrance of our descendants, because we thought that our descendants had a right to the same kind of life led by their contemporaries in Belgium, Iceland, in Morocco—the children of peace.

Now that the danger of war is hanging over Bosnia, I am pleased to see that Neven Andjelic, Senad Hadzifezovic and others are reacting with the same fervour with which I too would have reacted—if I were younger.

As things are, all that remains for me is to recall Isaac Babel, who said: "What does it matter professor that outside it is spring, when there are spectacles on the nose and autumn in the soul...?"

24th January 1993

The undertaking society Bakije has no more timber for burial according to Muslim custom. UNPROFOR hasn't helped, and it was even rumoured that they were offering thousands of coffins which are not used for Muslim funerals, and it is common knowledge in Sarajevo who is most in need of burial equipment.

It's long since we've run out of numbers for the years on the tombstones, those necessary for the first two digits, so they're being marked only colloquially: 56-93, for example.

24th January 1994

I visit the neighbour who's got a gas generator and we watch television. We're watching SRNA¹⁶² where tonight Karadzic proclaims: "Only a job which is finished will never have to be done again. Therefore, we will be Serbia. Serbia has to reach the Una River¹⁶³, and if it makes it to the Una, it will be easier to reach the Kupa¹⁶⁴".

At the neighbour's I also find the paper 'Ratna Tribina Zvornika' ('The Zvornik War Stand'). I take it home and copy a part of one of its articles into my diary. Its author, Hasan Hadzic, firstly mentions the example of an officer with the Tuzla Corps of the BH Army, who was awarded two flats, one above the other, which he combined by building a staircase. So there are no longer two flats. He has also managed, as Hasan states, to fill that flat with good furniture from abandoned flats, several of them in fact. At least that is the story going around Tuzla, according to Hodzic.

Hodzic is obviously angry and obviously loves Bosnia, which can be discerned from what he is prepared to risk:

"The greed and the accompanying machinations of the members of 'the caste of the untouchables' protected by military and other secrets, has long since assumed worrying proportions much like the dissatisfaction of the mass of the miserable populace, those without a roof over their heads, those whose children spend day and night traversing the Tuzla buildings and neighbourhoods, begging for a piece of bread, those who haven't slept with their own wives since the beginning of the war. The very people who should be initiating the establishment of order and the respect of laws have with their own egoism and insatiability compromised the functions that they are responsible for. How then can one expect from them to break the chain of humanitarian aid robbery, which for the most part continues to find its way to the ever-larger number of private shops? How can they regulate the growing illegal trade across chetnik lines which is bringing piles of foreign currency to certain individuals? Vares¹⁶⁵, that saddening Trieste of our day, will be remembered as a great theatre of the absurd," writes Hadzic.

He also lists what could be seen in Vares before the conflict with the HVO: a Serb from Bijeljina, a Muslim from Lukavac and a local Croat, haggling over a truck of

¹⁶² Official Radio and Television of the self-proclaimed 'Republika Srpska', the Serb Republic within Bosnia, established at the beginning of the war with headquarters in Pale

¹⁶³ River in northern Bosnia, near the border with Croatia

¹⁶⁴ A River in Croatia

¹⁶⁵ Town in central Bosnia, held by Croats during the war, with a flourishing black market

salt destined for the *chetnik* territory or a truck full of goods that are in short supply for our side. All that has to pass across the lines and the controls.

I haven't read today's paper; this evening Azra tells me that Zeljko Marjanovic has died. He will occupy an elevated and honourable position in the history of the post-war, free and now already pre-war Sarajevo. We met during the establishing of TV Sarajevo. Around that time he gave me some suggestions for programming innovations to read out. I still have that piece of paper. A quarter of a century later, some of those ideas still haven't been put into practice, and they are excellent.

Zeljko's wife Vera died in the course of the war from a brain haemorrhage. He had a rare but fatal form of cancer.

I met him recently at the market. I saw that he was without cigarettes so I offered him one to light up. He took it and I hesitated to offer him the entire packet. I had enough, but I was afraid of hurting him. Naturally, now I am sorry for not doing that.

I went to bed hungry.

25th January 1992

The Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church has spoken out against Milosevic and the Army top command: "The people who are now in power in Serbia, including the Presidency of Yugoslavia and the command structures of the armed forces do not have the mandate to dispose of the Serbian people without the blessing of the Orthodox church."

The priests aren't even accepting the 'Blue Helmets'¹⁶⁶. Has there really been a break between Milosevic and the SPC¹⁶⁷, or is it merely a question of a division of roles? In any case, there is a strong *chetnik* current in the Synod, whose continuity of influence hasn't been interrupted since the time of Draza Mihailovic¹⁶⁸.

In the meantime the hopes for a mini-federation have been all but extinguished. Bosnia doesn't want in, Macedonia doesn't want in, Montenegro has been forced in...

Here there was a fierce shoot-out last night somewhere around Velesici and

¹⁶⁶ UN

¹⁶⁷ Serb Orthodox Church

¹⁶⁸ *Chetnik* leader and Serb nationalist during the Second World War, sentenced to death by the People's Court of the newly created Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia immediately after the war

Pofalici¹⁶⁹.

Zlatko Dizdarevic told me today, when we turned to chatting on the subject of war and peace, that his and mine military records from the 'Oslobodjenje' unit have been moved to the Novo Sarajevo municipality.

Both of us have a war assignment in the newsroom, and we both reside in the Centar municipality. Our director Salko Hasanefendic doesn't know anything about this switch. As far as we know, in the military region of Novo Sarajevo the SDS has a strong presence. That I guess means that in case that I get a summons from the Novo Sarajevo municipality, I will become a deserter, as long as I refuse to join their municipal army.

¹⁶⁹ Quarters of Sarajevo

25th January 1993

In the atmosphere of a war whose beginning and immediate cause have already been forgotten, and whose end is not in sight, whose nerves suffer most are the ones who always and everyday tune in to the radio and television news. They await every broadcast with hope, every sign of improvement or calm on the frontline they interpret as an indication of future peace. That hope is continuously blazing up only to be extinguished once again—at eight in the morning, then at twelve, at four, and finally in the evening with the short waves—RFI, Voice of America...

Radiomaniacs are as tightly wound as strings, always reacting adversely to pessimism, however firmly it might be based on facts. Their tension is highest immediately before they are due for their dose of drugs on the eve of every news broadcast.

As far as RFI is concerned, Mico Danojlic really gets on my nerves. Whatever happens, Danojlic makes use of it as topical fodder for his anti-Communism. In principle I accept anti-Communism as any other political orientation, as long as those who are against Communism know what they are for, and Danojlic doesn't know that.

The BBC is virtually on the *chetnik* positions; Moscow is playing the pan-Slavic card and more long-term at that, with fewer operative and more strategic pretensions, waiting for others to compromise themselves.

25th January 1994

I'm having a lot of trouble with my *Oslobodjenje* column. Everything is fluid and takes me back to the conclusion I reached long time ago: Bosnia is faced with a choice between a rock and a hard place. That is the truth, and a truth is facing people who are hungry, in trenches without sufficient weapons, in houses without lights, separated from those closest to them, without news or with bad news about relatives in occupied territories.

Despite everything I decide to take a stand:

"It is the strategic estimate of the West that it can survive this war without negative consequences and that it should be left alone to make it on its own accord".

My immediate occasion are the kids from my street who've been collecting

signatures for a petition to Clinton. They're calling on the American president to solve the Sarajevo problem in the easiest manner possible; let him arm one of his combat aeroplanes with an atomic bomb and drop it on this city.

"You'll solve one of yours and all of our problems" the children wrote to Clinton. Our children are great. As soon as the shells quieten down a bit, they come out to play basketball, just like before the war. Straight from the hoops, in a year or two, we'll send them to the trenches.

My colleague Mehmed Husic has heard as many shells as the rest of us, but his strongest war memories are tied to a different event:

- "On the fifth of April of Ninety-two I turned forty and that is probably the end of life, because this which comes after doesn't belong anywhere. Until the first of May we thought that it was just political wrangling, a bloody game which must come to an end. I lived in Dobrinja then. On the first of May I came down into the city. I found some childhood friends, they had come all the way from Germany to make war. They knew what was going on. For the first time in my life I left a shot of whiskey untouched. As I'd told Hana that I'll be back before four, I didn't want to end up spending the night in the city. That was Friday, the first of May. The next day, Dobrinja was cut off. The following two months were my basic war-education. I wrote articles every day, because I was literally watching the tanks as they lined up at Lukavica, I watched them through the window, I watched the tank crews near the church at Veljine, the army assembling around the 'Sedrenik' construction company.

The eighteenth of June came. I had a report on the radio that day, and on television. Earlier, fighters from Dobrinja called me that if I wished I could go in, further into the settlement suburb. I didn't go. That day, in the early evening, the *chetniks* appeared in front our building, and started calling out to someone named Milosevic, a customs officer: "Milosevic, bring those *balijas*¹⁷⁰ out here", and that's when they took us: my wife, children and me. While they were leading us off, my daughter, who was thirteen and a half at the time, had her first period.

"Daddy, even if they don't kill us, they won't have any cotton pads..."

They separated me from my family. Whenever somebody asks me whether they beat me, I answer honestly that they didn't: what did they have to beat me for when they were holding my wife and two children.

The interrogations lasted for a long time. That was the day when the Airport suburb fell, there were many prisoners, many dead. I shared a prison cell with a guy whose father and sixteen-year-old brother had been shot before his eyes.

Among the prisoners, the most valuable for the purpose for exchange were the

¹⁷⁰ Derogatory term for Bosnian Muslims

Islamic Law professor Džananović and I. They interviewed me for their television. A young woman came who began discussing with me in front of the camera, I said the same things that I would have said on our television.

I spent three weeks in prison. Then an exchange was organised. On the way to the point of exchange, Vrbanja Bridge in this case, I passed through Lukavica¹⁷¹. Without exaggeration I can say that there was a tank in every single backyard. I had luck in the exchange, they let me go among the first, and later firing broke out and the exchange was broken up.

Since then there have been sniper bullets close to my head, shells which fell near me, but if I survive it, I will remember this war most for the arrest, imprisonment and the moment when together with my family I crossed over into the free part of the city".

25th January 1995

Nedžib Šabić is in Sarajevo, the father of our ambassador to the United Nations. Šabić is a powerful man; he went to America a long time ago, as a member of the 'Mladi Muslimani' (*Young Muslims*) organisation, whose recorded history can be divided into two parts. The first was marked by ideological labelling in the time of the one-party system, after the trials of the forties, when even some death sentences were passed. The second part is apologetic, after the multi-party elections and the SDA victory. One thing is certain: the 'Mladi Muslimani' have been that thin thread of Muslim (or Bosniac) national organisation linking the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia¹⁷² and the Party of Democratic Action (SDA).

Inside the country the organisation had been all but broken, but it remained an influence abroad, and Šabić has built up a strong position in the USA. He has gained political experience, but it seems that he is too distant from Bosnian practice, which proved fatal even for one Adil Zulfikarpasić¹⁷³.

So in an interview for 'Oslobodjenje' he mentions that the key argument of our delegation at some talks in the USA was also the presence of General Šiber, because he's a Croat. However, Šiber was moved in the meantime, to some irrelevant position in the diplomacy.

¹⁷¹ Yugoslav National Army barracks and considered by the citizens of Sarajevo as the command centre for the attack on Sarajevo

¹⁷² Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1918-1941

¹⁷³ Bosnian businessman who spent most of his life in Switzerland. Returned to Bosnia before the first democratic elections in 1990 and founded the Liberal Party

I had a nice day today in the newsroom, and below it, in the bar 'At Tito's', but I came back home with wet feet. Nothing can stand up to the rigours of Sarajevo slush, especially war shoes for which there is no polish. The shoes are brown and in Sarajevo one can only get black polish for footwear.

Vlado Mrkic has withdrawn his resignation, but he won't be writing reports any longer. He's fed up, tired of everything. He'll be writing on the economy from now on. What bloody economy, Vlado?

26th January 1992

I bought a China porcelain set today. The act seems totally out of keeping with the times, but Azra was happy too. Something really fragile, altogether peacetime, completely full of hope for the future.

One's own demagogue?

I run into two cousins of mine, forty-year-olds, men in their prime. They are both university graduates, have beautiful flats, children who are good students, well-to-do parents, they both drive cars. They were both born in Sarajevo.

Inevitably the conversation starts: politics or war?

One of them quotes the words of Alija Izetbegovic from the SDA assembly: "I swear to dear *Allah* that we won't be slaves". I agree with Izetbegovic. However I am in advance and in principle reserved towards any politician who invokes the name of God for any reason.

"Never say never," I cite an English proverb. Never say never. I tell them how two and a half million Muslims find themselves between eight million Serbs and four million Croats, and we have neither an army nor any weapons. We later argue over right and justice, and I quote the English again: "Might is right".

The discussion heats up. They're too young to know what war really is, war in Bosnia, and I know it in itself and from life, and from the windows through which, even ten years after liberation, mothers would stare down the street wandering if their son will show up, the one that disappeared, no one knows where or when, such as my uncle Esad Misic.

26th January 1993

I've installed the gas, jointly with neighbour Bajic. He has a regulation set, which he came upon in the flat belonging to Boro Cabak, who is now "over there, far away".

We got hold of the pipes and all that is necessary, and for four welds we paid four hundred Marks. There isn't enough hydrogen while oxygen they can still smuggle somehow from the hospital. Altogether I spent three days punching holes in the hallway concrete and through the wall that is likewise reinforced, and had I not had help from neighbour Filipovic it would have taken another five.

With Muhamed Besic and some of his countrymen I talk about the Serb crimes in the valley of the Una and the Sana¹⁷⁴.

They are numerous. The murdered number some thirty thousand people, estimates Besic.

I will remember two crimes above all. Firstly the torture of the camps, the bestialities perpetrated against the incarcerated Muslims.

Then there is the "conscription", which was, it seems, carried out somewhere near Kozarac¹⁷⁵ by Karadzic's Serbs, The Serb Democratic Party or, as it would be termed here, its extremist wing. Immediately after the aggression they summoned for mobilisation a whole generation of Muslim conscripts. They lined them up and killed them.

26th January 1994

The gas is hardly burning—probably because we live on a hill side and gas is lighter than air—we are in a even though better situation than most. The problem here is water, which entered the street ducts during the period of uncontrolled installation. When the pressure falls, the gas flows intermittently - it's there for two seconds and then the next two there isn't any, which is enough for the fire to put itself out, and for the gas to start flowing invisibly into the chimney or the house. Thus one has to keep some wood or coal in the heater at all times, so that the flame is constantly kindling the gas.

Azra and I are not hungry; we've reduced our appetites to the point to which a living human being can possibly do that. There are however people around us

¹⁷⁴ Rivers in north-western Bosnia

¹⁷⁵ A small town in north-west Bosnia

who have done precisely the same thing and are still hungry. They didn't have those few decisive tins, which we received in 'Oslobodjenje'. It's not that much—maybe a kilo of fish per month, but even that makes a difference, and a fateful one at that.

A kilogram of flour at the market goes for eight DM.

The summary of the amounts of humanitarian aid distributed in December. In the free territories the aid came to 93 grams a day. Here in the siege, where the aid is all that is to be had, 250 grams per day have been distributed.

Today we ate the last remaining serving of salad made from green tomatoes; four kilograms have lasted four months.

Near Kakanj and Vitez¹⁷⁶ hungry people have begun stealing food from the convoys. It's not robbery as hungry mothers are snatching food for hungry children. In the meantime this additional war against the HVO in central Bosnia is driving people mad. Many families are in the forests, in sod-houses. How are they doing now, in this cold?

Haris Silajdzic proclaims that anyone who blocks convoys carrying food should be bombed, be it Serbs, Croats or Muslims. That, however, is easier said than done. Banski Dvori¹⁷⁷ are blocking the food in Ploce¹⁷⁸, and Banski Dvori are certainly not going to be bombed from the air. Pale have stopped tens of thousands of packages from Belgrade, but that too is politics, they won't be bombed either. Thus there will be more and more of those who are stealing food, as many desperates as bandits.

My friend Senada Kreso lives in a damaged flat in Ciglane. I know Senada from my time at the Sarajevo TV. She is an excellent English translator, and she was also one of the few people who could work together with absolutely the greatest expert of the television media in Yugoslavia, Ben Hval. Such people were very valuable to the television during the Winter Olympics¹⁷⁹. At the start of the war, Senada began working for the government information service, and she spent most of her time with people who had more contact with foreign journalists than anybody else.

Doing all those jobs, she carried with her all her private fears. The foremost among those was 'her' shell:

- "I remember it was the end of June 1992, but I can't recall the date. My sister was here too, having escaped from Rajlovac¹⁸⁰ with hers 11-month baby as she

¹⁷⁶ Towns in central Bosnia

¹⁷⁷ Presidential Palace in Zagreb, Croatia

¹⁷⁸ A port in Croatia, 90% built and used by Bosnia, and Bosnian industry during the time of Federal Yugoslavia

¹⁷⁹ Highly successful 1984 Winter Olympics held in Sarajevo

¹⁸⁰ Suburb of Sarajevo, held by Serbs throughout the war. A centre of military industry as well as a military airport

thought it impossible to go on living there. She came here thinking that it will be safer. In truth, until then, throughout April, May and June it was mostly quiet here. Those were the first shells to hit Ciglane. I think that until then they still counted on returning and they spared our building thinking that it will be theirs.

I remember, it was around seven-thirty in the evening, and I know we had electricity. I was in the bathroom and then went into the bedroom to answer the phone that was ringing. Four days earlier my cousin arrived, exiled from the Airport suburb, she got here in horrific circumstances. Her parents from Priboj called. My cousin was outside and I was telling the parents that it was safe here, when that something happened. I am not sure that I heard the sound, I am not sure that I felt anything apart from the terrifying dust which began seeping into the closed room. The door had been closed but it was as if the dust were coming in through the walls.

I rushed into the living room, as I supposed that my mother was somewhere there. She had left the kitchen some half a minute earlier. The projectile followed the path: bathroom, which I had just vacated, the kitchen, which my mother left a moment earlier, only to come to a halt at the door of the apartment. It flew through the whole flat, made a small hole on entering, and leaving a larger hole in every wall. On the door it left a hole the size of its diameter and fell down.

One had to fight their way through that heavy dust. My mother had a nervous breakdown. Two days later, looking at me she asked: where is my daughter?

The dust was such that the neighbours, when they came over to help us, had to wear masks so as not to suffocate in the flat and the hallway without ventilation. We went to the floor above, but a sniper was waiting for us there. A neighbour invited us over for coffee, so that we could calm down. I went to the bathroom and saw that my hair had turned white. I believed that I had gone grey-haired...

My flat is the best protected in the building. The upper floors are exposed to Poljine, Boriye and Hresa¹⁸¹. I know that the neighbour from the third floor, colonel Sinkovic, knew well what was happening in this building, as he was—I found out later—writing letters to refugees who'd moved into his flat. He knew not only who lived in which one of these flats, as he was informed by people responsible for doing precisely that, but he also surely knew that a three-member journalist team spent a month in my flat. They were aiming for the journalists of The New York Times, Daily Telegraph and UPI agency.

Later they told me that it was an anti-tank shell. The following night the roof of the neighbouring building was hit by a mortar shell, also the first in our street.

On the second of August I was in Barcelona, at the Olympics, and I saw my street

¹⁸¹ Frontlines around Sarajevo

on CNN, I saw that three shells had hit just below my balcony. Once again they counted on some foreign journalists being there. After that, following the same path, two anti-aircraft gun bullets entered the same room. I don't attach any special importance to myself, nor do I think that it is paranoia, but doesn't the house have the higher floors too?

The damage is not great but eighteen people, neighbours, spent two days cleaning the flat, and there is still dust there."

There is no more dust; Senada is imagining it. There is soot, from the gas heater, from the wood Senada has managed to get hold of.

26th January 1995

The guests of the morbid manifestation dedicated to the thousand days of siege are arriving in Sarajevo. The government top echalons had been against it, but the anniversary celebration was inevitable.

These well-meaning people who've come mostly don't have a clue. The colleagues who accompany them and the interpreters who are with them must keep track of the most basic facts. Everything that we'd reported from Sarajevo has drowned in the languor of the usual, the normal European life. Karadzic has managed in these thousand or so days to get people used to killing in Bosnia and the siege.

In showing cataclysms on television, the media usually extracts the visual summary, dramatic details. Sarajevo killing and destruction surpasses the power of television. It is spatial, temporal, human, such that only some great documentarist could show what is happening here. We, who are from Sarajevo, no longer see things around us; we are used to them. We are not for testifying before the world, shelling is a normal occurrence for us, maiming, killing, hunger, thirst, cold; things we are used to. Such, the worst of things, I reluctantly include in my diary.

27th January 1992

How are my wartime reserves doing?

When the war began in Slovenia, I was convinced that it must eventually come to Bosnia. When the war moved to Croatia and when it was clear how bloody it was, hope began wrestling with estimation.

In the first wave, I bought two boxes of tinned ham and two boxes of tinned tuna.

That is a refined manner of preparing for war, only the best will do, and on credit, moreover, through Aska who works in 'UPI'¹⁸².

I also have 15 kilograms of sugar, I got those through 'Oslobodjenje', they were giving it away by some sort of list, very cheap, and the acquisition was organised by colleague Fahro Memic. I took a hundred kilos, part of which I distributed to my family and part I left at home, and they never deducted it from my salary. A hundred kilos of sugar, thus, was on the house. With the inflation that has been set in motion lately, it isn't that much. Having also in mind the fact that I am the only journalist of this paper who has been overlooked for three different lucrative correspondent positions, and I certainly am no worse than anybody else, It really isn't much. In any case I will pay 'Oslobodjenje' back—sooner or later.

The real problems with war reserves originate in the mind. I mean that one has to come to terms with the fact that war is coming, and then seriously start gathering goods. What I have brought in I have partly brought in secret. Salt is easiest to smuggle in. Hiding it from Azra, so that it wouldn't upset her, I bring in one kilo at a time - I already have fifteen.

27th January 1993

Gas has suddenly changed the atmosphere of our flat: now it's warm, we can move around outside of the area into which we had previously been confined. I am trying to persuade neighbour Asim Dorbudzuk to join in. He still has wood and coal in his mother's house above Kovaci, but that has to be hauled here, which is difficult even with a sleigh. Virtually every evening Asko, his wife Dina, Azra and I listen to a measured amount of radio programming, we swear together and then go to sleep.

This evening we ate beans with meat—I 'killed' a tin alone. I have no cooking oil. but it doesn't matter.

27th January 1994

It has been officially declared that indictments have been issued against sixty members of the Ninth and Tenth motorised brigades, two units who have long been, as it has been talked about officially, outside the system of command. If it's a question of defence, there can be no doubt—they guarded their portion of the

¹⁸² Bosnian-based food industry

frontline conscientiously. Their commanders, Musan Topalovic–Caco in the Tenth and Ramiz Delalic–Celo in the Ninth brigade, which I had been a member of at one time, had become even more famous through their 'invitations' for trench-digging duties.

A dramatic showdown with Caco and Celo followed by the end of October. After putting up fierce resistance, Delalic and his people surrendered to the authorities and so saved themselves. Musan Topalovic-Caco and his followers brutally killed nine military policemen and then surrendered. It was later announced that Caco had been shot "...while trying to escape."

I read through the indictment. What is written is terrible, and if what was being talked about in the city is true, the reality is even worse.

Late afternoon, a telephone call and Azra's long conversation.

Refugees have moved into the flat in which Azra's sister Asija used to live in Alipasino. When we moved Asija to her sister's, a military policeman first broke into the flat, but Azra managed to sort that out and let the refugees in. During that whole affair, as before, when Asija was sick, we had a lot of help from her neighbour, whom I'll call Mrs. F. Her child was killed by a shell on the balcony. A large piece of shrapnel blew apart the five-year-old's head, the mother found only the trunk. Afterwards, she redirected her unspent motherly love to one of the girls from the neighbourhood. When the shells killed the children in Alipasino, in one of those massacres that even Karadzic is not taking credit for, they killed that girl too. Now Mrs. F doesn't even want to pat a child on the head, she feels that her love and attention have become fatal.

Azra was told the story by the woman from Asija's flat, and later Azra told it to me, after which we remained silent for a long while.

27th January 1995

I was supposed to have gone to the final presentation of the project for a free and unified Sarajevo, but I gave up on that in the same way that I have given up on socialising with foreigners in general.

Hundreds of thousands of signatures grace the declaration for a unified Sarajevo. I didn't sign, I don't want Sarajevo to be unified, if it means that I will be running into people who shot at us from guns, howitzers, mortars, anti-aircraft guns and machineguns, nor do I wish to see Emir Kusturica¹⁸³ here, who, I think, betrayed

¹⁸³ Bosnian filmmaker, winner of the Palme d'Or at the Cannes International Film Festival in the early 80s, for his film "When father was away on business"

us. I don't want anything to be forgiven. There shouldn't be any revenge, but one mustn't forgive. Those who have the right to forgive are dead.

In the siege, Sarajevo has become Utopia. There is no Sarajevo; it has been divided by a wall thicker than that of Berlin. The Berlin wall used to divide two parts of a city that wanted to be whole. Here it is not a case of a very high wall, but hatred on that and contempt on this side.

We can be together again, but we have to build a wall first, and then we would remove a row of bricks every year, only as long as they should be good enough to live with us. Here in the free part, let all those who weren't attacking it live. Only that can be the "unified and indivisible Sarajevo".

28th January 1992

I handed in my column today and I had a little time to socialise with colleagues, which is usually how I verify my thoughts. I must correct myself - 'Oslobodjenje' is a tired paper, it cannot offer freshness, but it can offer durability. It seems to me after a few hours of conversation that in that disorientation, which affected everybody, we chose the minimum that should be defended and saved. For some it may be just an expression: civil society, a legal state, free elections, fair competition between parties... To us it is more like a personal time-out, so that we might scrutinise things. I am not sure that anyone believes in big words such as democracy. All big words have stuck in our throat thus far, and so it will be with these. However the repetition of big words gives time to real political forces to occupy and consolidate their positions. I just hope that instead of political, positions are not occupied and fortified by military forces. One can smell gunpowder in the air. 'Oslobodjenje' has naturally undergone all the changes which have affected Bosnia and Herzegovina, and so among them the haste for national alignment.

It has something journalistically attractive in itself. It's a new point of view, regardless of whether it could stand up under the scrutiny of logic and life, or would it in fact not do so, taking God knows whom into the abyss with it. It is undoubtedly an intellectual adventure of the highest order to separate along national lines the Sarajevo writers who drank together, some wish to be more precise: used to get smashed in the old 'Istra'¹⁸⁴. I, on the other hand, remembering well the taste of 'Istra's' slivovitz and pickled cabbage, claim that such an analysis would better apply as part of the history of Sarajevo alcoholism, or let's say Sarajevo bohemia, rather than as part of the history of three literatures. Sarajevo is

¹⁸⁴ Well-known Sarajevo cafe

large: there's a lot of walking distance from Jekovci to Vrelo Bosne, but it is rather small to accommodate three literatures.

28th January 1993

I hear that Vucurevic has begun the expulsion of Muslims from Trebinje. They were chased out of Ljubinja at the beginning of the war. They ran rather, from the horrific collective memory of the previous war and the *chetnik* massacres - they recognised the same ideas, the sons and grandsons of the same people.

Both of the then bloody powers are now in full swing, *ustashas* being as recognisable as *chetniks*.

What is happening in Trebinje, is going on in sight of Geneva, and the responses coming from over there about the definite ethnic division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The idea of national organisation is the only victor emerging from the scorched earth.

28th January 1994

While we are all occupied with the war that is raging, and now also various internal conflicts, the government is preparing a bill which would make all the publicly owned property government owned.

The power of the government over the people is becoming absolute. I am writing an article titled: "Happy New Year 1945". One state, one party, one company. Who is the boss?

28th January 1995

Since the gas has been allocated through the even-odd¹⁸⁵ system, gas explosions are a common occurrence: People haven't the strength to maintain their concentration and to keep track of when it is available and when it isn't. They open it up to check if it has been switched on or not, and on finding that there is no gas, they fail to turn it all the way back. After that one only needs to light a match.

¹⁸⁵ Because of chronic scarcity, natural gas was being distributed so that certain parts of the city would have gas on odd and others on even days

In the past few days I have thrice forgotten to shut the valves. Now I wake up, get up, check, and then when I lie down again, I don't know if I'd left the valve in the correct position or had I turned it on.

The warnings on the radio are constant, but something is always threatening us from all sides and one doesn't know which warning to heed, and heeding them all is out of the question.

There was some optimism in connection with the cease-fire worked out by Carter¹⁸⁶, but now he's melting away as well. I think that people are more tired of cease-fires than war. They raise hopes only to dash them once again.

A book titled "Bosnia and Herzegovina - A Tradition Betrayed" has been published. True: Bosnia is a victim of betrayal. The authors are two Americans, John Fine and Robert Donia. Azra proof-reads the text, which is a good study of times past and present.

29th January 1992

Sarajevo cafes are teeming with life as never before. Today I dropped in at 'London' in Ciglane. It seems that whenever I or somebody of my age enters, the young folk stare at us as if we were police detectives, and some make a quick exit. The latter are the dope dealers.

'London' is something of an exception. It hasn't won its place among the youth, so the older ones enter it without hesitation. Even grey-haired heads. That's why it's a real Sarajevan cafe. Through discreet eavesdropping, to which cafe regulars resort to habitually for reasons of personal protection, one can feel the atmosphere of the city.

The older ones are shooting the bull and concerning themselves with abstract political analyses, either that or they have sunk into one of the notorious party world-views.

The younger people are worried.

It's foggy outside, a heavy fog that stinks of gasoline and blood. People are dying over there across the Sava river¹⁸⁷, when will our turn come, I wonder?

¹⁸⁶ Jimmy Carter, former US President

¹⁸⁷ A River running through Croatia and Serbia, a part of its course also marking the northern border between Bosnia and Croatia

29th January 1993

The glass in my dining-room windows has been shattered; it was the last remaining, that which had been bypassed by all the shrapnel and fragments, until now. The last reserve. Fortunately no one was in the dining room at the time. The glass scattered across the floor, in tiny pieces. However much one cleans up, when the light changes its angle, tiny pieces glow on the floor. They're dangerous, glass cannot be seen on an x-ray, and it can roam the bloodstream.

29th January 1994

News items are outrunning each other today: American reconnaissance planes are flying over Bosnia, negotiations are in progress at the airport led by the pragmatic and efficient Haris Silajdzic. It looks like something is going to happen; maybe we'll even have some electricity. How does that sound? There has also been talk about the opening of a route to Visoko. Thus the siege would cease to exist in a way. If only one man were to enter legally, by land, and one were to leave, I would feel differently.

Sarajevo is now a political enclave within Bosnia. Here, it haven't been such fiercely nationalist conflicts among the populace as in central Bosnia, for example, or in Herzegovina. Those who have taken to the hills¹⁸⁸ we do not count as anything. Once the siege is lifted, we will be able to see different people, with different experiences, to talk with them.

I am really curious to get to know the members of that New Islam which, as they say, is gaining in strength around Zenica and in middle central Bosnia. Recently Dr. Karic¹⁸⁹ wrote about the brand of Islam being brought over by the mujahedeens from the Middle East. They keep on correcting our people about all sorts of things, even how to bow.

The key to the matter as far as I am concerned, without going into theology, is in the fact that Islam, such as it was in Bosnia, endured trying historical circumstances and contributed to the preservation of the Bosniac national identity. Should it change, it is a big question if it will retain the durability that it has shown until now.

¹⁸⁸ A number of Serbs from Sarajevo joined the Serb nationalists and the Yugoslav National Army dug in on the hills and mountains surrounding the city, where they held Sarajevo under siege. Referred to by the citizens of the city as 'those in the hills'

¹⁸⁹ Dr. Enes Karic, Islamic Theologian. Since 1994 Bosnian Minister of Culture

29th January 1995

Since the war began, Sarajevo has been stubbornly keeping up its peacetime way of life, resurrecting it wherever possible. Culture is as great a miracle as is armed resistance—so many books, exhibitions, concerts—and all that after such a great number of intellectuals had left the city.

Cafes are being restored and opened once again.

That sometimes is unnerving, that apathy about dying and sometimes such a stubbornness is impressive and gives strength. There isn't unfortunately a chronicler who will record all those exploits, that quixotism where big business deals that started with only two to three hundred DM, sometimes succeed.

This is an anonymous war. There aren't, at least in Sarajevo, any famous heroes. Only known are the names of politicians: the member of that, the Minister of this...

We, the journalists are the exception. We are covering ourselves in glory while the young men who are defending Sarajevo usually get only one mention, in the obituary. However, it is not our fault—there must be so many, many names. A nation or a state consists of people, or in any case that's how it should be.

30th January 1992

The London *Economist* comments on the cease-fire signed between Serbia (JNA—Yugoslav National Army) and Croatia: "*The outbreak of war in Yugoslavia has come as a shock, with the establishment of peace it looks virtually incredible. One has to admit that it is an unstable peace...Regardless of whether war has been brought to an end in the whole of the Balkans, or only its first phase, it's time to ask one simple question: who won?*"

The magazine feels that the Serbs had converted their military victories, won in an uneven struggle between the JNA and an ill-equipped Croatia, into political defeats. The only thing which Milosevic can boast of is the expulsion of Croats from the so-called Serb enclaves within Croatia. "Thousands of Croats have been hounded out, making those areas more Serb than they had ever been, which is the reason why a Serbian defeat would not necessarily mean a Croatian victory."

Today I've managed to rid myself of yesterday's pessimism. The calculation I made last night doesn't exclude war. However, instead of the fate of the nation I

am considering that of the family; enough Baksics died in the previous war, and surely we've come to our senses and that in the war which is looming, if it materialises, there will be more family wisdom. I am not much worried about my own life. What is behind me is a beautiful and interesting path. I haven't been rich enough to worry about a fortune, or poor enough to worry about survival. Somewhere in between. Typically Bosnian. Neither here nor there.

30th January 1993

Walking with a friend down Djure Djakovica Street, Azra found herself in an area under sniper fire. They lay on the cold ground for fifteen minutes and were chilled to the bone. Still, she's cheerful. We managed to get through to Rovinj and speak with our daughter.

After our brave surprise attack, the *chetniks* gave up the tower on Grdonj¹⁹⁰. First they lashed out with a heavy artillery bombardment, and then advanced with tanks and infantry. They're using up munitions and equipment whereas we can only use people.

Shells are raining down on Sarajevo; victims are falling like last summer, in the hardest days of the war.

30th January 1994

Colleague Mirko Sagolj in his 'Oslobodjenje' column has written a powerful truth: "Every square kilometre of the territory of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina contains on average at least six graves. Such territory is impossible to divide up and trade with, because the rebellion of the dead is the most difficult rebellion and it is impossible to put it down".

These days there haven't been many killed in Sarajevo, so we have enough space in 'Oslobodjenje' for memories to the dead normally given after seven days, forty days, and six months following the death. I look at a photograph of a young woman. She exudes youth. One of those beautiful Sarajevo girls whose smiles scented this city until April 1992. That is Dalila 'Lili' Tufo. The last respects are paid by Kenan Fejzic, Prco, Sejo, Dragica, Selma and Mirela, Miralem, Omer, Zarifa, Mirko, Asi, Bakir and then families Miric and Mesic. Dalila Tufo was killed defending her city.

¹⁹⁰ A hill near Sarajevo

And that is the cross-road; should one betray that beautiful young woman whose path to maternity, old age and natural death was cut off by a bullet or a piece of shrapnel? Thus, should we continue the struggle until we have avenged Dalila, fight to keep Bosnia from being divided, at any cost, or —with a dose of wisdom which is rooted in a vital selfishness and cowardliness—find some middle course, leave a piece of Bosnian tissue in the jaws of the attacker to save what can still be saved?

The only answer to this question may be given by Dalila's contemporaries, and nobody is asking them. They are receiving the summons in the name of History and Justice. They are neither the envoys, nor party officials, nor officers or diplomats. A few of them might be successful black marketeers, and that is everything that remains for Dalila's generation.

On my way back from work, I drop by my cousin Hida's. I come to see her rarely, as her street, behind the former Military Hospital, is the target of either anti-aircraft guns or snipers from the Jewish cemetery. On the eve of the war Hida lived in this family house, in the shade of the giant poplar and a flower garden, with her husband Hasan. Their son Zlatko would often also be there, daughter Nerma always, married to a sailor, a Dalmatian who lived in Sarajevo.

Zlatko worked in the Military Hospital as lab technician and he was wounded. The piece of shrapnel came to rest in the head, near the optic nerve. Those were the first months of the war, it was difficult to get hold of even a little of powdered milk for the wounded man. Hilda went repeatedly to Merhamet¹⁹¹, even Dzenana went once too, and she finally got a kilogram of milk, which was a day of relief in the whole family. Afterwards, Zlatko, following the initial surgery, left to recuperate in Sweden, and he was operated on there. He's well now. Nerma went with her daughter to her husband's family in Zagreb, a letter arrives from her occasionally and sometimes they speak on the phone.

Her Hasan has died.

Hida still doesn't have gas in her home; she would have to hook up from a distance of seventy metres. The firewood is on the stove is the chopped up trunk from in front of the house. The wood is wet, it needs a day to dry, so that they it could be used as firewood. Hida is blue from the cold.

Across the former rose garden, traces of the flower-bed. Hida's brother Mirza, a geodesist, one of the best in Bosnia and Herzegovina, did it for her. Not even Mirza can do a lot any longer; he's lost thirty kilograms, but he has kept the cheerfulness that keeps Hida alive too. And the hope that he will once again, with his daughter, son and grandchildren, drink coffee on the terrace on which the late

¹⁹¹ A Bosnian humanitarian relief agency

Hasan and I spent a few pleasant evenings together.

He has another, more immediate hope. That power should come back on. Hida is an excellent tailor; she's working as if for a boutique. She has no strength to work with a foot-powered sewing machine, and if the power comes back on, the house will be full of customers again, and at least something will be like in the old times.

30th January 1995

Another round of negotiations is starting at Sarajevo airport. That is becoming tiresome. Everyone knows that Karadzic won't make a significant concession, that he will press the city until he succeeds in evacuating it, unless we or someone else cut through knot with a sword.

The mother of Nijaz and Samija Durakovic died from the gas poisoning. She couldn't go back to her Stolac and came back to her son in Sarajevo. Just when her health was beginning to improve...

Rasim Cerimagic calls me from Ljubljana. Rasim belongs in the category of tired, nervous heroes of 'Oslobodjenje'. Before the war he was the editor of our weekly supplement. Very talented. Behind that official profile hides a hypersensitive personality, a combination of Herzegovian wit and journalistic curiosity—an explosive mixture that should be handled with care.

Rasim remembers the exile of his family from Trebinje. The Cerimagics remained there as long as they could, as long as it seemed worthwhile to tie oneself to the land whence one sprang from. When it became obvious that the land will remain, and that the Cerimagic offspring will be cut down by the *chetnik* knife, they took the well-known route through Montenegro. Now they are in some floating refugee camp on the southern edge of the North Sea.

Rasim, much like other colleagues, myself included, must keep forcing himself not to tell the readers his main story. For Rasim, Trebinje doesn't exist any longer, Ljubinje has long ceased to do that for me, for others there is no Foca, and I ask myself whether the city of Jajce exists for me either. After the story I heard about how the confused Cerimagics, with tickets for Sweden which are the dream of every one of our refugees, boarded the wrong ferry and landed in Denmark, I will start reading his articles in a different way. Those people, so confused by the fact that they had been torn from their roots, feel closer to me than all those who are able to cope.

If we win the war, the victory will be won by the people who cannot cope.

31st January 1992

Prices are rising, salaries are plummeting. Bosnia is shaking with the waves of social unrest. The government and the assembly are not even paying attention to that, the state is collapsing before the eyes of its citizens and its leaders. The national parties are pulling each in its own direction. The SDA's goal of keeping Bosnia and Herzegovina together, or the goal of certain people within that party, or that which the party wants to present as being its goal, is further and further away from realization.

31st January 1993

A six-month-old baby was killed.

On the pavement in front of the Presidency this morning I passed by a shoe that had fallen off the foot torn to pieces by shrapnel yesterday. In the evening I watch over Sarajevo: Cengic Vila has power, and around the Trg Heroja (Heroes Square) there are flashes of artillery weapons. A battle is going on.

31st January 1994

Today I feel truly victorious.

I have survived January! They bombarded us with shells, we have been cold and hungry. My biggest fear was dying of the cold. In the final calculation, I worked it out that everything that could be kindled in the flat would maintain the temperature above the point of freezing to death for three weeks. I suppose that neighbours Asko and Dina would come over to our place, carrying all that could be used to keep the fire going from their place. That would be enough for at least another week. Now February is upon us and there will be another cold wave, but there will also be a thaw. We won't freeze.

The problem of winter has thus been removed from the agenda. Whoever doesn't get hit by a shell will live to see the spring. Days are longer now too; there is less fear of endless nights.

I haven't managed to get my name on the priority access list for electricity. It would have been wiser to have invested some money and hooked myself up to one of the gas generators. Since that started up, many people can watch television.

Others get to do that by latching onto one of the 'priorities'. But even those who get hooked up in this way cannot take advantage of high users as they would thus deprive their 'donator' as well. Now I must look into one of those solutions, I cannot write without light. Topics are getting wasted, the diary remains shortchanged, and I have already given up on other manuscripts.

31st January 1995

I was almost late for Camila Durakovic's *dzenaza*; I had a difficult climb up to Alifakovac¹⁹². There were quite a lot of people, virtually everyone left from pre-war Sarajevo: from politicians like Nijaz¹⁹³, and the others regardless of their political convictions.

From Alifakovac I looked at the Trebevic road, the *chetniks* can see us from there and could kill us whenever they wish. I looked at the gutted National Library, the deserted Obala¹⁹⁴, the city in fog.

5th February 1992

The last bridge to Bosnia has been destroyed. First of all, in August, the bridge near Gradiska¹⁹⁵ was mined, in September near Orasje¹⁹⁶, in November the old bridge near Brcko...

Borislav Jovic¹⁹⁷ has returned from New York and on his way back, in Paris, he was interviewed by 'Le Figaro'. The subject was, for the most part, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I can tell you that the European suggestion that a referendum on independence should be organised for all citizens will lead to catastrophe... Even if they should be in the majority, two out of three peoples cannot impose their will [on the third]: that's what the Bosnian constitution says."

It doesn't say that. But:

"It is still possible that such a decision should be reached. In that case, Bosnia will

¹⁹² A quarter of Sarajevo, overlooking the old town, Bascarsija and providing a vantage point whence the whole city can be seen

¹⁹³ Nijaz Durakovic, SDP (Social Democratic Party) leader

¹⁹⁴ A street along the bank of River Miljacka, in central Sarajevo

¹⁹⁵ Bosanska Gradiska, a town on the northern border between Bosnia and Croatia

¹⁹⁶ A town on the River Sava, which forms the northern border between Bosnia and Croatia

¹⁹⁷ Member of the Yugoslav Federal Presidency in 1992

disintegrate and war will break out. The European recommendation leads straight to war.”

The journalist asks Jovic doesn't that mean that the conflict in Croatia would end in order that a second one may be started, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“It's not a matter of a decision which rests with the government. It's a matter of an actual situation on the ground which may not be altered by any sort of policy. If a referendum is ever held, and if based on its outcome one should be insisting on the implementation of a decision contrary to the wishes of one of the three peoples, then a civil war is inevitable.”

“With or without the Army, it would be terrible. The Serbs and Muslims are almost equally well matched. The Army will remain on the sidelines, unless it is attacked. But, it's difficult to imagine that the Muslims and Croats wouldn't attack it.”

The journalist asks Jovic is there some way of averting all this.

“It's very easy. It would be quite sufficient if Europe were to let Bosnia know that it cannot unilaterally leave Yugoslavia. The process would be halted immediately... I tell you quite frankly, and that's what I think: today there is a danger of war, even with Europe. If Europe doesn't believe in that, too bad. For us, but for them as well.”

Then the journalist asks him is the answer in partition?

“In order to begin such an operation, it would require Bosnia to already be outside Yugoslavia. So that, when it becomes independent, it will be partitioned. And once it's partitioned, it will be drawn into war.”

5th February 1993

Neighbour Dragan is passing by with pieces of water-pipe slung over his shoulder. He's not on the frontlines today, but on his way to install gas somewhere. The whole city is getting by like that. It started in Dobrinja, continued on and now the gas is arriving in all sorts of different pipes, by different means, to flats where people would otherwise die of cold and hunger. We've learnt all the German words that installers use.

I have reached the conclusion that lengths of rubber hose are most securely fastened with several layers of Band-Aid.

Still, we are often without gas. The greatest piece of ingenuity has again come from Dobrinja; one takes an inflatable beach mattress, fills it with gas, and later

that gas is used as a last reserve. There were even drivers who pumped the inner truck tires full of gas, and then used that for running the cars. The driver places the tire on the seat underneath himself and thus squeezes the gas in the direction of the engine. Quite enough for shorter distances.

After 11 AM there was a lot of shooting. The UNPROFOR has registered over 700 shells landing in the city and 170 of our own going the other way.

5th February 1994

It had been a quiet morning and warm for this time of the year.

Another convoy has left Sarajevo, Jewish by name and organisation, even though people of different faiths had found salvation on it. Gordana Verona¹⁹⁸ left this morning as well. Tomorrow, or the day after, she will finally see her daughter after two years.

The way to the newsroom leads me, just like nearly ever other day, through two markets – the one here in Ciglane and the main one, at Markale. The market is my initial morning source of information about the life in the city. Everything can be surmised from the prices, the assortment of goods and the topics of conversation.

This Saturday there isn't any particular activity. From Ciglane I go to have coffee with Kemo and Jasna Muftic¹⁹⁹. Afterwards I drop by the newsroom, have another coffee there and then I go down to the Markale market. Markale is an old German name for the market-hall building – transformed through being slaviced.

At the market, a misery. Two heads of cabbage, a few bags of apples, a little potato, two bulbs of garlic, a woman selling a litre of oil so that she could buy a pair of military boots for her son at the neighbouring stall. In front of Markale I buy cigarettes from a tall, corpulent young man in a uniform. He takes my 'three-for-ten' out of his breast-pocket, and his sleeves are full of cigarettes. There are more and more people on the street. Everyone is counting on the fact that we'd paid with our blood a tribute to the chetniks yesterday, in Dobrinja. They usually leave some space between two massacres.

I drop by my sister's; she's not home. I sit down with my brother-in-law for a few minutes.

In those few minutes the shell hit Markale. When I went back out into the street, everything was normal. Near the Veliki park a car passed by, a red golf. They

¹⁹⁸ Senior reporter and editor of Radio Sarajevo.

¹⁹⁹ Kemal Muftic, head of President Izetbegovic's office throughout the war. Presently the manager of BH Press, Bosnian News agency. His wife Jasna is the author's cousin.

seemed to be driving someone who'd been wounded, but that's an everyday sight in Sarajevo. As I went on along Kralja Tomislava street, which leads to the hospital, cars full of people started flying by. Some were sitting, some lying down. Two, three, four cars... The mind slowly begins to accept the thought of a mass slaughter. After that, for a few minutes, no new carloads. I start believing that those five-six had been the final tally that would be a few dead and 2-3 times the number of wounded. Thus, just like yesterday in Dobrinja.

Then the second wave comes, one car after another. A dark 'caravan' passes by, the legs of the wounded dangling out of its back, and then a truck on which I can make out bodies; two men sitting dejectedly, the rest on the floor, dead, in pieces. Now I know everything, now I can imagine even what I hadn't seen. The same thing as it happened close by, in the Vase Miskina street, a long ago. A shell in the midst of a human crowd. Markale was the place I'd visited just minutes ago! I picture the young man who sold me the cigarettes – was he in one of the vehicles?

I haven't the strength to turn, driven by professional duty, toward the hospital. When such large massacres occur, like the one that obviously took place today, the pen is rendered powerless. The journalist simply isn't sure whether he should help the unfortunates around him, or write. And if he writes – what should it be about, which of the multitude of human destinies that end up in car-boots or in the vans? I am a professional, I should rouse myself. I should turn back, to the market or to the newsroom.

I cannot; I'm running home.

From the stairs that go along Ciglane I can see that on the upper streets they are still driving victims to the Kosevo hospital.

At home, the phone isn't working. Only buzzing; everyone in the city has heard the news and now everyone is inquiring after their own. The lines are congested, just as they would be in peacetime, but then everyone wanted, at two minutes past midnight, after having exchanged kisses with the household members, to wish a happy New Year over the phone to their close friends. Precisely that comparison went through my head as I held the receiver whence only buzzing could be heard.

Almost an hour passes by before the phone finally rings. Ahmed from Dobrinja is calling me. His brother-in-law Ibro, a forestry engineer, left the house a few minutes before the explosion. He lives in Romanijska street, just behind the Cathedral. He still isn't back, and he hasn't called. I try to comfort Ahmed by telling him that the telephone exchanges in the old part of town still cannot get the system back up and working. Then it rings again: Kemo is wondering if I am still alive; he knows that I go through the market at least once a day. Now everyone is trying to track down their own, their friends, colleagues from work.

I finally get through to the newsroom – they are all alive. Senka Kurtovic was sent to the market-hall to make a report, a young woman with a strong journalistic nerve, and, evidently, of superhuman strength. Senka’s mother had been killed by a shell earlier. Then Jasna calls. Kemo’s brother-in-law was killed on the spot, Kemo’s sister was severely wounded. Ahmed calls again – Ibro is dead too, killed on the spot.

I find out in what part of the market the shell had struck. Hardly a meter away from the place where that woman stood, who wanted to buy her son a pair of winter boots for a litre of oil. Next to the man who was selling those same shoes.

I find out – little Igor has been killed as well, the boy about whom Azra talked about a few times. She used to run into him when she was visiting her sister.

Hundreds of people waited in front of the hospital at first to see if one of their own was among the dead or wounded. Lists with the names of those in either category were being released. The relatives of the dead would quietly leave the area of the hospital, the relations of the wounded stayed there a little longer, to be near.

In the evening, on the news that I am watching at cousin Saza’s—she’s receiving electricity from a generator—I hear a wounded woman, a pensioner. She telling how it all happened and says: “I’ve been left without my identity card and the coupon with which I was supposed to pick up the flour.” The flour which is being distributed in place of the pensions.

5th February 1995

Just like every morning when I go out into the city, I pass through the market at Markale. Today is the anniversary of the great slaughter.

The atmosphere at the market is back to normal, there isn’t a trace of some pathos for the victims.

During the past year, the difference in the number of victims in Sarajevo – there are 10,068 of them now – between the earlier pace of killing and what has followed after the ultimatum, is at least three and a half thousand people.

As far as the weapons around Sarajevo are concerned, (they were supposed to have been removed as a result of the NATO ultimatum), the attackers—according to the data recently told to guests of the city by general Karavelic²⁰⁰—are keeping the most heavy weapons beyond any control. The UNPROFOR controls 74 anti-

²⁰⁰ Vahid Karavelic, commander of the Bosnian Army 1st Corps in the early part of the war

aircraft guns; 54 are outside their control, just as are 3 anti-aircraft rocket launchers, neither of which is under control: a hundred mortars under control, 125 that are not; 46 heavy guns under control and 28 howitzers, and 48 and 34 of each respectively outside its domain. 12 armoured vehicles and 28 tanks are outside UNPROFOR control as well, somewhat fewer of which are under control. Altogether close to 600 pieces of artillery. All distributed across the best positions, which the JNA officers picked at their leisure, at about this time in 1992.

While we still somehow believed that the JNA was a “pool of professionals”.

These days, Momcilo Krajsnik states that there will be no partition of Sarajevo, that it was once a Serb city and that it will again be a Serb city.

5th March 1992

A large peace demonstration has been arranged to take place at Marindvor. No banners, just a gathering. One can already sense the differences in the speeches; what sort of peace for Bosnia? Nevertheless, these are unimportant.

There's alarm in Kobilja; they're afraid that the chetniks from Poljine will strike at them. I'd been to Poljine once for a walk, three years ago, with Metka and Dzevad Hozo²⁰¹. We stopped by a stream to pick some mint, when the owner of the nearby field showed up and chased us away with a gun. An army gun. His son barely managed to stop him from firing.

5th March 1993

In the hours before noon, the phones are quiet again. A transmission-line pylon has probably been brought down somewhere again, so that we wouldn't get water. A 48-hour wait follows in order that the teams might get an UNPROFOR escort and go out into the field, and one should add to that the time needed to repair the transmission-line.

In the FIS cafe I run into Stjepan Kljujic²⁰². That's our first encounter after the elections. I knew him before as the 'Vijesnik' correspondent. He had also been, I think, the editor of the newsletter at the MESS festival. The director there was

²⁰¹ Dzevad Hozo, famous Bosnian artist, member of the Bosnian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo.

²⁰² Member of the Bosnian Presidency, initially the Bosnian HDZ leader, with the beginning of the war turned Bosnian patriot.

Miro Lasic²⁰³. We maintained cordial professional relations, but since Kljucic has entered government and I haven't had any sort of close contact therewith for 7-8 years now, we haven't been seeing much of each other. I respect Kljucic a lot because he didn't try to leave Sarajevo when he was so hastily chased out of the Presidency. However, I think he is being too harsh towards his former profession; one can very often hear coming from Kljucic severe political dismissals of journalists and journalism.

By the way, Kljucic still has bodyguards, but I have a feeling they bother him because the cafe is packed with his friends and acquaintances, Sarajevo *raja*²⁰⁴.

In the newsroom, we are talking about prices. A loaf of bread is only 0.3 pfenings, and we are selling 'Oslobodjenje' for 0.6 pfenings. At the market, only DM talks.

I have exchanged a tin of meat for two kilograms of flour. Explosions can be heard coming from Ilidza. The son of neighbour Zeljko Filipovic is over there in Azici as well.

5th March 1994

Sharif Basiouni is in Sarajevo, one of the honourable people from the United Nations, and another member of Basiouni's team of war crimes investigators: professor Daniel Hardy. Incidentally, the West has found a great excuse for not investigating war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the UN has no money!?! After this, should one only blame the chetniks for the war crimes?

Doctor Hardy: *"At the Psychiatric clinic I found the head, Dr. Ismet Ceric, who had lost more than 40 kilograms in weight during the war. Every bed and every chair in that institution are filled and they currently house 275 patients suffering from syndromes resulting from the war. They have had to send chronic patients home. At the Children's clinic I saw a 6-month-old baby, the youngest patient with a psychic reaction, because it cries at the slightest sound, which is a consequence of exposure to shelling. I saw a boy who is without injuries, but he has lost the ability to walk. One two-year-old won't allow his mother to leave the room where they are living together..."*

Doctor Hardy has come from outside, he notices things which are terrible, things to which we inside the siege have become used to.

²⁰³ HDZ representative in the Bosnian Presidency, strongly affiliated with Croatian President Tudjman and the HDZ in Zagreb.

²⁰⁴ Raja, Bosnian slang term for the urban inhabitants of Sarajevo.

I am sitting with Rasim Cerimagic in the newsroom. He's telling me about the expulsion of Muslims from his native Trebinje.

"The last time I was in Trebinje was in January 1992. I had to go through Serb road-blocks at Fatnicko Polje and Bileca²⁰⁵. The Dubrovnik war was already in full cry and Trebinje resembled Saigon. We were surprised at the shiny cars—Mercedeses, Audis—without registration plates. There were a lot of soldiers there heading in various directions. I couldn't recognise Trebinje anymore.

When I returned to Sarajevo, I knew that something was bound to happen down there, and that fear of mine lasted until January 1993. During that time I had managed to get in touch with my family several times, through radio-hams or else via Red Cross messages. Those were always sentences from which little could be gathered. The last two months, with the help of radio-hams in Fojnica²⁰⁶, I was able to contact them more often. "How are you, are you alive?" "How are you. Has anyone been killed in Sarajevo?", and not much more than that. Then I received information from Ljubljana²⁰⁷ that they were rounding up Muslims down there and expelling them. I set up a radio connection and my mother answered. She said that they'd been given until noon the following day to leave Trebinje. I knew that my father was one of the last people who would do that without the direst need. He was a partisan, a big man and brave. They only knew that they were going somewhere in the direction of Montenegro. I feared that they should push that bus off some cliff, or throw a bomb at it, as has been the case on several occasions.

Because I am engaged in this job of ours, between Ljubljana, Belgrade and Podgorica²⁰⁸ we managed to connect all the dots and I found out that they'd crossed the border, and from then on I kept track of where the convoy was. I heard that in Rozaj²⁰⁹ they were put up in some gymnasium or something similar. One of my cousins had married into there, so we informed the wife's family and they transferred them to a house.

They tried several times to leave. One time a heavy snowfall prevented them, and on another occasion they turned them back from the so-called Serb-Montenegrin border. The third time they made it through, got as far as Gdansk, where they embarked on the wrong ship and instead of Sweden made it to Denmark. That's where they are now. They live in Copenhagen, on some flotel. These are anchored floating hotels. In that place, in shared accommodation, there are two thousand Trebinjans.

²⁰⁵ Towns is south-eastern Bosnia.

²⁰⁶ A town in central Bosnia

²⁰⁷ The capital of Slovenia.

²⁰⁸ The capital of Montenegro.

²⁰⁹ A town in Montenegro.

My parents are there and one of my brothers with his wife. We three brothers are in three different countries now. They wouldn't let the third brother leave Serbia after sending him into exile, he hasn't no documents. He is now in his wife's birthplace. The parents are up there, in the flotel – eating, sleeping, waiting to die and that someone should enter the fact of their passing away into some computer, while the brother is expecting some sort of help from them...

“Fortunately both my brothers had been exempted from military service, otherwise they would have been sent to fight in Dubrovnik. The busload of exiles from Trebinje was full of wounded Muslims. They left with the same army bags with which they had previously sent them to the front-line. Naturally they demobilised them first, took away their weapons. Around twenty Trebinjan Muslims were killed at Dubrovnik, and I don't know how many wounded.”

There were only four or five Muslims left in the whole town now.

Rasim tells how he simultaneously lived through two dramas. The first was this Sarajevan one – going to the newsroom ever day amid the shells; he sleeps in that part of his flat he considers the safest, and his windows give on to Poljine. The second is the drama of a scattered family.

“My middle brother married Biljana twelve years ago, and that marriage broke up after a year. His child spent ten years between two parents. When the SDS was formed in Trebinje, the father of my former sister-in-law became one its most radical members. He'd been everywhere from Gazimestan²¹⁰ to Dubrovnik. When they were driving my family out, that father-in-law brings his grandson to the house and says that that sister-in-law will be moving in there. One of the grandfathers of that little boy, Adi—whose name now is Aleksandar Nikolic while he used to be Adi Cerimagic—is driving out the other grandfather, in front of the grandson's eyes. I am always thinking about that child” – Rasim says.

Later, in silence, we make for Kosevsko together.

5th March 1995

Once again I have received two parcels from Omer and Danka²¹¹. Now they are coming in a totally different situation – there is food here. I am not taking them home through the shells: sometime during the summer before last while I was

²¹⁰ An area in Kosovo where in 1989 Serbian President Milosevic gave a speech commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje, inciting the crowd with nationalist remarks.

²¹¹ Omer Karabeg, Bosnian journalist who spent most of his career in Belgrade, which he was forced to leave once the war had begun. Currently a journalist with Radio Free Europe.

hauling a cart from Adra's²¹² warehouse in New Sarajevo to Kosevsko, I counted twenty-seven shells that hit within 100 metres of me, mostly on the rail track along which the road leads. Now I take a taxi, I can afford such a luxury.

There is one significant difference between the food that arrives in parcels and the food that may be bought in Sarajevo itself. The former is peacetime. One may, for example, detect a taste of eggs in the pasta. The tins don't consist of the leftovers from when the slaughterhouse is being cleaned, nor are they dog food with the labels changed. The goods that are arriving in Sarajevo now are entering a hungry market and the procurers are buying the worst and cheapest things they can lay their hands on: only cheese is available in a variety which would correspond to the situation in some pre-war supermarket.

Azra says that Orhan sent me his greetings several times, a Romany from the neighbourhood and my wartime acquaintance. I don't pass in front of his house these days, it's muddy, so I go around. Orhan's son is urging him to join him in Germany, but he doesn't want to. He has a little house on top of a hillock. Beautiful view. From in front of Orhan's house one may take in at once about twenty kilometres of trenches that separate our world from that of the attackers. That's where once upon a time Omer Pasha Latas²¹³ positioned his guns and shelled Sarajevo.

Until well into the night passers-by can be heard. It is Bayram²¹⁴ and thus no police curfew.

5th April 1992

There can no longer be any doubt: war in Bosnia is flaring up; the war has come to Sarajevo. What has come to pass is precisely that which the three-party government stated last month, when they said that 'a conflict of unwanted proportions' could break out. The fighters haven't solved the question of what would have been a conflict of desired proportions; things are out of control. Either that or they are being controlled by some invisible hand, which I am still unable to fathom.

Sarajevo is surrounded and criss-crossed with road-blocks. People in JNA uniforms calling themselves the Serb territorial defence are coming down from the hills.

²¹² Humanitarian organisation run by the Adventist church.

²¹³ Mico Latas, an Austro-Hungarian officer of Serb origin who later crossed over to the Turkish side and attained high rank in the Ottoman military.

²¹⁴ The holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

There is some sort of mythic representation of war here in Bosnia. All efforts to present the war as a struggle haven't helped, it has been notionally equated with massacres and crimes of all sorts. There is a reason. More Bosnians and Herzegovinians have perished from the knife than in frontal assaults.

The city is in a cramp. It doesn't know what to do with itself. It would fight, it would defend itself, but apart from some virtually secret organisations and some arms about which there is talk, and of which nothing is known for certain, there is no other chance. Among those who haven't organised themselves, someone may have a revolver, a hunting rifle or a carbine. In comparison with the weaponry assembled around Sarajevo that is insignificantly little. Since last summer there has been talk about dispatches from Kragujevac²¹⁵ to Romanija²¹⁶.

On television and the radio, news items are overtaking one another. Something is brewing behind the mountain, and that mountain is Trebevic. I am looking towards the mountain from my balcony. I've always thought of it as a good spot for a weekend outing. For an easy-going man and moreover someone who doesn't drive, the Trebevic cable-car was an opportunity to enjoy nature and fresh air without too much effort. I didn't pay too much attention to the graffiti that read: "This is Serbia!" which could be seen there last year. Multi-party, or more precisely, inter-national elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina have left everywhere many such messages. The only ones that were not seen often enough are the ones proclaiming "This is Bosnia!". Once, a year ago, I suggested to an influential Muslim that they should print hundreds of thousands of such messages and distribute them in thousands of places, so that at the appropriate time—and this is such a time—they could be displayed. He agreed that it was a good idea, but no one acted on it.

A column of people from suburb of Dobrinja have started from there, passing by the RTV building. It's all live on television. They are inviting everyone to join them. The Student radio is voicing its support. I have many friends in Dobrinja, relatives. That suburb was populated after the Olympics. Flats were given to people in the prime of life, between thirty and forty years old, mainly Sarajevans. Dobrinja is one of the most Sarajevan places in the city. It is an epitome of Sarajevo. We are on our way too, the people from our street.

There are many of us, we can stop the war. Bare-handed, of course.

Rivers of people are already streaming down Titova street. It's as if the people had only been waiting for someone to give them a sign. I meet certain groups of my acquaintances going in the other direction. They are all Serbs. However, among us going towards the Parliament building there are Serbs as well, as far as

²¹⁵ A city in western Serbia.

²¹⁶ A mountain east of Sarajevo, controlled by the chetniks during the war.

I can see, as many as there should be.

We arrive at Parliament square, a slab of dark marble beneath the white edifice, a little before the column arrival from Dobrinja. The other part of that column and those who'd joined them on the way were going across Grbavica. Columns are pouring into the area in front of the building and the people are turning around in circles a little, uncertain about what to do next. They are calling on someone from the government to show up and say something. No one comes.

The chants resound: "Thieves, thieves... Murderers, murderers..."

The part of the column that had gone across Grbavica arrives. Someone had fired at them, a young woman was dead. It is being said that someone else had been killed as well. These from Grbavica are different from us, who came from the upper parts of the city. They are calling to us – let's all go after them, bare-handed as we are, we'll strangle them. People are looking at each other, no one moves.

The square is filling up slowly. Tens of thousands of people, I am unable to estimate.

Nada Bogicevic is with me, the wife of Bogic, my friend and I should think still a member of the Presidency. Azra and she are mothers, and the mother's off-spring has been endangered today.

Shots are heard from Vrace, then shots coming from the Holiday Inn. The multitude doesn't react. Then, suddenly, commotion ensues. The shots become more frequent. In front of the church the fire is being returned by a single police armoured vehicle. The police are our army. This vehicle has only one heavy machine-gun.

Bullets are flying above our heads, and a woman next to me has been wounded in the thigh.

In the midst of the cross-fire, a group of women standing on an elevated position in the square breaks into song: "Kad ja podjoh na Bembasu" ("When I go to Bembasa")²¹⁷.

First we look for shelter, then further, away from the square. One section of the crowd, livid, separates and makes for the Jewish cemetery, unarmed. Someone is wounded, the rest continue on. The most exposed Serb guardsmen retreat to deeper positions looking for shelter. A few armed people in olive-green berets run out of the Marindvor complex. In ten minutes the gathering had turned into a battlefield with unarmed and bewildered people running around it.

We flee further, along Titova street, and then in the direction of Kosevsko. I am out of breath. I stop and look at the city. Shooting from Trebevic. Again there is

²¹⁷ Old Sarajevo folk-song. Bembasa is Sarajevo public bath from the Ottoman period.

firing somewhere nearby and I try to run, but the lungs of a fifty-year-old, a smoker and a man who has always detested every physical exertion, won't allow it. I sit down to have a rest and in my mouth I feel the bitterness of my own defeat. War requires speed and strength. I am weak, slow and I have poor eyesight.

Neighbours from Kosevsko are keeping watch. They are unarmed and standing in large groups. Maybe some of them have a revolver hidden. No one has a rifle or machine-gun.

I say to myself, if you go again, take a gun with you. Never again bare-handed, I try to convince myself looking over at Jarcedol²¹⁸ where a fierce battle is raging. I suddenly remember seeing in a foreign television report that the Serb guardsmen had recoilless guns; they had wanted to use them at the time of the barricades. Nada, Azra and I advance towards the houses by staying close to the walls, even though I know that faced with the shell of a recoilless gun, even walls shatter like glass. At virtually the same time our neighbours who had been at the gathering show up as well: Dina, Asko...

The gathering has been dispersed but—I can see on the TV—the people have entered the Parliament building and are holding session in the great hall. People's assembly. The hall is packed, a motley crowd, everyone with an expression of some expectation on their face.

Just like a man rejects thoughts of death, so Bosnia rejects the thought of war. Is it starting, after all? Those up above are shooting to kill, it's not a demonstrative fire. The young woman who was killed was Suada Dilberovic. Marko Vesovic²¹⁹ is speaking in the Parliament. He's speaking bitterly, he's capturing the crowd with the sincerity of his rage:

“Where's the boss? So many guests in his house and he's nowhere to be seen, he's run away. Instead of welcoming you and bringing out the treats, he's turned his ass to you. I've always listened to the people, they were killing people in front of my own eyes. This is how the people curse the national leaders: may their mother recognise them in a minced beef-patty. Some are running away, they've robbed enough already. The people have survived a thousand worse ones, as they will survive these.”

The master of ceremonies informs that Dragan Vikić²²⁰ has stated on television that his special police units are with the people. One speaker, a university professor whose name I didn't catch, is asking for the national parties to be

²¹⁸ Eastern part of the old town of Sarajevo, on the way to Pale.

²¹⁹ Sarajevoan writer and poet. A Serb who publicly opposed the chetniks from the beginning of the war in Bosnia.

²²⁰ Dragan Vikić, leader of the Police special units. Contributed tremendously to the defence of the city at the beginning of the war.

banned. The next one says that someone reported that a bomb has been placed in the Parliament hall, and that once he'd heard that he hurried over in order to die with his mates. He says that the young recruits from the MUP²²¹ school are surrounded by so-called territorial guardsmen. "Kukanjac²²² says that the Army has to separate us. There is no separation, the Army has to be destroyed."

From the gallery they are tossing down tomorrow's copy of 'Oslobodjenje'. Professor Dzemal Sokolovic²²³ is at the mike: "While we were coming here today and calling on people to come out of their houses, one woman raised two crutches in the air. That was her apology for not being able to join us. Apart from her no one has an excuse for not being a part of this parliament."

A telegram arrives in the press-service from Derventa – don't let them turn Sarajevo into a Bosanski Brod or Derventa²²⁴. While that telegram is being read, Vikic and his special forces enter the hall.

The chants are heard: "We are with you Vikic..."

"I don't know any more whom to turn to, to stop what has been set in motion" – says Dragan Vikic. "I speak as a born Sarajevan and a man who loves Bosnia and Herzegovina. I don't see another alternative but you gathered here, but there must be more of us. I don't know if this madness will stop. I beg you, the only strength is in the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Serbs, Croats and Muslims, that they stop this evil, that what happened in Croatia doesn't happen here, that they let us live, that our children be happy..."

I beg you, get your friends together, come to Sarajevo regardless of the barricades. Our only hope is to be what we have always been. Don't leave here. Sessions are being scheduled – in a few days time. The only way is for everything to be played out today and tomorrow. If everything possible is not done, there will come a day when it will be wondered why we didn't give our all to save ourselves, our children, property. Tonight the politicians have sent their appeals, the Army has spoken up, but in the city there is still shooting. We don't need volunteers, that will only bring more bloodshed. This has to be solved by political means. I beg the leaders to reach an agreement, so that children won't curse their names", so says the corpulent Vikic, and then goes off to some position with his unit. It is being reported that there is still shooting in Vrace.

Telegrams are arriving from Stolac, Odzak, Derventa, Teslic and Tuzla²²⁵. From Bijeljina they report a quiet night, but tense. The same from Banja Luka. From

²²¹ Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police).

²²² General Milutin Kukanjac, JNA officer and commander of the Army's 2nd Region in April 1992.

²²³ Political Science professor at Sarajevo University.

²²⁴ Towns already engulfed by the war at this point, April 1992.

²²⁵ Cities in Bosnia.

Srebrenik they are sending food to the assembly for the following day.

One worker from Gras has come with his children. He says he is from Vares.

“Iron ore flowed there once, I am afraid that blood will flow now.” A fifty-year old, a driver takes the floor to say that he drove the concrete for the foundations of the Parliament building. “Now I see this beauty and what beautiful things we have built in fifty years. And what have these idiots made for us now?”

A telegram from captain Dzemal Mustafic from Mostar arrives in the press-centre, who sends his regards to the assembly and says that he’s left the barracks.

In front of the Presidency, an excited student from Glamoc says:

“Today, in Kupres, people of my age were killed in battle, forcibly mobilised. We have to drive the Serb national units and the HOS units out of Bosnia.”

From Dobrinja we get news that they are unable to join, their way has been blocked.

Battles are raging in Urijan-dedina street.

One request:

“We do not want to carry out a coup d’etat against our own Republic, but these people have to go, the cities have to be unblocked, we are asking for immediate peace and a transitional government... We don’t want to see the whole of B-H turn into Vukovar.”

The hall is chanting: “Elections, Bosnia; Elections, Bosnia...”

Someone reports that Smiljko Sagolj²²⁶ has said on HTV how some rabble has gathered in the Parliament on someone’s orders. The master of ceremonies explains that that should be verified, calling on Sagolj to confirm or deny this. No sound from Sagolj.

Five minutes before midnight, one speaker states that, precisely at this time in 1945, the legendary Vladimir Peric–Valter²²⁷ was killed defending the power-station.

The hall chants: “ We are all Valter.”

At midnight, last respects are paid to those who on this day had fallen defending the freedom of Sarajevo – the fighters and the victims of terror.

Someone suggests that respects be paid to Valter as well. Shouts go up: “Not him, he is alive, we are Valter.”

²²⁶ Sarajevo TV journalist. Formerly hard-line communist, turned Croatian nationalist at the time of the first Multi-party elections.

²²⁷ War hero from the Second World War. Killed by the Germans while defending Sarajevo.

5th April 1993

As a supplement to newspapers world-wide, today's 'Oslobodjenje' was published in fifteen million copies.

5th April 1994

I am writing my column, an evocation of the April days from two years ago. Those first days are completely blended in my memory, the notes don't help, nor do the memories of others. I have my own, twisted picture of the events. I could adjust my notes by comparing them to the 'Oslobodjenje' archives—but I won't. I am not trying to record history. I can only make some marginal comments for those days, leaving the original notes as they are.

I have a friend who during those days flew in from Singapore, where he found himself at the time, to defend the city. He rushed over to the Army section of the Stari Grad municipality. They told him – go home, you'll get a call. Nor did I make a note of the fact that neighbour Mira Skert, then in Belgrade, at her parents', came back to Sarajevo at a time when many were running away from it. Incidentally, Mira is Belgrade-born. Maybe today is the day when it should be mentioned that the SDA and the HDZ, after everything, again placed Jure Pelivan²²⁸ at the helm.

I remember the shots and the crowd crossing over the Vrbanja bridge. From up there, they are still shooting and killing, even today. Tens of our boys have laid down their lives at the Jewish cemetery.

In my column I wish all Sarajevans a happy anti-fascist April 6.

It is now known that the chetniks had planned to overrun Sarajevo by the 10th, and the whole of Bosnia by April 16. They had around four brigades of fifth-columnists inside the city. Just how Sarajevo was defended, no military analysis can explain. I think that the chetniks, after all, had committed a disastrous mistake in their choice of date. The chances would have been higher on any date but Bayram and April 6.

They were overconfident. One colonel was so sure that he would soon be back in his apartment that he'd left behind a tape he'd made of his naked wife. SDA's estimate of a quick Western military intervention proved to be just as disastrous a mistake. The most cunning, but no less faulty, was the HDZ calculation that the

²²⁸ Former communist, turned HDZ Croatian nationalist, but widely perceived as a weak politician.

Muslims would seek shelter under Zagreb's wing once they get a bloody nose from Belgrade and lose their territory. The mistake was a result of a flawed conviction that Muslims—Bosniacs—are not a nation in their own right, that they don't think of themselves as such, and so even a struggle wouldn't be able to consolidate their sense of national belonging.

It's colleague Mehmed Husic's birthday today. We part in a sombre mood. We'll see each other, maybe, as soon as tonight. Now we are neighbours. Husic is living in the flat of Dusko Paravac, who'd left at the start of the war, and Dusko's wife, once she'd secured a place on one of the convoys, handed the keys back to 'Oslobodjenje'²²⁹.

5th April 1995

I've been getting my little wartime archives in order, and then carried on in the cellar with the remains of the pre-war ones, whatever I hadn't burned. All that seems as if it were from another world. That Hamza Baksic over there, on the other side of the livid river that has been flowing through Sarajevo for four years, concerned himself with the relationship between the Yen and the Mark, the prices of goods on the world markets?!? He even had glass in his windows. He could have a bath whenever he wanted!

There are also a few of my pre-war articles. Of course, naïveté is my most prominent trait, despite the fact that I had been among the biggest pessimists.

I am still afraid of one sentence I wrote in April 1992: "When and if this war ends..."

I am afraid that in Bosnia we have discovered the *perpetuum mobile* of hatred and death. The question – who is responsible – only carries ethical weight. I don't think that it should have been any easier for the victims, those who've been dismembered by shells during all this time, knowing that they fall in the category of victims of the aggression.

8th April 1992

I am fifty-three years old. My last wartime birthday was a long time ago, in the village of Cajno near Visoko²³⁰, in 1944. This is war once again, no doubt about

²²⁹ Most of pre-war apartments were paid for companies and then given to some of their employees, but companies kept the right to their property.

²³⁰ A town near Sarajevo.

that. The artillery is pounding Jarcedol, and they are trying to enter the city with tanks from that side.

In today's column I published somewhat more ordered impressions regarding how it all started in Sarajevo:

“When on Sunday afternoon the column of protesters arrived in front of the Presidency, a silence descended: unarmed people had come there with an idea about which there wasn't much to say in particular. Their request was at the lowest limit of all human desires—survival and peace. Later, the shooting started which the crowd, gathered in open space, greeted with whistles of bitterness. They no longer have to worry about their lives; it's as if fate had erased them from the numerical state of affairs.

Those happenings between waking and sleeping turned into a stone memorial to the ten or so Sarajevo women lined up on one of the edges of the Presidency complex. One led the way and the rest followed with the song “Kad ja podjoh na Bembasu”, and they sang exposed to bullets. That is all that those young women want, all that Sarajevo wants: normal life on warm spring nights just like the one preceding the Marindvor gathering.

But, it's wartime, one doesn't go to Bembasa, shells are falling there and guns thundering, and five-year-old boys and girls are learning to differentiate between the sound of the machine-gun and the detonation of a projectile. Two days later, supermarkets were looted across Sarajevo overnight. That is the other, real face of the war, stripped of all the pretence of big words, and only naked self-interest remains, completely free from any need for justification.

Maybe the young women from Marindvor didn't know that, nor could they have known, but they had a premonition that they had been cut off from their youth, that in the fifty or so hours that would follow they would grow old and mature, and that they will never recognise their peers in the men and women of their generation who hadn't felt the proximity of chaotic death. They had, to use an old-fashioned expression, embarked in a yellow submarine, without a compass or an echo-sounder.

Perhaps that's how Jan Palah felt once upon a time, when he set himself on fire in one of Prague's squares. There are differences – Palah set himself on fire as a Czech, in the name of a Czech movement which was at the same time universal. These young women in front of the Parliament, the contemporaries of the dead owner of those tragic little shoes left on the bloodstained pavement, didn't belong to any national group. For them, and for many others, nothing better is left than a heroic death.

There is still a faint hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina will rouse itself from this bloody nightmare, so small that it should hardly be worth hanging on to: a straw

long enough for a drowning man, but meaningless for someone observing the events from Belgrade, Zagreb, Brussels... wherever. Because politics doesn't see snipers and targets, politics sees geographical maps, politics, which is the most worrying thing – doesn't see the present, it has its eyes on the future it would like to see to that extent, and so in its far-sightedness it doesn't see the man standing right in front. In the meantime, throughout Bosnia, people are escaping from suburb to suburb, from town to town, away from Bosnia..."

8th April 1993

My second wartime birthday. From the previous one until this, Bosnia has walked backwards the length of the way it had walked forward during my lifetime. Houses, factories are on fire, bridges virtually non-existent. People are running away.

Maybe because it's my birthday, we have water today, all the way up to my floor. A few evenings ago it was electricity, from ten until the morning, and now water. These things awaken dangerous hopes.

In the evening, by candlelight, Azra and I are leafing through our lives a little. All in all, it has been beautiful. If it hadn't been for this war, we could even have counted ourselves among the generations who'd had it a lot better than their predecessors.

Today, more than ever, I missed the daughter to whom I had long since gifted my birthday, so that she might have two. She's probably sitting just like us, over there, in Rovinj²³¹. Hundreds of thousands of Bosnians are sitting as well...

Let the earth turn up the bones of those who've brought us here.

8th April 1994

I am 55 today.

All dishes, including the ones I buy at the market, have the savour of humanitarian aid. The sense of taste has simply turned itself off, in self-defence, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to bear all those different forms of gruel that we'd been forced to eat. I would be happy if I could only eat a serving of cevapi²³², but such a serving costs 15 DM. Besides, one is never sure whether

²³¹ A town on the Istrian riviera, on the northern Adriatic coast of Croatia.

²³² A typical Bosnian dish of grilled minced meat.

buying the meat one has purchased a farm of salmonella.

There is a lot of diarrhea going around. A young man from across the street lost all his hair because of it. One neighbour was hospitalised. My cousin lost eighteen kilograms in three weeks.

I am due to go to Salzburg soon, to attend some round-table discussion on the media. I've decided that if I go, I will go dressed just as I am in Sarajevo. I have grown a beard, so that I might save water. I simply can't imagine myself dressing up, shaving. To rouse myself.

The topic in Salzburg is 'Media in War'. The only thing I would like to say is that it is immoral that someone in the world should judge my article, written by candlelight, by standards to which 'Oslobodjenje' articles would have been subjected to until April 1992. The journalists are hungry and tired, much like the rest of their co-sufferers in the siege. We live in the essence of other people's misfortunes, in addition to which everyone has a bigger or smaller share of their own misfortune. We are like the others, accidental survivors, people faced with transforming that multitude of adversity by way of a typewriter into some objective professional analysis. We've been humiliated as professionals, because foreign colleagues are travelling the length and breadth of Bosnia and telling us how it is, while we can't. Some stronger ones have made it, but I have no strength to grope my way through some ravines to Zenica, for example. And if I could, at this point I would make for Gorazde, everything else is now emptiness.

Mladic²³³ is advancing, Gorazdans are dying, soldiers and civilians, in trenches, in basements. I listen to calls full of desperation, it seems to me that the voices are all around me even when I turn the radio off.

8th April 1995

I am fifty-six.

The war has prevented me from finding out what a normal entry into old age looks like. I had believed that by now I would mostly be relying on gained experiences. Now I am forced to reject them all, gather new ones. I believed I would fear illness, but I am not afraid of illness as I am too weak for a long convalescing. Nor death, since it is literally closer than a shirt. Tonight a shell landed close to the flat where Sejo, Nevzeta and grandma Duda live, breaking the windows, shattering the only light fixture left by the previous inhabitants.

²³³ Ratko Mladic, the war criminal still at large. Former commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, who replaced General Kukanjac in May 1992. Among other things responsible for the massacre of the inhabitants of the Bosnian town of Srebrenica, for which he has been indicted by the war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

After that shell, and the several that followed, the general warning siren was sounded.

I stayed awake until late into the night. I listened as they revved up their tank engines in Poljine²³⁴. Virtually the whole first night of the fifty seventh year of my life I spent listening and estimating where and from what distance are coming the sounds of those insects of steel.

²³⁴ A hill in the vicinity of Sarajevo, which gained notoriety as one of the positions whence the Serb artillery shelled the city for three years.

EPILOGUE

Year 1995

13th June 1995

The breaking of the siege is being under preparations, Izetbegovic said, probably between 1 March and 25 November. The tension in the city, the fortification of military facilities with sandbags points to the fact that the breakthrough is near. In the city, a battle is being fought over water. Senka Kurtovic told me that in Mojmiilo people go out to fetch water at 10 p.m. and come back at 4 the next morning. On top of that, the dangerous Dobrinja-Mojmiilo road has to be traversed twice.

14th June

I am interviewing Edhem Camo²³⁵ for 'Dani' magazine. Camo was born in 1907. He's holding his own. He doesn't have a drop of elderly senile surliness. There were still people in the street in the morning; in the afternoon however - silence and emptiness.

In the evening, tension in the whole building—will it begin tonight? Protection has been put up over the basement windows both outside and in. There are no explosions around our house. They're pounding down there, in the centre, around Dzenana.

15th June

A little before nine, a siren: general state of alert in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the radio reports.

It has started, then.

Azra went out to work a few minutes before the siren. In the city there is virtually absolute silence. We are expecting the heavens to break open suddenly, we all

²³⁵ Sarajevo University professor, formerly the President of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Second World War partisan

suppose that the breakthrough will be a two or three day battle for life and death. Whoever survives will be able to leave the city whenever they might wish. The engineering works are being brought to a close at the frontlines. The containers for the field hospitals are being completely dug into the ground.

Thousands of people will die. Around Sarajevo and against Sarajevo all the weaponry assembled in Bosnia will be used. We, the remaining 150 or 200 thousand Sarajevans, are hostages. When our boys attack, the *chetniks* will lash out at the civilians, we don't have sufficient weapons for retaliation.

If the breakthrough takes place across Poljine, I will go out to take a look, even at the price of getting killed. I want to write an article about it.

The children were sent home from school this morning, and since noon the public servants aren't working either. In the companies, it varies; Azra is working. I initially cancelled some meeting that was supposed to be at noon, but then I decided to go to the newsroom after all. Today a journalist must walk around, even if he doesn't write. The passers-by are in a hurry. The majority are carrying canisters. At Skenderija - columns of people are tugging water from the 'papagajka'²³⁶, where it had been brought from the Brewery.

The acquaintances I meet are trembling with some sort of mixture of fear and relief. It had to start sometime I guess. Sarajevans have long stopped fearing the shells, just as sailors have no fear of the open sea. However, that which is upon us now is something new, and even Sarajevans are afraid of anything new.

The Army is in a good mood, volunteers are signing up too, mostly veterans from 1992. The message from the British is: this is a suicidal move. Nobody will help you.

Fuck them.

16th June

I speak to Kemal Muftic over the phone; he's the director of BH Press. He says that foreign journalists are complaining because filming inside the city has been forbidden. The ban is quite understandable. Some of the television shots were used by the *chetniks* for target adjustment. This is a big operation in which more than a hundred thousand soldiers are taking part on both sides. There isn't much room here for journalistic curiosity.

One shell hit the building of the Tuberculosis Ward in Dositejeva Street, across

²³⁶ A modern apartment building in down-town Sarajevo, on the banks of the Miljacka

the road from the cafe where I had interviewed Camo. It seems to have been a two hundred-kilogram *chetnik* flying bomb. Everything is wrecked. They shelled the Presidency.

They hit the hospital too.

Two years have passed to the day since the famous Geneva map redrawing session.

17th June

The day begins with the idyllic summer silence. The sparrows and the pigeons can be heard. We have power so I get up to make a coffee before it's cut off again, in order that I wouldn't have to burn books.

An hour passes, two, but only distant firing can be heard from the direction of Reljevo. Then Jasmina Musabegovic calls me; she says that the previous night a *luna*²³⁷, or something similar, had hit in front of their house at Skenderija. It threw cars up onto the parking lot, and lifted a tow-truck all the way to the third floor.

Neighbour Prndelj brings us water over in a truck. Fifty litres—one DM. Or a carton of cigarettes. That was awfully good of him, I don't quite know how I would have hauled the water all the way from the Brewery. Today, for the first time in five days, I had a glass of cold water.

As the day draws on a fear is spreading among the people that this isn't really an attempt to lift the blockade, either that or it has been given up on already. People are tired of the siege, they are ready to go unarmed and die.

Senada Kreso calls me. She's been outside and had made her way back into the city across Igman at two after midnight, last night, in a car with Minister Hasan Muratovic. She couldn't have picked a better moment to return. She says that the troops on Igman seemed to be in an excellent mood, some even offered them chocolate.

At twelve sharp, a few explosions echo around. I go out. I run into my old acquaintance and refugee from Grbavica, Muhamed Babic.

"I'm hauling water all day long. Firstly for me - seventy litres. Then for neighbour Halil. He's over seventy, he's got a colon cancer and his wife is disabled since the last war; her leg's been operated on fifteen times."

Muhamed tells me how Halil only expects death from God and how he would

²³⁷ A type of rocket

consider that the greatest divine mercy.

Babic has made it past seventy, but he's full of stamina and in spite of all, cheerful. We're talking about whether the *chetniks* had taken back the part of the Trebevic²³⁸ road which we'd taken in the first days with many casualties. There is no official information, and many rumours are flying around, one must rely on one's eyes and ears. In the evening, on *chetnik* television, Momcilo Krajisnik²³⁹ once again proclaims a state of war.

18th June

In the morning, quiet again. Stories are going around that we have taken Bacevo²⁴⁰, that we are taking Golo Brdo²⁴¹. I hadn't seen smoke that would have signified a great battle in that area, even though the weather was clear. Last night it was thundering somewhere beyond Ilidza. I think that our boys are clearing the area.

The sirens are repeating the warning signal several times. Azra goes into the garden to dig.

From Dobrinja they inform me that a mortar shell hit the panel above where people were gathering to get some water. Seven dead, fourteen seriously wounded.

I have noticed that lately I have been talking a lot, and absent-mindedly at that. The illness, I believe, is called *logoreja*. That rhymes with diarrhea.

19th June

With the awaiting of the breakthrough even the last reserves of self-restraint have been spent. That can be best seen in front of the water cisterns. Even at the slightest occasion, swearing ensues, fights. A boy of fourteen, not much of him to look at, coolly tells you to go fuck yourself. He looks you in the eyes and swears without altering his countenance. *Sehid's*²⁴² families get the water ahead of queue. The rest swear the *sehids*.

²³⁸ Trebevic is a mountain near Sarajevo

²³⁹ President of the Bosnian Parliament as a member of the SDS, until the start of the war when he joined the *chetniks* in the hills

²⁴⁰ A part of the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza, and also the main water supply reservoir for the city

²⁴¹ A hill near Sarajevo, a part of the Trebevic mountain

²⁴² *Sehid* is a Muslim martyr

Some people are carrying a two-litre canisters. They can't carry more. On the uphill road to Kosevsko Brdo I met a man of seventy pouring water out of a five-litre canister. Twice, a glassful or two at a time. He's sorry to have to do it, he's been carrying it from the Brewery, but he's got no strength left.

There's no one to help with the unloading of the truck in which neighbour Prndelj brought the water and so saved us the trip between shells. One fifty-litre barrel slips and cracks. It belonged to the mother of our Sead Hamamdžić who was killed in Otes. Dina Dortbucuk hurries over to transfer the water into something else.

The sound of our side firing and the explosions of *chetnik* shells is constantly in the background.

Yesterday, in Dobrinja, one explosion was so powerful that they weren't able to identify any of the bodies at the spot. The local civil guard, the best in Sarajevo, claims that it is still the safest place for the distribution of water in Dobrinja.

The price of cigarettes has gone up, fifteen DM a carton. News stands aren't working, so the resellers are collecting their well-earned wage for fear.

In the newsroom the atmosphere is normal, there isn't any sort of unusual tension. We're discussing - how many days will be needed for this, the decisive battle. The latest issue of 'Ljiljan'²⁴³ is sitting on one table, with the headline across the entire front page proclaiming: "The BH Army will lift the blockade of Sarajevo in twenty-four hours".

The Markale market is open for business, but not many people around.

In the Kralja Tomislava Street, now called Kosevo, I run into an older man. Smartly dressed, he knows how to wear a suit, it's obvious that he's taken care of himself well all his life. He's talking to himself. But this seems strange: he's doing it using a sign language.

Five minutes to twelve, when the Serbs begin testing out the weapons returned to them by the UNPROFOR. I am watching the shells falling on Velesici. These houses on Kosevo are shaking too—a large calibre.

20th June

In Markale market, it seems like a feast for only a select few exclusive guests. Large, juicy strawberries and cherries, first-class meat... Still, someone shows up for whom all that was intended, fills his sack with a hundred DM of goods and

²⁴³ A newspaper founded by the SDA party

goes home.

Last winter the *chetniks* had assembled around Sarajevo, whether under UNPROFOR control or outside anyone's control: 138 large calibre anti-aircraft guns, 225 mortars of all calibres, 98 guns, 62 howitzers, 26 armoured vehicles, and 50 tanks. Now all that is beyond control, bombarding our positions and the city itself. Within seven days, there are 47 dead in the city and over four hundred wounded.

People fear the siege more than they fear death.

My friend Serkan went to the *dzenaza* of his friend from the unit, with whom he'd fought side-by-side from the very beginning. When he came back home, he called out to his wife Gordana to bring out a bucket of water so that he could wash his hands. He'd carried the bloody *tabut*²⁴⁴ and the blood of his friend was still on his hands. "I didn't want to go into the house like that. It's as if I would have brought in parts of his body".

In my building, two young men will receive their call-up papers in a few days. When the war began they were still boys. I haven't, it seems, noticed how they had been growing up and how they had, thus, come of age to carry a gun.

In the late afternoon, mortar shells are falling around the house. The third was the nearest, pieces of rubble pelted the windows and rustled along the plastic coverings. We go down into the shelter. We're not sure how long we'll be there for. Once, in the summer of 1992 we went down into the shelter like this, and then continued sleeping there for two weeks, only running out occasionally to get some things.

This time, we remained there for slightly under two hours. When we walked in the flat, the telephone rings. A call for Dino and Aska from their cousin in Denmark: what's happened? We in Sarajevo have no idea, but the world's TV networks have sent the news. Now somebody reported that Kosevsko has been hit. Colleague Drago Soldo found out about the first massacre at Markale from his daughter who lives abroad. He lives in Radiceva Street.

After the massacre in Dobrinja, new security measures have been introduced in the distribution of water. The cistern arrives around three after midnight. I've no strength to get up at that time. Still, around three, I'm woken by the sound of the screeching of small carts, whose wheels once belonged to city's garbage containers.

²⁴⁴ A wooden base on which the body of the deceased is carried in a Muslim funeral

21st June

In the morning, the projectiles from a multiple rocket launcher are whistling above our heads. I saw one of those for the first time in 1992, when they were shelling the school in Kosevsko from Vrace. It flew past some thirty metres from my balcony, while I was trying to get a fire going in a tin can.

I go down to the shelter to play with little Emir Darman, born in February. The Darman's had spent the night in the shelter and has bags under his eyes.

I bought 150 litres of water; it's fresh, and I am treating myself to one whole jug. I down it as I once would a bottle of beer.

Today, a food convoy is finally scheduled to make a stop in Sarajevo. Nothing has come in for four weeks.

The battle for Sarajevo is getting more complicated by the minute, while we know less and less of what is going on. The HQ has assumed the militarily correct standpoint of not hurrying with the release of information, but that's why rumours are circling the city. It's being said that the MUP²⁴⁵ unit 'Lasta' ('Swallow') has virtually broken through the siege, but had no one to meet them on the other side. In any case, the battles are fierce, and there are a lot of casualties, mostly from artillery.

I am thinking about that 'Ljiljan' headline—a victory within 24 hours—how much confusion it could cause among the soldiers. It may have sounded that someone doesn't want to break the siege, which is an old rumour.

The Ciglane market was shelled today. It's been closed since the beginning of the operation, but through force of habit people are still going there to see if there is anything to buy. There is a large covered parking lot, which would be easy to protect, but no one has thought of that. Today at the market, the vendors are trying to sell their goods, the customers are trying to get hold of something to eat. One can't live on dry bread alone, and not everyone has its own garden.

There are many dead again.

My cousin Nafa has taken in her grandson from Alipasino. He's behaving a little like a grown-up man. I take him out onto the balcony: of all my seedling of strawberries, the pigeons and the drought have left only one fruit. We pick it. He takes the strawberry inside the house, and leaves it on the table: "I'll share it with Haris and Vildan (*his brothers*) when they get here".

²⁴⁵ Bosnian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Republic's police forces

He came to stay with Nafa because in Hrasno they live virtually on the frontline, under incessant sniper fire.

Typical for Sarajevan living conditions is the true story about a soldier who'd been on the frontline in Treskavica mountain. He was bruised by the explosion. The shrapnel pierced the bullet-proof vest and he was released from the service. One day, he was smoking in the building's lobby and as he turned to the friend standing next to him, in that very moment a sniper bullet hit him. It went right through his shoulder, leaving a long slash and damaging a nerve. Had he not turned in that very moment to say something to his friend, he would have been dead.

At dusk two shells fall on Gorica again, below the gypsy houses—some hundred or so metres from me—in a back-yards full of people. Three wounded, one whose arm has been virtually cut off. Still, I don't go to the shelter. I can't do it any more.

I go down only so as to have a talk with the children, I manage to calm them down, I seem to have some authority with them because I talk to them on an equal footing without condescending. When I returned I found Azra very upset. There had been another massacre in Dobrinja, six dead in front of Alma and Ahmet's house.

Adnan has been wounded.

I speak with Alma. She's very composed. She was on the balcony when the shell hit. There would have been even more dead if there hadn't been for a UN armoured vehicle driving through the street at the time, which absorbed its portion of the shrapnel. Adnan was hit in the thigh. Amidst such misery, that may even be fortunate. Alma gave him first aid.

Ahmed and Alma have managed to stop Adnan's bleeding, they got hold of a car and they're driving him to the hospital, Ahmed was in the street at the time of the explosion, a few metres from his son. The wounded Adnan was helping those with more serious wounds. There are six dead.

Adi came back home from the hospital after getting bandaged-up. Now I can picture it: Alma sees the explosion from the balcony. Ahmed is just around the corner, but passers-by won't let him to rush over to help, as there is usually a second shell intended for the rescuers. Adi, wounded, helps out with the more serious cases. Alma runs down from her balcony.

I go out onto the balcony in order to calm down and take a look. People are coming back from the garden, they'd gone back there as soon as the shell chased them away. They've got soil all over them as they'd thrown themselves to the ground when the explosion happened.

The sound of the shells can still be heard coming from the lower part of town. I circle the flat and open all the doors. When they are open, one may judge approximately where some sort of cover could be taken, even though shrapnel tears through thick plaster walls as if through cloth.

Recently one of our doctors was assisting those around him while he himself was wounded, until he collapsed and died. He hadn't even noticed that he'd been wounded.

Nervously I search for the RFI and Free Europe programs on the studio 99 frequency. There aren't any – banned by the army. Military operations zone.

22nd June

I spent last night in delirium.

The morning is quiet. However, in these last few days we've observing *chetnik's* new shelling strategy. There are no longer any of those concentrated attacks. They're aiming at killing the largest number of people possible with the lowest number of shells possible. They're allowing us to relax. Then they allow us to gather to be shelled again.

The day before yesterday an armour-piercing shell in the neighbouring street went through three walls. Fortunately, it killed no one. Yesterday the house next to Sejo's building was also pierced by the shell.

In the lower part of our street somebody brought the canisters over in an government official's car. That drives people nuts. One will have to live with such characters even after the war.

I'm going through my files. Many Sarajevans share Adi's fate; 78.000 adults and children have been wounded.

I'm starting a fire with Balzac today. It's symbolic: burning of "*Les Miserables*".

Late afternoon, rain. We're dragging water from the drain-pipes. Neighbour Maso, always fond of black humour, says to his wife Halida:

- What will you do for water when I go to Kosevo?
- What do you mean, Kosevo?
- You know well that I support 'Sarajevo' soccer team. I must hurry, while they're still burying at Kosevo Stadium. To think that they could bury me in 'Zeljo's'²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ 'FC Sarajevo' and 'FC Zeljeznicar' (popularly known as Zeljo) are the two rival Sarajevan soccer clubs. Dead Sarajevans were burried in the stadium fields because the local cemeteries were overflowing.

field, I'd be turning over in my grave until the judgement day!

Technician Dado, who was supposed to come to fix my television, has been seriously wounded. He and his wife had been drinking coffee on their street when the shell exploded.

The civil guard commissioners are collecting any remaining provisions of rice for "*people's kitchens*", i.e., for those who couldn't survive otherwise.

I go to bed hungry. Even that I have food in the house, I can't eat. I don't know how long this all will last.

23rd June

I run into my former neighbour Sadko Bajic. He used to live where Nafa is now. The Bajics had lived at Sip, until the shells drove them away: the parents, three sons, and a daughter. Sadko's brother was killed in our attack on Nedzarici, in the first summer of the war. He was inside an improvised Bosnian armoured vehicle, it was hot so they left the hatch open. It was a direct mortar hit on a vehicle in motion. One in a million. I observe Sadko: a tall young man, strong, smart, he has aged a decade since 1992.

Our Adnan has a little band-aid on his face as well; got it from a piece of flying glass. It escaped attention in the initial check up. Technician Dado has been operated on, he'll survive. The shrapnel caught his wife only on the ear. Just before the shell hit she bent down to pick something up.

There are a lot of serious cases of diarrhea going around. Up to fifteen kilograms are being lost in weight. As the result of war diarrhea, a young man from the neighbourhood has lost all of his hair. Quite simply, everything had been drained from him. Nevertheless, he's still alive.

Merso Darman tells me about his cousin from Alipasino whom he is unable to help. She has four children. One of them is suffering from cerebral paralysis. Her husband left for the frontline five days before the birth of the fourth child. Alipasino is constantly being shelled, and she can't go to the shelter with the children because in her building the sewage has flooded the basement.

24th June

Rain and fog. During the day, the frontline quietens down. In the evening, guns thundering somewhere around Blazu²⁴⁷ I think. Can a breakthrough be made there?

There have been 36 dead in seven days in Sarajevo. But, 44 babies have been born.

My rheumatism has overwhelmed me. I stay at home. My hopes for the army break siege operation to lead to a quick breakthrough, have been crushed too. We've been waiting for that since the spring of 1992.

All the civilians are nervous and tense, the soldiers have been gripped by the action, for the first time a real breakout is being attempted.

Thunder started in the evening, my first thought was that they were firing from their multiple rocket-launchers, I believed in the thunder only once lightning struck. Then I find out that the husband of my colleague Vildana Selimbegovic, from 'Dani'²⁴⁸, was killed on the frontline. He was thirty-three. They have a son.

25th June

Once again they are hitting the city cowardly: a shell here, a shell there. At the beginning, there was not sufficient blaring to drive the people back into their homes and shelters. But, they succeeded, first in Dobrinja, then in the city centre, and then in the old city.

Battles are being fought around Ilidza. It seems that after all, the objective is to make a breakthrough in the direction that would cover Bacevo, Reljevo and Butila. Thus the problem of road and rail traffic would be solved, as well as water, electricity and gas. If the HVO helps us, we'll be able to break out.

²⁴⁷ A small town 15 km south of Sarajevo

²⁴⁸ Independent monthly newspaper

26th June

I think that our bitterness and our powerlessness can now only be expressed in hatred. Four summers have gone by—the fourth is actually in progress—and no help has arrived, no end in sight, the targeting of children and the defenceless hasn't lessened.

I read somewhere that only hate, out of all the emotions, is the one that requires no food. It feeds on itself, grows of its own accord. The choice is approximately this: if you do not hate sufficiently deeply and widely, you cannot win a war, because hatred is the strongest war motivation. If you hate on the other hand, the war is still won by Karadzic, who started it in order to make beasts out of us.

I didn't call the newsroom yesterday. Suzana Cerimagic tells me today that one shell hit nearby and broke all the windows. Nobody was hurt. Altogether there were seven dead yesterday. The children suffer the most.

27th June

I got some folders for burning: a housing loan of the assembly functioner of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lazic Gajo, former judge on the higher trade court, the appropriate board of commissioners approves a loan at an interest rate of 3%, for fifteen years, for the building of a house on the sea shore. I cannot estimate the amount in real values, but the size of the house is 84 square metres.

The raw material for some future obituary of Yugoslav socialism.

Reading the newspaper I find out in a conversation, that my friend Stojan Klikovac died a year ago. In the first summer of the war he escaped from Grbavica, later to be joined by his wife Mara. Their son Igor is somewhere abroad.

On the way back home, at the water distribution point near the Kosevo hospital, I see a group of older men. Former engineers, lawyers, economists and directors. Among them also a younger woman. Her husband is passing by and comments to his wife: "What are you standing there for, can't you see they're only a bunch of nothings!" He's right. The people who built up Sarajevo have become nothings here.

My best man Pero Pilic tells me of our mutual acquaintance, once a famous sportsman, who left for Canada. He completed all the formalities in Zagreb,

arrived at the airport and had a nervous breakdown. Still, the next day they stuffed him with sedatives and loaded him onto the plane. He went.

In the evening, around nine, the neighbours are carrying their canisters down the street to the queue for the cistern truck that will be there around two. The truck has now become an excuse for getting around one of the war nightmares—the police curfew. One takes a canister along and is free to walk.

28th June

Around half past nine in the morning, the artillery starts roaring.

Our radio is silent. The *chetnik* radio reports that the second phase of our offensive in the area Ilidza - Hadzici - Rakovica has begun.

The telephones are functioning worse and worse, the ones beginning with a six cannot possibly be reached and the ones with a five only with difficulty. I call the paper, only out of courtesy as they don't need me today.

In the office, Mehmed Halilovic is upset: quite a few people have been taken away for the digging of trenches, and the military authorities are requesting that the number of employees be reduced to a fifth of the current staff. If this is carried out, the paper won't survive.

A modified aircraft bomb, carried by rockets meant for a multiple rocket-launcher, hit the RTV building. There are dead and wounded.

The radio doesn't bring news of that until the evening. In the meantime they called us from Denmark, Germany asking what's happened. I get the details from Senad Malhodzic. He's alive and well, but a real drama unfolded around him. He stayed home; his son was in the RTV building looking for his father for an hour and a half. Senad tried to get hold of his son on the phone, but the lines were blocked up. Four dead, thirty-seven wounded.

It seems that our excellent sound man Igor Moncai was left completely deaf by the detonation.

The foreign journalists were jumping through the windows out of fear.

29th June

The rain has been pouring since last night. The armies are wet, and trenches are full of water. Adi is at Sejo's, so I drop by to see him - he's well. I'm about to leave, but a shell hit somewhere nearby. I wait for the second one. It explodes. Now, I can go.

At my sister's place I find her friend Ribica. He lives in Alipasino. He says it's horrific there. In the few days since they started shelling it with these new bombs or *lunas*, Alipasino has acquired the nickname 'luna park'²⁴⁹.

I go out, and by force of habit, I start down the other side of Titova Street, the one closer to Miljacka, I've always thought it safer. It seems that others are of the same opinion, there are more people there. When I was within the reach of the pavement, a powerful explosion resounds from the direction of the nearby shopping centre. I run back gripped by a fear that I am unable to restrain. I am sitting at Dzenana's, fighting with a surge of fear, and reach the conclusion that I can cure it only if I go where I got it—on the street. I retrace my steps along Titova Street. I meet Zijo Dizdarevic. We make for the newsroom. I was late for the meeting because of the shells, but many people didn't turn up at all.

I've completely overcome the panic. Now a euphoric state takes over, even more dangerous than fear. Caution is thrown to the wind. Now one must fight euphoria.

Sweltering heat; the city is empty. I arrive home tired out, but then my daughter telephones me and the mood curve swings upwards. I go into the garden, work, but it's not going right. Then Ahmed informs me that a large bomb exploded in front of the Television (Sarajevo TV HQ). Senada Kreso says that two female American journalists, who happened to be there, went half-mad. The back wheel tires on their 'golf' burst from the force of the explosion even the spare: the brunt of the explosion reached there. They got into the car despite the state it was in and were driving towards the city when they crashed into one of our military vehicles. When our soldiers started walking towards them, they started laughing. Then the soldiers also burst into laughter. The joy of life.

30th June

The guns were thundering around Vogosca all night long. In the morning it's quiet. Then somewhere in the direction of Marindvor²⁵⁰, shells start falling. The

²⁴⁹ A name for an 'amusement park'

²⁵⁰ A square in central Sarajevo

ambulance siren can be heard. Then, from various directions, at irregular intervals, explosions. They're hitting us fiercely.

In the afternoon, the RTV is targeted once again, and the modified bomb hits the building of the New Sarajevo municipal council. The bomb, I hear, broke through two floors and exploded in the large conference hall.

They bombarded, says my best man Pero on the telephone, somewhere around Sutjeska and Skerliceva streets. No casualties. I hear that four were wounded and around twenty slightly hurt at the main city bakery.

In the evening, UNPROFOR troops based in Zetra return *chetnik* fire; the latter had been provoking them all day.

1st July

I wake up and drink coffee in silence, then hear a powerful detonation. The shell hit in Velesici. Around nine, another. Then another somewhere in Kosevo. All a large calibre.

The rumours that our boys had taken Golo Brdo aren't true. This would be strategically important for a breakthrough on the line towards Hadzici.

One of the apartment buildings in Alipasino hit by a modified aeroplane bomb, will have to be evacuated. Its foundations have been shaken. The *chetniks* have sent a message through their channels to the inhabitants of Alipasino that this is nothing compared to what is to come.

In the afternoon, missiles are falling all around the city. The siren can be heard again - would that be heightened general danger or air raid warning? The sirens don't start at the same time and it's difficult to distinguish the signals.

One shell hit near Drvenija bridge—four dead. That is a permanent target. A shell flew into a flat near the Cathedral²⁵¹. Two dead, and the passers-by in Titova Street were showered in shrapnel. There will be more invalids. Neighbour Ferid Hidic, who works in the hospital pharmacy in Kosevo, says that today was as bad as in the time of Markale.

A confirmed piece of news arrives from the frontline: we've broken through the lines at Semizovac on a width of three kilometres. We're closer to Poljine, on the other side.

In the evening I sit with the neighbours. Dzevad Ferhabegovic explains to me the

²⁵¹ The Catholic Cathedral in central Sarajevo

situation with the heating in Dobrinja. If it can possibly be worse than here, it's worse there. Dzevad's wife Amila is trying to light a fire his blazer in order to cook.

- "This blazer of yours is no good; look how poorly it burns."

2nd July

The real, hot summer is starting. The morning is bright, complete silence, the birds which have returned to the city in the war because there is no smog can be heard, the footsteps of the rare passer-by can be heard too.

I drink the coffee on the balcony, just like in the best times. I observe the roof of the house in Velesici which was hit yesterday: it's already been covered up with plastic sheets. The radio reports the number of casualties of yesterday's shelling: twelve dead, more than sixty wounded.

In the afternoon the *chetniks* shell UNPROFOR once again. It seems everyone wants the UNPROFOR to go. At dusk, infantry skirmishes in Poljine and the Jewish cemetery. As they say in Pale - in the Serbian Jewish cemetery.

Sarajevo sinks into sleep with a few lit up houses somewhere in Otoka. There have been twenty wounded today, they didn't say if there were any dead. On the frontlines there had been for sure, but they don't count in the total which is published.

I talk with Fahro Radoncic and he tells me a true story from one of the hills around Sarajevo. A heavy load was being hauled out in several shifts. The horse dragged one cartload, and then another, to the top, to the edge of the cliff. The third time, when he had brought the new load, when they unburdened him, he looked around and jumped off the cliff. The soldiers, they say, cried.

3rd July

This morning, somewhere towards Iidza, a machine gun is continuously at work. It's a *chetnik*. Our boys don't have those.

Explosions can be heard around the city too. In the midst of that crash, a blond, well-dressed girl, is picking plants for her herbaria on the field above my house, neatly arranging them in a thick exercise book.

Azra had to go to a meeting in 'Svjetlost'²⁵² before noon. She makes her way back through the shells; I await her glistening with fear. She arrives around one, drenched with sweat from running. She says that the city centre has been demolished, no glass anywhere any longer, everything looks like in the summer of 1992. She had found herself in a hallway with a woman who'd left Grbavica: that unfortunate wasn't allowed to leave her house there, just like all other non-Serbs, so here she goes out even at the time of heaviest shelling. And she keeps repeating—they're not all the same. Her daughter is with her, a disabled person, missing an arm.

In the afternoon they're bombing the left bank of the Miljacka River and Novi Grad. I stare at the mushroom clouds growing out of the roofs. The radio says that today was the third anniversary of the first flight of the airlift. UNHCR announces that there are no reserves left in the city. Some of the neighbours have completely run out of flour already. Kitchen gardens are not helping much; there's nothing to cook on. The spinach should be washed with as little water as possible and dried for the winter. It's thirty degrees; a desert wind is blowing.

I hear that at Srednje²⁵³ our onetime neighbour Medan was killed, he was from the first group of tenants who passed through the abandoned flats. He was a strong, blond man, always of good cheer. He had grown-up daughters and a two-year-old son, the latter being a foster-child. The child's mother had died, and the father left for somewhere when the war started. Medan took care of the child as if it were his. I can't recall if little Gogo's father was a Serb or if his mother was, but he is from a mixed marriage.

Medan had been wounded once on Zuc hill and barely pulled out because there was no gasoline for the transport of the wounded. He used to say: "If I could only go back to the old times, we certainly lived well."

4th July

Wasn't this once the 'Freedom Fighter's Day'?

Last night I slept fully clothed; shells and rockets were hitting without respite and I had been ready for the shelter, but elected to sleep at home.

In the morning, I have to go out in order to stay sane. I observe the city centre: new ruins. They bombed in order to leave the greatest possible mark of their might.

²⁵² A Bosnian publishing house, one of the biggest in former Yugoslavia

²⁵³ A village near Sarajevo

I run into an acquaintance from the 102nd Brigade, he's off to the frontline in a torn pair of shoes. His brigade is ethnically mixed, hence some of the donators are hesitant to help.

A friend who lives in the Vrazova Street says that a bundle of projectiles from a multiple rocket launcher hit the area between the former Oriental Institute and the former Maxim Gorky Street. "In former Sarajevo", I respond.

5th July

The air raid siren took us by surprise. It turned out that the cause was the shelling of Bihac. By the way, what is the purpose of these air raid warnings, when bomb shelters are virtually non-existent?

I went around Kosevo and Ciglane, looking for somewhere to buy bread, without success. Dina comes back from work and tells me that in the Filipa Kljajica Street she passed by the body of a man who'd committed suicide.

Somewhere on Trskavica, it seems, the *chetniks* have shaken up our lines, prisoners were taken, dead, wounded. In the evening, a gentle breeze. I am sitting out on the balcony. Aunt Saida informs us that a shell hit in Logavina Street, in its lower part.

6th July

Increasingly frequent are the so-called natural deaths. People are dying within twenty-four hours from lung inflammation, mouse fever is also widespread, it's being brought over from the mountains. My liver is starting to play up, from the large amounts of chlorine I am stuffing into my water in order that I wouldn't suffer from diarrhea.

It's quiet today, no infantry fire, with constant explosions in all parts of the city. The streets are deserted. The odd car passes on the way to Velesici, a pedestrian rarely. I go into the garden.

In the evening I find out the total: seven dead and fifteen wounded.

7th July

I stop by the newsroom: I've run out of paperclips, and there isn't anywhere I could buy some more.

The newsroom has moved into our fifth premises since the start of the war. It's an old building, comfortable and relatively safe.

Manojlo Tomic telephones us from Canada. It's three in the morning over there. Manojlo misses us; he talks for a whole hour.

On Titova Street I run into quite a few acquaintances—they're quiet. It's not a depression; it's something lower than that. The majority of them are scared out of their wits, hungry; their souls drained up.

Old news are being published from the frontline, hardly anything can be discerned. It seems that we have occupied the 'Metalka' building, near the Vrbanja Bridge. Thus, house by house, head by head... We've taken back the concrete producing plant near the Stup intersection too.

Today there are no dead in the city, three wounded. There are, however, dead on the frontline.

In Ciglane, in broad daylight, a rat is crossing the street.

8th July

The commemoration was at eleven, and then the *dzenaza* for the painter Ibro Ljubovic, a dear lyricist. I didn't make it—hauling water.

I heard that they shelled Ibro's *dzenaza*.

Around noon, a general danger warning signal. Azra is in the city, at work. As far as I can tell, the shells hit somewhere around Bistrik. Later, a few hit the streets which people take on their way back from getting water at the Brewery.

Azra gets home in the evening, broken. She'd worked a long time, shells falling around her, and then had to make her way back through a deserted city. The feeling of loneliness is devastating. One's muscles ache from the fear.

The *chetniks* are mounting an assault on Srebrenica²⁵⁴.

²⁵⁴ A town in eastern Bosnia famous for the nearby spa, declared a UN 'safe-haven' in 1994

9th July

I go out - supposedly to buy something - just so as not to put two days together without going outside of the house, in time of shelling this mustn't be done, because a man quickly loses the little courage he might have. It has to be kept up by exposing yourself to danger. If you hide away for a lengthier period, you grow fond of life. The exception are the hungry, they walk reluctantly, preserving their energy.

I run into doctor Zlatan Hrelja. This morning a shell hit in front of the main entrance door to his clinic. It wounded a porter and demolished the ward where patients suffering from carcinoma are being held.

A friend of mine Zakir Cuk tells me to drop by for coffee. He's received a letter from his son in France. We read it and recall better times. Ivana tells me a Sarajevan story about a family from Alipasino. They were Jehovah's Witnesses and in 1992 the father refused to carry a gun. He was arrested, tried and spent three years in prison. In the end they let him go. Just so that he could finally meet his wife and daughter at the precise place where a shell was going to hit. He was the only one who didn't die immediately, he managed to get up, saw the two of them lying next to him, and died. From shrapnel—or maybe from pain.

Nothing is still known about the fate of our soldiers captured by the *chetniks* on Treskavica. Another massacre is being prepared around Srebrenica.

10th July

Sweltering heat. Beautiful, Sarajevan morning. Since the beginning of the war there hasn't been any smog. I meet my sister near the Veliki Park. She's exhausted by flu on her way to 'Bosnalijek', which is a half-hour's walk away, a dangerous walk.

In the newsroom talk about the shell that the day before yesterday hit the premises we'd vacated only recently. We're also talking about the article written by Kemal Kurspahic, in which our former editor-in-chief is criticising Silajdzic and Bosnian 'diplomacy'. There is, however, a story which says that Kurspahic bears a grudge against Silajdzic for not offering him a diplomatic post at the beginning of the war. Silajdzic frankly wasn't in a position to do that as at the time the SDA was repaying those who'd helped bring it to power. Kemo hadn't, for sure.

I run into Slavko Santic. His cousin is also among those captured on Treskavica. He doesn't know anything about the boy. His brother is on the verge of losing his

mind. Following is a condensed series of Sarajevan encounters: Zekerijah Djezic, Bato Cengic, Mirko Petrinic. It's been a long time since I last ran into three acquaintances in the same hundred-metre stretch. With old Sarajevans, by the way, I exchange greetings, and usually shake hands too, regardless of whether we'd known each other before the war.

When I came back home, a detonation could be heard coming from the city centre. Both my wife and my sister have to go through there. I stay and wait and hope that once again everything went well. Detonations can still be heard; I'm pacing around the house. Azra arrives late. I sit down to write my column, but shells start falling nearer and nearer, so we descend to the shelter. Down there I find out that the first shell hit the very spot where I met my sister this morning. What became of that young man who was selling cigarettes and razors nearby?

11th July

Srebrenica is falling.

People here are increasingly less inclined to believe in a breakout.

Shells falling everywhere again, I am home before Azra again. Dzenana didn't go to work today.

From my balcony I watch a shell demolish a house in Velesici. An ambulance car arrives, or else some other white van.

12th July

My friend and my first commandant in this war, Mustafa Cemalovic, was killed yesterday.

He was going across Ciglane when a shell hit behind him and tore his abdomen to pieces. He died half an hour later.

I recall how in the first winter of the war he gave me a bundle of firewood. Before that, we'd had a drink in his room, full of shoulder-mounted anti-tank launchers, with a large portrait of Tito on the wall. He was from a well-known Mostar *partisan* family. At the time he offered me for a tour of the frontline, for few days: "Hamza, report from the place where the borders of the free country of Bosnia are".

13th July

We are all mentally in Srebrenica. Mladic announces that he will flatten Zepa as well. When I listen to Bhutto Ghali and the people around him, I want to vomit. In Mladic's case we already know him as a criminal.

14th July

I go out into the city early, but I dare not descend to the Titova Street, or visit my sister and my brother-in-law. They're shelling there.

Infernal heat, the sewage stinks. In Ciglane I couldn't walk through what once was their most beautiful part: the little walkway near the top.

Around one, planes are flying above the city. Nobody pays any attention.

Around three, a tank from Poljine is hitting a very close target, the distance between the source of fire and its destination being very small. The radio reports that the planes were flying to, as they say, 'protect' Zepa²⁵⁵.

In the early evening, a shell hits the base of the uphill road to Kosevsko Brdo. Dika Kacic gives me a call on the phone: she was on the balcony and saw it kill two women. A young man was seriously wounded. All around canisters are scattered, Dika says.

15th July

I know that our men in Srebrenica had two tanks. The question that's troubling me: did they use them? There is so much death there; I can feel it inside.

16th July

After what happened in Srebrenica, more and more people are talking about leaving Sarajevo. People who have children somewhere abroad are waiting for the first opportunity. Sarajevo has had enough of heroism. If this thus far isn't sufficient.

²⁵⁵ A small town in eastern Bosnia

This morning in Ciglane I met a young woman with a beautiful girl who'd just learned to walk. Like a little bird that has just got its feathers. The mother can't keep her in the house, they're walking in an extremely dangerous place. It would have been somewhat safer on that walk-way, but it stinks so much up there, and lower down, around the tunnels, there are rats.

17th July

The newsroom is gripped by a sort of pent up nervousness. There's no pay, so people are talking about how nice it is for those who've settled in the Ljubljana office²⁵⁶ - peace, fivefold wages. They might even secede from us.

Emir Hrustanovic greets me with "my honest Hamza". What does that mean here and now?

In the meantime it seems to me that the state is attempting to take over 'Oslobodjenje'. Not yet, it needs us as we are at the moment, but we haven't done anything to privatise the paper.

In Tuzla, *reis*²⁵⁷ Cerić is calling for a Jihad²⁵⁸. He says that we are not at war with the *chetniks*, but all Serbs. What does that mean is that a "true believer" in Sarajevo ought to slaughter the nearest Serb?

No one still knows what happened to the fifteen thousand people in Srebrenica. What sort of hell is going on in the forests in that part of Bosnia...

18th July

Fog and rain. Buckets under the drainpipes, collecting water. Even the sewage doesn't stink so much when the waters cleanse it.

That, the word 'cleansing', takes me back to the last JRT festival in Neum, where I was a member of the panel of judges. I was sitting with colleague Nebojsa Ristic from Belgrade and naturally the discussion turned to the impending war. Ristic

²⁵⁶ At the beginning of the war the editor-in-chief of 'Oslobodjenje' Kemal Kurspahic decided to establish a back-up location for the paper in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where during the war 'Oslobodjenje' was published weekly and was distributed across Europe. The paper was coming out thanks to the work done by Sarajevo newsroom, but the Ljubljana office in turn provided much needed funding and newsprint for the staff back in Sarajevo. In addition, the newsdesk editors, who worked in the toughest conditions of all, in the demolished 'Oslobodjenje' building 100 metres from the frontline, were every so often sent to Ljubljana for a well-deserved break

²⁵⁷ Mustafa Efendija Cerić, Muslim religious leader

²⁵⁸ Holy War

spoke about war as of some sort of historical cleansing. I don't know what happened to him later, he's no longer on air, as others he harboured some bookish, theoretical illusions about the war. I don't think that at the time he was conscious of the fact that he was espousing that which is presently going on in Sarajevo.

My friend Fuad Foco, a war photographer, was wounded in Kobilja Glava. Foco is a fanatic, he looks for the best possible angle regardless of who is shooting or why.

Early evening, they're targeting Donji Velesici: four times two projectiles from Trebevic. The missiles are whistling low over my roof, maybe fifty metres. I go down to the shelter, to talk with the children who've gathered there.

I am once again liked by children and dogs. It hasn't been like that for a while, which means that I have been a bad man. Or, maybe, no sort of man.

I hear that shells have hit the hospital again, the casualty ward. Six wounded in front of Alma's house in Dobrinja. A house was hit here as well, in Kosevsko. In Velesici there were three dead, sixteen wounded.

19th July

Last night I watched until late into the night as a large howitzer from Poljine was pounding Sjenicka Kosa and Kobilja Glava. When I finally went to bed, the howitzer was still working away, long into the night. I dreamt of the dead, and those who are still alive as dead.

I went to the newsroom. By half past eleven I was already on my way back home, and that's when the shelling increased in frequency. Firstly the old town and then the city centre. I run home, call Azra in the 'Koridor'. She says they're pounding Logavina Street and the area around the Presidency building. A shell hit in Romanijska as well. She was about to leave for home, but now she's waiting for it to calm down.

My tooth broke, the second in ten days. It dissolved like a cube of sugar in water.

20th July

There is less shelling, the streets instantly fill up with people, who've gone out for the same reason that I have; to go out. Thus a general danger warning is sounded. That doesn't decrease the liveliness.

My daughter has left Ljubljana for a few days to take a holiday in Rovinj. I had a hard time persuading her to do that. We speak more often; it's incomparably cheaper. For the first time since she left, Azra talks with her without keeping track of the minutes.

That leads me into evocations, old and new deaths are tripping over each other in my thoughts. It's been three years since the death of Siba Krvavac. I am not forgetting—no one should forget—Siba died hungry too, dreaming that someone would bring him a piece of yellow cheese. He was buried in a plywood coffin. He was buried the same day as our colleague photojournalist Salko Hondo; from Siba's funeral I crossed the thirty metres over to Salko's *dzenaza*. I see in the paper that it is the anniversary of the death of colleague Ivica Bodnaruk and his wife Mila. The shell killed them both on the spot.

Zepa is falling, after all.

21st July

When the operation began to lift the siege of Sarajevo, we already anticipated that Mladic would retaliate where we are the weakest, in Srebrenica and Zepa. It was also expected that Belgrade would become directly involved. However, even without Belgrade, Srebrenica couldn't have defended itself. Even with it, it could have been evacuated in a more orderly fashion. This way thousands of people have disappeared without trace.

No one expected such a brutal and systematic terror being unleashed on Sarajevo.

Today, around eleven, a little earlier than usual, a shell hit near the Young People's Theatre, a second near the 'robna kuca'. There are dead and wounded.

Maybe one day a reader of this book might get angry with its heroes, the Sarajevans of the siege. Why are they walking around and exposing themselves to danger?

Well, they must, because they have to. One has to go to get not only bread but anything else to eat; find firewood for cooking. Water must be hauled. There are people you just have to see. Whoever has a job, has to go to work. When one is in the Army, he must go to the front. Why not add to all these musts\ an hour of walking around one's city, for the benefit of one's own soul?

In the afternoon, two shells hit Ciglane, near the place where at that time water is usually being distributed. That is also the road I usually take on my way to the centre. Azra passed by there only a few minutes before the shell exploded.

22nd July

Last night around nine, while listening to RFI, explosions started reverberating. I ran into the hallway. Then I returned to put out the candle, and then down into the shelter. I didn't know where the explosion was, nor was I able to count how many detonations there had been. From Blagovac, near Vogosca a bunch of rockets had been fired from a multiple rocket launcher and fell on the area between Crni Vrh and the Health Centre in Vrazova Street. There were dead and wounded. The rockets demolished entire floors. Glass, there where some was still left, was breaking even in Kosevsko. Dina went to see the doctor this morning and she says that down there it's desolation.

In the afternoon, Emir Fazlagic tells us that their cousin Jasmin has been killed. A great guy, I liked him a lot when we first met. Part of pre-war Sarajevo crowd: fun, game of tennis, patronising cafes...

His parents had crossed over from Grbavica; his father died last year. Jasmin was demobilised, and when the new wave of mobilisation began, he left Sarajevo. He went somewhere on the coast and died in a car accident. He's left behind his mother, a wife and a son.

23rd July

Last night the *chetniks* pounded the UNPROFOR in Zetra. The blues didn't respond. This morning, planes are flying over Poljine, which is where the fire came from.

I go to the market. There is no amount of fear that will stop poor women from going out and selling two-three kilos of apples. Around eleven, when I came back home, the shelling starts. They're pounding everywhere, fiercely, at uneven intervals. They're demolishing and killing. In the early evening, Dika Kacic tells me that another shell hit in front of her house. Firstly – near the place where the children used to play a table-tenis. The children weren't here, but the passers-by were wounded. One soldier pulled over his car and ran to help out. That's when the second shell hit. She saw him running for cover, one arm missing.

In the evening, in the neighbourhood and on stolen electricity, I watch the news. Another 'determined engagement' on the part of the West is being announced. People are laughing. Afterwards we watch a film, 'Three Days of the Condor'. From time to time, I get feeling as if that soldier who was hit while going to help the other is crawling towards me.

24th July

This morning Azra went to pay a visit to her sister's grave. It's the second anniversary of Sija's death. Sija died on another day as hot as this one, after another shelling as intense as this. I went around contacting all the presidents of the Muslim religious councils asking for a burial place, until I finally got one near the Logavina Street mosque.

This morning the shelling began at half past nine. I planned to sketch out the column that I meant to hand in tomorrow, but I spent a lot of time waiting and hauling water, so I was no longer capable of even writing a postcard.

Last night, here, in Ciglane, near Senada Kreso's flat, the *chetniks* sent ten or so armour-piercing shells. They don't explode on impact, so the neighbourhood slept peacefully, thinking that it was only some mortar fire nearby. A young woman was wounded. I run into neighbour Mirza. Last night, when he was sitting with friends in front of the house, a ricochet bullet caught him on the hip. If it had hit in the soft stomach tissue, it would have killed him.

25th July

The shelling started at half-past ten. I go to get some bread in Lower Ciglane. I pass by the building that was hit with the armour-piercing shells. They are fired from the 'bofors' gun, I think around 50 mm. On the outside the shell displaces only one building brick, the carnage takes place inside.

I run into neighbour Ibro. He's disabled, a *pravoborac*²⁵⁹, he was hurt recently by a mine in Nisici. A harsh, smart man. Ibro lived in Croatia in the seventies. He says that Savka Dapcevic²⁶⁰ told him as early as that, that the time of bi-polarisation is coming. In the time of the 'Maspok'²⁶¹ Ibro was among the first to be detained, and later those same people restored him. Later he lived in Herzegovina; he's married to a Croat. When the war was drawing near, he sent his wife from Neum off to the northern parts of the Adriatic coast, while he came to Bosnia with his daughter, and later they both joined the Army. The girl was a real fighter. Now he's sent her to her mother's, in Germany, and he's still here, alone.

²⁵⁹ *Prvoborac* - someone who joined Tito's *partisans* at the very beginning (in 1941) of the Second World War

²⁶⁰ Savka Dapcevic-Kucar, President of the opposition People's Party in Croatia, one of the leaders of the Croatian National Movement in 1971, which ended when Tito removed its leaders, including her

²⁶¹ The name of the Croatian National Movement of 1971

Ibro continues: “Savka used to tell me: Don’t worry about your pension, when the time comes for it, you won’t even be able to buy an egg...”

Firing across the city, a breakthrough is being talked about again. If one listens to the news and looks at the maps, it seems to make more sense that this whole operation was devised to break out towards Gorazde²⁶², and not to lift the siege of Sarajevo.

On the *chetnik* radio, I listen to a report by Veljko Kojevic, my onetime colleague from the Television, a talented reporter and an unsuccessful director, which sounds to me like a rather familiar combination. Of the entire report I recall only Veljko’s crowning evidence of fundamentalism in Sarajevo: He’s walking down the street and sees a man wearing a fez and riding a bicycle. I have never seen such a person. I have seen people wearing fezzes, and people on bicycles, but the former are so few in number that I have never encountered such a combination.

26th July

Azra went to work again; I took care of the water, as soon as I had handed in my column. The water arrived around eleven-thirty; we had been down to six litres. Down, lower, where the water arrives regularly, they’re washing carpets and watering their gardens. They wouldn’t let Azra’s brother go into a basement and fill up with water, so he had to go half a kilometre further, to a pump.

Azra returns exhausted by the heat and the fear. One hit the square in front of the ‘Svjetlost’, the shrapnel cut the leg of one soldier, he started screaming for help, and the first to run to his aid was some woman. The next hit the Courts building, there are dead. The third – in Mejtas. While Azra was going through Nemanjina Street, she heard crying coming from one of the houses. There are dead there too.

In the evening, around ten, three large missiles hit near our house. I heard the third while it was still hissing on the way down.

27th July

The day of the insurrection of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina against fascism.

Yesterday, our boys managed to make a significant advance on the front at

²⁶² A town in eastern Bosnia

Spicasta Stijena, towards Nahorevo and Crepoljsko. The *chetniks* concentrated everything they had at their disposal, even rolling barrels filled with explosives, but we made it through. One line of communication between Vogosca and Pale has been broken.

In the afternoon, I go down with fever.

28th July

I woke up exhausted. I hear we have lost our positions on Spicasta Stijena. A tank counterattack. As far as I know five of our fighters were killed, and we are where we started from on the first day of the attempted breakthrough, just like on the Trebevic road. On Spicasta Stijena, some of our soldiers were being thrown back by the barrel explosions for tens of metres and survived.

The humanitarian aid is being distributed, for the first time since the ninth of June. 250 grams of green pea each, beans and rice, a hundred grams of sugar, a quarter of a litre of oil. The last time the pensions were paid out was in February.

29th July

The war is drawing further away from Sarajevo. It is now in Zepa, Bihac, around Gorazde, near Grahovo and Glamoc. Remaining here is the danger that hangs in the air, exhaustion, hunger, the absence of prospects.

And human stories.

Our photographer Didi Torse returned from the Igman-Treskavica battlefield. He was in the rescue units. Didi's father is French, his mother Sarajevan. When the 'blue roads' were still open, he went to see his father in Monte Carlo and came back. He concluded that his place is in Sarajevo. Now his place had been on Treskavica, he was in charge of a horse there. One night, in the mountain mist, he lost his horse. He was interrogated in the unit HQ. The loss of a horse is a significant thing in peacetime, but in war one must assume that either Didi didn't take care of the horse, or that he had sold it.

Didi patiently repeated his story. He liked the horse, he talked to it while walking through the passes, but that night they separated and he couldn't find him again. In the break between the two hearings, Didi saw the horse coming out from the nearby forest. He came straight up to him and, as Didi says, angrily rubbed its head in his hands, which was supposed to have meant – and why did you leave

me alone?

Now Didi is worried: are his successors taking good enough care of that smart animal?

30th July

I am again suffering from intense bouts of fever. Everything hurts and I have no desire for anything. Nevertheless, I can't keep still; I don't want to give up.

Srebrenica is killing me too. It turns out that no one knew precisely how many people were trapped in that siege, how many were shot and slaughtered by the *chetniks*. Every calculation points to a lot.

31st July

I go out and buy some freshly baked bread, which is the only goods of pre-war quality that I can afford every day.

I run into a friend from Marindvor, from the old neighbourhood.

- "Do you remember Hamza, the bread from Brkic's bakery?"

Of course I remember. Brkic was a famous baker; he came to Sarajevo from Grahovo, driven here in the same car in which Djuro Pucar arrived. He learnt a trade and was one of the old-fashioned workers. He sang in a choir, went to the opera and always made the same bread.

When he died, the bakery was taken over by his wife Zora. Then the war came, and she went over to Grbavica. She sold pies, that's something that sells well in wartime.

Zora died there. She didn't have anyone in Grbavica; cousins from Serbia came to bury her. Soldiers with stockings on their heads burst in, took all of Zora's money, all her relatives' money, so that the next day they had to borrow for the funeral and for their trip back home.

In the evening, the director of the RTV Amila Omersoftic telephones me. My pre-war friend Zvonko Vidovic has died. They need some sort of obituary, and barely a few people are left who know anything about Zvonko.

I write it, hand it in. That is my first article requested and aired by TV Sarajevo since I left them thirteen years ago.

1st August

The fourth wartime August is beginning. I only passed through the newsroom, as usual. It's pointless to open up some serious topics – the first thing that thrusts itself upon one are the differences in pay compared with our people in Ljubljana: a newly hired interpreter gets in a month what I receive for thirty commentaries.

The lawyer Rizo Pasalic has returned to Sarajevo. The last time we met was I think at Ismet Buric's *dzenaza*, on the eve of the war. He's a friend of Omer Karabeg. He had been a prisoner in Grbavica; used to live directly in the line of fire. He would spend ten-twelve hours a day in the forced-labour platoon that brought him to 44 kilograms. His daughter was trying all the time to get him out and finally succeeded. He went to recuperate in Austria and for now, he is back here to open his law office again. He's managed to keep his cheerfulness and optimism, and he'd had it worse than I.

When I was at the market in Ciglane, an explosion reverberates, I think from Kosevsko. The sellers are holding me back – don't go, the second one is bound to follow. I haven't the nerves so I go on my way.

In the evening Senada Kreso informs me that the explosion was a multiple rocket launcher projectile, which hit somewhere around Vrazova Street. Karim Zaimovic, the editor of 'Dani' and the son of the painter Meho Zaimovic, has been seriously wounded. He's still in a coma, fighting for his life. Everyone likes Karim.

2nd August

A river of people is flowing out of Sarajevo. A pile of papers is necessary for the departure, but the more administrative obstacles there are, the more discharges. Administrative obstacles only serve the purpose of separating those who have connections, acquaintances, or something of the sort. The something of the sort is what remains for the average person. It is being estimated that since the beginning of May of this year, twelve thousand people have left the city. Nobody can confirm that fact, or else wouldn't want to, but judging by the streets it would seem to be somewhere around that figure.

People are leaving mostly from the fear of the coming winter. Everything that could possibly have been stoked has already been fed to the fire. There is no gas. The lifting of the siege obviously isn't going the way people had been expecting.

Another reason is worry for the children. Even ten year-old boys are, in the eyes of their mothers, candidates for the army. Already at fifteen they cannot leave the city legally. Thus they should do so at thirteen.

As things stand now the war is the only thing we can see ahead of us. Behind us is oblivion, the majority of the people don't know any longer what it was that they did before the war.

3rd August

Karim Zaimovic is still in a deep coma. I talk to Boro Kontic about him. We both place him in the vanguard of the generation—Boro being more familiar with that generation than I. Today I find out that the same projectile wounded my friend Sead Kreso, a former Minister of Finance. Fortunately it's only a leg-wound; he's already been released home. Very near the place of the explosion was Zeljko Filipovic with his son.

In the newsroom people are numb with pennilessness. I run into Zijo Dizdarevic. He moved to 'Oslobodjenje' in April, after returning from sick-leave. Since then, he hasn't received a penny.

The parliament of the Republic and the Federation is convening in Zenica. Not one Sarajevan journalist was given permission to leave the city and report.

The Serb radio reports that the Croatian guns are pounding Drvar “where only civilians and refugees are to be found”, and their HQ says that it will retaliate by bombing Dubrovnik²⁶³ town centre.

In Zenica, Haris Silajdzic has offered his resignation. People are appalled and disappointed.

4th August

Karim Zaimovic is still floating between life and death.

Everyone is talking about Silajdzic's resignation. I haven't met anybody who would be glad about it.

The Croatian Army is breaking up the *marticevci*²⁶⁴. They've obviously been given a free hand for a few days to get most of the job done as fast as possible,

²⁶³ Ancient city on the Croatian Adriatic coast, sometimes called 'the pearl of the Adriatic'

²⁶⁴ The paramilitary units of the rebel Serb leader Martić in Croatia

and operations for the cleansing of the terrain would follow. However, the Serbs are on the run en masse, only a few elderly people being left behind. They've had enough of all this.

5th August

The nights and mornings have turned colder, the heatwave is over. That often happens in Sarajevo around the beginning of August.

In Croatia, the Serb defensive lines are shattering like glass.

Karadzic proclaims on their radio: "If we lose Western Slavonija²⁶⁵ in this war, we'll be back even if it takes a hundred years".

On the radio, the Bosnian radio, old Bosnian songs.

6th August

Columns of Serbs from Kninska Krajina²⁶⁶ are on the roads. The Croatian Army operation was executed Israeli style. Krajina Serbs are mostly headed for Bosnia, thus Karadzic is getting that which he has mercilessly spent and which is the most scarce at the moment – people.

On the VOA²⁶⁷ I listened to colleague Dzejlan Pecanin. She held up heroically while she was here. But, many heroes, once they leave, decide never to return. Dzejlan has probably decided thus as well.

7th August

In the newsroom they are putting together a new, reduced list of work responsibilities. It fails to include even the minimum requirements. If it is enforced, 'Oslobodjenje' will cease to publish. It seems to me that even I will be relieved of work responsibilities. In that case I will be switching employers – it's a matter of principle. Not even a mobilisation would worry me, assuming they deem that I have sufficient physical strength. Psychologically we have all been

²⁶⁵ A part of northern Croatia under Serb occupation until 1995

²⁶⁶ A part of central Croatia, on the western border with Bosnia, under Serb occupation until 1995

²⁶⁷ Voice of America

anaesthetised. To be dead or alive—both have their advantages.

Still, I am really angry at that newsroom. We've carried 'Oslobodjenje' through some hard days with fewer people than there had been in army or municipal services. The indestructibility of the paper had been an inspiration to those who were defending Sarajevo.

Is this all in direct connection with the recently arrived 'suggestion' that UNPROFOR shouldn't be covered, that foreign sources shouldn't be featured. Even the ban on filming within the city was an Army decision reached without the knowledge of the government.

8th August

The headline for my column today is "Yalta, Yalta". I think that a division of Bosnia will follow, and then a new unsparing war between the Serbs and the Croats in which, once again, the biggest victims will be the Bosniacs.

The battles around Sarajevo, as far as the citizens know, are calming down. There aren't any longer the continuous signals of general danger. People have relaxed. Still, there is no water, no food – it's a sad relaxation.

The Army has received its first pay—35 DM in cash and some goods.

9th August

Today, if my calculation is right, is the 1220th day of the siege.

Karim Zaimovic has begun breathing without the assistance of artificial lungs. A big step in the struggle to stay alive.

The deadline President Izetbegovic set for himself and for the Army for the breaking of the siege, runs out in about a hundred days.

Mehmed Husic gives me a lift to work. Husic also takes in an acquaintance of his from the neighbourhood. She's going to visit her child in hospital. The kid is seven years old. He's got stomach cancer. Since he turned three he's been eating virtually nothing but tinned food.

Yesterday in a nearby police station a twenty-two year old man collapsed from a brain haemorrhage. These haemorrhages are very common.

Bihac is free, after 1200 days that siege has been broken. We in Sarajevo feel easier for it too.

Serbs making their escape from Krajina through Bosnia are appalled at the ruins.

10th August

Last night's skirmishes about Haris Silajdzic's outburst on television ended leaving the Prime Minister politically wounded. In the afternoon the state television received a letter from the SDA requesting that a representative of the party parliament members club should take part in the program along with Silajdzic. In the next letter it was stated that it should be Edhem Bicakcic, acting vice-president of the Presidency of R BiH, acting vice-president of the Federation and the director of 'Elektroprivreda'.

Silajdzic has declined to take part in such a program.

In the course of the night, electricity is back in the city. The children in front of the house are shouting: "Bicakcic has turned the power on!"

Little Emir Darman got his first tooth.

11th August

The name and number of the street I live in have been changed. I used to live at 69, Mitra Trifunovica, and now I am at 51, Antuna Hangija. They didn't leave the old numbers and names of streets crossed out, as was done in Ljubljana. Who can find their way around Sarajevo now...

All in all, except the names of streets and numbers, the appearance has been changed; three trees that used to shield us from the sun have been cut down for firewood; the top of the building has been broken up by a shell, the staircase used for the approach has been blown apart, and three tank shells heavily damaged flats in the neighbouring building. Half of the current tenants have moved in here during the war. The basement windows are blocked up with sandbags. It's hardly recognisable.

12th August

This morning we were woken up by couriers looking for some fighters in our street. Poor people, with these new numbers their only option was to go from door to door and inquire.

Payroll was finally distributed in the newsroom. Some will buy things for the house, some are going to the café. That nice journalistic habit has survived throughout the time of the siege.

I was in the Army section HQ again, my second invitation in ten days. Checking up. I didn't run into anybody I know. I am gripped by the fear that after that war—if that "after the war" even exists—only the most naïve, the speculators and a group of dreamers who will live and die in the messianic effort to preserve the ancient, pre-diluvial image of Sarajevo, will remain here.

The first excerpts from my booklet "I, journalist" have appeared in the paper, a handbook for all those pushed into reporting by the war, and who are learning the trade in the frying pan of war news. They've joined in the stead of colleagues who've left the scene of events.

13th August

Our boys are attacking Donji Vakuf²⁶⁸. UNPROFOR estimates that eleven thousand soldiers are engaged there.

Beneath the window, neighbour Redzo is chopping up his furniture in order to cook lunch. He's breaking up a new, beautiful wardrobe, probably from his daughter's room; she was killed by a shell. For our lunch, I've torn up the flower-stand, the first piece of furniture I made once upon a time, in the clutches of a 'do-it-yourself' mania.

Later, I visit my cousin Husnija Sejdinovic, he lives close by and we were in the unit together. I haven't seen his son Samir since the beginning of the war. He's in the MUP and always on duty.

Some ten days ago, Husnija's cousin was killed near Dobož.

At home I find Azra in tears. Karim Zaimovic has died.

Cousin Nafa drops by. She's crying too: one of her sons in on the frontline, here in Sokolj, and the other, who lives in Dubrovnik, in on the front near Popovo Polje.

²⁶⁸ A town in central Bosnia

Those lines are active too.

Her grandson is on Zuc hill.

Electricity was supposed to come back on in the evening; Alija Izetbegovic is speaking on the state television. There was no electricity.

Haris Silajdzic speaks on the local TV 99 station.

14th August

I'm on my way down into the city, headed for Karim Zaimovic's *dzenaza*. While he was still in a coma I tied myself to the fate of the young man. Today, however, neither the *dzenaza* nor the commemoration are taking place.

I call on the ONASA agency. The wife of colleague Mirko Sagolj was there too. She says that she recently had a call from our mutual acquaintance Momir Jungic from Pale, who left Sarajevo to go up there. The extent to which Jungic was persecuted here can be surmised from the fact that on the eve of his defection for the other side, I ran into him in the Presidency building.

Some telephone lines to the other side are open and Jungic found a way to get in touch with the Sagoljs - to ask about friends and acquaintances. As if nothing has happened, as if he had gone to a neighbouring town in perfectly normal circumstances.

The ONASA director Mehmed Husic is upset: his daughter has won some sort of scholarship in the USA. Parting with a child isn't easy.

The streets are crowded; there haven't been any general danger alerts for a few days now.

A respite or an end?

15th August

Rain pouring down all day. I notice that Vlado Staka is no longer in the newsroom. He's received some sort of grant in the USA and left with his wife and daughter. Vlado was on the edge of his nerves. An honest and reliable reporter. I spent the afternoon at the *dzenaza*. All of Sarajevo is seeing Karim off, the earthly remains of Sarajevo. Around two hundred people in the mosque, barely ten or so that are unfamiliar to me.

We return, drenched to the skin, quiet, thoughtful. Karim was, it seems, the youngest present at this *dzenaza*.

16th August

Today I didn't make it to the funeral of my former colleague from the television, Srbo Slijepcevic. We worked together during the formative, hardest and most beautiful pioneer years of the Sarajevo Television, when everything came down to enthusiasm necessary to lodge the foot in the door and make it between the powerful programming blocks of Zagreb and Belgrade Television.

I didn't make it because I was waiting for the water truck. The water didn't arrive until the evening.

17th August

I am doing an interview with Kemal Hrelja for 'Dani' magazine; he's the director of the Institute of Economics. He's written a book about Bosnia - "*How the People Used to Live*", the economic history of Bosnia before the Second World War. Illiteracy, syphilis, malaria, consumption, maize meal and cabbage. An honest, thorough work. I remember the Bosnia of that time too, Kikic's²⁶⁹ Bosnia. When my father arrived as the first teacher for the newly built school in Cajno near Visoko, he had to persuade the local hosts, who worked as miners on the other side of the hill in Breza, to steal lamps from the mine, so that in the evenings he could show them what reading and writing were all about and teach them the alphabet, hoping that they would allow their children to attend school.

Hrelja tells me about his own father, the best pupil of the school in Rogatica. The school board decided that such a gifted student deserved to continue his studies and receive a scholarship, so the principal, a Serb, went to put the proposal before Kemal's grandfather. "You've anyhow made a non-Muslim of him already" - replied the latter. Kemal's granddad was, by the way, a rich and an enlightened man for his time and I'd heard of him before.

²⁶⁹ Hasan Kikic, a Bosnian writer who lived between the two world wars, killed in the Second World War as a partisan

18th August

Today two neighbours are tearing up their furniture in front of the house. First a chair, then a wall-unit and finally, an armchair. The armchair support is made of beech-wood, a real treasure.

I've no will to work. I'm walking around the city, across the Skenderija Bridge, even though I am still scared of walking on the other side of the Miljacka River. I glance at the news kiosk near the former Café 'Dva Ribara', where recently two young gypsies from my neighbourhood were wounded. The shell blew apart the sheet metal as if it were made of tin foil. What, then, did it do to the children's bodies?

No one pays much attention. Such sights take a day or two to sink into one's general picture of ruined Sarajevo and the fact that every step we take could be our last.

19th August

A sack of wood costs twenty DM. I picked one up at the market today, no more than ten, 15 kilos in weight. Firewood is more expensive than potato, beans, flour or milk per kilo. One cannot eat cold tins.

In the evening, power is back. Azra is straining to cook as much as possible. We'll do our best for it not to spoil in the heat.

A UN personnel carrier with an American delegation inside, toppled down the side Igman.

I switch to the *chetnik* station. They're showing shots of four of our dead soldiers, somewhere on the northern front. All four have cheap sneakers on their feet. They say that one of them was a brigade commander, before switching over to diversionist units.

20th August

The streets are full of people. There's no shelling, just an occasional sniper shot. Mehmed Husic tells me that a missile from a Serb *kacusa*²⁷⁰ hit his mother's house

²⁷⁰ A Russian rocket

near the Brewery, whistled by half a metre from her and didn't explode.

In front of 'Svjetlost', a few women from Hrasnica are selling brooms at half price compared with those at the market. They need special papers to cross over to Sarajevo from Hrasnica²⁷¹, while a person travelling from Travnik to Zenica²⁷² needs only one's identity card, just like in peacetime.

21st August

The spirit of Sarajevo, reduced to black humour, is still alive. After the Croatian Operations *Bljesak* and *Oluja*²⁷³, the lifting of the siege of Sarajevo has earned the nickname "Operation *Sabur*²⁷⁴".

22nd August

Renewed shelling. From my window I can see shelling of 'Bosnalijek', and I hear they are pounding Cengic Vila. A shell hit the street across the road from Dzenana's flat. It killed a policeman standing on the corner. A neighbour who was carrying water and a girl from the basement of the building opposite, were wounded. It tore apart the plastic sheets on Dzenana's windows, broke the glass on the inside doors and scattered their things around the house.

They weren't hurt. The ceiling is full of little holes—tiny pieces of shrapnel lodged in the ageing mortar. Had it been a modern concrete ceiling, they would have ricocheted.

This Tuesday took away seven lives, while more than forty people were wounded.

23rd August

Yesterday's bloodbath started with the withdrawal of UNPROFOR from one of the lookout posts in the direction of Vogosca. That hill used to be in our hands and so we reoccupied it. Then our boys there came under attack from the artillery in Vogosca. We shelled the 'Pretis' factory, which is a munition factory. The

²⁷¹ Suburb of Sarajevo

²⁷² Cities in central Bosnia

²⁷³ 'Flash' and 'Storm', Croatian Army operations to liberate parts of Croatia held by rebel Serbs in 1995

²⁷⁴ 'Patience'

Vogoscans retaliated by shelling Sarajevo targeting 'Bosnalijek', 'Zrak'²⁷⁵ and, mostly, civilians. In its statement the UNPROFOR skips over the first part of the story and claims that everything started with the attack on the factory in Vogosca. That version of events leaves them least liable. Still, they did shell the Serb positions when their fire wounded six Egyptian 'blue helmets'.

The name of the policeman who was killed yesterday in front of Dzenana's house was Hakija Kulovac. He was eighteen. I've greeted him several times; Dzenana has been taking care of those policemen since the beginning of the war—she used to bring them tea in the time of the worst cold and hunger, in the winter of 1992.

24th August

In the shelling of the day before yesterday, Suad Svraka was killed; one of the best Sarajevan soccer players of the first post-war generation.

I called on Merso and Nela. Nela has neatly folded her bed linen and is feeding the fire with it to cook dinner for her child. Rare is the person who still has books in the house. At least another National Library has perished in the flats.

Azra's relatives from Banja Luka have been expelled and have managed to cross the Sava. Still remaining there are, it seems, Salko and Seka, and we don't know if they'll drive them out towards central Bosnia or put them on a ferry across the Sava. Salko had arranged for an exchange with a Serb from Visoko, but then a Serb changed his mind and decided to stay in his house. Now they're kicking him out.

25th August

Salko and Seka have finally made it to Zagreb. They've saved their skin.

Overcast and rainy. I'm reading Simon Wiesenthal: *"Justice and not Revenge"*.

"To survive, that is the privilege that binds... Survivors must be like seismographers. They must be able to sense danger before others, recognise and point out its contours. They haven't the right to deceive themselves once again and to deem harmless that which may end in catastrophe. We failed in as much as we did nothing to counter the emergence of the social circumstances that made it easier for Hitler to rise to power. Whenever I talk to younger people I tell them

²⁷⁵ Optical Devices production company, serving both military and civilian needs

about the millions of the unemployed who walked the streets at that time, about the people who would wear a sign around their neck with the inscription: 'Will do any job'. Whoever says that about themselves once, accepts the job given to him by Hitler."

26th August

From the newsroom, I go to the bar "At Tito's" with Mladen Paunovic and Ibro Polimac²⁷⁶. Ten or so people there, typical Sarajevo atmosphere.

- "*Eselamu alejkum, serdar*²⁷⁷!"

- "*Alejkimu selam, vojvodo*²⁷⁸!"

Talk turns to the time of the greatest hunger. A gaunt man sitting next to me joins in the conversation:

- "At that time I used to make *jalan-pace*²⁷⁹."

Jalan means 'meatless.'

- "I take a little oil, a little vinegar, crush half a clove of garlic and then we eat it as a dip. My son says that he can't eat any more and I instruct him not to dip too much, to drain the piece of bread on the edge of the *sahan*²⁸⁰."

The host, Davor, tells of the pawning of gold at the Sarajevo markets. A gram was going for as low as three DM. The jewellers—not all of them—were paying up to seven DM for it. A packet of cigarettes was going for ten DM at the time.

As we are leaving I begin to think: will the people with the cardboard inscription: "Will do any job" be pacing in front of the companies acquired by the war profiteers.

In the evening on Radio Free Europe, gynaecologist Srecko Simic was speaking about the increasingly common cases of wartime carcinoma in women. These carcinoma rapidly enter the final stages.

²⁷⁶ A journalist who worked for the 'Unis' company newspaper

²⁷⁷ *Serdar*, An old Ottoman title for a Janissary commander

²⁷⁸ *Vojvoda*, a Serb duke

²⁷⁹ *Pace* – a dish made from a cow head

²⁸⁰ A copper bowl with a lid

27th August

We spend all day in waiting as power is supposed to come back on. In the meantime it's being reported that in future it will be coming less often and that we will have less and less of it.

Still, waiting for the power I await water, buying a hundred litres for two DM. In the afternoon a shell hits in Kosevsko, in Jukiceva Street. In the evening, another in Gorica, wounding a child.

Finally around nine, the bulbs light up. Azra can switch on the washing machine and the water has to be added manually. Later she cooks and irons as much as her strength will allow her. After a few days I get fresh, hot homemade food and eat it indecently; I eat a lot and fast everything that is in front of me.

28th August

Last night I ruined my stomach. I can't go outside. I try writing. Suddenly sirens are heard: I hadn't heard the explosion over the sound of the typewriter.

I telephone Azra at work. It's busy. I try again a few minutes later, but there's no dial tone. I hear the whistle of the ambulance vans.

There is still no dial tone; the telephone is a dead thing sitting on the table. That means that some bad news has swept around Sarajevo. The city then acts like a body of a mamal, whose nervous system transmits a signal about an injury. The shells have been falling for forty months already, but when there is no dial tone, that is a sign that the telephone exchange cannot absorb all the fear.

Then the telephone rings. Azra is calling from 'Svjetlost'. The shell hit the entrance to Markale, towards the tram tracks. A massacre. "Tell my family that I am alive".

Again no dial tone. However, I once again know that I have a wife. Many are now without wife, brother, child...

My sister calls. I am again unable to get in touch with anyone. Then Dina's brother from Denmark calls: he saw what happened on television and is explaining to her where the shell hit. The radio, censored, reports that the shell hit "the city centre". That is, like, protecting a military secret.

Around one o'clock, NATO aeroplanes are in the air. Flying above the safe haven of Sarajevo. Another airborne promenade above the execution scaffold.

Minutes flow by. My neighbour tells me that twenty-eight people have been killed. I don't miss the television or the radio. All that has already been seen here. The method is identical, the only thing that changes are the names of the victims. Children are still playing in front of the house. A neighbour is changing a tire on his VW Golf. There are no longer events that could stagger Sarajevo. There is, then, no Sarajevo.

The news at two: 33 dead, 74 wounded. The tally is by no means final.

Silajdzic asks on CNN what is NATO doing? Around two-thirty, the phone is working again.

Automatically I switch on the *chetnik* radio. They, of course, again had nothing to do with it; once again the idle Sarajevans have been killing themselves. They, on the other hand, don't have the weapons with the destructive power sufficient to kill that many people at once. It turns out that we are also technically superior and that we are demonstrating that superiority in the market.

As the day drags on, names start surfacing, the details of what happened.

This is the third massacre in the span of approximately one hundred metres, on a line roughly connecting the point between the former 'Alpina' shop with the exit from Markale to the tram and the corner of the supermarket, in the direction of the former '22nd December'²⁸¹.

Shells are still falling in Sarajevo, around the hospital.

29th August

Traffic around Markale has resumed. The blood has been washed away from the tarmac but it remains wherever the rains have drifted the earth. At the point of impact, a little table with flowers. It has been left there by the Association of Sarajevans.

The shell had a delayed trigger. Virtually every piece of shrapnel hit someone, people were being cut in two. Because I pass by here all the time, I am waiting for the pictures in the newspaper to see whom I can recognise. Azra's colleague from work who was driving the dead and wounded yesterday, this morning found a piece of human bone in his car.

Our acquaintance, the mother of seventeen-year-old Adnan, phoned in to postpone the *dzenaza* until she gets to Sarajevo. She would like to see him dead if nothing else.

²⁸¹ A building in down-town Sarajevo, near the main city theatre

In the bar, Davor tells us about the man who was running to get inside one of the rescue vehicles, carrying his left hand in his right. Then, others add pieces to this mosaic.

Sarajevo is ready to explode any minute. People are ready to fight barehanded.

In the afternoon, NATO threatens Pale. This time I have some hope, but I have no courage to reveal its full extent, even to myself, and I especially mustn't reveal it to the readership who've been cheated by hope so many times.

In the evening, a bunch of dogs are barking in front of the house and I cannot get to sleep.

30th August

Azra woke me up two hours after midnight. She heard aeroplanes and explosions. There are many planes, more than ever before. The explosions are powerful, but I cannot tell where the sound is coming from.

I've been out on the balcony several times, and then I saw a huge flame over Vogosca and explosions within it. The shell factory is on fire!?!

They had all been meant for us.

The neighbours are gathering now. The best view is from my balcony.

An artillery duel between Igman and Golo Brdo: the forces for quick intervention against Mladic's gunners. For the first time since they put on their uniforms, the *chetniks* are faced with an opponent who is also equipped with state-of-the-art artillery.

The morning comes, my teeth are chattering from the cold and exhaustion, but I have seen what I have seen.

The Pale radio begins its morning programming thus: "Good morning, if that may be said about it..."

I now know how my former acquaintances felt while watching their artillery in the hills demolishing Sarajevo. There is, of course, a difference: NATO is precise in its targeting of military facilities and positions, while they went for the civilians, aiming for the destruction of Sarajevo. It would be nice and pathetic if one could say that they haven't succeeded. They haven't completely, because the evil that is in them is such that there isn't the amount of destruction which would satisfy one Koljevic, Mladic, Karadzic, one Maksimovic, Ostojic and tens of thousands of dirty lesser *chetniks*. However, they *have* succeeded to an extent.

This here, in this valley surrounded by artillery duels the outcome of which is not in doubt, is no longer that city in which, once upon a time, Suada Dilberovic²⁸² was killed.

²⁸² The first victim of the war in Sarajevo, a student from Dubrovnik, Croatia, assassinated on the 6th April 1992 on the Vrbanja Bridge. She was shot by a Serb sniper placed on the roof of the *Holiday Inn* Hotel while taking part in the last mass peace demonstration in the city

Originally published as “*Sarajeva vise nema*” (Sarajevo, 1997)

Author: Hamza Baksic