

Š K O L E G I J U M

DESKTOP JOURNAL

www.skolegijum.ba

Year 1, No. 1
Sarajevo 3/2019

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The Culture of Non-remembrance

What does Anne Frank mean to us today?



On the comments made online after the Serbian National Football Team Coach, Siniša Mihajlović, said that he didn't know who Anne Frank was.

Ružica Marjanović

Nine years ago, the artistic (mis)use of Anne Frank's portrait shook Europe, primarily the Netherlands. In several different spots in Amsterdam, the street artist known as T painted a portrait of the famous girl with the red and white Palestinian scarf (keffiyeh) around her neck. (It was soon followed by postcards featuring the photographs of this work.) The reaction was very strong and almost immediate. It ranged from *shameful*, as the Israeli Ambassador to the Netherlands at the time described it, to *inappropriate, sick, unacceptable*, etc., as the general public reacted. Everyone agreed that Anne Frank is an icon of the Netherlands, Europe, the world, and that as such she should not be used for *rewriting history*.

The author of this text feels differently: notwithstanding the issue whether T's intention was rewriting history (the author thinks otherwise), she believes that Anne Frank can only be an icon (in terms of values) if she is put in the context of the actual reality. It is precisely the worshipping of an icon, without understanding its symbolic value that leads to its devaluation.

Football Fans Intervention

In late October 2017, Anne Frank was once more in the public spotlight because of the use of her well-known portrait. This time around, it was not an artistic intervention, but an intervention of football fans. The Lazio supporters made stickers featuring the same portrait of Anne Frank dressed in the jersey of the rival team Roma. The local media reported that the fans were shouting offensive chants, the con-

tent of which was not given, while holding the problematic pictures. Then former footballer Siniša Mihajlović said that he didn't know who Anne Frank was. And that prompted the media to focus exclusively on Siniša Mihajlović for the next few days, forgetting the anti-Semitic incident. Most of the titles contained adjectives such as *shameful, scandalous* or it was at least mentioned that the footballer didn't know who Anne Frank was. It's true that comments on the texts published on web portals or in newspapers do not represent a specific focus group, but they are certainly indicative of the direction in which the public opinion leans. The comments about the ignorance of Siniša Mihajlović significantly outnumber the comments below the texts about the incident at the game. The Italian anti-Semitism mostly prompted a single-digit number of readers to leave their comment, while more than 150 readers per text on average, sometimes even more than a few hundred, felt the need to share their opinion about Mihajlović's ignorance.

Parallelism

A significant number of comments expressed prejudice towards footballers (*What do you expect from a footballer? You can't expect them to be educated! Stupid football player!*, etc.), but there was also an abundance of commentators who saw it all from the perspective of the Serbian nationalist discourse; the following argument was used: Siniša Marjanović went to school in Borovo, Croatia, and in Croatia children *don't learn about the Holocaust or it's diminished*. The usual comeback wasn't far behind: *But what about the others, have they heard about Jasenovac?* Then came the comments comparing the deaths of Anne Frank and Milica Rakić, the three-year-old girl who tragically died during the NATO bombing of Serbia, whose name should be made a symbol for all the children who lost their lives in 1999 - apart from the Albanian children, of course. This is the standard mechanism of drawing parallels and trying to mention that the suffering of Serbs in the World War II or in the nineties was equally horrendous (or even worse than) as soon as the Holocaust is brought up.

The fact that the word **annihilation** (zatiranje) - which should signify the Serbian version to the Holocaust - is being introduced to the public discourse proves that it is in fact a state agenda. The former president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, publicly insisted on that.

The way in which the Serbian public reacted (in the media), points out to the possibility that teaching about the Holocaust, including the reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank* did not

yield satisfactory results. Our schools are, obviously, doing something wrong. What that is will become clear from the following example.

From the Students' Perspective

In the elementary school in Jakovo, near Belgrade, on 28 October 2017, a seminar on the Holocaust was held for the teachers of literature and history. A workshop on *The Diary of Anne Frank* was held as a part of the seminar, with the idea to show why and how this book is treated in Serbian schools. The teachers were asked to forget their previous knowledge on the topic, as much as it is possible, and to focus on the text offered in literature textbooks, as their students do.

Although the Ministry of Education approved nine different literature textbooks for seventh grade, the elementary schools in Serbia mostly use the following three – *Umetnost reči* (The Art of Words) by Nataša Stanković-Šošo and Boško Suvajdžić; *Riznica reči* (The Treasury of Words) by Nataša Stanković-Šošo (**the publisher of both is Klett, Belgrade**); and *Čitanka za sedmi razred* (The Literature Textbook for Seventh Grade) by Simeon Marinković (**publisher Kreativni Centar, Belgrade**). According to the Curriculum, students should read and discuss an excerpt from *The Diary of Anne Frank* and the excerpt used in the literature textbooks is almost identical. It is the part when Anne is thinking about Peter and *a patch of blue sky*, which is usually also the title of the excerpt. The instructions for teachers accompanying the textbooks explain that the goal of the class is for students to acquire the meaning of the word diary and to point out the distinction between *the diary style narration and descriptive narration*. Students are encouraged to start writing a diary. In the literature textbook *Umetnost reči* the origin of the word diary is explained, and the following keywords are highlighted: *diary, letter, epistolary form*. There is no mention of the Holocaust, Nazism or fascism, nor is it clear why the Frank family is hiding.

In the Jakovo seminar, the text was analysed using the methodology known as *philosophy for children* (see: Radmila Gošović, Vesna Gošović, Radmila Branković Sutton: *Filozofija s decom*, Kreativni centar, Belgrade, 2007). When asked to read the text *from the students' perspective*, and to give association words related to the text, the teachers produced the following list: **depression, fear, atmosphere, dungeon, air, night, circle, sky, crying, begging, happiness/unhappiness, escaping, wall, peace, dark clouds, sunlight, darkness, secret hiding place, freedom, danger, loneliness, god, sad-**

ness, wind, misfortune, nature, an open window, longing, wealth, dazzling blue, solace.

What about the Time and the Context?

The next step was to divide the teachers into five groups with a task to read the excerpt and then formulate the key question for that excerpt, which was supposed to be *philosophical*, i.e. that it cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, but that it has to trigger a conversation.

The following five questions were produced:

1. What could be the black circle limiting the freedom?
2. What is your secret hiding place?
3. Where does the hope that good will prevail over evil come from in such (?) circumstances?
4. What is the relationship between the light and the dark?
5. Are illusions and hope an impediment or help?

The methodology of *philosophy for children* involves voting, so that every participant is given two votes, and only one of those can be used to vote for his/her group. This possibility is always given to the young people; on the other hand, when working with adults, it is assumed that they have overcome their own competitive urges, so they can vote in *the usual* manner – one vote each. Out of the fifteen votes, seven were given to the question number three, and five votes to the question number five.

The ensuing discussion focused on the layer of meaning which can be reached through the question about hope and the question about the good and evil. After ten minutes of discussion, a history teacher asked for word, pointing out what could have been noticed after reading the listed association words. *But there isn't a single sentence here on the time and the context in which the event is taking place, there is nothing about the Holocaust, the persecution of Jews, the race laws, the consequences...*

The literature teachers were still analysing the text and the basic meaning of the excerpt, as any teenager might contemplate the sky, depression, love, happiness, loneliness, or longing; and this **results in the successful circumventing** of the most important question that needs to be asked when discussing *The Diary of Anne Frank*: why are they persecuted, why are some people helping them, although the law forbids it, and why are other people betraying them, while respecting the law?

If a seventh grade student develops empathy for someone who is persecuted (and that someone is of different ethnicity, therefore the opposite of the dominant tendency here today

(среда, 25. окт 2017, 17:08)

Грифон [нерегистровани]

пошаљи одговор

Грешите!

Синиша је младост и основно образовање провео и стекао у Хрватској! А тамо, наставне јединице повезане са нацистичким и фашистичким злочинима, једноставно, нису изучаване јер се по њиховом тумачењу, нису ни догодиле. Или ако јесу, то је било нешто минимално и занемарљиво! Да не дужим, каква држава, таква је и наука!

(среда, 25. окт 2017, 18:16)

анонутous [нерегистровани]

пошаљи одговор

Izjava

Pametno je rekao. Ne znam i dovidjenja.

Mnogi znaju previse, pa udju u raspravu iz koje izbije svadja, pa tuca.

Cesto je bolje ne znati.

Photo

Above: Screenshot of some of the online comments about the statement of Siniša Mihajlović that he didn't know who Anne Frank was.

(Wednesday, 25 Oct. 2017, 17:08)

Griffon (unregistered)

Reply

You are mistaken!

Siniša spent his youth and finished elementary school in Croatia! And there, the Nazi and fascist crimes are simply not taught because, according to their interpretation, they did not take place at all. Or if they did, it was something minor and negligible! To make a long story short: you cannot expect a better education in a country like that!

(Wednesday, Oct 25th, 2017, 18:16)

Anonymous (unregistered)

Reply

Statement

He did the smart thing. I don't know and that's that. Many people know too much, so they enter into a debate which can result in a fight, even a fist fight. It is often better not to know.

to use education only to develop sensitivity for one's own ethnic group), if he/she can clearly understand that fascism is based on the idea that we are not all equal and that one community has greater rights than the other, that evil is growing progressively and that we need to fight it as soon as we recognize it, and not wait until someone is persecuted or killed, then Anne Frank is no longer a fictional character of the past existing only on paper the student has nothing in common with. If Anne Frank is not an empty symbol which will lull us in the confidence that *evil must not be repeated*, then empathy for the contemporary refugees will certainly come.

Anne Frank and the Refugee Quotas

The experience of working with young readers shows that once you show them the only known video of Anne Frank, just 21 seconds long, in which a young girl, Anne Frank, appears in the window for a few seconds, she stops being a fictional character for the generation used to video sensations. Still, a much more important result is achieved when a connection is made between the current moment and students, who can hear that the member states of the European Union are discussing the quotas, i.e. the number of refugees each state can and wants to accept; when students are told that the Frank family applied twice for the immigration visa to the USA, but that their request was denied both times; the first time because the quotas were filled, and the second time because there was an amendment to the law on accepting refugees, because *too many Jews have already entered the country*.

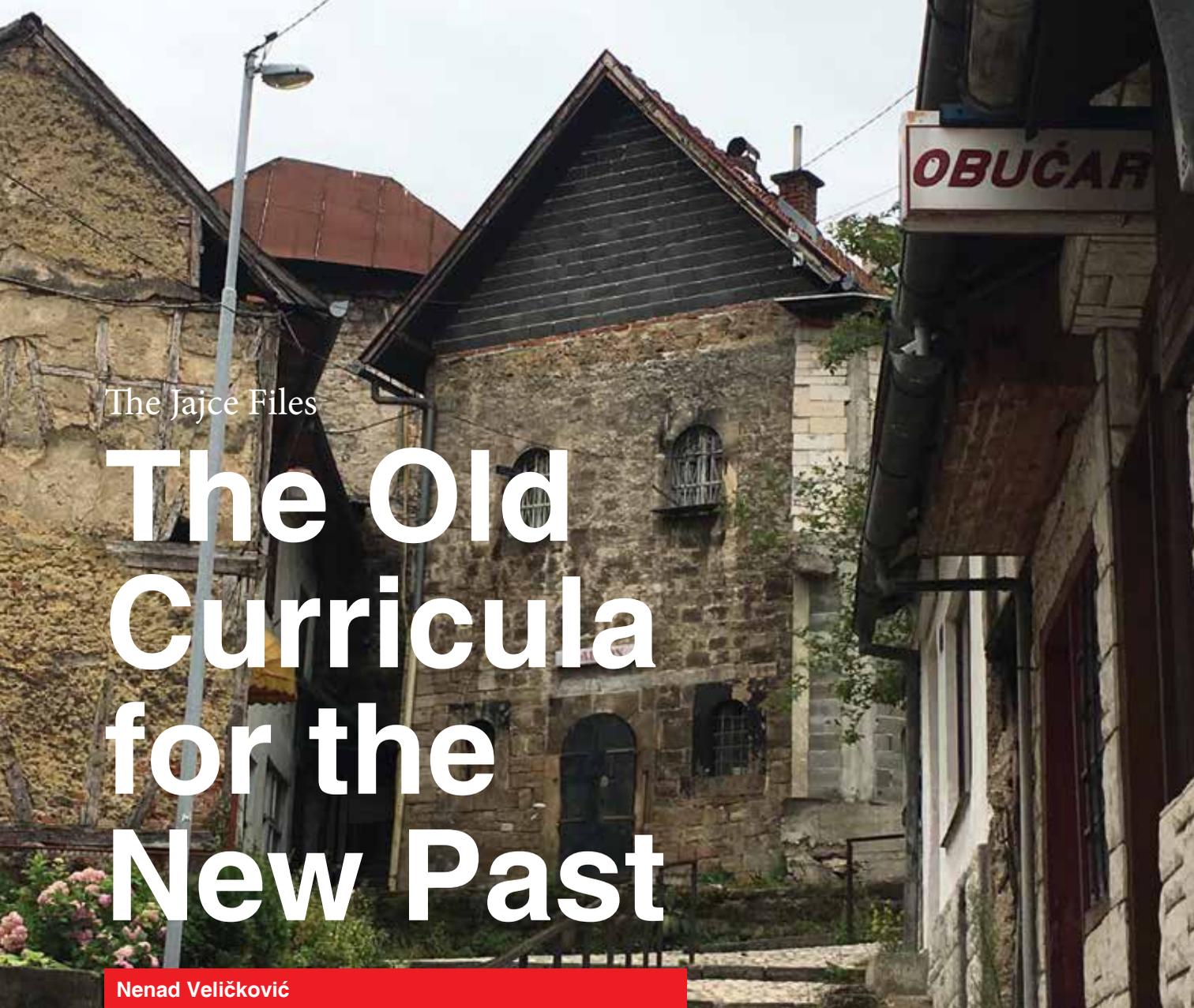
If we analyse *The Diary of Anne Frank* in schools in this way, if we show that there are dozens of diaries of other children who died during the Holocaust, only then the discus-

sion of this text in schools will not be a simple clearing of the conscience and a manipulative avoidance of the actual issue. And the reason for reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* is to develop empathy in the young people for ALL the people who are persecuted and who need help. Or, as Ivan Ivanji brilliantly said in one of the shows on the Serbian national television RTS following *the incident of Mihajlović and Anne Frank*: if you are dealing with the Holocaust only because of the Jews, you need not bother. It is more important to know that the trusting hand Anne Frank gave to her father when she was boarding the train is the same hand a child gives to its father when boarding a dinghy full of refugees trying to cross the Aegean Sea and enter the European Union.

Celebrities and the Creeping Fascism

If we teach the children correctly about *The Diary of Anne Frank* in schools, then our students will not be disinterested in anything that is not *our pain*. When they grow up, these students will not make trivial comparisons of tragedies, split hairs and barter with numbers, they will know about Chelmno and Ravensbrück, as they know about Auschwitz. They will feel the pain of Srebrenica and Jasenovac; they will not be satisfied with the overused symbols and the commercialisation of remembrance. They will recognise manipulation and the rare well-written informational texts about fascism, racism and hatred will not seem boring and stupid to them.

But since we don't, our students will have nothing to say about the creeping fascism, unless the same article mentions some celebrity. ●



The Jajce Files

The Old Curricula for the New Past

Nenad Veličković

In the Secondary Vocational School in Jajce, the curricula *in use* are the curricula from the mid-nineties. From the perspectives of Sarajevo and Mostar, as well as Travnik, it's good enough for Jajce.

The Secondary Vocational School in Jajce has managed to keep all its students under one roof, but it still continues with the practice of dividing them when it comes to the national group of subjects, as was demanded by the parents. The *Brčko* model applied here has been lauded in the reports of the international observers and experts, and for the time being it appeases the appetites of the local ethno-national politics. At the same time, it successfully absorbs the endeavors of the students who are advocating for a unique curriculum which they were enthusiastically fighting for from the parking lot in front of the Government building in Travnik last year. In the meantime, it seems that the revolutionary mood of the high school students has dwindled significantly. The reason for that is the lack of a detailed model of such a joint curriculum, which the high school stu-

dents certainly cannot develop on their own, while the many representatives of the diplomatic missions and non-governmental organizations who passed through Jajce so that they could show their support to the cause did not make an effort to develop it.

The Secondary Vocational School in Jajce shows precisely that it is not difficult to envision such a curriculum, nor do it.

The school follows the Curriculum in Croatian, so the official language is Croatian. The exemptions are Islamic Religious Studies and Bosnian, since the school year 2005/2006, and Geography and History since 2018 (both taught in Bosnian). The minor inconsistencies regarding the number of classes (which was noticed by a Bosnian language teacher from Bugojno), have been corrected in the meantime. Thus, for example, it has been decided that there should be three mother tongue classes a week in all the vocational schools in the Central Bosnia Canton.

This year, there are 506 students attending the Secondary Vocational School, roughly half of whom are Bosniak, and the other half are Croatian, with a few exceptions (Serb and Roma students). The students can choose between four three-year or four-year departments:

- I **Hotel Management and Tourism** (tourist technician and chef)
- II **Electrotechnics** (telecommunications, computer and energetics technicians)
- III **Construction** (construction technician for general building and civil engineering work)
- IV **Mechanical engineering** (CNC operators, locksmiths, car mechanics, plumbers)

Ethnicity is not a prerequisite for any of the departments or professions. Of course, everyone understands that whether someone will be a good waiter or a good plumber does not depend on what their father's last name is, which church they attend and on what days. Similarly, it should be clear to anyone (and yet, it is not) that a good waiter would remain a good waiter, whether he read Boccaccio in May or June. All those 506 of the students, boys and girls, want to gain certain knowledge and have better chances of getting into university or finding work in three or four years, when they graduate from the Secondary School. In order to meet their expectations, and to fulfil its social, humane, and pedagogical purpose, the school must offer them a lot, but primarily a contemporary curricula, good teaching materials, competent teachers, and all this in a safe environment, one that inspires work, cooperation, learning, and success.

The Birth of the Existing Situation

Unfortunately, the real life is different. Officially, the curricula in use are the *Sarajevo* curricula inherited from 1994, 1995, and 1996, and the curricula of the Institute of Education in Mostar from 1996 and 1997. The textbooks for vocational subjects are either not available or are outdated, or the textbooks from neighboring Croatia are in use. The curricula were slightly supplemented in 2012 and in 2017, while the development of the new curricula was put off until the *Common Core* is not completed and published by the State Agency.

It is clear that pedagogical, administrative and professional neglect of the vocational school students' needs has been going on for the last two decades at the cantonal level. In such circumstances, to deal with the issues relating to *the right to education in one's mother tongue*, which is, after all, one language, is a consequence of a distorted sense of values. And to not deal with the modernization of the lessons and curricula, introducing the new didactic concepts and technology, improving the students' standard and needs and the youth rights, but instead to spend the last twenty years babbling and jabbering about the war, using the same war narratives which put the education right in the mid-nineties, is morally repulsive and the parents should finally take a stand and renounce it as unacceptable.

Faced with this disregard for the interests and needs of youth, the Croatian nationalism in education in the Central Bosnia Canton is now hiding behind the Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education, placing the responsibility to the *state level*. However, the truth is that a reform at that level will only *be accepted* if it affirms the current setup of the roles and, unofficially, recognizes the current educational objectives, which proclaim to celebrate life, but in fact perpetuate a vegetative state.

If it were really committed and determined to stand on the border between the two semi-Jajces as the ally of children and youth to whose obvious and long-term detriment the nationalism is kept in power, the international community could almost immediately start integrating the two curricula into one, in a single language with two names and two standardized varieties, which the children can learn easily since they are both a part of their mother tongue. To start with, the two current curricula need to be compared, for example the language curricula for the first grade of the construction department.

September (Croatian)

1. Introducing the Curriculum and student grading and evaluating elements
2. Revision of the lessons taught in primary school
3. Croatian language – written speech and structure
4. Literary science
5. Language and literature
6. Literature – Art of words
7. Scientific and professional literature
8. Literature and other arts
9. Types of text
10. Literature and society
11. and 12. Required reading

October (Croatian)

1. Lyric poetry
2. J. Pupačić: Zaljubljen u ljubav (In Love with Love)
3. S.S. Kranjčević: Moj dom (My Home)
4. A. Mihanović: Hrvatska domovina (Croatian Homeland)
5. Oral assignment: Interpretation of a lyric poem
6. Sounds: Phonemes
7. Sounds in Croatian
8. Accent system
9. Revision
10. Revision
11. Test
12. Test correction
13. Required reading

November (Croatian)

1. Accent system
2. Sounds č and ć
3. Sounds dž and đ
4. Spelling test
5. Spelling test analysis
6. N. Šop: Kuda bih vodio Isusa (Where I Would Take Jesus)
7. V. Nazor: Cvrčak (The Cricket)
8. Matoš: Jesenje večer (An Autumn Evening)
9. Preparation for the first written assignment
10. The first written assignment
11. Correction
12. Required reading

December (Croatian)

1. D. Cesarić
2. Sound pronunciation
3. A.B. Šimić: Opomena (Warning)
4. M. Dizdar: Zapis o zemlji (A Note on the Land)
5. A. Šenoa: Na stolu (On the Table)
6. Revision
7. Test
8. Oral examination
9. Revision
10. End of term final grades

September (Bosnian)

1. Introducing the curriculum and student grading and evaluating elements
2. Revision of the lessons taught in primary school
3. Nature and function of language
4. Language as a sign system
5. Linguistic activity
6. Language functions
7. Aspects of the language manifestations
8. Idioms: organic and inorganic
9. Literary and/or standard language
10. Linguistic norm

October (Bosnian)

1. Revision
2. On art
3. Literature as a language art
4. Literary and artistic text
5. Basic literary genres (general features)
6. Types of literary genres
7. Test (21 October)
8. Periodisation of literature (brief overview)
9. Classical literature
- 10-11. Approaching an epic text
- 12-13. Greek myths

November (Bosnian)

1. Homer: Iliad (excerpts + *Troy* movie screening)
2. Homer: Odyssey (excerpts + documentary film)
3. Approaching a lyric poem
4. Greek lyric poetry: Sappho, Anacreon, Alcaeus (selection)
5. Modes of discourse
6. Description
7. Drama (features and types)
8. Tragic hero and tragic flaw
9. Preparation for the first written assignment
10. The first written assignment (**28 November**)
- 11-12. Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound

December (Bosnian)

1. Correction of the first written assignment
2. Sophocles: Antigone, 2 classes
3. Eastern literatures (introduction)
4. One Thousand and One Nights, the narrative method
5. Test (**16 December**)
6. Test correction
7. Revision
8. End of term final grades

January (Croatian)

1. ?
2. F. Mažuranić: Svemir (Universe)
3. Sounds and place of articulation
4. Lyric-epic poetry: Hasanaginica (Hasan Aga's Wife)
5. Retelling
6. Short epic forms
7. Structure of an epic
8. Homer – Iliad

February (Croatian)

1. Homer: Iliad
2. Novel
3. Epics
4. Drama
5. Sophocles: Antigone
6. M. Držić: Novela od Stanca (The Dream of Stanac)
7. Types of drama
8. Dialogue
9. Revision
10. Test
11. Test correction
12. Required reading

March (Croatian)

1. Literary discourse forms
2. A. Nemčić: Putositnice (Travel Trifles)
3. Literary history
4. Bible
5. Psalm: Song of Songs
6. Kur'an and Talmud
7. Homer: Odyssey
8. Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound
9. Roman literature
10. Oral examination
11. Required reading

April (Croatian)

1. Plautus: The Pot of Gold
2. The Middle Ages
3. The Croatian Middle Ages
4. Beginnings of Literacy
5. Baška Tablet
6. Sound changes
7. Elision
- 8-9. Required reading

January (Bosnian)

1. Holy books
2. Epic of Gilgamesh
3. The classics of Persian poetry
4. Levels of linguistic analysis
5. Phonetic and phonological systems in our language
6. Euripides: Medea
7. Distribution of phonemes
8. Elision and assimilation

February (Bosnian)

1. Iotation and final l becoming o
2. Alliterations je/ije, i/o
3. Revision
4. Test preparation
5. Test: sound changes (14 February)
6. Roman literature (introduction)
7. Roman lyric poetry: Catullus and Tibullus
8. Roman lyric poetry: Ovid and Martial
9. Roman lyric poetry: Propertius
10. Roman lyric poetry: Horace
11. Virgil: Aeneid

March (Bosnian)

- 1-2. Ovid: Daedalus and Icarus and Orpheus and Eurydice
3. Preparation for the second written assignment
4. The second written assignment (7 March)
5. Correction of the second written assignment
- 6-7. Plautus: The Pot of Gold, required reading
- 8-9. The Middle Ages (introduction)
10. The beginnings of Slavic literacy
- 11-12. Old Bosnian texts and their features
13. Revision

April (Bosnian)

1. The literature of the Middle Ages in Bosnia and Hum
2. Analysis of the texts from the Middle Ages
3. Test: literature (7 April)
4. The late Middle Ages (humanism)
5. F. Petrarch: Canzoniere
6. D. Alighieri: Inferno
7. Oral folk literature (basic features)
8. Epic poem (features)

May (Croatian)

1. Assimilation
2. Coarticulation
3. Preparation for the second written assignment
4. The second written assignment
5. Correction
6. The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja
7. The Record of Father Martinac
8. The features of the literature of the Croatian Middle Ages
9. Revision
10. Test
11. Test correction
12. Required reading

June (Croatian)

1. D. Alighieri: The Divine Comedy
2. F. Petrarch: Canzoniere
3. Boccaccio: Decameron
4. Revision
5. Oral examination
6. Final grades

May (Bosnian)

1. Banović Strahinja, epic poem
2. Preparation for the third written assignment
3. The third written assignment (9 May)
4. Correction of the third written assignment
5. Budalina Tale odlazi u Liku (Fool Tale Goes to Lika), epic poem
- 6-7. G. Boccaccio: Decameron
8. Revision
9. Epic-lyric folk poem
10. Hasanaginica (Hasan Aga's Wife), a ballad
11. Accent system of our language
12. Enclitics and proclitics

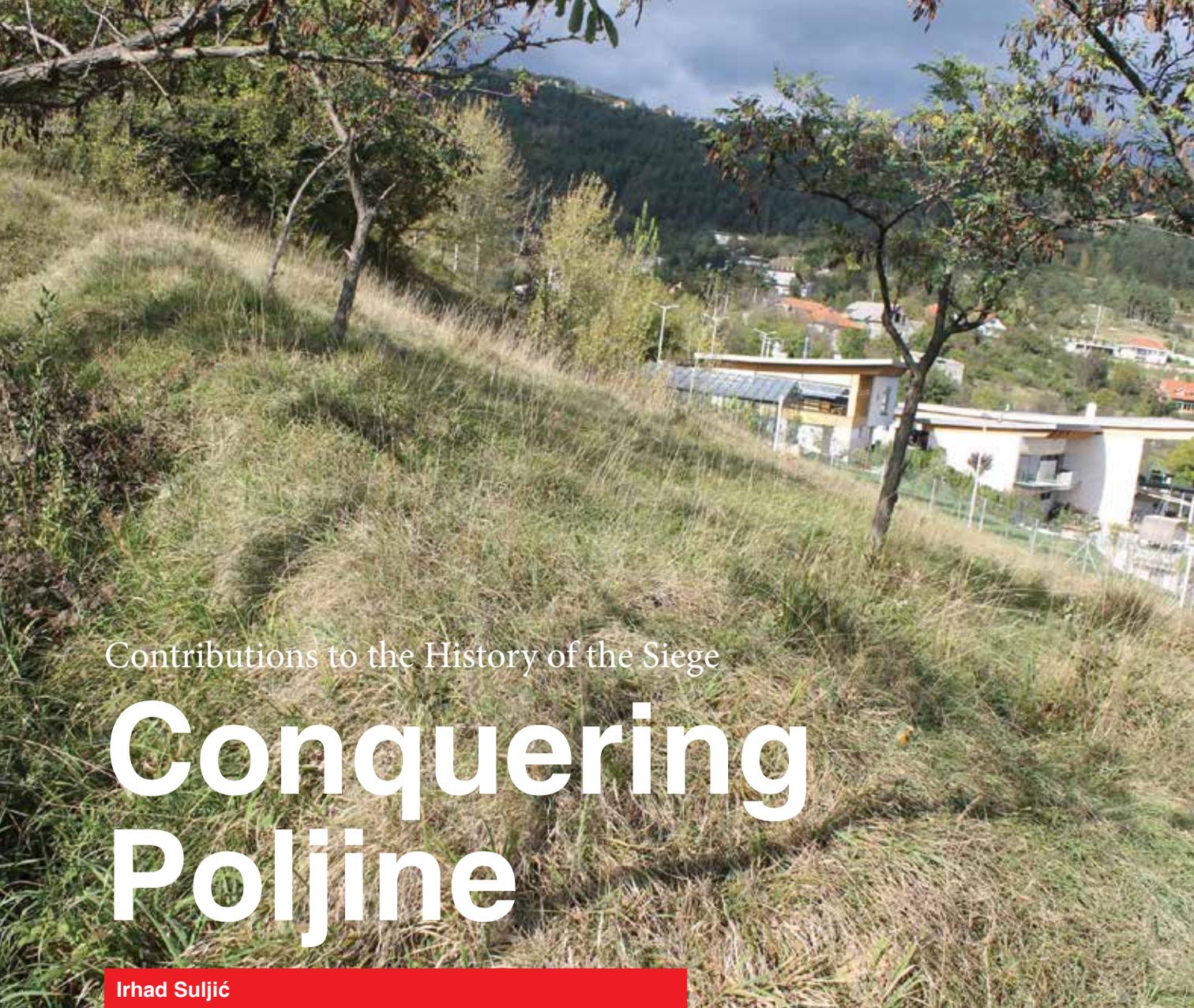
June (Bosnian)

1. Spoken and written language: orthography and orthoepy
2. Test preparation
3. Test (6 June)
4. Test correction
5. Systematization of lessons taught in the first grade
6. Final grades

Comparing the two curricula, it can be noticed that the differences are minute, and that the choice of one or the other, or of a third one (or none of them!), should be based on the criteria such as the quality of the content and the teaching objectives (outcomes), as well as on the answers to the questions such as: Why should Bosniaks or Croats be excluded from something? Why would, for example, Bosniak children spend one class studying the holy books, and the Croatian children three? Why would the Croatian children skip reading Ovid, while the Bosniak children wouldn't? (It goes without saying that no one will ask why plumbers or waiters should know who Ovid and Eurydice are, unless we want the nationalist education give way to the *dual* one.) What governs the decision whether students read Catullus, Tibullus, Ovid, Martial, Propertius and Horace, or instead, the priest of Duklja and priest Martinac?

The legal requirements exist. Students and teachers are up for a change. The arguments used by nationalists are all spent. The curricula are outdated, unsuitable for the children's needs and the contemporary demands. The funds, as promised by the international community, are not lacking. So who, what are we waiting for? ●





Contributions to the History of the Siege

Conquering Poljine

Irhad Suljić

If schools want to offer a complete and honest depiction of war to the children, then they have to speak not only about the war crimes, the heroic deeds, the heroes and the victims, both military and civilian, but about the war profiteers as well. Otherwise, schools are accomplices in the deception and the looting.

A few days ago, I officially cycled up the last hill near Sarajevo that I hadn't cycled up before. The first time I wanted to cycle to Trebević, some ten years ago, my dad told me to be careful and not go *up there*.

"I don't understand why you're telling me that now, the war has been over for a long time", I told him before going down the Stara Breka. But, at some point between then and now, I realised that the war wasn't over for him. Which means that the war is not really over for me either.

Now, ten years after my first cycling feat, I go up Poljine, the last hill I haven't conquered, long after I have cycled up the rest of them at least a dozen times. I finally made the decision to do it once I accidentally put my hands on the *Teaching Material for Studying the Siege of Sarajevo and the Crime of Genocide Committed*

in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. But let me go back for a bit.

Maid's Cap

The first time I heard Poljine mentioned was at the beginning of the war. It was also the first wartime warning which I got from my parents: **Beware of the Poljine sniper!**

From Poljine you have a direct view over the greater part of my street, and it is relatively close, so it was fairly easy for a brave sniper to look for a victim there. We always ran when passing that part of the street. I remember the first news of the fatal attack which had occurred on 31 July 1992. I remember my cousin Džemo, who came to our place after the attack, all shaken up, telling my father how he had barely survived. During the withdrawal he was going through a stream bed, which also served as the faeces drainage. I remember him repeating: "*People lost their lives, Sejo, as if they were nothing*". He died in 1998 as a consequence of a sniper wound from 1993.

The first time during the war I saw my father cry was when a sniper shot a long-time friend of his, our neighbour Maid. Maid was released from the army because of the severe and frequent epileptic seizures. He would sometimes have three seizures in a single day. The last night he spent on watch was with my father on the front line in Brekin Potok. When my father took over digging from Maid, he climbed up from the trench and while lying down he leaned his back and his head against the embankment, so that he could light up a cigarette and have a breather. While they were chatting, my dad suddenly got covered in the soil and then he heard a thump. He turned around and saw Maid, frozen, with a gunshot wound on his forehead. The sniper. The soldiers on standby took over the digging, Maid's body was dragged to the morgue, and my dad, who was in shock, was released home to rest. I remember that it was around 3 or 4 a.m. when someone knocked on the door. My mom, my sister and I jumped up, as we weren't expecting any visitors at that hour. My dad called our names from the other side of the door, and my mom unlocked the door. He entered the hallway with a military cap clenched in his fist, leaned his back against the wall, sliding to the floor where he sat down and started sobbing. After he told us through the tears what had happened my mom snatched the cap from his hand and put it on the table outside the door, sent me and my sister back to bed, and took him to the bathroom to wash up.

The following morning I was the first one to wake up and I walked out of the door, still confused about what had happened during the night. I saw the bloody military cap on the table and I unfolded it out of curiosity. A piece of skull was still inside. I remember feeling chills down my spine and that a part of a child's innocence was replaced by the dark reality of war. Maid never joined his wife and children who were abroad, and my father went back to the front line.

The War Wound

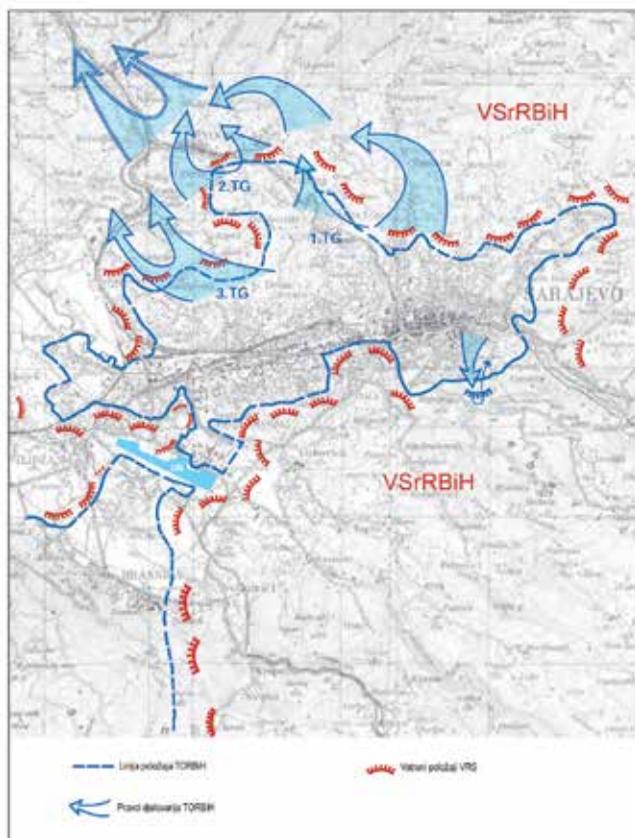
At a glance, it seems that there is nothing wrong with children learning about the war, since it's a part of their country's history. They should be told about it. But whose story should they be told? My father's story, my mother's, Maid's, Džemo's? My story? Eight days before the Poljine military action, I was wounded. My father told me to go to uncle Mirko's house, our neighbour who lived some hundred meters up the street, to get the poles for runner beans. During the war, our garden was our main source of food. We had our own vegetable supply: we could eat it, sell it, and even swap it for other goods. I remember when my parents made brandy using the plums in our garden. Then my mom swapped two litres of the brandy for two bags of flour, and hid the other two litres to be swapped when the need arises. As I was coming back with the poles, a shell hit the cypress tree next to the crossroads. Never in my life had I experienced a louder bang, neither before nor after. I went deaf and could only hear the shrieking noise in my head. I felt warmth in my right arm, I saw blood, I ran back into the house and put a doily on the wound. Since I didn't exactly stop bleeding, a buff young man offered to drive me to the hospital. He was Alija Izetbegović's bodyguard, and his girlfriend was on call in the hospital. The car horn got stuck because of the explosion, so the VW Golf 2 was blaring the entire way to the hospital. While I was waiting for the doctor to see me, I kept feeling the bump on my arm inside which a shrapnel was lodged.

Weapons

I remember the first time my dad brought his army rifle home. It was called *papovka*, and it was an M59 semi-automatic rifle, 7.62mm. Apart from the rifle's name and calibre, my dad told me that you should never point a gun at someone, not even when it is unloaded or with safety on. He said that was the most important rule for handling a weapon. That was the first

Photo
Page 11: The trenches
view of the castles.

POLJINE, juli 1992.



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and the last time that I came near any kind of firearms. I also remember a movie-like scene, almost as if it were written by Sidran. They called my father from the headquarters and told him that Zetra was under a poison gas attack and that he must put on the NBC suit and report to the headquarters. My mom, as usual, helped him put everything on. The rubber boots, the rubber gloves, the rubber pants with suspenders, the raincoat and the gas mask. My sister and I were told not to go out, so we were watching from the window. My dad going first, in all the equipment, and my mom behind him in just a T-shirt, trousers and slippers, carrying a bucket to get the dry clothes from the clothes line. And then we heard my father's voice, under the gas mask, sounding as if he was speaking into a pipe: "Safa, can you smell anything?"

Pony

I used to lend my *Pony* bike to a guy from my neighbourhood so that he could visit his girlfriend who lived in Baščaršija. At the time

there was a conflict between the wartime commanders Caco and Čelo, and this guy belonged to the Čelo's crew who were on watch in my street. Since he had to go to Baščaršija, which was on Caco's turf, people started calling him a traitor. I would lend him my bike, and in return he would give me a few T-shirts with fresh print on them. During the war, he got a machine from abroad which printed three or four of the cartoon monsters and he sold them for ten marks each.

Let There Be Electricity

In my house we used to play *Let there be electricity!* game. The rules were as follows: each of us could say it up to five times a day, and if the electricity came back on within the three seconds after you announced it, the rest of us would yell in unison *And there was electricity!* However, during the entire war it only happened once to mom, so she remained, to this day, the undisputed champion of this game. We would go to get water at the spring. In the summer, the stream was very thin and you would wait for a long time to fill the canisters. I was in charge of that. I was ten years old and I would carry canisters filled with 25 litres of water. Once, out of boredom, I started whistling mimicking a shell falling. Everyone and their canisters quickly fell to the ground. My neighbour pulled my ears for that.

I also waited in the line for the humanitarian aid. I would just save the spot for my parents, as only my mom or my dad could get the rations. Once, my friend's flour bag got ripped. He was grounded for a few days. The people from the street gave some of their flour to Auntie Emina to make up what was lost. When my dad was on the frontline in Nišići, I would chop wood, and my sister would stack it. My mom worked in the state pension department, calculating people's pensions. My sister and I went to school in different shifts.

Life as if it were nothing

Anyone who lived through the siege has stories like these. Of course they can't all be told. But it does matter whose story will be told. Maybe the story of me as a child is not relevant. But I think that my cousin Džemo's is. Him saying: "People lost their lives, Sejo, as if they were nothing".

That is the reason I looked inside the *Teaching Material* to see what was written on the attack on Poljine on 31 July 1992. Poljine are mentioned briefly, in two places. The first time it is under the title *The Course of the Siege of*

Photo
Above: Map of the breach plan – Poljine, 31 July 1992. Source: the Monograph on the First Corps of the Army BiH.



Photo
Above: The monument erected in memory of the soldiers of the 1st Podrinje Brigade, next to the petrol station on Bare.

Sarajevo from 1992 to 1993 and the Most Important Battles, on page 9: “During the month of July the battles continued, and they were the most intense at the end of the month in Poljine, and on the outer side of the siege ring during the liberation of Trnovo”. The second time is under the heading *Battles and the Most Important Military and Political Events in the Sarajevo Region During the Siege*, where the following is stated on page 140: “July ended with the unsuccessful attempts to break out over Poljine and Vogošća, but also with the success of the Trnovo TDMHQ, the 7th Brigade and the RBiH Army units from Igman that captured the Rogoj mountain pass and liberated Trnovo”.

I have also consulted the *Monograph on the First Corps*. On page 106, it is briefly written: “And thus the failure ended the attempts to break out and breach the Sarajevo siege in July. In all the aforementioned battles in July 1992, 105 soldiers of the RgTDHQ Sarajevo lost their lives and 416 were wounded.” How many of those had lost their lives on the last day of July as if it were nothing, we do not know. I think that is why I had finally decided to go to Poljine. To add Džemo’s story to the *Teaching Material*.

The Battle on Poljine, the Monument on Bare

I found the monument to the Poljine battle near the Gazprom Petrol Station in Bare. It was erected in the memory of the soldiers of the 1st Podrinje Brigade. It’s square. On one side, you can find the carved names of twelve soldiers, on the other side *Army BiH 1st Podrinje Brigade*, while on the third side it says that the monument was erected by the *Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Sarajevo Canton, the Centar Municipality and the Association of Citizens of South-East Bosnia*, and on the fourth side is a motif of a man with his hand raised in greeting, found on medieval tombstones called *stećak*. Apart from the 1st Podrinje Brigade, there is no mention of any other military formation, and they were not the only ones fighting in the battle. For example, cousin Džemo was in the 105th Motorized Brigade. Maybe there is another monument to the fighters who died there, hidden somewhere on Poljine?

Behind Enemy Lines

I climb to Slatina over Betanija, and then continue to Poljine, following the poorly made and narrow asphalt road. The SIPA patrol car is coming down, and another one passes me and goes up the road. The total of fifteen very polis-



Photo
Above: Driveway leading to the mansion guarded by a SIPA officer, at the end of the Army BiH Street.

hed limousines and SUVs with tinted windows drive by me within a kilometer. I have a feeling that if I stopped and asked someone who the people who lived there were, an agent in a black suit, with an earpiece, would jump out of a bush and tell me to follow him.

I come to the village, children are playing, parents are gardening, and grandparents are sitting on the balconies. The asphalt is cracked and full of potholes, yet the limousines and SUVs go over it boldly and with ease. What was that joke, which car is the fastest on the macadam? An official one. Ha-ha. I still haven't seen any other monuments. But I did see some pretty big and luxurious mansions. Some of them are surrounded by walls, and some aren't, so you can see the swimming pools and imagine the incredible view of the city. Some have guards, too.

Okay, it is time for me to ask who is holding the frontlines on Poljine today. Of course, I already know about some of them, but still... I stop my bike next to the house where there is a ripped poster of the SDA party from the election campaign. I ask the first person who walks down the street who the owners of these mansions are. He tells me what I will later confirm on the internet: Bakir and Sebija Izetbegović, their neighbour Zlatko Lagumdžija, then Nedžad

Branković, various businessmen and film directors. I ask him whether there is another monument to the fighters who died on Poljine or in the area. He doesn't even know about the one in Bare. I cycle to the crossroad. To the left I can see the fancy houses and some mansions a bit further, with walls around them, looking over Sarajevo. I turn right, because I cannot claim that I climbed to the top, if I didn't cycle to it. On the road I pass a crossroads with three black limos parked in the middle of the road, the three drivers in black suits, one of whom has climbed up a tree and is throwing pears to the other two. I continue my ride to the top, no stops. Nothing spectacular up there, fields of fertile land on top of the hill, I guess hence the name *Poljine* (polje – a field).

On the way down I notice some fenced concrete reservoirs which appear to have been built recently. On the crossroads where the cars were parked and where the pear pickers were, there is no one; they drove away the people they were waiting for. It turned out that those were new reservoirs - filled from the main reservoir on Bukovik. Which means that the water supply network in Poljine is not a part of the city network. The Poljine heroes have their own water supply, without any reductions, while the common folks can use wet wipes instead. It was



Photo
Above: Mansions resting comfortably against the green hills of Poljine, with a lovely view of the city.

precisely this feeling why I kept postponing my climb up Poljine. I cycle back feeling nauseous.

Alzheimer

I have cycled to the top of all the hills and mountains around Sarajevo. Now, ten years after I took my bike and started my journey down Breka, I understand what war is and what its cost can be. How hard it is to escape the war traumas. I understand what the force breaking my father is since I have been watching for years how it slowly wins over his mind and his soul. When I was cycling up Trebević, he thought someone would attack me there. When I went to Igman, he would jerk out of sleep, covered in sweat from all the nightmares. When I climbed up Bukovik, he started locking his bedroom door, thinking that someone would come in the middle of the night to kill him. By the time I reached Poljine, dementia took over completely. Why is it that there is no mention of the consequences of war in the *Teaching Material for Studying the Siege of Sarajevo and the Crime of Genocide Committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995*, or mention of the thousands of former soldiers who are still fighting the traumas in their minds, so many years after the war? Why doesn't it say how many soldiers lost their lives on Poljine

on 31 July 1992, as if they were nothing? Why won't the students of schools in Sarajevo learn that Poljine, *the place where one of the most important battles for the city took place*, is now an elite neighbourhood for the heroes of privatization? Why are the stories of the soldiers who tried to conquer these same Poljine, such as Džemo's, falling into oblivion, or the oblivion is falling into them, like it is falling into my father? The father who taught me all that a child should know about war: *do not point a gun at a person, even if it's not loaded*.

When I came back home I found him sitting hunched on the chair in front of the house, staring at nothing in particular. I called his name, once, twice, managing to get his attention only after calling him for the third time. I tell him where I was and what I saw.

We go into the house to have dinner. He is talking about the war while we are eating. He is still proud *to have defended his country*. While I am doing the dishes, he is trying not to fall asleep on the couch. Lately, he needs to nap more often, no matter if it's day or night. The doctor says it's one of symptoms of the Alzheimer's. Before he dozes off, he asks me: "*Where have you been today?*" ●