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The controversial issue of anti-Serb violence within besieged Sarajevo: Attempting a preliminary assessment

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Abstract: The siege of Sarajevo and the violence committed by Bosnian Serb troops against the city and its population are among the best known and most studied events of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Less well known than this violence against the city are the acts of violence committed inside the city by its defenders in response to the siege, which contributed to affecting the population even more than it already was. This paper focuses on this „internal zone of violence“ (Jelena Golubović) and looks specifically at the situation of Serbs living inside the besieged Sarajevo, to examine the extent to which they were victims of this internal violence. This highly controversial topic within Bosnia and Herzegovina has so far attracted little scientific research. In this context, the aim of this article is not to offer an in-depth study, but to outline, on the basis of existing literature and sources, a provisional synthesis of established facts and open questions and to formulate proposals for future research.

1. How to talk about anti-Serb violence during the siege of Sarajevo?

The Siege of Sarajevo is one of the most well-known events of the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the violence perpetrated against the city and its population was documented as early as 1992 by numerous journalists and UN observers; since then, various autobiographical and scholarly accounts have been published, and several trials have taken place before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Let us briefly summarize the most important facts: The siege of the city lasted more than three and a half years, from April 1992 to December 1995, during which the Army of *Republika Srpska* (VRS) bombarded the city with an average of 330 shells per day. The siege claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people inside Sarajevo, approximately half of whom were civilians, in addition to tens of thousands of wounded. The most notorious massacre occurred on February 5, 1994, when a shell killed 68 people and wounded over 140 in the central market. Much of the city suffered varying degrees of destruction, as did cultural landmarks, such as the National Library, which was destroyed in August 1992. While the UN was able to deliver humanitarian aid, the blockade of the city deprived residents of electricity, heating, and running water for extended periods, making living conditions even more difficult. The siege was part of the Bosnian Serb nationalist party SDS's policy of seizing control of a large part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with the support of the Milošević regime in Belgrade, forcibly expelling non-Serbs, and annexing the conquered and "ethnically cleansed" regions to Serbia. In the judgment rendered by the ICTY against Radovan Karadžić, the former president of the self-proclaimed *Republika Srpska* (RS) in January 1992 and commander-in-chief of the VRS sentenced to life imprisonment, the siege of Sarajevo was defined as a “joint criminal enterprise”; it was characterized by a “campaign of sniping and shelling, causing terror among

the civilian population in Sarajevo, as a means of exerting pressure on the Bosnian Muslim leaders and the international community in pursuit of his political goals”¹.

Although the siege of the city is generally very well documented, some aspects are less studied and known. Less known than the violence against the city itself are the acts of violence within the city, perpetrated in reaction to the siege by the city's defenders, which contributed to affecting the population even more than it already was. This text focuses on this “internal zone of violence” (Jelena Golubović)², and more specifically on a question that Robert Donia described as “one of the most controversial aspects of the siege”³: to what extent were Serbs living inside Sarajevo victims of this internal violence?

Writing about this subject is not an easy task. Firstly, reliable information is lacking—little serious research has been devoted to this aspect of the siege. This is also due to the fact that it is not a popular topic in Sarajevo, as it contradicts the prevailing narrative of the siege with its clear division of roles: criminals on one side and heroic defenders and victims of the besiegers on the other. For this reason, the subject is rarely discussed in public discourse in Sarajevo, and when it is, it is often accompanied by attempts to downplay its significance.⁴ Furthermore, violence against Serbs inside Sarajevo is a central theme in Bosnian Serb nationalist propaganda. This propaganda attempts, on the one hand, to deny the existence of a siege and, on the other hand, to reduce the war in Sarajevo to violence against Serbs, describing Sarajevo as a whole as a “concentration camp for Serbs”⁵, and referring to it as “genocide”⁶ or “the largest ethnic cleansing in Europe since World War II”⁷. Any writing on this topic therefore risks being misused by Bosnian Serb nationalists.

In this context, how to write about this subject? Given that this topic is still relatively understudied, the aim of this article is not to offer an exhaustive study, but rather to outline, based on existing research and published sources, what we know today and what we do not know, and to formulate some preliminary hypotheses. I will attempt to answer the following questions: To what extent were Serbs more affected than others by this internal violence? What forms did this violence take? What was its scale, and to what extent were there any counterweights to this violence? By attempting to provide a preliminary overview based on existing publications and to formulate the questions that remain open, I will also suggest avenues for future research.

¹ See the summary of the judgment published by the ICTY, 24.3.2016: <https://www.icty.org/en/press/tribunal-convicts-radovan-karadzic-for-crimes-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina> For a good overview of the history of the Siege of Sarajevo, see Robert Donia, *Sarajevo: Biography of a City*, Michigan, 2008, 287-334

² Jelena Golubović, *Zones of violence: Serb women inside the siege of Sarajevo*, PhD, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, 2020, 3. [Comment added in March 2026: A reworked version of Jelena Golubović's PhD will be published in May 2026 under the title *Inner Zone. The Untold Violence of Retribution in Besieged Sarajevo*, University of Pennsylvania Press, <https://www.pennpress.org/9781512829037/inner-zone/>]

³ Donia, 322.

⁴ See, for example, the recent discussions surrounding the new Kazani monument: Aline Cateux, “Kazani - the monument of shame”, *Courrier des Balkans*, November 19, 2021: <https://www.courrierdesbalkans.fr/Kazani-le-monument-de-la-honte>

⁵ See for example the documentary “Sarajevo, logor(i) za Srebe” by Milan Knežević and Dalibor Josipović: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5_EwiU3Rn0

⁶ For example, SNSD representative Drago Kovač, quoted in <http://www.radiosarajevo.ba/novost/89737> (12.9.2012)

⁷ *Glas Sprske*, 6.4.2012.

2. State of research and sources

Although reliable research on the situation of Serbs in besieged Sarajevo is generally lacking, some publications provide valuable information on the subject. First and foremost is anthropologist Jelena Golubović's doctoral dissertation, "Zones of Violence: Serb Women Inside the Siege of Sarajevo," which is based on 60 interviews with 23 Serb women who lived in Sarajevo during the war and analyzes their experiences in a highly differentiated manner.⁸ Another important book is Ivana Maček's anthropological study of life in Sarajevo during the siege, in which she also addresses the issue of interethnic relations.⁹ Furthermore, Ioannis Armakolas and Ondřej Žíla have worked on the Serb inhabitants who left Sarajevo before and after the war.¹⁰ On the subject of crimes, historian Merisa Karović-Babić's well-documented book addresses the mass murders of civilians in Sarajevo, primarily those perpetrated by the besiegers, with a chapter on various cases of Serb civilian assassinations committed by defense groups.¹¹ I myself have published a case study on one of these crimes and how it has been dealt with in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the war.¹²

Besides academic research, the memoirs of Mirko Pejanović, one of the two Serb members of the BiH Presidency during the war, and of Jovan Divjak, deputy commander of the BiH Defense Forces, are important sources on the situation of Serbs during the war.¹³ The newspapers *Dani* and *Oslobođenje* are other direct sources, as are personal diaries, for example, those of the pre-war mayor of Sarajevo and member of the "Serb Civic Council," Dane Olbina, and the Orthodox priest Dragomir Ubiparipović.¹⁴ On the issue of violence, the legal proceedings conducted in Sarajevo from 1994 to the present day for some of the crimes are also an important source.¹⁵ Finally, there are various publications on this topic edited in RS and in Serbia, which do not constitute research in the scientific sense of the term, but which are nonetheless interesting: firstly, for analyzing their role as instruments of propaganda, and secondly, because they contain information that is not, or barely, mentioned elsewhere, but which must be treated with the utmost caution due to the ideological bias of the publications. The most recent example is the report of an international commission "*on the Suffering of the Serbs in Sarajevo between 1991 and 1995*", established by *Republika Srpska* in 2019, whose obvious objective is solely to confirm their own nationalist narrative on Sarajevo.¹⁶

⁸ Golubović, 2020. [Comment added in March 2026: About the book publication in 2026, see above footnote 3]

⁹ Ivana Maček, *Sarajevo Under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime*, Pennsylvania, 2011.

¹⁰ Ioannis Armakolas, "Sarajevo No More ? Identity and the Experience of Place among Bosnian Serb Sarajevans in *Republika Srpska*", in Xavier Bougarel / Elissa Helms/ Ger Duijzings (eds.), *The new Bosnian mosaic : identities, memories, and moral claims in a post-war society*, Hampshire, 2007, 79-99; Ondřej Žíla, "The Flight of Serbs from Sarajevo: Not the Dayton Agreement's First Failure, but its First Logical Consequence", *Nationalities Papers* 49/5, 2021, 967-985.

¹¹ Merisa Karović-Babić, *Masovna ubistva civila u Sarajevu za vrijeme opsade 1992-1995*, Sarajevo, 2014.

¹² Nicolas Moll, "*Sarajevska najpoznatija javna tajna*": *Suočavanje sa Cacom, Kazanima i zločinima počinjenim nad Srbima u opkoljenom Sarajevu, od rata do 2015.*, Sarajevo, Frierdich Ebert Fondacija, 2016. [Comment added in March 2026: New updated edition in 2024: "*Sarajevska najpoznatija javna tajna*": *Suočavanje sa Cacom, Kazanima i zločinima počinjenim nad Srbima u opkoljenom Sarajevu, od rata do 2023.*, available as pdf: <https://collections.fes.de/publikationen/ident/fes/21554>]

¹³ Mirko Pejanović, *Through Bosnian Eyes. The Political Memoirs of a Bosnian Serb*, Sarajevo, 2002; Jovan Divjak, *Sarajevo mon amour*, Paris, 2004. By Jovan Divjak see also his war diary for 1992: *Ne pucaj*, e-book, 2011. [Comment added in March 2026: The complete edition of Jovan Divjaks diary was published in 2022: Jovan Divjak, *Ne pucaj*, 3 vol., Sarajevo, Obrazovanje gradi Bosnu i Hercegovinu, 2022.]

¹⁴ Dane Olbina, *Dani i godine opsade*, Sarajevo, 2002; Dragomir Ubiparipović, *Ratni dnevnik sarajevskog sveštenika*, Belgrade, 2011.

¹⁵ See notes 24, 25, 31 and 70 below.

3. The “internal zone of violence” in Sarajevo

As Peter Andreas pointed out in a pioneering study, the siege of Sarajevo created a struggle for survival within the city, and within this context, it fostered the development of various criminal practices, such as smuggling and the misuse of humanitarian aid, practices involving different individuals, groups, and structures.¹⁷ Criminal activities also included physical violence directed against the city's population. To understand its origins and evolution, we must examine the situation that prevailed at the beginning of the siege.

While the SDS was organizing the attack and siege of Sarajevo with the help of the Yugoslav People's Army, the new government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, shortly after the country's independence, did not yet have its own army, and the city's defense was ensured by a multitude of groups: units of the "Territorial Defense," paramilitary groups and militias, including the "Patriotic League" and the "Green Berets," both founded in 1991 by the national Muslim SDA party, police units of the Ministry of the Interior, as well as self-organized groups. Some of these groups were led by Sarajevo criminals, who possessed weapons and a significant number of henchmen. Although all these formations were formally united in mid-April 1992 under the umbrella of the “Armed Forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina” with a single command, numerous internal rivalries existed, and in fact, each group retained a degree of autonomy. During April and May 1992, the various groups managed, with varying degrees of coordination, to defend the city against further territorial losses, stabilize the front lines, and avert imminent military and political collapse. However, the situation remained precarious, chaotic, and confused, with state authorities still lacking effective centralized instruments of power and control. In this context, various criminal activities rapidly developed, and some commanders exploited their numbers and the prestige gained from their role in the defense to become veritable warlords in the districts they controlled. Among the most notorious were Jusuf Prazina “Juka”, Mušan Topalović “Caco” and Ramiz Delalić “Ćelo”. After the creation of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1992, the government integrated these various groups: Juka, for example, was appointed general, and the Green Beret group “Bosna 10”, led by Caco and consisting of 2,000 men, which defended the strategic front line on Mount Trebević and controlled part of the Old Town, became the 10th Mountain Brigade of the Army of BiH. Although these groups were formally part of the official army, the aforementioned commanders continued to consider themselves above the law and act as they pleased in the fiefdoms they controlled, which involved looting, theft, extortion, arbitrary arrests, forced labor, and murder. International observers and locals at the time spoke of conditions reminiscent of the “Wild West”.¹⁸

In this context, the official establishment of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its gradual consolidation were accompanied by efforts to strengthen internal discipline and limit arbitrary acts. After a time, measures were also taken against warlords: In October 1992, the government issued an arrest warrant for Juka, who subsequently fled Sarajevo, and in October 1993, as part of “Operation Trebević,” a joint army and police operation “against criminals in our own ranks,” Caco and Ćelo were arrested, and Caco was killed shortly after his arrest. The main motivations for this operation were less about protecting the lives of Serb residents and

¹⁶ “Concluding report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the suffering of Serbs in Sarajevo between 1991 to 1995”, October 2020. For a brief critical assessment, see Eric Gordy, “Independent International Commission of Inquiry”, a literary review, 14.4.2021: <https://eastethnia.wordpress.com/2021/04/14/independent-international-commission-of-inquiry-a-literary-review/>

¹⁷ Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets: The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo*, Ithaca, 2008.

¹⁸ Andreas, 94. On the “warlords”, see id., 26-32, Divjak, *Sarajevo*, 138-143, and also the remarkably well-documented graphic novel by Joe Sacco, *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo*, Montreal, 2003.

other civilians than the fact that these warlords refused to integrate into the army's chain of command and were increasingly openly rebelling against their own government. That said, the fight against these criminals has undoubtedly made life less precarious for the civilian population of Sarajevo, even if internal violence has never completely disappeared.¹⁹

Internal violence could affect any inhabitant of Sarajevo, but it seems undeniable that it disproportionately targeted the city's Serb citizens. A concrete example: Caco regularly led raids with his men into the Old City and forced those captured to dig trenches on Mount Trebević. All were taken, regardless of their nationality, but Caco also made a point of sending Serbs among those captured to the most dangerous sections of the front line.²⁰

The Serb population of Sarajevo found themselves in a particularly precarious situation, as the siege and daily bombardments of Sarajevo were also organized by Serbs. Furthermore, among those holding prominent positions within the *Republika Srpska* and among the soldiers firing on the city were neighbors and colleagues who had lived in Sarajevo until the start of the war. In this atmosphere, any Serb remaining in Sarajevo could be considered a potential traitor or a "fifth column." In January 1993, journalist Senad Pećanin wrote in an article about the "Serbs of Sarajevo": they live, like all other citizens of Sarajevo, with the fear of "grenades and sniper fire from Serbs in the mountains," and additionally with the burden of collective guilt and the dread of "the terrible possibility that, simply because you are Serb, armed men will take you away from your own apartment, the water queue, or your workplace, and you will never return."²¹ Mirko Pejanović also speaks of this double burden: "All the inhabitants of Sarajevo suffered en masse from the bombings and the siege. (...) But with the deprivations suffered by all civilians, the Serbs had to live with an additional fear. This was the growing distrust of Serbs on the part of certain other elements of the population."²²

4. Forms of direct violence

How exactly did the internal violence manifest itself and to what extent did it particularly affect the Serb inhabitants?

First, we can mention various forms of harassment, including raids on homes by armed groups in civilian clothes or uniforms, especially during the first months of the siege. All indications are that these raids primarily targeted the apartments of Serb residents. Initially, the main objective was to search for weapons, for understandable reasons: it was known that the SDS had distributed weapons to its members and other Serbs in Sarajevo, and there were fears that the besiegers were receiving support from within. It appears that a large number of weapons were confiscated, but many of these actions also resulted in outright looting to steal valuables and/or actions in which Serb residents were intimidated and mistreated even without concrete suspicion. More precise studies are still lacking to determine the extent of the mistreatment and/or looting and the frequency of the raids. A Serb resident told Ivana Maček that his apartment had been searched 12 times - whether this was an exceptional case would need to be clarified through further studies.²³

Another form of direct physical violence was arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Undoubtedly, in the initial phase of the war, various units and groups maintained "private prisons" in cellars,

¹⁹ On the Trebević operation, see Marko Attila Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed*, London 2004, 97-101, and Andreas, 91-95.

²⁰ Cp. Moll, 78.

²¹ *Dani*, January 29, 1993.

²² Pejanović, 131.

²³ On searches see Golubović 86-7, Maček 79, 106-9, Pejanović, 131-133.

apartments, or shops, where people were often mistreated and held in inhumane conditions. However, here too, there has been no serious and systematic study to date that would allow us to determine their exact number, how many people were detained, and for what reasons, even though all indications suggest that they were primarily Serb civilians. In June 2021, one of these private prisons was the subject of its first court ruling: Two members of the BiH army's special unit led by Juka and of the territorial defense unit "Stela", led by Juka's right-hand man, Samir Kahvedžić "Kruško", were convicted for participating in the illegal detention in an apartment block in Alipašino Polje, "where, between May and August 1992, more than 100 Serb civilians were held in unsanitary and humiliating conditions, and subjected to murder, inhumane treatment, rape, disappearances, torture and forced labor."²⁴ Besides private prisons, it is also proven that the official military prison located in the former "Viktor Bubanj" barracks was a place of violence: "A large number of Serb civilians [were] detained there (...), where they were exposed almost daily to inhumane treatment by individual guards," reads a judgment issued by the BiH Court in 2016, which convicted two former members of the BiH army for war crimes committed there.²⁵ The alleged offenses took place between June and November 1992, and it appears that the situation changed afterwards, with the professionalization and centralization of the Army of BiH, and also that at the end of 1992, all or most of the private prisons were dissolved.²⁶

While most of these violent practices targeted individuals or small groups, mass arrests also occurred in some cases. The most blatant incident took place in June 1992, when Zoran Čegar of a special police special unit, arrested over a hundred Serb civilians and took them hostage in the Koševo football stadium, either to exchange them for Muslim prisoners held by the VRS, or to threaten to kill them, in response to crimes that had been committed shortly beforehand by the VRS (accounts differ). An intervention by President Izetbegović, the Minister of the Interior, and other members of the government persuaded Čegar to end the hostage-taking.²⁷

Ultimately, murders also became part of the repertoire of the "internal zone of violence." The most well-known individual case is the murder of six members of the Ristović family in July 1992 in the Velešići district. They were shot dead in their home by armed men—the police investigation revealed that these men were members of a police unit belonging to the Ministry of the Interior.²⁸ Merisa Karović-Babić cites other cases in her study, focusing on those in which at least two people were murdered and which were officially investigated during the war. Other individual murders are mentioned, for example, by Mirko Pejanović, Jovan Divjak, and the journalist Senad Pećanin.²⁹ The best-documented murders are those perpetrated by Caco and members of the 10th Mountain Brigade. It is estimated that they murdered at least 29 people, mostly of Serb ethnicity, between the summer of 1992 and October 1993. Most of them were murdered on Mount Trebević at the Kazani pit, into which the murderers then threw their victims' bodies.³⁰

An investigation into killings should not be limited to civilians, but should also include prisoners of war. A particularly blatant case occurred on April 22, 1992, when eight Serb

²⁴ See detektor.ba, 11.6.2021: <https://detektor.ba/2021/06/11/dzananovic-and-gadzo-total-of-16-years-for-crimes-in-sarajevo/?lang=en>

²⁵ The judgment is available on the BiH Court's website : <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/predmet/2881/show>

²⁶ See Pejanović, 91-2, 136-7.

²⁷ See Pejanovic, 134-5; Nusret Šehić, *Dnevni zapisi o životu u Sarajevu pod četničkom opsadom tokom 1992. i 1993. godine*, vol.1, Sarajevo 2003, 187-188.

²⁸ Karović-Babić, 238-239.

²⁹ Pejanović, 138; Divjak, *Ne pucaj*, 10.7.1992; *Dani*, 29.1.1993.

³⁰ Karović-Babić, 243-8; *Dani*, 10.11.1997.

prisoners of the Yugoslav army were shot dead outside a police station in the city center, likely by members of the secret police unit “Ševe”.³¹ In some cases, killings were also perpetrated against Serb soldiers in the Bosnian Army: Two cases are documented involving Caco, Božidar Šljivić and Predrag Šalipur, both of whom fought in his unit, but whom Caco nevertheless had assassinated in June 1992 and October 1993.³²

The motivations behind these various acts of violence could be of different kinds: revenge after deadly VRS attacks, fanaticism, sadism, collective blame, and/or nationalist hatred; often, personal gain - such as financial enrichment - or personal rivalries were also a factor, and people would, for example, murder someone whose flat they coveted or a person who had witnessed a crime. These last two reasons were probably decisive in the assassination of the prominent Bosnian Croat Josip Gogala, in December 1992. He was killed by members of the same unit of the 6th Army Brigade that had kidnapped and murdered one of his Serb neighbors shortly before.³³ This last example confirms that internal violence was also directed against non-Serbs, but violence against Serbs was certainly facilitated by the fact that it was easier to justify through a spirit of revenge and fifth-column rhetoric.

5. The issue of anti-Serb discrimination

In addition to forms of physical violence, it is important to examine more closely the issue of indirect violence, primarily discrimination in the workplace. Mirko Pejanović speaks of a “hierarchy of trust” that developed in political and public life during the war: At the top were the members of the SDA, followed by Bosniaks in general, and finally, where applicable, members of other ethnic groups, with Serbs at the bottom of the hierarchy. He also cites several examples of Serbs holding leadership positions in the public administration who were targeted by smear campaigns until they resigned and were replaced by SDA members.³⁴ Jovan Divjak also mentions in his book that non-Muslims—both Croats and Serbs—were increasingly marginalized within the hierarchy of the Army of BiH.³⁵ He does, however, mention that the Serbs who fought on the front lines of the siege within the BiH army did not have problems with their colleagues, with a few exceptions.³⁶

Regarding the situation outside the army, Divjak paints a mixed picture. On the one hand, he confirms Pejanović's assessment: “Little by little, those who held management positions in the water company, the banks, or the university were dismissed.” But he also emphasizes: “It should be noted, however, that a considerable number of Serbs remained working in hospitals, the media, and the arts. Apart from a few rare cases, they did not suffer discrimination.”³⁷ Similarly, the removal from management positions caused by defamation did not necessarily mean the end of professional activity: Đorđe Zarić resigned in 1994, exasperated, from his

³¹ This crime has been the subject of a trial at the BiH Court since 2017, see <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/03/21/bosnian-police-officials-war-crimes-trial-opens-03-21-2017/> [Comment added in March 2026: In December 2022, Dragan Vikić and three other defendants were acquitted of this crime, see: <https://n1info.ba/english/news/dragan-vikic-et-al-acquitted-of-war-crimes-charges-in-final-verdict/> The verdict did not contest that the crime took place, but rejected the responsibility of the four defendants.]

³² Divjak, 140-1 and *Dani*, 10.11.1997.

³³ Karović-Babić, 241-2; Zlatko Bećkanović, *Sjećanja na 400 Sarajevskih ratnih dana*, Sarajevo, 2016, 206-8.

³⁴ Pejanović, 147-150.

³⁵ Divjak, 144-5. On the evolution of the BiH army under the influence of the SDA, see Hoare, 102-7.

³⁶ Divjak, Sarajevo, 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 192, 190.

position as director of a state-owned bank, but continued to work as a deputy director.³⁸ A thorough study of discrimination would require distinguishing between different professional categories and determining whether discrimination primarily affected management positions or also subordinate positions. Generally speaking, it seems undeniable that occupational discrimination increased during the war, in parallel with the process by which nationalist tendencies became increasingly dominant within the SDA, the main party in power.

It would be important to examine the extent to which discrimination was also present in daily life. In interviews conducted by Jelena Golubović, several women recounted being disadvantaged during the distribution of humanitarian aid, specifically mentioning Catholic and Muslim charities, while other organizations provided them with food parcels without any issues.³⁹ However, the sample size of those interviewed is too small to determine whether these experiences were widespread, and a more general study of humanitarian aid distribution practices within Sarajevo would also be necessary.

6. The difficulties of a quantitative classification of violence

If we want to better categorize anti-Serb violence within Sarajevo, the question of quantifying it inevitably arises, in terms of the number of crimes, perpetrators, and victims. But due to the lack of serious quantitative studies, it is very difficult to answer these questions.

A particularly controversial issue concerns the number of Serbs in Sarajevo who were not victims of VRS shelling or sniper fire, but rather of internal violence. Several lists of names have been compiled in *Republika Srpska* and Belgrade over the past 20 years, listing between 2,500 and 5,700 names for these victims, but media outlets and organizations in Sarajevo quickly discovered that these lists contained, for example, double or triple entries and also included Serbs killed by VRS shelling, and that they most often contained no specific information about the individuals beyond a first and last name.⁴⁰

The number of Serbs killed by internal violence was already being discussed during the war. In January 1993, the government told the newspaper *Dani* that 39 Serb citizens had been killed in the first eight months of the war.⁴¹ For the period from April 5, 1992, to December 31, 1994, a department of the Ministry of the Interior reported 291 people murdered within the city, of whom 210 could be identified, including 110 Serbs.⁴² It can be assumed that the total number is certainly higher, but no effort has been made in Sarajevo since the war to systematically study the subject. The journalist Senad Pećanin, who has done extensive work on some of the crimes committed in Sarajevo, said of the number of Serbs murdered: “No one knows for sure, but certainly not less than a few hundred.”⁴³

The difficulty in establishing a figure for the victims also stems from the fact that it is often not easy to determine the exact circumstances of the murders and to what extent they were linked to the victim's ethnic identity, and also because the victim's ethnic identity can be defined differently, particularly for children of mixed marriages. There are also grey areas, illustrated, for example, by a case cited by Mirko Pejanović: when a civilian, forced to work in a trench on a particularly dangerous front line, is subsequently killed by a bullet from the besiegers, should

³⁸ Pejanović, 150.

³⁹ Golubović, 1, 121.

⁴⁰ Moll, 81.

⁴¹ *Dani*, 29.1.1993.

⁴² Cited by *Start*, 15.4.2008.

⁴³ Cited in Sacco, 96.

he be considered as a victim of the VRS or of those who more or less deliberately caused his death?⁴⁴

Quantifying the perpetrators of the crimes is also difficult. How many groups and units were involved? The 10th Mountain Brigade led by Caco and the 9th Mountain Brigade led by Čelo appear to have played a leading role in the violence, as well as units under Juka's control until October 1992, but several sources also refer to other groups. Mladen Pandurević, vice-president of the “Serb Civic Council,” for example, mentioned in 1997 that crimes had also been committed against Serb residents by the 7th Mountain Brigade in the Sarajevo neighborhoods of Hrasno, Hrasno Brdo, Aneks, and Mojnilo.⁴⁵ This also raises other questions: To what extent was the violence the work of commanders, or of individuals or groups within or outside certain units? Conversely, one can ask how many units and individuals did *not* participate in crimes and to what extent some directly opposed acts of violence against Serbs.

Regarding the victims, it is also difficult to quantify how many Serbs were affected by a particular form of internal violence and to what extent it shaped their lives and daily routines. In the absence of a more systematic study, I will not, for the time being, go beyond the general observation that this violence was probably experienced very differently and that some were confronted with it much more than others. A few concrete examples can illustrate this point:

Dane Olbina recounts in his diary that in November 1992, the brother of a Serb acquaintance was taken away by a man in uniform and found shot dead the next day; however, in his very detailed diary of over 700 pages, this is the only case he mentions, and he also makes no mention of any harm he himself may have suffered.⁴⁶ A Serb woman living in Sarajevo told me that her father had been abducted and killed by Caco's men, but that she herself, who lived in another part of the city, had never been attacked or threatened and had always maintained normal relations with her neighbors and colleagues.⁴⁷ Mirko Pejanović recounted after the war that he was supposed to be “taken away” from his apartment in April 1992, but that a Bosnian neighbor prevented it, and also that one day he only narrowly escaped a raid carried out by Caco's men.⁴⁸ In his autobiographical novel *Sarajevska Princeza*, the doctor Edo Jaganjac recounts that of the five surgeons at the Sarajevo military hospital, three were Serbs and highly respected by their colleagues, as were other Serb employees of the hospital; but he also recounts that a Serb ambulance driver was falsely denounced as a traitor by a senior official who wanted to win the favor of the SDA, after which this driver was murdered by Juka's men.⁴⁹ In his book based on his diary entries, Mile Jovičić recounts how, as director of Sarajevo airport in April 1992, he heard of several specific cases in which Serbs—some members of the SDS, others ordinary citizens—were leaving Sarajevo because they had been mistreated or threatened by the “Green Berets”; he himself suffered no harm, but in May 1992, he too decided to leave Sarajevo after the airport was closed and out of fear of the SDA militias.⁵⁰ As for Jovan Divjak, several sources confirm that he was the most popular of all the generals in Sarajevo, particularly because of his close relationship with the soldiers he regularly visited on the front lines. He also writes how the people of Sarajevo regularly expressed their gratitude to

⁴⁴ *Dani*, 24.11.1997.

⁴⁵ *Svijet*, 30.11.1997.

⁴⁶ Olbina, 13.11.1992.

⁴⁷ Personal interview on 15.1.2019 in Sarajevo.

⁴⁸ Pejanović, 133-134, and *Dani*, 24.11.1997.

⁴⁹ Edo Jaganjac, *Sarajevska Princeza*, Sarajevo 2021.

⁵⁰ Mile Jovičić, *Two Days Till Peace: A Sarajevo Airport Story*, Bloomington, 2011.

him—for leaving the Yugoslav Army and siding with BiH, despite being born in Serbia. He also recounts how President Izetbegović and other politicians were suspicious of him, how he had to defend himself against accusations of being a “Chetnik,” and how he was increasingly sidelined from decision-making processes. He also writes how his two sons, who had both joined the army, were injured and mistreated in the city center, one by a military patrol and the other by Caco's men, and how they both left Sarajevo shortly afterwards.⁵¹

For a comprehensive assessment of direct and indirect violence, it would be necessary to examine the extent to which it also manifested itself in neighborhood relations. In discussing the evolution of social relations in Sarajevo, Ivana Maček emphasizes how the war made ethno-national identity an essential point of reference for Sarajevans; while nationalism and mistrust increased considerably, she also notes that Muslim residents often distinguished between “good Serbs” and “bad Serbs.”⁵² Jelena Golubović also addresses the issue of neighborhood relations in one of her chapters. A woman recounts how a close relative was falsely denounced to the police by her neighbors as a Serb spy. This demonstrates that neighbors could participate in the internal sphere of violence, even without direct physical interaction. Other women interviewed by Golubović, however, emphasize that they maintained good relations with their neighbors.⁵³ Other publications indicate that, despite widespread mistrust, mutual solidarity generally prevailed in close neighborly relations.⁵⁴

In this context, it is also worth considering possible differences in relations between long-time neighbors and newcomers. What role did violence play in the social relations between Sarajevo Serbs and Muslim refugees from other parts of Bosnia who had arrived in Sarajevo during the war? Pejanović recounts situations where, after VRS attacks on the Žepa enclave in eastern Bosnia, delegates of refugees from that town living in Sarajevo threatened reprisals against Sarajevo Serbs.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, one of the Serb women interviewed by Golubović describes how worried she was when refugees moved into the apartment across the hall, having been evicted from their home by Serbs, but to her surprise, they were very friendly towards her.⁵⁶ This topic, too, would merit an in-depth and nuanced study, both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

7. Leaving Sarajevo: a consequence of internal violence?

To what extent did internal violence lead many Serbs to leave Sarajevo during the war? The claim that almost all Serbs left the city due to systematic terror is part of the Bosnian Serb nationalist narrative. According to the 1991 and 2013 censuses, nearly 100,000 people identifying as Serbs lived in Sarajevo's four inner districts before the war, while today that number has dwindled to just 10,000. However, the issue is too serious and complex to be reduced to a mere numbers game.⁵⁷

Sarajevo undeniably underwent a radical demographic shift during the war years. On the one hand, tens of thousands of people left the city—not only Serbs, but people from all national groups. At the same time, tens of thousands of refugees—primarily Muslims—arrived in the

⁵¹ Cp. Divjak, *Sarajevo, 189-197*, 230-1, and id., *Ne pucaj*.

⁵² Maček, 167-190.

⁵³ Golubović, 82-96.

⁵⁴ See for example Barbara Demmick, *Logavina Street, Life and death in a Sarajevo neighborhood*, New York, 2012.

⁵⁵ Pejaković, 139-40.

⁵⁶ Golubović, 87-8.

⁵⁷ Golubović, 104-106, also mentions the problem of numbers.

urban area of Sarajevo controlled by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the east of the country and from the VRS-occupied outlying districts of Sarajevo. When studying the departures from Sarajevo, it is important to consider that they occurred in several stages, and more precise quantitative studies are lacking. Generally, it is estimated that many people left Sarajevo between March and May 1992, that is, just before the start of the war and during the first two months, when the siege was still relatively permeable and it was possible to leave the city by plane, train, or bus. Furthermore, in February-March 1996, when, under the terms of the Dayton Peace Accords, several urban areas occupied by the VRS were reintegrated into Sarajevo, it is estimated that approximately 50,000 Serbs left these areas. In the interim, between the summer of 1992 and the end of 1995, leaving the city was more difficult—in addition to privately organized escapes, there were controlled official channels that required lengthy negotiations, such as prisoner exchanges, medical evacuations, and evacuation convoys for the elderly, children, or other specific groups.⁵⁸

What reasons drove Sarajevo residents to leave the city, and to what extent was internal violence responsible for this, particularly for Serb residents? Jelena Golubović dedicates a chapter to the theme “To Stay or To Leave?” and shows that there were numerous motivations in both cases, which were not always the same depending on the phase of events.⁵⁹ In Sarajevo, it is often said that Serb residents who left the city just before the siege had been informed by the SDS of the impending attack on Sarajevo, but Golubović rightly points out that the rising tensions in the city since the independence referendum of March 1, 1992, also constituted a reason to leave, even without direct warning.⁶⁰ In April and May 1992, many people fled because of the bombing of the city and the direct threat to their lives that this represented; it can certainly be demonstrated that in several cases, mistreatment of Serb residents during those first few weeks led to their departure, but there is no indication that this was the case for the majority of them. The *fear* of being attacked seems to have been more significant here, a fear that the SDS had been systematically stoking for months by talking about an imminent genocide against Serbs, as during the Second World War.⁶¹ Furthermore, the SDS aimed to have all Serbs leave the areas of Sarajevo that it did not control, and it exerted corresponding pressure on them, labeling the Serbs who remained in Sarajevo as traitors or “Alija Serbs” (referring to Izetbegović). This was keenly felt by Serbs for whom ethno-national belonging was important, such as Dragomir Ubiparić, who noted in his diary : the Serbs who remained in Sarajevo were “doubly and even triply victimized: they are hit by grenades, hit by Muslims, and then they consider themselves rejected and are called 'those of Alija'.”⁶²

For the period from the summer of 1992 to the end of 1995, it can be observed that in various cases, direct experience of internal violence (including threats) led Serbs to leave the city. However, other factors also played a role, notably the dangers associated with the city's bombardment and the extreme restrictions imposed on daily life. Finally, the February-March 1996 phase, often referred to as the “exodus,” involved Serbs living outside the siege lines. Their departure cannot therefore be explained by persecution by the city's defenders. It is clear that after four years of war and anti-Muslim propaganda, many Serbs could no longer imagine living outside the protection of the *Republika Srpska* and/or feared acts of revenge. Furthermore, the SDS also exerted massive pressure on Serbs not to remain in areas that were

⁵⁸ On the demographic changes of the 1990s and their cultural impact, see Anders Stefansson, “Urban Exile. Locals, Newcomers and the Cultural Transformation of Sarajevo”, in Bougarel et al., *Bosnian Mosaic*, 59-77.

⁵⁹ Golubović, 99-133.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 106-108, 114-116.

⁶¹ The importance of this fear as a reason to leave the city is also highlighted by Armakolas, 86-88.

⁶² Ubiparić, 17.5.1992.

about to revert to "Muslim" control. Ondřej Žíla shows that other factors also played a role: the Dayton Peace Accords created a logic of separate ethnonational territories, and the SDA-led BiH government did almost nothing to provide Serb residents of these areas with security guarantees. Nevertheless, it is difficult to dispute that the proactive part of this "exodus" was organized by the SDS, which also manifested itself in the harassment of Serbs who wanted to stay, for example, by setting fire to their apartments to force them to leave.⁶³

When discussing departures from Sarajevo, it's also important to emphasize that a significant portion of the Serb population did not leave the city during the siege. Again, determining their exact number is difficult—estimates range from 10,000 to 70,000. Just as it would be wrong to believe that Serbs left solely because of persecution, it would also be incorrect to assume that those who remained did not experience internal violence. The reasons for staying were also varied (and were not necessarily linked to support for Bosnia and Herzegovina).⁶⁴ Some remained despite experiencing internal violence, while others left without having directly witnessed it.

8. The role of the authorities and the position of the Serbs in Sarajevo

We still need to examine a crucial question further: What role did the state authorities, led by the Bosniak party SDA and President Izetbegović, play in the internal violence, and more specifically with regard to crimes committed against Serbs? Based on the research conducted so far, their role appears contradictory. On the one hand, Izetbegović and other members of the government stated both internally and publicly that acts of anti-Serb violence were unacceptable. This was particularly evident after the murder of the Ristović family: the Ministers of the Interior and Defense subsequently issued a statement condemning the crime, emphasizing the importance of coexistence, and assuring Serb residents that the state would do everything possible to protect them.⁶⁵ I mentioned before the professionalization of the army and the "Trebević operation" against "criminals in our own ranks", and President Izetbegović also personally intervened in various cases to oppose or put an end to particularly egregious abuses.⁶⁶ On the other hand, for a long time the state authorities did nothing to arrest figures such as Caco and Čelo, with whom the president maintained direct contact, even though he had been informed of their crimes very early on, and on several occasions.⁶⁷ Jovan Divjak summarized Izetbegović's contradictory attitude as follows: "While calling on Bosniaks to respect Serbs and Croats, he protected the petty warlords who were wreaking havoc in Sarajevo."⁶⁸ More generally, it is legitimate to ask to what extent at least part of the ruling political apparatus not only tolerated, but also actively covered up and, in part, encouraged or even incited various acts of violence.

We can also speak of a contradictory attitude regarding the legal responses to the crimes committed. It is worth noting that trials were held within Sarajevo during the war for several of the aforementioned acts of violence; 14 members of the 10th Mountain Brigade, for example, were indicted for the crimes committed in Kazani. However, there was very strong resistance to such trials. "The pressure from extremists within the SDA was enormous in order to

⁶³ On the "exodus" of 1996 see Žíla, and Edin Omerčić, "Reintegracija Sarajeva", *Prilozi za proučavanje historije Sarajeva*, 6, 2008.

⁶⁴ See Golubović, 124-130, for more details.

⁶⁵ *Oslobođenje*, 12.7.1992.

⁶⁶ Pejanović 134, Karović-Babić, 240.

⁶⁷ Moll, 76-8.

⁶⁸ Divjak, Sarajevo, 228.

influence the justice system and prevent a trial for this crime,” noted one of the police officials who had arrested the alleged murderers of the Ristović family.⁶⁹ Also, the sentences handed down were generally very light: for the Kazani crimes - which were considered only "ordinary murders" - the Sarajevo military court sentenced the accused in 1994 to terms ranging from ten months to six years, most cases not for murder or complicity, but for not reporting the murders to the police, and most of the convicts were immediately released.⁷⁰

The government also adopted a contradictory political stance towards the Serbs of Sarajevo. On the one hand, the platform of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), adopted in the summer of 1992, explicitly emphasized the equal rights of Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. But high-ranking government officials also sent very different signals: Ejub Ganić, a member of the BiH Presidency, declared that the Serbs were collectively responsible for the war.⁷¹ And in 1994, newspapers close to the SDA and the Minister of Culture, Enes Karić, launched a campaign against mixed marriages and against the broadcasting of Serb songs on the radio.⁷²

But this campaign also provoked strong reactions in non-nationalist circles in Sarajevo. Despite the strengthening of nationalist tendencies within the SDA, other forces continued to exist in Sarajevo to counter the sweeping accusations and increasing discrimination. This was particularly true for the intellectual and cultural circles that played an important role in Sarajevo and whose "spiritual and cultural resistance" against the siege often included opposition to all forms of nationalism.⁷³ Furthermore, the concern not to lump all Serbs together was widespread: in government communiqués, in media outlets like *Oslobođenje*, and also in private writings, those attacking the city were often not referred to as "the Serbs," but by other terms, such as "Chetniks," "aggressors," "occupiers," "Karadžić Serbs," "SDS Serbs," or "those in the mountains."⁷⁴ It should also be mentioned that traditional Orthodox/Serb organizations were not prevented from working: the cultural association *Prosvjeta* continued to operate during the siege, as did the humanitarian organization *Dobrotvor*. The Orthodox churches in Sarajevo were closed, not because the government had ordered them to be, but because almost all the Orthodox priests had left Sarajevo at the beginning of the war.⁷⁵

It should also be noted that Serbs held important political positions in Sarajevo throughout the war. Two Serb representatives served on the seven-member Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina ; these were Mirko Pejanović and Tanja Ljujić - Mijatović, both members of the Social Democratic Party of BiH. Admittedly, real political power was not held by the Collective Presidency but by Izetbegović and the SDA. However, even though the non-Bosniak members of the Presidency had little influence in the main political decision-making processes, this position nevertheless allowed them to make their voices heard and gave them direct access to Izetbegović and other influential figures in power. Pejanović and Ljujić-Mijatović, along with Jovan Divjak, regularly used their positions to denounce the existing violence within the government and were able, in several cases, to secure the release of

⁶⁹ Bećkanović , 233-4.

⁷⁰ Moll, 31.

⁷¹ Pejanović, 145.

⁷² Rémy Ourdan, "The end of the Bosnian dream", *Le Monde*, 28.9.1994.

⁷³ On "cultural resistance" in Sarajevo see for example: Andrea Caira/Arianna Cavigioli, *La resistenza oltre le armi : Sarajevo 1992-1996*, Sesto San Giovanni, 2021.

⁷⁴ See for example Edo Hozić, *Biografija Sarajeva 1992-1993*, Sarajevo, 2008, which reproduces articles from *Oslobođenje* and other newspapers.

⁷⁵ As evidenced by his diary, Dragomir Ubiparipović remained in besieged Sarajevo for several months as the only Orthodox priest, and during this time he regularly received Orthodox faithful in the old Orthodox church for prayer and communion.

arbitrarily arrested Serbs.⁷⁶ All three were also members of Serb civic organizations, along with other Sarajevo Serbs from political, cultural, scientific, and civil society circles, who openly opposed Karadžić's policies and advocated for a multinational BiH. The most important of these organizations was the “Serb Civic Council” (*Srpsko građansko vijeće* - SGV), founded in 1994. Its aim was to counter the SDS's claim to speak for all Serbs in BiH and to defend, vis-à-vis their own government, the rights and interests of Serbs in Sarajevo and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (established in 1994) against increasing discrimination. The SGV became a very visible interlocutor in Sarajevo, and its existence demonstrates that Serbs of Sarajevo have been able to make their voices heard on the socio-political stage, whilst also highlighting the fragility of their situation.⁷⁷

10. Preliminary Conclusions

To conclude this text, I will try to summarise a few key points. What was the nature of the internal violence directed against Serbs in Sarajevo? Firstly, it should be noted that there is no basis for equating the situation in Sarajevo with that in *Republika Srpska*, or the BiH government's policy towards Serbs in Sarajevo with that of the RS towards Muslims. Even though within the SDA and the government it led, the Bosniak nationalist tendency increasingly dominated the multi-ethnic tendency, anti-Serb violence in Sarajevo was not the result of a systematic policy implemented by the political and military authorities of BiH. In other words: Sarajevo was not the mirror image of Srebrenica, nor of Foča, Višegrad or Prijedor, where the Bosnian Serb authorities created ‘ethnically pure’ territories through mass murder and systematic expulsions.

At the same time, it would be wrong to regard internal violence against Serbs in Sarajevo as a marginal phenomenon or to reduce it to a few isolated crimes. There was indeed an area of internal violence in Sarajevo, and it seems undeniable that Serbs, more than others, were its victims, and that it partially reached massive proportions. Generally speaking, responsibility for the physical violence against Serbs in Sarajevo can be established on three levels, in the following order:

- The power structures of the RS, in particular the SDS and the VRS, which, by besieging and terrorizing the city of Sarajevo, created an atmosphere that allowed and encouraged the development of internal violence, making the Serbs of Sarajevo a prime target of this violence.
- The people and groups inside Sarajevo who actually carried out this violence.
- Those in political power in BiH, who have not effectively opposed violence and have long tolerated it. Further research should be conducted to determine the extent to which power structures, or parts thereof, have encouraged or even incited at least some of these acts of violence.

Jelena Golubović speaks of “retributive violence”⁷⁸ in relation to the anti-Serb violence in Sarajevo—a term that indeed seems relevant: the violence occurred in reaction to the violence of the siege, without which this zone of internal violence would not have emerged. At the same time, and within this general framework, dynamics of violence subsequently developed in Sarajevo, following internal logics, the scale and responsibilities of which need to be analysed in much greater depth.

⁷⁶ See for example Pejanović, 105, 135-7, 141, Divjak, Sarajevo, 192-3.

⁷⁷ On SGV see Pejanović, 187-195.

⁷⁸ Golubović, 3.

A more comprehensive study should, in any case, proceed in a differentiated manner, also with regard to the chronology and topography of the violence. Based on the publications and sources examined, it can currently be hypothesized that anti-Serb violence occurred primarily (but not exclusively) during the first year and a half of the war and that it was primarily (but not exclusively) perpetrated by various local warlords and elements of their units who controlled certain districts of Sarajevo.

The relationship between physical and indirect violence, particularly discrimination in the workplace, also warrants closer examination. It can be tentatively observed that the two developments appear to have been counter-cyclical: the consolidation of the central government and the Bosnian army during the second half of 1993, accompanied by a strengthening of the SDA and Bosniak nationalism, led, on the one hand, to a reduction in the internal zone of physical violence, but on the other hand, also to a deepening of discrimination against non-Bosniaks in the workplace. Here, too, there seems to be a difference compared to the dynamics of violence in parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina controlled by the VRS, where workplace discrimination has often been the starting point for an ever-increasing escalation of violence that has resulted in mass expulsions and mass killings.

Overall, this overview has above all highlighted just how many questions remain unanswered and would require further research. I shall therefore conclude with a few ideas for research that could help to better understand the theme of Sarajevo's "internal zone of violence" and its anti-Serb dimensions:

At the organizational level, it would, for example, be useful to carry out studies on various army and police units to determine the extent to which they were - or were not- involved in internal violence. It would also be desirable to carry out scholarly studies on the history of the Patriotic League and the Green Berets, not assuming that internal violence was their primary activity, but analyzing the extent to which they actively participated in it. Studies of state structures - the Presidency, the BiH Army, and the Ministries of the Interior and Defense - as well as political parties, particularly the SDA, would also be helpful in determining their role in internal violence and in examining the extent to which attitudes on this issue differed within and between these structures.

Further research could focus on different forms of violence: for example, searches, or the concept of the "fifth column," which clearly had a very strong influence on thoughts and actions within the internal violence zone. In addition, a study of private and public prisons would be important, as would research on the numerous assassinations. This could include case studies (for example, the Ristović family murders), as well as the compilation of annotated quantitative lists, based on a critical analysis of various sources, which would indicate when cases are unclear or suggest different hypotheses.

In order not to reduce the subject to a purely quantitative issue and to gain a better understanding of the victims of violence, it would also be important to conduct further studies focusing on individuals, families and/or residential buildings: to what extent were they affected by anti-Serb violence and how did they cope with it? It would also make sense to gather the accounts of different individuals to create a kaleidoscope of experiences of violence, and to see if any general trends emerge. Specific studies could also focus on the issue of counterreactions: at what levels were efforts made to stem the violence and to assist or protect those who were threatened and persecuted?

To better understand the specificities of the situation in Sarajevo, it would also be useful to conduct parallel studies that would allow for a comparative examination of potential similarities and differences. This could include, for example, a study of the situation of the Croat population in Sarajevo. It could also include studies of other cities that were under the control of the Bosnian government: How did the Serb inhabitants of Konjic, Zenica, Bihać, or Tuzla experience the war, and to what extent were they victims of anti-Serb violence? For a

complete history of violence in Sarajevo during the war, it would also be necessary to examine not only the siege of the city on the one hand, and the internal violence within Sarajevo on the other, but also the territory of the urban areas of Sarajevo occupied and controlled by the *Republika Srpska*, such as Grbavica, Ilidža, Vogošća, and Pale: To what extent was the violence perpetrated against non-Serbs there different from that in other cities within the RS? How did the immediate proximity of besieged Sarajevo influence local practices of violence? And to what extent were Serbs living in these areas also targeted by this violence, both by their own power structures and by the defenders of besieged Sarajevo?⁷⁹

Finally, beyond individual studies, it would be desirable to conduct research into internal violence in general, which would also make it possible to better assess what was specifically directed against Serbs and what was not. Research into the overall situation of Serbs in Sarajevo would also be welcome, taking into account all aspects of their lives and activities within the besieged city, so as not to reduce their fate to the sole experience of internal violence, and to be able to better determine to what extent the latter affected their lives.

Conducting such studies would not be an easy undertaking. Sources present a challenge: the accessibility of archival records, particularly those of the Ministries of the Interior and of Defense, is a significant issue. Interviews with witnesses from the period also have their limitations: not only because the war is now almost 30 years old, but also because the sensitive nature of the subject raises the question of how willing witnesses would be to discuss it. The controversies and political stakes surrounding this topic present another challenge, as they expose researchers to potential negative reactions. Nevertheless, if one wishes to paint a complete picture of the siege of Sarajevo, one cannot avoid the issue of internal violence and the question of its anti-Serb dimensions. The fact that Bosnian Serb nationalist discourse exploits the subject for revisionist propaganda purposes should not serve as an excuse to downplay anti-Serb violence, or to ignore it altogether, or to only talk about these propaganda abuses and not also about the subject itself.

⁷⁹ On the question of the dynamics of violence in the urban areas of Sarajevo occupied by the RS, we do not yet have a comprehensive scientific study, such as, for example, the excellent study on Banja Luka by Armina Galijaš, *Eine bosnische Stadt im Zeichen des Krieges: Ethnopolitik und Alltag in Banja Luka (1990 – 1995)*, Munich, 2011. [Comment added in March 2026: In early 2026, a translated version of the book was published in Serbia: of Armina Galijaš, *Banja Luka u ratu: Etnopolitika i svakodnevnica (1990–1995)*, Novi Sad, Akademska knjiga, 2006.]