

The
**Carl Beck
Papers**

in Russian &
East European Studies

Number 1705

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of Dobrinja:**

Schooling Under Siege in
a Sarajevo Community

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David M. Berman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Instruction and Learning, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, where he coordinates teacher education programs. He received a Fulbright Scholar Award under the Minority Studies Regional Research Program for work at the University of Sarajevo during 2001 which served as the basis for his current research on “The war schools of Dobrinja.” His recent book, *The Heroes of Treca Gimnazija: A War School in Sarajevo* (2001), is a case study of a Sarajevo secondary school during the years of the siege. He will return to the University of Sarajevo during 2006 under a second Fulbright Scholar Award.

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Novi Grad municipality located on the west end of Sarajevo as it existed in spring 1992 at the beginning of the siege. Dobrinja is located just to the northeast of the airport runway, and the Airport Settlement is located directly across the road from the airport terminal (Aerodrom 'Sarajevo'). Map courtesy of JP Geodetski zavod BiH (1993).

Tetarić Adnanu
potpredsjedniku Koordinacionog
odbora za naselja Dobrinja i
Aerodrom, neustrašivom borcu i
utemeljivaču prvih oblika civilne
vlasti u opkoljenoj Dobrinji

To: Adnan Tetarić
vice-president of the Coordination Board
for Dobrinja and the Airport settlements,
intrepid fighter and founder
of the first form of civilian government
in encircled Dobrinja

The Siege Within a Siege of Dobrinja

“Dobrinja was a special place,” said Behija Jakić (1998) a high school sociology and philosophy teacher, who was trapped in her Dobrinja residence during the spring of 1992 at the beginning of the siege of Sarajevo. An apartment complex approximately two kilometers square lying in the shadow of Mount Igman, set alongside the airport in Butmir, Dobrinja was separated from Sarajevo proper by Mojmilo Hill. A single road below Mojmilo that ran by Nedžarići settlement, controlled by the enemy, connected it to the city. Completely cut off from the city proper during the first months of the Bosnian war, Dobrinja was the siege of Sarajevo at its most severe, referred to by some as “a siege within a siege” (*opsada u opsadi*) and by others as a “double siege” (*dvostruka opsada*). These conditions, in which Dobrinja was totally surrounded for seventy-five days and written off by the Bosnian political leadership, differentiated Dobrinja from Sarajevo proper (Hromadžić 1992). “Here we talk about Sarajevo and Dobrinja, two geographical areas that are very similar but at the same time very different,” wrote Mustafa Hajrulahović-Talijan, commander of the First Corps of the Bosnian Army, one year into the war. “Even today there is something special about Dobrinja. It was like that before the war and throughout the war. . . . Dobrinja has become a symbol for the perseverance of the Bosnian spirit” (1993). “Dobrinja je bio čudo,” said Ismet Hadžić, the commander of the First Dobrinja Brigade, reflecting upon Dobrinja’s survival on the Sarajevo front lines. “Dobrinja was a miracle” (2001). In the words of Seniha Bulja, the manager of the Elementary Education Section of the Dobrinja War School Center, who created a war school on the very front line: “We were under a double siege. The plan of the enemy was to ‘cleansing the ground’ [*čišćenje terena*] . . . They thought that it would be easy to take Dobrinja. Once there was no Dobrinja, there would be no Sarajevo. No Sarajevo, no Bosnia. What happened was quite the opposite. What was incredible was the resistance shown by the population of the settlement. We were defending ourselves and our multicultural society” (2001). The severity of siege conditions created in those who were trapped there a dogged resistance to the enemy and a determined tenacity to survive. “Odoh i ja majko, Bosnu braniti,” they sang in defiance. “And I am going, Mother, to defend Bosnia. If I am killed, do not regret it.” The scenes of besieged Dobrinjans singing in defiance of the enemy just outside their gates, led by General Hadžić himself, were recorded on videotape by Mevsud Kapetanović, of FIVA Studio, and watching these scenes today with those same Dobrinjans chills the blood.

Among those trapped in Dobrinja at the onset of the siege were approximately two thousand elementary school students, one thousand secondary school

students, and perhaps one hundred twenty teachers from schools throughout Sarajevo city, as well as approximately four hundred university students who attended the many faculties of the University of Sarajevo, along with perhaps fifteen to twenty professors. Of the three elementary schools in Dobrinja, two were located at either end of the settlement directly on the front lines. They were occupied by a ragtag group of citizen defenders who would later be transformed into the First Dobrinja Brigade of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH). On 15 May 1992, the third elementary school, in the middle of the settlement, was deliberately shelled and burned to the ground in full view of the bewildered residents. At the time of the siege, there was no secondary school in Dobrinja; students of high school age traveled into Sarajevo proper to attend the twenty-seven secondary schools located throughout the city.

In the words of Smail Vesnić, deputy director of the (Inter-Municipal) Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo at the time of the siege, one of the educators trapped in Dobrinja, “When I remember those days, I think about how impossible it was to organize a school” (2001b). During the summer of 1992, however, Smail Vesnić and his colleagues from the Pedagogical Institute created one, Gimnazija Dobrinja, under the administration of the Dobrinja War School Center and what was then the Sarajevo City Secretariat for Education.¹ Today, sitting in his office in what is now the Ministry of Education of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, turning the pages of the journal of Gimnazija Dobrinja, he reads one of his wartime entries, shaking his head at the memories of schooling under siege:

5 November 1993: A rainy morning, just like human souls. Blood on the sidewalk and one life less as a result of last night’s shelling. How long is human blood going to flow down the streets, and the world still watch and say nothing?

It’s dangerous so the kids can’t go to school, again. Classes are still cancelled. Still, in the schools, life will go on. (Gimnazija Dobrinja 1992-1996)

These entries, along with similar entries in the almanac of the Dobrinja War School Center, expand the scope of this study from a traditional educational analysis to encompass the nature of schooling as an educational adaptation to siege conditions. The proximity of the front lines provides the opportunity to consider the process of reconstructing the schools as a form of sociocultural adaptation by besieged Dobrinjans in the struggle for physical and psychological survival. If, according to Ismet Hadžić, “the educational system was a function

of defense” designed “to give the people a purpose for living” (2001), this study is designed to illustrate the magnitude of the struggle and hence the significance of education in the lives of besieged Dobrinjans.

Jonathan Jansen recalls the dilemma he faced in trying to write about his teaching experience during apartheid in South Africa: “First, I have told a story. In doing so I have struggled to write in such a way that I break the tension between my structuralist training and the desire to affirm the primacy of the human experience . . . While some would wipe away experience and focus instead on the primacy of structural explanations for opposition in South Africa . . . I have drawn on students’ own experience—both the oppression they have suffered and the creativity they have shown—as a source of resistance” (1990, 68). Like Jansen, I wish “to affirm the primacy of the human experience” through the voices of besieged Dobrinjans, and Dobrinja educators in particular, even at the expense of structural analysis and explanation. These voices emerge from the incredible documentary record they compiled consistent with the “Guidelines on the Educational Work of Preschool Institutions, Elementary and Secondary Schools During the State of War” issued by the Ministry of Education of the Bosnian Republic (Jabučar 1997, 293–95). One guideline specifically concerned “evidence and documentation [that] must be kept regardless of which way instruction is organized and performed,” to include, most notably, the class section books (*odjeljenska knjiga*) that recorded student registration and attendance. The importance attached to these documents is clear: “each school is obligated to hide school documents in a safe place” (Jabučar 1994, 4–5). These documents include the “Basic Work Programs” (*Programska osnova rada*) that contained the abbreviated school curricula developed by Dobrinja educators and the organization of classes designed “to adapt to conditions and to organize the work of schools.” Of particular note are the almanac (Almanah) of the Dobrinja War School Center and of Simon Bolivar Elementary School, and the annals (Ljetopis) of Gimnazija Dobrinja and of Osman Nuri Hadžić Elementary School, that chart the daily course of events. The administrative forms that are the everyday bane of teachers and students alike, from class rosters to permission and registration forms are, in this case, historical documents that record a variety of school events and indicate the complexity of school organization during the siege. I present them in some detail in order to establish the historical record for the schools; personal interviews give further voice to those educators who gave so much of their lives to their students whom they viewed as the future of the country.

Hajrija-Šahza Jahić, of the Pedagogical Institute, asks, “What can one say about teachers in wartime?” Her response was written during the siege.

We hope that history will devote both space and time to them and to their efforts, because it is thanks to their merit that such a fundamental segment of the new state has been preserved and continues to thrive. None of this could have ever functioned without the teachers, *who were thus in the front line in the fight against the aggressor* [my emphasis] . . . [and] in the fight to preserve the schools and the educational system as a whole . . . However much is written, it will never be enough, because each pupil and each teacher, each parent, represents an individual history, a drama and an inspiration. Therefore I dedicate these lines to *The Teacher*, the warrior and pedagogical patriot of our land. (1996, 27)

Abdulah Jabučar, the deputy minister of education during the war, also writes of schooling as a form of civilian service on the Sarajevo frontlines: “Provinces, municipalities, and particularly schools, as well as teachers, have to be maximally engaged and try to find all possible ways of successfully educating the children. That is ‘*the second battle line*’ [my emphasis], and our victory as well as the final liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina depends on it” (1994, 5). Indeed, the imagery of the military battle for the country is employed by teachers and students alike to describe the psychological and logistical struggle to reconstruct an educational system under siege. It suggests that schooling became a form of civilian resistance to the enemy, what Jahić refers to as “pedagogical patriotism,” reflected in the Sarajevo’s term “war schools” (*ratna škola*).

In a recent interview, Smail Vesnić recalled his thoughts at the time. “Although it was August 1993,” he said, “we were told that the Americans would come and write about how we did it, how we reconstructed the schools” (2001b). Today, as an inquisitive and appreciative American educator, I have come to write about how they did it, how they reconstructed the schools, enabled by the documentary record they have left for any adept educational researcher to follow. Based upon this record, this study will focus primarily upon the struggle to reconstruct schooling during the first year of the siege in order to illustrate the magnitude of the task at hand and hence the significance of education in the lives of besieged Dobrinjans. On one hand, schooling served as a means to create “the illusion of normal life” for Dobrinja’s children living under the abnormal conditions of the siege. On the other, schooling also served as a means to create “the second battle line” for the civilian population and, in the process, became “a symbol of resistance” for Dobrinja’s citizen-soldiers who served on “the first battle line” in the defense of the settlement. If “the educational system is [indeed] a function of defense,” in the words of the military commander, then this study will clarify the nature of this relationship seen in the organization of schooling as a particular function of civil defense operations. As a civil government began

to function in besieged Dobrinja, civilian and military roles often became intertwined, because both teachers and their students alternated their time between teaching and learning in the classroom and military duty on the frontline.

In order to highlight these themes, this study will describe the process by which Dobrinja educators forged what Seniha Bulja termed “a model of educational work in Dobrinja” as an educational adaptation to wartime conditions during that first difficult year of the siege. Most notably, the administrative structure that organized educational work was developed during the early months of spring and summer 1992. With Dobrinja totally surrounded for 75 days at the onset of the seige, Dobrinja educators trapped within were forced to confront the educational realities of their isolation with greater immediacy than in many areas in Sarajevo proper. These educators forged a local educational adaptation to particular wartime conditions and, hence, a local educational system that would operate, at least at the outset, virtually independent from the Sarajevo City Secretariat for Education. In the process, this localized educational system, that operated in “a siege within a siege,” became “a model of educational work” for the “war schools” in other local communities of Sarajevo as well.

The Illusion of Normal Life

In her Afterword to Dževad Karahasan’s book, *Sarajevo: Exodus of a City*, Slavenka Drakulić likens besieged Sarajevo to a concentration camp and explores the mindset of people living within such boundaries. “Both Sarajevo under siege and Auschwitz represent a closed system, with their own set of rules and patterns of human behavior,” she writes, “and every closed system where people get killed and one is uncertain about the future, produces a certain kind of psychology that is not easy to understand” (1994, 114). People who live in a “closed system” develop their own psychological outlook and patterns of behavior as adaptations to survive such extreme conditions. Her description of Sarajevo as “a sort of concentration camp, which one could enter only with the greatest difficulty, and from which one could hardly get out,” applies equally well to Dobrinja. The siege within a siege of Dobrinja that began the weekend of 2–3 May 1992, one month into the siege of Sarajevo that began the weekend of 5–6 April 1992, when the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) took control of Mojmiilo Hill, totally isolated Dobrinja for some seventy-five days through the first months of the Bosnian war. With the departure of the last convoy on 13 May 1992, “not even a fly could get in or out” (Bulja 2001).

Other contemporary observers also made the analogy between Sarajevo and Auschwitz, the concentration camp and the besieged community. In a

17 May 1992 article in *Oslobođenje* (Liberation), the Sarajevo daily, entitled “Novi Aušvic” (New Auschwitz) and datelined Dobrinja, Mehmed Hromodžić wrote:

Dobrinja has been under complete blockade for three weeks. Since 2 May when mines were set along the road by Mojnilo and the road by the airport blockaded, this settlement became a huge [concentration] camp, and its 40,000 residents are kept as hostages. If this ever ends, very few of them will cross these roads again and not have severe psychological trauma . . .

It's not necessary to blame the terrorists for this so-called Auschwitz, because no curse or appeal can touch their hearts, as they were told to leave the people to starve and die in inhuman ways. While western countries are still mourning for Marlene Dietrich, who is as old as this century, on the doorstep of their countries, genocide against children is going on. (1992b)

Three days later Hromodžić returned to this theme in an article entitled “Doktori” (Doctors):

Doctor Faust, Doctor Jekyll, Doctor Mabuse, Doctor Mengele, and Doctor Karadžić. The connection between these five doctors is their common title of unsuccessful healers.

The first three names from this list are imaginary characters from literature. The last two doctors from the same list are famous for the monstrous things they have done in the last fifty years of this century.

Doctor Mengele used concentration camps and hundreds of thousands of people for his experiments. On the other side, Doctor Karadžić used the entire population of one country, around four and one-half million people, for his experiment.

The best example of his monstrous experiments is the settlement of Dobrinja. Forty thousand citizens of this settlement are now forced to hide inside their homes like mice inside their holes. First of all, his army was shooting at anything that was moving in Dobrinja. Then, after they completely surrounded Dobrinja, without letting anyone leave the settlement, they started the bombardment. The next stage was when the aggressors started controlling the amounts of food, medicine, electricity, natural gas, and water that were getting into Dobrinja. In the last stage of this experiment, Karadžić is trying to separate families.

The thing that scares most of the citizens of Dobrinja is that they are unable to take their children to safety. The killers are very close to reaching their

final goal. The settlement is almost completely empty and the remaining citizens are scared of everything. (1992c).

While the analogy may be problematic, it is nevertheless clear that the situation in Dobrinja was extreme and, in the words of Tzvetan Todorov, the Bulgarian scholar and critic, “We would rather not hear the accounts of these extreme situations.” Yet such accounts have a larger significance. “Concentration camps . . . clearly epitomize extreme circumstances, but I am interested in them as much for themselves as for the truths they reveal about ordinary situations . . . My intent is to use the extreme as an instrument, a sort of magnifying glass that can bring into better focus certain things that in the normal course of human affairs remains blurry” (1996, 27). In besieged Dobrinja, the extreme circumstances magnify decisions made by educators about the reconstruction of schooling for Dobrinja’s children, posing fundamental questions about the purposes of schooling, and of life. For this study, the most relevant example from the Holocaust is the discussion of clandestine schooling in the ghettos during the early days of the Nazi occupation of Poland. Writing about the Warsaw Ghetto, Susan M. Kardos poses the fundamental educational questions:

Central questions about the role of education emerge from the stories of the clandestine schools, which were maintained at a time when life for the Jews was shadowed by death and despair: Why have schools? What is schooling for? Should schools prepare students for the future, provide for the present, or preserve the past? For whom should schools be organized—for . . . can be found in the story of the underground schools in the Warsaw Ghetto. It is a story of organized schooling, but also of resistance. It is a story of how schools can be used for individual survival, community continuity, and cultural endurance. (2002, 33–34)

“Why education?” she asks: “The questions remain: Given the perilous nature of the activity and the grim conditions in which it was undertaken, why did organized schooling thrive in the Ghetto? What was the purpose of the teaching and learning?” (48).

The very questions asked by Kardos were once posed by an anonymous writer who was himself confined to the Warsaw Ghetto.

But again, why should one study at all, when uncertain of the day and the moment, with no prospect of to-morrow, not knowing where one shall be, whether one shall eat and what?—How can one, in these circumstances, think of educating children? . . .

And yet, in spite of it all, there is a universal, primordial, unquenchable drive for learning, contrary to all logic and braving obstacles. How can this be explained? Let's try to analyze what propels youth to schools and learning, and bids parents to squeeze out the last penny in order to provide their children with some education, not bread alone. (Anon. 1986, 501)

The same writer concludes his description of ghetto schooling by noting, "The better the education provided, the more conscientious and serious its methods—the better founded might be the hope for their future *normalcy* [my emphasis], for their building a better central pillar of future society" (515).

Joseph Kermish also writes of the legacy of ghetto schools and the creation of a documentary record, "this desire to give testimony before future generations on all that happened . . . expressing the struggle of resistance to the cruel regime" (1962, 28). He describes the children of the Wilno Ghetto: "The ghetto children developed a deep awareness of the communion of their fate with that of their families. They proved eager to help them in their arduous struggle for life, notably in the smuggling of food into the ghetto. On the other hand the ghetto-child unconsciously tended to enclose himself in a faraway wonder-land to which he could escape, at least in fantasy, from the ghetto. A wonder-land of this sort was the ghetto school. There he imagined a different life, *a life of illusion* [my emphasis] which made him forget the terrible reality" (30).

Deborah Dwork notes the same phenomenon. "All over the ghetto, students and teachers met secretly to continue the process of education. As we have seen so often before, to go to school, to persevere with one's studies, was a basic tenet of childhood. It was an essential activity that embodied *the principal of normality* [my emphasis]: life would go on, there would be a future after this madness" (1991, 180). In the midst of the struggle for survival, schooling represented "future normalcy," to cite the anonymous writer, "some sort of normalcy," to cite Kardos, "the principal of normality," in Dwork's terms, "a life of illusion," to cite Kermish, which made children forget for the moment the "terrible reality" of the ghetto. By reconstructing the story of clandestine schools, these writers evoke echoes of the war schools of Sarajevo in the connections traced down through history of the human spirit under conditions of extremity, of a Warsaw Ghetto, of a Wilno Ghetto, of a besieged Sarajevo, and of a besieged Dobrinja.

"Iluzija normalnog života," a Sarajevan might say, "the illusion of normal life." In a letter to me explaining the phenomena of the war schools of Sarajevo, Mujo Musagić, the editor of *Prosvjetni list* (The Educational Gazette), speaks to the desperation of people whose "life in the besieged cities was equal to that in the concentration camps" and their struggle to construct a sense of normality amidst siege conditions.

The psychology of people in the besieged cities, in which tens of people were dying each day, and sometimes thousands of different caliber projectiles were falling, was trying to establish a “normal” life. Those people wished, at least in their illusions, to form a more ordinary environment that resembled a normal way of life because only in that way, could they have the desire to survive.

Life in the besieged cities was equal to that in the concentration camps. The long-term siege was destroying in people the last spark of life, of hope for a possible solution, optimism. Stage shows were performed, art galleries were opened, poetry forums and musical shows were organized; even a “Miss Besieged Sarajevo” competition was organized.

That’s how we come to “war schools.” They were also part of the normal illusions of life, although we can’t take away their numerous functions. Children did learn, teachers did hold classes, the educational process did take place on the basis of a reduced program written by the Ministry of Education. However, my impression is, the most important value of schools during the war can’t be measured by numbers and statistics but, as I would put it into words, it can be measured by the *value of the significance of life* . . .

There are many reasons why this aspect of “war school” research should be given special attention. For sure, the war schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina played a part in defending this country and its people. The war schools offered an additional sense of normal life to the children and adults; they offered strength and the belief that it is possible to survive the impossible conditions of hunger, thirst, wounding and dying. Even fighters with guns in their hands believed that there was a sense in fighting when they knew that their children were attending so-called classes . . . Even the children concluded that peace and normal life would come because they were taught everything they would need in peacetime and normal conditions. Therefore, everyone “took advantage” . . . of the belief in the possible return of peace and normal life. But sometimes during the long, war-camp life, hope and belief that peace and normal life would return, is equivalent to normal life itself. (1998)

“Ovdje niko nije normalan,” read an epitaph on the wall of a building in the heart of Sarajevo, “Nobody here is normal.” To date, nobody has yet erased the epitaph.

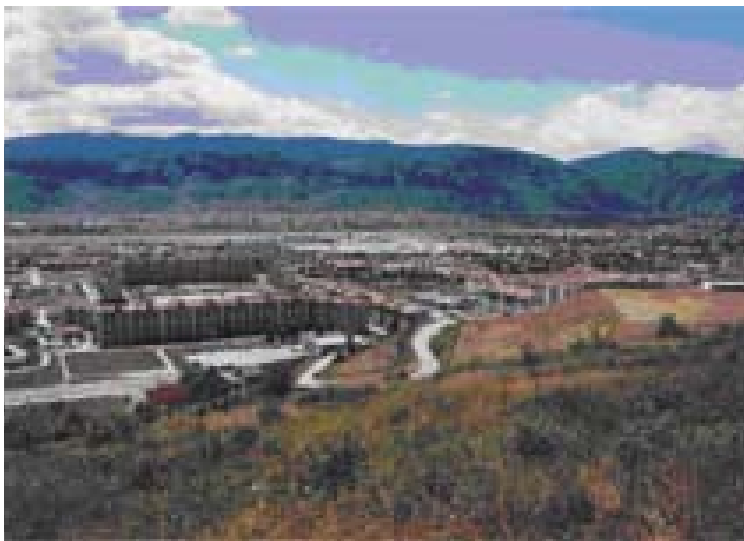
Halil Burić, the manager of the Higher Education Section of the Dobrinja War School Center and a university professor, a man who had to flee for his life during the assaults on Dobrinja, is able to address the contemporary realities of

education during the struggle for physical and psychological survival. Like Smail Vesnić, Halil Burić today reflects on the difficulty of the struggle since many of his own students served in the Bosnian army in the defense of the settlement. “My students were on the front lines,” he told me. “They were defending Sarajevo—and Bosnia, the country.” Under such extreme circumstances, where students alternated between classrooms and trenches, it was very difficult to organize the teaching process, to schedule classes, and to conduct examinations with any semblance of normal conditions. Some students could only attend class in the morning, others only in the afternoon, for others it was impossible to meet with professors. It was important, he said, for professors to accommodate their students. For those students who were defending Sarajevo, “it was very important for them to think about normal things, about classes and examinations, for example, as a means to forget the war, at least temporarily.” Looking out through his kitchen window with the frame still bearing the jagged holes of high caliber shells, Professor Burić remarked on the strategy of the enemy. “One of the major aims of the aggressor,” he said, “was to try and make it impossible for students to live a normal life.” In almost the very words of Mujo Musagić, at another time and place, Halil Burić then stated, “One of our major aims was to try and create the illusion of normal life” (*iluzija normalnog života*). “It was crazy,” he said. “Reading, writing, one day. The next day you might be killed. Just 300 meters from our school is a bloody war” (2001).

“Conditions of extremity compel one to choose what is most important” (Pawelczyńska 1979, 140). In Dobrinja, decisions made by dedicated Sarajevo educators under conditions of extremity resulted in the reconstruction of community schools in order to save the community’s children. Faced with stark choices of what was most important, Dobrinja educators in particular made difficult and courageous decisions, looking toward the future in their hope for the end of the war, creating the illusion of normality in order to survive the reality of the abnormal conditions of the siege.

Half a century after the Holocaust, the documentary record of the war schools of Dobrinja echoes the documentary record of the clandestine schools of World War II. Like the European Jews, the “desire to give testimony before future generations . . . expressing the struggle of resistance” (Kermish 1962, 28) against an enemy that would annihilate them inspired Dobrinja educators to preserve their own testimony for future generations. There was indeed “something special about Dobrinja.” “Dobrinja is a symbol of resistance,” read an article in *Dobrinja—ratne novine* (Dobrinja—The War Newspaper), written by the vice-president of the Bosnian government, Hadžo Efendić (1993, 5). And in the words of Zlatko Dizdarević, an *Oslobođenje* editor, writing of the role of Dobrinjans and their determined resistance

in the defense of Sarajevo: “Whatever the ultimate outcome, in Dobrinja Sarajevo has won its greatest battle. Actually, it would be more honest to come right out and say it: Dobrinja justifies all those secret hopes that while Sarajevo might be destroyed, it will never be vanquished. From the trauma brought on by days and nights of isolation and hiding from the bloodsuckers lurking at every doorstep, a resistance movement was born (1994, 157–58).



A view of Dobrinja looking southwest from Mojmiilo Hill across toward Mount Igman looming in the background. Dobrinja 3 lies at the bottom of Mojmiilo in the foreground with Dobrinja 2 directly behind it. The airport runway is seen below Mount Igman, and the light-colored roofs mark the Airport Settlement across from the runway. Photo courtesy of Mevsud Kapetanović.

The War for Dobrinja and the Dobrinja War School Center

After the onset of the siege of Sarajevo on 6 April 1992, the regular school year was effectively terminated on 15 May 1992, although teachers and administrators in selected locations attempted to continue the routine of schooling. Abdulah Jabučar, the deputy minister of education for the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, offered the following explanation of the “Law on the Completion of Teaching in the 1991–1992 School Year in Primary, Secondary, and Higher Schools,” which appeared in *Službeni list* (The Official Gazette), dated 5 May

1992, and provided the legal basis for closing the schools before the end of the school year: “The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Physical Culture had been following the development of events and reacted in time. When the chetniks’² euphoria gained the upper hand, we had to stop the process of teaching lest children would be killed. The Ministry then proposed, and the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued, an Executive Order with legal force concerning the end of the school year—the fifteenth of May 1992” (1994, 4). Of particular note is the reference in *Službeni list* not only to the end of the 1991–1992 school year but also to the prospects of the 1992–1993 school year that would normally follow: “As a consequence of the premature termination of this school year, the subsequent 1992–1993 school year will begin when conditions are favorable for normal instruction and work in all elementary, secondary, and higher schools, faculties and art academies in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Jabučar 1997, 176).

The month of May in Dobrinja was a prelude to almost four years of intense shelling, infantry assaults, and deadly sniper attacks. By 8 May, one of the initial assaults took the apartment complexes of Dobrinja 1 and Dobrinja 4 on the eastern end of the settlement. Shelling of the city intensified, with the middle of May especially deadly. “Criminal bombarding of the city from early morning and attempts by chetnik-terrorists to penetrate settlements,” read the 14 May account in *Oslobođenje*, “Karadžić requested air attack from Milošević” (1992a). In an article entitled, “The War Schools of Sarajevo,” Hajrija-Šahza-Jahić, then of the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo, describes the conditions, and the motivation: “April 1992, May 1992, a tale of destruction, fires, cellars, screams, sirens, the wounded and the dead, day and night fused into a gigantic hell, and in parallel, our inner compulsion to organize a school, as quickly as possible and whatever the cost, to normalize the lives of children living in totally impossible circumstances” (1996, 11).

The Simon Bolivar Elementary School, in the very heart of Dobrinja, “which went up in flames on 15 May 1992,” the very last day of the truncated school year, symbolized the destruction of a community by the obliteration of its schools (Smajlović 1994). “Ubice u školskim klupama,” (Killers in School Benches) read the headline of an article on the shelling and burning of the elementary school that appeared in the very first issue of *Dobrinja—ratne novine* published by the First Dobrinja Brigade (Tabaković 1992). The article indicts the former school director along with many of the Serb teachers as “the criminals who perpetrated these acts.” The bitterness of this article reflects the bitterness of a community that saw the horror of its teachers turn into killers (*nastavnici ubice*).

On 20 May 1992, five days after the official closure of the 1991–1992 school year, when Dobrinja was totally cut off from Sarajevo city, the very first entry

appeared in the almanac of the Dobrinja War School Center (Nastavnici centar 1992-1993a), several weeks before the Center was even officially created: “At the meeting of the Coordination Board for Dobrinja and Airport Settlements, which was appointed by the War Presidency of Novi Grad Municipality [at the time, one of nine municipalities that comprised Sarajevo city], the proposal of Smail Vesnić, representative for the school system and a Coordination Board member, concerning the formation of a Teaching Center was considered.” The work of Smail Vesnić and others in the creation of the War School Center and the reconstruction of schooling in Dobrinja was later recognized by Hajrija-Šahza Jahić and her colleagues, who cite the importance of the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo.

April 1992, May 1992, destruction, burning . . . days and nights blending into one and our mutual feeling within of creating the Institute no matter what the cost, as soon as possible. A great number of us came from all over the city . . . During those first war days, the connection with the Institute was restored by Smail Vesnić, then manager of the Section for Promoting Educational Work, who was situated in Dobrinja and who, as a worker of the Institute, immediately was involved in the organization of the socialization-educational process in Dobrinja. Zlatan Pravidur, professional advisor, was in Dobrinja too, and was also involved in the work as much as he was able taking into consideration that he was a member of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A worker of the Institute, Adnan Tetarić, deceased, tragically lost his life together with his son, a young psychologist. (Bešlija 1995, 22).

Adnan Tetarić and his son, Samir, died early on Wednesday morning, 17 June 1992, during the most intensive assaults on the settlement yet as the enemy sought to close the noose around the city. Around 6:00 a.m. that morning, Halil Burić, who lived at 28 Franca Prešerna Street in the C4 complex of the Airport Settlement, and who later became the manager of the Higher Education Section of the War School Center, woke up to find tanks in the streets outside his kitchen window. “This is not normal,” he remembered thinking during his bewilderment and shock. “Everything happened so fast. You don’t expect that your neighbor will try to kill you.” Halil Burić understood, “at that moment,” for the very first time, what was happening when he saw women and children from further up Franca Prešerna seek refuge in the garage below his apartment from the gunfire echoing through the narrow (2001).

The assault began in the Airport Settlement, the apartment complexes known as C4 and C5 alongside the airport. Tanks, howitzers, and mortars pounded the apartments into ruin, and paramilitaries terrorized the civilian population. Bewildered

families emerged from their apartments only to flee for their lives further within besieged Dobrinja. Damir Hadžić, a 16-year-old student at the time, along with his friends, rushed to the front lines to defend his neighborhood (2001). John F. Burns wrote in the *New York Times* of “a local volunteer defense force consisting of boys as young as 16 and men as old as 65 that had been holding off tank and infantry assaults by Serbian forces with firebombs and weapons that included World War II tommy-guns and hunting rifles” (1992a). On what was then Prištinska Street, Damir witnessed the executions of those who were caught by the enemy and cut into pieces by, in Hadžić’s words, “cold weapons,” in a message to those who would stay behind (2001). Among those executed in the street, in front of their families, were Adnan Tetarić, the vice-president of the Coordination Board for Dobrinja and the Airport Settlement and a counseling psychologist with the Pedagogical Institute, and his son, Samir, also a psychologist. Alija Dacić described what happened.

In the late evening hours, 16 June 1992, I was getting ready to go to the Airport Settlement. Professor Adnan Tetarić set out a few moments before me, but came right back to Headquarters all flustered and pale: “Alija, I was nearly killed, a bullet passed by my ear, I think it grazed me a little.” For this professor, this exceptional man, that bullet, which passed by his ear a little before, was not sufficient warning to him to abandon his departure for his family in the Airport Settlement. I changed an order and stayed behind at the Headquarters that evening.

In the early morning hours, 17 June 1992, strong aggressor forces from the direction of the Airport and Nedžarići with tanks, transporters, and other equipment, fortified by “Niš commandoes,” entered the perimeter to divide the Airport Settlement.

Our underarmed defenses were unable to halt the advance of the enemy and, with the residents, retreated together towards C5 settlement. Some of the residents of the Airport Settlement were taken prisoner.

In the morning, I was at Headquarters in Dobrinja. The Airport Settlement was covered all over in smoke and couldn’t be seen, but from the force of the tank and artillery shells, piecemeal running fire couldn’t be recognized. Everything appeared as a terrible thunderstorm.

The professor did not come to Headquarters that morning. Hajriz Bećirović, the commander, said in passing, “Alija, call the professor to see what is up with him.” I called the professor and he answered. I said to him: “Professor,

pull back toward C5.” His answer was: “Alija, my son was killed, shot in the middle of the heart, send Doctor Radončić to me,” and he dropped the phone. This was uttered through tears and death rattles. That morning he was killed in the street on the doorstep to his building. I believe that I am the last man in his life, who heard his voice over the telephone, and that after his son’s death he was killed. (2003)

“They almost tore him apart,” said Smail Vesnić of his colleague, “a good man,” to whom he dedicated the first issue of *Putokazi: list Nastavnog centra Dobrinja* (Highways: The Gazette of the Dobrinja Teaching Center) and to whom this essay is dedicated (Pijetlović, 1993)³.

Somewhere two thousand and three thousand residents were expelled from their homes during this initial assault. At least eighty people were killed, about forty on the first day, and an unknown number were taken prisoner, among them the wife and son of Alija Dacić, “with more than around 200 women, children and a lesser number of men.” These civilian captives were first taken to an airport hanger across the road from C4 settlement, and then incarcerated in the Kula restaurant, transformed into a prison camp, in Lukavica, many of whom were tortured and many of whom disappeared. They are still missing (Dacić 2003).



A group of elementary students walking to school under cover of sand-bagged dumpsters used as sniper screens in besieged Dobrinja. Photo courtesy of Mevsud Kapetanović.

On the morning of 18 June, some twelve thousand shells of various types fell on Dobrinja within a four-hour period, according to Ismet Hadžić (2001). Burns wrote: “In the two months that Sarajevo has been under siege by Serbian nationalist troops, a still more pressing drama has been developing, mostly unwitnessed by outsiders . . . Dobrinja, less than four miles from the city center, has been the site of a siege within a siege, a suburb of about 35,000 people that has been surrounded by Serbian troops, tanks, and artillery for more than 10 weeks . . . Serbian commanders appeared to be aiming at taking complete control of an arc of territory on the western edge of the city, including Dobrinja, which has been one of the last strongholds of Bosnian Government loyalists on the city’s periphery” (1992a).

These attacks took most of the Airport Settlement, further reducing the size of besieged Dobrinja and establishing a Bosnian Serb salient. This became the front line for the rest of the war, yet “small groups of courageous men,” in the words of Omer Musić, one of those men, in the absence of a Bosnian army, defended that line against impossible odds. “That line held through Dayton,” he recalls, in reference to the Dayton Peace Accords, and he “remained on that line, in front of his own building [from 17 June 1992] until March 1993” (2001). Today, a small memorial behind the C5 complex looks out over the airport to honor the sacrifice of twenty-seven men of C4 and C5 who died while holding the line, including Adnan and Samir Tetarić.

According to Ismet Hadžić, these mid-June assaults made Dobrinja residents realize the nature of *čišćenje terena*, literally, cleansing the ground, or what we now term ethnic cleansing (*etničko čišćenje*). “People really didn’t believe that something like this would happen,” he said. “Only then, with the heavy attacks on the Airport Settlement, did people understand” (2001). Unless besieged Dobrinjans continued to hold the line, they too would become victims of a strategy designed to cleanse Dobrinja of its non-Serb residents, seize the western half of the city, and create a Bosnian Serb capital of the Republika Srpska, the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everyone in Dobrinja felt a “continuous fear of what the next hour would bring,” wrote Zlatko Dizdarević, knowing that if Dobrinja fell, as the Airport Settlement had fallen, the violence inflicted upon those who remained behind, witnessed in the executions on the streets of the Airport Settlement, would be merciless (1994, 157).

On 6 July 1992, the First Dobrinja Brigade of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was officially formed to organize the defense of the settlement, and Ismet Hadžić was appointed brigade commander.

The anxieties and hopes of 35,000 people poured forth today [12 July] as a convoy of United Nations relief trucks crept across no man’s land and into

the devastated landscape of Dobrinja, penetrating a siege-within-a-siege that has turned the Sarajevo suburb into a ghetto of hunger and death.

For 71 days, Dobrinja has been the hardest-hit area of this besieged city, cut off from the rest of the Bosnian capital by Serbian troops who have attacked it with artillery, anti-aircraft guns and sniper fire.

The high-rise suburb was built to serve as the athletes' village for the 1984 Winter Olympics, and its plight has transfixed the rest of the city's 400,000 inhabitants, who have found inspiration in accounts of the residents' endurance under fire. (Burns 1992b).

With the arrival of the UN convoy on 12 July, the first humanitarian aid arrived in Dobrinja after seventy-one days under total blockade. Canadian UNPROFOR troops had taken control of the airport alongside Dobrinja on 29 June. On the same day, Bosnian army troops assaulted the enemy on Mojmiro Hill and, in the days to follow, occupied the ridgeline overlooking Dobrinja. With the airport in the hands of the UN, and Bosnian army troops on Mojmiro, the siege within a siege of Dobrinja that began the weekend of 2–3 May was finally broken. The enemy now at besieged Dobrinja only at either end of the settlement.

“The educational system was a function of defense,” said General Hadžić. “In order to survive the specific conditions of the siege, I got a copy of Churchill’s book of the defense of London during World War II. I remembered Churchill’s words, that everything was a function of defense.” Hadžić recalled how he integrated the educational structures, initially developed under the direction of Smail Vesnić, with civil defense operations. “I called Fuad Babić, the coordinator of civil defense for Dobrinja. I told him that my idea was to gather all the intellectuals in Dobrinja to organize all the schools—preschool, elementary, secondary—to give people a purpose for living” (2001). Dated 3 August 1992, one month after Ismet Hadžić took command of the First Dobrinja Brigade, the “Order Concerning the Establishment of a Teaching Center,” signed by Fuad Babić, the commander of Civil Defense Headquarters for Dobrinja and what remained of the Airport Settlement, officially created the parameters of the Dobrinja War School Center. The order read as follows:

On the basis of the indicated emergency, and in the aim of organizing education and socialization in Dobrinja and the Airport settlements, I
ORDER

1. the organization of the Teaching Center of Dobrinja and Airport settlements.
2. I designate the rooms of the Games Club for the Teaching Center.
3. The Teaching Center will operate according to the curriculum which the Teaching Center Council will enact.
4. I designate SMAIL VESNIĆ, deputy director of the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo, as manager of the Teaching Center.
5. The Teaching Center will work with the Inter-Municipal Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo in this process.
6. The order takes effective IMMEDIATELY. (Babić 1992)

Copies of the order went to the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute back in Sarajevo, Novi Grad Municipality, and the War School Center. The order (*naredba*) signed by Fuad Babić is reiterated almost verbatim by the directive (*odluka*) signed by Adila Muhamedagić, director of the Pedagogical Institute, on the very same day. Consistent with the Babić order, the directive reinforces the working relationship between the institute and the Teaching Center under the direction of Smail Vesnić, a deputy director of the institute himself (Muhamedagić 1992). The integration of educational administration in Dobrinja under Civil Defense Headquarters and, in particular, the integration of military operations and civilian services such as education under a central command, was seen by General Hadžić as a necessity to ensure the psychological survival of the community. Given its isolation from military headquarters and civilian government offices in Sarajevo, General Hadžić viewed Dobrinja as an entity unto itself and, for all practical purposes, on its own in a struggle for survival. “Dobrinja was the most beautiful place during the war,” General Hadžić said to me, given the purity of the common goal of resistance against the enemy, and in contrast to the infighting, the criminal gangs, and the black market back in Sarajevo. “It was much more beautiful in wartime than it is now,” he said a bit wistfully. “Dobrinja was like a small state during the war, and everything was under control” (2001). General Hadžić became something of a mythic figure, considered a hero of Bosnia by some, and cited in books and film; to others he is more controversial for “his iron-fisted control of the district and of his independence from the Bosnian government” (Burg and Shoup 2000, 139).

If education was a function of defense, and the organization of schools was a priority of the military, it is nevertheless clear that well before General Hadžić

took command, planning was underway for the reconstruction of schools (as noted in the 20 May almanac entry citing the proposal by Smail Vesnić for the creation of the Dobrinja War School Center). And while Ismet Hadžić may be the most prominent name associated with Dobrinja, it was Hajriz Bećirović and Adnan Tetarić who together forged the connection between military and civilian government and, with Smail Vesnić, created the organizational framework in order to establish “the educational system [as] a function of defense.” Hajriz Bećirović, as commanding officer of Territorial Defense (TO) forces, organized the defense of Dobrinja during spring 1992 prior to the formation of the First Dobrinja Brigade and recognized the necessity of civilian involvement in the besieged community and a civilian government in support of military operations: “Since Dobrinja was cut off, not only from its own municipality of residence but from the rest of Sarajevo and BiH, we had to step forward forming a body of civil government, which the people called a civilian government . . . It was imperative to organize the Dobrinja territory in a new, wartime manner [and] that I form a new popular government . . . The actual popular government body in which direct participation of the endangered people was not formed in the war until the month of May 1992. The first body of the new popular government, which the people of Dobrinja formed themselves, was the Provisional Self-Help Board which consisted of all structures of military and civilian life. The first president of this body was Adnan Tetarić (Bećirović 2003, 96).

With the formation of the Provisional Self-Help Board that evolved from within the Dobrinja community as an unofficial and interim “organ of popular government,” the mechanism was set in place for the development of an official, civilian government structure as an extension of existing municipal government to complement military operations. A 28 May 1992 letter from Adnan Tetarić to the War Presidency of Novi Grad Municipality proposes the formation of a Coordination Board “as an organ of the municipality” and outlines the spectrum of civilian services required, including schools, for a community under siege:

We are putting forward to you that within the framework of our authority, a decision is made concerning the formation of a Coordination Board for Dobrinja and the Airport Settlements as a body of the municipality which will be in effect as long as the circumstances of the war encirclement of this settlement lasts.

The Provisional Self-Help Board nominates to the Coordination Board:

1. Hajriz Bećirović, Commander, Territorial Defense
2. Adnan Tetarić, Vice-President
3. Dževdet Radončić, Member for Health Services
4. Rasim Tahirović, Member for Ministry of Internal Affairs Services
5. Smail Vesnić, Member for School Services
6. Rabija Bajraktarević, Member for Housing and Public Utility Services
7. Fuad Babić, Member for Civil Defense and Well-Being of Residents
8. Kemal Aljičević, Member for General Financial and Economic Services
9. Dževad Džiho, Member for Citizens' Information Services. (Bećirović 2003, 96–97).

In response, dated 1 June 1992, Ismet Čengić, president of the War Presidency of Novi Grad Municipality, wrote that a decision was adopted concerning the Coordination Board:

1. The formation of the Coordination Board for Dobrinja and the Airport Settlements, in its entirety, is in accordance with the order of the War Presidency of the Municipality concerning the formation of crisis headquarters in the local communities in the territory of the municipality.
2. As long as the complete encirclement of Dobrinja and the Airport Settlements lasts, the Coordination Board has united authority for the organization of life in the conditions in which it is situated . . .
3. The War Presidency approves the proposal of the members of the Coordination Board. (Bećirović 2003:97).

The Coordination Board provided the structural framework for the organization of civilian services as conceived by Hajriz Bećirović, the military commander, and Adnan Tetarić, whom he personally chose as his civilian counterpart. In his own words, reflecting upon those days, and in very emotional terms, Hajriz Bećirović told me: “Dobrinja was in bad shape. It was totally surrounded. I was aware of how difficult everything was, and I had no experience in this. I was looking for important people who would try to help out. We had a military command, but we were thinking

about how to create a civilian government. I wanted to establish the institutions of a civilian government. We decided that the civilian government should be placed under the military command. This was upside down, but it was war. It was Adnan's initiative to form a Coordination Board, but he wanted to name me as president. I disagreed. I said I am the military commander. He said that as the commander you have the power" (2004). Bećirović put Adnan Tetarić in charge of the civilian government by virtue of his position as vice-president of the Coordination Board, and then named Smail Vesnić, a deputy director of the Pedagogical Institute, together with Adnan Tetarić, a psychologist with the Pedagogical Institute, as the person in charge (povjerenik za prosvjetu) of "school services." Just as he recognized the initiative of Adnan Tetarić in the formation of the Coordination Board, Bećirović acknowledged the role of Smail Vesnić creating the Dobrinja War School Center: "While it was my idea to organize the schools, I put Smail together with Adnan on the Coordination Board with responsibility for school services. Having in mind his experience, it was Smail's idea to form the Dobrinja War School Center. Smail Vesnić created the Dobrinja War School Center" (2004).

Although the 20 May 1992 entry in the almanac notes that "the proposal of Smail Vesnić, representative for the school system and a board member, concerning the formation of a Teaching Center was considered" at the Coordination Board meeting, the 10 June 1992 entry indicates that the board approved the formation of the Dobrinja War School Center almost two months prior to the official order. "At the meeting of the Coordination Board, the decision concerning the formation of a Teaching Center was approved. Smail Vesnić, deputy director of the Inter-Municipal Pedagogical Institute Sarajevo, is in charge for its organization and work" (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a). The 12 July 1992 entry notes that "the premises of the former Games Club are given to the War School Center." The Games Club was located in a shopping area on what was then called USAOJ (United Council of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia) or AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) Boulevard that ran through the heart of Dobrinja just behind Simon Bolivar Elementary School. The task of converting it for the administration and operation of schooling in Dobrinja was immense.

Entries in the almanac throughout July show that work was underway well before publication of the official order of Civil Defense Headquarters on 3 August 1992. This planning is clearly seen in a document dated July 1992 entitled, "The Basic Work Program of the Teaching Center in 1992," developed by the War School Center in concert with the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo and leading to the eventual adoption of the "Basic Work Program" (*Programska osnova rada*) on 6 August 1992. Among the basic objectives and tasks were the following:

- to plan, program, and implement all activities in the field of education which will contribute to faster normalization of life and work in the settlement with an aim of increasing the total defense capabilities.
- to initiate, direct, and offer assistance for completion of remaining work in the 1991-1992 school year in the schools of Dobrinja.
- to assist and direct activities . . . based on regulations with legal power, to determine conditions on temporary internal organization, systematization, and allocation of employees in institutions in the fields of education, science, culture, and sports, during war or immediate war danger.
- to offer appropriate professional services to the users in an instructive and consultative manner for successful continuation of schooling on the basis of the program of work for primary and secondary schools.
- to register, program, and organize examinations in the Teaching Center in cooperation with the Rectorate of the University of Sarajevo, based on the Guidelines concerning the examination schedule, the time and place where examinations will take place in the higher education institutions of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Teachers' Council of the Center shall discuss in detail current problems in the education and socialization of students and shall undertake concrete measures in this regard. (Medjuopštinski pedagoški zavod and Nastavni centar Dobrinja, 1992:5–6).

Of particular note is that, the “Basic Work Program” makes specific reference to the conditions of elementary and secondary education: “Along with other things, all aspects and possibilities shall be analyzed for repair of existing [elementary] school buildings, as well as other projects, especially secondary education and socialization and, in that sense, to generate worthy proposals to appropriate institutions for the establishment of a secondary school in Dobrinja” (6). The basic objectives and tasks are followed by what translates as “Programs of Instructive Teaching” (*Programi instruktivne nastave*) which are analogous to curricular guidelines for the organization of instruction. These guidelines provide an outline for the range of subjects in the curriculum at the preschool, elementary and secondary school, and university levels, and were compiled by a similar range of instructors.

In addition to the objectives and programs, the document identifies seventeen members of the Teachers' Council (*Nastavničko vijeće*) of the Center, established 19 July 1992, that included representatives from the university faculties; teachers from Sarajevo schools; two principals of Dobrinja elementary schools; Enes Kujundžić, deputy minister of education of the Republic; Severin Montina, director of the Republican Fund for Secondary Education; and Smail Vesnić. Eight members of the Teachers' Council were appointed as section managers (*rukovodilac*) with responsibilities for the Center's eight educational sections, to include preschool, elementary education, secondary education, and higher education. There was also a coordinator for culture and public activities and a manager for information. Asad Nuhanović, who was manager for the programming and development section, was also in charge of coordination with civil defense agencies. While section managers would change over the years of the war, there are several important names for the purposes of this study: Smajo Halilović and then, most notably, Seniha Bulja, managers of the Elementary Education Section; and Zlatun Pravidur and, most notably, Ilija Šobot, managers of the Secondary Education Section. These individuals, working under the administrative framework of the Center, were given the initial responsibility of meeting the objectives outlined in the "Basic Work Program" for the reconstruction of elementary and secondary schooling within Dobrinja during the long hard summer of 1992.

The significance of the July "Basic Work Program" as a framework for schooling in Dobrinja, and as a forerunner of the more comprehensive program developed during the fall, is belied by the simple notation that closed the document: "The Teachers' Council of the Center Council adopted this Program at the meeting of 6 August 1992" (Medjuopštinski pedagoški zavod and Nastavni centar 1992, 83). A simple notation in the almanac on 6 August, although underlined, reads almost as an afterthought as well: "At this session, the Work Program of the Teaching Center was adopted," followed by, "The day was tumultuous with heavy firing" (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a).

However, the entries in the almanac during those August days prior to the opening of the 1992–1993 school year point to the complexity of the tasks and the increasing intensity of the workload. The Dobrinja War School Center was clearly up and running, but notations of the siege outside periodically intrude into the daily flow of events.

- 8 August 1992 (Saturday): The Center did not work because of the danger of shelling and heavy firing.

- 9 August 1992 (Sunday): The commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Dobrinja, Ismet Hadžić, visited the Teaching Center. He was accompanied by Fuad Babić and others . . . After their departure, three shells fell in front of the Center and caused great panic. Four people from the Teaching Center were injured, two slightly and two heavily. Paintings were damaged, the entrance door was destroyed, mirrors were broken.
- 15 August 1992 (Saturday): Every day we are accepting and registering students for exams. At 6:00, two shells fell in front of the Teaching Center, and one onto “Solid” [a business across the street]. At that time, 40 people were in the Center. Fortunately, only two young men were slightly injured. Great material damage was done. After that the training continued.
- 21 August 1992 (Friday): Regular training for members of the Armed Forces of RBiH continues. Consultations with teachers from the “Stairway Schools” [*Haustorska škola*] from Dobrinja III. It was suggested that the “Work Program” be developed and a work journal [*dnevnik rada*] of teachers be maintained. Consultations of teachers with students continue.
- 22 August 1992 (Saturday): Increased activities concerning the selection of directors of the elementary schools in Dobrinja, through contact with the director of the Center with the municipal organs of Novi Grad municipality. Creation of materials for the initiative for opening of a *gimnazija* [gymnasium: an academic secondary school] in Dobrinja. (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a).

On 28 August 1992, just prior to the regular beginning of the new school year, the headline of an article in *Oslobođenje* posed the question: “Gimnazija Opens in Dobrinja?” The subheading noted: “Directors of the majority of elementary schools in the region of Novi Grad Municipality are appointed; Gimnazija in Dobrinja [is created] with four sections.” The article updates the reader on the educational situation in Novi Grad municipality, and especially in Dobrinja:

The arrival of September always signified the beginning of the new school year. Will that be in this wartime, it is difficult to say, although it is evident that all competent organs pursue maximum efforts so the work of schools will be normalized and the functioning administrative organs restored. The War Presidency of Novi Grad Municipal Assembly abolished former administrative organs in the elementary schools. Then instead of school

boards, councils, and directors of the schools, steering and supervisory boards were formed and the director of the schools appointed . . .

During these days the decision on appointing directors in the majority of elementary schools in the region of Novi Grad Municipal Assembly was passed . . . in Nikola Tesla Elementary School, Faruk Jabučar . . . in Dušan Pajic-Dašić Elementary School, Narcis Polimac, in Simon Bolivar Elementary School, Senahid Topić . . .

The War Presidency of Novi Grad Municipal Assembly supported the initiative of the Teaching Center in Dobrinja establishing four sections of the gimnazija with 160 students, in view of the fact that currently in Dobrinja the teaching staff has permission for the work of one secondary school institution . . . Although only a small portion of the secondary school students of Dobrinja will attend this gimnazija, this wartime initiative deserves the attention and support of all authorized authorities (Oslobodenje 1992b).

Although Dobrinja had three elementary schools prior to the war and now had three elementary school directors (but no school buildings), the elementary school administrative framework remained in place. It is clear, however, that this structure had changed with the creation of the War School Center. A gimnazija was proposed that would serve not only as an academic preparatory school for the university but also as the administrative coordinator for all Sarajevo secondary schools with students in Dobrinja under the direction of the Center. The severity of the siege forced Dobrinja educators to confront educational realities during the summer of 1992, much earlier than in most areas of the city. They had to provide for safety of the children as well for their education. Dobrinja is discussed in these very terms in a Pedagogical Institute document, “Work Program in Wartime Conditions for 1992,” whereby “a model of educational work in Dobrinja,” to quote Seniha Bulja (1994), became a model of educational work for Sarajevo (1994): The Institute document, which speaks to all Sarajevo:

The advisors of the institute will take an active part in the compilation of instructional programs under war conditions for elementary and secondary education which means compilation of operational plans for individual subjects, compilation of technical guidelines for stated programs, and repeating programs and processing missed instruction from the previous school year.

To this end, the experience gained in the operation of the Dobrinja Teaching Center, which links all segments of education, culture, and information, and represents a novelty in our educational system, should be used in view of the

efficient and successful organization of all activities . . .

The new situation requires, on the part of school institutions, a swift and efficient restructuring and different organization at the internal and external levels. The experience gained in the operation of the Dobrinja Teaching Center should be used here (Medjuopštinski pedagoški zavod 1992, 4).

Through the War School Center, educators in Donrinja were able to reconstruct schooling in their besieged settlement and plan for the completion of the 1991–1992 school year as well as the beginning of the 1992–1993 school year. In doing so, they created “a model of educational work” that could be implemented by working with advisors from the Pedagogical Institute. In the words of Melita Sultanović, one of those institute advisors in the forefront of educational reconstruction, “Everything was an improvisation . . . The idea was to normalize the situation for the children, to start first with programs in one location [Dobrinja] and then implement these programs throughout other parts of the city . . . but we were the cell of the organization” (1998). The significance of school organization and the role played by Smail Vesnić in implementing school programs is noted by Hajriz Bećirović: “Special measures (on ‘the government-level’) were undertaken to organize the work of schools. These dealings were considered as special assignments. Smajo Vesnić, who was responsible for schools, worked in the best possible manner to ensure that students completed the 1992–1993 school year successfully (like all other war years). That had a great impact on strengthening morale for the battle of the fighters and the people” (2003, 100).



An arts class of ninth and tenth grade students who had attended the Skender Kulenović Elementary School, which was shelled and burned to the ground, in a makeshift classroom. The teacher is Ćar Smajil who also served as a soldier. Photo courtesy of Mevsud Kapetanović.

Elementary Education and the “Stairway Schools” of Dobrinja

“The children of Dobrinja can’t go to school,” wrote Seniha Bulja, the manager of the Elementary Education Section of the War School Center. “They don’t have any. These schools are dead and destroyed monuments. It is war” (1994, 1). Within a month after the start of the siege the three elementary schools in the settlement had become casualties of the war. Dušan Pajić-Dašić Elementary School, on the eastern end of the settlement, was directly on the front line, “full of bullet holes,” since it was now occupied by the defenders of Dobrinja, “and now it looks like an old, empty castle.” Bulja continues, “Until yesterday this school was alive, happy, and its doors were wide open for the little ones . . . Its doors are still wide open but now that school is empty. One can easily get killed just by being next to it” (1). Nikola Tesla Elementary School, on the western end of the settlement, just across the street from the C4 complex of the Airport Settlement, was directly on the front line as well. It too was “full of bullet holes,” but the defenders of Dobrinja, who now occupied the school, held the line there during the mid-June assaults on the Airport Settlement.

As for Simon Bolivar Elementary School, located in the middle of the settlement, Seniha Bulja writes, “Simon Bolivar School, even though being burned to charcoal, again is an everyday enemy target” (1994:2). In the words of Mustafa Smajlović, writing in *Dobrinja Danas* (*Dobrinja Today*), “‘The school does not exist, but its students and teachers do,’ it was said, on changing the name of the school ‘which went up in flames’ on 15 May 1992. From the cultural-entertainment program, which was arranged by the students and teachers, and which was enthusiastically received by all those present, we picked out the best literary and artworks on the theme, ‘SCHOOL IN FLAMES’” (1994). Another article refers to the Serb teachers in the school as “chetniks,” “criminals” who plotted the war during school “parties”:

“No matter how hard the bandits from the hills worked with shells and crushing fire on the places where the criminals plotted and performed, they will never get away with it, simply because justice is always on the side of truth. For this reason the 12 shells which the chetniks fired on the charred remnants of Simon Bolivar Elementary School, and a few incendiary rounds, to incinerate to the ground what has remained of the documentation of the criminals, who prepared ‘a party’ in the building, don’t have any effect. There are no more secrets concerning everything that happened to this school and the criminals who came out of this building (Tabaković 1992, 15).

Dobrinjans' perception of the enemy, of the assaults on their elementary schools, and of their former teachers as "killers," resulted in a kind of reverse cleansing in order to eliminate all traces of "the criminals." On 10 April 1994, two years into the war, Smajlović's article, "The Schools Will Carry the Names of Our Writers," highlighted "the ceremony on the occasion of the change of names" of two of Dobrinja's three elementary schools. Thus Simon Bolivar was renamed Skender Kulenović Elementary School and Nikola Tesla was renamed Ćamil Sijarić Elementary School (1994). For some reason, Smajlović does not mention the third school, Dušan Pajić-Dašić, which was renamed Osman Nuri Hadžić at the beginning of 1994 (Osnovna škola Hadžić). These names, of course, reflect a particular Bosnian rather than Yugoslav literary tradition befitting the creation of a new identity in opposition to the Yugoslav state that supported the objectives of its surrogate, the Republika Srpska.

To resolve the lack of school buildings, Seniha Bulja organized "the first 'stairway school' [*haustorska škola*] in this part of Dobrinja," in the apartment complex known as Dobrinja 2B. Classes began on a Friday, 19 June 1992, "in a building that was on the front line. You will have to admit," she wrote at the time, "that took cheek and courage" (1994, 1). Although perhaps a more accurate translation is "corridor school," the common reference is to stairway schools that occupied the hallways and stairways of apartment buildings as well as basements, shelters, utility rooms, and private apartments. Located in a shelter (*sklonište*) along a narrow lane known then as Salvador Allende Street, in stairways number 5, 9, and 11, the 2B Stairway School was a stone's throw from the front line at the end of the street where Bosnian defenders occupied Dušan Pajić-Dašić Elementary School. Classes met everyday for two hours, from 10:00 to 12:00 a.m., because "that time period was the safest." Two groups of students attended on a regular basis: four students in Group A (two students in grade three, one in grade four, and one in grade six), and five students in Group B (three in grade five and two in grade eight). The two groups rotated around a regular class schedule that included mathematics, Bosnian language, art, physics, chemistry, and music. "Above the names of the students written on the wall, it says: *First Stairway School 'Dobrinja 2B.'*"

The children of this street, these nine little kids, sat bravely at their desks which were not standard, they were not for students, they were made out of canvas, they were warped, but they are fine, it is possible to sit down. The student classroom is small. Nine of them can barely fit together . . . The classroom has three walls. The fourth is a hallway and it leads outside of the stairway onto the street in front of the building . . .

The source of light for the classroom is a student-made candlelight. The way it's made is by filling half a glass with oil and half with water. Then two thin cotton lines are taken through the cork of a wine bottle and placed in the glass. When those cotton lines are soaked in oil, they are lit and they stay lit as long as there is oil. (Bulja 1994, 3).

From the work journal (*Dnevnik rada*) (Bulja 1992a) of the Salvador Allende Stairway School, it is clear that the regular class schedule was organized around specific topics and learning objectives for each class and developed from a regular curriculum that included mathematics and the sciences. Bulja notes that teachers also attempted to talk with students about contemporary events, introducing classes on first aid and civil defense, in order to confront the reality of a war that was occurring just down the street from their modified classroom. Furthermore, teachers made an attempt to adapt the regular subject matter to address the implications of such a dangerous situation. Thus themes for art classes included such topics as "War in My Street," "War in Dobrinja," "War in Sarajevo," and "War in Bosnia and Herzegovina"; instructional units (*nastavne jedinice*) for music included "Patriotic Songs of Bosnia and Herzegovina"; and "socialization" objectives for literature (what we might call affective objectives) included "the development of patriotism toward Bosnia and Herzegovina." Bulja writes:

Before the implementation of the program, it was necessary to talk with the children and, in a way, explain what was happening around us. These children did not understand where this sudden hatred and evil come from. You will admit to yourself that even after all these things that we have lived through, it still is not quite clear . . .

The students in higher grades who took chemistry were also educated about poisonous gasses, nerve agents, and means of protection. It sounds impossible but it happened. Most of this information obtained by the students came in useful, not just for them, but also for their parents.

The Teaching Center supported such work with a justified warning on the very dangerous situations which are ever-present in this part of Dobrinja. (1994, 3).

The Dobrinja 2B Stairway School could not have existed without the support of the Dobrinja War School Center and the parents of the children who attended the school, not to mention civil defense, local government, and military authorities.

Bulja specifically mentions the parents' contribution seen in the first parent-teacher meeting at the War School Center held on 17 June 1992 during the height of the enemy assault that resulted in the loss of much of the Airport Settlement. At this meeting "we decided that classes would be held in the area of the shelter at [stairway] number nine" (1994, 4). Two days later, classes for students in the Dobrinja 2B Stairway School in the extreme western end of the settlement had begun, right on the front line. The students who attended the first class session were even given a homework assignment that consisted of three questions, one each on biology, chemistry, and physics. The theme for the art class that day: "War in Dobrinja" (Bulja 1992a).

Much of the work of organizing the stairway schools of Dobrinja during those early days, especially for preschool and elementary students, was accomplished by individuals who had no experience as teachers. The listing of the fourteen teachers for the Emile Zola Stairway School, for example, located at Emile Zola Street number 3 and 5, running perpendicular to Salvador Allende Street in Dobrinja 2B, included the following individuals: one student in the Music Secondary School, one undergraduate student at the Fine Arts Academy, one Master's student in economics, two economists, two engineers, one retired teacher, one retired professor, one political science professor, one preschool teacher, two elementary school teachers, and one whose occupation is not listed. These fourteen teachers taught forty-five students organized into six different classes: preschool, grades one and two, grades four and five, grade six, grade seven, and grade eight (Nastavni centar, 1992a).

Faiza Kapetanović, who calls herself "an amateur in this line of work," organized a stairway school in "a dark basement area" of Marka Oreškovića Street number 9, just behind Simon Bolivar Elementary School in the middle of the settlement, in the area known as Dobrinja 2A, "which was the safest place for our gatherings." That dark basement "became something of an oasis, a world that did not have a place for hatred and death." With a total of twenty-six children ranging in age from four to sixteen at the outset, and nine preschool children who "came to join us from neighboring stairways," the Lily Stairway School included students from preschool through eighth grade. "To be honest, I am not an educator," Kapetanović writes, "but the desire to preserve the mental health of the children became stronger and stronger. We came together and that is how the 'Lily' Stairway School came to life. Forgive me for being personal, but you will understand that this school is a part of me, a wonderful experience and a memory for the rest of my life" (1994, 1). The Lily Stairway School began work on 15 May 1992, the very day that Simon Bolivar Elementary School was shelled and burned to the ground, and the very day that the school year officially ended.

Given the chaotic conditions in May and June 1992—the premature end to the school year, uncertainty about the next year, continued assaults on the settlement—the educators and volunteers who were responsible for the organization of stairway schools had, at the very least, two very specific objectives. First, the creation of the stairway schools appears to be in direct response to the concern of parents and educators to somehow complete the 1991–1992 school year without the loss of class time. Seniha Bulja writes that “the school program covered the material that was planned for April, May, and June of that school year (1994:3). As noted in the July “Basic Work Program,” one of the primary objectives of the Center was “to initiate, direct, and offer assistance for completion of the remaining work in the 1991–1992 school year in the schools of Dobrinja” (Medjuopštinski pedagoški zavod and Nastavni centar, 1992, 5).

Second, the stairway schools addressed concerns for the safety and sanity of the children, particularly the elementary school students, by keeping them off the streets where they were fair game for shells and snipers. Faiza Kapetanović writes of the traumatic effect of the war on the children as the siege lines tightened: “Wartime situations have a deep psychological impact on people. To put it very mildly, all life habits change and tension, fear, and uncertainty steadily break down the walls of tolerance until reaching the crisis point. War and the horror it causes have the longest and hardest effect on childrens’ psyche. Personally, I realized that during long stays in basement shelters, beside myself from detonations and ominous premonitions. I watched the children closely and almost sensed the change that happened in them. Overnight they grew older. Their happy eyes, those mirrors of pure and innocent souls, lost their light, which was replaced by some terrible darkness. On the other hand, the older ones were concerned with safety for their very lives. That is what inspired me to gather the children from our street together” (1994, 1).

Professional educators and concerned volunteers like Seniha Bulja and Faiza Kapetanović, with hundreds of others who remain nameless here, constructed a stairway school system throughout the settlement under siege conditions designed to ensure the safety and the sanity of their students. Unfortunately they were not always successful in protecting the children. A closing notation in the work journal for the Salvador Allende Stairway School, dated 15 July 1992 reads: “Because of the dangers to which the children of this street are exposed (on the front line), work with this group of students is brought to an end on 15 July (Wednesday) 1992 . . . However, it is expected that stairway schooling at Franca Rozmana Street will include instruction for the subjects of physics and chemistry to be developed according to the same curriculum which was turned in earlier to the archives of the Dobrinja Teaching Center” (Bulja, 1992, 24).

It is significant that provision was made for the continuation of classes at another location suggesting the importance of schooling for teachers, students, and parents alike.

In the almanac of the War School Center, dated 30 October 1992, Smail Vesnić writes a particularly poignant entry concerning the hopes and dreams for the children of the stairway schools.

A lot of work is expected today at the Center. I arrived to work at 7:00 a.m. As usual, we are late. The equipment was brought in at 11:00. At 12:00 the stage was arranged. Some of the desks and chairs for the “stairway schools” were taken to Dobrinja 4 and 5. At 3:00, general rehearsal began for tomorrow’s show, “Children Singing the Hits.” The room was full as if there was a show. Hopefully everything will go well and in peace. The children had wished more than the adults for something like this to happen. Looking at their faces in their performance, it is easy to see that they could easily forget the damn war. I hope that their small smart eyes will see days of freedom. Today the whole city is under general attack by the chetniks. It is being attacked by its yesterday’s “inhabitants” who had gone to the hills, and the majority of them had just recently come down from them. They have never understood the soul of this city, of these people, of this way of living. I believe they are enjoying the air in the “hills” which they are so used to, and I hope that they will be without that air. (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a)

On the following day, a number of prominent Sarajevo artists attended the performance as guests. It followed a Catholic mass in the presence of French UNPROFOR priests as well as the Croatian priest from the area of Stup nearby.

At 2:00 the children began to arrive at the Center. It was so crowded. The event itself was fantastic. The children greeted every performer with applause. It was not important to them who the winner would be. Everyone was a winner today because they managed to beat the war with the wideness of their soul the size of their children’s hearts. The flame of peace could be seen in their eyes. (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a)

At least twenty-eight stairway schools operated across Dobrinja from spring into fall 1992 when, it appears, individual stairway schools were integrated under the administrative framework of the three existing elementary schools in preparation for the 1992–1993 school year. In her role as manager of the Elementary Education Section of the Dobrinja War School Center, Seniha Bulja notes the

assignment of each stairway school to one of the three elementary schools. In her “Notice Concerning School Regions” to the local Dobrinja communities, Bulja writes, “From 10 November 1992, in accordance with the directive of professional advice of the Teaching Center, we are informing you about provisional war districts of the school regions of Dobrinja and Airport Settlements” (1993). She speaks to the developing relationship between the Dobrinja War School Center, the three Dobrinja elementary schools, and the twenty-eight stairway schools scattered throughout the settlement:

The Teaching Center rendered all necessary professional assistance concerning the complete organization of work, not only to this school [Salvador Allende], but to all other stairway schools which operated with abbreviated interruptions in the time from June to October 1992 in every street. It was that way in the streets of Nehru, Emile Zola, Nikole Demonje, Omladinskih Radnih Brigada [Youth Work Brigade], October Revolution, Sulejman Filipović, and Petra Drapšina, and many others.

All stairway schools in Dobrinja were organized by the same principles and operated in accordance with the same programs which were designed in the Section for Elementary Education with the guidance of the Teaching Center.

According to the data from the mentioned Section, stairway schools during this period were attended by around 900 students, and 89 teachers carried out instruction ... Among the teachers, some were engineers, doctors, lawyers, and economists. All of them wanted to help those children through school and to get away from the reality of war.

The experiences in the operation of the stairway schools were possibly and perhaps certainly a reliable professional foundation for programming the shape of socialization-education work in the coming school year. It is carried out in the war regions of Dobrinja in the three existing elementary schools.

Dušan Pajić-Dašić covers the territory of Dobrinja 1, Dobrinja 2B, and Dobrinja 3B. Simon Bolivar covers the territory of Dobrinja 2A and Quadrant C5, whereas Dobrinja 3A and Dobrinja 5 are part of Nikola Tesla School. (1994, 4)

Under the direction of the War School Center and specifically, the Elementary Education Section, Dobrinja and what remained of the Airport Settlement (Quad-

rant C5) were organized into seven regions or territories (*područje*), by apartment complex, with the three elementary schools providing the administrative framework for their respective regions. These “school regions” are consistent with the local community (*mjesna zajednica*) organization, perhaps analogous to the American political ward, within the municipality (*općina*), and the political reorganization of local government in Sarajevo under siege. Based upon its location, each of the twenty-eight stairway schools was now under the administrative umbrella of one of the three elementary schools. Thus Dušan Pajić-Dašić Elementary School, whose building was occupied by soldiers, was responsible for organizing the stairway schools located in the apartment complexes of Dobrinja 1, Dobrinja 2B, and Dobrinja 3B, on the eastern end of the settlement. Nikola Tesla Elementary School, whose building was also occupied by soldiers, organized the stairway schools in the apartment complexes of Dobrinja 3A and Dobrinja 5 on the western end of the settlement. And Simon Bolivar Elementary School, whose building was shelled into ruin, organized the stairway schools of Dobrinja 2A and Quadrant C5 of the Airport Settlement in the middle.

With the development of a framework for organization of elementary education, Bulja writes of the initial administrative responsibilities, as noted previously in the “Basic Work Program of the Teaching Center in 1992,” dated July 1992, that recorded the appointments of the section managers, “As early as the month of July in the Teaching Center, special duties were defined and managers of all [eight] Sections were appointed. Smajo Halilović was in charge of the Section of Elementary Education and Socialization for a brief time, but after that Seniha Bulja was left with the task of organizing, directing, and supervising the implementation of program assignments” (1994, 4).

Regional coordinators were then selected to organize the individual stairway schools and prepare for their integration within the administrative framework of the three elementary schools:

For Dobrinja 1, Elvir Ćosić; Dobrinja 2A, Fata Trle and Fehim Adžanela; Dobrinja 2B, Mirsada Balić and Huso Peco; Dobrinja 3A, Azra Tahmaz; Dobrinja 3B, Marija Čalija; Dobrinja 5, Hatidža Rašić and Binasa Adrović; and for Quadrant C-5, Azra Kujundžić.

The task of the coordinators was to take care of all planned activities associated with the synchronization of work in the stairway schools in specific regions, to continuously update data relevant for socialization-education work, and to carry out all necessary preparations for beginning the new school year. (Bulja 1994, 4)

“The synchronization of work” of the stairway schools with the three elementary schools is systematically detailed in a November 1992 document entitled, “Basic Work Program of the Teaching Center in the 1992–1993 School Year” (*Nastavni centar 1992b*). It provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the administration and operation of each of the eight sections of the War School Center through individual work programs. The program from the Section for Elementary Education and Socialization (Odjela za osnovno obrazovanje i vaspitanje), for example, addresses the organizational framework for each of the three elementary schools and the operational plan for each of the seven elementary regions under their administration.

It notes the formation of Teachers’ Councils (*nastavničko vijeće*) at the elementary level for each of the seven regions and the number of teachers in each council. The administrative responsibility of the individual elementary schools for schooling in the local communities is seen clearly in their relationship with the Teachers’ Councils. “The work of the Teachers’ Council is managed by the directors of the parent elementary schools in Dobrinja, by territorial basis, pertaining to the designated local community in the school region” (35). In other words, there is a clear indication here that the individual stairway schools are now under the administration of the elementary school that has responsibility for that region. Furthermore, these data clearly reveal that the Elementary Education Section of the Dobrinja War School Center established educational policy for Dobrinja and thus provided the direction for reorganization of the individual stairway schools within the administrative framework that existed prior to the siege.

The July “Basic Work Program” set forth the Center’s educational objectives and clarified the many tasks at hand as well as the specific problems to be addressed. It established the organizational framework of the eight administrative sections of the Center, but also included a work program for each of these eight sections to include curricular outlines for each subject area for both elementary and secondary education. The July document provided the substantive basis for the November “Basic Work Program” that addressed the implementation of the curriculum during the 1992–1993 school year.

It then outlines the objectives to be addressed and the specific tasks at hand:

- to gather and process new data on the number of students who attend classes in elementary school and the number of engaged teachers in order to improve planning of programming activities;
- to coordinate activities with the appropriate people or institutions to secure school space in preparation for the start of the 1992–1993 school year;

- to conduct all necessary preparations (medical examinations, psychological tests, etc.) for the enrollment of first-grade pupils;
- to implement the condensed teaching program for elementary schools which was passed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports;
- to cooperate with the Armed Forces of BiH, civil defense, and local communities in the region of Dobrinja in order to achieve the objectives and tasks and with all other relevant subjects which can offer their contribution in that direction;
- to cooperate with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, the Republican Fund for Elementary Education, the Republican and the Inter-Municipal Pedagogical Institutes and with other relevant institutions for the efficiency of all activities which are undertaken in the Section for Elementary Education. (Nastavni centar 1992b, 20)

The task of gathering critical data on numbers of students and teachers in each of the seven school regions is an integral feature of the program. Whereas Seniha Bulja could only estimate the number of students and teachers in the stairway schools, the November 1992 document cites a precise total of 1392 elementary students in grades one through eight, and 92 teachers, in six of the seven Dobrinja regions. Only the data for Dobrinja 3B are lacking, with one report noting that the “data are not final” (*podaci nisu konačni*) while another notes “formation in progress” (*formiranje u toku*). A narrative later explains that “there are around 1500 elementary education students living in Dobrinja and over 100 teachers,” perhaps a general reference to the data yet to be compiled from Dobrinja 3B (20–21). There are data on the number of classes for each grade level and for each individual school, including the number of students who attended each class. Excluding Dobrinja 3B, there are twenty-six classroom locations, or *punkts* (points, from *punktovi*), throughout the six regions, a number consistent with the twenty-eight stairway schools cited by Seniha Bulja. Classroom numbers and locations changed over time, of course, depending upon wartime conditions.

The data that appeared in the work program for the Elementary Education Section were compiled with the assistance of the coordinators and the Teachers’ Councils of each region. Throughout November, Seniha Bulja, “on behalf of the War School Center,” was meeting with the Teachers’ Councils and the coordinator of each region, with the exception of Dobrinja 3B. A seventh meeting attended

by the regional coordinators, again excluding Dobrinja 3B, was held on 28 November at the War School Center. The agenda of this final meeting: “Activities to date of the coordinators of elementary education and socialization and the next assignments.” At this session, the data compiled on numbers of students, teachers, class sections, and school locations were reviewed, and the numbers cited are, by and large, consistent with the numbers that appear in the work program. The problems mentioned included not enough teachers in general, not enough qualified teachers in particular subjects, and not enough locations for classrooms. Azra Kujundžić, coordinator of Quadrant C5, notes while there are teachers for all subjects except the English language, there is only one location available for classes. Nevertheless, “The conclusion is that instruction may also begin in this region.” Binasa Adrović, coordinator for Dobrinja 5, notes that “it is also necessary at this time to receive consent of the parents in writing that his/her child go to school . . . at the parents’ meetings which need to be held before the start of the school year” (Bulja, 1992).

Mirsada Balić, coordinator for Dobrinja 2B, offers this statement: “The conclusion is that all activities concerning the organization for the beginning of a school year are completed in this region.” She also recommends that “from now on all these activities [the work of the stairway schools] be taken on by the director of Dusan Pajić-Dašić or someone from that school,” citing the elementary school that has responsibility for the 2B region (Bulja, 1992). In concluding remarks to the meeting that addresses this connection, Smail Vesnić notes that “from now on, [for] everything concerning instruction (schedule of classes, testing of children, securing of premises, etc.), the coordinators will make arrangements with the school directors” (1992). This statement clarifies transition as the individual stairway schools were integrated into educational regions.

In the concluding section of the minutes, a summary of the organizational issues is presented along with a number of questions and concerns. “Methodological and didactical guidelines” are also suggested for “elementary-socialization work” at the beginning of the new school year:

The concept of the “little schools” [stairway schools] has been accepted at the city level, and when the security situation is assessed, the 1992–1993 school year may begin.

However, as it is war, and as the society needs to be built in the postwar period, a great burden will again fall on educators. That is why we need to prepare and to adapt our work to the conditions . . . The Director has warned that the responsibilities of the teachers are huge now and that the same teachers can provide a great contribution to the normalization of the existing

situation. The Manager for Elementary Education and Socialization is to provide all anticipated documentation connected with work in the schools (Bulja, 1992).

In a concluding question, Fata Trie, one of the coordinators for Dobrinja 2A, expresses a fundamental concern for educators, parents, and students alike concerning the work done in preparation for the 1992–1993 school year. “I would like to ask whether this school year will be recognized because this needs to be said to the parents.” Smail Vesnić answers, “If all this is well organized, this school year will probably be recognized” (1992). His response, that the invaluable work of those Dobrinja educators who organized the stairway schools during the early days of the siege would not be wasted, also validated both the formation and the operation of the Dobrinja War School Center.

The purpose of compiling the data in the “Basic Work Program” was to prepare for the start of the 1992–1993 school year. The document provided the basics for “the synchronization of work” necessary for schooling to function under siege conditions, but the implementation of the program had yet to be set in motion. The official beginning of the new school year was on hold pending decisions by the Ministry of Education of the new Republic, in a country struggling for its own survival and by the Sarajevo City Secretariat for Education, in the capital of the country under siege. The “Basic Work Program” reads as follows:

The programming activities of the Section for Elementary Education and others that are participating in the realization of the tasks set forth for the 1992–1993 school year will be conducted in very difficult conditions. That is why it is the responsibility and obligation of every participant (individually) in the educational process to offer his/her best knowledge and skill in order to ease and overcome the current situation . . .

Taking into account the security situation and assessing the possibilities of educational work during the last school year, we started forming “little” stairway schools that began in stairways, shelters, and other safe spaces. In this way, the last school year, with instructive education during July, August, and September, was brought to an end. Such a concept offered very good results on the safety plan as well, and not one student had been injured during instructions in any way . . . This way of organizing instruction was also of a preventive character, so in terms of percentage, the number of children killed or injured in Dobrinja, compared to the number of killed or injured civilians, is far less than the number in the city region.

That is why we decided in this school year, based on the experience gained and in cooperation with the elementary schools in this region, to offer a possible concept of the organization of socialization-education work and themes for all of us, especially for students and their parents, and we are bringing about the new school year with certainty. (Nastavni centar 1992b, 19-21)

The reconstruction of elementary education in besieged Dobrinja offered a new framework for educational organization under siege conditions, the concept of “little schools” that would operate under the administration of local elementary schools. The development and implementation of this concept occurred in the early months of the siege with the assistance of many agencies—the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo, local civil defense authorities, command headquarters of the First Dobrinja Brigade, and the local Dobrinja communities. The primary agency responsible for these developments was the Dobrinja War School Center itself.



A group of seventh and eighth grade students, with their teacher, Elvedina Vidimlić, pose for their 1993–1994 class picture in front of their sand-bagged classroom. Photo courtesy of Mevsud Kapetanović.

Secondary Education and Gimnazija Dobrinja

Smail Vesnić and his colleagues created a new secondary school, Gimnazija Dobrinja, which began instruction on 25 January 1993, nine months into the siege. Its significance was not simply the establishment of the school itself, but that it served as the administrative center for all the students trapped within

the settlement who normally attended secondary schools across the city. In fact, the managers of the Section for Secondary Education and Socialization at the War School Center, Žlatan Pravidur, and then Ilija Šobot, supervised seven regional coordinators for the seven secondary regions of Dobrinja, twenty-two coordinators representing the vocational-technical secondary schools throughout the city, and one coordinator specifically for four of the five city gimnazija, the academic secondary schools that prepared students for the university. However, the story of the reconstruction of secondary schooling in Dobrinja begins well before the opening of Gimnazija Dobrinja.

As noted above, the July “Basic Work Program of the Teaching Center in 1992” made specific reference to the tasks at hand for both elementary and secondary education. One of those tasks was to consider establishing a secondary school in Dobrinja: “all aspects and possibilities shall be analyzed for repair of existing [elementary] school buildings, as well as other projects, especially secondary education and socialization and, in that sense, to generate worthy proposals to appropriate institutions for the establishment of a secondary school in Dobrinja” (Medjuopštinski pedagoški zavod and Nastavni centar 1992, 6). In the annals of Gimnazija Dobrinja, dated 19 July 1992, on the very same day that the Teachers’ Council for the War School Center was appointed, the entry cites the “Basic Work Program” of the Teaching Center, which will “serve the need for the establishment of the gimnazija in Dobrinja within the Section for Secondary School Education” (“Gimnazija Dobrinja 1992-1996”). The July “Basic Work Program” included a secondary work program for secondary education with a particular emphasis on the development of “Programs of Instructive Education” (Programi instruktivne nastave), the curricular organization and subject area classes for the mother language, mathematics, physics, and history. The description from the mother language section read:

To realize the instruction of a unit of planning for the months of April, May, and June, with students of secondary school, [directed toward completion of] the instructional plan and program, with special emphasis on literacy and cultural expression . . .

Implementation of the program, depending on the safety situation, will take place in the Teaching Center or at shelters and other suitable spaces.

Instruction will be performed in the settlements: Dobrinja 2, Dobrinja 3, Dobrinja 5, Quadrant C5, and the Airport Settlement. (39)

Based upon Center documents, it is clear that the development of secondary education in Dobrinja, with no secondary school at the time and, therefore, no organized cadre of secondary teachers, lagged well behind elementary education, where “stairway schools” sprang up in corridors, basements, and shelters all across the local communities. One indication of this developmental disparity is that there were only five secondary regions cited in the July program with no subdivision of Dobrinja 2 and 3 into localized areas, in contrast to the seven elementary regions. Yet, it is clear that the creation of a gimnazija was viewed by Smail Vesnić and secondary school educators as a critical element in maintaining an educational program in the besieged settlement. As explained in the July “Basic Work Program,” “To be able to achieve the educational objectives and tasks in the future more fully, a need for the establishment of a gimnazija in Dobrinja was presented. The reasons for this are not only the distance to Sarajevo and the war activities, but the great number of students and teachers in Dobrinja . . . The conditions for verification of this school are being created. The starting school premises have been secured for first-year [of high school, i.e., ninth grade] students” (41).

The November “Basic Work Program of the Teaching Center in the 1992-1993 School Year” reveals that Ilija Šobot, who had assumed the role of manager of the Secondary Education Section, and his secondary school colleagues, had accomplished an enormous amount of work since July. There was now a comprehensive work program for the Secondary Education Section that contained an operational plan for secondary schooling and a curricular framework to organize instructional plans for individual subject areas. Although the July secondary curriculum addressed only four subject areas, the November curriculum includes the scope and content of instruction in virtually all the major academic subjects, a variety of vocational classes, and civil defense as well. Some of the basic objectives for secondary education programs are:

- that students gather in organized school premises and in that way protect themselves from injury in these difficult times;
- that students prepare and complete class in order not to break the continuity of education;
- that students form and develop as healthy, physically and mentally capable, independent, and culturally enriched persons. (Nastavni centar 1992b, 42).

The basic tasks for secondary education include:

- gaining knowledge based on the achievements of modern science, technique, technology, and social development as well as enabling one for work;
- developing a responsible relationship toward work as a source of values and measures of the social and economic status of a person;
- rearing the independent personality of a human being, the critical spirit for work, moral and cultural habits and characteristics;
- preparing and training for the defense of the country and social self-protection. (42)

The November document also shows that the managers of the Secondary Education Section had gathered comprehensive data on secondary students and teachers in the local communities. This was no small task since this information had never before been collected. There were now seven secondary regions, analogous to the seven elementary regions: Dobrinja 1, Dobrinja 2A, Dobrinja 2B, Dobrinja 3A, Dobrinja 3B, Dobrinja 5, and Quadrant C5, with Dobrinja 2 and 3 now divided into their respective local communities. There were eight coordinators in the seven regions for instructional purposes, including two in Dobrinja 2A which had the largest number of secondary students.

The data indicate a total of 790 students from grades nine through twelve who registered for the 1992–1993 school year across the seven regions of Dobrinja, and there 89 teachers to teach 44 individual class sections in 14 available spaces that were converted into classrooms. All the basic secondary subject areas, along with the number of teachers by subject area, are now listed: the mother language, 8 teachers; mathematics, 8; foreign language, (English, 6; German, 1; French, 2; and Russian, 2); physics, 5; chemistry, 5; biology, 7; history, 3); geography, 3; computer and information science, 4; sociology, psychology and philosophy, 6; the arts (visual art and music), 4; vocational subjects, professional subjects, and civil defense, 3; for a total of 67 teachers available for all secondary subject areas. Given the number and variety of vocational-technical schools in Sarajevo, it is interesting that the number of teachers for vocational and professional subjects is not listed, but the narrative also indicates that a large number of “experts” with diverse profiles were living in Dobrinja. “Some of these experts (around 20) will be involved as external associates for the realization of the teaching material for the subjects from the professions and subjects from the field

of professional education” which specifically refers to vocational-technical education” (44). This number is consistent with the difference between the 67 subject area teachers and the total number of 89 teachers listed for instruction. According to the secondary work program:

Classes will begin with a condensed teaching plan and program to be prepared by the teachers of the respective subjects. These teaching plans and programs may apply until the completion and distribution of the new teaching plans and programs. The teaching material is designed for 18 working weeks for 50 percent of the regular teaching material.

The Dobrinja Teaching Center will provide new plans and programs as soon as possible, especially with subjects where great changes are expected, for example: the mother language, history, and geography. Until these plans and programs are produced, the teachers of the respective subjects are at liberty to create and carry out the teaching plan and program on their own in which the elements of the Constitution of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be fully emphasized. (51)

The November “Basic Work Program” notes that fourteen classrooms were available “in September, October, and November for the teaching material which was not covered in the last school year” (45). Clearly, the first priority for secondary schooling during the fall months of 1992 was to complete the courses that had been canceled in the spring. The stairway schools that operated during the spring and summer had accomplished this for elementary students, but there was no similar program for secondary students who were trapped inside the settlement during the siege.

The secondary work program states that with a “reduced teaching plan and program” to be offered “in the planned time, from mid-December 1992 to mid-June 1993, working in two shifts, it is necessary to provide a room for two sections or 22 rooms for a total of 44 sections” (45). In other words, the work program indicates that, by fall 1992, the administrative framework for the organization of secondary schooling to include, most notably, the secondary school curriculum, has been adapted for reduced course offerings for which teachers can now plan accordingly. In this regard, the program was intended to serve “the aim of better planning of programming activities” designed for the impending 1992–1993 school year whenever it would begin. Indeed, the beginning of the new school year would be decided by the City Secretariat for Education back

in Sarajevo and, given conditions in besieged Dobrinja, in conjunction with the Dobrinja War School Center.

As a complement to the November “Basic Work Program,” one of the most informative documents compiled by the Secondary Education Section is a three-volume set entitled, “Data on Teachers and Students: Secondary School, 1992–1993 School Year” (Nastavni centar 1992-1993b). This document is of particular importance, for it painstakingly reveals the nature of the relationship between secondary schooling in Dobrinja and the secondary schools of Sarajevo. It lists each of the twenty-seven secondary schools or secondary school centers extant in Sarajevo city and each of the 27 coordinators who were responsible for their students in Dobrinja. Information on the number of students and classes for each school or center is also provided, as are the names of the instructors for each class and a roster of all the enrolled. The difficulty of gathering such data on the 790 registered students of high school age living in Dobrinja, who had once attended twenty-seven different schools, was enormous. So too was the complex task of organizing these 790 students, across three and/or four secondary grade levels, to attend classes in their individual subject areas, according to a regular class schedule, dependent upon an academic or vocational track, at perhaps fourteen available spaces, under wartime conditions.

For example, Senada Kulenović, a chemical engineer who worked at the Occupational/Industrial Safety Institute, became the coordinator for Treća gimnazija (the Third Gymnasium), an academic secondary school located in the center of Sarajevo. At least twenty-two different subjects and thirty-one different class offerings were available to its students, including four foreign languages (English, German, French, and Latin), a variety of specialized vocational classes, and Civil Defense as a curricular subject. At least forty different instructors taught in three of the four secondary grades (there was no enrollment of first-year or ninth grade students at that time) that included four separate academic tracks for eleventh and twelfth grade students. To the best of my calculations, there were at least twenty-seven students who were enrolled at Treća gimnazija, based on November 1992 class rosters, but living, and now trapped, in Dobrinja, unable to travel into the city proper. These students would soon attend thirty-one different classes at the locations organized by the Secondary Education Section under the administration of the Dobrinja War School Center, along with students from the other three Sarajevo gimnazija. They maintained their enrollment at Treća gimnazija while attending classes in Dobrinja, under the coordination and guidance of Senada Kulenović.

The secondary work program noted that “there are students from all types of schools. The fewest number of students are tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade

students from the gimnazija” (Nastavni centar 1992b, 43). Although there were five gimnazija located in the city municipalities, the numbers cited here are based upon data from the three primary Sarajevo gimnazija. (No figures are given for the Fourth Gymnasium, and there is some confusion about which students are enrolled in gimnazija programs at the Fifth, located in the occupied suburb of Ilidža). In the three primary Sarajevo gimnazija, thirty-one second class (tenth grade) students, thirty-nine third class (eleventh grade) students, and twenty-six fourth class (twelfth grade) students were listed on their respective class rosters. Thus there were ninety-six gimnazija students in three grade levels registered to attend classes in Dobrinja for the 1992-1993 school year. There was no listing of first class (ninth grade) students who simply had no chance to take the entrance examinations for the gimnazija during the summer of 1992.

These figures suggest that there were approximately seven hundred students who had attended vocational-technical schools all across the city and who registered for classes in Dobrinja. There are coordinators listed for twenty-three vocational-technical schools, including the Pero Kosorić School Center which includes the Fifth Gymnasium, but this number is problematic since many schools were consolidated as a result of the war, and their school buildings were unusable. These schools ranged from the Economics Secondary School to the Comprehensive Electroenergy Secondary School, to the Comprehensive Wood-Forestry School, and the Railway School Center. The incredible variety of programs and courses that were devised for students who had been enrolled in such specialized occupational or vocational tracks is a testimony to those “experts” with diverse profiles living in Dobrinja who taught their classes under the administration of the Secondary Education Section.

Not all the 790 registered gimnazija or vocational-technical students could attend classes on a regular basis because many of the male students, especially in the higher grades, were also soldiers who alternated between attendance in the classroom and duty on the frontline. Some would find themselves in classrooms during the day and at the front during the night. Some would miss a semester of classes, or even a year or two. In the words of the November “Basic Work Program,” class attendance for secondary students “changes very often, because students leave, and more often return. A great number of students in the higher years are active in units of the Army of BiH, so these students need to receive special attention. This especially relates to the outlying regions of Dobrinja. When looking at the divisions of Dobrinja, the majority of students are from the center of the settlement: Dobrinja 2A, Dobrinja 2B, and Dobrinja 3A” (Nastavni centar 1992b, 43). Outer Dobrinja included Dobrinja 1, or what remained of Dobrinja 1, on the southeast edge of the settlement, Dobrinja 5 on

the northwest edge facing Nedžarići, and Quadrant C5, what remained of the Airport Settlement. The students who lived in these areas were directly on the front lines and found themselves defending their homes from the beginning of the assaults on the settlement.

Damir Hadžić, a sixteen-year old, tenth grade student, was enrolled in the Railway School Center, a vocational secondary school located in Novo Sarajevo municipality in the center of the city. When the 1991-1992 school year came to an end, he found himself defending his home “but,” he told me, “I was not the youngest” (2001). Damir lived in Quadrant C5, directly across from the airport, directly on the front line. “That’s how I found myself in a unit of the Territorial Defense,” which later became the First Dobrinja Brigade. “I didn’t feel patriotism at that time,” he said, “We only felt the need to defend our families. Patriotism only came later. It was only later that I realized what we were fighting against.”

Once the front lines had stabilized, Damir found himself in a special brigade running weapons and supplies through “no man’s land” across the airport runway between Dobrinja and territory held by the Bosnian government in Butmir. “You’re talking with a man who ran across the airport more than four hundred and fifty times” he told me, “perhaps seven times a night,” an extremely dangerous assignment necessary to supply Dobrinja, and Sarajevo, with military ordnance and humanitarian assistance before the tunnel under the airport was constructed. “During that time, I wasn’t thinking about my schooling,” he said. “I was thinking about war, and weapons.” Despite the loss of the 1992-1993 school year, his third class or eleventh grade year, Damir somehow managed to return to school one year later “as a soldier-student,” attending electroengineering classes in the facilities of Gimnazija Dobrinja. Searching through the school records, I came upon a “Request for Registration” (*Zahtjev za upis*) submitted by Damir Hadžić to the Teacher’s Council of Gimnazija Dobrinja, dated 15 July 1993.

I am asking the Teachers’ Council of the General Gimnazija Dobrinja to make registration and completion of the third class of secondary school possible for me. From the first days, from exactly 15 April 1992, I have been engaged in the armed forces of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina that I can prove with the attached confirmation from 16 January 1993. Since I am continuously engaged, I have not been able to attend regular classes, and I am asking you to instruct me in literature in the manner I would have prepared myself for the class examination. The Sarajevo Railway School Center is the home school for me; I wish to train for the job of electrical engineer. (Damir Hadžić 1993)

Attached to Damir's request is a certificate signed by Mirsad Belko, the company commander, and Alihodža Safet, the battalion commander, dated 16 February 1993. It is a standard official form, with Damir's name filled in, that confirms he has been a member of the First Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Hill Brigade (formed out of the First Dobrinja Brigade), since 15 April 1992. At the top, dated 17 July 1992, and signed by Smail Vesnić, is the notation that the request had been approved.

Damir remembers that "my teachers were understanding of my duty with the army," and he somehow managed to graduate, alternating excursions across the airport runway with classes that he was able to schedule with "the non-stop efforts of my teachers." He said that the times were "unbelievable experiences for everyone, but especially for guys my age" remembering "the high level of solidarity of [my] generation . . . What we had in common is that we all defended our homes." Damir became the mayor of Novi Grad municipality, which includes Dobrinja and a portion of Dobrinja 4 that had been part of Serbian Sarajevo and the Republika Srpska, annexed in 2001. "The war caught me at that age," he reflects, "and I came to the realization that we had to live in a different community" (2001).

In the midst of the chaos and the reconstruction of secondary schooling during fall 1992, there was steady movement toward the creation of Gimnazija Dobrinja. "Conditions for establishing this school are being created," noted the secondary work program. "School premises are being secured for first year [grade nine] students . . . Activities on acquiring teaching equipment needed for this school are underway. This means that with the start of the classes we are organizing [for secondary education], the new gimnazija in Dobrinja starts with work as well. The gimnazija will open with the four first-year classes [four ninth grade sections]. An advertisement is already being prepared for accepting students and teachers. Instruction will take place under the professional supervision of the Pedagogical Institute of Sarajevo" (Nastavni centar 1992b, 41). The work program also notes the high level of interest in the new school. "In accordance with the wishes expressed by first year students, a great number of them are interested in enrolling in the gimnazija, and that is, of course, the reason for opening the gimnazija in Dobrinja" (43).

On 2 October 1992, the annals of Gimnazija Dobrinja noted: "The Presidency of the Sarajevo City Council adopted the report on establishing a gimnazija in Dobrinja." A five-member commission, with Smail Vesnić as commission chair, was formed to hire the new staff. A series of October entries in the almanac of the War School Center (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a) traces the course of events. The 7 October entry reads: "It is again a cold morning without water, electricity, and gas. Walking to work, everywhere you look you can see a fire in front of the buildings or balconies. It seems the the city is on fire." On 18 November, "the

students are asking about the start of the new school year, and parents and students about the beginning of the work of the gimnazija.” By late November, however, the 1992-1993 school year had yet to begin, which meant a delay in the opening of the new gimnazija. On 3 December: “Preparations are in progress for holding the meeting of the Teachers’ Council for elementary and secondary schools related to the start of the new school year . . . Regular consultations of professors and students are held . . . In the neighboring “Preporod” [a business], Professor Muminović is giving a lecture entitled ‘War and Morality.’ An entry for 7 December reads that “preparations are in progress for the start of the new school year in elementary and secondary schools.” Although no decision has been made, the War School center continued its work. On 22 December, the almanac entry reads:

The whole day was spent on completing the “Basic Work Program” of the Dobrinja Teaching Center for 1993, as well as the report on work in 1992. One big and important job for the Dobrinja Teaching Center was completed. The programs were reviewed, put together, and packed. The director of the Dobrinja Teaching Center, Smail Vesnić, will take them into the city tomorrow. We hope that everything is alright . . . Applications have begun to come in concerning the announcement of openings for teachers in the future gimnazija in Dobrinja. That is proof that in war, it is important that one thinks mainly of peace.

Another winter month went by, with continuing references to the lack of water, electricity, and heat, and to the shelling and the snipers. On 22 January 1993, the almanac entry suggests that the new school year will soon begin: “A relatively peaceful day, without shelling and shooting. At the Dobrinja Teaching Center, regular activities with students are being completed. The last preparations are being carried out for the start of the new school year. The new school year should start on Monday 25 January 1993 . . . It can be said for the first time that the gimnazija in Dobrinja is beginning its work, and in war conditions. This undertaking would have been hard to achieve in peace, but how much will, love, and effort is needed in these difficult times?”

On 25 January 1993, Gimnazija Dobrinja formally began classes. The entry in the gimnazija annal (Gimnazija Dobrinja 1992-1996) was simple and matter-of-fact, referring only to “the first day of classes at the gimnazija in Dobrinja,” and to a history lecture by Smajo Halilović on the social and political situation in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The entry in the almanac of the Dobrinja War School Center (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a) expressed the struggle to create the gimnazija in Dobrinja as well as the hope that the school would serve as a cultural

focus of the community when the War School Center began to relinquish its responsibilities now that elementary and secondary schools were up and running. “A big ceremony at the Dobrinja Teaching Center. Today the newly opened gimnazija in Dobrinja began its work. For now, first and second year students from all Sarajevo secondary schools will be taught in Dobrinja. The gimnazija was formally opened by the director of the Dobrinja Teaching Center, Smail Vesnić, in the presence of a large number of students, parents, teachers, and guests.” After noting the lecture by Professor Halilović, the entry continues: “It is expected that this gimnazija, besides educational activities, will be a center of cultural and other manifestations in Dobrinja and beyond. The opening was very humble. Time will prove the importance of this school for all the inhabitants of Dobrinja. After the ceremony, the first working and teaching day in the 1992-1993 school year continued. We wish to all students and teachers and their parents much luck and success, but the most we can wish them is peace and a free Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

1992-1993 School Year

(War)

The beginning of the regular school year was introduced in the pages of the “School Annals” (*Školski ljetopis*) of Treća gimnazija, the Third Gymnasium (1992-1996) with the cryptic headline above. On the first days of scheduled classes, intensive shelling throughout the city prevented most students from even thinking about school while they huddled in basements and shelters. The blockade of the city, the lack of electricity, the shortage of food and water, and the impending winter all contributed to a difficult fall season. The initial entry in the Treća gimnazija “School Annals” for September 1992 suggests the uncertainty of the situation in a city under siege: “The school year didn’t begin at its usual time and it is uncertain when it will. The city blockade and the aggression continue with an even stronger intensity. Due to that, minimal conditions for school to start work don’t exist. The school buildings are mainly damaged and destroyed. The city is not provided with electricity. The number of children in the city is unknown.” On 8 September an article in *Oslobođenje* (1992c) explained the situation.

The preparation of plans for registration in the secondary schools in the Republic is in progress. The authorized ministry states that the date of the beginning of the school year will be given later because it highly depends on war operations and the situation at the front.

One could say there is something “slippery” about beginning of the school year. Municipalities will individually decide about the beginning of the school year depending on the circumstances. In the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Physical Culture, four different school program proposals are prepared which will determine the length and duration of classes. Because of the war, however, they are likely to be changed.”

On 10 September, another article (1992d) reviewed the “Decision on the Registration of Students in Elementary and Secondary Schools and the Beginning of Instruction in the 1992-1993 School Year” which appeared in *Službeni list*, the official gazette of the Bosnian government the previous day.

The Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina yesterday adopted a decision on the Registration of Students in Elementary and Secondary Schools and the Beginning of Instruction in the 1992/93 School Year.

With this decision, the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina ordered municipality and city community executive organs that are responsible for the safety of students and teachers to insure conditions for conducting normal instructional procedures in elementary and secondary schools.

In harmony with this, municipalities, with respect to city communities, will determine the beginning, the length of time, and the place for registering students in the first class of elementary and secondary school, and will decide when and where to hold classes in the 1992/93 school year . . .

Instruction in elementary and secondary schools will be carried out according to the program designed by the Educational-Pedagogical Institute of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the organization and supervision of instruction, in accord with the decision of the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, will be executed by the appropriate secretariat that works in wartime conditions—it was said in the report from yesterday’s meeting of the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thus the Ministry of Education allowed school administrators at the municipal and local community levels to “individually decide about the beginning of the school year depending on the circumstances.” In Sarajevo, the responsibility for these decisions rested with what was then the City Secretariat for Education, the school administrators in the four municipalities of “free Sarajevo” that remained under the control of

the Bosnian government, and the local communities of each of these municipalities. In Dobrinja, on the outskirts of the city, the responsibility rested primarily upon the shoulders of the administrators of the War School Center in conjunction with the municipal government of Novi Grad and the local communities of Dobrinja, not to mention the military and civil defense authorities.

The entries in the almanac of the War School Center (Nastavni centar 1992-1993a) testify to the difficult conditions in which Dobrinja educators sought to discharge their responsibility

- 12 October 1992 (Monday): Nothing came of the promised water, electricity, and gas. The people took everything they could for fire from Simon Bolivar Elementary School. The police and the army tried to prevent this but it was in vain. Bread is needed the most. In the afternoon, training for members of the Territorial Defense of RBiH continued. It gets dark very early, and the rain is falling almost continuously. Will anything nice happen soon? We all hope it will. It must!
- 22 October 1992 (Thursday): The morning is cold and wet. Finally the electricity began to come on. Oh God how we look forward to things that belong to us naturally, which are returned to us for a moment.
- 28 October 1992 (Wednesday): The day went on without significant events at the Teaching Center . . . We no longer react to the shootings, as if we do not care. It is still cold in the premises.

For the performance of “Children Singing the Hits” on 1 November, mentioned above, entries record the words of Sarajevo artists who came to Dobrinja for the event and paid tribute to the tenacious resistance of besieged Dobrinjans. Gertruda Munitić wrote: “With much love and humanity to heroic Dobrinja on a day of peace for our dear children, that for sure they will have a better future than we, but with our strength and faith to a better tomorrow.” Mirsad Delimustatić: “I am positively surprised with the organization of life, the power of will of the people and the heroic defense of Dobrinja. Dobrinja, I love you!” One unidentified poet composed a short poem:

We are being shot at with tanks
Tanks that destroy everything
But they can do nothing
To the warriors from Dobrinja.

And Mladen Vojičić Tifa, the singer from the popular Yugoslav rock group “Bijelo dugme” (White Button), that once captured the imagination of all of Yugoslavia, wrote simply, “Believe in love and keep it!” Now a Bosnian trapped in Sarajevo, perhaps Tifa’s most well-known song, “Grbavica,” was a resounding salutation to the occupied section of Grbavica just across the Miljacka River from “free Sarajevo.”

The almanac entries continue:

- 7 November 1992 (Saturday): Nothing new in the positive sense. No electricity, the telephones are not working and around 9:00 there was no water.
- 9 November 1992 (Monday): It is again a cold morning with frost. Last night was very rough in Dobrinja with a lot of shooting and danger. In the Center itself there are still meetings and the continuation of regular activities.
- 10 November 1992 (Tuesday): The morning was extremely cold. The electricity came on, but there is still no water . . . In the afternoon, the lecture for members of the Territorial Defense of RBiH took place on the proposal for the new constitution of RBiH.
- 17 November 1992 (Tuesday): It is still cold and there is no electricity. Despite all that, work in the Center is being done intensively. Especially with the students. Students come to the Center in large numbers where they ask about the possibility of enrolling in the faculties [of the university] in Sarajevo, that is, about the possibility of enrolling through the Teaching Center, because the departure to the city is made difficult.
- 25 November 1992 (Wednesday): “Priority” electricity is installed, and work on the magazine of the Teaching Center, *Putokazi*, continued. Enrollment of students in the faculties of the University of Sarajevo is in progress. The number of students enrolling is unexpectedly large. We wish them luck in their studies and in their lives. The majority of students are members of the Territorial Defense of RBiH, and their enrollment in the faculties is just a sign of their belief in a better future.

The last two entries continue those gimnazija students living in Dobrinja who, under normal conditions, would have enrolled in one of the many faculties of the University of Sarajevo, which are scattered across the city. It also refers to students already enrolled in the university unable to travel to Sarajevo because of the dangerous conditions. Nevertheless, they could still enroll in one of the university faculties

through the Higher Education Section of the Dobrinja War School Center, which was managed by Halil Burić. As many as four hundred Dobrinja students enrolled in the university faculties and were taught by fifteen to twenty university professors and their assistants. As Professor Burić has told me, many of these students were also soldiers, so it was very difficult to schedule classes and examinations. Given the situation, “the professor always waits for his students,” he said, recalling one professor who waited for his student to arrive to take an exam only to learn that he was killed on the way. “The professors were very close to their students here in Dobrinja,” he said. “It was crazy, reading, writing, one day. The next day you might be killed. Just 300 meters from the school is a bloody war” (2001).

December entries in the almanac:

- 3 December 1992 (Thursday): Preparations are in progress for holding the meeting of the Teachers’ Councils for elementary and secondary schools concerning the start of the new school year . . . Regular training was held for members of the Territorial Defense of RBiH. A meeting of the members of the second battalion of the 5th Hill Brigade was held. Around 2:15, two shells fell behind the building of the War School Center. The director’s office suffered damage (broken windows). Luckily no one was hurt. Today shells were falling all over Dobrinja.
- 5 December 1992 (Saturday): The morning is cold, full of wind, and [we are] without electricity. Shelling continues all over the city as well as in Dobrinja . . . A session of the Teachers’ Council was held for secondary schools on Youth Work Brigade Street. At this session, the beginning of work in the next school year in the Dobrinja region was discussed. The restoration of the premises in the Teaching Center continue and especially in the director’s office. It is a bit warmer now and it is easier to work.
- 8 December 1992 (Tuesday): A difficult day in every aspect. Shells and shots can be heard from all sides. Two shells fell in the parking lot behind the Teaching Center. The ventilation system was damaged in the toilet and as a result there was flooding. The heating system was turned off and greater damage was prevented. A session of the professional council of the Teaching Center has been canceled due to heavy shelling and has been rescheduled for Thursday.

Showing great coverage and determination, the staff of the War School center completed the “Basic Work Program” and prepared for the opening of Gimnazija Dobrinja and the belated beginning of the new school year.

Schooling was initiated in the besieged settlement on 25 January 1993, over a month before the official beginning of the school year in the rest of Sarajevo city on 1 March. For the schools of Sarajevo city, the 1992-1993 school year ran for eighteen instructional weeks, until 9 July, “plus one more week in reserve,” until 16 July. This truncated version of the regular academic year, the 18-week session that served as the 1992–1993 school year brought students and teachers together within their respective schools and served as the basis by which to operate the schools under the administrative framework of the City Secretariat for Education in the 1993-1994 school year. Based on the hard lessons learned during the rebuilding of the administrative structure in 1992-1993, the 1993-1994 school year in Sarajevo and in Dobrinja actually began on the scheduled date, 6 September 1993, and ran for a total of thirty weeks of the regular thirty-six-week schedule.

A Model of Educational Work

In the early spring and summer of 1992, well before the rest of Sarajevo City, Dobrinja was beginning to create a new model of educational work in wartime conditions. The work programs of both the Elementary and Secondary Education sections reveal that Dobrinja school administrators, working under the direction of the Dobrinja War School Center, were addressing the organizational problems of schooling along with the curricular adaptations as early as the summer of 1992. Furthermore, at both the elementary and secondary levels, these administrators had developed a systematic plan through which to initiate schooling and, in the process, address their respective schooling situations seen in the revised work programs of November 1992. At the elementary level, the work program was designed to integrate the teachers, students, and classrooms of the “stairway schools” into the administration of the three elementary schools, which had noschool buildings and hence no physical locations under the direction of the Elementary Education Section. At the secondary level, the goal was to integrate teachers and students from schools in Sarajevo into a new proposed gimnazija, with no previous history and no physical location, under the direction of the Secondary Education Section. Forced by the isolation of a siege within a siege to confront the educational realities of schooling in wartime conditions much earlier than Sarajevo proper, the educators of the Dobrinja War School Center forged “a model of edu-

cational work that became, in many respects, a model of educational work for the reconstruction of schooling throughout the besieged city. In the words of Smail Vesnić: “The Elementary Education Section [of the Dobrinja War School Center] is the birthplace of the ‘stairway school’ which later on became the basic model for the organization of educational activities in Dobrinja. The model of the “stairway school” born in Dobrinja, enriched with faculty experience and a high level of the concrete adaptation of work conditions, remained as the basic groundwork for the organization of educational activities throughout the region of the city during the period of the war” (1994, 18-19).

The experience gained from the work of the Dobrinja War School Center was carried into the City Secretariat for Education and the schools of Sarajevo city. The “stairway schools” of Dobrinja became the “war schools” of Sarajevo, integrated within the local communities and school regions under the administration of a Sarajevo elementary or secondary school. The model forged in the siege of Dobrinja was validated throughout the city with the belated start of the 1992-1993 school year. The reconstruction of schooling in Dobrinja served to recreate “the illusion of normal life” giving a sense of hope to the Dobrinja community and especially to Dobrinja children that a future lay beyond the immediate reality of war. The legacy of dedicated educators such as Smail Vesnić, Seniha Bulja, and Ilija Šobot, and numerous others who remain nameless here, is the historical record of schooling in the besieged settlement. As Smail Vesnić said, “We didn’t fight with guns. We fought in this way, to defend our homes, our families. We saved those kids. We moved them off the streets to the classroom, and we saved them” (2001).

Notes

1. I have taken the liberty of translating *Ratni nastavni centar Dobrinja* as the Dobrinja War School Center. While *nastavni* translates from the Serbo-Croatian, or Bosnian, as teaching or instructional, *nastav/a* translates as teaching, instruction, or schooling. *Ratni nastavni centar Dobrinja* reads more easily in English, at least in my view, as the Dobrinja War School Center, and suggests the all-encompassing meaning of the designation. *Nastavni centar*, when written alone, and *Nastavni centar Dobrinja*, which appears on many documents, are translated as the Teaching Center or the Dobrinja Teaching Center. In the reference section, all Center documents, other than those with an author's or editor's citation, are located under the reference *Nastavni centar Dobrinja*.

Throughout the text, in both citations and references, I have adhered to the traditional Serbo-Croatian orthographic style. All Serbo-Croatian, or Bosnian, references and terms, with the exception of proper names, are marked by capitalization of the first word only, as in *Ratni nastavni centar* (*Dobrinja* is capitalized because it is a proper name). Standard English capitalization will be used in the translations.

2. From the Serbo-Croatian, *četnik* (chetnik), Serb nationalists who originally supported the Serbian royal monarchy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. During World War II, the Chetniks formed the Serbian resistance movement led by Draža Mihailović and fought against the *ustaša* (Ustasha), the Nazi puppet government of the Independent State of Croatia, as well as the *partizan* (Partisans), the Communist resistance movement led by Josip Broz Tito. Today the term is used as an epithet for Serb nationalists who initiated the Bosnian war and, in the process, besieged Sarajevo.

3. The first issue of *Putokazi*, a combined issue, numbers one and two, was published by the Dobrinja War School Center in March 1993 one year into the siege. Gordana Pijetlović was the main editor. As noted, the first issue was dedicated to Adnan Tetarić, the vice-president of the Coordination Board for Dobrinja and the Airport Settlement. It is only fitting that Tetarić's contribution and sacrifice be recognized here and also that of his colleagues, most notably, Smail Vesnić, the member of the Coordination Board responsible for School Services and the man primarily responsible for the creation of the Dobrinja War School Center as well as for Gimnazija Dobrinja.

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