

Ajnija Omanić, ed.

Zdravstvo u opkoljenom Sarajevu
1992-1995: dokumenti, arhiv, sjećanja
[Healthcare in the Besieged Sarajevo,
1992-1995: Documents, Archive,
Memories]

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554 pp; 143 illustrations; 33 tables; References at the end
of each chapter

It is difficult to write on Bosnia and Hercegovina: in such a politically fragile country, any „wrong“ word can provoke serious turbulences. Therefore, the attempt of Ajnija Omanić, Professor of History of Medicine and Medical Ethics (and the co-author of the book *Bosnian Behavioural Culture*), and her collaborators, to collect and publish memories regarding the cruel Serbian siege of Sarajevo, 1992-1995, and to document its repercussions upon the healthcare system of the city, represents a value on its own.

The blockade and occasional bombing of Sarajevo, pressed by Yugoslav Army and the Bosnian Serbs' militia from the surrounding mountains, lasted for 1,425 days (longer than the siege of Stalingrad or Leningrad in WW2). The civilians, who sometimes had deliberately decided to stay in the city, were exposed to sniper bullets and artillery shells ultimately killing more than 16,000 people. Hospitals and other healthcare facilities were faced with several major threats: direct grenade hits, lack of drugs and sanitary materials, defficient power, water, and food supply, etc. In such conditions – not typical for each and every war, however – it is no wonder that some both really heroic and paradoxical acts were noted (like the case of the physician Jasmin Merdžanić, who was shot by the enemies after he had taken care of and handed over to them their own soldier). According to some estimates, objects

devoted to healthcare suffered about 47 million Euros damage (losing about 34-50 % of its capacities). In Sarajevo, 47 of healthcare personnel lost their lives.

At the beginning of the book, an overview of the pre-war history of the hospitals in Sarajevo is provided by Osman Durić, who follows the chronology from the period of the Austro-Hungarian *Landesspital* (1894-1918), over the hospitals during Royal Yugoslavia (1919-1941), Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945), and Communist Yugoslavia (1946-1992), until the forming of the Sarajevo University Clinical Centre and its war and post-war reorganisation and recovery (1992-2008). Somehow odd may seem that the author, obviously wilfully, neglects the fact that the Sarajevo Faculty of Medicine was founded in 1944, and not in 1946 (which is, nevertheless, congruent with the ideological positions of the Communist era, ignoring the Independent State of Croatia). The same author, obviously dissatisfied by the political development in the 1990s in Bosnia and Hercegovina, continues with the presentation of the war particularities of surgery, coming closer to his own professional background. The heads of various surgical clinical departments and institutes (Neurosurgery, Abdominal Surgery, Urology, Children Surgery, Glandular and Oncological Surgery, Thoracal Surgery, Anaesthesia and Reanimation, Traumatology, Orthopaedics, Reconstructive and Plastic Surgery, Maxilofacial Surgery, Vascular Surgery and Organ Transplantation, Otolaryngology, Ophthalmology, Cardiac Surgery, Emergency Medicine, and Transfusiology) talk about the necessary adjustments of doctrines and practice in so different conditions than normal.

Zehra Dizdarević depicts the situation at various departments of internal medicine (Vascular Diseases; Gastroenterohepatology; Hematology; Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolic Diseases; Nuclear Medicine; Nephrology; Heart Diseases and Rheumatism; Dermatovenereology; Oncology; Infectology; Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; Pulmonology and Tuberculosis). The stories presented are touchy amalgams of very personal memories and the facts on objective changes occurred within the population pathology.

Srećko Šimić revives the suffering of Gynecology and Perinatology Department, Lutvo Hodžić of the *Milivoje Sarvan* Paediatrics Clinics, and Slobodan Loga of Neuropsychiatry. Faruk Dalagija and collaborators tell the story of the Institute of Radiology; Enver Suljević on the Institute of Clinical Chemistry and Biochemistry; Fuad Šišić on the Institute of Scientific Research and Development; Bakir Nakaš and collaborators on the *Abdulah Nakaš* General Hospital; Youssef Hajir on the Dobrinja Hospital; while Mahir Tokić and collaborators on the occurings within the public health system.

The book ends with a Memories section by the former Mayor of Sarajevo, politicians, Medical Faculty members, and healthcare professionals, recalling the days of the siege, the bombings killing people queuing for water or food, or children playing on the snow. Those memories, like the entire book, cannot certainly be considered an accurate source. However, with all its unuttered or uncorrectly remembered, this book does emanate certain truth, and, even if many things are going to be forgotten or forgiven, this might very well be the closest point the truth on the besieged Sarajevo can arrive to.

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