

Pogledi: Vështrimet: Views:

Personal histories of Serbs and Albanians

Susret ličnih istorija Srba i Albanaca

Takimet e historive personale të serbëve dhe shqiptarëve





Stadion u Pribini 2010.



Koerška Elektroenergetika Kopernica 2010.



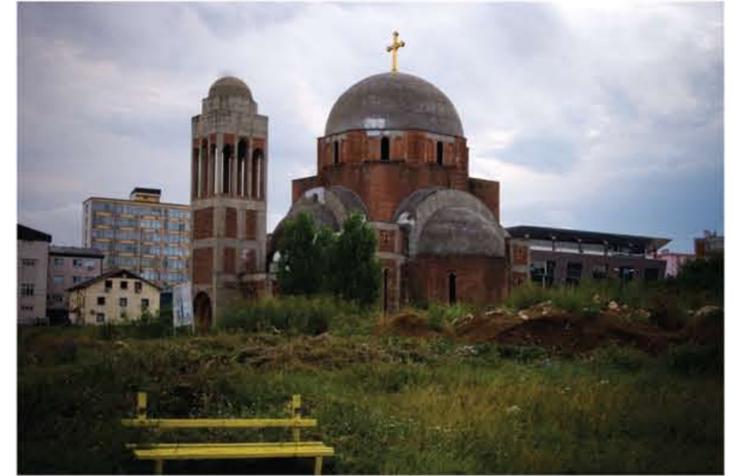
Sih obnavljanje kule - Grahovica 2010.



Zastave ispred Hotela Grad - Pribina 2010.



Biblioteka e Prishtinës 2010.



Parokshiri i rektit Hristin Spasa në qendër të Prishtinës 2010.



Misazeti e Prishtinës 2010.



KFOR mbledhës e Prishtinës 2010.



Grad u Pribici 2010.



Prodanica u Pribici 2010.



Stipska kuća u Grahovcu



Zid manastira Ozaljica 2010.

Views: Personal histories of Serbs and Albanians

In the summer 2010, members of the Association Kulturanova from Novi Sad and Multimedia Centre from Pristina interviewed Serbian and Albanian population from Kosovo, examining their memories, views on life and thoughts on the future. The whole journey to Kosovo have been photo documented in a way that shows genuine atmosphere of everyday life.

We believe that a major cause of misunderstanding, mistrust and hatred among the people lies in harmful generalizations and stereotypes. Therefore, the main goal of this project is to establish cultural link between Kosovo and Serbia, which revitalizes the dialogue that is in stagnation for several decades now. Researching oral histories of "ordinary" people through their personal stories and confessions is also the exposure of our mutual history. These findings allow us to conduct a critical review of our own developing identities and thus take a step towards a deeper understanding of the lives of two people.

Continuation of the project in 2011, involves creating a theater play inspired by the interviews, which explores the relationships between Albanians and Serbs from Kosovo, their similarities and differences.



Hotel "Victory" in Pristina 2010.



Shop in Pristina 2010.

Interview 01.

page.10

Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?

I came here at the end of 2006. I am 30 years old, currently living in Gracanica, well, have been living for two years now, actually, and I am working in Caglavica media centre.

What are your personal motives for coming to Kosovo?

Firstly, it is about personal, as well as professional challenge. This is a very good school, a very dangerous place to live in, and a place where you are bound to become paranoid, whether you want it or not. One must be careful at all times, and that is something that forces one to keep working. I had no idea how long I would stay here, and for how long I would be doing this job. The first ever rock concert to be organized here in Gracanica, was organized by me. And for two, two and a half years now, it has been happening here. The young people here are accustomed to what is offered to them, to having no choices, no theater, no cinema, and no sports recreation. Basically, they have nothing. Two years ago they got Internet connection and that was some kind of high point. No other space has been given to them. They give in to alcohol at a very young age. It is the only form of entertainment for them, and they are forced to listen to folk music, simply because that is the only kind that is offered. But the worst thing of all is that they seem to have fallen into some kind of lethargic state, and furthermore, have embraced that way of life as normal. They don't know any better; many of them have never traveled anywhere. For them, it's normal to see a shooting in the middle of the street, there is no stress, and those kinds of abnormal things have become normal. It's normal not to have electricity, water, to have no basic life necessities. Injustice has been accepted as something normal.

Have you come to contact to people from mixed, Serb- Albanian marriage?

There weren't many mixed marriages even before, but the families respected one another, visited each other for religious festivities, such as Saints' days and Bajram. This would perhaps not be as big of an issue for the Serbs, but the Albanian families had to step further away from their tradition. Serbs used to be a lot more flexible, but now, rare are the examples where a father would accept his daughter being married to an Albanian, or even dating one.

Which people are the most respected ones among the Serbian population in Gracanica?

The person that gives you a job and the person who puts something under your pillow is the one you respect. When you ask the people who got a job in the city hall, and who have decided to accept this country, they are surely to tell you that their mayor is an honest man who has done a lot for the town. The problem here is that many people feel a certain kind of fear. Even when it comes to those who do negative things, they would never report a case of bribery, simply out of fear of losing their job.

What is your general opinion of Albanians, and of Serbs, from an objective point of view?

There are a lot of good people, but it is a completely different mentality, when compared to the rest of Serbia. They have lived in such environment, side by side with Albanians, and they have influenced one another greatly. You had one interwoven society, and that is why a lot of people in Serbia, after hearing that someone is from Kosovo, refer to that person as Siptar, regardless of the fact that he or she is a Serb, because of the association to the people who live here. Generalization is very difficult. Serbs are gullible, greedy, and when I say this it sounds really harsh, but many of them have taken advantage of the situation for their own personal gain. They are otherwise, very traditional, patriarchal, with certain norms they have created on their own. When it comes to Albanians, my personal opinion is that they are a semi-civilized people, with a few exceptions of course, but generally speaking, they are people who are having a very hard time acquiring certain social and cultural norms, which are necessary, which make our lives better and more beautiful. Starting with littering, the little things, they have no sensibility for those kinds of issues, they are simply arrogant. Here's a typical example of the way they deal with problems. Pristina is a city without a river. There used to be a river flowing through Pristina, not a big one, more like a stream. It is highly important for a city to have water, in any form. At that time the entire city had water that ran through the city centre. However, since everybody was throwing garbage into the river, there was so much garbage at one point, and it was not an option to clean it. Instead, they paved it and made a promenade. Accept for the sources, which are located somewhere in the periphery of Pristina, there is no other water.

Which are the traits of the Albanians you respect?

Consistency and politeness. The old Albanians are very good hosts, and that is something that comes from their upbringing. Also, if someone promised you help, that help will be given unconditionally. When a promise is made, it is highly respected. Even today there are cases where an Albanian will get a certain job done, while a Serb will look for an opportunity to trick you.

Do you have any close Albanian friends?

I met an Albanian man, who I liked very much, and I personally would have dated him. He was in love with me, but couldn't pursue a relationship with me because his friends and family would lynch him.

What is your opinion on Serbia's relation to Kosovo Serbs?

Five hundred million Euros were sent here, or at least tried in the last ten years. That money does not reflect in anything here, not in the roads nor the infrastructure. On the other side, you have families that have jobs in public institutions, all of them working, receiving two, three salaries. It is all on that state level.

Do you think that there will ever be reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians?

It will take about twenty years for something like that to happen, for new generations to come in order for us to discuss that. There can be tolerance, but not sincere trust, because it is a civilization process that needs at least two more generations to pass, so that people can be cleansed from all the war trauma, and start thinking about genuine reconciliation.

What is the Situation with Gracanica?

We attended the EXIT festival recently, and this boy was rushing to take a bath at 8 pm. I said to him, "Wait, we will all go together later", and his reflex response was, "We'll run out of water!" They just can't believe that there is water and electricity all day long, which is a luxury here. It is the same case when it comes to some cultural aspect of life. I managed, with the help of some friends, to get them out of Kosovo borders, to create for them at least some spirit of the city, to make them feel like a part of a civilized urban environment, get them to see a play once a month, take them to a rock concert instead of listening to music only by using the internet, because they haven't had the chance to see a live performance, to built their own music taste. It is hard to get them to be more active, first you have to make them do something, regardless of the fact that it's for their own good. And even then, the first thing they ask is whether there is any money in it for them, because here, everything revolves around money. I want to get them out of the casinos, gambling parlors, since that is their only entertainment here. There are 20 betting parlors in Gracanica alone, and even kids who attend elementary school frequent them.

page.11

Interview 02.

Did you grow up here, in the monastery?

Yes, my whole childhood was spent in the monastery, because my parents divorced when I was very young. I have no information about my father, he called once, and I told him, "Where were you 25 years ago, why are you calling now?", and from that moment on he didn't want to have any contact. My mother re-married in Kragujevac, and has been living there for seven years now, but is still working here in the Health Centre. And so I am here, in Gracanica, with my grandmother.

Tell me, did Serbs and Albanians go to school together?

No! At school, there were just Serbs and Roma people, Gypsies, as we call them. We went to school with them, but not with the Kosovo Albanians. With them, I had no contact whatsoever.

Did you have any problems or bad experiences with the Albanians?

Yes I did, with a girl. Our daughter-in-law was supposed to get married. They come along, and there was trouble instantly. I said to them, "You had no business getting in the way now, can't you see there is a wedding going on?" Then she said to me, "Go to hell", and the next thing you know, there was a fight. The police came; they took the Albanian man and chased him away. After that they were not allowed to go through Gracanica without police escort, because we make it a habit to take their flag down. They come out chasing us to give them the flag back. I took it off once, my friend made me. I told him, "I will take it down, but who will defend me?" He responded, " You just take it off, no one can touch you" So, I took it. There was even a television station present, to record us as we burn Albanian flag.

Do you hope that everything will work out for the best in life, or you fear the worst?

I'm not afraid of anything, except God. I went to Pecka Patrijarsija by myself, without an escort. I even go to Pristina by myself, to the supermarket.

Are you an optimist?

I don't know what that means (in a shy manner)

What is your general opinion about Albanians?

Albanians? I'm just waiting for our five minutes. As Legija used to say, "Just once, for the Serbian boot to march in here". Nothing else. Give me just five minutes in Kosovo, and in 24 hours, not a single Albanian would be left there. We just need for the Serbian army to get here. There are some good Albanians I guess. But the most smuggling takes place in Kosovo. Drugs, prostitution, mostly through Macedonia.

How would you want the government to treat Kosovo Serbs?

Well, my wish is that we find a common ground, for the Serbs and Albanians to live in agreement, the way it used to be. The Turks were here for 500 years, and still, everything belonged to Serbs. Here is the mother of nine Jugovics, as well as Milos Obilic, the Czar Lazar, and everything is Serbian. Because this is Kosovo, it is full of blood.

How do you imagine this agreement than?

This land was always Serbian, and it always will be. Gradually, they bring us merchandise now, bread, everything. Our people go to their malls in Pristina, they say it's cheap.

Interview 03.

page:12

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I was born in Djakovica in 1964. My parents never left Kosovo, they were born here. I grew up in Djakovica, and was mostly friends with Albanians, as oppose to most of my fellow citizens. That is because my ambitions were much greater than being limited to one Serbian street.

What are your memories of your school years?

There was this Albanian girl, who was maybe my first love. Actually, not maybe, definitely my first love. It was a love that started off with holding hands and nothing more, maybe a couple of kisses, although I can't be sure of the kisses happening for certain. But, it was a kind of auto-censorship. I had no right to be with her, because that would make her entire family miserable and my family too, to a great extent. Most Serbs felt animosity, but also fear of getting beaten up, or of being provoked.

Does that mean that you were close with Albanians at that time?

I was close then and I am close now. We used to smoke pot in high school at the time when Belgrade kids would run after grownups and look for cigarette buds. Djakovica is a avant-garde place in a way. It is going to take years and years for Belgrade and Novi Sad to organize a gay pride parade. Here, it was an everyday event. And with those Serbs and Montenegrins, you have 10 homosexuals, public ones.

Let us get back to love. Are you telling us that you couldn't have a relationship with the Albanian girl even back then?

I remember my friend protesting, "Why do you speak Albanian whenever you talk to Albanians?" But some friendships still last. And those friendships are not just about drinking bears, and then picking up the whole tab if you have enough money; it's about gambling, loans, paying gambling debts for your friends. We lived in a quite aggressive manner, and each and every one of us achieved something in life, and it's because of that energy, it was always pushing us somewhere. Today, I'm making thousands of Euros, with legal businesses, those are my paychecks. My friends own restaurants in Pristina, Djakovica, Prizren. We taught our friends to eat pork. An Albanian friends would restrain himself, saying it doesn't feel good, it makes him sick after...But the bottom line is, each and every one of them has become a very fine Serb when it comes to wining a and dining. They accepted those customs of drinking, offending, and shouting at the table...(the waiter comes and he orders his drink in Albanian)

Mixed marriages?

When all of this started happening, the kids from mixed marriages were a lot more extreme. Friends of mine, whose mothers were Albanians and fathers Serbs, expressed their hatred towards Albanians more energetically, and vice versa. There weren't many mixed marriages in Djakovica, and those that did exist, did not fall apart. What I have noticed is that, where a mixed marriage was made out of love, the kids were allowed to speak both languages. In some more radical, more rural environments, when a Serbian woman marries an Albanian, she is strictly forbidden to speak Serbian to her children. It happens that, some Albanians that I used to work and live with don't speak a word of Serbian. After a while they tell me, "My mother is Serbian." Then how is it possible that you don't speak Serbian?

What is life like in Northern Mitrovica?

In Northern Mitrovica, where Kosovo police is established, 30% of the force is corrupted, bandits and criminals. The uninterested and even less powerful is the international police force, in a city where you can get joint for 80 dinars, where the balloon of anarchy and incidents just keeps inflating. That is why good communication with my son is very important to me. He's 14, and he's already starting to worry me, he is in a very bad crowd...perhaps I could... This is the first time I am seriously considering sending my family away from Kosovo. However, I know that my wife would never agree to that.

Do you see yourself here?

I see myself here because I am the one who earns money. It all makes sense because my wife saves money so we can buy real-estate and provide for our children. I don't see a future for my children here. There will be no reconciliation between Serbian and Albanian politics, even though Serbs and Albanians made peace a long time ago. With a Belgrade license plate, you can go anywhere in Kosovo. The message of the Kosovo Albanians is very simple. Serbs, brothers, come and be Kosovars as well. We didn't see great benefit from the independent country either. The only ones who gained are the ones on the top, our Partizans. Bandits (in a quiet voice). It is very easy to live here. I don't nurture hatred, I have conquered it. We all get into a romantic as well as nationalistic frenzy, and some of us stay in it forever, while others snap out of it in a couple of months.

Interview 04.

Would you please introduce yourself?

I live in Plementine. I am currently involved with organizations whose goal is to enable other nations to see who the Roma people are, what they live for, and make them realize that Roma people have the same rights as anyone else. I am married to a Roma woman, and I have a daughter who is 2 and 1 half years old.

Where were you when the war started?

I was at home. I remember the night then the first bomb fell. It was at the Pristina airport, Slatina. It was very dark the first night, the power went off, and my oldest brother knew what was happening. I stepped outside and saw red clouds. I was happy like a little child. It's night time, what is this now, what is happening? But in another moment, I turned around and saw that my mother, father and brother were crying. I don't know, I cannot describe it, it was really stressful, and I just couldn't bear it. At that moment I just wished I could go back in time, like a week back, so I could prepare myself for that. What struck me most actually, is when the war started, the second day, I took my bag and headed for school. My mom told me: "No son, there is no school, can't you see what's happening?" When I got there, the school had already been closed, and I was so sad that I was going to lose all my friends. I thought I would never go to school again. It was the hardest part for me.

Can you tell us a bit about the quality of life after war?

That March 17th had a far bigger impact on me than the war, the booming. I had grown, I was more aware. That is the first time I understood what war really meant. It was on Kosovo television stations, the report on how the Serbs were defending themselves. It was really awful, one moment everything is normal, and the next one, they are attacking here. There were attacks everywhere, and they chased out many people, the Serbs, the Roma, Askalije, and Egyptians from their towns. It was something indescribable, something one cannot forget.

How do you see the future of Kosovo?

The future of Kosovo does not depend on one man. It is in the hands of all nations, communities more precisely, since we speak in terms of communities, not nations - the Serbian community, the Roma community, Askalija and Albanian community. The kind of communication, that was born, that started, the freedom of speech. Of course, everything takes time. The future of Kosovo? In any case, I just want there to be peace. I want us to stay where we are, in our home towns, and for there to be peace.

page:13

Interview 05.

Tell us a bit about yourself

I was born here, and I have been living in central Kosovo for thirty years now. I have lived in Kosovo Polje for 20 years, and in the last ten years I have been living in a Serbian village. I don't have a house anymore, and almost no assets whatsoever. I am married, I have two kids, I am a law student. We were born here. My wife is from Gracanica, our son was born here, in Kosovo, and I was born in Pristina. We are the inhabitants as you would say.

Your high school graduation in the middle of bombing?

On March 27th, we didn't attend school, and neither did the rest of the country. I was full of optimism, of thoughts about the future, about the world. At that moment everything seemed reachable. Everything was easy and simple. What I remember missing the most during the bombing were my friends, hanging out, because I had a great crowd in high school. We had some good times, and then we started wondering where we would go from there, and how we would see each other. But we continued hanging out even during bombing. The bombs were falling, and we were going to school. We would enter the classrooms and some of them had cracks on the wall, broken windows. However, no one could imagine what would happen. You could see it in the faces of people, the military men who slowly started to run away. But, being young and foolish as we were, no one believed those things. I even remember June 12th, when the Serbian military and police were retreating, and the KFOR was entering Kosovo, when the Albanians just came out of nowhere, and we were on our way to Pristina to enroll in college. We thought, at least I did, and sincerely, that if I got into college, everything would remain as it was, that what happened later will never happen. It was completely irresponsible. There were kidnaps, murders, everything, it was completely insane. We sold the house, since we were left all alone. The whole neighborhood had moved out, it was really scary, an extremely uncomfortable situation. It was really impossible, the neighbors ran for their lives. The neighbor who lived above me was kidnapped, that same day, June 10th, and then his father managed to save him somehow. Thank God he was able to.

So you had to sell the house?

Yes, the pressure was enormous. The situation was what it was; the houses were burning during and after the war. Left to my house was my godfathers' house, and they left too, and to the right from us was my neighbor, who left at the very beginning. And those neighbors, whose son was kidnapped, ran for their lives. Needless to mention that there was no electric power whatsoever. There were power restrictions that would last 16, 17 hours. And when the night fell, it was completely dark; you couldn't tell where you were going. The Serbian stores weren't working... I remember this one time when I went to my unclé's house to take some video tapes, because there was nothing else to watch, nothing else to do in a situation like that. There was no TV reception, since KFOR people knocked the reception poles after arriving, and then, an Albanian man who worked at the car wash once came to me and said, "Hey, I better not see you walking around here again." I wanted to punch him with those cassettes regardless of what might happen next. Mostly because my parents insisted on me not being here while all of this was happening. Later, we sold the house, reluctantly, of course, and moved to a nearby village called Ljubare, not more than a kilometer away. I walk by the house which I used to live in, and I feel sort of disconnected, and if I had never lived there. But it all comes back to me in my dreams. For the 10 years that I have been living in this, not a single dream ever takes place in it, it all happens in my old house. I dream of going over to my friends, who are no longer there, and I don't know why, they left, and then I dream of that whole high school gang.

What did it feel like to leave Kosovo during war and go to Serbia?

I tried to follow everything that happened here. I read newspapers, watched TV, was constantly on the phone with my family. Here and there I would hear about a bomb being thrown, someone got killed, someone gone missing... people in central Serbia were slowly returning to normal life, but for me it just could not happen. You are constantly in the dark, expecting, but eventually I started getting used to the whole situation. Let's say it was a real lucky occurrence that all Serbian inhabitants were connected by roads. We did not have to take the main roads, we stayed out of trouble as much as we possibly could. Albanians avoided back roads, we avoided the main ones, so we kept distance, and now, the rest is history, the tension slowly came down, and it's different today, I must say. Though, even today, honestly, I do feel some tension, I'm not comfortable, no matter how many times I have walked to say, a supermarket. I mean, when you can't even talk in your own language in a voice higher than a whisper. I'm not saying I'd like to shout or anything, just to have a normal conversation... You have those offers, as in all super markets, to which I just nod and move on. Still, the situation is much better than before. I believe that people have started taking more concern with economy and existential issues and left the nationalistic ones behind. Now, how long that is gonna last, this is a question, since the unemployment rate among both Serbs and Albanians is very high. Those who were lucky work in public institutions, all the others must struggle in various ways to make a living.

School, before the war?

We went to school together with Albanians up to the fourth grade, which was in 1989. I know there were conflicts there from time to time, there was the infamous Serbian constitution that negated Kosovo's autonomy given to it in 1974, and all I know is that then, all Albanians abandoned Serbian schools. We did not think about these things after that, all until 1998, when the talks started. And then I remember, in 1998, there was this big protest of Serbs in Pristina, when a great crowd gathered, I believe there were over 100,000 people, protesting against all that. I mean, ok, we were instruments, even though we believed we were doing the right thing. I know there was one moment when we set off, around 20 of us from school. We were supposed to go to this one building in Pristina, take the signs, and this was spontaneous and unorganized, we had two flags. We arrived downtown and started shouting "Kosovo is Serbia", "We won't let Kosovo go". Pretty creepy, since it echoed among buildings, and somewhere further, like 2 km from there, Albanians were having their own protest, this was the famous one – penguin walk, two steps forward, one step back, or the other way round, doesn't matter. There were some policemen here and there, one on every corner. When they saw us like that, they said, "Are you insane, where do you think you're going?! Do you know what is happening there? If you provoke them, there will be hell to pay." Still, as crazy as youth can be, we were walking along, at one moment reporters spotted us, foreigners, completely uninterested in us, and we started shouting, "Hey, tape us." And they started taping us, when cops saw us, another team, they started following us in a car, we were passing by hotel Grand. We were shouting like crazy, believing in a higher cause. We went round town, a giant crowd... I had never seen such a great number of Serbs in one place. I arrived home and at that moment, on BK television, I was there, close-up, with a friend. Then we were on SKY, CNN... and that's how I got on media.

Your wife is Serbian, but have you ever had a chance to date an Albanian woman?

No. But they say it's the same! (laughter). I haven't, because separation is pretty big. In Pristina, this was happening in some circles – metal, punk lovers etc. These were more fleeting, one or two night stands, never had any weight.

What was life like in the period prior to the war?

We Serbs were privileged in many ways. There was work for both Serbs and Albanians. If you wanted to buy sneakers or jeans you entered stores without thinking whether the owner was a Serb, Albanian or Pakistani. What was important to me was to find what I wanted, by the most favorable price. The rest of Serbia should turn a blind eye for us in some things, because we really were in a media darkness. We had first and second channel, and then the third, the famous one, came along. So the only information available to us was the one given by the state television. There were no alternative points of view, other local stations, like in Belgrade, where there is someone to tell you, "People, you are rushing in a wrong direction."

Do you see your future in Kosovo?

Well, it depends... Mostly no, even though I try not to go as far. But mostly no. When I think about my future in Kosovo, it mostly covers a few months or a year at most. I fantasize about a secluded house, far out there, where it's peaceful. A little house, with a cinema, LCD tv and a killer computer! (laughter). I don't know if I carry this burden, do we, Kosovo Serbs have this future-of-the-nation burden. I think about what I will leave my kids tomorrow, if they will have these same problems? Let's deal with this right now, and live somewhere else tomorrow.

Interview 06.

page 14

Can you introduce yourself for starters?

I am 32 years old, I come from Dobrotin. This is a Serbian village with 1,200, 1,300 Serbs. I was born in Lipljan, a small town where there used to be 98% Serbs, and today there is around 300, unfortunately. People sold their houses and land.

Did you have a great love in this period of your life?

Right after I finished high school. I was shot and lying in hospital, at orthopedics. There was this nurse, very sweet, and I was her youngest patient in this hospital in Pristina. We got close and were together while I was there, we slept together for 21 days. My leg was in plaster and I was with her. I was shot in my leg. Right after my surgery, she came to visit me, and took a night shift. I didn't know, I thought she was Serbian the first time. However, people started talking. Later they told me she was Albanian. Our relationship ended by my release from the hospital. I went a couple of times to see doctors for check-ups later, but in fact, I was going to see her. We met secretly in hallways, in patient rooms, 10 - 15 minutes and scoot. This became boring. If we divided the last couple of decades in three periods: before Milosevic, during and after, could you compare your life standard in these periods? What were work conditions, for example? Look, if there hadn't been for Milosevic, no Serb would have found work. Albanians worked. Serbs couldn't even find work in mines. My dad was a driver in a mine. He had a modest salary. My brother didn't work anywhere. Then Milosevic took power, Albanians started leaving their jobs, and Serbs started to work.

What kept you in Kosovo?

Mostly, a hope that I would find work with foreigners, money. My dad has a 30,000 dinars pension, my mom never worked and she receives 50 euros from Kosovo Institution, my brother works for municipality, his wife also. This is municipality of Gracanica, that is financed by Kosovo Government. I kid them, say that Tachi is paying them. They don't care. She even receives minimum wage from Serbia. They receive this, and Kosovo government salary. So, they have two salaries each.

How do you feel about Albanians?

You know, many of my relatives got killed. Albanians have their goal, which is independent Kosovo, and I can't do that. Take their government ID and passport, no way. On the other hand, Serbs are greedy. Sometimes a Serb will let you down sooner than an Albanian. This is why I keep distance from both friends and enemies. I have my hair cut by an Albanian, we drink coffee sometimes. I shop in their boutiques. They give me discount. I met them after the war was over, and they are really OK, only that they have this goal – independent Kosovo. I don't talk about this with them, though there are few with whom I make jokes about this. And I repeat, when it comes to trade and cooperation, there is full cooperation.

What do you think is the future of Kosovo?

Serbia will not keep us on a pay roll for long. It's just a question of time when they will dump us. Soon we will all have to move from here. I have some land and I tell my folks we should sell it. My father wanted to sell his house for 2 million euros. Hey, do you know what kind of money that is? And everyone thinks a time will come, a Serbian time. No way, that ship has sailed for us. I don't care. I'm gonna sell. I won't be the boss all my life. I'm just waiting for a good buyer. I won't care who they are and where they come from. I would like to go to Spain. I also love Italy. No matter, even Serbia means abroad to me. Where have I been? Nowhere! And Montenegro as well. When somebody asks me where I have been I say Serbia and Montenegro. Maybe even Vojvodina. It's a question of days when they will go independent.

page 15

Intervju 07.

Let's start from where you were born?

I live in Caglavica, but I was born in Kosovska Mitrovica but I never lived there. So I grew up in Caglavica, a little place near Pristina. I lived there all the time with a brief break between 1999-2002, when I was in Kragujevac. I finished elementary school there, and I came back here to Kosovo, finished secondary school. Now I study English language and literature here.

When did you realize you wanted to do something not to have a regular, serial life?

It was in mid 2003, when we were out of electricity for a month and a half. That was on all TVs then... we were bored and tired, our life came down to going to school and coming back from it. Since we went to school in the morning, I slept all afternoons. And then what, in the evening there was no electricity, nothing interesting to do... And we had an idea to gather a number of people and do theatre, to make plays. At the beginning, we never even planned for it to go to a higher level. That was all – we wanted to get organized, rehearse, try to put it on a school play level. But in time we gathered a lot of people.

What are your memories of childhood?

You know, I didn't really have much to do with the situation before, but after. I was fifth grade when the bombing started. I only noticed minor things. For example, we had this rule, since our village is four kilometers away from the town, that I was only able to go to the town with my parents, if we needed to go shopping or something. But it was a standard to watch your mouth. Like, there were a lot of Albanians everywhere. They call them Siptars, but now I learned to call them Albanians. This was the relation between ethnic communities. Everyone hiding something... And in '98 the situation got really tight... our parents would not let us go for walks. There were terrorist attacks, kidnaps were popular. People could not walk freely around Pristina late at that time. If we needed to go shopping, we went during the day... Whereas now... Ok, maybe I can move around cos I know English well... I can even go to Pristina at ten o'clock at night. But I don't do this very often, not because I'm afraid or anything, but because I don't have any friends there. I can pretend to be an Englishman, a Scot, whatever... but they will see through my accent. Or I could be some other international person, like a Croat, a Bosniac or something like that, which goes great around here! (laughter) Also, you do better with Albanian girls if you are a Croat or a Bosniac... I you're a Serb, the situation is very different, regardless of your behavior. But I believe the rules are like that the other way round too.

What was socializing like back then?

Oh it was the best back then! After the bombing came KFOR and UN. Everything got a different tone to it... the situation got worse by the day. And then people suddenly moved away. My village is on the Skopje-Pristina road, and everyone who went to Serbia had to take this road. For example, refugees from Urosevac went this way, and these are the pictures I'll remember forever, trucks and tractors carrying people... and we stayed. There was no access to Pristina at the time. Because the KFOR soldiers were still very lost then, didn't know where they came, what they needed to do... We even had come heart to heart conversations with these soldiers, who told us they had come cos they had heard that Serbs had been poking people's eyes out, biting, slaughtering... Their primary assignment was not to protect people like people, but people from Serbs. Many of those soldiers said this...

What do you think of Albanians as people?

I told you about the conflict, and how it all went down. But if we talk about civic society... I have a positive picture of Albanians. I met them in those peace camps, in depth like people, not like ethnicity. Cos when you spend fifteen days with somebody, masks do gown after the first three days or after the first binge we have together. I always tend to meet people, not ethnicities.

Do you think Kosovo can be divided?

People still are. But they do do business together, partners don't see nationality, they care about money. There is hope that things will be great round here, there is hope if you are willing to organize your life nicely, you can earn a nice sum of money, only people need to learn that it is important to get the job done, not working hours. Now the power is fixed, there is electricity. Water is still a problem, since there is only water for a couple of hours a day in our village.

As far as papers are concerned, can you travel? Have you done any travelling?

I still have a Serbian ID, driver's license and a Yugoslav passport. I don't have Kosovo ID. I still haven't managed to fix this, even though they say in Serbia that you can fix this if just by asking, but it's not quite like that. (laughter) We need Kosovo documents cos, for example, soon I won't be able to get my salary. I want to open this bar, pay taxes and all, we submitted all the necessary documents, but the problem is, we need Kosovo IDs if we want to register my business. Luckily, my older brother has got UNMIK's documents, and we were able to do this in that way. I cannot receive my salary, people cannot pay my fees if I don't have Kosovo documents. In my opinion, these problems are much bigger than anything else, and security, of course.

What made you decide to stay here back in 2004?

I decided to fight against what was being imposed on us, I lived in central Serbia for three years and I can't say I had a much better time there. There they attack me as a Siptar, here they attack me as a Serb. Over there in Kragujevac I went through a lot of hassle for being from Kosovo. I can also understand those people, the living is bad as it is, and then someone comes from Kosovo who has sold all their valuables, as a refugee millionaire.

Interview 08.

page.16

What are your memories of your childhood?

Childhood, as well as growing up in Kosovo, was always stressful... One of my earliest experiences is knowledge that we lived amongst other children who were just like us, but somehow different from us. And I always wondered why those children were different, when children are - children. But in time I found out the answer to this question. They differ in language, religion, sometimes behavior. I went to "Vuk Karadzic" school in Gnjilane which had four classes consisting of Serbian, Roma and Muslim children. And there were 28 classes consisting of Albanians. I learned Albanian language for nine years as the second language, which I'm glad I did, I'm sorry I forgot it. Cos, while I was living in Kosovo, I spoke it and understood it real well, but in time, since I went to live in Belgrade, it disappeared. Those are some things that used to be fascinating for me, the great number of Albanian classes and such a small number of Serbian ones. In time, this decreased, of course...

Did you have friends among Albanian children?

Of course I did. I am talking about the period from 1974 to 1984. Those were some ten years, when I started getting to know the world around me. In my street I had friends who were Albanians, who I hung out with, played football... you know, innocent children games. And I never had a problem with this, I never wanted to not play with them cos they are Albanians. But in time the separation started. Especially after the eighties, when our 'great leader' went away. But the relations had always been stiff, always with a dosage of distance... In 19985 I went to Novi Sad, to do military service. For me, Novi Sad was a revelation, I could hear tens of languages in its streets, see tens of different churches, see different cultures... so this was a very positive influence on me in a pretty early age, regarding my views of different people, same people but different religion. In 1986, I went to study literature in Pristina. And my first shock was, and I had seen it in Gnjilane before - the division of walking paths. It was a popular occurrence for young people to go downtown and walk up and down this path. In the dusk, when the day settles, people dress up, go out to see one another, and they walk. Albanians on one side, Serbs on the other. Then, we all had our cafes. Albanians went to their cafes, and we went to ours. This is when I realized that this atmosphere could not last long. This was of course proven in 1988, when Slobodan Milosevic took power, and in 1989 when Albanians 'willingly' abandoned huge companies and public services. Of course, this was all ordered by somebody. Whether it was this time's Albanian government in exile or someone from here, I don't know...

Do you remember this period of old Yugoslavia, was there at least some tension among nations?

Of course there was, but Communist Party managed to cover all that. Certain nations, who had no intellectual movements before the II World War in time got their universities, schools, PhD graduates, their leaders. And then they realized that that was their opportunity and their eternal dreams about creating new little states, territories...

What were your dreams when you were a kid?

When I finished my army service in 1986, I didn't even dream of having to wear a uniform again or of someone even calling me and telling me to take guns in my hands again. And this is what killed all my dreams! My dreams have been very flexible in the last twenty years - from today till tomorrow. We are out of dreams because, for twenty and more years, we had been made believe war was never gonna happen - but to be ready if it comes the next day! This is what we had as a daily dose of drugs we lived on. We had more fears than dreams, and when fears replace dreams, that's scary!

What was the financial condition of Kosovo Serbs and what were work conditions in 1999?

In 1989, Albanians left their working positions voluntarily, freely, and I am ready to repeat this. Serbian people took those positions. Then Sloba said he would give Serbs work everywhere. Whether knew how to write, read, had one leg or no eyes, this was all irrelevant. This was fatal for Albanians then, but it turned out later to be more fatal for Serbs, for after ten and a half years you now have a completely reverse situation.

If we divided time in periods before Milosevic, during and after, can you compare which period was better for whom?

During Milosevic, Albanians were denied many things, and after Milosevic we were. Serbs here have literally become hunted animals. Law and order in Kosovo are not the same for a Serb and for an Albanian. Serbs are pushed into ghettos, rural areas where they vegetate. Serb have no cities under their control, nor can they walk freely, to work and develop, and this is that boomerang effect we are experiencing. I had a friend whose dad was a police officer, who always came here, and she told us always in whisper,"Hey, something's going on in Pristina, Albanians are demonstrating, they will kill us all." And for 45 years of my life, I have experienced thousands of bloody Thursdays, Fridays, all announcements. Out of fear, people start whispering around that this or that Thursday Siptari are gonna come and kill us all, they will start raping, cutting, and this has happened in the last ten years. Many people lost their lives, many people went missing.

Tell me about the new contact with Albanians in 2005 and 2006?

The first contact with an Albanian, after everything that happened, was with a man from my profession. By chance, I met a man who is a playwright over a Slovenian friend from Canada. As a man of arts, I had been in a shadow till then, simply because I could not go to theatres and cinemas, I was short of what I find my emotional and spiritual food. And this man told me about an Albanian who works in a theatre, and who would like to work on a project, a play about people who were kidnapped. I said yes, cos I wanted the silence about it to stop, and with that, the approval that followed. When he told me about his idea, I eagerly accepted the offer to meet and arrange everything. This one detail I will never forget. As a young man, six years ago, he lived in a small apartment in downtown Pristina and had a guitar. I took this guitar and played "Balkan" by Dzeni Stulic. He stood up and said, "Keep it down! I don't want my neighbors to hear a Serbian song here." I told him, "Well, it's not a Serbian song, a Croat made it." This is something I will never forget. Then I put the guitar aside and we got down to writing. I noticed this cold-bloodedness in him. Albanians are not a cold-blooded people, they are very warm and noble, and when you notice they are cold, you should know that they either don't know Serbs very well, or don't want to know them. In time this was ironed, cos we realized we were two people aware of doing something important for them. The fruit of our collaboration were a couple of plays, even a book we wrote together.

What did it take for him to cross this barrier and remove the distance between you?

I think that what unites Serbs and Albanians here is that list of international community that says we MUST live together, cooperate, move forward, and this is some initial string that binds us together, to function, not more than that. They have everything of their own: their schools and faculties, their towns, urban areas, they have it all, and we have nothing. Maybe from having nothing, some new quality will emerge that will make us better somehow. We all know that the only Serbian novel that won Nobel prize was written in the most difficult time for Serbs at the given moment in time. Maybe here and now, at this moment, some Serb is writing a novel? (laughter)

Do you know about any mixed marriages from your surrounding?

This exist of course, but more like an Albanian man and a Serbian woman. It is very rare that a Serbian man should marry an Albanian woman. This is also changing now. Till ten years ago, Albanians lived in a very traditional society, by strictly coded rules. No bird flew with a different flock, no religion-crossing, no language-crossing, this was firmly kept sealed. With us Serbs, this has always been a bit looser, a bit more liberal, more open. Albanian women, truth be told, had no closer encounter with Serbian men, so they could not meet us, fall in love with us, I don't know. They were mostly directed to their schools, their cafes, watched over, whether by a brother or a father, a cousin or a mother. But this is also changing. In the last ten years I have been noticing this, a lot is changing, and I'm glad it is. Albanians are massively accepting Catholicism, which was unimaginable earlier, for example.

How do you see the future of Kosovo?

All the plans in my life mostly fell through. I had millions of them. I really don't have any plans right now, I want to live day to day, because this was imposed on me. Here, everything is an illusion. Illusion of peace, illusion of life together. Here you depend on people who are on their way to become rich. My mission is, since we don't have any institutions around here anymore, and we probably won't have any soon, to ask the government to give us institutions guaranteed to us by the new Kosovo constitution. Why can't they give us a minimum of good will, so that we can create our future? They serve it for us, but we don't want it. Let us decide on our own priorities as a community, as an entity. Our priorities are our children's education in their mother tongue, our theatre, cinema, gallery, free movement, not being limited by pieces of paper.

page.17

Interview 09.

In our primary school, there were one Serbian class and seven Albanian classes in the same school. My memories of primary school are full of fights, unequal fights, based upon nationality without any significant national hatred. That went on by default. I was born in the conflict, I do not know what is normal. I don't know what normal is, if burning each other's house is not a conflict, but we hate each other.

Do you know who Faruk Begoli is?

I know who he is. Wait, was he the managing director of the theatre at some point? I know him from the movies, when he was like a bold man, playing a mafia guy. I know him from those Albanian posters from 1999. I am not sure now whether he was the managing director of the theatre after 1999, where it was clearly written "Adem Jashari" and no entry for Serbs. So, if that is him, and maybe he is, I do not respect him as a manager of a public institution. As an actor - average, I don't know if average but nothing special. And well, he is one of the three most famous Albanian actors. When the bombing started, I was in Pristina.

Have you ever been in close relations with an Albanian?

I did not have friendly relationship. Friendship is something sincere and long lasting and I did not have anything sincere or long lasting with anyone of them. I worked with them and I used to go for a beer, but our conversation would mainly be about cars, 'chicks' and such things, and that is not a sincere relationship. If we speak openly!

About Albanian's characteristics:

I can neither say that I respect nor that I hate that quality, but that is the way it is, that solidarity of theirs. I would name that differently, single-mindedness. That is something I respect and at the same time dislike. I would maybe like Serbs to have more solidarity, to act with more solidarity than they are doing now.

Do you think there will be reconciliation between these two communities in Kosovo?

I do not see reconciliation in the sense of mutual trust and the accepting of differences. Honestly!

How do you see the future of this place?

Black, black as it is, as it was; it will always be like that - black.

Interview 10.

I have never had any problem whatsoever. All my friends loved me and we still hear from each other and we socialize. Sometimes I can not make it, but other times, when I can. I go and meet them, but my memories of them are the best possible. I have never had any problem.

Did this conflict change anything?

Of course, it changed many things. We could sell all the agricultural goods that we produced at home. Now you can't. We used to live from that, my father and my mother worked together, but it was much easier and more normal to live and work before conflict, and that is normal.

Have you been close to any Albanian?

No. We, people from Caglavica, did not mingle, we did not have contacts with them. Albanians, as a nation, are unpleasant...

What do you like in Albanians and what do you dislike?

I respect them; they are hard workers, we can't deny that. They have that "Besa", when they give that - it is done. That has vanished now; they have changed a bit, in that respect. War did not bring any good to anyone, we all know that.

How do you see the future here?

At the moment, it is better. Now, you can go to Pristina. I don't remember any incident in the last two years.

Interview 11.

page:18

I remember very well the first day at school. We were about 50 kids in one single classroom, and I remember that I had to sit in one bench with three other little girls. I remember that one of them was a chatterbox, and the other one kept pushing us all; they were all getting on my nerves. I was very disappointed and didn't feel like going back to school after that day. During 1988-89, there were many demonstrations. We never stopped going to school. Before I would leave home for school, my parents would tell me to be careful since there were demonstrations. Or, they would say something like: "If you smell something strange, something similar to carnations, grab your bag and leave the classroom immediately." It was the time when Albanian children were being poisoned in schools.

When did you realize that you are an Albanian and they are Serbs?

In July, 1990.

How?

I realized that few days after my parents were expelled from their jobs (from the Serbian regime). I had strict orders "From now on you are not going to hang around with those Serb friends of yours!" (laughing)

In the elementary school were I went there were Serbian pupils too, but very few. I think it was in third grade when "Dardania" school got divided into two parts; a wall was constructed in the middle of the school to divide the Serbian side from the Albanian side. The biggest part-and the nicest one, with the gym and the teacher's room, was on the Serbian side, which in total had only two or three classes of pupils, whereas the smallest part, and the poorest one, was left for the Albanians, which were a majority in that school. The Albanian side was so crowded that they had to improvise with wooden boards small classrooms in what used to be the corridor, in order to fit in all pupils. There were even physical conflicts, throwing of stones... it is so absurd when children fight over nationalism... this only show how evil their parents are... All my childhood was marked with street demonstrations. Growing up in that time was like being part of the whole movement, whatever that movement was. At the time it was called "the peaceful movement". Today, though, it has a different name. Nevertheless, I was a part of it, I would see it almost every day, I would walk into it in order to get to a certain part of the town, or I would walk into it only to see how it feels...

Do you remember the first day of bombing?

I remember it in details. It was a beautiful day (laughs), a sunny day. The rumor that NATO would "hit it" started as of 20th of March. And then, it hit! No one actually believed that it would really happen. I had met with my friends, and then I went back home to find my parents had bought food reserves. Suddenly, a very solemn mood fell over our house. Mom had made dinner similar to New Year's Eve dinner. The table was set and the TV was turned on. Dad, as an "italophone", put some Italian news on, and started translating for the rest of us. The first plane had left Aviano.

We were scared of everything!

In the apartment building where I lived, the Serbian neighbors dressed up in uniforms from the first day of the NATO bombing. They were the same neighbors that would even greet us kindly in Albanian until a day before the bombing. Normally, we were scared, I don't believe there was someone out there that was not scared. On the 1st of April, they were expelling all people living in "Lakriste" neighborhood. We immediately got ready to leave also, for Macedonia. There were a lot of people in our car, and I was sitting on several laps. The road was very long... We were stopped several times by the police, but there were no major problems. There were a lot of cars on the road, and when we got to the Kacanik gorge, we stopped because there was a long line of cars. We thought the line of cars would start moving in half an hour, or one or two hours maximum. We stayed there three nights. There was a lot of misinformation. It was a terrifying time.

[After the return to Kosovo]

How did you find Pristina at that time?

Horrible! It has never been worse!

Can you explain why?

It was a time of complete anarchy!

Did you have a Serbian friend, or did you know Serbian people after 1999?

After 1999, until 2002 or 2003, I would still see around some of the Serbs that I knew from before, we would greet each other and that was it. Serbs and Albanians used to live together in some parts of Kosovo, while in some other parts they didn't. There are several models of "living together". There were parts where only Serbs lived, or where only Albanians lived. The idea of them living together, how it is propagated today, is impossible! You cannot tame Albanians and Serbs like one tames wild animals. Sooner or later this inter-ethnic relationship will recover because the young generations will get tired following the ideals of the older generations...

How do you see Kosovo in 10 or 20 years?

Like a human being in a coma, kept alive only by machines...

page:12

Interview 12.

When I was in primary school, we had a kind of improvised post office inside the school, where we could write our greetings for New Year's Eve. A girl wrote a greeting to another girl. "Ta uroj Vitin e Ri, me flamurin kuq e zi, qe valon ne Shqipëri" (I wish you a happy New Year, with red and black flag that waves in Albania). Her parents had to give reasons to the principle why she had written that. That was the situation, we shouldn't mention Albania.

I know we went guests at Serbs, and that they would come as guests at our house. We would visit each other. I had a friend then, she was a sales assistant, and I asked her - wanting to speak in her language: "Kolko kosta u killu portokalla?" She realized that I wanted to speak in her language, and we both laughed.

"If we, as religious people, don't cooperate, what should we expect from other people?" (these were her words to an orthodox nun)

On Easter Day I came back from the church and I saw the military tank down there. I told sister Smila: "Sister, the tank is in front of our door and we should not upset anyone". We remained calm. When I spoke with my Serbian neighbor, she told me that they (the military) wanted to come inside, but she had told them that they don't need to go inside, because the sisters only pray, eat and sleep. So, a Serb protected us. She would always tell us: "If someone bothers you just come and call us."

My other Serbian neighbor had a telephone and through her we found our sisters in Croatia, and the families of the other nuns. They would call her (the neighbor), and her son would come and tell us: "X family called to say they're safe and they asked about you." Even today we call that neighbor for Easter and Christmas. Now she lives in Belgrade. I haven't met them since then, but we call each other during holidays.

One month after NATO bombing started, I got my papers and together with the other nuns we left for Albania, even if I had all papers to go to Croatia, where our base is. We had decided to go to Albania because all Albanians of Kosovo were there, and we wanted to share their fate.

A very important event. When we came close to a place in Peja/Pec, the army stopped us. I was in my uniform, driving a car. They asked me to open the trunk and the hood. It was OK that they asked me to open the trunk, but I was surprised that they asked for the hood as well. I realized that this is God's will, because before we left for the trip I told one of the girls: "Please add water to the car." She had done so, but she hadn't put the lid on properly. By the time we had arrived there, the water had boiled and the engine was almost all burned down. The police officer yelled at me: "Don't you see that your car is almost on fire?! Do you have water?" I told him "No." He told me I should drive slowly; there was snow on the road. He took some snow and put it instead of water, but that didn't create much water. Two of the other police officers went to the river and filled up a bottle. They poured water in my car. They told me: "This is our duty." They didn't ask me about my nationality.

Interview 13.

I went to high school "Ismail Qemajli" in Hogosht, but, unfortunately, before I finished the first year, I was expelled from school because I was considered a "politically inappropriate student". For a long time I remained a house girl, I didn't have the right to go to any other school. I continued my education eight years later, in the technical school "28 Nëntori" in Pristina.

Hogosht village is predominantly Albanian; however, when I was a child, Roma people were living there too. We spent time together, no matter of what ethnicities we were, although as we were growing up, we started to sense some sort of difference.

On my 15th birthday, I was taken by the police, which tortured me psychologically and physically.

I knew Faruk Begolli since I was a child. I think other children my age knew him as a great artist, not only as a Kosovar artist, but also as a world famous one. At that time, it was a little difficult to see movies in Albanian language, including here movies where Faruk Begolli starred. However, I remember knowing his name since I was a child.

There were no Serbs in my birthplace.

My first contact with Serbian language was when I was in the fifth grade. In the first year of high school, the Serbian language teacher was a Serb, whereas in the elementary school, he was Albanian.

Other contacts with Serbs were always bitter because when our house would be surrounded, it was always by the Serbian police. We had a traumatized childhood. The police would awake us in the morning. They would search our house looking for what they referred to as nationalist and irredentist material.

When the war started we were all very happy because, despite the consequences that the people of Kosovo would suffer from the war, it was necessary for the world to see that Kosovo needed international intervention.

Before the war started, I was a participant of student protests of 1997. During these protests the Serbian police brutally beat me up. I ended up with two broken ribs and a damaged spine.

My parents received the news that I had been beaten up, and they came to Pristina. But I pretended to be fine in front of my parents. They went back home thinking that my health was fine. I did not go home to my parents for the next six weeks because I had to wait for the pain to go away.

Since when I was young I suffered due to my ethnicity. It made me understand that every human being, including Serbs and Roma in Kosovo, have the right to live their own lives. My sufferings have raised my awareness that it is not good to try and achieve something by damaging others.

Interview 14.

page 20

I finished the elementary school in Pristina, but the first time I went into the actual school building of my elementary school was only after the war. I went to “Faik Konica” school, but only Serb pupils were allowed in the actual school building. The first four years of the elementary school I attended in the building of “Naim Frasheri” school, but only during the evening. There were only two classes signed up in “Faik Konica”. One class had 9 pupils and the other one had 11. The only reason why we went to school in the evening was that we were Albanian. We would finish school at 20:00 or 21:00 in the evening and, I remember, since it was dark, especially during autumn and winter, our teacher would always walk each one of us home.

I grew up being scared that the Albanian music would be too loud, at parties we always had to make sure that the volume of the music was quite low.

We could never go out to play after 17:00. I remember when we were playing with rope we would do it only in our balconies, and only during the day. When there were police walking under our balcony, my mom would always take us inside.

I remember that during the war we would sleep at night with our clothes on, we could not afford to put on our pajamas, because we thought that we would be kicked out of our apartment at any moment. This was the time when people were being expelled of their homes, but, anyway, we were lucky since we lived in the apartment buildings in the center of the town, and they did not expel people from there. People abandoned the apartment buildings in the center themselves.

I had only one Serbian friend during my childhood, his name was Stefan. I remember him very well. Before the start of the conflict we used to play together. When the situation started to worsen, we stopped spending time with each other. He left with his family to Serbia, and we lost contact.

In the apartment building where I lived there were only three Serbian apartments; an elderly man lived in the first, an elderly woman in the other one, and a family one floor above us. We would not socialize, but we would always greet each other, “miredita”, and “dobar dan”... a mutual respect. They were good people.

I remember very well how we got on the train to Blace, when we went there to get a cabin for the whole family - me, my mother, my brother, his wife and their child. They put me in through the window. The train departed and my mother remained in Pristina.

I asked my brother: “Why are they taking us away like this?”. I wanted to know why it was happening.

All this, apart from making a lot of damage, it made me think a lot as a child; it made me see things differently and I am convinced that all my generation thinks the same about it. No matter how hard we try to “Europeanize”, I am convinced that we are all a little different, because we experienced things that other didn't, and now we see things from a different perspective.

Then, I used to keep a diary, and now, all these years after, I still go back and read through it. There I had described the time when we left Kosovo, how we studied, but I don't enjoy reading it too often because it makes me feel bad.

Today I read an article that reminded me of Faruk Begolli. How little we estimate people when they're with us, and how much we remember them once they leave this life. The same thing happened with Bekim Fehmiu. No matter how much I respected this man, I still think that I have not respected him enough while he was alive. I regret I didn't go to watch the last performance of “Professor, I'm talented, that's no joke”, because I always told myself that there's plenty of time to go and see it. I think it's a matter of culture to value people while we have them.

During the war, not more than 5 telephones worked in Pristina, and these were in particular apartments. Our telephone did not work, but the one in the apartment of a late professor, who used to be my mother's professor - worked. Each time we wanted to talk to our mother, we would call his number and we would tell him that in two or three hours we will call to talk to our mom. She would go to his apartment, and we would talk to her. This would happen rarely, but it was enough for us to know that she was alive. During that time, we had no information about my sister's whereabouts. After the war we learned that she was in UK, and she returned after some time.

Immediately after the war I had no wish to have contact with any Serb. I don't feel guilty about that; the circumstances imposed this on me.

Interview 15.

My childhood was quite nice. I was living in an apartment building and we were a multiethnic community. I had Serbian friends, and naturally Albanian friends, but no Roma friends.

I had many friends from my neighborhood that in the beginning were neither Albanians, nor Serbs or Roma; we were all simply children, and apart from playing together, we would also end up in fights, or we would steal together, we would swear at each other, we would eat together. I went to a kindergarten for two years and there my friendship with other ethnicities began. We played together a lot. I still remember Diana, Dalibor, Ben etc.

We separated only in the end of the '80s, when we understood that we are Albanians and they were Serbs, that we are different from each other. However, we spoke Serbian and they spoke Albanian, we never thought about the language that we would use, we used the language which was the easiest for all of us to understand. If someone didn't speak any Albanian, we would speak in Serbian, and vice versa. On the back of our building, we would organize concerts inviting as guests people living in other apartment buildings, where songs in Albanian and Serbian would be sang, without any censorship. We would separate from each other only when we heard there was a demonstration. Only in '88-'89 the nationalities started to separate us.

We didn't have a lot of actors, we had Bekim and Faruk, whereas Serbs had more actors and their films were more enjoyable. I grew up in a time when the world cinema was more popular than the Yugoslav cinema, however, we watched the “Bolji Zivot” TV drama, we would not go to sleep without watching the new episode.

Faruk Begolli was not only an Albanian actor; he was also a Yugoslav actor. He belonged to the Yugoslav cinema. He was a very good actor and we enjoyed watching him at home or in the cinema.

The first day of the war I was at home. My sister's friend came to be with us at our house. It was a terrible night. Our neighbor gave me a gun; we kept watch all night long. I had 700 DM (Deutsch Marks) saved, which I had put aside together with my mom, and during those days we lived only with this money.

There are many places where Serbs and Albanians do business together, play together, but I do not see how I can have a good Serbian friend as I used to have before, even though I have good relations with Serbs.

page 21

Interview 16.

“Prenk Jakova”, school of music, was a mixed school. In my class, I had a Bosnian girl who learned to speak Albanian later on. Serbs were in the first floor whereas us, Albanians, in the second. The teachers did not make differences between us. I had a Serbian teacher who was very kind to me, and I was very kind to him. Sometimes, when I didn't understand something, he would translate it in Albanian.

Honestly, without our neighbors, I do not know whether we would be here today. At the beginning, they helped us in order not to leave the country. There were about five Albanian families and the Serbian neighbors would tell us: “Stay, no one will harm you”.

Later on, we went to Blace, and after that, in Stankovec, where we stayed for ten days, and then we returned. When we came back, we found our Serbian neighbors here. At the moment, there is no one of them living here.

After the war, I had a chance to meet a Serb that used to live here in my building, in a shopping mall. As a neighbor, he kindly asked me to drive him around. It was the post-war period and many people used to go in Pristina. I took my neighbor, and drove him around the town and these were his words: “Will I ever have another opportunity to come back and live with you, Albanians?”

I met a Serbian girl from Gračanica, and now I have good relationship with her. She lives in a village close to Lipjan, with her family. I go there at least once a month; they invite me for feasts. I feel at home when I go there, because I had relations with that girl. I have good relationship with them. My family knew that I was visiting that Serbian girl and they would tell me: “Be careful!”. Her brother is my buddy. I told him that we, Albanians, are not allowed to flirt with our buddy's sisters, and he replied: “That is the way we are; more 'opened', and, if she likes you, you can go on with her”. I was surprised by these words. Now she got an apartment in Belgrade and she spends more time there. This is the reason why we went apart. I can not go there because I don't have a Serbian passport.

I am much more opened than the others and I often used to say that if anyone from my family marries a Serbian girl, I would be the first one.

Before the war, I used to watch “Bolji Zivot” TV drama.

People that were affected by war have troubles to accept the reality we are living in. I don't think any other country has better minority standards than Kosovo.

Interview 17.

I got married after finishing the secondary school. I didn't continue my studies, I got married in Pristina. My husband is an economist and when we came in Pristina; our first neighbor was a Serb. That was my closest contact with a Serb. I did not try to build a relationship with them, but it was our neighbor, Elena, who approached us with nice words and wanted to socialize with us. She always asked us how we are, and invited us over for coffee. After that, we started visiting each other. She spoke Albanian, we did not have any problem, because my husband also spoke Serbian, but in most cases, we would speak Albanian and we did not have any problem. She had only one daughter. When we talked, she would tell me about her hardships, my, I started trusting her and she seemed to me a good person. As time went by, little by little, my prejudices started vanishing and I began to notice the goodness, the help that she offered me and I began to see that not all people are the same. I considered her a good person and I liked her.

We watched films occasionally. Even though, at that time, there were few TVs that broadcasted films in Albanian, we made efforts. My husband showed interest because, sometimes, he used to do acting. We tried to watch and support actors like Faruk Begolli, and we were aware of his fame.

We left Kosovo three weeks before the war ended. Before we left Kosovo, we were afraid to go to the border from Vranjevac, because we knew there were Serbian forces everywhere and it was very dangerous. This way, Elena would come, because we did not dare to go out to buy food and necessary things. She would come, accompany us, she would stay with us in the late hours and try to help us and not let us be afraid of Serbs. When we decided to leave Kosovo, Elena and her husband drove us to the border with her car. She never left us alone and she distracted us from our fear of something bad happening to us. We were very grateful to her because she helped us in the hardest times.

In our way to the border, the police stopped us. Elena and her husband started speaking in Serbian and told them: “They are with us, our family”. I can say that she rescued our life, because, until that time, we stayed “locked” inside. Maybe thanks to them, we are alive today.

When we returned in Pristina, I immediately wanted to meet Elena. She had rescued us and we were very thankful to her. When I went to the house, the doors were locked. I went there from time to time to see if she would come back in the meantime, but she never did.

After a year and a half, she decided to sell her house and visit her family in northern Mitrovica; that was the reason of her coming back to Kosovo. And one day, surprisingly, I saw her in front of my door. I was surprised because I did not expect to meet her again because she was quite old. We did not have any contacts because, when the war ended, she fled to Belgrade and then she came back and paid us a visit, staying a couple of nights at our place. It has been two and a half years since she passed away, but I may say that she is the only Serb that I had ever loved.

Interview 18.

page 22

When I was a child, the school would take us to theatre...

Our school used to be big but it was divided: one floor only for Albanians, and the other floor for Serbs. On the second year we were fighting with each other. It was the time of repression: police would come to imprison the teachers... it was very bad.

It was part of our daily life, different stories, all family was LDK, politicians, and you were surely inspired by patriotism because at school also we were being taught about patriotic issues.

I had Serbian friends... we used to play football together... when the guerilla war began it was like a sign that things would change. Demonstrations never stopped.

There are Albanians that think that we should go back under Serbia. There are Serbs that think that Kosovo should be independent...

Here, there's no economic development, there are no jobs, no money. If people have jobs and a good life, they would not think about entering into conflicts with each other.

page 23

Impressum

Views: Personal histories of Serbs and Albanians

Editors: Marko Rakić, Filip Bojović and Sanja Stanković
Art direction and design: Filip Bojović
Translation: Dženana Huseinović and Qerim Ondozi
Photo: Nikola Bradonjić

Interviewing:
Ivana Srdanov, Damir Bojić, Marina Grnja, Milana Femić,
Ljubiša Milovanović, Qerim Ondozi, Blerina Rrustemi-Neziraj,
Elvira Berisha, Donjeta Demolli, Luljeta Demolli

Project coordination:
Milan Vračar, Jeton Neziraj and Qerim Ondozi

Realization of this project is supported by:
European Cultural Foundation
ERSTE Foundation
Heinrich Böll Foundation Southeastern Europe
Kosovo Foundation for Open Society
Fund for an Open Society, Serbia

Project realization:
Association Kulturanova - Novi Sad, Serbia
Multimedia Center - Pristina, Kosovo

www.kulturanova.org
www.qendra.org

Print: FORUM Press, Novi Sad
Print run: 1000

November, 2010.

CIP - Каталогизacija y yблuкaцuи
Бuблuоtеkа Mаtиcе cрпске, Нови Сад

323.1 (047.53)

POГLEDI : susret liĉnih istorija Srba i Albanaca /
urednici Filip Bojović, Marko Rakić, Sanja Stanković. -
2010- . - Petrovaradin : Asocijacija Kulturanova, 2010-.
- Ilustr. ; 30 cm

Godišnje.
ISSN 2217-3838
COBISS.SR-ID 257847303

POSETITE
KOSOVO
VIZITONI
KOSOVË
POSETITE
KOSOVO

