An aerial, high-contrast black and white photograph of a city. A large, bright white, cloud-like shape is centered in the upper half of the image, contrasting sharply with the dark, textured urban landscape. The city's grid pattern is visible, with roads and building footprints. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

Center for Nonviolent Action

I cannot feel good
if my neighbor does not

edited by Ivana Franović & Helena Rill

I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not

collection of interviews with people from the region of
the former Yugoslavia: how they see reconciliation, the
past, responsibility, guilt, nationalism, future, etc.



www.nenasilje.org

title

I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not

original title

Ne može meni bit dobro, ako je mom susjedu loše
As unë nuk mund të ndihem mirë nëse fqinji im ndihet keq
He може мене да ми биде добро, ако на мојот сосед му е лошо

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I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not

Ivana Franović & Helena Rill (eds.)

Translation : Nenad Porobić

Center for Nonviolent Action
Belgrade-Sarajevo, 2009

contents

- Foreword to the English edition (7)
- Foreword (9) - Acknowledgements (12)
- Interviewers (13) - Map of the former Yugoslavia (14)

INTERVIEWS

- Metodija (Skopje/Shkup):* The guilt is collective. An individual alone cannot pick up a gun and start shooting.
15
- Galip (Skopje/Shkup):* Every nation has its own nationalism
20
- Sead (G. Vakuf – Uskoplje):* We are nearing the bottom
26
- Đuro (G. Vakuf – Uskoplje):* People are slowly “sobering up,” although some politicians are still “rattling their sabers”
29
- Tamara (Sombor):* Hey, can you hear what you are saying?
33
- Esmā (Sarajevo):* If you bleed, I bleed also – blood is one
38
- Vojo (Nevesinje):* Well then, brother, let’s start with ourselves
43
- Edin (Ulcinj/Ulqin, Sarajevo):* A global phenomenon
49
- Predrag (Trebinje):* It’s terribly hard to say “I was wrong”
51
- Vedat (Gjilan/Gnjilane):* People need to realize that hatred should not be bred
56
- Jadranka (Loznica):* They hate while having no idea what happened
60
- A. (Knin):* I am a better Croat because I do good for my country
68
- Mevludin (Gjilan/Gnjilane):* Breaking out of the cycle of violence
73
- Peda (Babušnica):* We should look the truth in the eyes
77
- Mustafa (Ulcinj/Ulqin):* We are worse than we were told
84
- G. (Bijeljina):* True heroes are not today’s heroes
86
- Fata (Bijeljina):* Let’s not allow others to speak for us
91
- Nexhat (Gjilan/Gnjilane):* Trust should protect us, not armies
98
- Boris (Knin):* To clean up our own backyard first
103
- Iva (Zagreb):* Start a conversation over Sunday lunch
109
- Junuz (G. Vakuf–Uskoplje):* How can I be happy when the unhappy surround me?
115
- Olivera (Kamenica/Kosovska Kamenica):* We all share the same queues
118

- Kosta (Skopje/Shkup):* How did we get to the point of seeking reconciliation?
122
- S. (Prishtinë/Priština):* I breathe freely, I walk freely, we talk freely
126
- Albert (Podgorica):* It hurt Albanians, Roma and others as much as it hurt me
130
- Darko (Horgoš/Horgos):* Third level of guilt: those who did not turn out to vote
137
- Petrít (Skopje/Shkup):* He – large house, you – little house
142
- M. (Karlovac):* We have things to be ashamed of
149
- Ljubica (Popovača):* I am afraid that we lack tolerance and dialog, and we need them
155
- M. (Subotica/Szabadka):* Everyone thinks that he is the victim and others are guilty
158
- Josipa (Jajce):* Small reconciliations are very important
164
- Muhamed (Skopje/Shkup):* From head to toe
168
- Milica (Bijeljina):* They found us on the road and accepted us into their home
170
- Ajša (Podgorica):* They participated by being silent and doing nothing
175
- Ivica (Šibenik):* He didn't fall from the sky, we voted him in
182
- Razija (Sarajevo):* And to experience all of it... For what?
188
- Nina (Belgrade):* I feel better if I know that I am not sitting and waiting
190
- Saša (Sarajevo):* I should invite my neighbors over for a cup of coffee instead of attacking them
199
- Dika (Sarajevo):* Alhamdulillah
202
- Aleksandar (Split):* If you are silent, the other one will shout, and everyone will listen to it
209
- Sister Makrina (Berovo):* One's enemy is within oneself
216
- Zymreta (Skopje/Shkup):* Hatred only attracts more hatred
219
- Srđan (Osijek):* Man as the political will
226
- Dejan (Zemun):* I remember the nineties with anger, and bitterness, and feeling of shame
230
- Lana (Kotor):* Time and will
240
- M. (Vukovar):* I still greet the Croat neighbors with "Bok" and Serb ones with "Zdravo"
242
- Vera (Zemun):* Nationalism is a sticky thing
247
- Instead of an afterword: Violence has been discussed often enough, here's something about nonviolence
255

Translator's Note

Footnotes have been entered and written by the translator and editors. All three languages (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian) are spelled phonetically, that is, each letter of the alphabet always represents the same sound. Below is the pronunciation guide to the letters not found in the English language.

c is 'ts' as in bats
č is 'ch' as in archer
ć is 'tj' as in tune
đ is 'dg' as in bridge
dž is 'g' as in gentle
j is 'y' as in you
lj is 'lli' as in million
nj is 'n' as in new
š is 'sh' as in sharp
ž is 'zh' as in treasure

Original transcription has been utilized for personal names and local words. On the other hand, the usual English transcription is used for geographic locations due to a number of towns with two official names in different local languages (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Hungarian and Albanian).

Foreword to the English edition

The collection of interviews entitled “I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not” was first published in the winter of 2005, in the Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Albanian and Macedonian languages. All those languages, present in different regions of former Yugoslavia, were “intertwined” in one publication which was, in Ivana Franović’s words, to symbolize the “unbreakable linkage between human destinies in this region.” Linkage, despite ethnic and national borders - or linkage *due to them*...

Almost five years later we decided to translate the publication into the English language and thus make it accessible to readers outside of the region. Different reasons, inclinations and feelings inspired us to make this decision.

Starting with slightly **trivial** ones – many researchers and activists outside of the region incessantly asked us what the “large orange book” was about. Does it have to do with reconciliation? Theoretical works? Oh, I see, people’s testimonies... how interesting! Then we decided that it would be easier to translate the book into English than to continually have to explain anew what is not easily explicable, or easily retold.

Through reasons related to **solidarity** – aware of how much the “live” material from other contexts means to us, we wanted to make the publication accessible to the people who were interested in this topic, hoping that it would be read and utilized in the circles which work on the issues of peacebuilding, dealing with the past and reconciliation. This encompasses activist, academic and theoretical points of view.

And that’s how we reached the very **activist and political reasons**.

That is... you think “everything is alright here now”? You came a few times to the region, and it’s nice, right? The people are, like, nice, they know how to have fun, they’re friendly, no pressure whatsoever. It’s not like they crazily feel the mutual love and respect, but, it’s alright, a war took place, that’s probably *normal*...

You are right.

The “normalcy” category has been the dominant discourse in this area for the last few years. Things are becoming normal. The relations are *normalizing*. The region is open (while the rest of Europe and a good part of the world are not for most of us). We can travel and visit. We can trade. We watch the same movies, we listen to the same music and read (more or less) the same books. We are meeting the EU conditions for joining at the same time, and so on, and so on... We normalized the region, we normalized our relations. We also normalized a great number of things, which we would rather not speak about since we have been “humanized” overnight while following the international and domestic “stylists” best advice.

We normalized hatred, inter-ethnic distrust, ethnically clean states and regions, contempt, mockery and disgust for the other and the different. We also normalized our views of the crimes and violence from our (near) past which shows when we shrug our shoulders or turn our heads away. There is no use crying over spilt milk. And it's everybody's fault. Except ours.

Maybe some kind of peace-activist naivety made us believe that this book's translation into English could contribute to another understanding of development. The one stating: yes, changes occurred here, some of them positive. But, stating simultaneously: much more work is needed if we want to make those positive changes sustainable. And if we want to have something more substantial and deeper really happen. We don't need just any kind of work, we need peace work. What's necessary is action which rests on the belief that having a full fridge of Croatian products (for example) is not the same as having a lot of Croatian friends. That the *possibility* of traveling across the region is not the same as the *need* to visit some places again to meet people. That to condemn war crimes and support peace (or, more often, be against war) declaratively are not enough to really stop us from being afraid of each other and to enrich the real and mental maps of our safety zones with the toponyms from the other *side* of borders.

We wanted to remind ourselves of the people's stories of reconciliation from different parts of our region for all of the previously listed reasons. These stories were collected throughout 2004, which, from today's perspective, seems to our *normal* region like a long-gone indication of better times.

We can only assume what the answers to the identical questions would look like today. Some of the long-lasting national dreams have been realized in the meantime (Montenegro) or partially realized (Kosovo). Some of the long-sought criminals (Gotovina, Župljanin, Karadžić) have been brought to... the Hague. Doubtlessly, that's enough to boost some people's optimism. We, however, don't share that optimism. It rather seems to us that we'll have to wait for sustainable peace, trust, justice, truth and reconciliation for much longer. At least until our societies realize that nothing sustainable or good can be built on bad foundations and poisonous "land."

We certainly will not wait for that moment with our arms crossed. Too much blood has been spilt for us to accept that "normalcy" for which we, by the way, pay dearly. So dearly that we, pressured by our pains, traumas, fears, debts, are not even aware of our neighbors. Not to mention the realization that, maybe, those neighbors are not good with (by) us.

This book is to reaffirm the belief that "I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not." We hope that this contribution is not a futile one.

Tamara Šmidling
Sarajevo, February 5th, 2009

Foreword

What you have in your hands is a collection of interviews with people from all over the former Yugoslavia.¹ These people come from various backgrounds, they are of different ages, professions, sexes, ethnicities, etc. What all of them have in common is that they are ready to talk about the past, perceive the present, have fears of and hopes and wishes for the future. One might say they are just “ordinary people.” Maybe they are “ordinary” in the sense that they are not in any positions of power or that they do not belong to the world of celebrities which we hear about and see in the media. But, they definitely comprise, I’ll venture, the majority of our societies. Most of the weight they carry is just like ours, consisting of many wishes, fears, frustrations with the social situation, thoughts, anxieties, aspirations and hopes. At the same time, we may rarely hear their voices. It’s absurd, don’t you think? How many times have you had a chance, if at all, to hear how it was for a woman to live in Sarajevo or Pristina during war? What a person is thinking in Belgrade, Sibenik, Skopje, Jajce? What someone in Knin, Gnjilane or Loznica is afraid of and hoping for? What about a refugee, or someone who fought in the war, or someone else who just watched it on his/her TV set?

Our efforts were to find space for these voices to be heard. Our long experience in peacebuilding has taught us how much the exchange of thoughts about our societies’ painful spots, our expectations, who we are, what troubles us and what we would like to happen, contributes to mutual understanding and trust building. Just like one of our interviewees said: “If you bleed, I bleed, too – blood is one.” Mutual trust and understanding are of crucial importance for peacebuilding, or building the peace which our societies are certainly lacking. Thoughts that follow do not fall into the “don’t worry, it’s nobody’s fault” pattern. Some might step on your toes or, perhaps, you might think some of them should not be a part of the publication aspiring to contribute to peacebuilding. I think the task of peacebuilding may definitely produce such an effect since we believe that it cannot be accomplished by simply ignoring the tragic past or the present that many of us are experiencing. If we tackle the past, considering it in all its complexity, it is certain that we cannot all agree on it. That is exactly our “ordinary people’s” greatness, the endeavor to understand precisely those opinions that are so different from ours (excluding the fascist ones, there may be no place for them in this book since they have usurped enough of our surroundings already). We may say we have made a major step forward when we

¹ The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of six republics and two autonomous provinces: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia, and Vojvodina and Kosovo.

succeed in reaching the understanding of why the other is thinking so differently (or it might not be so different, after all) and grasp that it is not caused by some blind and inexplicable hatred.

One of the “ordinary people,” our friend Dževad Budimlić, said: “I cannot feel good if my neighbor does not.”

The interviewees responded to our questions speaking about all of the big terms that had become ordinary phrases, which imply certain meanings as soon as mentioned. Actually, these exact terms, such as reconciliation, the past, coming to terms, oblivion, guilt, responsibility, peace, the future, coexistence, war and others, we all differently comprehend. We tried to present explanations of these terms through individual experiences, and not by using other big terms. In this way we have made space for the improvement of mutual understanding.

It is not our intention to base this research on a representative sample which would indicate public opinion (or public opinions). From the start we clearly wanted to emphasize the qualitative nature of personal experience at the expense of representative sample’s quantitative nature. Also, as I already mentioned, there can be no space here for some of the voices, the loudest and the most aggressive ones.

This book’s noticeable abundance is in the number of languages presented. Some might say it would be more economical and/or practical if the sections in Albanian and Macedonian were published separately. Still, we liked the idea that everything was in one place, tightly bound together, just like our destinies still are.

The interviewing started in March and lasted until November of 2005. Eighteen interviewers (also from former Yugoslavia) had the responsibility of choosing the interviewees and had the freedom of conducting the interviews as they liked, as long as all of the relevant questions were included. The interviews were conducted in Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian and maybe a few more languages (Serbo-Croatian, Montenegrin, etc.). The dictaphone recordings’ transcripts are presented here authentically. Some of the interviews have been minimally shortened to avoid unnecessary repetitions. We also had to “edit” some of the verbal “noises,” primarily to make reading and comprehension of interviewees’ speeches easier.

It was not easy to pick the interviewees. Along with coordinating the interviewers to cover the social variety and include people of different profiles and opinions, another hardship was to find interviewees who were ready to speak publicly about painful topics. A large number of people felt afraid and uneasy about it. Although we decided to present them using their first names only, some of them felt better if we used just their initials, mainly for their own safety. We completely understand that fear. It gives us a picture of how much our societies have sunk into mud or have become ill. That fear also shows us how urgently we all need to act in order to bring about the so needed social

change (which cannot be, as one interviewer stated, “once we get bigger pay-checks”). Here I cannot resist quoting Meša Selimović²: “Fear the bird, fear the turd – when will you live?” I completely agree with the woman who said that we didn’t live, we *attempted* to live.

An open questions remains: who will be interested in this book? We have our list of wishes and recommendations for whom should be interested in all of this. A part of it is realistic, other parts we are not sure about. In any case, readers’ feedback would be very helpful. Please send us your comments and impressions. Peacebuilding needs both action and reaction so that we can change ourselves, and, thus, the societies we live in.

YYou might want to read the interviews in the order presented here, but it’s not necessary. We tried to put them together so they interact. We avoided, on purpose, any national, ethnic or religious categorizations in order to contribute to the deconstruction of our disturbed social values.

Of course, there are many possible sequences for reading these interviews in which they may still interact somehow, obviously or not. It’s your choice.

Ivana Franović

² Mehmed Meša Selimović (1910 – 1982), famous writer from the former Yugoslavia.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the interviewees for their sincerity, courage and will to express their thoughts and feelings publicly. We would also like to thank the interviewers for fulfilling such a delicate and demanding task.

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We are also grateful to the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their generous financial support of the book's first edition.

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Interviewers

Ana Bitoljanu
From Skopje

Lidija Gjokić
from Skopje

Anita Grabner
from Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje

Lidija Zeković
from Podgorica

Bojana Jovanović
from Zenica, lives in Bijeljina

Lovorka Bačić
from Zagreb

Boris Avram
from Nevesinje

Milan Colić Humljan
from Babusnica, lives in Belgrade

Edina Hasanaga – Čobaj
from Ulcinj

Nexhat Ismaili
from Medvedja, lives in Gnjilane

Emina Popović
from Garesnica, lives in Zagreb

Sanja Deanković
from Split, lives in Sarajevo

Gordana Pirkovska Zmijanac
from Skopje

Tamara Šmidling
from Belgrade, lives in Sarajevo

Helena Rill
from Sombor, lives in Belgrade

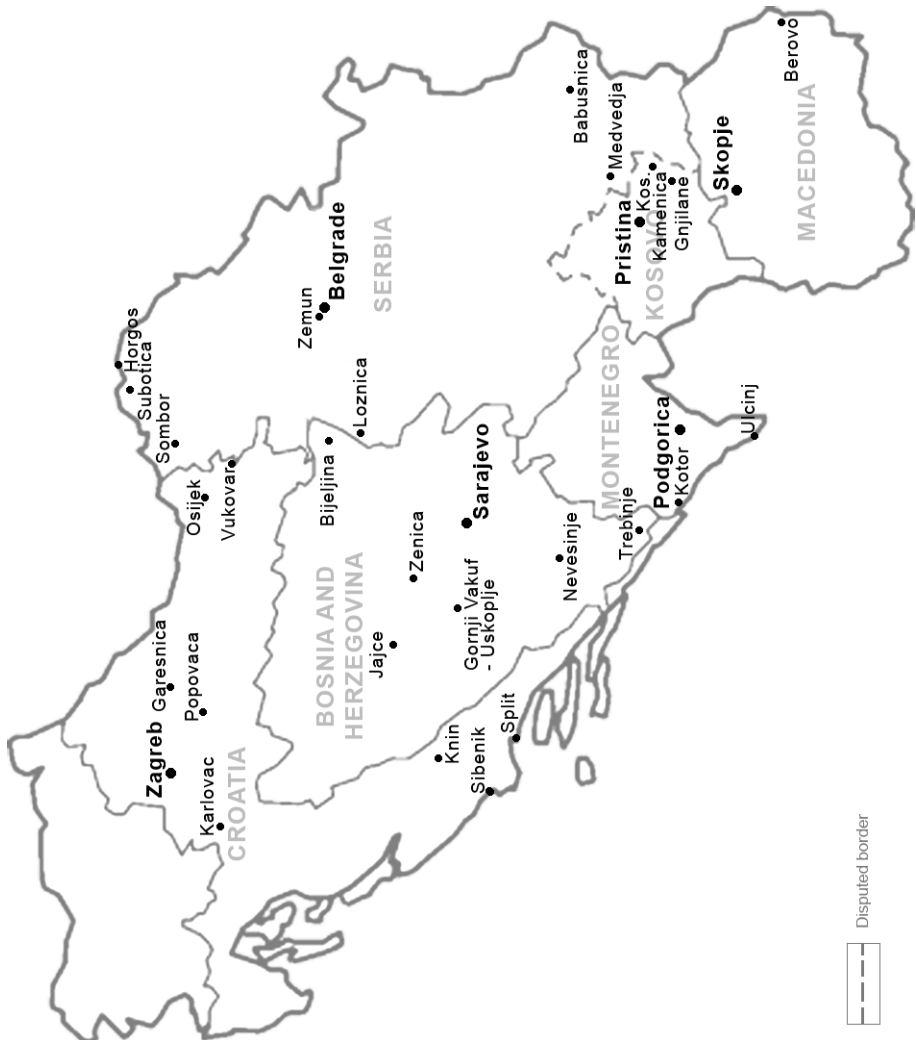
Tijana Gnjidić
from Sombor, lives in Subotica

Ivana Franović
from Belgrade

Vildan Efendić
from Sarajevo

Map of former Yugoslavia

- The interviewees' and interviewers' birthplaces and places of residence -



**The guilt is collective.
An individual alone cannot
pick up a gun and start shooting.**

Metodija

(78)

Skopje/Shkup
retiree,
radio amateur

You were very active as a radio amateur during the war in the former Yugoslavia. A conflict broke out in Macedonia after it. How did it affect your life?

Very bad interpersonal relations in Macedonia could be discerned, in a way. In my opinion, it was the political parties that introduced the hatred. There are a lot of political parties and a lot of hatred, and those party leaders, they introduced the conflict between peoples. When the Macedonian independence was declared, initiating pluralism, I thought there should be two or three political parties so that Macedonians, Serbs and others ethnicities could join them. The authorities of the day made a large mistake by allowing creation of national parties, nationalistic parties, which contributed to the hatred. I lived in Gostivar among Albanians, Turks and various other nationalities. I was one of the athletes who shared everything. We competed together, met socially. This was around 1948 and 1949. I never thought it could come to this, to a conflict. It was hard for me, particularly because of the uncertainty existing wherever one wanted to go, and because of the lost interpersonal trust, even with the Albanian radio amateurs who had trusted me before the conflict.

I lived in Gostivar among Albanians, Turks and various other nationalities. I was one of the athletes who shared everything. We competed together, met socially. This was around 1948 and 1949. I never thought it could come to this, to a conflict. It was hard for me, particularly because of the uncertainty existing wherever one wanted to go, and because of the lost interpersonal trust, even with the Albanian radio amateurs who had trusted me before the conflict.

How did you feel about the Ohrid Framework Agreement³ when it was signed?

I think we could have done without it. If they had sat at the table as Macedonian citizens, VMRO and SDSM, PDP and DPA,⁴ etc., there would have been no need for mediation. But, that's just that. A large nationalistic system is good for nothing. Why can't an Albanian be in a mostly Macedonian party?

³ The Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed by the government of the Republic of Macedonia and Albanian representatives on August 13th, 2001. The Agreement ended the armed conflict between the two sides.

⁴ Political parties in Macedonia: VMRO-DPMNE Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity; SDSM – Social Democratic Union of Macedonia; PDP – Party for Economic Prosperity; DPA – Democratic Party of Albanians.

How could the consequences be alleviated?

Reason needs to prevail. Unemployment is contributing to the creation of conflicts, thefts are occurring due to people's poverty. Drugs are also adding to the overall uncertainty. Only reason can help people, nothing else. Mainly, life at home needs to provide proper upbringing for children, ethics need to be taught in school. Politicians are using children for their own purposes, or are,

for example, using sports to introduce unrest, divisions, arguments, fights. We didn't have that earlier. It was well known that fans were supporting their teams, but fights never took place. And now, on the contrary, we have nationalistic arguments. Didn't we see politics at its purest in Aracino?

That is, reconciliation between Albanians and Macedonians has to happen and that could be accomplished by abolishing nationalistic parties. Civic parties should exist in order to resolve the issues between citizens, Macedonians, Serbs, Roma and Albanians.

How could that change?

We need to pay more attention to children's upbringing. We need to have them start socializing. For example, there are all sorts of social clubs. They should be allowed to socialize. But, adults must not act as they do in Semsevo, for example. Macedonians do not allow their children to go to school there, while Albanians make their children boo the

Macedonian children. This incitement, aggravation needs to stop. Still, adults need to understand that life must go on.

Let's return to the war's consequences and their alleviation. How could we accomplish reconciliation? What does reconciliation mean to you?

Reconciliation will happen, I hope it will. It can't go on like this. Both Albanian and Serbian nationalistic parties are creating conflicts so that we don't enter Europe (*tn: the European Union*). That is, reconciliation between Albanians and Macedonians has to happen and that could be accomplished by abolishing nationalistic parties. Civic parties should exist in order to resolve the issues between citizens, Macedonians, Serbs, Roma and Albanians.

Who should work on reconciliation, in your opinion?

All people should. We don't need these educated people in the Parliament. Ordinary people would resolve all of the issues better.

What are your fears regarding reconciliation?

I would like it to be peaceful and for the situation to calm down so that you could move freely, so that you could go anywhere. I, as a retired railroad worker, ask myself why there is still no train running to Kicevo. Both Albanians and Macedonians live there, but the trains don't run. The trains to Kocani don't run due to financial reasons, but the trains that ran to Kicevo were always packed. Now they don't run since you can't know what awaits you there, you might get killed. Fears explain it all.

What could halt the reconciliation process, in your opinion?

Only nationalism and chauvinism could halt it. I think that nationalism is the worst pest, an epidemic that keeps man from being free. Only political interests are considered.

Do people want reconciliation? Do people in Macedonia want reconciliation and are they ready for it?

I think that over fifty percent support the idea of coexistence. I don't believe that all Albanians in western Macedonia want to fight Macedonians. I don't believe in it at all. The people who suffered so much, who work hard all day long, it's not in their interest to fight. It is those who do nothing who don't have interest in coexistence. Drug smugglers' interests come up, of those who deal drugs, and such. They will halt coexistence. Honest people, hard working people of any nationality are not propagating the nationalistic hatred. And, one more thing – Macedonian, Serbian and Albanian nationalisms were awoken. But, not all people think like that. A group is manipulating the weaker people. They are using their chance, particularly now when unemployment is high. They can, with little or minimal help, incite conflicts and slogans. For example, the Albanian flag is the object of aggravated relations. Political demonstrations escalate turmoil between people. Or that bomb in Kumanovo, that's pure vandalism.

Who could lead the reconciliation process?

The youth, mostly. But, adults should stay out of the youth's way, they need to let it be. You saw the children who come for all sorts of festivals, meetings,



radio amateurs', for example. There's no nationalism in our meetings. We have other kinds of conversations.

How could you contribute to the reconciliation process, how could the others?

I am contributing to it, in any case. Some Albanians from Tetovo communicated by radio with my help during the Bosnian conflict. One of them asked me what my nationality was. When I said I was Macedonian, he said that was great, because I helped him find his family in Sarajevo. On the other hand, only Albanians were charged for establishing radio communication in Gostivar, while I did it free of charge. Many Albanians came to me to communicate by radio. I still help them. Trust may be improved in different ways. Commerce and education could contribute to it. The Albanian side needs to give up politics, people need to live together. They shouldn't listen to politicians, neither Macedonian nor Albanian since they incite quarrels. The paths of reconciliation between Macedonians and Albanians need to be paved one after another, little by little. Macedonians could be afraid or scared of the majority where they're underrepresented. Politicians incite fears, quarrels. On the other hand, neighbors, people are talking and living together, without politics coming between them. We can see it on TV.

What will change for you once Macedonia is reconciled?

Everybody will trust Macedonia if she's peaceful, calm, regulated, with no hatred. Nobody trusts her this way, we're a joke! When we reconcile, we'll live nicely again, we'll socialize, just like they used to in Bosnia.

What about the past?

It won't be eradicated easily in the case of elders, but children won't know such hatred. Let's consider our past. The people of old Serbia and old Bulgaria wanted their piece of Macedonia. That generation is gone now. They believed in Great Serbia, Great Albania, Great Bulgaria. Once, some Serbs from Serbia told me: "What do you mean Macedonians, you're Serbs!" That opinion is gone now, they have vanished. Same goes for Albanians, they will also realize that they have been manipulated by their politicians in order to incite hatred. But now, while Albania is entering Europe, a lot of things need to be done. Albania has to let people know that they live in Macedonia and that's where they stay, that they may be of Albanian ethnicity, but Macedonia is where they live. That's the goal. I don't know about the goals of the new government but that has been the goal so far.

Is there anything we should forget and, if so, why?

It's hard for Albanian and Macedonian families who lost a member or innocent children. Of course, the family of a child who was killed while playing basketball will not forget. A lot of Albanians will not forget. Which Aegean would praise Greece? They were driven away, their homes were burnt to the ground, villages

were taken away. They will not forget. Persons who haven't lived through anything similar will forget quickly, maybe because they don't care about that.

What about forgiveness?

One should forgive. Forgiveness is inevitable. The war is over now, people were led into it. There is no other solution. If someone knows another, I want to hear it.

What about guilt? Is it individual, or collective?

It's collective. An individual alone cannot pick up a gun and start shooting. Serbian radio amateurs used to obstruct my calls during the Bosnian war. I pleaded with them, saying: "Colleagues, please stop obstructing the calls, these people are suffering. God forbid you experience such suffering, only then would you know what it's like." That happened in 1999. I have an audio recording that would make you freeze: arguing, cursing between Serbs and Albanians. We have brought in that turmoil, we, the people. That was a mistake. If only the situation would calm down faster so that people and children could live freely. Many people don't care about anything. But, that changes when they find themselves in a similar situation. Some had mocked me, perhaps, for working until they were trapped in the war. Serbs had obstructed me, but their attitude changed when it was their turn. One of them, I don't want to mention his name, told me: "I will throw a bomb into Najče's house." However, I hope he thinks differently now, when the same has stricken him. He was driven out of his home. He moved away from Kosovo and lost his home, his furnishings. His children are on the street. Indolent persons won't believe what's happening around them until their own problems commence.

Whose responsibility is everything that happened to us in Macedonia? Do you feel responsible? Is there anything one could have done?

Not everyone is guilty. Main culprits should feel responsible, but it's hard to distinguish who they are. I, for example, don't feel responsible for the war because I didn't help it start, I also worked. I gave a part of my life in order to do good.

G. P. Z.

Galip

(58)

Skopje/Shkup
high school
teacher

Every nation has its own nationalism

Can you still feel the consequences of the events from 2001, now that four more years have passed?

Certainly, I can still feel the consequences. Children and people are still generally afraid. That's usual with conflicts, just like that old saying that claims you need two parties for a fight. Today you may see people quarreling everywhere. That's the biggest reason why conflicts occur. Unemployment contributes to it, the bad financial situation as well. Those who have nothing certainly can't be satisfied. Conflicts happen everywhere, but what hurts the most is that the consequences of war still may be seen. We should think harder because it may affect the following generations as well. The youth are poisoned with nationalism and every nation has its own.

How could it be changed? What needs to happen in order to induce change?

Parents should induce the change, first and foremost. They should, for example, be more careful about what's being discussed at home. We had wars before but our parents never told us anything bad about the others, another

nation being one way or another. The opposite is happening now and that's why parents need to be more careful when they're speaking, particularly regarding the war of 2000–2001. They shouldn't say, like they usually do, that the war was caused by Albanians or by different Albanian militants. You may read that in newspapers and magazines every day, as well as about other events, such as Kondovo, Radusa, etc. These problems have to be tackled more seriously, with more understanding. People who do these things need to be invited and sat down at the table so they can discuss their needs and their objections. I think these problems could be resolved in a nicer way, through dialog and discussion.

Conflicts happen everywhere, but what hurts the most is that the consequences of war still may be seen. We should think harder because it may affect the following generations as well. The youth are poisoned with nationalism and every nation has its own.

How did the war's beginning affect you?

It reminded me of the children's game called *kamaj* when it began. But, one went too far so that the other still feels the pain today, since it's hard to give up your children for nothing. That's why those who are on top, the politicians, should think about it.

Did anything happen within the last few years that hurt you? How do you view those situations now, has anyone apologized?

I don't know what to say about this topic. Anyone may offend you these days, but these offenses need to be differentiated. Was it intentional, for example? It would need to be recognized if it possibly wasn't. But, dialog clears up misunderstandings. I had no big misunderstandings where I work, except when they abolished *parallelke*⁵ in Albanian. This was during the VMRO–DPMNE's reign when a new principal was hired. I begged her to proceed with the *parallelke* and not to push what was very painful on someone else's terrain. She didn't listen to me and to this day we have, if not every day then every few days, misunderstandings among children, teachers and staff. These types of problems are being solved, but it's going slowly. That is the current situation.

Do teachers, or do you, personally, take initiative to change this situation?

Our former principal, a Macedonian, is back. Albanian *parallelke* had earlier been my responsibility for twelve or thirteen years. We'd had misunderstandings during that time, but you still feel the consequences of war and you cannot expect it to settle momentarily. Some children lost a loved one, they are still hurting.

Whenever I spot a misunderstanding between students of both nationalities, Macedonian and Albanian, since this is a mixed school, I immediately call them to my office and attempt to calm them down. Why should they argue? One should reconcile with the other who made a mistake, right away, on the spot. I don't let them out of my office until they are reconciled. That situation should not happen again.

As I said, organizing concerts, sports events, and camping trips is needed for a change to occur. For example, this summer camp helps. I feel this is extraordinary, something one may hardly believe. We have arrived here from all over, Kumanovo, Skopje, Tetovo. Students of all nationalities who live in this country, our country, have arrived, they are socializing and exchanging their opinions. This is very important to me, that we can tackle problems, or homework, this way. This approach is necessary to make the situation in schools much, much better.

What is reconciliation for you?

The Bible also mentions it: "Don't lie, don't steal, don't kill." Every person brought into this world is here to survive, to develop and, in the end, obviously, to die. That's why I think that we need to calm down our passions and live normally. Everybody should live normally.

How could it be accomplished? What is the reconciliation's prerequisite?

⁵ Parallel school studies conducted in the Albanian language.

What needs to be done in order to achieve it?

All people should be treated equally. There should be no national divisions. I think that everybody is valuable. There is no need for divisions: I am Albanian, you are Macedonian, Turkish, Roma, Serbian or anything else. All of us should live in unison within this community.

There is a lot of work to be done. I work in a mixed school where all nationalities are represented. In my opinion, children need to be involved in different projects, trips, sports events, they should socialize. That will help us forget bad things and stop judging one another. We could easily do a great number of things in order to reconcile.

**Who should do these things?**

Clearly, everybody, starting from politicians to technical personnel, from the Minister of Education to my school's technical staff, all should participate.

What do you think could obstruct the reconciliation process? Do you have any fears regarding this process?

Parents themselves are most important for the children's upbringing. A well brought up child can comprehend issues in time and act according to a standard, act like a student.

Are all rights currently granted to you in Macedonia?

Everything is normal now, thanks to the new law and the Ohrid Framework Agreement's implementation, although a lot still needs to be done. We need to eliminate the war's consequences. A lot has changed, I

think that positive changes are happening. I feel equal to the people of other nationalities who live in Macedonia. Educational and employment systems' improvements are obvious, for example. Every aspect has been improved.

What's your opinion on the employment quota?

The Ohrid Framework Agreement's expectations have been met. This process is going well and there are no major problems with it.

But, the non-Albanians are protesting it. Do you think such a regulation contributes to reconciliation in Macedonia?

An old saying claims that the sun can't shine on all. Nor can the Ohrid Framework Agreement satisfy everybody. It's often said how Albanians were given too much, how they enjoy too many employment privileges. The other side would certainly object, unsatisfied with it. Still, this regulation of employing 20% Albanians should be observed since there would have been no war if it had been observed on time.

Do peoples in Macedonia want to be reconciled?

My opinion is that many people on both sides with whom I spoke thought reconciliation should happen.

Should one forgive?

Well, one should always ask for forgiveness in order to reconcile. We can always make a mistake in our everyday lives. An ideal man or person doesn't exist, anyone can make a mistake. Forgiveness has to be sought after each mistake.

Who should apologize to whom?

Firstly, the person who has made the mistake, the one who has offended the other: "I am sorry, please forgive me, I had no intention of hurting you."

What could the "ordinary people" do about this? How would you, for example, contribute to the reconciliation process?

Well, in case you are dealing with stubbornness, a third person should be brought in who could talk to everyone involved and peace would be made. One side has to yield in order for a dispute to be settled.

What will change in Macedonia once people are reconciled?

People will not live in fear. All sorts of murders, abuses, kidnappings are taking place not only in Skopje but in every other city as well. People will be relieved of these tensions.

A much disputed law regarding flags was enacted a while back. How much can such a law contribute to the reconciliation process?

I think that every people on earth has a flag for its symbol. I wouldn't condone or attack a person for defending his or her identity. There is no need for a new flag. We could put all national symbols on one flag and place them in corners of others' flags. In a way, make it an "everybody's flag."

What could your people do for reconciliation in Macedonia?

I, as an Albanian, would talk to Macedonians and other peoples who live in Macedonia. I would invite them to sit at the table and reach a mutual agreement stating that we want to be reconciled and that we want to establish relations. That's how we could enter Europe.

How should we treat the past? Should it be forgotten?

A lot of people will write about the past, every nation will write its own history. However, it will be censored before it's published. We should refrain from writing for at least twenty or thirty years, in my opinion. If we do not, passions will rise again and we'll go back to different misunderstandings and different wars.

Should it be forgotten?

Of course it should. We need to think about our children. A moment ago I said it could be very painful in certain cases. In such a case it's hard to forget, but those are the circumstances. When both sides are reconciled, and they should be, they won't be able to escape our destiny of forgetting ugly things.

What about forgiveness?

We Albanians forgave a lot. Lekë Dukagjini's canon,⁶ the tradition of having to reciprocate a murder with a murder of someone from the other side, is a thing of the past. You may rarely see it happen today. That's why they will forgive as well.

How much, in your opinion, does the international community contribute to the reconciliation process and stabilization in Macedonia?

I think they helped a lot. They also had to help during the war. The EU has helped us a lot, it initiated the dialogue between the two sides. It's getting better, passions will calm down and people will reconcile. No problem.

Do you think the guilt for what happened is individual or collective?

An individual cannot get a whole country into a fight. It's time to pause and think if the majority is talking about people preparing for something and if the majority is unsatisfied. Just like in medicine: prevention is more important than healing. A timely reaction is necessary. What's causing the war needs to be determined and discussed. War and loss of people are not the solution.

Do you see your responsibility in it somewhere? What is your responsibility as a school teacher?

Well, I would request a regular discussion with the country's higher ups if I were asked what would accomplish our goals.

Is there space for development of different identities without endangering the others in Macedonia, in your opinion?

I don't see why there shouldn't be space for a person that is capable of developing his or her identity without someone else's intrusions like "my identity is stronger, better, more evolved." There's no way that it may be forced upon a person like that. There is space for all of them to develop and live like a family, although we have all sorts of people now, in my opinion. Religious identity should develop as well, but only if the goals are not mixed and if it is not being

⁶ Lekë Dukagjini (1410-1481) was an Albanian prince known for a code of law instituted in northern Albania.

forced upon someone. I said that the Bible stated “defend your own, don’t attack another’s.” To conclude, develop your own identity without offending another’s. There is no need for it.

Is there anything I forgot to ask you or anything you would like to say in the end?

I would like to say that the position of school employees would greatly improve if all schools, starting with the multiethnic ones, and all of the cities participated in social activities, got acquainted, exchanged opinions, and tackled different problems. The position of children and students would improve as well, and there would be no hatred between students.

G. P. Z.



We are nearing the bottom

What are your memories of the period before the war and during it?

I remember a few things from the prewar period, I know I could have gone freely wherever I wanted, there was no danger. I finished first and second grade in elementary school, I can remember a few classmates. I don't remember specific events. I remember the wartime events better, I spent most of the war here, whereas I spent the rest of it as a refugee.

You can feel the war's consequences strongly in our town. The town is split in two halves, Croatian and Bosniak. For example, elementary schools are completely segregated while high schools function following the "two schools under one roof" principle. You can feel the invisible line dividing the town. When you walk the town you exactly know how far you should go.

Can you feel the war's consequences and, if so, how?

You can feel the war's consequences strongly in our town. The town is split in two halves, Croatian and Bosniak. For example, elementary schools are completely segregated while high schools function following the "two schools under one roof" principle. You can feel the invisible line dividing the town. When you walk the town you exactly know how far you should go.

How do you personally feel about that? How do you live with it? Has it ever been particularly hard and, if so, why?

Perhaps it was hard right after the war, we didn't know whether we could go to certain parts of the town, we had no communication with people from the other part. Only when some organizations started their work, like the Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje Youth Center, did we get a chance to initiate communication with those people. High schools were merged later, enabling more contacts.

What needs to change in order to alleviate these consequences?

I don't think it's up to the ordinary people, I think it's more of a political factor. The current situation in town is that we have no mayor, nationalistic parties are always in power, the intolerance between parties is increasing and all of these factors are causing further distance between people.

How should we treat the past?

Facts happened. Of course, people who have lived through it will never forget some things but I don't think we should dig through the past too much. Life goes on, that's how we should work with young generations.

What about reconciliation, what does it mean to you?

My first association when I hear the word is that people from both parts of town should be together, work side by side and socialize. But, again, it's not up to the ordinary people, politics play a significant role in this.

A little spark is enough to take us back to where we began regardless of how much we work on bringing people together. That's what happened, right now we don't have a mayor, the municipal administration is not functioning, and the budget is frozen.

Still, do you think that people themselves are not doing enough, that they might fear reconciliation?

I think that it varies from person to person. Some people lost a loved one during the war, some went through ugly things and are traumatized. It's hard for them to move on and take a step toward reconciliation. I think that people have many prejudices and fears which will last for a long time because they are afraid of it happening again. Prejudices were created during the war. People who had lived and worked together before the war and who ended up fighting lost trust. They will always fear it happening again. Lack of knowledge creates prejudice. People have been getting wrong information and thus have created a wrong picture of others. I think it's not right for people as a whole to be blamed, I think guilt is individual. I was very young when the war began, too young to understand that situation, but what I know from stories, books, makes me think that politics is to blame for everything that happened to us. That is, certain individuals' politics, of those who profited from that situation during the war and after it.

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How could we attain reconciliation?

Regarding reconciliation, the only option is to work with the young generation, starting from kindergarten age through elementary school. Teach them that history is not individual, meaning Croatian and Bosniak, which are contradictory for the most part. Each group writes what suits them so that children form wrong pictures of the other nation and of themselves. A common language needs to be found!

What do you think about responsibility? Should there be "ordinary people's" responsibility for what happened?

I think that responsibility is also individual, we may not blame all of the small, ordinary people. Although, I do think they could have done more, they could have resisted better what was forced upon them.

Who should work on reconciliation?

Everybody should work on it. Politicians could just oversee the process and help people with it. It's important that it's talked about. These are small steps

but very important for the reconciliatory process. People should primarily work on themselves and thus spread the “virus” of reconciliation communally!

Do some institutions have more power and opportunity to influence people regarding reconciliation?

I think some institutions influence people a lot. For example, the media and religious institutions have a lot of power and an opportunity to change the people's minds. Still, I think they don't want that since this situation suits them. Their interests are being served in this situation as it is. They don't care about people!

What's your impression, do people want to be reconciled, are they ready for it?

It varies from person to person, we should not generalize. Some do, others don't. But, I think that those who want to work on reconciliation could try to influence the others.

How does the youth, from your experience, react to conversations about reconciliation? Do you talk to your friends about it sometimes, what's their attitude?

Most of them want to reconcile, but, again, that political factor is crucial, it makes it harder. The situation in town, in the country even, is not giving a chance to youth development, it's not giving them a chance to be heard! The old educational system is to be blamed and all of the institutions which are not allowing young people to express what they want. Probably the fear of authority is causing it, fear of the people who have gained power through war. That's what hinders the youth's efforts.

What are your predictions for the future regarding reconciliation? How do you see the future?

A lot has been done for reconciliation in Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje since the war ended. Maybe it was done wrongly, causing the current situation. Currently, we are nearing the bottom and this is when we should restart the reconciliatory process but this time we need to try other, better methods.

A. G.

**People are slowly “sobering up,”
although some politicians
are still “rattling their sabers”**

What are your memories of the period before the war and during it? Can you feel any of the war’s consequences?

I was working in Austria before the war began. It could be better sensed over there that something was about to happen here. I cannot believe that something like that could have happened in a town that had been so tolerant. People say that a high level of tolerance existed between nationalities here even during World War II; because both Croats and Bosniaks live here. Like I said, I could not have imagined such an escalation of conflict here. This war was one of the most terrible events that took place in my life, even though I, as a child, had lived through WWII and the exodus caused by a bombardment. What I went through that year surpasses all of my darkest thoughts. People started separating during that period. At night they would secretly cross from one side to the other, the town started splitting in half. I hadn’t felt the need to go anywhere, since I couldn’t have believed that such a large misfortune would have happened.

What do you think about the process of reconciliation now? How could it be attained, who needs to work on it?

I don’t think the high commissioner or the international community can do it if people don’t do it themselves. Unfortunately, the people here usurp the others’ jobs, starting with the clergy that is using religion to speak against the other people and unite their own. It’s not in their interest to try and end up with the others. It’s only a façade. I personally think that a new generation needs to appear for it to change. It is hard now because young people do not know how we lived a while ago. They were born during the war and may only hear from their parents how it used to be before the war and accept it or not. I am pessimistic about it since it seems to me that they only care about going out nowadays. A few wish to actively work on changes, or, for example, to take up politics. They don’t even want to vote these days. Their only hope is to get involved and try to do something. No one will help them if they don’t help themselves.

What could the “ordinary people” do?

There are no great solutions. We live in a country that’s in transition. The state robbed workers of everything, sold the factories and kicked them out. This period has to come to an end for some things to return to their place. I don’t know what else a small man could do. Besides, young people need to get involved,

even through politics, if necessary, they need to come out and try to do something. Many NGOs tried, but municipal authorities didn't follow. Youth need to enter politics, find parties that are not nationalistic and which opt for this country to remain multiethnic. Young people are running away from politics, all sorts of political games are repelling them. Until I became a city councilor I didn't know what C and B parties were. However, now I know that this is something important – C is for Croats, B is for Bosniaks, and all gather around their own. We need to support the organizations and parties which don't find this important.

People were told that they should fear one another – some that they should fear a Jamahiriya⁸ state while others that they should fear an Ustaša⁹ state.

Do you think it's possible that some persons are interested in this? People who are interested in reconciliation?

See, that is the problem which worries me. I am in SDP,⁷ we have people of different nationalities in our party, and now I can see that's the case with other parties as well. But, these parties caused the war and fought it. Thus, all of the people of different nationalities who join nationalistic parties are doing it for their own interest. Young people probably don't feel any interest in politics which makes it hard for us to gather them. Everything I am talking about comes down to politics. I am also worried about the lack of economic opportunities for youth. I, as a man, feel unprepared, I don't have a solution and that worries me. A lot is political since people are showing signs that they are ready – they come to the market place, they socialize as much as possible. Business connects people. The economy would contribute to reconciliation, but it needs to be prepared.

Are there any fears regarding reconciliation?

War is a great evil, and its victims are many. I think that both nations have been misled and that persists to this very day. People were told that they should fear one another – some that they should fear a *Jamahiriya*⁸ state while others that they should fear an *Ustaša*⁹ state. We managed to get the children of both Croatian and Bosniak nationality together for a project (handball). They socialized, rejoiced in winning together, hugged. Then, suddenly, the Croatian children stopped coming. Anyone I asked could give me no answer – whether they were threatened or whether one of them, as a leader, influenced the oth-

⁷ SDP – Social Democratic Party in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁸ An Arabic term which means "people's state" or "state of the masses". In this particular case, the emphasis is placed on the state's supposedly inherent Islamic nature.

⁹ The Ustaša (Ustasha, Ustashe) was a Croatian nationalist far-right movement. The term usually relates to Ustaša militia that was in power during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) which was part of axis Powers during the World War II. "Ustaša" is also used as a derogatory term for ethnic Croats.



ers. Later, they came back and rejoined us. There's nothing bad between those children. So, maybe something like this could produce results, but more needs to be done and we don't have the conditions for it.

What's your opinion on how the past should be treated? How could it be conveyed to younger generations?

The truth needs to be told and the children should determine what's right and what's wrong. Although, this is very hard, particularly considering the current school programs as they are. They should follow a single program, study a single history – Bosnia is one and it should have a single history. We can't erase what happened, and I am against that. We need to remember, we must not forget, but we also have to forgive. Most of the people are misled, I talk to many so I can see it. Unfortunately, another problem is the change in demographics. The rural populace has come to town. They lived kind of divided in villages earlier – the villages were either predominantly Croatian or Bosniak. Thus, it matters little to them who their neighbors are, this situation suits them. That complicates the situation further. I don't see a quick solution. This needs to be "worked on" slowly, patiently. The international community is not of much help, either. The high commissioner's representative who came to visit us just wanted us to "keep calm." He gets paid if there are no problems.

What is your view of the future? What are your predictions regarding future reconciliation?

I think that people are slowly "sobering up," although some politicians are still "rattling their sabers." People are slowly realizing that they have been fooled. I expect it to get better. It's just sad that we had to feel what it's like to be at the

bottom in order to feel what it's like at the top once we start climbing. We are already near the bottom, especially in our town. I don't know how people can survive at all. I remember that after that war (tn: WWII) all of us put our forces together to rebuild, for free. After this war everybody just waits for the finished product, no joint effort exists. This amazes me since we were so proud when we would build something new then. A friend of mine told me: "They are so easily destroying everything we built. It was so hard, we rejoiced after building it." Maybe we need large community actions with the youth now? But, the politics of today are not focused on this. Thus, we need capable people in politics, that's who we need to vote for.

A. G.



Tamara

(23)

Sombor
student

Hey, can you hear what you are saying?

Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Tamara, I am twenty three years old and study physics in Belgrade. I am from Sombor.

What are your memories of the nineties' war?

I don't remember it as something that particularly affected my daily life, except that I couldn't watch the news because of some disgusting scenes. I would always be sent away from the room during it. I also knew a (displaced) family that settled in the neighborhood, I used to play with the children.

How does it look now, from the fifteen years' worth of time distance? Do you have different associations or pictures of that war now?

Well, it's different, it's much harder now. It didn't touch me then, but now I have many of those pictures in my head, it's being refreshed currently. All of the crimes are being pushed. Like, the Serbian society has to start recognizing it. It's a lot in the media, and, as far as I can see, something terrible happened over there. Of course, it hits me hard.

What does "dealing with the past" mean to you, personally, disregarding the way the media presents it? How would you define this term?

Well, I would say it means both recognition and understanding. Simply, it is insight into what happened and acceptance of the fact that no people did good. Neither my own, nor the others.

And what's your view of this process currently? Do you see it as the society's or the nation's need, as an obligation that was imposed for various reasons, or as something else?

I think the society needs it to be healthy. We need to admit it all to ourselves so that we can go on. On the other hand, I do feel it's being forced, that the international community and Europe are imposing it on us, pushing us to "admit it, so that we can move on." It's not spontaneous, only a small number of people in Serbia are clear about the need to admit. They are getting angry about the large majority sweeping it under the rug, saying that nothing happened.

It seems that many parents have incited their children against other peoples – "this one is a Croat, and this one is a Muslim, and they are not good." A few days ago, a few eleven years old kids, while playing in front of my building, were saying (I am not sure whether it's a cheering song): "kill, slaughter, get rid of a Croat." He is eleven years old, he does not even know who Croats are! Maybe the kid sitting next to him is one!

Is it good or bad that it's being "pushed"? If nobody pushed it, would it happen on its own?

I think it would be very hard for it to happen on its own. In any case, it's good that some are emphasizing it, but it appears that people resist it.

Is it due to the fact that some emphasize it, or could it be something else?

It's because the ones who emphasize it are outsiders. The desire to admit it is not Toma Nikolić's,¹⁰ but the pro-westerners', and that is the problem.

Who would have initiated this process if it hadn't been for the "pro-westerners"? Who should start and lead it?

Well, I don't know. Currently, those NGOs which work on human rights are leading it and carrying it. It's logical that, even with no external influence, the process should be started by those people.

What's the role of the state? Is it only up to the NGOs?

No, I am saying that they should do it and that they do it okay. Now, the state should contribute, but the politicians are not exactly clear about what they should do. So, they are occupied with other things, and not the right things. I couldn't rely on them regarding this.

What about the individual's role, should he or she participate in this process, and, if so, how?

The individual simply needs to be conscious of everything that has happened and should feel empathy, empathize with the unfortunate people who lived through war or are currently experiencing it not only here, but in all other parts of the world. Simply, human feelings need to be stirred since I think that they are gone. People are selfish nowadays.

How could we make the individual conscious of it?

Phew! I don't know. It's accomplished through upbringing, that's learned at home. It could also be accomplished in school to a degree, through history lessons. It needs to be addressed more.

Okay, that's the process of shaping future generations and society, but how could we work on people's empathy right now?

I think it would be hard with older people.

You mean that we can't move on?

Yes. Maybe the ones who went to the front, the ones who saw it with their own eyes, or the ones who lived there and experienced the war feel more regard-

¹⁰ Tomislav Toma Nikolić (1952) is a Serbian politician. At the time of interview he was the Deputy Leader of the Serbian Radical Party whose president, Vojislav Šešelj, was (and still is) in the Hague, Netherlands, indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

ing it, I think. But, it's useless to talk to the local volunteers who went there to plunder and to get rich. And I also don't see a way to affect the people who sat here watching TV. They are still influenced if they sit in front of TV sets.

The process of dealing with the past, as it is today, is it going well or should it be done differently, irregardless of who is stressing it and for which reasons? How should it be done, in your opinion? What levels should it affect?

I don't know.

Will any results be accomplished, the way it's going?

It seems that people will find out what happened, but they will not acknowledge the results thinking "yes, it really happened, I believe it happened" but will think "yeah, yeah, keep talking, nobody cares" instead.

You think they will not believe what happened?

Yes. I had a chance to talk to a law student who was interested in Serbian history and recent wars. She, for example, claimed that not so many had been affected and that they hadn't lived there at all, that politicians had arranged the displacement like a trade deal. I also heard that in the media. That it didn't happen like Nataša Kandić¹¹ says it did.

Does that lessen the crime's weight?

I don't think it does. A single person is one too many, not to talk about the thousands that are mentioned.

What about reconciliation? What is it for you, in the context of current relations?

It consists of facts' acceptance and forgiveness. If you were a wartime victim you would never forgive, of course.

Do you think it shouldn't be forgiven?

I am not saying that, it should be forgiven, especially if you have no influence over the development. We shouldn't waste our lives and be angry if we are aware of our ineffectuality. We should keep living. That's what I mean. It's of no use staying angry forever.

What about the "forget – forgive" relation?

We should not forget, we should remember, but we should forgive in that sense that no animosities remain between nations.

Can you notice the process of reconciliation progressing in our society?

¹¹ Nataša Kandić (1946) is the executive director of Belgrade's Humanitarian Law Center (HLC). HLC documents human rights violations committed during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and provides legal aid and protection to victims of past human rights abuses before national courts.

The messages are contradictory. My surroundings contain everything from the people who say “let’s go to the Croatian coast for vacation” to the people saying “fuck them, I’ll never go” and “what are they doing here, let’s beat them up.” I simply cannot determine who’s in majority, whether the ones who are okay and who want to make peace or the ones who are still angry.

Who should initiate and direct the reconciliation process?

The state should play its role. I think it’s good that Mesić¹² comes here for a visit, and that Koštunica¹³ goes to Zagreb. Let’s bury the hatchets.

That’s at the state level...

Well, if it’s initiated at the state level, I suppose it will... More has to be done for the individual, for people. I know a man who still cannot enter Croatia because he is listed. Even if he could, I doubt that he would go. Another twenty years will pass before something is done with those lists or before they are forgotten.

Do you think that reconciliation will be accomplished at the state level first, while “ordinary people” will be slower?

Some people have reconnected with their old friends and are visiting again. I may not see them in my surroundings but that doesn’t mean that it’s not happening. It’s just that I don’t see them.

What is needed for the final reconciliation? What are the obstacles which hinder the parties once at war to reconcile and renew cooperation? Who or what is hindering this process?

First, it appears that our society is too chaotic for immediate action. I think it’s too late for changes, considering the situation. It slowly needs to be attempted through education, to start with children when they’re little. A lot of time has to pass in order to forget. Actually, it is not to forget, but to get rid of the hatred and the intolerance. It seems that many parents have incited their children against other peoples – “this one is a Croat, and this one is a Muslim, and they are not good.” A few days ago, a few eleven year old kids, while playing in front of my building, were saying (I am not sure whether it’s a cheering song): “kill, slaughter, get rid of a Croat.” He is eleven years old, he does not even know who Croats are! Maybe the kid sitting next to him is one!

Do you think the youth should lead the process of reconciliation then?

Yes, the older people are hopeless.

Why do you think so?

¹² Stjepan Stipe Mesić (1934) has been the President of the Republic of Croatia since 2000. He was also the final president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

¹³ Vojislav Koštunica (1944) is a Serbian politician. At the time of interview he was the Prime Minister of Republic of Serbia. He ran against Milošević, and won, in the presidential elections of 2000.

It seems to me that the middle aged people who took part in those wars have gone through too much and are unable to forgive.

Do you think you could do something yourself?

I don't know.

What is your role?

I can only stop and tell the people I meet and socialize with, when I notice their intolerant attitudes, "hey, can you hear what you're saying?!" I am not sure if it reaches them.

What is your view of near and far future relations between countries of former Yugoslavia, in the sense of both the "ordinary people's" cross-border contacts and on the "top" level? What is our future?

I think that cooperation took off already, since we are neighbors. The day trips to Sarajevo are already being organized. Contacts, travels and all that will exist, but initially hypocritically, I think. In the "come over to us, it will be nice" way, but it will still happen that when you are visiting Zagreb you will have to worry a bit if somebody figures out where you are from and curses at you. I think that some time has to pass before it becomes relaxing. For example, currently I would be scared of traveling to Croatia.

Why?

I am not sure. For example, if I were from Croatia, I would be scared of visiting Belgrade during a derby.¹⁴ You never know which fool you might run into. If I went to New York, I could probably run into a fool who would beat me up for no reason whatsoever, while people here feel they do have a reason. I would be scared, although maybe not so much in Bosnia.

Let's wrap up: who should carry most of the load for reconciliation and dealing with the past?

Who should carry it?

Yes, carry it and carry it out.

I think that the NGOs that are provocative should continue with provocations and force politicians to talk about it. Politicians should take another step and the influential people who are continually in the media should try and influence the middle generation which partook and is now leading the society. In any case, I think that a lot of water will pass and that the babies of today will finish the reconciliation process and forgive, once they grow up.

T. G.

¹⁴ A Partisan – Red Star (two soccer teams from Belgrade) match.

Esma

(58)

Sarajevo
retiree

If you bleed, I bleed also – blood is one

Please tell us something about yourself.

I am from Prijepolje, Sandzak.¹⁵ I have lived in Sarajevo for 30 years. I have two sons, while my husband has passed away. I am retired.

If someone who was really close to you was killed or slaughtered somewhere, would I be able to hide that from you? Of course not, by God. Or, as I always say, how could I ever forget somebody doing good to me? Either in the neighborhood, or anywhere else. My child can never forget when good was done to it. Likewise, it can't forget the evil. Just like I can't forget those cases, the late Branko's goodness...

What do you remember from the nineties' beginning, before the war began?

*Insan*¹⁶ remembers those wartime days and the shelling. You remember how they told you to run, when we hid in the basements and ran through the neighborhood, I with my children. I remember hiding by the car or at the deceased neighbor, Branko's house. We spent most of the nights there. The whole neighborhood did, all together.

Did you feel any hatred or anger back then?

No, I didn't. I am not sure. I was afraid and anticipating what will happen next with children by my side. That was the worst. There's some kind of anxiety in your organism, you can't sleep, you are afraid of someone showing up and knocking at your door, since we lived right by the front line. That was the only thing. The neighbors made it easier. Having other people around helped a lot. I remember when we would go to grandpa's he would be scared of nothing. He would still stay up there while shots were firing.

We were scared of nothing when we would gather. And, there were all kinds of us – Muslims, Croats and Serbs, all three nations.

What were the interpretations of who's fighting whom between all of you?

I still don't get it, believe me. I am from Prijepolje, Serbs also live in my neighborhood there. I can show you the pictures when they came to visit me last year. That's where they sat. What is the difference then, how could I recognize the difference? A man is just like another. I don't know, I can't figure out why it's like this.

You still don't have an answer?

¹⁵ Region in southwestern Serbia and northwestern Montenegro.

¹⁶ Man (Turkish).

I really don't have it, still.

What about the current situation, how does it look to you?

Let me tell you, we haven't changed a bit here. Some have been here the whole time, some have returned, some have fled, like that one neighbor M. You know, all of my neighbors were Serbs.

I remember once when late Branko, God rest his soul, and I ate the Eid¹⁷ *baklava*¹⁸ in 1992, right before the war began. He came to visit us, I had no idea what was about to happen. Some people were saying that there were weapons hidden in houses, while I hadn't a blunt knife at the time. It's a fact. So, he came for Eid. I asked him whether the rumors were true, and he told me: "By God, Esma, it won't be good." So, I told him to go to hell, he couldn't have meant that. I thought it would happen somewhere else, not in Sarajevo.¹⁹ My husband and I had no idea that the storm would start in Sarajevo, not in its center and not that strongly. The tanks were passing on the road above Sarajevo while we did nothing, we just watched them from our balcony. Branko told me that they were calling his son incessantly because it was already hot in Croatia. His wife told me: "I am not giving my child to anyone to kill or to be beaten. This is not good." So, they left for Switzerland, while late Branko stayed here to guard the house. Once he tried to visit a cousin who lived on *Marindvor*²⁰ and, while leaving, gave me the key to his house and said: "Here's the key, take it for the life of me. If anybody wants to enter, don't allow them to break in but let them in. Let them take it all away, just don't let them break into my house." He gave me the key to look after his house! It's a fact. He is living the truth with God, while we live the lies. But, there was no way he could have lasted there for more than two days. He returned the third day.

Whenever they were celebrating their family's *slava*,²¹ Branko would always give something to the children, candy, chocolates. They invited us to visit them for *slava* every time, we always went. I will never forget that they came for Eid to visit us! Just to be truthful!

They used to come, and they still do, to this very day. Everyone came to express their condolences when my husband died, also. We went there when Branko was killed...

And during that first year of the war, J. made food provisions for the winter, jam. Branko gave it all away! She also sent us packages from Switzerland!

Not everyone's the same, to be truthful. We have five fingers and they are all different! May God forbid we become all the same!

¹⁷ Eid is a Muslim holiday.

¹⁸ Baklava is a traditional sweet pastry.

¹⁹ Sarajevo was under siege for almost four years during the war.

²⁰ A neighborhood in Sarajevo.

²¹ Orthodox Christian custom of celebrating a family's patron saint.

And when they killed Branko in the war... Once, at dawn, I could feel something was wrong. On a way to Branko's a neighbor told me "be quiet, Đula, they killed him." I asked the neighbor who could have killed him? That was so hard, everything within me turned upside down. That was really very hard. You know, I thought I'd pass out. That's how I felt. You don't see those things, you can just hear the shells exploding and flying and all that. This was something else... "Our people" killed him...

Let me tell you another story. One day S. came from Vukovar while I worked in a factory. He worked as a technologist in a Borovo factory. He came shouting that Borovo was leveled to the ground and that we were in danger as well, that we should be careful. He was poor, so we collected money and had shoes made for him and his family. That was so hard on us while we had no idea it would happen here soon! Finally, he left when it began in Sarajevo.

What did you think about the people who were shooting at you from the hills?

What? Come on! God save us from them. I don't know, I don't have the words to describe those people. The first time that I went to Prijepolje after the war was in 1996, with the children. We left from Grbavica and had to change buses in Lukavica, from where one could leave for Serbia. I was just waiting to be told that the bus had broken down so that I could return home relieved. I was completely scared. On the other hand, I wanted to see my mother and brother. And this situation now... You know, I get goose bumps when I hear the people who live in Bosnia saying they're not rooting for the Bosnian national team! We need to be realistic. How can I not cheer for you while you live here with me? A



neighbor is more important than a distant relative. The neighbor J. used to come to my place to fetch water when she grew feeble. She did it herself. And I should say something to her? Come on!

When you hear that reconciliation has to be reached, what's your understanding of it?

I really don't know. The ones over there, the politicians, they have to reconcile, those, please pardon me, pieces of shit! Why should I reconcile with anybody when I quarreled with no one. We had a neighbor, a Serb, he was always quite short-tempered, but I never quarreled even with him. And that one who left without saying a word, I even stop and talk to him and ask him how he's doing when I see him. He calls us on Eid to congratulate. Whom should I reconcile with? I didn't quarrel, neither I with a neighbor, nor a neighbor with me.

What about the higher, state level?

It's not just politics to me, but the politicians were the ones who quarreled. They quarreled while people were dying innocently. They rightly said a few nights ago: "I'd rather keep my head than the state." The man was right, in the end. We don't have a state! We don't have it, just see what's happening.

What is Bosnia and Herzegovina if not a state?

What is it? A country in pieces, that's what it is. And I can't be smart enough and figure out what should be done, if you can believe me. What they cooked up and what they cooled down, I really have no idea. I feel sorry for the youth today. What will they do today, tomorrow? Even after finishing school, what will they do afterwards? They secured enough for their grandchildren and great grandchildren. What have we secured for ours, righteously? We do everything nicely, righteously, but, then again, thank God we are healthy. I hope there is a god.

What would you like the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina to look like?

As it was before, brother. I would like it to be unitary, one state, one president, Serbs, Croats and Muslims all together. Those who don't want it should be kicked out. Too bad *Goli otok*²² is gone, although it is too good for these people. I mean, just the politicians who are cooking up all of this, and not the people themselves.

Could you point out any of the "ordinary people's" responsibility?

What could I do now? How may I know if you were shooting or not? Well, I don't know, I can't figure that out. I started telling you about my trip to Prijepolje across Trebevic.²³ I saw a bunch of bunkers up there, so somebody must have known about it. We were such an easy target. It's not a simple feeling. The

²² Goli otok was a prison camp, notorious for the treatment of political prisoners during communist rule in the former Yugoslavia. It was located on an island near the northern Adriatic coast.

worst is that Serbs cooked it up and they're still bitterly sticking to it to this day. They just won't cooperate, they want something on their own and that's it. You may see it yourself. What could have been just their own, we are all just flesh and blood? We are all going to one god. And, what about the poor? Stay down and suffer as long as you can...

Do you think that the wartime events need to be talked about nowadays? What should we do with all of that?

We should not cover it up, we need to be realistic. We should talk about it, it should be known! I also want to tell you this – when my children started school... It's not okay. When I could study history and World War I and World War II, why is history hushed up now? They are not allowed to speak about much of it. Why? I didn't do it, nor did you! Let it be known, let the truth come out, right? When God knows it, people should also know it, that's an old saying. If someone who was really close to you was killed or slaughtered somewhere, would I be able to hide that from you? Of course not, by God. Or, as I always say, how could I ever forget somebody doing good to me? Either in the neighborhood, or anywhere else. My child can never forget when good was done to it. Likewise, it can't forget the evil. Just like I can't forget those cases, the late Branko's goodness, for example, maybe they can't forget their own killing and expulsions and everything else.

What could prevent the cover up?

The youth should not allow it! My child can't forget the shelling and everything else while I was taking it to school that was in a shelter. There's no way a child can forget that. Of course, my child will communicate with your child, since your child is definitely not one of the hotheads. It will never be forgotten, that's for sure, but it will slowly evaporate. It would go much faster if we increased the production, if the youth could work, if we had some freedom. Freedom is gone, dear Tamara.

Can our economy progress if we don't look for answers to the question of who's responsible for the war and all that?

Things would be solid if the main culprits were imprisoned. Then everything would start very, very, very slowly. The entities²⁴ would be abolished, the youth would unite and all that. The industry would start moving as well. By God, with an empty stomach and all that pain we can't move on. Well, here you go, my son works for Serbs and he should! You are a Serb also, right? If you bleed, I bleed also – blood is one!

T. Š.

²³ Trebevic is a mountain very near to Sarajevo. The Serbian forces' artillery was positioned there during the siege of Sarajevo, making Trebevic a key fighting ground.

²⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises of two governing entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, with District Brcko enjoying a special status.

Well then, brother, let's start with ourselves

Could you please introduce and tell us something about yourself? Where were you born?

My name is Vojo, I was born in Mostar in 1974. I am from Nevesinje where I lived all my life. I finished schooling for a technician and joined the Army of Republika Srpska. I served from 1992 to 1996. After the war I had, like, a million jobs, but mostly waited tables. I have a temporary job now. I am married and have a child. That would be all, shortly.

Do you, as somebody who took part in the war, think that people have learned a lesson from it, that they behave differently nowadays?

Whether they learned a lesson? Well, I think that they didn't, if you generally take everything into account. I think that the society as a whole didn't. It's different in individual cases.

Did the war solve any of the problems which existed when it broke out, in your opinion?

Whether the war solved those problems? Maybe the war was initiated because of other problems. Actually, I still don't know why the war began, personally. There is... I mean, whoever is answering this question thinking they have the answer and that theirs is the answer – that is probably one of the correct ones. Why did it start? Why did people turn into machines and form aggressive units all of a sudden? What flipped in them so unexpectedly? Something flipped in most of people and societies. What drives people to go to war and kill one another, banish, commit crimes, kill women, children and elders? I don't think we are doing well regarding this as a society thus it's hard to answer this question.

We primarily need to face everything that has been happening to us all of these years, we definitely ought to. That is some sort of dealing with the past. What has been happening to us? Where was I in all of it? What have I been doing? Am I responsible? Have I contributed somehow to that big wheel of violence? Did I partake, am I a small wheel in it, a cog?

Why do you think so?

Well, I don't know where to start. I'll start with Dayton,²⁵ but I'll try to keep it short. The armistice was signed in Dayton, the so-called Dayton Peace Agreement. It stopped the war, but that's all it did. Why do I think this? Ten years

²⁵ The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Agreement, was formally signed in Paris on December 14, 1995.

have passed and we have still not moved on. We are still not aware of the war's horrors, we still have no idea. Let's not talk about the other party's war crimes. Let's talk about ourselves first if we do have to defend the Serbian, or I don't know, Croatian or Bosniak national interests, national, one people's interests. Well then, brother, let's start with ourselves. I want to start with myself. Persons should be aware of their own Calvary if they have been through it. One has probably been through it, and if not, one has lived under a lot of stress. Although my late grandmother lived here, in Nevesinje, she still heard the shelling and was afraid for me and the rest of the family knowing I was at the front, understand? Maybe she was afraid for some neighbors and some other people also. Thus, in any case, she went through a lot of stress, and can you imagine then what people went through at the front line or during some of the battles? I think that we are not aware of the tragedy that struck us. We are not aware of the number of people killed, I mean civilians – youths, elders, feeble people who were only of other faith or nationality. Who belonged to some... As Rambo²⁶ says, "We from mixed marriages are the worst." Not to speak of war crimes, ethnic cleansing, house burnings, property destruction. Every animal here has suffered, how could a man not? We are still not conscious of it, we simply got lost in it. We got lost because nobody made dialog a possibility, the dialog with the other party, to be precise. We had no dialog with ourselves after the war, first of all. Let's make a state right after the peace agreement was signed? They immediately built some institutions, they immediately made some... How large our armies can be.

²⁶ Rambo Amadeus (1963), or Antonije Pušić, is a regional musician.



Do you think it's exclusively up to the individual?

Well, not exclusively. But the individual is important in that sense that he needs to realize the true matter of the problem, he needs to resolve his past, to realize where his place was in it. That is an important task the individual can accomplish. There is one more party to it, actually two more. The other party is the authorities who represent the society, assuming that the majority votes for the option that represents it, right? The authorities are us, although I perhaps didn't vote for these but, my God, probably most of people did. Well, it looks on paper as if they comprise the majority, but when you put on paper how many people actually do govern, you see that it's an extremely small minority. I think that not only these authorities, this government, this parliament seriously lacks the political will, all of it does. Nothing has been done regarding this since Dayton.

You say that nothing has changed since Dayton. What is peace to you and what does it look like?

Well, what is peace to me? It's not only the absence of war. Let's say, specifically, in Nevesinje... I would like to wake up one morning and see people living and working normally. All of those people who lived in Nevesinje prior to the war and their descendants who were born during the war. I don't care at all what kind of system it would be or if there would have to be any. I would just like for all of those people to come back and that we simply... That people go to church like they used to and work like they did before. I think that peace is simply freedom, definitely. That you feel free to say what you want, that you can criticize some of the higher ups, the authorities whoever they are. That you are plainly critical and, at the same time, able to accept criticism, that you are self-critical. Peace is when the country is prospering, or at least you have the signs of prosperity. Peace is not only the absence of war but also a kind of improvement, a sign signaling that we are moving forward and that people have become aware of everything, of themselves and their places in society. Finally, peace is when society is aware of itself, which is very important. Peace is also when you don't have to worry about basic needs and survival and stereotypes such as nationality. We all love it when a neighbor's cow dies and that's it.

What is required so that everything can be as it used to?

Well, I think we need some kind of reconciliation. Thus, we primarily need to face everything that has been happening to us all of these years, we definitely ought to. That is some sort of dealing with the past. What has been happening to us? Where was I in all of it? What have I been doing? Am I responsible? Have I contributed somehow to that big wheel of violence? Did I partake, am I a small wheel in it, a cog? And then, simply, when we exit, since we are divided in those three nations already, those three parties... Of course, it's easier to reign individually than when people are united. Then we would see how we can live on. We are definitely imprisoned by mentality and history together here. I don't know... Our habits and problems are the same thing. We live together

in a geographic area that's negligible when you consider the big picture, and we definitely have to live here. We are, just like someone said, punished to live together. I do not feel doomed or punished if I work with a Bosniak or a Croat, or socialize on the street, in a bar, at school, whatever, or if my child goes to school with a Bosniak or a Croat. We need to promote values which are truly worthy. If people want religious identity, my God, so be it. All who wish should... It's not important which religion it is, as long as it provides people with what they want.

What is reconciliation for you? What is needed in order to achieve it?

Well, reconciliation for me is... Dealing with the past, definitely. Accepting the responsibility, either small or large. But, it is definitely... Well, even if I were... I am responsible, let's say. But I can't say now that they are all responsible. But, all who participated in the war in any way are responsible. It's also important that we deal with the war crimes. We should not allow that the people who may-be killed thousands of people and small children, it doesn't matter whom, civilians, are freely walking the streets today, living comfortably or even being privileged in the society. Not to mention creating heroes out of them, myths and legends about them. We need to take the final stand regarding them, every individual firstly and then society as a whole. We need to promote nonviolence. We simply need to beat these stereotypes we have out of our heads. We need to turn to ourselves and to other people.

A few can see the difference between heroism and crime. And that's only because we have allowed that wartime scum to teach us lessons on "patriotism."

What should the politicians do for reconciliation and trust building? Are they dedicated enough?

They are definitely not. They, through their inertia, only encourage the forces that hinder these processes. They often assume the "patriotic" role so that a few can see the difference between heroism and crime. And that's only because we have allowed that wartime scum to teach us lessons on "patriotism." That's why some still don't recognize the reasons behind our big deceptions. The dudes who raided behind front lines still exist in the world of politics. We need to finish firstly with those who broke laws and moral principles. Only then can we start creating the conditions for dialog between parties formerly at war. Religious representatives and the media play a big role in it also.

How can you, as an individual, contribute to peacebuilding?

I can contribute by analyzing my own role in the war, my own actions and how I relate to it nowadays. There are still many open questions regarding the war, but I have no dilemma regarding myself. My responsibility is that I took up weapons and became a link in the latest chain of violence. That is my responsibility after everything that happened during the war, after it, and is happening to me today and not only to me, but to the majority of young people in this country. I think that we should work individually on some things so that they don't

happen again, and I primarily mean hatred, manipulation, war crimes, ethnic cleansing. We need to work on prevention. We need to tackle history properly, objectively, without prejudices such as: Why would somebody justify 'our' crime with 'theirs'? Why do we make heroes out of criminals? Why don't we face the truth? I personally have no problem with it and I know what I thought about it during the war. I still think the same and that is important to me. I wasn't aware of some things then, but I am today. But, concerning women, children, old people, house burnings, treating the prisoners... I am proud of myself and I can only thank God for not turning into an animal because, as I do know, some did. They probably have problems with themselves and their conscience. Dealing with the past is a process that is really not easy at all. If we create the prerequisites for it... Although, we are already ten years late... But, then again, better now than never. I keep comparing our region to Palestine. We have always responded with violence to everything here, throughout history. Well, now we need to sit down at the table and talk about it.

What does the society within a community need for reconciliation to happen?

It needs precisely what we already talked about, the truth. How do we reach it? Through dialogue, there's no other way. But, in order to have a healthy dialogue we need to condemn all war crimes and criminals. We should, impartially and self-critically, gather all of the relevant war participants through different kinds of dialogue. People could vent all of their bitterness, hatred and their personal Golgotha this way; they could speak openly, fearlessly.

Why do we need to deal with the past?

Someone said once that the people who had learned nothing from their past were doomed to its repetition. This statement is not only applicable to us, but also to the whole world. What is human history, in fact? How can you define it, shortly? In one word only, and it is death! We go from one war to the next, from one genocide to the next, from one holocaust to the next, starting with tribal wars, followed by civil wars, France, the Bolshevik revolution, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Iraq, Somalia, to our regions. From Chechnya to Iraq, and who knows where else. People have, in their freedom, always chosen violence and the path that leads to death.

Can we accomplish permanent peace without dealing with the past?

Definitely not! Otherwise we'll fall into the same trap of the past for who knows which time. I would also like to add that the individual's biggest difficulty is that we are too distanced from ourselves and that we don't want to bridge that gap. We are always avoiding having to face ourselves. Some say this was a religious war. And I ask myself – can any killing of people be called a religious war? If we all had been religious, no killing would have taken place.

B. A.



A global phenomenon

How do you relate to the war now, ten years after it ended?

What you mean by “war” must refer to what took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina since it hasn’t been that long since the war in Kosovo ended!

I personally think it’s impossible to objectively answer your question since I am of the opinion that war is still present latently, if not in the sense of everyday reality. I mean, if the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, which happened under the strong intonations of war, caused the creation of national and ethnic states (which was precisely the war’s objective), what normal person, would be able to guarantee that this disintegration has come to its peaceful rest? In other words, who can guarantee that the newly created minorities, or even former ones, will not become opportunities for the experienced pyromaniacs or their apprentices to demonstrate their powers? Of course, that will be the case of these national states, within the scope of their internal politics, if they keep behaving like the former Yugoslavia did, causing different nationalisms to become their own gravediggers, as Leszek Kolakowski well understood. What I am saying is that we live in continuous anxiety, similar to an existential crisis, which, in accordance with its luxurious fan, is leaving deep indelible marks all over our psyche, I am afraid.

Do you think that war has ended, after all?

Even if we think that war, in its active and potential aspects, has reached its death-line, which is, a necessary condition for analyzing its “peaceful” outcomes, who can be unbiased? Particularly a Muslim, in the context of the declaration of a new Crusades (wars), which will foster a new discourse of liberation of Muslim lands instead of liberating Christ’s grave? Moreover, if I, as a Muslim, had been dreading becoming a sacrificial lamb for the bloodthirsty beasts of the ultra nationalistic cultures around me, and being swept from the world’s historical and holy maps by the imperialistic wave, now I have to dread that one of my “fellow believers” might blow me to pieces (although, according to the Prophet’s revelations, there is no place for such persons under the connotations of the term Muslim).

When you discuss the war, do you mean the war that took place in the region?

I am saying that I can personally guarantee that the solution is in the creation of an open society which guarantees, on principled grounds, the safeguarding of each minority’s national, religious and cultural identities. Consequentially, that means depriving a minority of the fear of assimilation, or the disquiet. This disquiet is necessarily a precondition for new wartime adventures.

War is no longer of local character. It has already become a global phenomenon which we have to face, willingly or not, and continuously suffer its almost endless consequences.

But, if I have to explicitly discuss one of those consequences, then it would be a powerful one; disquiet in all of its forms, which covers a wide network within the field of semantics. I think that no man who inherited a genuine, primordial human nature is without this disquiet. It penetrates into all levels of man's intellectual and spiritual activities, namely political, economic, social, psychological, religious and many others...

What is needed to attain peace?

Regarding the uneasiness I mentioned a moment ago as a crucial consequence of the war, as a theologian I must emphasize that God, at least in Islam and at His self-professed level, is referred to as *Selam*, meaning Peace, among all of His other Beautiful Names and Attributes. It signifies that Muslims believe God is Peace, and, as such, He is the source of worldly peace. In other words, planetary peace cannot come into existence until we, as His creation, attain peace with Him *a priori*. This is where the key role of religion becomes generally important and fateful for our century. It also gives humankind, which is doubtlessly galloping toward its fatal ending, a merrier direction. This concept not only attempts to reactivate responsibility before God as a worldly ethical principle within the consciousness of *homo modernus* or *homo technicus*, but also to make comprehensible the reality of plurality and otherness in this world as God's inescapable Will. The disruption of this Will, which would entail the desire to hammer a monolithic and uniform sound, represents the disruption of God's Intent and that leads to uneasiness.

The latter also entails the ideologizing of religion which can have grave consequences. The ideologizing of religion was an indisputably present phenomenon during the last war, probably because this region pulsates with a traditional and epic spirit focused on the past.

Thus, I think that a strategy of 'return to religion' needs to be followed to restore true dignity. This will happen when the authentic ideas of those traditions that are, in their metaphysical precision, noble and good are affirmed in any of the Abrahamic religions. These traditions are, at the same time, the only preconditions for a serene, peaceful, humane, cultured and civilized cohabitation.

To conclude, I am saying that I can personally guarantee that the solution is in the creation of an open society which guarantees, on principled grounds, the safeguarding of each minority's national, religious and cultural identities. Consequentially, that means depriving a minority of the fear of assimilation, or the disquiet. This disquiet is necessarily a precondition for new wartime adventures.

E. H. Č.

It's terribly hard to say "I was wrong"

What are your wartime memories? How do you relate to the war nowadays, after all these years?

I usually repress those bad memories. That's the way I am, I just push them deeply to the back of my mind and retrieve them only when I want. From the beginning I remember all of the hard moments, hiding in shelters, hearing the shelling, listening to all of the ugly stories inciting people to do all sorts of things. From later on I remember the growing sadness on returnees' faces and increasing discontent. I remember desiring things that were unaffordable, bizarre things like a piece of candy or a trip somewhere or a... I don't know, luckily I was young so I overcame it somehow. I also channeled it like teenagers at that age do, so it seems that I am not traumatized that much. I hope it won't appear later on, out of nowhere.

Can wounds heal with time?

Mine can, thank God.

What's your general view of war's consequences? How can they be lessened or removed?

Well, we must work on it. All of us have to really, really work on it, especially with the people who are 'seriously wounded.' We have to talk about wounds. I don't mean the physically wounded, of course, but... I think that a lot of ugly things have happened and are still happening. Unfortunately, we are still dragging some stories from the past. Working with people is important, nothing else. Simply, we have to help one another pull up since one cannot do it alone, especially if that one is hurt and cannot pull oneself out of it. All we can do is to help one another. It seems that this is the only possible option currently.

What's your view of reconciliation, what does it mean to you?

It means the future. It is what we have to do, it's necessary to reconcile if we wish to continue with some kind of normal living. Officially, we have been on this road lately. It's nice to see and hear it, but it must go much deeper than the official or formal version of it does. We all have to accept it as the leading principle, meaning

Unfortunately, sometimes I manage to fool myself that the hatred between people is a thing of the past and then I meet somebody who is full of it. That hatred must have a source and we need to find it and plug it. This is a handy instrument for manipulation: emotions, hatred and all of the wounds are still being used for manipulation for whatever reason.

every individual, any country's or region's citizen of any confession or anything else. That is what we need to do.

What conditions are needed for reconciliation, in your opinion?

It's necessary to... Unfortunately, we can still hear the inflammatory and who knows what other kinds of speech in the media, from leaders on the top, politicians from all different blocks. We need to minimize it, we must stifle it. Unfortunately, we know how much the media and all that affect our consciousness, our conscience, or an averagely educated and averagely conscious and conscientious man. We need to start with that while working with people and opening to others, offering a hand to everybody and everything, forgetting some of the ugly things and letting some of them go. For some this bite might be too large, but it's the only way.

Who should work on reconciliation?

Everybody should work on it. It should start from the top, of course, but we all need to work on it.

What are the obstructions on this road to reconciliation?

Well, it's hard to let some of the wounds go, let's call them wounds, since the person who is very, very hurt cannot forget some things, but he or she can forgive them if we all help. They will never forget, those are very hard things. Unfortunately, sometimes I manage to fool myself that the hatred between people is a thing of the past and then I meet somebody who is full of it. That hatred must have a source and we need to find it and plug it. This is a handy instrument for manipulation: emotions, hatred and all of the wounds are still being used for manipulation for whatever reason. It's very ugly.



Do you think that “ordinary people” want peace and that they are ready to work on it?

Absolutely, especially in this economic and social phase of the whole region. Enough with the stories, we all have had enough of politicians, war stories... We can talk about anything when we have enough to eat and when we are financially comfortable, but once that is gone... Maybe it's easy for me to talk since I have only one mouth to feed, but I know people who have four or five, and it's hard to sell them those empty stories.

What can the “ordinary people” do to contribute to reconciliation?

They can do a lot. One can work on oneself; work with one's immediate surroundings if they're not ripe for reconciliation or if things have gone astray. That's it, I think, that's the formula. If we all work on ourselves, we can change the whole world.

If reconciliation were accomplished, what would it mean to you?

It has been accomplished in my case because I can go to my friends' in any country, anywhere. Reconciliation is present in my case, people around me are reconciled, it has happened to me already. But, I would like everyone to feel it also, every citizen of any country and any region to feel this freedom to go anywhere and feel comfortable and be at home there, since one is indeed at home everywhere, essentially. That is a large freedom with no yokes, no additional yokes.

The past – what should we do with it, how can we face it?

We should view it as it is, meaning without the additional decorations which are so characteristic of us and with no finishing touches. We should speak the truth only, perceive everything as realistically as possible. This might sound like a utopia but it is the only way out of the past's heroic stories that exist to vindicate us in our own and others' eyes. We need to simply perceive what happened, how it happened and to finally realize mistakes from the past so that we don't make them again.

How hard is it to deal with the past that way?

It's very hard, terribly hard since it's terribly hard to say “I was wrong,” especially in case of huge mistakes. It's hard to say “I was wrong” even for a small mistake, since it's in our mentality that we don't want to admit when we err, we don't want to relate to our mistakes that way, and, then, we have such a past... We all know what happened and what was happening. It's very, very hard but we need to be courageous and face it, for once look the truth and the past into the eyes. All of us, meaning from a small individual to...

What do you think about guilt, should we look for it only on one side? What's your view, is it individual or collective?

It definitely needs not to be sought on one side only, the guilt is everybody's. We

all need to face individual guilt first so we don't reject our individual responsibility for all that happened since we are all, more or less, responsible. It's easy to reject it and say "it was their fault, not mine, what could have I done?" That's how we justify ourselves and try to overcome some things, but we won't get far

We all got fired up, all sides got fired up, I clearly remember them driving around with weapons, screaming and singing their songs. All of them. That's our responsibility. There were some lonely voices calling for reason and for dialog in the fog, but, unfortunately, they were drowned. That's our guilt, guilt belonging to all of us individuals.

this way. We, simply, all need to accept our own responsibility, as much as it is, since it does exist. We all got fired up, all sides got fired up, I clearly remember them driving around with weapons, screaming and singing their songs. All of them. That's our responsibility. There were some lonely voices calling for reason and for dialog in the fog, but, unfortunately, they were drowned. That's our guilt, guilt belonging to all of us individuals. We were too young then to stand up and firmly say no, or do anything else, but everyone who could have chosen individually between yes and no then, everybody who was self-aware, bears that responsibility.

You also mentioned the media. What do you think about their responsibility?

Their responsibility is large, huge. I remember all of those pictures, all of those inflammatory voices saying we were right and they were wrong, they were nothing and we were everything. Even I was carried away with that wave of national awakening and awareness of our greatness and their pettiness. How should they be brought to reason using the methods that have already been used. It's horrible. Even now my mind is blown



by what is sometimes written or said in the media. It's very ugly. The media's responsibility is huge, especially due to our mentality. Unfortunately, a statement like "I read it in the newspapers" or "the newspapers say" still denotes an irrefutable fact, an axiom, to this very day. No more discussion about it, no dilemma whether it's true or not. People are very suggestive to what they read or hear. That's why journalists bear a large responsibility, but some have not managed to do it honorably.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

It's important that I travel and meet other people since it's easy to scream about other groups, saying they're like this, they're like that. That's easy to do, it happens naturally. But, if we separate a face or two from those groups, if we mention their names and concentrate on their personalities, then it's very hard to say "they're like this or that." Thus, we have to travel around, stretch our legs and hands, go around without fear, not wondering if we are free. I think this is a very good way and a method to overcome everything. If you have a friend or an acquaintance somewhere, or if you are close to somebody, then you will first remember that face whenever you mention the religious, national or any other group that person belongs to. At least this is how it goes in my case. Then you just can't utter "they're like this or that."

L. Z.

People need to realize that hatred should not be bred

Can you please tell us a bit about yourself?

I volunteer for the Gnjilane Youth Center's theatre activities. We cooperate well with the Ministry of Education or, to be precise, with its department for culture, youth and sports in Kosovo. I also volunteer for Kosovo's youth network.

How do you feel nowadays, six years after the war ended?

Everything is completely different. I can say I feel pretty good, but I can also say I feel pretty bad, meaning there are two replies. Why do I feel good? If it weren't for the fall of Milošević,²⁷ I probably wouldn't be what I am today and I wouldn't

have so much opportunity to engage in all of the activities I currently pursue. It's much better now after his fall, but there are still things that bother me and one of them is the interethnic conflict in Kosovo. I think it should not be this way, but this is the natural state of things.

I view the past with horror, especially the nineties. It was really bad during the war, we in Gnjilane were horrified the whole time. We couldn't even think of coming close to the border since it was said how they kept, harassed, killed and raped the youth. We could not go anywhere since we were closeted, isolated the whole time.

Why is it natural?

It's natural if we consider all of the crimes committed in Kosovo and the genocide against Albanians. Fortunately, I did not experience it, I had nobody die in my family. What did happen was that they torched my house. It's true that now I hate those who did it, I hate the specific persons who did it since I know exactly who they were. But, everything is okay now, they're not here any longer. I still feel hatred against them but I keep it within myself.

What's your view of the past?

I view the past with horror, especially the nineties. There was no chance for a young man to show his capabilities in an institution, at a university or anywhere

²⁷ Slobodan Milošević (1941 – 2006), was the President of Serbia (1989–1997) and of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1997–2000). He lost the presidential elections in 2000, but resigned only after massive protests and demonstrations organized all over Serbia (the so-called "October 5"). He was arrested by the Serbian government in 2001, on charges of corruption and abuse of power. However, he was extradited a few months later to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia where he was indicted for genocide, complicity in genocide, deportation, murder, persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds, and so on. His death in 2006 terminated the trial, thus there is no legal verdict against him.

else. Problems existed starting from within elementary schools up to universities. It was really bad during the war, we in Gnjilane were horrified the whole time. We couldn't even think of coming close to the border since it was said how they kept, harassed, killed and raped the youth. We could not go anywhere since we were closeted, isolated the whole time. The greatest fear came upon us when the police handed out the talked-about yellow cards to us. I am not sure how much these cards were a part of the Serbian regime's policies. It was said that these cards were to be used to identify us in mass graves we would be thrown into. That fear was indescribable. We were at a cousin's and not at our house during the war.

Do you think the past needs to be discussed?

I think that it should not be forgotten. I think that the past is history, and history should not be forgotten at all. We should discuss the past, but gently, peacefully.

What's your attitude regarding reconciliation?

I think that we should reconcile. We should build good interethnic relations, but we should take small steps towards it, starting with the people who do not feel that hatred any more. As long as we hate Serbian people, not wanting them to live here, we are at the same level as the regime and Serbs who wanted to expel us in order to create Greater Serbia. Neither Serbs nor Albanians can ever do this. If we want to catch up with the civilized world then we should not breed hatred against a person who has done nothing wrong, regardless of their nationality or faith. He or she is another human being who breathes, eats and wants to live just like we do, just like all of people do. That's why I don't support interethnic hatred and criminals. They should be where they belong, and that is in prison. I think that the international community should do more about it since many of the war criminals are still free.

What's reconciliation for you?

For me, reconciliation means ending the interethnic violence once and for all. It also means improved interethnic cooperation.

What could be the initial steps toward reconciliation?

I would start at the state level. Serbia as a state or the federation of Serbia and Montenegro should deliver, through its institutions, the bodies and persons still located there. Regarding Serbia's declaration that there are no more prisoners there, I think this is not true and that a number of missing persons are still held captive in Serbian prisons. Thus, they have to release prisoners and missing persons who are still in Serbia, dead or alive, buried in mass graves through-

As long as we hate Serbian people, not wanting them to live here, we are at the same level as the regime and Serbs who wanted to expel us in order to create Greater Serbia. If we want to catch up with the civilized world then we should not breed hatred against a person who has done nothing wrong, regardless of their nationality or faith. He or she is another human being who breathes, eats and wants to live just like we do, just like all of people do.

out Serbia. Serbia should publicly and institutionally apologize to people in Kosovo for everything that happened. If they publicly declare they are against Milošević's policies, they need to prove it. We have no need for words since our politicians have enough of them. The people of Kosovo feel a need for action, for concrete happenings, since this is the only way a compromise between Kosovo and Serbia can be achieved.

Who should work on reconciliation, in your opinion?

There are specific people who can work on it. If we begin with level one, the first step, then I think that it should be the people. People need to realize that hatred should not be bred, that violence should not be used against a minority, whichever it is. Reconciliation in Kosovo will take place when this is accomplished. Kosovar institutions should be involved a lot. Municipality centers should be open which would then open smaller centers in villages where there were or still are other nationalities/ethnicities. All of the problems should be discussed through seminars, trainings, debates. I think that this would be successful.

Do you think that people who live here want to reconcile?

I have had a chance to talk to a large number of citizens who would answer the question "Would you want no more problems, that you don't hate one another any more, that you reconcile, that you cooperate with other nationalities?" negatively. When I ask them why, they justify themselves with the war and everything that happened during it. More needs to be done so that people become convinced there is no other way but reconciliation.

What should Kosovo do for reconciliation to be achieved and what should Serbia do?

First I'll talk about my own place, and not about what our neighbors could do. The Kosovar institutions should make concrete moves and engage county institutions for interethnic reconciliation to be achieved in our home, Kosovo. What Serbia should do for us is to remember once and for all that Kosovo is not a part of it or of the Serbian and Montenegrin union any more. Serbia should return the prisoners of war either dead or alive, like I said a moment ago. It should also seek forgiveness from the people of Kosovo through institutions, change the strategy it has/cultivates for Kosovo and recognize Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state.

What can an ordinary citizen do to contribute to the process of reconciliation?

I'll start with myself. I support interethnic reconciliation and reconciliation with those Serbs who did nothing bad to the Albanian people during the war. There can be no reconciliation with the people whose hands are awash with Kosovar blood. I think it would be good for reconciliation if everybody who had solid evidence against anybody who had done dishonorable things in Kosovo reported it to the police or judicial bodies. This is not being done in Kosovo, so people

hate an entire ethnicity and not an individual and that is a problem.

Do you think that guilt is collective or individual for all the things that happened?

I think that the guilt is individual and not collective. I'll take the war as an example since it provides us with most contrast. The guilt is individual, starting with Milošević who called on his advisors to prepare a strategic plan for the people of Kosovo. Their goal was to expel Albanians from Kosovo and create a Greater Serbia. The guilt is definitely individual, starting from Milošević, his advisors, his army and the part of Serbian people who supported the war against Albanians in Kosovo. There were others who did not support it. They were usually the people who belonged to the intellectual part, who analyzed and realized that war should not be waged against another human being who has the same right to live on planet Earth.

What's the media's responsibility, were they manipulative?

The Radio Television Pristina station²⁸ played a major role before and during the war. The news in Albanian was catastrophic, full of hatred and tension. While everybody knew that Albanians constituted the majority in Kosovo, the anchorwoman would say "the Albanian minority in Kosovo." This source delivered catastrophic information in order to manipulate citizens.

What's your view of the future?

I am optimistic that the political leadership in Kosovo will change and that a better future will be realized for all of us. People will get angry with time, causing unrest, unless we change the political leadership we have had for six years during which everything collapsed.

Do you have a comment regarding this interview?

I am very glad these interviews are being done since there's a need to hear the opinions of Kosovar citizens as well. Also, an ordinary citizen should get a chance to speak about problems that trouble him or her. I think this is a good move that helps in interethnic reconciliation. I hope it will be better, although I think it's still very bad.

N. I.

²⁸ *Radio Television Pristina* (RTP), like almost all other media, was under the control of Milošević's regime.

Jadranka

(29)
Loznica
mathematics
professor

They hate while having no idea what happened

Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Well, my name is Jadranka, I am twenty nine and a half years old, closing in on thirty. I teach mathematics at the Technical High School in Loznica. That's about it, I am on the front every day, in negotiation for myself and other people...

How did the nineties and the wars then influence you? Can you tell us about it, I know that many things have happened to you?

Slowly the communication subsided, for fourteen years almost. Then I decided to write to them and tell them a bit about ourselves. Afterwards they phoned us. Nothing changed. A human remains human... there were tears... the neighbors were shaken just like we were. Why were we shaken? It was sad that you are suddenly separated from someone you grew up and socialized with on daily basis for half of your life.

It hurts less as time passes, that's first. As time passes I also realize that what remained is valuable. As I told you earlier (before the interview), I am still in touch with the neighbors in Croatia who remained human throughout wartime years and practically protected us from the ones who were not so good. They remained human and haven't changed and that's why I think that what was valuable earlier still is. And what's not valuable surfaces, right? It consoles me that those who were good haven't changed, it forces me to move on and maintain trust in human goodness. And also to believe that those who were not good would become better (*laughter*). Everybody has a right to make a mistake and to fix it.

What was happening to you during the nineties' war? You lived in Croatia and then you moved when the war began...

Oh yeah, we moved from Sibenik to Knin and stayed there for a year and a half. We left Knin for Kosovo before "Storm,"²⁹ and then, later, left Kosovo for... It also happened in Kosovo that some Albanians who were there at the time, and I only communicated with Albanian neighbors, were very nice and cultured people. They remained human after all the problems that occurred and didn't change

²⁹ *Oluja* ["Operation Storm"] was a military offensive launched on August 5, 1995 by Croatia, with the objective of re-taking Krajina, a region in Croatia which was under Serbian control. 150.000-200.000 ethnic Serbs fled the region during the next three days. August 5th is celebrated as a national holiday in Croatia, while in Serbia it is marked by commemorations for those who were killed and exiled.

a bit. They said it was their fault, that they didn't want us to go but they couldn't expose themselves to danger. They remained human during those hard times. We met at times, they would come to a store in an isolated building and discreetly ask about us, send their greetings to our families, discreetly wave when they pass so they were not noticed by others. They did not change their opinions about us nor did we change ours about them. That is human, you can feel it, there is no need for anybody to describe or emphasize it, you can see and feel it. You can notice it in their behavior, even if it's not verbalized.

How much has it affected you during all these years?

I think it has made me stronger. I also think that the good fortune of meeting those good people in bad times is exactly what stopped me from being prejudiced and feeling hatred against anyone since those people erased everything bad that happened. One or two persons are enough to overshadow this whole evil. I was bitter in the beginning but felt no hatred. I was simply helpless, I have done nothing, why did it have to happen? But, it happened so I would grow stronger and realize the truly important values in life...

What do you think about reconciliation, with your experience? What is it for you?

Well, I fought and argued with no one in particular, but it seems like it will be hard, considering the big picture...

Why?

Well, I don't know, I feel there's a lot of ignorance and prejudice among people who have never lived through something like it or who don't know much about conflicts. Then you hear statements that shock you – they have no idea what happened but they still hate someone they don't even know. These wrong perceptions need to be tackled first because you shouldn't hate someone you don't know, especially not a whole nationality. Do you know everyone who belongs to that nationality so that you can conclude that they are all bad and that you are the best? The worst is that if a person is good then he or she does not emphasize it at all although people can see it anyway. Those who are not good say they are God-given, but, actually, their talk is hollow and they only make things worse. Unfortunately, these elements are omnipresent, as far as I can see. Serbs, Croats have it, in Bosnia, too...

So, reconciliation would also mean fighting prejudice, in your opinion?

I think that's primary. If the Serbian youth could only meet people from Croatia, from Bosnia... A lot of them were born after the war so they had no chance to see how it used to be. And now they are forming a picture about something they have no idea about based on stories they hear at home or socially. That picture is wrong. If the young people could at least socialize since they are the future, after all. What worries me is that many young people are leaving and older people are staying and they are not overly tolerant...

You said that prejudices were crucial. What else should be addressed?

Prejudices are, supposedly, the biggest problem, work on oneself follows. For example, as a member of the Serbian people, I dislike the belief that we are "the best, God's people, no one is like us" and I don't know what else while this is not the actual case...

Many people are involved in something they don't believe in. They should find what truly suits them and then work on it and not cling onto something in a roundabout way without tackling the problem's essence, waving labels and paroles. It is basically hollow like an empty pot, baseless. It gets on my nerves a bit that people don't work on themselves but talk nonsense instead. A man cleaning his house has no time to look into another's yard. Here it seems that everyone is watching others and only concerned with what others think and say and not thinking about themselves, meanwhile their own yards are overgrown, the garden of one's soul is full of weeds.

People should come back to earth and realize that not all is that perfect, especially regarding the Serbian people. Regarding victims – wait a minute, you are not the only one...

Who should work on reconciliation, fight prejudice and the other things you mentioned? When it's said it should be done, it's not stated by whom.

I think it's a mentality problem, generally. A park should be clean, without trash, meaning we should take care of it. If I throw my trash into the trash can, and not beside it, the park will stay clean. People should start with and work on themselves, make peace with themselves because many people are in collision with themselves. You can see how many arguments and murders there are... How can you build peace when you are not at peace with yourself?

Thus, everyone could work on it. How?

There are basic human values everyone should have. If people only followed the Ten Commandments, there would be no problems in the world. Start off with something proven, maybe not an ideology or a theory, but with something that's truly worthy, but how can we do it when people don't want to hear it? Here, a concrete example would be that I try to do something if I see two persons fighting or if I hear the "we, the victims" rap, I respond that ours did it too, especially after what I saw happening in Kosovo... When I told a colleague that I saw Serbs pillage and steal she told me "See, I could never even imagine it." If you open even one person's eyes, it's enough that they start thinking with their heads a bit and not only accept the same stuff that's poured into their heads constantly. It would be enough that they are ready for different things to be poured into their heads so they can differentiate between what's true and what is not... People are immersed in their everyday troubles so they don't even think about reconciliation. It would be nice to have friendly relations with former states, our former republics, like we do with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary. Something intimate but still at a distance so that we don't blend too much

again, so that it doesn't blow up again. It seems to me that ex-Yugoslavia was created against all of its inhabitants' will.

You said that you can start with yourself by sharing information. Is there anything else you can do as an "ordinary person"?

That's one step, I can't get these prejudices out of my head... If I could only crush them, I try as much as possible. Not only prejudices against other nations, but other social groups as well.

What kind of fears are obstacles to reconciliation?

I think that every people is scared that what happened might occur again. That's why I think it would be better to start the reconciliatory process from a distance so it's not like when two girlfriends get into an argument and then they are perfectly fine and then, later, it blows up again. Interpersonal relations need to be worked out at basic level, but, then again, it's hard to do it now since people don't mix. I watch both Serbian and Croatian TV stations, they are full of prejudices against the opposite side... If only people could travel more, socialize more. But, you can't travel nowadays due to economic hardships. Maybe cheaper camping trips can be organized so that young people can meet and see that normal people exist on the other side as well and that they are not all devils as they've been told, "all Croats are like this, all Albanians are like that." A choir mate just recently went to a youth camp in Germany. She met some young Croats there with whom she had the best time although she was born after 1980 and had had no chance to meet any earlier. She said that language had brought them together. They're still in touch but, in real life, she had never seen a Croat up to that point.



A moment ago you said that you were afraid of something like it happening again. What should we do with the past so that it doesn't repeat? Some say that it should be forgotten, others that it should be faced, forgiven. What do you think?

As a mathematician, I am afraid that wars occur periodically, every twenty, thirty, fifty years, that it is a periodic function. It's better to face it, since forgetting it... Some things can't be forgotten. It would be bad to forget because it's like an infected wound that festers. It's better to clean it while it's fresh. And how can we clean it? Well, I don't know, firstly those who did it, killed people, raped and pillaged should be brought to justice. I don't know if there's justice, when the top judicial people are corrupted, who can be trusted? If only those people would repent but how can we bring them to that point?

What about "ordinary people"? What should they do with their past, what can you do with yours?

Everybody carries as much load as they can, as much as they were given. I have processed and worked through mine in order to find what was good in what happened. Even the law of conscience in the case of those with bloodied hands is beginning to function. Some have begun to turn themselves in and started speaking about what happened since their conscience is biting them and since they have a heart and a soul.

My sis used to work in a café here in Loznica. One day a drunk boy came crying, saying that he hadn't wanted to do it. She asked him what it had been. He said that he had been ordered as a common soldier to kill a few civilians and there he was crying "I didn't want it, I didn't want it." Thus, conscience can still bite. Even if he can't apologize to the people whose family members he killed, it still reached him that he shouldn't have done it... The worst is when people do something and keep living believing it was the right thing to do, "kill a Šiptar,³⁰ kill a Serb, kill a Croat," and why? A mother gave birth to him, a mother will cry for him. But, it seems to me that the ordinary people who haven't gone through it are not burdened by it. The question is whether they think about reconciliation at all and whether they feel the need to reconcile with someone they didn't fight with?

Do you feel a need to think about reconciliation?

I am not sure, especially since I wasn't involved in any direct clashes, I have nothing to regret, I never did wrong to anyone. I know that people entered Albanian neighbors' apartments and ransacked them because Albanians were not there during the bombing campaign. I entered those apartments to reorder them... For example, in the anatomy professor's case I returned his books where they belonged since I felt bad that they were scattered around. What else could have I done?

³⁰ A derogatory term employed in the region of the former Yugoslavia when referring to Kosovar Albanians.

An Albanian neighbor found her apartment in disorder upon returning from Macedonia. They don't eat pork. She found a pig's head, roasted, rotting there. The woman was vomiting in her home. My mom gave me some tea to take to her, a few bags of chamomile and peppermint. The woman started crying, wanting to give me some money. I said "No way, neighbor!" She couldn't believe that my sis went to help her wash the carpet. That was happening precisely between June 10th and 20th, when everything was 'topsy-turvy.' My sister also had an Albanian friend who was hiding with his family in their apartment during the bombing. She went there a few times although it was risky, because of the police and everything else, just to knock on their door. Afterwards, when we ran out of food, they brought us some milk and flour from another part of the city. You risk your life to go there and return. That humanity, it is all that persists, those sparks from the ashes that remained. That humanity is still sparkling. I am not bitter and do not want to poison myself. Luckily, God gave me that good side, good is all around us, those who want to see it can do it and those who do not cannot... I want to see it.

For example, it struck me when I heard about Srebrenica in 2001, I hadn't known about it earlier... We hadn't had enough money for satellite TV, I had had no opportunity to listen to foreign radio stations or read foreign magazines. I simply hadn't known about it.

What is dealing with the past for you? Is it facing responsibility?

It is facing yourself and whatever you did, repentance and realization of your actions, recognizing they weren't good.

What could people do for reconciliation? What can the one you belong to do about it, for example?

They need to stop acting like victims, before anything else. Actually, I don't think it's an act, it's deeply rooted actually. If they think they are victims, they should respect other's victims as well and not just their own. The number of missing has been determined. It should be noted how many are missing on other sides when the number of Serbian missing is discussed. I don't like mathematical and statistical analysis of percentages of missing compared to the total number of people of a nationality. Every victim is equally valuable, it is someone's child or a brother, father or a husband. It shouldn't be stated the way it's usually done – so many people got killed, five people – that's five families, immediate and extended. And there are some of us with the tendency to say "it's a small number." It's not just a number! What happened was their whole world for some, so I don't know... It needs to be talked about to a greater extent. Alright, it's talked about, but it's always met with fierce opposition. B92³¹ broadcasts such programs, they do exist, I have watched them. They

³¹ B92 was a radio station and one of few free media during Milošević's regime. B92 also started broadcasting its TV program in 2000.

tormented me but I still watched them. I would rather be tormented than lie to myself. It also tortures you when you see what happened on the other side. For example, it struck me when I heard about Srebrenica³² in 2001, I hadn't known about it earlier... We hadn't had enough money for satellite TV, I had had no opportunity to listen to foreign radio stations or read foreign magazines. I simply hadn't known about it. A colleague told me about it. When he saw that I hadn't known about it he told me I was an excellent actress. And I really hadn't known about it. That is also if you want... but, you had no chance to see the other side, all we had was the 1st channel of RTS³³ and poor reception of RTS2. You either watch that or nothing. And I hadn't known about it.

How did you feel when you heard about it?

I immediately recalled Kragujevac.³⁴ It has been talked about for fifty years, how horrible it was. You talk about it for fifty years without even mentioning Srebrenica for five... The catch is not to be worse, but to remain who you are, to be better than the one who was bad to you. That's what I am scared of. It was done by many, not by one man...

What's your view of responsibility and guilt, whether it's individual or collective, when you say it wasn't one man's deed?

I don't know how it could be collective when I hadn't known about it. That was horrible, when I watched it on B92 I was truly shocked. Collective? I am not sure. That is hard, I don't know what I would have been able to do even if I had known about it.

And now?

When they start with "so many were killed," I can say "there were forty thousand on the other side." I feel stupid saying it since every person is a person... One lives without knowing where another is for ten years. What can I do – say something? Sometimes I ask myself what is it that divides people, is it something in your blood that determines what you are?

What may be the future with such a past?

Ouch! What worries me so much is the remaining rot which is the basis of this state. Valuable people are leaving, not only from Serbia, but also from Croatia and Bosnia. The people who are staying are full of some kind of bitterness. I am generalizing now, there are some who do think. People in power in these states are the product of voting bodies in their countries, of those who voted them in. Now we can make a connection between bad people and bad government. That's what worries me.

³² The Srebrenica Massacre, also known as the Srebrenica Genocide.

³³ Serbian public broadcasting service.

³⁴ The Nazi German soldiers' massacre of civilians in Kragujevac during World War II.

Can we discuss that voting body's responsibility?

Yes, there is a lot of resignation, "what can I do about it?" There are a lot of people who are not interested in that any more, the voter turnout is decreasing. Maybe people have no time due to their worries and problems, there's even no time to think, and then a new madman shows up and a war begins. I am scared... If you don't want to take part in it, another one does. And that other will appear to be the majority although it is not, because everyone else is silent. For example, the British majority is against sending their soldiers to Iraq but they were sent nevertheless because the voters supported the idea. Those who don't support it won't even come out and vote in the elections, they are not interested in it. What you could have prevented, another is doing presently. The future is not looking very bright...

Before we started the interview you had told me something that reminded you of reconciliation, and that you had written to your neighbors in Croatia.

From 1991, when we left, until the end people remained human. They came out to say goodbye to us despite shouts and threats of passers-by who hadn't known us. We communicated until the phone numbers changed. Slowly the communication subsided, for fourteen years almost. Then I decided to write to them and tell them a bit about ourselves. Afterwards they phoned us. Nothing changed. A human remains human... there were tears... the neighbors were shaken just like we were. Why were we shaken? It was sad that you are suddenly separated from someone you grew up and socialized with on daily basis for half of your life. You don't meet many people like that one person afterwards, and she probably thought the same. They invited us to visit, we did the same. A part of your soul tickles you because they are a part of you and you are a part of them. But it was torn out because of others... When you speak about it, it's as if its value melts away. And it needs to be talked about. If you keep it in you, nobody will ever find out.

Do you have something to add in the end?

Everyone should start with oneself. There are those who don't want to and those who don't know how... How can we help them? I do what I can do. Unfortunately, I can't do much, but if I manage to shake up even one who is playing a hero, waving a sword in the air, barking but not biting, and bring him or her back to earth... Even a little is enough, little by little. Something big would probably happen if everyone did a little. I think I am succeeding, as much as I can. When someone tells you "I could never think about that" that means they are thinking in that moment! And then maybe that person will tell someone in his or her surroundings who thinks the same way and then it will spread like a wave.

H. R.

A.

(42)

Knin
café owner

I am a better Croat because I do good for my country

What do you remember from the nineties? Which feelings come to life when you recall that period?

I remember a surreal fear of former neighbors, I remember that we didn't sleep at night but only during the day for three, four months, that we had to guard our houses and such. All of it was unnecessary from the current perspective. Not my fear itself, but all of the events which could have been avoided by a wise political accord, like what is being worked toward today. I don't know why it couldn't have been done in 1991. Too many people died and too many people lost everything they had for it to boil down to just that, ten or fifteen years later. People have to live together.

They showed a poll from Knin on the Croatian Television about ten days ago. They stopped a high school kid on the street and asked him whether he socialized with Serbs. He said he didn't. I know he does, he is in a group which contains at least two Serbs. He either doesn't know they are Serbs or he has to say he doesn't socialize with them for the sake of the public.

What did it depend on during the nineties? What could have been done for it not to happen?

It depended on pure political wisdom and nothing else. Zagreb's, Belgrade's and partially Sarajevo's political will. Now, there are people who return, you know, I normally communicate with all of them, with the ones who I know did nothing. Those who did something haven't shown up, they haven't initiated contact with me nor do they intend to do so. Ok, I think that it should not be forgotten who did what, but life must go on. Especially in my case, from my professional perspective, nobody has it written on their foreheads who or what they are. Whoever is a good guest, well-behaved, cordial, good, is welcomed.

Nevertheless, something resulted from the wartime nineties. How should we, from your perspective, deal with the wartime past, crimes, ethnic cleansing, etc?

We should work on that people finally start living. I think that Knin is, after all, the most specific of all towns which went through the war because many people have arrived, there are no jobs even for locals, not to speak of the newcomers, the ownership of apartments remain unresolved. Actually, nothing is resolved. People here can only survive by observing who and what you are, that nationalism still persists. This is the last community that will see it resolved.

Why, in your opinion, are people still nationalistically judged by who and what they are?

Because people have nothing else to hold onto. Everybody clung to it in the nineties, like, you'll get your own country and that will be the pinnacle. Nobody deemed it important that everything would be twice as bad and that you'd have nothing to eat in that new country.

Many people left Knin, others arrived. Is that discussed enough or is it a taboo?

Well, I don't know, I socialize with people who think pretty normally so I can't say with certainty. I know some stories about different groups' conversation topics. It is normal that the people who had been in the war, people suffering from PTSD,³⁵ see their final status as the most important thing in the world. They don't choose the people they cooperate with on the basis of being particularly pure-blooded. They cooperate with Serbs as well, but there's always a little distance. You live with these people whether you want it or not, it will have to be resolved with time and people will come to live again like they used to.

They showed a poll from Knin on the Croatian Television about ten days ago. They stopped a high school kid on the street and asked him whether he socialized with Serbs. He said he didn't. I know he does, he is in a group which contains at least two Serbs. He either doesn't know they are Serbs or he has to say he doesn't socialize with them for the sake of the public. I don't know which it is. It's on television, after all, meaning that his mom can end up rebuking him for whom he socializes with. I don't know what the motive could be. We ended up laughing about it heartily...

Is the distance result of fear?

No, but of hatred.

Where does the hatred come from?

I visited Serbia last year and saw a talk show on one of their TV stations. I don't know who the guest was, but refugees from Croatia were the topic. People called in – simply to say they couldn't stand those refugees there. They also thought that the refugees should go to Croatia by themselves and resolve all their things and not wait for Serbia to resolve the return of their possessions. It's a completely normal thought, right?

From experience I know about the people who will not come to Croatia because they are afraid. Although, you can spot Belgrade and all other Serbian license plates here and nothing happens. If a person found a job somewhere over in Serbia, they would not return here where they can't find a job and would end up on welfare. Why would that person return?

Why the hatred? If I were a refugee of my people... How can you not hate someone who has done it to you and left you without anything? That is still, simply, like this, unfortunate, although when I think of the way it was three years

³⁵ Post-traumatic stress disorder.

ago... You can't say we are not moving forward.

How can you see it's moving forward and how was it three years ago?

Three years ago you couldn't say anything about a Bosnian who moved here, took over another's house, sold his own in Bosnia and got good money for it. He would go to Bosnia every month to pick up his welfare check and would receive one here as well. You would get beaten up on the street if you said something publicly about him. It happened to a friend of ours. There's no way you could promote the idea that we, after all, have to live together and thus make a step toward making our lives at least somewhat bearable. It's different now, you may say and write whatever you want and nothing would happen, you would not cause too big a reaction.

I felt afraid after the latest local election. Even now I, as a Croat born in Knin (my husband is a Serb), have no freedom.

I am still regarded as a black sheep, although at that time I was with my ex-boyfriend, who had been a Croatian soldier during the war and had seen what it had been on time and had given it up, and was being considered a good Croat... But, we owned a "Serbian café" because we didn't think like the majority of people did.

Why?

Because people who didn't turn out to vote in the last local election were being counted and named in town, in the papers, in the City Hall. That's information that should be kept private, should not be made public, whose business is it, anyway? Which also means that it can be determined from the voting slip's serial number whom I voted for. All of it is a catastrophe in these small settings. All of it hits you so you can't wait to leave again after you had gone somewhere where nobody had asked you anything and then you returned...

What's reconciliation to you, what's the meaning of this word?

Reconciliation... It's every person's personal matter how he or she sees it. What I know is, I can't reconcile with someone who has wronged me. I can say, ok, there's a God or someone else who will judge them, I don't know, I won't judge them, but I also won't have anything to do with them. And now, reconciliation, that's... That's what I said earlier, that some things have to be understood to be put behind us, to let us move on. It needs to be recognized that my child has no idea about whom or what it will be in the future, nor views that as important. That child should be concerned with whether it can find a job here, live, own an apartment, provide existence for itself. When we meet this goal we can say reconciliation has been accomplished.

Can reconciliation be achieved if what happened and its causes are not discussed?

No, it can't, I think not. We should consider the level of sincerity when you talk to someone, so it's not that I say one thing when I am with you since you are a Serb, and another when I talk to a Croat.

How can we work on the reconciliation process and who should lead it in this setting?

I think the youth should carry it since they should be free from frustration. It's normal that a family which lost someone as close as a brother, a father, won't easily begin this process. Nevertheless, I think that ninety percent of people haven't experienced such a trauma. Especially the children, the young generations, first graders in high school, for example, should follow the logic: I don't care whom I go out with, I go out with a friend because she's good and not because she's of certain nationality.

Only, Serbs are selling their property a lot here, they sell it themselves since they don't see their future here. That's not solely due to political reasons, but purely existential. Especially now, after the local election in Knin, when Serbs got the majority of votes. Just like I am against that the Croatian emigration votes from Australia for the Croatian President or the Parliament President, I am against that buses from Serbia bring people here for election so that they may vote while having no intention to live here. They are only making it worse for the Serbs who do live here. And they are literally pushed aside here with "who gives you a right to choose anybody." In five years it's inevitable that, if all of those people return, they'll constitute a majority and become a decisive factor. But, I think those are the games played between Zagreb and the people who represent the Serbian minority in Croatia, their buying and selling.

What can the "ordinary people" do for reconciliation?

I think they can't do much in this setting, nothing can be done without politicians, no way. Reconciliation will be accomplished when Serbs start getting jobs with the State according to their percentage in Knin. In that way it can be initiated and said that the process has begun. This way, as long as they are a taboo regarding jobs or any other activities, no reconciliation can be reached. We, the little, ordinary people can speak but it's of no use as long as there's propaganda in the newspapers, on TV, in the government and in the Parliament, which state the opposite.

I, as a member of the Croat nationality who has gone through it all, don't need anybody's apologies or excuses. We shouldn't regard those forms that highly, what we should admit, because we weren't right then. It is as it is, you have returned, I wasn't the one who gave you the residence here or the ID or the passport, they were given to you by someone who thinks you have a right to be here. Thus, who am I to judge you? I don't need anybody's apologies regarding reconciliation, but "what happened, happened, let's move on." For this you need a normal collocutor, but many people are intolerant like "you can say what you think, but that's not right since I think it's you and your nationality's fault." But, we need to talk... We should organize round table discussions and even if only five people showed up today there would be fifteen in a month, enlarging the circle.

When we consider the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past, don't we, as individuals, have a particular kind of responsibility?

I think so. I try to do that, even if it's only within my café. We opened it seven years ago when it was very important who and what you were. It was never important in my café, but that's why they call it a Serbian café. It is still funny. Everything was allowed here, ok, I didn't mean allowed, everything was normal, for anybody to show up, properly have a drink and pay for it. I didn't care who or what it was. That's why all kinds and peoples came to it: blacks, whites, Muslims, Jews, everybody... I am still regarded as a black sheep, although at that time I was with my ex-boyfriend, who had been a Croatian soldier during the war and had seen what it had been on time and had given it up, and was being considered a good Croat... But, we owned a "Serbian café" because we didn't think like the majority of people did.

I am happy when five young people talk to me and I try to explain to them that not all is black and white as they show it on TV. I am satisfied when I see that they have listened to me and that they would think about it the next day, since I am a kind of authority to those youths. That is my responsibility because I can't just listen if someone is telling them wrong things, I have to approach and say that it isn't completely right. That's a part of the job I need to do and I do it. Everyone who thinks normally should have their five people they talk to, five by five and you come to a pretty good number...

My conclusion is that every Croat has his own Serb in Knin. You know, 'Serbs are bad, but this one is good to me since I know him or her.' I think that's a way to work on it as well...

Here's a personal question which you, naturally, don't have to answer. You are married to a Serb. Do you think that more of cases like yours could have an impact on the reconciliation process?

My case is a bit different since my husband has no ties to Croatia. We met when he came to visit his grandmother in Zadar, he wasn't a refugee from Knin returning to it, we met after the war.

I think that's also a way to initiate the process of reconciliation, although some people look at me judgingly to this day because of it. I don't care much about it because I will prove to anyone who says a word to me that I am a ten times better Croat than he is and that they can't do anything to me. A better Croat in a sense that I do good for my country and that I find all people equal.

S. D.

Breaking out of the cycle of violence

Can you please tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Mevludin. I am a mechanical engineer, father of three, married.

How do you feel currently, six years after the war ended?

The last few year's social circumstances have changed me a lot. A part of my life which I spent under different types of pressure, always outside of a "system" and social schemes, has transformed me into a different man. I think differently, I believe differently. The worst is that I don't feel good. I imagined this period in my life differently. Aside from professional ambition, I expected a completely different social, economic and political climate.

I thought that my people would come out of the war with an improved civic conscience, with the will to sacrifice for a better future and regarding that future. I thought we would need no help (now, six years after the conflict), as if we were incapable. I expected that we would, owing to unpleasant experiences, overcome corruption, poverty, theft... I thought that the people who would bring about the political changes (politicians) would be the best and most adequate representatives of my people, but that isn't the case. The people who represent us in the world, as a result of an election organized by the international community, have just jumped into different clothes and have become devoted to personal gain and benefits at the expense of poor people which suffer from poverty. More than 70 percent of the youth is unemployed without hope for it to change in the near future. "The political elite" has no idea, capability or the will to change anything for better. I have three children and have not many reasons to be an optimist or to feel good.

I believe that great people know how to forgive and reconcile for the sake of breaking out of the cycle of violence and for the sake of a brighter future.

What's your view of your past?

I view it as a bad dream, but also as an experience which cannot be "bought" or "sold." It is obtained through a lot of effort, but I wish no one had lived through a past such as ours.

Should the past be discussed?

It should not only be discussed, but written about, studied and analyzed from all possible angles. We should learn from it so it does not repeat itself.

What is your attitude regarding reconciliation?

Peace and reconciliation are being preached about in elementary school textbooks, philosophical and religious (theological) texts and all sorts of literary works through which man has formed his subjective opinion through centuries. The fact that individuals constitute the society shows that it is an organism which survives on exchanged pieces of information.

I see reconciliation as cooperation between two or more subjects, an attempt to live an easier and more comfortable life. Shortly, if you want to live well you need to respect another's needs. Reconciliation must be an honest gesture from the subjects who live together and the reason behind it does not matter. We should discuss factors that brought about the need for reconciliation under our post-conflict sky. Reconciliation should take place, and it needs to be two-sided. Every individual and people should take on their own responsibility and ask for forgiveness honestly.

Can reconciliation be accomplished in Kosovo?

I already said that it is not a question whether it can be accomplished, it must be accomplished. We reached that level of consciousness where we realized that we had helped scum to get rich while fighting one another. Now we are paying for it since it's known that we are one of the poorest nations in the whole world regardless of what nation we belong to.

I am perplexed by the question of how one can still be manipulated and how come we are still not aware of the new reality? Finally, complete reconciliation will be accomplished once we start comprehending how bad our current reality is.

What is needed for reconciliation?

To forgive, regardless of how hard it could be. To ask for forgiveness, to think about a better future and to pursue it by any means necessary. I am not saying this because I've had it easier than the others and because my town was less affected by war than other regions of Kosovo. I am saying it because I believe that great people know how to forgive and reconcile for the sake of breaking out of the cycle of violence and for the sake of a brighter future.

Who should work on the process of reconciliation?

All segments of the Kosovar society should partake. Starting from educational and religious institutions, ordinary people, ones from the NGO sector including our international friends who are involved not for their own, or strategic, interest.

Do you think that people who live in Kosovo are ready for reconciliation? Do they want it?

If I consider people I know, the answer is affirmative. Those would be my family, neighbors, friends and colleagues... If all people of Kosovo think similarly like the aforementioned, the reconciliation is more than just a possibility. People who are aware of current problems want to say goodbye to the past and the

present which is not exactly blooming. We must reconcile if we want the problems we are facing now to become a thing of the past. Thus, reconciliation is not just a human act, but an obligation as well. The only segment of the society, if we can call them that at all, in whose case reconciliation is not desirable, consists of criminals of all kinds and nationalities. People who have suffered before the conflict, through it and after it are still suffering. I have never heard one who had lost one's nearest in the war using hate speech in the media. Most often the opposite happens – those who practice it more have not been affected by the war.

Do the people will reconciliation?

Without a doubt.

What about obstacles?

There are obstacles, certainly. They materialize in the form of stereotypes often. There are those who don't think too much, who are shallow. It suits some people, for their own and personal good. Another obstacle to reconciliation would be the need for "sensational" news, for intentional emphasis on problems or incidents. Media does this a lot and thus shows a lack of professionalism. We should also mention misinformation and its constant repeating which creates the truth for those people who do not know Kosovo's reality that well. A striking example would be current Serbian politics. The Serbian political structure is not reconciling with anything and has never even come out with a normal proposal to resolve the problem. Reciprocal lack of knowledge could easily be the main obstacle.

What should your side do for reconciliation, and what should the other?

My side has neither the means nor the potential to clearly articulate reconciliatory messages. It is trying to create a stable internal environment in which people should feel well. Sometimes those messages are not successful since they don't appear to be honest. These attempts are losing their appeal since they are not capable of convincing the public how much initiative is needed for the reconciliatory process. The logical consequence of that process is the acceptance of guilt on the side that initiated and attempted to wage war senselessly against the whole world until the end which resulted in much violence, crime and many victims. The worst is that it can't be taken seriously due to the fact that most of the public institutions are corrupted to such an extent that nobody gives a damn about the state officials' message.

The side that my people fought against for bare survival doesn't care about the innocent victims, problems and consequences which were caused to other peoples and is not taking what would be the best and the most expected step. Our neighbors we fought against should wise up and realize they cannot just erase all of the horrors done by their people. What I want to say is that the step they need to take is to ask for at least the direct victims' forgiveness. I believe

this would be a good message and a good step toward reconciliation.

What can an ordinary citizen do to contribute to reconciliation?

I think an ordinary citizen can do a lot. The ordinary citizen did the most, in a way, and I mean ninety percent of the population. The ordinary citizen who, for the sixth year in a row, doesn't have electricity regularly, no steady job to provide him with the elementary living conditions, who often doesn't have enough of drinking water in the scorching heat, who's under the threat of being ran over by our politicians' armored jeeps, and it goes on and on... I think he's done a lot. Due to this ordinary citizen's patience the process is still ongoing. I think this citizen ought to be rewarded for a simple reason. If this citizen is not problematic for his community, can you just imagine how it would behave if he had a job to provide for stable existence, fixed infrastructure and good living conditions? I am certain it would have been even a better role model.

I would like to illustrate this with an example. I have been continuously working since the war ended. My colleagues are of different nationalities. Albanians, Serbs, Roma, and so on. We all receive better pay than this poor town's average is and we never have conflicts at work. Why? The answer is simple – we have no large financial problems, and have no time to think and create problems... It only shows that one of the factors that caused the war and which represent an obstacle to normal living is of the economic nature.

In the end I would like to add that the ordinary citizen is doing enough, but I also think he can contribute more if he regains consciousness and doesn't remain out of the process.

Do you think the guilt for what happened is individual or collective?

The guilt is not collective for one reason. Even if half of a population does something bad, the other half remains which does not partake in that evil. But, it is a fact that the majority is always blamed for the minority's misdeeds which were done in the majority's name. I would rephrase this question. For example, how responsible are we for not reacting more strongly against the instigators of violence and conflicts, the individuals within our collective?

What is this region's future, in your opinion?

We need more time until the majority realizes that there's no other way to create a new reality than with work. When we will be able to objectively tackle problems, when we realize that the only prerequisite for mutual trust is honesty and that benefits do not come by themselves but through a lot of effort, sacrifice and no lies – shortly, when most of the citizens reach the civil consciousness. I hope this will be accomplished since there can be no other way. I optimistically think this will be done in the near future.

N. I.

We should look the truth in the eyes

When you remember the nineties and the wars, what is it that prevails, what kind of feelings do you have stemming from that period?

I didn't believe in the beginning that wars would take place, just like everyone else, but I was scared that there would be... I could sense something, some evil, I felt some kind of fear.

When was that?

That was from 1989 to 1991, approximately when you could see the abuse of "daddy, don't let there be war" slogans in demonstrations and while the first JNA³⁶ incidents were taking place. I already felt some kind of anxiety then. That's when all sorts of things were happening, March 9,³⁷ demonstrations in Belgrade... Those scenes of breaking the demonstrations... Earlier I had watched such scenes only on TV. In Israel, South Africa, in the countries ruled by the worst regimes. When I saw it in Belgrade I realized what was happening.

That day I fought with my father who told me I was crazy, that I didn't understand anything, that he (Vuk Drašković³⁸) was a foreigners' hired gun set on destroying Belgrade. That's when I started flipping through all of the stations seeking information. I was lucky enough to run into RFE,³⁹ they were still located in Munich and could not be easily heard here, and still had not started the section for south Slavic countries. I started listening and realizing how much they [tn: the Serbian regime] used dirty means in order to manipulate the people. When it started in Sarajevo I listened to both Radio Zagreb and Radio Sarajevo, mostly on low frequencies. It disgusted me, I was disgusted with this regime, I felt bitterness and terrible helplessness at the same time. For example, when the maternity hospital was hit in Tuzla, a doctor from there called a maternity hospital in Belgrade asking for help, begging for it, saying that their

When it started in Sarajevo I listened to both Radio Zagreb and Radio Sarajevo, mostly on low frequencies. It disgusted me, I was disgusted with this regime, I felt bitterness and terrible helplessness at the same time.

³⁶ The Yugoslav People's Army (YPA or JNA).

³⁷ The first demonstrations against Milošević's regime took place in Belgrade on March 9, 1991.

³⁸ Serbian politician, opposition leader in the beginning of 1990s, and leader of March 9 demonstrations in Belgrade.

³⁹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

hospital was on fire and that mothers were in the basement with the babies... And, she says in the end: "Let me just give you another fact, I am a Serb," and started crying... Or, a student from Belgrade who was studying in Rijeka tells me: "I watch TV in Zagreb and in Belgrade, the words are the same but the faces differ." Thus, the media and images were abused identically. The whole of Europe was moving toward integrative processes, globalization, unification,

democratization, and so on, while we were moving to nationalism, wars, division. Also, I think that our educational system was like that, the system as a whole, actually.

All of them were telling us that we were endangered and hated, this and that... What could an ordinary man do but to pick up a gun and go voluntarily, or wait to be kidnapped and taken away from home, forcefully mobilized? And then he gets killed or kills...

What do you mean by the educational system?

I mean education on all levels. There was no true quality to it. I think that the level of education and culture attributed much to the fact that people fell for a scam, media and lies, they could not fight back. Once I listened to conversation between Čičak and Đilas⁴⁰ in the "Bridge" program on RFE...

When was this?

I don't remember precisely, maybe already in 1994 or 1995, during the war. The theme was whether the people, or the populace, in Croatia and Serbia were responsible for the war, crimes, because they listened to and followed their leaders. Đilas delivered a thesis, a correct one in my opinion, that all of the ones who were obliged to deliver the truth to the people instead were saying that we were under threat and calling us to war. The Academy of Sciences, the Church, universities, professors, and all of the system's institutions: the Government, ministers, politicians... All of them were telling us that we were endangered and hated, this and that... What could an ordinary man do but to pick up a gun and go voluntarily, or wait to be kidnapped and taken away from home, forcefully mobilized? And then he gets killed or kills. Many of them never figured out the deception, that leaders were waging wars as agreed upon and for the sake of staying in power and safeguarding their interests. Nothing else. Victims were of no importance, their ethnicity or faith.

How much did you follow the events in Sarajevo, in Croatia, in Vukovar?

I followed them closely since I couldn't sleep at night. I would listen to *Radio Sarajevo*, for example, the whole night long during the shelling. I also heard General Perišić's⁴¹ direct order, actually not an order but an ultimatum, given to citizens of Mostar, to return two pilots they supposedly kidnapped or he would otherwise shell residence halls and universities in Mostar. He gave them until

⁴⁰ Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, Croatian politician, and Aleksa Đilas, Serbian sociologist and historian.

⁴¹ Momčilo Perišić (1944) was a Serbian general. He is currently indicted with crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war by the ICTY.

10 p.m. to comply. After 10 p.m. shelling of those objects commenced since it turned out that citizens of Mostar had had no idea that those pilots had fled to Croatia and had had nothing to do with that whole business, the supposed kidnapping.

You mentioned you would listen to radio with no sleep at night. Why, what motivated you to do that? What was the decisive factor? What were the feelings, and why were you worrying?

Why? On one side my existence was under threat, completely. Poverty, hyperinflation. All of it affected me. I have no family and children, but I was brought up as a pacifist, it's in my nature. I felt sorry for the youth. I remember that Bogdan Bogdanović⁴² told the Belgrade students: "Run off as fast as you can, no Bosnian shit hole is worthy of one of your young lives." I felt the same way – why should they get killed? For what reason? Everybody was hiding the fact that up to a short time earlier Croats, Serbs and Muslims had served the army in the same barracks, participated together in public works. Maybe I feel nostalgia for Yugoslavia. It was a totalitarian state and it had many faults, but it also had many good things, the existential minimum was met, individual rights, right to life and work were provided. We lost it all, all of us.

Was it that people could not reach this information? If a person wanted to find out, would they be able to do it?

Certainly, just like I did! But, we are talking about a system that bred such people, the educational and cultural level played a crucial role. I think we are at a very low level, in general. During Milošević's reign culture was attacked first, the first major changes occurred within cultural institutions, the theatre and TV directors were fired. And then the scum rose to the surface. Many accepted for fact what was presented to them in the media. At that time I was reading fantastic articles in *Naša borba* and *Srpska reč*⁴³ in which individuals were exposing certain cases of such deception. Our TV showed a church in Osijek, supposedly Serbian, in front of which a sign said "Mother Mary, help us." I'd never seen that written on an Eastern Orthodox church. The deception was clear to me. But, every attempt to explain it as a deception to my friends and colleagues at work was futile. They said I was crazy! Or that I was an enemy, asking me where I lived, where I had been schooled, whose side I was on.

What's your opinion now regarding the wars?

I think that there were normal, honest, honorable people on all sides during the wars. Many of them lost their lives trying to help their neighbors of other nationality. Many helped others to escape, to evacuate. Many were shot for helping others. Even to this day many testify in court about war crimes com-

⁴² Bogdan Bogdanović (1922) is a former mayor of Belgrade (1982-86).

⁴³ Daily newspaper ["Our Struggle"] and magazine in Serbia ["Serbian Word"].



mitted in Croatia and Serbia although the criminals are of their own nationality. These people always existed, but they are always a minority. But, they are the war's real heroes.

Today it's much easier. It's smoother, reconciliation will surely be reached, sooner or later. But, it will be a long process since those who lost their dearest will not forgive... Some for religious reasons, other for... It's well known what kind of mentality and traditions we, the people from the Balkans, have. For example, Albanians and Montenegrins, blood feuds and such.

You mentioned reconciliation. What is it to you? What does it mean to you, in which sense should we reconcile? What needs to happen and how should it look?

Former Yugoslavia and its spirit will never return. That's over with. I had an accident in 1972 after which I underwent surgery in Sophia, Bulgaria. When I was leaving, my mother, who remembered WWII and Bulgarian occupation of this area, told me: "Okay, they are our enemies, they were torching and killing us during the war and here you are now, going there to get their help." Simply, she couldn't forget the scene when they were intercepted by a penal expedition in WWII. But, since I don't have memories of that war and that experience, I saw that Bulgarians were just like we are. It is a very similar mentality. Everything contains some bad seeds. There are good and bad people everywhere, evil and honest, and those who are willing to lay down their lives for you.

Who should reconcile?

No reconciliation suits the political elites, if you ask me. Regarding ordinary

people, it has been shown up to now that, while refugees are returning, many of former neighbors are cooperating and helping one another. But, when problems occur they trickle down from higher places, the governmental and institutional level, the worst extremists who committed worst crimes during the war, and the diaspora. There can be no reconciliation between nationalists and chauvinists, they'll never want it. And politicians are not far from it.

And the ordinary people who participated in the war were simply forced to do it. Maybe they still have no mutual trust, but their hands are not bloody, those are the ones I consider. They should heal and create normal and human relations. This process needs to happen within the everyday, ordinary life. Refugees should return where they lived earlier, on all sides, and start living a normal life. People should cooperate, trade, meet as neighbors, invite one another to celebrations, marry. A terrible psychological barrier exists due to war, crimes, manipulation... Fear was utilized for manipulation, it was abused to make people afraid. Karadžić⁴⁴ is a psychiatrist and it is well known what methods he used to incite and wage war. It still lives and is present in people's psyche and it makes them afraid, the other side horrifies them! Thus, only after a long period, after a process, I think can it be accomplished that people become close again and for normal, human, everyday things to commence again.

It has been shown within the last fifteen years that we never managed to choose the right side and that we are susceptible to all sorts of manipulation. What can we do? Firstly, we should elect a proper government. Secondly, we all need to be more active...

And who should lead and be responsible for this process?

Well, the citizens, the people themselves. Nevertheless, no success would be accomplished if it weren't for the United Nations' forces and non-governmental organizations. Thus, help from outside was needed... But, the victims themselves, together with families of the kidnapped and the missing and the victims' families formed their own associations and non-governmental organizations for mutual help. They should carry it. The process needs to be even larger. But, a lot of time will have to pass in order to overcome psychological barriers, fears, and to establish relations. Citizens themselves have to become involved. But, there should be somebody to lead. The authorities are still resisting it and that's a fact. They cooperate only under the international community's large pressure. But the NGOs play a hugely positive role.

And what can we, "the ordinary people," individually do for this process?

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⁴⁴ Radovan Karadžić (1945) was the leader of Bosnian Serbs – the president of Republika Srpska. He is currently indicted with genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war by the ICTY.

we do? Firstly, we should elect a proper government. Secondly, we all need to be more active in those NGOs against which there's, even to this day, an ongoing unseen campaign, against the Women in Black.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, *RTS* invites to its program different... I am not saying that different opinions should not be heard, but I think that the individuals who sustain tension, hatred and espouse hard nationalistic attitudes are deliberately invited.

What do you think a person “from the other side” expects you to do regarding reconciliation?

I think they expect me to be normal. That I normally vote for a normal government in the election. That I do not vote for nationalists and that I do not support their organization in such endeavors.

Who lost the most during the war? Is that level of responsibility identical everywhere?

I don't think that responsibility is identical. The most responsible is the one who had the biggest force, the biggest strength. That would be us, since we had the *JNA* on our side, Serbia and the Serbian government. I think it is the most responsible for the war's beginning. And we, as citizens... It is terribly hard to fight against such machinery, a system everyone was harnessed to, the academicians, the church, but we all are responsible.

What could we have done, and what can we do now?

That's a very hard and complex question. I know that all sides committed crimes and all had their victims, but it's important to keep in mind that no war took place in Serbia, but did in Croatia and Bosnia. That says a lot. It says a lot about who had the greatest force at disposal and who is the most responsible for the war. And, I don't have a straight up answer for what we can do or maybe I am scared to state it since it could be radical... I think that we, as people, had been attempting to resist Milošević's regime for ten years, but had been altogether inactive as opposition and people. Everybody stared at their TVs watching the news... That's how we are at work, in economy, in everything. We wait for God's help, for it to fall from the sky, we are inactive, we simply initiate nothing. I remember when the Army headed toward Vukovar that soldiers' parents came out and blocked the roads and managed to stop the military. But, the regime fought back by initiating individual mobilizations, sent smaller units and managed to stifle the resistance through the media and kept on going. Maybe there should have been more victims on the March 9, maybe two thousand killed Serbs instead of two, but the war would have not lasted for ten years, costing us two hundred thousand lives. We have a custom to speak of our history and ourselves as liberators, we liberated almost the whole world, we are very brave and so on. I think that the resistance to regime showed the

⁴⁵ Women in Black is an anti-war nongovernmental organization.

great courage of certain individuals on one side which constituted a minority, and the cowardice of the large majority on the other. My hat is off to the young men, women and retirees who were being beaten on the streets by the regime but most of the people were too scared to even leave their houses then, they were passive.

I can, as an individual, support all those in Croatia and Serbia and the world, but it's no use since I am always outvoted.

How should we relate to the lapsed wars? Should we forget them, remember them, mark them?

I think that all normal people in the world could learn from them. And we should not forget them since they cannot be forgotten, they are simply history. History is forged here, real events as well. We should look the truth in the eyes. A government should get elected, a completely new set of people who will come out and open all of the archives and show to people what really happened so that we can learn from it just like Germans learned from WWII. I heard that Germans after the war, when they saw the crematoria and gas chambers, lowered their heads and started working quietly for fifty years. Although, most of people in Serbia think now that Germans are fascists and that they hate us. We should also face the past, look into the truth's eyes and learn from it.

What do you mean by looking the truth in the eyes?

Many here do not believe to this day that there are war criminals among us although they have seen the footage. And many support those crimes, which is horrifying... If the victims are Albanians or Croats. And these are ordinary people. It's horrible, but it's the truth, a fact.

Is there a need among "ordinary people" to discuss the wars? Do people talk about it?

More and more infrequently. I think that many do not want to talk about them now after how they ended for us, especially after the last one with NATO.⁴⁶ I also think that we should turn to the future. There's no sense in talking about the war any more. There is a need for dealing with the truth. Ordinary people can't even get to the truth on their own, let alone deal with it. For it is necessary to elect a new government in Serbia, for the media to democratize so that the truth can rise to the surface from a higher level. All of the bodies need to be dug out and shown, criminals should be tried, just like *B92* broadcasts Milošević's trial from The Hague.⁴⁷ Yet, many do not watch it, many don't get the trial's essence or understand that process. We are in a tough situation.

M. C. H.

⁴⁶ The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia that lasted from 24 March to 10 June 1999.

⁴⁷ "The Hague" or "The Hague Tribunal" is the common name for The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) established in 1993.

Mustafa

(37)

Ulcinj/Ulqin
journalist

We are worse than we were told

Although our region was not hit by the war, did you have a feeling you were experiencing it?

Although no wartime events took place in Montenegro and Ulcinj, fortunately, I had a chance to feel it and experience it since I studied in Dubrovnik during the early nineties.

How do you relate to the war now, ten years after it ended?

All who experienced it will certainly say – may it never be repeated. It's better to negotiate for a hundred years, than to wage war for one.

What is needed for the war's consequences to be alleviated?

First and foremost, the crime's planning and execution should be admitted. Next, we need to admit that our people are worse than we were told by our families and schools.

What's reconciliation to you?

It's an attempt made by former enemies to find mutual values as a basis for coexistence or an attempt to build bridges between the past, the present and the future.

What is needed for reconciliation? Why is it important?

Truth and acknowledgement are necessary preconditions for reconciliation. They are important for establishing justice and building an open society.

How can we accomplish reconciliation?

We can accomplish it through the realization that we are only passersby in this world to bring about only good deeds.

Who should work on reconciliation?

All of us should. The greatest responsibility is certainly the politicians', the clergy's, younger intellectuals', who, as far as I can see, are not conscious of it much for now.

What can the "ordinary people" do?

Ordinary people can do a lot. They should force themselves to study, respect everybody's dignity, speak no falsities, learn how to communicate and try to be better than they are on the daily basis. This region is inhabited by run-down people.

History is perceived as a market most frequently – you take only what you need at the time. But, the repressed past does not come back as a farce, but as a ghost!

Do you think that people are ready for reconciliation?

We lack the essential desire, will, readiness and strength for reconciliation, but we should hope that time, geography and economy are stronger than ideology.

How should we regard the past?

By trying to comprehend both good and evil in our near and distant past. History is perceived as a market most frequently – you take only what you need at the time. But, the repressed past does not come back as a farce, but as a ghost!

Do you think that it's only one side's fault?

Do I think that? Of course not, but it is clear (and The Hague verdicts support it) that the greatest fault for wars and the tragedy of the former Yugoslavian region is Serbia's, its leadership then and its intellectual elite.

Can the guilt be individualized, or do you think it's collective?

It's necessary to individualize it. Thus, the guilt is individual, while the responsibility is collective.

Do you think we all carry part of the guilt?

Yes, depending on our position in the hierarchy and on our knowledge. Children were the only innocent ones in this programmed slaughterhouse and chaos.

Who were the wartime victims, in your opinion?

We are all its victims, except for the war (and the antiwar) profiteers. But, God's mills grind slowly!

Do you think that people were often susceptible to the media's manipulation and did they, somehow, agree to be manipulated? Could they have resisted?

No! The force of destruction was everywhere around us, and mostly within us!

How large is the media's responsibility, in your opinion?

Too large, and that's why it's strange that The Hague's prosecution hasn't indicted a single journalist from the former Yugoslavia yet.

How do you see this region's future?

In borderless Europe, ha ha ha! In any case, some values of a 'higher' level must connect us more in the future.

E.H.Č.

G.

(25)

Bijeljina
student

True heroes are not today's heroes

Could you please tell me a bit about yourself?

I am twenty five years old, a third year law student. I was born and live in Bijeljina. I am very active in its social life. I am a member of the cultural club and am very active in the youth sector.

How old were you when the war in B&H began?

I was eleven years old when the war began, my consciousness was not developed enough for me to realize the situation's seriousness. We, the youth of Bijeljina, could live peacefully, away from all those wartime events. War was fought here for eight days only, which I spent here. Some migrations had already occurred before the war happened here. Some had already left Bijeljina or had moved their children away; my family stayed. That lasted for a very short time so I cannot say that I have experienced wartime events. Some kind of (ethnic) local government was formed when it calmed down. What we could feel here was an economic crisis – the shops were empty and, even if you had some money, there was nothing to buy. But, when the situation calmed down the ties with Serbia were renewed and that kept us alive. As far as my circle of friends goes, we managed, as eleven-year-olds, to organize our lives and not feel the war. We accepted everything normally – the police hour and being chastised for singing while people were dying.

How much do the young people of your age discuss that time period?

Very frequently, especially if they had bad experiences. Luckily for me, nobody from my family was wounded or killed in the war. The people that had unpleasant wartime experiences discuss them very frequently: that's the period in their lives when they halted, kind of. For them, their lives ended in 1992. What I can see in my family is that my brother, who is thirty-one years old, simply remained in that time period. Nothing happened between 1992 and 2005 for him. He hasn't lived another single year. All of it is reflected in his life, in his present, and that is painful. The increased number of postwar suicides unearths a collective depression which reigns over the society. We all try to escape from it, we don't talk about it, we are not solving those problems and then those suicides happen or we have latent suicides, people who are slowly killing themselves daily.

What does the term 'reconciliation in B&H' mean to you?

Let's say it means that we function normally. What would be normal? That we forgive one another for ugly things that happened in the past, create a higher



level of tolerance among us, reject the blaming of others, and accept forgiveness as a model for our behavior. We Serbs are Christians and a part of that is forgiveness, also. That is why we should be tolerant and allow other people to live normally in our state, without bothering them. We should be the initiators. We should all shun pretentiousness and fascism and make some effort to live normally: free trade and education, mobility of all citizens, especially for youth. That's how I envision the reconciled B&H.

What were your first contacts like with the other B&H entity and people who live there?

I travel often due to my activism in the cultural club and youth sector. Soon after the war ended I started contacting people from the other entity, regardless of their nationality – Serbs, Croats or Muslims (Bosniaks) who were all very glad. I mostly communicated with people of my age. Those contacts brought about much happiness with enough élan to change not only their lives but lives of others around them as well. Maybe I was lucky to meet people who think like I do so that we are uniting forces to make a difference in this country.

How much are the international community and its institutions helping the B&H reconciliation?

Their role is to sustain the current state of unarmed conflict. That was their role in 1995 and it is still – let there be no shooting. Even if incidents happen, like in Mostar, Brcko, Janja, they react and bring the situation to a point of stagna-

tion. I don't think they would be able to have a different influence on the B&H population even if they wanted.

How do you now, ten years after the Peace Agreement was signed, react to the news of an incident based on nationality in a part of B&H?

The media is currently pushing the story that everything is alright and that we are all great. We are getting a completely distorted picture of reality from the media. My personal opinion is that every person is responsible for himself. It's much easier to accept other nationalities and religions if I realize and accept who I am and start acting according to my heritage and myself, whomever I might be – a black woman, a Serb, or a Muslim. And I think that it's up to the individual, so I deem the global effort to blame whole peoples a big mistake. I support the international community's effort to present an individual's thoughts with clear indications that they are based on the individual's opinions and personal experience and not on a people's. If that is not distinguished, a false picture of a whole people based on individuals and their deeds is created. True heroes are not today's heroes. Fascism is becoming a common phenomenon. And that is the really distorted picture of our reality which is in the domain of our politicians' errors. They are leading this country in a completely wrong direction and are dragging an army of young people behind them.

Another problem is the lack of an individual's self-knowledge within a people – firstly we should realize who and what we are. Consequently, we'll easily raise the level of tolerance and cooperate with the others better. Tolerance is not



something you obtain at birth, it is a skill obtained through many years' experience.

I have been a member of the cultural club for sixteen years. I have realized, through travels and performances, how much Serbian folklore is recognized and appreciated throughout the world, along with our specific Orthodox religion and lively traditions. People should explore all of it since it's a part of their heritage while we, Serbs, have a tendency to be ashamed of our traditions and shun them. That is something we can offer to the world. And every other people in B&H should work on its culture and art. Art and culture connect people. Peoples are linked one to another and could reap mutual benefits from it. Integration in no way assumes ethnic integration, leaving enough space for learning about one's own and other peoples' heritages. There will be no obstacles to reconciliation in B&H once most of the people realize this.

How much of a possibility is there for a young person in B&H to take part in the process of reconciliation and other social processes?

There is much possibility if they allow themselves to become interested in these problems. When they decide to become engaged they can plug themselves into particular structures which can be of help. NGOs and the international community which finance these programs have the most merit. Many programs are organized and it's all up to the young person to become engaged. On the other hand, not a lot of information is available to the young person, despite many projects. You will rarely see a notice about such a program in the media. If information were more available it would be easier to decide if they wanted to participate or not. This way they don't have a choice.

Will your generation also carry the burden of B&H's wartime past?

Of course it will. Even generations that will come after mine will carry that burden of wartime events in this region for a long time. All we can do is balance. I balance my life participating in cultural and youth activities and thus attempt to keep my life normal and not think about the country I live in that was recently a stage for wartime events.

How large is the "ordinary man's" responsibility for reconciliation in B&H?

It's huge! As I said a moment ago, a satisfactory level of reconciliation will not be reached as long as the individual is not ready to assume responsibility for his or her actions. A friend of mine from Janja, whose parents were killed by Serbs, decided to return and live there with his family. He says often that he doesn't intend to seek revenge and look for the killer since that would not substitute his loss. When we all reach such a level of tolerance and understanding something natural could start happening in this country. My friend has risen beyond circumstances and is aware that he is just one of the many whom such evil has stricken. Humanity and ethics awoke in him. They should be awoken

and followed principally by everyone. We should feel responsible for even the most everyday things. I think that religion plays a large role in it. The Orthodoxy I inherited from my ancestors is teaching me forgiveness and respect for others. I have learned these values in my family, they taught me that faith in God means forgiveness. And that is the true Orthodoxy, and not the dogmatic kind that appeared after 1992. A person needs to understand that he's not alone on this planet and that he must act responsibly.

Young people should be enabled to travel, to be mobile, to be given access to information, to meet other peoples, religions and cultures. They should also be enabled to find in other places what they lack in their own religion, family or society. They should be able to choose.

What could your people do for reconciliation in B&H?

I live in a town that was almost ethnically clean from 1992 to 1995. Much changed from 1995 to 2005, the interethnic situation is getting better every day.

What does the future of B&H look like to you?

That is a bit problematic. I have that picture in my head, but I think that many people don't see and don't think about the future. You know the saying, "ten good ones cannot cover a bad one." There are not many of us who have such a picture of B&H in our heads. A picture of B&H as a normal country, where I as a Serb won't be underestimated or blackmailed, where I could say: "I am a Serb and I live in B&H and I am who I am," without any retorts that make me feel bad. In that country Bosniaks or Croats would not bother me. I don't have a problem that people call themselves Bosniaks and their language the Bosniak language, but I want the same rights for myself. The only place where I feel that way in the Federation of B&H is Sarajevo. Only in Sarajevo, do I not feel threatened being a Serb, while other towns are still as they were in 1995. B&H should be a country which gives equal rights and possibilities to all of its citizens, regardless of their nationality. It's often forgotten that not only do the constituent peoples⁴⁸ live in B&H, but some others, also. Slovaks, Romanians, Roma. But, we should raise the tolerance level for such a thing. The only time there is no division into three nationalities in B&H is when something needs to be smuggled. Bribery, corruption and crime know no ethnic differences. Such phenomena should be regulated by law, and we, as a "mercantile" people, should devote ourselves to trade and economic progress.

B. J.

⁴⁸ Constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina are Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats.

Fata

(35)

Bijeljina
textile worker/
NGO activist

Let's not allow others to speak for us

How old were you when the war began in B&H?

I was twenty one years old when the war began in B&H.

What are your memories of the wartime period? Could you tell us shortly how you felt then?

Memories of the war are mostly ugly. It was hard for me as it was for every other person during the war, and I also had to sacrifice – a lot. Differently than the most, I, loving people, was meeting and befriending people of other nationalities even during the war. I cherish to this day those wonderful friendships which were made in that extremely hard time.

How much did the war affect your life? Was it diverted into another direction?

All of my hopes and all I wanted to accomplish were left unattained, in my personal case. I lost the opportunity to raise my children together with their father, I lost the opportunity to finish my schooling as I planned, I lost the opportunity to live normally. A lot is lost during war. My nature is optimistic, I don't like to remember ugly things from the war. The word 'war' is enough to make a person feel bad. And then I remember all of the dear people whom I might have not met if it weren't for the war, and that makes memories of that period bearable. Some of my best friends are the people who had fled other parts of B&H and had come to live in Bijeljina. It seems to me that my whole life has been redirected.

How did you greet the news that the Dayton Peace Accord had been signed?

My first thought was: "At last the shooting ends, at last I am safe and do not have to worry if I will lose another family member or a friend tomorrow."

How much progress have we accomplished in B&H during the last ten years?

Progress within these ten years... At times I think that we made no progress at all. Or, even if we made some progress, I think that it's so minimal that there's

Identity cannot impede reconciliation in any way, reconciliation is hampered by rotten minds and not by identity. It's not so catastrophic that there are national differences between people at birth, what's catastrophic are the differences in thinking. That's what creates distance, not identity or nationality.... And I really don't see why our nationality makes us so different that we can't live together.

no use talking about it. What has been done in B&H so far has been done through a veil and passed over in silence. "I'll keep this silent, you'll keep that silent," never meeting eye to eye saying "You know, I am guilty of this and that and now you should tell me what you are guilty of so that we can see the possibility of repairing our relations."

Is the time distance of thirteen years since the war began and ten years since the Dayton Peace Accord was signed enough for talks to begin and reconciliation to be worked on, in your opinion?

I think it's too late. We should have started discussing these topics much earlier, in my opinion.

What does the term reconciliation mean to you?

The postwar reconciliation is, above all, the readiness to forgive. Although some things done in this war are unforgivable, people who did them do exist and they will be punished for what they did. That should be the authorities', who should bear some of the responsibility for reconciliation between B&H peoples, basis for action. They should punish the war criminals and thus create the foundation for reconciliation between peoples.

Are you personally satisfied with the course of reconciliation in B&H?

I am not satisfied. There are no people whom I need to forgive or who need to forgive me in my surroundings. There are people in this country whom it would be hard to forgive for what they have done to us. If they did something now which would contribute to this country's progress (instead of solely invoking ghosts of the past), I think that people would find the strength to forgive.

How should we treat the wartime past, in your opinion?

I think we should finally stop and start speaking the truth in order to overcome everything that happened to us. Nobody will be well in this country as long as things that really happened are kept doggedly concealed, while the highest authorities emphasize only what suits them at a given moment. Only when everything is disclosed, the guilt is straightened out and those persons are accordingly sanctioned will the "ordinary" individuals be able to resolve their mutual problems.

Have you had a chance to meet people who were not ready to reconcile? How do you react in such circumstances?

Luckily enough, I socialize with people who think normally. Very rarely, maybe a few times only, was I in the situation of meeting people who were not ready to reconcile and who reacted according to their attitude. Although, it seems to me now that those people just had the inclination to counter me instead of disclosing their true attitudes.

What were your first visits to the other B&H entity like? How did you greet the possibility of visiting the other entity once peace was established?

I think I am one of the first people who had the courage to travel across entities. I was born in Srebrenik, a small town near Tuzla, and, since my parents lived in Srebrenik, I visited them for the first time on the 14th of February, 1996. I must say that it was another trip into uncertainty. My husband was in the Army of Republika Srpska throughout the war, although we are not of Serbian nationality. If anybody from my family had asked me a single 'why?', I would have immediately returned home and broken off all contacts with them. If one were unable to understand why we decided to stay in Bijeljina at the time, then one would not be able to understand me as a person. But, the trip to the B&H Federation was very hard for me. I went into uncertainty with a four-year-old child and left my husband and a seven-year-old child at home. It was hard to go to your birthplace at that moment and collect people's impressions after everything that had happened. I think I was lucky since no one asked me 'why?' but I am aware that the visit could have been a pretty bad experience. The return was pretty bad since, at that time, exiting the Republika Srpska had to be reported to the police. While I was returning to Bijeljina the police wanted to stop me from entering the Republika Srpska. Luckily enough, strong friendship is a solution to everything, so the man who drove me from Srebrenik managed to bring me home by referring to his connections.

Your sons were pretty small during the war. Do they now, when they are almost grown up, remember that period? Do they ask you about that period?

Very rarely, especially the younger son, who was only eighteen months old when the war began and who went through that period unconsciously. The older son recollects some details at times, but he wasn't traumatized since his



name is not a typical Muslim name so he could not be set apart by other children based on his nationality.

Are you, as a mother, anxious of that period's images which your children might receive through the media and education? Are you personally satisfied with the information about that period that is accessible to us through the media and education?

I will be honest. When my older son started school there were things in textbooks that touched upon the former war which, in my opinion, weren't realistic. In any case, I personally think that every parent is the most responsible for what children carry from their childhood. My intention is not to underestimate the teachers' contributions to the children's education and I think that education here is of pretty high quality. But, some errors do slip through in the schooling system and are the result of the tug-of-war between people who do not care about reconciliation and who try to carry their conflicts into textbooks. Yet, luckily, these errors are not too large so we can still correct them at home.

Is it possible today, in your opinion, to realize your ethnic and religious identity without obstacles? Do these identities contribute to or impede reconciliation?

Identity cannot impede reconciliation in any way, reconciliation is hampered by rotten minds and not by identity. It's not so catastrophic that there are national differences between people at birth, what's catastrophic are the differences in thinking. That's what creates distance, not identity or nationality.

I think we are all equally guilty, it's impossible to fight somebody who refuses to fight. If one of the three people had given up fighting, whom would the other have fought? All of us have, at a given moment, shown some force and harshness, and now, when we need to discuss the consequences, we are acting like little children: "I didn't do it, he did!!!"

Do you think that a higher level of tolerance for another's identity (and not perceiving it as an act of aggression) would help reconciliation in B&H?

Since I personally don't view identity as something that hinders the process of reconciliation, I am sticking to the explanation that identity is not what bothers those people, but some other things do, instead... The problem is in their own heads and not with someone else's identity. It's not problematic that a person is a Serb, a Muslim or a Croat, but it is problematic if it prevents them from developing and it actualizes sick ambitions. Somebody cares to, at a given moment, destroy a country and unite with others with the same goal, and only then do they find a reason to do so. This time that reason was different nationalities.

And I really don't see why our nationality makes us so different that we can't live together. I am not bothered by the ringing of church bells, or by a mullah singing from a minaret; I am absolutely not bothered by people's names, but am bothered when one kills another, I am bothered when one does evil to another,

and I am bothered when one snatches away something that definitely belongs to another.

You are in frequent contact with the people who left Bijeljina during the war and now visit it only during vacation. What's their attitude, are they ready to return to Bijeljina and how do they currently view B&H?

Their opinions differ. Some people, due to economic reasons, stay abroad, while some have not overcome the past and resolved everything within themselves, and have not arrived at forgiveness yet. Those who wanted it [to return] have already done it. In the beginning I said that it's too late for what's needed for the reconciliation in B&H to be reached. Whoever wanted reconciliation has already resolved it a long time ago in his head. Maybe there was nothing to be resolved, but they simply knew what bothered them and could avoid it, and what didn't so they could face it. It was resolved a long time ago who had forgiven, who had not, who had returned and who hadn't. Since I am aware of the Republika Srpska's Ministry's for Refugees and Dislocated Persons work, which handled the return of property, I know that a majority, a large majority, has had property returned and that only a very small percentage of property has not been returned. People who had their property returned and have come back to their houses... Not all of them returned because they wanted it, but because they were old and had no other place to go.

There must have been people during the war who have done you evil through insults, threats... How are you managing it now, has anybody apologized for the evil done to you?

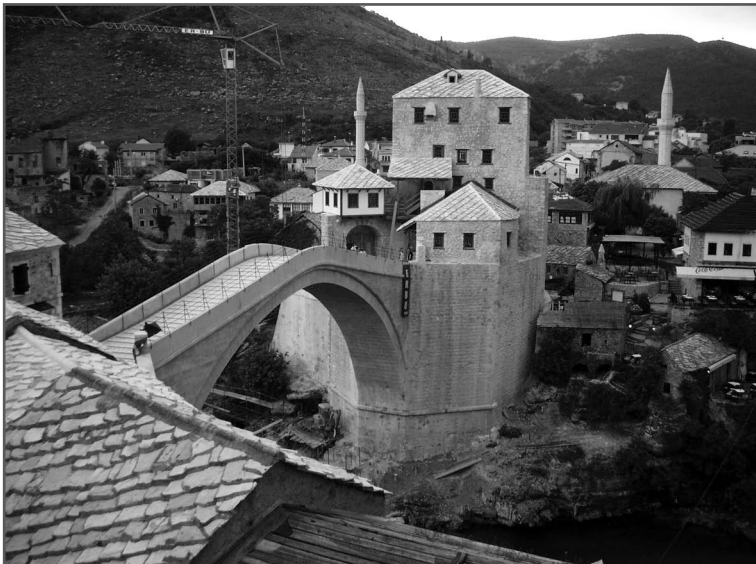
To be completely honest, nobody from my family suffered any physical injuries. There were verbal insults and threats... I respect the opinions of my neighbors who carried themselves in that negative way and allowed themselves to insult me as a minority affiliate. I have respect for it, it is their opinion, anyone may hate me, that is not a problem for me. Of course, nobody apologized after everything that had happened, moreover they found it inappropriate to communicate with me at all since they had expressed their opinions publicly at a particular moment. I respect less the ones who hid from me during that period due to some so-called fear of being treated the same as me. These people became nice after the war, amiable, while they are actually slimy, and I don't see them as people of enough virtue to socialize with. But, they hadn't been my friends even before the war. I feel respect even when I am told that I am not wanted, but that doesn't mean we have to kill one another because we don't love one another while living in the same place.

Do you currently see Bijeljina, ten years after the war ended, as space where you can actualize some of your rights? Can you, as an affiliate of one of the constituent peoples which is in minority, equally exercise your rights?

To be honest, some of my human rights were not endangered as much as they were in other Muslims' cases in Bijeljina, even during the war. My husband worked during the whole war, and does to this day, in the same firm he had been employed with before the war began. I didn't keep my job, I was fired. Due to some lucky circumstance, and thankfully to the people I am surrounded with, I live a good life now, my husband and I are employed, our children are getting schooled... I had no particular problems due to my different nationalities. But, if I think more and analyze better, there are certain institutions where it's insisted on people returning to their prewar job positions, but not everybody is willing to do so... Still, in my opinion, this won't last long since everything will fall to place, it will smooth out. That's the part which I could describe as endangering human rights.

We are witnesses to the fact that in B&H, especially in state institutions, "ethnic key" (tripartite system) is being observed. How much do you think that this contributes to reconciliation in B&H?

In my opinion, that is opening a wound that hasn't healed yet. I don't like anything that emphasizes nationality, be that the "ethnic key," equal number of members of different nationalities within institutions, etc. I think that people should be chosen and employed according to their qualities, regardless of their nationality. It's more important to resolve the cases of plagiarized wartime diplomas and employment through family connections than it is to insist on the "ethnic key."



How much can an ordinary citizen of B&H, an individual, do for reconciliation?

Very much, starting with not allowing ourselves to continue choosing the wrong people who rule, and govern and tell us that they are thinking and doing what we are thinking, desiring and saying. If I sit silently at home listening to what they're saying, doing all sorts of things, certainly I have knelt down and allowed it to happen. Then I do deserve the ugly things that might happen to me. I think we should verbalize what we are thinking and not allow others to do it for us all the time. Thus, there would have been no war if we had been conscious of what would happen to us and if we had spoken up with one voice, disregarding the people who had wanted that war. It's ugly when I hear people saying prior to an election: "I know who will be in power again, I don't want to vote, I know who will win..." Maybe I also know it sometimes, but if I come out and vote my conscience is at peace.

What is up to your people to do for reconciliation in B&H?

To do what is up to other peoples in B&H... Simply, they should start speaking the truth, and just the truth, and to finally overcome "let's blame someone else, let someone else be more guilty." I think we are all equally guilty, it's impossible to fight somebody who refuses to fight. If one of the three people had given up fighting, whom would the other have fought? All of us have, at a given moment, shown some force and harshness, and now, when we need to discuss the consequences, we are acting like little children: "I didn't do it, he did!!!" That's not the way to resolve things on the state level.

What does the future of B&H look like to you?

Well, it's not very encouraging, but, in any case, if they don't speak the truth as they currently don't, this state we are in will persist for a long time. To be silent, to sweep things under the rug and live poorly... If only people were indeed ready to admit their mistakes and what they did wrongly... Although, during the war, some losses, which cannot be settled, are suffered. It would be good if we turned to some kind of work which would bring about the improvement of the economic situation in B&H. Also, if we had some other stories to tell in the media beside the ones about someone doing something ugly to another because of their nationality. Much better news would be that someone had built a factory that had employed a large number of people without asking about their nationality, but about their expertise. I think everything would be different, everything would be easier... But, honestly, I am not optimistic and I don't see it happening any time soon.

B. J.

Nexhat

(36)

Gjilan/Gnjilane
OSCE employee/
activist

Trust should protect us, not armies

Please tell us something about yourself to begin with...

My name is Nexhat, I am from Medvedja where I was born. I will turn thirty-six soon. I completed elementary school in Medvedja after which I attended high school in Pristina, studying chemistry for a while. When the University closed down and Albanians were kicked out of dormitories around 1991, I left for Greece in October, when I received my draft slip for mobilization to go to Croatia or Bosnia, I don't remember. I returned at the end of 1995. After 1995 I was mostly in Medvedja and Pristina. I left Medvedja in August of 1999 for Gnjilane, where I currently live. I work for OSCE.⁴⁹ Also, I have been working as an activist for Action Against Violence and Peacebuilding in Gnjilane from 2000.

What are your memories of wartime years, the violent years?

The people of Medvedja, where I am from and where I know all of them, suddenly changed: you walk down the street and nobody wants to say hello. Albanians were the minority there comprising 36 percent, while there are only 4 percent now. It hurt me a lot when I arrived to Gnjilane to see that things came back like a boomerang, that the situation is the same, only the antagonists have changed, Albanians were in Gnjilane while Serbs were in Medvedja...

A lot of it is painful, if I look back. My life lacks the five years I spent abroad, which I would not have spent out there if it weren't for the war in the Balkans. I have no information and I feel that I have no information whenever that period is talked about since I wasn't here. I cannot draw parallels in any way, but when I remember the last ten years, I feel horrible and that's why I am working on such things not happening ever again. I wouldn't like to go through it again when I remember it... When I was a student, while studying chemistry during the nineties, those processes and happenings, the violence during that period, and to top it all, the war of 1999 during which I was in Medvedja... Big changes occurred.

How did all those events affect you? What is your perception of everything that happened?

Big social turbulence was hard for me. The people of Medvedja, where I am from and where I know all of them, suddenly changed: you walk down the street and nobody wants to say hello. Albanians were in the minority there comprising 36 percent, while there are only 4 percent now.

It hurt me a lot when I arrived to Gnjilane to see that things came back like a boomerang, that the situation is the same, only the antagonists have changed,

⁴⁹ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Albanians were in Gnjilane while Serbs were in Medvedja... That hurt me a lot and my suppressed activism boiled because of it.

Did you personally feel the consequences of such violence?

I didn't lose anybody in my family, I wasn't physically maltreated, while some of my close family's houses were torched in the village of Safajlija. I visited them in 1999, when most of them were in Macedonia, some of them in Albania, while others were in the woods and had no other place to go. They were expelled which was very hard for me because I had lived at their place as a student. It was also hard while my family lived in Medvedja and I in Gnjilane. In 1999 and 2000 I visited them only four times due to crossing points and harassment on the administrative border. It was also hard for me in Gnjilane, being from Medvedja, to reevaluate my and others' attitudes. Generally, I felt as if I were in the middle of a nightmare, it was hard for me to understand people at all. They viewed me as someone... like, "this one is coming from Serbia," and that was the hardship, having no space to express your opinion and whether you disagreed with anything.

What's reconciliation for you? Generally, taking into consideration the situation in Kosovo?

The situation there is pretty intense because of these negotiations which should start soon. After 1999, after the bombing, the creation of Kosovar institutions was initiated from scratch, and if I call this peace it's not the peace I want. Peace is when everybody in the society is satisfied, in my opinion. This here is more of a peace imposed by the international community. It's peace for Albanians, but not for Serbs and other minorities who live in Kosovo. During the three months of bombardment, and the war which already began in 1998, many houses were torched, both Albanians and Serbs went missing and it was hard. Afterward everything returned like a boomerang, especially the violence against Serbs and other minorities. The situation wasn't the same everywhere, in all wars; for example, people weren't expelled from Gnjilane but only from the surrounding villages, and the postwar situation is different. Say, in Pec, which was torched, the process of returning is much slower; it all depends on what a town has been through during the war.

How do you view reconciliation? Is it currently possible in Kosovo?

Yes, it's possible. Everyone should work on it. Firstly, the politicians, they should think about what they are saying. For example, there are some good statements, but to no effect since they do not follow up. And then the media, it's important to talk about what happened, and ugly things happened to both Albanians and Serbs. It would be very important to discuss those things, I don't think it should be forgotten, but I am for forgiveness, we must forgive.

Are you talking about some kind of active relation to the past?

Yes, active. We should discuss what happened, a large role could be the me-

dia's, it would be good to show in Serbia the real picture of what happened in Kosovo, or if the media cooperated better and showed how ordinary people had lived through it, and not seek the stories that are mostly served.

What can the "ordinary people" do?

Ordinary people can do a lot. Firstly, they should not hate. They should not generalize and should not say "all Serbs are like this" or "all Albanians are like that." I know that many prejudices about each group exist, maybe because of insufficient knowledge, lack of information, how the media served it earlier, or what the governments of those countries promote. People should meet more in order to get a chance to say what they think, to make friends, to see that what's served to them is not true.

Do people get a chance to meet?

Not really. People in Kosovo live separately. That's what bothers me the most, people live in separate enclaves, they live mostly in separated communities and little communication exists between them. Ordinary people avoid contacts. They should listen to others and communicate, and there's very little of it. I do have the responsibility as an individual in this society – where am I in that story? Maybe the ordinary people could do more regarding this topic. It's not enough that we keep coming back to "Serbs did this, and this, and this to us, why should I reconcile?" The first step which would be good for reconciliation is for all of us to condemn our war criminals. Every side has its criminals, but it's



not that important to me what goes on in Serbia but what goes on in Kosovo, in the sense that I want to work in my own backyard, to act here. Later I can go beyond, but it's important to me that I contribute in my own setting. I think it's very hard to act that way since all of them are national heroes and we look to our neighbor's – how many of them went to The Hague. I think it would be good to sensitize people to violence and citizens could play an important role in this.

You mentioned responsibility a moment ago. What is it, in your opinion? Is it individual or collective? Can we discuss guilt and/or responsibility?

Responsibility is individual, it can't be collective, no way. I would see it as my responsibility if I were unable to react to something in 1999, or earlier. Also, I have responsibility as a member of a nationality or as a citizen in a particular place. A question comes to me: "Am I responsible for all of that?" when I hear that all Serbs are responsible for what took place in Kosovo or that all Albanians are responsible for what happened on the March 17⁵⁰ or for what happened to Serbs in the postwar period. I am not. The criminal has a name and a surname and he should be held accountable regardless of his religion, ethnicity, which community he belongs to, I am not interested in all that.

What's up to the people you belong to, what should it do? What's up to Albanians in Kosovo?

Albanians should abandon the victim's role, they should not see themselves as victims – "what all Serbs did to us." All peoples had bad things done to them and that should not justify the violence against others or refusal to communicate just because someone is a member of a nationality. One of the most important processes that should be initiated is peace action, peacebuilding. That's most important for Kosovo, as well as is economic progress and all, but that's hard to accomplish without peace. The politicians should particularly pay attention, that, for example, the president visits those people, to see what their needs are, to make sure that truly all people in Kosovo feel like its citizens, equal, safe.

What do you deem as obstacles to reconciliation and fears that hinder it?

One of the obstacles is Kosovo's status, which is being manipulated. Every Albanian political party is using the status to its own advantage and is little concerned with real problems, the status is more of an electoral parole. Another obstacle is a large number of missing persons, both Albanians and Serbs. It

The question of Kosovo becoming independent, or remaining within Serbia... For me it's important to build trust between people, that people trust one another, and not to be guarded by an army or to have armies at the borders.

⁵⁰ On March 17, 2004 a violent unrest broke out in Kosovo, which led to large-scale violence against ethnic minorities (mainly Serbs) and religious sites.

would be the best if all of it were revealed. They return forty bodies every month in Kosovo... It would be less painful, since the mass graves are already known, if the bodies were returned, it would be a big relief for the families. Individuals fear that their community would reject them or label them as traitors if they reconciled with someone or if they cooperated. Another thing, at a higher level, maybe political, is that the Serbian government has changed but some things remained the same. I am not saying that politicians here are ideal, but it would be good if the Serbian government, or politicians there, discussed those crimes and apologized for the state. That would be a step forward. The question of Kosovo becoming independent, or remaining within Serbia... For me it's important to build trust between people, that people trust one another, and not to be guarded by an army or to have armies at the borders. I am afraid that negotiations won't arrive to a solution, that the solution will be imposed by the international community creating fertile grounds for further violence and conflicts, with no end in sight. I would want permanent peace to be accomplished and that positive circumstances are provided for people's return, especially for Serbs and other minorities to obtain all rights.

What does the future look like with the past as a burden?

Nothing happens all at once, but if something bad lasts for, say, ten years, I think we need double that time to do something good. A lot of time and energy is needed. It's important that we all partake in it, that citizens recognize their role in that society and that they partake in peacebuilding.

The future? I am trying to work on it and live in a normal, nondiscriminatory society...

H. R.

To clean up our own backyard first

What are your current feelings regarding the nineties' events in Croatia and what do you think came out of them?

That's a very complicated question for which you need a bit more time to reach the conclusions which are important for the present, the past and the future. In any case, I didn't conform to any political events of that time, like I still don't. That doesn't mean I didn't believe the political word and order, but I did it in a way that wasn't generally accepted then, just like it isn't now. In 1990 I was a member of Ante Marković's⁵¹ movement which fought against the war and for preservation of Yugoslavia, which was then a completely normal option for people who didn't push nationalistic stories. I was also a member of the Green Party which operated at the state level, i.e. it was founded in Zagreb. I wasn't politically active during the war. I picked up politics in Belgrade in 1997, actually in 1996 during protests against Milošević's regime. I am now involved in politics in Knin, nonprofessionally, as the HNS⁵² secretary. I think it's important to act politically, but in a way completely different than this region's habitual kind before, during and after the war.

I thought when I lived in Knin in the nineties that there was no chance Knin would be the town that caused the war and which would symbolically set the conflict alight in the former Yugoslavian region. I thought the complete opposite would happen in Knin, but I was wrong.

What is a specific way to be currently politically active, in your opinion?

To be idealistic and not expect big positive feedback. Maybe to be a bit ahead of the present, but that's hard, very hard; I can estimate if my political attitudes, and I am not talking about others', are ahead of the current. At least what happened in the past proved that I was relatively right, although I was in an absolute minority. Specifically, I mean peacebuilding, but in an idealistic and anational manner, simply – aspire to it [peace]. I thought when I lived in Knin in the nineties that there was no chance Knin would be the town that caused the war and which would symbolically set the conflict alight in the former Yugoslavian region. I thought the complete opposite would happen in Knin, but I was wrong. I believed in some ideals that I still believe in, there's no other solution. The other solution is conflict, fighting again, which, in essence, keeps reoccur-

⁵¹ Ante Marković (1924) was the final prime minister of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

⁵² The Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats.

ring here.

What are the ideals?

That we live in an anational country, whose foundation is not an ethnic, but a social state. My ideals are life without so many social differences or that people are aware of such differences and they fight for a better life which will not be

God or nature has decided that I become a part of a Serbian national minority, that I understand and not run away, that I don't convert but am conscious of how much my people did, and that I, as a part of it, contributed to everything that was bad, particularly during the 20th century.

based on what politicians taught us for the past ten years – that nationality and material background are most important and I don't know what else.

What I am trying, and I don't know whether I am succeeding in it, is to keep some faith in all of that.

How can we build such an ideal society without dealing with the past constructively?

Firstly, we need to clean up our own backyard, we should see where I, as an individual, might have made some mistakes in relation to those large social movements which were to be expected, paradoxically... Then, other people should do the same and try to be a bit idealistic also, but not unrealistic. We should try to live in a socially conscious society where we would firstly clean up what happened in

the past, be it distant or near. My personal opinion is, regarding representatives of the Serbian national minority here, that we need to resolve some things and I am working personally on it. Whether others do the same is a completely different matter.

How do you work on it?

Specifically, in my opinion, by resolving two matters, which are my relationship to two very important things that stem from my family. Firstly, it is the Jasenovac⁵³ phantasmagoria from WWII and, secondly, involvement in the breaking up of Yugoslavia in 1991. I am particularly interested in how my people acted in relation to my neighbors, specifically Croats who are in the majority now but were in minority in 1991. In any case, we need to cleanse ourselves of all of it, to simply try to be conscious of how much I am in the wrong regarding part of my family's heritage, something I am still working out in my head which can still result in new delusions regardless of how much I, as an individual, question this time as a member of a collective which acts as it does. God or nature has decided that I become a part of a Serbian national minority, that I understand and don't run away, that I don't convert but am conscious of how much my people did, and that I, as a part of it, contributed to everything that was bad,

⁵³ Jasenovac was a notorious concentration camp during World War II in Croatia where mainly Serbs, but also Roma, Jews and Croatian resistance members were detained. Most of the detainees were brutally executed.

particularly during the 20th century. This could affect the present and future days.

What's your concrete responsibility regarding the events that took place?

I think I haven't done enough to be satisfied with myself currently. I was still here in Krajina, although I was declaratively for peace, when Croats were being expelled in 1991. Similarly, I became a victim when I returned here in 1998, just like my people created victims in 1991. We should be aware of it, actively work on changing it so it does not happen again. Because I have a feeling that some things will happen again.

Why do you have such a feeling?

It's based on everything, the current sociopolitical reality, local elections, people's habits and their total assurance that they were right all of these years. In my opinion, in most cases people from both the Croatian and the Serbian side have not changed the attitudes they had in 1991, or maybe even in 1941, I cannot know that. I think that people don't learn from history, distant or near. Only one peace meeting has taken place here since 1998, when I returned. The local elections take place, after everything, with results similar to the results from 1990–1991, whenever they were... When Tuđman⁵⁴ won. It's not clear to me, as to an individual, why people don't change, or if I may contribute to at least friends' or family's attitudes. I think they haven't changed a bit since 1991. Maybe a minority of some ten percent has gone through some kind of catharsis – Serbs who stayed here in 1995. Very absurd things are happening here. Heads of local governments around Knin are becoming the people who had been authorities in Krajina or even political leaders. They fled Krajina and haven't even once come back during these ten years – these people win the elections here. I find it terrible that they are not aware of things that are happening around us, but they will sow the seeds of differences, lack of understanding or hatred again... Regardless of how much the international community was good to us, how much we need to answer to ourselves, again with no intermediary... Thus, some things from 1991 could happen again, and I don't want that. I live here and have to be aware of it.

What needs to be done regarding that within the frame of coexistence?

More peacebuilding activities, more mutual reliance, more dialog, more communication, more specific goals for coexistence which sounds so abstract and worn out after all these years, but that's the only way to ensure that the things that took place in 1941, 1991 and in the latest local election don't happen again.

⁵⁴ Franjo Tuđman (1922 – 1999) was the first president of Croatia in the 1990s, when Croatia declared independence. He remained in power until his death in 1999.

You pointed out the shabbiness of the word ‘coexistence.’ Another one is frequently used, and that is ‘reconciliation.’ What does it mean to you?

It means that we understand one another, that we raise our awareness first. Just as much we belong to a family or we are people with names and surnames, we are also affiliates of a larger, broader social community called a nationality. Thus, I don't think that the solution is in anationality or in running away

Raising the awareness of differences which are absorbed and passed on from generation to generation, meaning working on not breaking under pressure and saying – well, we are all the same, there are no differences between us at all. No, some things are obviously different, despite of how strongly we resist this idea. The differences are in faith, nationality, family background, social conditions.

under pressure and joining a majority – which I have been witnessing all these years. I don't think we should incline toward the majority, I think that we need to raise awareness of differences at the national level so that we could enter a dialog, understand one another and jointly work toward a common goal.

Can you please explain a bit what you meant by raising awareness of differences?

I meant raising the awareness of differences which are absorbed and passed on from generation to generation, meaning working on not breaking under pressure and saying – well, we are all the same, there are no differences between us at all. No, some things are obviously different, despite of how strongly we resist this idea. The differences are in faith, nationality, family background, social conditions. We need to realize how much all of it affects us as individuals and our thinking. That's an overly complicated matter and is not easily accomplished. We should not strive

for cancellation of differences, but live those differences and be aware of them. We should not enter some kind of hysteria and incline toward the majority. No, since that will cause conversion again, the perversity that will again lead to what happened in 1941 and 1991.

What's your view of your own and the “ordinary people's” responsibility within any community regarding reconciliation?

The responsibility consists of the fact that we were not aware of differences and we were not aware that we should protect all groups: whether of other nationality, or females, invalids or any other marginalized group. I think we are not aware of it. Again, we only declaratively support some of the liberal West's achievements. I don't know, a circus is in town so we'll protect the animals that are, like, being abused. We'll do it declaratively, but nothing concretely. Just like I wasn't aware in 1991 that we should have, regardless of how much I was for peace then, protected the Croatian national minority which existed here. I hadn't even been conscious of it, I only found out later. Just like the Serbian national minority needs to be protected now since it's marginalized at all levels, existentially... Life's basics are lacking. Same as with Croats in 1991, to a degree. I wasn't conscious of it and I think that awareness needs to be raised

collectively in a group of people which would help it further. I, as an individual, won't do anything, but a group, be it political, humanitarian, an NGO, God knows what it might be called... Only in this way can we contribute to social progress and ensure that some things that have been happening throughout history don't happen again.

What would reconciliation bring to Knin's citizens, or, generally, all the regions' that are under special state care? What would it bring to nationalities that live in this area?

Maybe reconciliation is not the proper word, maybe we should not strive for reconciliation, maybe we should go for what's also talked about all the time – being neighbors. We don't need to hug and kiss one another but we need to live, we need to be legal and legitimate. I think that we, deeply within our souls, are still at war and that we are still living wildly, not recognizing the legality and legitimacy of the Croatian state, for both Serbs and Croats. Knin is still enveloped in wartime circumstances. Serbs still live in wartime conditions of 1991–1995, and then the expulsion followed by the comeback. Croats, as the majority, are still living in the post–Storm halfway hysterical need to avenge. There's much less of it now when such needs are satisfied, but for a deep, true change all the people's asses need to be shaken in order for them to start thinking differently.

How do you, as someone who is politically active – you mentioned that you were an activist of the HNS, see your contribution to change of the existing situation in Knin?

We need to be very serious and studious when we are politically active. Whether



we do it as errand boys for some big politicians in Zagreb, or we are narcissistic leaders of those little parties here in Knin, we need to very seriously and studiously understand such things. We ought to pass, we ought to pursue further education, we ought to collect all the information, starting from the most ordinary, newspaper, the everyday kind to seminar-like kind. We must comprehend our responsibility. I think that even politicians and journalists as the intermediaries between bases, or masses, are simply not aware of their responsibility. That responsibility will happen, unfortunately, that's the way it is... While politicians are being punished for what they did in 1991, and they were not punished for 1941, or even if they were punished, it had no connection to proper law. Same with journalists, where are they? Three or four Croatian journalists appeared at The Hague full of themselves like they had nothing to do with it, but what they did in the nineties is known only by the people who witnessed those times and were aware of it. Thus, we must work on responsibility, and if people are not responsible for their own actions, their lives, how could they be responsible toward a larger group of people?

We should communicate, start a dialog... We must work on tales, as well, and those tales are very well known: in relation to The Hague Tribunal, in relation to forgiveness as such, in relation to all of the terms created by third Croatia: reconciliation, coexistence, even brotherhood and unity which remain in traces. In the end, we must be aware that we as people are not only directed toward the present and the future, but also, luckily or not, I don't know, toward the past. But, we selectively choose from that past. And then we let a tear during a *Bijelo dugme*⁵⁵ show not being aware that it might not be such a good thing, since retro mania is actually an attempt to preserve old values and show a lack of inclination and bravery towards change. Among other things, we must be aware of that retro mania also.

S. D.

⁵⁵ Bijelo dugme ("White Button") was a very popular band in the former Yugoslavia.

Start a conversation over Sunday lunch

Please tell us a bit about yourself.

My name is Iva. I was born in 1981, in Zagreb, where I have spent my whole life. I currently have one more exam before graduating from the College of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb. I am looking forward to graduation. I have been working for *Radio 101* for the last three years as a journalist. In the last year I have been active in the nongovernmental sector and have started working for the Volunteering Center of Zagreb. Due to my interests which are still in development, I suppose that I will, at least I hope, cooperate with some other organizations which work on human rights and dealing with the past. That would be me in two sentences.

Since you mentioned your interest in this topic, I would like to start off with the question of how you see reconciliation, what is it for you?

Reconciliation, for me, is a pretty long and hard process which is necessary. I really think it is necessary to reach a certain level of reconciliation in post conflict societies so that life can go on and the state and society can function. It seems to me that it is of primary importance for reconciliation to identify what is called the factual truth. Meaning, to determine who did exactly what to whom and to very clearly define and expose the factual truth publicly. An equally important aspect of reconciliation is to condemn the crimes that were committed, in my opinion. It is also equally important to find out the fates of the people who were killed, who died, who suffered, and who went missing. It seems to me that it's very important to prosecute the war criminals, those who were accused of war crimes, and it seems that reconciliation would be more easily accomplished if those processes were handled properly.

You have already mentioned some of the means for reaching reconciliation. Do you think it is possible? To which extent can it be realized?

Sometimes it seems easier, other times harder. It varies a lot, depending on daily politics. Because, say, something nice happens, something I view as important in the context of reconciliation, even if only a declarative thing such as the Prime Minister Sanader's compliments of the season to Orthodox believers. Somehow, that is more of a declarative thing, but it seems – well, let's say that it's a pretty good thing. But, then, on the other side, I see the negation of any possibility that someone has committed a war crime in a defensive war. Then it seems to me that we'll never manage to accomplish anything. So it varies a lot.

If I draw the bottom line it looks possible, but I don't know if completely, at least not in any near future which I can envision. It seems possible, but it's terribly hard, all of us who want to do it will have a hard time. It will be terribly hard.

As much as I understood you, it must be worked on?

Absolutely, since I hold that no country or society in the region of the former Yugoslavia, apart from Slovenia which already functions democratically, can

The first thing is that we should learn from it. That seems to be the most important thing. Generally, it seems that the peoples in this area have a problem with learning from their own mistakes, which I deem very disastrous in the long run. If we don't learn that war or conflict is not the solution, it will, very likely, happen again. I hope it won't, but it simply seems logical to me that if we don't handle the past now we'll end up manipulating data again, we'll lie again, engage in shady deals, cheat, we'll pursue again some ethnic mythologies, great ethnic patriotic phrases...

continue with their own lives, that these societies cannot develop further, at least not in a right way, if things are being swept under a rug, if there are lies, if the truth is being hidden, if answering to uncomfortable questions is being avoided... Simply, it seems to me that all of us would be better if we admitted our mistakes, omissions, if we established some kind of cooperation, even at the economic level.

Who should reconcile within Croatia, where you live? Who are the people who should work on it?

All who desire reconciliation, since I think that everyone can do it in their immediate environment. Start a conversation over Sunday lunch, maybe raise awareness of some ideas, talk about some things. Of course, the media are terribly important in all of this, since they, in a way, serve the public whole sets of data which the public holds to be true, as the absolute truth, which is not always the best idea. Thus, I think that the media have a role in raising the public's awareness as well as NGOs which have been doing a big part of the job so far and I think that will also be the case in the future. The international community is also important, I think, it might point out some omissions, or help us work on those projects with its experience, capacities, finances and experts. Scientific institutions are important as well, Institute of History, for example, Institute for

Social Research, universities, College of History, College of Philosophy, College of Political Sciences. All those institutions, organizations, international, non-governmental, the media, individuals. It seems to me that everyone, if they wish to, may find space where they could work on it.

What are possible obstacles for people from, say, your surroundings, to work on reconciliation, delve into it, or talk about it at all?

Maybe we can talk about two levels here. The first regards the people who were directly hit by war, have lost their nearest, have personally gone through some of the wartime horrors, lost their property, friends, places where they lived, jobs... I am very careful about suggestions in this case. I don't feel comfortable telling people who have really suffered how to carry on with their pain, their

loss. But I can speak for people like myself, who are young and were not hit directly, at least I don't feel I significantly suffered throughout what happened, I can speak for the youth. First thing is the lack of interest, maybe people are not aware of the problem's level and how much it prevents us from getting better, from prospering. The obstacles are also our political elites, and when I say 'our' I mean Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian, I don't know how much they emphasize those reconciliatory projects in a proper way. It seems to me that everything boils down to a declarative story, which is full of terms 'cooperation' and such... And I am not sure how much that's meant and supported at a given moment. People's personal traumas also present a great obstacle. On the other side, a great obstacle for the media and NGOs it seems to be the fact that reconciliation is still a heavy topic here, thin ice. Maybe the people who want to work on it estimate that it would create problems for themselves or bring onto themselves a part of the public's condemnation so that would be an obstacle, also. People probably judge that it's not the right time yet, which I don't agree with. I think that enough time has passed. If we always think that not enough time has passed, nothing will ever be done.

Who needs to reconcile, in your opinion? Which groups? Are they within Croatia or not?

Well, I think that cases of regional cooperation already exist. I deem them very important, and that the NGOs from countries or regions that were in some way involved in the nineties' events initiate some kind of cooperation. It can't be bad if someone is working on this, I think. Of course, it must be done properly. If some values are promoted which one deems worthy, I think that there can be no mistake. Work can be done at whole series of levels and, in that sense, a whole series of protagonists can partake in it. From individuals to state institutions, NGOs, the media, informal groups. Space for action is really broad.

How should we deal with the past, in your opinion? The wartime past and others?

The first thing is that we should learn from it. That seems to be the most important thing. Generally, it seems that the peoples in this area have a problem with learning from their own mistakes, which I deem very disastrous in the long run. If we don't learn that war or conflict is not the solution, it will, very likely, happen again. I hope it won't, but it simply seems logical to me that if we don't handle the past now we'll end up manipulating data again, we'll lie again, engage in shady deals, cheat, we'll pursue again ethnic mythologies, great ethnic patriotic phrases, and I think all of that can lead only to some kind of destructive consequences. It seems it is very important to determine what happened, but in a constructive way. Not to go around, pointing a finger: "It's your fault, no, it's yours..." My opinion is that it's important to find a critical mass in all societies in the region of former Yugoslavia, to find a specific number of people who want to engage in this constructively. Meaning, find out who is guilty, not

to condemn one another, but to have the guilty ones really prosecuted, to send a clear message that it should not be done, must not be done, that you must not kill civilians, must not engage in ethnic cleansing, must not rape women only in order to draw the bottom line, to clearly and without a doubt emphasize that it is not the way. Aside from learning from it, I think it's important that we also build some new experiences based on the past, that we all jointly realize that picking up a gun is not the solution, that we resolve our problems through dialog, cooperation, that we all understand that we need much more tolerance and goodwill in those relations than we have shown thus far. Even in case of a good excuse, speaking conditionally, a neighbor of mine did this and that to me, maybe we should raise awareness for finding the strength not to counter violence with violence. Thus, let's try to learn from what happened, which was, no doubt, ugly, terrible, tragic and horrible, the most that we can. Let's learn the lessons and start working on the future. Let's also start looking for solutions which would enable us all to live better and, consequently, decrease the potential for some kind of possible conflicts or quarrels in the future.

You have already mentioned processes and trials a few times. How do you view that way of dealing with the past in The Hague and what it attempts to accomplish?

I think that The Hague Tribunal is an awfully complex question. Firstly, I have some kind of feeling that its space has become too cramped, too slow, too bureaucratic... Everybody says: justice is slow. Ok, it is. The new question is actually, ok, maybe The Hague Tribunal is not ideal, but in any case it seems better to have it. Since I am not exactly certain whether we are ready to put our war criminals on trial. Reality shows that we have all those processes which make it to the Supreme Court and then they go back to the beginning... I don't know, I have a feeling that it's not ideal, but it's good that such an institution exists, that there is somebody who indicates to you that you can't forget someone who killed civilians, those are simply things which cannot be forgotten and need to be accounted for. But, it's equally important that, by the completion of the process of dealing with the past, the Croatian judicial system becomes competent to try its own defendants. Since that seems like the sign that the society has ripened and arrived at a level where it can handle it. The day when a smaller court in, say, Osijek or Split, sentences someone, that sentence stands and that one completes one's sentence, that day, it seems, the society would reach a level that's actually desirable. It seems not all that healthy that all cases are handled by someone from the outside. But, it seems terribly sad that whenever The Hague Tribunal is being discussed, I hear that the international community has conspired against us and that they don't understand anything. I mean, the international community is not ideal, there are a lot of mistakes and omissions and we could discuss its particular moves but equally we cannot expect that all of it functions perfectly.

If I understood you well, you deem it a good step toward dealing with what happened? You see it as a part of the reconciliation process.

Absolutely. I think it's very important that after a certain number of years, there are already people who are sentenced, meaning there's a message: That must not be done, consequences are imprisonment and the public's condemnation. I view it as important that processes are taking place and that sentences stand.

Is your impression that in your surroundings, community, Croatia, those sentences are received with condemnation?

I think that they are well received in my surroundings, but I move in a pretty closed circle of people with whom I share the same interests because of my job – I have a feeling that my surroundings cannot be a representative sample. As much as they might not agree with messages that are sent or with the sentences' lengths at a given moment, those discussions do take place, but their basic attitude is mostly similar to mine. Meaning, The Hague Tribunal, the prosecutions, that it's good that they exist. They are not perfect, but we have no one who would do it better, for now.

We have finished with the past. What should we do with it regarding the future? How do you view the future?

I think it's important for all of us to understand that we cannot escape our neighbors. We cannot move Croatia to the Atlantic Ocean and have no neighbors, and even in that situation you would still have problems with someone. It's absolutely impossible, with such a large number of countries in the world, to have problems with no one. I think that if we understand and if we do a good job of dealing with the past, and if we want to work on reconciliation, it would be good to realize that we must function together with our neighbors. For money and economy, if for no other reason. We are, in a way, quote, sentenced one to another, unquote. We border one another, we have to function together. The bottom line is that an awfully large number of people from this region have family or property across the border, so there's a need for circulation of people and goods. It seems that we simply have to learn how to live together. We don't have to adore one another, I leave space for everyone to judge just how much they want to do with someone from another country, society... But, as a state, we need to learn how to function with our neighbors. I think that's expected of us, and rightly so.

What can the “ordinary people,” the so called little people do for reconciliation, in your opinion?

Firstly, they can think a bit more about their attitudes, ask themselves a few questions: how do I view what happened here, or in some other country, what's my view of a war crime as such, a war crime committed against my people and, then, the war crime committed in my name, clarify things to themselves,

and then emphasize that discussion within their families, their surroundings, become somehow active if they feel the need, engage in a campaign, write some texts, do a street performance... I think that the possibilities are many. It would be the best if one started with oneself, clarify whether one would pick up, say, a gun if there were a need or in case of a war whether one would go to it, whether one would fight civilians or soldiers? Whether one would be ready to go to war into somebody else's territory, just simply think about how one would act in such a moment... And to think more or less about the questions we just discussed. About relations with others. If nothing else, raise awareness about some of one's attitudes.

Thus, you are starting with your own responsibility?

Well, yes. It's good that everyone thinks about oneself first and raises awareness of what reconciliation is and how important it is, before doing anything else or motivating others to start doing something.

And what do you deem necessary, what should every man do regarding reconciliation? What's most important?

Every man should, without thinking, condemn every crime, the innocents' deaths, torching of churches and cultural monuments, abuse of women... Every man should say to himself, ok, it's war, ugly things happen during it, but murdering civilians, torturing, imprisoning and starving people, and abusing women goes beyond what we can consider a one-on-one war. Our attitude should be that war crime is not something that can be justified.

Do you have anything else to say?

That seems such a complex question. I am afraid that I omitted something, or that I talked about other things which might not be that important, but, ok... This interview would be different every time even if we did it ten times, since there are so many important things here to talk about. But, I am glad it exists, that a need exists, for someone to ask me what I think. And I would like it if it were discussed much more often.

L. B.

How can I be happy when the unhappy surround me?

Do you still feel the war's consequences? How?

Of course I do. I have never been paid better and less satisfied, or even less happy, whether in regards to the individual or the family's success. How can I be happy when the unhappy surround me? People's facial expressions, their moods, illustrate the society's state the best.

Can changes be made to improve this state? For you personally, and for the society as a whole as well?

Fundamental changes – the lawful state (rule of law) is the best guarantee for better tomorrow, the faith in progress and the society's priority, and not resignation, losing every hope in the possibility of creating a better and happier society.

How should we face the past? And how should we deal with it?

I think that the Germans' recipe is an already tested guarantee for success – condemn every crime and not just the other nationalities'.

What are your attitudes regarding reconciliation? What is it for you? How should it be reached?

Reconciliation is a necessary condition for living. There can be no reconciliation without the acceptance of truth since the ugliest truth is better than the prettiest lie. Who managed to root out nationalism with nationalism – isn't that a step toward chauvinism, or even fascism? I am talking about the prewar state, 1991 and 1992. Wouldn't it be the most normal move to abolish the nationalistic parties after 1995? In my opinion, religion and the religious institutions' place was fully justified in the postwar Yugoslavia, although liberalization was necessary after a certain time, especially in the SKJ⁵⁶ members' cases, like it was done in Italy, France, etc. Recipe for reconciliation: Germany – France, or, even more suitably, Switzerland. How? To this day we can see how the German police react to neo-Nazi gatherings.

No one is free of responsibility, but an ordinary citizen's smaller responsibility is best shown within Hitler's or Mussolini's "machinery." However, I don't doubt reconciliation or the brighter future.

Who should work on reconciliation?

"Reconciliation is everybody's job" – that is our politicians' phrase, but it's true.

⁵⁶ League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

It is every citizen's job, since the citizen belongs to a civil society, but also others' within their authorizations, especially each institution's: schools, religious communities, families, etc. We tend to think that is the politicians' task since they are the lawful authorities. But, I ask you again: can nationalists work on reconciliation at all and would we call them that if the whole concept of authority was not already based on nationality and, as such, automatically annulled every possibility of cooperation with the affiliates of another nationality? But, sorry, I forgot that crime has no nationality.

Do you have any fears regarding reconciliation? Might the “ordinary people” have them?

I have no fear, aside from the fear that comes from the ones who get paid to “work on reconciliation” – the politicians. I think that everyone's fear is similar to mine, meaning there is no fear – there's only fear of those whose positions - which yesterday they couldn't even have dreamt of - are secured by a ethnic or even nationalistic concept of power.

Do you think someone should have a more prominent role and work on reconciliation more intensely? Who would that be?

How to work on it more intensely and who is enabled to do that? What is common, aside from sport clubs? Here, a few days ago the volleyball league was unified. What about unified youth organizations, labor unions and similar organizations which could have a significant role in the reconciliatory process? The media's significance is also important – it's large, but so is their control, particularly of radio and television.



Can the “ordinary people” do anything? Do you think that you can do something, personally?

I work on reconciliation on daily basis within my profession, although I know that the result is negligible. I regularly attend lectures, round tables and alike, primarily because of the youth, and do not despair due to the results' irrelevance although an efficient way to reconciliation is known: within families, schools, sports... It's hard for me to admit my own powerlessness in relation to weaklings and ignoramuses... But, that's the reality. Do you know how many professors do their job professionally? Ask their students, see how they greet one another in schools and on the street and then you'll realize how many of them are anational or apolitical.

Is the guilt individual or collective, in your opinion? What about the “ordinary people's” responsibility for everything that happened?

Guilt, being a psychological category, is individual, but, since a collective comprises of individuals we can, scientifically, talk about collective guilt as well. Especially when we are aware of a social group's influence, such as a throng, a mass, a mob, an audience, fans, etc. No one is free of responsibility, but an ordinary citizen's smaller responsibility is best shown within Hitler's or Mussolini's “machinery.” However, I don't doubt reconciliation or the brighter future.

Would you add anything to this discussion?

I could speak much more, and not in order to say just anything (I remember Alija Isaković,⁵⁷ who, when asked why he was silent, said: “So that I don't say just anything”) and because this society does not value moral constants, or fundamental principles, and not to mention professionalism, responsibility... The society that does not value the fundamental morality has little chance to prosper fast. I would like to convey to youths that they should change the elders, in order for the elders not to change them, or so that elders don't shape them according to their daily interests.

A. G.

⁵⁷ Alija Isaković (1932 - 1997), Bosniak writer.

Olivera

(61)

(Kosovska)

Kamenica

NGO activist

We all share the same queues

Six years have passed since the war ended. How do you feel nowadays?

Six years have passed and it seems crazy... I am tied to a chair, I could say I am a handicapped person, but I am still active and want to help communities. And when I say "communities," I mean all communities that live here in Kamenica. I can say that I have had no problems, personally, throughout this time. The wartime situation contributed to people's large moving away from Kamenica. I can discuss Kamenica since I don't know further and broader. People have mostly sold their apartments in Kamenica and moved away, while villages are still compact. I only had one problem, last year on the March 17,⁵⁸ when I became tied to a chair, either due to stress or I don't know what, since everything was broken in my house. Regarding friends and my current neighbors, who are Albanians, I can't say anything bad since we help one another and live together. And, also, for the last six years I have been working on multiethnic projects together with my colleague S., who is Albanian, so we ran into large problems which we want to resolve. Our wish is to help all communities regardless of their nationality or age.

What's your view of the past?

What came to pass was horrible. I certainly don't want it to happen ever again. I have no idea who stirred it up. I minded my own business and tried to do my job as an ordinary citizen, I might say. I minded nobody's business and wasn't interested in politics like I am still not, normally.

Can reconciliation be accomplished?

Yes, especially here in Kosovska Kamenica, I would say. It could be accomplished while all people in the municipality of Kamenica would have to be largely empowered. Again, I am talking about the municipality of Kamenica only. Thus, the empowerment of those people, men, women and children so that they don't move away. The fact is that they are here and that they want to work and live here since they have no other place to go. They have been here for years. That which passed... How can I say it in one word, I don't know if I can describe all of it, that is again those big people's deed who wanted to obtain our terrain or set us at odds; divide our communities. Or push us into a conflict which we normally don't want since we have had none before, and

⁵⁸ See footnote on page 101.

have no bigger ones currently. I can say that a skirmish breaks out every now and then, and that skirmish is always linked to a political skirmish or a nationality-based one.

What would reconciliation mean to you?

It would mean a lot, although I can say that people are even now reconciled to a degree. For example, Serbs and Albanians trade together, everything is mixed here in Kamenica. You have people from all communities in the Bureau for Social Affairs and in banks, we are going toward a better future where everyone can live together.

Can reconciliation be reached in Kosovo?

Kosovo is bigger than me. Since I have started working for an NGO I have been going to Pristina, Pec, Djakovica, Prizren. But, I can travel under the protection of OSCE, UNMIK,⁵⁹ or the police, but I am not sure if I could go alone by car. Somebody would have to guarantee me safety, but some gentlemen told me that they couldn't even guarantee such safety to Bush. However, I still think that communication with people would contribute to reconciliation, and I would link that to the exiles' return which would mean a lot. People would feel the return as more realistic, realizable.

What needs to be done for reconciliation to be accomplished?

I would like to mention the economic situation here, although many don't share my view. I think a lot could be done along with the improved economic situation. Increased employment would also be of help since people would have no time for squabbles and skirmishes, but would concern themselves with getting up in the morning and returning home tired at night, having no time for thinking about destroying someone's house.

Regarding youths, it's normal that they complete schooling and become engaged more in this field of reconciliation instead of indulging in drugs and alcohol... Their education needs work.

The youth lives in divided settings. What's the situation here, in Kamenica?

There are divisions, if we are talking about socialization of Albanian, Serbian and Roma children. They all know one another during daytime, they communicate and go out together, but, at night, since we already have particular cafes and all that, Serbian youths frequent

There are divisions, if we are talking about socialization of Albanian, Serbian and Roma children. They all know one another during daytime, they communicate and go out together, but, at night, since we already have particular cafes and all that, Serbian youths frequent them less, I believe because of the fear of someone hurting them. Parents also tell their children not to go to that part since it's full of Albanians, and something might happen to them there.

⁵⁹ The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo - UNMIK.



them less, I believe because of the fear of someone hurting them. Parents also tell their children not to go to that part since it's full of Albanians, and something might happen to them there.

Who should work on reconciliation, in your opinion?

I think that we, the NGOs, can do a lot, starting from early age, right from the child's beginning of being shaped. If we shape that child into a healthy and democratic person, he or she will remain like that until the end. But, if we tell that child other things in school, we leave him or her to the street. Thus, we should not discuss horrible things in front of the children, but only the good ones.

Do the people who live here want to reconcile?

I think so. I can't answer negatively since we all share the same queues, either in front of a bank or some other institution. The chance for reconciliation is large, we just need to use it.

What are the obstacles to reconciliation?

This is a big question for me, I am thinking about what hinders it... Well, fear hinders it, the fear of an unsafe situation. If we consider other places the situation differs, but everything here is connected to some kind of politics. Politics doesn't shape people, people create politics. They can't fool us just like that.

What should Serbia do for reconciliation, and what should Kosovo do?

That conversation between Koštunica and Bajram Kosumi⁶⁰ has been a topic for a long time. We should, for once, prevent people from paying for someone else's sins. I don't think of it as our, or the people's, responsibility. They are well paid while we have no money!

Should politicians work on reconciliation, in your opinion?

Not only politicians but people as a whole should. People are already working on it, but some from up above should say: "Hold on a sec, man, let's work together." We can't wish for something we cannot accomplish.

How can an "ordinary" citizen contribute to reconciliation?

Through tolerance, of course. And we'll realize who made mistakes and where. We are ordinary people who can reach better things through communication.

Is the guilt collective or individual for everything that happened to us?

I think that it's individual. There needs to be more than one protagonist in any argument or fight. That also took place now, but not everybody was involved and not everybody is guilty.

What are your predictions of the future?

We can reach the goal in the step-by-step manner, if we take one step at a time. It would be really crazy if it were up to me. I think I would have given everything I could, not only to everyone in Kosovo, but in the whole world. Allow them to have all they need to eat and drink and not to starve, as it is done now.

Do you have any other comment for this interview, something you'd like to add?

I will be sorry if I remember something I could have said after you leave...

N. I.

⁶⁰ Bajram Kosumi (1960) is a Kosovar Albanian politician.

Kosta

(81)

Skopje/Shkup
retiree

How did we get to the point of seeking reconciliation?

What would be reconciliation for you?

How did we get to the point of seeking reconciliation? Some questions are still unresolved, however, what brought about the tragic consequences which revived the ghosts of the past and led to tragedy was the strengthening of nationalism after Yugoslavia fell apart. You are seeking reconciliation... What do I think about it? First, we need to look forward, that's what ordinary people pursue. That they live well, that they can find a job, that they can have children and school them, and so on. Some old, unresolved issues and ideas would probably be forgotten if we looked at it like that.

What concretely happened here, after everything that had occurred in the Yugoslavian region, was what some call war, others conflict, some fight for territory, and others fight for human rights. No one ever fought for rights, but war was used instead as the politics' last possible continuation, as fight for territories. Unfortunately, no assessment has been made here of what happened and why it happened, in my opinion. Probably due to two reasons, the first being that most were unsatisfied with their positions, and the second is that a nationalistic current was formed asking for clarification of some things militarily. The militant force came from the outside, or it was suggested from there, due to nationalistic tendencies, slogans, and the unsatisfied persons' activities.

Are you talking about Albanians?

Yes, I am talking about Albanians. While some issues were being worked out – Croatian, Serbian, and so on – a moment came for the Albanian issue to be clarified as well. Still, another issue remains unresolved in the Balkans, the Macedonian one.

What would be reconciliatory at this time?

I, as a communist, can say that Macedonian people's nationality must be respected. Foreigners who are trying to reconcile us have made an error, in my opinion, and that error is that reconciliation cannot be reached at one's expense, all bills must be settled. Why am I saying this? Because the Ohrid Framework Agreement, for example, has been imposed on us from the outside although it contains a few good things. And no one likes others resolving one's problems and imposing themselves. Also, Macedonia has been, through that agreement, stripped of its

We should respect and study the past and not forget the mistakes which we don't want to repeat. We would reach what you call reconciliation and what I call unity if we don't repeat them.

right to be a nation state while the Balkan mixture contains nation states everywhere – Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Albania, etc. And the ordinary Macedonian person sees that and is bothered by it. The Agreement states that Macedonia is a multinational, multiethnic society, a multiethnic state, but practice confirms only Macedonia's binational nature, and not the multiethnic one. Regardless of the size of a community, human rights do not differ between smaller and larger communities, they should be equal for all. This condition will probably hinder the compact unification of this region in the future.

How can we work on such a compact unification?

Firstly, we are overburdened by the past. The past should not be ignored or forgotten, but we need to draw a lesson from it for the future. If we draw lessons from it – what was good and what wasn't – I think that we will reach reconciliation sooner. The word reconciliation also means separation. Reconciliation is not a state of unity. If Macedonians and Albanians... I am assuming other communities here as well, although their problems are a bit different since they have not been confronted to such an extent, Turks, Serbs, Vlachs... Speaking of Vlachs, it's typical of them that they are closest to coexistence with others, since they don't have a state. In their case there are no obstacles to marriages or contacts with others. They are a rare, or maybe even unique, example in the Balkans. There are many of them in Albania, many in Greece, while in Serbia and Bulgaria there aren't that many. However, since they are not burdened by their own nation state, they are most likely to live with all others.

If that is a possible way to reconciliation, isn't it slightly contradictory to what you just said about Macedonians' right to a nation state?



Yes, a little bit (*laughs*). Macedonians have renounced what we call a nation state – they live as a community within a state. They just carry the state's biggest community's sign.

How far should we go with the exploration of the past, of what happened to us and why it happened?

We should respect and study the past and not forget the mistakes which we don't want to repeat. We would reach what you call reconciliation and what I call unity if we don't repeat them.

What about Macedonian nationalism?

Macedonian nationalism can also be, and is, extreme, especially this belittling of Albanians, stating that this whole mess is their fault... Further, I can speak about my own experiences, I have many friends among them. They weren't often considered, especially regarding employment and opinions about their intelligence. However, they showed that they could speak well and that they were good politicians, organizers, educators and everything else that was necessary. That's where we made a big mistake.

What could an "ordinary man" do, whether Macedonian or Albanian?

People would understand one another better if they weren't susceptible to different political and ideological influences. We in Macedonia have extraordinary examples of coexistence, but it boils down to two families or two villages. Wild nationalism, both Macedonian and Albanian, caused this split. The Macedonian exodus from the Tetovo and Kicevo area is tragic. That's a river of no return. That's why I think this conflict was basically a fight for territory, and we



have that on both sides. The opposite of Macedonian exodus is the torching of bakeries in Bitola, Kocani, same thing. Further, faith, both Islam and Christianity are espousing the worst things and exacerbating misunderstandings at this moment. The second really bad thing is the organization of political parties following the ethnic principle. There are Serbian, Turkish, Vlachs' parties. Even the parties which are called social democratic or liberal or alike are not really social democratic or liberal if their members belong to only one nationality. That's an element which hinders reconciliation, in my opinion. Further, we have a fragmentation between the overly rich and overly poor Macedonians, and the same goes for Albanians. What hinders reconciliation in this case is that it's not enough to tell people their rights, but also to ensure that they can realize their rights lawfully. Future reconciliation could be even harder at this level than at the ethnic one, during the transition from one system to another. Interethnic relations had been getting better, and then ended up in war. The contrasts between the rich and the poor and between the ones for which the lawful state functions and the others for which it doesn't are gaining in dynamics, are sharpening.

I would like to ask you a slightly personal question in the end. You mentioned that you had many Albanian friends. Has that closeness remained in those private relations, or had the relations become worse as the situation worsened?

My experience is of two types. The closeness has remained the same with some Albanians who are in pretty high positions within the Albanian political parties, we still meet and talk. Some other relations have cooled, on the other hand. Nevertheless, I think that people who are true friends remain such in crises as well.

A. B.

S.

(36)

Prishtinë/
Priština
professor

**I breathe freely,
I walk freely, we talk freely**

How do you feel now, six years after the war ended?

I've never felt better. Although people think that they feel at their best when they're young or during adolescence, now I feel better than ever. I started feeling like this on March 24,⁶¹ 1999, when this feeling was mixed with a certain amount of fear. I feel better if I draw a parallel between the kind of life we had when we were young and what we have now. I feel better because I breathe freely, I walk freely, we talk freely and because the taboos have started to ease up and are being removed. Freedom came for everybody. Limited freedom is being discussed, which might hold for certain circumstances. However, we remain limited as a society as long as we don't have our own state, which causes the limits to freedom. We need to know how to enjoy this freedom, but we also need to work more in order to add to it.

What's your view of the past?

Our past was full of pain, full of moments which I don't want to remember. One young generation which had its dreams and a lot of potential has been prevented from doing anything. A lot of energy was wasted and now it's hard to return things to their original path. Those past aspirations and desires should be skillfully transferred onto younger generations in order to provide them with the means and basic human rights which they have today, at least. I think it's time to turn to more serious work where every moment must be utilized.

Should the past be discussed, in your opinion?

Yes, certainly. The best way to solve a problem is to deal with it. We must sit down and talk, but we need to find a place to do it and establish order. We must find the people to do it since the past was full of frustrations and all sorts of encumbrances. If that is not talked about and if we pretend that it's a long way behind us, we are making a mistake. We need to clarify things that happened, but gradually, without sudden steps forward – and without just keeping silent.

What's your personal attitude regarding reconciliation? What is reconciliation for you?

The word itself resonates with beauty and sweetness. Our people, in all moments of historical importance, have always favored the concept of reconciliation as the ultimate value, not going into the kind of reconciliation we are cur-

⁶¹ Date when the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia started.

rently discussing. I believe we cannot reach reconciliation if we don't sit down and talk. We should ask again whether the right time is now. Who should start this process first?

Be that as it may, the smart approach needs to be found for all dilemmas and challenges, by smart and educated people whose visions are clear and who can open up such a process without feelings of inferiority.

Could reconciliation be reached in Kosovo?

Sometimes I see sparks of the possibility that we could talk about reconciliation. However, other times I think the opposite – that we couldn't. What happened to us Albanians is a huge obstacle to reconciliation. Real reconciliation could be reached after many, many years, definitely not now. It's enough to just initiate it currently. Still, we are reconciliatory people, open to our neighbors and others, historically speaking...

What is needed for reconciliation?

I repeat often that people's general consciousness needs to be raised, that they need to talk and forgive, communicate. However, the question is where to talk, where these discussions could take place? The place and a reason why this should be done is needed. What should be discussed? What would improve? Are we ready for something like that? It's hard to answer all these questions and there's not much space for optimism. Despite this, I think there can be no progress or well-being without economic development and job openings. People become the closest through work.

Who should work on the process of reconciliation?

I think that a combination of experience and initiative should be made. The elders provide experience while initiative comes from the youth. The youth who



are included in the everyday process of reconciliation and have *élan* don't hide any hatred inside.

Do you think that people are ready for reconciliation? Do they want to reconcile?

I should emphasize again that Kosovo is small, but is comprised of people from different places and of different opinions, and it needs to be determined where to start. For example, reconciliation should be initiated where there is some basis for it. Next, those places should act as models for other places which don't have such a basis. The experience obtained could be transferred that way. The characteristics which should be kept in mind as a starting point would be the sharing of experience, relaxation of the situation, tolerance toward people, consideration and respect for freedom of speech without intrusion.

What hinders the people who live in your town to start talking about reconciliation?

There are obstacles. The Balkans are a specific region where great cultures and histories intertwine, where ego is very strong and where it faces collectivism, but without a good opportunity for expression. Main obstacles are dishonesty, lack of tolerance and the refusal to accept reality.

What could your side do in order for reconciliation to be reached, and what could the other?

The place we live should continue working on it. First and foremost, human values should be emphasized over any other, such as titles and careers, in my opinion.

Generally, we don't lack these values as people, but we lack the strategy for determination (delegation) of duties and values. When everyone knows his job and helps the other as it's demanded, that's when things get on the right track. I think we should work and read much more than we do now. Then we will be able to think in a more rational manner and become our destiny's designers. In a way, people work more with victims, which is the right thing to do, but not much is done with the ones who caused it all. Thus, others should concern themselves with the perpetrator, in this case a neighboring country, so it would be taken where it should, where justice will find its place.

What could an "ordinary" citizen do to contribute to the process of reconciliation?

We are all ordinary citizens, but someone's position can make that person extraordinary or "more interesting," which could lead to misunderstanding since even an ordinary citizen could have a more fruitful idea. The ordinary citizen should also contribute when rules and regulations are passed and carried out, actively participate in the everyday life. Once ordinary citizens participate in these processes, we all will contribute to the problem's resolution. We cannot expect a person to willingly dwell on things that are not of primary importance

to that person but are secondary instead at the time when we lack the life's essential elements, such as paychecks, houses, homes.

Do you think that guilt is collective or individual for all that happened?

This question is a bit harder since I personally think that guilt is not collective except in a few cases. Usually, the guilt is individual. This individual act was committed by a group of individuals who could manipulate the masses. That's the way it was and still is to this day. I cannot clearly differentiate between the individual and the collective guilt in response to this question, but I could note that, when the masses are not lifted up enough combined with a poor infrastructure, it's normal that the individual will follow another or a group without knowing why.

Do you have anything to add?

I have no comments, the ideas are good. People of different levels and from different places should be interviewed in order to arrive at a conclusion. When these types of interviews are done, not only the experienced and socially active people should be chosen. People of different profiles should be interviewed so that conclusions are healthier and more realistic.

N. I.

Albert

(20)
Podgorica
student

It hurt Albanians, Roma and others as much as it hurt me

Could you please introduce yourself? What's your name, how old are you and where have you lived?

My name is Albert, I am twenty years old. I lived in Rastovo, a village near Djakovica.

So, you lived close to Djakovica?

Yes, for thirteen years.

What are your memories of the wartime experiences?

Firstly, I wasn't living there throughout the whole war, we left a bit earlier since our Albanian neighbors came and told us that it would be better for us to leave. The village was packed with soldiers so that they couldn't guarantee our safety. That happened on Easter in 1998, there was shooting while we were leaving the

house. However, all that came to pass, this is the seventh, eighth year since the war ended, since we fled. A lot of it is forgotten, it happens that I run into people I know from Kosovo in Podgorica without recognizing them. I was younger then and all that, but the stress remained. Sometimes it happens that I lock my house during the day although I live in Podgorica where it's peaceful. And I get up in the evening to check whether the door is locked and windows are closed and such. I have forgotten a lot of it, although I would be lying if I told you that I felt no hatred or anger during first few years. That's normal, since it's hard to leave the place you were born and grew up in under such circumstances, when you have done nobody wrong. Still, as years pass much is forgotten, one must move forward. Also, I am not the only one who experienced something like this and it would be nice if all people thought like this. War is war, victims are inevitable. It hurt Albanians, Roma and others as much as it hurt me... However, I forgot it all.

My family consists of all sorts: my cousin is married to an Italian, my brother to a Bosnian, my aunt is from Croatia, another cousin is married to a Muslim from Bosnia, she married him during the war, he fled and they got married, another aunt is an Albanian. I simply cannot hate that people, any people, since if I hate that people then I don't love my brother, or my mother-in-law, or my cousin.

How did you feel about leaving your home and other events at that time?

Well, it was awfully hard. I had it the hardest since I was the youngest in the family, it was awfully hard... But, then again, when we came to Podgorica I continued with education, I was in the eighth grade of elementary school, I had

new friends, new surroundings, I was meeting new neighbors... Some things have made it easier to get over it, made it easier altogether. Thus, I started to forget and now I feel great, as if nothing happened. I am sorry it turned out that way, and what I regret the most is that so many people have died, and for what? For nothing. And there's a bloodbath somewhere out there again, people are dying again, bombs are being dropped, etc.

Do you think that, since the war happened to you when you were a child, it might have influenced positively your current life?

No, it didn't, since you cannot forget some things when you are a child, those pictures remain for the rest of your life. I cannot get those scenes, that film, out of my head. For example, the night before the last we were there on our terrace, looking out. It was April, we saw them running around with flashlights, shooting, Albanians were demonstrating... And then all the stress while their Liberation Army⁶² was passing by our house, we were just waiting for someone to come in and kill us. Our father didn't live with us, there were just me, my mother, my eighteen year old sister and two brothers who were also younger. Thus, a house with no weapons, nothing. It was really hard, I don't know how to describe it. The house was near the Pec-Prizren highway, so it was awfully hard. There were six Serbian and six hundred Albanian houses in the village, so it wasn't a pleasant feeling to stay alone at home. However, in the end an Albanian helped us to escape, otherwise we would have stayed hoping it would get better...

But, then again, it wasn't a nice feeling to leave our home full of all sorts of things with only two suitcases in our arms. Since nothing happened to anyone from my family, nobody was killed, the hope remained that it would get better. It's a much better feeling if you come out alive, a house can be built again. Now we live in Podgorica in a much nicer house than the one in Kosovo which we sold along with the land. We live much better, it's much nicer among our people, so we feel much better.

What do you think is needed to overcome the war's consequences?

Firstly, to forget is of primary importance, to forget everything that happened. Some have it hard, if a mother lost her only son, or the families I know which lost up to ten members, whether cousins, or a son, a son-in-law, a daughter... It's hard for them to forget. But, then again, the worst thing a person can do to himself is to talk about justice and revenge. That person is not aware of the time passing. Life is only one... Many don't believe in destiny, but, then again, that's what it is.

Are you in contact with the friends who also came from Kosovo, whose destinies are similar? How did they feel about it?

⁶² The Kosovo Liberation Army - KLA or UÇK.

Many of them felt worse, I don't know why. However, our people are like that. If a person is facing a problem, another, in order to console the first, will tell him that his own problem is bigger. However, war is war, everyone had it the same. Nobody came out of it feeling great. I rarely come into contact with the people from Kosovo, since my memories come back when I see them, although I claim that I forgot it all. This is the first time I am talking about Kosovo in four years and this is already hard enough. I rarely come into contact with them, although either they or we cry when I do... So, I avoid coming into contact with my former neighbors from Kosovo, or with the people I studied with, since it's always the same story. That's our people's biggest problem, always the same story, war – in Bosnia, Kosovo, Croatia. For example, the biggest mistakes we make are buying toy guns for our children and telling them about the war, thus teaching them about all that starting from an early age. Also, for example, you can see an Albanian child, maybe three years old, giving a V sign⁶³ which he or she was taught. That's not a sign for victory or peace, that's nationalism. It's our mistake, because people in Montenegro and Serbia... The Balkans are nationalistic, which I cannot understand. I understand that many wars took place and all that, but our elders – parents, grandmothers and grandfathers – should perform a different wheel dance for the youth's sake. They need to initiate it since they raise and teach the children. Oblivion is hard to reach.

How often do you think about the situation in Kosovo, do you think that it's better now than it used to be?

It's certainly not better. Many of our Albanian friends from Kosovo give us a call and stop by for coffee when they visit Podgorica. To this day I get goose bumps when I hear the Albanian language due to the stress that remained, although I don't hate them. It's just a bit hard. They say that they are praying to God for Serbs' return since they deem that KFOR,⁶⁴ which maintains the peace in Kosovo, is not good either, although they came to provide peace. Also, Albanians kill one another now, they are settling accounts. Kosovo has been bloody from times immemorial and will always stay like that. And I think the elders are right when they say that it will never be good in Kosovo. As much as people live peacefully, a day always comes when all hell breaks loose.

What's your current view of reconciliation, how close is it to you?

As I already said, I have forgotten it all, I am not bothered by it any longer. It was different in the beginning, but now it doesn't matter, I even don't think about it. I certainly support reconciliation. If we only consider the countries in the EU, where they are now and where we are, and we used to be a strong

⁶³ For the Albanian population, that sign symbolized the struggle for Kosovo's independence.

⁶⁴ The Kosovo Force (KFOR) is a NATO-led international force in Kosovo, responsible for safe and secure environment.

country, well-known in the world. I am even ashamed sometimes when I travel and have to show my passport, after everything. We, individuals, are not guilty as people, although there's some guilt of our own and we should not blame it all on politicians. An individual cannot do all of that although that's what people say: the fault is the President's, or of this or that one. People initiate a lot of it, first the poverty and everything else. The time has come when brothers can't stand seeing one another, or when they argue over politics, when they actually just look for a reason to fight. These times must be unhappy when people hate because of a name, they should snap out of it and be more active in that reconciliatory tendency... Whether one's name is Ervin, or Esad, Albert, Dragan...⁶⁵ we are all the same and that's how I see it and that's how I was raised. Nevertheless, there are parents who raise their children completely differently. My family consists of all sorts: my cousin is married to an Italian, my brother to a Bosnian, my aunt is from Croatia, another cousin is married to a Muslim from Bosnia, she married him during the war, he fled and they got married, another aunt is an Albanian. I simply cannot hate that people, any people, since if I hate that people then I don't love my brother, or my mother-in-law, or my cousin.

How much do you think that this region's peoples are ready for reconciliation?

It all depends, it's certain that at least forty percent is ready for reconciliation, but other sixty percent is not. As I already said, all of the Balkans is nationalistic. I hope for reconciliation, but it won't happen soon, that's for sure. It's terribly hard, instead of moving forward we have new problems occurring daily. If only we could break out of the vicious cycle, snap out of it and do something, and not think about it. If only we could raise our children differently and forget all that evil. We cannot move forward if we always keep remembering some bad things, that's how we do damage not to others, but to ourselves. They torched my home, we left Kosovo, but still I have some kind of new life here. I understand the people who lost someone there, that's hard to forget, but, then again, to blame someone else, wish for revenge, cry incessantly... I know it hurts, family members are in question, after all, best men, neighbors, but, then again, we cannot revive those who died by blaming someone else. Culprits should be left to justice, courts, and we, as individuals, should make an effort to forget. As hard as it is, we must go on. Everything we want we must obtain painfully since nothing comes by itself.

As years pass, my desire to return is increasing, to see the place where I was born and grew up, my birthplace is calling me. I hope to return, but I would like to at least pass by my former home in a car, just to see it. The Albanian who bought our house told us that he changed nothing, although it had been torched to the ground. It was renovated according to its original blueprint. That Albanian's wife even planted flowers the same way my mother had done. Nothing was changed.

⁶⁵ Some common names that denote different ethnic backgrounds.

People should overcome all of it and leave all those bad things behind.

How often do you run into the term 'reconciliation' and what does it mean to you?

When I hear that word I immediately think of people shaking hands or hugging. I don't know, and I don't have much time to think about those things, although I do yearn for it. I thought earlier that I would never want to return to Kosovo, even if it were wholly just mine. Nevertheless, as years pass, my desire to return is increasing, to see the place where I was born and grew up, my birthplace is calling me. I hope to return, but I would like to at least pass by my former home in a car, just to see it. The Albanian who bought our house told us that he changed nothing, although it had been torched to the ground. It was renovated according to its original blueprint.

You are not in touch with him?

We are not in touch with him, but he works with my father in Switzerland. That Albanian's wife even planted flowers the same way my mother had done. Nothing was changed. I hope to go and see it at least once. I have no one to blame, such was the situation, we'll gain nothing by blaming another. There are as many bad Serbs as there are bad Albanians, it only depends on whom you run into. There are good and bad people everywhere. You'll run into good ones if you're lucky, and if you are not, you'll run into the others. I am sorry that so many people were killed. I still don't have a solution to all of it. These wars contributed to the people's hatred, and this is still fresh, ten-fifteen years since the war in Bosnia, eight since the war in Kosovo, etc. It's all fresh, more time is needed in order for people to forget. A lot of people were not as lucky as my family was, we have our own house now, while many displaced people and refugees live in others' apartments. Some even have nothing, they live in tents. They certainly cannot forget. I know many people who lived in three story houses and who currently live like beggars, barely being able to feed their families. A lot was taken away from them, but little was given. I am happy to live in Montenegro, but I am still not happy with the treatment of refugees either in Serbia or in Montenegro. I even feel that Bosnians and Croats are more welcomed than we, who come from the same country, are. Nationalism is pretty large, after all.

What do you think, how should we deal with the past? What should we do with all of strong feelings, pain, all those truths that happened to people? How should we approach dealing with the past?

Well, I cannot speak for others, I can only discuss how I and my family relate to it. Those memories need to be erased, although that is very hard. For example, I don't allow my mother to look at the pictures from Kosovo or our torched house since it always makes her, or my sister and brothers, cry. We spent our whole lives there so it's not easy. Actually, I spent my whole life there, I have



been here for only the last few years. Still, I feel as if I have spent my whole life here; my desire was to live in Montenegro anyway. However, it's awfully hard for older folks. For example, my grandmother had lived in one place for seventy, eighty years, had borne and had raised children. It's awfully hard for her, not a single day passes without her recalling how it had been for her in Kosovo and all of the things she had had in Kosovo but doesn't have any longer. To own land, raise children, work on that land your whole life and then people suddenly show up, torch your house and expel you from the place you lived in your whole life. That is very hard, indeed. All the while you didn't do anything to anybody, that is, nothing was your fault. There were a lot of people who disappeared or got killed who weren't guilty, most were innocent, actually. Those who cooked it all up and who fought, they managed to pull out on time. Everything was programmed. Nor did the war in Kosovo start unexpectedly, it all had been planned beforehand, how else would all the weapons show up there? I hope, and I ask of people who will listen to this to forget, to try and forget, since there's no use in remembering all that and suffering over something that cannot be returned. They should turn to their children, whoever has any. Thus, to forget. We need to move forward, there's no use in turning around. Whenever we turn around we make it more painful for ourselves and for others who will be offended or angered by our rage, the people who have nothing to do with it.

When you talked about guilt, whom did you have in mind? Is anyone responsible, how much are the “ordinary people” responsible?

We were a minority, in Kosovo's case. I don't know what the situation was in Bosnia and Croatia. I was younger then so I am not competent enough to speak about it. In Kosovo we were a minority, a few thousand Serbs and two million Albanians. People, the civilians were certainly not guilty of anything. Although, both sides are somewhat guilty, spite is a factor as well: “Alright, he

burned a neighbor's house, I'll burn that one's although he's got nothing to do with it," revenge and alike. The Albanian side was doing the same to us. Everything zigzagged, everyone took part, everyone lost something or somebody to a degree in that war. One side should not be blamed exclusively since it's everybody's fault, even mine, although I was thirteen when the war began... And we should share the guilt. If one group started it, the other certainly added fuel to it, the consequences and the guilt, all of it is everybody's. Just like we all participated in the war together, we all should heal from it together. We should all gather and say: "Stop!" since I cannot see where we are headed currently. All this needs to be forgotten in order to begin a 'positive cycle' so our youth and our children who are being borne can be raised in a normal world, just like our children in other European states and in the world are, for the sake of better common future.

What's your view of the future?

Many things will not change in next ten years, in my opinion. We, as people, are not active; the joking stereotype that we are lazy is correct, to an extent. Whatever might be causing it, the rhythm is pretty slow within the endless cycle. As a young man I still hope that it will be better in ten years.

Do you have anything else to say?

I am pleading with all of the people from Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and other places to move forward, to forget everything that happened since those memories are not good for them or for their surroundings.

L. Z.

Darko

(30)

Horgoš/Horgos
economist

Third level of guilt: those who did not turn out to vote

Could you please introduce yourself?

My name is Darko, I am from Kula. I work in Horgos.

What are your wartime experiences or memories of the war and that period?

Since I was born in 1975 I did not partake in the war but I could follow what was going on in my surroundings. My brother took part as a member of the reserves, they picked him up. An interesting event took place when we were seeing him off. Since our father had signed the enlistment and my brother didn't want to go at all, he was hiding, there were arguments at home such as: "why did you sign it?", "you shouldn't have," so the brother had to go. Due to a bureaucratic irregularity, those monkeys who work in the draft board had forgotten to note that he left. Cops came busting in at 4 a.m. notified that he hadn't left, my father walked out in his pajamas, they pushed him aside, flashlights pointing all over the house, I was laying in my bed, they said "who's this?," my father replied "that's the younger one, leave him alone."

When my brother returned... Those were visibly traumatic experiences. He was shaking, he didn't resemble himself, he was going to the garden to smoke all the time, he was crying. He told us that he had seen some dismembered bodies since he hadn't taken part directly in the fighting, he had been in the headquarters where they had been bringing those bodies. That had happened precisely during the Croatian attack on Torjance, that's when twenty five of them from Kula had been killed. It was pretty unpleasant. Secondly, I had a girlfriend who fell in love with some guy from Bosnia and who, I guess under that influence, started to espouse some attitudes, like "the Serbian people should be defended," this and that. I remember already having a totally pacifist attitude then, "oh, come on, that's rubbish, what are you talking about, what's wrong with you?"

Thus, those were all indirect experiences. That's it. I had no family there.

What about today, from ten years' distance? How do you and your family feel nowadays?

I personally have never had a problem with it, that wasn't my war. And when they say that "ours conquered this and that"... Who is ours? They are not mine.

I would divide guilt into three levels, possibly: those who killed – that's the hardest, second – those who voted, and third – those who didn't turn out to vote.



I do not belong to that tribe that is at war with another primitive tribe over there, so that, as far as I am concerned, I have never been a part of it. And, regarding the surroundings, what's being done and what the thoughts are – it's well known, thirty percent of them are still radical.

Do you think that we are heading toward reconciliation?

Well, I don't know what reconciliation means. In my opinion, total reconciliation might be reached only in four or five decades. When children who don't remember the war grow up, and then their children start marrying one another, like it is in Vojvodina⁶⁶ between different peoples. That would be total reconciliation, and this, now, is a sort of coping with the problem. The problems do return a bit... they must not, you know... The human brain is wired in such a manner so that conclusions are reached via the shortest path – Serbs killed someone dear to me, some Serb, a madman, an extremist killed my father, mother, brother – Serbs are bad. And the brain immediately responds with the “Serbs are bad” generalization. That's why the war criminals' arrests are important, the real culprits need to be located.

Is there something that's called the collective guilt?

Well, there is. I would divide guilt into three levels, possibly: those who killed – that's the hardest, second – those who voted, and third – those who didn't turn out to vote. They are now being punished since radicals are in power, for example in Novi Sad. I am not guilty on any of these three levels, I always voted, I have always been a pacifist and had been speaking up against the war and had been convincing the people in my surroundings not to vote for Milošević, that he was evil. Maybe I lacked some activism, I was covering my ass a bit too

⁶⁶ Vojvodina is a province in Serbia. There are more than 26 ethnic groups in Vojvodina. It has six official languages.

much, what could have I done in all that? Maybe I could have been more active, but that's also connected with charisma. A man needs to be charismatic in order to move the masses. But, in any case, some passivity – that's what I could hold against myself. That's it.

Whose responsibility is to initiate the reconciliatory process?

Well, just like I said earlier. Arrest those, sentence them. Thus, the authorities are number one. And then, the apology... What is an apology to anyone who lost something? I don't know. It should happen in any case, but I am not sure how much it would help. Apologize for whom, for me? Well, alright then, that's cool, maybe for my passivity. I don't know, maybe it needs to start with highest instances, and later... I don't know. That process needs time.

Do you think that it has already started?

Passions have calmed down in any case, that's the first step. My approximation is that four or five decades will be needed... I think it has already started, let's say.

How do you view the youth's upbringing? What values are bred into them and do you think that they will honestly, in forty years...

Well, some seeds will probably survive until then, but this first generation that was raised under the influence of impassioned parents will probably be like "Serbs – they're not good" and "Croats – they are evil," and so on. Only the third generation, the children of today's children, will be more normal, under the influence of those less impassioned parents, certainly. Then I can see some mixed marriages already.

Can you define reconciliation? What does it mean to you?

Well, I already told you – that life between people is on that level such is in Vojvodina, that it functions like it – you are a Croat, I am a Rusyn, I don't know, now we'll have babies, or be friends, anything. That's reconciliation for me.

What about dealing with the past?

Well, the truth must be known. I don't know, that's a touchy subject. For example, even in WWII, I am not that familiar with history, how many Hungarians were in Horthy's army or were partisans, maybe a lie can be good sometimes, who knows. Since we were taught in elementary school that there were Hungarian and Russian partisan units, there were also Horthy's, these and those. Now, I don't know whether it was like that, but if I thought that all Hungarians were Horthy's, maybe I would subconsciously see them as bad, I don't know. I have no idea, it's a touchy subject.

What about "this" side?

All those people should redeem themselves by admitting "yeah, we did vote for Milošević," they probably said back then, blinded, "we should, we must, they attacked us, they wanted to expel us," and now, when everything has calmed

down, they are saying “that’s horrible,” others are saying “that’s a photomontage...” I think that every person should do something for his soul. And those women who voted, they always irritated me the most – “Voja⁶⁷ knows how to say it, Voja knows it.” Also, those who didn’t partake, they should also know what was done, they should become aware of it and their responsibility in all of it. And those who didn’t turn out to vote, I view them as stinkers, you had no idea and you were running away, that’s some kind of escapism – “I have no idea what’s happening.”

It was happening nearby, but not to me personally, so I don't know if I am competent to talk about it; neither someone close to me was killed nor did I do anything to anybody else, so that, as far I as I am concerned, I would marry a Croat tomorrow... Or an Albanian.

Who should open their eyes?

Well, the authorities should. Those who are in charge, Nataša Kandić and others should tell the truth – this is what happened, this and that, and not be hampered and harassed. Thus, this happened, and that, from one side and the other, determine the facts precisely. I don’t know how good this is for reconciliation, but it is good for the people’s redemption. Be aware of what you did.

In the current situation, do you view dealing with the past as a duty or as a necessity for some other reason?

As a duty to myself. How can you look at yourself in the mirror when you wake up in the morning? I am guilty for this and that. It’s a duty.

Can you recognize any obstacles?

There are as many as you want! Let’s stay out of politics...

What’s preventing us from reconciling before 2050?

A lot of bad blood has been shed. All of it is still fresh. More time needs to pass before everything. I think that time is the key factor, then the establishment of how many were killed by whom, and how. They should be tried, and sentenced, quickly, and then we can move on. The authorities in Croatia and Serbia are sucking up to the nationalistic public. They are sending them to The Hague with honors. We should distance ourselves from that type of politics. They were bad, now we are doing something different, people support us nowadays – meaning that people are not as stupid as they used to be, they got a bit smarter.

What can an individual do?

An individual can ask himself where he was and what he was doing all those years. To ask himself what he did in ’89, ’90, during the instigation, or what his mental framework was back then, under whose influence. Thus, enter into a kind of introspection, to pass chronologically through the whole road of how it

⁶⁷ Vojislav Šešelj. See footnote on page 34.

developed within, that whole ugly period – starting with '88–'89 until today. And see where he erred. There will be no bad blood if he meets a member of another nationality afterwards. If the individual fled with “you are guilty for this and that,” “you started first,” “you wanted to expel Serbs just like Hitler did,” “Croats are bad,” “Croats had Jasenovac.” Croats, Serbs and Muslims are the same shit, those are primitive tribes. Jasenovac would have happened on the other side if the constellation of historical events had been different, I am convinced of it. And you say “you started it, we had to defend ourselves, etc.” We should return to the beginning and go through all of it again, having this experience.

Should we forget?

Of course not.

Forgive?

Forgive whom? Say, I have nothing to forgive. Or should anyone forgive me anything, I don't know. Now, all my experiences are “from the side.” It was happening nearby, but not to me personally, so I don't know if I am competent to talk about it; neither someone close to me was killed nor did I do anything to anybody else, so that, as far I as I am concerned, I would marry a Croat tomorrow... Or an Albanian.

What will be our common future like?

Common future? Well, in the European Union (*laughter*)! I don't know, some kind of rivalry will always exist: “Dinamo,” “Cibona,” “Partizan,” “Zvezda...”⁶⁸ We'll be similar to Turks and Greeks! That's it, but we'll cooperate, I'll have my Croatian friends and I'll be their friend, and so on. It will be ok, the world is moving for the better (*laughter*). Two hundred years ago a woman that is a Nobel Prize winner used to sit by an oven, so in two hundred more years we won't fight any longer, we'll be smiling, we'll be pretty...

T. G.

⁶⁸ Sport clubs from Croatia and Serbia.

Petrit

(30)

Skopje/Shkup
artist

He – large house, you – little house

I'd like to ask you about the 2001 conflict, how did you feel about it then? And I also would like to know whether you view it as a conflict, a war or a civil war?

Oh, mother, the definition of conflict and war was given by Clausewitz. I wouldn't want to call what happened to us here war. It was something, only God knows what. Some call it a fight for human rights, some call it terrorism, others an invasion from the neighboring country. In any case, there was shooting and that was very bad. Everything was dominated by a kind of, I wouldn't call it real danger, unbelievable psychosis which was a killer.

Fortunately, that's when we were starting the *Live radio*. We started dealing with this topic sometime in November of 2000, not even thinking that something like this could happen. There were periods when the streets of Skopje were empty, while we were situated in Mavrovka, and Mavrovka is a dangerous

place, right? That's where we all used to gather. Although it was uncertain what would happen, division and exchange of territories were being discussed, nothing was certain. We were sure in ourselves and that's how we were managing to escape the psychosis. And that helped us, at least it helped me, personally, to handle the conflict better than some of the others since we didn't fight between ourselves. Macedonians and Albanians, Turks and Serbs, and I don't know whom else we had in the radio station. We didn't accuse one another, this one killed this many, that one that many, you do this, they do that. We were doing what we had been doing our whole lives, studying the situation and

trying to stay mentally healthy within our circles. That's how it was, that's how I felt about the conflict. Although a million things were happening outside I personally played with "Long play." We took part in that peace concert with many of our bands. Even in the start we tried, as humans, to say "hey, what's going on?" and there was another movement, also – DOSTA E!⁶⁹ We gathered, signed the petitions calling for passions to cool, to approach the situation calmly and think more reasonably, but it was obvious that the realm of thought created in politics and in the media was negative already.

I wouldn't want to talk about reasons for war since I am not a person who thinks

Still, there are a large number of people who are still prejudiced, don't do this, don't do that... It happened to me that I couldn't find lodging in Ohrid a year after the conflict since I spoke Albanian.

⁶⁹ Enough is enough!

that violence can be a solution to anything except at the moment when someone attacks you and you have to necessarily defend yourself and save your life somehow. But, you cannot resolve things with violence, it's difficult.

Can you still see the consequences of what happened to us during the conflict?

Yes, I definitely can. I am an optimist regarding this. I think that Macedonia is recovering surprisingly fast from everything that happened. I don't know if that impression of mine is due to the world I live in, in such surroundings. We played in clubs even during the war, although it was in front of three to five people, since people were afraid to go out, but we kept pushing, simply to stay clean and healthy ourselves – in order not to see a twisted and fearful face when you look in the mirror in the morning, but a somewhat normal person. We are recovering, we are recovering fast, but something else is scaring me – that there are still people who are slowing everything down and who want to give everything a kind of ethno dimension. Simply, people who never got used to “my personal opinion” still exist here, most of the people, I am not saying all since there are, thank God, wonderful, normal people who don't deal with that but with life and the daily routine. Still, there are a large number of people who are still prejudiced, don't do this, don't do that... It happened to me that I couldn't find lodging in Ohrid a year after the conflict since I spoke Albanian. It was clear why it happened. There are still people like this, unfortunately, in those high structures who decide our fates directly or indirectly. That's what scares me. I am not afraid of the ordinary people's behavior, those who are called ‘masses’ by the politicians. ‘The masses’ are, I must disappoint our esteemed politicians, much healthier than they are. That's why a war didn't happen, although some who spurred it on – they wanted to see Tetovo, Skopje, Debar, Strumica on fire – wanted it to happen. There were some structures which desired it, but the people turned out be *kurnaz*,⁷⁰ they felt them, or as the Ohridians would say: *Gi sumi*?⁷¹ and didn't let them do what they had intended.

Let me ask, since we are talking about the people...

There are, to this day, this and that kind of veterans, they want, they ask, then they block roads, they want jobs, they were in the reserves, they fought in the ONA,⁷² they want their pensions, they want to be treated as war veterans, war invalids... I don't care about all that.

Look, there are things that must be resolved in any conflict. Thus, those people who took part in that war, or conflict, must be socialized again, since if he was shooting or at the front or faced death, then he is suffering consequences and

⁷⁰ Wise, sharp, shrewd, canny, astute (Turkish).

⁷¹ “Have you figured them out?”

⁷² The National Liberation Army, also known as the Macedonian UÇK (KLA). See footnote on page 131.

the state needs to take care of him. Because he will make trouble today, or, if not today, then tomorrow just like in million other cases. A Lion⁷³ came into a bar, got drunk, took a bomb out... If that man hadn't gone through that phase when he was exposed to blood and killing... Those are not the normal situations which the mind can endure; you can feign madness – yes, I was in the war and am normal now. That's not how it goes. There's something that stays in the subconscious which must be healed, be treated. The state must care for those people, find them jobs, give them homes, and make an effort to help them go through recovery more easily.

What about “ordinary” citizens?

I think that the citizenry that lived in the so called crisis regions must be worked with a lot, because of mistrust. But, that mistrust existed from the beginning. I mean, it's really stupid to say: We lived so nicely. Prejudices always existed here, the other has always been viewed with... And this needs to be worked on, a lot of work must be done... There are two kinds of activism: the activism that is not pretentious, I would call it the daily activism. It shouldn't be only concerts, caravans or seminars. That is also good, but there should be another type of activism – a little event that would draw people closer daily.

Reconciliation... We don't have to organize a festival, have five hundred people show up and then... They are reconciled. That's not the way. Another kind of cooperation is needed; we need something that happens every day, which happens, that what our English friends call reconciliation.

It's not something you do all of the sudden – bam and it's over, we are reconciled. Some kind of process should occur, people should be in touch daily, to see it as something completely normal. What, do you need to sell them reconciliation? Or tell the merchants downtown, where Macedonians, Turks, Albanians, Bosnians work together, how to live together? A conflict took place, people downtown live together to this day, their needs are intertwined, they are neighbors. If nothing else, the street must be washed, the street light needs to be replaced, problems occur – someone's shop is broken into, wait, let's get organized. Whether they wanted or not, they must cooperate, firstly they will have to, later they'll want to. It will be much easier to do business with a pal, a neighbor, than with I don't know whom.

Who should work on this process?

Everybody, starting from street cleaners to the President, all of us. Those dudes on TV, who lead parties, states, who give statements which indirectly, between the lines, dissipate hatred get on my nerves a lot. Do people think about whether a peasant from Sipkovica understands that statement, a guy who has completed four grades of elementary schooling and has never entered the understanding of politics and state rule. Our political elite is very immature and

⁷³ Lions - former Macedonian special police unit.

is not weighing its words, does not know what to do with itself. Those dudes are running today's politics for today. Not even today's for tomorrow, that's the problem. They are trying to hide their tails and sneak from one election to another. I'll say it again, these people have them figured out and are already listening to it as some kind of hurdy-gurdy, but some of it always remains and returns as a kind of neurosis.

Having so many different peoples in one place automatically means that a part of one people will hate another people. That's a definition, you can't have a place where everyone lives happily. It's not like that even in Switzerland.

Whose responsibility is for everything that's happening to us, in your opinion?

The responsibility was the necessity to think about problems before they occurred. Simply, and this might sound like I am taking a side, Albanians had a problem in that state, in that SFRY they constantly had some problems. Even during the Old Man's⁷⁴ reign their problems were kind of softened with *ad hoc* solutions, but the Old Man knew how to manage it well. But, when he died, there was no one that could take over that process. Everything boiled down to – now it's not the time, it's not the time yet. On the other side, that created dissatisfaction for Albanians. And every time some human rights were recognized, the other's political structures concluded – alright, look at this, they took this now, they'll take that later, tomorrow they'll take our state away, thus creating a group of dissatisfied Albanians who were shouting: What is this? Macedonians also had dissatisfied people: Look, they'll take away everything, the University tomorrow, they'll ask for half a state day after tomorrow, they'll secede, who knows what they'll do and all that. Thus, it was blown out of proportion, God knows what was made: "These Macedonians will destroy us, they'll assimilate us," while the others were saying: "Albanians will destroy us." This power, stopped by no one, was smoldering the whole time while obtaining votes in elections. Foreigners who arrive after it, they'll sit down and say: "It's alright now, it's nice now, we'll live nicely together," and they were eating crumpets at political rallies until yesterday. And they are going to be sitting together tomorrow, closing deals, driving semis and doing business. These things are happening even today. These are the people who thumped their chests at rallies the most. Petko⁷⁵ will sit down with Hashim,⁷⁶ no problem, if it's a good deal we'll be like brothers, we'll barbecue together.

Can you recognize any guilt?

I cannot recognize any in people, since people do not generally have much say in what happens to them. They decide whether they go on a vacation or

⁷⁴ "Stari" – one of Tito's nicknames.

⁷⁵ Common Macedonian name.

⁷⁶ Common Albanian name.



not – most won't go since they have no money, what they'll do today and what tomorrow, how to come up with a few denars to survive. The guilt is exclusively the politicians', the media's and of the people who wanted to become part of the establishment. We are talking about the criminals who made their money, but they also want to gain social status. We are talking about the people who are spending their lives running around politicians wanting to become politicians themselves. And then they become greater Catholics than the Pope; if Petko is using nationalistic vocabulary, his little followers will use it more, since they need to prove to him that they are following his ideas consistently.

Do you think that we, as people, bear some responsibility since we allowed them to manipulate us?

Well, maybe a little, but I think that normal people managed to do more or less what they could have done. We didn't come out saying: no more, we'll have no more of this, but fear is greater than courage in such situations. We even played on the square, but nobody cared whether we thought there would be peace or not. A lot of people showed up for the "Rock for Peace" concert, so you'd think there was no way war would happen, you saw how many people showed up. But, unfortunately, three or four thousand showed up, but there are thirty of forty thousand who are yelling: See how that one was shot, they'll come to my door tomorrow.

Especially for the people who live in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Kicevo, Struga, it must have been much harder for them than for us. We who live in the capital didn't even feel the war. We felt the wartime psychosis but not the war itself. But, where bullets and shells were flying by people's heads... There are

consequences. Well, if you are a formed person and you know what's happening to you, you go for a treatment, treatment for yourself, primarily. But, not everyone can do that.

Please tell me in the end, what are your predictions, what will be happening to us in Macedonia within the next few years?

Oh, sweet mother, if you had asked me this question a year ago I would have said that everything would be great. I don't know any more. I don't believe there will be a conflict, that's the least likely option. But, there will certainly be those people who will be riding the horse of nationalism, seeking their way to power, to money. There will certainly be these people and those people who'll get stuck on it. They usually look for followers amid the poorer classes, amid people who are moneyless and to whom it's easy to explain that they are poor since "an Albanian, or a Macedonian" is responsible for it. An Albanian will say: "They all work for the state while we are breaking our backs in Switzerland, Germany... It's their fault." A Macedonian will say: "Go to Kicevo, Tetovo and see how large their houses are." And that man cleaned bathrooms for twenty years to build that house. But, it's enough just to say it: he – large house, you – little house. Where did he get the money from? Actually, drugs, there are many who build houses from the money made off drugs.

I am a pessimist, in a way, and not so much because of the incidents. Some people will always push nationalistic ideas, nationalities, ideas, there are even state structures who are led by the idea of a Super Albanian, or a Super Macedonian, which is dangerous and should be rooted out as soon as it starts.

I am honestly scared of crime. We are becoming a criminal state. State, private property, where everyone can do anything they want as long as they have the money to get out of it later. Criminals who have warrants out are walking freely to this day. I saw some of them sitting with cops at the same table.

Yes, it's hard, but what should we do for it to become better?

What do we need to do? They need to come to their senses since nothing can be done from the bottom up, only a revolution can, and we don't need that, at least personally I don't. I have some anarchist streaks and I am still claiming that state is the most evil thing that has ever happened to man and that it shouldn't exist at all, such as it is. Unfortunately, I cannot see what we need in those who lead us.

If you still hate each other, maybe the same thing will happen five years from now. Thus, work on prevention. We don't work on prevention. Unfortunately, we

Thus, those who manage politics and the media, newspapers, TV stations, should think daily, take a look in the mirror and ask themselves: what can I do to make this state better, and what should I not do that would only fill my pockets? Do something, you have an opportunity, you do have it now. Maybe you haven't had it earlier, but you have it now. You have responsibility. Two million people are watching you. You should work on that.

are not in that period when we can work on prevention. We can work with the youth, with children, but prevention... There is no need for preventive work with grownups, but for healing.

Thus, those who manage politics and the media, newspapers, TV stations, should think daily, take a look in the mirror and ask themselves: what can I do to make this state better, and what should I not do that would only fill my pockets? Do something, you have an opportunity, you do have it now. Maybe you haven't had it earlier, but you have it now. You have responsibility. Two million people are watching you. You should work on that.

L. G.



M.

(50)

Karlovac

M.S. in

economics

We have things to be ashamed of

Do you still feel the war's consequences, and, if so, to what extent?

We all still feel them and we'll feel them for a long time. Many people were killed, wounded, maimed. Many homes, other objects and property were demolished, many people got divorced, many friendships were ruined, ties were broken between people, families were split, many changed their names and surnames, faith and nationality in order to survive. Many lost their jobs since they were of another faith or nationality. Within the supposedly legal framework, and under the auspices of the then ruling party in Croatia, the Croatian Democratic Union, the so-called transformation and privatization were executed, which are just other names for the biggest robbery and plunder of extremely valuable assets produced on the territory of the Republic of Croatia in the last forty five years, that is between 1945 and 1990, although everyone was saying that the former system was not good.

What needs to happen so that those consequences can be at least alleviated?

We would need a good magician, much better than David Copperfield, to improve these conditions. It would resemble an attempt to push toothpaste back into its tube, which is practically impossible. From everything I have already said it is obvious that such a large number of problems cannot be solved quickly. Certainly we cannot return to 1990, but we could overcome even these problems if we approached them in a one-by-one or step-by-step manner. But, time is needed, a lot of it. And who has time to wait? Long term, we are all dead! It's possible to solve the created problems, if not for the current generations then for the subsequent, by developing civilized life, democracy and civil society in the former Yugoslavian territory.

Is reconciliation the solution?

Reconciliation is the acceptance of "our" and "their" true roles during the last decade and a half. Just like love, war needs two parties as well. Or, a single dinar [coin] in hand cannot jingle by itself. Reconciliation is, kind of, heightening the awareness of "our" negative and "their" positive roles. It is accepting the fact that "ours" did bad things as well, committed crimes and that we have things to be ashamed of. That needs to be realized and openly said by every in-

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dividual. That it was not done in their name and that they didn't ask for it. Only in such manner can we "get rid" of the collective guilt, while those who think that they can build "successful" careers on murdering the poor, elders, women and children will be exposed. They are the brave people from the rear who have

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never even tasted the frontline. When all peoples who took part in wars do that, when they condemn their own bad guys, that's when we can talk about reconciliation.

What else is needed for reconciliation?

Will and strong desire for reconciliation are needed, it's necessary to examine the current situation and realize that we are neighbors, that we live one by another and that it is, appears to be, our destiny, and that we'll live together again one fine day in united Europe. We'll travel without borders, just like we did in SFRY. That's when maybe even the dogs of war will realize that they chose the harder way in the nineties.

Who should work on reconciliation?

We should all start with ourselves. You also have civil political parties, all politicians, the international community, but it mostly needs to be done by the nongovernmental, non-political, nonprofit organizations, institutions, civil society organizations and alike. Time and broader help are needed to reach reconciliation. The antifascist WWII veterans' experiences should be utilized.

What are your fears regarding reconciliation?

I have no particular fears regarding it, but I know that people generally will doubt whether the other side is serious about it or if it's just declarative; one thing is said, another is thought, a third is being done. We can fight that fear easily if the other side's concrete steps follow its story, that's how we can be convinced. But, we also have to practically show to the other side that we mean business. We should keep in mind that, in this kind of situation, trust is won through a lot of effort, but it's easily lost.

Do you think that people in your country are ready for reconciliation?

I am not that convinced that people in Croatia, and I mean the majority, want reconciliation and that they are ready for it. You can see that in the authorities' attitudes toward ethnic minorities, especially Serbs. They are still discriminated against in all aspects: return, renewal, documents, property rights, at least one person from every Serbian house is charged with a so-called war crime. Only a few people have been sentenced to very light sentences for crimes against Serbs. There are no jobs for them, they are publicly attacked, etc. You can hear direct statements all over the media that reconciliation is undesirable since it's still too early.

Do you think that people need a leader's apology? What are general fears regarding reconciliation in the country you live in?

A leading politician's apology would be welcome, but time is needed as well. Primarily, we should work on raising the group's awareness of the fact that the members of our nationality did stupid things and that we should apologize. They need to be persuaded that the situation is not simple and one-sided at all, or black-and-white, that the war between Serbia and Croatia wasn't an act of aggression and that the war in SFRY was a civil war. There were elements of aggression, but it was multisided. For example, aggression can be discussed only after the 15th of January, 1992, when Croatia was recognized internationally, but the Croatian Army also went to Bosnia and Herzegovina during the conflict between Croats and Muslims. Further, Croatia allowed NATO planes to fly over its territory during the bombing of Serbia and Montenegro, which was also an act of aggression according to international law. Thus, the members of one's own nationality need to be made conscious of the fact that mothers, wives and sisters were covered in black on the other side also. It seems to me that the Croatian people are afraid of what the nationalists were scaring them with and managed to make them afraid – the idea of Greater Serbia, Serbian domination and exploitation, and that they still support the nineties' slogan: a Croatian wallet in the Croatian pocket, a Croatian gun on the Croatian shoulder and every Croat on his own. In many documents you can see and hear people say that they don't care about the bad economic situation but what's important is that they have their own 'Croatian state and that they will, if they have to, even eat grass. So it's no wonder that Tuđman called them the small-toothed cattle. I don't eat grass nor will I ever eat it, and I have no use of the state, quite the contrary.

Let's return to reconciliation. What can the "ordinary people" do in this field?

I am afraid that they can't do much, since no one asks them anything anyway and there's no will to shed light on the events from fifteen years ago. Politicians only confuse them with pre-election campaigns. No success can be reached until they realize themselves that they have been used by the political elite for its own benefit. We, the people, should interpret what really happened, what the reasons were for the fall of Yugoslavia, its causes and consequences, who was involved in it and in which way and such. That's the very important role of the civil society institutions.

Should the countries which were at war approach reconciliation differently? Which country should initiate that process more strongly?

All countries should firstly comprehend the situation objectively and clean their front yards first. Show good will, learn from mistakes, accept its own share of the guilt and not only accuse the others. When one side does it, no matter which, the others will follow its example. Only, who will muster the courage

and start cleaning his or her front yard? I don't know who will make that step. It seems to me that no side is ready for it. It seems that extremists and radicals in all those countries are still usurping the public voice and that the politicians and the authorities are still afraid of them, in a way. It's not important who will make the first step toward reconciliation, what's important is that it happens. Maybe it would be easier for a state whose consciousness and democracy are at a higher level. It's hard to determine which one that is.

Thus, the members of one's own nationality need to be made conscious of the fact that mothers, wives and sisters were covered in black on the other side also..

What will change for you once that happens? What will change for your country?

Reconciliation is not a one-time event – here, we have reconciled and different rules and different relations guide us from now on. It's a lengthy process, there will always be people who haven't reconciled. And, if it happened, that would be a relief for all of us in all of different aspects of

life. Minorities in other countries would have the most to gain from it, Serbs in Croatia for example, or Croats in Serbia. The economic situation would develop and improve in those countries, unemployment would decrease and the standard of living would rise. The cooperation between countries of the former Yugoslavia is like a little school, praxis and preparation for relations within the EU. Those countries need to learn how to behave one toward another and how they'll have to behave once in the EU.

That's the future. How should we handle the past?

We cannot change the past, so it needs to be accepted as it is and critically analyzed with the goal of learning from it and not repeating personal mistakes. Nonetheless, no generation of humankind has managed to do that. History shows repeated mistakes. The guilty ones that caused evil should be individually punished. That should be a warning to other peoples and to your own people as well. Maybe we should learn from the Germans who stop any appearance of fascism at its root.

Is forgiveness the solution?

We must forgive, but never forget. Only so that a similar thing doesn't happen again. If we forget, a new Hitler, concentration camps, Jasenovac, Srebrenica, Vukovar, Skabrnja, Pakracka Poljana, Gospic, Karlobag could appear again...⁷⁷

Who bears the guilt or its biggest part?

It's not only one side's. Not a single side came out of the former Yugoslavian conflicts innocent. Every side is stained. Slovenia and Croatia seceded by force of arms while Serbia, who was represented by Slobodan Milošević's (mis)deeds, didn't care much about Yugoslavia either. All attacked Ante Marković, the last

⁷⁷ Places of war crimes and massacres.

cohesive force of the SFRY and brought down his reform. Tuđman was annoyed by the surplus of Serbs in the Republic of Croatia and Milošević by the lack of Serbs in Kosovo, so their agreement in Karadjordjevo⁷⁸ sealed the fate of former Yugoslavian citizens. Alija Izetbegović⁷⁹ has certainly given his contribution. These are just a few brief points since it's impossible to answer such a complex question here.

Is guilt collective?

It's hard to talk about collective guilt because it actually doesn't exist. It is individual. However, the political elite and nationalists managed to mobilize and homogenize most of their countries' citizens with regard to some doubtful ideas. How Tuđman's politics took Croatia is known as well as where Milošević's took Serbia. But, they were legally and legitimately elected as their states' leading men. If we follow that logic we could blame the voters themselves for their current status. Croatia is economically and politically ruined, while, as far as I know, the situation in Serbia is even worse.

What's your responsibility?

I have already explained what the responsibility of the "ordinary person" was, the voter, if we consider it within a broader context. I have personally turned out to vote in all of the elections and have always voted for options on the left, for peace, coexistence, brotherhood and unity, equality. Those are the ideas I have always fought for. But, the majority wanted the other ones, there were too few of us. Throughout my activities I have always been dedicated to objectivity, exactness, calming tensions, but the new authorities noticed me and fired me in November of 2001 and thus disabled me to act any longer.

What is the "ordinary man's" responsibility, generally?

It can consist of the fact that they didn't think with their heads, have allowed themselves to be misled and have voted for promises of a better tomorrow. That's why they fell into the cycle of nationalists and nationalism. Because they believed that Serbs or Croats were the cause of their problems, without realizing that they were being used and destroyed by their political elites. But, in a country that has a large percentage of illiteracy and only elementary school graduates, where the national TV is almost mandatory... You wouldn't expect more.

Who are the war's victims?

Everyone is a victim except for the political elite. But, these political elites will pay the price for everything bad and intentional they have done sooner or later

⁷⁸ Karadjordjevo is a place where many secret meetings between the Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević took place during the war.

⁷⁹ Alija Izetbegović (1925 – 2003) was the Bosniak leader during and after the war. He was the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when it declared independence.

because of the natural balance. All citizens are victims in a civil war.

**Are people partially responsible for their susceptibility to manipulation?
Could they have resisted it?**

People in the Republic of Croatia have been very susceptible to manipulation. An especially negative role was played by the Croatian TV stations. Hate speech was a common occurrence which many experienced. The people who watch and listen to one side only will act on someone else's wish, which was the goal. People weren't aware that they were being manipulated, but that was an easily accomplishable goal considering people's generally bad educational background and the political support for the media's manipulation. The media doled out information in doses according to need and thus led people into delusion. The people did or did not do particular things based on that information so that it's mostly their fault that they were manipulated. They could have resisted, but the overall circumstances were not helping them, they were not aware that they were being manipulated in their own name.

What do you expect from the future?

Much time will be needed for tensions to calm, just like after WWII. The number of mixed marriages was increasing after 1945, more and more people were declaring themselves as Yugoslavians. I believe that something similar will occur after this conflict, in twenty or thirty years. Perhaps even earlier, since I believe that we'll be a part of united Europe. I assume that everyone who wants will return to their homes then, that new generations will handle some problems better and that some kind of reconciliation will be reached after a certain time period.

Do you have anything to add?

This topic is extremely wide so it's hard to analyze it concisely within a normal framework. Your questions are very complex, a scientific paper could be made out of each one of them. To conclude: reconciliation is a process which is ongoing and which will last for a long time. The upcoming generations will have to take on this burden. The international community's assistance is necessary. Crimes were committed on both sides, and it's not that important who will make the decisive step forward first. What's important is that there is a will to reconcile between peoples and political authorities. Religious communities and civil institutions must play a significant role. Sports and culture first break through ice and that provides hope. There will always be people who are dissatisfied, but it seems that their number is decreasing. Long live reconciliation! I am not bothered when they call me a Yugo nostalgic person. Nostalgia is a common occurrence when you long for something good that is no more. That's why I would recommend "The Lexicon of YU Mythology" to everyone!

E. P.

I am afraid that we lack tolerance and dialog, and we need them

The war began just when you were entering advanced age. Our civil war occurred just as you were to start the quiet life of a retiree. How do you currently feel if you remember all of it?

I feel bad, really bad. It was an immeasurably hard period of life which we couldn't have even imagined. It was a nightmare coming true. I still feel deeply in my soul the consequences of the nineties' events, my thoughts are still intensely with the people who lost their lives in that war of ours. I also think about the real invalids who, in the true sense of the word, fight for survival. Those wounds will never heal.

What is reconciliation for you?

Reconciliation is needed. We should offer the reconciliatory hand, but we should never forget, no way. Good will and the strength within a man's soul are necessary to forgive all of the misdeeds that took place.

How can we reach reconciliation?

We should start believing first. I believe in a better tomorrow, I believe that not all people were criminals and that not all did evil to others. I believe that they were helpless and that they couldn't have changed the evil's reign as individuals.

We should start believing first. I believe in a better tomorrow, I believe that not all people were criminals and that not all did evil to others. I believe that they were helpless and that they couldn't have changed the evil's reign as individuals.

You agree that reconciliation must be worked on. Which other steps should be taken, besides having good faith?

People themselves, all of us, should gather strength and will to find a common language and to head out together toward a better tomorrow.

What are your fears regarding reconciliation? Are you scared of dealing with the past?

I am afraid that we lack tolerance and dialog, and we need them. Ordinary people can contribute to reconciliation with tolerance, communication, dialogue, meetings and talks.

Do you think that people have the strength, that they are ready for reconciliation? How much can they contribute to that process?

Ordinary people are individually generally powerless, but they have the strength and the will to improve everyone's lot. People are, finally, always ready for for-

givenness and reconciliation, but they need time for it, more strength and faith in a better tomorrow.

What benefits will you and your people enjoy when relations are completely normalized?

A new light will shine for us, all of us in this region would breathe more easily. I think that we can and that we must cooperate and find common points which would bring about improvement for everyone.

Which moves should be made by your country, and which should be expected from the country your country fought with? Who should lead the process of reconciliation more intensely, in your opinion?

We, Croats, must forgive, while they have to show that they are sorry for all of the crimes they committed against us. Life itself will take care of forgiveness, since normal people cannot live alone and in hatred.

How should we treat the past? How should we deal with it?

The past is a part of us, we must not forget it, we have to remain a part of it and not run away from it. We must not forget it in any way since it's the future's guiding light.

Do you think that guilt is one side's only?

Two are always needed for a fight or war, but one is always more guilty than the other.



Can guilt be individualized, or is it collective?

It seems that it is collective, since people's leaders caused the collective madness and led people in a wrong direction.

Do you feel personal responsibility?

I am an ordinary person who partook in the war psychologically, but I don't feel responsible for a single bad move made during the war. And our people's guilt is that we weren't more expedient with decision-making. We lived too long in brotherhood and unity, and then we suddenly had little time to comprehend what was happening at the beginning of the nineties.

Were there any situations where even an "ordinary man" could have reacted and thus reduce his own part of the responsibility, within his area of possible action?

We could have done little, we were mostly powerless, living in fear that the worst could happen to us, as well.

Who's the victim of all that happened, in your opinion?

All of us, all of the ordinary people who committed no crimes.

What are your predictions for the future regarding this conversation?

Both love and hatred have their ups and downs, so we should believe that we'll start climbing toward the top of love and tolerance, even we who were directly in war.

What would you like to conclude this conversation with?

Let God guard us from all evils and wars and let Him bring peace, happiness and prosperity to all of us.

E. P.

M.

(37)

Subotica/
Szabadka
el. engineer

Everyone thinks that he is the victim and others are guilty

Could you please introduce yourself?

Yes, of course. I was born in Loznica, I am thirty seven years old, currently unemployed, I completed the College of Electrical Engineering here in Loznica, where I currently reside. That's it, what else... I live, but I don't work!

Do you have any wartime experiences?

Yes, I do. Actually, no direct involvement, but indirect. I received a draft card for each war that was fought on our territory. While I was studying I was called up when the war began in Croatia, or, actually, when it began in Slovenia and then in Croatia, I wasn't called up for the Bosnian war. I was also called up for this last one with NATO.

Did you respond to all those call-ups?

Yes, I responded to all of them. Actually, I tried to evade on account of my studies in the beginning. However, that didn't help much since they came here and sent me the draft card, I went, responded every time. I was in Loznica when all that in Slovenia started, we were there for some forty days, getting ready, where we would go, what we would do, what was happening, we got winter uniforms in the middle of a summer, some got skis, that's when you saw what was happening, what they were intending to do, where we had to go... And that's when all that happened here, people rebelled in Loznica when we were supposed to head out and that's when it was all stopped and we ended up not going. No, pardon me, that happened regarding Croatia. Regarding Slovenia, people just gathered and they let us go, nothing happened. And, then, for Croatia, we were here, had some drills, a few times crossed to Bosnia, marched a few times, returned, that lasted for some forty days and then they let us go. Afterward we were called up again when that war began, I went and was in the barracks, and when I was about to go my mom sent a request for discharge since my father was already on the front and my brother was also in the military, in Croatia. I was discharged then, I didn't go. That group of mine went somewhere to Slavonia,⁸⁰ they spent a month, a month and a half there, returned, I came for my studies, again and so on... I reported for service in Subotica later thinking I would not be called up there, but they started to do it regularly. And, then, during the bombing. Truthfully, I spent my whole time on *salaši*.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Slavonia is a region in eastern Croatia.

What was the dominant disposition in your setting when the war began?

The disposition was one hundred percent antiwar. Thus, no one was in the mood for those things, they even stopped us when we headed off. We formed a column which was who knows how many kilometers long... on trucks and with weapons... and that's when people heard what was happening, where we were heading off to, and that's when they stopped us... Nothing was organized, they came out onto the streets, the whole Loznica gathered, they stopped us, halted the column, we could not pass, and then the negotiations took place: "folks, step aside, we have to go there," a lot of agonizing scenes occurred, people laid in front of tires so that we could not proceed. The negotiations lasted for some time, well, certainly for half a day, and then that drive was abandoned, they sent us back and we all went to our homes right away, all of it was a bust. After fifteen or twenty days they called us up again on the radio; all who had been there had to report, to show up again. And we reported again, I don't know whether all of us did, and we had some drills, mostly in Serbia. There were one or two marches, a bit to Bosnia and back. And, when it was time to go to real battles, I was discharged and came here, I hadn't been there, but my brother and father had been...

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What's the disposition like in Loznica nowadays?

Now? As if the war hadn't happened. People don't talk about it anymore, they live normally. A lot of people from Bosnia had been coming to Loznica for work, even earlier. Ok, they don't come here that much anymore, but if they did – everything would still be the same. As if the war didn't happen, people act the same, just the same.

Is dealing with the past discussed?

Well, less and less. People have turned to their worries and problems, conditions in the country, unemployment, more people pay attention to that. Alright, when they show something on TV the memories do come back a bit, but, what do I know, I can see that nobody won anything here. If the people were asked – certainly none of it would have happened. But, someone incited the people, a bit with propaganda, actually, not a bit, propaganda had a lot to do with it.

Who is that "someone"?

Well, the authorities, those who answer for it, those who should answer for it

⁸¹ Farms in Vojvodina.

and those who don't answer for it, who were prevented from it, death prevented them. Those ones cooked up all of it. A lot of Muslims went with me to high school. I had no idea what a Muslim was then. So, I was growing up in such a setting, that's how I was brought up, I knew that there were Muslims, but what they were and how they were different – I had no idea.

I was growing up in such a setting, that's how I was brought up, I knew that there were Muslims, but what they were and how they were different – I had no idea. There were also Muslims, Croats, Slovenes in the military in the beginning after I joined. The difference was in, I don't know, speech, accentuation, language, for Slovenes and Macedonians, but I could not distinguish any other differences. And then all of it started happening, boiling, the dissemination of propaganda. Only then did I find out who and what a Serb was, and what a Croat and a Muslim were.

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Is guilt individual or collective?

It is certainly not collective, while individual – yes, a certain number of persons', probably not a large number of them, who were in power then. Ok, when war begins people act differently. When you experience something like a misfortune to someone in your family, then the person cannot think like he thought up to that point, then he is moved by emotions, then propaganda does its thing, then everyone is ready to do something he would not have done up to that point, because I know how I was experiencing all of it when the war began, and then you see some murders,

heads chopped off, one had something done to him, another something else, then you hear one side only, you can't hear anything from the other, then you pick that side, normally. There were certainly those who committed crimes on all sides and a large number, too, but whether all are guilty and responsible, that's untrue. The guilt is certainly not collective.

Do you think that the process of dealing with the past is going well here?

I think not, all of it is still slow. It's being shown a bit, they just showed Srebrenica. Who knows, maybe ours even wouldn't show it, but... All of it goes very slowly, we considered everything in a one-sided way, as it probably was on the other sides as well – what Croats show to their people and Muslims to theirs, that's probably the same everywhere. Only our victims were shown here. There were victims everywhere and it's normal that everyone who has committed crimes has to answer for them.

What is dealing with the past for you?

Well, so it doesn't repeat itself ever again. What happened, happened, and is not to happen again, since it was to no one's benefit, war brought nothing good to anyone, except for a few individuals, war profiteers, there are those in every war, but no one lives better than how we used to live before. Maybe Slovenes do, they finished it all quickly and went on their way, and regarding the others, I guarantee that they all lived better earlier than they live nowadays. I know that I lived better, much better than I do now.

You mean before the war?

Yes, before the war. I had no worries, I didn't have to think about how I would feed myself, let alone how I will start a family, feed it, I barely even think about that.

Do you feel some responsibility?

Well, I don't know... Such was the time, I had to enlist, if I hadn't enlisted I would have been arrested, I would certainly have been court-martialed and who knows how I would have been sanctioned. I enlisted since it was, like, my duty – in the military you swear an oath and you solemnly declare by something that you'll also do it. The time came to enlist, and I enlisted when I was called up. Many people enlisted, out of fear, of course. Now, there were volunteers there, who... Propaganda made him a volunteer and that he thinks it's proper that he goes over there and fights for who knows which reasons, to kill and get killed. It's likely a large number of those people who went voluntarily realized later what was happening. They would probably think differently now, certainly, God forbid it happens again.

What do you mean when you say “propaganda”?

I mean the media, TV, radio, press. Thus, everything that was happening at that time and what occupied everyone – who did what was being watched, no one was working, they all watched TV, what's happening there and what here.

How much are the media currently objective, in your opinion?

They are more objective, but not as much as they should be. In Loznica, for example, still... I watch cable TV here, I have Croatian and Bosnian stations in Loznica, they all view it from their side, everyone thinks that he's the victim and others are guilty. There are those movements here which don't want to prove but to show that not just one side is the victim or two or three, but that all of us are victims and all of us are responsible for what happened. We are also certainly guilty, but much less than those few people...

What do you think, when we speak of peoples, or the former republics and current states, are there those which are guilty more or less, and smaller or greater victims?

Well, what do I know? There probably are, but who can prove that now? We

don't know the real truth to this day, and who knows how many more years have to pass before we find it out. Maybe we'll never find out. Every war's victor is the one who writes the history and you study it as the truth. Now, whether that happened or not, who knows? I can talk about what I know, what I experienced, what my brother experienced on the front... He was in the regular army and he went to Croatia, he was on the front where they fought and where people were getting killed, and then Muslims attacked their convoy when they were retreating from Bosnia. The convoy's passage was secured, it was agreed that they would retreat peacefully from the Croatian territory, they were attacked and many got killed there. My brother's friend died next to him. Now, if you consider that, if I only consider that or my brother who lived through it, consequently he'll have the picture or impression that it's those others' fault. He knows what happened to him, doesn't know about many other cases, what happened either on ours or on the Croatian side. Thus, it happened on all sides. When war begins it carries a person off, that person starts thinking much, much differently from how that person thought up to that point. You try to survive then, keep yourself alive, save your family, your friends. If something happens to anyone, then a person loses control and it's hard to bring that person back to his senses.

What is reconciliation for you?

Reconciliation? Well, it will not happen here for a while. People will not be able to forget the victims. The one who hasn't felt it on his own skin is the one who will forget. The one who felt it on his own skin will need much more time for it to pass, who knows, maybe even a few generations will have to pass before it can be forgotten.

Reconciliation? We should work, cooperate in business, in culture. That which existed earlier will not definitely occur again, but each one of us has to live for oneself and cooperate. That's it...

What about "ordinary people"?

Ordinary people? Well, I don't know. Well, honestly, I am talking about all of it, but so many things have happened that even I don't believe in many of them. I, for example, wouldn't attempt to visit Croatia alone, still, I couldn't. I told my sister and my brother-in-law; they come from Switzerland so it's much better if they go through Croatia. But, if I think more, could I go with my children, who knows what kind of extremists are there and what can happen. Who guarantees safe passage to him? I mean, they pass, people travel, they come here from Croatia, nothing happens to anybody, our people go there, but, still... I think that there's still something in the air that separates us, unfortunately. Now, how much time will have to pass before people forget, for it to settle again – I really don't know.

What do you think, who should carry the reconciliatory process, dealing with the past? Who should initiate it?

All should initiate it, but the greatest role should be politicians' again, since all of them are in the media, they are present, we watch and listen to them every day. What could I do, where can I appear? If anywhere, I could say something on a radio station or on a small TV station, but that lasts for a day and is forgotten the next. Those who are daily on TV or in the newspapers can do much more, and I don't mean all of them, but they can do much more due to the media's nature.

Could we reconcile if we don't deal with the past?

It would be very hard. We all must say who it was, have the culprits answer for it. Everyone who is guilty, from all sides, must answer for his deeds. As long as a person is free, and he did those things, and is protected by this or that one, there cannot be reconciliation. Thus, all have to end up where they belong.

Are there any other obstacles on the road to reconciliation?

Reconciliation, when and if it happens at all... But, it still won't be like it used to, for sure. Many people will deliberate if they can enter into marriage with someone of another nationality, many more will think about it, and do think about, than before. Such were our surroundings, not as multiethnic as Vojvodina's, there were people of other nationalities but not as many, no attention was given to whom you would marry, who was of which faith, nationality, whom you liked – that was what you had. Well, it's a bit different now since everyone has experienced something ugly in those wars, many marriages failed precisely due to the fact that husbands and wives were of different faiths. Many children were left without a mother or a father, so I would not easily enter marriage with someone of a different nationality as I would have done it before the war – for objective reasons. Let what happened to us never occur again! I hope it won't.

What's our future like?

Ouch, it surely isn't pretty. Many more years have to pass. We need to change our mentality first, and a lot of time is needed for that to happen. This country needs to be rebuilt after so many wars, after so much ruin, and a lot of time is needed. I don't think it will get any better within next ten years. It will remain just as it is currently. I don't see a better future for us in a while. The line is: you're on your own. That's how it is here now. No one will help you if you don't help yourself. No one will give you anything, no one will remember anything, many people became invalids in this war, no one pays any attention to them nowadays. Are they mentioned anywhere? Did they receive something for it? No! Maybe someone got something for it, but that's insignificant. Thus, live only unto yourself.

T. G.

Small reconciliations are very important

Can you still feel the war's consequences? How can you feel them?

I feel the war's consequences completely differently than the people who have lost someone, since I lost no one who was close to me, thank God. Yes, I do feel consequences, I managed to get sick, got high blood pressure, my family is scattered all over. Before the war I lived in a system that was maybe confining, but was protecting all of us in a way. And after ten years now, a lot of ruins surround us and are in people's souls – the youth wanders aimlessly and gives into vices and no one cares about it except a few foreign organizations which maybe help short-term, but our authorities have no ear for it.

What would you like to change? Which changes would improve not only your current personal situation, but the whole society's as well?

I would like it if the children went to school together, youths sat in cafes together, they finished school and did what they liked, people obtained employment and were not separated into "ours" and "theirs." How can we arrive to that? Well, that question is also hard for me, I think that schools could contribute to it largely if they changed how they work, sport clubs, religious institutions... Schools should organize youth meetings modeled on different youth and foreign organizations' activities, starting from elementary school and high school students and older – organize joint picnics, games, shows; maybe that would contribute somewhat. Particularly if those activities were commended and supported by all sorts of politicians.

I try to show with small examples that not all was so black, so we often mention in our conversations some things from wartime which were positive examples in all that evil that was happening. For instance: "Do you remember that friend of mine before the war, we were sending one another food packages although we were apart, and to this day we often talk and write to each other?"

How to deal with the past? How to relate to it?

The past is something that is remembered, and especially here where so many different pasts exist. Thank God that I don't hate. I respect both mine and other's, I try to understand others without diminishing their pain. I try to show with small examples that not all was so black, so we often mention in our conversations some things from wartime which were positive examples in all that evil that was happening. For instance: "Do you remember that friend of mine before the war, we were sending one another food packages although we were apart, and to this day we often talk

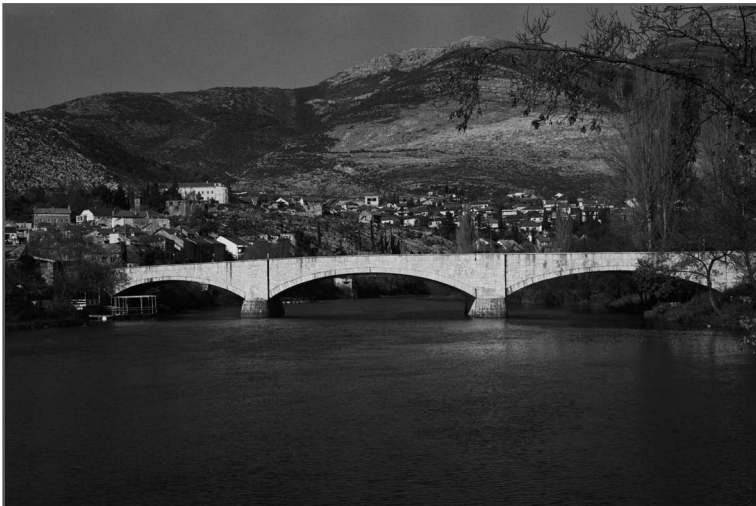
and write to each other?" She can also tell someone her example. If we start with blaming and accusing exclusively like politicians from all sides do, then we'll become just like them, without desire to change anything.

What are your attitudes regarding reconciliation? What is it for you? How can it be accomplished?

Small reconciliations are important – meetings in a store, at the market... Reconciliation cannot be accomplished through laws, but through tolerance and joint meetings. The media could do a lot regarding this topic – if they changed their speech, if no one was pulling to only one side again, regardless of what the truth was. As soon as man forgets something, some ugly pictures from the past are on TV or in the press, underlined with such ugly interpretations and statements that man returns to the past in a very ugly way. Reconciliation is the solution – people need bright prospects, education, work, friendship. What I find interesting is that we all reconcile and love in individual conversations, revisit the past in another way, but when the group is larger everything changes. As if we were afraid of one saying something to another.

Who should work on reconciliation?

I already said that the media and schools could make a few steps forward by adopting small changes in how they work. Beside them, religious institutions could do something as well, I think. Since we have religious teaching in schools now I think that religious workers could help reconciliation a lot by telling the children about their fellow humans differently – so that they love all people. When they return home they will pass it on to their family members and so on.



Also, the neighbor should be talked about with respect regarding religious subjects, the man of another faith. However, they have turned into politicians who emphasize only what's "theirs" and divide people into "ours" and "theirs."

A pretty future without all of these divisions is far away, but it will happen if another nationalistic fool doesn't show up. I think that someone should finally ban the nationalistic parties, that would be a step which would mean a lot.

Do you have any fears regarding reconciliation?

My fears relate to the role of the international community which, I think, does not understand our peoples' mentality. We were, for a long time, in a system that promoted the cult of personality and now they "allow" us some kind of democracy – we don't understand what democracy is and we still abuse it.

Can the "ordinary people" do anything? Do you think that you can do something personally?

I personally support reconciliation and I practice it, successfully. I socialize with everyone in our school which functions as "two schools under one roof," I taught my

children to love what's theirs and respect what's another's, and I talk about "the others" with the schoolchildren daily, I teach them to differentiate good from evil, and not "ours" from "theirs."

Do you think that people in our country are ready for reconciliation, that they want it?

People are ready for it, but most of them will still say that "it's too early for it," just like their politicians do. Also, the people from abroad bring in the disquiet often, those who enjoy their lives in Western countries, by saying "it should be



important to you..." They are often ready to enter conflicts thoughtlessly with the people with whom we work on building relations and reconciliation. I think that people are ready for reconciliation and they want it but they think that it's easier like this – everyone in his or her "cage." And politicians and a part of the international community support that.

What do you think about guilt, is it individual or collective? What about the "ordinary people's" guilt for all that happened?

All of the different types of guilt are neither individual nor collective, but they are both in certain cases. The greatest responsibility is the politicians' and their parties'. The media's responsibility is significant, as well as religious workers'. All of them forced the fear of "the others" onto ordinary people. People feel the ever-present fear of the side which is always presented as the enemy, a fear of a new war breaking out is being created. And the ordinary people keep postponing the process of reconciliation by voting for "their people." But, the "small, ordinary people" are not guilty for the past, we lived nicely and now they live nicely and we have it as it is.

When you talk about the future, what are your predictions regarding it? How do you see the reconciliatory process in the future?

A pretty future without all of these divisions is far away, but it will happen if another nationalistic fool doesn't show up. I think that someone should finally ban nationalistic parties, that would be a step which would mean a lot.

A. G.

Muhamed

(33)

Skopje/Shkup,
store worker/
student

From head to toe

What's your experience of the 2001 conflict?

I was not very surprised by the conflict, personally, knowing not just our context but a wider one. Personally, it wasn't pleasant, especially since I live and work with Macedonians. I live in a municipality which comprises of ninety percent Macedonians so that it wasn't such a pleasant experience.

Do you still, four years after the conflict, feel its consequences?

I am the same as I was four years ago, but I feel that there is a large, how to say it, large distrust between people, especially immediately after the conflict. Although it existed before the conflict as well, after the conflict it became much deeper.

Which direction should we take and how, in your opinion, should we handle the existing distrust?

That's a bit more complicated question because we need more time before anything else, and in that longer time period people should get accustomed to this way of life; thus, to accept things as realistic, existing, and the problems will disappear. And, understandably, the authorities must contribute, they should contribute the most.

Do you think that reconciliation of the two sides that were involved in that conflict is a way to handle the distrust?

Reconciliation... Well, I don't know. I don't feel as if I fought or argued. However, I would come back to what I already said, both Macedonians and Albanians should accept the reality. Thus, the reality is that this is Macedonia, and the reality is that it cannot be divided and that all should live and contribute to this state's well-being, that is, work together, which I believe to be everybody's goal; that is, joining the EU when such problems will become even smaller.

Who should work on that process?

I would say from head to toe, or starting with the government to the most ordinary citizen, all should contribute. That is a chain, and its strongest links are the ones on the top, but it cannot function if a single link is missing.

No one can accept that he's the only guilty participant, that's one thing, and the other is that, if you distribute all that guilt, it will certainly be present on one side more than on the other; what's important is that we are all guilty and that we accept our responsibility publicly. For example, we Albanians are responsible for this, this and this, Macedonians – for that, Serbs – for that, because we all participated in the conflict. Maybe in Macedonia – Albanians and Macedonians, but in Bosnia – Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and these and those, however they're called.

Do you see anything as responsible for that conflict, for that whole situation?

Responsibility certainly exists, it must exist. Just like there is a reason. However, I don't know if those reasons are so large that they could have led to this. Maybe some analyzers could provide us with an answer. Certainly, a conflict can be divided into a pre-conflict period, the conflict itself and the post-conflict. Certainly, the pre-conflict period was very important. Something always preceded many conflicts that took place, especially in the Balkans or, say, in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia and other places. After the conflict, depending on the war's scale, and whether it was a civil, interethnic, international war or even a war between republics, the result is reached, or a truce or an agreement. So, surely something hadn't been working before, maybe with Albanians, maybe with Macedonians, that had been accumulated and ignored, and that's why I believe there will be no problems in the future. I was convinced that this conflict couldn't intensify because problems between Albanians and Macedonians were not so large as to begin a great war over them. I think that this was a controlled war by some bigger links, so they controlled the situation and ended it.

Can you spot guilt or culprits anywhere?

Yes, although I don't think I could locate them. We shouldn't go deeply into analyses, those analyses could cause something else. That's why I wouldn't want to go into them. I am sure there are guilt and culprits, no way that there aren't, but they are on both, or all three sides.

However, no one can accept that he's the only guilty participant, that's one thing, and the other is that, if you distribute all that guilt, it will certainly be present on one side more than on the other; what's important is that we are all guilty and that we accept our responsibility publicly. For example, we Albanians are responsible for this, this and this, Macedonians – for that, Serbs – for that, because we all participated in the conflict. Maybe in Macedonia – Albanians and Macedonians, but in Bosnia – Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and these and those, however they're called.

Tell me, what are your predictions regarding Macedonia?

The future is in the European Union and when you really reach a standard of living, a job, when you enjoy those basic rights, not the basic ethnic rights but the basic citizen rights, that's when no one will have any problems.

I want to say that I am convinced that these problems will cease one day, only, normally, time is needed. And when I say time, I mean generations, and not us. When a five year old becomes a thirty year old, he'll think differently.

L. G.

Milica

(52)

Bijeljina
admin. official

They found us on the road and accepted us into their home

Can you please briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Milica, I was born in Zenica in 1953 where I also grew up, finished high school and worked in the “Zenica” Steel Mill for twenty one years. We left Zenica in 1993, since then we have lived in Bijeljina.

How did the beginning of the B&H war affect you?

Just like it affected the others who didn't expect it to happen. I never personally felt that it would come to war in Zenica, the city in which I grew up and where I had socialized my whole life with people of different nationalities, faiths and even races. I didn't expect that in such a working class setting, as Zenica was, to which people came from all regions of SFRY to work there and start families

When we arrived to Zepce the tension could already be felt, a Croatian family which gave us refuge didn't know us at all. They found us on the road and accepted to their house. We were exchanged from Zepce and that's how we arrived to Republika Srpska.

and stay to live... We all socialized and I didn't expect that it could come to war in such a setting. The war found me completely unprepared and shocked. I don't know about the others, but I was completely unprepared when the war began.

How much have your wartime experiences affected your life afterward?

Well, a lot, my life changed in its root... Just when I expected that I would start living best – my children grew up, we had good jobs, we owned an apartment, we were doing well financially – we were left with nothing overnight. All we had left were our own lives, but, to be honest, that is the biggest valuable.

How often do you think about war currently?

I still think about it often, I think often about its first days. We often mention its beginning. But, our friends and we more often remember our beautiful prewar days and the lives we had then.

Your family has survived some hard moments during the war. Do you feel bitter when you remember those moments?

No, I don't, I didn't feel bitter even while it was happening. I was disappointed in my friends and neighbors, but I never wished evil to anyone. Not even to the people who did what they did to my family, I never wished for evil to come back to them. Maybe I sometimes, irritated, said: “May it come back to him,”

but I never really wished it to happen. Since we have already mentioned those bad events that happened to me and my family, I'd also like to explain them. We never had problems with neighbors until the war began. I didn't expect that I could have problems, personally. Our family is truly multiethnic, we are connected with members of other nationalities through family relations. Neither I, nor my sister, my mother, or my husband expected that something like that could happen to us. Until the misfortunate day, I had never thought I could leave Zenica. Until one night some unknown people threw dynamite into my mother's house. My mother and daughter, who was eleven years old then, were heavily injured and the house was completely destroyed. My daughter was completely disfigured and we had no idea whether she would survive for a while. They helped her adequately in the Zenica Hospital, the doctors put her on the Ophthalmology Ward although she didn't belong there due to the nature of her injuries. Medical staff took care of her. But, the day when I decided that my family and I should leave Zenica was the day when I saw my family house destroyed. I couldn't wait to leave Zenica although that was the city I had loved like no other and in which I had intended to spend my whole life. We had to leave it because of everything that happened. But, since Serbs in Zenica were living in a ghetto, not being allowed to leave the city; I, with my name and surname, couldn't leave Zenica.

How did you manage to leave it, after all?

It was hard, like I already said, Serbs were forbidden to leave Zenica. I asked a colleague from work to give me her ID. She helped me and I am convinced that



she saved my life, and I'll never forget that. Although we don't look alike at all, it was enough for the guard at the barricade to read her name in order to let me through. My daughters were on the same bus, but separated from me. A friend of my older daughter's, a young man from Zepce, a Muslim, that is, a Bosniak, was taking the two of them and told the guard that they were his cousins, refugees from Vitez. My husband gave all the money we had to bribe the military police and have them take him out of Zenica. When we arrived to Zepce the tension could already be felt, a Croatian family which gave us refuge didn't know us at all. They found us on the road and accepted to their house. We were exchanged from Zepce and that's how we arrived to Republika Srpska.

Has the situation in B&H changed since then for the better and, if it has, how much?

If I were asked, there would have been no war. If most of the people were asked, there would have been no war. The situation has changed. From the war's beginning until I left Zenica my coworkers were harassing me, starting from little malicious acts to horrible offenses, but when I went to Zenica the first time in 1996, I experienced those exact people's wholehearted greetings and invitations to visit them... I was shocked by that transformation. Maybe I would have felt better if they kept acting how they had done during the war. That whole period wasn't clear to me since I hadn't changed. I would at least know where we were if they kept turning their heads away. I would like it if people were less two-faced.

How do you feel nowadays when you visit Zenica?

I rarely visit it. As time passes, the desire to go there decreases. When I arrived to Zenica the first time after the war, when I saw the steel mill's chimneys while entering the city, tears started flowing uncontrollably. My daughter couldn't understand why I was crying, and I felt so sad that I had been forced to leave that city. As time passes I love it less. I would never want to return and live in Zenica. None of my Bosniak friends asked about my child or came to visit when my daughter was injured. And we had been sharing all of our fortunes and misfortunes until then. And no one could even call me to ask how she was when that happened.

As soon as phone lines started working I called my friends thinking that they could hardly wait to hear me. No one has returned my call although I gave them my phone number. I called them twice or three times, but no one has called me back. I would never go there, if it wasn't for my sisters who live there.

Are you, as an "ordinary citizen," satisfied with the level of reconciliation reached, if you consider the situation in B&H?

I am not. Maybe ordinary citizens want reconciliation, but the media and politics affect this process a lot. The media still invoke the wartime period and the politicians don't care about it.

What are the relations between different nationalities in Bijeljina like nowadays?

I don't think there is any interethnic intolerance in Bijeljina. All of the new neighbors in our street were Muslims when I came to Bijeljina. They helped us to settle since we arrived to Bijeljina with nothing. We socialized well and we didn't have any difficulties with them nor did they have any with us.

What was your reaction when you heard that the Dayton Peace Accord was signed?

I was very happy, I even thought, idealistically, that a period of renewal and development would follow, like it did after WWII. I thought that B&H would also see construction and progress after reaching peace. I didn't expect that a period of plunder would follow instead, that individuals would manage to get rich, and that the large majority of people would remain in poverty, with no conditions for living, and lose their jobs.

Do you discuss returning when you talk to your acquaintances and friends who fall into the refugee category?

We often talk about it, but none of the people who are from Tuzla, Zenica, Travnik, Bugojno... No one wants to return to his prewar place of residence; they all want to live in Republika Srpska.

What do you think causes such an attitude?

The existence itself, most likely. We know that we would, if we returned, become second-order citizens. We don't have great jobs here, but we manage somehow, but we wouldn't be able to do even this much over there. Another factor that prevents us from returning home is what people experienced during the war and all of the ugly memories.

What else needs to be done in B&H in order for people's relations to normalize?

What needs to be done? Well, we mentioned Dayton where it was signed that Bosnia and Herzegovina was a state which consisted of two equal entities – the Federation of B&H and Republika Srpska. I don't think that this model should be messed with and that Republika Srpska needs to survive as a federal unit within B&H. That would contribute to reconciliation; that Republika Srpska maintains the status it acquired in Dayton, that we all live where we want and that nobody is pressing us. Those everyday pressures for one of the entities to be abolished are returning us to the nineties' beginnings. We should live as good neighbors, each where he wants, on his own.

How much can an individual contribute to reconciliation and the situation's stabilization?

An individual can do little. As far as I am concerned reconciliation would have been accomplished a long time ago, but it doesn't depend on us. It depends

on politics which we don't understand. Maybe the goals of today's politics will be comprehended by my children or their children.

What's your view of the term 'reconciliation'?

I am not in a feud with anyone. Whom should I reconcile with? The reconciliation that we have reached is enough for me, what's important is that we can travel freely and socialize with whomever we want. My family and I act that way, one's nationality and race is not important, we judge one based on one's human qualities. Reconciliation has been accomplished, as far as I am concerned. I am not angry at anyone, all good people are dear to me, I don't hate the bad ones but I don't love them either.

What's your view of the B&H future?

Uhh... Its future is dark. Everything is falling apart, no progress whatsoever... I feel sorry for my children since I am not certain that they will make the retirement in B&H; I suspect that I won't make it either. People can't make their ends meet, they barely make enough for bare existence, and nothing is getting better.

What can the people you belong to do for reconciliation in B&H?

Not only mine, but other peoples as well could reach reconciliation most easily if they started living normally, and if they had enough work, and if they reached normal standard of living. Then we wouldn't have time to think about other things besides work. The improvement of the economic situation would contribute to interethnic relations. The possibility of a normal life and economic safety would contribute to reconciliation.

How do you currently react when you hear of an incident caused by interethnic intolerance in the media?

The media contributes to discord. Maybe not all should be made known, and they treat those incidents with too much care, sensationally, and thus slow down reconciliation and increase intolerance between peoples.

How should people handle memories and ugly experiences from the war?

I think they should forgive but not forget. I forgave the people who had done bad things to me a long time ago, but I have never forgotten nor will I ever forget.

Do you think that the "national key" within institutions affects reconciliation?

If we are a state that consists of three constituent peoples, that should contribute to reconciliation. Equal representation is a way to ensure that no constituent people feels cast out or under represented.

B. J.

They participated by being silent and doing nothing

How old are you and where are you from?

I am twenty six years old, and where I am from is a long story... I was born in Prizren where I lived shortly, then in Pristina, Djakovica, all in Kosovo, then in Sibenik, Drvar, Bijelo Polje and now in Podgorica. Classical story for a military officer's child.

Under which circumstances did you move during the beginning of the nineties' wars?

We were in Kosovo when demonstrations and riots calling for the improvement of minority's rights were starting. My father was already working as a border-guard and was spending a lot of time working away from home. As we were growing up he asked to be transferred in order to move away since it was becoming dangerous already. He wanted to retire, to leave peacefully. Then he was transferred to Sibenik where we spent two beautiful years, 1989 and 1990, until the war began. Then he was transferred to Drvar, Bosnia, where we stayed until the war began there. After it began they were ordered to return to their original place and that's when we returned to Montenegro. Our stay in Montenegro was chaotic until we adjusted to a degree.

How did you feel during that period, being a child?

What war showed me, as to a child which was protected from all sides, was people's good side. For example, we spent three months in basements while we lived in Sibenik. My father was in the military barracks, almost imprisoned, while we were there, in military buildings where everyone was an officer's child. Half of them joined the Croatian Guard while the others had no idea what to do. Only the families of those who joined the Guard could walk freely from there, so we spent most of the time in the basement. What I remember is that those neighbors turned out to be the best people, they used to go to the market for us and bring us back whatever they brought for themselves, used to check on our father in the barracks. They did for us everything we couldn't have done our-

We spent three months in basements while we lived in Sibenik. My father was in the military barracks, almost imprisoned. What I remember is that those neighbors turned out to be the best people, they used to go to the market for us and bring us back whatever they brought for themselves, used to check on our father in the barracks. They did for us everything we couldn't have done ourselves; maybe I couldn't understand how much that meant until I heard what was happening and what people had gone through.

selves; maybe I couldn't understand how much that meant until I heard what was happening and what people had gone through. Thus, I experienced the nicest things and saw a pretty face of humanity in all of that.

How did life go on in Podgorica, could you feel any consequences, could you feel them personally?

We were fine wherever we went. I don't know how much that is because of us, who are open and communicative, and how much it is due to the surroundings: after Sibenik we went to Drvar, whose population is purely Serbian, and there we were with a last name that is completely Muslim. To be honest, we have never had much of a Muslim identity, ours was more based more on a Yugoslavian one, but it still could have hurt peoples' ears, but it didn't and that was phenomenal for me. When we arrived to Podgorica we had virtually nothing, it was only the three of us. The neighbors sent us some things later and that made it easier. Life in Podgorica was the hardest period for me, we came before the inflation and during the greatest possible rift in political affiliation. A guy came up to me my first day in school and asked me whether I was a liberal or a radical.⁸² I had no idea what he was asking me, until he explained that those were political parties and that the whole class was split between these two parties. That was definitely the hardest change of residence, maybe because of the moment when we arrived or maybe because of the Podgorica youth circles' inaccessibility, they were a bit more closed than elsewhere.

That wartime part of your identity – did you feel it as your own, did it mean anything later to you and did people see you through it?

The war took away some nice teenage moments, I had to mature early on, being the oldest child. Essentially, I still don't see the point of that war, neither do I see the reason nor do the results show that anything was accomplished. What's horrible for me is that people had to go through it at all. We had lived in safe surroundings, there had been friction around, although we couldn't have felt it then. I felt the worst in Podgorica, since they asked us all the time if we were war profiteers and why we didn't go back to "what's ours." Thus, this was harder for me than living in the war-stricken regions. I have an example from school that's interesting. I was failing geography in high school which wasn't logical since I liked geography very much. The professor wouldn't even want to test me. In the end my father had to go to school to see what was happening. It all ended with the explanations that he was not a Mujahedin⁸³ and that he worked for the JNA; afterwards the professor would test me. Those are some of the things which remain as bad memories, but it's nothing that could affect me or my family.

⁸² Terms "liberal" and "radical" refer to political parties: Liberal Alliance of Montenegro and Party of Serbian Radicals.

⁸³ A Mujahedin is a Muslim engaging in *jihad*.

Did Montenegro participate in the war, in your opinion?

The fact that war didn't take place on its territory doesn't mean that Montenegro didn't participate herself. I still look at it from a child's perspective, all of that seemed terrible while it was happening, while now it seems even more terrible when some pieces of information are being discovered. I think that she has participated, even tacitly, but in deeds as well. Large media campaigns existed here also. But, people could communicate for a while afterward, just like we did, since they called us all the time, so we had an idea of what was really happening. And it was up to people how that information would be received by them. Thus, it's not clear to me how the bombardment of Dubrovnik could have happened or the Strpci train hijacking,⁸⁴ which is illogical if the state didn't participate in war or if it was "an oasis of peace." Those are not the things that happen to someone who is not participating in war or who is neutral. That was, in my opinion, also every individual's concern, so much that it was unbelievable. I felt the most discrimination on the basis of faith and nationality, which weren't a part of my identity until I started being discriminated against. Then some things became important to me, out of spite. I experienced it the most in Montenegro, and I think that, in some of those moments, the fear of diversity peaked.

Do you think that fear has decreased in intensity?

I socialize in the most wonderful circles, so I cannot entirely respond to this question. It's completely different if you go to the Montenegrin northern parts, when you get down to the coastline, then villages... I like traveling and meeting other people very much. Once I was spending time in the northern mountains. People breed cattle in a *katun*.⁸⁵ The people are pretty lonely there, so they are happy whenever someone comes around and they can talk, hear the city news. There were three of us, a woman offered us some sweet bread and milk, to have a chat and give her some news. She was explaining that life was pretty hard over there and so on, and I responded that I knew, since I was also from a village. She asked me if I were a Čegović (who I was, what was my last name) and when I said I was a Hadžibegović she got confused and said: "It's not your fault" and explained that she had had some Muslim neighbors and that not all of them were bad, that is, that there were some "good ones." See, there's no use in explaining anything to those people since she, for example, had lived there for eighty years and considered whether it was my fault for being born of a different faith. I think that it's pretty rooted in the society, families and upbringing. I believe that it can be changed, but it needs time. It should be influenced from all sides: TV, school, society, family, street. Although, just

⁸⁴ The location of the 1993 kidnapping and execution of twenty passengers, mainly Muslims.

⁸⁵ Village (Montenegrin).



one negative influence is enough to shake up everything that others do in that field.

What does reconciliation mean to you?

Coexistence – that we can live one with another without noticing the differences. Because I can't notice them, I was taught from the beginning to see good and bad in people, and I can see that line, I can always get something good from people. Forgiveness is also very important. People must learn how to forgive one another. I know that what I am saying is not all that realistic, a certain time distance must be established. I went through war, but I saw that nice quality in people. And although there were bombardments and suffering, nobody from my immediate family died and that's why I don't feel that sense of loss related to war which could create additional hatred and so on. Reconciliation is possible for me, coexistence also – life with people, and not life with "particular" people.

What would reconciliation deliver to "ordinary people"?

Everything. Wealth. I think wealth is in all those different people, different customs. It's unbelievable to go to a village wedding near Bijelo Polje, and then to a wedding in Kotor. That difference between customs, I feel that it's phenomenal. Again, also where those customs intertwine... We are also, in a way, pagans since a lot of the pagan has remained with us. It seems to me that we would live better if we forgave one another, if we learned one from another and helped one another.

Regarding reconciliation... Is it and, if so, how much is it specific to Mon-

tenegro? Is the need for reconciliation recognized here at all?

What I would like to see is that the people in Montenegro realize that there is, or there was, a problem. That's the first point, that story stating that Montenegro didn't participate in the war, that everything happened around us, and that's simply not realistic. When people realize that they participated by being silent and doing nothing. If they didn't come out to vote – then they let those 30 percent decide for them – and that's the end of the story! That's the first condition in order to do anything here, in my opinion. If they don't understand that they even took part in it, then they don't feel the need to reconcile; maybe they're peacemakers, then? I don't feel as one who is only from Montenegro, but it's not visible enough here that we all participated in all of it. Although some progress has been achieved, like what's done jointly at the Croatian border. Like in culture and music. I think it's important that ordinary people understand and accept it. In order to remove some kind of collective guilt.

What's your view of the others' readiness for reconciliation considering that they are in a slightly different situation, since you are present regionally outside of Montenegro?

I traveled much after the wars, visited the places where I had lived, it was important that I did it. Some places I found the people I had known earlier, some places I didn't since the demographics had completely changed. I think that a lot of hatred, hurt, being offended, and misunderstandings of some things still exist. I think that a lot of time has to pass to create and renew relations between people. The politicians' apologies are fashionable nowadays, but somehow they are only words on paper, and it should be happening in people's heads in order to realize what we were doing and what we did. Although the economy's role will be the biggest, I think it's important to talk about it, to discuss problems. Actions need to follow apologies. It's hard for some people also to admit that they had been mistaken for such a long time.

How should we deal with the past, how should we face what happened?

I don't know, I can only tell you how I did it. I tried to find information from all sides: TV, internet, newspapers. One piece of information was presented in an unbelievable number of ways, from some very narrow to very objective and thoroughly done. I've been finding out what happened since we often cannot consider everything realistically. Thus, I decide on my attitudes, acts, and behavior based on information. Attitude can change depending on need, I am not an advocate of stubborn inflexibility of attitudes. You should also look into your heart and

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see if there's a desire to reconcile, sorrow and so on. I still attempt to get in touch with people who meant so much to me then, because I want to tell them "thanks!" Since they were the exact ones who taught me what it was to be human. I think that the same thing should be considered from another angle; if something bad happened then one should check with ourselves why and how to let the other know. We cannot do anything good if we keep such thoughts to ourselves.

How important is that individual relationship with the past for you?

I found history interesting since I wondered why we studied wars that much, it was creating the impression that people had been fighting wars the whole time. It seems to me that history does not provide us with the information about what really took place, what really happened. Knowledge of experiences and recognition of others' experiences is what I find to be important. I didn't suffer a loss in this war, but I could experience through other people's destinies just how brutal and useless this war was.

What can an ordinary man do and how large is his responsibility?

The largest possible. It is clear to me that I am always responsible for each one of my acts. But I also want to know about everything that's being done in my name, or protest against it. Our voice needs to be heard when some things are happening or when they are not. I can affect the surroundings only if I change myself. Only if I win the battle against myself, against my own past, will I be



able to help others with their problems and affect my surroundings regarding reconciliation.

What about tomorrow?

I was good in school and was often told that I should go abroad and live well over there. I was never drawn by that idea too much, since I would take myself abroad just as I am. If I have problems with something, I would have them there, also, I am certain. It used to be different, people had to go abroad since they had no other way out. My choice is to stay here since I firmly believe that some things can be changed. How much I can contribute to it as an individual is questionable, but I give all that I have and I am satisfied with it. I am not always satisfied with the results, but I do my best. An American institute's assessment regarding the Serbian and Montenegrin Union's entrance into the EU stated that it would happen in about twenty years. These things completely discourage people, I see no sense in stating them. Maybe, actually, they should motivate people to become active. I chose to stay here and change something. If I grow completely disappointed, I'll leave and seek a place where it will be easier. I think that tomorrow is possible, a mutual tomorrow. I am saying that tomorrow, when I meet someone with a different past and a different name, we'll be able to function together. Although we are impulsive, I think it can be accomplished.

Does it mean that you don't view this region's future as dark?

That is my personal choice, that's something I believe in and what I do. I can't say that I view our future too optimistically. A lot is needed for a single person to change. I work with young people, with children, and when a child returns home and his or her father, who's watching TV, says: "Stupid Gypsies," everything that we did with that child that particular day has been ruined. Many small changes are needed to reach the critical mass, for something to change. I socialize in the most wonderful of circles, but people don't understand that they can change a lot, they are not aware of it. I think that those changes do happen and that they can lead us forward, although it's sometimes like – a step forward, a step backward. The only question is how persistent one is, and ready to invest strength, energy and time.

L. Z.

Ivica

(34)

Šibenik

The Croatian
Association of
Demobilized De-
fenders activist

He didn't fall from the sky, we voted him in

How do you currently feel if you consider everything that happened in the nineties and all it caused? What was your motivation to go to war?

A strange question... I remember the system before this one as a very bad system, in my opinion, because of its social nature and not because of some nationalistic reasons. My experience tells me that all the propaganda about the social state, workers' rights, etc. was just a mask that fell off in the end. I cannot say that the earlier system represented something positive, based on my personal life and experience.

When I went to war in 1991, I thought that we would manage to make a change, not only militarily, in no way nationalistically, but generally socially progressive and orderly. That we would build a society which is completely normal in the West, which meant that the creativity and ability of young people could come forward, which hadn't been exactly recognized during communism. The system had always been creative, but the individual couldn't be. What I expected from '91 and on is that we would succeed in building a system which would see the arrival of the competent, and not the suitable; however, that didn't happen. I currently feel that some of my wishes haven't come true, my dreams which should have been related to today's state of things.

What's your view of the state of things currently?

Today we have a system which is identical to the communist one, only it's in a, we might say, milder form, let's call it democracy. You, as an individual, let's say at work, in some organizations, cannot succeed either if you do not belong to a particular herd. That herd is recognized in Croatia as political parties. Thus, if you wanted to satisfy a desire of yours, or succeed in reaching a goal, you must belong to the herd. Otherwise, your situation is made harder if you wanted to achieve some of your basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. I don't have to be as competent as I have to be suitable in order to succeed. There's no chance to succeed here if I reverse this.

What's your view of the postwar situation, what the war left behind as its legacy and that's not being discussed?

A lot is not being discussed here. All of the political institutions and the organizations that work on human rights, I have a feeling that they prowl like cats around hot broth. No one wants to get to the problem's core and face it. The

core of the problem is the society itself, that's my opinion. We have a problem with the rusty metal construction of this society which is narcissistic and hypocritical, that's my opinion.

What do you mean by narcissistic?

During the communist era, you had a system in which you had to work and keep quiet and then you had no problems. Currently what is being advertised is that you should speak, work, but, on the other hand, it's also said in a way – keep quiet still, don't rock the boat. Any kind of positive change is considering to be rocking the boat, if it attempts to change what was before and what is now. It doesn't suit many social elements, especially not the older ones who are used to living and not working in socialism since the system took care of them.

How do the government authorities or the citizens treat the wartime events?

I think that the key word in all of this is responsibility, since nobody wants to take on responsibility for any problem. We have all sorts of examples from everyday life, the press and so on. If there is a problem, responsibility is always passed on to someone else, and nobody is solving it. It's only passed from one side to the other.

When we discuss the past, or, concretely, the war crimes, how does the society relate to it?

That is not discussed at all. An ordinary man, a worker, a peasant, a farm hand, an administrator doesn't want to think about it. Everyday politics also shows us that it doesn't want to discuss it every day. In that way the socialist system worked, by disseminating fear. People are scared of talking about it since they believe that they'll disappear in the night, that it's not good to go against the bad guys and nth number of other things that are present in our everyday life.

Is that that fear realistic?

The problem is that there is a certain number of people who want to talk about some things, but they are a minority. They feel that they are not a number large enough to enter the polemic regarding it.

Is there, in your opinion, the “ordinary people's” need to discuss the war-time past?

There is. There are no bad people, I say. No one is born a thief, a person is made into it by circumstances. It's in human nature that the injustices he is experiencing, certain problems, bother him subconsciously. But, due exactly to those fears and certain prejudices, a person doesn't want to talk about it publicly, but does want it subconsciously. Everything needs to be done here

Reconciliation is primarily respect. It's not based on nationality, or faith. It's based on mutual respect. As long as we, like we whispered fifty years ago – he is a Serb, he is a Muslim, you can socialize with them, but don't agree to anything – there can be no true reconciliation. When we will be able to look at a man and see a man, that's when we will get a chance to reconcile.

in order to take that step and have people realize that many talk about those things and nothing has happened to them. Dealing with the past and the story of war crimes is pioneer work here. Exactly those pioneers which will talk about it, if nothing happens to them, will encourage the others who will be able to talk about it later fearlessly.

What do you think about the presence of denial in our society? When I say denial, I mean – we just defended ourselves, we couldn't have done anything bad... Is it easier to live like that?

That's an illusion. When we had a meeting in Selac, there was a mother who was looking for her son who had gone missing in Vukovar. There were two persons who were from the Organization for Protection of War Veterans' Mental Health from Novi Sad and she asked them to apologize in the name of the Serbian people. Those people were doctors who had nothing to do with it, but... So, I interjected and said that it was not ok, and that mother later attempted many times to start a polemic with me and she excused herself every time so that she made me feel uncomfortable. I told her: "Madam, I understand your pain, when you speak to me as a mother that has been seeking her son until this day I feel very bad. I also felt bad telling you that you were not right regarding some things." After the fifth or sixth time we spoke she told me: "I understand what you are saying and I am aware that it is alright. But, I am afraid to face that because then I would lose the meaning I have now, and that meaning is that my son did die for something, after all, that he didn't die for nothing." After all, it is easier to live an illusion such as: I gave my son for something worthy, after all.

You'll see nowadays, if you talk to the defenders and if you ask one why he fought, he'll tell that he fought for Croatia. If you ask him what kind of Croatia he desired, he'll tell you – Croatia as a free, independent country... Thus, he'll tell you what's told in the political realm, he'll retell you everyday politics, he won't have his own attitude because he learned that the system thought for him and not he for the system.

What's your view of the recent politicians' apologies from all sides, can they help the majority of the Croatian public be open for the story about the past?

The point is not to apologize now. What Mesić and Marović⁸⁶ did is essentially hypocritical. Politicians are those who led the whole war, there is much evidence for it to this day, they traded between one another, met secretly, designed and changed borders, traded with certain numbers of people, territory, and they

⁸⁶ Stjepan Mesić, Croatian president, and Svetozar Marović, president of Serbia and Montenegro, exchanged apologies in September 2003 for "all evils done by any citizen of Montenegro and Serbia" and to "anyone whom citizens of Croatia caused any pain or damage."

bear a lot of responsibility. It's normal that it's hard for them nowadays to come out publicly and say that their previous political moves were dirty. You can see in everyday politics the attempts to manipulate people because as soon as people start touching on dealing with the past, as soon as some things from the past are discovered, frauds, this or that, immediately everything gets diverted to nationalism in order to create a ruse so an eruption won't take place.

How can we overcome that? How can we inspire people to accept responsibility and where would we start, with higher levels or with "ordinary people"?

I think that the little people have the biggest potential. The ordinary person is entering the phase where he's taking matters into his own hands and is starting to create his own destiny, and not some politician who is in the government. He elects the politician, and not vice versa. I think that precisely the ordinary people, especially the young people here without an outlook, have to organize into specific interest groups, individually or collectively and thus affect the everyday politics which will start changing that way. Because, the politicians will not change by themselves, and if we give them this task, they won't do anything for another hundred years. Thus, no radical changes are taking place, and we need them.

It's easiest to blame another for my conditions, and not myself, and see myself as a victim all the time. People have to stop seeing themselves as victims in something and start changing that.

What's your view of the collective and individual guilt with respect to the past?

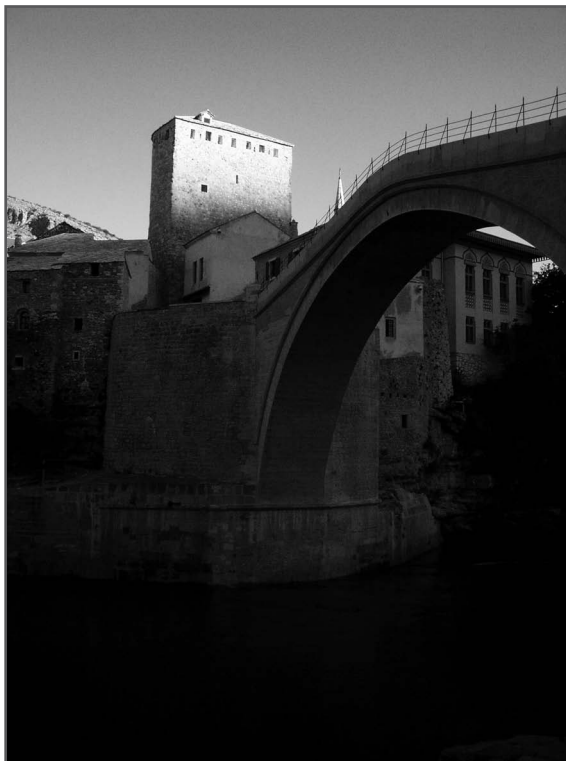
Say, let's start with veterans. Foreign embassies or other states see them as a destructive force from the outside. Following this thought, a man carrying a gun in his hand going to kill another man cannot be constructive, regardless if he is defending himself, fighting for independence. To be clear from the beginning, war itself is destruction. A society that chooses a political elite which takes it to war cannot say tomorrow – we are not responsible. Here we can talk about collective responsibility and individual guilt for some things and nobody can say that he is not responsible for this or that. That's an illusion also and it is exactly what people cannot accept. If we all voted for Franjo Tuđman, and he created two hundred rich families while the others are poor, and now everybody is spitting on him, and they all voted for him. Thus, we have a problem, he didn't fall from the sky, we elected him. So, there's collective responsibility...

When sixty years of the European antifascist struggle was celebrated recently, a young German of twenty two years of age said that he felt responsible for what had happened here sixty years ago; I don't even want to think about the results of surveys here. This society must face its own responsibility for living in society. Thirty percent of the electorate turned out in the last local election, less will turn out in next and everybody will say that he or she doesn't want to vote left or right since none are good, there is no third option, while the society doesn't

want to initiate a third option. Thus, people don't want to accept responsibility for anything.

What can be done so that it changes?

We need to invest in the people who are ready to face the problems and act, and not in somebody who has a good story which sells well. The Balkan societies' problem is that



people are always seeking an idol, while they must understand that they need to look for an idol within themselves and not in others.

Teamwork is important here. Just like a good team accomplishes good results in soccer or basketball, the society has to be a good team.

What's your opinion about reconciliation, do we need it?

Yes, of course we need it, and it is primarily respect. It's not based on nationality, or faith. It's based on mutual respect. As long as we, like we whispered fifty years ago – he is a Serb, he is a Muslim, you can socialize with them, but don't agree to anything – there can be no true reconciliation.

When we will be able to look at a man and see a man, that's when we will get a chance to reconcile.

What fears exist regarding reconciliation, in your opinion? Why are people skeptical when it's discussed?

People are afraid without even knowing what it is that they are afraid of. They are simply afraid and that's just that, it's in the human nature. If a person is not formed and is not his own, if he is not considering his own and other peoples' emotions, he will always fear changes, anything new where he will need to develop. Although, when that word is heard, the first association is – come

on, what do I have to reconcile for, brotherhood and unity all over again... The French flag has an inscription that says: liberty, brotherhood and unity. There is nothing bad in brotherhood and unity as a concept in civilization. According to a religious belief a man is another man's brother and there is sense in it and there is no need to seek senseless reasons and motives for mutual hatred. People are afraid, and a motive for it is not hard to find. If it's not nationality, then it's because he has built a wall, and I don't like to have a wall in front of me; there is always a myriad of reasons to hate.

How do you see the Croatian and Serbian responsibilities in the reconciliatory process?

I only want to talk about my own side. The Serbian side has to solve its problems by itself, I don't want to solve them. I can only help with what I do, talk with those people, show them how I act, how we work in our organization, so that they can learn from it and apply it in their work. It's not up to me to point a finger. It's easiest to blame another for my conditions, and not myself, and see myself as a victim all the time. People have to stop seeing themselves as victims in something and start changing that.

What would reconciliation bring to us as a society?

It would mean a lot for this state and the neighboring ones if we were aiming for basic human respect and respect for human rights. It would give a strong guarantee that what happened now and what was happening during WWII would not reoccur easily. That's the guarantee of peace.

S. D.

And to experience all of it... For what?

What's your view of the war nowadays, ten years after it ended?

I feel awful ten years after it. I remember it for walking twelve kilometers every day in order to get to work where my goal was to save other people's lives, I remember it for standing in line for five hours so that I could get two canisters of water, ten liters each, which I would bring back home and use for bathing, laundry, and again from the beginning the following day. From the war I also remember seeing my child off in the morning and thinking whether I would see him again, whether he would see me again. I remember that, when a neighbor called me and told me that our building had been hit and that our roof had been damaged, the first thing I thought was that I wouldn't be able to keep any of my child's early pictures. And to experience all of it... For what?

What is reconciliation for you?

I don't have a feeling that I need to reconcile with anyone since I am not angry at anyone. If anybody asked me, this war would have never happened.

I remember that, when a neighbor called me and told me that our building had been hit and that our roof had been damaged, the first thing I thought was that I wouldn't be able to keep any of my child's early pictures. And to experience all of it... For what?

What are the preconditions for reconciliation?

I will mention the financial situation again, since if people had enough money to go to a theater, cinema, go on a trip, it would never cross their mind to discuss the war and its consequences. A stable material situation leads every individual toward reconciliation.

Who should work on reconciliation?

He who leads the state should work on it, but not without our individual assistance.

Which problems could the reconciliatory process run into, are people ready for it?

I don't know. It's hard to talk about reconciliation with the people who have, say, lost close family members, they will need much more time before they even start thinking about reconciliation. That process is much faster in my case, since I was spared of such ugly events during the war.

What can the "ordinary people" do?

The ordinary people can do very little in the political realm. The only thing they have left is mutual acceptance, tolerance and coexistence.

How should we treat the past? Should we forget all of this?

My current reminder of the war is my devastated apartment which I am renovating. The war which took place is a certain part of our history, and, if nothing else, it should serve as a reminder to future generations. Oblivion, in any case, is out of the question.

If we reached reconciliation, what would change in your life?

I think that reconciliation leads to the region's economic progress, and that ensures every individual's improvement, which serves all of our interests, on one hand.

Should we seek guilt on one side only?

I don't think so, since we need two or more parties for a war. Each of those sides has its truth and reasons for war. What the global truth is only time can tell.

Is the guilt individual or is it collective?

Well, a collective is made out of individuals so that separate consideration of different sides is not possible in this case. What we must not do is consider one people through the crimes of a few individuals' who belong to it.

Do you think that we all bear a part of the guilt?

I personally don't feel guilty! I am guilty if I wanted to survive, help others to survive and stay here and spend the whole war at my job. I feel bad that the war was fought in my name, while nobody asked me whether I wanted it or not.

How large is the media's responsibility?

The media were just puppets controlled by the persons in power. They created our awareness of the enemy, allies, and I think that nobody had time in that moment to delve into the truthfulness of things which were served up to us then. I think that now is the right time for it.

To conclude with, what's your view of this region's future?

I don't know. The economic situation is slowly progressing... Forming some kind of a shared market would expose all of the past war's near-insanity.

V. E.

Nina

(42)

Belgrade
civil engineer

I feel better if I know that I am not sitting and waiting

Can you please tell me a bit about yourself to begin with?

My name is Nina, I live in Belgrade, I am forty two years old. I work in the Ministry of Capital Investments, and, besides that, I am a peace activist.

What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you remember the nineties?

The first thing that comes to my mind are the protests, war, fear and hope, let's say. Fear of what?

Fear of life becoming worse and worse, of people dying, since a part of that time was marked with some kind of hopelessness and feeling of powerlessness. The feeling of powerlessness was... Present a lot. And the feeling that I was in it alone, I didn't feel that I belonged to my surroundings, I simply felt alienated, as if it wasn't my place, the city I had lived in to that point and which I love. Also, I remember, a dilemma was ever-present either to stay or to leave. Also, the feeling of a divided family. Half of my family stayed in Croatia, all connections were severed. My brother was abroad and couldn't return.

It was very hard even to visit him. He couldn't return since he didn't want to go to war, he was a conscientious objector. I thought that was good, on one hand I was happy that he was there, I believed that he was protected from war over there, from violence, from the police that looked for him often reminding us of his duty toward the regime; although, they named it differently. These are some dominant feelings... Powerlessness was the strongest one.

How did you deal with it?

That was, somehow... It depended on the day, the year, I went through different phases. I had a constant feeling that I could not, as hard as it was, that I could not and must not turn away from all of it, not to watch TV and not to see the victims. I couldn't get away from it, although all of it was very hard on me. I wondered what I could do. What I was

doing didn't seem to be enough, I saw no concrete results, simply I didn't see that anything was changing. I saw that some other people are making an effort, but all of it was a diffused energy. There was more hope in certain moments, after certain demonstrations and elections, but, in principle, a feeling prevailed

It seems to me that it's easier once you convince yourself that only "your people" got killed while it happened less to the others or, I don't know... I think that it's easier to feel like a victim to a degree since you expect someone to help you in that case, to understand your suffering, to do something for you while you have to do nothing.

that I simply couldn't... Sometimes I was really... Caught in despair, I thought I should simply leave, but I didn't, after all. Maybe I was afraid of uncertainty, but I think that a feeling which prevailed was that I belonged here, that, if I left, it would be running away. There was no one else to do our job. If I left, that would mean I was leaving it to someone else.

What is our job?

Even earlier people had been leaving this country to go abroad. But, I thought that our job was to make this country a livable place, to humanize it, simply make something else out of it, to change it.

Whom did you view as the responsible one for the whole situation?

All of us. The whole time there was some kind of a silent majority which did nothing. On one hand, yes, there was a regime personified by Milošević, but it didn't look to me that he was the only one, maybe not even the decisive, in the sense of responsibility. As easy as it is to blame everything on Milošević and the others who ruled, who directly benefited from it... I daily saw and talked with the people who openly supported him, and those who did nothing, said nothing. Thus, I think that all of us here, in Serbia, bear some responsibility. Everybody's is not the same, but... If it wasn't for the people who voted for him, or not just voted, but did nothing, didn't turn out for the elections – that was also a way to avoid doing something. Nowadays you hear sometime that, like, the regime was evil. I think that the regime, or the system, couldn't have functioned as long as it did if it were in just a few people's hands. Milošević had support from the beginning which, however, decreased with time. Today we need to heal the consequences of it, change things. Start with that supposition, and not the supposition that a handful of people ruled, while everybody else was poor and powerless and a victim.

Regarding the past, what do you think is the best in this situation, how should it be dealt with? Some say that all of it should be forgotten, some say that it shouldn't and must not be forgotten... What do you think?

I think that it definitely should not be forgotten, whatever it is now that we are working hard on, whether it is cooperation and pretending that nothing happened, or simply skipping ten or fifteen years, developing economic relations, or cultural, whatever. Of course, I am all for establishing relations, but I think that the past should be discussed. I don't think that anyone who lived in Serbia really has no idea what was happening in Croatia or Bosnia... Or what happened in Srebrenica. I believe that people simply don't want to know, that they are rejecting it consciously or subconsciously. I think that, to begin with, it needs to be discussed and written about persistently. There's a job in that for everyone, the media, schools, NGOs, state structures. There probably should be a program or plan at the state level, but I think that it will be hard... That should be the subject of our discussions, it needs to be present since I think

that what is called dealing with the past cannot happen in a day. I think that it needs to be the subject of stories, meetings, actions, on all levels, and that it should not depend only on state structures, criminal investigation commissions, for finding the missing. Certainly, they should also do their job. Simply, that story needs to be present.

Why?

Since people need to be given a chance to hear it, accept it, say what they think, and not to view it as something that someone else is imposing onto them.

Why do you think that dealing with the past is important?

I think that it is important that each one of us citizens gets a chance to hear something that (s)he maybe hasn't heard before or what (s)he already knew about – to accept it, think about it, think about his or her own responsibility, about what he or she was doing at the time, how he or she acted. Since, simply, that's the basis for tomorrow, or what both today and tomorrow will look like. I think that the state of things, or the situation, and I speak only of Serbia, cannot change only by Serbia drawing nearer to the European Union. The situation must change from within, we need to change how we view the responsibility toward society and for what was done. After all, we all affect which way our society will develop, what tomorrow will be like. To make it impossible that someone like Milošević, an unscrupulous manipulator, demagogue, nationalist, wins over the majority's support. Meaning, so that this country never goes to war in which its army kills the members, or actually citizens of other states and in which its own citizens are dying. I think this important for our neighbors and for Serbia itself, whichever borders surround us and with whomever we will live,



whether independent or with Montenegro, without going into this question.

What does reconciliation mean to you?

I am not sure. That term is somewhat confusing for me. For me, personally... I am not under the impression that I argued with anyone. If reconciliation is that we don't hate, we – this state's citizens, that we don't have prejudices about some others... Maybe reconciliation is that we are capable of accepting the facts upon hearing them. Say, the facts about victims, about Srebrenica, without feeling the need to... What I hear often, that people don't want to hear what has been established as a fact, but keep twisting it instead. They say that not seven or eight, or however many, thousands got killed, but two. Such things... Not to only emphasize Serbian victims all the time.

If we do nothing, if we turn our heads away, if we say that we are not interested in politics since we have no time, I think we thus reject our responsibility, and we could do different things which are peacebuilding... I think that peacebuilding is also an attempt to be informed about everything that's happening in the society.

What do you think is the reason for it?

One is the avoidance of responsibility, and the other is... It seems to me that it's easier once you convince yourself that only "your people" got killed while it happened less to the others or, I don't know... I think that it's easier to feel like a victim to a degree since you expect someone to help you in that case, to understand your suffering, to do something for you while you have to do nothing.

In your opinion, how important is peacebuilding and why?

I think that it's important, of course it's important. That is as important as Serbia joining the European Union or at least coming closer to it. We have to change this society, and I think that it is the way. To change it so that it's a society of equal citizens, and not only Serbs'. Serbia is a country which has a large percentage of citizens who do not belong to the Serbian ethnic community. It bothered me a lot, it hurt my ears to hear during Milošević's time (and I can only imagine how someone felt who is not a Serb) – when only the Serbian people was talked about... It was always: "the Serbian people wants this, wants that," while no one asked you whether they could talk in your name. I think that peacebuilding is important for this society to be stable, so that all citizens could realize their potential within it, so that all have an equal chance, so that it becomes a society of social justice in which everyone will have equal rights to education, healthcare, life, after all, which was threatened for many until 2000.

What is peacebuilding for you?

I think that it is a lot of things which we all, as members of this society, can do. Whether it's reacting when, for example, a little Roma is kicked out of a bus or is hit by someone... Reacting to injustice, reacting to hate speech, fighting against corruption, organizing a protest, expressing one's opinion. I think

it is also many individual actions, I am not only talking about peace activists working in organizations... Many of us can do something and that's where our responsibility is. If we do nothing, if we turn our heads away, if we say that we are not interested in politics since we have no time, I think we thus reject our

Work for common good was never too respected here, we don't have that tradition of social engagement which brings no direct benefit. I myself was mistaken earlier thinking that every social engagement delves into politics, and I stayed away from it not wanting to be dirtied by it. But, politics is everything, everyday life is politics: how big our pay is, what children will learn in school, whether we'll eat poisoned or healthy food – all of it is politics.

responsibility, and we could do different things which are peacebuilding. That's one thing no one can bring us, not even the economic progress itself can bring it, when we make I don't know what kind of income per capita. That's something that is a long-lasting process and it depends on all of us. I think that peacebuilding is also an attempt to be informed about everything that's happening in the society, instead of saying "I don't care about the news," "I want to give my brain some rest." Yes, sometimes it's needed that I give it some rest, but I want to know who represents me, in the Parliament, for example, and I don't want to vote for a party whose program discriminates against everyone who is not a Serb. I don't want to vote for someone who is for protection of the people accused of war crimes. I think that is also peacebuilding. Of course, it is also deliberate and coordinated actions which should move people. Whether it's action against Serbia joining NATO or something else, there are lots of them.

You mentioned that you were against Serbia joining NATO. Why?

There are many rational reasons for it, in the sense what it would be like for the Serbian budget, what kind of obligations membership imposes. There aren't many objective pieces of information in the public about what joining would mean, but it's sold in a package – if we want to enter the European Union, we must join NATO. I don't think it's like that. I believe that this region needs to be demilitarized. Joining NATO would strengthen some militaristic structures in this society. We have a heritage with which we simply need to fight in order to free this society of that kind of influence. I think that joining NATO would definitely not contribute to it.

Besides, NATO bombed this country... Somehow it would look like an extremely cruel joke to me if Serbia joined it. It would be good if as many unbiased pieces of information as possible were available once it's being decided whether to join NATO.

How did you view the bombardment? There are people who think that it was the only way to bring the regime down. How did you view it then and what's your view of it nowadays?

I was definitely against it. I don't think that was the way to bring the regime down. The regime had never been stronger than then. It seemed completely

absurd that someone was chasing me out of my home with bombs in order to bring someone else something good, and, in general, that you can bring something good with bombs. I am aware of everything that led to it and what justified that operation in the end, that Milošević had to be taken down, or that the regime's repression in Kosovo had to be stopped. That was also one of the things I was against; I took part in the protests against the regime for years, against the wars that were fought by that regime and the repression it exercised over the majority Albanian population in Kosovo. However, I think that the bombardment was definitely not the way. Not only that civilian targets and the infrastructure were destroyed, but also the ground was pulled away from under the Milošević's opponents' feet. I know that I felt deserted, confused... The world I believed to be a part of, in the sense of values I considered mutual – bombs came from that world. Simply, I couldn't understand that. I know that no one around me could accept that.

What do you view as the main obstacle to peacebuilding?

I think that this society, leaving the twisted national-socialism, let me call it so, entered some kind of transition after 2000. People have become impoverished during that process, the society has simply split into a thin layer of rich people and a large number of people who are just surviving. In such conditions, many people would say that they don't have the time to work on anything that is not bare survival. I can understand that, to a degree. But, I think that it is not the only obstacle. I think that the obstacles are, among others, the media, the state they are in, sometimes the people who work for them. One of the obstacles is also the state of education, some of those structures which were inherited, which haven't transformed enough. I know about the education during socialism since I was schooled at that time, it didn't provide us with enough education to understand social processes, the way that society functions; maybe some of the obstacles lay in it. In that sense the media could play a role which they currently don't. One of the obstacles is the authorities, as well. They often don't exist or enact some laws with delay. I think that the political will is lacking.

However, I think that there is enough space to do something, even without some of the structural support. The important impression after 2000 for me was that the fear disappeared, after Milošević was finally defeated in the election and had to withdraw. I was very dissatisfied with the pace of changes, I was frustrated, so to say, I thought things would go faster. They couldn't have, and that's clear to me. But, the fear and direct fear disappeared, so there's space to work, even though the structural support is missing.

Do you think that enough is being done?

I suppose that more can be done always. Most likely not enough is being done. Maybe people don't understand that they can benefit from it, not in the material sense, but that they can live better, not only by getting bigger paychecks. For example, I often hear from the women who are, as a rule, paid less than men

are for the same job, how they support the politicians who are sexists and male chauvinists. I don't get that.

I think we lack the awareness of the fact that an action produces a result, and that no one will provide us with that result. That between the effort we exert and the change which results is the link of action done by us, and not by someone else. Maybe that's inherited from socialism – work for common good was never too respected here, we don't have that tradition of social engagement which brings no direct benefit. I myself was mistaken earlier thinking that every social engagement delves into politics, and I stayed away from it not wanting to be dirtied by it. But, politics is everything, everyday life is politics: how big our pay is, what children will learn in school, whether we'll eat poisoned or healthy food – all of it is politics. I think that we lack awareness that the effort, resources we put in will return to us through changes for the better, and that it's not only the "I'll have a better pay," or be in a better position.

You mentioned the wartime horrors. If you consider that whole situation, how possible is reconciliation at all?

I think it's possible, definitely. Some people, a very small percentage, will never reconcile. But, that shouldn't be the decisive factor, in the sense if someone is debating whether to do something or not. I can say that it's possible since I contacted, talked, spent time, cooperated with people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, with people who became my friends, whom I hadn't known earlier. I think that such people exist in Serbia also, and elsewhere, who believe that it's possible and who work on it. But, that is also a job for all of us. I know that, whenever I had traveled, to Bosnia, for example, people asked me how they live over there, are there jobs, what is life like. It was curiosity, we had lived in one country, and that's normal. On one hand that pushes me to move on – I see that I am not alone, which was a dominant feeling throughout all those years; as much as I participated in the protests, I would feel that I didn't belong here once I returned home and turned on the TV. I would feel as if I lived in someone's nightmare, a twisted reality. Now I know that there are people of another nationality, faith, who even speak another language, but we believe in the same things, and that is the possibility for normal life, that we are not doomed to conflict, that it is not in our genes like you can hear. All of the wars which were fought are not the result of something that is characteristic of us and other nations.

What do you think that the Serbian society should do regarding reconciliation, what do you expect from the society in which you live?

I expect that the facts will not be falsified any longer. Also, I expect the lies to stop and that we'll stop pretending that we are crazy. That is hard for me when I see it. I mentioned Srebrenica, we all know what happened there, that there were so many victims, but it is still often disputed at length in the newspapers. Thus, I expect the lies and falsifications to stop, and that those who commit-

ted crimes will stop hiding behind all of us. And that it is presented in such a way, that we will admit some kind of a defeat if we turn them in to The Hague Tribunal. I view not facing it as a defeat, not taking them to court. That is the continuity of the Milošević era, in my opinion, those attempts to continue living a lie and a self-deception. I view that as very bad. We cannot build our future on such foundations.

What are you expectations of Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians?

I think that they should do the same, that no one from Belgrade should have to tell them who their criminals are. What I am dedicated to and what I do when I call things by their true name is that a crime is a crime, and the one who committed it is either a suspect or a criminal, that's what I expect to be done in those surroundings also. I know that it's being done. That's a process which will last, both here and there. I think that it's everybody's duty to work on what was happening in his or her society.

Which one of the previously listed sides is the responsible one for everything that happened, in your opinion?

There is no singly responsible side, definitely not. Each one of those sides bears its own part of responsibility. Unfortunately, The Hague Tribunal had to be formed in order for those criminals to be tried. As far as I know, the Serbian situation is not such that, for example, judicially, they could be tried here, or that they could have a fair trial. I think that it's similar in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Although that's the case, each one of those surroundings could discuss it and write about it, for it to be present publicly through a social dialogue, that it's in the focus of public attention, that it's not hushed up, twisted, avoided... I definitely don't think that it's only one side's fault. I find the Serbian side's responsibility to be of most importance to me. Simply, I belong to these surroundings and I think that it should be the most important for all of us. That we don't deal with, or that we don't analyze, the others' responsibility. As far as the collection of evidence goes, and all those other things which follow, I think that it needs to be done cooperatively, certainly. That we should not, or Serbia, hide her own accused. The foundation for the future is how much each one of those societies is ready to invest into cooperation in the capture of those accused of war crimes. That is a foundation for other kinds of future cooperation. It's very important that our cooperation does not come down to exchanges of pop concerts, or any other.

Do you think that there's collective guilt?

I don't think so. That matter of guilt and responsibility was unclear to me for a long time. Many people in Serbia killed no one, and in that sense they are not guilty of a crime. But, they were responsible for the regime's survival through some of their deeds and acts, and when I say this I also include myself, they are responsible for the situation as it was, that the regime kept on surviving...

Thus, I would make a distinction here, guilt and responsibility are not the same. Not every one of us bears equal responsibility, but bears his or her own part... When I hear people saying "Croats are a genocidal nation," and they were here themselves, took part in nothing, they were not interested in politics, of course that they should bear responsibility.

What are you hoping for? How do you view this region's future or the society's in which you live?

Hopes vary. Sometime I am a bit more skeptical regarding the future, or positive changes, sometime less. I hope that this society, let me only talk about the Serbian society, will become normal. I don't know when it will happen. I hope no wars will happen again. I would like it if Serbia didn't join NATO. I would like that we can travel without difficulties, so that people could convince themselves of the life behind the borders, where Yugoslavia once was, since many haven't had a chance. I also hope that we'll never have such TV as we used to, that I'll be able to find the information I need, while not having to read between the lines. The moments when I feel more hope are the moments when I see a positive step, and those are usually moments when I just did something or when I know that some people from my surroundings just did something, that's when I feel better and that future looks closer. I feel better if I know that I am not sitting and waiting.

You said what you hope for regarding the future. Whom do you expect to do it?

Simply, the future is all of ours. That sounds like a phrase, but I definitely believe in it. Who doesn't understand this is running away from his or her own responsibility. Who will bring us the future is definitely a matter which concerns all of us, each one of us can do something. One doesn't have to be particularly active for it, one can do it in one's workplace, in one's family, that's a bunch of small things... That's how we behave every day and whether we'll contribute to discrimination or we'll react to it, or we'll turn our heads away. It's definitely everyone's business.

I. F.

I should invite my neighbors over for a cup of coffee, instead of attacking them

How do you feel ten years after the war ended?

I feel good, but not satisfactory. I think that much more needs to be done, for which we'll need an additional ten years.

What are your wartime memories?

I experienced war only partially, since I wasn't in Bosnia and Herzegovina the whole time. But, I remember two events. I was a pupil, we were sitting at our desks in school when our teacher screamed: "Everybody, dive under your desks!" So we spent two hours under our desks, after which my mom busted in and took me home, although shelling was ongoing. My school was near the church which was the target of shelling. That's my personal wartime memory which I remember by its total futility which brought good to no one, a few tens of thousands of people were killed, one state was attacked with no motive... And, finally, we're back where we stood in 1991.

What do you think is needed to soften the wartime consequences, or to remove them altogether?

We need to face crimes, that everyone understands what happened, and not only face the individual, what someone has personally survived, but also to face the others' experiences. Only then, and based on it, can we start moving toward reconciliation.

What is reconciliation for you?

That word is hard for me to define, but it means for me that we can live normally together, that no one looks at me wrongly when I, as a Bosniak, arrive to Banja Luka wearing a lilac⁸⁷ or a crescent moon,⁸⁸ or when I arrive to Sarajevo as a Serb, with a cross around my neck, that no one says: "Look at that Serb." It's important that we mutually respect one another, that they don't see me as member of one group and that they offer me, an individual, an opportunity to live my life simply how I would like to live it here. I have already reconciled personally and I utilize

One of the basic problems is the lack of communication, thus, there's no dialog at all. Specifically, in the BGH case, all three sides view themselves as victims and do not want to consider the others. I think that all have to face what they did to the others, but what the others did to them, as well.

⁸⁷ The fleur-de-lis, Bosniak symbol.

⁸⁸ Often regarded as a symbol of Islam.

it in my life to the maximum.

What are the preconditions for reconciliation?

All who deserved it should be punished so that the other side could reconcile as well. Each one of us has to define it for ourselves. I have already done it for myself.

What obstacles can the reconciliatory process run into, in your opinion?

One of the basic problems is the lack of communication, thus, there's no dialog at all. Specifically, in the B&H case, all three sides view themselves as victims and do not want to consider the others. I think that all have to face what they did to the others, but with what the others did to them, as well.

Do you think that people want to be reconciled?

Yes, I think that people want that. Everyone who thinks with his or her head clearly knows that we can achieve social progress only through reconciliation, especially economic progress, and we'll get everything else through the economy. People certainly want reconciliation, only those who can influence them are not allowing them to express it.

What do you think that the "ordinary people" can do regarding reconciliation?

Little things. Get in touch with my neighbor again, that I invite my neighbors over for coffee instead of attacking them, that I say: "Here, neighbor, what happened is behind us, let's sit down and start talking again"... And, of course, engage in activities. It's understood that we all don't have to become activists, but we can at least support actions, seminars, public lectures... We simply need to face that term. We must not be passive.

How should we deal with the past: what is dealing with it for you, should it be forgotten?

No, it must not be forgotten in any case, we should forgive, but never forget. Dealing with the past is facing a crime for me; we need to face what my ethnic group has done to others.

If reconciliation occurred, what would change in your life and how would that affect the conditions in this state?

My life would change in such way that I could express my national identity freely, wherever I lived. I can do that to a large extent in Sarajevo nowadays, but not completely. Society would change so that important things would come up to the surface. Only then would we understand what is important for the whole society, and not delve into trivialities.

Should we seek guilt on one side only? Is it individual or collective?

Guilt is individual, I don't support the idea of collective guilt.

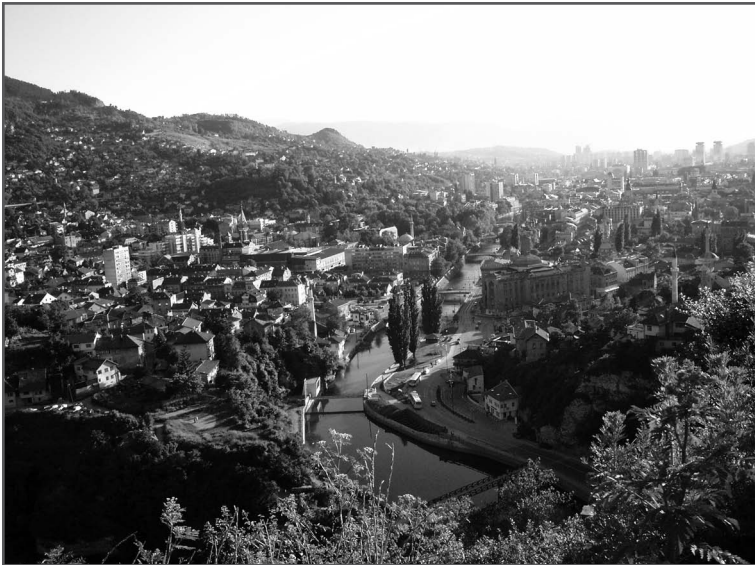
Do you think that each one of us carries part of the guilt?

I don't feel any guilt. Since I was only a child when all of it was happening I cannot feel any guilt, I had no idea what was happening then, I didn't understand what was happening then, nor could I have done anything to prevent what happened. While, on the other hand, the persons who were more mature at the time and who could have resisted all of it at least by not going to the front lines should carry a tiny part of individual guilt.

What are your predictions for this region's future?

I think that the reconciliatory process is heading off in a wrong direction, that needs to be changed. I think that apologizing is a good deed, especially if a state's president apologizes, but I think that it is wrong if a whole people is not behind it, since it is an individual apology then, and not in the whole people's name. The things which happened to us we must not forget, since we only repress them that way. We had a similar thing in WWII, when many crimes which took place were pushed into oblivion by communist policies. I liked the German way of dealing with the past; the way they faced their crimes. If everyone faced only his or her crimes and compared it with the second or third sides' crimes, every individual could create a picture of what really happened.

V. E.



Dika

(30)

Sarajevo
school dormi-
tory director

*Alhamdulillah*⁸⁹

First I would like to ask you to please introduce yourself as you see relevant for this interview.

I would like to mention a few things about how I see myself as thirty-year-old Dika, who is currently the director of a school dormitory, meaning that she bears a large responsibility of which she needs to be aware. Dika stayed a

fifteen-year-old in many things, and the fifteen-year-old persistently calls out to me rebelliously: "Don't be negligent now and don't miss what you have been missing for the last fifteen years." And that is the wartime period – when it began I thought that I was doing absolutely everything I could do, and now when I think I see that I could have done much more, even regarding little things. Those are the things that press and hurt me. Fifteen years have passed, and I still haven't talked to my Nataša. And it's as I was waiting for something the whole time, this way or that... And she's my high school friend, we were very close, and that last Christmas and Eid were our last meetings. That was in 1992. She left, and Dijana and I... One left for Belgrade, one for Zagreb, one for Sarajevo... And it really hurts, it hurts even more for the last three years. And I still haven't done anything regarding it. And I would like to, it looks as if that little thing could change some things in my life. Maybe in Nataša's, as well, and maybe in many others' lives, if we established that contact. We ran away somewhere, maybe from one another.

What the war did is that all of us became closed. I call them ghettos. And everyone turned toward themselves, as different as they are. To themselves – I mean to their identities which have even been forced upon us at a particular moment so we ended up accepting them as such. Or one was chosen from among our other identities and we were told: "This one is decisive for you now." I mean the national identity.

What do you remember nowadays from 1991, 1992, those wartime years? What's your relation to those years?

I am an observer, unfortunately, more than a participant, who observed all of it from some spot. Ready to participate at any moment, but, I grew to accept, unfortunately or not, I don't know, "Do not meddle in what you haven't been invited to." I was also ready to join the war, in the end, I was ready to leave Bosnia for the same reason because of which I would pick up a gun. What's

⁸⁹ *Alhamdulillah* is an Arabic phrase meaning "Praise be to Allah." In everyday speech it simply means "Thank God!"

the problem, what's wrong with us all? And it is not clear to me what's common to all of us to this day – in that sense it could be a kind of total lack of knowledge. We socialized, we spent our whole lives together, while it's questionable, completely questionable, how much we really knew each other. Still, we loved each other, that's indisputable and that's what confuses me the most. And I think, normally, all those shells and snipers, etc... Well, I think I'll never manage to forget them, no matter what. I had that luck that no one close to me died so that I cannot say as much as someone... Maybe I don't have as many emotions, maybe it's easier for me to talk and react and work than for someone who's more hurt emotionally. Well, then, what the war did is that all of us became closed. I call them ghettos, I don't know how good this term is. And everyone turned toward themselves, as different as they are. To themselves – I mean to their identities which have even been forced upon us at a particular moment so we ended up accepting them as such. Or one was chosen from among our other identities and we were told: "This one is decisive for you now." I mean the national identity. I am one of the people who believe that what happened had to happen. And, then, our mistakes, let's take a closer look at them. Somehow, it's easier for me to live like this, I customarily say that I do it so that I don't fall ill with cancer or something alike. That's how I comfort myself. But, I wouldn't like it if it happened again. I think that we are the ones who will have those things happen again or not. And we have a chance that it doesn't happen again. We are the generation which should, at least, open the road for it not to occur again. That we really get to know one another and see what the others' needs are.

What's your opinion if you consider the current situation in B&H – are we, as a society, closer to the war happening again or not?

Well, if you had asked me this question two months ago I would have told you that we were closer to it happening again. I didn't know a lot of things I have learned within the last two months, I've been watching TV, the media give us a picture that leads us only to war, at least in the sense of how I see it. Maybe I am not a good viewer, we can also consider that. But, I felt like we were just a second away from war breaking out again because of it all. Deep inside I felt fear, I was still that fifteen-year-old who didn't know what she must do, who needed to be told what to do. So much for responsibility. And now, if I think about it, it seemed to me that I was lonely, I really couldn't manage. And, then, two or three months ago, I don't know exactly, I started meeting some people who were not the ones at the top, the unreachable ones, very conditionally stated, and who are ready to work on it as individuals, and I among them. A young man who entered my office has inspired confidence in me, and then you... Look, like, there're a lot of us then! We can do much more, somehow I obtained some, I don't know how to call it, support for my efforts. Thus, I don't think now that we are close to war breaking out as it seemed to me earlier. The



possibility of it reoccurring... It still seems to me that a lot is being done, and that there's a desire for it from the first, second and third side, or from all of them. Not only three sides should be considered. And maybe the first ray of that small light was when I saw, I think it was a literary author, her interview on TV, I can't call her a representative but she's of Serbian nationality, when she clearly stated that she was against particular crimes committed against this or that people. That was a real surprise to me, look, there's also someone over there who... After ten years... I mean, it's my own personal shame that I knew so little. The fact that we are talking today, that we are closer to that something, speaks of us having a chance of peace more than of war. Now, it's up to us to choose whether we'll continue in this manner or there will be more of us to whom peace is closer... I think that it will... I believe in it and I really live in hope. I am convinced, I know – we lived together before knowing one another poorly. Now we have a chance to get to know each other. Now we know what our breakdown was.

You think we know? Actually, that average, or most of people know?

Well, I can see that tendency or maybe my social circle is too small. Lately I have been meeting only the people who have that tendency and that desire. And I feel that their number is increasing. It's something that's starting to fulfill me and which gives me strength to continue and to believe, convinces me that it's possible. And this other stuff, I think it's only at the surface after all and that it's not as hard to handle as it seems at first sight. Although, a lot, lot, of sweat and effort is needed from all sides. Then, again, it's much easier for me to talk about it than for the people who invested much emotion in terms of loss, it's much

harder to reach them than me, it's much harder for them to open up, it's much harder for them to leave all that pain aside. A breakthrough is needed for it.

Why do you think that it's important to work on the war crimes you mentioned, within this context?

We must do it because of the people I just mentioned, they cannot pass over that as easy as I can. I could do it for a thousand and one reason, because I miss Nataša, who, to be clear, is maybe not the same person any more... I think that those things have to be sorted out. I watched an interview with Bakir Izetbegović⁹⁰ a few nights ago, he said that we had to utilize all means for this or that reason. And I think it would be fairer to say – it's not ok what we did in certain situations. If you want to represent an idea, you need to stick to it the whole time. Somehow it's very important that I see that you admit your mistakes. Not a mistake in the sense of religious repentance (now that I am veiled), but that you really feel that it is not alright and that you'll never do it again. Because I do feel fear. I know that people from my social circles will tell me now: "Well, you know, 1914, 1918, 1941–1945, 1991–1995 happened to us, we are naïve." That's also true, if you look at it from that side. That's your truth, but when I hear that someone from this side is ready to say that those are not nice things, yes, they were done but we need to make sure that they don't happen again... Those are not nice things and we admit that, well, then, I'll reexamine myself. My responsibility could be smaller, but, ok, I'll also measure it, picture it to myself – this, this, this and this is my responsibility. Then, again, you have everybody's closeness...

Maybe I am also naïve for believing that we are close to some kind of peace. But, neighbors are important, the ones around us, closer and further. The general conditions in Europe can affect us a lot, and they always have. Bosnia and Herzegovina... Serbia and Croatia, France and Germany are also important to us... All those global tendencies... Thus, altogether, I am a bit more afraid because of it than because of us. We also learn from our mistakes made during communism – I view it as a layman who loved it altogether – many things were forced on us from above, and now I think that we work from the bottom up, through individuals. Communists had a few, close circle of, people who were aware, and an idea which many followed. And that idea didn't touch those people. And now, it seems that the peacebuilding idea is touching individuals, and it still exists somewhere above. It exists, I cannot say that it doesn't. Now, its strength or weakness is another matter, but I do see it.

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– terrible things, I
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But, when I descend into
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do something, all of
us together, each one of
us can...*

⁹⁰ Bosniak politician, son of the late Bosnian president, Alija Izetbegović.

What else do you think that's important to be done aside from the story about crimes within the context of dealing with the past and peacebuilding?

I don't think that a lot of time should be wasted on it, but until we reach the point where individuals whose hearts are closed for the others are talking again... It's necessary to talk about crimes up to that point, so that they are not forgotten, simply. And what else? I think that we must necessarily act in the media. As I said, maybe I am not such a good viewer, but when I watch TV – terrible things, I can see no hope for us. But, when I descend into real life, I still see hope. We, the people, can really do something, all of us together, each one of us can... Some more, some less, but, come on, all of it is fine. Thus, more needs to be done in the media, in the sense of both propaganda and everything else. And I don't mean billboards as big as "the weapons' harvest"⁹¹ and everything else, I think that they should rather be about peacebuilding, so that people are brainwashed with it. That it enters our subconscious, and not only weapons, weapons; weapons wherever I turn. I think that I'll finally want to own some, that's how much they throw it at me.

What does the word reconciliation mean to you? How does it ring in your head?

My brain is a bit too religious regarding the term 'reconciliation,' so I see something in it... I am often called a Jesus' fan by my close friends, I view it from the "let's all love each other" standpoint, in that sense. Maybe I am not the person who could talk about it from a more practical standpoint.

That is heard often, but I am interested in what you think about it, who should carry that process and who should "make peace" with whom?

I think that we need to primarily do it with ourselves, and then it will be easy to do it with others. Thus, exactly at the moment when we realize our own defects, our own faults, even sins, in a sense...

I am glad to hear that word being repeatedly used, but I hope that it won't stay at that level of parrot-like repetition, since even a parrot can learn a few words and then repeat them. But those words, by God, awake hope in me, so be it as it may! That's like that Coca Cola, I enter a market, I buy it unawares so that I would like to return later, it simply enters your unconscious. Well, same with this, I think it's still good that it's being repeated, even if that way. With such hope – maybe I am just a Tito's pioneer⁹² in that sense.

How will we know that we are reconciled in this society? How should the society look?

Well, currently, I'll say knowing that many won't like this sentence – the entities

⁹¹ Public campaign to get people to hand in weapons.

⁹² "Tito's pioneer" refers to a member of the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia. During communist rule, all elementary school children became "pioneers" by default.

still exist, monoethnic schools exist. We are not Switzerland in which that there are so many different languages to make it necessary. Thus, it's an ongoing process, and it demands what I already said: sweat, effort... Well, what can you do, it demands, so what, it's worth it. Well, then, people, let's sweat!

Here's how I see it altogether: we are still a state which lacks authority. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I don't care about how people will comment about this, but I would like to have one such authority to lead us, who will care that this state has a system of values built in if we view it from top to bottom. To introduce a system of quality so that, after his death, the same won't happen as after Tito's.

Do you have any ideas how you would work on it?

I think that even my going to any public place, expression of my needs, that's very important... And I would like to act in more levels (maybe I am too ambitious)... I am also really interested in the political sphere and I think that, if you really want to do something, it must go through those pores as well, that you must sneak into it. I am very sorry that people in our state have such a poor opinion of politicians but I also think that the politicians have contributed to it themselves.

What are your needs, being a Bosniak and Muslim woman who is veiled?

My need is that I am accepted as a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina according to my constitutional rights, or, as we would say, *Alhamdulillah* (thanks to God).



I really mean it. I don't need much more than what the Constitution guarantees me. But, I need it understood that my needs are within that framework. In the sense of having to change the Constitution for some other reasons, well, then, let's do it, it's nothing terrible and unchangeable. In that sense, that I, as an individual, not only as a veiled Dika, but every individual, if we are in contact, as we all necessarily are in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we cannot avoid one another, if we wanted to. So, let's see what bothers us, what bothers you, let's see what we can do all together. And, this is what I view as expressing needs. That I also show you that your needs are also very important to me, that's what it is! And I really don't want my needs to interfere with yours, if at all possible, and let's go ahead and find a solution for where our needs interfere with each other. Let's see what we can do. And then, finally, I don't have a problem with visiting a psychologist to resolve something, well, then, let's call someone, in the end we can even call that High Representative,⁹³ in quotation marks. Let's hear one another. I only hope that these are not my wishes and fantasies. I am already doing some things in my surroundings. Maybe I regret that I haven't had a chance to live elsewhere for half a year or a year in order to use that experience in this segment of the peacebuilding work.

Anything else to conclude this conversation?

Recently, whenever I meet someone I say: "But we must talk about it," since it has happened that people tell me "Let's not talk about politics." Well, folks, that's not politics, that's our reality, what's wrong with you? Speak about it, speak, as loud as you can! It doesn't have to be loud permanently, only until things start getting resolved, in a sense. All we must do is comprehend the reality well.

T. Š.

⁹³ The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina is a position created with the Dayton Peace Agreement. Office of the High Representative (OHR) oversees the Agreement's civilian implementation.

If you are silent, the other one will shout, and everyone will listen to that

What kind of feeling do you get when you consider the nineties and all that was happening then? How were they for you?

I think that I totally repressed a good part of it. I didn't understand what was happening at all. I was seventeen, eighteen, it began as it did. Plitvice,⁹⁴ it was, like, far away, then air raid alerts started, Split, ships, bullshit, all sorts of things... Look, my father was in the military, but only up to 1974. Then he left it, got an apartment from it, so these apartment buildings around us are the military's. Not only officers resided here, it changed with time, all sorts of people lived here. I was living on the sixteenth floor, air raid alerts started, we would go down to the basement, I would usually take only my cassettes. I liked music, it's all I listened to, I would take down neither clothes nor anything else, just a bag full of cassettes, that was the first thing. When I realized after a few times that the alerts had nothing to do with reality and that they only instilled fear, I stopped going down to the basement. The city would be darkened... I didn't watch TV much, I figured out that it was all propaganda, you know, when Mozart's Requiem is played along to a slow motion image of the Vukovar procession. All of it was a tragedy, but that machinery worked on such a level that you hated all Serbs when you saw that scene in the news. That was the logic.

We were a gang, we stuck together... I think that I was letting all of it pass, I didn't understand what was happening at all, it took time for me to put it all together. Something irrational was happening which I didn't understand, that hatred, that madness...

What caused it, in your opinion?

I wouldn't like to trivialize it, but the first thing that comes to my mind is one of Balašević's⁹⁵ lyrics – the priests came first, then the cannons, then the thieves. That comes to my mind first and that is, like... I think that all politicians were

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⁹⁴ One of the first incidents (two persons were killed) which led to full-scale war. It took place in Plitvice, Croatia, in March 1991.

⁹⁵ Đorđe Balašević (1953) is a popular regional singer and songwriter.

mythomaniacs, more or less, who woke up and inflamed some historical ghosts and beasts along with basic passions which lay in that mythology, in a nation, in a faith. I don't think that it was an ethnic conflict, but a religious one, that it was a religious war, basically.

Why was the war needed and what came out of it?

I don't know, I don't know what to... Someone would stress that it was something that was accumulating and finally burst like a pus-filled boil. If that's the case, we'll recover and burst again sometime. If we are genetically predisposed for a war every fifty years... Actually, I'm not inclined to such theories. Why did it come to that like...?

Why was it a religious war, as you said, more than national or any other categorizations?

Regarding nationality, the people are much ethnically mixed in this region. I am also mixed, my old man is a Bosnian Serb, my mother is a Croat from around Neretva,⁹⁶ she has some Illyrian blood as well. If I delved into that genesis I could conclude that I am a cocktail, pretty much, of all sorts of things. When all of it started, the churches came out and preserved the nationality. Which was absurd to me right from the beginning since I cannot connect the church, which is from God, for which all men are equal and all are his children, with the national. Like – God and Croats, we are the chosen people. That maybe belongs to some religious beliefs before Christ, some cults, Mithraism, I have no idea. I figured out, with time, that these people were not baptized at all and that they did not believe in that God to whom they bow down, since that God is full of love, understanding, forgiveness and mercy, and they still believe that a father needs to be strict and just, and that is actually the Old Testament God who is strict and just, wielding a sword in one hand. But, then again, maybe *rakia*⁹⁷ is to blame for it all...

Why *rakia*?

People make it poorly so that it hits them in the head. And fear, man is a social being and must belong to a group and when all of it starts happening it takes a lot of courage to say that it's wrong. Like what was happening in Iraq with the prisoners. All sorts of things happened here as well, many even worse. Scientific studies show that that the mechanism of human consciousness works in such way that it will, as a part of a group, make some irrational and unbelievable things and still live with it. I believe and I hope, as things develop, that someone will always say that it isn't right.

If you look at today's situation, it seems that you, at your band's level, are very conscious of the situation and our society's level of consciousness.

⁹⁶ Neretva is a river in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

⁹⁷ *Rakia* or *rakija* is a type of an alcoholic drink similar to brandy.

How do you see it?

I think that people don't have a sense of security and outlook, an existential fear has snuck into them, the most ordinary kind. They are afraid of losing their jobs tomorrow. People today do not have that sense of security like they had during socialism, you get a job and work there until you retire. People cannot handle those existential fears which are always present, they handle them poorly. What happened here is a strange cocktail of all that which, altogether, takes a man into a chaotic state. Everyone is managing on his or her own and it's the simplest to live outside of the law. Our society did not experience the evolutionary development to view the law as something that is above all of us, something that guarantees everybody's equality. But, the law is always like – qadi sues you, qadi tries you.⁹⁸ The same law is interpreted differently for different people and that is understood as something normal; like the people who should really be exposed and shown in the public as great people, like that judge who sentenced Norac,⁹⁹ what's her name ... She is this society's hero.

Why do people don't see her as a hero?

Well, because she wasn't presented in *Extra* or *Gloria* magazines...¹⁰⁰

During the war all sorts of things happened, Norac, Gotovina,¹⁰¹ ethnic cleansings and a bunch of other things which took place and are taboos, are not being discussed. What do you think, how should we relate to that wartime and everything that came out of it?

I don't know what to tell you. I read *Feral*,¹⁰² daily newspapers here and there. The things *Feral* published ten years ago are slowly starting to become public. When it was being published and when it occupied and bothered me, those were sci-fi things, total fiction. I think that there are always people who want to learn and who want to work on themselves as people, as humans, want to overcome those discriminating camps such as nationality, religion, so that it's not being interpreted as a Masonic conspiracy. I think that there are many such people in Croatia.

Why aren't they heard?

They are heard, yes, they are, but that's not in the foreground, but it cannot be there, such is the nature of the thing. The foreground functions based on the rules of a spectacle – makeup, elegant clothes, pretty young people. The thing

⁹⁸ A saying from the region meaning: the judge and the prosecutor act as one.

⁹⁹ Mirko Norac (1967) is a former general of the Croatian Army who was indicted for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war by ICTY. In November 2005 his case was transferred to Croatia.

¹⁰⁰ Popular Croatian magazines.

¹⁰¹ Ante Gotovina (1955) is a former lieutenant general of the Croatian Army. He is indicted by ICTY for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war.

¹⁰² *Feral Tribune* was a political weekly newspaper in Croatia.

is that we are a small market and all those things of commercial character have to survive in such a small market so it's normal that people work on things which sell. I still think that the, how can I call it, honest intelligentsia exists.

How is that to be handled, how can it be fought?

With knowledge, reading, knowledge is everywhere, everyone has the internet, books and newspapers, so, whoever wants it can study, and who doesn't want to doesn't have to. I was terrified when the war began. When *HTV*¹⁰³ showed a few days ago that footage from Srebrenica, I couldn't watch it at first, I think that it is already psychologically... I think that my psyche has created a defense mechanism for that type of things. I simply felt as if it wasn't happening. Great horror and lack of understanding of all of that. Possibly, everyone who was normal, even the actors themselves, could not have been immune to it. I don't know, I cannot understand it at all...

How was it for you to continue living in Split, considering your heritage which you mentioned in the beginning, considering that your old man is a Bosnian Serb? Have people viewed you through that? You don't have to answer this question if it's too hard for you.

I didn't feel any consequences because of it, since I don't have it in me, I don't have a sense of national affiliation. I used to be a Yugoslavian and I had a feeling for Yugoslavia, all of us living in peace, if anyone attacks us from abroad we'll defend ourselves, that's about it. Neither am I a Yugo-nostalgic person nor is Tito a god to me, that was something nice. One country where you can travel, which has different people, I had lots of friends everywhere, all of them normal, everything was OK, super... I suppose you have to have it in you in order for it to hurt. I figured out, like, when I say my name was Aleksandar, I saw it somewhat in gestures... But, it didn't bother me. The people I socialized with had always been normal, we liked music, it was always number one. No one died from my personal circle, the circle of my close cousins or family.

I always think about what would mean if someone who was close to me died or something, and that changes the whole thing. Then that person really must have strength to rise above it all, but really, not just declaratively. When asked, everyone will tell that they don't care about it, that they see all people as people, and when you scratch beneath the surface you see so many of those ghosts and negative energy. You enter the spheres of, let's say, the spiritual, where I am disappointed by all those churches which inflamed it subtly instead of trying to do something in that field. They pushed themselves into politics and everywhere as if they were required or responsible to explain some things to people. That's an amalgam which can create chaos for an unlearned man. If people were learning and not being limited in any way, if they were learning about their traditions, their roots, they would find many things which were universal.

¹⁰³ Croatian public broadcasting service.

In those religious and national traditions which are the same for everyone. Maybe the method is not to avoid saying it and rising above it, but enter all of it instead, into the roots and understand that it might be the thing which connects people.

How to enter it?

By reading books, meeting other people through culture, music, socialization, art. Those are the universal languages which connect people. By watching the *Discovery Channel* (laughter).

What is reconciliation for you? How do you view this word?

Reconciliation is making peace with yourself. I think that's it. Like, now we need to reconcile the Ustaše with the partisans... I have always been for peace. Reconciliation is presented now as having to forgo something. Give up on it, that is, sacrifice it, let's say eat shit, all of us, these and those – in order to live in peace. Maybe that's OK on one hand, but on the other it's a shortcut which is not exactly natural. I personally don't need reconciliation, I view people without those connotations, and those people because of whom we need to reconcile are dead. Those people who were Ustaše, partisans, who fought back then.

I think that the current reconciliation is indeed occurring, in a way. People were, it seems to me, drawn into the whirlpool and chaos of that madness. Ideology has been replaced by faith and nation, and then politics came which has no ideological background, that has been the case for years. Since the beginning, there have never been any ideas behind it, political, ideological in the sense that the left is based on the French revolution, which is a type of civil ideology, and



the right is nation, tradition. Reconciliation can always be found in it, there are elements which can really connect people via ideas, but they won't reconcile through an idea, they'll reconcile for some simply pragmatic reasons, meaning pure authority, power, again some one-dimensional and primitive things.

If you take a look at the concrete Croatian society, the situation with the returning of people, do you think that we need reconciliation?

I would erase all borders, allow people to travel wherever they want and settle wherever they want. That's normal from my perspective which has no relation to reality. I am aware that it is a bunch of things which you drop from those abstractions and that they all sound OK theoretically, but, in practice, it's a bunch of bullshit.

When you hear someone saying some shit, like inciting hatred, people say all sorts of things. If you are silent, the other one will shout, and everyone will listen to that. Reaction is needed in such situations.

These are things which in the end boil down to that they need to be handled by small communities of people, such as what it is called local democracy, local self-governance, which is happening in today's world, but we are all still far away from it. There's no awareness that each human is important, that he or she decides about things, if he or she wants it.

Do the people in Croatia want reconciliation, do they want to face the wartime past?

I believe that they do, every normal person wants to live in peace and wants peace for his children. That we can do our jobs, that we are satisfied with our jobs, that we can love and achieve some of our dreams which are above the material framework. There are ways and mechanisms to achieve it, such as elections, investing some effort into civil and nongovernmental initiatives. There are mechanisms, but will is needed. I am afraid that most are numbed, alienated, and are satisfied with the TV program and shopping on Sunday when they can buy a bunch of cheap and useless things which they'll throw away in two months and buy new ones, go into credit... But, then again, it's stupid to talk like this, people have a lot of problems and they live with them.

What are your fears related to reconciliation within this society and do you see the way how they can be overcome?

The fear of facing yourself. Like, that's it. There are people who participated in all that, who are actors and that's one large burden and the ways to solve it are complex. There is a whole circle of people around it who have, through inertia, learned who was at fault, that's a learned lesson, that's another type of responsibility, but, in essence, that's a very simple thing, things have to be felt purely, without any masks, fences and screens. One is human, primarily, then a Croat, then a Catholic, and only then is considered what kind of person one is. In my opinion, we should start with what kind of a person one is.

What can the “ordinary people” do, those who are walking on the water-front right now?

They should get educated and learn how to join the dialog in ordinary situations. I start with the street. When you hear someone saying some shit, like inciting hatred, people say all sorts of things. If you are silent, the other one will shout, and everyone will listen to that. Hate speech has its own crazy logic and argumentation to it, but it always ends in some fog and abstractions which leak on all sides, the story is thin, it can't stand. Reaction is needed in such situations, roll up your sleeves. Everyone knows we won democracy, dialog, sovereignty, and law and that's what it is. There is law, there is dialog, there are mechanisms in which you can affect the authorities, but that's only an idea, it doesn't work in practice.

How do you see the lyrics and music you create, is that one of the ways to react to the current situation?

That's an inner thing, an insight, a way to assume responsibility; I wouldn't assume the majority's responsibility, that's a very foreign thing to me. Social responsibility and engagement, that is thankless, in a way. I really and essentially don't believe that one person can change things. One can work on oneself, change oneself, and, if you have some ideas and ideals, you can try to be consistent with them. So, in a way, I observe things by excluding myself from some social events and happenings and watch them from the outside, but I live them at the same time. So, that is, actually, like an inner conflict of mine because of which I write those things, that is probably a sort of an inspiration. Some inner conflict of mine connected with the social. I am a very social person, I believe in world peace, I believe in it. I feel that I belong to that current, that idea. I am engaged in the sense of practical social activities. I love doing it and that's the way how we express ourselves.

S. D.

One's enemy is within oneself

What would reconciliation be within the Macedonian framework, in this reality of ours?

That's too broad, somehow... Reconciliation... Means that something preceded it, or, to put it concretely, that someone was at odds. You mean what's happening here to us, right, Macedonians and Albanians? Alright, this is how it sounds theoretically... There is a book written by a Christian which is entitled: "About Christianity's dignity and Christians' lack of dignity," and that came to me as a first association, what would be his attitude... I mean, I am asking myself, whether I am worthy of talking about Christian ideas, when it's so big,

I don't want to avoid finding out why it came to such situation; I would like to hear those others, why do they feel threatened and what I did to contribute to it. We can assume how another felt or how another feels, but only that other can tell us how he really feels.

all-encompassing, so strong... I don't know if I can do it as it should be done, in that exact spirit, so to speak. And it is exactly what can help the most in this type of situations. I mean the Christian spirit, the basic idea which Christ brought along when he came to this world. Something that He said. The Old Testament gave us the command "Love thy neighbor." And, when He arrived, He gave us a new command "Love thy enemies." Well, now, let's say that I, individually, have an inner need for some answers in my life; one of the main questions is "Who are my enemies, who is my enemy?" I still don't have an answer to that question. And I still actively search for it. And that attempt of mine to locate who would be that enemy force,

for now, ends within me. I think that it is somehow the first and the last place where one's enemy is, within oneself.

What would be needed in order to reconcile, or at least heal, the consequences of this growing split?

That the people are not viewed as masses, a collective, a bunch of sheep, but as a community of people, live persons, each one of them special. Each one is a story for itself. Well, then, let each one of those stories work on itself. Thus, turn to oneself, think about improving one's own conditions, one's own situation, and not meddle in others' lives. To establish a contact with another only when in situation to give or offer another something, or I don't know what else. Reconciliation requires that we all take a look into ourselves, look for strength

¹⁰⁴ Macedonian Orthodox Church.

there, analyze ourselves, and seek our motives. Besides, it is symptomatic that guilt is always passed onto someone else in such situations. Well, we need to pass the guilt back to ourselves. If someone has to be at fault, we should be at fault ourselves, and not someone else. If nothing else, that guilt should be transformed at least into a sense of responsibility. Not that someone else is guilty, but that I am responsible. I think that's working on oneself. That's what is needed – that you turn toward yourself in that sense.

What should be our relation with the past, what to do with it, with wars and conflicts within that context? Is future life possible if we don't look back at what happened?

I think that Einstein could help me with this, that time is a relative category somehow. What I think important is the present, although the present is the past's consequence, and although those conflicts or that war were current at a particular time, right? Now, it happened as it did. We should concentrate on what is now, on what is happening at this moment. Of course, not to forget what happened or attempt to change something, to falsify history...

How do we know what happened?

We always know what the truth is, it cannot be relativized like I said time could; some absolute categories exist. I think that an objective picture of what happened exists. Roughly said, an interpretation exists. You should comprehend the problem and tell a story, this and that happened, without taking sides, you are neither an Albanian nor a Macedonian, neither this nor that. Anyway, we cannot... If our identity is, let's say, Macedonian, we'll always tell a story from



the Macedonian perspective, although that won't be our intention. I would like to take the other's side, let's say. If Albanians attacked us asking for their rights, I want to know why they did it, I want to know what they are asking for. I want to know how they feel, why they do it. Why do they feel frustrated and hurt? I am interested in it. I want, if they have a problem, to see what I can do and what's my responsibility in it, how I can help. If a conflict took place, as it's explained now, or war, that they attacked, I don't want to avoid finding out why it came to such situation; I would like to hear those others, why do they feel threatened and what I did to contribute to it. We can assume how another felt or how another feels, but only that other can tell us how he really feels. I don't want to run away from problems or reality, quite the contrary.

How can space open for discussions about the other's needs, about his feeling that he is threatened?

Well, that practically depends on our openness, it depends on how much I feel threatened, how much I am afraid, how much I see one as my enemy, and how much I see one as someone whom God gave to me in order to reach God through him. And that's the whole difference – whether we see one as our potential murderer or as a chance to reach some love, since, if we ever came into that situation, it's clear that it happened because I didn't have love for someone, and not because someone just came wanting to simply kill me. I think it's in the human nature to always blame someone else while pretending that he is OK, that he has nothing to be blamed for. It happens mechanically somehow, meaning that the person is not aware of the blame game. Well now, once you become conscious of it, when you see that someone is not your enemy, that he was imposed onto you as such, that's when both of you get a chance.

Do you think that the religious communities in Macedonia give enough active support to reconciliation?

They show some will for it, based on the ones who are, let's say, the leaders of those communities. There are contacts, communication between them. In every religion's, faith's core is the final goal of living with God, or being on the good side. I believe that we at least theoretically, if not practically, stick to that (*laughter*). In order to accomplish it practically, I think that we need that period which is ahead of us.

What is left to the “ordinary people” to do? What can we do?

There aren't ordinary and non-ordinary people. There is always just one man and everything starts with him. In masses of people, each one is special, unique, and there aren't any ordinary people in that sense. Those ordinary people are millions of unique persons. Each one can do a lot, first within himself. I insist on it that we firstly work on ourselves; make ourselves better. Only when we do something with ourselves and within ourselves, can we turn to another, open up for another.

A. B.

Hatred only attracts more hatred

Can you still feel the consequences, four years after the conflict in Macedonia?

Yes, I see them everywhere, especially in places which were strongly engulfed in the conflict, like Kumanovo region was, for example. I have a sister who lives there and who was affected by all those events. During the war, she spent a lot of time in basements and is traumatized because of it. Even to this day it happens that she gets up at night, goes outside, screams... A grown-up woman, forty years old.

I can also feel them in people, generally, and how they behaved right after it. Small changes have occurred since then, but the consequences can still be felt.

How did the war affect you?

I am different and I comprehend things differently. The war was stupid for me even then since everything can be accomplished through negotiations, agreements.

Thank God, we, the people, have a gift, which is that we can speak, communicate, and can understand some things, and work anything out through talking. We don't have to do it with guns and bombs. I think that we can understand one another without those means.

Were there any situations in which you were hurt?

Yes, there are, there are too many, but one situation left a strong impression on me. I worked in both a health center and the Medical School, they lacked staff, and taught in Albanian *parallelka* at the time. A colleague of mine who was teaching the Gynecology lab was absent. I offered the principal (she has been replaced since then) to replace my colleague and help her since her students were skipping classes. Why should they skip them and be in the street, and offered to teach the class, when she told me, in wonder: "Who? You? To do that in a Macedonian *parallelka*?"

She was even amazed and I was hurt, since I thought: how can Macedonians teach in Albanian *parallelka*, and we must not in the Macedonian ones? If the problem was in the language, OK, let's say that I don't know it, although that's not true, but ordinary labs at the clinic, in surgery, were

I often felt like crying because they hated me, and that hatred only created hatred, and, at first, I was afraid, but later you start hating the one who's offending you, whether you want it or not. We are all just humans, we are all the same. Maybe some cultural differences do exist, but we all breathe, we are all humans.

the problem. It needs not to be discussed in length that in Albanian *paralelka* they show how to give shots or some other intervention just like they do in the Macedonian ones.

How did you manage to deal with this situation and other similar situations which hurt you?

I think that I am an open person. I want to talk when there's space for it. I also want feedback, I asked the principal for it as well, since we had earlier had a chance to learn more about nonviolent transformation of conflicts and how things could have been solved through dialog in Megjashi.¹⁰⁵ That's what I wanted to try there, to succeed, but she didn't understand it at the time, and it seems such was the situation after the war, so I don't know why... Maybe she was shaken. Recently I have been feeling that this person is going through a lot of changes. I am even surprised – she talks with me respectfully, sometimes she consults with me about some things. I believe that we can make miracles, in education, for example, by heightening the awareness of violence and non-violence and techniques of nonviolent communication – what we do with our students in workshops... A lot can be done, really.

What is reconciliation for you?

Instead of spending your life arguing and hating, why don't you transform it into something nice? When you have to live in the same place, instead of arguing, you should accept it and understand it. Problems need to be discussed openly, trustfully, in a free and relaxed manner, with no hesitation, like we do in workshops. People can put themselves in your situation and understand you, to clear things up. It often happens that someone does something out of fear, unintentionally.

They say that a fish's head stinks the most, while we clean it starting with its tail. Reconciliation also depends on the authorities. That needs a lot of work as well.

What, for example?

Well, why not these workshops? I don't know how it works with politicians, but why couldn't workshops be organized for them? Workshops could influence them as well. When they could influence us, professors, why couldn't they be influenced?

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¹⁰⁵ The First Children's Embassy in the World Megjashi is a nongovernmental organization based in Skopje, Macedonia.

What do you think, do the people in Macedonia want reconciliation?

Yes. I think that Macedonians also want it. It's normal that these conflict situations do not suit them either. Although I have no understanding of politics, I'll still say this: I heard in the news that Macedonians were also afraid and that they wanted Kosovo's independence. If those conflicts exist, they'll spill over here. I think that they are right.

What do you think, what else could be done in this field? For example, how could you personally contribute to the reconciliation process? Do you think that you can do something as well?

Here, in the Medical School, are professors who are Albanians, unemployed, there are unemployed doctors, and we lack staff. Why don't we enable them to get jobs faster, to become qualified for another job so that we wouldn't lack staff any longer? A lot of things are being slowed down, in employment also. Someone is doing it on purpose.

Do you know why I think like that? Because I can confirm it with my own personal experience, so that it doesn't turn out that I am lying or who knows what, or that I am resorting to disinformation. When I was supposed to transfer to the Med School, they lacked staff, I was being transferred from a health center to the Medical School, they kept me without pay for three years. I worked without getting paid. I barely managed, after three years, to be transferred from a health center to a school, and it could have been done earlier and more professionally if I had taught then and not like – run to this job, run to that job. It was very hard for me, and with obstructions. I am not saying that all Macedonians were doing it, but there were more Macedonians who were obstructing it at the time. But, I think that they understood that they needed to live with us.

How did you react to all of it?

I attempted to talk to those people, but I didn't succeed since some of them ignored me; it was simply humiliating for them to talk to me. I also attempted it with their superiors, but they just kept saying: "yeah, yeah, yeah," but did nothing. I also tried it with our superiors who worked in the Ministry, I created some pressure through them; they managed to do something, but barely, it was something very small. We invested so much effort into something which should have been normal.

What do you think, what can the people which you belong to do for reconciliation in Macedonia?

Well, now, there are also politicians on the Albanian side who lie to people, they promise them a lot of things for which there's no reason, from my point of view, I think that people are abused for a lot of reasons.

Anyway, in my opinion, there are a lot of Albanians who want to cooperate and live together, they want a peaceful life and are for tolerance. There are also those who are asking for things for which there's no way. I think the more

mixed, different, the more interesting it is. I like that fact that I know Macedonian and Serbian and, somewhat, Turkish, and Roma and Albanian languages. I feel richer because I live here. I have friends in Albania and they might know Albanian and English, but I feel richer, and I know a bit of English. What I want to say is: more nations, more cultures – a more interesting life. I just think that a common language needs to be found, and that's possible.

But, some things need to be changed from the top down. Otherwise, the people... The people are not bad, neither on the Macedonian nor on the Albanian side. But, some bad things are being broadcast in the media, especially on some TV stations.

Do you currently see Macedonia as space where you can enjoy all your rights?

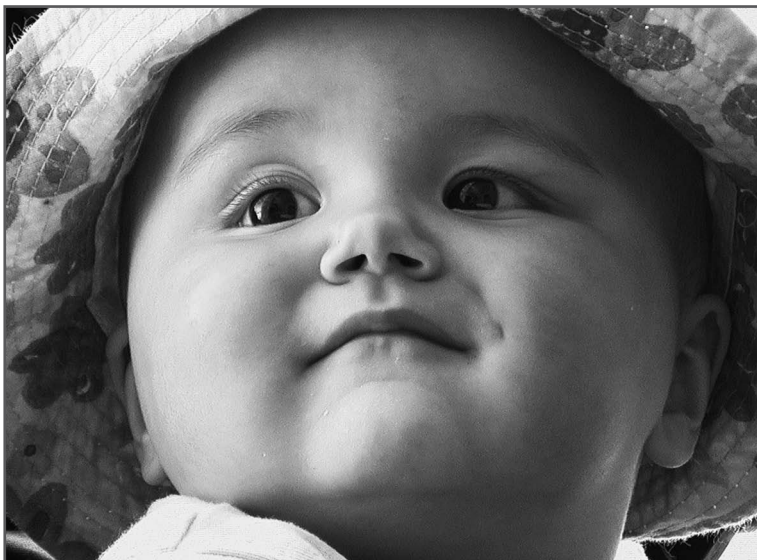
Yes. I can, absolutely. I also feel as a Macedonian citizen and wherever I go, I say that I am from Macedonia, even in Albania, when I go to the seaside and when they call us Albanians I correct them and tell them that we are Macedonian Albanians.

What's your opinion about employing twenty percent in state institutions?

The key, in my opinion, shouldn't be twenty or thirty percent. The key should be quality. I would want to have someone fresh out of school teaching my students. I would rather go to a professional Macedonian than an unprofessional Albanian. They should be employed according to their professions, affinities they have; and, normally, that all have equal possibilities at enrollment, because the Albanian nation does not have all specialties, all professional profiles at this moment. That's because we used to be banned from study during a period. I know it from my own personal experience – I was a great student and I applied to Med School and wasn't accepted, thus, we were banned. I didn't want to apply anywhere else, I wanted to study medicine and that was it. I applied the next year again, and the same happened with my entrance exam. I thought that I would be admitted and I wasn't accepted, again, by 0.3. I couldn't enroll again... I couldn't have done anything so I was admitted to the Chemistry department. What I want to say to you is that neither my desires nor capabilities came true and that's why we lack professionals now. More opportunities should be given to Albanians or Roma, and I mean any nation; offer them opportunity to qualify themselves, obtain additional education, switch to another workplace after additional training, according to the possibilities and needs.

What do you think, how should we treat the past, should what happened be forgotten?

I always want to forget bad things. That's my personality, I only want to remember what's good, since bad leads to worse. And that's why some things need to be realized: well, it came and passed, now we should know some things, how to proceed.



Anyone can change. Not all needs to be based on the past. The past should be known, but what's bad should be forgotten.

What about forgiveness?

Forgiveness needs to happen, of course.

What about those who lost their closest, friends? How much can they forget?

Well, it has been like that since the beginning and it will stay like that. There will always be victims. Additionally, it needs to be forgotten in the name of faith and humanity.

Well, not to forget, to keep... For example, my youngest sister died because of a Macedonian man, he killed her. And what will I get if I kill a Macedonian, what? Neither my sister nor anyone else will return to me. I am against it, I want to forget what's bad; the sooner I forget, the better it is.

What do you think that politicians should do?

Well, if they related to their people with love, for example, an Albanian to Albanians, they would become aware that they need to change. Some things are becoming better... What's good should only be remembered... But, that doesn't always suit them.

I think that we should start with the improvement of the people's social status, economy, in general, so that it's not "we, Albanians" and "we, Macedonians" always, that they always thump their chests with the usual: we need a Greater

Albania, Greater Macedonia. What to do with that Greater Albania, Greater Macedonia? What, when you are nobody?

You primarily need to succeed in instilling love into your people, and not disseminate hatred – hatred only attracts hatred. On the contrary, coexistence is needed, love needs to be attracted with love. We would lose nothing.

What do you think, whose fault is it for everything that happened to us?

Well, I think that it's both sides'. But, I also think that it's the great powers' fault. They, normally, create obstacles in order to rule here more easily.

What do you think about individual responsibility, about individual guilt?

Well, you know what, it's always like that – if a little stone moves, then the second will, and then the third, and something might happen. If nothing moves, then nothing happens.

It's normal that some things are imposed onto us by great powers, but if we are not strong, if we are convinced in it, every little stone gives its contribution, meaning every individual, gives his or her contribution. I, as a person, might be no one, but I have contributed in my surroundings, in my immediate surroundings, to improved better relationships, improved moods and I can feel that, I see it on the faces of the people who surround me, and anyone could do that. According to his or her capabilities, an individual can influence others a lot, an individual can influence the family. The society's structure would be healthy if we had more healthy families. The guilt is also the group's. There are some groups which fell under the influence of the great powers. Secondly, the collective dissatisfaction also contributes, as well as collective overpowering. The Macedonian people wanted to be above all others – Macedonia to Macedonians, others beneath their feet. If they weren't like that and if Albanians didn't feel crushed, it wouldn't have come to this.

Do you have a place, space in Macedonia for expressing your own identity?

Yes, there's space, only it's that there are lots of people who want to have an influence, want to interfere. Otherwise, understanding is there, everything can be resolved by talking.

Do you freely express your identity as an Albanian woman in Macedonia?

Yes, I am even proud of it.

While I studied at the University of Bitol I was the only Albanian there, and, since the Macedonian language is different in Bitol than the one in Skopje, they didn't notice that I was Albanian. Once, when I was at a friend's with some

While I studied at the University of Bitol I was the only Albanian there... Once, when I was at a friend's with some others, they asked me how many children I had. I said two, and they said: "Well, you are young, give birth more, we'll die out as a nation. They can have five or six, while we have only two." They didn't know that I was Albanian, and that's when I told them that I was Albanian also but that that births are not based on nationality, but on possibilities... They were embarrassed when I told them that I was an Albanian.

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Did they apologize to you?

Yes, yes, they apologized to me. Apology wasn't on my mind, but why should they have such an attitude at all? Everyone thinks that all Albanians are the same. If there is one who is not – they think that all are like that. Generalization is useless.

How do you see the future of Macedonia?

Well, I am a bit of an optimist. My nature is optimistic, I think that it is getting better and that it will keep going like that.

Macedonian students didn't want to hear a word in Albanian before, not to mention studying it, and now I see that I have three groups, large ones, and through this I can see that our future could be a better one.

I can have arguments in my family, that's normal; a time will come when we won't differentiate based on nationality, but on humanity and character instead, and not based on whether one is an Albanian, a Roma or a Macedonian.

In your opinion, how much does the Ohrid Framework Agreement contribute to the Macedonian situation's improvement?

Well, not a lot, it should have been implemented a long time ago. It's not that I comprehend all that, but I can see that some results are moving slowly. Some things are still only on paper, but not in practice.

In the end, is there anything else that you would like to say?

I would like to send a message: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Each man is an endless source of positive energy.

G. P. Z.

Man as the political will

How do you feel nowadays when you recall the nineties' events, ten years after the war ended? Can you recall them at all, considering the fact that you were very young then? How intense are your memories?

It's clear that I do remember them. Certainly, my feelings are not as intense as they used to be. That's something that's behind me, although some consequences remained for us, mostly in that financial sense. In my personal case, mother lost her job during that wartime period, father kept working but has become an invalid due to worsening disease which was caused by general stress at that time. I feel the consequences in that sense, but I have no negative feelings, especially not for another nation; I don't feel any hatred or anything alike.

What is needed so that those consequences could be alleviated, if not eradicated, for you and for all of us?

I'll speak like a Marxist (*laughter*). I am convinced that the economic situation should be repaired first, since only successful trading could contribute to better social conditions, or any other positive change. Because, we can move forward only when people's stomachs are full, or, at least, the majority's. If most people are hungry and cannot solve their basic existential problems, we cannot talk about changing for the better.

If we continue hating things and people from the past, we will not be able to act normally either presently or in the future.

What is reconciliation for you?

Successful reconciliation would mean good coexistence. And coexistence is made up of a community which includes many nations. That's the community in which other

nations are not oppressed by the home nation, it is a harmonious multiethnic community, where every individual's rights are respected.

What is needed so that people would live in such harmonious communities in this region? What is a condition for such reconciliation?

As I already mentioned, it's primary to improve the economic situation, and then the civic education follows. Considering the level of such education in Croatia, it seems to be not impossible, but hardly feasible.

Who should work on it?

I'll speak like some old man now, the youth should, of course; the world will be

theirs... It seems to me that we are, somehow, more engaged, we have more energy, more space, we could have a bigger effect. Well, here, young people with more liberal attitudes and more humanistic values are even in the media. Intellectuals, in any case, the people who have the know-how.

Thus, the youth should be more involved in active social life and the reconciliatory process, according to you? Are there any others who should carry this process?

It doesn't sound that good when you say "they should be involved," it sounds like a machine which turns on and off from time to time. I think that youths themselves should recognize social problems and start working on them. I think that there are ways to do it, that there are initiatives in which youths should become involved.

Which problems do you see as obstacles on the road to reconciliation?

I'll discuss the problems which definitely exist in our society. These are, again, wrong values instilled into the majority's consciousness, which, for example, set nationality or faith as important criteria for evaluating an individual. I think that it shouldn't be a priority at all regarding interpersonal relations.

Do you think that the people in your country are ready for reconciliation?

It seems that some heavy emotions are still present, which is understandable from the aspect of the people who lost family members during the war. On the other hand, much time has passed and I think that they should be slightly ready for reconciliation, but, then again, it seems that they are not.

Do people want reconciliation?

Well, look, all war-torn regions were never too urban as a rule, they were mostly rural regions where mostly poorly-educated people lived, and this caused a different kind of thinking and different values. Thus, it's what I have already mentioned, setting nationality and faith as priorities. Yes, I don't think that people don't show the tendency to reconcile. They might even recognize it as a positive thing; for example, in case of their agricultural goods which could be marketed in Serbia and Bosnia, which is pretty hard currently.

What can the "ordinary people" do for reconciliation? What is up to us? Are we "too small" for some of the steps?

I cannot agree with such a distinction: little and big people, but, yes, there are those who categorize people in such a manner. Certainly, people can do a lot through their engagement in initiatives, I think that everyone can do it regardless of how much they work daily. And its basis is enthusiasm and faith in reconciliation, and then, later, man's activity as a political being.

How should we treat the past?

Forgiveness comes first, in my opinion; to comprehend that there's no use "fighting" some things, since they are simply history now, and that's how they

should be accepted. The war is a thing of the past which will affect the future as much as we allow it. If we continue hating things and people from the past, we will not be able to act normally either presently or in the future.

Should we forget?

I don't think that oblivion exists within a human being as a category, at least until the being becomes senile. It exists with regard to some irrelevant things, but not for such large events, things which have affected us strongly, such things cannot be forgotten.

What do you think that politicians and other "powerful" people should do so that we reach reconciliation as soon as possible? Do they do enough in this field?

To start with, they should talk about reconciliation positively as much as possible. They should stress democratic values and awareness of the need for reconciliation, without the pathetic politicization, of course.

Which one of the then warring sides should start the reconciliatory process more intensely?

Of course, it's in everybody's interests, so that should be the balancing factor. We all need that process which leads to normalization to end as soon as possible, especially if we want to enter the EU. We all know that an unavoidable precondition, among others, is also good neighborly relations.

What would change for you if reconciliation occurred between two, three nations?

I'll be practical. I would, concretely, be able to study in Belgrade or Sarajevo for a semester or two. That, for me... It would be good in that educational sense if good relations existed between our countries.

Do you think that guilt is one side's only?

No, no way, it certainly is not one side's only. I won't say that it's equal, since guilt cannot be measured, just like the pain it caused cannot. But, guilt is, realistically, both sides'. We cannot gain anything if we start off with the thesis claiming who started the war. One side started it in one region, the other in another, and off we go in circles.

Can it be individualized, or is it collective?

I always support its individualization. I can hear things like "the people which committed genocide against another people." That's complete rubbish! There are no such peoples.

Doesn't it seem to you that we all carry a part of the guilt? Maybe because we were passive, because we didn't condemn evil for another reason?

Concretely, my generation and I as a part of it couldn't have done anything. We were too young indeed. On the other hand, our parents certainly could

have done more, but we should also understand them since they were raised in a world completely different from ours. Just consider the literature they had read, things they studied... That's completely at odds with what happened later on. They actually had no knowledge of the option of it happening. My parents, concretely, didn't believe that the war would begin as much as it had smelled of it until first shells started falling.

What is the “ordinary man’s” responsibility?

That's hard to say, it's hard to condemn the “ordinary man” if he had done nothing, since people were afraid, there was a large fear of any action within them and everyone was primarily and basically concerned with saving his own head. However, yes, the “ordinary man’s” responsibility is also large, since he is the one acting within his circle, his community.

Who is a civil war’s victim?

It seems to me that we are all victims, on one and other side, if that's how we want to distinguish ourselves. Of course, most of the people nowadays live pretty poorly, financially speaking, except for the political elite which lives well to this day and has a Western standard of living.

Do you think that people, if there had been enough will, could have resisted the media’s manipulation?

I'll philosophize a bit, but it seems to me that people, somewhere deeply within their instincts, love to be manipulated, they love to be governed. There is no rational answer as to why we accepted this manipulation. I am talking about the majority here, it's clear that some weren't and couldn't be manipulated, and that's also connected to education I already mentioned.

What are your predictions for the future regarding complete reconciliation of the peoples involved in the nineties’ civil war?

That will certainly happen. Examples of reconciliation have always occurred in history throughout the world, so it will happen here as well. An example is Germany, we suffered under their boot here as well, but people still went to work and even live there not much later. That is simply necessary and it will happen.

E. P.

Dejan

(40)

Zemun
publisher,
editor-in-chief

I remember the nineties with anger, and bitterness, and feeling of shame

To begin with, I would like to ask you to tell us a bit about yourself, who you are, where you're from and what you do.

Yes, hard questions. Well, ok – I could introduce myself – I am Dejan Ilić, I was born in Zemun in 1965, and I have a very relaxed attitude toward my life: I love what I do, but, if I had to tell you how important it were to me, I would tell you that it's not very much. I went to school, I obtained a BFA degree in General Literature, and then I attended the Gender Studies at the Central European University where I graduated with a Master's degree. Maybe I'll even obtain a Ph.D. at the same department, since I am close to finishing those studies as well. I translated a bit, wrote literary criticism, even quite intensely during a period, and then I started working as an editor. I have been an editor from 1994, actually. That's how I would describe myself. Everything else, what I wrote, translated, studied in school, all of it serves the purpose of my editing job.

We are responsible because we, as a society, had a chance to choose, and we chose as we did, and the ones whom we elected did what they did and that's it. We can't do anything about that now. And that's why each one of us should ask ourselves – what did I do all that time, did I engage in helping a party? I didn't and that's why I feel sorry now.

What's your view of the wartime years, what are your memories of them? How do you view the nineties?

I consider two questions regarding this topic. When I think about the nineties, I think about Yugoslavia which fell apart first, and only then do I think about the nineties. I don't remember that country which fell apart very clearly, except that I miss it terribly. I didn't believe that it would happen, that the country would fall apart. And, if I had to tell you what was so nice about it and exactly what I remember – I remember the simplest things, from my childhood, how I used to play when I was little, how I went to school, how I lived with my parents, how I socialized with people, some really ordinary things, but all of it looks like paradise lost now, maybe because I am getting older. Everything nice that happened to me, as people usually do – they project

it onto childhood and early youth – I am projecting that now, that somehow overlaps with Yugoslavia's last decades, making that country very dear to me, I miss it terribly somehow.

And then I remember the nineties with anger, and bitterness, and some feeling of shame, because what happened in the nineties destroyed that country which

I miss so much now; and, who knows, if it existed, maybe I wouldn't have liked it that much. And I become furious when I think that maybe I could have done something, accomplished something, and I didn't; maybe because I was lazy and stupid, and maybe because the circumstances were as they were; however, then again, it's not as if I were doing little. One could say spitefully – if it weren't for all those problems, that what you were doing would have made no sense and you wouldn't have accomplished anything. That, however, can never be figured out. I believe I could have done more and better, as many others here could have. Thus the anger: I don't know who took the right to ruin our plans and wishes. And then the bitterness related to all that. I was completely senseless, stupid and selfish, since I only thought about myself, and what I would have liked, and where I would have liked to be and all of it was everyone else's fault. I needed much time in order to realize that I could have done something myself. Thus the bitterness. And I am ashamed that even when I talk about this, I talk only about myself and the people here. I became aware of troubles very late, when they struck other people. It's hard on me to this day, it makes me uncomfortable, and I try to justify myself somehow, to redeem myself for that lack of basic empathy and for my selfishness, since I had been trying to preserve that little life of mine without doing anything for other people whose lives were utterly shattered. And, now, if I were taking it easy on myself, I would say that I acted like the majority of people did, that it's human to try and preserve one's own little life without worrying about the others' little lives, but I justify myself in such manner very rarely. We, the people who worked with literature, we brought shame upon ourselves in the nineties, and all I do now is attempting to redeem myself. And that's also shameful; what to do now after so much time has passed?

Why didn't I sign up to be a monitor at a polling place, why didn't I hand out a single flyer, why didn't I call someone up by phone and said – come on, come out and vote? We knew where that government was taking us after 1992, 1993, all of the consequences were obvious, everything was visible. And what did we do regarding this? That is our society's responsibility and each one of ours, individually.

How did the nineties affect you?

Well, I am satisfied with my life nevertheless. I have no problem with what I did and what I accomplished. On one hand I feel that I could have done much more, and on the other I feel that what I did wasn't that little. But, the problem is that all of us who were here and who were not directly struck by the war – all of us were building something in our lives, accomplishing something, while some other people's right to life was taken away. And that's what I have a problem with. I don't know how to deal with it. The magazine *Reč*,¹⁰⁶ which I am very proud of and with which I increasingly identify myself, since everything I

¹⁰⁶ [The Word].

did as an editor and everything I wrote is related to that magazine – everything leads from and to it: and now I, like, go somewhere, to some towns very close to Serbia, and the people there ask me what we were doing, and I tell them that we translated, wrote, we created a nice magazine for literature, and they tell me – we went to get water, fixed windows, protected... I don't know what, hustled for food and such.

I met one young man in Sarajevo, who lives in the house whose garden contains the tunnel's exit. The tunnel ran underneath the airport runway and was used by people to get out of or into Sarajevo. While I was translating books here pretending that I was hot stuff because of my editing job, since people respected what we did, thus we could have felt important, he was maintaining that tunnel, and when the war ended there, he devoted the rest of his life to that tunnel, like I devote it to my magazine. And currently he is putting together a museum there, now when he could study something, redirect his life, start it anew, he decided to put together and maintain that museum, to repair and maintain the tunnel. And that's how that museum became everything he had. And he fights to keep the museum. "Miraculously" enough – although I am not too surprised by it – the authorities there are not too interested in helping him, and he copes, asks for help on all sides. And you can be nothing but ashamed when you stand in front of him. That moment, when you are standing by him – he with his tunnel, I with my magazine – everything we did here was shameful. And what can you do... And, then again, what could I have done, that's what I think about often.



A book we published – its title is *No one is free of history*, which was written by Helmut Döbel, is about the German Parliament's discussions which dealt with mass crimes committed by the Nazi regime. In the book is a German MP's speech, he stood before the podium and said: The only right thing to do while Jews were being deported to camps was to put on a yellow ribbon and go with them, or lie down in front of the trucks or trains which were taking them away. Only that would correspond to moral principles. But, we are only human, it cannot be expected of us to consistently live up to such high moral standards. Unfortunately, such a high level of morality cannot be expected of us. And precisely due to the fact that we didn't act as we should have, precisely that obliges us to talk about it today and redeem ourselves in a way for what we failed to do; and not in the sense of some sort of repentance for our sins, but that it simply obliges us to act according to norms which prevent something similar from happening again. Additionally, it obliges us to bring to justice all of the people who organized it and who are directly responsible for it. Our responsibility, i.e. our obligation as then observers and as the people who didn't react on time is that we repeatedly caution that something like that must not happen again, that we, as a society, are obliged to be sensitive and react to any sign that something like it might happen again. I think that I didn't do everything I had to and I could, and now I want to redeem myself in some way, and act according to basic moral principles, since current circumstances are in fact better, that superhuman gesture is not being demanded of us, so come on, now – it's easy to be good in good times – ok, let's try to be good now.

You mentioned the past. What could we do with it, what should be done with it, some say that we should face it, some say that it should be forgotten, how do you view it and what with it?

I cannot claim that it's absolutely wrong to forget it: there are examples of when forgetting it did the job. Forgetting it is one of the possible solutions.

On the contrary, I am, personally, very interested in what happened. And I don't believe that there is only one truth. I really have – surprisingly, considering the involvement I am devoted to – I really have understanding for the Serbian side's behavior during the nineties. Although I am ashamed of everything it did, I can understand the reasons why people went to those wars. Moreover, I think that if we take away from those people the right to explain their reasons, if we say that there could have and must have been no reasons for it, then we nullify the possibility for discussion about what happened and the comprehension of those events. Threats were present, and I understand the fear of those threats, and I empathize with the people who were exposed to them. But, on the other hand, that cannot justify the crimes committed in any way...

I don't understand where a person steps out of what's human, the human order of things, and does something which cannot be justified. I hear it now: this right was taken away, that right then, they were fired just because they were Serbs,

they were harassed just because they were Serbs, and that's why they had to defend themselves. But, you still defend yourself following certain norms. Moreover, you try not to do things from which you are defending yourself. That's the only way your defense could make sense. Crimes were committed in Bosnia against Serbs as well, it's not true that those belonging to one side were the only victims of that war. But, what to do with it now? I understand, and I want to listen, accept and empathize with the victims on all sides. But, none of it could justify a crime. When you visit Sarajevo you see how those surrounding hills look: if they threw stones at them, they would still cause major damage, and not with all those guns and snipers; that's not human, that's not normal. Well, then, should we remember, should we recall? I think that this question needs a response just like we would respond to other things regarding breaking the law... If you broke the law, well, then, you must answer for it. I'll listen to all of the stories about patterns, reasons, an unfavorable position, abuse... But, if you broke the law, you must answer for it, regardless of my awareness of the fact that amnesia could have its advantages. What is very important for us, I think, is that we show that we are, after all, observing some universal principles of justice, that we observe some laws: some people must be tried, and the stories about breaking the law must be told, besides just as history. History looks to me different than to someone else. I'll speak of it in one way, the other will do it differently. And that's why we don't discuss history here, and especially not historical relativism, we need to put that aside. But, on the contrary, there is something that is a pure fact which cannot be relativized. There is no possibility within the legal framework if, say, a historical explanation justifies a crime or breaking the law, that it would cease to be a crime and become a heroic act, for example.

You just mentioned that there wasn't only one truth. In which sense? Does it mean that different sides should be heard? What does it mean for you?

It's very simple: say, we can talk about the books which explain Yugoslavia's disintegration. There are different interpretations of its disintegration and they don't necessarily have to be mutually contradictory; they are simply different and accentuate certain factors which could have affected it. These would be different truths, and, like I said, they don't have to be contradictory, but could be. I am currently reading a book about how Albanians in Kosovo organized their schools during the nineties. And I don't agree with the description of conditions in Kosovo, but I find it interesting to read about.

Actually, I don't have a problem with what the people in Croatia, Bosnia or Kosovo think... They could think what they want, and I will always be ready to hear that opinion. My problem is what the people in Serbia think, and how to with those people – with whom I deeply disagree, and who, at a certain level I still can control, anger me very much and provoke me to react in a way which I consider unacceptable, even what I am saying now is unacceptable – thus,

how to find a way to a mutual understanding with those people with whom I live and share public space. My problem is not the understanding of others, I don't live with them in the same state, it's enough that we respect one another; we can offer some things or help one another, or at least make an attempt not to obstruct one another. But, we live here together, we share one space and, within that space, they endanger my basic interests, and in the way of articulating Serbian interests, they are dedicated to them in a stupid way which only does damage. And now, I want to show them that I don't hate them, that I listen to them carefully, that I am very interested in what they talk about although I think that it is not smart, that I am interested in the reasons which lead them to talk like that, and to explain to them that some of our ultimate goals are not different: they also desire a more decent state, they would also like to live decently, just like I would like to live decently in a decent state. Well, then, let's see how we can make that happen. I think that the side that I am ideologically on, conditionally speaking, has come up with an efficient road to that goal, and I have some arguments which go along with that road. For example, consider the last fifteen years and where we have arrived; it was bad, you did a bad job, let's try something different now, let's give different solutions a chance and let's see what will happen... We are certain now that one of the roads was a dead end, let's return then and take another one.

Since you mentioned the law, norms, how do you see the responsibility for all that happened, can we talk about individual guilt, collective?

In order to answer this question, I'll completely rely on the texts written by Nenad Dimitrijević.¹⁰⁷ He wrote a lot about it, and I published some of it. I published them since it gave me a chance to understand those questions and answer them. Individual guilt – I would place that in the domain of criminal prosecution: whoever broke the law should answer for it. I believe that we can also sensibly talk about collective responsibility, through which our individual responsibilities are reflected in a way, responsibilities of all of us whose interests were articulated and represented through certain politics, which we equate with Slobodan Milošević. I don't think that Milošević was a dictator; I don't think that we lived in an oppressive regime. I might be wrong, but I think that the elections of the nineties were just free enough so that we must accept responsibility for their results. The current Serbian political scene confirms that those results were not forced upon us. I think that we cannot justify ourselves with some kind of a terror, dictatorship. Those are excuses. It would be nice to say – well, we had no choice. But, we did have it. We could have done a lot.

Here is some data: until 2000 political parties were not able to monitor all polls in Serbia. The leaders of those parties complained after every election that the results were fixed. They say: they lied – while not having any reports from the

¹⁰⁷ Nenad Dimitrijević is a professor of political science.

polls since they had no people of their own there. And then you ask yourself – they exist for a few years, what do they do all this time if they cannot cover the whole country, all polling stations with their monitors? And they can't, and then it's another's fault. Well, it's not, you just didn't do enough... I think that great idleness, great laziness, brought us to the results we had. I myself am a part of that picture: I hadn't been politically active up to a certain point; that's shameful as well. We are responsible because we, as a society, had a chance to choose, and we chose as we did, and the ones whom we elected did what they did and that's it. We can't do anything about that now. And that's why each one of us should ask ourselves – what did I do all that time, did I engage in helping a party? I didn't and that's why I feel sorry now. And, if someone did, then – for which party, how many people did they ask to come out and vote, how many did they ask not to vote for Milošević, how many times were they ready to engage in an argument and explain why Milošević shouldn't be voted for, and not to his firm supporters, that's a futile job, but to the people who were hesitant, who stayed at home, who were too bothered by it to come out and vote? What did we do with the people who thought like we did, but who were too lazy to come out and vote? Or who believed that there was no sense to it. Why didn't I sign up to be a monitor at a polling place, why didn't I hand out a single flyer, why didn't I call someone up by phone and said – come on, come out and vote? We knew where that government was taking us after 1992, 1993, all of the consequences were obvious, everything was visible. And what did we do regarding this? That is our society's responsibility and each one of ours, individually.

And what now? Should we cover ourselves with ashes? Someone could say: well, I have done none of it, so what? Why should we talk about it now? Nenad Dimitrijević answered those questions very nicely – we have to show that we, members of this society, each one of us individually, have learned our lesson, have become mature enough to prevent something like that from happening again at least as long as our generations' memories last, and thus offer our neighbors guarantees that we no longer present a danger to them. We have to show that we have learned something, and that we'll behave rationally and responsibly from now on – that is the meaning behind the story about responsibility for me. And not only because of our neighbors, but because of us as well. What kind of country would we live in if someone, whether now or in the future, will be able to say that in the name of a group, in the name of some Serbian people – for which I don't know to this day what it means if it's not related to citizens of Serbia, since I really have no idea what else the Serbian people could be, and maybe someone would call this shameful, like, look at a jerk who doesn't know what the Serbian people is and would, maybe, list I don't know what, Cyrillic alphabet, the Orthodox Church and Saint Sava... And then I would say that it's not enough that for one group's members to call themselves a people, that there needs to be a state as well, which then significantly



disrupts the principle of blood relation which is behind every story about ethnic affiliation... But, not to drag this on now – thus, that someone would have the right to say that all of us should subordinate our personal needs to the group's interest, and that's a serious problem. Firstly because we don't know where that one got the right to articulate the group's interests, which procedures give him that right... I think that we can agree on what the group's interest might be, but that needs to be a clearly defined process, through determined procedures for arriving to a program which is obligatory for citizens of a country for a limited period of time. But, for someone to announce now what the Serbian interest is from somewhere, and I don't know where that one got the right to do it, and suddenly that interest becomes obligatory for me since the fool in power has decided that it is the right thing to do – well, I will not, I cannot, I don't want to. I want it to be guaranteed that I can live my life as I want to live it. I have a right to be disloyal to the interest which is imposed on me beyond any procedure.

What's your view of reconciliation, what would it be for you?

I don't see reconciliation as something that's necessary. Moreover, I think that reconciliation in our case shouldn't be a topic at all. We should live next to one another, and we don't have to love one another, we don't have to reconcile. Reconciliation means that you were close with someone at a time, and then you argued, then you reconciled and now you are close again. We weren't, I wasn't close with anyone, why should I reconcile now? I can only apologize to the people to whom evil was committed in my name, but that's not a gesture

of reconciliation. Unfortunately, we were distant, and that's maybe where that lack of empathy stems from at the moment when I was supposed to have it, but how can we reconcile now? Let's live next to one another, and let's not bother one another. I don't believe that groups can reconcile, groups can only give mutual guarantees through their representatives that they won't bother each other. When we arrive to the point where we can give such guarantees, that's much more than reconciliation. Reconciliation implies certain feelings as well, a certain closeness which is not necessary, not needed. The people I loved in Croatia, loved in Bosnia, I still love; even if we argued, we reconciled. Reconciliation is a personal matter. We don't need to reconcile, we only need to act sensibly and according to some rules. Reconciliation is a problematic term, anyway... I don't like that term since it becomes imprecise when it's transferred to the plane of relations between groups, it can be manipulated...

Which term would you use?

Thus, to live next to one another, without bothering each other... People should behave according to the law, rules: reconciliation is not needed so that I know that I shouldn't harass someone who is an Albanian, reconciliation is not needed so that I know that I shouldn't kick someone who is a Hungarian, equally as someone who is a Serb...

What is needed?

That we respect human life consistently, that we consistently respect everyone's right to live accordingly to one's wishes, needs, norms, principles, under the condition that no one else's rights are thus endangered. Let everyone live as they see best, and let them not endanger the others... I can even understand that reversed logic according to which Ratko Mladic¹⁰⁸ is someone's hero; you believe that he's a hero – alright then, great. But, let him be tried for what he is indicted; and you keep believing that he is a hero, he's a criminal for me and that's it. He is indicted for breaking some laws which apply to you and me and him. Let's observe those laws. Human rights are clearly defined, it's known how orderly states function, there's nothing there to make up. That really is not a thing of emotions. People have a right to hate, it's human to hate someone, I mean, it's OK, hate, but you have no right to harass anyone just because you hate him. I would want that – love, reconciliation – that's not human. Imagine, you go to that unfortunate Bosnia and Herzegovina, people murdered over there, and you go there, someone's whole family was killed, house torched, and you say – let's reconcile... Well, that's just arrogant... You might only say – I am terribly sorry; and promise – we'll never do this again. And, if you can keep that promise – great. I don't know what I would say, I don't know, I have

¹⁰⁸ Ratko Mladic (1942) was a colonel general and Chief of Staff of the Bosnian Serb Army. He is indicted by the ICTY for genocide, crimes against humanity and violation of the laws or customs of war. He is the most wanted fugitive by the ICTY.

no idea... But, I would certainly not extend my hand to reconcile, that would be as if I wanted to offend them, again. If someone wanted to forgive, great, thank you; but, if we could only promise that it will not happen again, that would be a lot already.

Where's the "ordinary people's" responsibility for the present and for the future?

Well, who else would do it if not all of us who are here, there's no one else to do it. Certainly we are responsible. Someone must implement everything that's agreed, someone must make all those changes, and that's us. And someone must realize that it is in our own interest... And that's us, again.

Our responsibility is... Well, you know what our responsibility is? Our responsibility is to do everything nicely, slowly and reasonably. That everyone is doing their job the best that they can, and we'll be fine. And the political elite, the current one: more space gets taken away from it, the better it is for us. I keep repeating – join political parties, be active, work, articulate your interests and fight for them... That's very important.

Do you have anything to add in the end?

If you say that you strive for reconciliation, just that – reconciliation, then I don't care about it. But, if you say that you strive for reconciliation since you believe that's how we will live better, since that reconciliation has to do with values which should be dominant in our society, then that has a different meaning. I would say then, OK, maybe that's not reconciliation, I wouldn't call it reconciliation, and maybe we agree on it and think the same thing, only you say reconciliation and I say human rights. But – I want to make that connection – the reason why we work on the events from the nineties, it's not just because we are curious, or because our conscience is biting us, but because we also believe that if we work on it we are creating a foundation to do some things better in the future. That's the connection I really care about...

H. R.

Lana

(21)

Kotor
law student

Time and will

Although you were very young, did the war have any consequences on you, and, if so, what were they?

I was only seven or eight when the war began, but some events, like arguments and fights regarding ethnic identities, friends letting me into the secret of threatening letters later, and so on, are still carved into my memory.

What is needed in order to eliminate the wartime consequences, or at least alleviate them?

Time and will.

What is reconciliation for you?

Moving forward while not forgetting what happened.

Why is reconciliation important?

So that life could return to normalcy.

How could we reach reconciliation?

Nationalism and chauvinism should be weeded out, make an effort to view people based on another value system.

Who should work on it?

Absolutely everyone.

What are the fears/obstacles that the reconciliatory process could run into?

Unfortunately, today there are political, religious and non-governmental organizations which are founded on religious and national intolerance. But, I hope that they cannot have a significant affect, due to greater freedom in the media and the experience from ten years ago.

What do you think that the “ordinary people” can do?

They can do a lot. They can start respecting people according to their individual characteristics, change their personal value system... And that's a lot.

Do you think that people are ready for reconciliation?

Unfortunately, I think that a great number of “poisoned” people still aren't. When I say poisoned, I mean poisoned with hatred, nationalism and religious prejudices.

There is a feeling of moral responsibility that we all bear. It happened to me many times that I feel shame because of the things that my nation did and behind which my state stood at the time, although I was only seven years old in that state then.

How should the past be treated, should all of this be forgotten?

No way. What happened should not and must not be forgotten. It will remain like a dark and ugly spot in history, it should be left behind but it needs to be remembered with the goal that it never occurs again.

Do you think that the responsibility for war is on one side only?

Actually, there are no “sides” in all of this for me, I view the political designers and organizers of all that (regardless of their nationality) to be one side, and, together with them, are the blind executioners of all that (not with the same amount of guilt). There are only two sides: the culprits and the victims.

Can the guilt be individualized or do think that it's collective?

Yes, the guilt can be individualized alright (since criminal liability can only be individual). However, there is a feeling of moral responsibility that we all bear. It happened to me many times that I feel shame because of the things that my nation did and behind which my state stood at the time, although I was only seven years old in that state then.

What do you think, who is the victim of war?

The names of real victims of war are already statistically processed somewhere. But, for me, the victims are also the people who did not suffer physical or material loss, the victims of war are all of those who feel its consequences this or that way.

Do you think that people were often subjected to media manipulations and were they, unconsciously, agreeing to be manipulated? Could they have resisted?

It's generally well known that it's easy to manipulate the masses, especially if you manipulate them based on the religious or national basis – with something which has an emotional background. Scores of books have been written about psychology of the masses and the media as powerful means of manipulation.

To conclude with, how do you see our region's future?

Really, regarding the Balkans, every long term prediction is absolutely uncertain. What I am hoping for is a higher level of democracy concerning rule of law, freedom of the media, human rights and so on.

E. H. Č.

I still greet the Croat neighbors with “Bok” and Serb ones with “Zdravo”¹⁰⁹

Do you still feel the consequences of war?

I certainly still feel the consequences of war, just like the majority of the 22.4 million citizens of the ‘disintegrated’ Yugoslavia. Life has dramatically changed and started going another way for each one of us, especially those who come from the territories affected by the war.

What needs to happen for it to change?

I cannot act differently alone, except for what I do daily at home and beyond it, at work, while socializing with people. Through my work I daily point out the deviant occurrences caused by wartime terrors. In my surroundings I still greet the Croat neighbors with “Bok” and Serb ones with “Zdravo,” I have a chat with each one of them, I respect them for what they are, I’ll help them and expect them to help me.

As far as my surroundings go, much more Danube water will have to pass before normal life is established, satisfactory and of high quality for all of us. I always claim that, aside from wartime consequences and the suffering caused by it, a better financial situation and each person’s individual satisfaction are the conditions for better relations between people, but also for a different, more positive view of the micro world I live in.

How should we relate to the past? How should we face it?

If there was anything positive, and I believe that there was – with utmost respect. Everything else should be forgotten, since some of the individual events were a shame for the human species.

It’s stated in our basic definition that we are ‘conscious beings,’ so we must be conscious of all the past things and events, nice and ugly ones. Honestly, it’s very hard to forget, especially, particularly if it’s something ugly. But, there is a sentence which is often repeated lately which goes: “Forgive, but not forget!” so we maybe must stick to that.

What is reconciliation for you?

I have always imagined that term as the moment when two chiefs of two tribes, which warred until the previous day, sit down and smoke a ‘peace pipe.’ Since the chiefs of our tribes have never been in war, but many individuals from their tribe or people have, ‘peace pipe’ smoking has never taken place. Still, even

¹⁰⁹ Common Croatian and Serbian informal greetings, respectively.

among ordinary citizens it hasn't come to some sort of reconciliation, like: we sit down, have a drink, hug and say – PEACE! Reconciliation between Croat and Serb neighbors, especially in Vukovar, is happening and should happen spontaneously, without heavy and big words, without offenses and humiliation, reprimands and accusations. Thus I consider reconciliation to be daily progress in communication, exchange of thoughts and experiences, offering any kind of support and help, without obligation to enter into deep interpersonal relations.

What is needed for it? What are the preconditions for such reconciliation?

Exposing the whole truth about wartime events, sincerity and empathy, mutual respect, improving relations, cool-headed thinking, improving the economy, providing a 'roof over the head' and safe subsistence. Precondition... When you wish a good morning to someone you should also mean it and that someone should respond likewise – sincerely well-intentioned. Everything else will follow by itself.

How should we reach that point?

There is still no right and concrete formula of how to reach reconciliation, although ten years and more have passed since the war ended and people's suffering has ended, less time has passed since the process of return was initiated and since Croat and Serb neighbors faced each other again. With passage of time, perhaps. When new, different, smarter, wiser, unburdened generations arrive.

Who should work on reconciliation?

The easiest answer might and should be – those who cooked all of it up. However, some of them are in the 'eternal hunting grounds,' others are behind prison bars, others are still 'rocking' the political scene. When the third kind pass into history as well, and when, like I said, younger, smarter, wiser, unburdened enter the scene, maybe everything will be different. One day...

What are your fears regarding reconciliation?

The primary fear is that reconciliation might never be reached completely. These dark forebodings will probably come true, but it's human to hope.

Do you think that the people of the country you live in are ready for reconciliation? Do they want it? What are the general fears related to reconciliation in the country where you live?

Individuals are not exactly ready for reconciliation or they don't want it, to a certain extent. Some of them have their strong reasons and they should be

I wanted to go to the other side of the world, to Australia or to New Zealand, but I was young, penniless and without anyone's support. I would probably thus stay isolated from everything that happened here, but my conscience would bother me then and I would wake up often asking myself a question – why didn't I stay and try to help and change something?

understood. Still, there is a trend according to which those who lost someone think much more healthily and logically than the rest of the community, despite the suffering and pain they experienced. We should have a lot of understanding for that kind of people, and we shouldn't even think about those for whom war brought numerous benefits, material and other types. The state of conflict, quiet and permanent, certainly serves those people well, since they function well during those troubled times. It's good fortune that there aren't many of those. Regarding fear, it's an irrational thing, so reconciliation is often related to unification and creation of some kind of a new, united state. That state was created twice in the last century and every time its disintegration resulted in a horrible bloodbath. People are mostly afraid of that and history repeating itself, but that shouldn't be considered at all.

What do you think, what does the whole nation need in order for reconciliation to be reached? Maybe an apology, among other things?

The leader's apologies, before all others, politicians, are pure demagoguery and I don't believe in them at all. In the end, considering how many of them were there up to now, and how many more will be, I am afraid that apologies might wear out along with them as well.

What should the country you live in do for reconciliation, and what should the country we fought with? What is up to us and what is up to them?

It's very hard for me to answer this question. It's a well known story that a state of war was never declared in Croatia, although this country had a war in its own and neighboring gardens for almost four years. Besides, I don't know how I would be able to provide you with a good and precise answer considering my personal perspective, family, neighborly and other relations.

Who should initiate the reconciliatory process more intensely? And why?

Those who cooked all of it up, since it's their moral obligation. As they left the scene, or as they have no morals, although they are here, it's up to us the ordinary citizens, individuals, little steps and initiatives, since one little snowflake might create an avalanche.

What can you personally do in order to contribute to the reconciliation process?

I must do my job professionally, respect everyone regardless of their nationality, faith, race, sex, reject 'hate speech,' thus build a tolerant environment and create preconditions for normal life. As I believe that I do my job fairly, according to the basic postulates of journalism, I believe that I can significantly contribute to the establishment of trust, reconciliation and international tolerance. But, someone else is more able to judge objectively my responsibility, but also the possible guilt.

Whose fault is it that the nineties were bloody and sad for us?

It's clear that the guilt is not one side's only, nor are whole nations guilty for



the wartime horrors. The guilt is individual and everyone should answer for it, according 'to merit.'

Can the guilt be individualized or is it collective and equally distributed onto all of us?

I wouldn't exactly, like one modern poet and singer, shift the guilt on all of us. If we say everyone, then we also consider a certain collective at the same time, then we mean not only one people, but all. That's not the way it is.

Thus, there is no collective, but only individual guilt. Still, certain individuals used to unite into criminal organizations, but there is law and justice even for such cases. It's slow, but reachable.

Is there something that the 'ordinary person' could have done in order to avoid responsibility and thus 'stay clean'?

I'll only give you my example – I wanted to go to the other side of the world, to Australia or to New Zealand, but I was young, penniless and without anyone's support. I would probably thus stay isolated from everything that happened here, but my conscience would bother me then and I would wake up often asking myself a question – why didn't I stay and try to help and change something? Thus I think it's all individual.

What is the media's responsibility (media manipulation)?

Huge. The media are directly guilty for a part of the suffering during the wars in the region of the former Yugoslavia. I wish no one evil, but I would certainly like to see the 'poisoned pens' in court trying to defend their innocence, if any of it was there in their dirty work.

How much were the people in your country subjected to manipulation and what was their responsibility for that subjection?

Unfortunately, when citizens see something on TV, hear it on the radio or read it in the papers, they believe it without objection and verification to this day. That is the consequence of a weird understanding of the media during the last decades when objective journalism didn't exist but it was a matter of purely reporting, actually it was a purely megaphone type of journalism. What was reported then was what the 'influential comrades' or 'gentlemen' said, and that was believed. Media manipulation found fertile ground, especially in the case of the uneducated population. Still, I wouldn't delve deeper in this analysis, since what will come out is that our people are 'sheep' and I would be a 'spitter' on everything and everyone.

What are your predictions for the future regarding complete reconciliation of warring sides in the civil war?

Peoples aren't warring, but rather individuals or certain militaristic groups. The people became the war's prisoners and its tragic victims. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of them have paid for it with their lives, many more had to leave their houses and apartments, many families were ruined or disappeared. Honestly, I think that complete reconciliation and better life are hardly realistic.

E. P.

Vera

(57)

Zemun
psychologist,
politician, activist

Nationalism is a sticky thing

To begin with, can you please tell us something about yourself: who you are, where you are from, how old you are, maybe some other data you think important?

Well, I am close to sixty, I am female – those would be first things that come to my mind. I am a psychologist professionally, a politician based on what I do currently, and an activist in different nongovernmental organizations. I love activism... I formally work in the Institute for Social Sciences researching public opinion, and most of the research currently covers the transition. Let's see, what else? I am married, have three children and a little granddaughter. I am telling you this because I, want to or not, follow all sorts of segments where people's interests meet and where how each strata, or generation can be overheard... I was born here and I've lived in Belgrade all my life, in Zemun, that is.

What's your view of the nineties, especially the wartime years, what are your memories of them?

First memories of the nineties... At the same time that was my entrance into politics because politics had been the furthest thing away until then. I thought that politicians were political bureaucrats, and that, since at that time there was nothing like civic engagement, or it existed in very narrow circles which I didn't belong to, for me it was nothing that had to do with my life at all. What scared me was what happened in the League of Communists of Serbia, or how its leadership was changed. Why did it scare me? Because I saw that they were prepared for one generation to displace another, since it was organized, violent and unscrupulous. Especially those speeches in the beginning, it could be felt that they would be programmatic, particularly the one given in Gazimestan:¹¹⁰ that's when my fear turned into panic.

Lastly, and within last few years, it's said "when what happened, happened"... It's not even said that war crimes were committed, that there was a war, that it has its proper name, and that, when they discuss another place and another time, people use those words. However, they use euphemisms here so that they wouldn't have to state their values, that they wouldn't have to say that a war crime against civilians is intolerable, that crime as such is unacceptable and that it's unacceptable not to be on the victims' side, whoever they are.

¹¹⁰ The Gazimestan speech was a speech given by Slobodan Milošević in June 1989 in Gazimestan/Kosovo. In the speech he mentioned the possibility of "armed battles," making clear that he was adopting nationalism as the main ideology.

Something in my personal life happened at the same time. My nephew, who is the oldest child in the family, meaning an object of attention for all of us (although I have three children of my own, D. is something completely special for me), was in the army then as a recruit in peace, in a relatively stable state. However, all of a sudden it was clear that everything started changing rapidly, and that the warmongering was becoming quite serious, that it wasn't just political turbulences within the League of Communists any longer, but was becoming something that would encompass the whole society and impact every individual. Mostly I was scared of what would happen with D., a young man of eighteen, nineteen years of age, who went to the army, and before that had had breakfast served in bed, had always had headphones in his ears, had been going to school waiting to get a job... In our family all of us were rational people, we discussed our attitudes without masks, openly, about what was happening. The boy was a pacifist by nature. And, all of a sudden, he was in the midst of war, he was somewhere close to Karlovac. That situation seemed so horrific – the parents knew nothing for six months, not even if he was alive... They couldn't get any information. Then the father went to see him and, when he arrived, they brought his son out without a belt so that he wouldn't desert and run away... He had gone through a lot while going there and returning; everyone took some money, all manipulated, he saw the hatred, he saw what the war looked

We need to be put in the victim's spot, see how much we can handle, realize what happened to the victims and those who were left behind those victims, and move forward from there, to condemn those crimes and those politics.

like in reality. When he came back with that story, and I was already terrified because the war had started, and I was already helpless because of D. and because of what I saw coming – I realized that I had too much energy. I had to put that energy into action in order to stay mentally healthy, it was a matter of survival, I couldn't have functioned without turning that energy into a cry against war. Then I started to become active politically and to participate in everything that was peace involvement activism.

What suited me the most those years was meeting people in the streets, to sign petitions together, to do something which from one side looked like a provocation, while for the other it was therapeutic. When you talk to someone on the street, even if his attitudes are contrary to yours, and you say sincerely, like a person who believes in something: "I believe in it and I work for it." If that person supports you, I ask then: "Why don't you do something?" and then the answer: "Because I am a woman." Well, antiwar organizations let women join them! Why don't you do what you are thinking about? Or, if I force the people that I talk with to face their own hypocrisy, and then that someone says: "I don't do that, I am old..." Well, the organizations let everyone join, disregarding their age. And then he starts facing himself. Thus, his attitudes are one thing, and readiness is on the other side, and his children are abroad or something like that... That was the most important involvement for me, that direct street activism.

Where are we now, as a society?

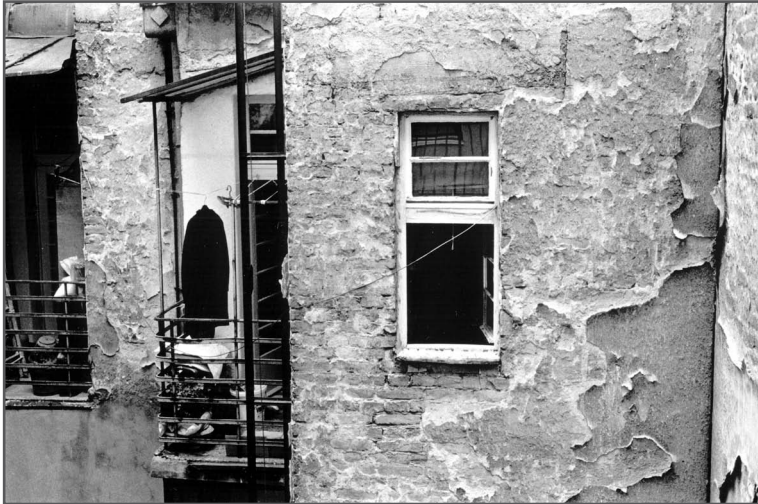
I think that as a society we are stuck in transition. I think that those were large steps after 2000, it was a huge energy. However, a big omission was made after the October 6,¹¹¹ in the DOS¹¹² coalition there were parties which wanted to make a real and symbolic break from the old regime, meaning, they wanted a new Constitution, and lustration, for some other values to come into the foreground, so that everyone can create their identity in that society. We just conducted some research... There are still two Serbias. The research shows that we have the traditionalists who are xenophobic, who are afraid of the neighboring states, afraid for their future, the other ones are afraid also, but they know which way we should go, and the state's direction is not visible. Thus, stuck transition, large political hypocrisy, and what scares me now is the reversal to that nationalistic rhetoric, behind that smokescreen of the nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric is the privatization of public companies, same as during the reign of Milošević. Only when the wars stopped did we see how much the economy was devastated and what went into private hands. Regarding *NIS*¹¹³ or some other large private companies, those things happen, agreements, and if you say something they'll say: "What, now, when we are negotiating over Kosovo?" or something pathetic like that. What I consider very important is that, while you are talking with any of your neighbors in a relaxed manner, or you are talking to a stranger in a café if there were no tables free, and then he tells that Kosovo is not Serbian any longer, and the public opinion research is already showing that, and then you have the ruling, political elite's rhetoric, and I am afraid that's leading us to a serious trauma. If people see that Kosovo is not Serbian any longer, and, of course, it's not independent either, it didn't deserve independence in the full sense of that word because many things need to change, just like in Serbia. We in Serbia have the least right to talk about what democracy should look like, but they really don't have democracy or consensual democracy. Well, then, if people start believing that Kosovo will be Serbian after the negotiations are over, and that it would be the revision of the Kumanovo Treaty,¹¹⁴ then we'll experience a serious trauma as a society, I am afraid. And if that rhetorical balloon is popped daily and people become aware of the reality, then they might fight against that fog that's coming over their eyes like during the nineties.

¹¹¹ On October 5, 2000, after massive protest gatherings and demonstrations organized across Serbia against election fraud, Milošević's regime was finally ousted. See footnote on page 56.

¹¹² The Democratic Opposition of Serbia was a wide coalition that consisted of 19 political parties. The coalition's victory in the elections of 2000 ended Milošević's regime.

¹¹³ *NIS* (Petroleum Industry of Serbia) is a national oil company in Serbia.

¹¹⁴ Military Technical Agreement between the military forces of KFOR and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, signed on June 9, 1999, concluding the Kosovo war and bombing of Yugoslavia.



You also mentioned nationalism. What to do with it when it's omnipresent?

Nationalism is a sticky thing. It sticks easily and if a person doesn't think about where he is, that he has a person in front of him who might not be of the same nationality or who came from another environment, if he is completely relaxed and not in control of his words, he picks up from the atmosphere many already prepared sentences which could hurt the other. Nationalism is present everywhere around us, and not only in the media, but also in public speech and the person could pick up a part of it just by breathing this air. However, if he is aware of himself, if he is aware of political attitudes, if he is aware of that person in front of him and if he is honest, then he really won't be a nationalist, that is, he won't speak that way.

And how much are we aware of ourselves as a society?

I think that we are not aware since we missed the chance on October 5 to build a new consensus. This means, a break and a new consensus which clearly states: we had a criminal regime which caused the war, set us against our neighbors, devastated the domestic economy, destroyed cultural institutions, and political ones also, and we say all that, and now, from now on, let's go to the other side, let's go straight toward Europe, value-based and behavior-based, in enterprise and in social security, let's recognize our path and know what we need to do. And then we say – let's see who can do what: "come on, you have some capital, which of your resources can you share, what about education, what should our children find out through the system of education, what values should they adopt in order to become competitive with their age-mates within

five years..." Simply, just like you prepare food provisions for winter in the fall, that's how we should order the state based on values, make it orderly regarding those goals. I think that Đinđić¹¹⁵ did that well, he addressed people and that rhetoric of his was open and full of optimism at the same time. He was saying that hard problems were ahead of us, he was saying that they couldn't wait for the state protection, that they needed to take care of their families by themselves since all of the funds were gone, but he also offered loans, he was telling people to take them out and do something for themselves, start moving, don't look to the state, to a factory door, that's a dead cow, no one could reanimate it, stand on your feet, don't let your future depend on your factory... He moved people and I think that there was a lot of optimism then...

What about the past? I have the impression that it is also being pushed aside and stored away. What to do with it?

Yes, lately, and within last few years, it's said "when what happened, happened"... It's not even said that war crimes were committed, that there was a war, that it has its proper name, and that, when they discuss another place and another time, people use those words. However, they use euphemisms here so that they wouldn't have to state their values, that they wouldn't have to say that a war crime against civilians is intolerable, that crime as such is unacceptable and that it's unacceptable not to be on the victims' side, whoever they are. We need to be put in the victim's spot, see how much we can handle, realize what happened to the victims and those who were left behind those victims, and move forward from there, to condemn those crimes and those politics. There's a readiness among politicians here to say "that was Milošević...", he ended up at the Hague...", however, what happened during the war and war crimes, Milošević didn't do that by himself, nor did he instruct people himself. A huge number of people worked for him and that is the 'structure' which is visible again, it is still standing...

Regarding the politicians, we often hear from people that they are exclusively responsible for what happened. How do you view that as a politician?

It would be easiest to say "it's everybody's fault." However, it's definitely not. The political and intellectual elites are always responsible, so it's not only the political. Writers, all public workers, all distinguished individuals who are in the media, they also should say something which corresponds to the moment's heaviness and significance. And they should be responsible primarily for the future. I remember research which was conducted in the beginning of the nine-

¹¹⁵ Zoran Đinđić (1952 – 2003) was a Serbian politician who was a key person of the DOS coalition. After the 2000 political change he became the Prime Minister of Serbia. In March 2003, at midday, he was assassinated in front of the government building in the center of Belgrade.

ties, a European study which also included Hungary and some other transitional countries. One of the questions was: "Do you think that a neighboring state's territory which is inhabited by your ethnic group should be part of your country?" Around 70 percent of Hungarian citizens answered "yes, of course."

Everyone who leaves this state and goes to Bosnia and arrives to Tuzla must remember the young people whom the Serbian forces hit from that hill and killed forty young people who were strolling. He must tell the people he meets over there what his attitude is regarding it, and tell them that he condemns criminals, since the whole of Tuzla lives with that pain. And from us, from our taxes came the support for it, from our money; and not only financial, but personnel-wise and any other way. Thus, we are responsible for that one who shot and killed forty people. It needs to be expressed in communication that you feel responsible regardless of what all you did to stop the war or prevent it from happening, but you didn't stop it...

However, the responsibility of their political and intellectual elites, all of those who make up the social substance which is the most significant within the society, meaning the people who are expected to point out the direction – they pointed to Europe. They said: "These things really look nice, but this is thinking from the last century or from the beginning of the 19th century. We are drawing near to the 21st century and we'll do it like this." They accepted the responsibility for it. It could have also happened there like it did here that someone took a flag and started waving it, he would have obtained support and risen to power. But, it's the politicians' and the elite's responsibility. Well, now, of course there's a certain and not so a small responsibility of everyone who voted or supported that regime while knowing what was happening, where his neighbors were going every weekend bringing back whatever that was what they were bringing back, and why the wartime rhetoric was spreading, and why that priest was holding a child's skull, and what would happen afterwards. People knew it all. And they could have extended their hands five centimeters longer at the newspaper stand and read some other papers. It was easy to find out what was really happening, and I believe that everyone knew what was happening, but they supported it because they thought that it was the most beneficial for them.

How do you view reconciliation, what do you think about it? Reconciliation between whom?

I think that reconciliation occurs spontaneously after every war. The first phase is what the economy requires – economic cooperation. We open factories here, you open shopping malls there, people request passports, they meet, travel, that looks like reconciliation, but it is actually

not. Reconciliation is emotions and trauma, it stays within people and can be activated in some situation. I think that it's very important for people to truly reconcile. For example, everyone who leaves this state and goes to Bosnia and arrives to Tuzla must remember the young people whom the Serbian forces hit from that hill and killed forty young people who were strolling. He must tell the people he meets over there what his attitude is regarding it, and tell them

that he condemns criminals, since the whole of Tuzla lives with that pain. And from us, from our taxes came the support for it, from our money; and not only financial, but personnel-wise and any other way. Thus, we are responsible for that one who shot and killed forty people. It needs to be expressed in communication that you feel responsible regardless of what all you did to stop the war or prevent it from happening, but you didn't stop it...

Thus, the “ordinary people” have the responsibility for reconciliation, meaning all of us?

Yes, I think that everyone can talk about things which were traumatic for one side or the other when they meet someone. That is hard since that someone might say “all of you are criminals,” and you tell him “not all of us, just like in your nationality, some of them are, others aren't, but the criminal politics came from my country.” Anyone who wasn't firmly tied to that type of politics can utter those words, and those who were should not travel around much, in my opinion.

Can we discuss responsibility, guilt, individual or collective guilt for all that happened?

Well, it's usually stated that there is no collective responsibility, or collective guilt. In my opinion collective responsibility exists since the collective, such as a political society, that is all of this state's citizens, have a common responsibility for something that they didn't stop, even if not participating in it, even if doing something to stop it. Thus, we do have the responsibility for it, and now we should discuss that freely.

What's your view of the future?

Well, I don't know, it seems to me, since we live surrounded with countries which are rapidly entering Europe, that the pressure of such feeling that all who surround us live in Europe will additionally stimulate all of the people in Serbia to wish that we also become a part of that Europe, to have motivation to change something themselves. And now, of course, the responsibility of those who lead the state and talk about European integrations is there. They, for example, don't think about European values since if the basic value is antifascism, and it is, then every fascist incident must be clearly identified and called by its real name, be sanctioned so that the public hears that you can't do that in this country, that it is not supported. At the same time, the bill which equates partisans and *četniks*, or antifascists and fascists, should not be enacted. If you have that law then something is out of order there. Or, you cannot see the criminals off, or the people indicted for the greatest crimes against humanitarian law, or even for genocide, you can't see them off with the highest honors since you thus encourage all of the others to continue that project which is surviving well in Serbia, the one of Milošević and Šešelj in which a large number of people participated and would do it again...

To end with, do you have anything else that you would like to say, something I didn't ask you?

I would say why I am worried. Beside the ones which are fundamentalist, mostly in contact with or under the wing of the Orthodox Church, those right-wing extremist youth organizations, there is something else that is a right-wing spirit among the youth and that is what worries me the most. Because, those are the people who will lead this country in the nearest future, and they are also currently deciding through their numerousness and their votes who will rule in Serbia tomorrow. That right-wing wave is not a pendulum, it usually happens in transitional countries that the left wins, then the right, then a bit of nostalgia after the past times, then a liberal government... However, this country has experienced war and terrible violence, and the right's existence, the extreme one, and its ideology's spreading among the youth might mean returning to the time of hatred and such ideas and projects.

How can it be stopped?

I think that we should talk with people a lot, we should be very open, we should talk with everyone and thus spread the 'oasis of normalcy' since none of us will go alone into the future nor can we do it alone. We have the responsibility for everyone around us. To talk with the people around us, orient them with regard to values, show them a different content, discuss with them, take them to a place, thus, fight for each person individually. I think that it is much easier for youths to do with their age-mates since there is a generational gap if someone who is sixty years old comes and talks with them about it. Thus, a sort of inter-generational education and everyone's involvement so that the extreme right is not present among the youth...

H. R.

Violence has been discussed often enough, here's something about nonviolence

Asking people what they think about reconciliation fifteen years after the wars in former Yugoslavia began demands readiness for a parallel view on the past, the present and the future of this region, where “viewing” denotes spanning very different points of view and attitudes, taking into consideration different perceptions of the conflicts’ causes and the whole spectrum of different “recipes,” wishes and hopes for the future. Considering pure facts and without delving into even the most superficial analysis of causes and consequences, the current situation does not leave us with many dilemmas – the year is 2005, the former Yugoslav region is divided into many states and regions with different statuses and different relations (within themselves and in relationship to others), mostly according to the bloody past during which the destinies of both states and, much more extensively, individuals were determined.

After the wars fought in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1991 and 1995, the last war fought here took place in Kosovo in 1999, while what happened in the spring and summer of 2001 in Macedonia is called “a conflict,” sometimes “an armed conflict,” which, subconsciously or consciously, reveals a tendency to avoid attaching the label of war (something which stays in people’s consciousness much longer and more painfully and which is, supposedly, longer lasting, with more human and material losses). The important question is how much the usage of diminutives within this context can erase the painfully clear truth that almost every corner of the country once called the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been, directly or indirectly, struck by *wars*, and that, to this day, wars (at different levels and metaphorically described) shake the societies in which we *attempt* to live. The choice of terms which are used to denote and describe the aforementioned events (unfortunate events, tragedy, armed conflicts, wars, aggressions, etc.) already speaks about our starting point, our relation to the past, our understanding of responsibility as category... But, whichever term you chose, you cannot escape the fact of terrible violence which was committed and its consequences due to which our part of the world has become an unavoidable place while listing and analyzing the world map’s “dark spots.”

After more than fifteen years since the battling for states, borders, identities, freedom [sic] began, we, the citizens of this part of the world which we intentionally won't call the Balkans here, don't know, *summa summarum*, how numerous are the victims of wars which were fought in our name, how many people were killed, how many went missing, how many were displaced or expelled... Thus, even the so-called *forensic* truth is still not available, as well as equally sensitive, but additionally complex answers to the questions like why all of it happened, who all and in which way bears the guilt and the responsibility for the explosion of violence and bloodbath from which we still try to recover as societies.

What we know or can know (willingly or not, with an open heart or with skepticism and fear in it), contrary to the above, is that it cannot be escaped (regardless of how much certain ones wanted or attempted to), and that we must learn how to live with it, how to shine a light on that past, understand it and recuperate from it later and not allow it to eat us inside out and completely rule over us and our world... And that we don't forget, along with it all, that this exact past (just like the present or the future) does not exist outside or in spite of us, in some sphere we cannot affect or where we have no responsibility. We are placed, or we placed ourselves, in front of a difficult task (many people would say that it is impossible) which, depending on different positions, means either going through trauma, suffering and pain again, or the unpleasant process of sticking others' noses into their own feces. It stinks, and it hurts...

One of the well-received recipes in such situations is the famous reconciliation which has been studied and analyzed in the examples of other postwar and post-conflict areas such as South Africa, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile, etc. That recipe has been wholeheartedly recommended to us by external "experts," diplomats, a few domestic politicians who cry when they hear the "peace, peace, peace, it's nobody's fault"¹¹⁶ phrase, media workers who rarely delve into connotations of language and pluralities of meanings anyway... With the qualification that there is no universally applicable approach, and that each society must seek the acceptable way of going through the reconciliation process alone, it sounds like a completely correct solution and it will be promoted by different sides, along with different types of explanations and from different theoretical and value-based positions.

The problem, and not the only one but certainly the largest, in that whole story is that such promoters of reconciliation are not, most often, its bearers (the actual and desired kind), or at least are not recognized as such.

And that is exactly where this publication's contribution lies – if we start out with the supposition that we know enough about what the persons from the

¹¹⁶ "Mir, mir, mir, ni(t)ko nije kriv" (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian) – popular children's play song in the former Yugoslavia.

international and domestic cultural/political/nongovernmental/governmental milieu think/speak about reconciliation, it remains to see what different people from different parts of our region think and feel about it (which we will not, on this occasion, call ordinary in not wanting to stick a label onto them which is followed invisibly by epithets such as: boring, uneducated and without the real power to do/change anything).

Without the intention to reject the concept of “reconciliation,” or to represent it with the approach most suitable for our situation, we only wanted to use the public space in order to show authentic voices and thoughts of people from the region about the term “reconciliation;” we wanted to point out the whole spectrum of different points of view, understandings and emotions which follow this topic. From taking it for granted that reconciliation is exactly what we need, through deconstructing and critically approaching the term and its limits, to rejecting the concept, but not the values it should contain – the perceptions are truly multicolored, as well as the understanding of who is responsible for initiating and carrying those processes...

What suits the most is what’s mutual and what is these interviews’ greatest value is the relation of that term to the whole series of deep and strenuous processes (and even its inability to be disconnected from them) such as seeking the truth of what really happened and who is responsible for it, questioning the term ‘justice’ and arriving to concrete justice in concrete conditions, the question of forgiving and forgiveness, guilt and responsibility... Everything that falls, most broadly, under the category of “dealing with the past.”

Asking people nowadays what they think and how they relate to “reconciliation,” also means opening the field of intertwined fears, hopes, frustrations which cannot be easily sorted into a seemingly fitting category or concept. Related to this, the collected interviews, among other things, show that the fear of both considering the past too lightly and seeing reconciliation as something which is in itself the only path and a purpose unto itself, is needless and inappropriate. Because the length of experienced wartime and living through the indirect or direct reality of hatred and violence is exactly inversely proportional to the readiness for taking things too easily and accepting some imaginative shortcuts which will take us to the desired state of peace. Opening space for unpretentious human stories about reconciliation contributes to another thing, a very important one for assembling the mosaic of everything that happened in this area, and that is the recording of personal histories and personal memories from which stem at least the suggestions of what it is that hurts and pinches and where our shielding is “thin”, if not answers and solutions.

We can draw many useful guidelines for the work in this field even from the naïve claim that what is desirable is the “return to what used to be.” The guidelines would range from that there are no unique views, nor a single theory which can describe either the relations of people in a town (not to mention a state or a region) toward the state/society in which they had lived until 1991,

or that there cannot be any kind of simplification regarding the “honest and touching” brotherhood and unity or about the five centuries worth of interethnic hatred. And, just as reconciliation is viewed as an exclusively private thing, the great explanations of what came before, during and after the war also must, in a way, take into consideration these personal stories. And, since we are seeking some universal guidelines, one of the most crucial ones could be that then, just like it isn't now, personal responsibility wasn't highly valued in our society. And, in order not to lie to ourselves, never and nowhere has that kind of responsibility been something which people would gladly put onto their shoulders, but the astonishing lack of awareness that we also have some power and that we are a deciding factor as well should definitely be one of the top priorities in building our societies. In the situation of being ready to extend some terms (like national interests and concerns about those) to unseen dimensions and thus include everything that exists (national interests in horticulture, national ecological interests, national artistic interests), we are, likewise, ready to support the narrowing of the term ‘responsibility’ to such micro dimensions, that no one in the end feels that responsibility is something which exists as a value in our surroundings at all. The responses collected in this publication cause different reactions and, in a very specific way, actually provide us with a pretty realistic picture of the society with its different variations and directions of thinking and acting. These responses not only show the few basic directions of understanding the processes of dealing with a heavy past, but also clearly show the influences and social sources of such pictures. And they remind us that without the serious consideration of these viewpoints, as much as they seem familiar sometimes, there cannot be a clear picture how we will act within this field, nor how we will finally manage to breathe in a bit of life into that phrase “potentials for peacebuilding everywhere around us.”

And, to conclude, most likely many will notice that this publication does not contain interviews with the not so small number of people who do not want (or their actions and deeds convey such a message) either to deal with the past, or reconciliation, or coexistence. And we respond with: yes, that's true, those stories cannot be found here, since we don't want to offer space which they have a lot of anyway. And, to the question whether it means that we want to look at the cruel reality through rose-colored glasses we respond: “no!” Cruelty is but one of the elements of reality, just like hope and humanity and empathy are, and the long time of peace work has taught that we very steadfastly demand and create space for those stories that are a bit different. Or, in other words, *“violence has been discussed often enough, here's something about nonviolence.”*

Tamara Šmidling

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