Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH ZORAN RISTIĆ

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Duration: 79 minutes

Present:

1. Zoran Ristić (Speaker)
2. Nataša Govedarica (interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:
() – emotional communication
{} – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:
[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Part One

Nataša Govedarica: Let us start from when and where you were born. What is the origin of your family? What are your earliest memories?

Zoran Ristić: I am Zoran Ristić and I was born in Gnjilane in December 1966 and literally a good part of my childhood is linked to that area, to that region. My father Blagoje Ristić was born in a nearby village called Šilovo, near Gnjilane, he worked and spent his whole life in Budriz, Lower Budrizi. It's a village near Gnjilane, where he was a village teacher. He taught children in a primary school there, then called Brotherhood, for almost forty years.

My mother is Vera Stojanova Ivkova. She is a native Bulgarian who back in '61 or '62, when she finished the teachers' school in Dimitrovgrad, came to Prizren to study at the Higher Pedagogical School. After that, when she started university, she enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy in Pristina where she met my father, who in the period of '64 and '65 studied Pedagogy and Law, which unfortunately he never finished. They fell in love there and got married.

I was born in Gnjilane and my first memories and experiences where from those five or six years when I lived in Budriz, in the primary school Brotherhood, where my parents as rural teachers and a young married couple got a small room to live, while in the second asnd third room of the house there were improvised classrooms where they taught children, providing them with some sort of first knowledge. And some of my first memories from my childhood are actually related to the school. I was probably conceived in that school and probably when I started walking I walked into one of those classrooms, and it is an incredible story today when my mother talks about it, and I also remember a bit, that during the breaks and during the classes, because it was a rural environment, I rushed into the classrooms and asked that my mother breastfeeds me.

Hanging out with those kids who were then in first, second, third or fourth grade, depending on which class my parents taught, that's how I started to learn how to read and write. So it is incredible, that [I learnt] the alphabet… it's an outstanding story of which my mother still convinces me, that I could read and write already in the second year of my life. We lived in that village and that room, which was only for temporary usage, for a short time and then my parents moved to a house that they rented near the school, and there we lived until the year '72. In '72 my father and mother, I do not know how, probably

with the savings of the teacher's salaries they earned, which then were not low, and of course with the help of their parents, bought a house in Gnjilane and so in ‘72 we moved from the village of Budriz to Gnjilane.

That was, how to say, a period of my life that I remember well. From that early period of my childhood I remember that I learned to swim very early, because the village was near the Morava river. And another memory I will hold onto until I’m alive is when children from the schools in the region got out of school, I believe it was the year ‘71, I was already 5 years old, and I clearly remember it, or it was ’69, I cannot be [sure], I will check that afterwards. This was during the visit of our Marshal Josip Broz Tito to Kosovo.

I remember that there was an incredible fuss and nervousness. I did not know what was happening, but I remember that there were rows of students in white shirts, red scarves and blue hats, they were going to the main road where the limousine of our Marshal Tito and his wife Jovanka was supposed to pass by. I also remember very well that we were waving some flags, and that marked a huge event for us children. Everyone talked a lot about that event before he passed by, during and many, many years after our Marshal Tito passed by that road.

That was a kind of carefree time, some sort of time of acquiring information, meeting people, while the departure from the village for me was... I did not even know what that was at the time, but the move to a small urban area was a turning point in some kind of activities. So, there were no more trips to swim in the river, going to the fields and stealing melons or grapes or some other seasonal fruit. It was already a different atmosphere and a different ambiance.

Another memory that binds me to my earliest times is visiting often my relatives on the border with Bulgaria, visiting my relatives in Bulgaria, in Sofia, Bulgaria. That is why in my early childhood I mastered the Bulgarian language very quickly, so that I learned some other, some other events that surrounded us, but were not quite so accessible, from another perspective.

Moving seemed interesting, because then and to this day my parents loved animals and raised animals and then, as they do today, they grew chicken and liked poultry. I remember that my dad packed a bunch of chickens in some boxes and put them on a horse carriage, so that they moved to the city, and that in Livoc, it's a village near Gnjilane, on a hill that I remember very well, the box somehow opened and the bunch of chickens jumped out, flew out of these boxes, and I remember that for an hour and perhaps longer, time did not mean anything to me then, my dad raced through the surrounding plains to collect all that poultry which maybe did not want to move from the village to the city.

Having this time distance now, this story is kind of symbolic for that period of time. Childhood, as I remember it, was socializing with other kids. We had a lot of free time at the village. Every Sunday we went for picnics with children, and there were other events in terms of socializing, and that was it, in short.

Nataša Govedarica: What about elementary school?

Zoran Ristić: So when we moved to Gnjilane I went with my sister to some kind of pre-school. We called it like that, so I spent a year there, and I met a different kind of children, children who regularly wore shoes, they had trainers, they had some sort of sandals, a different kind of shoes than those which we wore in our village.... Generally speaking, when summer came to the village where I lived, we mostly walked barefoot. And then some of my earliest memories are that I quickly became close to those kids, and started a sort of normal socializing, but in a completely different environment and totally different circumstances. We no longer had to run across the fields and organize football matches among boys, take two stones, put them on the field, cast a ball and then run around all day.

In Gnjilane there was already some kind of infrastructure, you could actually find proper soccer goals, there was a different context and we mostly hung out in houses. I started elementary school back in ’73, in the elementary school Vuk Karadžić in Gnjilane, where there were thousands of children. I remember at the time, as far as Serbs were concerned, there were four classes only in the Vuk Karadžić school. I think that every class counted more than thirty students. However, first, second and third grade were lead by our teacher Mira Popović but they moved us very often. I don’t remember this very well. I don’t know if it was because there were just a few buildings at that moment, and a huge number of children, so at the beginning of the school year the school administration made the schedule to rationalize space. So in the first and second grade I went to the Vuk Karadžić school in the center of Gnjilane, and then I went to a school which was a little bit farther from the city center and to me that became a problem and I remember that my parents escorted me to [school] and picked me up from school.

That means that I finished the fourth grade of primary school there, that was from ’73 to ’77, and then after that we started a so-called higher education, which was elementary school from fifth to eighth grade, when we returned to the school Vuk Karadžić again and then we had to learn a foreign language. Starting from fifth grade, and according to the curriculum for fifth grade, we began to learn a foreign language. Since at that time we never had a professor of English language, there were only two foreign languages from which the children were able to choose: one was Russian, the other was French. I remember very well that my father came to the class in which I was for the first four years and asked the homeroom teacher to move me from the French class to the Russian class. To this day, sometimes I think whether this was a good choice. Of course, I did not have any say in the decision.

A first memory from that fifth grade was the arrival of a boy whose parents worked in Germany and he did not know a word in Serbian. He was born there, his parents worked in Germany and he was sitting next to me during classes. Later, he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, but I remember well that when he sat next to me the boy spoke German. I did not know which language was it, but one of the teachers whispered to me, "Please Zoran, he does not know our language, please take care that he becomes well adjusted and copes well in the classroom." But after a few weeks I left that class and joined the Russian

class where the Russian language was taught. We joked among ourselves in school, “You are French and we are Russians,” or vice versa. There have always existed some kinds of divisions.

There I finished elementary school, and after that I started the general vocational education, as it was then called, now I remember, vocational education in a high school in Gnjilane, which was at the exit of Gnjilane. That's where I made some new friends, and for about two years there I gained a general knowledge, as it was called, I really cannot remember. I think it was part of an educational reform, we were a test class and now, when I remember that period of my growing up, literally I think that my whole generation, the class of ’66, was a kind of test, an experimental generation of students, in terms of, let's try something, not thinking about the results. And with that interruption of a classical school education that had prevailed until these years, we have always been a kind of an experiment. Not only us, my generation. It was like that throughout the whole former Yugoslavia, that story.

After the second year I entered the high school Zejnel Hajdini, which was next to the school in Gnjilane, where I was in the department of biology. Somehow, in those moments, I thought it would be good that through some kind of further education I became a doctor or a dentist or a veterinarian or something. And I remember it was even a wish of my parents that I wear a white coat, because in small towns it has always been imperative that the child of parents, especially if they were teachers, be a doctor. It is a kind of higher education and respect that small towns can offer. But throughout my personal development I must admit that I was involved in completely different things. I read a lot of comics, I read a lot of books. I say this with pride to this day, I should not be too modest, I own a huge library which has around seven thousand books. And all my life I was a bibliophile, loved to collect books, I loved reading them, looking at them, touching them, flipping them, etc., etc.

What is perhaps important during this period, in Gnjilane there was no movie theater. There was a cinema, but in ‘81, I remember this very well, reconstruction began, to change something in that cinema. This restoration, the reconstruction of the movie theater lasted very long. Until then, the repertoire mainly featured erotic films which arrived from Sweden or whatever prevailed, and honestly, although I was young then I did not dare, and even if I wanted to go as a kid to see that kind of movie, I knew it would be known, and then I would come home and get beaten by my dad, “What were you looking for there,” and I know that these screenings in Gnjilane during the ‘70s, those years, were sold out. The same movie would be played for five times a day, *Swedish Girls at a Gas Station*. I remember, that was a kind of easy erotic comedy that was played six or seven or even eight times a day for a couple of months. And it was visited regularly. Oh yes, of course, as all other children I watched *Sutjeska*, *Neretva* and other partisan movies that were shown there, we went there as a group and those were my first contacts with movies. The school had to send all the children to watch *Sutjeska*, to watch *Neretva*, watch *Walter Defends Sarajevo,* etc. etc. and these were some kind of moments of my fascination with movies and in general, with cinematography.

The theater did not exist, there was a library in Gnjilane that I have to admit was completely sealed, let's say, closed. A guy who worked there did not know Serbian and when you came into the library to look for a book, he was simply silent, not helping in the selection. He had an assistant who knew Serbian, she was a Serb who did not want to bother with it, so for a dozen times, I personally had, as a kid, had a problem when I wanted to choose a magazine, a newspaper, not something that everyone takes, like books we had to read for school, such as *Eagles Fly Early* for sixth grade, but do not look for anything else besides the required books included in the curriculum for seventh grade. That was mandatory, but if you were looking for something you wanted to read at that point because you had heard of it, then there was no response to assist you in this task.

Once I remember that I asked for something because I knew they had it in their archives, or wherever else in their library fund, the *Politika* daily from previous years, I do not know, from '39, '40, or '41, I could not get that either. So I gave up on libraries, and I said, "I'll make my own library," because I already had some sort of a small fund of books from my parents, "I'm going to make a library by myself, nobody can't touch me." Then I started ordering books from different publishers on delivery. It was like that then. You would find the letter in the catalogue and then you submit what interests you and in 15 days you get the books, which you had ordered and paid properly, to your address and then you filled out your library. That's about it, what I remember from Gnjilane.

What I still remember from Gnjilane, which would be interesting for your viewers, those who will watch and see or listen or think about it, I remember it was a carefree childhood, I remember that it was an environment where you could walk, socialize, you could say that you were safe in every respect until '81. 1981 was a turning point in the lives of all Serbs in Kosovo and all Albanians in Kosovo and all the people in Kosovo. I did not know much about it as a child. Nobody let us know much about it, nobody talked about it.

As a kid I was curious and asked my Bulgarian grandfather how was it during the Second World War, "Grandfather, how was it in Sofia at the time?" because my grandfather was in Sofia from '41 to '44. Often I also asked my grandfather from Kosovo, "So grandfather, how was it during the war, and what had happened during the Second World War?" because he was a participant in that war.

But about these things I learned more from my Bulgarian grandfather than from my Serbian grandfather, so that from this distance I think about the reasons for this. He was always a little secretive, hidden, airtight, closed. He did not want to talk much about it, but I mostly learned from the media, from the press, because there were no other types of media except for the press that was delivered every morning there by some kind of van or bus from Belgrade or from some other centers. I devoured those texts, especially texts in the field of culture, because I was much interested in it, but when you take the former daily newspapers *Večernje Novosti* and *Politika,* and turn the pages, you have to read everything. Yes, maybe that's an interesting story about me that I was never interested in sports. So never in my life did I read anything about sport, nor did I follow sport, nor do I know anything about sport.

So for years my dad bought *Večernje Novosti,* and for years I read only until those pages where sport appeared, and my dad and most men usually turned [the pages from the] back side, which were full, filled with sports news and then moved towards those first pages about daily politics and then everything else. There you have it shortly. I'm trying to remember some other important events. Yes, I began to talk about '68, how I did not know anything. I know that at that time there were some demonstrations, but I learned a lot, much later in life, of course, after '81, that a lot was kept silent about it, a lot.

In Kosovo, over these 50 years, a little less than 50 years that I can remember, everybody was silent about all those things that we later hang onto our necks. It was generally thrown under the carpet. Basically, the media were very closed to the stories and relationships between the two nations, and relations between two majoritarian nations have been always fuming. State authorities always knew what was happening in the area but were blocking communication between the two ethnic groups, using the existing institutions. The Central Committee of the Communist Party, or whatever it was called then, held the executive power and controlled everything.

I remember that my dad always said, "Son, be careful when you walk down the street, if there's some kind of fight or if any problem arises, stay away." He always taught me that I have to be very honest, decent, respect all the people around me, that I have to say, "Good morning" to whomever is going down the street and probably this story still follows me because I was brought up in my own home by my parents in such a manner, that I have to admit, as much as it sounds cruel or now constructed by me, that I never divided people based on their nationality, faith, language, but I divided them between the good and the bad. And I remember that until '81, even in elementary school, when I was in elementary school, I had a couple of good friends who were Albanians with whom I played soccer. Together, we looked at girls for the first time ... fell in love together, listened to the same music, watched the same movies. And when you grow up in such environment there's no divisions such as, "Well, you are an Albanian, you are a Serb, and I hate you because you are a Serb, or I hate you because you're an Albanian." Instead, we thought, "We are neighbors and we spend time together, eating baklava at your mom's, and you come over to my mother's to eat Bulgarian pie." At that time, an opposite kind of behavior was really inconceivable to me.

Part Two

The first time we were told that we are different dates back to '81. I remember I had a friend whose dad was a high-ranking official in the the MUP or SUP[1] at the time. I came to take her notebook so I could copy homework or something, her name was Lela Pantelić and she told me, "Shush, something happened in Pristina." "What is going on?" She said, "My dad has been away for a few days, they called him to work but I do not know what's going on, something is happening." And I just took that information, for in Gnjilane nothing happened in '81, nothing happened then.

[1] Federal Ministry of Interior/Local Office of the Ministry of Interior.

This was in April. I know when it was, because the weather was nice and I came home and asked my father what was going on in Pristina. Until then I never went to Pristina, nor did I have any knowledge of Pristina. I only knew that it was the capital of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, and that was all I knew. So after a while we found out that some kind of irredentist, chauvinist, or who knows what kind of demonstration, was happening in Pristina, and people started talking about it, something similar to ’68, they said.

Nataša Govedarica: What did your father say, do you remember how he explained what was happening?

Zoran Ristić: Well, I can hardly remember. I believe that he could have said, “This does not concern you, your duty is to study and the only business you have is to be yourself.” My dad wasn’t the only one with that kind of answer. I asked some other people whom I had met. We even asked teachers in our school what was going on in Kosovo. I remember that a few days later the former Television of Belgrade broadcast some story about it and we were all at home watching it, breathless. There was a piece of footage that I remember very well. It was a video of a man who was protesting while a member of the police approached him, and I remember that the cameraman recorded when the police officer removed a badge with a two-headed black eagle from the man’s coat. I remember this scene so clearly, as if it was yesterday that I watched it. I remember other and numerous shots of a bunch of people running while being chased by the police.

I was a kid then, I had no idea about what could be happening, why, what's going on, what’s the problem. Having in mind that we were always fed the information that everything works well in Yugoslavia, that we all love each other, we work a lot, and that we should believe that there will never be a war, but in the same time we have to be prepared if war comes tomorrow. That's what I also remember. This was the mantra that was broadcasted in our television every day: brotherhood and unity.

After the demonstrations in ’81, for the first time I doubted these stories. I was already, fourteen, fifteen years old, or something like that. These are some of my earliest memories. I remember that even in Gnjilane the divisions started to be noticed after ’81. These divisions were visible at every step. The streets were divided: Albanians walked on one side of the street, Serbs on the other. I'm talking again about Albanians who lived in the city, but I still do not divide people between those who live in the countryside and people who live, or want to live in the city. But really, in one of my first memories, there is a big difference between the urban population which was growing, growing and being educated in the city, and the population that came from the countryside and started to fill the cities during this period.

At the same time Gnjilane was still a major industrial center. As I was growing up in Gnjilane, various factories were opening up. Gnjilane was the largest industrial and commercial center, so to speak, in Kosovo. In Gnjilane there was the very well-known and very important tobacco industry, and the batteries factory. There was the textile industry in Gnjilane, a radiator factory. During the ‘80s, there were large farms that were cultivated, I remember that well.

Once, my dad came to Budriz, and in the neighboring village which had detached school department, where he worked, he had somehow found Californian blackberries, you know, and these were planted in large spaces in order to be collected, manufactured, and later sold, it was something you could have made a living of. My dad was enthusiastic. Then he took these Californian blackberries that don't have thorns and moved them to his birthplace near Šilovo, and he planted them there in some sort of large farming areas.

So, in the '80s, I remember clearly, they did make some cherry plantations, so we as kids in high school, went to pick them and pack them and get them transported to those who processed them further or whatever. So Gnjilane as a city that was rapidly developing was like a magnet for people of various industry professions. People with different skills would come to find a job, to start a life, family, etc. These are also one of my first memories, so to speak, from high school.

Nataša Govedarica: You started talking about the moment when the division becomes visible.

Zoran Ristić: Yes, yes.

Nataša Govedarica: How did that look like to you, how did that influence your life?

Zoran Ristić: Well, here's how it looks. I was a sophomore in high school, if you ask. During my youth, even when I was in seventh grade, I've been listening to some rock and roll groups, to heavy metal music. "Heavy metal, what is it?" I wondered. So, even as a kid I started going to these [newspapers] kiosks. A magazine called *Jukebox* had already been in circulation long before my time, and I got it from some older friends from the neighborhood. I was reading it a lot but only little did I understand what it was, I must admit. There were mostly articles about music, about rock and roll, various events in the music world, of course the technique of musicians. I wasn't that much into that.

Then, *Rock* started to be published, you might remember that, also a magazine about music. On the one hand, half of the magazine – it was a little different from other retail formats – on the one hand, there were comics that I loved, and the other side of the magazine there were texts on rock and roll music. And so I started to listen to heavy metal music, somehow I've got the first vinyl of *ACDC* that started my obsession with heavy metal.

I listened to it for about ten years and I acted and dressed that way. You know, I'd scribble my shirts, I'd tore one sleeve, the other was there, in its place, wearing a denim jacket was required as an important part of the image, and in the classroom, well, not exactly in the classroom, but in the school where I went, I saw a girl who was identical to me, with long curly hair, a casual, grungy style like an Oxford student, also wearing a denim jacket, denim trousers, her name was Floriana. I fell in love with her. And after a while I realized that this love, as much as we were just falling in love, I knew that things between us couldn't work

for several reasons. Even one of my Albanian friends once approached me and said, “Zoran...[be careful]”. I didn’t go out with her, there was only a sort of mutual flirting. In the Albanian class she was what I was in mine. And I was the same as her but in the Serbian class, so there was, let’s say, some mutual innocent flirtation when we were exchanging glances, we were in the second year of high school then, sixteen years of age. Afterwards I learned that she was missing, I don’t know what happened to her and I never heard anything about her, nor do I know anything about her today. But the fact remains that falling in love with a member of the other side or even looking at the opposite side was not recommended.

This was one of the ways to realize what’s going on, if you ask me, it was one of those things when you could see that the division began, the division between Serbs and Albanians. And for me this was shocking, we were raised in the same way, we were listening to the same music, reading the same books, going to the same movies, hanging out, talking about the same problems and suddenly it all stopped. We somehow split. I cannot say when exactly, but I can say that after ’81 I learned many things, heaps of information came to me when I realized that we’re not living in the same story anymore, although we live in the same city, we breathe the same air, go up and down the same streets, and despite the fact that we didn’t speak the same language, we used to communicate really well.

Nataša Govedarica: This is interesting for me, how did that division look like, who learned whose language?

Zoran Ristić: Albanians learned Serbian in most cases, and mostly all of our communication was in Serbian. A small number of Serbs wanted or did not want or could not learn Albanian. Honestly, Albanian for us Serbs was a little tight, tight, it is a difficult language even though you live with a person, say, a neighbor who speaks that language, it is still very difficult to learn. We learned Albanian in primary and secondary school and who wanted could learn at least basic phrases, basic communication patterns. But you know very well that in former Yugoslavia the official language in the army and the police and in all institutions was Serbo-Croatian. So I do not know what to tell you.

For example, I learned Macedonian because I listened to *Radio Skopje*. *Radio Skopje* was one of the biggest radio stations in my region. Every night and every day my radio was tuned to *Radio Skopje*. Shortly after we got a radio signal, I think, maybe it already existed, I don’t know but somebody told me about *Radio Niš*. I found *Radio Niš* frequency and *Radio Niš* had some good programs with music that interested me and I listened to *Radio Niš*, but I also listened to other stations. Only in the ‘80s or something, I started listening to *Radio Pristina*. Because *Radio Pristina*, if I recall correctly, had music shows playing folk music, Albanian folk music or Serbian folk music. Honestly, I was not interested in that, I did not listen to that kind of music, so that's it.

Nataša Govedarica: But you still learned a bit of Albanian?

Zoran Ristić: Yeah, well, I grew up in the streets of Gnjilane, my next-door neighbors were Albanians with whom I hung out, with whom I played football and of course the first contact with the Albanian language was in school, but regardless of the school, a parallel education was happening in the streets. You had to socialize with Sami or Avli who was your next door neighbor, with whom sometimes you ate a piece of pie or cake and cheese and then played football, you heard the first curse words, you were there to fell the atmosphere of their house. So even today I speak Albanian, actually, I speak "Indian Albanian" because I understand more than I can speak, because I was born in this area and of course I was watching and listening to the music from the area, watching television and hanging out with people who spoke the language, so I learned at least something.

But I have something else to say, it just came to my mind. I had a friend with whom I graduated from high school who also lived in Gnjilane and as we were classmates in fifth, fourth grade, we started to learn the basics of Albanian as a compulsory subject in fifth grade, I remember that his father came to school and said publicly that his son would not learn Albanian. For me, that was ... now what, we all have to learn it, so why wouldn't he learn it? Why wouldn't he come to class? I think we had the Albanian language class twice a week, and maybe one of the problems why the vast majority of children did not want to learn Albanian was because the professors of Albanian hadn't tried harder to teach them the language. Later it became an optional class, although earlier it was required. In my case it was a required class, I had to learn it, it was mandatory. Education in elementary school was mandatory.

But, you see, now that you ask me, I remembered that I had a professor of Latin in high school, an Albanian man, who taught me Latin and from whom I have learned so much about languages in general, not just about Latin, and I still think he is credited for a good part of my knowledge about Christianity and all that is related to Latin and Latin civilization and Roman civilization and history, you would not believe it. Otherwise, this man graduated in Romance languages and culture in the Vatican or Rome. I have not seen him for 30 years after graduating from high school, and I'd love to see that guy again. He was such a nice, great gentleman who as a young man had studied here. I was in a kind of scientific field of study and we needed to learn Latin. And since no one knew it at the time, there were no teachers available, so he was teaching in Serbian. It's one of the things that would be good to mention. I still remember him as a good and diligent professor to whom I owe a lot for my education and so on...

Nataša Govedarica: When you finished high school, what did you do next?

Zoran Ristić: Well, everything was set up for you when you graduated from high school. For all the guys who finished high school at the age of eighteen, what they did next was joining the Yugoslav People's Army. That was the path for every guy who wanted to become a man and be initiated to manhood. He had to go to the YPA and to serve in the army even if he was limp and blind and crippled and hunchbacked, God forbid, he had to go the army. Because in our [community], I believe in other Yugoslav communities as well, it was a kind of imperative, it was a must, "Oh, you have not served in the army, what's wrong with you? You must have some serious problem."

The farewells celebrating the start of a man's service in the army started in '85. I remember the end of July and beginning of August, Gnjilane quivered in farewells to the army, the so-called Yugoslav People's Army. My peers served everywhere, from Slovenia to Macedonia, and I expected to serve somewhere similar. Anyway, I was very skinny then. I did not play sports and I was a yet unformed man. I got a call, I think it was August 2nd, I recall that very well, I opened a note that said, "Military Post: Pančevo."[2] I closed it, put it back in the blue envelope, returned home, we had a farewell party before I departed, it was binge drinking until dawn.

I remember they put me on a bus to Belgrade and in the morning I caught a bus to Pančevo and found myself in the military barracks of Pančevo on August 4, back in '85. They put me in some sort of Recce-Sabotage troop, and it was some kind of elite unit that held their training there. And my meetings with important people from former Yugoslavia began then. There I met Bosnians, Slovenes, Croats, Macedonians, Muslims from Bosnia, Croats from Bosnia. And what is perhaps most important for me, seeing all those TV shows that we watched, from *Splitski, Velo Misto,* and *Mali Misto,* to Slovenian shows such as *A šćuke nič pa nič* , we devoured these TV shows, watched them constantly, not to mention some Croatian TV series, the Bosnian show *Leather*…, During this, I totally forgot that there were so many different dialects and understood that we were very close because of television.

There were 120 young soldiers in my unit, I remember this, we went through training together and there I started the first true friendships, important friendship in my life. When you come to this kind of a place, somebody leaves you there and you meet people who come from different socio-economic, and religious and linguistic backgrounds. That's where you start to understand who you are, what you are, to which group you belong, why you belong to them, and not to someone else, and ultimately, you come up with conclusions about all the things we went through in several countries in which I lived, just as you did.

Nataša Govedarica: And after that, you were back in Kosovo or where?

Zoran Ristić: Yes, I forgot to mention that l tried to enroll in the Faculty of Medicine in Pristina after high school, but I was not accepted. Yes, it might be an interesting topic. Something became noticeable back then in '85. In the spring, when I began to prepare the entrance examination for university, [I realized] that the state was starting to fall apart. This was obvious when you come to the counter with very good success and honors to apply for the school that you choose, and you realize that some of your friends from school are holding their parents' hands in front of you, while parents are waiting to register them in the desired school. However, they don't stand on line like everyone else, they walk, and their children follow them. I expressed myself a bit literally here, although there were many cases where some kids were really brought by hand to enroll in the University. You could see parents entering offices, talking with people, laughing, and negotiating. I saw that during my studies as well, but now it does not matter.

[2] Locality in Vojvodina, a North-Eastern region of Serbia.

In some way, I wanted to fulfill my wish and the wish of my parents and I tried to enroll in Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary. I tried Veterinary in Belgrade, Dentistry and Medicine in Pristina. I was not accepted in any of these three schools, although I think I'd be a good and hardworking student.... and then I came back home and told my dad, "Dad, it's not working, I will go my way, goodbye." What happened? When I took my documents from the Medical Faculty in Pristina, I ran to the Faculty of Philosophy in Pristina and applied for the entrance exam and after a few days I took the entrance exam, I passed and I enrolled in Literature. I took my student ID, returned home and joined the army. I spent 13 and a half months in the army, and after serving in the army I returned to Pristina and began studying Yugoslav Literature and Serbo-Croatian language. That was the name of the program.

But I want to tell an interesting story from the army. Maybe it will be interesting to you. In the army, I met Albanians from other cities who served with me. Among other things there was a guy my age who finished school somewhere in Kosovo and his name was Afrim Konjufca, I remember this very well. He did not know a word of Serbian. And then the captain, I think his surname was Tomić, said, "Zoran, you will stay with Afrim, you will sleep in bunk beds, but you should be with him during training and try to make him understand at least a little of the Serbian language." I said, "Sure, why not." For six or seven months during training I socialized with Afrim and as much as I could, I tried to say something in Albanian and translate it in Serbian. Of course, I remember Afrim because of this story. He was a great character, we hung out a lot, talked and joked together, but also did everything our superiors asked us to do.

Finally, my service in the army ended, and I knew that Afrim also enrolled in University, I think it was the Faculty of Agriculture in Pristina, and I thought, "After the army we will probably meet in Pristina." And that's what happened. We met again in November or December, I knew this because the weather was very cold. I was out and after I ate some pie, I was on my way home, when I ran into Afrim. "*Ku je*, Afrim? How are you, hey, what are you doing?" And he says, "Do you have time for a drink?" I did have time and we were off for a drink. He says, "Zoran, I want to tell you something. I just wanted to tell you that I knew Serbian all along and pretended not to know it because I did not want to be harassed and forced to do things I did not want to do in the army." This was a surprise for me, a pleasant surprise, I mean. The man simply wanted that while serving the army, and speaking of which, we served in Pančevo, a very tough military post with a lot of hard work, and I just, I understood why he wanted to disguise that fact ... if he did not know Serbian, he would not understand the commands, which were then in Serbo-Croatian. So that is one of the stories that remain in my memory from the army, but of course there is bunch of other stories as well.

Nataša Govedarica: How did your student days look like in Pristina?

Zoran Ristić: It was hard. I was supposed to live in the dormitory. I tried to get a room in '86-87 and '88. It was almost two years since my studies began and I wanted to live in the dormitory, but that's another story. After returning from the army, and from the moment I arrived in Pristina, I had already figured out that nothing's right there, that something's going on and for a thousand times I asked myself who is crazy

here, who is kidding whom here, I do not know. I had thousands of questions. If I start to think about those things, I can say so much more about it, much more.

I lived in a rented room. Back then, we didn't have many housing options. The dormitory was too small to accommodate all interested students at the University of Pristina. I think statistics is difficult, but if we now reviewed the statistics of students studying at the University of Pristina, it was certainly a huge figure. Now, town small as Pristina could accommodate only dozens of kids from different groups, different departments, and offer them some kind of decent living conditions. But there were no conditions there, no conditions. So you were doomed to your own pocket, so to speak, you had to find your own place that you would pay for regularly and everything else that goes with it and of course you had to attend classes regularly, be present during lectures and perform all other duties that are imposed by the University.

Quickly I got tired of Pristina, Pristina became too small for me. I remember it cold, gray, dirty, unlit, full of mud and dust. And when the winds of autumn and winter started to blow, then the town became overpopulated with stray dogs. These are some of my impressions from this period in Pristina, and I quickly got tired of Pristina, because it was all pretending. Life in Pristina was boring, a bunch of police on the streets, I forgot to say that. In fact, the same sort of atmosphere as it is today. I do not see much difference after these 25 years that I know about these things.

A tension was always being kept alive here, we constantly lived in the anxiety that something would happen, that someone would do something bad. And in order to maintain at least an appearance of peace, the illusion of peace or the appearance of peace, there is always the police, there are still some people in uniforms, there are always some people looking like good angels who oversee you, so you do not jump over the edge of the code that someone else wrote for you. Someone has set out everything: you've got to walk on the promenade from eight to nine and then go home because at nine or ten the police curfew starts. And it took a long time, it lasted too long. For me ... I no longer know how to describe it, for me this was like some game of madness that we all got used to, the common game of idiocy that has being oppressing me for fifty years.

All my life I had this problem regarding, should I do or should I not do something that would have far-reaching consequences. I don't believe I felt relaxed in my hometown even for ten minutes of my life, except maybe during the first phase of my childhood, when I was a small kid. But starting with the '70s, when divisions started - we are us, and they are them - it was terrible. Today I'm constantly complaining about my generation and the generations that came after mine, and the generations that are yet to come… We had tons of energy, strength, love, hope for better things in life, and we spent all that on something that does not make sense, something not human - on tension, divisions, struggle, fears ...

In Kosovo, fear is one of the most common feelings among people, fear of everything, of poverty, of war, of conflict, of excesses, both small and big, so I do not know ... somehow the whole story ... I have been talking for too long, so I ... I find the whole story very hard when I realize that I could have used all those

days for something more meaningful. It is hard for me when I remember that I was as a professor at some point and in the school where I worked I watched the children with deep regret and listened to how and where they spent their time. And I tried to keep telling them to turn to some nicer things, to begin to build some things that they would leave behind, that when they're gone, when we're gone, no one could say, "Well, they squandered their life in divisions, they dedicated their lives to ruin each other in wars. They ruined their lives with fear, their own fears and with the fears others', of insecurity, being afraid of everything."

Part Three

Nataša Govedarica: Now that we're here, at the beautiful and less beautiful things, where do movie and theater appear in your life?

Zoran Ristić: Well, where does it appear? It appeared where I least hoped it would, in Kosovo. It is the year 1988. Fed up with pretending, false morality, fears, doubts, I left Pristina with the intention to try to continue my higher education somewhere else. I tried to enroll at the Prague Academy in Film directing. Yugoslavia had some agreement with the Prague Academy FAMU in Prague to accept students from our country according to "a key." They would accept two people from Slovenia, two from Croatia - now I talk by heart - two from Serbia, one from Vojvodina, one from Kosovo, and two from Macedonia, in order to create a kind of professional pool that the former Yugoslavia may not have had. This was called the agreement about student collaboration, or whatever, student exchange with Czechoslovakia.

I somehow found out about this information, and I applied for Directing, Film Directing, here in the Secretariat, it was called like that, the Secretariat for International Cooperation and Students Exchange. At that time I was browsing through the library, the University library, but not the main one, the one of our faculty, I was looking at the book catalog, a line up at the top, I saw some white stack of books and asked the librarian, "What is this?", and she says that no one ever touched those books. I say, I think she was called Anica, I say, "Anica, give me a ladder!" I climbed up there and started looking and there I saw a book written by Bošković: '*Film Directing – the basics*', then I found, I do not know, *The basics of Editing*, then, I don't know, something else like that. So I asked, "May I take this?" She says, "Take it, nobody ever touched it." I got to my room and started reading and figuring out that this is not bad to try because I spent my whole life reading comics, and I was interested in film.

I went to apply for film directing in Prague and they rejected me with the explanation that they had accepted Patris Shala for the field of Documentary Directing, and in Film Directing they had accepted Mr. Aleksandar Spasić, I think from Vojvodina. He is a director, I think his name is Spasić, the director who recently made the silent film, and perhaps you've seen it ... I've got the recommendation that I apply again next year since they would accept a Serb from Kosovo. And I say, "OK, good." I go back home, continue my story in the meantime, after a while I get a statement or a notification from the Secretariat for Students Exchange to the Film Academy in Prague FAMA that they made some sort of regulation or I do not know how it was called, I think I still have it somewhere, the letter, which now demands from every

student from Yugoslavia to pay their tuition which then totaled 5000 dollars, if they are accepted in the program. I never had the money and I went to Belgrade and whatever ... I did not go to Prague.

Then I said to myself, "I should try to enroll in Belgrade." I went to Belgrade and I saw that it was a little harder to get in for many reasons, and I tried to enroll in the second-best group so I registered in the Production program. The program was then called the Organization of Performing Cultural and Artistic Activities. They accepted me, I began to study, graduated, then enrolled in the graduate Film Studies at the same school, I stayed there for a year and I was not as impressed - film theory, film history and aesthetics of film - and I registered in Film Directing with Professor Žika Pavlović. This was the first class or the second class that Žika taught in his life. It was at the Academy of Art Braća Karić. I spent three years there and then entered film production and then I started to have, after studying at that Faculty of Dramatic Arts, where I graduated in Production, I started producing my own work. I worked, I studied theater and radio production but I liked more to deal with film and that's how it was.

The more I hung out with a group of colleagues from film and worked on their films, I was accepted in their company, I don't remember this very well. Then I went and entered professional film production. The first movie I worked in was *Knife* by Vuk Drašković. And now I realize that life is strange. In the '80s the novel of Vuk Drašković was banned and it was hard to get it. Somehow this book came into my hands, a friend of mine got it somewhere and knew that I loved books and said, "Hey, Zoran, I have a novel by Vuk Drašković, will you read it?" I said, "I will." I have to admit that the book at that point in '82 or '83, when I was reading it, may have made and opened new horizons, to say…gave the insights into reality, because of the things Vuk Drašković then touched. We did not know much, not much was talked about it, only with the death of Marshal [Tito] and the departure from its policies, things began to slowly emerge and who knows for what reasons we have not solved this in [that] time, why we did not fix it on time...

And so it happened that 15 years after reading that novel I also participated in the filming of the movie based on the novel. Then I did some films and worked on some films and then in '99 came what came. We finished shooting *Knife,* I remember that very well, and there was supposed to be the pre-screening and it happened on 22nd or 23rd of March 1999. It was organized only for a small circle of people and it happened I think in the movie theater Tuckwood, where we watched it, and I think the premiere was supposed to be on the 24th, it was scheduled at the Sava Center on the 23rd. This can be checked. I honestly forgot. But NATO bombing started, the madness of the year 1999 started ...

Part Four

[Technical pause]

Well, the saddest event, one of many sad events that happened to us was the bombing. It eventually began in '99. We all knew about it, but it turned up to last for a very long time. I was in Belgrade during the bombing. Then I lived in *Vračar*[3] in a rented cubicle and was preparing to do some of my own projects.

[3] One of Belgrade's biggest municipalities located in the city center.

There were several scenarios in circulation, with my cameraman and with my friends who were familiar with these projects, we started to search for a producer, for people who would somehow finance it. Already the media began buzzing about the possibility of NATO intervention, the military campaign, while politics had been around for a good ten years before that time, and had become deeply entrenched in all aspects of our lives.

When I talk about it, I primarily talk about the part that I'm most interested in and that is cultural life. Culture became politics, everything about culture became politics. For a good few years before that, mostly people who had nothing to do with culture, people who were not engaged in culture and did not know anything about culture, were appointed to very responsible posts where decisions were made about culture and cultural policies, this is evident today as well. This irritated my colleagues, classmates and faculty who were outside academia and industry and the profession, and at some point I simply noticed that most of us who thought we knew something about these things or how to deal with them, raised our hands up in the air and surrendered. Because when you lose a large amount of energy and time to do something, while that simply cannot emerge as an established value or as a cultural model of behavior, what else remains except giving up.

And then the rumor began to circulate that there will be some kind of military attack against our country, which was already diminished in a territorial sense. It shrunk very quickly, you can see that by the mere facts, when I look at how many different forms I got from the state register regarding my nationality during all those years, and every time I took out a new one for something I needed, there was always a different name and a different symbol for the state where you lived, then you realize that it is simply out of control, that it can no longer be controlled by anyone, that even the political elites who considered themselves powerful and hold all the reins of power in their hands, you see them breaking as threads, one by one. Simply, you realize it can no longer be controlled or contained - the national hysteria, mass national hysteria during 90s was something with which we were poisoned every day.

Every day, we were poisoned with an enormous amount of toxins that were injected through our sight, through hearing, through food, through everything, wherever you were and whenever you started to move around the country, you usually experienced poisoning, poisons in your body, but you just do not know, you don’t have even the general notion about what other people think about your own opinions on about any other matter. The economic crisis, sanctions, wars, conflicts, demonstrations, always knowing half of the story, never the full version, the government changes every year or two, ministers change every year or two and I simply cannot remember that any individual would be capable to understand it all, neither in the field of culture nor in any other areas, the economy, nor I do not know.

Up until the last day of the bombing we thought - at least people with whom I was associated with and with whom I socialized -, we believed that this bombing would not happen, that it was just a way for pumping up the atmosphere in public and demonstrating force or something. When it started, then we realized what was happening. We had little knowledge about that short NATO campaign in the Republika

Srpska that happened for a few days and was completed quickly, blah blah blah, but really we, at least I, did not expect it would be so intense in this region. And when you find yourself under the fire of bombs falling from somewhere in the sky, or coming from who knows where, then you realize that your life does not mean anything, that your life is literally worthless.

Many different protests against the ruling regime lasted for years, decades in Belgrade, they were literally throwing dust into the eyes of the international public and the media and all the TV crews that were parading for years and came to this area to survey the Balkan nations that cannot behold to agree, cannot seem to settle down. And then big daddy came and said, “Now I'm going to raise my hand and I'll slap you in the face and you'll settle down, it’s simple just as that.”

I do not know, I was not in Kosovo when the bombing started, my parents were in Gnjilane, they lived there and the last time I heard from them was in the beginning of April, and I remember very well that on April 4, 1999, the main Post Office in Pristina was bombed, plundered, and then until the end of this military campaign I had no contact with my parents who were still in Gnjilane. For all that time I was at a farm in Vojvodina, for approximately 50 days.

I was sheltered there then, it was a place called Dobrinci close to Buđanovac and I remember clearly when the stealth was hit,[4] when it was shot down, I was in some sort of makeshift basement and I literally jumped six feet into the air. We were sitting around the table, playing cards to pass the time and I remember hearing some American Chinook helicopter flying above or something, they must have come to rescue the pilot. I remember one day or two after that, someone from the village, because there was the search for the pilot, showed us a bunch of things that the pilot threw away. I remember that I even held his helmet in my hands, I remember pulling on his glove, which was very small, I remember that well. I remember looking at a map that was printed in the NATO headquarters in Washington back in ‘95. So a few years, four years or five years before that, plans were already drawn and I literally saw it for half an hour, and then it was gone. It was probably someone from the secret service who took the document later.

Let me say, these are some kind of impressions from that filthy bombing campaign, when the bombs did not differentiate whom to shoot, where to fall, and who's going to get hurt by them. The bombing went on, then this unfortunate Kumanovo agreement happened and nobody understood whether the truce that was signed was imposed or not imposed, it was unknown to us. And then I knew that everything will change now, nothing will be the same. By then, I was aware that these stories that served the Albanian side and the stories that served the Serbian side, I knew that those stories nobody was going to control. It will get out of control and will be controlled by only one person or more people, or by one side.

I must say that all the time I watched the media, different media and they were generally contradictory. And in those situations honestly I can admit that I did not know what or whom to believe. Should I believe

[4] He refers to the shooting down of a NATO F15 aircraft.

the BBC, the official media in Belgrade or in Pristina or I do not know whom or what. I just let go and told myself that this is happening and that hardly anyone will be able to correct it. It will take maybe years and years to correct this issue, the bombing and that kind of conflict that simmered.

I have to mention that even a small number of people in the former countries of the former Yugoslavia knew that the conflicts in Kosovo began much earlier than when the bombing occurred. Several years before that, a group of military units was organized in this region and caused many incidents. Then the former Serbian political elite sent an enormous amount of military and police. And for me, it is my humble opinion, no one could control them anymore, even from the command centers of both sides, for this simple reason: when in a small place like Kosovo, which you can drive across in a few hours by car, you have so many different military organizations, military units in that kind of a place, it is difficult to control them. How it got out of hand later after these conflicts is evident. Crime was high and everyone was able to commit crimes either motivated by greed, or by some other reasons known to them, but the nausea that a normal and honest man feels regarding this, after the fact, is quite useless.

So many people are injured by these stories, they're always listening to war stories, and I have heard hundreds of them and all the different versions and variants. Some were partial, some were subjective, some were kind. Even today, I still think about what happened in this area, who fired the first shot, when and why the first bomb or rocket struck. I think that this part of history will be hidden from us here, or it is likely to be disclosed when they'll say, "So, it was Pera, Mika, Laza, Mehmed or I do not know, Jashar or someone else started it all." But maybe I blame myself because I was in a position to decide, I blame the others as well, because I know that they were in a position to decide, but did not decide, but succumbed to the national, religious or whatever hysteria. The main directors and screenwriters of these wars are not here, they do not live here, they do not know their neighbors, they do not hang out, do not talk, do not talk to the neighbors. They live who knows where, but they designed this story so well that the consequences of the story and the whole film, which is for me a nightmare, really a nightmare and everyone still feels it to this day.

Nataša Govedarica: Let's get back to how these consequences affected your life and your choices. So, in 1999 you are in Belgrade, when the bombing begins, you spend time on a farm and then what next?

Zoran Ristić: Nothing, in early May I was back in the apartment of my ex-girlfriend and spent some of the last days of the bombing in Belgrade, in all those processes of abnormal life in Belgrade at the time - shading windows, air raid alarms, etc., etc., the sound of various aircrafts flying over, the sound of various planes. In some moments you only hear the echo of some kind of explosion on the left, then the next day you hear it on the right, you have no idea what is happening. Of course people died, suffered, innocent civilians, children. Every few minutes you get different information, conflicting information. You receive information that there will be a big ground invasion, so you think about that, and then you hear about many possible ground initiatives, and this and that, and then in these moments of madness you no longer

think of your life, how to survive this madness, rather you think what would happen if you actually survived.

It happened to me several times to think that if I survive the bombing, what wouldI do with my life afterwards. Because we were informed that everything was collapsing around us, the infrastructures, the roads and the bridges and the buildings and the institutions and people died, people died because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. There are some groups who demonstrated for peace, some other groups demonstrated for the war, some third groups which were sent by who knows who, to protect bridges with their bodies. Then you have a group that is in an anti-war mood, but who knows who stands behind them. And then in this madness you say, "OK, if I survive we will see what will happen," because the bombing was a priority now, for me of course, in my opinion, the top of a massive hysterical national-religious madness that had prevailed in our region at that time.

Because if you start to fill an entity with hatred and you fill it continuously, you start poisoning it, it will either die or disappear or it will try to build up and be even worse after recovery. That is exactly what happened to us. We were supposedly cured, we patched things up with the Croats, we patched things up with the Bosnians and then at one time all the peoples of the former Yugoslavia thought that the war would begin in Kosovo. Everyone always said that. First, if there is a war in the Balkans it will begin in Kosovo because of the Albanians, and the opposite happened. The wars in this region ended in Kosovo. This is also one of those stories saying that here nothing is certain, that here, in this region, all is uncertain and everything is true and everything is not exactly true at the same time. The whole Kosovo story, as I often say, is a lie, the whole Kosovo story is a lie. The truth or the real truth about Kosovo is somewhere in between, and until we start in some way to disclose it, to reveal it in a way, we will always have this problem and the fear of the unknown, and we will always be similar to geese in the fog. We will have this constant problem, wondering about what is actually the truth.

Part Five

Nataša Govedarica: When did you really return to Kosovo?

Zoran Ristić: I returned to Kosovo in late 2000. At the end of '99 my parents came to Belgrade, we met, we met at last, thank God they were alive and healthy and they sold their family house, our family house in Gnjilane and with that money they came to Serbia to save their lives. Because based on my parents' stories, my father did not talk much about it, my mother told me though in small doses, they spent the whole bombing in Gnjilane. They were in Gnjilane until November '99. So this is approximately six months inside this madness, inside the chaos. They came with the intention to simply hunker down there and start to have a normal life again as much as it can be normal after the war and post-conflict trauma....

With the money from the sale of the house we bought a house in Avala[5] and there we settled, my father, my mother and I with the intention to forget all that had been going on in Kosovo, all what happened and

[5] Avala is a residential area on a hill near Belgrade.

I just remember I had a friend who worked in Laza Lazarević[6] as a psychiatrist and I just remember that I was advised, because I asked her what to do now when my parents came from Kosovo and survived what they had survived, the abuse and harassment and a sort of hermetically closed life. I just remember she gave me the advice to keep them at least for some time in a similar state of fear. I was shocked when she told me that. How could I keep my parents in fear when they came out of fear, in some kind of different fear, but much milder than the one from which they came. She told me that if they immediately and quickly relaxed, something might happen to their hearts or some other vital organ. And I remember saying that it could be more dangerous for them, that all sorts of things could have happened, it is good to be alive and healthy, they are at least somewhat safe, and that this will pass and thank God, today my parents are alive.

My father returned immediately to Kosovo because he had a few more years to work in school. He spent another five years in Kosovo, in Budrizi where he had been employed, and in 2004 he retired and came back to my mother who was alone and still lives with her. To this day, my father sometimes comes here from time to time, primarily due to retirement, to see some of his old buddies, to see where he lived, where he worked, but my mother who loved Kosovo, who came here, got married, had children, I remember to this day when I told her, “Come here, come on, come and see where I live,” how she replied to that was painful for me and probably for her, “Don’t take me to Kosovo ever again, don’t take me there even when I’m dead.” So just that one sentence by a woman who spent fifty years of her life here, worked, everything that happened in her life is linked to this area, when she says something like this, for me that is truly painful. A woman who, when she came to Kosovo, did not know a word of Serbian, but then taught children this same language, Serbian, taught children basic grammar and vocabulary, providing them with basic literacy, and when she says that she does not want to come to Kosovo after all what she survived and experienced, then this is really an extraordinary thing for me, the most extraordinary thing.

At that time, I did not even know that I would be returning to Kosovo. I returned to Kosovo three times. This is my third time when I finally stayed here. I've been back in ‘92 when I graduated from the Academy with the intention to work in Pristina. And then in ‘92, I was the only graduate student from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in the whole theater, and I worked for one year and I escaped at the end of ’93 for several reasons.

One of the reasons was that I could not get a job. There were no jobs for me in the theater. In the National Theatre in Pristina I spent almost a year as the only graduate from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, but still there was no job. So this was one of the reasons why I returned to Belgrade. The story about the demonstrations was still circulating. You hear constantly about the demonstrations, constantly about the threats, that bloody Thursday would come, bloody, or bloody Friday would come tomorrow for us, or bloody Tuesday. And those everyday pressures, that tomorrow we could expect something to happen to us, drove me away from Kosovo. And I didn’t experience the bloody Thursday or Friday, but I knew that I might experience it, because nothing was safe and everything was possible.

[6] A well-known psychiatric clinic in Belgrade.

Nataša Govedarica: And then in 1999, actually 2000, you decided to come back?

Zoran Ristić: Yes.

Nataša Govedarica: Or you didn't decide? How did that happen?

Zoran Ristić: At that time we started to film the first Serbian horror movie. This was the movie called *TT syndrome*. It was done by film director Zečević and since Zeka and I have known each other since the Academy, he gathered a great team of young people and wrote the script and said, "Come on, let's do the movie. We do not have the budget, we have nothing, but let's do it." I of course agreed to do it, because what else would I do in Belgrade, what kind of man of the movies am I, if I don't make movies.

We started with about 50.000 Deutsch Mark, it is nice to remember that we received it from some kind of producer who had offered it just to cover some basic costs. Of course we sign the contracts that if the film gets completed, all the profit from the movie will be paid back and that the people working on the film will be paid some fees. Of course that never happened but it is important that after a month or two or two and a half months of working on this film we did finish it. The film saw the light of the day, and was accepted at festivals and has been designated as the first Serbian horror film that was ever made.

TT Syndrome is the last thing I did and the last time I worked in Belgrade. After that I ran into a situation of no work, and the war ended. There were television crews that followed all the events of the war and I engaged in some external collaboration, making very good money. And at one point that vacuum was created, nothing was happening. This was due to the sort of *perestroika* that was happening in every part of life, including culture.

What now, let's move on, RTS [Radio Television Serbia] was [stormed], the Bastille was stormed, I do not know, also some institutions were demolished. A bunch of people left the country during that time. A bunch of people saw that this was going too far and that they must leave. And a bunch of people moved to America, to Germany, to other countries in Western Europe and nothing happened.

All the information you got from Kosovo were terrible. The first year or two, you'd constantly hear about some kind of murders, some kidnappings, constantly something happening and that place for many of us, for many of us, remained something like a dark boiling pot. So it was a no-fly zone, I want nothing to do with Kosovo because there were murders, kidnappings and all kinds of stuff happening. When this cannot be prevented by 150,000 NATO forces and I do not know how many members of the police, then you can see that it is out of control. Purges, evictions, burning, looting, etc., etc., began to happen on a daily basis.

At one point in my life in Belgrade, a man who studied in Pristina appeared, we had studied Literature together and he had fled Pristina and appeared suddenly in Belgrade. In doing so I was informed through the media that he was the President of the Student Association of the University of Pristina, while I was aware that he was active in those kinds of political events, and we meet in Belgrade. And he said that the establishment of some radio stations was being prepared, that he had received information from the Serbian National Council that the four countries, NATO member states, would invest some money to form the radio station in Serbian language in Kosovo.

And at the end of 2000, I met a man I have known for a very long time in Belgrade. And he told me the story that some radio stations in the Serbian language in Pristina would be formed because of the pressure of four states. I think America, Germany, France and Sweden put pressure for the simple reason that the Serbs were merely in a kind of vacuum, they did not have any media, any institutions that informed the public about the events in Kosovo - the initiative was to establish the radio, somehow launch and start with a radio program, and with the intention that later it might become possible to form a TV and some forms of printed media outlets.

I responded to this invitation and came here, I came back. I do not know why I decided to come back here. One reason may be that I was unhappy when I left Pristina in 1993 with the intention of never returning to Kosovo and then I firmly promised myself at the end of '93 that really I had no intention of coming back or have anything to do with Kosovo and the people of Kosovo because of the simple reason that we had enough and it was the last drop in a full cup to be filled, and in the year 2000 about two or three nights I could not sleep before making that decision and I remember when I told my parents that I wanted to come back to Kosovo, I announced it quietly the first time I told them.

I was not quite so energetic and youthful, firm in my decision, but I announced it quietly fearing how it would affect them, because they fled from there. I already had lived for about ten, fifteen years in Belgrade and had already created a circle of friends, people with whom I hung out and worked. And I remember the look of my mother when I said it, and she quietly said, "Son, it's your decision. If you're determined to go, then go." My father was against it and today I know why, for the simple reason that he feared he might lose me or what if something terrible happened.

And so it happened suddenly, quickly. When such things happen I make decisions quickly. I pack a suitcase full of some things, I come to Kosovo under escort on the *Niš Express,* the bus that took me was filled with people who came here for different reasons. Someone went there to sell something, someone to finish something, someone to pick something from their abandoned houses and apartments.

That journey was a nightmare, one of the worst that I have ever experienced. During this journey, which lasted perhaps about ten hours, my whole life that was left behind me flashed before my eyes, and I had a dozen of possible scenarios in my head of what might happen with my re-return to Kosovo, which was not the same anymore. Kosovo where they spoke a hundred languages, in which you could find hundreds of

nations, religions, cultures and everything else. I came to Čaglavica, met some kids who gathered there and who were motivated and passionate to learn how to become journalists and for about two months I was housed in the Gračanica monastery in one of the cells with some people who were there by chance or came deliberately.

There was also a guy from Argentina who finished film directing in Prague and who came to make documentaries, we were roommates. There was also a guy from Kragujevac who was a translator. There was also, I cannot remember all of the people who were there because there were a lot of people who came in and out of my life and my work. But the Argentinian was a very interesting character because he's from Argentina and finished directing in Prague and lived and worked in Prague and worked for some television station in the Czech Republic and he made some documentaries for Television Prague or the Czech Television, I forgot. He had some kind of accreditation and was able to move freely. He was married to a Serbian woman and knew Serbian very well, which was unbelievable.

I spent two months in the monastery, and every day I came to Čaglavica in some sort of a makeshift house of culture where we improvised different courses, we had some rooms where we could make some kind of radio program. Of course this started to spread and, the radio that was called KIM radio, was one of the first radio stations in the region that dealt with news program where we could tell people who lived here what's going on and provide them with other information from the field.

There were two radio stations that were musical and mainly dealt with musical summaries, but that is not important right now. I stayed on the radio for two and a half years and as usually what happens in life, I went from the radio station not willingly, but I was simply expelled. One of the people who worked at the radio station was then a monk and had a high rank in the Serbian Orthodox Church.

I am a man who is deeply religious and deeply believe in the church so I had boundless confidence in this man. However it turned out that money is always a strange element in every story, and that money changes people and changes their behavior. I was driven away from that radio and thankfully today I say to myself thank God that I went away because there were all sorts of things there, just not those that make radio stations happen. After that, I spent two years without a job.

I searched for a job in 2003, 2004 on all sides, literally from international institutions to I don't know what. In 2004 I got a job in a secondary school as a teacher of Serbian language because I was a graduate student in the Serbian language, and I got accepted on the basis that I needed to survive somehow.

In 2003 my wife came from Belgrade. She came for me here and stayed with me here, got a job, started to work at the school, in high school and in the meantime, she and I and all the people here started receiving the soft and hard hits that were being imposed on us in Kosovo. And these punches that we suffered until a few years ago were very painful, very stressful.

We survived the 17th March 2004[7] and survive all those situations that occurred in the north and persistently were felt quite well here, although we are far away from Mitrovica, some 50 kilometers. And that's it. I do not know what else to say about my first arrival to Kosovo except that honestly, those first couple of years, and perhaps a little later, a specific kind of false leaders that our politicians created, and were imposed on Serbian communities, made a mess. And the people were desperate, as they still are now perhaps.

Part Six

Nataša Govedarica: If I may take you back to 2004, you mentioned that you were a witness of the start of these events. What are your memories on that? How did you decide to stay here?

Zoran Ristić: Well, that's again that *inat*,[8] that defiance, an extraordinary thing. I am an opponent of *inat*, but honestly, when I look back to my life, I too made many decisions from defiance, decisions that were made out of spite. For whom and why, I have no idea to this day. I made the decision to remain in Kosovo out of spite when I could have left and in 2003, when I finished that kind of mission in the education of these kids whom I have in some way brought up and educated to become some kind of radio or online or other [medium] journalists.

Why have I continued to stay here? I lost my job, I remained without anything, I had no source of livelihood, why did I continue staying here, and I dragged another stone around my neck? And that is Dragana, my wife. Why did I need this in my life? I could have packed my two suitcases again. Because when I arrived here, I had a life, and in those two or three years I could have packed my suitcase and I could have easily returned to Belgrade to my parents and start again or continue what I started there. To this day, I have no real answer why I needed to stay in Kosovo. I'm still here and I stayed here. I'm here and I live and work here and I created a circle of people with whom I socialize, but I should also mention some professional references that were keeping me here.

I do not know, this question is important, but every man, at least I think that every person in this world has some questions that they cannot give an answer to, no matter how much they try. There might be different levels of responses. I stayed here and I hope I will stay here in the future. It is not that I stayed out of spite for myself, or out of spite for someone else, maybe this is one of the reasons. And meeting the people who remained here after all, all the events, fulfilling their desires, lives and everything that surrounds it, is perhaps one of the reasons why I stayed here.

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[7] In March 2004, riots broke in Kosovo following rumors that two Albanian children had been chased by Serbs into the river Ibar, where they drowned. While the only evidence alleging the attack was the testimony of a surviving boy, fear and resentment spread quickly, mobilizing thousands against Serbian individuals and property. A subsequent UN investigation, led by Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, recounts the events.

[8] *Inat* is an almost untranslatable word in Serbian that encompasses a variety of concepts. The most approximate translation would be defiance for the sake of defiance, even when it does not serve a specific purpose.

The culture I'm involved in here is totally devastated. In those years, everything that belonged to my people is gone, that is, the theaters, the galleries, culture centers, libraries. You can have a huge library at the University but it is to no use when there is no one who can use it. It's a devastating story for me and this is perhaps one of the reasons why I stayed. I admit that for the last fifteen years I did not enter the University Library in Pristina, even though I know there are thousands of works in my own language, but every person in this world has a mission and if they are crazy enough, or if they are persistent enough, this mission can be achieved.

At one point while teaching the children whom I taught courses in schools, I realized that my mission is to somehow civilize those children living in rural areas, to somehow show them a lot of beautiful things there are in life and that they can deal with in their own lives, especially in the field of culture. This was primarily my mission. Now imagine that there was a period when the Internet was in its infancy here. Internet did not exist. It began sometime in 2001-2002, and there was no cinema, there was no, I think at that time, there was no television. Those who had the satellite antenna which looked like large plate on their windows, they could pick something up to watch.

This is one of the reasons why I stayed, it is one of the reasons why I persistently persevered in supporting these children whose childhood was torn, not by their desire, not by their will, I tried to compensate in some way for this childhood, by telling them that there are beautiful movies, that there are some nice books they must read or which they should read, that there are things in the world, and perhaps in their neighborhood that they do not notice and they pass by them, and do not notice them but they should. So I stayed to point out these things and to assure that they are raised on examples of good literature, quality literature, of fiction, based on the examples of good and beautiful movies, for example some kind of images that someone creates for their eyes and so on.

Nataša Govedarica: You said you weren't visiting the National Library, but I know for sure that you regularly visit the theater in Pristina.

Zoran Ristić: Yes, yes, you know what it's like. It's not exactly what I'm looking for from the theater and I don't expect that only I go to the theater. I am going to the theater when I hear that there are some plays and really enjoy when I go to the theater for several reasons. There, I consider myself like I am at home. And when someone stays at home non-stop he gets bored of it, and says let's find another home.

My other house is not the café, although it is in a sense a daily living style. I have had a ritual for about fifteen years, to go and drink a cup of coffee in a café in the morning and the evening, or before midnight, before darkness, but the theater that exists five kilometers from here is my, let's say, safety valve, where I go and watch plays and socialize with people with whom I get along, with people who think the same way as I do.

In the darkness of the theater, when the actor comes out on the stage and starts talking in Albanian that I do not understand because it is the Albanian literary language, but I know roughly what to expect, this is perhaps one of the reasons why I go and watch the play. Of course, whenever I hear that a play is in my language, then I really want to go to the theater and I simply enjoy it. This is perhaps the only way out of reality that's holding me here.

But I made my own theater because the moment you do not have any cultural content, and you deal with it or want to be involved in it and then you say, so let me do it by myself, maybe it will work somehow. This is how I came to the idea to create a youth theater that I called Ghetto and which has been functioning for 11 years in this region and to me it is one of the biggest Serbian cultural phenomena in Kosovo.

Now, this is a little immodest, people are vain and self-centered but I have to say that since 1999, everything and everyone who was engaged in some kind of promotion of Serbian culture is gone, simply gone. People and organizations were simply moved or dislocated or however nicely you want to say it. And then I said, “Well, then I'm going to do a theater, it's my life's ambition, I finished the Theatre Academy. Let's use the experience that I gained while working or collaborating with teachers, with some of my colleagues, to involve them in work here.”

The first four or five years, the vast majority of people here thought that I was some kind of a lunatic, that I was some kind of an idiot. In that period, people here generally thought merely about how to survive, only how to endure everything that happens to us in Kosovo and then there's some crazy director who wants to do theater and wants to travel with the theater, he wants to promote the theater. This theater was made so suddenly.

Two kids came in after those famous 17th March events with the desire and intention to do something, to think about something else. The kids were in high school. They were pondering whether to continue their education and to leave Kosovo for Serbia or to stay here. And what if they stayed here, except for the daily school obligations they had no other content. I suggested to them, “Guys, let's gather the kids to make some kind of theater, do something where we can hang out, occupy some corner where we can talk, talk and create something.” And thus Ghetto was formed.

Ghetto Theater was created literally out of anger and out of, so to speak, the fear that we are going to die here or leave this place, and that we should leave a trace that we lived here. This is perhaps one of the reasons. After a few days the kids came and said that they had some friends with whom they spoke, they wanted to try it out and so we started to hang out. Auditions were organized, there were about twenty kids in the group. Of all them, about five of them remained for fifteen years, we had a bunch of shows, the sixth generation that I worked with and with whom I created this theater just graduated. I will accept the seventh generation of kids and that's it.

Ghetto Theater has made over thirty movies premieres so far, about a hundred reprisals, at the time when culture ranked 115-thousandth on the priority list for the Serbian community, when nobody wanted to deal with Serbian culture, no one was interested. Not in that sense. They were interested to find money somewhere and pay a poet or a painter or to pay for a singer to come, perform what he can, and go back where he came from. But dealing with contemporary creativity and fostering some sort of culture here, they were not interested in that. Thank God they are nowadays.

Now a kind of culture is returning to the area, and cultural institutions and cultural representatives who are trying to establish something here, to establish some community standards. But at that moment to think about it and make a cultural nook or corner was insane. And after all, I think that's the best thing I ever did. Apart from a few films I've worked on, or several books I've worked on, or a few professional theater productions I've worked on, for me Ghetto Theater, I think I'll die with Ghetto Theater as one of the most important things that occurred in my life, because hundreds of kids went through it. And the very fact that they left a part of themselves and embedded themselves in me and that I left a part of me in them, is for me something… that's, that's me. It is them, it is me.

I love to brag when I talk about it, when, perhaps, it may sound immodest and all, but I don't care, I don't care because these kids have experienced such different stories in comparison to their parents and experienced a community that is harmless… Firstly they thought that it's stupid, it's crazy to go to Ghetto after school and do something, and then when they heard that we made a show and that with this performance we will go to a festival, then this is what I like, then I enjoy these sweet victories. Then I remain silent, but until then I yell and get angry, I'm hard on myself and on them and on their parents, so there you go. Ghetto is here, it exists, it's a great story and I can freely say that and let anyone who wants to be angry, be angry. Here everyone gets mad, so often I also get mad with some stories of the others.

Ghetto was the best thing that happened in Kosovo. Ghetto Theatre is a good example, a good story that is happening in Kosovo. We can talk about other stories, construction of houses, apartments, roads, but there is big money at stake. When you have the money, you can do whatever you want. You can fulfill all of your dreams. But when you do not have one dinar in your cash register or do not have a single euro but you take on some kind of story you believe in and which sustains you. For me that is a good example of something that creates good will and desire and of course the efforts, energy and everything that comes with it. Because Ghetto is perhaps the only institution in the region that has no support, and I want to say, from anyone, from anyone, so neither from the official institutions of Kosovo, nor from the official institutions of the Republic of Serbia, nor from strangers, nor by anyone.

It would be easy for Ghetto Theater if it had three pots full of money or the full budget as it's called, or donations. Now three cauldrons, one from Kosovo, one from Serbia, the third one from foreign countries, or how you say, from strangers. You want to make something and you'd just need to put your hand in one of these cauldrons and say, "Now I'll make a movie about something, and from the next cauldron I will

make a theater play, and then I'm out of this cauldron, but in that case I can mix what's left in the other two, it'll be great and watchable, something will happen." It's Ghetto Theatre.

I would like to say something about this partnership, if it is interesting to you. I've skipped some things from my life in Belgrade but my time is up since a long time ago. I can talk about it. I do not know how interesting this story is, because this is a story related to Kosovo. I tried to tell you what I remember best from the 70s from 80s, but I do not know how effective it was.

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Nataša Govedarica: We are happy with what you shared with us. If you have any other detail that seems important to you, to your story, to your history, you can share it, if not…

Zoran Ristić: I would like to, I even wrote a story about it. My humble opinion is that one of the biggest problems in Kosovo is the *inat* that people have, that damn Balkan spite and constantly someone is doing something out of spite. So I also do things out of spite. I admit it. But I try to channel this spite into something creative, I will not force it to harm anyone or to do evil. My life in the last fifteen years is mainly based on socializing and relationships with young people, with children especially. I call them children but they are not really children. These are high school students who are growing up and I sincerely hope that we will leave this world to them, but I'm afraid we will not leave it even a little bit better or happier than the world that I lived in. This is what I'm most afraid of.

I believe all normal people share this feeling, people who think what will they leave to their successors and their children who will remain after them. If we leave them only these fears and some kind of spite that we have been forcing on each other for years and that we can't longer contain. I'm not asking people to think as I do, I'm not asking these young people and children to be like me. That'd be horrible. People tend to have a projection that everyone in this world has to live like they do. So this is always the guiding factor in the foreground.

All my life I have tried to develop attitudes and opinions in my work with children, to help them develop their own position and their own opinion about everything. I have never insisted that children or young people think like me and do as I do. I'm always with them trying to encourage freedom of opinion, freedom of thought, freedom of attitude towards life, towards the arts, towards culture above all. Because if you instill in young people the thought that is currently in your head, they will not be happy in the future. There is no happiness now, I can see that all around us. How can we expect to live a happier life, a more peaceful, harmonious, satisfying life, in the future? It will not be like that.

What hurts me most in all this, because I know about fifteen generations of children who are now adults, who work and have their own families, they often complain about the forced and ingrained opinions of others, other people's attitudes, other people's way of thinking, other people's experiences. A young person cannot have my experiences as life experiences, they have live them and gain them themselves. They mainly receive it in schools, but mostly they receive it from their parents.

The biggest mistake in our education and upbringing - good behavior is obtained from parents, education is obtained from teachers - is that we want to install the image of ourselves in our children, which is totally wrong. It is a completely wrong method and approach to education. There are individual cases or cases of some professors who have the [truly] pedagogical [approach], the psychological aspect [of developing independent and critical thinking] in their work with children so that you can see it [positive results, good consequences] later in the further maturation of these young people. The kids probably recognize this about me and because of that, I suppose, they follow me.

The happiest moment in my life is when I figure out that some kid went farther than I did, and left me behind. I never said that someone should follow me or be behind me. I always said, “Follow me and then proceed further.” Dozens of children who passed through Ghetto Theater, that is my greatest satisfaction, are now working in various media forms, doing different jobs as editors, and journalists, as well as cameramen, editors, as announcers, etc. Many of them graduated from University and work with people like doctors, dentists as well, and I don’t know what not. A bunch of children, several of them have completed Political Science and Law Faculty or Faculty of Economics and work in these fields together with other similar professions. But again, I'm going to be a little immodest.

Dearest to me are those kids in whom I planted some kind of seeds to spark some kind of artistic interest. One of them is a child from Dobrotina who is a member of our theater for five years and she convinced me that for her whole life, no matter her professional career, later she will always be a member of Ghetto Theater. And this always, always cheers me up and I remain wisely silent. I am particularly pleased when the day and time come for them to complete their primary and secondary education and move on with training and education, when they say that they want to try to enroll in some school that develops artistic interests. It's just, for me in particular, it gives some sort of adrenaline to my wings, which I spread and then tell them, “OK, that's great, but who is the fool to be blamed for your interests?” Sometimes I find out that some of them did not pass the entry exam for the school they wanted, that they were very sorry but will return to some kind of normal things and will enter a “normal” university.

So I do not know what else to tell you. Particularly satisfying in the whole story is that many do not believe in this story, but the very existence of children who passed through Ghetto Theater contradicts them. I do not know, every moment of energy I invested in them was returned to me a hundred times, a hundred times. And not returned through any material gain or benefit, rather simply by some kind of spiritual tranquility that I have when I hear that a child who I know very well, with whom I shared all his problems during adulthood, starting from those in the family, to those of love, falling in love for the first time, kissing, or I do not know what, until the moment when they say I am now an adult, I am moving out of the house and when I realize that that they’re now creating their own path is a kind of satisfaction that I cannot describe. I really try hard now to say something about it, but their faces and their relationship to the story is quite sufficient. I do not even have to hear anything from them, if I only look at what they’re doing, I know I'm right about this when they go their own way.

Nataša Govedarica: Thank You.

Zoran Ristić: Thank you. I could even say something if you feel that this is something I should say about myself although this is on a different level. There are a lot of things that we skipped and withheld, although they are significant. This whole story about Oral History Kosovo, when you invited me to be a participant in a conversation with you… I have thought a lot about this, that this kind of conversation should have started much, much earlier. Unfortunately, perhaps if it began earlier then there would be no technological momentum in which everyone has cameras like now with which they can record, etc., but today anyone can record their history and display it at home… This invitation sounded great, I only hope we had the chance to tell some stories on time, to finish some stories, leave them behind and move on through life.

Oral History Kosovo as such, has designed a story that the history of Kosovo, has to be told from our corner eventually. Behold, now the moment has come for me to say something about my impressions or experiences of life and work in Kosovo. I'm sorry that Kosovo as the area is not, how to say, without sounding too harsh... It was not dealt with on time, it was not closed on time, not opened and closed on time. We have thousands of outstanding issues, thousands of unresolved problems, thousands and thousands of things that we will be facing throughout the foreseeable future.

These things may be painful, especially for people who live in Kosovo. All those who live in Kosovo and who are more familiar with the situation in Kosovo, I think they know all about Kosovo, we all know very well and on some subconscious level we know very well what happened and how it happened. Albanian and Serbian communities here also know that. And we all know the quantity and weight of your guilt. And the quantity and weight of us not doing anything for it not to be the way it was, that it could have been much different. And that's why, I think, the thing that kept us in those cages of some sort, in a framework from which we couldn't get out.

We are placed in small cages or some sort of small ghettos in which we live our empty lives, in which we have some dull and empty stories. I'm angry with my community, and I'm angry with the Albanian community because we do not talk about it, you do not talk openly about things that have hampered us... That we say to each other what we think and what we should do to not think about it anymore. And there was this one episode in this show that I... Several stories entered in the theatrical performance, which are my personal stories from Kosovo, where I say that we as Serbs and Albanians living in Kosovo are completely irrelevant in the whole story when we talk about the universe. We're just actors on a kind of stage and are doing something, hurting each other, forcing spite, trying to forget it by positive examples, subsuming the various different clips just so that some things are never revealed.

Nataša Govedarica: You are talking about the play *Patriotik hipermarket*, written by Jeton Neziri and Minja Bogavac, directed by Dino Mustafić?

Zoran Ristić: That's right. I'm talking about this show that was supposed to show some examples of life in Kosovo through some sort of anecdotal evidence of people living here and their experiences. And until the moment that the little Albanian and the little Serb who sat in a gloom, barely illuminated stage, until they raised their heads at each other, raised their faces, looked into each other's eyes and said all that needs to be said, what they feel, and if they remained silent, nothing will be fixed in Kosovo. It's going to be an illusion, everything will be foggy and everything will be mixed in a sense.

Kosovo is like one big picture where everything is vague, and everything is apparently clear to everyone in the same time. The spite we force to each other... I'm not just talking in the context of the Albanian and Serbian communities, and within these communities there is the centuries-old mistrust and defiance of inaccessibility to publicly speak about all the things that have happened to us, and that are still happening to us. Small groups of people here have a great life at the expense of the vast majority of the group. I do not need to talk about it, it runs constantly in the media. But it will not be like this forever, at least I think it won't. I think we cannot throw dust into each other's eyes forever in the context of people within a single community and considering life with another community.

And when that simply starts changing and when on the other hand, the occurrence of a few people that I think are intellectual and strong and powerful to speak out about these issues, then it will begin to be resolved. Kosovo will always be Mecca and Medina for plotters, Mecca and Medina for people who like conflict, conflict of any kind. And our children will also live next to each other in parallel worlds, will not know anything about each other, they will hate each other. They will not even try to find out anything about each other and will not want to have any contact with each other.

What kind of state is this when you have a doctor here for the Albanian population and a doctor for the Serbian population, a judge for Albanians and a judge for Serbs? What kind of nation is this, when people expect to be treated by a doctor who is a member of their own people? This is unimaginable anywhere else, you cannot find anywhere a situation where you have a Serb as a judge, who cannot judge a man who is his neighbor. For example, just for example, what's that when the English language teacher, which is a foreign language to you and me, ought to teach it only to me, and not to you, for example? Not to mention some other more drastic examples. I am going to buy tomatoes only from Albanians because it is better and I'll buy them, why not? If tomatoes are more red and juicier, why not? But I will not go and buy tomatoes from the Serb because he is a Serb, or buy cheese because… These are crazy stories.

I am fed up with these stories. {Shows that he is 'over the head'} That's all closed. Closed universities, systems, closed schools, public institutions, a lot of corruption, a lot of what's called nepotism, and it cannot function like this anymore. It can work for a while but cannot work all the time, it cannot. Thank you for coming. I had great expectations of this interview and your project is great. I hope you have many, many important interlocutors who will share their stories, because I, as an ordinary citizen who is

engaged in our cultural and artistic activities, can only say a few sentences from my angle. But as a man I cannot decide on such a kind of basic things.

Well what else could I tell you? I'm glad that I was born here, I'm glad to know this area well, I'm happy.... I think my life would be much poorer without Albanians. Maybe you will rarely hear this from anyone. Albanians keep saying that it would be better if there were no Serbs here, and now there aren't any so we can discuss that as well. But I think if I did not meet some of these Albanians as artists and as people involved in what I do, then my life would be much poorer, my life would be like, I do not know, I would be much less happy. But thank God that there are such people, there are people with whom I can sit to drink coffee, talk about some of the nicer things than they encounter in their everyday life and only a fool can think of how life in Kosovo would be if there were no Albanians or if there were no Serbs. And as long as we think that way the situation will not be good.

I am happy and I pray to God that Serbs return to where they had lived for centuries and continue to live their lives. But as long as the opposing side does not decide at some higher instances, this will not happen, and it is a small step. I think life would be more meaningful to Albanians here as well if they could curse Serbs' mothers. I think that their life would be much more intelligent, meaningful, and smarter. There. I do not know whether I was going to say anything else...

Nataša Govedarica: Thank you.

Zoran Ristić: Thank you.