INTERVIEW WITH SEDA PUMPYANSKAYA

New York | Date: October 3, 2017
Duration: 102 minutes

Present:

1. Seda Pumpyanskaya (Speaker)
2. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
3. Lura Limani (Interviewer/ 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
Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Seda Pumpyanskaya: My name is Seda. Surname is a bit long, Pumpyanskaya. Difficult to pronounce. I'm born in '65 in Moscow, and plenty of memories. Memories of strange but happy life in Russia. Memories when I was ten years old and came to live in New York, which completely changed my perspective, because suddenly there was this feeling of freedom, feeling of choice. And this is something which could never leave me, even when we came back to Russia. So, I think since then I always thought that the world is one, that there is no ban to travel or to be anywhere, and all my life and my career became totally international.

Anna Di Lellio: Why did you come to New York? Why did your family come to New York?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: My father was a journalist. He actually dealt with United States. Wrote about it. Fell in love with it. That was not an easy love affair because that was in the '70s, in the middle of the cold war, but as an honest journalist he wanted to discover real America to Russians. So, he was writing a lot about the U.S., about politics, which was interesting in those times. Things like Watergate, or Black Panthers, or whatever, a lot about literature. And that was like kind of a fresh wind or whatever because Russians used to hear also the horrible things about Americans and, and he liked to open up those pages.

Anna Di Lellio: Feel free to talk more. Don't… this is not just a…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah, because…

Anna Di Lellio: … question – answer…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah. Ok.

Anna Di Lellio: So if you have memories also about New York…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Ok.

Anna Di Lellio: … and your father's, at that time…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: If you want me to talk more, yeah, tell me… I'm used to like giving interviews where you give, have to give short answers…

Anna Di Lellio: No, no.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: … but that's not expected to…

Anna Di Lellio: No, no.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Ok.

Anna Di Lellio: You should just… free to talk about your memories from New York, and from your father Alexander who really work for. If you have any stories to tell us.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Well you asked me, "What do I remember from the childhood?" Well, I remember of course Moscow, but it's strange because there was a place which had lots of limitations in many things, but also lots of freedom. At least in our house. Freedom of speech, freedom of humor, freedom of kind of real understanding of things. Because I think the surroundings of our family was an intellectual one. Journalist. There was lots of artistic people who were cynical towards the regime and very free in their spirit.

What do I remember from New York? I remember… I think as a child who was ten years old who came to the U.S. there were all sorts of things which did not quite correspond which, with what we were told. Because we were told that America is kind of very restricted place, there are lots of horrible things. I remember physical feelings. One is coming to Manhattan, coming to Wall Street and basically having your head look at high-scraper, having you head of a small girl going up. Like you look {she turns her head up} like this, this and doesn't end. And you continue turning your head and it never stops because you never come to the end of the building.

It's not just a physical feeling but it's a strange feeling of freedom because, because this is possible.

This is possible to build such a tall building. And I remember also a childish game which was interesting. I was walking with my mother by the streets of Manhattan and I was trying to find two equal cars because something was different. It was either roof or the seats, or the shape, or whatever else. There were no two equal cars in New York. Something would be different. And I was coming from the, from the country where there were three models of cars and about four colours, yellow, red, white and black.

So, it was difficult to understand. But it's all about choice. And that's I think what you kind of grasp with air, and when we later went back to Russia and we went back because my father, who was writing a lot about U.S. and a lot of true stories which he was interested in. But these were the times of the Communist Party, these were the times of propaganda. And finally, there was a conference where the secretary of propaganda wanted to teach journalists, as it happens, what to write, what not to write. He chose a black sheep, and the black sheep was my father.

Because the speech of the secretary of the propaganda was, "You should write about working class movement and not about daughters of millionaires". That was an article written about Patricia Hirst, which was a big article, a very interesting story, and etc. In those times that meant a little bit the end of journalistic career because my father was never allowed to come back to the U.S. He was sitting in this room in Moscow when this speech was made. My mother got a letter that she had to pack and come back. Anyway, so it was a tough thing and I think the relationship with the U.S. stayed a bit like a, like a… how should I say… like an interrupted love affair.

But what is interesting I was ten and eleven years old and those feeling which I'm describing, freedom and choice on the human level, is something which penetrates your skin. And after that, wherever you live you kind of don't believe anymore what you are told because you just know that you want to be free and you want to have choices in life. So, whatever happened in my life after, I think it was determined a lot by this New Yorkish – American spirit, or feelings that you want to be free.

Anna Di Lellio: How long…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: We lived there…

Anna Di Lellio: What happened when you got back?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: We lived there… we lived here for nine months. Well, we were supposed to live for, for five years and we were kind of settling. Choosing an apartment…. By the way that's also nice, that's nice story because many Russians at that stage had to live in a big block of flats in Riverdale,

kind of in common apartments, or whatever, in Russian buildings. But we, as a journalist my family could live in a normal building. And that was very nice to be in a normal building and just to see how things are different. I was amazed, I'm looking here in this room, I was amazed by the cupboards. Russian buildings at that stage didn't have in-built cupboards. I was amazed by the two bathrooms, or the three bathrooms, I can't remember, because Russian buildings usually had only one bathroom. So there was not yet that concept. Anyway, elevators, garages, things which are interesting.

So when we came back in '76 because of this interrupted love affair it was kind of tough. It determines in your family what your parents do and what happened, it was kind of tough love, life, because my father for many years was not published and was basically almost banned from journalistic work and really turned to black sheep because these are the times when many people stop saying hello to you and etc. And you know, it depends whether you're in power or not in power, so it was kind of the happiest year of his professional career and being a correspondent in New York and it was tough times after that.

I had to go to school obviously. One of my best friends, there were a few good friends, one of my best friends was also a girl who came, from not a similar situation but also international life and work from Mexico. So I remember we… it was funny because we spend a lot of time kind of exchanging memories, you know of different life. And kind of expecting those changes which came later in '80s, the country opened up and we could both discover and live different lives.

Anna Di Lellio: And when, where did you go to school? I mean what is your afterwards, after high school, what happened?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: After high school, well I mean in Russia there is ten year old, ten years of school. So the ten years of school basically include primary, kind of middle school and college. So this was one school, the Moscow school. And I always, because of this international exposure, I always wanted to learn international language so that was an English speaking school, very good one because we also had subjects, in English, we had history of England, we had English and American literature. So there was a big international exposure which continued in school.

After that I entered the Moscow University, which was in '82 and I've chosen in between journalism and philology. After long hesitation, I've chosen philology and by that time I was already learning French and then I decided to go, Garcia Marquez was very fashionable or whatever, very popular, fashionable is not a good word, at that time, so I thought okay it's time to learn Latin America and Spanish culture. So my main profession in the University was Spanish and Spanish literature. So that was '82 to '87, the five years in the University and I think I should say that I'm exactly the generation of

the change, of the break.

Because all this succession of secretaries of the Communist Party which happened one dying after another was ‘82-‘83 and ‘84 Gorbachev comes into power. So we are talking about first and second year of University for me. And in practical terms it meant one thing, I entered the University in one country and I graduated in another country. When I entered the University and as I told, I’ve chosen the Spanish group, I remember, she was not a very good teacher but I remember the first class of Spanish language and our teacher. She walked into the room and she said, “Actually I don’t know what you are doing here because you’re never going to visit the countries, Spanish speaking, you’re never going to get any job connected to the Spanish language. Well I guess you want to learn Spanish, but you know just understand that it’s a bit of your hobby.”

That was ‘82. In ‘83 as I said things started changing. I was in the second year the Gorbachev came. In ‘85 was my first work, job because there was a youth festival in Moscow and we the girls from the philological faculty were kind of invited there to work, to help with the language for a week. And that was in my memory, it was almost like, there was some link with this American experience ten years early, ‘75 because there were all sorts of international people. I ended up with Latin-Americans, with Argentineans. There was suddenly this amazing *fiesta* [party] and all sorts of feelings or interactions or things which were completely different from what I’ve seen.

And basically from ‘85 suddenly there were lots of international coming and people who spoke languages were very much in demand. Unlike what our professor said. So meaning there were small jobs at, for example international festivals, film festival or belli festival or for example I had a very funny job which I will never forget, with a group of Bolivians. There was a football team, teenage football team that came to play to Moscow from La Paz. The boys were whatever, 14-15 but in a very Latin-American tradition they were from fairly good or wealthy families. There were tons of relatives that all travelled with them, there were mothers, fathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles.

And there was a huge delegation from La Paz, from Bolivia. Very far. I never even heard of Bolivia. Landing in Moscow for five or six days, you know accompanying those boys. And I had to work as an interpreter with them, kind of opening up my country. So there were lots of fun and lots of changes. So by the time I graduated in ‘87, suddenly my profession was in demand. Suddenly there was a lot of international exposure and that was a different country opening up. But it's exactly the generation of a break. You live till 20 something years in a closed place, with exception of my American experience which opened up my eyes, and my feelings, and my understanding and then suddenly you wake up in a more free country where lots of opportunities open up. And then my career went this international way.

As I said I started working as an interpreter. Very quickly, initially I thought, okay I'm not going to do what my parents did. And my family is mostly journalists and filmmakers, but very soon I ended up in journalism. And I actually worked for a Spanish newspaper El Pais in Moscow. And that was another chapter because those were very extremely dynamic times, where things started changing fast, fast, fast. And basically when I think of those times '80s and '90s, there is a feeling that in a decade, you lived through at least a hundred years of history. And that I guess is a bit of a feeling that later on, in a different scale and different circumstances, later on I got on Balkans and I was kind of attracted to work on those places in transition, because in my youth I lived through transition.

I lived through a very fast transition where things are completely different, when… that things, in many other places and countries which I know by now, for example in Europe, where things are stable, things don't change that fast. And that makes it very interesting. So later on my career did bring me to transition worlds and places, because I think it's one of the most fascinating things. So in '90s I was working as journalist in the Spanish newspaper and also continued writing to a number of Russian publications and working for television. Well as I said part of my family, is coming from filmmaker's background because my grandfather was actually one of the first cameraman in Russia, in Soviet Union.

It's an interesting story, he is a jew from Saint Petersburg, who fell in love in '20s with the cinema. Went to Odessa, and ended up in Caucasus filming and kind of working at the same time and with the same generation as for example Dziga Vertov who is you know one of the very well-known documentary filmmakers. And he met my grandmother who is Armenian, she was eighteen. They fell in love and they had this amazing life in the '30s, basically not having a home. Fell in love with cinema. Being close to Dziga Vertov and his wife, travelling, filming until the war. And then my grandfather was a war cameraman. And unfortunately died in December '44, just before the end of the war in airplane crash. And my grandmother who stayed alone with my father who was four, she was 28, did an amazing thing.

She dedicated all her life to documentary filmmaking, to his course. She started working as an assistant to him and she became a film director. And that's how they happened to be in Moscow. Anyway, to cut a long story short I always admire that generation, that love affair. That love affair, the dedication to the documentary films. So when I got an opportunity to work for television and when I discovered image in connection with words, because journalism is about words, I also fell in love with that. I started working for different televisions and ended up working for BBC in '97, to make a documentary on Mikhail Gorbachev. Absolutely loved that. Applied to some different fellowships in the U.S., journalistic ones. Got a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University.

So came back to Moscow from London for three weeks. Repacked and went to the U.S. Spent one year at Harvard University. Had a fantastic year. I thought I had clear thoughts at this stage because I love documentary filmmaking and the only thing I wanted to do, to continue doing was documentary filmmaking. Was battling with Harvard to get visual arts studies, and even went to Boston school to study film etc, etc. But as sometimes it happens, my life then changed completely. I happened to be in New York after Harvard and I was actually sent to Bosnia, as the head of Public Information for United Nations Mission in Bosnia.

To be honest, I had very little knowledge. That was '99. I had very little knowledge of United Nations. I had very little practical knowledge of ex-Yugoslavia. Well I was a journalist but less knowledge of communication at that stage. So I thought it was strange I was kind of a perfect candidate but I guess this love for adventures and transitions made me accept this job. And that's how in April '99 I landed in Sarajevo, in Bosnia. And that's where the Balkan chapter started.

Lura Limani: Tell us about Bosnia. Anything.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Tell us about Bosnia. Well, Bosnia. So I remember the day when I landed there. And again what happened, because after that there was like a succession of international things happened in my life, one after another. So as I said first it was UK, BBC. Then it was Harvard University, Boston. So again I came to Moscow, I repacked and 12 or 13 of April '99 I flew to Zagreb. Sarajevo airport at that stage was not operational yet. That was after the war. Bosnia was a lot in the news. So I remember the first feeling. Somebody was supposed from the UN to pick me up in Zagreb, which is a nice city. And there was this sunny, fantastic, wonderful day as it happens in April or May, like now in New York, it was this…. So you land on this nice, peaceful, medium-size European city.

Somebody from the UN in a white car picked me up and we drove to Sarajevo. The drive is about five or six hours and well if you imagine… well not a girl, a young, I was 33-34 years old, as I said with little clue of what is it exactly. After one hour of drive, when you end through kind of the Republic Srpska and you drive, you see this fantastic landscape. You are struck by green and you see lots of houses with strange holes. And initially I couldn't understand what it is, you know maybe that's a type of construction, maybe it's a type.… I mean to be honest in Russia because of the climate and because of the maintenance a lot of houses are shabby, so the initial feeling that you see shabby houses, because of whatever.

But then you see this kind of circular holes, in big amounts and you don't even understand what it is. And finally I think I asked that and I was told this was an ethnic cleaning. Because not a single house

on our way was lived in. So every peaceful, what looked like peaceful village in a peaceful green with this fantastic sun, and fantastic temperature, whatever it was about 20 degrees celsius. And you suddenly understand by your skin that ethnic cleansing is a very practical thing. It's a house by house, each one, not one left. Because all the houses on our way, pretty much all the houses on our way through certain regions were like that. I think that was my first impression of what war is, the understandable, the practical, almost the one which you can touch.

We came to Sarajevo and I think another thing which strikes you, I spoke already about this green but… and I will come later to Pristina and to Kosovo, because in Kosovo, in Pristina you're not stroked by green at all, it gives a completely different image. This dark Balkan green, it's also the same feeling when you land in Sarajevo Airport, which is kind of surrounded by the mountains and suddenly you look from the plane and you look this, see this green mountains. It's very fresh but it's dark green. So there is something, how should I say, there is something strange that the strong Balkans there's a place of strong feelings and this green kind of adds to that.

When I took this job to the United Nations… and to be honest well maybe I was the perfect candidate but I had little experience in some of those things and I was hesitating for a long time, then I guess was the adventurous feeling which made me take it… I thought ok, if it really… I'm going to take it for three months, these were short contracts, and if it really doesn't work, it doesn't work. I'm going to go back. As it happens in such big adventures that you make in your life, for the first three months honestly you don't understand very much. Closer to six months you start to get around things and after one year suddenly you discover that your life completely changed.

And you work in a different profession, you like different things, you do different things and you live differently. So I guess that was the dynamics. What were the other images of the, which stay? Because memory is strange after a time, you know, after talking about '99, it's almost 20 years ago, so memory then cuts out lots of unnecessary things and there are just like some images or some experiences, which are normally good ones which stay with you.

Sarajevo was an amazing place. It's, I'm coming from Moscow which is twelve million, Sarajevo is a small provincial city with 300 thousand people. I never lived in such small places like that. It's actually interesting because it's almost like one long street like this {shows a line with hands} with a tram which goes, it's about twelve kilometers and surrounded by mountains of both sides. The nature as I said is quite, quite, quite beautiful so the surrounding of mountains suddenly you understand that is very easy to have a war there because you just place the weapons on the mountains and it's very easy to siege Sarajevo. It's again, it's kind of physical image which you get. Suddenly this, this small provincial town, but besieged as it was for a long time.

At that time as it was few years from the year, from the, from the war, there were 36 thousand troops, NATO troops and 2 thousand UN police. So speaking about your personal safety, well I guess we were fairly safe because, because there were so many… I mean it's a, it's a totally unprecedented undertaking. It was also I think…. I like literature, I graduated from philological faculty and there were two novels, or two literature pieces which were in my head. I was reading Ivo Andrić novel *The Diary of Travnik, Travnik Diary* which is a fantastic novel which got a Nobel Prize Award, which is about small place in Travnik, in Bosnia, Travnik, and there is a whole world politics there.

It takes place in '80 something, and there is a small, small village and basically there is an Austrian consul. And there are times changing in Sarajevo, the Turkish representative coming and the French one. And there is an amazing relationship, like geopolitical things happening in this small village. That's exactly what I felt in Sarajevo because in the small place the whole world politics was there. There were all international organizations, there were all countries and suddenly you get like a prism to see in a very practical, pragmatical things. It's not theories of what to do, it's people with their relationships, it's, it's exactly literature image like Iva, Ivo Andrić called, which gets into very practical terms. I don't know.

You talk about NATO, you talk about 36 thousands troops and suddenly you look at the way NATO is organized in, politically in, at those times in Sarajevo and you see that it's headed by an American journalist, no general, who has two deputies. They have to be English and French. There's traditionally English and French. They're completely different characters and they couldn't stand each other, so it all turns into very surreal. On small scene like in the theatre, having all world politics and having people from nationalities, it turns into a very interesting strange things.

Is to do well politics because the issue of Bosnia in that stage was how to make it work and what to do with this conflict. That's the question which doesn't have answers. It wasn't stopped by a long time then it was stopped by Dayton. But when it was stopped there were very strong consequences. So what the international community was doing in how to make the country, which later on happened in Kosova. There was this country with three nation, nationalities, with two entities, a strange word. There was relative peace and suddenly international community and all these people had to do sort of everything, because there were practical situations.

First practical situation: all the three nations they like very much symbols, like people in Europe. So in their cars they would always put… well they had two alphabets of course… they would put some national symbolics. So basically when the car drives you immediately see from two kilometers, or from a kilometer or from whatever you can see, that that's a Croat driving, a Serb driving or a Bosniak

driving. So there was no freedom of movement because they were shot. What do you do with that? Because there's no freedom of movement. I mean it's really dangerous to go…. And we are talking about very small scale, we're talking about going from one village to another. We are not talking about, I don't know, American distances or things like that, going hundreds of kilometers, we are again talking about five kilometers.

You go through a bridge from one village to another and you can be attacked just because you can be identified. So international community had to think about it. There was a task. And they had a clever solution. Also it was very difficult with the world culture, democratic culture of dialogue and listening, etc. You know things had to be agreed but it was impossible at this stage to agree with Bosniaks and with Serbs. They didn't want to agree. And then there was also a difference of… pretty much when I was at Philological Faculty we had a Serbo-Croat group learning Serbo-Croat language but at that stage there were claims that these are three languages, so Serb, Croat and Bosniak.

While honestly morphologically the language with certain differences but there were claims and sometimes international community had to translate a brochure or something for public information into sort of three languages. So the clever solution was, which nobody expected, somebody came with this… so they couldn't agree on the number plates for the cars because there are two alphabets. Usually there are some letters and some etc. The clever solution was to choose, basically to use numbers that are common and to choose seven letters which are the same in latin and in cyrillic, like A, O. And to come-up with the plate for a car which would have three numbers like 123 A 456.

And they didn't expect that because they couldn't argue anymore about the language and the alphabet and etc., etc., and finally it was accepted. And I'm telling this example because this completely changed the life of that area because people who were not able to move in spite of 36 thousands of troops and all this set-up etc., you know, then got the possibility to move. And I'm giving this example about, to, to say that what from theory of international interaction stopping the war, keeping peace… there was very interesting theories of practical one of making the country. Bosnia turned into a country and suddenly there were no money, there was no flag, there were no hymn [anthem], there were no boundaries, there was no airport, there were no passports, there was no nothing, which in European world history makes a country.

And the international community which was there had to deal with all those issues. Another good example would be the hymn, again with the issue of the language there was a big argument what to do. And finally the proposal which won was the proposal only with music without words. So was another clever solution. And another big arguments… because it's interesting how symbols are so important. One would think what is more important, I don't know, flag or making the boundaries of

the country? Boundaries are more important but the flag is very, you know, an emotional and other perceptions. The identity is very important.

So there was a huge argument about the flag. So the Bosnian flag ended up having two quite unusual colors, yellow and purple, because all the other color like white, blue, red, etc., were on the scrutiny of being used by ones or others, etc., etc., etc. And I did mention that there were two literature novels which were kind of in my head, I guess with my philological background. I was thinking a lot about this small place where the whole world politics is happening, which is the attention of the whole world and which attracts the whole world. And it's all, you know, in a small casserole with humans or human relationships. And I was thinking about a medieval sheep of fools. Because it's all the image of… it was strange mix of people. And this strange mix of people was not…

They were seen in a different way by the local people because, because it's not easy. Suddenly you have an influx of different people, and actually those different people kind of dictate or tell you what to do. I don't think that anybody likes that (laughs), in one way or another. And these strange people, well they're all different, but they come and go. Because mostly they come like on a mission for a certain period of time, I don't know, two or three years and then they go. So obviously the people living there started taking, well, slightly maybe cynical approach to them. "What are these people doing? They are not going to stay. They are not going…"

And it was a strange mix of people to be honest. But the good part of that, there were lots of people, I don't know, who were… I guess there's always the strange mix like in any big organization. There are people who are coming just to have jobs. There are people who are coming to have salaries. There are people who are adventurous. There are people who maybe are frustrated with something, something didn't work, I don't know, got divorced or something like that… they need to do something new. But the good thing is there were lots and lots of idealistic people.

And that's the interesting part because it's the relationship… I think it's not… I know that many people will think about almost like colonial, or protectorate or whatever. Feelings… I think it's the same thing which happened with the missions all over the world when you carry certain mission. I don't know, in medieval times, or the crusades or whatever, I'm sure it always had a strange mix of people. The good part there, there were lots of people with idealistic approaches because that's the crusade what I find on the 21st century, or the end of the century of democracy.

It's under certain questions and scrutiny and different points of view, it's again it's a complicated mix, but there were lots of very interesting people. Like in any relationship, it's about take and give and probably there was… I mean obviously you take something from your experiences but you come to

give. And those people who came to give their, their, not just their professionalism, or their knowledge, but kind of their honest dedication to a place. I think that what makes this interaction very interesting. And those people in a most passionate way, because all missions are passionate, were trying to give the best of their feelings, their passion, their knowledge to this construction and contradictory process of the construction of the country.

Part Two

Anna Di Lellio: Can you give us some example of your work in Bosnia and also these people you worked with? Something may have been particularly challenging or something particularly successful that you had to do?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Well, my work was always in communication. I'm former journalist. The field which I love, the field which I think in the last 20 or 30 years also went through very dynamic changes because everything is about communication and the way you let people know. So, when I came I had to had… I was called the Head of Public Affairs, Spokesperson for the United Nations. So, basically I was sent there to find modern ways to communicate with the people and with the world. During the war I think the main means of communication was press conferences, because basically what was happening there were lots of incidents, there were lots of NATO, UN Police dealing with the incidents.

Then there was lot of information about the world today, with I don't know, things happening in the world. Some… you know every day there are… so, it was a bit like that. So, I had to develop the whole strategy about how to communicate both with the Bosnians and with the world in different ways. And we did lots of good things. I had about 30 people working. There were probably five or six internationals from different countries like in the UN, and about 20 people locally recruited. It was very interesting to work with them because they were open. They were probably like me when I told you about the U.S. It was a prestigious job for them. They wanted to learn from internationals. They liked what they were doing. They were very dynamic and very fast growing.

So it was very nice to work always with the missions with, you know, with, with the people from there. One of the interesting things, we for example… well I'll give you very different examples. This tram which I told you, Sarajevo is, is a long street of twelve kilometers. I remember once we decided to make a UN tram which was really, really nice. It was a UN blue tram which was running everyday. Maybe people took it and they liked it. We were the mission which created completely different example. I remember we were the first in the UN to create the website. Today it sounds ridiculous but that's how it was. UN Mission at those times still didn't have websites.

In 2000 we had this idea. We found some local people and that was the first United Nations Mission to create its own website and to communicate from that. That's a completely different example. Then, there was another example that, for example Kofi Annan who was very brilliant Secretary General, was visiting Sarajevo. Obviously, it was a big fuss. And suddenly I got a telephone call saying that, "You know what? We are going to have a PR event." And just I was very fresh but actually we had to organize the birth of the sixth billion in Sarajevo. "And be careful because it has to be a mixed ethnicity child." (laughs)

So, anyway I took over PR event, those who know PR. There was quite a PR and there was quite a big undertake dealing with the hospital… now I can't remember. I think it was the first child born in after midnight and it has to be a mixed couple Bosniak and Serb. And then I figured out there was… actually I think there was… I may make a mistake now, but somebody like a niece of the, of one of the Presidents of Bosnia then, who was kind of put in the screenshot as a nurse. And etc., etc. There was the whole range of things happening. There was basically the world event the sixth billion child born in Sarajevo.

And then, there was a sad story because obviously, well I mean sad or not sad because this family was in touch with me for a couple of years, because you have this PR event but then obviously nobody deals with you after that. Nobody kind of, you know, supports you for life. And they probably suspe… expected that they would be supported for life by the UN or I don't know… paid a pension or whatever it is. So, anyway, I, I think with this example, life… I talked about Ivo Andrić… life in Sarajevo at that time with this completely surreal international setting, with the completely incredible mix of people. But it was a little bit like that because every day incredible events happening, you know like a puzzle.

It was very interesting. It was happy because, how should I say, it wasn't, it wasn't perfect but at least people were not killing each other. So I think, you know, I told you about this green and these houses with the holes and etc., etc., that stage on the, on the superficial thing it was maintained fairly peaceful. It was one or another incident, but you know no mass killings or mass incidents, but you could also feel that it is a superficial feeling because deep in heart of course the problems… it's very difficult to overcome such problems when they become so rooted. It's not that everybody starts liking each other the next day, and loving each other and hugging, etc.

They maintain certain, certain peace. As I say it was very difficult to agree anything because everybody would be polite but they would not agree on anything or particularly if you think of Mostar. Another place, which now looks completely different, because I remember it in time when its bridge was destroyed and it was sad shepherd destroyed place. Five years ago when I went there I couldn't

believe my eyes because I saw the bridge full of like Turkish market and you know zillions of tourists coming. And I haven't seen it before the war but it strikes you. It strikes you in a way you could go from one place to another.

But the interesting thing that the combination in this slightly superficial, slightly superficially peaceful place with a nice green… that's another image I come back to the green… again I came fresh I didn't have those experiences of the war time etc., etc. But then we were told, I mean we were told officially in the UN and we were told by the colleagues, "Don't ever step on the green." First you don't understand that, I mean what does it mean? Because there was something about one million bombs in these green, I mean in the forest, so the rule was never… you drive by the road but you never actually stop the car and go for walk or hiking. Just never step on the green.

Because it was a huge undertaking you know… it took not such long time ago, three or four years to mine the whole country, but it took a huge amount of force there was to undermine, or how do you call it, to unmine, to take out all those mines there. And obviously all the times which we were there. So it all gives the impression of fragility, like fragility, you have the green you look at it but you don't step at that. You have the peace but this peace is fragile. But also it gave a feeling of kind of very dynamical development and certain happiness because there was no war at that stage. It was stopped.

Anna Di Lellio: Ok, could you just tell us a little bit about your life in Sarajevo, your friends?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Well I told you about this long street in Sarajevo, about the hills. So obviously, Sarajevo have its different parts but it has a historical center which is a really nice one and which has a mix of what could be called like a Turkish bazar and place, *Baščaršija.* Lots of mosques and lots of minarets, a catholic church, an orthodox church and it's all within kind of ten minute walking. And that what makes this strange unique flavor which many, many people like. So I quickly discovered that the nice place is to be over the hill and I had a fantastic Bosniak family, Fikreta. They had a house. It was right on the centre but on the hill of the house, on the hill, on the top of, on the top of the hill.

So they basically rented an upper part of the house, so I could go through them and come. And the nicest thing I could have was the big, big terrace from which I could see all the minarets and the whole Sarajevo and it was really, really nice. So my life there, or my friends were all sorts of friends. Well as I said in UN there were all sorts of international. There was an American, there was an Indian, there was an Australian. There were all sorts of people and lots of Bosniak, Bosniak people. I quickly met two journalists who were recommended by, by some, some other friends.
I had a friend for example in New York who worked for Associated Press who told me. So one was the

journalist who is still there, Aida Cirkez, who is, was the head of the Associated Press in Bosnia, and another one Duska Juricic who worked for the television. And they became really, really close friends. It's interesting also because I was, well some of the UN colleagues suggested, since I came in mid-April, the one of the first weekend, I think maybe it was a long weekend… strange concept, kind of European concept… they said, "Why don't we go to the sea?" And they took me to the sea and I discovered the what is now a Croatian coast. It's actually four hour drive from Sarajevo to get to Dubrovnik. And that was another very interesting image, because that was '99.

That was the year when Belgrade was bombed, when Kosovo was already happening. We drove. And again this green and this nice area, and these bridges who were build by a stone. Then you come to this amazing sea and scape of Croatian coast with islands, with beauty. The sea… the only trouble is… the weather was perfect 25 degrees celsius, the sea was already ok, 20 degrees of Celsius… the only trouble at that time it looked like it was a nuclear bomb or something dropped. Because there wasn't a single person. It was early in the season but most likely all the tourist… there were few tourist then, not like now, but those few tourist who liked coming there, because of the bombing of Belgrade which is quite far away… You know you get this news in Italy or somewhere, people are saying, "No, no, we are not going to go to this area."

So I couldn't first understand because I saw this incredible beauty and not a single person, you know really like, like after the nuclear bomb. But it's nice because this, this coast, I'm in love with that coast, and it's a completely different of course feel than Sarajevo but from time to time we liked going there. And I think from the very first day on the one hand you see the war and you feel the war and on the other hand it's peaceful on the surface. And lots of vegetables. And people are like drinking coffee and they are talking. So there were lots of *kafani* [coffee bars] and lots of communication and lots of things to do. So, so life was there just dynamic and interesting and all about doing things and observing things. And doing… find, finding your ways. But it was….

And of course the minarets. Every time from the balcony I was coming out and trying to count how many minarets were there. I could never count. I don't know what it is, 20, 25, more. There were a lot of, a lot of mosques and a lot of minarets and obviously that's what you hear. But you also heard the bells of the catholic church and a small very old orthodox church. And I hope it can preserve in this nice mix.

Anna Di Lellio: And when did you get to… how did you get to Kosovo?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: How did I get to Kosova? I stayed in Sarajevo, Bosnia, well I mean I was visiting Republika Srpska and some other areas of Bosnia for two years and three months. And I was looking

for some change or something. And an opportunity came up to go to Kosovo. It already happened then and people started going. So basically I was offered transfer. And that was 2001, early stages of the UN Mission, not the earliest not the early one. Kind of the second row. So I think I came there something like 30th of July, 2001. And obviously I had been thinking but I guess those two, two and a half years in Bosnia determined a lot… well your background to your knowledge always determines the way you see things… so that determined a lot how I saw Kosova.

I always saw Kosova a little bit through the Balkan or Bosnian prism. In what sense? In practical terms because I had been living an experience of another conflict. Of course, conflicts have circumstances but it's also a conflict. So now I came to the second conflict but with experience of how it happened and what were the relationships and what could be done and what could not be done. And I already told that it was difficult to negotiate or to agree on anything in Bosnia. And secondly, obviously I was living, I was surrounded by people and I was myself in the communication field, you know, through what is being done to rebuild the country after the war. Again in practical terms.

And that, a lot is determined of course by the purposes of the United Nations missions. If we speak about that, United Nations missions, the mandates were completely different. The United Nation mission in Bosnia was basically dealing with two things: police and judiciary. A big shock for me when I came to Kosovo… in Bosnia were other international organizations which were dealing with other subjects so it was, you know, separated by tasks… but the United Nation Mission in Kosovo was pretty much government. So it was much more in terms of experience and much larger. Do you want me to continue on (smiles)?

Anna Di Lellio: Sure.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Well I mean I guess also first I don't know what I expected. Well you just have some experience, you hear something from the news. Well I guess I can't remember but I guess… I'm trying to remember when I came by plane or by car. Plane probably. Well anyway, suddenly I can't remember the way I came. The perception was different. Well I was expecting Bosnian green, but I didn't see Bosnian green because Pristina, that's the place where I landed and where mostly I was… later on I did travel and I saw some other areas… but Prishtina is, is not green.

It's, it's a city probably the size of Sarajevo, but if Sarajevo was very long and surrounded by mountains, Prishtina is kind of in a low flat, flat, flat low place. Not really… mountains are seen on the distance, they are not, they are not close. Well everybody know that is a Soviet place with those gray buildings that we see in many, many Soviet places, so it's not particularly nice. But I think there were few physical feelings which… and everybody was talking about this Grand Hotel which has this fame

before the war, and then the UN was there. During the war was kind of the place… anyway, typical, typical 20 floor something, grey building in like many hotels, I don't know, if you go to Siberia, or former Soviet Union, or in Russia you see lots of buildings like that.

What happened then? I don't know what you expect. I guess I came from slightly, how should I say, cheerful and nice Bosnian atmosphere which we had, because you already settled there, you already live there. Life was going on to this new place. First thing which strikes you, these are probably not the nicest images, is dust. Because somehow everything in Kosovo was full of dust always. Well in Moscow also because of rain and because of climate and because of land, and because of whatever, you can never have your shoes clean. It's always, it's always full of dust or mud, or something.

But Kosovo was this dry dust. And through this period that I lived you had a feeling that you kind of breath in the particles of something, because there is… it's always grey and it's always dust. It's also fairly cloudy. I think it was less sunny somehow than some other places in the Balkans. The second feeling is noise, because you live with a noise all the time for a very simple reason: there was no electricity then, there was no clear whatever plan. But what international community was trying to do to at least give electricity two hours and four hours interruptions. So everybody would have generators. So if you have lots of houses and zillions of generators who are working pretty much all the time, you are constantly with a noise.

I wasn't quite sure because I was coming as a Russian, and I wasn't quite sure if Bosnia had a fairly safe life. But you know, I think politically you feel unlike Bosnia which everything was very, very, very difficult, but at least international community was investing all the efforts to try people communicate and work together, I mean Bosnian, Croats and the Serbs. But I think the very first feeling in Kosovo because there this conflict developed was a wall. This is a wall and international community is not going to overcome it. And that was politically a different feeling. Because you work on a very difficult circumstances but you kind of try and here you understand it's a wall you can't do anything. I'm talking about the relationships of Albanians and Serbs honestly. And that determined a lot the political work.

Anyway, safety, coming back to safety. So I wasn't quite sure how I'm going to seem as a Russian because with all the biases I kind of thought Albanians are going to say "Ok, she's Russian, she's pro-Serb." Am I safe, am I going to be well-taken, am I going to be able to do my job? What, what… these are the questions which are kind of in your head, which are normal, human. My reaction was a funny one, 'cuz standing checking in somewhere, I don't know there was like a short line, I think I turned my head and there was a guy behind next to me. And I ask him, "Are you also coming?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Where are you going to stay in Pristina?", and I told him, "Why don't we live together?"

(laughs) I don't mean live together in any terms but I guess it was my protective side like ok, why not, I don't know, couple with somebody….

That was a very nice feeling because it turned up into very unexpected community and I'm going to talk about this international community in Kosovo. The guy, my friend Antonio, was from Brazil. He was working with IT and with a website that was just developing. Well I told you in Bosnia it was just the first website we created. Yes, actually I got to Kosovo because somebody whom I met in Bosnia, Simone Hezlig, who was the spokesperson or Head of Public Information for Office of High Representative moved there and he called me, and that's how the transfer happened. I forgot to tell you this thing.

So I turned around to Antonio. Anyway, we ended up. He said, "Yes, why not, let's share an apartment or whatever." And we started looking for an apartment that somebody suggested to us and he said, "Yes, some guys are suggesting something." And we went. We ended up living in a nice… I have Spanish background in a sense of languages. I speak six languages and I studied a lot Spanish literature. So we ended up with three Latin American guys and myself. Lots of fun. One was Peruvian, one was Chilean, Antonio was from Brazil and myself. Now, why is it important? Two things: when things on a… well there's also life besides work… so when things, when common things are difficult, common things I mean light, water, heating and all these thing were difficult. There was no water, there was no light most of the time.

UN also of course in the office had generators. So the two things happen: you become close to the people. Well first of all you have less opportunities to go… and what are you going to do, to go for a walk on dusty street? To go and find some place to run or to do sports, or whatever. To read a book with a candle is a little bit more complicated. Anyway, you become closer. You start helping each other. You form a nice community and you chat a lot and you find kind of nice solutions and you, you help. So whatever, I thought it wasn't exactly the issue of safety but kind of I don't know, some surreal thought, but it ended up in basically nice group of people living in a nice way.

And helping each other and the nice communication was I think another side also of Kosovo shortcomings of things. We… what do you do when you don't have electricity in your refrigerator? How are you going to keep, I don't know, food or whatever. So we came with a nice solution. We decided that we are going to always have cheese and wine (laughs). Well at least they don't get spoiled when the refrigerator gets switched off for four hours. So in the evenings we had quite a lot of, well you would call it parties, not exactly parties but kind of sitting, chatting, somebody dropping in, communicating, telling stories, etc., just with cheese and wine. And that was nice.

It was almost, in good terms, almost like an atmosphere like a pioneer camp or something. When you get to the community, it's community. Community can have good things and bad things as we know. But international community there was more of a community than probably in some other places. And certainly in a very settled life you kind of tend to communicate less because you have things to do on your own, and etc.

Lura Limani: Ok, what about what we call the locals? Communication with the locals?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: The communication with the locals. How should I say? So, I had this issue of being Russian. It's interesting, I think it's about the whole world is about race, etc., when you know that you are not seen or that you can't be seen, I don't know, as a black, or as a Syrian, or as a Russian, or as a Serb. You know there is a bit of stigma. Well, I mean for me it wasn't an issue of life and death, I mean I… but it's strange, strange thing. Something that determines you. Because I think the whole world tends to live, or I have a totally cosmopolitan thought. I really… for me the matters of differences, of religion, nationality, color really shouldn't matter. Except the richness of those things that they can bring.

But I'm afraid in modern world there are more and more stigmas and people not necessarily, people have a tendency to see things from those prism. I can't say I initially had many friends who were Albanian. Maybe this was also determined. What did I see? I, well coming back to Pristina you see lots of lots… well I saw the whole city which was full of white cars, UN cars. The whole city. In Bosnia it was not like that. Many white cars but not all of them. Because there was another life. And this was really the government, so it was like, like a lot.

Lura Limani: White cars, UN cars?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: White cars, UN cars. Like I remember I came to this Grand Hotel and every car was white, so it was…. I also saw a lot of houses which are all under, under construction and they were all very big. So it's like a house but it's very big. It's like five or six floors. It's a private house I mean. And later on I discovered that Albanians it's much more kind of family oriented and the goal is for the father to build the house where there will be a floor to each child so if the family has four-five or six children the house will be four-five or six floors. And also in the ground floor there would be a shop because the business which should be made. So the whole Kosovo at that stage was under construction.

There were lots of houses which were growing up, with three floors but others being build. So it's also added…. So there was, I guess there was a feeling that there was initial… much more internationals,

my inner interaction was with more internationals and much more family closure in bigger families, where the image are those houses. And later on, obviously through particular journalists etc., I started making friends or meeting people. Now, my job was, and that I guess what makes an interesting experience, or unique experience probably, probably because I was Russian or whatever, in the press office I was tasked to work with Serb journalists.

Well it's easier to say than to do that because there were no Serbian journalists in Kosovo. None (smiles). So, so, OK, very good. So what am I going to do? But then there was a political task because the elections were coming and there was something which the international community thought there is a plan, strategic plan and that was called Serb engagement strategy. Very western word.

Lura Limani: You are talking about first elections?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: First elections.

Lura Limani: Ok.

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Because there was a feeling that the Serbs are not going to vote. So there was an idea what are, can we do politically to encourage Serbs to vote. And there was an understanding that the Serbs in Kosovo are going to vote if there's a political kind of message coming from Belgrade. But in order for political message to come from Belgrade you also need media or communication. How it's going to come if there's a wall. So, so with all these complex things which I'm telling you basically we should work with a Serbian journalist. Let's find a Serb journalist. So I'm telling you this… no it was fantastically interesting. Maybe I'm telling complex things but, but also I, I had… I mean I, I visited more, not just Mitrovica, but I was visiting enclaves, I was visiting monasteries, I was going to Belgrade so, to certain extend I was more exposed to Serb part of story at that stage in Kosova, which was an interesting one. A difficult one. A very difficult one.

How did it look? I went to Belgrade because the Serb journalist were there. And we had an idea of bringing a group of Serb journalists to Kosovo. That was two years after the war. We are talking about 2001 autumn. We formed a group of 13 journalists. And I went to Serb newspapers, Serb televisions. I went to meet people, I went to look for them. It was strange to go from Kosovo by car to Belgrade. It was very strange to come from Pristina to this big city, because really big city of the capital city in northern Balkans is Belgrade. Hard to say that but it's a nice place. And I also remember this feeling of kind of dust and generators and other things… that's a very honest thing, when me or somebody else was traveling to Belgrade that the first dream was to get to the Hyatt Hotel, it was a nice hotel, to get a bath (Laughs).

So the first thing that you would do was fill the bath and sit in it for about two hours (laughs) because, because there was a feeling to wash out the dust. But I think it came in to a quite essential feeling because the conflict was ugly. The feeling of the dust and the dirt and the ugliness which you somehow was getting from Pristina with all the things. Was also turning into an image of ethnic conflict. And you constantly wanted to wash it out from yourself. And you constantly wanted to find solutions for that but deep in your heart you were understanding that there was… that there were two parts of the story, [one] were very happy, very dynamic Kosovars… there was a flag, an American flag or Kosovar flag on every corner.

There was huge construction. There was huge dynamics because you felt this incredible happiness and luck of people who somehow it happened that they got what they wanted. And you got a completely different feeling from any place where there were any Serbs, because you got a feeling of a dead end and like not a viable solution. And that's what emotionally, if working in Bosnia things were very difficult but there were kind of hopes there, in a hope is which one could lose…. There I think international job and all the right things and the constructions were done to the Kosovar state but there was no solution to the Serb question. And that's what all of us felt like all the time.

Now coming to the, to the journalist. So I went, when I went to talk to the television I came to the city and obviously everybody was talking about bombing and about Americans and I looked like a lunatic coming from Kosovo and whatever. But it was, I didn't realise how bad it was. Because on television, we are talking about main Serb television, and I said, "How can I help you?", they actually said, "Can you send us a picture of Pristina?" I said, "What, what do you mean?" They said, "We didn't get any picture for two years." Coming from communication, coming from television this is bad.

They really didn't get any physical picture. And one of my job I had started, I had to organize obviously web developed at that stage, but I had to organize just exchange of simple images… we're not talking about interview or I don't know particular situations, but simple images, so at least Serb media gets that. The visit in search of Serb journalist in Belgrade, understanding that there is an incredibile hunger for information, hunger… they didn't get any information for two years. They get it via, I don't know, CNN or… which is very long way. So that's how they kind of capture, understand of what's going on.

Part Three

Seda Pumpyanskaya: So we decided to bring the certain journalist. We formed a very nice group. I

was understanding that they are coming in a total hunger, as I say information hunger. But, but it was not easy because even with a Serb, with a Serb group for example the whole trip had to be in armed vehicles. These were white UN armed vehicles which sometimes you see because that's the way they show safety came in. We couldn't know what was going to happen, who was going to help you and whatever. I think with a great… I like… in my life, in my career and everything what I do I like opening doors. So, re-opening door for information to Serb journalist in Kosovo, I think was a very, I think it was a good step, it was a very important step.

And later on basically I had to be the person in, sitting in Kosovo in the information office of the, of the United Nations, helping to provide Belgrade journalists or Serb journalist from anywhere else informations. Be it photographs, images, interviews, I don't know, access or other, other things. Now, what did we see for example and what did I see and later on when we went? What happened in Kosovo and when I talk about this war, their states are enclaves. What is an enclave? Enclave is a tiny village for example ten kilometers from Pristina, for example where there are 150 people living. Serb. For example you are right there and you see the car, obviously with the serb number plate, but this car can't travel anywhere. You see…. At all. We spoke about problems of movement in Bosnia, but that's even worse.

You see people who are completely cut, it's almost like a (incomp.), cut from everything because they can't go out of the village. They can only go to the houses. They can't go out to buy bread. Obviously they had Italian troops for example guarding them with their outfits and with armed vehicles and they were dealing with the Italian troops to go out to the Albanian shop to buy bread and bring to them, with armed vehicle. Again these are the image… I mean obviously that's what we are talking about how are you going to work? How are you going to earn your living? How are you going to get your pension? You're cut completely from everything.

This was a sad image because that's something you pretty much the only thing that you can do is protect these people. But talking about any type of integration in a normal life what are you going to do with that. So I think the whole issue of enclaves gave this feeling of a little bit of a dead end and lack of solution. Now the similar things you could see on the Monasteries when you go to South. And there are wonderful Serb Monasteries, and that's an important part of culture. But again you could see a Monastery, seven monks, and you see four armed vehicles, and you see KFOR or NATO troops guarding them. And the monks, well sitting inside the Monastery, not really being able to go out.

It's like suddenly you are surrounded in your apartment and you have to sit in you apartment. Anyway, for some time you sit and you will do things but you need also certain freedom to move anywhere to do, to do things. That was the feelings over there. And then there were complicated issues of Mitrovica

of both sides, with a bridge and with everything. And we had lots, and lots, and lots of stories of the Serbs who were, how should I say…. Even, even when I was in Bosnia, the Bosniaks, the Croats, the Serbs… it gets into a conversation, "When do I get out of that?"

The Bosniaks got a country and got everything. The Croats were very unhappy because they thought they did not get a country, because the country was divided into two entities and they were mixed, so they didn't get a country, or whatever…. Or independence, or territory, or whatever it is. So that's why the, the, the relationships in Mostar are so much complicated. The Serbs got something. Ok, they lost whatever it is the empire or whatever it was, but didn't get sort of very much. So even further more in Kosovo because obviously the Kosovars… and there was a feeling of happiness, I think that was the contradiction, there was a feeling of a lot happiness on the side of Kosovars because a lot has happened. And there was a very dynamic. Pristina really felt like a young place. Like a very dynamic, a lot of things were happening.

And suddenly there was this feeling of deep and happiness on every place. It has nothing to do anymore, or it had, or had little to do maybe not nothing, you know maybe with Miloševič or the previous things. But the fact was that those people at that stage did not get very much or vice-versa they were cut of any kind of viable sources. Sources of life. It was more interesting because I think adding… Kosovo experience was a completely different to Bosnia. While as I said it was a different field, different conflict. I think language also added to that because since the Albanian Kosovo language is a completely, completely different group of language that's why you also felt….

You know, if, if a Bosnian you argue is it a Croat or whatever, a Bosniak or Serb, not just alphabet but word for example, the bread would be *kruh* in Croatian, *hleb* like almost Russian word in… and they were digging out these words which had different origins. So obviously Albanian and Serb is a two group of languages they have nothing to do, there is not a single, single interaction.

So, there was this Balkan panorama kind of shaping up. Because you go to Croatia, you go to Slovenia, also went there to have a look and you see this green peaceful place which fortunately you know…. Anyway, was the first one to drop more peaceful you see the totally torn Bosnia with four million displaced people out of four million, so basically two million out of four million, so basically 50% and with this you know cultural mix. You see Kosovo with this, you know, very dynamic development and a lucky one for Kosovars. I think that's the story, lucky one. And to be honest looking at it from my perspective you'd be able to understand a lot was determined by the circumstances. It's against Bosnian background that the independence happened.

I don't know, in some other circumstances it would have developed in a different way, but here were

afraid of the repetition of some other things which are not prevented early or not prevented in time that things happened. But there was a, this big, big issue of this dead end of the Serb issue in Kosovo which obviously did follow me because it's also true. This experience was unique because I think in terms of professional feelings I think it was even, you know, you get kind of partial experiences in other places, but here was, with this need of the international community, or however you call, with this need to do the country. To do the whole government, to deal with all issues at all. It was a very full experience.

With a slightly led American angle as I told you where I lived it which was a lot of fun, a lot of community almost Soviet style. And a lot of leftish of American perspectives, because left Americans are very often kind of the left side of sword. Once we also, with a Balkan experience, once we also, to be honest with you, escaped to Greece with a friend of mine. And well it's not very far, Greece and Macedonia are not very far. Escaped because it was still a procedure, it was fairly safe but it was a procedure that we had to let somebody know. We decided to go for two days. It was a weekend or something.

So it was really interesting because driving… we were also escaping to Montenegro, that's, that's another part… well I mean not escaping but there was like a bus which was going to Montenegro coast, which was going for nine hours. It was… through the mountains or whatever. Again, you get to this beautiful sea, you get to these beautiful mountains. You physically go through like a high top {shows with hands} the mountain to get to the sea. And you kind of think about all that because it's a… you know and probably as a Russian, you think about a couple of things.

You think that former Yugoslavia from our perspective, from Russian perspective… you asked me "When I was born?" '60, '65, grew up in '80s in a closed world. Ex-Yugoslavia was a little dream. Ex-Yugoslavia was the most advanced the most closest to the West. It had all sorts of things which for example for Russia was unbelievable. It was private sector, I don't know, coffee shops, and there were restaurants and there were possibilities which you couldn't imagine to travel to the West, earn some money and come back. Well, I come back to the same issue but there was a lot of nature, there was a lot of sea, there was a lot of mountains.

And coming from a family where was a lot of liberal thought and kind of generation of my father, my parents who made a lot for *Perestroika,*[1] everybody would have thought that Yugoslavia would have been the easiest. They're western, they're already western… I speak about Russian perspective. So what is easier… kind of what Soviet block falls and the western country just becomes western and that's it. They already have private sector, they already have priv… well part of private economy. You

[1] **A political movement for reformation in the former Soviet Union.**

know, they're in the West, they have freedom of travel. Nobody could have ever expected the, how it would end up. And now… nobody could have expected that pretty much having everything it's gonna end up with so many unresolvable or difficulty resolvable latent conflicts.

So it turned out to be kind of vice, vice-versa. And I guess this international experience of three years it was also interesting while we talked about these internationals coming and going, what you give what you take. Of course many people stay or get married, or I don't know or dedicate all their life after to the Balkans. You get addicted to Balkans. In my case I got addicted to Balkans but I knew I had to put a time limit because I don't know. For some reason I decided it's going to be three years. Because I knew that if I would stay more than three years, I would probably stay all my life or dedicate all my life to the Balkans.

And at some stage I made the decision, "No, I'm going to move on." I love it. I love coming back. I love the people. I understand this, I understand part of the history. I spent this fantastic, fantastically-interesting, maybe not easy, but fantastically-interesting three years in the Balkans but I'm going to put a time limit. I better come back after. I'm going to move. And I did move to another geopolitical conflict thanks to the UN, which happened to be completely unexpected for me. Very unknown conflict. Very important in the '90s, almost like Balkans in the '20s. I ended up going to Guatemala in Central America. And that was another chapter of my life.

Anna Di Lellio: What about afterwards? So you left… bring us to today. What did you do after Balk… so Kosovo, you went to Guatemala?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah, yeah.

Anna Di Lellio: Then…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Ok.

Anna Di Lellio: You were still engaged in the Balkans from the Council of Europe, right?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah, well not…

Anna Di Lellio: … indirectly…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Indirectly. I mean, indirectly. Well another question, I'll tell you that, but another question if you want to precise any of those experiences, whatever, childhood, Russia,

whatever else, America, just ask me question and I'll… family or whatever… and I'll give some little bits. Well, as I said after Balkans I went to Guatemala where I spent another three years, which was 2001-2004. I couldn't… a lot in one word is communication about work, about images, about perceptions. So I landed there, in the country where I didn't know anything at all. I didn't know at all that there was a, a civil war which lasted 36 years.

Actually it was much worse than for example Salvador which is much better known, with more people who died, who disappeared, etc. and I also didn't know that UN brought the peace agreement only in '95, very late, when the whole world was already changed. So I really felt that if I happened to be in the middle of geopolitical conflict of the 20th century in the Balkans… well it was end of 20th century, beginning of the 21st… I somehow… It's like a time-machine which takes you to the conflict which was a big one in the '80s but everybody forgot about it today. That's how the world, how everything works. But it wasn't, it wasn't better.

That was a totally fantastic experience. A completely different one because it's another like wonderful orchid in the jungle or something with all the Latin-American, Latin-American flavor. Comparing to Balkans a completely different, well different conflict but not, not a better one. Completely different United Nations experience because there it was all about human rights, it was not about police or about government but about human rights. So different angles. And completely different angles for example, for example… when I came there I didn't quite figure out that Guatemala has more than 50% indigenous people, 26 languages, very rich color and the system that… to apartheid or racism, because nothing… not a single law, not a single thing in connected, connected with that.

I stayed there, I'm happy to tell more, for about three years. Fantastically interesting place and job. After that I moved to Europe. I somehow decided that it's more interesting for me to get to European perspective and got a job as Director of Communication for the Council of Europe, where I was for six years, from 2006-2011. And that was also interesting on other perspective because it was all about European issues, it was all about multilateral coordination, it was all about legislation, with lots of good things. I was again dealing with communication, development of communication, PR operation, and information at large which started developing very fast because there was the web developing very fast, the I don't know, the engagement and public information campaigns developing very fast, the social media developing very fast.

So we were all caught in this, well looking for the same tasks which I had when I went to Bosnia, how do you look for modern communication means, you know, in modern world. But to be honest there was a feeling, and that's, that's, that's also always a conversation… well I guess it would be the same feeling if somebody talked today about Africa or…. There is a developed world and sort of funded

developed world. Not very nice terms but there are many continents with many problems. But you can understand that and really feel it if you went there. And we were considered as people with experience in the field.

It's called the field because obviously those institutions, talking about UN, talking about Council of Europe, taking about European Union, it's a much more theoretical legislative work in their headquarter with much less touch. Which I think was a very, very, anyway, very big and very positive thing with the real life, which, as I was telling you we got to places like Bosnia and Kosovo and Guatemala.

Then, I did a different couple of things dealing always with information. I decided to change. I actually went back to Russia, which changed a lot those 20 years, and worked for a completely different project. Building an Innovation City and dealing with innovation, but always in communication. So my job was kind of similar. And that happened in 2001 and now I continue working…

Lura Limani: 2011?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: 2011, sorry, in 2011. That was also interesting coming back to Russia, see how it had changed in 20 years. Feeling… because obviously, when after 20 years you come like Alexandre Dumas to the same place, on the one hand you know it, on the other hand you don't know it. You know how to move, you know how to drive, you come to the same city, you know how to react to some things, you know how to park. But there are certain things, particularly in those limited places which I liked which changed, which you probably grasp a little less. It was really really interesting.

And then I formed my own firm. A small firm dealing with PR. Always with public relations and communications, that is what I'm doing, what I'm doing now. And also one thing which I wanted to tell you, I'm kind of, I had been thinking why I ended up with such adventurous international career which I love. Well I, I mix myself but I had also conversations today about mix migration, emigration, racism, and all other things. I'm a mix of… well I'm born in Moscow, grew up in Moscow, had all this international… became a truly cosmopolitan international person and I guess I feel like that.

But I'm also a mix, I have Armenian background. My name is Armenian, actually from Nagorno-Karabakh. And part of jewish, my surname is jewish. So I guess having blood of those nations kind of determines. And interesting enough, one thing which probably less noticed in organizations like United Nations which has, or Council of Europe, they have their shortcomings, they are criticized a lot… they have limitations, but I like those organizations. I think they're needed, I think…. And I like them mostly because of lots of idealistic people who work there and work very honestly and try to do

things.

But I found that there are lots of lots cosmopolitan people like me, not just by educational or by languages, obviously people are hired by language skills, but mainly mix of blood. And I think the mix of blood, really very unusual mixtures of, of everybody that, I think that makes you open. That makes you different. And it makes you also see… I guess two things determined my, well I mean three things: the sense of freedom which I got in U.S. which I told you; the mix of blood which make me different, it makes you feel different but it also makes you more sharp to understanding differences; and living to the transitional period of the Soviet Union, this very fast developing.

I kind of like countries in transition. I think it's one of the most fascinating things. The transitions are different. They are irrational and they happen due to many circumstances, but in transitions, you suddenly have to do everything. You have to resolve it and that's what makes it really, really interesting.

Anna Di Lellio: You wanna add, do you wanna add something or do you wanna ask something?

Lura Limani: I don't need to…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah, something which lacks, or anything to precise.

Lura Limani: I don't think anything lacks.

Anna Di Lellio: No, no. I just don't… do you live in Moscow now? Do you live with your parents, or next to them, or with… Moscow?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: Yeah, I live. I came back to Moscow. I came in 2011. Well I came with this job which I described, Vice-President for International Relations for school called foundation which was recreation of the innovation city. I came back. I was thinking of renting an apartment but I came back exactly to the same apartment which I left back in '96. It's funny you open the cupboards and you see the same small papers… I collect also the papers with my notes… so they were sitting there. So, certain stage of your life…. I haven't had very much… due to my approach 20 years after, which I came to U.S., 20 years after to study to the Harvard University.

And suddenly you recognize smell, noises, I don't know, some pictures, or some things. So, the same way now I came back to Moscow. And for the moment I partly live in Paris but for the moment I have been more in Moscow because my mother was quite sick, so I had to help. And I spend a lot of time…

there is an apartment close to this kind of family apartment in the centre of Moscow, where I lived in the '80s and '90s. Like on the same, basically two apartments but very close. But I spend a lot of time in my parent's apartment which is my, not exactly childhood, but kind of youth…. Full of same objects, same memories, same small papers.

Anna Di Lellio: You were involved briefly also helping your father setting up a magazine, right?

Seda Pumpyanskaya: No…

Anna Di Lellio: Or saving the old one, I don't quite actually…

Seda Pumpyanskaya: No, I mean I was helping a lot. But there, the story of my father where I told you that he was specialist in the U.S. I corresponded for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* which was a very liberal paper in those times, in '75, '76, with whole culture to write with what is called a 'zop' language. So, kind of formulated things, not exactly in the direct way but understandable. Then for a couple of years he had very difficult time in Russia, not being published, not being kind of allowing, you know, separated from all the necessary things. But he is a strong person, so he survived. And then slowly in a sort of a bureaucratic also rational way he was coming back.

What I call bureaucratic because actually he was, there was a new trend set up, newspapers then in English language. There were quite a lot publications for the Soviet Camp which were published in languages. Not only English but also German, Spanish, etc. I mean Cuba and Eastern Germany, and etc., etc. It was kind of propaganda tool. There was a new newspaper set-up called Moscow News Information and he was proposed with his good English and his gain languages, he was proposed to be a Editing, Editing Chief there. And that was very strange. That was a publication that nobody would care at all. But as a true journalist he turned it into kind of a big newspaper.

And later on a *Perestroika* came and Moscow News became like a flag-man of *Perestroika* number one. You know, it's one of those strange thing which happened. And later on, so he worked in Moscow News, and later on he moved to another publication, which is analytical magazine New Times, *Novie Vremena,* which was again set-up by Stalin in nine languages, in 14, whatever, nine I guess, as a propaganda tool. But with those, you know, *Perestroika*, it turned into one of the most liberal analytical newspapers, and he was working there for some time. In the '90s till the 2000s.

He also has a good story with the U.S. For about twelve years he couldn't travel but then he came back to the U.S., I guess it was… if he was kind of returned to Russia in '76, he came back then in '87 or '88, twelve years later in a very strange, again it was some bureaucratic thing because there was some

peace exchanges… because it was a new trend in late '80s in traveling and group of people staying in the houses in kind of exchange, human exchange. Very nice. That was a funny trip because he came, he flew to JFK,[2] of course dreaming of New York and Manhattan very much, but this group was going to New Jersey. So, they were sat in small minibuses with very narrow windows.

He saw his beloved city of New York from this narrow window and he was taken to Trenton, New Jersey, which wasn't the dream of his life not even seeing New York. But it turned out in a very nice relationship of a very close friend of ours, Patricia Compton, who was engaged with American kind of puritan approach into this group of exchanges, and became a very close friend of ours. And then he started coming. I mean obviously he's career was changed. He wasn't quite working. Now he's writing a book again about American literature and American characters and American things.

In the 2000 things started changing as the magazine was a very liberal one. There were the stories they building which was writing the end of Moscow was seized and captured and the magazine had difficult time, they had to leave. But that's a completely different story and completely different era. I told you in Russia you live sort of hundred years, so it's like another century of another set-up of rules and ideas which came into force. And other practices like economic pressure on the media and seizing the buildings. But, that's another story.

Anna Di Lellio: Thank you.

Lura Limani: Thank you very much. That was…

Anna Di Lellio: Thank you so much. Also the ending, because we don't wanna…

[2] **Airport John F. Kennedy in New York.**