

INTERVIEW WITH ANTONELLA GIORGIONI

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Duration: 66 minutes

Present:

1. Antonella Giorgioni (Speaker)
2. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (Camera)
4. Catherine McGahan

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

Anna Di Lellio: The first question is about your childhood and can you tell us something about your family, your grandparents...

Antonella Giorgioni: Yes, I was born in '56, on November 8, '56, from a very simple family. My father was coming out of eight years of war, my mother was, I would not say semi-illiterate, but she had only completed second grade, and so my dad. Back from the war he had to roll up his sleeves, he already had a daughter, my older sister, and became a miner. He worked in a sulfur mine for the old Montecatini, which later became Montedison. Unfortunately I only knew one grandmother because the others all died before I was born, anyway my family and the entire entourage, my whole family, cousins, all, was a peasant family, a family of sharecroppers, that is, extremely poor.

However we grew up well, because we were lucky enough to have a tight mother, we would say “*curnasch*,” and thus she managed, then... they built a small house... there are two sisters and two brothers and I am the youngest, I am. They built a small house with three bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room, fortunately with a nice piece of land so we had a garden and could sow all the products, in the spring, summer and winter, we had a pig, rabbits, chickens, we managed well.

Shall I go ahead? Do you want to know more of my childhood?

Unfortunately I lost my mother when I was eight and a half. In my family, my mother was the pillar of the family, without my mother my father, when they closed down the mine practically worked in Ferrara because Montecatini, closing the mine, had moved all the workers of the mines to Ferrara and thus to the headquarter of the Montecatini and thus he was never around.

My grandmother was old and she already had two cousins to raise, because their parents worked abroad and thus we lived like this, by ourselves, with my second sister, who then was 18. However, the presence of my father was constant, in the sense that even if he wasn't around from Monday to Friday he was a very good father, very very very good, a father who never beat us up. I was the only one who was beaten, only once, but perhaps because he was exasperated. He never beat us up, he never imposed anything on us.

Imagine that my brothers in '66 wore long hair and in the small village where I come from, a village of 900 souls, maybe 1000, 1200, wearing long hair...with the carabinieri station... wearing long hair was a problem at that time, and every other day the carabinieri would come to my father to tell him, “Have your son cut his hair?” And I remember, I was very young, I was almost always with him. My father would say, “Did they do anything wrong?” “No.” “Did they steal anything?” “No.” “And then why do

you have to... why do you come every day to tell me?" "They must cut their hair?" So, he shut them up like this.

But in the evening, when we had dinner, all together, and everyone was at his own place, because then there was this big table and everyone had his place at the table, it's not that one could arrive and seat wherever he wanted. And my father sat at the head of the table, my brothers near him and he would say to them, between morsels, "Go to cut your hair. Cut your hair," but he never imposed it on them. This is Giorgione Giuseppe, my dad.

So I, as I said above, come from this small village and back then we did not have the bathroom at home. Thus there was no tub, there was no shower, nothing, the bathroom was outside in the shed, we called it shed, where there were the chickens, the pig, there was this small shed, with a hole in the middle and two stones. This, that was the bathroom.

So, in the summer the life of the village took place at the river. For the mothers the river was a washroom, it was. On Saturdays, whoever had a Vespa like my father went there to wash it and clean it and we all went to the river to bathe. And thus at 4pm the village emptied out and everyone went to the river. And I remember once as we went to steal... it was my brothers who are closer to me in age and I and a group of friends from the neighborhood, which is via Castiglione. The village is divided in three parts: Taverna is the old Roman neighborhood, San Carlo is the new part of the village, and Castiglione which is the old part, where there is the bricks furnace.

And I remember that once with my brothers, after having bathed in the river and been in the water for two three hours, we were hungry and had to eat something and there were two peasants, one on the left bank and one on the right bank. Every once in awhile we went to steal the peaches on the left bank, on the right bank however there was the watermelon, and that day we thought of stealing the watermelon.

But the left bank, the river level was the same as the land, on the right bank the river was lower and it was enclosed by an old metallic fence. Within this fence there was a beehive. I was the youngest in the group, I don't know, I must have been six, no, nine, eight and a half, nine. The fact is that the brother who was ahead of me, who was ahead of me in the line to go stealing the watermelon, stepped on the beehive and all the bees came to me, to my eyes, my forehead. Fortunately, the water of the river was clean at that time and it was a panacea.

I remember that as a child I wore wooden clogs or some cardboard sandals, they were popular, these sandals made of blue cardboard. In order not to wear them out, practically we tied them to our neck, we walked bare foot, we walked barefoot on the asphalt, on the wheat when it has just been cut, because on the wheat that has just been cut...there is a system to walk on cut wheat, which is not lifting your foot and pushing, otherwise the stubs hurt you, but sliding, so the stubs get squashed and they don't prick you. So, this was my childhood.

I finish... I go to elementary school in my village. Because we did not have a mother my sister could not manage well the five of us, and thus they sent me to boarding school. In fact, during the first and second grade of middle school I was in a boarding school run by the nuns of the Holy Family about... Sant' Arcangelo di Romagna, about thirtyish kilometers from my village. I resisted two years there than I told my father, "I want to come home."

At that time there were social workers so there was all... the social workers came, "Why do you want to come back home? Do they mistreat you?" I was not really mistreated at the nuns' boarding school, but (laughs) I did not want to stay there, I was better at home and thus my father brought me home. I finish the last year of middle school in my village and always had great friends near my house. One was Anna, my best friend, and we are still in touch...we are not in touch but when I go to my village we meet and talk. She was one year older and had enrolled in the accounting high school. I was good in math, I was, I did not want to study, and enrolled in accounting high school.

So, [school] begins in September, in December after the Christmas holidays my father comes to wake me up, "You must get to school." "I am going tomorrow, I am tired." This continued for a week and I never went back to school. My father, seeing this, gave me a nice little talk. He told me, "Listen, I payed for all your books, they cost a load of money, you don't want to go to school anymore? Keep in mind that if you don't want to go to school, you go to work, but if you want to go back to school you must pay for it."

So, I found myself a job in a small shop three hundred meters from my home and then began to slice cold cuts, to grate parmesan, back then there was no closing day and I worked seven days a week and I felt good until this shop owner closed down his shop and so I became the babysitter in a...in Forlì, 25 kilometers, so I would wake up at 5 in the morning, take the bus, go to the station, at the station take the train, from the train half an hour walk and I arrived at the house of this family.

I stopped working as a babysitter there, why? now I will explain why to you. It was a very well-off family, the husband worked...the wife was a teacher, the husband worked in a bank, and they had a boy named Antonio. I was there already for two months, it was the time of austerity, so I believe in '74, '72-'74, I don't remember well, and one day, one Saturday, she says to me, "Listen..." Her husband gave her money to shop, probably the lady was controlled, in sum, she makes up an excuse with her husband and asks me to lie about 10 thousand Lire, 10 thousand that she had spent. So she asks her husband 10 thousand Lire on Saturday to give it back to me. I didn't sleep all night and said, "Antonella, why must you tell a lie?"

In the morning I got up at 6, I left the 10 thousand Lire that the lady smartly had given me, even though I had not given them to her, and I left.

Then I held some seasonal jobs, at the seaside, because my village is rather close to the riviera of Romagna, so I did, I don't know, the sous chef, the chamber maid, the cleaning lady, I did everything. So, I worked three months and in those three months I made enough money to manage, because I wanted to be on my own without asking my father for any money.

Until a cousin tells me, Lorenza, she tells me, we are talking of '75 more or less, she tells me, "Why don't you come to Ravenna? There is a school where they teach pottery, mosaics, etc. etc. drawing, and furthermore if you pass the exam you have a fellowship so you can try." I applied, I passed the exam and earned the fellowship, which was 62 thousand Lire and finished the school.

I chose advertisement, serigraphy and photography, finished this school, finished this school, there was no possibility of working in Cesena at that time, serigraphy, which is dyeing t-shirts, printing them, things like these, was over. Graphic design...there was only a firm in Cesena, so it is not that

there wasn't...I manage to find a job in Imola, but the problem was there wasn't...the problem was transportation, so the train that stopped in Imola, because trains from Cesena went to Bologna, the one that stopped in Imola had an impossible schedule and then from the station until this place I had to bike, so even there I worked for a week and then I left.

I worked in the fields, I gathered string beans, I picked strawberries, I gathered everything. Until I join a cooperative... I finish school, I return to my village, I...

During school I was a militant of a group of the extreme left, called Lotta Continua [The Struggle Goes On], there we distributed flyers in factories, we picketed schools, protested the Vietnam war, anyway we were all under police surveillance and for these three years, I was in Lotta Continua until when feminism was born, we, women of Lotta Continua held a meeting in Rome and we split and joined feminism.

Back home from Ravenna, from the school in Ravenna, I began to be a little active in the Communist Party of my village, in the branch of the Communist Party, in a Catholic village, they voted Christian Democracy. And then gossips and more gossips, that I was the lover of this one, that I was sleeping with that one, that I was sleeping with that other one, all sorts of things, you know, old ladies in the village, they have nothing to do, it was a whole bla bla bla...I worked for a certain period in the branch of the Communist Party and then with the feminist group of UDI [Unione delle Donne Italiane, Union of Italian Women], which was the part of the Party, the feminist part of the Communist Party.

Then I would like to explain to the new generations what was feminism for us. One must consider that in the years in which feminism was born in Italy women were very...as I said before, the fact that I worked in the branch of the Communist Party meant I was a loose woman, the fact that there were only men, that I was the only woman... feminism for us represented a certain freedom, the freedom to be friends with boys, to feel freer. We could not go out with boys in the evening, at 10PM we had to be home. We could not go out and have pizza with friends, it was not possible. And this is just what regards the time I was a young girl, but feminism represented many other struggles, it means abortion, divorce, independence, right to work, not having always a man as a boss, the possibility of a career. This has been the story of feminism.

And many other things, that today, today young people believe it was always like this, in effect everything has been a conquest of those years of feminism, which in Europe in those years was in France, in Italy and I believe also in other European nations. Ehm... anyway. After this period in the Communist Party, through the UDI a social services cooperative is born, so in Censa they opened a center for kids who had not gone to school and had some handicaps, so we talking of kids already adult, some of them in fact were my age.

I join this cooperative. This center opened, this cooperative opened, I began to work and for ten years I worked with these kids, but it has been a very happy period, they taught me so much, I believe I gave them something, but I worked so much. I also gave them a lot. Communication for example which is not only verbal, communication, there is also communication with gestures, with eyes, making oneself understood only through gestures, making oneself understood. If one wants, one can make oneself understood in other ways, not only verbally. But one day I realized that they were getting old and were going backward and I was getting old with them, so at that point I no longer like doing this type of work only for a guaranteed monthly salary.

Some time earlier my father had remarried and had gone to live in Rome with his second wife at the home of my step sister and so I called my step sister and I said, "Milena, can you give a job?" "Yes, yes, come here when you like." I gave my eight days notice to the cooperative and loaded my Fiat 600 with my cat, my vinyls, my turntable, my books, the things which I cared most about and went to Rome.

Naturally I had asked to live alone, because at 19 I already had my apartment and lived alone. They found me an apartment in Ostia and I worked in an office. In the arch of these... one year and a half, every once in awhile it happened that the office organized for the Jewish community some photographic exhibitions mostly for the refugees from Lybia, for the Jewish refugees from Lybia, which normally are the same as the Italian refugees from Lybia.

Given that I had this past in photography, practically I took care of the photographic exhibition, so there was someone who organized everything, who arranged the photos according to historical phases, organized everything, he knew whose was that photo, what it represented. I did the organization of the panels, I did, however, mostly I worked in the office. I do not like office work, I like manual work, I need manual work. So at one point I decide to go back to Cesena, I did not want... I say, "Dad..." Because on Sunday we all went to my father's house to eat, I say, "Listen dad, I cannot stand Rome, it is too chaotic. Friends... it is difficult to make friends, I don't want to be here any longer and I want to go home."

My sister, who heard what I said, said, "But no, we have a surprise for you, we have a surprise," and she shows me a plane ticket, "listen, we have to go for work, we have to go to Kenya. Raffaello – he was the head of the office – Raffaello, given that you have always, that for two years y have always done this photographic exhibition, would like to give you a present. Come to Kenya with us." I was struck, the first flight outside the world, you know, outside the world known to me, yes, some small trips to France, but I had never been to Africa, in sum, I leave and we arrive in Africa.

A beastly heat, we arrive in Nairobi at 11PM and the first thing I remember in Nairobi is this stink of manure, which I did not really dislike, I was born in the countryside thus I was raised with the smell of manure. This smell of manure persecuted me for two-three days, anyway we sleep the first night in Nairobi and the following day we leave for Mombasa, for the southern coast of Mombasa, almost at the border with Tanzania. I was supposed to stay for five days, the first three I was on holidays, a little bit of seaside, but a beastly heat, a sultry weather, I was not used to it, the big drops coming down on the right and the left.

On the third day they call me, by boss and this English multinational company, they call me and you know, "We need, we are falling behind, do you feel like doing a census of what different working groups have done so far? How much carpeting had they installed, how many rooms were ready, how many pieces of furniture..." And I began to work. The most wonderful thing was that in this construction site, because this hotel was increasing its capacity to 150 rooms, in this construction site we were five or six whites and there was this ocean, on the stairs, you know, there was this black ocean that went upstairs with a small white fly every once in awhile and this black ocean that came down with this small fly every once in awhile. I must tell you the truth, I am not a racist person, but the first days my stomach...but because of the novelty, a strange sensation, I had never seen so much black as in that moment.

In the evening we go to dinner and they say, there was also the owner of the multinational, we were having dinner, my sister prepares me and tells me, "When the waiter asks you something, you must tell him 'Yes please' if you want it and 'No please' if you don't." With this teaching...who remembered it? I did it that way, so he put it (on my plate] and I passed the evening. And the they told me, "Listen, do you feel like staying for a month, we need someone who stays for a month to organize an Italian group - because the furniture had been bought in Italy, in Tuscany -, because the kids are a little lost." When I said that the disabled have taught me, now I am know why [I said that]. With disabled people one must do everything in a schematic way, everything must be the same everyday, so nobody forgets anything, so there were these very big worktables and underneath them there were the pieces to be assembled.

So, I had called some African kids and had told with them through gestures that when ten pieces were lacking they had to put them back in, so the assembly line never stopped. The Italian kids assembled the piece and these kids replaced the pieces. There [the experienced with the disabled] helped me a lot, in sum, the fact is that from one month it became three, from three eight. They asked me to stay longer, so, after 15 days at home, it became five years. I had a very wonderful life, there I also met many...Italian friends few, but many friends, it was an hotel, many clients came even twice a year, mostly Germans and English, and we became friends, we became. And then they would invite me for drinks in the afternoon, in the meanwhile my English, with five words placed before, five in the middle, and then with a half-verb I managed to speak (sighs).

Then after five years my father began to be sick and I then thought I wanted to be in a place nearer him and then I am a person who every once in awhile needs to close the phases of her life and there they had offered me to manage the Italian restaurant, but in that period I had no intention of managing a restaurant, so I went back home, I went back to Rome and they proposed me to go to Albania, this was in August '92. I go back home from Africa in September '92, my boss and the multinational company ask me to go to Albania.

I say no first, but I must premise that I already knew Albania from the tales that my father told me because my father did two years and a half of his eight years of military service at the border between Greece and Albania on the Albanian side, and he remembers very well of all the itineraries he did on foot, so I already knew something about Albania. The fact is that at the beginning I am a bit uncertain, then I say ok, I am close enough to my home, if something happens to my father.

I go through Rome, always with my Fiat 127, they give me the ticket for the ferry, I load the car with canned beans, mortadella, flour, everything, because there was nothing at that time in Albania, in sum, I had the car loaded with food. I load the car on the ferry and at that time the ferries were run-down, the cars were in the parking on the upper level, there was no parking, it was a run-down ferry, there were only chairs to sit down.

I arrive in Albania, in this port where there were heaps of land, I don't know whether it was chrome, I cannot tell you, all those cranes, this port... I said, "Good God, they did the revolution last night!" And someone was supposed to wait for me there, but at that time the police did not let anyone enter the port. I didn't understand the language (smiles) and I find myself using gestures and words, I follow some cars of Albanians who were coming back after the exodus of '91 with washing machines, refrigerators in the trunk, above the trunk, there was everything and more in these cars and I follow them.

Every ten meters there was a military with a kalashnikov and the hat, and he stood there but did not look at me and said... “*çamçakiz* [bubble gum], *çamçakiz*...”

I did not understand anything, I got scare, ten meter farther down, “Cigarettes” another ten meters farther down, “*çamçakiz*, cigarette.”

I started to sweat for the entire port, which then was rather long because it began from the old port and they let you out only at the end of the port. There I meet this kid, this Albanian kid who spoke Italian and he practically took me to the office where we also lived and there there was a person who worked with me, and whom I knew, a person from Ferrara whom I knew and we stayed there, I worked...

In the meantime I traveled a lot in Albania, I went to Dhermi, Qeparo, Berat, which was very beautiful, we are talking of the beginning of '92 and the streets were empty, there was no car yet and in fact when I drove around town everyone looked at me with wide-opened eyes because I was the first woman they saw driving, with an Italian license plate, and then when I also got a dog, the dog in the car, they are all really shocked. I travelled a lot in Albania, and in fact I know Albania very well, and many remember me, when I travel to the south of Albania some of them still remembers me.

Anyway the company stays, it was still during the transition, it stays because it wanted to renovate some hotels in Albania, we are talking of Alp Tourist, the hotel in Vlora, Berat, Saranda... they were five hotels that the English Company was interested in renovating them, in renovating them and managing them. Come the elections, Sali Berisha wins, so we have the cancellation of all the agreements with foreign companies, everything canceled, in fact those horrible things are still there and have not been destroyed. The hotels are the same disgusting things. So the company, since it had already distributed little favors, the company decided to close, because it saw there was no chance to work in that sector

In that period I worked on a contract-basis, so I worked when the company called me. So, you know what? Waiting in Italy or waiting in Albania, as a matter of fact, I visit the country, I see this country well. Since the beginning I had good friends, because in Albania almost all spoke Italian, very good friends. I have excellent friends. To tell you the truth I met them in the only private restaurant back then, it opened in '92, it was called Taverna Tafaj, where they served local plates, lamb with *tavë kosi* [sour cream], these things all local plates, peppers with Giz, all this stuff. I leave the apartment, so I move away from the company and rent my own place.

That was the period, among other things, in which Italy sent aids, had already sent aids, the aids was in warehouses for a year. You could find parmesan for 200 Lek, it was nothing, what can I say, a piece of parmesan cost 1500 Lire, you could find it, in sum, we found a lot of stuff which had been sold, under Berisha, on the market: there was olive oil, there was everything, and through these friendships in the meantime, every once in awhile the company called me for two or three months, I don't know, they called me to go to Geneva to check an hotel, to Lyon, they called me to work everyone once in awhile.

There was no restaurant where you could eat Italian food, and I had a friend who was called Talina, her mother had illegally taken over the old ticket office at the center of Tirana, things were not settled yet, with people who had taken over illegally public places. Finally, what do I do? At that time I no

longer had the Fiat 127, I had bought a Regatta station wagon. My brother is a contractor and I knew that he had lots of construction material and in the premise there was room for six tables, there was only room for them, all close to each other. I go home, I load the car with what I need and take the ferry back to Albania, from Ancona to Durres, leave Durres port and get to Tirana and arrange the restaurant.

This restaurant with six table has been a good luck, why? It's not that I could find many things, but I could find meat, parmesan, of course, the one from the Italian aid, I could find oil, I begin to make tagliatelle, I had bought the machine, I made tagliatelle alla bolognese, gnocchi, always alla bolognese, or very simple sauces with tomatoes, la bolognese, rigatoni matriciana, with lots of onion and so on and I take off with this restaurant. It was always full in summer and winter. To get into the restaurant there was a staircase of eight nine steps, then there was a big balcony and there was a staircase that brings you to the other side. And then what did we do? I had closed this passage and in winter I would put a bottle of wine outside and patrons waited even for one hour to be seated.

It went well, then there were divergences with the partner, I left and... I opened another place and this too went well, and then I opened another one.

Part Two

[Question cut]

So, as I was saying, I split from the first restaurant, then I opened two more. The last one was near the lake of Tirana between the faculty of law and the national guard.

I would like to say that I remained in Albania eight years and I would like to explain why I stayed in Albania for eight years. I immediately liked Albania. First of all, people moved on foot only, and in the afternoon there was this tide of people that began at the museum, came down to the university, and then went up on the other side, practically they walked all this route, and it was beautiful. There were no cars, as I said, I was the only one who had a car, there were very few cars and people were curious, had such curiosity, because they knew almost everything about Italy, but they knew it only illegally, because they had to hide to watch TV, and they knew only through TV, but then the first tourists, the first internationals came, and people went crazy with curiosity.

Imagine that when I went there in '92, the Hotel Daiti, which I think now is closed, I don't know, perhaps they are renovating it, was not open to the public, when I went there, these people came in sleeveless t-shirts and slippers from the villages during the summer to see this hotel Daiti, where all the big shots used to go, it was incredible.

And then I saw Albania in its splendor, all those beautiful things, the sea, the sea is very beautiful, I mean, from Dhermi, you pass Saranda, you pass Vlora, you go along the southern coast, it is something splendid. The Museum of Berat, which unfortunately was looted in '97, and then looted again during the troubles of '98, but is very beautiful, with the works of Onufri, with that very beautiful Orthodox Church. In Fieri there is a monastery which has been now returned to the Orthodox monks, but they had made a restaurant of it, the church is very beautiful with frescoes, at the time of Enver Hoxha they used it as a granary, imagine. Thus, I saw the beautiful part of Albania. And the South is

exceptional, really exceptional, so much so that even now, when I go on vacation, I don't go to Italy, I go to the seaside in Albania, this year too I will go to Jala.

Ehm, the impression that I have of Albania, I stayed eight years, I was sorry to leave, later I will tell you why I left it to come to Kosovo. And I have many beautiful stories that I remember. It was the beginning, I did not know Albanian well and so the only words I had memorized through friendships were curse words. One day I was taking home...it was late, it was almost one in the morning and still the situation, you know, was not perfect and so I accompanied home....

[Interruption]

So, the first...the first words I learned in Albanian, as I was saying, were curse words.

I remember there is a very nice episode, I remember one night, taking home one of the kids because it was very late, on the old loop of Tirana, in Durres street, at the light, I had to turn left so, and there was a police checkpoint. I signal my turn, turn left and as I turn left, seeing well the Italian license plate, this police whistles. But he whistles when I had already tuned my car and I had already passed. I drop the kid off, turn around the loop, pass the bridge, when I hear this police car, it was a [Fiat] Tipo, or a Fiat Uno, *weh weh weh*, he makes me stop, he blocks me. Fortunately there was my partner in the car and one starts, one very thin one and one quite round, quite robust, he says, "Documenta, documenta." I give him the documents, and he says, "Why didn't you stop?" "Because my eyes are in my front and not my back." He begins to say something in Albanian etc. etc. etc. He keeps the car papers, my driver license and says, "Go." I say, "No, I am not going." He says, "*Ik, ik* [scram]." *Ik* means go. I answer, "You go, piece of shit. The other, the thin one, begins to laugh, laugh, laugh, I am talking of '93-'94. *Ik ti*The fact is that his one, very angry, became very red in his face, he wanted I don't know what he wanted to do, but the other takes my documents and puts them on the glove compartment of the car and says, "Shko, shko [Go]." This is one of the first stories with my Albanian, the first words I said in Albanian by myself, without any suggestions.

And then there is another episode, this is in '98. I am on vacation, my nephew Matteo had come to visit me, there was a Chilean friend, I and one of my waiters at the restaurant. We decide to go to the south of Albania, the road was not yet good like now, at Porto Palermo there was still a road made of big stones, it was not paved, etc. etc. We stopped a few times along the way, to drink a fruit juice, a cold beer, and I would always meet someone I knew. "Antonella, you too here? Bla bla bla bla bla." In the meantime, my Albanian was much better. You know, everywhere I met someone I knew and they begin to say, "You are the most famous person in Albania. You are the most famous person in Albania. You are the most famous person in Albania."

And we had, at one point a friend of mine had invited me, he was a OSCE observer in Gjirokaster, he had invited us, we had made the whole turn going along the southern coast, I had decided to go through Gjirokaster, Fier, Tirana. Ok, we stop there one day there. one night we arrive and he says, "If you want to rest stay here a moment and tonight we go to Livobona, we are going to eat there, it is a very beautiful place, there is a tree, a huge oak tree, so huge that seven, eight people cannot hug its trunk." Then they say, "Eh, you will meet someone you know even there." I said, "I swear I don't know this village, I am sure I don't know anybody, let's bet 100 thousand Lire." Ok, 100 thousand Lire. They were three, I was one. In sum, we arrive in this village blab la bla, we drink a good cold beer, we look at the there and at one point I hear someone says, "Antonella!" He was a priest, in this Muslim village, he had opened a church, he was a priest from Puglia, he was a client of mine, when he went to Puglia and

passed by Tirana he came to my restaurant. You know, I had to pay 300 thousand Lire to these three, you know, my bet. Next time I put on some moustache, I color my hair, I don't know what to do. But anyway we had a wonderful holiday, very beautiful.

I still go to Albania, as I said. I still have many friends, both Italian and Albanian, from Roberto Doja, Josita, when I go there I stay with Josita, she is like a sister for me. Let's go back to the fact, how did I come here from Albania? I had a very large clientele, in the meanwhile in Albania there were several international missions at that time, I am talking about '99, but many had completed their mission in Albania and had already moved to the missions [in Kosovo] after September, they had come here, to Kosovo, even before September, and every once in awhile they would come to close their project in Albania and would say, "Antonella, come on, come to Kosovo, come to Kosovo, come to Kosovo! We cannot eat there, there is nothing, we cannot eat, there is no food, there is no atmosphere, there is nothing, there is nothing."

And one morning I wake up and tell myself, "Bhe, why don't I go to Kosovo?" Let me premise that during the exodus from Kosovo we had hosted, my partner and I - we had a small tavern under our restaurant which was reserved for events such as birthdays and it was as big as the restaurant, with two bathrooms, it had everything to be self-sufficient -, we had hosted a family of 15 people from Prizren, practically two adults and the rest were children. So, Kosovo, "I know where they live, I may go to Kosovo. I stop by Xhema, the only man who accompanied all that family, I will ask him, and then I will go to Pristina."

In the meantime these friends had already reserved the hotel. I go to Kosovo, I go to visit how it is, I leave at 11 in the morning via Macedonia. They tell me, "No, don't go, there still are bombs, there are mines, you don't know what you will find." What do I find? I will find what I found in Albania, is it worse there after all these years? In sum, I leave, and go there I meet many friends and see whether I can find a place that is good for a restaurant.

In the meantime, however, there were some concerts, and I met some young Albanian singers such as Elton Deda and others and in fact during the day we were very often together. I come and go, either my partner or I. In 2000 I had to go back to Italy for surgery, in the meantime my partner came here, found a place for the restaurant and signed the contract, so in 2000 he did all the preparation. In the meantime, in Italy, I had bought all that was needed and in August... in June, this friend of mine came from Italy - I lost her last year - she helped me, so we took off, we cleaned up the place, we decorated it, we fixed it with posters, canvases, photos, we fixed the tables, decided how to display them, etc.etc.

I had brought some gas tanks, we had an external gas connection, the bombole were Italian and the gas came from Albania. We do...one Sunday we invited all the clients who were here in Kosovo and we invited them for a test, to see how we worked in the kitchen. I had also found the staff, large part of this family, which I had brought back, who had helped too. I had hired two three people from this family, I make this dinner, everything goes ok, the clients are happy the friends, the people are happy. Monday I begin and on Tuesday I ran out of gas, here we did not have gas yet, I go to Kukës, in Kukës there was gas but that type, not Kukës, Prizren, but that type of gas did not work in this system, in the meantime I also ran out of water....the evening, the restaurant open...

[Interruption]

Can I go?

The restaurant was very full, but there was no gas, no water, I offered an aperitive and I sent everybody home, then I brought the pipes inside, inside we managed to work very well.

I always stayed in touch with this family that we hosted in Tirana. When they arrived, I lived in a small apartment, the families here are very large, it was not like in Tirana, here families are very large. [In Tirana] they don't live all together like back then, the in-laws, the uncles, the relatives, the children, all of them, and my partner tells me - he had a small house like my apartment -, "You know, I am thinking of hosting a Kosovar family." But I said, "You have a small house, you are four, where are you going to put them? Where are you putting them?" I said, "Ilir, do you know what we do? We can shutdown the small tavern we have downstairs, and put them there and in fact that's what we did.

Some friends of the UNHCR gave us some cots, we gave the blankets, some gave us some money, some who had shops gave us clothes, we gave something else... breakfast, lunch and dinner, even the afternoon snacks for the children we provided, my partner Ilir and I. They stayed with us for three months.

They went back in June, in June we had a farewell party, there was also the Ambassador Marisa Lino. I invited all the Italian friends, in sum, all the friends. We had a BBQ in the garden and they went back. We rented a van, 800 Marks, they asked for that, there was no Euro, we payed for it. Then, before they left, because the Albanian state had allocated a sum for the family who hosted refugees. We never wanted this money, my partner took them to the office and practically we gave them that money and they they went back home.

I went back in November and I had surgery in December I went to see the family, I found them, they had no money for wood I left 300 Marks with them to buy wood. We have remained in touch with them, they also helped me very much when I opened the restaurant, they helped me a lot.

The experience of the war, we, in effect...we in Tirana heard the planes arrive from Italy when they went to bomb Serbia, because they passed and they flew very low. We heard wuuuu and the windows shake. When they came, for us it was as if they dropped the bombs over the Dajti hotel, because the windows shook and we heard *Boohh!*

They said, "No, they are are breaking the sound barrier," but it was not true at all, in my opinion it was not true, so we asked ourselves, then, I did not...I don't know whether at that time I agreed with this bombing... I don't know, I have been a little skeptical about the fact that Italy did well by bombing Serbia, but then, I am not a politician, but then I had serious doubts. I had very serious doubts.

Here I was shocked because... When I came here this entire area practically, there were practically many Serbs and many Turks, it was a mix of minorities, this area where the restaurant is was more Turkish, this restaurant, the owner is Turkish. In the main street and even there, there were many burned houses. They were saying that all the burned houses were Albanian houses, but they were Serbian houses, all Serbian houses were set on fire and none of the Albanian was touched, none, none. This hurt me a lot, the lies told at that moment hurt me a lot. They said, "You see, this was an Albanian house and they burned it down." At the end, after four years, I understood that those were all Serbian houses, all Serbian houses. There is one here that until it was rented, it is in small alley, a

small alley adjacent my restaurant, that house was rented, someone maybe had taken it illegally and had rented it to some internationals, when the tribunal gave back properties, to Serbs theirs and Albanians theirs, this house, which was a nice house, two storeys, a garden, they did not leave a window while, they threw stones and broke them all. So, who burned houses?

And in 2000 [2004], when they burned the church? I was here. That was another really dirty business. I am sorry, I must say this. At 7:30pm I hear some grenades, all the young people, nobody was at home, they were all outside. At 7:30pm I decide to close the restaurant, send all the kids home, until about midnight I stayed here. At 2am a call arrives from the Italian Embassy, they say, "Antonella, run, run there is a big fire, there is a big fire next to your restaurant." Before going back home, before midnight, I saw the priest run away with his daughter, fortunately the police pick them up and took them away. At 2am the Embassy calls, "Run run, there is a big fire." I come here alone, I take all the garbage cans, I fill them up with water because as the crow flies, this is an old house, as the crow flies it is two hundred meters from the church, and the bell tower was on fire, it was really a huge fire.

The police began to shoot and two...I saw several kids run. Two of them were from the neighborhood, all dressed in black, black t-shirt, black shoes, black pants, the jacket, not leather, what can I say, but that fake leather, black. One walked like this because he had taken a dum dum bullet in the leg, they were from the neighborhood.

These are the things of Kosovo, which I never liked, never. It is thirteen years I have been here, I never understood them. Never. Here there is no Serb left, they all left, they made so much pressure on them that they sold their houses for little money. This house here is a Serbian house. Until the other day it was illegally occupied by three families. It is ok by me, it is not a problem but...it is not nice.

I hope nobody is coming... do you get it? This is something I don't like of Kosovo, I never liked it. In Albania they did a revolution, they did everything, but they never did anything, anything. Only in '97 they looted, yes. In '97 I saw awful scenes near Fier, kids, some Roma kids, in Albania, with hand grenades, because people from Fier had a good time targeting them when they went to work in the fields, and they defended themselves. They did night time incursions, those people from Fier, with Mercedes. One night they burned 33 Mercedes, they burned, they never went any more, do you get it?

I now have been here in Kosovo for thirteen years, I no longer like to go back to Italy. I am fine there for fifteen, twenty days, I don't feel at home anymore, it is a completely different world. Here I go out, shop in the small shop, which is open from Monday to Sunday, next to my home. Children call me *teta* Antonella, which means Aunt Antonella, the whole neighborhood knows me. What would I do in Italy? On Saturday I would go to shop at the supermarket for the whole week, and then throw away half of the refrigerator, no, I don't feel at home there anymore.

My projects...I already said, it is perhaps ugly talk, but I have already said to my kids [the waiters], "Surely I will die here." The restaurant will be theirs because nobody from my family will come here from Italy, the walls are not mine but what is inside the restaurant is theirs, and they can do what they want with it. And they should bury me here, there is a very beautiful village near Prizren on the right side, yes, on the right side, between Prizren and Gjakova there is a very beautiful cemetery up in the mountains, a Catholic cemetery. I would also go to a Muslim cemetery, it is not a problem, no. They should bury me up there with a sheet, a simple coffin, and that's it.

So, I mean, I don't have big project. Yes, I would have the project to enlarge the restaurant, do something here, but here, I would do it here. This is... Maybe if tomorrow I am less lucid I would say, "I want to go somewhere else," I don't know, but for the time it's here. I also have so many friends, internationals, locals. When I go to Albania they say, "*Ti je Kosovarë?*" Are you a Kosovar? At the beginning here I was offended, they thought I was Serbian. I was walking around with a small hammer at night when I walked the dog, at the beginning, I thought, if they call me *Shki* again I will hit them in the teeth and knock them all. When I am here, they say, those who don't know me, "*Ti je Shqiparë?*" Are you Albanian? Because in their language there are many differences. In Albania they say *vezë*, here, at least my women, say, *vo*, it is their dialect. At the beginning I would say, "*Mori dy vezë* from the fridge," get me two eggs from the fridge, and they did not understand, *Vo*, so I.. *cococo* "Ah, *vezë?*" In Albania they say *drita* [electricity], here they say *rryma*. When I go to Albanian and talk to my friends, to Josita, I say, "*Nuk ka rryma?*" "*Rryma?*" "*Nuk ka drita.*"

There are some differences, but come on. I don't know Kosovo well, I travelled here less than in Albania, I did not travel much, I did not memorize the map of Kosovo, to tell you the truth I would not know where to go. I went to Deçan, Graçanica, I visited the museum, the house museum, I visited other places, but there isn't...these days I don't go out much, I don't know what are the new things. But come on, I am happy here, I have wonderful staff, if indeed something they are always present. I felt a great pain in my leg, I had herpes, the *fuoco di San Antonio*. On Saturday night I had not sleep, I called the chef at 6 in the morning, and he took me to the hospital and when I need them they are always present, here I am very well with them. Do you know?

I am lucky to know many politicians from the beginning. I remember when, at Steiner's home, when the first Parliament was formed, we began at 7:30 in the evening and ended at 4 in the morning. And then ok, I met many people, many politicians, the current president, the president of Kosovo now, she used to come when she was not president, but she is coming now as well, she came very often to this restaurant. And this is my experience. And as in any place, I close it now, I believe that first you must respect, even if you feel like at home, you must respect the mentality and the customs of the place, you know, which are not a burden for me, at all. There are plates I love very much, from *flija* or *burek*, I love them very much (laugh).

What else shall I say? I believe I said everything. If you want to know more, come when I will walk with a cane, I will talk... I am 57, come when I am 67 I will talk with my denture *ppappapa*, I will tell you more....(laugh)