

INTERVIEW WITH BARDH SALIHU

Pristina | Date: January 27, 2018

Duration: 16 minutes

Present:

1. Bardh Salihu (Speaker)
2. Lyra Limani (Interviewer)
3. Ermal Gashi (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.

Bardh Salihu: I'm Bardh Salihu, I work as a project manager in software, in the software industry. Yes, I was born in Pristina, I grew up for the most part in Pristina, I also had a few periods where with my family we lived abroad. I lived in the Netherlands about three years, in Albania... in America, I was an exchange student in high school, and then I went back to finish my masters. The past three years I am, meaning since 2014, back in Pristina. When I returned, in fact, to Pristina I managed Dit' e Nat' for about three years, Dit' e Nat' was in fact in the process of being closed down and so it just happened like that... that I had the opportunity to take it in my hands and during those three years I can say that I learned a lot about this country, I met the entire city because you know, there are so many layers, so many generations, many scenes, this city... is very complicated and I had the chance, you know, I've never felt more of a *prishtinali* than these past three years, and...

Now that, very interesting, it's been ten years since independence and it's making you think about all that has happened in the past ten years, what happened ten years before that, you know... everything... I'm really glad... this is why in fact I wanted to do this thing... this interview, because it is something I'm thinking about, it is something we're all thinking about... it's an interesting time in the whole world, you know, but here too it is a very interesting time right now and a good time to reflect, to look at everything that happened.

Lura Limani: Do you remember... were you in Pristina in the early 2000s?

Bardh Salihu: Yes in fact in '99 I was 13 years old and I always had this feeling that, "Hey, how was I not here exactly during... liberation..." you know, I wasn't here, we were in England as refugees at the time and we came in September I think, we returned, while this happened in June, in the summer, you know and... I always had this feeling, "*Kha*, how was I not here?" And you know, as if... FOMO [fear of missing out]... like fear of missing out. Plus, I was only 13 years old and how... 13 years old, I grew up in the '90s, it is very weird to try to understand those concepts of what liberation is, what independence is, what democracy is...

I remember, you know, being seven, eight years old and going out {raises his hands} "Democracy! Democracy!" I don't know what I was doing, but it was a lot of fun actually... to me at the time... I didn't know exactly what was happening. But I know that... when liberation happened, you know, we were watching the news, we were watching KFOR going in, we watched people crying, going crazy... and it definitely was a feeling... I felt like I missed that day and plus, I was jealous of people that were a bit older... my brother was 17-18 years old... they went out, had fun, we were kids, we had to come home at 9 PM, so it was a bit different as an experience. What I want to say is, when independence came in 2008 that was a feeling for me like, "Oh Yes! I finally have the opportunity..." you know... it's

like the second night of New Year's Eve now, the first night is spent with family, the second night you go out and lose it...

It was... I know... a very interesting time... it was very cold, I remember that thing, but we didn't notice it that much (smiles). I remember that it was a strange period because four-five days, or I don't know how many days, maybe a week, you know, the whole thing was being dragged, "Huh, did they declare it? Didn't they declare it? Did they declare it? Didn't they declare it? Oh, no they're declaring it today, no tomorrow, or..." I know that I think it was even February 15 when literally we all thought that this is the day, it's happening today. But it didn't happen, it didn't happen, it was like a sneeze when you try to sneeze, you try to sneeze and then oh, we sneezed suddenly... you know the 17th was...

I don't know man... I talked to some people before this interview, very few people remember exactly the whole day, you know? Yes, I know that for sure I kissed and hugged hundreds of people, and I danced with foreigners... Albanians, foreigners, this and that... it is a fact that I didn't kiss or hug a single Serb that day but... in fact, I didn't even think about that thing at the time, how the Serbs are feeling today, you know, very late did I start thinking about that thing, after it all calmed down... but that is also OK, I don't feel bad that maybe I thought or didn't think about this thing on that day. But now when I look back, I tried to put myself in their position a bit, how Serbs felt that day.. .and it isn't that I couldn't understand that in fact perhaps similarly we also felt, our community, in a much earlier time.

I remember that until five years ago, I had a reflex, when I saw an Albanian flag on top of a house roof for 0.3 seconds I had a, "Oh shit, this person is not normal, or he's entirely crazy, or he's very..." Because it is some kind of a reflex, because you didn't dare do that thing and now when I pass through Graçanica and I see the Serbian flag and I say, you know, I say, "Wow, do they feel the same as we did..." I don't know, it is something that I've started thinking about, but on that day to be honest I didn't think of it not even for a second, it was... we all felt that, phew... finally something that we have deserved and waited for so long happened, and you know there was no time on that day to think about anyone else.

Lura Limani: Do you remember what you did exactly or where you were?

Bardh Salihu: Yes... in fact during the day, hm...I don't know what day it was, I think it was something like the weekend... or something... I don't know, because I can't remember whether I had school, or something like that, I was in the fourth year of university at the time. It was a week, February 17 is a week before my birthday, so it was a week before I turned 22 years. That day I remember we were all watching television, more or less... it was such a quiet day because nobody was really out, nothing was happening. And... because, what I'm saying is that that thing was a development, it wasn't just that day. It wasn't like we got up and said, "Hey, today we will declare independence." It was something like five days, or I don't know how many days that we were glued to the television waiting, "Oh, what is happening, what is happening?" Yeah, that day we were watching television, it happened sometime in the afternoon if I'm not mistaken. And when it was all over, then I literally remember that not a single person stayed home, we were all out, you couldn't park your car anyway, and I went out with the car... I had taken my father's X5, you know... and I was with a male friend and a female friend, but I was dating another girl at the time... at the time... and it was a very strange situation because it was like, I don't know why I wasn't supposed to tell that I'm with another girl, but the other

girl and I had nothing going, do you understand? So that part was a bit complicated and I would like to erase it from that day.

Otherwise, together with that friend and the girl friend we cruised in the X5 like idiots, and you couldn't really drive anywhere because all the streets were blocked. So you would move forward 50 meters, would stop, got out and dance *valle* in the middle of the street, kissed and hugged whomever was there, got back in the car and continued to find another party. Literally, we hopped from one bar to another, going in, clinking glasses with everyone and continuing. All I can remember is that it was really cold, no? I don't know what temperature it was, but I have a feeling that it was extremely cold but people anyway... we all were outside... we all were having fun. It was great... in fact, it is very interesting that every year we celebrate "February 17, February 17" or any independence day, for example, America's was 200 and more years ago and they still celebrate it, go crazy... or the 100th anniversary of Albania, but we were all there that day, and that is what makes it very special. How many people can say that they were there, on that day when independence was declared?

Speaking of television earlier, I remember a very interesting thing. There was a girl there, when the representatives signed, she was collecting the signatures, she was a young girl with short hair, and she was on TV all day. The reason I remember her is because years later I had the chance to meet that girl and she was my colleague. Hana Bajrami is her name and she couldn't have been older than 19-20 years when she was doing that job in 2008. But I remember that I met her much later and I told her, "Excuse me, are you that, I think I know you from somewhere, are you the girl that was collecting signatures?" She said, "Yes." And it was a very interesting experience to meet her. Otherwise, the next three days, I don't remember at all. We really drank a lot, we all drank a lot that day. It was a bit... it was one of those days. Otherwise was it a Sunday, or is it... was it a Saturday, or does it just seem to me... because I have this feeling that it was a weekend.

Lura Limani: I have no idea... In fact, you said, that the independence was declared in the afternoon, it was actually declared exactly at 3:50, and I guess you were at home watching television?

Bardh Salihu: Yes, we all were... that is what I remember, we were a few days in fact, even a day before, it was surely a day before that it was gonna be declared, and, so it was a few days that the whole family was in front of the television, waiting...(laughs). Very interesting. Very interesting to go through this whole... because, for example now, in '99 twelve year-old, 22 in 2008, now I'm, I'm turning 32 and you can put everything that happened in place and see it from a somewhat different perspective, and in fact, all of us didn't have time... to deal with what happened. As a child I didn't really remember quite well what happened, I just read, fine... people told me the context so I could understand how it happened, but it is very strange for a child. And then for a 22 year old it's again completely different, you have some kind of *inat*, you have something like, you know... a completely different perspective, but then even now, you can really reflect and say, "Wow! What has happened?" And you can deal... because I think that in this respect all the people we're traumatized, all the people who went through the '90s, have some kind of ...

The thing is that for example we in Pristina, at least from my perspective this is how it was, we didn't feel like we had a lot of right to complain about what happened, because we went through that time very well, superb, no, no one killed anyone, or no... only one of my aunts' husband died after the war, you know, that's fine, people's entire families were massacred. There was some kind of a feeling that we survived super and that we had no reason to feel traumatized because we had it easier. But much

later something happened to me, in 2013-14, I went to Jerusalem with the school when I was doing a Masters in the US, we went to Jerusalem in a group and we went to the Holocaust museum, and normally that is a very terrible thing, it's a terrible experience, but when it ended, it lasted about an hour and a half, two hours, that I went through the whole museum, and when it was over I had an attack, some kind of a panic attack, you know and... I started crying like, not crying... I can't even explain it to you what sort of crying. And I couldn't stop. And my professor just asked me, "What's wrong?" And when she said, "What's wrong?" That was the... the whole situation became three times more intense... and the whole group had gathered, they were about 15 people, "What's wrong, what's wrong? Are you OK?" They were trying to help me, I couldn't even speak or breathe, but that's when for the first time I understood that hey, fine, maybe I had it easy, but that entire situation was very, very confusing for a child. And I think that we all feel like this: Serbs, Kosovars, Albanians too, you know even the Albanians from Albania have their own problems, and whoever lived through that time, whoever grew up during that time, you know, and it was...

But it is interesting, that finally after all of this time I can think a bit about what has happened, to put things in their place. I personally feel great, as a Kosovar, I feel very good, it's been ten years. I know we have problems, I know we have a lot of work to do... I know that we are very cynical and it is very difficult sometimes to see, you know, how we're gonna get out of this situation, but... we are good! We are good, we forget that we are good. People are prospering, people are forgetting that, you know, they are not suffering from anything anymore - we have everything. We all have the opportunities to do what we want and a thing that we take *for granted* [in English] the most... cause I don't know how to say that word in Albanian...

Lura Limani: For granted...

Bardh Salihu: For granted. It is the freedom that we're enjoying. We forget that we're one of the freest people even in the region, I can say at times. We have, yes, many problems but we are free. We are free, I can do whatever I want, I can, you know... I can say right now that Hashim Thaçi is an idiot. And that's fine because I'm free to say that thing. Do you understand? He's our president, but I can say that and nothing will happen to me. Nobody will be mad at me, nobody will even pay attention to me, let alone get mad at me. Because sometimes we're like, "You mean this?" "Yes," but we're forgetting how we suffered to come here. And sometimes people think that it's simply something we deserve and that it will be there forever. It won't... we had an experience when it wasn't there and... and sometimes I tell people, "Slow down *bre*, it is okay, it's great." But you know I... I don't know, maybe it comes with maturity, with age. But... I think that something could be done here... there's something to this people, we have a spark, some kind of a spirit that I don't know what it is, don't know what to call it, I don't know... But I hope, that we can have this conversation again after ten years and see.

Lura Limani: What will you do for the tenth anniversary?

Bardh Salihu: Pff... The first night with the family...

Lura Limani: (laughs)

Bardh Salihu: No, but yeah, most likely I'll spend it with the family, I don't know... it started to become too much right now.

Lura Limani: Maybe Rita Ora will come.

Bardh Salihu: Will she come? Is this happening? That would be nice. OK. No I don't know, no. That's what I wanted to say: I never celebrated the 17th again. I was there that day and I never know, it's the feeling that you can never replicate that feeling and if you were there that day, you can celebrate all day, but it's not the same thing. Maybe because of that, you made me think, I never really celebrated the 17th again because I was there on February 17, 2008. That was the real one. And that was that.

Lura Limani: OK, thank you very much.

Bardh Salihu: You're welcome.

