

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SAMIR SEZAIRI

Belgrade | Date: June 28, 2017

Duration: 100 minutes

Present:

1. Samir Sezairi (Speaker)
2. Marijana Toma (Interviewer)
3. Boris Sebez (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

Marijana Toma: We are starting with the interview, it's June 28, 2017. I would ask you to introduce yourself first, your name, last name, where were you born, your birthday and your birthplace?

Samir Sezairi: My name is Samir Sezairi, born on February 24, 1986 in Pristina, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Marijana Toma: Can you tell us something more about your family, that is, your family, your parents and in general about the place you were born in?

Samir Sezairi: My parents were also born in Kosovo. We were five family members at some point, that is, three children. It was my parents' idea to have as many children as possible and how to say, now we are three grown-ups who were born in '86, '89 and '99. So, one of my brothers has just turned eighteen and will enroll in the university.

My father and mother were born and lived in Kosovo, their parents did so as well. They originally come from a village in the region of Prizren. From a part of central Župa which is in the upper part of Prizren, a bit further from Dušanova, near the old monastery of Saint Archangel. So, this is something worth mentioning. My father has died, it's been three years since his death, but my mother is alive and she is a mother and a father to us. So, this is some of the general information about myself.

We lived in Pristina. I was born in Pristina and we lived there until '99, until the notorious bombings happened. At one moment, we moved to Skopje since my mother's family had been living there since the '60s. We had a small base there, how to say, we finished a part of our education there before moving to Belgrade. My father had always been on the move between Pristina and Belgrade, since '99.

Marijana Toma: Can you tell me something more about your family, your parents and their lives, their parents, I mean, about their families, considering that they come from the region of Prizren and you have an interesting last name. Can you tell me more about these circumstances?

Samir Sezairi: Ah yes, but our last names have changed, we have our history. I am one of those who wants to dig deeper into these things that are part of our family. In fact, we are speaking of a very, very poor region, where people were less educated, however concerning the origin, last names and the rest exists in the Church's books, because this was the only institution where people knowledgeable, who knew how to write so they documented.

Our last name is Sezairi and it comes from my grandfather or my great-grandfather whose name was Sezair. And all these last names are derived from the names of parents or people from the past, who among other things, have evolved. This is what I like to say because my last name was Sezairović until some time around the '60s, when they literally forced people from this region to shorten their last names, and Sezairi is a remain of Sezairović because people.... As I call them, the "Turkishized modern people," because somehow they were economically conditioned, in order to get employed and so on, so they shortened their last name.

In the '90s, people returned to their original last names. Even some from my family did so, except my father. He has four other brothers, and among them we are the only ones with the Sezairi last name. I didn't want, and I still don't want to change my last name because I am totally convinced that someone's last name is unimportant. What is important is what kind of human you are, this has always been my opinion.

Then, my parents met each other because they came here at a very early age and they visited that part that is very special, with an altitude of 1500-1600 meters. Generally, this was how they gathered during the summer. They were on a summer excursion and they met by total accident, even though their parents had known each other from before because among other things, people of my grandfather and my mother were from the same village and... In fact, they knew each other when they were children, then they met when they were twenty and simply decided to live together.

Marijana Toma: They met in Prizren, right?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, they met in Prizren. My mother is, my mother got an education in Skopje, she lived, actually she was born in Montenegro since my grandfather worked there. Due to the earthquake, they left Skopje in 1963. Since my mother was a little child in 1963, she was a few months old when they came to Skopje, but of course they went to visit their grandparents every year, they visited the village and that's where they met. So... my father was living in the village of his father, in Planjan, until he turned 18, then he got an education in Prizren and then became employed in Pristina. And we mainly lived...

As for me, I think I would never trade Pristina for anything. I try to explain these things to people all the time, but hadn't we went through what we went through... We really had no reason to move, and

Belgrade was only a tourism or shopping option because it was the biggest city of a big country like Serbia, respectively like The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was, this is... the only memory I have from Belgrade is when we went there like tourists, met friends and did shopping.

Otherwise, Pristina was an absolutely multicultural city with 300.000 inhabitants, everything was close, this is how I think of that city. I remember one story related to my friend, but it comes from the same perspective because it is a matter of a child's perspective, to me it seemed like an extremely big city, but now from the perspective of an adult who goes to visit it, because I often go and visit Kosovo and Metohija, which is like that, a city where everything is just close and you can walk through it in 15 minutes. But from a child's perspective, it was a very big and serious city. That's how it was back then.

Yes, Pristina now is a big city. The number of population has almost doubled if we compare it with the period of the year '99, but of course these are natural changes because people live in the biggest city and that is where the highest density of people exists, in the city that is the center of all the events. No matter whether Kosovo is independent or the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, that is the biggest city and the administrative center of that region.

Marijana Toma: Can you tell me about this now, you started speaking, in fact, how do you feel about Pristina today? You were born in '86?

Samir Sezairi: '86.

Marijana Toma: Right. You were three years old. Can you tell me something. First, in which part of Pristina did you live and can you tell us more about it, about your childhood, what did it look like and what are your impressions, do you remember stuff from their scent or color?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, we lived in the part of the city that is called Ulpiana, it is near the hospital, a new hospital that was very close, five minutes from our building, only the street or the boulevard was in between. My mother was always late for work, she worked at the hospital. This is the kind of syndrome, the closer you are, the later you get there. But, it was a really interesting childhood.

We had everything in our apartment, absolutely everything. I can remember, I have a visual memory and I would be able to tell you now who lived where. I know the names and last names and in which apartment they lived, I don't know, whether there were Serbs, Muslims or Turks, we had absolutely everything. We simply grew up with the idea that for us the presence of many cultures was exotic. As children, we didn't know, I mean politics and other things weren't interesting or important to us, we played with marbles, soccer or hide and seek and climbed trees. It was absolutely unimportant who we were with. To us, it was important to organize a kind of game and get along with each other. We could barely feel the discontent, to say conditionally... because, I mean, that was all passed on to us from our families. I remember the time when I went to school and it was divided. My school's name

was Dositej Obradović until '93 it was the elementary school Hasan Prishtina. The elementary school where I went, was divided, literally, we were divided. We didn't mix, there was no...

Marijana Toma: You mean with Albanians?

Samir Sezairi: I mean with Albanians and others. I mean, we didn't mix because they had their two floors, they had their own entrance and we had our floor and our entrance and there was simply no physical communication, up to '93, until that time, this school had a common name, and it was called Hasan Prishtina.

But I think that all the disagreements, respect and culture come from home [family] and it happened several times, not only several times, but simply the political situation started getting worse, the situation in Kosovo, and this was of course reflected on the youth as well, more specifically on children. This was something we didn't know about at that time. We were twelve-thirteen in '99, but there were many occasions when children fought with each other and we looked at it simply as an entertainment or simply this was something...

Marijana Toma: You are speaking about the children?

Samir Sezairi: Yes. Children between each other. But I think children got all that information from their homes. This is a big problem. Otherwise I am, my experience is positive in every meaning, because we were between two fires. We are simply undefined in that sense, I am Samir, I speak Serbian and I go to a Serbian school, maybe together with those whom we share the same religious beliefs with, but I don't share the traditions, customs and culture with them because that I got from the region where my people come from.

That was a historically Orthodox setting. There were mainly Orthodox living there and time after time, I don't know how to say, the acceptance of Islam and other things, people have changed... the structure of inhabitants has changed but there was always the part where Serbs and Muslims lived, for example, where a very specific language was spoken. This language was specific for the areas where only Serbs and Muslim lived and shared the same tradition, culture and customs, for example the Saint George's Day. These were not religious motives, they were customary motives at that time.

So, as children we were here but also there. In fact [I don't know] whether we were accepted here and there at the same time, but for me that experience is very valuable because for one moment I went through that kind of discontent and then I learned that I shouldn't because you shouldn't hate, it simply is not who you are, you have understanding for every human because everybody goes through some kind of suffering, pain, difficult experience.

I experienced the post-bombings '99. I wasn't in Pristina during the bombings. Luckily, I was in Skopje and I didn't get to go through all that trauma. At one moment, just across the street, in front of our building, some 20 meters from our apartment, since we lived on the first floor, there was a small shop that was a property of an Albanian, he always owned that shop, he had that shop even after the war.

The biggest mistake we made as children was not learning that language. From the perspective of a thirty-year-old, I think that the language is wealth, so I consider that to be my biggest mistake. My father learned it through working with them and he really knew it well, but he learned it out of necessity. We had the chance to learn it as children as well. I mean, we know up to twenty or thirty words but they are mainly for basic communication, but we had the chance to learn it better.

I simply think that the hate we have towards that language comes from this entire sequence of events, that Albanians are a bad nation, that they are unclean, that they are this and that. These are simply stereotypes without any foundation. And we, as children who stayed on the street the whole day, we embraced all this information, we simply were loaded against this language, even though we had the chance to learn it without any problem, just as they learned ours.

They made 90 percent of the population of the territory of Kosovo, most of the population of Pristina. Each salesman of every shop who might have had completed only four years of elementary school, or let's say, might have only completed elementary school, they knew and spoke Serbian enough to communicate, because they were traders and they needed it. But in fact, they made 90 percent of the population and they didn't need to learn it, but however, they did. So, that was our greatest mistake, the greatest mistake of that generation and the generations before mine. Let's say, those who came after us maybe they were very young, or are still young, but those who were born in '82, '83 or '80, especially those who were born up to '86, '87, they made a mistake by not learning the language, especially this particular language which is wealth.

From this perspective now, no matter whether it is Albanian or English. I think those in Kosovo are right to call it the language of the future, somehow this experience taught me not to divide people, since '99, I no longer divide people. I went out of my apartment and went to that shop without speaking a word in Albanian, because the relations and the population structure changed completely after the war.

I remember it as if it were yesterday, I have the photograph in my head of those open apartments. I am speaking about apartments that didn't belong to Albanians and people had moved from different places, from villages from the interior of the country and simply had settled into somebody else's apartments, slept on somebody else's beds and ate with spoons and plates of somebody they didn't know. Once I got into the shop, I was expecting everyone to get out and have the Albanian salesman telling me, "Samir, how can I help you?" In Serbian. I told him, "Look, we are moving, I need some big boxes to pack some stuff, as big as possible, I need to pack the books," because we had a mountain of

books at home and... he told me, "It is not a problem, I will prepare them for you." And I suddenly saw some young men gathering in front of the shop.

Because the boys who had used to live with us, those of them who lived in the same apartment building before the bombings, they knew me, I came... and suddenly, 20 young men gathered in front of the shop. The year '99 was the year of full anarchy in Kosovo and all those who spoke a single word in Serbian, no matter what word, no matter who they were, what was their name or their last name, Serbian language was enough for them to make you their target. Whether it was a target for murder or something else, but simply, the situation in '99 was such that whoever spoke Serbian, would face very serious problems.

And I told my Halim [the salesman], "Listen, I can't go home," I looked at my apartment which was 15 meters from the shop, but I couldn't get there. He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "These young men will beat me and who knows what is going to happen." He went out at that moment. I was looking at him putting his life in danger to defend me, and he walked me to the door of my apartment, literally, because those young men attacked me, "You are speaking Serbian, how come you are alive, what are you doing here, you who goes to school with Serbs?" They were triggered by the old inhabitants of that neighborhood.

But this experience taught me that there are unpleasant people everywhere. But Halil is the perfect positive example for me, who made me not consider all the negative things that I got to go through at that time. There are negative and positive examples, but I will only count the positive ones. I am lucky to meet positive people, magical people and I haven't had the bad luck of facing discontents anywhere. People from our region are known, they are people who never... I don't know who kidnapped them and where but I simply know that there are people who never returned, not some, but hundreds of people were kidnapped and they never returned, they were never found. Whether they were used for something, for other works, I am absolutely uniformed about that, but I know that those people never returned after those events. My younger brother who was born in '99 is also a story in itself.

Marijana Toma: I wanted to ask you about that, how did that go, considering that you mentioned that he was born in '99, after the bombings.

Samir Sezairi: He was 28 days old before the bombings began. My mother traveled since she was with us in Skopje, my father went to Belgrade, sorry, to Pristina since we had real estate. My grandmother, the mother of my father was in Kosovo, simply, when there was a family for which you should... My father had many Albanian friends who were very positive and were great people. He spoke the language beautifully. Simply, the situation in '99 was so specific that one stole someone else's apartment, people were forced to sell their properties for nothing. Luckily, in all that mess, we had friends who protected our property. Then my father spoke Albanian very well, that is why he often

went there freely...and my mother would go with him to Kosovo too. I remember her story, this is the time when she took my brother Damir with herself, that's my brother's name, Damir. They went out of the house and she told him, "Damir, now put your hand on the mouth, like this, until you get in the car." And he remembered that, and as they were getting out of the apartment he asked, "Mom, should I put my hand on the mouth now?"

This was the situation, but he didn't care. He is like that, he has no ties. He wants to go skiing in the mountains and if the weather is good he goes to visit our grandparents, but about Kosovo as such, he has no memories. Since when he was born, he was literally either in Skopje or in Belgrade. I tell him, "You are a classical *Beogradan*,¹ you literally have no connection to Kosovo." I said, "Those of us who are older, have," And I want to go there. Now that I am growing up, maturing, I want to visit Kosovo. Not Pristina, I absolutely have no feelings for that city. I don't... not even when I pass near our apartment...

Marijana Toma: Not even after the fact that you grew up there?

Samir Sezairi: That's true. No, I don't have that kind of feeling, it is as if I have never lived there. Maybe because we lived in Pristina then Skopje and then Belgrade. Then a few times we had that idea of moving to Australia. We were used to moving as children, maybe this is something you build from that kind of experience.

But no, I don't feel Pristina as such, I have no emotions towards that city in general. I have feelings for Prizren. Prizren is a special city for me. But Pristina... recently I passed by the building of our apartment, I went inside and spoke to some neighbors. I said, "I have lived just across the street," but it is absolutely the same, I mean, I don't have any feelings for that city.

Marijana Toma: Hmm... do you remember when you went to school, I will ask you about school now, I mean, you already spoke about the division, the division of the school. But did you have any friend, any Albanian friend in that school?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, I had some friends with whom we stayed in front of the building. Yes, I had some, I did.

Marijana Toma: How much do you remember, what did you play with, do you remember anything from that time?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, it was something specific, for example, with them. They were in a situation of fear. They were afraid. This was all because of the situation...

¹ Serb: *Beogradan*, born and raised in Belgrade.

Marijana Toma: Now you are speaking about the '80s and that...

Samir Sezairi: I am speaking about the '90s.

Marijana Toma: Yes, the '90s were the beginning of it.

Samir Sezairi: Before, you know, before... now... there was always a kind of division, for example we were also divided in the kindergarten. Let's say, we were divided. We went to kindergartens where Albanians never went. Same in elementary schools, there weren't, that is why we never had contact, we didn't have direct contact, only indirect. There was communication on the street or before or after school, but that direct communication with them we did not, but we socialized a bit in front of the apartment building. But these were two different experiences because... simply put, it has always been like 'us' and 'them'. Even though we made some attempts several times, but they were always a group on their own and this is something that made us have this division. This was a kind of construction. It was like that from childhood. O, o, o, {onomatopoeic}, these were my experiences from that time, from that time.

At a higher level, at the level of our parents this was really different because they were grown ups, serious people who above all were normal. I mean, you choose people who are at the same level as you, not just like that, but... we socialized, but it was somehow peripheral. It was mainly very superficial. They had their part. No, it wasn't divided with a wall like in Gaza where one group is supposed to play on one side and the other on the other side, but we simply didn't mix. We mainly didn't mix, even though there was no need for that, I consider, that we could have worked something out, I think that all the relations come from the family, somehow we carry them from our families, because somehow in my family, respectively in my family, now let's return to 2004-2005, when my brother was five or six, you know...

We never spoke about who was a Serb, Catholic, Albanian or I don't know *šiptar*.² Even though they call themselves *šiptar*, *šiptar*, this is how they call themselves, but if somebody calls them that, they take it as offensive. We never used that terminology, we still don't, whether they are *ustaš*,³ *četnik*⁴ or *šiptar*.

² The Serbian word for Albanian is *Albanci* or *Albanac*. In an attempt to distinguish between Albanians from Albania proper and those in Kosovo, they use *šiptar*, stemming from the Albanian word for Albanians, *Shqiptar*, for Kosovo Albanians. The word is considered derogatory by Albanians.

³ *Ustaša* commonly known as *ustashe*, was a Croatian fascist, racist, ultranationalist and terrorist organization, active, in its original form, between 1929 and 1945. Its members murdered hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Roma as well as political dissidents in Yugoslavia during Second World War.

⁴ Refers to members of the Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

Because when my brother was little, when he was playing in front of the building, he faced such situations, some five-six year olds told him, “But you are a *šiptar*,” or something like that. Not directly to him, but during the conversation. What was more interesting, he comes home and asks my mother, “Mom, what does *šiptar* mean?” How do you explain that to a five year old?

So there were no such things here, no, we simply didn’t have these things, for us it was absolutely normal. That is why I am saying that people bring this behavior from their homes, I mean, this what they reflect on their children, that is why they carry it on the streets with them, in front of the building, and then they pick people based on that... but the definition that for Albanians was, I use the term Albanians because I think, for me it is absolutely normal that they were different. As for the definition that they don’t work, they are unclean, they are different and so on... this was the definition, simply, and like that, children created that irrational hate towards someone or a child who is absolutely normal and with whom they were supposed to be friends.

Marijana Toma: Tell me now what do you now, you mentioned once that in principle you personally are more connected to Prizren than Pristina, even though you were born and raised there. I suppose you only went to Prizren on vacations to visit your grandmother and grandfather and I mean, what do you remember from that Prizren?

Samir Sezairi: Prizren... I love history and I can find that in Prizren. Prizren is the only city in Kosovo, let’s not count the monasteries and other buildings that you can also find elsewhere, simply, Prizren is an exception, the city has spirit. I mean, they all speak all the languages. These are things that make that city very special, because they speak the languages of each other and this is fascinating to me. The only city that has a river. I mean, a real river, it has Bistrica,⁵ which is a real river.

The city has cobblestones, it has its traditions, it has churches and mosques... I went there, my grandmother is there, the mother of my father, she used to live in the city of Prizren. Since she was a child of divorced parents, her father lived in a village in Prizren, then we went to visit her very often. We went there for Eid, for summer vacations and so I spent a lot of time in that city. I usually spent my summer vacations there, but I especially went there on weekends because we visited our grandmother and I really loved the summer in Prizren, because we used to swim in Bistrica. And when I think about it from this perspective, each time I go to Prizren I think, “Look at this little river, now it looks like a little stream.”

I remember my childhood, with the vision of a child, for me it was a kind of river because we used to swim in the river. In reality, it was a very small river... but since my origin is entirely from Prizren, I had the chance to notice the difference between people, people wearing traditional clothes, people selling stuff in the market coming from different places, from different cities. That culture of Prizren has been preserved in its totality, somehow. The city has broken the language barriers, this is Prizren. It is a city

⁵ *Bistrica* is the Serbian name for the *Lumbardhi* river, streaming through the city of Prizren.

where many... I don't know, Muslims and Gorani live there, no matter that they simply declare themselves as Bosnians.

However, this is all part of a folklore that triggers interest because of the political situation, because it is popular now in Kosovo to declare themselves as Bosnians because they consider it as a way where they can swim politically, even though we have no connection with Bosnia at all, we only share, let's say, religious moments, but we really have no connection with their language or their culture, but people declare themselves as Bosnians because such is the political moment, that they benefit from it themselves and for the group. It is absolutely legitimate. This is absolutely legitimate. Just like the Gorani have created a brand of their own, I call it a brand. This is a mountain region that is called Gora, but they are loyal citizens of a country, they respect the constitution and the law. As such, they are accepted as Gorani and this is absolutely legitimate.

But all of this, for example that interesting language, that mixture, the layers of this language, this is all unknown to me, we speak like this at home. We simply don't have a dialect, you go to the village and listen to people speaking another language and then you... this is a bit unpleasant from this perspective, you need to learn that language, but from the perspective of a child, they speak to you in a certain language, and you are coming from a city, from Pristina and this makes you important and you tell them, "Fine, but I don't understand you at all." In fact, you understand him, but he speaks differently.

So, these are some memories related to Prizren, and Prizren is a very lovely city to me. It is like this to me because I have many friends whom I still visit. I am such, I am a person, like I have told you in our telephone conversation, I want to visit some of the cultural monuments. No matter whether they are mosques, churches or other religious buildings, for me it is a respect paid to traditions and the culture of a nation, no matter which one it is. These are God's houses, doesn't matter whether we believe in God or not, or in which God we believe, but I really feel that, very honestly and with a lot of emotion, because...

One day, I took my mother with me, for the first time. I think that people fear the unknown. This is the biggest problem because they fear the unknown and this is what I love, I want to break those barriers and people should know, by knowing the culture, nation and the language, you really get to know the core of a nation and you expand your horizons, that is why I like to hang out with priests. I mean, when I say this it looks to me like you are going to say, "Samir, do you know, I have a very good friend in the monastery near Prizren, Saint Archangel, you know, it's near..."

Marijana Toma: Yes, yes, yes, I know.

Samir Sezairi: The place I am talking about is exactly in the upper part of Prizren, we have met recently. I go to his holidays. I mainly, I mean, I especially go to the monastery for his holiday, at

Mihajlo's, because I respect him, first I respect him because he is Mihajlo, then I don't know, because he is an Orthodox, then because he is a Serb, then because he is a priest. And, this is where the negative story about religious people breaks a little, when you meet one of them, so, a religious person who really believes in this, and on the other side you watch TV or something else, other people, other religious people, and then you form an opinion according to that, then you have to meet these people. But I am mentioning this Mihajlo a lot, I mention him because he is a positive example, even though he is a church person.

My relatives, especially my mother, were afraid, for example, "Why do we need to go inside a monastery?" I said, "Let's go to the monastery, I want you to meet a person." I did the same with my paternal uncle's daughter who was born in our village of origin. So the village is three kilometers away from there. My paternal uncle lives...

Marijana Toma: She had never been to that monastery?

Samir Sezairi: She had never been there even though she passes by it every day on her way to school, but she had never been there. I took her there for the first time and she said, "What are we looking for in the monastery?" I said, "We are going because I want you..." I said, "I want you to meet a person." Then we stayed there for dinner for about two hours so that she could understand... and her first sentence when we got in the car was, "Hey, but this Mihajlo is super." "Yes," I said, "Yes, Mihajlo is a human above all, so..." This was the experience of my mother who no longer has that, that...

She knows, since it is on the way, we have to pass by the highway, when you go out of Prizren you have to pass by the monastery in order to get to the village. I say, "We have to stop by at Mihajlo's, at least for five minutes," then I said, "Let's continue." We were together with Stefan, my friend, there were four of us, I remember it was May 1. Easter was connected to the holiday of May 1, then May 1 was connected to the Day of Saint George, and that was the time when we visited those at the church, then we went up to Gora, they have the traditional holiday of Saint George.

Then on May 1 we walked around, and at one moment Mihajlo told us, "What would you like to visit?" I said, "First we want to sleep high up at our's, in the mountains." I said, "Then we will wake up in the morning and come to the liturgy." I woke up first, of course, they were still sleeping. I said, "People, wait, you will be late, I mean, the liturgy is yours, because I am not forced, I mean, I should not even come with you, it is not a problem for me, but you will be late for your own ritual, for the liturgy."

Then we made it to the liturgy, a friend of my grandfather was with us, they were together in the military but he had converted to Catholicism in the meantime. A very respectful 83-year-old man. Then they went to the liturgy, Mihajlo was leading it that day and he told my Sava, my friend, "Where is Samir?" "We left him at the door of the monastery." "But why is he not coming in?" I didn't know how

to explain it to him now, doesn't he know which Samir I am? He said, "Call him because the liturgy starts now..." At that moment, they interrupted Mihajlo, who looks like an Obelisk. I mean, the definition of Mihajlo with his pepper-like nose, two meters tall, with his big hands, I mean, a real Obelisk. In short, the definition for him is that he is like an Obelisk. And he said, "Man, we cannot force the guy to come, you know that he is Samir, how can he assist in the liturgy." I have forgotten at all, I thought he was...

I visited this, these monasteries, I mentioned the monastery of the Upper Deçan, which to me is one of the most beautiful monasteries that I ever got the chance to see and visit, and I have visited many of them even in Serbia. Then, on our way back, Mihajlo called us, "People, return, I need the car," because we used his car since his car plates were KS, so that we wouldn't have any problems.

We returned and the four of us were stuck in the monastery. At some point, the phone rang and he told me, "I have to go Prizren to buy some stuff but I will leave you here," "That's not a problem," I said. I mean, I feel at home there and I act as if I was in my own home, absolutely. Then he went and the phone rang again, I picked it up and said, "The Monastery of Saint Archangel, Samir speaking to you." The person on the other side was shook, for five seconds. Then a woman spoke, I said, "Yes, please!" She was like, "Is this the monastery?" I said, "Yes, this is the monastery, Samir speaking to you, how can I help you?" "I need Mihajlo." I said, "Mihajlo is in Prizren, he will return in a few hours, do you have any message?" "I have to come from Kruševac." I said, "Mihajlo will call you back, don't worry."

After some time, a friend of mine called, he is also from Kosovo, from the Mitrovica of Kosovo. Alexander asked me, "Where are you?" I said, "We are in the monastery." He said, "What are you doing there?" "We are just staying, Mihajlo has left us alone." He said, "Careful man not to burn that centuries-old monastery, who left you alone to take care of the monastery?" And so I have some amazing, very amazing memories that connect me to Prizren in general.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, you have also mentioned it earlier, tell me about this, I can see that you really love history, tradition and so on. When did you notice this in yourself? During your studies or as a child?

Samir Sezairi: I was always interested in history. And I loved it very much even as a subject at school and when I enrolled in university I had no backup plan regarding political sciences which are social sciences where history is learned in a certain a way. But, when I became an adult, when I turned twenty, I no longer returned to the village because of the specific relations of my parents, simply of my father, and we went to Prizren but we didn't go to the village. We stopped going to the village only when I turned twenty and that is why people don't know us, they don't know us as somebody's children, they ask, "Whose are you, who is your grandfather, who is your father?" They don't even know my father, because he moved out of the village when he was 18, but we are connected through my grandfather, my uncles and so on.

Then I started going more often, I go there at least once a year, since when I turned twenty, I go there at least once a year. I am interested to see where we are, where does our last name Sezairi come from when it used to be Sezairević. Who is the very first ancestor of ours? Then I chronologically go back to our history and then I come to the situation about which we don't know much, we don't take those years into consideration much, we only go up to the 1870s ancestors. What was there before him. It is not important whether he was an Orthodox, Catholic or a Muslim who came here, we simply have absolutely no information and this and that is just because people didn't pay any attention to these things.

Because migrations were such, they were such that, for example the Orthodox Christians leave as soon as they finish school, they move to bigger cities, while they, and they are mainly educated, while for example people who, who used to, for example Muslims of our region, they were mainly workers, that region is known for working class people, people who worked in construction, gunsmiths, wall painters, workers of ceramic and so on...

Of course, they were always poor. They were really poor. They had many children... this is where the demographic situation changes, because some go and some remain in the meantime, those who remained had many children, that is why the percentage of the population changed. Until '95 it was eighty-twenty in favor of Muslims. The language and tradition is a kind of foundation for them and...

But this is who I am, when I go to the village I also visit the cemetery. My mother says, "You are not normal, people think that you are crazy." But I am interested in that, it is fine when you have the graves of your grandfather, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents there. This is where you can see the diversity of last names, how people changed their last names, I don't know, my grandfather and great-grandfather for example was Sezairović while my grandfather was Sezairi. On the other hand, my paternal uncle who died when he was a baby, for example, his last name was Senadović. This is a kind of fading of last names, how they change the last names for various reasons, that is why they have changed them so many times, but let's find our roots. Not only with the goal of finding out who we are now, simply, let's find out where we come from, what and how? And I found that chronology in the Upper Deçan, by absolute accident, there was the registration of the population that was done by Turks in 1571.

So, this is not present, we are working on this together and we are giving it shape by necessity and in accordance with the political situation, but this is the description coming from the registration of the population that was translated into Serbian. The Institute of History in Serbia that made three hundred copies of the book Registration of Population in the *Sanxhak* of Prizren, respectively, the District of Prizren. *Sanxhak* is the Serbian word for district.

I found them, I found them, they were there. The registration of population of the year 1571 for that district still exists, it shows where my people come from. Where people of Middle Župa come from, that was the village where my grandfather was born. The data was written in colors, red for Orthodox, green for Muslims – logically, green, I mean, we are green and purple for Catholics. In 1571 when the registration was conducted, the whole village and its surroundings were red, which means the Orthodox lived there. There are very interesting and precise explanations about who owed taxes to the state, who had grain, how many widows were there, how many unmarried people were there, so there were so many explanations about so many things but there were no explanations about the last names.

But there was Mihajlo Jovanov, from his father Jovan, after some time he had turned his last name into Jovanović, just like Mihajlo and Jovan, his brother as well, I don't know, Dušan and his sons Muhamed and Osman. There is an explanation for this that his children embraced Islam. Whether they were threatened by one side, or had privileges by the other side, because they didn't pay taxes and this way their life was easier, they were living in the city, these are different situations, then there are questions about why people chose to convert. In the meantime, the high rate of migration, then the expansion of the family forced people into these situations...

This is like in the movie, in fact, the book *The Knife* when the muezzin whose origin was Orthodox says, "Those who accepted Islam turned to Istanbul." He built a church for his parents in that place, while for himself and his descendants he built a mosque, I mean, he simply continued, he continued being in that family, but for his Catholic parents he built that [church] and for himself and his children, since he was now believing in this, he built a mosque for himself and his children.

But I am interested in that, I have an idea now. I have bought a new genealogy now and my idea is when I go next time to try to find an older person and dig as much as I can. Whether it is my grandfather or my great-grandfather, I want to dig as much as I can according to data on taxpayers, I want to find the name, last name, what they dealt with, what they worked, how tall were they, their weight, who they were married to. Then we will chronologically reach up to me and then carry it to the next generation because it has to start somewhere. Simply, if they didn't pay attention to it, and I believe that there are church books, we just need to find them and open them, of course there are books about the origin of that whole region, because registrations were made in church books. I believe that these church books have existed since when the villages have existed, that is logical. But, I will work on that this year, this is one of this year's tasks when I go there in the end of August, I will see and talk to someone and start digging the foundation, I will commit fully to it. But it depends until where I will be able to go.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, I will take you back to Pristina again, at the time before the war. Do you remember anything, you were little when the war began, you were twelve-thirteen and were living in Pristina. Let's say, your age protected you, but do you have anything that you can remember, how did

the news begin, was there any kind of news, what was the first news? How did you experience that? What are the first memories that something is wrong and the war will begin?

Samir Sezairi: For example, you were in Kosovo, you know the satellite plates there, now they are more modern like TV cables in the '90s like everywhere in Serbia, we had three TV channels. In Belgrade perhaps, let's say there were more, but we, we in Pristina had RTS 1, 2, 3 and TV Pristina. And this was our window into the world, no other. So, what was served on these channels, we believed it. Quote unquote, we believed it. Until the satellite television appeared, respectively satellite dishes.

And now you have normal parents, who have friends on both sides, who are not prejudiced, simply... I remember, I mean, I remember it as if it was today, a summer day, we had lunch at 4PM because my mother worked until 3PM, my father came from work at 4PM and it was known that lunch was at 4PM, news at 4PM. 4PM news at RTS as first and basic news.

Weather forecast, 32 degrees, it is warm, there are sporadic shootings, some shootings near Pristina, this is happening ten kilometers from you, the distance was like here to Zemun, approximately. It was that far, but nothing special. And we put on Deutsche Welle. You know, this was one of the sources of information, I don't know, another one from America, both in Serbian, and some news from Deutsche Welle, and you understand that the tanks, that there is serious shooting going on. We are having lunch, the weather is nice, we plan where to go at the seaside, I mean, this is something that is fixed in my memory.

Marijana Toma: Excuse me, is this '98 we are talking about?

Samir Sezairi: This is '98. Simply, people somewhere were living as if it was a dream, if they believed in any of these, then on the other side you have everything in *Deutsche Welle* with voice and photographs, then there was Voice of America, I think this was an evening at around 11:30PM, there was the news and my father always watched it at that time. We watched the news at 7:30PM in RTS where we listen to beautiful stories and then at 11:30PM he experiences it, "Wait, what is happening? This situation is not normal!" But watching the news at 4PM you eat lunch and plan your summer vacations, as if nothing was happening.

But this was true. This was a kind of experience, it was the same thing at the beginning of bombings. I thought they understood it, I thought my parents are making one another understand, and my dad was like, "Nothing will be of this, they are just threatening us a little", as if, she says, "*Aman*, man, they have announced it, I don't know where, on *Deutsche Welle* that the planes are going to fly tonight." "Nothing will come out of this." So you know, this is how the [NATO] bombardment caught us, how it caught me [unprepared].

Marijana Toma: You were in Pristina?

Samir Sezairi: It happened in the evening. I was little, I was in the fifth grade and I was playing outside. I remember we didn't go to school that day and I asked my mother, "Mom, I am hungry, give me food, I want to eat something," I sat down to eat, when the electricity suddenly went off at 7:30PM and a bomb made such a noise that it shook the whole building. And at that moment, you really understand that something really began.

Marijana Toma: What about the neighbors, did you notice anything. Since Ulpiana is near, and Albanians, Serbs and Muslims used to live there?

Samir Sezairi: Nothing specific happened before they began. I mean, that day was like an initial reaction towards something unbelievable that was happening, because we were there in the first week of the bombings. The first week and maybe the first ten days of bombings. Nothing happened, nothing spectacular took place until the moment of bombings, until they began.

The night of the bombings the situation was messy because of food, what was happening, let's buy this, we massively bought water, oil, sugar and flour and some other things, but when the first bomb was thrown, after that bomb everything changed, we were all lost, we were cut, the link was cut and it simply brought us to unbelievable situations. Nothing happened during the day. I mean, we can conditionally say that nothing happened.

We were children, the bombings began in the evening and then they dropped bombs day and night, but in the beginning we went out. Of course, Albanian children were locked at home, they didn't go out. Men didn't go out at all, no matter who they were, I mean, no matter whether they were Albanians or Serbs. Simply because they can deport you if you are an Albanian and if you are a Serb they can recruit you as a reserve soldier for the army. I remember that only mothers went out, my mother always went out to buy stuff, but this also changed at some point, I don't remember...

I don't remember anything, I simply got the feeling from a child's perspective. But my uncle lived in the building behind ours, he is a doctor and he told us, "Look, I don't want to stay here, I will go to Macedonia." And he said, "Come take some stuff." My mother told me, "I will go to my brother to take some stuff." I wanted to take a camera from him.

And I saw some jeeps coming in front of our apartment, people with masks, with masks and uniforms, with hats and they went inside the buildings. They heard us speaking Serbian, there was no problem, I mean we were children, how do children know what is happening. We took the camera and returned home. Then they asked, "What is happening?" I said, "I have no idea, I saw some people going inside the building," I don't remember if this was when they started taking people out of their apartments. I don't know that, but I remember a river of people going down the street, now the boulevard is in that street, back then there were two lanes coming from *Sunčani Breg* [Sunny Hill], from up there, of course

there were those people who had taken blankets with them, basic stuff and their children. They were leading them towards the train which would take them I don't know where, to the border with Macedonia or to the border with Albania. These are some things that I remember as if they happened today.

But up until the bombings began, my father was completely convinced that nothing will come out of this, he was convinced. I mean, even after the bombings ended, he is the utopian type who believed to a point, since we had the company that worked with glass windows, he was like, "Super, the bombings will end and then we will start working, there will be a lot of work." Because somebody understood it in a naïve way, of course we all went through war be it directly or indirectly and we knew that there was no turning back to the old times. I mean, there was no turning back to the old times and nothing even close to that. Of course, those who didn't go through that, they still have utopian moments. But it doesn't matter, everything will come to an end and we will all return home, we will start working on Monday, but there was nothing from work, all of that...

Part Two

Marijana Toma: You told me that you were in Pristina for seven days during the bombings. How did you decide to leave? I mean, what happened? Considering that your father thought that nothing was going to happen?

Samir Sezairi: We simply, we simply, the idea was that, that... on the first day of bombing. The bombing, I mean simply when you don't believe [the worst will happen] and it confronts you in the classical way. We were caught by the bombings, we could've fled way earlier but, "Will we flee or not?" We also had our grandparents who live in Skopje, we could avoid experiencing that moment. The bombings began and we made the decision to flee, to go to Skopje. I don't know whether it was the second or the third day of bombings when we arrived at the border but they turned us back.

Marijana Toma: Who? The police?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, the police. They turned us back. There was no human on the street. My mother with the thirty-day-old child, the two of us in the backseat, my father who literally came to take us to the border and returned to Pristina immediately. In the meantime, they were shooting at the Canyon of Kaçanik, they were shooting some police checkpoints and some tunnels. My father had some friends since he collaborated with the military airport, he had some friends from the military staff, they were like, "Don't go!" In the sense that if you insist so much, we will make it possible for you to arrive at the border with Macedonia.

We arrived at the border with Macedonia and that person took us near the border. There was no living man, it was like in American movies, literally like in Las Vegas where there is just grass and there are no living humans, nothing works and he told us, "You can't pass, you should pay an administrative tax in order to pass the borders," and he said, "You don't have that." "Where do we have to pay for it?" No one was working there, the country was in a state of emergency. Then, "No, no, you can't." When we returned, there were some paramilitary troops waiting in Kaçanik, I don't know, one of them turned the machine gun towards my father like, "Where are you going? You want to leave Kosovo while we stay here trying to protect it." And near him there was his wife who had just given birth, with her one month old baby, what do I say...

And we went through all of that, then returned to Pristina and at some point, I mean, now you have gotten me into memories, I remember how much my parents struggled, and they are so naïve, they are naïve. At some point, my father said, "There is another way to go to Skopje, via train." And we were like, "Yes, let's do it!" We, the children, had never took the train. Then he stayed in Pristina and took us to the train station, my mother's sister came with us together with her two children, my cousins and I sat on a wagon, there were seven or eight of us, eight with the little Damir, and the train took off. In the meantime, outside the train, outside the station in Kosovo Polje there was a crowd of people waiting...

We were in Kosovo Polje, in the train station and then we continued to Pristina to take some other travelers, at some point, a bunch of people came inside the train. The train was full of Albanians, mothers and children, who were sleeping in corridors, I mean, the crowd of people was so big that it was impossible to even reach the toilets. The train took off, we arrived in Lipjan and stopped there. It was dusk. At this moment I saw the houses on the side and everything else burning in flames. The train didn't move, nothing was happening. People were jumping off the train, the police forcibly turned them back. The train went to the border with Macedonia and then it stopped and we all jumped off. We are, I am telling you that my parents are very naïve, they thought that it was like when we used to go to Belgrade or Novi Sad and that our grandparents will be waiting for us in the train station in Skopje. The train stopped in the border with Macedonia and they said, "Get out!"

Marijana Toma: The police?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, the police. "Get out!" And they told us that we had to walk on the railway because everything around the railway was mined. My mother was holding her one-month-old baby while we were from nine to twelve-year-old children, my cousins were approximately the same age as us. The crowd of people walking on the railway. At some point we arrived at the border with Macedonia and they said that the police was theirs, they came from upstairs. They came walking on the railway and spoke to my mother who was holding the baby. My mother speaks Macedonian because she finished school in Macedonian, and they told her, "Lady, where to?" She said, "My brother and father are waiting for me." And they said, "Alright. You can come upstairs to warm up." It was March, I mean, it

was cold. He said, “Come upstairs to warm up, up in the police station.” She said, “But I have two other children.”

I mean, they consider us as little children who went through that, but from this perspective, a mother who was alone with three children, this must’ve been very difficult. My maternal aunt with her children joined us in the meantime. They continued calling us from the police station. My grandfather and uncle were waiting for us in the train station, this was the moment, we thought that we would go to the train station and they will wait for us there. They called them at home, “Do you know that your daughter is at the police station at the border?” Then they came with their car, we went in theirs and this is how we settled in Skopje.

Then in ‘99 we came to Belgrade because we thought of uniting here. My father realized that it was difficult to survive there in the economical aspect, it was impossible at the moment, my mother wasn’t working. I mean, she was working, she had a salary but not enough to fulfill the needs of three children two of which were still going to school, then there was the baby... the apartment rent. There were many demands around my father, he was working in Zemun so he remained in Belgrade but he traveled between Pristina and Belgrade. And then, we remained in Skopje from ‘99 to 2004. I know it looks traumatic but we were lucky, we were lucky because it was important that we had someone who spoke the languages, that was my mother who spoke Macedonian just the way she spoke Serbian, she had finished school there, she spoke Albanian just like she spoke Serbian, but I can say that others weren’t that lucky. That is why people ended up in camps, fifteen-twenty kilometers from Skopje and we lived in the center.

Most of them left Macedonia because they got visas to European places that accepted refugees. Then most of them returned again, thinking that they were returning to a holy land, to Kosovo. In the meantime they realized, I mean they were aware that it turned out worse. It turned out better for a few people but for most of those who were honest, had a difficult life because they were living in a non-established state, say whatever you want. But we had the chance to go to Australia, my mother’s maternal uncle has been living in Australia since ‘68 or ‘70, then two others went there during the ‘90s when the war broke in Bosnia.

Marijana Toma: Did they use to live in Kosovo?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, they lived in Kosovo but in the village. They lived in the mountains in Prizren, they left in the ‘90s when the war broke in Bosnia, that is when they left. I don’t know how but they filed a request and applied for visas, first they went to Bosnia and then the idea was to take the visa in Bosnia, so that’s what they did and then they moved to Australia. My mother wanted to do it, “I will go without you,” without my father, in the sense, “If you don’t want to go, I will go without you.” My father was strongly connected to my mother, he was a child of divorced parents that is why he was very connected to my mother. “I cannot leave our property, what are we going to do there?” Seen from this

perspective, nobody can take the walls. If you fix the papers, this is not important at all, but seen from his perspective, he struggled a lot, he worked a lot to provide a better life for us. I understand why he made the decision not to go. My mother couldn't decide to go with three children, especially with that little baby, very little.

If we went there in '99, we would have no problems, but then she applied in 2001. For her, this was a serious trauma. She was determined in that moment and she said, "If you don't want to come along, I will go with the children and you can come whenever you want. If you really want to come to Australia." In the meantime, the situation changed completely in 2001. We remained in Skopje, we had gained a kind of status, we were close to getting citizenship, but we had the status of the refugee.

So, Albanians returned to Kosovo in '99 and some Serbs came to Skopje as refugees at exactly the same time. My mother applied for the Australian visa. She couldn't stay any longer, simply. She applied for the Australian visa, my uncle sent the papers she needed and said, "You have the warranty in the paper, I don't know whether your application will be successful." Since she spoke English, she completed the form herself and explained everything in those papers but in those papers there was this question, "Tell us specifically why you cannot return to Kosovo and Metohija?" Specifically, not the general reasons. The fact that you speak or don't speak Serbian, why can't you go to Serbian schools, I mean these are general reasons... these are not specific reasons.

We were in a situation where we couldn't prove any specific reason of why we couldn't return, except the one that we cannot speak Serbian or go to Serbian schools and they were asking for specific reasons, "Why can't you return?" My mother's sister who was one year older than her didn't want to go to Australia, ever. My cousin is the Balkan prototype who says, "Speak Serbian so the whole world can understand you." Since he was in Macedonia too, he spoke Serbian there as well. I told him, "Man, you can't do it like this, you are disrespecting people." I mean, it is not Chinese, but even if it was Chinese, you should learn it at least for basic communication. I said, "Try to learn the basics for the sake of communication." "No, everybody understands me." "Yes, but..." I said, "You don't respect them." I mean, this is...

I want to go to Kosovo, with whatever I know, I know twenty words but I beautifully say them in Albanian, "Hello, see you and thank you very much!" Then for what I don't know, I apologize, this is all I know, but I show respect. Then they accept you, they understand that you respect them and there is nothing negative, the situation is alright. My mother filled the application for emigration visa. She said, "Let me fill it for you. It doesn't matter, we are going to try." But they required the specific reason with the emphasized question, "Specify why you can't return." The brother of my cousin worked for the police and his wife was shot in '99. I mean, she had some wounds. The woman was on the street, she was shot as she was getting into the car, but she survived. Fortunately, she had no injuries to vital organs.

And of course she told the police about it, they prepared the papers and they listed this as a specific reason. Because, I don't know, a member of our family was shot, or something like that. And now, when you apply for the Australian visa it is specific because if they call you, if they send you the email, I mean, when they send you the email they say, "We want to conduct an interview with you." I mean, I don't know whether there is one percent of cases that are denied after the interview. Even those who didn't want to go to Australia, eventually did go. And so, they have been living in Sydney since 2001. My mother went through serious trauma during those years because this negative response struck her badly. It was a negative response and then she applied five or six more times to go to Australia, and in the end we didn't go.

They are in Australia, they live a very good life, we meet with them every year or every second year when they come here. Differently from us, they still keep the tradition because my sister [cousin] got married two or three years ago and then my brother [cousin] and they said, "We will find them girls from our lands and then we will organize a wedding in Kosovo, in the south." They organized weddings and some cousins from Australia couldn't make it so they organized one wedding there and one in Australia for those who couldn't make it, so...

We came to Belgrade in 2004 by complete accident, and I think this was a good idea from my father. Because he was alone in Belgrade at that time, he had already created a kind of foundation for everything here. I came here in my third year, when I completed the third year of gymnasium,⁶ even though I really wanted to stay one more year. My sister came right after she completed the eighth grade, she completed the eighth grade in Skopje and then she came to Belgrade and enrolled in gymnasium. I wanted to stay there for one more year. Even though, seen from this perspective, I think that it was better that we decided like that because in one year I got to know the city and some people, it literally felt as if I had lived here forever, then I enrolled in the University without any problems adapting to the new setting. I had gone through that one year ago in high school.

Marijana Toma: In which gymnasium did you enroll?

Samir Sezairi: XII.

Marijana Toma: Aaaa, very good.

Samir Sezairi: XII Gymnasium, we are the third. Damir is the third generation in the family who completed the XII gymnasium.

Marijana Toma: Beautiful. Who taught you history?

⁶ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Samir Sezairi: Sonja Erceg.

Marijana Toma: E Erceg, good, she taught you?

Samir Sezairi: No, Sonja Erceg, yes, it was Sonja Erceg. I always had a one⁷ in her class in the first semester, even though I knew the subject for five.⁸ She would say it herself, “You know it for five but I can’t give you a five without you working to improve the one from the first semester, I can’t give you a better grade.” But I was interested in history and so...

Marijana Toma: Now tell me, so you come, I suppose that you live in Voždovac, right?

Samir Sezairi: We lived in the south boulevard. Because I was studying at the general gymnasium of Skopje. That is why it was specific for me because I had to find a general gymnasium and XII gymnasium was such, but it was also very, very near my house. In the meantime we went from Vračar to Voždovac, it was the same distance but in that year I was in a kind of a classical survival mode until I adapted to everything, because I had been going to school in Skopje which is very specific, with other people and I did sports, I had some benefits and then I came here to a class that was the best in school, not only was it the best class in the generation, but in the whole school, from grade one to four, the GPA of the class was 4.6.

Marijana Toma: How did that go? I mean, how did that look, how did they welcome you? You were coming from Skopje but however, your mother tongue was Serbian. How did it look to you? Did you have any kind of experience?

Samir Sezairi: For them it was special that a Macedonian had come.

Marijana Toma: (Incomp.)

Samir Sezairi: (Incomp.) I remember that a professor of Serbian language once told me, “What was your grade in Serbian language in Macedonia?” I said, “But I didn’t have a Serbian language class in Macedonia.”

Marijana Toma: (Incomp.)

Samir Sezairi: I came to a whole different school and I had a kind of aversion to Belgrade. I mainly had aversion to Belgrade but now I wouldn’t change it with any other place in the world, for me it is the most beautiful city in the world. I mean, I don’t mind migrating but Belgrade is the center of all of them to me.

⁷ Grade F on an A-F scale (Five-0)

⁸ Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0)

Marijana Toma: Why did you have that aversion?

Samir Sezairi: For some reason each time I came to Belgrade, something happened. I came to Belgrade from the seaside and ended up in the hospital, some sort of infection, some sort of... I came to Belgrade to relax for seven days and these things happened to me, ending up in the hospital and then little Damir would get sick... I don't know, something always happened and I can say that we had nothing positive about Belgrade until 2004. During my education in Skopje it was different, we had many friends and very good ones, I played volleyball in the school team and we got several awards that made it possible for us to compete in national competitions. And I never felt tired, my mother always says, "You played with some sort of charm," each time we speak about that story, "You always played more than you studied, you always played," it was true.

So, from high school I made a decision to spend time on my intellectual growth and go to university. I worked as much as it was needed to work. Then I found myself in a setting where they were all classic good students. And here it was a kind of... the professor called for answers and they all volunteered. I was shocked, I was like, "People what are you doing?" And the professor was like, "Is there anyone who would like to answer that?" And from 35 people that were there, eight of them raised their hand to answer. A friend of mine who was sitting before me said, "Don't you want to answer?" I said, "I think you are enough, why should I?" This was interesting. I only went to school, I didn't spend much time outside in Belgrade, trainings and home.

Marijana Toma: You practiced volleyball?

Samir Sezairi: I didn't keep a backpack for books, I kept it for my sneakers, the ball and... but I had left my friends and my crush behind in Skopje and then it was very difficult for me to adapt in the first six months. And all the friends that I had in elementary and high school were isolated because they didn't get along with people from other classes, they would always say, "Look they are crazy..." We call them *štreberi*,⁹ but for them it was something cute because I am someone new, a newcomer, "Where are you from?" "From Skopje." "What do you do?" Since my name is Samir, they try to make sense of things. I mean, people are informed more or less, because I have many people who still send me good wishes for Christmas and Easter and I regularly respond, "*Hristos se rodi, Vaistinu se rodi*," in their own language without any problem because I don't consider these things as provocations.

Because people don't think, people aren't prejudiced over such things, or they aren't interested in that part, that is why they send, "You are my friend, come over some time," and then you say, "I don't celebrate this." "*Auuu* {onomatopoetic}, I am so sorry, I didn't mean anything bad." But, in that school they had no problems until they started grading us and I got a poor grades... Because I was still

⁹ Serb: *Štreber*, nerd.

nostalgic for Skopje and my friends, that is why I got a one and my classmate, the girl I spoke about earlier told me, “Are you going to ruin the GPA of our class?” I said, “Excuse me?” As if...

Therefore, we started hanging out, we had something in common. Then there were the *štreberi* who started hanging out there, those who were athletes got together, but I didn't have anyone, I had no friends because I played basketball with them, I played with girls because boys were limited when it comes to sports. Among 35 students from my class, seven of them were boys, one of them was a dancer, the other was a cyclist and others didn't do anything. We didn't even have a soccer team, a girl from our class joined us once to fulfill the number required to create a team. We had 29 girls in class. At some point, one of them said, “I will be the goalkeeper if it is needed for the team of our class.”

So, now I mainly don't hang out with friends from school. I can say that I spent one year with them. We hang out. We go... two years ago was the tenth anniversary of our *matura*¹⁰ and my mother told me, “Why do you want to go to the tenth anniversary of *matura* when you only spent one year with them?” And then she added, “Aha!” I know why you are going. You want to see who is married and who is single.” I said, “Yes, mother. Now is the time to get to know each other deeply.” And that was why I decided to go. But, we hang out time after time because we have a kind of group, we go out for dinners with those who are in Belgrade, but I mainly have a completely different circle of friends, I mean, I am so happy when I see them, but it is not that we are close friends. One or two of them with whom I keep in touch...

I hang out with Stefan and Sava, these are my friends from Pristina. I mean, I have known Sava for 27-28 years now, but I met him at school, we were in the same school, our classes were close and I know that he knows that I am Samir, he knows me from Pristina but he cannot make the connection with Samir from Skopje, he doesn't have that and so on, we continued hanging out. So, my circle of friends is connected to that part of my education, the others are people with whom we discuss the same subjects and have the same interests.

Marijana Toma: You enrolled in university in 2006?

Samir Sezairi: 2005.

Marijana Toma: In 2005 you enrolled in university. Why did you choose political science?

Samir Sezairi: I have always been... I have always been disturbed by injustice.

Marijana Toma: In what sense?

¹⁰ *Maturë or Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

Samir Sezairi: Because for example in my family, my paternal uncle was a member of the Serbian delegation in Paris and Rambouillet in '99. He was a member of SPS [The Serbian Socialist Party] and we still admire each other. For me he is like a second father, since my father is not among us anymore, and we never speak about politics.

Each time we speak about politics, we always have different opinions and then fight because of that and then we don't speak for almost two weeks and then, "Listen, you have your opinions. I respect that because of different reasons, it doesn't matter." I really try to respect people's opinions, be they political or religious, I try to respect them. This is why we have some fights, some explosions. But I have loved watching the news since when I was a child... Ihaa, you have taken me back to those things of '99 when you watch the news at 4PM and then later you watch the total opposite of that on another channel, on another program, on another television.

You feel it deeply that someone has to go through such an injustice. That is what I am talking about, because we are collateral damage of a wrong politics. All of us who lived in Kosovo are damaged from that politics. If the politics were different and more just, everything would work differently, because they had been working for centuries.

Marijana Toma: (Incomp.)

Samir Sezairi: In that way. Then I was interested in political science, I was attracted by its social aspect, I mean, by democracy, I always respected democracy very much. I never allowed myself to have problems because I am Samir. I think that is something valuable, why we are different and I will never allow this to make me feel less. People say, "You should try more, this and that..." But I don't care about that because I have never given the chance to anyone to say that I am less valuable because I am different. To me, that is not a problem at all. We say...

There is an interesting anecdote from politics if I am allowed to tell it, because I am a member of the Council in the Assembly of the Municipality of Vračar from the Democratic Party. And now we were approving the budget for 2016, the chair of the Assembly, in fact the deputy mayor is from Kosovo, a member of the council from Kosovo, of course, a christian orthodox. The director of an enterprise is from Kosovo, a member of DSS, the only one from Kosovo and I am a member of the council in DSS from Kosovo. And now as we were sitting in our seats in the Council, my microphone had been activated.

We were approving the budget and the chair of the Assembly said, "Congratulations everyone! We approved the budget for 2016, thank you for voting!" And now I said something with myself, I said, "We gave Kosovo to Albanians and you cannot approve the budget." Since the microphone was active, there were also media and all the other groups there, they turned to me and I said, "Yes, that is a big

truth because if it wasn't for the six of us from Kosovo, you," I said, "You wouldn't even be able to approve the budget in Vračar."

But when we look at the arguments whether you are an Albanian or a *ćetnik* or an *ustaš*, or a Croat, or Muslim, whatever you are, people cannot say anything to you because of that because it doesn't touch you. Because there is the definition for Kosovo, no matter whether you are a Serb, Albanian, Muslim or whatever, I mean, those who came to Serbia in '99, they were all *šiptar*. Stop people, how can my Sava be a *šiptar*, in the sense that they celebrate the same holidays, you know, this is how they say, "See, the *šiptar* from Kosovo came." "OK, we are *šiptar* from Kosovo? Then we will be *šiptar* from Kosovo who vote in Vračar, no problem."

When you challenge these arguments, people can no longer hold on to them. Because they will notice that you are educated and that this will be a value or this cannot be a weakness in which they can attack you. The argument of where we come from was challenged from the beginning and I didn't have that problem, so how to say...

Marijana Toma: Tell me, how was studying in Belgrade for you? I mean, you mentioned that those who came here in '99 often faced obstacles, I mean, they faced a kind of resistance. You came from Skopje and enrolled in the School of Political Sciences, which is one of the most prestigious schools in Belgrade. People who belong to the elite study there. How does it seem to you, to say conditionally, without considering that you had one year to adapt, because you were an outsider?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, but in university I never went through that, I never went through that discontent because I am... somehow, in a way it was, "Uaaa, he is from Kosovo." And then you can play with the sentiment, "Uaa, we come from the South, you know, it is difficult for us," and so on, and so on, but somehow I can say that we had an advantage, maybe. Because our professors were educated and they had experience with people from different regions, that is why...

And when they ask, "Aha because you come from that region?" As if they mean from a village, they simply couldn't make sense of it, but I wasn't impressed by that. I mean, in university, there were many people from my generation from Novi Pazar and other cities from Croatia and Bosnia, but the dose of division didn't exist. There were no divisions in society either... maybe this is from my perspective, maybe I have a different perspective, but for me it was great, we were all coming from somewhere but we got along, I myself didn't make the difference either.

Let me say it again, I got this from my family. This is my problem. But this was not a kind of anomaly, so to say, sometimes I used it as an advantage to gain points or a higher grade with my emotions and love for Kosovo. But I have also tried to transfer this to my sister and brother. That is why we don't have that kind of feeling.

Maybe it was easier for Damir, because he tried to walk in everyone's shoes, so to say, but so did my sister, even though since her name is Sabrina, it is easier for her because this is an universal name. My name is Samir, but I had an explanation for it because when I was working... It mainly happened at work, when I was working in a state company and rented business spaces. Once some people came from the public enterprise and we talked, I have no accent, or at least I think so and we talked about what we had to do and so on and they asked, "What's your name?" I said, "Samir," and they...I said, "But it doesn't matter because my name has evolved with time from Sava to Samir." So, when you joke about that, you kill the mood, you kill the moment for them to say, "Look now, his name is Samir," or stuff like that.

My director had issues with me because... she is married to a Muslim and it often happened to, let's say, I wanted to take a break, now this was a specific state company. I say, "I am on leave from Monday." And she says, "You cannot go on leave." I mean, of course I am allowed everything, this is a dosage of good relations that we had that I used in front of the clients who came to rent something, they aren't unknown to us, I say, "You do this to me intentionally and you are ignoring me on national and religious grounds." And people who are around feel uncomfortable when they hear that, "Look what she is doing to them." She is married to a Muslim, all the same she treats him like that and pretends she celebrates all the holidays. And she says, "He is stupid, he does this just to embarrass me in front of the clients," and so on...

So, I am always the one who uses the argument of differences, I mean, I use this as an advantage and not as a shortcoming, and this has always proven successful for me. Because I have never had a negative experience, in general I never had negative life experiences in Serbia. And in this emotional moment, I always find a very honest and open way to say things. If we have problems of that type in the beginning, then it is better not to enter any kind of relationship, because the energy, struggle and emotion that I will invest on that, I don't want them to say to me after three months, "Look, we have problems."

I mean, each one of us knows what they want and what their families have taught them, whether their families are religious or not, how much they accept differences and so on. But let's be honest, we can get along and we can even be friends, yes, we can visit each other and say good words for each other's holidays, but if we cannot build this kind of emotional relationship, then it is better not to do it and destroy the friendship that can be honest. So, I had this kind of experience, but I am a very honest type of person and I know that later this won't hurt me. When you develop feelings for someone, in this case, after three, four or six months as if... That is why I said, especially these last years, "People, be honest with yourselves." I mean, first with yourselves and then with the others, but it is important to be honest with yourselves first. Can you do that or not? If not, let's try, we cannot guarantee that something in life will last forever, but it depends from us. If you cannot do that, then why try.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, what do you do now?

Samir Sezairi: Now I work for an Austrian insurance company, it is called Uniqa Group. Since I have finished political science, my only tool is speaking and I like this kind of work in the insurance company. I work in the sales department and I cannot complain, for me it is great. For example, I love Vračar because it is special like that, even though I am not from Belgrade and I am registered in Vračar, my ID card says Vračar and this is... I am a member of the council here, simply I feel good emotionally in Vračar for many reasons, and I decided to work here. My office is here in Vračar, people who work here are normal. Now I don't know whether this is an advantage, but Vračar is the most expensive, the wealthiest, the most educated and this is something that attracts you, especially the fact that people here are normal.

And here in this street where we are right now, this is my electoral unit and I know the people. I have a habit, when I pass by a building I ring the bell and ask who they have voted for, whether they have voted for me, or just simply ask them, "Are you alive?" When I pass by here and park on the other side of the street, here in Krunska, I always go by this couple's, they were like my most loyal voters. I would just call them and ask, for as long as the man was alive, "Tomislav, are you alive?" And he would be like, "I am, I am, come over for a sip of *raki*."¹¹ I would say, "I cannot right now, I was just passing by," I would say, "I will come another time."

I don't do favorites, I always maintain good communication. I love to talk to people working in the market, I know the problems of people starting from those who work in the market selling fruits and vegetables to those cleaning the streets. For example, they are very nice, you can talk to them, I don't do favorites, I simply don't, it doesn't matter whether you are the mayor or just someone who works for bread. That is why I always stop and talk to them, I ask them about their salaries or when can they take their leaves. People greet me on the street. This is Vračar, this is what makes Vračar special, that is why I love it, I really love it because everything here is somehow...

Marijana Toma: Where did that idea come from? I mean, how did you come to the decision to engage in politics? I am interested in that now. Why did you do that?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, all the stories about Kosovo and the desperation is where the idea came from. The fact that I enrolled in the School of Political Science proved that somehow if you want to change something, you have to engage in politics. This certain moment has to do with the energy that for example Zoran Đinđić had when he was a member of the Democratic Party and as a person who really, honestly tried to take this country forward, as a role model for the youth, lost politics of the '90s and all those wars, the inflation, I have no idea, the refugees who were coming from Croatia to Kosovo, with whom we maintained some relations, some of them worked for the hospital where my mother worked... I think about all the honest and good people. Serbs from Croatia, the statistics have shown that they were the most educated people in all of Yugoslavia.

¹¹ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

And this is what set me in that direction. It didn't trigger me, it somehow, I always wanted to be part of all of these processes and the Democratic Party was a logical choice for me, because of all the values it had, democracy, opportunities for the people, respect towards the diversity of minorities and all of this came together in 2006 when I became a member without having any doubt. In the game of accident, how to say, the son of a family friend was a member of the Democratic Party, he is older than me and he was in Vračar. This is at the core of how I ended up in the Democratic Party in Vračar and I can say that I never regretted this, not even now when there are more political alternatives. And when the Democratic Party was near a census, a census, I am always pro... I am saying this because I have no benefits from that.

I mean, I absolutely have no material interest or any other satisfaction because I really believe in their idea, in the ideology and I believe in the local politics. I never liked dealing with central politics because the central politics has no real approach to the citizens. And the politics of this level are extremely interesting because you are in touch with the citizens just like I am talking to you right now. And you can decide to solve people's problems from this level, but if you have no access to them, you no longer have time for them and feel extremely high and important.

And from this level, you can call Tomislav and ask him, "Are you alive, are you fine?" "I am, where are you, come over for *raki*." Then he asks you, "Do you need anything?" I need parking, since there is none in front of my apartment or the elevator doesn't work, or the façade is bad or children go to school that has no surveillance. These are real problems of the people and you can solve these from this level. You cannot employ anyone, but you can fulfill their basic needs for a better quality life that fall in the domain of the municipality. But the most important thing is that you have to communicate directly.

Marijana Toma: We are slowly approaching the end, I would really like to ask you two more questions. If you have something else to share with us, which maybe didn't tackle with my questions. I am interested, you mentioned before that one of the reasons for getting into politics was Kosovo.

Samir Sezairi: Yes.

Marijana Toma: How much do you remember it now? What is Kosovo to you now?

Samir Sezairi: Yes... I have no emotions, no sentiments towards Kosovo of that time, in the sense of... I have had... I have had the opinion that those who live in the South, because my paternal uncles and many cousins of mine live in Kosovo. I would like them to live a normal and quality life. Whether that place is called Kosovo or the Autonomous Province or whether it will become a third state, I really don't... all I care about is them having a quality life. Because when you stop and think, this is essence, and this has to happen eventually.

I was in Kosovo three years ago, I was in Pristina in the municipality, I needed to go to the Municipality to get some papers from Kosovo regarding some property that we have inherited from my father. I took the cab from the bus station, from the roundabout near the bus station. I took the bus from Prizren to Pristina. I entered the car and told him, "Hello!" And he looked at me, he was old, around fifty, then I said, "Take me to the Municipality," in Serbian. One thing was not clear to him. I said, "I don't know any other word in Albanian, if you could take me there please." He said, "That's alright," and then we continued talking about something, I told him, "How beautiful this Kosovo of yours is."

Of course I provoked him. He said, "What do you mean by beautiful?" "Yes, beautiful." I said, "There are no Serbs nor Muslims anymore." I said, "Now you are independent." And he said, "I can say something with deep honesty, Kosovo would work better if they were here," he said, "When Serbs were here, there was order and rule of law, we knew why we had to pay taxes, we knew where we spent our salaries," he said, "and now, nothing is known, a part of the nation lives very well while the others only survive."

I asked him, "Where were you in the '90s?" He said, "I lived in Switzerland. I went to Switzerland in the early '90s." He said, "I came to Kosovo in '99 thinking that now it was becoming a state." Many people returned from those countries because they thought that now they have a state, an independent state who will finally be granted all the rights that it had been denied. In the meantime, their life was not better, I mean, it became more difficult than it used to be. I am not saying that not, I mean, they were oppressed, but they still are.

They have a kind of agreement line when it comes to big things, if they have decided to boycott the institutions, the state and everything, they all support them. I mean, here there is no such unity for big things, I think that our people have disgusted us all with the entire Kosovo issue. I mean, all the moments when their mouth was full of Kosovo and when there was patriotism, but they had never been in Kosovo and had never seen it...

There was a fascinating moment, I am returning to the religious buildings again. I was in Gračanica, in the monastery and through the frescoes the names Ana, Pera, Zika '93 written, in the entrance, where the frescoes are, I don't know whether you have gotten the chance to see them. Just pay attention to them when you go there, if you don't respect your people, how can you expect respect in return, you should respect your tradition. But people, I think, and those who lived in the same Kosovo after '99, most of them lived better after '99 than they used to live before '99. There is a bunch of people who I know that are living in northern Kosovo, they had their apartments in Belgrade but they took double the salary there and the additions for children and so on, some bonuses and benefits and their mouths were full of Kosovo. So...

Then you experience it, you listen to that and then go and literally look at it and say stop, what about those in the South? Northern Mitrovica, Zvečan, alright, the state is not indirectly but directly connected to that part of Kosovo, but what is happening down there in Gračanica, Štrpce, Serbian enclaves, people don't have food to eat. And you have those who speak about Kosovo all the time and leave that amount of money... One million Deutsche Marks went to Kosovo every day until '99, every day they deposited money in the Central Bank of Kosovo. And you speak about Kosovo all the time. On the other hand, hmmm, even those who lived in the South, they are also part of...

As a municipality, as the Municipality of Vračar we kept the accounts three years ago, two years ago in Lipjan. Until '99, Lipjan was a monoethnic city where only Serbs used to live. The elementary school Karl Petar, I think that was its name, it had 250 students and no calculators. We sent them ten, three or four laptops and seven or eight desktops for calculations and they served us lunch. The parallel structure, the imagined life, a life that people live... the Serbian mayor of Lipjan served us lunch in Gračanica, I was there too and together with us was also a man of my age, maybe a little older, from the region of Gračanica. And I asked him, as if I knew where everything is geographically, "Where are you from?" He said, "From Lower Gušterice." Or something like that. I asked him, you know, a logical following question, "What do you have when it comes to property? Have you sold anything?" He said, "Yes, I have sold a parcel, I sold some of my property." I asked, "For what price?" He said, "300.000 Euro."

Now I am thinking that he could buy three, four, five, six apartments in Belgrade with 300.000 euros and he could rent them out and make a living out of the rent and have a pleasant life, that is what I was thinking. I asked him, "What have you done with all that money?" He said, "Nothing, I gambled." He said, "I am in a 20.000-euro-deep debt." Then I said only this, even though I was seeing him for the first time, I said, "You are stupid, you are an idiot." I said, "That wasn't your property, that was the property of your descendants." I will never sell my property, my property is in Kosovo and I will never sell it. Only in case I will need it for medicine for any kind of investment. In fact, I would first buy a car, but I was never interested in that...

Marijana Toma: Alright, if you have something that you remembered in the meantime that I haven't asked you, or take your time to think before we close the interview. I might have one or two additional questions for which I got inspired by what we just talked. You talked about how certain people talk about Kosovo all the time and nobody does anything specific or have never been there. Considering that you studied at the time when difficult political events took place, events related to Kosovo and that you belong to a generation that remembers Kosovo, but you still have a kind of specific connection to it... How much do you remember that time of Kosovo and does it relate to your circle of people in any way, how do people in your circle comment on it even though they haven't experienced it directly, they aren't connected to Kosovo, in fact they look and remember Kosovo or maybe they don't even remember it at all?

Samir Sezairi: Yes, that's true, I have the best examples to illustrate that, I always have the best examples because I take them to Kosovo because that is the real experience. What we learned from TV and see... that is an alternative, then, I don't know, they hear somewhere that a bomb exploded in Northern Mitrovica or that shootings are heard in Northern Mitrovica or I don't know. According to a definition, we accept it that this was done by Albanians for example.

We accept it according to the definition and that is where everything ends, it ends on TV and then nobody questions that there is a fight between some families because of property, things have to be defined, those were the Jovanović and the Petrović families, and people perceive it the way it is shown on the TV. As if such things happened between Albanians, as if Serbs were attacking them again. I don't say that it didn't happen, but if it did, this is a lie that has been repeated so many times that it sounds like it is the truth.

Marijana Toma: (Incomp.)

Samir Sezairi: And so this gets clearer when you go there and see Kosovo yourself.

Marijana Toma: Where do you go when you take people to Kosovo?

Samir Sezairi: I take them to Prizren first.

Marijana Toma: (Incomp.)

Samir Sezairi: To me, my foundation is in Prizren. I went there with my friend, three or four years ago there were the three of us, Sava, Stefan and I, who are from Kosovo, we had different points of view. In essence they are similar, but we all had our own points of view, this is normal. And the fourth, who was with us, he is from here but with a Russian origin, he had never been to Kosovo before.

He is three or four years older than me and he was a deputy at that time, he said, "I want to go there, take me with you." "No problem at all, we will arrange that," and then the fear of the conversation with his parents, because our families are friends. Then his mother said, "When you went to Kosovo, I didn't sleep for those five nights, I thought that something would happen to you, someone would do you harm."

I think that nothing happened, but we met different people and we returned with an absolutely positive experience. They went in the field and got to see the real values of Kosovo and when they see it now, they have their own verified story that the mosque of Sinan Pasha was built with the stones of Saint Archangel and they say, "This is very good, however, this is history and we are not to be blamed for it, we should respect it. Somebody else has built it, but we respect it nevertheless."

And when we sit in Pristina with the deputy ambassador, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, the boy who is 35-36 years old, with a very wide intellectual background, who speaks Serbian as if he was from Belgrade and when I ask him, because I knew him, he used to own a coffee shop in Pristina, the one that was covered in comics. I asked him, "Sorry, I would like to ask you, how did you learn Serbian so beautifully?" "But," he says, "I grew up with the comics of the *Politika* [The Politics] newspaper."

Marijana Toma: What's his name?

Samir Sezairi: No, I have forgotten it now. I mean, I have his number saved somewhere in my phone, but he speaks Serbian perfectly. His father is a lawyer, his mother worked at the National Library or at the Museum of Kosovo. But you stay in that Pristina after so many years, you park the car with BG plates in the city center, in the public parking and nobody says anything, you order a drink. These are the stories that we should carry with ourselves, not the ones that you cannot go there or that you cannot speak Serbian there, or that you cannot go to Dubrovnik because something can happen to you even there.

Nothing ever happened to me. That is maybe because I am not a person who carries negative energy and I don't provoke people in any way, but simply, the experience is different from those who carry negative energy, we have the tendency to only carry negative things, in case we don't like anyone, then we say nothing positive.

I could also say, because I haven't been living in Kosovo since '99 and even though I speak Serbian and I go to school in Serbian language, that is why Albanians defend me, but now I am returning to the beginning of the story of Halil and I will say it again, he is the best human who showed his true colors in the most difficult moments, he put himself in danger because of me. That Albanian is truly a great human being and this is when everything else fades, everyone can carry these personal experiences. When you listen that a muezzin is corrupted and a thief and when you see that a priest is driving a BMW or an Audi and has a castle where the people of the church go for entertainment, then you go and see it yourself, you get to know it, you will say, "People stop, what you are saying is absolutely not true."

Marijana Toma: You once said a sentence, and I would really like to end it here, you said it within a sentence, when you were telling me the story about when you moved to Belgrade from Skopje and for Belgrade... this was very interesting to me, considering the fact that you lived in all those places and in every occasion you say that you are not a *beogradan* and now you are not... You have lived in Skopje, you have also lived in Pristina, you said that your relations with Pristina are not compared to the relations with any other city, how can Pristina be more important, where is your home now?

Samir Sezairi: Belgrade is my home and I am from Kosovo. It is true, honestly. I always say it, I never said that I am from Belgrade. If somebody asks me, maybe from the way I speak or look, my looks show that I am not from Vranje or any other place, with all due respect for all the people and cities, but Belgrade is the biggest city, events take place here, big changes take place here and of course, the fashion changes and every other change starts from Belgrade, but I always say that I feel that I am from Kosovo. This is the truth, I live in Vračar and I come from Kosovo.

Marijana Toma: Super, thank you very much, Samir.

Samir Sezairi: Nothing. Thank you!