

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH OLGA GUCIĆ

Janjevo | Date: June 19, 2019

Duration: 37 minutes

Present:

1. Olga Gucić (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (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.

Anita Susuri: What do you remember from your childhood?

Olga Gucić: My childhood consisted of a lot of events. There were around four thousand residents in Janjevo back then, 1,700 were pupils. We worked in three shifts. I often think how many children, a whole classroom consisted of my generation in my neighborhood. So, we lived a modest life, we socialized, we helped our parents. Every house in Janjevo at the time was also a small workshop because, back then, a lot was produced in Janjevo. Forks, spoons and countless items. Everything that circulated in the former Yugoslavia, those toys for kids were produced in Janjevo.

So when we were little around seven, eight years old, we were included in the production. We helped our parents and provided for ourselves. We lived off work, it was honest work. So, we had time to help, time for school and for play. Often, I remember what it was like during the night, we would gather, a lot of children, all kinds of games, you would hear voices all around, they sang, they played, what can I say.

Anita Susuri: Tell us more about your family life.

Olga Gucić: I was born into a family that had many members, I'm the tenth child, I have a younger brother, we are eleven children. Seven sisters, four brothers, two of my brothers died, one of them was nine years old, the other one was two, when they died. My parent's story, back then health services were hard to get, and all of that they provided, but good, they provided them for one of my brothers. And at that time, the '50s, medicine and injections came from America. So even then, people helped each other and so on. My childhood, I didn't have much, but I was happy and satisfied. Our mother was a good cook, now what do I know, if we had a *pite*¹ in front of us, we were happy, we...

There were no tables, we used a *sofra*². We would all sit on the floor, gather around the *sofra*, whatever, we would split everything and eat. We didn't have sweets, there weren't any southern fruits, but there were a lot of fruits in Janjevo. I once counted them, there were around 15-16 kinds of pears. Pears...

¹ A phyllo dough based pie that could be filled with meat, cheese etc.

² Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

And now you go and buy one in the market, and I don't know... You can't compare them to those from 30-40 years ago, here in Janjevo. And not only in Janjevo, I think it was like this everywhere.

Anita Susuri: Tell us more about your house, what did it look like...

Olga Gucić: Well, how do I know, my brother is the sixth generation, my brother's son who lives in my house. The house has Turkish-style architecture, it has a *çardak*³, the stairs, the columns, like they say, all of these. If you want, so in the old language of Janjevo, which we speak when we're together, we talk, we converse. This the Turkish word, *llaf*, to converse. We talk, so... The house is, I don't know, for me, holy.

Anita Susuri: What was it like to live in Janjevo during that period of time?

Olga Gucić: Janjevo... And now often when I travel, I meet people and immediately tell them I'm from Janjevo, that I'm Croatian. I know how people talk, Albanians, Serbians and Turks, how they remember Janjevo. I, myself, those big emotions, that, that I can't express what I feel about my house, about Janjevo, about every street, about every alley in Janjevo, and especially about the church. The church had kept us here for many years, so we're close.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember what was it like when you went to church as a kid?

Olga Gucić: Back then there were five masses a week, five. There was the mass for the elderly people in the morning, then the mass for children, the church was full. Children went to school from the first grade to eighth grade. So back then there were only the children. And I don't know, I think I can't explain this with words, now when I remember my childhood, everything that was here, all the beauty that is left behind, the ruins, they're not behind us but... People from Janjevo still live, but they're not in Janjevo, they're in Croatia, and everywhere in the world, but people from Janjevo are only in Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: What did your father do, and what was it like for men back then? Did they go out to the *çarshi*, what did the women do?

Olga Gucić: My father worked at the Metalac factory in the foundry. So, my mother was a housewife but she also handcrafted. She had a loom, and we have traditional clothing, so with the *boshqe*⁴ that were needed, back then they used to... I saw them in the museum in Pristina also, they weren't only in Janjevo, they had them in other places in Kosovo also. They prepared them for the deceased, my mother did those, they had sheets and pillows, and those were used since birth, so since the child was

³ A covered space located in the first floors of the dwellings, mainly above the porch – *hajat*. This area may be open, surrounded with timber columns and fences, or semi-closed with timber skeleton and windows. The English translation of *çardak* is gallery.

⁴ Embroidered fabric.

born, they prepared those compresses, those sheets, like blankets today. The ones for children to cover, I have those in the house that remain. And how they say, they handcrafted till death that, so they have, how do I say, they provided for themselves.

We had our traditional clothes, *dimijat*⁵, and everything was produced here. They worked together, our women, Croats, there were also Turkish women who helped, they also made part of the clothes. So the women got paid to work, so...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember anyone who wore those clothes?

Olga Gucić: Yes, until recently, I still have them, each one of us, the young and the old had their traditional clothes at home.

Anita Susuri: Until when, I mean, did they stop wearing those clothes... What year?

Olga Gucić: Well... 30 years ago, when the war in Croatia started, when our people traveled to Croatia, then everything... The war between Serbs and Croatia, everything changed.

Anita Susuri: You went to school here at the church... Was the school there?

Olga Gucić: No, no, that's an old school which was burned, the newer one, that's where I went.

Anita Susuri: For how many years did you go there?

Olga Gucić: Eight years, from first to eighth grade.

Anita Susuri: What was it like growing up in Janjevo?

Olga Gucić: The classrooms were big, 40 students in each class, three students sat at the same table. They worked three shifts, but I don't know, it feels like everything was different... In Janjevo you didn't need preschool, kindergarten or anything, every family was for itself. I had an older sister. She would take care of me while doing her homework. I learned and prepared for school near her. I finished high school in Lipjan...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember, were there any activities in Janjevo, a library or something?

Olga Gucić: There was a library, the library was big, we had our own basketball, football club, and everything, there were activities for young people, like this.

⁵ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

Anita Susuri: Where was that library?

Olga Gucić: The library was part of the school, then there was the post office, children went there. They worked in three shifts back then.

Anita Susuri: In the library?

Olga Gucić: Not the library, the school worked in three shifts, since it couldn't fit all the children, and the classrooms were placed where the post office is now. There was another building there, over by the post office there was a big library.

Anita Susuri: Does that building still exist?

Olga Gucić: Yes, the post office building exists, but the building where we went to school, the cultural center, near the cultural center there was another building, it doesn't exist anymore, it was demolished.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever go to the culture center, were there any, I hear that there were movies and...

Olga Gucić: Yes, there were movies, there was a cinema. Also singers from Serbia, Croatia and all of ex-Yugoslavia came there. There was a ball every Sunday, so they came from other places also, not just from Janjevo...

Anita Susuri: Did you also go, how, how was...

Olga Gucić: I went, but I wasn't involved (laughs) actively, but like, Christmas, Easter...

Anita Susuri: You told me that you went to Lipjan?

Olga Gucić: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What was it like, traveling from Janjevo?

Olga Gucić: We had a school bus, so... My generation, twelve of us finished high school in Lipjan, and we were around two hundred in total and...

Anita Susuri: Tell me more about this, your youth, what was it like back then?

Olga Gucić: What was it like... you can't explain it with words, there was no Internet, there was nothing but there was everything. Young people socialized, whoever had a gramophone, that's where they played music, we listen to it. Families gathered at home, whoever had a TV, watched TV shows and things, so.... Life was poorer but happier. We socialized a lot, it really was like that, there were always weddings and baptisms and all of these, and all of this was a special happiness. You would get ready to go from one celebration to another, always, the roads were always clean. Every Saturday everyone cleaned in front of their house. They sang and I don't know... Every Sunday people went to *korzo*,⁶ the hill over Janjevo, Gllama, there were only youngsters there in the afternoon.

St. George's Day was the same, there were special preparations. For us, during the night of St. George's, there was a *rifana*,⁷ and usually the girl who was engaged prepared it. She would invite her friends, and her family...

Anita Susuri: Tell me about wedding traditions. How are weddings...

Olga Gucić: Weddings, the wedding would start... [door opens]... First it was... [long pause] engagement, arrangement that, this is an old tradition of Janjevo. After that, they agreed to the wedding. The wedding would start on Thursday, then Sunday, Monday. At home, the wedding was held at home, they married on Sunday at the church. After that, the groom and the bride would each go back to their houses, in the afternoon, the people who were celebrating would gather and would go to take the bride. There was music all over Janjevo, they went to take the bride, because in the afternoon they brought the bride home, and so on.

Anita Susuri: Were there any special preparations for the bride?

Olga Gucić: Well yes, there was special clothing for brides. Then the parents of the bride brought her presents...

Antoneta Gucić: Excuse me, do you want some coffee?

Anita Susuri: No, no thank you.

Olga Gucić: [addresses Antoneta Gucić] Don't interrupt us anymore... So her parents would prepare gifts which she brought, like this. It was...

Anita Susuri: After high school, did you continue your studies or...

⁶ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

⁷ Fun, party.

Olga Gucić: Yes, I graduated from the Faculty of Education in 2000, so I worked, I worked in Pristina in a bank until the war, and in Lipjan.

Anita Susuri: When did you start working?

Olga Gucić: I started working in '87.

Anita Susuri: In Pristina?

Olga Gucić: I started in Pristina, in a bank, bank...

Anita Susuri: You traveled or?

Olga Gucić: I traveled, I traveled...

Anita Susuri: What was it like back then?

Olga Gucić: The transport was the same as today, buses would go to Janjevo 15 times a day. There was a direct line, Janjevo-Pristina, which didn't go to Lipjan, and it was much easier. So, people who worked in Pristina would travel. I think I was the only woman in Janjevo who traveled to Pristina at that time, so...

Anita Susuri: In Janjevo, at that time, did women, girls go to school?

Olga Gucić: Not many. There were women, but not many.

Anita Susuri: How many were there in your generation?

Olga Gucić: There were five women in my generation. They all moved, they all live in Zagreb, they have children and everything...

Anita Susuri: Why was it like that?

Olga Gucić: I don't know, we had... We had our job, I told you in the beginning, every house had a workshop, so our people worked all over ex-Yugoslavia, in every place they had their market stall where they sold their products. So neither women nor men got an education.

Anita Susuri: What was it like the first time you traveled to Pristina?

Olga Gucić: Well, when I went there for the first time, seven years after I finished high school, I told myself, “I forgot how to write, let alone work on something, I’ll just go see how it is, so I’ll have a clear conscience and I won’t work.” But for me, the best day was my first day of work. They were so welcoming, I had a Turkish co-worker, Nashida Zijabeg, Slobodan Medić was my boss, there was Mirvete, she was there, she worked there. You can’t pick them apart, you can’t say, “This one is Albanian, this one is Turkish, this one is Serbian,” and all of this, back then we lived, I was the only Croatian in that building. We were 70 workers back then.

Anita Susuri: What was Pristina like back then?

Olga Gucić: Much more beautiful...

Anita Susuri: Can you describe it a little, how were...

Olga Gucić: I can only describe the center of Pristina. Maybe you experienced that also, the road with the trees, with trees and everything. It’s too bad they were cut.

Anita Susuri: In the center?

Olga Gucić: Yes, in the center. The traffic wasn’t the same as now, the boulevard and everything. But it was something like, the break was at 9:30 for everyone I think. You go, you left work, you went and bought breakfast, and you would come back to work happy, like this.

Anita Susuri: How many years did you work in Pristina?

Olga Gucić: I worked in Pristina for four years, then I worked in Lipjan. I have 15 years' work experience in banks.

Anita Susuri: You always traveled?

Olga Gucić: I always traveled, always.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us a little more, has anything interesting happened to you while you worked in the bank?

Olga Gucić: I can only say two words, that I didn’t have even five minutes of problems in all those years, that no one had ever said anything to me, no one has ever treated me badly, I traveled freely. I was waiting for a bus, maybe the imam from Janjevo passed by there, or someone else, they would stop and take me to Janjevo. So, it was the same way with Serbs...

Anita Susuri: What was the bazaar like in Janjevo at that time?

Olga Gucić: Eh, the bazaar was a real bazaar. Now when you pass through there, there's not one, back then it was full of life. There were many butcher shops, whoever came there to eat dinner or, Janjevo's sausages, kebab, and all of these.

Anita Susuri: Did only men go out in the bazaar, or women, too?

Olga Gucić: No, more, men went out more, women would gather on the streets, so they had their places. Everyone in front of their house, five-six women would come, gather, like this.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us more about the culture in Janjevo?

Olga Gucić: (exhales) There's a lot to be said, I don't know, I think that we have lost everything our elders created. Culture was number one, you didn't dare hurt anyone, or rob anyone, or lie to anyone. They had their vineyards in which they worked. All of these hills, now they're empty, they were all harvested. There were peaches that you couldn't find anywhere else, only in Janjevo. We had *praska*, a kind of peach. And often, when I met people who lived around Janjevo, they all remember what kind of fruits Janjevo had. *Rakia*,⁸ grapes, wine and all of these. Because they had basements in Janjevo, everybody, so the people around Janjevo were supplied from here.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the time when the way of life (coughs) started to change in Janjevo?

Olga Gucić: Gradually everything came to Janjevo, like everywhere else. We started having electrical energy, water, TV and everything, it all came gradually, but families protected themselves, it was a priority. Nothing dirty passed on to the families, so, but since the war and on...

Anita Susuri: What was it like in Janjevo during the war?

Olga Gucić: During the war? Not a single bullet was shot, we were all together there, back then they didn't talk in Albanian anywhere, Albanian was spoken in Janjevo, Albanians and Croats went out freely, the military which came there had no problems. If there was something secretive going on and I didn't know, really but...

Anita Susuri: When Croats started leaving from here, did you feel?

Olga Gucić: I was hard. You had to experience it to be able to describe it, I can't do it with words. I just know that I suffered a lot and that it was very hard, but today I can accept it. I know they're all alive,

⁸ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

none of them died, women weren't raped, no one was killed, or anything, I know where they are. And that from, every day a family would leave, Janjevo was emptying...

Anita Susuri: When did you start working at this school?

Olga Gucić: I've worked at this school since 2000.

Anita Susuri: So after the war?

Olga Gucić: After the war.

Anita Susuri: And what has changed, what is like now, what was it like in that period in Janjevo, so after the war, was everything normal, or was it different?

Olga Gucić: We always had good relationships here in Janjevo. Albanians, Turks and Roma always lived together. And we don't say, "She is Croat," or, "She's Roma," or, "She is Albanian or Turk," "She is from Janjevo." So I've never had problems. To this day, we still socialize and so, we're together now in school, the teachers who work in Serbian villages around have come to school freely for like ten, twelve years. This a real multiethnic school.

Anita Susuri: Are there Croats and Albanians who come here, so go to school, and how does this system work?

Olga Gucić: Only the elementary is here...

Anita Susuri: Yes...

Olga Gucić: You have to go somewhere else for high school. Albanians have their own school they go to, our children study in Serbian. Gracanica, Gushterica have the medical school, the gymnasium is in Llapllasella, so.... I think now there are more children going to school than before, as I said, 1,700 students. And many Roma from Janjevo finished high school, university even.

Anita Susuri: Until when did the old school work?

Olga Gucić: Until 2001.

Anita Susuri: Then you left?

Olga Gucić: Yes. This also is an older building, this building was built when there used to be 1,700 students. There was only a part of the building that could be used, that was used, and after the war, the second part...

Anita Susuri: Do the Croats who went to Croatia come here?

Olga Gucić: They, we have...

Anita Susuri: Where?

Olga Gucić: Well, we have certain holidays when they come. They come on August 15, the Assumption of Mary, and it's the same for the Nativity of Mary in September, for all the saints. There's a holiday that is celebrated by the village above Janjevo, Peshter. It's celebrated on January 20, a lot of people come then, especially young people.

Anita Susuri: And what is it like then?

Olga Gucić: It's hard in Janjevo because, I think, every person from Janjevo who lives in Zagreb, who has houses here, they would want to fix it, to have it for themselves, just a room, bathroom and so on, but don't dare do anything, because people are stealing a lot. They immediately ruin it, that's why.

Anita Susuri: Where do they stay when they come?

Olga Gucić: If they have family here, they stay with them, if not, thank God, there are a lot of hotels in Kosovo. Or they go back immediately. They come to the church, they visit the graves and, if they have family, they go back.

Anita Susuri: And what kind of traditions do you have when they are...

Olga Gucić: Holidays?

Anita Susuri: Holidays, special days. What happens, is there anything...

Olga Gucić: There's a special mass in the church on August 15 when they come. That celebration is not in Janjevo but in Letnica. And back then, this is how it used to be when I was a kid, we used to go, we had a horse-drawn carriage, how do I explain it, maybe you don't know, but older people do. And who do I know (laughs) just like nomads, those cars they had, covered, that's how we went from Janjevo there on August 15. Since we didn't have any other means of transport, we went to Letnica by car. The baby inside, traveled for 13-14 hours and we stayed there for three days. Then, when it was earlier, they went there for a week. The annual joint vacation for us people from Janjevo was in Kosovo,

Janjevo, Letnica. I don't know if you heard, it was also a Croatian place, there's a shrine of God's mother there and so...

Anita Susuri: What happens there, tell us about that.

Olga Gucić: There was, we socialized, we especially socialized there. They have, in front of the church there are, it's covered, the roof is up there. Inside there were spaces, everybody took, they were all, we took everything we needed from the house. The sheets, the dishes, and everything, everything, everything, the food that we needed also. We would fix it there, you can see this now also on August 15, go there, everybody stays outside. Nothing, what is it, there's only a roof over your head, some covers are put on the side and so...

Anita Susuri: Is there any particular celebration or something prepared for that day?

Olga Gucić: How would I know, you buy it, everyone is around the fire, they sing, the music comes on the side, one by one the musicians come and go and so on. They sing special songs, but there's nothing special prepared, no.

Anita Susuri: For example, food or something?

Olga Gucić: There's nothing specific, but this is, corn is roasted on the fire and everyone can do it. But nothing special.

Anita Susuri: How do you experience Janjevo now?

Olga Gucić: (laughs) I experience it only through memories, as you can see. What bothers me the most is the waste in Janjevo, every house is a landfill. The demolished old houses. We say that there are many poor people and it's hard to live in Kosovo. It isn't. When you see all those cans thrown out and all of those, if you have enough money, you have enough money to live. In front of each house there are also dogs, street dogs, it's horrible, I couldn't go to church in the morning. I think they keep them in asylum somewhere, and they let them free, they bring them there, and this is something that... They steal, now lately, they have robbed three-four Croat houses, just there. Some colleagues come, they come, they take, one, the roof, they made a hole in the roof and got into the house.

Anita Susuri: Did they damage it?

Olga Gucić: Well, you know, old house, the dust, everything is ruined...

Anita Susuri: Did they take anything?

Olga Gucić: Yes, they took some money, I don't know how much, the same with the other colleague.

Anita Susuri: Is this happening repeatedly?

Olga Gucić: It's happening repeatedly. As I said, it is happening everywhere, there are robberies everywhere, but when it happens all the time, you can't leave the house.

Anita Susuri: Tell us more about your traditions as Croats, so about... you told us about Letnica and that, but are there other interesting traditions?

Olga Gucić: The most beautiful holidays are in the church, tomorrow is Corpus Christi, that's what it's called, it's a special holiday. Before people from Janjevo moved, this was, they went on every street to visit all of Janjevo. And now, whoever could prepared something, decorated their house, adorned the altar and all of that. The kids were wearing white, they pick flowers, those baskets and everything. Each celebration had its own way.

Anita Susuri: Does any of your family live here?

Olga Gucić: Yes, my sister, she lives only with her husband, her family is in Croatia, I'm there with my brother and sister so... It's hard. Personally, I think I will never leave Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: (coughs) You talked about the language of Janjevo. Did you always talk like that with your family, your friends? When you conversed, right?

Olga Gucić: We always talked, we talked all the time, all the time. Only school and all of these, but often you understand that a word...

Anita Susuri: So in your family ... You told me you go to church every day.

Olga Gucić: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Are all people in Janjevo religious, or are Croats more religious, what is it like?

Olga Gucić: I think every person respects their religion, there's mass here every day, and most people go to mass. And when there are big celebrations, then it's something special...

Anita Susuri: Good.

Olga Gucić: It's Sunday every day, and every Sunday is a holiday. Here no one works on Sundays, you have to go to church, not that you have to, but it's an obligation to go to the holy mass.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back to the pre-war period, you told me that everybody cleaned in front of their house. What was it like at that time? Describe a day like that, for example.

Olga Gucić: (laughs) I often think about it when I talk through the streets, now paved, but it isn't like it used to be. There used to be, each in front of their house, they would take the water and make it wet, clean it, every Saturday, every holiday. The river was always unclean, everything that was on the streets, everything was thrown in the river, so... But it was special. And often when they meet me in front of my house, because there's no one to live on the streets anymore, you clean it a little in front of the door. They say, "You always go back to the old traditions," but I can't really do things like they were done back then.

Anita Susuri: Were the neighborhoods separated, for example, where the Croats lives, where the Albanians were, what was this like?

Olga Gucić: Well, it was, it was clean in the middle, there were only Croats, while on the sides, on the road that was called Virovce, there lived Albanians and Croats. It's the same in Sarajin when you enter Janjevo, Turkish lived there, that road is special to this day, Turks and Albanians live there.

Anita Susuri: Good. Do you have anything else to say, did you forget anything?

Olga Gucić: I didn't forget anything, I respected you in everything I said, and there's a lot to be said about Janjevo, about Janjevo and everything. So, maybe I can't express all the emotions I have inside, but... Not only me, not only people from Janjevo, a lot of people who have worked here, the teachers and everyone, they all speak fondly of Janjevo. They say, "Whoever drank water in Janjevo..." because we have springs, we had two fountains. There was a fountain in front of the church, and one over the church, which is still there today. That's from the Turkish area, and it comes from the spring, it is special water. People who didn't drink water in Janjevo don't know what it's like. People who didn't eat desserts in Janjevo, there were sweet shops and all of them especially are... They used to say that the sweet shop in Janjevo was much better than the one in the center of Pristina.

Anita Susuri: Where were the sweet shops?

Olga Gucić: They were in the bazaar, in the bazaar.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember how many people were there?

Olga Gucić: Of course, yes, there were always people there, they prepared. The Gorani were there, two families lived in Janjevo, now they also left, they prepared the sweets, so... They always had ice-cream, sweets, tulumba⁹, soaked tulumba, and like this, they had everything...

Anita Susuri: Okay, thank you very much!

Olga Gucić: Thank you, I apologize for what I might have said, what you heard from me.

Anita Susuri: Thank you.

⁹ Deep fried dessert soaked in syrup, similar to jalebis and churros.