

INTERVIEW WITH BOBAN PETROVIĆ

Gračanica | Date: February 25, 2020

Duration: 52 minutes

Present:

1. Boban Petrović (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (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

Anita Susuri: If you could introduce yourself, tell us your date of birth, something about your family, ancestors.

Boban Petrović: I am Boban Petrović, right now we are in a tour guide association's office in Gračanica, where I am the director of this nongovernmental organization. Otherwise, I am originally from Gračanica, I was born in Priština, on January 29, 1985. I finished my elementary school here, high school in Sušica {points behind him with his thumb} not far away from Gračanica and I graduated in Niš. Otherwise, I studied telecommunication engineering. And the next question (laughs). I am sorry [addresses the interviewer] I might go like this, but will you cut it out or not or everything will be on record?

Anita Susuri: It's no problem at all. Now I will ask you about your family, were you a large one?

Boban Petrović: Okay.

Anita Susuri: Did you live in a large family? How was it?

Boban Petrović: Well since, literally since my birth we lived together, father has... had a brother and two sisters. Sisters lived, one was in Priština, the other one in Bor, but during the summer the whole family used to gather {folds hands together} and we were all together. Otherwise, I have two more sisters and a brother, they all live here in Kosovo in Gračanica. Like all the families in the past, we all lived together in the same house, we were all sitting together, having lunch, hanging out, talking, and there we used to learn a lot, mostly from the elders, father and mother were mostly working.

They had a great influence on all children here, not only on us, but overall. More precisely, grandmother and grandfather had a great influence on me. But mostly grandfather, because grandfather liked working with them and doing all those chores around the house that we had at the

time. I mean, this was before '99 grandfather, and after '99 while my grandfather was still alive, he had cows, he also had pigs and a lot of chickens, there was one big backyard, as is the case with all house owners here. This is not the case today in Gračanica because as far as agriculture is concerned, people are still into it but livestock is smaller, so to say, people have cows, not so many pigs, not so many chickens, and other domesticated animals altogether.

Anita Susuri: What was the family like then? For instance, what was your father doing, your grandfather?

Boban Petrović: Father was working in Electric Power Industry, that is at thermoelectric plant Kosovo B, and since '99 he is at home, he is not working, mother started working some time before the [NATO] bombing, before the war, at the kindergarten, and to this day, she works there. Grandfather is retired, he was working in Ajvalia, in {points to the right} the Kišnica mine as most of the people from this area that lived here at that time. A great number of people worked in mines. Grandmother was a housewife, and when it comes to us, we went to school here, except me, I went to Niš later, both brother and sister went to their studies here in Mitrovica. Please (smiles) you will have to ask me a question again so that I could continue [addresses the interviewer].

Anita Susuri: I would prefer you talking about your ancestors and...

Boban Petrović: Aha, okay. What I found out from my grandfather and what we were later, well, reading, there was... since our family was big, they moved to Gračanica in 1880. Before that, they lived in Sušica which is a village not far away from here. And before that on Šar Mountain {points behind him} in a village called Sušica. Before that, it's not exactly known, but it is assumed to be somewhere nearby Skadar, Andrejevice. In the Middle Ages, there were those migrations of people due to the invasion of Turks [Ottomans], due to other things, due to blood feuds. There were lots of them and people were displaced in different areas of the Balkans.

But what I know is that our surname was changed quite a lot, back then there were those tribal alliances, I know that our family descends from some progenitor Marko, and so all of us, our family {spreads hands} Markovčani, meaning ancestors of progenitor Marko. I also know that there were three brothers Petar, Petko, and Jovan and that my... My surname is now Petrović because one of Marko's [sons] was Petar, and so we are Petrović. In Gračanica, there are Petkovići, from progenitor Petko and there are Jovanovići from progenitor Jovan. So, all in all we are related, to some degree of relation. What we also know is that on Šar Mountain we had the surname Ilić, Ilković, or Načković.

However, for more detailed research, church books should be consulted since they paid attention to that, if there are any, of course. We don't know the exact reasons for migration, probably, as I have already said, that was mostly the Ottoman period, and there were a lot of blood feuds and displacements and all of that. But what is important is that we know that we have been in Gračanica

since 1880 and my family had their first house right next to the Monastery, but because of the great flood that according to my grandfather's story was in, I think in 1947 in Gračanica when there wasn't a dam and Gračanica Lake, that is Badovac Lake.

The house and everything around the Monastery was flooded, what also happened was that my grandfather's younger sister almost drowned in that flood. Then great-grandfather Vasilije decided to change the location of the house from this place right next to the Monastery to the belfry a few meters away to a higher area in the hill. So we are here now, in the school area and it's on a bit higher altitude {raises his hand}, seen from, I mean away from the river and much higher than the water level. However, with the building of the dam and artificial lake, the problems with floods were resolved.

But there, the house has remained here, there are some old photos on which we saw that the house in that part of the hill {points with his hand in front of him}, that there were the first houses in that part. There were very few houses, but since '99 a larger number of people who lived in the surrounding areas and in general throughout Kosovo who did not want to go to Serbia gravitated towards Gračanica, so that Gračanica today counts somewhere, the whole municipality counts somewhere around twenty-thousand inhabitants. Where about 85 percent are Serbs, about ten percent are Roma and about five percent are Albanians, who live - I hope - in harmony. In the past ten years there have been no major problems.

Anita Susuri: What are your first childhood memories and what was Gračanica like back then?

Boban Petrović: Well, Gračanica was much smaller then, much smaller. My first memories are mostly memories from the family home with my parents, with my brother, sisters, with my aunt's son with whom I hung out as a child, we were inseparable. He lived in Priština, so he moved away, and then we only hung out during university. But also my childhood memories are related to the schoolyard and our street where there were mostly a lot of children and where we all hung out and played games that weren't computer or phone games, but we certainly had games with a ball, a stick, we made huts.

There were a lot of trees in the schoolyard, so we played in the schoolyard, despite the fact that there weren't many cars and the fact that the street was quite empty. We did play on the street, but the school was still a meeting place for all the children who lived there, in this part around the school. We had a football field and a lot of fun. It was, it was a different kind of game, there was no multimedia content like today and the phone to make it interesting, but we spontaneously gathered on the street, spontaneously started the game, hung out, played hide and seek.

And nowadays, nowadays, I haven't seen children play hide and seek, I haven't seen children play hide and seek (laughs) for maybe a couple of years. So it was different, it was really different, it wasn't such a modern age to say to, to... as it is today to have all the information at your fingertips, to make everything so accessible that it's... and children grow up differently, differently, the environment is

different, the approach to life is different and the approach to all electronics and, and devices, and media, and everything that modern life brings is different.

Anita Susuri: I think that you also celebrate Christmas? How...

Boban Petrović: We celebrate Christmas, my family, as well as any other Serbian family, celebrates *slava*.¹ We celebrate Saint Nikola. As all of our relatives, I have also mentioned celebrate it, Petkovići, Petrovići, Jovanovići. *Slava* is one of the things that connects families. And *slava* is celebrated, there is the main *slava* and *preslava*,² but mostly everyone celebrates Saint Nikola in May and in December. *Slava* exists among Serbs, among Orthodox people, Serbian Orthodox people, since it differs a bit, other Orthodox people don't celebrate *slava* and from what I managed to read, that is a tradition kept from ancient times, from the Slavs.

The Slavs worshiped their gods and then the Serbs found it a little harder to accept that they did not celebrate something, so they celebrated the saints and I think that I don't think, I know that St. Nikola is one of the most widespread *slava*, the greatest number of Serbs celebrate St. Nikola. *Slava* is celebrated here in Kosovo and in Gračanica, and in general, in my family, it is celebrated for two, possibly three days. We celebrate the evening of *slava*, it is the day before the main day of celebration, then the very day of *slava* and then it happens that someone celebrates the third day if there are many guests if there are relatives who cannot come in the evening and the exact day because it is a huge celebration, someone celebrates the third day as well.

What is certainly interesting are the customs around the celebration, and it is mainly while my grandfather was alive, the grandfather led this whole rite. Then my father took it over, later my brother and I will take over and the *slava* will probably be shared with two houses since it is normal for everyone to have their own family and their own house to celebrate *slava*. It is a custom in some of the houses that when someone takes over *slava*, he gets the cake for the ritual, the cake that is cut in the Monastery. On the day of *slava*, the main *slava*, which is celebrated in December, we go to the Monastery, where the cake is cut, and guests visit throughout the day. Lunch, dinner, and traditional Kosovo dishes are served.

One of the most important and crucial things that is served is Kosovo *pogača*.³ There is always wine and boiled wheat at every *slava*, and a candle is obligatory. There is this bigger and smaller cake {shows the size with a hand}, that is, the cross, the cross made from a small cake that is cut, then there is a toast. I mean now it depends from house to house, household to household, it's blessed, a speech is given, it all depends on how it was inherited from ancestors. But what is certainly interesting is that a lot of those little things change through modernization and over time so *slava* has changed a lot.

¹ *Slava* is part of the Serbian Orthodox religious tradition. Once a year, every family celebrates the day of a particular saint who is believed to be the guardian of the family.

² *Preslava* is another *slava* a family has, only celebrated within the family.

³ A specific type of bread baked for the religious ceremonies.

We have... by chance in 2015 we made this brochure with USAID {touches brochure} about intangible cultural heritage where we describe both Christmas and *slava* and the wedding and all that is intangible cultural heritage. Not only Serbian, but there are also Roma and Albanian, so we made, made some comparisons. Here in the book, in this brochure, we included *slava* that was celebrated from 1812 through 1912 and, according to the book we found, a lot of things are now different.

In other words, today it is said that you shouldn't invite people to *slava*, you know when *slava* is and the one whose *slava* you attended should reciprocate. However, it was there in the book that we used for the brochure, we found that a loaf of bread was sent, a piece of bread as an invitation for *slava*. Because, as you already know, as I have already mentioned, these customs are changing, but what is the most important and, and, the goal for which people gather during *slava* remains the same. That is to celebrate the protector of the family, to put it like that, the Holy Father.

Anita Susuri: You were telling me about your *slava* and Christmas, but when you were young, I mean a child, were there any other cultural events for example in Gračanica or what else were you doing?

Boban Petrović: In Gračanica, mostly the fairs, the village fairs, were extremely interesting for all the children, especially because back in the day the yard of the monastery was used to host them, {points with his finger behind him} which was huge. From, from the south side, where the whole amusement park was and there were different carousels, ballerinas and... really lots and lots of different things which the kids could enjoy. Today it is on a much smaller scale, mostly more focused on cultural events, which I am not saying they did not happen before.

Since '89, Gračanica has been celebrating *Vidovdan*⁴ as the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, they have made it one of the biggest events and it really gathers a lot of people. And a lot, a lot, a lot of cultural events take place from the beginning to the end of June. Among them, the well-known event is choosing the "Kosovo Maiden," {counts on his fingers} there is also "Poetry Vigil" or "Poetry Communion," which has been held every year since '99. Also, the liturgy, that is, the commemoration of the victims of the Battle of Kosovo, which takes place every June 28, and the pilgrimage to Gazimestan, and a lot of other traditions related to *Vidovdan*.

But the main celebration of the church, since the Gračanica Monastery honors the assumption of the Holy Mother, *Gospođin dan*, which is on August 28. So, on August 28, we had that period of vacation where we had two fairs in the village, one at the end of the school year, one at the beginning, before the beginning of the next one. It meant a lot to children, there were various other celebrations to

⁴ *Vidovdan* is a Serbian national and religious holiday, a *slava* celebrated on 28 June. The Serbian Church designates it as the memorial day to Saint Prince Lazar and the Serbian holy martyrs who fell during the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire on 15 June 1389 (Julian calendar).

entertain the people, there were the Gračanica Evenings, where I was one of the participants. I wrote some village news that was a bit humorous.

I was also part of, like most of my peers, the acting group of the Cultural Center in Gračanica, we performed several plays. Not only here in Gračanica, but also in Prizren and Suva Reka, we performed in Mušutište then. It was extremely interesting, I think that the majority of the audience in Suva Reka were Albanians and we still performed that play, the play was “The Pepper” [Biberče]. I don’t know how familiar you are with the story, and this one, I also danced folk dances like most of my peers. I mean that’s, everyone followed one another, and that’s how your circle of friends had certain interests. I danced folk dances for almost ten years. With the group, we went almost across the entire of Serbia at the time, and participated in various, different competitions...

Anita Susuri: What was the name of the ensemble?

Boban Petrović: Folk ensemble Simonida.

Anita Susuri: Simonida.

Boban Petrović: Simonida. Like, it was really interesting, there was something for everyone because I had friends playing football. They preferred football to folk dances, but they found themselves in their own stories. It was interesting for me, I loved to spend time with my friends (laughs) as I do today. I loved to move around to explore new places. Same thing today with the tourism organization and all the other activities I do.

Anita Susuri: Could you tell us a bit more about those ensembles you were part of, what kind of organizations you had there, and who was your choreographer, what dances did you do?

Boban Petrović: Yes. We mostly performed the dances from central Kosovo, dances from Pomoravlje, *čačak*⁵ was often performed, *hajdučko kolo*.⁶ There was really a lot of choreography (laughs), I can’t even remember how they were called anymore, considering that almost 20 years have passed since then. And until I was 15-16 years old, I did folk dances, I also acted in plays and we passed, we competed... one of the most interesting folk dance competitions was in Ratina, near Kraljevo, we were in Loznica, we were in Belgrade, and I repeat we were in Prizren with the folklore ensemble.

Here in Gračanica, in Priština, there was a guest performance and competition for acting and folk dances. There were some different TV shows on TV Priština before, where we also participated. I think we even had a competition in the Sports Center, formerly known as Boro and Ramiz, which was

⁵ A type of *kolo*, a traditional collective folk dance performed by dancers interlinked to form a chain, usually moving in a circle holding hands.

⁶ Another type of *kolo*.

extremely interesting because the audience was multiethnic, no one cared about what nationality you were or what religion because they all lived together and it was, it was okay then.

And I don't think we won a really important award, but for me, it was a very nice experience, to be part of a folk ensemble in general and learn about the tradition of my ancestors, about the traditional dances, about costumes. Certainly, about the Kosovo embroidery, which is extremely interesting, about those flowers that are extremely characteristic, characteristic even from the Middle Ages, where ladies who were princesses, from the nobility, were engaged in embroidery in general, since it was part of tradition and...

We can talk about the Middle Ages as much as you want, since we are here and my friends and I and my brother have started to work on, we started to work on the revival of medieval arts and crafts. Also, in cooperation with the Swiss donor agency Swiss Contact, I started my first private project and we are working on the first theme park, a medieval theme park, in Gračanica.

It is actually a small wooden fortress where old crafts and old skills and traditional medieval cuisine will be presented and a lot more, but it is only a project that will come in the next six months. And what is certainly important is that we will work on reviving the highest intangible cultural heritage. Considering that a lot of tangible heritage has been preserved, and I mean the Municipality of Gračanica preserved it quite well and it is on us to cherish it in the future.

Anita Susuri: Where did you go out the most and how was it for you, when you were young?

Boban Petrović: Well, until '99, I was a relatively young eighth-grader, until the eighth grade we mostly didn't go out. We started going out only somewhere in 2001 - '02, when I started high school it was the first, the second year it was mostly those birthday parties, where we had some smaller bars here that we rented and then celebrated birthdays with friends. There were about 40 of us in that neighborhood of ours then, around, around the school itself. And then we all went everywhere together, together of course and it was always a great company.

There were cafés, some that worked. Especially well known is the club we all went to and it has been attractive to all of us for almost ten years. There was a live gig, great company, everyone loved to hang out, to talk. To have a drink, we had entered that stage in our lives, when a person... actually, we were no longer children (laughs). We will start meeting for a beer, wine, and other alcoholic beverages, and then it is not so popular to be someone who uses alcohol and I do not recommend this to children...

Anita Susuri: (laughs).

Boban Petrović: But that is what happened and is a fact and it certainly cannot be avoided. There were really a lot of cafés there, a lot of them starting from Millennium, from... I forgot their names

(smiles). But they were in the center of Gračanica and we went out there, we hung out there. And until 2007, 2004, in fact, until I went to university, my friends were there, and then everyone parted ways a bit, left because of university, some stayed here to work. But with the return, after university, everything came back as it was before, and we are still here, hanging out, we are still connected.

Anita Susuri: During the '90s, did you feel any sort of discomfort... did you also feel...

Boban Petrović: Well, as a child, I couldn't feel the discomfort because I wasn't moving around. I mostly moved around my street near my school, where I mostly didn't meet Albanians, I didn't go to Priština so I didn't feel any discomfort. But, according to my parents, you could feel a certain amount of tension. There were various kidnappings from all sides, and then people did not know how to behave, or which transport they were allowed to use, how they were allowed to move, where they were allowed to move. Before the job at the power plant, my father, he worked in Drenica, they ran the water supply system, working on the construction of the water supply network, he worked in Uroševac, my father never had any problems and although he was a manager, he never had any problems. But I think there were probably some minor problems not so significant, but it was more business-related.

Anita Susuri: After that you went to high school...

Boban Petrović: In Sušica. I started high school... I just finished eighth grade in '99 and I was supposed to enroll in high school. It was the most critical time then, you were supposed to enroll in schools in June, the bombing stopped, the Serbian army withdrew, Albanians began to come, I mean, to return to their apartments, houses, and then it was quite a critical period. There were a lot of kidnappings in Priština. My uncle and I went to enroll in high school, so they took us for a walk because at the time Priština was extremely turbulent.

We did not know where the electrical engineering school was, I think the electrical engineering school was in Grmija at the time, we went to Grmija, they said no, it was moved, they will receive the documentation at Aca Marović Elementary School in the center of Priština, Ulpiana, where ever it was. So we went there, and they said no, go to Medical School, so we went there. There I found what interested me, a teacher who taught me English in the sixth grade here in elementary school.

Then in the meantime, she, already, somewhere in the seventh or eighth grade, while I was in the seventh or eighth grade, she went to work in the electrical engineering school and I met her there and that was a nice memory for me. Um, I think her last name was Martinović, that's how we all knew her. After that, upon my return from Priština, my uncle and I learned that on the same day they kidnapped a couple of Serbs at the market, that everything was happening, but thank God nothing happened to us and I still live and function here and that's it.

Anita Susuri: Because of that you later returned to Sušica?

Boban Petrović: Well, after the schools from Priština, you generally already know about all the schools that existed in Priština, that most of them, that is, almost all of them, were moved here to the territory of the Municipality of Gračanica. They function in accordance with the Serbian system and I completed the electrical engineering high school in Sušica, after that I enrolled in university in Niš. I was interested, I was quite interested in electrical engineering, and I became more interested in computer science.

But it was harder to enroll into a computer science program, so I ended up in telecommunications, which is a combination, that is, the one that I finished, communication and information technology, is a combination of computing and telecommunications. The studies lasted five years, ten semesters, about fifty exams and, and I started in 2004, I finished in 2011. Immediately after that, I started working at the Monastery. Hence the love for tourism and cultural heritage. I started working at the Monastery in 2010, so I had about ten exams left before the end of college. As a tour guide, then KFOR, which was on duty in front of the Monastery, left and they needed it. I was more of a curator and someone who will work as a tour guide than securing the Monastery.

But it meant a lot to me, I got to know a lot about the history of the Monastery with fresco painting, something I didn't know until then. I also started speaking English because, before that, everything I knew from English was more professional, more related to electrical engineering, and I never used the language even though I knew it. That's where I relaxed a bit and started speaking English, it's not at an enviable level, but it's enough for communication.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: The most interesting thing you have learned about the Monastery, a characteristic of some sort?

Boban Petrović: Well the Monastery really has a long history, almost seven... next year will mark 700 years of the Monastery of Gračanica. It was built in 1321, King Milutin... then, I read a lot about King Milutin, I read a lot about the Monastery, about frescoes. Monastery Gračanica, that is, the very church Gračanica is particularly characteristic for its architecture and frescoes. Frescoes are Byzantine-Serbian as well as the architecture.

I learned a lot about the painters who did the painting. It took three years to paint them, and there is a huge area with frescoes. There are about four thousand frescoes. There is also a lot to learn through the stories of the people who, that is, the nuns who lived there, and still live today. I learned a lot from

the professors who come and do the restoration and clean the frescoes. In the narthex, which was built a little later, there are many inscriptions on the frescoes, on the walls be it either by vandals and priests who lived there, because in the Middle Ages there were many books, especially about the Gračanica Monastery, which was burned three times.

Before I started working in Gračanica, I didn't know that. The Monastery was set on fire twice by the Ottomans, once by the Bulgarians, which is extremely strange, during the Balkan Wars, even though they are Orthodox, which is an even bigger paradox. The relics of King Milutin, that is, his body is in Sofia, in the church of Holy Sunday in Bulgaria, and they are now not allowing the relics to be returned to the Serbs and they are still there. By the way, I don't know how familiar you are with this, but the relics of King Milutin were originally in the Banjska Monastery, which is the fortified Banjska Monastery near Zvečan.

Also, one fact that I did not know before, before 2010, is that the Gračanica Monastery was the last monastery built by King Milutin. There are many more facts. The whole monastery is interesting because in the monastery there is a secret chamber of Queen Simonida, that is, a small church within the large church, which served only for Queen Simonida, who prayed to God privately. And through a small window {makes a square with his hands} which still exists today, she was able to look over the service that was conducted.

I also learned a lot not only about the Monastery, but also that Queen Simonida built a Monastery somewhere in the hills near Kišnica, the Vojisilovica Monastery, which was demolished somewhere in the 17th, between the 17th and 18th centuries. And that the monks after the arrival of the Turks here, after the arrival of the Ottoman Empire, all moved from the Monastery of Gračanica to that Vojisilovica Monastery, whose only remains today are stones. And what is even more impressive is that after the Monastery [of Gračanica] was founded in 1321, there were about 150 monks in the Monastery and throughout that turbulent history since the arrival of the Ottoman Empire, they did not demolish the Monastery, but it is from the Monastery... actually, it wasn't demolished completely, but the whole belfry was destroyed that was part of the monastery.

Also, the lead that was used for the domes was removed because the famous rifle bullets and cannons were made out of it. I also cannot say that it was only demolished during the Ottoman Empire, in the 16th century, during the time of Makarije Sokolović,⁷ Patriarch Makarije Soklović, who was the brother of the Great Pasha Sokolović,⁸ Sokol because the Serbian Orthodox Church throughout Kosovo not only here in Gračanica, not only the Monastery of Gračanica underwent a small renovation, where the Patriarchate of Peja received, under the auspices of the Patriarch Makarije Sokolović. And it was a

⁷ The Archbishop of Peć and the Serbian Patriarch from 1557 to 1571.

⁸ Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was a leader in the Ottoman Empire. Born in Herzegovina to a Serb Orthodox family, Mehmed was abducted at an early age as part of the Ottoman *devşirme* system of forcibly recruiting Christian boys to be raised to serve as a janissary.

turbulent time that is hard to describe. As today, in general, the entire Balkans is such that it is subject to some turbulent situations and rapid changes, and that has happened before.

So that's interesting, the thing I found out. You might find it interesting, I don't know how much you know about the Circassian tribe.⁹ They settled near {points to the left} Gračanica by the Ottomans who committed various atrocities in Gračanica, and it's pretty much in the books so it can be read, but to this day the field where these Circassians lived is called the Circassian Field. And it is somewhere between {pointing to the left} Gračanica and Ajvalija, the direction Gračanica - Ajvalija - Čaglavica - Laplje Selo, literally surrounded by these {right circle of hands} four borders to say. Somewhere in between is the field that is still called the Circassian Field where they lived.

Anita Susuri: And I wanted to ask you, did you ever meet Patriarch Pavle,¹⁰ or the Patriarch that was appointed then, when you were younger or as a child?

Boban Petrović: Yes, I saw him in the Monastery...

Anita Susuri: Aha...

Boban Petrović: I was lucky that as kids we were in the Monastery and met Patriarch Pavle, what was also nice during those liturgies during *Vidovdan*, and during liturgies for the Day of the Assumption of the Holy Mother, we had an opportunity to see all those important church people, the Bishop, Patriarch...

[Video was stopped]

Anita Susuri: You were telling me about Patriarch Pavle.

Boban Petrović: I was very young so I didn't have much to talk about with him, to... we can cut this part. What is important is that in the Monastery we could meet a lot, a lot of important people.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Boban Petrović: Among them, I had the opportunity to meet our very famous poet at the time, Desanka Maksimović.¹¹ What was interesting, my parents told me about that because I don't

⁹ The Circassians, also referred to as Cherkess, are an indigenous ethnic group and nation native to the historical country-region of Circassia in the North Caucasus. They have been in Kosovo since the 19th century.

¹⁰ Pavle (1914 – 2009) was the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1990 until his death. His full title was His Holiness the Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovci, and Serbian Patriarch Pavle.

¹¹ Desanka Maksimović (1898 – 1993) was a Serbian poet, writer and translator. Her first works were published in the literary journal *Misao* in 1920, while she was studying at the University of Belgrade. Within a few years, her poems appeared in the *Serbian Literary Herald*, Belgrade's most influential literary publication.

remember it, I was so young, but I know we kissed her hand, we gave her some flowers. She played there with us and despite there being a huge crowd, she took the time to talk to each one of us (laughs), to exchange a word or two.

Anita Susuri: After the war, you were already a bit grown up, how can I put it...

Boban Petrović: Well eighth grade, 14 years, yes.

Anita Susuri: And you started going out, that's what you were telling me.

Boban Petrović: With 15, 16 years, yes.

Anita Susuri: And I would like to know how you meet your wife, your partner?

Boban Petrović: (smiles) And I met my wife later, a lot later. I have already returned from my studies here, my wife is from Kuršumljija, she studied art in Mitrovica. We have met thanks to my relatives, sisters so to say, and that's how love was born. After that, that was somewhere in 2013 and we have been married for five years now, we are expecting a baby now in April [2020] and more children, God willing. And also, since the beginning of our marriage we wanted to build a house, we have built a house here in Gračanica and we live here together.

After five years of marriage, I have succeeded in relocating my wife who was working. By the way, my wife was working as a teacher in, in Kuršumljija, as an art teacher. I have managed to relocate her here, and we have finally assembled a family after five years of long-distance marriage. It's a marriage that... only those who are in a long-distance relationship can understand how difficult it is for you to constantly travel in order to be with the loved one only during the weekends and only a very strong love can overcome that.

Anita Susuri: And what was your wedding like, do you remember (laughs)?

Boban Petrović: I remember, I wasn't that drunk, if that's what you are implying (laughs), I am kidding. Well, the wedding, well, all those modern weddings aim to avoid the tradition, we won't do it, we are modern, we don't want the tradition, and in the end, of course, tradition was present at our wedding. So, we didn't have that tradition of going to pick up the bride since it's about hundred kilometers to Kuršumljija, but my wife was here.

And then we started off with the wedding guests, it is customary to go to the Monastery to perform a church wedding there, it is also customary to go to the municipality building to finish the wedding there. What is interesting now is that we have two municipalities, we have them regulated according to the Serbian and Kosovo system, so there are almost, almost three weddings, so it is decided, mostly

Serbs decide to get married in the Serbian system, so that paperwork is copied into the Kosovo system.

It is more of a bureaucratic part, but what is interesting is that the customs are after the church. That is, after the church wedding, going home, some of the customs of throwing a sieve, raising a child, the so-called *nakonče*.¹² Cooking lunch with the mother-in-law, *kolo*, dancing *kolo* in the yard, and some various small customs that may differ even from village to village. Where there is that smearing with mud, which is (smiles) I don't know why, but here, the cover-ups {as if it covers the shoulders with something}, mostly the father and mother of the groom are smeared with mud and then they dance {as if covering the shoulders} covered with blanket and some various, paprika, strung paprika, onion and so on and so on.

There are really a lot of customs, for example, of the customs is that the bride shouldn't step directly on the ground when she comes home for the first time after the wedding, but you are supposed to put a tree plank there, and she steps on it first and then she puts her foot on the ground and that wooden plank is later nailed into the ground and remains there. And also, really... one of the superstitions is when you take the bride from her [home], if the bride turns around {turns his body sideways} and looks at her family, the kids will look like her family and not her husband's family.

And then... there are really, really beautiful traditional customs, there is a custom, I think they call it buying the bride but that is not buying, it's negotiation over the bride and then the groom's brother talks with the bride's brothers and it's more of a joke really and having fun time more than, than this. But it's a nice custom and those customs should be preserved, they should be kept and cherished during the holidays, all of the customs. It certainly is, there, from the perspective of tourism that I am into today, it's extremely interesting for tourists. There are agencies in the world that... and very often in Belgrade they are selling the tradition, they are selling the customs to the tourists.

For instance, there are cases in Belgrade when a *slava* was specially organized for tourists. And when tourists come, for them there is... although there is no *slava* on that day, it is organized for them to see how the *slava* looks, how the food is served, how you make a toast, how you greet the guests. When you light the candle, when you lit a candle and bless the table and all the rest. And it is exceptionally, exceptionally good feeling and experience for everyone there, for all the tourists.

However, it's not really in accordance with religion but yet again there are such things. I feel bad for pointing it out, but not only is *slava* as a tradition being sold, you are also selling other customs. There are various customs, when it comes to sowing, harvesting, and others, even from old Slavic polytheistic religions.

¹² A male child who is invited to perform several religious rites at weddings. It is important that the child is male, because tradition holds the belief that the rite will ensure that the married couple's first child will be male.

Anita Susuri: Also, having a godfather, it's also a characteristic of Serbs, do you have a godfather?

Boban Petrović: Having a godfather is another characteristic... we have an old godfather. What is interesting is that, well, we inherited this godfathership from my great grandfather, I think, and it's a long and old godfathership. I know that we are also godfathers to one family here in Gračanica. Also, what's interesting, okay, so one of the customs related to godfathership, it used to happen that if the children were to die, for that reason people used to change their godfathers.

And they decided who the new godfather would be by putting their children, newborn babies {as if he is holding something in his hands} near the gate, the entrance gate that leads to the yard, and the first man to pass by and takes the child in {as if holding a basket} that wicker, wicker basket probably, in which a child was put, that man becomes the new godfather. And that's how godfathers were changed, that's the story I know from my ancestors and that's something that's a bit different. But now in the modern age, people often choose their best friends for godfathers and that's, that's new.

Anita Susuri: If you could tell me about any other celebrations you have, other celebrations you have, for example, not *slava*, but some celebrations, what else do you celebrate, I don't know how to put it?

Boban Petrović: Well, compared to others, we have a different calendar in terms of those 14 days added, we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate Christmas on January 7, but we also have our New Year so that's... some call it Serbian, others call it Orthodox New Year, it's celebrated on January 13. Every year, there is a folk music concert organized here in Gračanica and then a lot of young people gather in Gračanica, in the center of Gračanica in front of the municipality building and there they await the New Year, with fireworks, mulled wine, roasted meat. Usually there is an ox on the roasting spit and a lot, lot, lot of (smiles)...

Anita Susuri: A lot.

Boban Petrović: You will {as if cutting something with a hand} as that guy says, polish this during editing. A lot more, a lot more activities are organized as part of celebrating Serbian New Year.

Anita Susuri: And you were telling me about the International Festival of Medieval Arts.

Boban Petrović: Yes, medieval crafts...

Anita Susuri: How did it come to that?

Boban Petrović: Well, what happened, we are... there was USAID's call for, for 2015, to brand these tourist places. We have already done a lot of research on that period, considering that Gračanica has a medieval monastery, we wanted to brand something medieval. And in that period, somewhere, that

medieval sport and the promotion of those medieval arts and crafts began to develop. When I said sports, I meant knightly fights, archery, more and more series that were shown, such as Game of Thrones,¹³ and others related to, to the medieval period, because they certainly were very popular. And what came to our minds here is to make a knight's festival, a medieval festival that will show both medieval arts and crafts.

And then within that we... I already have a flier here [shows flier to the interviewer] for, for next year. This is the fifth year that we are organizing the festival. The novelty is that we are, that I started this private project, so we will build a fortress where the festival will take place, so the ambience will be complete. And what is important is that every year we have different participants, we have participants from Hungary, from Serbia, this year we expect a couple of participants from Montenegro, we expect participants from France. We had {counts on his fingers} participants from Croatia, we had one participant from America (smiles), who is studying in Belgrade I think, so he saw that it existed and then started doing it.

The whole story is connected and people recognize the potential of it, and then a lot of participants apply to other festivals through our participation and want to come to us. Currently, there are more than ten festivals in Serbia alone, and there are four or five medieval festivals in Croatia. There are several festivals in Slovenia, in all of the neighboring countries. Except in Macedonia and Albania, we even looked for some participants that we invited because the distance is shorter, the cost is lower and we would like that again... those people live here and we would like all nations to present something of their own and make it interesting to everyone who comes to the festival.

Anita Susuri: Are there battles organized or the whole village....

Boban Petrović: No, there is a medieval village. So, it's organized, the medieval camp is built, in which most contestants spend a night, they are sleeping in those tents. You literally recreate the experience of medieval times for three days. You can see a blacksmith forging a sword {as if hitting the table with a hammer}. A man or a woman who sews some of those leather bags with medieval drawings. We also have heraldry,¹⁴ calligraphy, where children can come to us and we print, print like a hundred and twenty sheets of papers with shields on them, and then the kids come and draw their own shields with felt-tip pens, that's certainly fun for the kids.

We also have a small fencing school where children play with foam swords and a larger part of the program is somehow focused on having fun with the children. So we had, in 2016 or 2017,

¹³ *Game of Thrones* is an American TV series created by David Benioff and D. B. Veiss. It's an adaptation of the novel "A Song of Ice and Fire" by George R. R. Martin. The story is set on the fictional continents of Westeros and Esos, narrating the events happening to several noble families fighting for the Iron Throne and rule over the Seven Kingdoms.

¹⁴ Heraldry is a professional art discipline and auxiliary historical science whose role is to create and study existing, as well as emerging new, coats of arms.

ambassadors came to us with their children. Some well-known people who are passing by come with their children and try some of these crafts and arts because everything is focused, that is, focused on making the workshops interactive, not just a display, but everyone who comes can try to see it, to, to buy, to, to have something that will remain as a souvenir after the festival.

Anita Susuri: And where did you get the costumes, where is that done?

Boban Petrović: During the first festival we, when we were founding the festival, we received funds from USAID in order to get the costumes. We have around twenty of them, and after years of existence of the festival, we have over 40 costumes, we have the armor of Miloš Obilić that we carved out the dragon on his helmet, I don't know if I have a photo here but here [shows the photo on the flier to the interviewer], it's here. And then there is, we also bought blacksmith tools to make King Milutin's coins. We got a lot of helmets, swords. We started to make them on our own.

As part of one project, we also learned how to knit these chain shirts, which are intertwined with chains {makes a chain of his fingers} made of metal rings that are knitted. However, we made replicas of that, otherwise the real replica of that would be that it is bought to have wedges that connect it, connect those rings. It is an extremely complicated craft and an extremely expensive one. But for our needs, the needs of the association are good enough... that rings are made of wire and then when we have a meeting or hang out informally at the medieval association that we have established, then we start to make those things sometimes.

We did most of the things in those first workshops, now somehow everyone is focused on something else. We have an archery section at the association that deals with archery, and at one of the biggest festivals in Serbia, we won first place in archery for two years in a row, even though we don't train that much... but again, other competitors are strong, because at the Festival Manasija, in the Manasija Monastery near Despotovac, there are about 40 countries, about a thousand, fifteen hundred participants and then the competition for archery and any tournament is quite strong and what is certainly good is to promote Gračanica and the organization and medieval arts and it is very important that someone from our organization, from Gračanica, wins a place.

Anita Susuri: Boban, do you have anything else to add for the end?

Boban Petrović: (nods) I think I will put you to sleep (laughs). I don't have anything else to add, I mean, I have talked about... from various perspectives.

Anita Susuri: Okay then, thank you very much!

Boban Petrović: Thank you as well!