

Oral History Kosovo

DON MATEJ PALIĆ

Janjevo | Date: August 23 and August 28, 2019
Duration: 126 minutes

Present:

1. Don Matej Palić (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
4. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.

Other rules of transcription:

[] - addition to the text to help understand

Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.

Part One

Anita Susuri: Can you introduce yourself, tell us a little bit about your family, your ancestors?

Don Matej Palić: Gladly. I am Matej Palić, born in Janjevo 11.07. '64 from father Gašpar and mother Magdalena, née Macukić. There were eleven children in the family, so we are from a big family. I am the seventh one, seven sisters and four brothers. So recently, one of my sisters died in the beginning of May, so now there's ten of us living. And, in the family, there's 122 of us, everybody is married, they live in Zagreb. Most of us, everybody's in Zagreb. My parents died in Zagreb in 2001 and 2007, my dad died in 2001 and my mom in 2007 so we still have a connection.

I'm the only one that stayed in our hearthstone if I may say so, but for anyone else, but for the reason of the service I have here, which I perform, which is that, since I finished elementary school in Janjevo in '79, continued with classic four-year high school in Subotica, and after that, in '83 until '90, I finished college and the former Yugoslav People's Army in Rijeka. In '90 I was, now it's going to be 29 years of when I was appointed minister in this very church, in this place in 15.09 and it's going to be 29 years with the presence of my big family, the family which came from Croatia then, and it was a little bit weird, interesting since my family is in Croatia and I'm coming back to Kosovo.

Namely, since my roots are, well my grandfathers, great-grandfathers, we are the Karamatić family, Palić during the Turkish times, there was one known man from my family, Mato. And so the Turks¹, because he was very strong and renowned, they called him Black Mato, *Kara* Mato, he was dark. So I have been named after him, and there's more of us in the family on my dad's side who carry his name, *Kara* Mata. However, our former name was Palić so we are from that big family, in Albanian, it's called *fis*², or *rreth*³, right below the church grounds.

¹ Turkish: *Kara*, the color black.

² *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that like the Latin gens includes individuals who share an ancestor. *Fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common. Membership in a *fis* is based on a common mythical male ancestor.

³ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

Here the Karamatić family are, most of us have gone back to the last name Palić so some of my aunts are Karamatić, my dad was Palić and so we... And it's interesting to us that until the history of our family name and our lineage is explained, "How come one of your brothers is Karamatić and the others are Palić?" But that was an oasis where only the Karamatić would live. So I'm proud of my lineage and origins. I was doing something, there's a lot of us, and I'm telling you, there was this influence because we lived by the church, we were with our grandfather and grandmother in the house, and later on, we were guided towards Catholicism, where we belong, by our mom and dad, where we were baptized, and all eleven of us were a part of that and the church festivities.

So then of course, out of eleven children, one of them had to belong to the church, and that was me. No, I wasn't forced, it was by my own will that I chose this calling, to be a priest. In fact, this place is known for that, for this spirituality, because here ages ago, even though it was developed, they say that Novo Brdo and Janjevo used to be mining towns back in the day. So, since 1303, Janjevo is first mentioned as a mining colony where people back then lived very luxuriously and they were wealthy, which means, they had gold, so since then and until maybe 20 years ago, that craft was popular, separating ores. They even had their own workshops at home where they would separate ores. So they were exceptional craftsmen.

So here, brass, aluminium and copper were made, and all kinds of pottery. Those were being sold all over the world, even in a museum in Moscow, there's a ring that was made here. In the Moscow Museum, then there's in Bulgaria, in Sofia, there are some sort of parts that were made here. So the people were exceptional craftsmen, hardworking, diligent, and from those mines, Janjevo came to be what it is today. So I was always drawn to this, to the history of Janjevo, to the willpower, the desire and the love for this place and in 1990 I came here. And until '97 I was on duty here, later I was transferred to Letnica for eleven months and in '98 I came back officially.

So there you have it, to this day I perform this duty of spiritual care for the religious Catholics that belong to the land of the Municipality of Lipjan. And with that these last years, when there was a war in Croatia, in Bosnia, later the bombing of Kosovo, war in Kosovo, I lived through all of that right here. So my service wasn't just on the spiritual level, but now as the number of Croatians in Janjevo is drastically low. So in '91 there were 4,551 Croatians, when I was on duty. And unfortunately, now we only have 188 Croatians. The war in Croatia encouraged many people to join the Yugoslav People's Army out of uncertainty, out of the instability of the marketplace, young men, and so they started to run away in order not to fight against their brothers in their own country, our homeland Croatia.

So many started fleeing and then when that instability enters the people because the setting of the place is such that people started to fear, young men were leaving, what will happen to us... If I can just digress for a little, the street where I grew up as a kid, there were ten houses with 111 children. So in the school there was 1200 kids, also in the church, so eight grades, 1200 kids. You can see how strong the birth rate was then, but it was a part of living, a gift of God. So religion and craft, we were all little craftsmen, we had homes and we had vineyards, fields and that's what we did. But we did also have a

craft, we made some decorations out of plastic, toys. You could live off that. There used to be 750 private mini factories in Janjevo. Casting, plastics, leather, all kinds of activities and there were also people who were in agriculture and livestock. And so Janjevo was blooming.

During the '80s, '70-'80s when the biggest renaissance and growth of Janjevo happened, building, modernization, in '91, we have that war in Croatia and then people started to leave. So from...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could we continue a little bit more with your childhood? What was life like? Your first memories and such.

Don Matej Palić: In the family, well that's one. My memories, I remember some things since I was four-five years old, I have a sister who remembers everything. She lives in Zagreb now, Ankica she knows everything from our childhood, and I told her to write some of it down, but I'll tell you, I was the seventh one and I had an older brother Branko, he was the eldest, then we had four sisters and then two sons, my brother and I, and then again another sister, a brother and two more sisters. So it's mixed like that, and I can say that there was an interesting sort of ritual or a tempo and rules of the house.

We didn't know much about the modern times back then, but we all had to contribute somehow, no matter how old we were, contribute by working somehow so that the family can progress. So anyway, we grew up, my eldest sister, because mom was having children every two years, my sister took care of me, raised me, slept with me, fed me and such. So those sisters, who were luckily older than us, they practically took care of us, food, laundry, everything. Mom had other things to tend to, which were cooking, sewing, knitting, housework. Dad was a barber and a waiter for a while.

He contributed with his work, but we lived humbly, but we were always happy with what we had. So all of us had to work as we grew up, I can't remember a time when I didn't have anything to do. We made things out of plastic, then we always worked on something. We had a happy childhood, joyful one. After a day's work, at night, when we finish, we'd be satisfied because we did something. It was a tradition in all families in Janjevo as we were all close to each other, so on Saturdays we bathed, on Mondays clothes were washed, you knew what happened on which day. Friday was the fasting day and you knew what you could eat, so we were all somehow very lively, very active.

We also had some fights, but when you sleep with three people in one bed, it's to be expected, our house was full. Fifteen people, but we always had meaning to our lives. We never thought about going away from home or doing something like that. Our grandma and mom raised us to be patient, to be hardworking, honest and to be proud of what we had. So I was lucky to have had such a childhood and a family like that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did your family have a workshop?

Don Matej Palić: We had a workshop, we had some machines for manufacturing plastics. We made fishing nets, we made cigarette holders, we made some decorations, pendants, and when that wasn't enough because there were a lot of us, we had to work, then we'd get from other people who made flowers, rattles, bikes, cars, tractors, plastic dolls, we'd get those in bulk and assemble them ourselves. So we also helped others in order to earn some money and to survive.

I remember when I was supposed to go to high school in Subotica, it was my first time going somewhere farther away. Because except for Pristina and Letnica, I never went anywhere because the times were like that. Then you were supposed to get on a train, it was the first time in my life that I saw a train, I have to get to the city, how will I do it? Parents were worried, what is that child doing in Subotica, Subotica for me was...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how old were you, 16?

Don Matej Palić: 15, barely 15. Barely even 15 and that was the first time leaving home. And then later on, my eldest brother moved to Zagreb, then my sisters and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you have a market for the toys you made?

Don Matej Palić: We made it all, then there were some bigger stores, they were warehouses that sold those items in large quantities. We gave it to them, then most people traded with Skopje, so Tuesday and Friday it was Skopje, Saturday was Đakovica or Monday. Then Saturday was Uroševac, so all that merchandise was placed here in Kosovar markets, Thursdays, weekends and such, I can't remember the schedule now. But they went every morning, the people who drove and had the vans. On those days for going to markets, they would get up at three in the morning, park, and start to sell.

During the summer, so around May 10-11 until the end of the ninth month, you worked seasonally on the coast. So when you cross Montenegro, Croatia, so that need, the production that was happening in Janjevo, so those products that were supposed to be sold so families could survive, families were big, it was sold in the market and in cities all over ex-Yugoslavia and further. Those were the so-called *pečorbari*, or salesmen, who would from the fifth month or middle of the ninth month be away from their families. So they lived alone, and their families were here. They sold those products and later, around the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh month, they'd return to their families, return to Janjevo.

Mostly those who sold out all of the products and from that income, they'd live through practically the whole winter and also prepare the materials, products during the winter for the next season. Many people came home briefly, most were stationed at those markets where they had their stands and shops. They'd stay during the whole year, but they would come home a few times a year, for a week, two weeks. So that was mostly for church holidays when they weren't working and so they'd stay with their families. Those were mainly for All Souls' Day, or Day of the Dead, All Saints' Day on the 1st and

2nd of November, and then Christmas holidays and New Year's, Easter and St. Nicholas on May 9th.

So four-five times a year, but very briefly, they would be with their families. That's how I remember my dad who worked in Zrenjanin, he was in that part of Banat and Bačka. From Ratko he learned that the eldest one grew up and he was there to help him, then the sister that grew up was next, she already went to help Dad after elementary school. They were at the fairs, selling their products at the stands. Dad rarely came home, we didn't see him often but we always waited for him excitedly because we knew he would bring money for us and always a little something for each of us, wardrobe or a souvenir for the house.

Later, when he started working as a barber in Janjevo, he was at home all the time. But that rhythm didn't bother us or the family because we knew that Dad has to go and he has to come back for us, for our survival. So many men lived for years separated from their families, but it was clear that they were making money, working hard for us and for the family to live. Back then, how I remember from my childhood, Janjevo was really in some sort of renaissance. We had everything in Janjevo. It was a small town that had everything people needed, citizens needed to live.

So all kinds of shops, stores, not only where we worked but in the center there was a *Çarshi*⁴ where that life of trading was cultivated. So from early morning when the church bells rang, the people would wake up, get ready for their day, go to the shops, go to the markets or manufacturing, some were in agriculture. They'd work almost all day, at night, the bells would ring again and that was a sign to stop working because a service was about to begin at the church. And so they stop working, and after that, the men, the hosts would go to *Çarshi* in the center and there they make deals, talk about business, sales, trades of goods and such. So that lasted...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there any people from outside who came to Janjevo?

Don Matej Palić: Well, we are, the place is so strategically made that, in Janjevo, whoever came from outside, we'd know, Janjevo people all knew each other. From any nationality we knew each other, and whoever came from outside had to go through the *Çarshi*, had to be noticed, and he had to go back. So, there were people from outside, people worked, people came here to trade, bought the products that Janjevo people had. So that was sold here a lot, not only our people left, but many came here to buy these products.

Janjevo cheese that was made from local cattle, sheep and goats was especially popular. And also *sudžuk*⁵ from Janjevo, so many ache for it (laughs). The ones I encounter outside of Janjevo say, "Oh, is there any more of that Janjevo *sudžuk*?" So Janjevo was a well-known place during its development.

⁴ Literally meaning small market, old part of Gjakova; Main street.

⁵ Turkish: *sucuk* is a dry, spicy sausage which is eaten from the Balkans to the Middle East and Central Asia. The Turkish name *sucuk* has been adopted largely unmodified by other languages in the region, including Serbian: *sudžuk*; Albanian: *suxhuk*; Romanian: *sugiuc*; Russian: *sudzhuk*; Kyrgyz: *chuchuk*.

When I was a kid, we even had a town hall in Janjevo, we had our own police station, we had a city library, we had a cultural center where many then-famous people performed, such as Mišo Kovač...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember that, were you here then?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, yes, yes, I was here, I remember it. I went to Doris Dragović's concert, Mišo Kovač, Lepa Lukić and so on. There were a lot of those big stars that came here, I'm telling you, it was a very rich place where many gladly came, those famous people. We even had a movie theater, I remember as a kid, we'd have a lot of these events, movies. I even performed as a kid in the school choir, church choir, in the folklore group. So we had it all, both culturally and regarding development with which we can't be proud of today, because we had a school library also, and a city library, where we went to often and get books. We had our own electrical office when we had the town hall, it was one big, uhm...

Something was happening in Janjevo, which was possible for those times, so during the '70s, '80s it was among the more popular places in Kosovo, as far as development goes. Unfortunately, today we don't have any of those cultural institutions except that I'm trying to, with the members of the collective, Croatian collective and the youth of St. Nicholas Janjevo, to maintain a certain continuity, some librarian work, readings, working with kids, teach the kids that they need to be doing something. So we have art workshops, we have a drama club where each year, either we perform in Zagreb or Kistanje where we have communities, or every third year that is held here in Janjevo at the end of April or in May.

So many people gathered, participants of these events and then we have also during the year this drama club and recitals performed at various church events. So for Christmas, Easter and also for some other events when Janjevo people come, then we try to express, to showcase all these amateur acting abilities. The goal is, as I've been saying, for Janjevo to be able to develop a history for itself, its own culture, and tradition. It's all mostly in this Janjevo dialect which is famous in these parts to everyone. It's a composition of a speech, communication between all the nationalities that live here in Janjevo, composed of all sorts of dialects.

So here we have Dalmatian, Vranje, Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish influences from all these cultures, and my conclusion is, nobody had analyzed the reason for it, the sources of these words, what I said before that our people left to work in all those areas and then of course, they had to learn the local language so they can sell better. When they'd return to Janjevo briefly, for a few days, then those words somehow, the phonetics and the speech would, I remember that my dad spoke like the *Lale*⁶ do in Vojvodina. And when he came, it was a little bit funny too, we just got used to our dad talking like that. So, a lot of people worked in Vranje, there was a lot of them in Vranje, Gnjilane, that part and so they brought it back to us. Many were in Dojran, Ohrid, Strumica, Skopje, almost every Tuesday and Friday,

⁶ Term relating to men from Vojvodina, Serbia.

they went there.

So those influences were very visible here and are even today, at least I preserve them because there are so few Croats left here, I want to preserve it and write in that dialect as much as I can, to save it so young people don't forget it. Because no matter how many of those influences there are, from the places and the people, it is still our tradition. It's interesting that, apart from those dialects and speech, we had, only one woman wears them now, *dimije*⁷ and the old traditional clothes. We were under a lot of Turkish influence since I don't know when it started. But it must have been more than 200 years ago when our women started wearing *dimije*, we even have photographs of it, and little girls wearing them, all types of *dimije*, how girls wore it, how brides-to-be wore it, young married women and how older women wore it. So that was how you knew, from the *dimije*, where that woman belonged.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was your connection with Croatia like, from then until now?

Don Matej Palić: Well, it was very big, we cherished it, we still do. Mostly the people were educators, even my great-grandfather who was moved in '14 was a Croatian teacher, Filip Čimarić, and there is one Berišić. We had a Croatian primary school at the beginning of the 19th century in Janjevo, there was an elementary school. Then in '14, when World War I started and there were all kinds of political screenings and nationalism, so they took them away somewhere because they didn't want to give up their national identity. And so they were taken somewhere to Štip, Macedonia, buried there, they were buried somewhere. We examined where, we searched, it was my great-grandfather, my grandma's father.

So that was always cherished and connected to Croatia. In Turkish times while there were janissaries⁸ here, we had a consul from Dubrovnik who resided in Janjevo, and you paid *danak*⁹ directly to the consul and the former Venetian, or Republic of Dubrovnik. So Janjevo didn't pay taxes to the Turks, but they made gold and other riches. Then they'd pay the taxes to the Republic of Dubrovnik. So the connection between Croatia and the Croats here was never cut, and the Croatian identity and a conscience that we are Croats originated more than seven hundred years ago from Dubrovnik.

It was cultivated also through church and religious traditions that we have even today, some customs are appearing in Dalmatia, trying to renew them and here we still have them, no matter how many religious people there are. So the church always cultivated that, my predecessors and myself. In '91 when the war in Croatia started, of course it was brutal for us, hard times. Then the emigrations began, but the connection with Croatia stays, and our people here, Croats, they go back to their homeland, go back to Croatia. In Zagreb, in Kistanje, in '96 they went, then we have a large number of us in

⁷ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

⁸ A member of the Turkish infantry forming the Sultan's guard between the 14th and 19th centuries.

⁹ Tax.

Dubrovnik, large number in Split and Osijek, but most of us are in Zagreb.

Even my ten brothers and sisters have moved there, they're all with their families in Zagreb. Mostly, most of us have since '91 and on, with the help of Croatia and the government or the state, attained Croatian papers. I think a few of them haven't attained them but not because they can't, but they simply didn't put requests in for Croatian citizenship, but most of us have it and have the documents with which we still communicate easily, we don't need visas for anything because Croatia made it possible for us according to Article 16 about belonging to Croatia, Croatian national identity and citizenship.

Even today we work closely with the diaspora office of Croatia and our associations, we have some help from Croatia, not very much because they are having a political and economic crisis as you've probably heard by now. That worries us and we are very sorry that that's happening because Croatia is (smiles) our motherland. So I say, the youth tends to, to us Croatia is like a promised land, unfortunately, to others other European countries are the promised land and a source for existence. But I'm telling you, everybody here still gravitates towards Croatia.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's talk about your life. How did you decide to become a priest?

Don Matej Palić: Well I'm not sure... It's nothing unusual, but let's say that my involvement in the church choir helped, I started maybe in the second grade to sing in the kids' church choir. We performed, we had great concerts, celebrations in the church were also accompanied by the choir, kids' choir. And since the first grade we had baptisms, I was baptized when I was six days old, that's when we start to enter the religious life. My big family, that was nothing unusual, it was never a question whether we'd go to church or not, we regularly attended church activities, services that happened, many sanctities that we had and still have.

Since the first grade when you get into elementary school, that's when you start with religious education. So we were constantly in this sort of religious upbringing. From the first day of school, at the age of seven, from day one, you had religious education. And then later you take some religious sacraments, but in Janjevo, there were even some communist families, so the husbands, fathers who worked in those institutions, there were a few of them. Even their families were included in religious upbringing. So nobody was marked or stigmatized here because it was normal for Croatians to go to church. So me and my family, all my sisters sang in the church choir, we were quite the musical family. So all eleven of us, even mom and dad sang sometimes in the choir.

And it was a tradition to perform, to help the church whenever we could, even my grandma and grandpa, my dad, mom, brothers and sisters, we all helped with preparing liturgies for the church. I didn't plan it, but when it was time to go to high school, then suddenly I felt going there, which my parents didn't like because they thought I couldn't handle it. But I was determined to become a priest, which was a good thing, and there was a young priest that worked here back then, he worked with us

a lot, with kids, took us on trips and everything. I kind of looked up to him, and I would do the same. It was hard leaving Janjevo, separating from your family, I was the first one that saw the world, went to Subotica. But I'm telling you, with great effort and willpower, I made it through those four years of the Paulinum high school and after that...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why Subotica?

Don Matej Palić: Well because we didn't have that kind of school here. Later, in '80 something, in '79 I went, but sometime in the '80s a school like that opened here and in Skopje. Then the candidates from Kosovo, they later went to Skopje. But for that region, except for Croatia, Serbia, Vojvodina, Macedonia, Montenegro even in Bosnia, there was only in Subotica. That was the classic religious high school. We had the regular high school subjects, but additionally we had Greek, religious education, we even had Marxism. So the program went, of course, according to the Ministry of Education, but we had additional subjects for which we were prepared and had the willpower to learn, which was clergy.

We lived a boarding school life, so we got up at five in the morning and then prayers all day, school, discipline, order, labor, studying. We were constantly supervised, we had certain daily schedules, when we study, when we go out, when we walk, when we have road trips or anything. But it was mostly the strict discipline and supervision of the church and church superiors. Later in '79, I left in '79 so in '83 I go to Rijeka for university, also a theological school in Rijeka. And there I graduate in '90 having been in the army for one year, of course, and I return here in '90. Now it's 30, 29 years that I've been here...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You weren't caught up in the battle there, the war?

Don Matej Palić: No, but during the war in '90 when I came back here, and then in '90, it already started, in the eighth or ninth month in Croatia. And many of my relatives from my dad's and mom's sides that lived there, my brothers and sisters still came in spite of the troubles and rebellions that were already started in Croatia. They arrived in time for the celebrations on the 15th and 16th September in '90. Many were scared and could not participate in the celebrations. But Janjevo was still full then, and it was a big celebration, it was the last celebration of an ordination for a priest. Later the candidates that were, they went and studied and finished it in Croatia.

But under the conditions we were in, we invited them to celebrate with us and the community. So, I went through the wars, troubles, confrontations of Croatia and Bosnia and Kosovo wanting to survive here. So even today I'm optimistic and I'm trying to, not only in a religious way but all other ways, cultivate what made Janjevo beautiful, what made the people happy. So honesty, respect, devotion to faith, devotion to national identity with the utmost respect to all those around us and who live with us. You won't hear that, I don't think you did in the interviews before, but I don't know what's happening, but you won't hear that in Janjevo there were any problems or chaos or fights between the nationalities that live here.

So maybe we make up two percent of it, 180 people, and the rest are Albanian, there are some Roma people, there are Turks, and a Bosnian family. So coexistence between people of Janjevo is by some unwritten rules and manners, tolerance, community, respecting each other. And those of us who left, Albanians and Croatians, they somehow lose that. When they come back here, that kind of nostalgia for what was here somehow returns. Now I'm trying to cultivate that in the young ones, through these activities which we have, and the religious education I give, that they need to hold on to those values, respect and pride of who they are, what they are, where they are, so they can bring that to the world and keep on living and raising their kids. It's not easy but I think it can be done.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the influence of the church on life here.

Don Matej Palić: Well, of course, since the very beginning and those people that came from Dubrovnik, what they wanted mostly was to live with the church. So by coming here, they had a priest who did those services and rituals. And later, the continuity of the church was never interrupted. Even in the seventeen hundreds and something, the Kosovo bishop from all those troubles and war happenings, and the Turkish conquering, Ottoman Empire and destruction of everything, he came here because in Janjevo there was peace except that he said that people had to accept women and the clothes, but nobody ruined anything.

Church was forbidden for a while but even the bishop still resided in Janjevo. So the church was the one to be followed and that's why it's in a place like that, in the central part and so grandiose, dominating the space and calls out to everyone. Everybody was focused on the church, even when there were no clocks, the church clock and the bell before the clock on the tower, the bell rang and let people know what was happening. So, there used to be a complete trust in and reliance on the church. And the typhus that was present in 1850-1860 something like that, when there was typhus, the people went to God with all those burdens.

Later, sometime after World War I, another disease appears, typhus and the plague that overpowers. But Janjevo people, with faith in God and the church, supported by priests, give themselves to God, and in '35, a church is built in Brus, in Pešter, which is two hours on foot away from us, in that Novo Brdo area, Slivovo, that area, there a vow is given to St. Sebastian and many young people come in January, which I already mentioned, it starts on the 17th, lasts four days, until the 20th. The pilgrimage is on foot, in any weather, good or bad, for any sickness. And they get heard, church was always there for them.

I can say that today there's some people that don't come on the major holidays like Christmas or Easter, you couldn't make them come with a stick or force, but anyway, my doors are open day and

night. And if they're locked, closed, for any call of any kind, any needs, they are open. Our people are not used to going to the courts for any problem, family disputes and such, we solved it. That was the way it's done and so I say that I'm also a judge, and a lawyer and I have verdicts (laughs). Whatever the priest decides and the church committee people respect.

Most of that is even today directed at the church. So there's a small number of people in these circles that wondered, when an argument happened, about cutting down forests, or anything, any family altercations, sons, father, daughter-in-law and such. We didn't go to court, there are few cases when Janjevo people go to court, everything was resolved in the church. And that's a good thing, it was respected. I say today, when someone comes like that, "First, you talk, then the other one talks." "Want me to talk right now?" "Yes, Reverend."

Then I say something, I make a verdict, they go home satisfied and that is something unique to these people, and it's a good thing. It's hard to accept and to understand that kind of behavior, many of my colleagues and priests have trouble understanding that in Croatia, and the traditions too. Then they say, "Why should I have to resolve their conflicts and arguments?" And that's how they are used to doing things, but the church is a central part.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You had a school here, is that right?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, an elementary school, and we still have it. When I went to school, there were 1,200 kids. That was until the fourth-fifth grade¹⁰. I remember, there were five classes from the first to the fourth grade, my generation of '64. Then later from the fifth-sixth, there was four, and in the seventh grade, they put us together in only three classes. So we had three classes in the eighth grade. There was a lot of kids, but in the '70s really... Janjevo, Croatians, that migration began in '56. By '58, a whole group of people left.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the reason?

Don Matej Palić: Well, economically, economically Croatia was, then, even after World War II, was in a phase of development. That's when many left, our families, some left even because of the pressures of communism, and it was just easier to live in Croatia. That's when the migrations began and then it stopped for a while. Then in '67, '68, '69, many more leave individually, not like it was in '90 but they leave individually, one family, two, nobody comes back. They make it there, mostly they do business and those mini factories that they brought with them, and so it's easier to communicate and to sell in the Adriatic. There used to be tourism also, well the development of tourism in today's form in Croatia and they take those positions in various places across the Adriatic, by the coast, where they sell their products. So there's a street in Zagreb, a trade street, like there is *Çarshi* in Janjevo, there's a street *Konjišćinska* that's very...

¹⁰ Grade D, B and A, on an A-F scale (Five-0).

[Interview is interrupted]

So that street becomes very luxurious, rich, known not only in Zagreb but in all of Croatia, Konjiščinska in Zagreb where many of our businessmen take space, buy houses from the locals from those streets. And the numbers are enormous, big money is spent, shops are big, markets are opened with European standards. And that is a development when everything happened, I'm telling you, all of Croatia went there, they'd sell, they'd buy in bulk, big shops were being opened. Textile, shoes, jewelry, plastic, everything that we had here, they brought to Croatia. So during the '80s, '70-'80s, it was the beginning of it, and in the '90s, the street is popular.

That street and everything around it, people would say, "Where are you going?" "To Konjiščinska to shop." So many people, you could trade and shop in bulk, and Janjevo people are included in the life in Croatia, especially Zagreb. They do keep some of the traditions, but the schools, they develop later, which was rare here, it was rare that someone would go to and finish that higher education because the families were big and you had to go to work immediately or trade. So it was important that, when a child finishes elementary school, that it continues doing the family business, to work, to contribute. That was normal for us.

So I'm telling you, hardly anyone went to high school, let alone university, only a handful of us went to university. Later, since in Zagreb the chances are bigger for universities and so on, the young people get a desire for that education. So now in Zagreb we have people in higher positions with doctorates and such, so that's good and for that community, which in Croatia is considered to be ghettoized, although we are not, we always have our people who will help those who need it. We are very connected, in regards to family and marriage. It starts normally, it's a trend everywhere and where people come and move, to create families with the locals.

And so today we have more and more mixed marriages, not in a religious way but more in a national way and such, with Bosnians, with locals in Zagreb, with Herzegovinians and so on. So that's mixed, and the traditions of Janjevo, the dialect and the culture are starting to disappear. Now there's again a desire to renew that. Many of us have very quickly adapted in Zagreb, built two or three neighborhoods where they live with others too, but the majority of the people there are from Janjevo. There's a few neighborhoods where Janjevo people live. And they all know each other, but there is no more of that intimacy and closeness because of modern technology and development, the need for that, for business and all that urban pace of life had made it like that.

Unfortunately now, most of them only see each other for bigger celebrations, Easter, Christmas or God forbid, when someone dies. They meet then because the intimacy is interrupted, you see it in the configuration, the way houses were built so we all focus on each other, and it was normal that we all knew each other. When I started going to that school in Subotica, a priest asked me, when I said that there are eleven of us, "Well, Mate, do you know all their names?" (laughs) "How can I not, when I know half of the village." Half of it, I know the names of half of them and not know mine.

They had only one child, but for us it was normal that we know each other and what's also interesting is that people in Janjevo don't use the formal "You." Because of the closeness and communication between us, we called older people *baca*¹¹ or *axha*¹² for an older man. So we'd say, "How are you *axha* Paško, *axha* Roko, *axha* Petar?" and not "How are You?", then we think how many of us are there. So, it was weird for me that I had to learn that in Subotica, to address older people formally, then I think how many of them are there. So here it was important, it was like it used to be always, maybe 50 years ago, here a doctor, a teacher and a priest are important people in the village.

So I always say when they ask me why I'm still here, that it's better to be number one in a village than last in the city. Namely, that authority and that respect when you went to see the doctor, you'd get ready as if you're going to Mars. Also, when you go to church, the clothes had to be special, both for kids and adults, so you can't go to church as you want, that is getting lost today. Also, you'd get ready for school, kids had to be dressed nice for church, and they used to say, "You have clothes for Friday and for holiday." That meant work clothes and formal wear.

So we used to, as kids, stay in those clothes after we come back from church because we liked it, they were clean and new. But our sister would always say, "No, wear old clothes and then go play." And so, as I say, there used to be a rhythm, and I'm trying to describe it all in this Janjevo dialect and what was unwritten, to write it all down. So people that left and youngsters might not come back, God forbid and the crisis that happened in Janjevo, but they still knew those values that were cherished, which should really continue today even, so people could live joyfully and in touch with each other. That's what's missing in Janjevo still, I'm trying to get young people involved in it, I invite them to my house, since there's no other cultural institution, to stay there and put their phones away and all that technology. So they could start to live.

I met a girl a few days ago, she had those headphones in, passes by, says hi to me, and I say, "Take them [headphones] off and talk to me." She was ashamed a little bit and so. But this trend of technological development is catching on here also, which I consider to be normal, but it has to be a limit, so they know how to spend time with each other, to listen to each other and to spend some time together, and that's why we have this drama club and rehearsals. Now we're about to start every Saturday when school starts. In church, also at three o'clock, all Catholic kids that receive religious education come, both Albanians and Croatians, all of them. They come at three, we sing, we have a schedule, conversations and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Does anybody help you?

Don Matej Palić: No, I do it alone. I have an hour and a half with them, so we have on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday also, we meet and do religious education and have conversations. So every grade individually, on Saturday, everybody comes, all kids from first to eight grade. And then we work

¹¹ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

¹² *Axhi* another word for *axha* or *xhaxhaj*, uncle.

out what to do for that week, how and where to meet, what to do, when are rehearsals, so I publish that at the church. And everybody accepts it, and then we have some workshops during the church holidays. So we never buy any jewelry or decorations for Christmas, we haven't in years, they make it all with recyclable materials. We gather everything, and then they invent some things, we even have some products on the Internet. Then for Easter eggs also, those flowers, and we make something out of nothing, out of the materials we have kids make stuff. They meet there, hang out and know each other.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let me ask you something, when we spoke to people, they all said that Janjevo was a peaceful place. But what I'm interested in is, how did you perceive all these political events in Janjevo? I don't mean now, but what happened in the '90s. We can discuss that but earlier how was...?

Don Matej Palić: Well, I told you it was a communist system then, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it tangible?

Don Matej Palić: Here, not much, we paid taxes, everything was fine... When the town hall was ours, that was one way the Croatian community was repressed, in Janjevo back then, the town hall was taken from us, moved from Janjevo to Lipljan. Then the Kišnica mine was taken from us, which was owned by Croats, they were the directors and it was moved to Pristina. And later when we formed Metalac in '47, factory for making metals and metal products, they started to take away a bit of the authority. We had some of our communists there who were under their influence for sure and made it easier for people to leave, and the institutions.

Because we had big taxes, I think that's why there weren't any other repressions of communism. So the big taxes on the turnover we had, people paid regularly. So the municipality and the state were happy, taxes paid, 750 taxpayers. Sometimes they took away goats, cows, sheep and made things up. Especially in the '50s, that's when most people left for Croatia because they took everything from their homes. So taxes for the cattle too, for the products. We had vineyards, I remember that they used to 12 take from us this sort of excess of *rakija*¹³, we had to give away wine. We had two goats, and from that, you had to give away one goatling and so on.

We managed, we lived, but nobody fell under the influence of communism especially, except for a few of those that didn't contribute to their families, but even damaged the community, even today we don't have those institutions. First elementary school in those times was progress for Croatia and Croats. But later during communism, as it was a trend everywhere, teachers came here, policemen, doctors from all over and that influence also came, and we don't have our own people anymore and that's why I think the desire for an education is slowing down. So, I can't say with certainty, but I have been analyzing and observing it a little bit.

¹³ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from the distillation of fermented fruit.

Why weren't we given the education that we needed, we still have very intelligent people here, very capable. But we were given something, if he knows, he knows, if not, go home, he's not going to high school. So if you don't do well in elementary school, it wasn't enough to just teach them to read and write, but it's like it was only like that, when I talk to others from my generation or younger, it was, 13 "Whatever, let him go, give him 2, 4 or 5." So you were excellent but you didn't know anything. When I came to Subotica, I only knew the multiplication table, no tangent, no cotangent, no logarithm, what is that, no languages. Maybe Russian, I learned some Albanian, but only: *kallxuesi*, *emri*, *mbiemri* [albanian - verb, noun, predicate] and that's that, got a 5. Russian, *skaska*¹⁴, 5, basically nothing was...

Those teachers didn't educate us, didn't give us a platform so we could later get involved. It was a miracle that I survived and also my colleagues who later finished that school, there only needs to be willpower and a desire to accomplish something, I got involved and nobody taught us Croatian or Serbian or Albanian, nothing. It was all like, "Let him go, he's a kid," because there were 40 kids in the class and the teachers rarely insisted on anything. But also I think that it seems like we weren't given enough in those communist times, so we as Croats wouldn't prosper in anything. So it was like, "Just give them that, they will make a business." And that was something which I think was wrong.

And I also think that in that aspect we were deprived of an education. And of course, if your parents [phone rings] are not smart, educated, then it was normal that the parents for the survival of the family, couldn't wait for us to finish school and to start working, or those who were farmers or who made products at home, to start doing that in order to survive and live. And now, I'm telling you, in Croatia, that happened differently, we already have a lot of us who are professors, doctors and who are politically involved and finished all possible sciences. They have options, and it's normal today that without high school you can't... And this Metalac that was founded in '47, our people on their own got together and formed an association to make something happen for those people who were either illiterate but they could work, or they had this feeling for production in them or their hands.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And the state provided that for you?

Don Matej Palić: The state was taking over bit by bit and our people later, who was a communist, could be the manager of some or director and the others would be just regular workers, day laborers and such. So, many were hired but there wasn't any real progress, you couldn't prosper much.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And this masquerade you had, how was that cultivated? Was it also a tradition from Zagreb or Croatian?

Don Matej Palić: No, it was like, Croatian, Croatian, but we continued it here, and so it happens regularly, it was big, it was even forbidden for a while during communism, so young people organized it themselves and were even arrested, brought to the police and such. They were questioned...

¹⁴ Russian word literally meaning "story"; Russian fairy tale.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why, how did that happen?

Don Matej Palić: Well, that was always connected with religion, so in the communist system, it was like, “They are religious, got it.” So there were priests here, my former colleagues who were arrested, didn’t say anything, their services were being recorded, ceremonies, what happened in the church. Or if he talked to the people, many people were arrested and went to communist jails on no grounds and kept for two, three years. There, they lock them up but the church still took care of others. So that wasn’t something, the people would argue but they knew how to silence it and then they’d blame the people unjustly...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: As political prisoners?

Don Matej Palić: Most, most politically because religion was being spread. I remember when I was in the army, I was told immediately, “Priest, don’t spread any religious propaganda.” I say, “What am I going to do in the army, to whom?” So that was considered religious propaganda, that was always said, “Religious propaganda.” But we were brave, fearless, and in spite of those let’s say tendencies at schools and high schools to recruit us in Janjevo, it’s still that story and we don’t have any policemen. We don’t even have anybody from the army, there was always that recruitment in schools, police and the army, *JNA*¹⁵ officers. But to us it was presented differently in our homes.

No, you have to be a communist. Because then you end it with the church, so only when one officer left, my generation, I remember that they came for vacations and in the summer we’d play in the churchyard because that’s the only place we could play soccer, basketball and that’s how it is even today. We’d play there, and when it rang to go to church, he would go home. So he wasn’t interested anymore, but when he was young, he was one of the best boys in church. But, I’m telling you, they tried to separate us from the church, there was this pressure, but we focused even more on the church. Church meant a lot to us. Now, “Lock the priests up, take it away from them, fix a process for them and lock them up.” But the people continued to be brave and with the support of our bishops then in Sarajevo and Skopje and Prizren. So they always supported us to keep going. That was a Christian Catholic segment to preserve our faith and to stay in spite of any repression and torture.

Part Three

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you talk about the connection with Prizren, I heard that you... Songs from Prizren.

Don Matej Palić: Ah yes, yes, yes.

¹⁵ Serbian; short for *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija*; Yugoslav People’s Army.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: There is a connection, is it religious, what's it like?

Don Matej Palić: Well, the connection with Prizren has stayed to this day, but it was always cultivated because we were mostly jewelers, gold mostly, mines and such, and there was a lot of rich people here, rich families, and Prizren back then was new and the jewelers of Prizren too. We used to meet them in Letnica. Some at the beginning of the eighth, and we'd stay for 15-20 days in Letnica. They were people of the guild, businessmen, gentlemen, so many of our women got married to them or they would come here. And it was a good connection, I think it's a start of the trade line when they worked with us and traded goods. Here they made products from brass, copper, zinc, aluminium and there was also filigree trades.

Right after that, trading contact marriages came to be, families were made, very strong connections so to say. On the other hand, we also have a church connection with Prizren because it is an old Skopje-Prizren diocese that lasted until '96 and was directed at us. So Prizren was and still a center, and it has been renovated a few months ago, a dedicated cathedral in Prizren. So institutionally, religiously, it was a center of Catholicism. So we were also in that aspect focused and then religiously they were strong, we were strong. There was a close connection, which stays until today. You have this diocese today, there is no Kosovo diocese, but the Prizren-Skopje one where Prizren gets an important role in the Catholic Church in the world.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can we talk about when you came here during the '90s, were you a priest?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, yes, yes. I officially became a priest in September of '90. With a great celebration from my family, support and such, my family always gave me material and spiritual support when I went to school in '79, and are to this day. With the presence of my closest family and cousins, I have officially become a priest here. After two weeks, I waited for my decree two weeks, the designation from the former bishop of Skopje, Herbut. Then he named me assistant here for two years to work with kids and the youth. I had that decree for a year and then it was prolonged, so in '97, I had been there for nine months.

Then I went to Letnica for a while to also work with young people and later I return as warden of the parish, so pastor and I still have that title. In September of '98, I return to Janjevo, and alone of course, without any help, no nuns or any colleague to help me until today. In 2004, I got two nuns to assist me with medical and pastoral and any other aspect. I do religious education as much as I can, also performing and singing at the church. Today we only have one person who takes care of patients in Janjevo, and around because we had an infirmary here two-three years ago. The doctor came here every Wednesday, Doctor Zvonko Stašević who took patients no matter their nationality or religion.

So every Wednesday there were examinations, we had an infirmary, the nurse would help with first aid, bandaging, regulating blood pressure, sugar, pills. We had the help of a Kosovo pharmaceutical company, we had a contract and a deal with them, and the Ministry of Health, so we could perform

that duty and distribute medication, which we also got from the Kosovo pharmaceutical company, with Mister Lutfi and Haki Ejupi. We had that sphere of competency apart from anyone else, and we operated during crisis and we didn't charge anything, it was all free, even today, the medications that we got from Kosovo and Croatia, from Pliva three years.

All the needs we had, we did it only by demand, so there was a religious, economical, Caritas¹⁶, giving food, wardrobe. We had that... So that social and religious life happened here at the church. Thanks to help from Đakova, from Croatia, with two nuns, I was able to develop some other activities. Because on my own I could not accomplish everything, at the church and everything, but with their help... Now I only have one nun with me, Nun Ermina, who has been a victim for 82 years but she still visits the sick, takes care of them, bathes them, looks at blood pressure, medications and such. We stopped the infirmary because we could not handle it physically, there's no infirmary for the past two-three years because we had to stop.

So four years ago, not only people from Janjevo came, but also from other places, other villages. Then it was like, "Why go to the infirmary or hospital when you can go to the church for everything." But even today the nun and I, I was in medicine in Germany, I understand it, if anything is needed, 24 hours and meds or if we get anything from Croatia, we know to give it to people. Everything is for free. There isn't a man that came for help here and came back without receiving it, material, medical, whatever.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you here when Šešelj¹⁷ came to visit, do you remember it?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, yes, only... Yes, I remember that day, the doctor dentist, a friend of mine Ferit Kočani was at my place, I walked with him to the center. Then the kids, my kids said, "Šešelj, Šešelj." I say, "Let's go see him." I followed him to the center because it used to be impossible on the cobblestones, on that poor road to get to the church, so people would park in the center where the asphalt was. Here we didn't have the cobblestone, no asphalt, so it's developed now.

We, the locals, knew how to drive on the cobblestones, but people usually don't know. So I accompanied Doctor Ferit to the center, and I think that somewhere by the exit of the center I saw a group of people. They told me they went behind Šešelj, I myself didn't see him. Šešelj, apart from being at law school, part-time professor in Pristina, I heard some of his speeches, he didn't say anything here. So, he came by the police station in the center, turned around and walked to the exit of Janjevo, accompanied by his supporters. But he did not give a speech, nothing, no meetings, but...

¹⁶ Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of 165 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations operating in over 200 countries and territories worldwide.

¹⁷ Vojislav Šešelj (1954-) is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party. In 2003 he surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2016 he was acquitted of the crimes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: He didn't stop by the church?

Don Matej Palić: No, no, no. Only in the center, I remember exactly and I came down to accompany Doctor Ferit and I heard, I see {waves hand} a bunch of people. That didn't disrupt me, but I did see fear in some young eyes, "Šešelj, Šešelj, he came!" What was his rule, "Slaughter Croats and salads," something like that. He didn't do anything here, no meetings. I even asked people later if he said anything, nothing. So he did come here, but it was just for show, it was an additional incentive for Croats because there were already some riots in Croatia and war events. In Vojvodina also, in Bosnia, there was fear everywhere and here too.

When people start to panic, it's very hard to collect yourself and to preserve a certain stability and security, which, as a young priest, I knew I'd stay until the last man, as long as there are Croats here, I will stay. But, I couldn't guarantee to people that nothing would happen. It was uncertain, and when they asked me what to do about migration, it already started. Then I said, "Pray and decide for yourself, talk in your homes," because to give false hope to someone regarding future events is not good, nobody could have known what was going to happen. So there, what happened, our people were leaving daily, and they left with a verification from the church.

So we gave those out, my colleague and I, a document of baptism, to confirm that someone has been baptized. So they left with those, registered in Croatia, got their papers or marriage certificates or a family document. So we have files in our archive where a whole family is registered, dates of births, baptisms, when they got other sacraments. So with all that, they left for Croatia, registered at both state and church institutions. They crossed borders too, until '97 that document from the church, mine, with a stamp would even get you across the border. Also for visas at the embassy and so on. I mean, Croatia helped us a lot there and made it happen, even though in Bosnia, there was a barricade and everything, none of us got hurt. There were no victims, not in Janjevo, not in Croatia.

Anita Susuri: And how did those migrations affect the people who stayed here and the atmosphere, and you?

Don Matej Palić: How do you mean, the relationship with Croatia?

Anita Susuri: No, when they started leaving this place.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened to Janjevo?

Don Matej Palić: Well, it was scary, people panicked because when you see the configuration, I remember that my mom while she was here, in '92, when our first neighbour left, she told us, "*Kijamet*¹⁸, it's over." I said, "What's over, Mom? You mean the others?" "No, they left." So there was a

¹⁸ Arabic: the end of the world.

panic, a kind of euphoria that took over, that people got caught up in because families were big, many young people left. "What will happen to us old folk. If something happens, who will protect us, who will defend us?"

Because as I say, the configuration of the place, from the old times, when the wars were without any sort of advanced weaponry. So you'd come in strategically, nobody could come into Janjevo without being noticed or if, for example, a station was set up at the entrance, at the so-called door of Janjevo. You could put a watch and you wouldn't be able to go anywhere. Today everything is different, you could come from any side, even bomb it, planes, helicopters, driveways, who could stop anyone. So the technology developed, and the fear and panic grew.

There started being less and less jobs, we were somehow put on the margin, dead end. I think that was political, that Milošević ordered people not to leave, we couldn't do it. However, whether that was planned or not, what they wanted, we had no refugees from Croatia, refugees from Krajina where our people lived, in '96 in Kistanje. There were refugees in Gornja Gušterica, and in Donja, everywhere. But not in Janjevo, we did have many empty Croatian houses in '95-'96 that were intact. Nobody inhabited them, if that migration was systematic, let them go, so trucks from Pazar came here daily. People used to guess if the truck will come tomorrow or the day after, they'd pack everything they could possibly carry. Nobody could ban that, the police knew about it, the state knew, everybody knew. Nobody put an end to it, they didn't care.

So we carried everything, my parents took everything. Mom did leave some things in case someone came, they could settle, some old couch, stove, closet and such. But anything that was valuable, everything that they could, they carried even furniture and everything that was registered on a list so they even crossed a border with that confirmed list. "Go." Now why I say that, and it played out politically like that, there was a fear and a panic here, panic for those who would stay. So I can't say, those who stayed, and I stayed with them later, there were three of us, then two, then five nuns, everybody left.

I stayed alone in that big house for 12 years. I can't say that I'm a hero, but I didn't want to leave these people behind. Nobody knew what was going to happen, if everybody would leave. Those who stayed didn't have anywhere to go or something, most just have a love for Janjevo, for their hometown. So we have some single people living in houses, on a street maybe one person lives alone but they won't leave their house. I can understand when you get to a certain age, and that possessiveness comes to be, regarding property and such. So as long as there are those people, may God give them health, with and strength, I will always be here with them. And thank God, there were no problems ever.

So that's one thing, as you said, Janjevo is peaceful. From that aspect, Janjevo should have been the most developed place because of the unity of the people. Here we had in '90, actually in 2000, right after the bombing, 52 UN ambassadors. The Imam and I were together at my place on the balcony, sitting up there, wondering how could we. The late Irfan, Imam of Janjevo, how can we sit together.

We hugged, we saw each other every ten days, we had peace and tolerance declarations, and we asked leaders of Kosovo, Turkey and Croatia to do something with this place. But even today, we barely get any infrastructural help, but we should have been an example of multinational, multicultural and religious progress, to truly be an example to the world of how people can be together. We didn't have military here. We did have some refugees, I took care of Catholics from the Morava district because they came from Pristina during the bombing. Imam took care of the Muslims, we have always coexisted.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was it like during the war?

Don Matej Palić: Well, we had the police here only during the bombing, they were always there. It's possible that there were some other forces, but I think only two Albanians got hurt. One was somewhere above Janjevo, I guess he ran into the watchmen and he was drunk, I don't know, and got killed. The other one was old Džafa who was also above Janjevo, all the way to Šaškovac, I guess he didn't hear the guards who were firemen, I mean anti-aircraft. He didn't hear them and that's it, only two people got killed, two deaths during the war. So here it was very peaceful, and there was panic only one night. All those refugees who were there, we took care of them and put them in those empty Croatian houses. So, the people who were there, the Croatians, they gave them everything, bedding, housewares, dishes so that they can live normally. They lived...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: They were Albanian?

Don Matej Palić: Albanians, yes. And the Croatians gave them everything. So we put them all in the Croatian houses. And after the war, when people went back to their homes, they respectfully returned everything that was given to them. Many come to thank me even to this day for the help because we were more organized. The owner of Anija, the boat restaurant which we still have, Mr. Eset, his late son was also the owner. They made it possible for everyone, so Croatians and refugees, to have a great quantity of flour, which they didn't charge even after the war. That was a gesture of kindness, I looked after the refugees, provided them with basic needs, like flour, sugar and oil, for the kids, so they don't starve because it was a time of crisis. That we all know.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did anyone threaten you or anything else?

Don Matej Palić: No, no, no, I can't say. I'm telling you, I kept a list of the refugees, I even spoke with the commander back then, told him that he doesn't need to stop and check them, to harass them or to list them because I knew who was Catholic and the Imam knew who was Muslim. So we tried to, the late Irfan Beklići and I maintain peace, unity, and we were lucky that we had that mill which still works even today. The owner of the mill, who had silos with wheat, so we had the basic necessities to live, and flour, I'm very grateful to him. He showed he's a good man when I came to him to settle the bill, to see how much I should pay.

He said then, “Don Mato, thank God we were able to help.” Then he took those papers I had and ripped them up, I don’t even know how much flour he gave us. He tore it all up and said, “Forget about it, God gave us plenty, and thank God we’re alive and that we could help those people, and that nobody died, no children, from hunger and poverty.” So it was very good here except for that one night of panic. From Šaškovac, from that part of Janjevo, people started running. They came to the churchyard, I went out as some sort of leader. I don’t know how or what or why, but I said we’re not going to the church, because if something happens, the church would be bombarded because it’s in a visible location and it dominates the space.

I said, “No problem.” In my house that night, there were about a hundred people, I told them, “Everyone with kids, get inside here.” I already had some refugees who lived and slept there, from Minča, Kabaš and Stupla. They stayed for three months, lived there. I was alone and I put them all in the big rooms and said, “We’ll see what happens in the morning.” Those without kids we put in the surrounding houses where people took them in. I’m not sure what happened there, how brave was I, but if someone found out that we have them (laughs), it would not be good. But I don’t know, I wasn’t thinking. “Everybody get in the house, put the kids in beds, benches, tables, wherever. We’ll see in the morning.”

Then tomorrow around 6 o’clock, nobody was sleeping of course. I called the commander and asked him, “What’s up with Šaškovac?” And he said, “It’s over, there were some shots fired,” but he said nothing happened, “Everyone can go home.” And they are grateful even today, they call or come here from Germany, Switzerland, “We stayed with you.” Because it was real and it was at night. When I saw children barefoot, no shoes, no clothes, “No, no, can’t let them go at night, they’d freeze.” We can’t go to the church, so we went to my house. Everybody with kids, men, everyone inside and those who were alone, we just put them inside and that was that.

Part Four

Don Matej Palić: Are you going to ask a question or...

Anita Susuri: Could you talk more about the people in Janjevo who still follow those traditions?

Don Matej Palić: The people who come are a great support to us, I talked about the care we got from Croatia, our motherland. We get the biggest help and support from Janjevo people who still, after ‘91, but they didn’t come for a while because Croatia was under occupation, so they couldn’t come, they crossed through Hungary. When I went to visit my family, I had to go through Vojvodina, Hungary and then enter there, the trip lasted 18 hours. Many were even scared to come, so for a while we were really alone.

And later, since '96-'97, they started coming more and more, now we have a holiday approaching on the 8th of September and many people come on the 4th or 5th because St. Mother Teresa is celebrated then at the cathedral of Pristina. There's a big celebration every year and we all take part in it. And then on the 5th, the three-day holiday starts and the preparation for Letnica. And then many people from Janjevo come and we expect a big influx of guests, they even come with buses and then we find accommodations for them, dinners and such. To us it's a tradition that we love, and it gives us a certain will, energy and strength to stay and to thrive in our hearthstones. And those people are mostly the ones who help this community and the church with material means.

So the church survives and our cemetery is looked after and, at the same time, it's a big moral support for us. We feel a certain familiar bond, unity, many of them weren't even born here but they come happily. So five, six times a year we feel the support of our community, of the people of Janjevo and with them, Croatia. That's one reason for us to stay here, even people still do leave sometimes. There is no coming back because it's very hard in regards to infrastructure, there's no water. Just a few days ago, it was gone and we were supposed to get it on Monday, after we opened a well and fixed everything, the power went out. I called, asked around, and the lights in Sušica were on.

So the power grid is very bad here, and if there's strong winds or thunder, the power goes out. We already know about this, and we don't have water, this morning my neighbor tells me how they opened a well and they have water. She says it's very murky. I don't know why this trend keeps happening to people who live here. Not only to Croatians, even for Ramadan, there was no water, they celebrated, I was very sorry that it happened because you have to greet guests, you can't do anything. But why is it like this? This treatment of Janjevo, which still is an example of unity, cherishing traditions.

You asked me about the events that mark Croatian community, or Catholic Church holidays happen multiple times a year, and one is in February, depends on Easter with a full moon. Before preparations start for Easter, 40 days before, it's called, it's always on Tuesday. Clean Wednesday is the beginning, on Tuesday, you'd make donuts, all sorts of... There's a big celebration that day, there's still a tradition from Croatia, it's called costume ball or a masquerade, and on that day people are allowed to be wild, to act however they want to, to put on masks. Here traditions were always, in the communist times, they used to have these masquerades throughout the whole village. And people used to get ready for months in advance, they made masks, not like today when you just buy them.

And then some groups would secretly get ready so nobody would know who they were. I remember when I was a kid, we'd dress up in all kinds of stuff, Indians, cowboys, and had some toys also. Men would usually dress up as ladies, they'd put makeup on, you couldn't recognize them, even as priests, on that day, everything is allowed. People went around the village, groups would gather and celebrated the event, then they'd go to houses, usually nobody would recognize you and they come to the house and in Croatia you don't, but here too, "Masquerade, masquerade, today's the day, give us

something and we'll go." If they don't give anything, then they shame them and nobody knew who you were.

So mostly men dressed up as women, women dressed as men, put mustaches, makeup, everything is allowed. Somebody dressed as a prostitute (laughs), a cowboy, with, Gypsy or whatever, it was like that, all was allowed. They would get ready in large groups in the morning. We'd organize a ball in my house and a pageant for the best mask. We'd have awards — best mask, second best, third and then every kid who had a mask got something. But mostly they'd buy Spider-Man masks, princesses, I don't know, Turkish TV shows and such. That used to be held at the Culture House.

In the evening, when they get through all of Janjevo, whole lines of masked people, and there was a dance at night. The Tuesday before the fast, tomorrow at night actually, at midnight when Wednesday starts, everything stops. During the fast, many people renounce alcohol and cigarettes. On that day they can drink and smoke but at night it starts. Many give up alcohol, meat, cigarettes and all other vices to keep their bodies grounded and humble and prepare for Easter. When Easter comes, we already have a celebration at the church, as soon as it's midnight, then everyone lights a cigarette and celebrate again at my house.

Then they'd drink, no drink for 46 days, but then it began, smoking and they can barely wait for that to begin at midnight. Some continue not smoking and some can't wait. Those are some nice traditions and then we have on the 23rd St. George's, on the 22nd, everything was allowed again and friends would meet. The so-called *Rifana*, or St. George's Day, sing and drink all night, and after that stealing was allowed. So those who made meat, you come to their house and steal something, nobody told you no. And if you get caught, nobody would stop you. So there were groups of young men and women, they'd make tents outside. Our hills up there were full of tents. Then you sing and drink, and in the morning, the music stops, everyone falls asleep, go to early rise, wash up.

There's a spring there, where a grave is. They go there and wash up, come back, go to sleep and then it's quiet all day, on the 23rd. So, the traditions that marked the Croatian community and Janjevo still are popular today, even the masquerade. On the 23rd of June, for *Rifana*, people meet and light fires. They're big fires and also, nobody forbids it. So fires, people light them, jump over them, drink, celebrate, bake corn, there's already some then. That's something we will have. A little bit less now, we only light one fire to mark it. But see I'm trying to get the kids to remember that, some of those traditions are pagan for sure. But it still holds the community together and we celebrate, it's good to be happy, not to be depressed all the time, under all that technology today and to be together.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: There was never any thefts in Janjevo? Because if people forgot, they'd add it...

Don Matej Palić: Never, never. People now, on Friday, one older man also from Janjevo came to me, brought me something he found in the center because it was market day, "Here Don Mato, I found this there."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was that cultivated?

Don Matej Palić: Let's digress for a bit, there was eleven of us. And if our mother and grandmother had not raised us not to steal and touch and that's not yours, there'd be eleven criminals (laughs). We had gardens, fruits, vineyards. I don't remember that we even had a key to our house. So it was always unlocked, the gates to the yard, house, all. We were all so honest, and everyone that came here knew that, Albanian traders and Roma also. If you lose something, keys, wallet, gold ring, earrings, anything, watch, they lose it. If a Croatian found it, he took it to the church.

So today I still keep an archive for some keys, watches, some gold, some wallets, no documents, of course. They were brought to the church but people never came for them. When something was found, we'd post it on the church, "Found set of keys, wallet found." Then people knew and Albanians also heard about it and whoever lost it, police knew that it was reported, and if the owner came, they'd come to the office here. Did you have a wallet, how does it look, how much money did you have, any ID and so on. Antonija, my younger sister, she found a big wallet on a Friday. She was at the marker and found it. I remember it had some marks and dinars and a man came, he sold cattle I guess, he got the money at the market.

So he basically lost his whole life, she brought it to us immediately, didn't open it. I took her, brought her to the priest and the same day that man came. He reported it to the police and then a colleague asked him what he had and how much money he had. He knew everything. Then he got his ID out and said, "Ah it's you, here you go." Then he said, "Who found it?" And he called our mom, he said "It's fine, No, no, get her here." And he gave a little something for my sister. Mom said, "Out of the question, it's our duty." Because she didn't want something to be given in front of the child because then the kid would learn.

No, and when our sister came out, she said, "You can't give anything to her, we don't want it, it's yours." "No, no, I want to give something." Then he gave a little something and Mom said, "No, I'll take it in front of the priest, but not because she's a kid, it's her duty to give it back." So if we found a dime, a nickel, we had to take it home and then Mom said, "Take that to the church." So that's strange to us, I still don't have any problems here, you heard they were calling and I was busy. I don't know who came in, it's a big house, someone could come and do whatever they want, I couldn't find them. There was never any reason for me to lock up.

I have some files, office, house open, sometimes there's even money laying around. But no one ever, not Albanians, not Roma people took anything. That was the rule here, no stealing. Through our vineyards, there were some fruit fields, no fences, no nothing. And to get to somewhere, not to go around, people would pass through. You could still pick an apple, a pear or some walnuts when you pass through, nobody will tell you anything. Only grapes were protected from big damage.

Today Janjevo, I only talked about my home and the church, recently our shed was broken into, it's

outside the gates. It was broken into three times already, some iron was stolen, copper and some old cables. I don't care about it because I have to clean anyway, but nobody here ever does.

Even myself, how many times I left the church unlocked, the house unlocked, I forget to do it or my sister, whoever's last, but nothing happened. I'm not scared that something will be stolen. I even told them, "Don't sin and steal." You can come and say you need it, I'll give it, it's no big deal. Just don't commit sins. But we have some families, especially the Pacolli family who is notorious for stealing, they're like termites, there's ten of them. Wherever they enter, they demolish and destroy everything. Beautiful kids, I tell them, "Why do you steal, just come and ask and I'll give it to you." Their dad is a thief I guess, and that's how it works.

They've all been to court, the police know them as termites. And people are afraid now, which was never the case, to steal. Even their house was broken into and we always find out who it is. We don't know how to stop them, they were supposed to move out and go to Obilić but they didn't want to because they like it here, it's easy to steal. There's many different houses, they took every little thing from those abandoned houses. And those who live alone are also scared, they got into two houses, a woman was in church last year, they went in through the roof. Broke it, opened it, went inside, took some euros, some gold, threw things around, cut open the couches.

They thought there would be a lot of gold, she lives alone, she's a teacher. During the hour that she was in the church, they even blocked the door in case she came early so she can't enter. So she also had to break in. I understand now, and I tell her, "Slavica, I know what fear is, when you came inside and saw your house like that." She still lives alone but she's too scared to go anywhere for the night or to leave the house alone. Now one of my neighbors here also, a mother died and now she's alone in that part. First neighbor comes quickly or to church and she comes back quickly, says, "I don't know, they'll ruin my house."

So that's that, and no Janjevo people would go in and break stuff and steal, but that family, we're all a little bit scared of them. I told the commander, we talk often, Pacolli, Pacolli, Pacolli. Pacolli can't do it alone because those kids are still so young. The rest steal whatever they can, cattle, chicken, sheep, goats, horses and then they give it back. People know they steal pigeons, chickens, and they go to them and find their own and take them back. They say, "They're only kids, what can I do?" But there's probably someone else with them because in January a van was stolen, a house was broken into, some traces were left at the house where the brother and sister live.

At night, they took some 600 euros, all kinds of documents, the woman's wallet and some coats. So there is someone else behind the Pacoli family. Now it's hard, our station is very weak, only five or six officers and they can't do three shifts. At night there's only one officer, yesterday, the commander was the only one there all day, entire shift. He can't even go out on patrol or anything. I said it before, it seems like Kosovo institutions, the state of Kosovo don't care about us a lot, we at least have some reported crimes. When the internationals were here this year, a discussion in this very room was that

there's no crime in Janjevo.

I say, "If you want, we'll make them, it's easy but you're not supporting that." We were at the Municipality of Lipljan, police station with the least incidents. I say, "Thank God now and bring more officers so it completely disappears." Some Austrian looks at me like, "Thomas," he says, "Well, we don't have them, we don't." "Well, then I'll make an incident tomorrow. You want five, you want ten, how many? But you should thank God that people live in unity." Then he was sitting here like this and went, "Well, Father Mateo"... I say, "Don't father me. I'll make ten incidents tomorrow, you want us to be first on the list, that's easy, but why do that when we can be honest." So it's good I guess and it's not suitable for higher institutions, what, we're supposed to support bad behavior. Crime, drugs, smoking, already started with drugs, they have those, smoke those weeds and stuff. That should be stopped, those places where they meet, I can smell the smoke, and when I walk there, I can smell the scent of it. We're supposed to stop it, so we don't make thieves of them because they will need the drugs. If we don't take care of it when it starts, it's bad.

But unfortunately, I'm telling you, we made appeals to the Croatian Embassy and the government, and the former Prime Minister Haradinaj was here, President Thaçi, Atifete was here three times. We always talk about that kindness, unity, beauty this place still has, and the coexistence and unity still. We should support that and they should too, it should serve as an example publicly, on TV, everywhere that people can live together. But no, the opposite is happening, nobody looks after us. We appeal, we ask, I asked for the police station to be improved, to get more officers, to get rid of the crime because it's a small place, we all know each other.

Now there are people who go by who we don't know and then a van gets stolen, a tractor, other things. That means that they come with the help of some locals who show them, "You should steal there." I want to stop that, we know, I asked it from the police. They have their rules, I have mine, but I said, my suggestion was to put a checkpoint at the entrance of Janjevo, who comes, why they're coming, visit family, sit in the tavern, buy some *sudžuk*, anything. But we register who came and if they do something, we have them registered. Not like a control of the people, we don't want to scare anyone, but just a simple, it doesn't have to be every day, but a few times to set it up and these thieves would be like, "Oh wait, maybe it's going to be there tonight."

But an officer can't leave the station, it's their rules. He can't go on patrol, you can do anything you want in the village. By the time we call Lipljan, and the patrol comes, and how many times they told us, "Patrol is busy, they're in the field, wait." What to wait for, there are no murders here, or attacks, Janjevo is a free place. People can walk at two, three in the morning, nobody will get attacked. But these thefts and break-ins, you never know what the thief is carrying. It's dangerous, if they come to my house, I think I'd just run, there you go, steal, just don't hurt me, I don't want to get killed. What can I do.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the past you had a custom of pouring water?

Anita Susuri: Yes, to clean the streets when the priest goes by?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, and they'd clean on Saturdays, that was the tradition. My mother was alone with Dad, but every Saturday, even if she didn't have water, she had to clean the street from where it's ours, we knew the line. And if the other one doesn't clean it, the neighbor, hers stays dirty and people go to service on Sundays. They go to church or visit each other, it was a tradition for daughters who got married to visit on Sunday afternoon her home and her parents. So if in the afternoon people return from church, or tavern, and they go by a dirty street, it meant the houselady was lazy, it was shameful.

So we never had water in Janjevo, same as today. No water, especially in the summer, but the streets were clean, houses were clean because Sunday is church day. God forbid that something is dirty. Janjevo was clean then, I waited today for the rain, to get wet and I got surprised when I walk by, especially in some parts where Albanians live. Right by the curb, bushes, grass, nobody will clean it. My mother or any Janjevo woman then cleaned it, men never cleaned. If your husband goes out dirty, it was shameful to the woman. I remember when I was a priest here in '90-'92 while Mom was here and I step in the mud sometimes, I leave my shoes out, can't walk inside with those shoes.

There are rugs, God forbid. I take off my shoes outside, she goes out, serves me, goes out. When I go back, my shoes are clean. Many people thought it strange, shoes in Janjevo are clean and neat for years, that was the tradition. To walk out of the house, I said, "Mom, I'm going up again." She says, "No, [there's] dry mud." So the men were gentlemen, which was bad, they didn't touch anything, but when he goes out, he's a reflection of how the housewife is. Child, man, husband has to look nice, well dressed and all, yard has to be clean, clean houses. Janjevo women are very clean women, very neat and so are the streets.

It had to be done so if someone walks by doesn't say, "What kind of housewife is this? She's no housewife," meaning she's a bad woman. Now it's the opposite, a woman told me a day ago on the street, by the end, she said, "It was never like this." It's all stone now, it's a lot easier to maintain than the dirt before, mud, cobblestone was hard, a rock comes out, Mom puts it back in or anyone. You had to put it back, but it's a lot easier today. I organized a tractor to go by here and clean it. I go and clean and maintain this circle as much as I can, I went down the other day, cut everything overgrown, thorns, trash. They look at me and wonder, "Don Mato, what are you doing?" "You throw, I clean." "I'll throw it away again." "Not this much."

I organized these actions a few times but nothing substantial. Even the Norwegian ambassador, the former one did it together. Now it's this director of OSCE Jan Braathu, we had an activity, Clean Up Janjevo, but what for when they throw it out again. It's interesting, eats a snack, throws a can, I say, "Why did you throw it?" It's like a tradition, and now I try to educate kids and I put a trash can there in the yard. Whenever I give them something, ice cream, cookie, the military brings those cans, those water bottles. "There you go, it's no problem to take four steps to throw it, fifteen, twenty just put it in

the trash.” Then we light a fire over the fence. I collect trash all the time, I became a trash company (laughs).

Now I’m waiting for the rain so it gets wet by the curbs and I can take shovels and clean with the kids. It’s disgraceful, everyone waits for someone else to do it, then the Municipality, when they don’t, we do. It’s ours, it was out of the question, it’s mine, so I must take care of it. We do have trash collectors but some people won’t pay three, four euros a month for it. We have a very nice little truck that can go through these small tight streets of Janjevo. We have three workers and I signed some contacts in the Municipality to do it monthly. Wednesday, Saturday, a truck comes and gets the trash. What else do you want, a man comes and takes your trash, he also has to earn money, takes away your dirt and trash. But no, they won’t pay, not even four euros because there’s no penalty. And I made a suggestion two years ago that whoever threw trash, if he’s seen by someone or the police, to report him and to get a fine of 50 euros.

[Interview is interrupted]

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And those carpets you mentioned, did women make them?

Don Matej Palić: Yes, the women made them, they made the rugs, the *bošče*¹⁹, women made all kinds of old cloth rugs, and they put them, they were mostly narrow and long and colorful, from old rags and they would go in the hallway or long paths. And they used to make big rugs or just bought them from the markets, from Prizren, those colorful ones. And they used those until those new modern carpets came to be. There are still some families today who used those old rag carpets, which are actually good quality. And they are wear and tear, but nothing happens to them, so mostly all of us had them.

And we had to be careful not to ruin them or get them dirty and the tradition was, let’s say, at night you couldn’t throw trash away or any other leftovers, but you kept it in the room. And then in the morning you could, but at night a young woman mustn’t go outside if she had a baby or something. Those were all sorts of traditions we had, I think they are good and I wrote them down wanting to preserve the idea of a Janjevo mother who had children whose goal in life was to raise them without any issues and who was patient in these daily, weekly and monthly rituals.

Everything that you’re supposed to do was done with the utmost respect for your father-in-law and mother-in-law and your husband, there’s his water if he needs it, everything is in order, the glass is right there, everything. And then he says, “Get me the water, woman.” (laughs) So the men were like that, I couldn’t understand this. Later when I come and sit with the same people a few times, as I walk in, the women stand up, “What are you doing?” “Ah you’re a man.” I tell them to forget about that. So there was a strong patriarchal system and the men enjoyed it. He could drink and do whatever he wants, but he would never touch anything.

¹⁹ In Albanian *boshqe*, in Serbian *bošče*; Embroidered sheets used to wrap up presents.

Women painted houses, women did everything, and the husband had to go to work to bring the bread. That's how the husbands were, fathers were mostly out working and their families respected that. He earns money and we must respect our father because he puts food on the table. Our mom, I remember she always used to say, "Dad didn't bring any flour or things to the neighbors but to us. You have to be happy with what we have." That was also a major part of life, and I started writing a book a while ago called *Janjevo Mother* to celebrate these illiterate women but who had a great spirit, great sense of life and who were accepting and patient.

They respected their husbands, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, everybody, whatever they wanted, she had to endure and complete.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I asked about these rugs because, when I look at these photos from the past, they had the rugs behind them.

Don Matej Palić: Behind, yes for photos, so the *čerpici* wouldn't show up. They are something, and so they'd put the rugs up and they stand like this and that was that, the photo was taken which was a big deal. They were so proud, we still do but we had a big Bulgarian community. At the end of the 19-18th century, beginning of the 19th, our people migrate to Bulgaria, to Sofia, Smolen and Plovdiv, and there still are some communities left there, Croatians who still stick together, Janjevo people. Some moved to Croatia, I visited them in '96 but not after. So they were Croatians who left from here for gold, jobs, business and such.

And their families here, mothers and fathers had some French documents that served as passports because then Bulgaria was under them and my grandpa had it and it said "Croatian." So they could travel a lot, even to Moscow. They went to Argentina, to America, there were supposed to be two of our men on the Titanic, Ivkić and Berišić. They were supposed to board, they had the tickets even, but they weren't able to reach Italy and so they couldn't board. But those tickets, they still have them, their grandkid Pera has them, grandkid of Tune Ivkić, ticket to the Titanic where he was supposed to be. My great-grandfather, mom's grandfather, he was in America and we even have graves where they were buried, and everything is written in Croatian.

At the cemetery, we have memorials which were sent from America back in the day, by boats for months, a memorial from America which arrived for the mother, father and so on. So in the 18th and 19th century, many people went there, we have two Croatian communities in America, from Janjevo exactly. Their kids don't speak much, they call us sometimes, now the Internet has made it easier to contact each other and so they come back to their families here, to their roots, they look for books about it. So from that time, we have some documents when many people were registered as Croatians, religious people, St. Nicholas and such, and they traveled the world.

So it was very developed but because they were smart and wide, they knew. My great-grandfather lived there, his wife died here and my Grandpa Baško stayed. Those who went to America more often,

he got a wife here, a girl, asked her, “Marija, will you marry Kolja? He’s in America, he has a son here.” She said yes and they got married. She didn’t know that this Kolja, Nikola Macukić, and so she got on the boat and they travel for three weeks. They arrived in America and she got married and my mom’s uncle is born there, Marko. Then they return to Janjevo and later there, four more kids are born and they still live here. There was no question about it, you want to marry him, yes, do it. Get on the boat, he pays for the ticket and they get married in America and that’s that (smiles).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the weddings like here?

Don Matej Palić: The weddings were very big, significant, held on Sundays. Just on Sundays, not any other day, Sunday and Monday the weddings would last. Before noon, they’d get married at the church, on Friday at the town hall, it was like that. Three days before that, the couple would come by the church and learn vows and such. You knew they had to do that, then they got married on Friday at the town hall, on Sunday at the church at nine o’clock. Then everyone went back to their homes, you’d get *bakšiš*²⁰, get the couple some gifts. At two o’clock, they leave the groom’s home, go get the bride and you’d give a *miraz*²¹ and celebrate the departure from the house. So her relatives then, she goes to her husband but she visits often. The celebration continues at the groom’s house.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Is there a tradition that’s unique only to Janjevo?

Don Matej Palić: Only in Janjevo? Yes, yes, yes, a big tradition. For example, there was a ram especially for that back then, not now, you’d put apples on the ram and when you go get the bride, some other bride goes out, then he asks, “That’s not hers, this one is mine.” Then she comes, gets special blessings from the parents, which is still popular now. Our people in Zagreb still do that, then the parents, mom and dad bless the bride so she may go into that marriage. Then there were some special songs and women who are either related to her or great friends, they all gather and walk behind her. Parents basically give the blessing, then those women, girls, friends and family come and they give her away. Before that, we had many more of those traditions.

While they’re engaged, on Thursday, it was *boja*²² and such. Those are very long traditions. My brother tried to do some of them when he got married to his wife in Zagreb and we succeeded, but again, I wrote some of it down so it may come back. It’s not just a tradition, it’s getting to know people and the family. From the groom, they go the woman and give gifts, what to give to which member, then she packs it all up in a huge suitcase and then they give gifts to him. He carries those home and shows it, then the women look at it to see what she gave to whom and such. So the preparations for the wedding are massive, and buying presents and getting money ready. It didn’t go as fast as it does today.

²⁰ Tip, bribe.

²¹ Dowry.

²² Tradition done before a wedding; Women’s gathering.

Today, if we want to get married, we do it. Me, you had to know what's coming. There were some cases during the preparations, that old women weren't satisfied that she is getting married to him, or the other one is going with him, so the old women would step in and meddle. Then it was interesting for the guys to see the girl that's getting married. It was talked about, we all knew each other, then the guys get intrigued. So they'd say, "Where was he before?" But as soon as she starts getting ready, they find her more interesting. Then the women meddle, even before the engagement, someone else got interested and then sometimes they would break off the engagement. And all that happened through the church.

If they got engaged, they had to come here and then break up, return the gifts and such. A grand ceremony, but still significant, and good for getting to know each other. When the bride get to the house, she had to have money in the shoes, then the youngest brother-in-law or any other had to put her up on a chair and she'd give money away. You kissed everyone's hand and everyone had money. So that was a big preparation and big expenses because whose hand you kissed, they'd have to give money. Then you'd have a lot of money, weddings were interesting.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Don Matej, do you have anything else to say for the end? Something we didn't ask but you'd like to add...

Don Matej Palić: Well, I'm not sure what to add, there are many interesting things about Janjevo regarding those Prizren songs and all those traditions. For example, we don't have our own folklore, it's mainly put together from all these different local influences from here. Sometimes people are amazed how we sing all songs, Macedonian, Dalmatian, Kosovo, Prizren. Some of it I put together and we're trying to make some music. There are some of our musicians in Croatia who could perhaps make something.

We have a seven-act rhythm and dances and weddings and *kolo*²³, we mostly dance, we don't have that typical Croatian dance or a waltz, but we do have *kolo*. That's still popular because we have that Eastern, Byzantine melody in our ears and we do sing a lot, very nicely. We're all mostly very musical people, it's rare that a Janjevo person doesn't sing. I think that this area, the air, we're 740 meters above sea level. And there's a circulation, how the valley sits, this air circulates and gives us certain phonetics and a clear voice. We sing quite a lot and we talk very fast, very high-pitched, which is interesting for this area.

Now this should all be saved somehow because most of these things we do not have in written form. We do have some photographs, but nothing written down. Why? Nobody could write, they thought we'd stay here always and then it was just transferred from generation to generation. Many people still know about all that, I did record some things and I still must keep doing it to preserve our presence. What you're doing now is what we should be doing ourselves because this monogram is just one part

²³ Traditional Slavic circle dance.

of it, it's not chronological, even though much work goes into it. Our Professor Čolak who was in Padova, he gathered a lot of material. However...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: He was from here?

Don Matej Palić: He was from Janjevo. He did have some material which his daughter gave to the Faculty of Philosophy, Linguistics Department. I don't know why she didn't let it be published but I'm telling you, that business and what happened all together in the past 30-40 years, the migrations and everything, I guess we too have forgotten what is of value. Then you worry what you're doing, how you're going to do it, where you will go, barely existing, worrying about material things and that home life and family. So we kind of lost track of many things. I think we will, when many people come for the 8th and 9th, we already started with these events and try to sort of wake people up culturally and see what they bring from home. We want to somehow get it all in one place, an archive and to open a museum and some culture, to have it all written down, to know who we are, what we are and what is appreciated here.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you so much.

Don Matej Palić: Thank you for your effort, and when you publish something, let me know, so I know what to do next.