

Who We Were; Who We Are



Kosovo Roma Oral Histories

- 2004 -

*"Roma never wanted to be rich;
they always searched for happiness in any place,
and this is all."*

-Feride Hasani,
Preoce, Kosovo

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Introduction

All place names mentioned in this project - towns, villages, and municipalities - are in listed primarily in Serbian. Where relevant, the Albanian name follows. This is not a reflection of our political beliefs. Serbian names are internationally recognized; the new Albanian names are not known outside the province.



The name Roma is used in place of Gypsy - a word with its origins in the misplaced assumption, by Europeans, that the Roma in their midst originated in Egypt. Europe was recently emerging from the dark ages when Roma first appeared there; no one had seen Egyptians in a long time, and things got a bit confused.

While the word Gypsy has romantic connotations in North America, it is generally a racist term, as are its many equivalent terms in the European languages: Zigeuner (German), Cigan (Serbian/ Croatian), Maxhup (Albanian), Athingani (Greek - *do not touch*), Kipti (Turkish), Gitano (Spanish) and Gitan (French).

This project exclusively uses the word Roma. It encompasses all sub-groupings. Sometimes, Roma in this project are sub-identified by their particular clan, be it Gurbeti, Muhadjeri, Arlija, Bugurdjije, Ashkalija, or Egyptian (although Egyptian is more a hopeful non-Roma classification than a clan).

A British 'Gypsy' was once asked why his people were called Roma.

“Cos we’re always roamin’,” he answered.

There is a much simpler answer; Roma is the Romanes word for man, or us.



Prizren's Terzi Mahala

This project was implemented between February and July of 2003 in several Kosovo Roma communities. It started long before that - in early 2001, when we began to see and understand the need for such a project.

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In November of 2001, we conducted a random interview in Gracanica to see what it would yield. We picked the mother of the middle-aged blacksmith next door, who we'd paid to weld iron bars over our windows. His mother, on sunny days, would slowly walk outside her small, well-kept home, to sit in the sun. She brought a small stool with her and placed it on the edge of the dirt road that ran up to the unused railroad tracks and the Serb homes beyond. On every sunny day I exchanged greetings with her on the way to or from work.



Father and Son: Kosovo Polje

Adem Osmani interviewed her. He struck gold. She was almost 90 years old - she was sharp and lucid, she cracked jokes and occasionally she smoked a cigarette. She revealed to us a world none of us knew about; the woman spoke of growing up in Pristina's Moravska Mahalla in the 1920s, when the Serbs were rare and the

Turks were still the elite of the town. She spoke of the smells, the languages, the Turkish markets, the politics, and her best friend who she played with despite the fact that they shared no common language. She learned Turkish in order to better play dolls with her. She talked about Italian officers and the German occupation forces; she spoke of Roma traditions that we'd never seen or heard of - not even from the Roma we knew around Gracanica.

She was not the inspiration for this project; she was confirmation that it was worthwhile. We were going to showcase her, and others her age, and we would dig into them - sell them the project idea and the value it could possibly have. Through eighty or more interviews, a broad picture would eventually emerge; a history of people who no one had ever been too interested in before. Roma have been studied exhaustively - by some that hate them, by some that treat them as pets, and by some that are simply curious. Only a few scholars paid attention to Kosovo's Roma - Crowe and Duijzings - and it wasn't enough.

We're not scholars. We thought that we would paint a picture of a world that no longer existed. We'd find Roma that could remember a southeastern Europe before the borders were solidified, and later sealed. We dreamt of bridal fairs and horses run through mountains to graze, families and clans that would wander this area according to their trades and the seasons. We got romantic; it was naïve, and it was stupid and wrong.

No such picture emerged. We were lucky with the first interview, but we didn't record it. We laid down improvised shorthand in a child's soiled notebook. And when we secured the funding for this project, we went back to that old woman who used to sit in

the sun before the winter came on and the power died and we were all buried in snow until March.

She didn't survive the winter. Her son told us that she went to sleep one night and never woke.



Roma bride in Obilic, circa 1960s

anything at all. She sits in Kosovo Polje now, still alive, with a shawled head full of memories she'll never speak of.

Roma appearances are deceptive. Life in Kosovo's tough. It wrings the beauty out of the women and the ambition out of the men, because ambition here was never rewarded unless, depending on the decade, you were a Serb, or an

Albanian, or a communist or a nationalist. We found elderly Roma in every site but in the end, many of them weren't so elderly - 55 years old on average. We discovered older Roma who wouldn't talk, or couldn't talk, and we found Roma that wished to speak with us but couldn't recall how many children they had. And while they told us some things, what we really wanted - the memories of their parents, of their stories - came out to a paragraph or two. Maybe the memories were painful, whether good or bad, because they represented poverty, desperation, racism, and times past that may have been better than the Roma situation now. We asked Kosovo Roma to share stories, events and histories at a time when those memories may be exceptionally painful to recall.

*"We don't have anything that is our own.
All we have was taken by other nations."*

- Ibrahim Eljšani
Prizren, Kosovo

This project is a document of what has been lost. It's about a language choked with foreign words; traditions often followed by rote; a people removed from their past, trying to preserve the things they have left that make them Roma. It's about a people who have lived in Kosovo for hundreds of years and have never been afforded a true place there by others. It is said that the Roma version of history is simply the earliest memory of the oldest member of the community. And when they die, they take their history with them.



Destroyed Roma home: Kosovo 2003

Kosovo's Roma live precariously. The Albanians say they sided with the Serbs. Some call them Shqiptarët I dorës së dytë - Second-hand Albanians.¹ Many Albanized Roma in western Kosovo declared themselves Egyptians - before, to reclaim their culture, and after the NATO war's end, to offset the murders, rapes, beatings and expulsions that were collectively directed at Roma after June of 1999.

The NATO campaign against Yugoslavia began on March 24, 1999. It ended after 78 days of bombing. In that time, Yugoslav forces expelled roughly 800,000 Kosovo Albanians, and killed thousands in the process. The West thought it would take years for the Albanian refugees to return.

It took weeks. Returning Albanians - and the Kosovo Albanian community at large - turned on Kosovo's Roma. The Kosovo Albanian perception of Roma - collaborators, spies, looters and gravediggers - was

accepted as fact. And Kosovo's Roma were beaten, raped, murdered, expelled, robbed, burned out of their communities and driven into fast-established enclave areas. Those that avoided this fate fell back into their Mahalas - neighborhoods - where most continue to suffer at the hands of the majority community. Some Mahalas - in Mitrovica and Pristina - were entirely burned and destroyed.

No matter that it was not their war. In the end they, as the weakest minority in Kosovo, were shattered.

"My son was killed.

He was 44 years old, and now his wife is a widow with three children. He was murdered by the Serb military; they thought that he was someone else, and they shot him.

*My other son found him,
and when he saw him he collapsed."*

- Azem Beriša
Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë
Kosovo

The security situation has improved. This may reflect that Roma and other minorities have gotten smarter instead of the hatred getting lighter. Roma refugees are slowly returning; this is a long, slow, and oft-times hazardous process. Roma are now visible in Pristina; some of them beg, others recycle, and a few entrepreneurs have set up squeegee businesses by the UN-installed traffic lights; they'll clean your windshield for 50 Euro cents or one Euro if you drive a big white car.

They're all smart enough to make themselves scarce after dark.



Bullet for Enemy: Pristina Graffiti, 2003

The NATO campaign ended four years ago. Most Roma still speak of it in the present tense; it has not stopped. They also don't refer to it as 'the war,' or 'the NATO campaign.' They simply call it 'the bombing,' as that's all it really was for them. With Serbs and Albanians, Roma were in the middle. Both sides courted them, neither liked nor trusted them, and all thought the Roma were a notch beneath them. So the Roma were pushed, pulled and broken between the two, and many of them were expelled along with the Albanians, while others were bombed along with the Serbs. Mythology has solidified into history for many Albanians; they were on the side of the Serbs, and that's that.

History has no need for simplicity or clarity; it recognizes no such things. But people who seek explanations for the terrible things that they dealt with and witnessed do. Humans aren't good at history; we seek to categorize. And most Albanians have categorized the Roma as fifth columnists.

No matter that they were forced to dig graves. No matter that, for every Roma that stole something, more were expelled. No matter that Albanian-speaking Roma were driven into Albania and Macedonia only to find themselves assaulted by Albanians in the camps; they were intimidated into registering themselves as Albanians, and were refused humanitarian aid by local NGO employees - both Slavs and Albanians. No

INTRODUCTION

matter that some were killed by Yugoslav troops, or that when they fled to Serbia, many were expelled back into Kosovo as undesirables. No matter that many of their women were raped and deal now with the trauma of not being able to mention it because they'll forever be regarded as unclean by their own. No matter that, as a suspect people and a nationality with no nation, they have always had to gravitate toward those that are in power, and those that own the scaffolds, truncheons and whips. Kosovo's Roma are now convenient scapegoats for one side and manual laborers for the other. Or better, as a Roma in Gracanica told me:

*To the Albanians, we're dogs.
To the Serbs, we're pet dogs.*



Who We Were; Who We Are

is the result of two and a half years of work with the Kosovo Roma. This project was thoroughly shaped by their suggestions and ideas. After all, it's their story.

Here's to them.

Bobby Anderson

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The Interviews

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A Serbian woman died in Pristina. She had five children; two daughters and three sons. She was my uncle's wife; she died after a long illness. And when she passed, the family buried her, but her spirit returned to my uncle and entered his body.

'Why don't you return to your place?' My uncle soon asked her.

'I can't. Because your graveyard won't have me. You should have buried me with the Serbs.'

- Adilje Osmani
Gracanica, Kosovo

All these stories are the same as others. They could be told by Albanians, Serbs, Gorani, Turks, Bosniaks or Circassians; anyone that lives in Kosovo has a similar story to tell. These interviews detail thwarted ambition, pride in one's children, the frustration of living in an undefined land where your neighbors may, and likely do, hate you, traditions that have faded into the distant past, and rites and celebrations that people no longer remember the meaning of, nor the reason for. These stories recount fables and songs, family memories, children growing up in neighborhoods that no longer exist, falling bombs, foreign troops, deaths and even hauntings. And, every once in a while, a certain story reveals a glimpse of the distant past. The Roma are Kosovo's everymen; the racism directed against them assumes that their stories can't be the same as others, but they are.

No internationals were present during these interviews. Our interviewees were more candid and comfortable without them. The presence of an international would change the questions, answers and content.

All interviews were conducted in the language the interviewee felt most comfortable telling a story in; every Roma involved in this project speaks Albanian, Serbian and Romanes fluently. Roma are linguists; they have to be.

Many interviews have been extensively edited for content. Thirty interviews are not included in this project.

"...ad petitionem Vlachi et Vitani Egyptiorum..."



Ottoman Kosovo - Pristina

November 5th, 1362:

In Ragusa - now Dubrovnik, Croatia - late fall is overcast. Clouds choke the southern Adriatic; hard rains hit the walled city, overflow from the gutters and pound the smooth cobblestones below.

The goldsmith Radenus Bratoslauich accepted as a deposit eight silver pieces from two dark-skinned, black-haired men - one Vlachus and Vitanus. Ragusa was an empire built on trade; it had outposts as far away as the ancient mines of Novo Brdo, Kosovo. Its traders controlled Bosnian silver from Srebrenica. Its diplomats fawned and played greater empires - Turks and Venetians - against one another. It invented the concept of ship quarantine and outlawed slavery before any other nation in the world. Its ships later took part in the Spanish Armada.

Radenus refused to return the dark men's coins; Vlachus and Vitanus filed a petition with the local authorities, who ordered the goldsmith to do so. Ragusan ships then sailed the known world; strangers such as these were not unusual. But the official noted on the petition that these men were Egyptiorum.

The petition survives - in the Dubrovnik *Historijski Archiv*. It is the first reliable record of Roma in the former Yugoslavia.²

Gypsy \Gyp"sy\, n.; pl. *Gypsies*. [OE. *Gypcyan*, F. *Gyptien*, Egyptian, Gypsy, L. *Aegyptius*. See *Egyptian*.] [Also spelled *Gipsy* and *Gypsey*.]

HISTORY

1. *One of a vagabond race, whose tribes, coming originally from India, entered Europe in 14th or 15th century, and are now scattered over Turkey, Russia, Hungary, Spain, England, etc., living by theft, fortune telling, horse jockeying, tinkering, etc. Cf. Bohemian, Romany.*

*Like a right gypsy, hath, at fast and loose,
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss. --Shak.*

2. *The language used by the gypsies. --Shak.*

3. *A dark-complexioned person. --Shak.*

4. *A cunning or crafty person [Colloquial].*

- Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary
1913

Unfortunately for the Roma, their first appearances in southeastern Europe coincided with the Ottoman Turkish invasions of the 13th-15th centuries; the stereotypes began on their entry. Roma were associated with non-Christians; they were dark-skinned, dark haired nomads of no fixed address, traveling according to their professions and the seasons. They were divided into bands - *Kumpania* - comprised of many families, ruled by *Voivodes* (Serbian for chieftain), a lifetime-elected position. Their caravans crisscrossed Europe; they left signs of their travel for other groups; bouquets of sticks tied with ribbons, and notches carved on trees.



A Roma Dervish

Roma men were donkey-drivers, bridle-makers, leatherworkers, blacksmiths, sieve and brick-makers, livestock traders and animal trainers. Roma musicians played instruments their ancestors had first picked up in Armenia and Persia.

They led dancing bears on chains. Their women wove baskets, told fortunes, begged, read palms and sold herbal remedies. They were nomads - a suspicious lifestyle for the settled

European communities used to invasions, be it from the steppe or other lands. The Roma found business among Europeans; the animal traders knew about cross-breeding and the health of livestock. The blacksmiths worked cheap and well. The musicians were always welcome.

“The real wild Balkan gypsies rarely bother about a tent, but crouch in the lee of any bush or bank that is near a water and fuel supply. Swarthy, scarlet-lipped, with black brilliant eyes, long heavy elf-locks of dead black hair, and unspeakably filthy, they are scorned alike by Serb and Albanian. The scorn they return tenfold, for they hold that they are the chosen of all races, and that none other knows how to enjoy the gift of life. One came up and boasted that he was the father of thirty-two children.”

- M. Edith Durham
High Albania
1908

And slowly the European idea of Gypsies formed - that they were heretics, lazybones, thieves, beggars, kidnappers and vagrants. Europeans called them Heiden (*heathens*), Tatarre, Saracens, Turks, Jews and Pharaones - the Pharaoh's people. They spied for the Turks; their women were witches. Many of the racist stereotypes heaped upon European Jewry found their way to the newcomers. Isabel Fonseca, relates, in Bury Me Standing: the Gypsies and their Journey, a tale, told by a Macedonian Romni, of how the father of all Roma inadvertently forged the nails that were used to crucify Christ. They became cursed; a discarded fourth nail, glowing hot, haunted them. They could never escape it, no matter how far they traveled.

Europeans told similar tales, the *inadvertently* was omitted.

Since their appearance in medieval Europe, Roma have been ghetto-ized, expelled, branded and enslaved; Roma were human livestock in Romania until 1864. Roma were collectively hung, simply for being Roma; in 1710, Frederick I of Germany had an inscription carved on a gallows: *'The penalty of thieving and Gipsy riff-raff.'* A decree issued in Prague in 1740 made lynching policy throughout Bohemia. Nineteen years before, King Charles XI of Germany ordered that the Roma within his territory be put to death. The Roma called these dark historical turns *Porrajmata* - devourings.

And then came the holocaust - the *Baro Porrajmos*, or great devouring. A badly wounded German soldier, recipient of the Iron Cross at the battle of Stalingrad, convalesced in his hometown in Germany while the Roma attracted greater SS interest; the soldier's grandmother, it emerged, was Roma. The man was promptly dispatched to Auschwitz. Roma had their own *Zigeunerlager* at Auschwitz III - Birkenau: the 'Gypsy family camp.' That decorated soldier and 21,000 other Roma died there; at least 400,000 Gypsies were murdered during the Baro Porrajmos.

*"He is a gypsy, a thing without cross or soul,
one cannot call him either friend or brother,
and one cannot take his word by anything in heaven or earth."*

- Ivo Andrić
The Bridge Over the Drina
1946

Roma are no longer lynched - in an organized, state-sponsored manner. The Second World War's end saw Eastern Europe's Roma barred from traveling, bartering and plying their trades. They were forced by the new communist authorities to reside in fixed locations. New Mahalas grew outside the capitals and major cities of every east European state. Šuto Orizari, Macedonia - Shutka to those who live there - began as a refugee camp for Roma when Skopje was leveled by an earthquake in the 1960s. Shutka is the largest of these Mahalas, with a population of 40,000, and is the only Roma 'town' in the world.

Some nations tried to assimilate them. Others tried to eliminate them by passive means, such as (then) communist Czechoslovakia's sterilization programs. The fall of communism has given rise to nationalist, right-wing movements that find natural targets in the Roma among them. Economic stagnation makes it easy.

Attacks on Roma grow, by both skinheads and ordinary citizens enraged by the idea of gypsies - 'petty criminals' and 'welfare recipients' among them that are not of their blood. From Germany to the Czech Republic, from Slovakia to Romania, Roma have been beaten and killed. Their settlements have gone up in flames, often under the eyes of police who don't care to stop what they see. Ideas of the rights of minorities find little resonance in those that commit these acts against a people who do not even possess a native word for war. Roma borrowed the word from Turkish.

Roma unemployment in Europe averages 30-40%. This is the direct result of Roma educational levels; most Roma who are employed work as menial laborers. In Eastern Europe's new states, Roma are the last to be hired and, in times of economic downturn, the first to be fired. Traditional outlets for grievances related to hiring and firing practices - complaint boards and civil courts - are often off-limits for Roma due to the institutionalized racism found in these outlets. Roma illiteracy and lack of proficiency in the state language doesn't help. In countries where racism directed at Roma is much more extreme, legal bodies take no action against abuses directed at Roma, and police sometimes actively condone or even participate in those abuses.

The Roma situation in Europe led a Macedonian Roma political party to write a letter to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, urging the creation of a Roma country, to be called Romanistan. The Macedonian media regarded this as a joke.

It wasn't; it was a naïve, last-ditch attempt to rectify generations of exclusion and abuse. Roma are the only nation that has not even the semblance of a country. They are strangers in every land they were born in. The Kurds can define Kurdistan; the Roma cannot even say with absolute certainty where, in India, they are from.

HISTORY

In Kosovo, the Roma were always better assimilated. Unfortunately for them, the Albanians viewed them as being assimilated into the Serb side; their children attended Serbian schools after the Albanians were banned in 1989, when Kosovo's autonomy was revoked by Belgrade, and when Albanians were fired en masse throughout Kosovo, the Roma weren't.

After the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia ended in June of 1999, a new Porrajmata began there. It continues.

The Roma populations of Europe and Kosovo

Europe's Roma population is impossible to estimate. Reasons for this range from deliberate undercounts by government census takers to the desire of some Roma to distance themselves from their ethnicity by adopting a different one.

"I cannot ever, ever be Albanian or Serbian."

- Hazbije Vičkolari
Prizren, Kosovo

In Kosovo, Roma often registered themselves as Albanian or Turkish, while others now claim Ashkalija or Egyptian as an ethnicity. Many Roma living in Serbian areas, especially those Roma that follow the Orthodox Christian faith, declare themselves to be Serbs. This classification - "Srpski Cigani" - has its origins in the Vojvodina and northern Serbia, where many more Roma are Christian than in Kosovo.

Between five and ten million³, and perhaps as many as twelve million⁴ Roma call Europe home. The majority of these Roma are found in Eastern Europe.

According to United Nations Development Program (UNDP) estimates, Roma - including Ashkalija and Egyptians - now total 1.8% of Kosovo's population. Many scholars and activists agree that Roma, before the 1999 NATO campaign, were roughly 5-10% of the Kosovo population.⁵

Roma Origins

"There is a story about one prophet in the Koran who God punished. God told this prophet, don't be afraid of war, and don't leave your home. You must stay in the place where you are from. And I'm afraid that we are actually descended from that kind of people."

-Azem Beriša
Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë
Kosovo

HISTORY

Roma emigrated from the northern Indian subcontinent in successive waves of migration, beginning roughly 1100 years ago; the first records of Roma in Persia appear in the 11th century. The linguistic evidence shows the route Roma traveled to Europe by the quantity of loan-words they adopted from other languages on the way, and Romanes now uses many words of Farsi, Armenian, Turkish and Greek origin. Romanes bears distinct similarities to the Indo-European Punjabi, Dardic and Gujarati languages of northern India. Romanes is closest to ancient Punjabi/Hindi.

Roma are very similar to the Dom group of Indian tribes: Dom is a Sanskrit term for a lower caste whose members make their livings as musicians. The most striking linguistic link between Dom and Rom are their names, both meaning 'man,' or 'us.' Most Roma accept the Indian link; a minority of Roma claim other origins, including the Egyptian theory put forth by puzzled Europeans. Still other Roma theorists accept their Indian origins, but claim that they are the descendants of migrating Kshatriyas - the warrior caste.⁶

Causes behind the migrations

There is little evidence in the historical record to explain why the Roma abandoned their homeland. War or famine are the likely culprits, but, much like the question of why the Scandinavian tribes suddenly began raiding Europe's coastlines a thousand years ago, the concrete reasons have been lost. Romanes only became a written language a half century ago; the little we know of early Romani history was always written by others.

Roma in early Kosovo & southeastern Europe

Roma ventured into modern-day Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo along with, and often ahead of the Ottoman advance; Byzantine scholars had already made note of their presence in modern-day Greece. A likely-inaccurate historical assumption placed Roma in the Balkans by the 1350s; most scholars now agree that the Persian phrase Cingarije simply denoted shoemakers, though that word eventually evolved into the pejorative Serbo-Croatian phrase Cigani. Besides Ragusa in 1362, Roma were first noted in Zagreb, Croatia in 1373, and villages of sedentary Roma in Western Bulgaria were noted in 1378.⁷

The city-state of Ragusa (Dubrovnik, Croatia) had no land, nor did it seek to conquer any. It grew fat on sea trade, and maintained its independence throughout the Ottoman-dominated 14th and 15th centuries. Noel Malcolm called Ragusa the 'Hong Kong of the medieval Balkans.'

Roma appeared there bearing Slavic surnames - evidence of considerable time spent among the Serbs. They likely fled from Ottoman-ruled Serb territories. In Ragusa Roma found work as servants, along with their traditional trades of blacksmithing and music. Ragusan records in the *Historijski Arhiv* indicate that Roma, though in low standing compared to the Ragusan elite of rich families that dominated sea-borne and inland trade, were never subject to the abuses they would soon encounter in the rest of Europe.

HISTORY

The first reliable source placing Roma in Kosovo notes the presence of Christian Gypsies in Prizren in 1491; their main trade was smithing.⁸ This vocation survives among them; in Prizren's Terzi Mahalla, there were 65 blacksmith shops up until a few decades ago, and in Prizren there is a street called Fatatarde- Blacksmith Street. Those 'Christian gypsies' converted to Islam long ago.

In the Ottoman lands, many Roma converted to Islam, along with a significant portion of the Bosnian and Albanian populations. Coastal areas of Albania proper avoided the near-thorough Islamization of some ethnicities in the interior because of their proximity to Italy, Montenegro and Greece, and the priests that found their way to them. In Kosovo, most Albanians and Roma converted. The Ottoman millet system decreed different rates of payment to the empire for Christians and Muslims; conversion came with financial benefit, as well as the right to ride horses and bear arms. Muslim Roma were still subject to Christian taxes. This may be because the Ottomans did not take their supposed Muslim beliefs seriously.⁹

The Ottomans viewed Roma as an unruly, albeit harmless population; the process of ghettoization - confining Roma to specific neighborhoods, first called Ciganluk, and later, simply Mahalas - began under them, as did increased taxes for Roma of no fixed employment (*privat*, in today's terminology). The Ottomans felt uneasy at the idea of nomads within their territory, though they themselves began their history as nomadic raiders under the ruler Osman; the seasonal wanderings of the Muslim Bijeli Cigani - White Gypsies - were banned. A Roma census carried out by the Ottomans in the 1520s noted 164 Roma families in Pristina, and 145 in Novo Brdo; many of them had Serbian names.¹⁰

In the north, Serbian blacksmiths pressured Roma into not plying trades that put them into competition with the Slavs. The Turks taxed them more heavily. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Roma population of the former Yugoslavia grew, fuelled by Roma slavery in bordering Moldavia and Walachia (modern day Romania). Escaped Roma slaves made for the border, where the only thing they were subject to was taxation. Many Roma settled among the Serbs; in the north, they adopted Orthodox Christianity, and many lost the Roma language in the next few generations, leading to the group now referred to as Srpski Cigani (Serbian Gypsies) by both Serbs and Muslim Roma.

Serbia became officially independent from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 (recognized as such at the Congress of Berlin). The nomadic Roma lifestyle was officially banned in Serbia a year later. This rule did not become truly enforceable until the end of the Second World War; southeastern Europe's borders were porous, and the Serbian attitude towards Roma lacked the brutality found in neighboring Romania and other areas of Europe. The Serbs regarded the Roma as unruly children, as opposed to heretics and, in tales from Western Europe, the forgers of the crucifixion nails. This attitude was not shared by Kosovo Serbs; when Kosovo was absorbed into Serbia in 1912, the Roma there were, like the Albanians, regarded as leftovers of the Turks. Many were driven from their homes and killed.¹¹

The Baro Porrajmos

HISTORY

In 1938 Heinrich Himmler ordered 'a settlement of the Gypsy problems on grounds of race.' Roma in the third Reich were required to wear yellow armbands bearing the word Zigeuner. They were removed from school and banned from traveling. Those who could not prove employment faced imprisonment in Buchenwald or Dachau. After the Second World War began, German Roma were expelled en masse to the Polish territories.

Soon the Roma were earmarked for extermination; the Reich Racial Hygiene Research Unit determined who was a Gypsy, and who was not; who lived, and who died. The differentiation between immediate liquidation and detention in an Arbeitslager meant little; it often concerned only the timing of death. The armbands changed. Roma now wore black triangles, which denoted them as asocial - or green triangles, which identified them as career criminals.

Vichy France deported 30,000 Roma to the camps. The Romanian fascist leader Antonescu had thousands of Roma dumped in the Transdniester region, where they were left to die.¹² The Czechs - themselves classified as subhuman by the Nazis - killed scores of Roma at the Lety camp.

At least 400,000 Roma throughout Reich-occupied Europe were exterminated.

The Baro Porrajmos in Yugoslavia

"Roma were punished by all sides. We were slaves to everyone - Serbs, Albanians and Germans. They hated Roma here."

- Hačim Minuši
Prizren, Kosovo

*"I cannot remember any bombing, any violence.
All I remember is that we didn't have any bread to eat."*

- Djafer Čuljandji
Prizren, Kosovo

Germany invaded Yugoslavia in June of 1941. Croatia became a puppet state, run by Ante Pavelić, a Croat lawyer and founder of the Italian-supported Ustaša - a separatist Croat terrorist group that managed to assassinate the Yugoslav king Aleksandar Karageorgevic in Marseilles, France in 1934.

The Ustaša did not, like other Reich allies, behave passively when it came to Hitler's desire to remove the Jews, and the Roma, from Europe. 28,500 Roma¹³

lived in Croatia and the sections of Bosnia-Herzegovina that were ceded to it. The new state forced them to register with the authorities; it banned them from sidewalks and parks. Roma faced a myriad of rapidly-established laws that effectively prevented them from functioning. Between 26 and 28,000 Croatian and Bosnian Roma were murdered by the Ustaša. Many were killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp, 95 kilometers from

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Zagreb, on the Bosnian border. Others found themselves shot in reprisals for partisan activities, while others deported north, to the General Government - the rump area of Poland where every major Reich death camp was built.

German occupation forces in Serbia targeted Roma as well; 40-60,000 Roma lived there. Executions began in October of 1941, usually by firing squad. A concentration camp for Jews and Roma was established in Zemun (now a district of Belgrade), staffed by Ustaša from neighboring Croatia. At least 12,000 Serbian Roma died in the Baro Porrajmos.

Kosovo's Jews were targeted in the Holocaust; its Roma were not. Kosovo was in the Italian zone of occupation; the Italians deported Jews and Roma in a haphazard, and sometimes half-hearted, fashion. Individual Italian officers refused to carry out deportation orders, and the Italian zones became sites of semi-refuge for European Jews and Roma; some Roma and Jews were even provided with false papers by the Italian authorities. Sometimes the safety was illusory. Kosovo's Jewish population was rounded up and deported to the northern camps by troops from the Albanian Skanderbeg SS.

Noel Malcolm estimates that roughly 1000 Kosovo Roma died during the war.

Roma in post-WWII Eastern Europe

*“Roma had work then. They got credit. They had better salaries.
And at the end of the month,
we could afford to buy sugar and oil.”*

- Isak Avdo
Prizren, Kosovo

After initial low counts in post-WWII censuses, the Roma population of Eastern Europe climbed. This was not only due to birth rates; Roma did not identify themselves as Roma for years after the Baro Porrajmos.

The new communist regimes established in Eastern Europe after World War II introduced a myriad of laws regarding Roma in their territories. These laws, on the surface, intended to improve the social, educational and economic standing of Roma; the practice was to forcibly remove them from their culture, and all the positives and negatives of it. Roma would be assimilated into each majority; they'd go to school and work. Livestock trading, animal training, and other traditional Roma livelihoods were outlawed, as were encampments and seasonal travel. Eastern Europe was not unique in these laws; Western European nations had created similar laws a century before.

Roma were to be educated - but not in Romanes. Their cultural expression, national dress, and other traditions were discouraged.

These laws were not difficult to enforce. The Baro Porrajmos had already encouraged Roma to not be Roma.

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Communist assimilation policies in Yugoslavia and other nations had many positive effects. Schooling for Roma children became mandatory; in prior times Roma were not thought to be worth educating. Within a few generations, literacy found its way into Roma culture, as did, in some areas, an understanding of the necessity of education - a necessity that older generations of Roma were denied.

Positive quotas were set for Roma entering university and seeking government jobs. Perhaps the greatest impact these regulations had were exposing the majority ethnic group's children to Roma children in classrooms; before, none had any interaction with Roma, and this exposure ensured that stereotypes would not simply be taken at face value. Racism directed at Roma is less easy to accept when it affects your playmates. Education and quotas created higher living standards for Roma in Eastern Europe, and socialized medicine extended the average Roma lifespan.

Roma in post-WWII Yugoslavia

"In Tito's time I had a job, and after that I even got a pension."

- Azem Beriša
Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë
Kosovo

"Tito gave us all our rights. The right to everything."

- Rexhep "Redjo" Skenderi
Plemetina, Kosovo

Yugoslavia's Roma fared better than others. They were classed as an official national minority (as opposed to a nation) with the right to their own language and cultural expression. On census forms, they - and many other nationalities - enthusiastically declared themselves as *Yugoslavs*. Along with mandatory schooling, quotas for government work, and university entry, the Yugoslav government later forbade media outlets from using the word Cigan; it instructed them to use Rom instead. Yugoslavia created primary school classes in the Romanes language; this may have been a unique offering in post-WWII Eastern Europe, and by 1983 ten primary schools offered Romanes language instruction through grade four. Roma literary journals and magazines were published; Roma movies were shot in Serbia and Macedonia. Yugoslav Roma theatre companies toured Europe. Josip Broz Tito toyed with the idea of creating a Roma autonomous area in Macedonia; he did not, due to Macedonia's new, and often challenged, status as an ethnicity instead of a geographic region. Bulgarian irredentism - they claimed Macedonia as theirs - played a role as well. Shutka and its environs flourished; its Roma musicians and actors became known throughout then-Yugoslavia. Belgrade broadcast radio and television programs in Romanes. An educated Roma middle-class of small businessmen, traders and communist party members emerged, albeit small in number. Roma benefited from Yugoslav policies; many others did not. Educational policies were not taken seriously by local officials; Roma still had the

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highest infant mortality rates in Yugoslavia. A 1978 study noted that only 100 Roma were currently attending universities in Yugoslavia.* Generational racism would not be rooted out in a half century; after Yugoslavia's dissolution Roma found their rights removed, and became the victims of the conflicts that few paid attention to.

“Our children weren't in school; the teachers didn't want them there. But every once in awhile Belgrade decided that Roma children should be educated, and the police would arrest a set of Roma parents because their children weren't enrolled. Dad would get his butt kicked; all the Roma parents would rush their children to school. Soon the campaign would end; our children would stop attending, because the teachers didn't want them there and they didn't want to be there either. But soon another campaign would begin.”

- Roma woman, aged 68
Gracanica, Kosovo

Kosovo Roma continued to practice ethnic mimicry. They were aided - and sometimes even coerced - by the authorities. Non-Roma last names were assigned to Roma families by municipal officials, often in an attempt to bolster the population of their own ethnic group. Yugoslav census takers noted that many who claimed to be Turkish, Albanian or Serbian appeared as though they were Roma.

The estimated Kosovo Roma population stood at 100,000 in 1971. The declared figure in the 1971 census was under 15,000. In the 1981 Kosovo census - the last census not boycotted by Albanians - only 34,126 declared themselves Roma. The real number may have been five times that. Albanian clerics pressured Muslim Roma to register as Albanians in both Macedonia and Kosovo.

The rising social and economic status of Yugoslav Roma began to end after Tito's death in 1980. The process accelerated when the country ended in 1991. Yugoslav Roma were regarded by the Yugoslav constitution, not as a nation, but as a protected ethnic minority; not so in Yugoslavia's successor states, which often do not recognize Roma within their borders at all. They are denied citizenship and what it bestows - the right to residence, state health care, social assistance and education. Croatia is rectifying this with new laws. Roma children have been excluded from Croat schools by both the government and ignorant parents; in September 2002, in Drzimurac - Stelac, Croat parents ejected Roma pupils from the school, insisting that only academically-gifted Roma be allowed in school with their children.¹⁴

Exceptions to these exclusionary rules are Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro; these states recognize Roma as official state minorities with all rights to citizenship. Montenegro even became a preferred place of flight for Roma fleeing the

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Kosovo conflict in 1998. Montenegro set up refugee camps for Roma refugees; other states only sought to deny them entry on frivolous administrative grounds.

Roma were not the specific targets of ethnic attacks during the Yugoslav civil wars until the NATO campaign ended in Kosovo in June of 1999. In Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, they still found themselves expelled. Roma settlements in the combat areas of both countries were destroyed during the 1991-1995 wars.

Kosovo - the history

Kosovo's ethnic balance, according to the 1981 census, was: 77.5% Albanian, 13.2% Serb, 1.7% Montenegrin, 0.8% Turkish, 3.7% Muslim, and 4.1% other. The Roma population was buried in the last two groups, along with an assortment of other ethnicities, including Circassians, Torbesh, Gorani, Bosniaks and Croats.

This was the last semi-accurate Kosovo census; the Albanians boycotted in 1991. The United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo has scheduled a new census for 2004.

The 1981 figures are inaccurate due to the ethnic mimicry of Roma in Kosovo, which deflates them and inflates the number of Serbs, Albanians, Turks and 'Muslims.'

(The Yugoslav government allowed people to classify themselves as 'Muslim, in the ethnic sense.' Census takers first allowed this in Bosnia, where earlier, people had to declare themselves as either Serbian or Croat Muslims, though they identified with neither.)

UNMIK's planned 2004 census will clarify the ethnic upset that has occurred in Kosovo since 1999; because of the amount of displaced Kosovo Serbs and Roma, Albanians may account for as much as 96% of the present population.

Kosovo was ruled by the Romans and Byzantines; often it was ruled by no particular nation. It held little value besides its minerals; the Romans mined the region, and settlements grew along its trade routes.

The Illyrians - perhaps the fathers of today's Albanians - were already present in Kosovo when the Slavs, fleeing the Avars, settled there by the eighth century AD.

The Nemanjić Dynasty, the Ottomans and medieval Kosovo

The Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanjić, a vassal of the Byzantines, ruled Raška (an area directly north of Kosovo) from 1169 to 1196. Stefan expanded his rule through modern-day Kosovo, Bosnia and Montenegro. Upon Stefan's death, his son, also Stefan, was declared king of Raška by the Byzantine Pope Honorius III in 1217.

In 1219 Stefan created the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church (Stefan, with the approval of the Byzantine Empire, broke the congregation of his lands away from the enraged archbishopric of Ohrid) with its seat based in Žiđa, near Kraljevo, Serbia. The church's seat was moved to Peć (Kosovo) after Žiđa was destroyed in a Tartar raid.

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Stefan's brother, Rastko, was the church's first archbishop; he was later canonized as Saint Sava.

Stefan's grandson, Stefan Uroš II - now known as Stefan Milutin - expanded the Raška kingdom into Macedonia, at the expense of the now-weak Byzantine empire; he made Skopje his capital. Stefan Uroš II's eldest son, Stefan Uroš III - later known as Stefan Dečanski - led a revolt against his father. The revolt was crushed.

Stefan Uroš III was blinded on the order of his father - a typical Byzantine punishment - and exiled to Constantinople. Legend states that he was not completely blinded; he only pretended to be blind for his time in exile. Years later, Stefan Uroš III was allowed to return; soon after Milutin died, Stefan Uroš III 'regained' his sight - a miracle to all - and seized the throne. He expanded the empire into Bulgaria and began the construction of the Dečani Monastery; soon he was removed from power by his son, Stefan Dušan. Stefan Uroš III was imprisoned in the fortress of Zvečan, Kosovo, and was later garroted.

Stefan Dušan's reign was the pinnacle of Serbian medieval civilization. Under his rule, the empire grew rich on trade, mining and agriculture. The Serbian Orthodox Church prospered and expanded under his endowments to them for new monasteries and churches. Western Kosovo became Metohija - Serbian for church estates. Stefan Dušan waged war against the Byzantines; he conquered Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and vast areas of Northern Greece. Had he lived longer, he may have taken Byzantium as well. The empire reached its maximum expansion - culturally and economically as well as geographically - under his reign.

The year before Stefan Dušan's 1355 death, the Ottoman Turks first set foot in Europe. The Serbian kingdom had less than a century of life left at the height of its power. Ottoman military prowess would bring them to the gates of Vienna, Austria by 1529.

Stefan Dušan's son, Stefan Uroš V, lost the empire his father had created; under his weak rule, the kingdom dissolved into rival principalities. These principalities became vassals of the Byzantine Empire; after the fall of Adrianople to the Ottomans, the rival Serbian princes who ruled the pieces of Stefan Dušan's expansion united to counter the Turkish threat. In 1371, their armies met the Turks on the Maritsa River. The Serbs were crushed.



Medieval Serbia

HISTORY

The Ottomans, led by Murat, conquered Sofia, Bulgaria in 1385 and Niš, Serbia in 1386. A Serb-led army defeated an Ottoman expeditionary force in 1387 (or 1388) at Pločnik.

The Ottoman invasions were seasonal. The Serbs and their Christian allies waited. The Bulgarians - allies of the Serbs - unexpectedly accepted Ottoman vassalage; Murat was free to strike west. And on June 28th, 1389, a Christian army led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović met a large Ottoman army at Kosovo Polje. Lazar's army was made up of Serbs, Hungarians, Bosnians and Albanians. The Ottoman army, led by Sultan Murat, was not nearly as diverse, but Christian mercenaries, including Greeks, Bulgarians, and even Serbs, were present in its ranks.



Decani Monastery

The armies fought one another to a standstill; both Lazar and Murat were killed. The Ottomans, led by Murat's son, Bayezid I, left the field, in order to secure Bayezid's succession. He returned to Constantinople to kill his brothers and rule. Lazar's wife accepted Ottoman vassalage; she then entered a convent. A truncated version of the Serbian empire survived, with its seat of rule in Belgrade, and later Smederevo. The Ottomans finally eliminated the Serbian empire in 1459.

The Turks ruled Kosovo for the next five centuries. The Austrians expanded southward after the Turkish siege of Vienna was broken; they invaded Kosovo between 1688 and 1689. The Serbs threw their weight behind the Austrians and rose against the Turks. The Austrians pulled back in 1690; thousands of Serbs - perhaps as many as 30-40,000 families - fled northward with them, led by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Arsenije. These refugees were later settled in the Vojska Krajina - the military frontier (present-day western Herzegovina & Croatia) that separated the Austrian empire from the Ottomans.

The descendants of these settlers created a Serbian Republic of the Krajina in 1991 by force of arms, and were driven from the Krajina in 1995 by the Croatian army; 200,000 fled into Serbia and Serbian areas of Bosnia. Many were forcibly resettled in Kosovo - three hundred years after their families had fled behind the Austrian forces.

Kosovo had an Albanian character before the arrival of the Slavs; under the Nemanjić dynasty, Serbs were the majority. Under Ottoman rule, Kosovo assumed an Albanian character again. After 1690 Albanians may have outnumbered Serbs. The Serbian Orthodox Church was abolished in 1766; this contributed to the far advanced Serbian cultural decay.

Kosovo, in the mind of the Serbs, became an icon of all they had achieved, and all they had lost. The 1389 battle was remembered in epic folk poems; an entire mythology developed around it that shunted many truths to the side. Lazar's men became all Serb. The Turkish army increased exponentially in size. A blackbird appeared before Lazar on the eve of the battle; it offered him a kingdom in heaven or a kingdom on earth. He chose heaven; he and his men died. Legends of the nine brothers Jugović, the Serb hero Miloš Kobilić and the traitor Vuk Branković - claimed in folk legend to be the father of Montenegro's Roma - became the reality of that battle; in truth, the Serbs had reported the 1389 battle as a victory, but over time it became a crushing defeat. The Serbian empire eventually died because they left their best warriors slain on that battlefield; they demographically exhausted themselves. The Ottomans had troops to spare; they returned, season after season. The Serbs and their allies could do no such thing. The next Turkish seasonal campaigns met the fathers and sons of those men who had earlier died at Ottoman hands.

The Serbs identified with Kosovo; they thought it was their heart. When ideas of enlightenment and nationalism drifted into southeastern Europe, the Serbs finally developed a national consciousness: much of that consciousness was based on Kosovo. It became what they lost, and what they wanted back. The legend of Kosovo had been altered, shaped and preserved in folk poetry; Byron, Goethe and other cultural notables publicized the Homeric tradition in the West's backyard. The first tracts written in the Serbian language concerned the Nemanjić dynasty and the 1389 battle. The Mountain Wreath, by the Montenegrin Bishop - Prince Njegoš, turned the struggle against the Turks into an epic fable that enchanted Western Europe.

The Ottoman ruler Selim III granted Serbs limited autonomy within the Ottoman Empire; later restrictions on this autonomy, imposed by corrupt janissaries, led to a successful revolt against the Turks. The 1804 Serb uprising was led by Kara Djordje, or Black George - arguably the most successful one-time pig farmer in history. Selim III had the Janissary leaders executed; the Serbs conquered the Belgrade Pashalik by 1806. Serbia was re-conquered in 1813; Kara Djordje fled into Habsburg lands. Other uprisings occurred alongside Black George's insurrection, including one in Eastern Slavonia that Roma took part in. Several Serbs who accepted Ottoman vassalage became puppet rulers; one of them, Miloš Obrenović, led another revolt in 1815. Russia pressured Turkey into accepting Obrenović's rule over Serb lands. As a conciliatory gesture, Obrenović captured Kara Djordje, decapitated him and had the head dispatched to Selim III.

Roma continued to pour into Serbia from Wallachia and Moldavia, where they were slaves; they were welcomed for the purpose of taxation. These Roma settled among the Serbs; many of them became thoroughly Serbianized in language, culture and religion. Muslim Roma were simultaneously persecuted. They, along with Albanians and Turks, were expelled from Serbian lands. Serbia became officially independent after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

Kosovo was absorbed by the new kingdom of Serbia in 1912. This event was met, in Serbia, with the same jubilation many Israelis felt when Jerusalem fell to the IDF in 1967.

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The ancient past came to the present; a historical wrong was corrected centuries after the fact.

Royalist Serbia consolidated their control of Kosovo - denoted as 'Old Serbia' on the maps of the era - by driving out the Greek Orthodox Church and carrying out punitive measures against the region's Albanian population. Kosovo Roma were considered to be allies of the Albanians. In the north they were assimilated musicians, loyal citizens; in the south they and the Albanians saw their villages torched and their men shot out of hand.

1915 saw the collapse of Serb defensive lines against the Austro-Hungarians in World War I; the entire Serbian army retreated, on foot, to the south. They passed through Kosovo, where they were ambushed and killed by the same Albanians the Serbs had punished in 1912. Few Serbs got as far as Albania; even fewer made it to Corfu.

The treaty of Versailles recognized the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) with Kosovo as a part. The Albanians sporadically revolted until the mid-1920's; they were mercilessly put down. The Serbs began haphazardly expelling Albanians to Turkey; this continued for the next two decades. A Serbian 1921 census listed 14,489 Roma in Kosovo.¹⁵

The Germans invaded Yugoslavia in 1941. Kosovo was ceded to Italy, which merged the province into a greater Albania; the Germans were only interested in the minerals they could extract from the Trepca mines in the province's north. The Albanians quickly turned on those Serbs that they regarded as colonists; in the west, hundreds of Serb villages were burned, and many Serbs fled into Montenegro and Serbia proper.

The Italians stationed troops around the Orthodox areas of Kosovo including Decani, Pec and Gračanica; in 1999 the Italians, as members of KFOR, returned to protect the western sites that their grandfathers had guarded from destruction a half century before.

At war's end, in 1946, the communists put down Albanian revolts in the Drenica. 1946 brought some positive changes to Albanians; their language was recognized, along with Serbo-Croatian, as an official language of the province, and they were no longer expelled to Turkey, although after 1946, they were actively encouraged to emigrate there (In Royalist Yugoslavia, the government entered into negotiations with Ankara to accept and resettle the entire Kosovo Albanian population) .

Kosovo was declared an autonomous region of Serbia, but this was a joke; the area was under the control of Tito's Interior Minister, Aleksandar Ranković - a man who the province's Serbs later regarded as their protector. Ranković ran Kosovo as a police state, under the pretext of stopping Albanian nationalists. He was expelled from the communist party in the mid-1960's; Belgrade's control of Kosovo, and Kosovo Albanians, soon loosened. The Albanian press became more daring; the police presence dropped.

These freedoms culminated in the constitutional changes of 1974; Kosovo was officially recognized as an autonomous province within Serbia; these changes gave Kosovo some

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power with Yugoslavia's republics. Kosovo had a greater voice within the federation, and decision-making power within the realms of internal development, foreign policy, and economic planning. Each republic had two representatives within Yugoslavia's federal assembly; Kosovo had one.

These changes were not welcomed by the Serbs. Nationalism was effectively illegal in Tito's Yugoslavia; Franjo Tudjman, Alija Izetbegović and Vojislav Šešelj were all jailed for violating the concept of Bratstvo I Jedinstvo - brotherhood and unity - in papers they presented and articles they wrote. After Tito's death, restrictions on nationalism loosened. The Serb media in Belgrade portrayed Kosovo Albanians in a more and more unflattering light. They were birth machines, desecrators of churches and graveyards, irredentists, spies for Tirana, and rapists of Serb girls. Kosovo Serbs did face job and housing discrimination during these years; the media made it appear as though they faced crazed Albanians with broken bottles every time they walked the street.

The most famous and explosive case of supposed Albanian abuses involved the Kosovo Serb farmer Djordje Martinovic. In the mid-1980's, Martinovic was wheeled into a Gnjilane hospital on his stomach with a broken beer bottle in his rectum; he claimed that he was ambushed in his fields by crazed Albanian nationalists who sodomized him with the object now stuck in him. The Belgrade dailies put the story of Martinovic's beer bottle on their front pages for weeks on end. A firestorm spewed from his sore, hairy farmer's buttocks. The report the

Gnjilane hospital filed on the case noted the doctor's suspicions that the Martinovic defiling began as self-gratification and ended when the poor man slipped. The doctor's report was of no concern to the Serbian papers or the increasingly nationalist and vocal Serbian Academy of the Arts and Sciences.

Ordinary Serbs, propelled by stories of everything from graveyard desecration to violently misused foreign objects, began to regard Kosovo Albanians as a danger to their people and their nation.

The most commonly repeated allegations about the mistreatment of Kosovo Serbs at the hands of Albanians were; that Serbs, by the hundreds of thousands, were driven from the province to create a purely Albanian Kosovo, which would then be merged into Albania proper; that Kosovo Serbs were subject to assaults, robberies and rapes, and desecrations of their graveyards and churches; and that most Albanians had only moved to the province in 1946 as refugees from Enver Hoxha's Albania.

These papers and politicians conveniently forgot the fact that Kosovo was one of the poorest areas of Europe, and one of the most densely populated as well. Thousands, or even tens of thousands of Serbs, did leave, but many of them left due to economic reasons. There were small-scale instances of discrimination against Serbs, but nothing of the scale and type that Belgrade alleged. In regard to Serb accusations that most Albanians moved into Kosovo in 1946, this was, and is, wishful thinking, and absolutely nothing in the historical record lends any weight to this claim.

Kosovo from 1989 to the Present

HISTORY

Despite these oft-repeated allegations, Kosovo did not become the real focus of Serbia's ire until Slobodan Milošević came to power in 1987. He staked his political career on the alleged sufferings of the Kosovo Serbs, and rode them to power. In 1988 he proposed changes to Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution that would seriously reduce Kosovo's autonomy; Milošević's moves generated street protests across Kosovo. In 1989, Kosovo's autonomy was revoked; Albanians answered Belgrade's revocation of their status with protests and hunger strikes (most notably the Albanian miners in Trepca, who sealed themselves hundreds of feet underground for weeks, and had to be carried out).

The protests achieved nothing. Albanians were fired from administrative and teaching positions and the police force became almost entirely Serb, with massive reinforcements bussed in from the north. Education was segregated; instruction in the Albanian language was banned.

The Belgrade authorities changed street names in every city in Kosovo. Medieval Serb heroes and Serb nationalist slogans replaced Albanian partisans and socialist catch phrases. Orthodox holidays became public ones.



Medieval Serbia's shifting boundaries

HISTORY

The Albanians fought back passively, through the political leaders that emerged during the protests. Ibrahim Rugova, a professor of French literature at the University of Pristina, became the leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The LDK withdrew Albanians from Kosovo's public life; a parallel state was formed, with alternate schooling and healthcare facilities. Parallel government teachers and doctors were paid from a voluntary 3% yearly tax on Kosovos, both at home and in the Diaspora. Albanians boycotted Yugoslav elections; one thing that both the Serbian opposition and the ruling socialists could agree on was that they didn't like Albanians, so why bother? The 1991 census went unanswered by Kosovo's majority; the Serbs had to estimate how many Albanians were there, or more appropriately, how many they had to deal with.

Rugova and his deputies believed that, by peacefully withdrawing from Serbian administrative and political structures in Kosovo and simultaneously drawing international attention to their cause, the Serbs would eventually have to accept the will of the Kosovo majority. The Kosovo parliamentarians who had lost their jobs upon the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy declared Kosovo's independence at a secret meeting in Kačanik in June of 1990.

Due to international sanctions, the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, and absurd economic mismanagement, the Kosovo economy plummeted. In the boom days of the 1970's, Kosovo remained stagnant; it was the poorest area of Yugoslavia, and the majority of internal development money earmarked by Belgrade for the poorer republic disappeared into it. In the 1990's Kosovo's economic mainstay was remittances from Kosovos working abroad. Meanwhile the militia leader, Serb nationalist, mobster and later ICTY indictee Željko 'Arkan' Raznatović was elected to the Yugoslav federal parliament - as the Pristina, Kosovo representative. His campaign slogan: *this is Holy Serbian Land*. Arkan forced local mobsters to give him greater kickbacks; he recruited for his Bosnian private army, the Tigers, or Arkanici, at the Grand Hotel Pristina. And Serb police went on witch hunts through Kosovo, searching for spies and rebels. The Albanian population was collectively choked; Serbian police and Ministarstvo Unutrasnjih Poslova (MUP) troops subjected them to arrests for no crime; 'informative discussions' that turned into months-long periods of detention without charge; random beatings, and even extrajudicial executions. Traffic cops pulled Albanians over for imaginary infractions. Albanians called the traffic cops *Daj Mi* - Give me's - for the deutschmarks that had to hand over with every stop.

In an effort to stem the tide of Serbs leaving the province, Belgrade made it illegal for Kosovo Serbs to sell their homes. Serb refugees from Bosnia and Croatia were forcibly settled there. Many of them were dumped into cot-filled school gymnasiums and left to fend for themselves. One busload of Krajina Serbs was told they were being sent to Niš; upon realizing that Kosovo was their destination, the Serbs revolted, and one man held a gun to the driver's head and forced him to return to Belgrade.

The Albanians had put their trust in Rugova; he did not deliver what he promised fast enough. When the 1995 Dayton accords failed to address Kosovo's status, some Albanians looked for quicker means of getting rid of the Serbs.

HISTORY

The Kosovo Liberation Army - Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës - had formed in the Drenica (a rural region of central Kosovo) as early as 1993. The KLA had little organization. At its core were several extended families, including the Jashari Clan of Prekaz - famously killed in a three-day shoot-out with the Yugoslav army on March 5th, 1998.

The KLA agreed with everything the LDK wanted; they discarded the passivity, and began small-scale attacks on isolated police outposts. Their attacks grew with the sudden influx of cheap small arms that accompanied the Albanian government's 1997 collapse, when that country's weapons depots were thoroughly looted. AK-47s now went for 25 dollars a pop in the Tropoja arms bazaars; donkey trains of weaponry snaked their way through the Prokletije Mountains. Training camps were established in Albania by the KLA and their rival, the LDK-affiliated Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosova, or FERK. FERK was soon destroyed in what some called a Kosovo Albanian guerilla's civil war, waged in Albania proper.

The KLA succeeded in internationalizing the Kosovo issue in a way that Rugova was never capable of. It must be said, however, that before the end of the NATO campaign in June of 1999, the KLA killed more Albanians (marked as collaborators with the Serb regime) than it did Serbs.

The KLA grew more brazen; the Serbs cracked down. The KLA seized Orahovac town; the Serbs retook it and shot the place to bits. The Drenica - the KLA's birthplace - was ripped up. Villages were burned and massacres occurred that had no beginning provocation. International organizations became increasingly involved in the conflict; Belgrade allowed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Kosovo Verification Mission into Kosovo to monitor a ceasefire in the fall of 1998. The alternative would have been earlier military involvement. The KVM's activities were extremely curtailed; the absolute freedom of movement that they had been assured of never materialized.

The Račak killings of January 1999 were denounced by KVM's head, William Walker, as a massacre of civilians by Serb police. Walker was ordered to leave the country, and one last meeting between Albanians and Serbs was called - in Rambouillet, France. Any agreement that resulted from Rambouillet would be enforced by an international military presence in Kosovo; on this basis, the Serbs refused. Milošević refused on the basis of a newspaper referendum for the public, with the question - 'Do you support foreign troops on Yugoslav territory?'

Because Rambouillet did not address the issue of Kosovo's independence, the Albanians also refused to reach any agreement. The Albanian delegation, in the end, reluctantly agreed with the conference's terms; it took the heavy convincing of Madeline Albright for them to sign. The Serbs answered their failure to sign at Rambouillet by intensifying their operations to destroy the KLA. By now, tens of thousands of Albanian IDPs were scattered throughout Kosovo. Operations in the Drenica region intensified.

A day or two before the war began, satellite photos of western Kosovo looked like burning leaf piles on a windy day.

"Before the bombing started, I thought everyone was kidding."

- Djezida Emini
Priluzje, Kosovo

The KVM was withdrawn, and the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia began on March 24th, 1999. The Serbs answered with mass expulsions of ethnic Albanians. Within the first six weeks of the campaign, 723,000 Albanians¹⁶ were driven from the province. Thousands were killed in the process*. Another half million Albanians were soon internally displaced.

(* Deaths in the Kosovo conflict are a point of contention between countries and international agencies. During the war, CNN and other western media outlets reported that up to 100,000 Albanian men were separated from refugee columns and taken away by the Serbs. The implication was that they were to be exterminated. This did not happen. At war's end, western governments kept reducing the number of Albanians killed. The accepted figure now stands at between 6000 and 10,000 killed.

After the war, two Mitrovica Serbs were convicted of genocide by a Kosovo Albanian court; their convictions were overturned by a majority-international higher court due to the finding that genocide did not occur in Kosovo.)

Milošević thought that NATO's will would break before his resolve did. He was wrong. NATO attacks intensified; the military targets became scarcer. Infrastructure targets came next; electricity grids, bridges and secondary government buildings. The bombing continued for 78 days; the war ended with the NATO - Yugoslav Military-Technical Agreement, signed in Kumanovo, Macedonia.

The bombing halted in June of 1999. Serb military units withdrew, and NATO's Kosovo Force, or KFOR, established control over the province. 45,000 KFOR troops provided security for the province; the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo was established to govern the province. UNMIK's first duty was to remove the KLA from power, with the help of KFOR; the guerilla army had attempted to establish its own state in the days that separated the Serb withdrawal and KFOR's entry.

KFOR did not establish its authority quickly enough. The outpouring of violence directed at Kosovo's remaining Roma and Serbs was incredible. Pristina, the capital, was depopulated of minorities. Entire villages were destroyed, along with hundreds of churches and Serbian historical monuments. Random killings of minorities occurred daily - as did kidnappings, rapes, robberies and arson attacks on homes. It became unsafe to speak Serbian, or even a similar Slav language, in public; a Bulgarian UN worker was shot dead in Pristina on his first day in the province. After June of 1999, roughly 231,000 Serbs, Roma and other minorities fled the province. 22,500¹⁷ remained internally displaced within Kosovo as of 2002, rotting in monoethnic enclaves.

After a few months of passionate looting and killing, attacks against minorities became less frequent, and more organized. The worst attack was the 'Niš Express' bus bombing of February 16th, 2001. Eleven Serb civilians, including a two-year-old girl, were killed, and eighteen others injured when 200 pounds of TNT stuffed into a culvert was

detonated as their bus ran over it. Hand grenades have been thrown onto playgrounds; Serb buses have come under sniper fire and been hit with rocket-propelled grenades; car convoys have been ambushed. Others - close to a thousand minorities - have simply vanished. Most recently, in June of 2003 a Serb family in Obilić town was beaten to death, in their beds; their house was then burned down.

Kosovo Today

Kosovo is governed by UNMIK; the agency is downsizing and slowly handing over its powers to municipal authorities and the Kosovo assembly. Local administrative units hold decision-making power in all areas except for those reserved for UNMIK's Special Representative of the Secretary General - ex-Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri. KFOR is reducing its presence and troop strength.

UNMIK held Kosovo-wide elections in November of 2001; the province's first-ever democratically elected assembly was formed, with Ibrahim Rugova as its president. The election results did not give the LDK a clear majority; it took until March of 2002 for a power-sharing arrangement to be made between the LDK, Hashim Thaçi's Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK) and Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). Both the PDK and AAK are right-wing parties that are essentially offshoots of the Kosovo Liberation Army's political structures; Thaçi and Haradinaj were both KLA leaders, and Thaçi briefly seized power after the war (he appointed his uncle as minister of defense) until NATO and UNMIK forced him to the side.

The Serbian Povratak (return) coalition holds seats in the Kosovo Assembly. The Assembly has no Roma representatives.

The Kosovo Liberation Army is now officially demilitarized, and a scaled down version - the Kosovo Protection Corps - remains, led by Agim Çeku, former leader of the KLA. The KPC's official tasks include, among other things, ceremonial duties and disaster relief.

A February 2000 confidential UN report presented to Kofi Annan implicated the KPC in 'killings, ill-treatment/torture, illegal policing, abuse of authority, intimidation, breaches of political neutrality and hate-speech'.¹⁸ KPC officials in Srbica/ Skenderaj ran a brothel; in Dragaš, they assassinated Gorani politicians. Many senior KPC figures have been arrested by UNMIK and jailed for crimes committed against Albanian civilians during the earlier conflict; others were expelled by the KPC (with pressure from America) after turning up on US State Department watch lists for involvement with Albanian separatist groups in Kosovo, Macedonia and southern Serbia¹⁹. Still others have been indicted by the ICTY in Den Haag; Fatmir Limaj was extradited to the Netherlands to stand trial for command responsibility for war crimes committed against Serbian and Roma civilians in Kosovo.²⁰

Between Serbs and Albanians - the Kosovo Roma Porrajmos

“I wouldn’t sleep; while my children slept, I kept guard. I knew that I couldn’t help them, and I couldn’t stand it. I could not sit in one place. I wanted to save them, but I didn’t know how.”

- Ferki ‘Beco’ Emini
Priluzje, Kosovo

Kosovo Roma had little concrete political alignment until 1989; before, they simply liked Tito. The minutiae of local politics had little bearing on the Roma situation in Kosovo. At the revocation of Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989, most Roma identified themselves with the Serbs. This was a typical historical compromise; Roma must gravitate towards those who hold the power. Roma became an unfortunate showcase for the Serbs; they were held up to the west as examples of Serbian tolerance. Look how we treat the most despised community in Europe!

Some Ashkalija identified with the Albanians; other Ashkalija aligned themselves with the Serb authorities and re-classified themselves as Egyptians, to counter the process of ‘Albanization’ they had already undergone. The emergence of the Egyptians was actively encouraged by Milošević; he hoped that those Roma who had declared themselves Albanians would switch to Egyptian, and leave him with demographic figures slightly less inconvenient than those he currently faced.

A few Roma schools continued to operate in Kosovo; Roma children attending Serbian schools were not removed when the Albanians were. Roma were not summarily fired from their jobs when the Albanians were; the mass-firing of Albanians resulted in higher Roma employment.

Luan Koka emerged as Kosovo’s Roma leader; he spoke for none of them, but publicly aligned them with the Serbs. A small demonstration in support of Milošević was conducted by Pristina Roma in the early 1990’s; this event is vividly remembered by many Albanians.

It must be emphasized that, for most Roma, these ethnic and political concerns had little to do with them. They were not Serbian, not Albanian; they were concerned with their own families and their own lives, and the need to identify with one side or another was made for them by others.

Roma voices were not heard in this conflict. Luan Koka doesn’t count; the Serbs regarded him as akin to a parrot. Koka joined the Serb delegation at Rambouillet; he now lives in Belgrade. A Roma protest in Podujevo - ‘*Luan Koka does not speak for us*’ - was not remembered near as well as the pro-Milošević Pristina Roma protests, nearly ten years before.

During the NATO campaign, large numbers of Roma were press-ganged into Serbian military structures. Some joined voluntarily; most did not. They dug graves; they helped Serb forces loot. Others - like the Serbs before them, and the Albanians after - did enrich themselves with the goods that expellees abandoned. This is not a Roma trait; it is a trait of the desperately poor, and sometimes, just the greedy.

HISTORY

Other Roma - Ashkalija and Egyptians - were expelled by Serb forces along with the Albanians. Many instances of abuse - including rapes, beatings, robberies and murders - were directed against them by Serb forces.

Kosovo Albanians returned en masse to their homes beginning in June 1999. The outpouring of violence against Serbs, Roma and other Kosovo minorities was stunning to the internationals. Not so to those on the ground. To many Albanians, it was time to deal with the old regime and their quislings. Although a small minority of Albanians participated in these attacks, many Albanians implicitly condoned them.

Roma were driven from their homes in every city and village in Kosovo, with the exception of the Serb-dominated northern municipalities. The southern Mitrovica Mahala - previously home to roughly 7,000 Roma - was leveled. Mitrovica's Roma now live in Serbia, or in the northern IDP camps; Žitkovac, Čezmin Lug and the Leposavić Roma collection center. In Gnjilane/ Gjilan, the Roma population went from over 6,000 to 350. Pristina's Roma almost entirely fled. Most cities in Kosovo have burned-out Mahalas on their outskirts; gutted concrete shells with the roofs blown off. Satellite dishes punched full of shrapnel holes.

Roma popped up dead everywhere. They disappeared from villages; they were found shot in the head, thrown down wells, or simply skeletonized in fields. Hand grenades were thrown through their windows. Their doors of their homes were booby-trapped. Those that ventured out in public were beaten or stoned by children. Others refused to leave their homes. KFOR patrols were ineffective in halting this violence due to their inexperience in the land and the opinions of their ethnic Albanian translators, who often refused to translate for Roma, or purposely mistranslated.

Albanians were the victims; now many of them were the persecutors. The abuses inflicted upon Roma in the immediate aftermath of the conflict was overlooked, or even dismissed.

The worst atrocity against Roma occurred in November of 2000. Four Ashkalija males - three heads of family and a 16-year-old boy - were bound and shot through their heads in the village of Dašovac/ Dashevc, Srbica/ Skenderaj municipality. The four were IDPs, squatting with their family in homes abandoned by other Roma in Kosovo Polje. The family wished to return home; they contacted the OSCE and UNHCR, who assisted them. The men returned to Dašovac, to meet with their neighbors and ethnic Albanian local leaders; all encouraged them to return. They were told they were welcome.

They returned to rebuild their destroyed homes. UNHCR provided them with a tent. KFOR offered to guard them; the Ashkalija refused, superficially confident of their initial reception and fearful that KFOR's presence would attract too much attention to their return.

The next morning an OSCE caseworker visited them in Dašovac. They had all been executed. Their bodies had laid outside for hours, in open view of their neighbors. No one had called the police.

There were no witnesses. The crime remains unsolved.

HISTORY

Kosovo's Roma are now found throughout Europe, or displaced within Kosovo. At least 30,000 Roma fled the province to Serbia proper and Montenegro; 25,000 have not returned.²¹

The Kosovo Roma IDP situation in The Republic of Serbia and Montenegro is problematic; many are denied refugee status. Roma in Yugoslavia have been barred from certain public swimming pools and supermarkets; they have been beaten and tortured by police; they are targets of nationalist gangs; they have been illegally evicted from settlements and are actively encouraged to return to Kosovo, with no regard for their security there. The Serbia-Montenegro office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights states that "the rights of Roma are being violated on a daily basis, and they face discrimination among all classes of society."²²

Roma communities in Kosovo have stabilized. The return of a Roma refugee family usually results in a home being burned.

The message, from a distinct minority of Albanians; there's enough of you for window dressing. We'll not have any more.

A new Albanian terrorist group - the Albanian National Army - has been created; it fuses elements of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the (South Serbian) Liberation Army of Preševo, Medved and Bujanovac, and the (Macedonian) National Liberation Army. The ANA was created by Shefqet Musliu and Besim Tahiri; both are currently in UNMIK detention, and Belgrade has requested their extradition. The ANA is suspected in numerous attacks against Serbs and Roma. Membership in the group has been declared illegal by UNMIK.

Kosovo Roma unemployment rates average 100%, due to the security and freedom of movement issues they face. The older schools that once educated them in their own language were destroyed, along with their homes.

"Roma never wanted to be rich; they always searched for happiness in any place, and this is all."

- Feride Hasani
Preoce, Kosovo

*“My mother died when I was five. I don’t know how she grew up.
She took her stories with her.”*

-- Roma male, 53
Žitkovac Refugee Camp
Zvečan, Kosovo

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“(On Vasilica) When my mother was alive, she did all the cooking for us. We had a large table, made of wood, with our dinner on it, and we had our friends - Albanians, Turks, Jews, Serbs and Roma - come over to eat and drink on that day. My father would sing the song of Sveti Vasilija.”

Sebahata Šerifović
[Gracanica](#)

Sebahata asked me to locate her mother’s grave, on Gazi Mestan in Kosovo Polje. Gazi Mestan is the site of the 1389 battle that saw the Serbs and the Albanians, both Christian, all brothers, unite with forces from as far afield as Bosnia, Hungary and Poland to stop the Ottoman Turkish advance into Southeastern Europe. The armies fought each other to a standstill; the Serb empire died 70 years later. The Albanians converted to Islam; the Roma did as well. The Serbs didn’t - or if they did, they weren’t called Serbs anymore.

Sebahata drew me a map, and one January day I went to Gazi Mestan and spent hours walking through the dead fields, trying to locate her mother’s grave. Journalists write about the flowers on Kosovo Polje in the summer, and how the Serbs say their bodies fertilize them, and how the Albanians say, no, ours do, but those same journalists haven’t been out there in the wintertime, when everything is frozen, rock-hard, and dead, with a minus ten degree wind chill factor. Two Norwegian soldiers were my only company. They hid from the wind in a warm guard tower near the Serb monument and only emerged to ascertain that I wasn’t Albanian before running for their lives back to their insulated, fortified post. Albanians aren’t allowed near the Serb tower that commemorates the 1389 battle.

“They deface things,” the Norwegian said, shivering and listening to my voice, looking for any trace of an Albanian accent. “Some of them use the tower as a bathroom.”

The graves in the small Muslim cemeteries dotted around Gazi Mestan’s Turbe have been swept by brush fires for years. Some of the richer Muslims left enough money for proper gravestones; the poorer ones used wood, and the poorest got nothing. Sebahata didn’t remember exactly where her mother was buried, nor who she was buried near, and her tombstone was made of wood. Sometime in the 20 years since she died, the fires in spring ate her marker, and now she’s under the dirt with no indication of where she lies, on that old, windswept



INTERVIEWS

battlefield. I knew that one of the raised mounds was hers. I thought of shooting a picture, to make Sebahata feel better. I didn't.

Gazi Mestan's not as bad as the Serb cemeteries. Their dead were called to answer for the actions of a minority of their living, and their graveyards were smashed.



Sebahata took the news with a fatalistic shrug. The next day she asked me to drive her to the Moravska Mahala in Pristina. Sebahata was born and raised there; she kicked about, worked and played in that ghetto until she was married off to a Gracanica man.

I'd walked through Moravska, or what's left of it; I'd kicked my way through the rubble of dynamited homes, counted the bullet holes in the walls, looked out the smashed windows, and slipped in a puddle by a broken toilet that still jetted water three and a half years after some faceless man smashed it to bits. I could still see where Roma had, in a vain effort to save their homes from the burning, spray-painted Albanian names on their homes before they fled.

Despite the destruction, real estate is still real estate, and the Moravska Mahala's an Albanian neighborhood now. The destruction is being deconstructed. Kids play football on the road. Mothers push their strollers through a neighborhood that was blood and smoke before.

I refused to drive Sebahata there. She's got high blood pressure already. Her son thanked me.

Sebahata has two daughters, Sofija (9) and Selda (12); they always ask us to drive them to school. They like their friends seeing them in a truck. Sebahata has other daughters; one lives in Bujanovac, Southern Serbia, but because of the violence there, the family often comes on extended vacations to the family home in Gracanica.



Sebahata's always good for a joke and a cup of Turkish coffee. She's a Roma wife, and a mother of many, and her work never ends.



SS: My name is Sebahata. I'm 48 years old.

Do you remember any of your mother's stories?

SS: I remember her life, and the problems she had before...

What was your mother's name?

SS: My mother's name was Dzulja, and my father's, Zumber.

What kind of work was your father doing?

SS: My father helped people with different things. He left his real job because he drank a lot. My mother worked in Pristina, for Jewish and Turkish people, so that how we lived.

I know that my mother was a baby when my father finished the army, but my father was very beautiful. ([LINK to Sebahata speaking](#))

My mother was a housekeeper for Albanians, Turk and Jews. Many Jewish people lived in Pristina then.

After some time, she found a real job - in Kosovo Polje. The job was making handbags. She worked very hard to help us, sometimes in the mornings, and sometimes she worked all night. ([LINK to Sebahata speaking](#))

I know that she never had a clock; she always got to work late. She woke up one night at midnight; she thought she was late for work, and she started running.

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On one (Pristina) street someone once threw a rock at her. She thought that her cigarettes had fallen from her pocket; she started searching for them but found nothing. Sometimes in Pristina, different things happen on different streets, and people saw many strange things. Vampires - she was very afraid of them, and sometimes she'd just smoke cigarettes because vampires were afraid of the lights. It was a very hard time for my mother.

My mother stopped working (in Kosovo Polje) because it was very hard for her. She worked again for Albanians. Then she found a job in the 'Path' factory.

When I was growing up, we sometimes went with her to work and helped her clean up.

A woman died in the Pristina Mahala; and a black dog* began to follow my mother whenever she went out. My mother knew that something was going on. She tried to give the black dog bread to eat; the dog wouldn't eat it. My mother went to buy meat from a store. She put it on the ground but the dog wouldn't eat it. The meat just sat on the sidewalk.

(*This tale - of the soul of a loved one inhabiting a black dog, which follows a relative for months on end - is common in Roma folklore, but is not restricted only to them; Armenians have the same legends. This story emerged, with slight variations, in several interviews. See [Adilje Osmani](#)

Did your mother know the woman that died?

SS: Yes, she was my mother's cousin.

And when my mother went to work the dog followed her. People asked her about it: 'What is that dog doing with you?' and 'That dog is always behind you.' My mother answered that she didn't know, but she knew why that dog followed her; that dog was her dead cousin.

The dog followed my mother for months. One day my mother returned home from work, with the dog behind her, and a car hit it. No blood came from the dog. My mother heard, from the dog's mouth, the voice of her dead cousin.

Did your mother go to school?

SS: She didn't even know how to write her own name. She worked very hard, and was respected by many. ([LINK to Sebahata speaking](#))

I have another story, from my own family -

We had no electricity because my father drank a lot; everyone had electricity except for my family. We only had candles; and my mother still worked very hard.

My brothers grew up. My older brother worked very hard. I remember my brother going to Grmija* and chopping down trees, for firewood. He would carry the wood home on his back. He'd sell the firewood, and he also worked for others - cleaning their garbage. He worked so hard; he made money, and our family got electricity. From his hard work we bought a Radio - a "Nikola Tesla."

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(* Grmija is a large, wooded area on Pristina's eastern outskirts.)

But still my father drank too much, and after my brother was married, my father died. My mother no longer worked; she developed bronchitis, from working outdoors in the cold.

She was 60 years old when she died.

There was a man (in Pristina) who worked as a shoeshine boy. He had nine children. His wife worked very hard to feed her babies, because they didn't have enough money. The work wasn't good.

Soon Serbs hired the man to clean their store. He was a very honest man. But soon they accused him of stealing money from the shop. But he never did that. He was honest, he had honest children, and his wife was respected by all: Jews, Albanians and Serbs always hired her to work in their homes. There were never any problems. She would never steal anything.

The man didn't know what to do; he tried to kill himself, but his son found him and saved him. He worked so hard to be honest, and he feared that when his children grew up people would tell them that he stole. ([LINK to Sabatana speaking](#))

Did you know any Ashkalija in Pristina?

SS: I knew Ashkalija. They had their own Mahala in Pristina.* I had Ashkalija friends; they all spoke Romanes.

(*Pristina's Ashkalija lived in the Vranjevac neighborhood. After a significant drop in population after the end of the 1999 war, Vranjevac's Ashkalija are slowly returning; UNHCR has facilitated the return of 15 families as of May 2003.)

Did you know any Egyptians?

SS: I never heard of them before. They only started to exist recently.

What Roma holidays do you follow?

SS: Djurdjevdan - (Herdeljez), Vasilica and Christmas, but we mostly paid attention to Vasilica.

Before Vasilica we spent all night baking bread and cookies. We'd bake a coin into the bread. We sacrificed plenty of chickens and goats on Vasilica.

When my mother was alive, she did all the cooking for us. We had a large table, made of wood, with the dinner on it, and we had our friends - Albanians, Turks, Jews, Serbs and Roma - come over to eat and drink on that day. My father would sing the song of Sveti Vasilija. ([LINK to Sebatana speaking](#))

On Vasilica, my father would choose a very good tree that had lots of apples on it. He'd bring one apple in the house, and this made good sense of everything.

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His eldest son would begin singing a song, and the youngest son would finish it.

What song would they sing?

SS: The song of Sveti Vasilija.

Can you tell us about the famous Roma singers in your time?

SS: There were two: Nijat and Magbulja.

Nijat was a poor boy; he lived in a small, dilapidated house. His mother loved to sing and dance. She bought a piano for Nijat, and she told him:

‘Now, my son, you will play the piano and I will dance.’

If Nijat made a mistake, his mother would beat him with a stick. ‘You can’t play the song that way!’ ([LINK to Sebatana speaking](#))

And she kicked him too. Soon he became famous and sang in public.

On Weddings:

SS: Before, (during the wedding) men and women would be segregated in different areas to have their fun. We’d have the weddings in tents. And only the women would dance before, but now, everyone does.

The bride’s parents would put all her clothes in a trunk; all those clothes have to be ready before the mother-in-law comes, to take it to her house. The bride’s parents now buy new gold earrings and bracelets for her.

How much was the dowry before?

SS: The bride price is twice as much as it used to be. And we didn’t have to buy nice clothes, like we must do now. The best clothes are *dimije** (Romanes: kumasi), and the *dimije* must be blue or white.

(* *Dimije* are traditional women’s baggy pants. The Turks introduced *Dimije* to the Balkans after they conquered the region in the 14th- 15th centuries.)

How much did you ask for your oldest daughter’s dowry?

SS: 12,000 Deutschmarks.

Did the groom’s family comment upon the price?

SS: No, they said nothing.

My father-in-law worked in Kišnica*; he was a manager, and he told people what they had to do and when they had to finish. He was old; he couldn’t see so well, because he worked in the dark all the time. He worked all day, and all night; when he was very young his mother died. He was very poor. He also worked for Serbs, as a shepherd; this is what he told me.

(*Kišnica is a mining complex outside of Gracanica.)

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He knew to play the *Duduk** and *Frula**, and he was a very good musician. He was once on a Serbian television show. One Sunday I watched him on TV, in the home of my Albanian friend.

(*Duduk - an ancient woodwind instrument likely inherited from the Armenians: Duduk is an Armenian word. The Duduk is similar to the Central Asian Balaban and the Chinese Guan.)

(*Frula - "pipe" in Serbian - is a smaller wind instrument.)

A Serb woman came to my home, and brought us apples. She saw my father-in-law, and she told me that he was so amazing, because he knew how to play every kind of music - Albanian and Serbian. He could sing as well.

Do you have any recordings of him?

SS: Yes.

(We received a single old cassette of music that SS's father-in-law had performed in the early 1980's. It was the only copy, the tape ribbon was in terrible shape, and the sound interference was difficult, but deep under the noise, we could hear the man's mournful, beautiful voice.)

Hear an [Audio](#) excerpt of Riza Serifovic singing.

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“My father died during the Second World War; when the Germans came, he died as a soldier dies. I was orphaned, without a mother or father. My father was a guerilla, moving from place to place to bring freedom to our land. There were no cars; they walked, sometimes with shoes, sometimes without. They won the war, but my father died.”

Nadire Kurlaku
[Prizren](#)



This interview was conducted in the Albanian language.

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (1).

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (2).

Were you born in Prizren?

NK: Yes, we were born here, and now we grow old here, in this Mahala, Dzut Mahala. My father and grandfather lived here and I was married in this Mahala. ([LINK to Nadire speaking](#))

What was your father's name?

NK: Iljiaz.

And what was your mother's name?

NK: Nedjmije.

Your grandparents?

NK: Nuredina, and my grandmother, Alten.

Were they always here?

NK: Yes, my family always lived in Prizren, in this Mahala. My father and my grandfather were field workers. We had much land; in this Mahala, we were very rich. There were only two rich families here.

How old are you?

NK: I was born in 1940; I'm 63 years old.

*Can you tell us about the other cousins? * (Direct translation- for others in the Dzut Mahala) What kind of work did they have?*

NK: In our Mahala many Roma worked as Hamaldjija*. When the summer came, the women worked in the gardens and in the fields. We always had our women working in the gardens.

(Hamali/ Amalija/ Hamaldjija. Serbian: Nosač. English: porter. Hamaldjija is from the Turkish word Hamal; Hamal is also a Turkish insult.)

Is Albanian your first language?

NK: Yes. My mother was from Gjakovë (Serbian: Djakovica), and my father was from Prizren. I finished primary school, and wanted to continue, but could not. In that time we were afraid of the Turks. They loitered in the streets, and my school was far from the Mahala. In Dzut only three of us attended school. The Turkish kids would make trouble with us, and in that time I was afraid. And the school that I was attending, I could have learned to be a teacher. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

*Are you Ashkalija? * (Albanian as a first language is usually a sign that the interviewee is Ashkalija)*

NK: No, I am Roma. The father of my grandfather was Roma. Even if we were rich, our name was still Madjup* or Cigan*. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

(*Madjup/ Maxhup - is a pejorative word for Roma that originated in Djakovica/ Gjakovë.)

(*Serbian: Cigan, pronounced Tsigan - is another pejorative term for Roma. Cigan is a corruption of the word Persian word for shoemaker (Cingarije) - a common trade among the first Roma who entered southeastern Europe.)

Have you heard of Roma Egyptians?

NK: No, we didn't know before about Egyptians or Ashkalija, we were all just Roma*. When we attended school the other kids called us all Madjupi; they were just children, and we were older than them, but we were still afraid. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

(* Prizren's Roma define themselves in simpler ways than Roma in the rest of Kosovo: their security and freedom of movement is good, at least in Prizren municipality, and they do not feel the pressure to align themselves to the Albanian side by adopting different ethnicities to differentiate themselves from Roma. Prizren's Roma were earlier subjected to the same terror as Roma throughout Kosovo in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo conflict. Please refer to Roma in the Kosovo Conflict; European Roma Rights Center Published Materials 1999 <http://www.errc.org>)

How old were you when you were married?

NK: I was 20 years old.

Did you have a choice?

NK: No. My husband's family came to ask my father for my hand. I didn't have a boyfriend like today; if my father or mother ever saw me together with another boy, even if it was my future husband... that would be a great shame. I was engaged, and after one year I married. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

Did you know your betrothed before the marriage?

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NK: Yes, I knew him from around Dzut Mahala - but he was not my boyfriend. When I was engaged, during holidays such as Bajram, my future mother-in-law brought me cakes and nice, new clothes; I sent my future husband new clothes as well. When Herdeljez arrived, my mother-in-law brought a sacrificial sheep and cookies; she would come with music. It was a great shame to not celebrate these things on Herdeljez, because our neighbors would note this and say bad things about us.

We celebrated these things as the Turks celebrated; Turks would buy two sheep for this day. Our Mahala did the same as the Turks.

On Herdeljez we cleaned our homes, and before the holiday we bought our children new clothes and visited the Turbe*. After the Turbe we walked home; we collected flowers while the women sang. We danced and picked flowers, and we decorated our homes with them - the doors, all the rooms, even under the beds.

Herdeljez falls on a month when the leaves bloom from the trees. We Roma aren't the only ones celebrating; the whole of Europe celebrates, when our eyes enjoy the new flowers and trees. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

On Herdeljez we prepared the sheep for slaughter, we baked bread and cakes in the afternoon, we ate lunch and drank and played music, and we danced in our new clothes. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

On the day before Herdeljez - I forgot to mention this - all the people who returned from the Turbe built fires in front of their homes. We drank and played music until dawn. When Herdeljez came we killed the sheep and played music. The night before and all the older women from the Mahala would bring out an iron cauldron; all the families would bring things to place in it, how much depending on the size of the family. They brought silver wear and cups, other things. On Herdeljez we sat around the cauldron, and one betrothed (but still unmarried) girl covered herself with a veil and recited poetry.

*I came from a village down to the city
And one black bird flew around me
Don't do that. I am a gypsy girl.*

[LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

You bought sheep to kill (every Herdeljez)?

NK: Yes, those who had money would. Those who had no money didn't. We bought and killed the sheep for the children, to bless them, to make them happy. For families that had no money to buy sheep, the children were shamed and sad. There were many poor people then.

What about your other holidays?

NK: We celebrate the month of Ramadan.

Do you celebrate Vasilica, like Gracanica's Roma?

NK: No, but I've heard of that.

Where were you during the bombing?

NK: We stayed at home.

You didn't flee?

NK: We stayed here, together with our neighbors.

On that night I stayed with my son, his wife and my two grandchildren. My husband was not with us; he was with his sister because her husband was very sick.

I talked to the children and then I slept, and God saved me. I didn't sleep by the windows. One airplane flew overhead all night. When the bombs came down all of the windows in my home shattered and the power went dead; a bomb had fallen thirty meters from my home. I got up and wanted to go to a shelter, but I could see nothing. We had no lights; it was all darkness. God helped us: shrapnel flew everywhere, it fell to the ground, but we were lucky. Shrapnel came down in our yard but not in our house. There was a large hole in our yard.

We ran outside, but we could see nothing; we couldn't open the shelter door. It was blocked. We sat in the street, terrified. Later I heard that four people in the Mahala were killed.

Were they Albanian or...?

NK: No, they were Roma; the bomb landed inside the Mahala. The family that died was very poor. The homes moved - like an earthquake. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

My father died during the Second World War; when the Germans came, he died as a soldier dies. I was orphaned, without a mother or father. My father was a guerilla, moving from place to place to bring freedom to our land. There were no cars; they walked, sometimes with shoes, sometimes without; my uncle was with him. They won the war, but my father died. [LINK to Nadire speaking](#)

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“We stayed at home in Obilić. More windows were smashed. Three or four times. Albanians came to demand money from us. They said they wanted money to pay for the release of their friends and relatives imprisoned in Serbia. But that was just an excuse to come to my family and demand something from us. They would say ‘You are Roma - you looted and stole from us, and you killed Albanians.’ And even if you said you didn’t kill anyone, they would simply say, ‘Yes, you did.’”

**Aferdita Beriša
Plemetina Sela**

Mrs. Beriša is an IDP from [Obilić/ Obiliq town](#)

Aferdita graduated from medical secondary school this year. Last year she refused to pay bribes to the school administrators; they gave her an oral exam, didn’t record it, and asked her plenty of questions about podiatry - not a required subject. They failed her and sent her on her way.

This year she showed up again, and refused to hand out money for the second time. She’d spent the year working and studying on her own, and she taught herself the fundamentals of podiatry, among other things.

Aferdita’s family are considered outsiders in Plemetina Village. They’re close to Gadje - the Roma word for everyone who’s not Roma. The Berišas live on the very edge of the Mahala, in a two-home walled compound; they’ve been there for four years. The family is subjected to taunts and low-level harassment from a minority of the local Roma. Plemetina’s Roma suffer from political divisions that pit one half of the community, led by a prominent and corrupt family, against the others, led by no one. Family alliances are made and broken every day; the Berišas try to ignore the political problems around them, but they often cannot. Their guests are harassed. The family that targets them blocks the road to their home with their one dilapidated car. They grumble and threaten; the Berišas keep their heads down. Their kids study and their parents worry. Aferdita and her older sister are both employed by international organizations, and this makes them targets for others who have no work.

Aferdita’s father’s an engineer, or he was, until he had to flee Obilić town in 1999. He keeps busy by caring for chickens, playing with cats, and repairing electrical odds and ends. Mr. Beriša’s the guy the local Serbs and Roma turn to when their radios and televisions stop working.

Aferdita's sister, Drita, is the OSCE's Plemetina Roma Community Advocate: a fancy title for a girl that makes sure that the Roma homes will withstand the winter and the children are immunized. But some of the other Roma hate her. They circled a petition in the community demanding that she be fired by the OSCE. The OSCE told the petitioners; if we remove Drita, we won't appoint another advocate.

The implication: no Drita, no representation at all. The petition's organizers didn't care. Fire her.

Many Roma signed. They did so because the petitioners told a bald-faced lie; they claimed that Drita diverted food aid destined for them. None of this was written on the petition. No matter that there was no food aid anymore. Drita wasn't fired.

LINK to [Video of Interview](#)

Can you tell us your name?

AB: Aferdita.

Where were you born?

AB: I was born in Pristina but I grew up in Obilić.

How old are you?

AB: I am 19 years old.

Why you don't you live in Obilić?

AB: Because of the current situation there. Security isn't what it should be. We had to flee Obilić (In July of 1999). My family came here (Plemetina, 2 KM north of Obilić town - a predominantly Serb enclave with a significant Roma population); we live in someone else's house and we abandoned our own. I'm still here.

Why specifically did you have to abandon your house?

AB: Because of the Albanians (In Obilić town). Some of them made problems for us, but not our neighbors: they were good people.

Did you stay in Obilić during the NATO campaign?

AB: Yes. During the bombing we stayed there.

How was the situation before the war? Were you in school?

AB: Before the bombing I went to school in Pristina. We had a good time there. My school wasn't so far, the public transport was good and the situation was much better than now. I wasn't afraid of anyone. We didn't do the things then that we must do now.

On the first day of the NATO campaign (March 24, 1999), did you believe that it was going to happen?

AB: Yes, we knew. We heard about it on the television. That day I went to school; my mother and father were very afraid. They went to work that day anyway. It's normal that parents are afraid for their children.

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Were you afraid that day? For what might happen?

AB: Everybody knew that the bombs were coming, but no one knew when they'd stop. The bombing lasted a long time (The NATO bombing campaign lasted for 78 days).

What did you do when the bombing started? Did you go to the shelters?

AB: All that time we stayed at home. We didn't know what was going to happen. We listened to the different airplanes and we heard the bombs explode. Nobody knew where they would fall.

Were you afraid that your house would be destroyed?

AB: Yes.

Did you have any problems with Albanians during the bombing?

AB: No, we didn't have any problems with them. Our (Albanian) neighbors were very kind to us; the Serbs were too. Now everything's changed.

And after the bombing? When you had to leave your home?

AB: In the beginning I wasn't there...

Where were you?

AB: My family and I had fled to Serbia. After the bombing, when I came back, the situation was awful. Groups of Albanian men came to our house every night, demanding money; they forced their way into our home to check whether we'd stolen or looted anything during the war. My family called KFOR; they did nothing. One night someone smashed our windows. We didn't see who- it was dark. We were afraid to go out and see or say anything; it was too dark, and maybe those who did it had guns. There was no security.

We stayed at home in Obilić. More windows were smashed. Three or four more times. Albanians came to demand money from us. They said they wanted money to pay for the release of their friends and relatives imprisoned in Serbia.* But that was just an excuse to come to my family and demand something from us. They said 'You are Roma - you looted and stole from us, and you killed Albanians.' And even if you said you didn't kill anyone, they simply said, 'Yes, you did.'

(* When Serb forces pulled out of Kosovo, they brought thousands of Albanian prisoners with them. Others - in Istok/ Istog prison - were massacred in their cells before the war's end. Most were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment during mass trials. The charges were usually unverifiable and unsubstantiated terrorism offences; almost all of the Albanian prisoners were released by the new Serb judiciary after Vojislav Koštunica came to power in late 2000.)

Where did you go after you left Obilić?

AB: We fled Obilić after someone threw a hand grenade at our home. Someone accused us of doing it to ourselves; that wasn't true. We knew that one of our neighbors did it. My family was afraid to tell anyone this. He had actually helped us before. We didn't have problems with him before. The grenade didn't damage anything or injure us; it just broke our neighbor's window. Then someone broke another of our windows, and we went to find the new police. They sat, smoking cigarettes, and said they'd send a patrol over, but no one ever came. We realized there was nothing left for us in Obilić. We left.

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Did you have any problems when you first arrived in Plemetina?

AB: We didn't have many problems in Plemetina; it's a big Serb village and they don't make trouble for us. Albanians don't make problems for us here. But we can't really leave, we can't travel anywhere.

Did you finish school?

AB: I completed secondary medical school.

Where?

AB: I completed my first year in Pristina, and my last three years in Plemetina.

Tell us about school in Pristina, did you have any problems there?

AB: No, we didn't. Before the war, going to Plemetina for school was a problem because there wasn't any public transport.

And now?

AB: Now I am looking for work.

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“The rich Roma families - their children actually finished primary school (eight years). But people like us finished only four years. We could work as cleaners, or physical laborers; we didn’t think a lot about school.”

Sabedin Musliu
[Gracanica](#)

Sabedin took his young wife and children with him to Bihać, Bosnia in the early 1970’s. He built a life there, and earned his money by building homes. Sabedin is a skilled carpenter and roofer; like many Gracanica residents, he also has the title *majstor* - a man who’s good at just about anything around the house. He can fix pipes, repair a hot water heater, tinker with a car engine and fix a radio.

(* Majstor/ Meister (German)/ Master (English))

Sabedin fled Bosnia when the war there began in April of 1992. When we interviewed him, we asked for permission to scan any old photos he had of his family.

“We have none of those things,” Sabedin explained.

“They’re all still in Bosnia.”

Bihać - or, to use a term from the early 1990’s, the Bihać pocket - was attacked by the Croats; it was shelled by the Serbs. The renegade Bosnian Muslim businessman Fikret Abdić declared a revolt in Bihać against the Bosnian Muslim government of Dr. Alija Izetbegović, and a Muslim-on-Muslim civil war began. Abdić cut a deal with the Bosnian Serb Army; they provided him with artillery support. Abdić’s men carried banners into battle bearing his portrait; their slogans declared their willingness to die for him; they called him Daddy.

Sabedin’s photos probably won’t be found again; a small history of his family and his life was wrecked back then. Sabedin and his family became refugees, in their land of origin; they settled in Pristina, and after the NATO campaign ended, they fled again. But Sabedin, like Ismail Butić in Livadje, took the time to build a new home in Gracanica. Unlike many others, Sabedin had a plot of land to return to.

Sabedin allowed us to interview him, but on one condition; that we should take pictures of his home, and his family, and give them to him.

How old are you?

SM: I was born in 1952; I'm 51 years old.

Where are you from?

SM: I'm from Pristina, but I lived in Bosnia for 20 years - from 1973 to 1992. When the war started in Bosnia we fled.

Did you return to Pristina?

SM: We had nowhere to live when we came back; we had no home in Pristina. We rented a place; we were refugees. When the NATO war started, and they bombed for 78 days, everybody left Pristina. We fled too; to Kruševac, in Serbia. We stayed there for three years. But before the bombing I built a house here - in Gracanica.

Was your father from Pristina?

SM: Yes, and my grandfather as well. We lived in the Moravska Mahala. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

When I went to Bosnia, I built two houses there. I worked many trades; we had wealth, but we left everything there. When we returned to Pristina, some of my sons traveled to Italy and Germany*. They helped me by sending money home, because we didn't work here. Again we had to leave everything in Pristina. Our riches were lost; we lost our minds, our way of thinking. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

(* Kosovo Roma working in Germany, when discovered, are usually deported back to Kosovo, despite the security risks they face. The UN and Roma NGOs have pleaded with the German government to stop this practice.)

When you were young, what was your father's work?

SM: My father was a Hamaldjija.*

(*Hamali/ Amalija/ Hamaldjija. Serbian: Nosač. English: porter. Hamaldjija is from the Turkish word Hamal; Hamal is also a Turkish insult. SM's father was fortunate in that he had a samara, or pushcart, enabling him to carry heavier loads and earn higher wages. Some men had only their backs.)

Everybody lived together then - Albanians, Turks, Ashkalija and Roma. It was very peaceful; in that time Tito ruled us, and everything was okay. Peaceful, as I said, but the people who had work had a better life. Some were paid very well, some were rich, but today we work all day, only for some food. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)
In Pristina we made bricks and sold them. Everybody did that - Ashkalija and Roma - because we lived together.

Is there much difference between Gurbeti and Arlija?

SM: Yes, but the differences are very small. We can understand any Roma accent. Bugurdjije use some strange words; people call them Kovači.* Bugurdjije lived in places like Plemetina, Priluzje, Obilić, Kosovo Polje and Slivovo. Another Roma group, Divanjoldjije, lived in Pristina. Some of them spoke Turkish; they were Roma.

(*Kovači is the Serbian word for Bugurdjije - blacksmiths.)

How old you were when you were married?

SM: I was 15 when I had my first child, so I was married at 14. For Roma, it's normal to get married very young. Serbs and Albanians, they get married at around 25 years old. When a Roma boy reaches 14 or 15, his parents marry him; that's the tradition.

(In Pristina) the boys weren't in school?

SM: A very small number were in school. Some children finished only four years of primary school. The rich Roma families - their children actually finished primary school (eight years). But people like us finished only four years. We could work as cleaners, or physical laborers; we didn't think a lot about school. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

How many children do you have?

SM: I have seven children; two sons are with me and two are outside of Yugoslavia. And I have three daughters.

Do you have any income?

SM: No. I don't even have a pension, because I worked privately*. I saw that it was very good to work private.

(* Private is the general word that Roma use to describe any labor when they work for themselves. Private can embody everything from collecting cans and digging trenches to constructing homes.)

Are your sons all married?

SM: Yes, except my youngest son.

What customs did you follow when your sons were married?

SM: First, you must go to the (bride's) family, to ask for their daughter. An agreement is struck; the bride's father then says the bride price, along with instructions on how much gold to purchase, and what clothes to buy as well. This costs the equivalent of one house.

So it's easier to marry a daughter than a son?

SM: You see, when my daughter was married, I didn't want any money.

[LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

We have to pay around 2000 - 3000 Deutschmarks (as a dowry), but it depends on the people. Some families want around 20,000 Deutschmarks, so that they'll become rich; Gurbets* Roma do this. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

(*Gurbeti - Gnjilane/ Gjilan Roma)

Which holidays do you celebrate?

SM: I'll start with Herdeljez; that's our important day. We buy new clothes for our children and a sheep. Second is Vasilica, but that's more a Serbian holiday, like Christmas. For Christmas we just buy apples, nuts and so on. But for Roma, the biggest holiday is Herdeljez.

When you were a child, how did your parents celebrate Herdeljez?

SM: On May 5th we'd bathe and go to the Turbe; we'd wear the new clothes our parents bought for us. My mother would prepare food to take with us. Others would sacrifice

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sheep and chickens there. We'd stay at the Turbe for the entire day. We'd return to the Mahala to see others sacrificing sheep at home. On the 6th we'd take a ceremonial bath with flowers in it (Kukubreg and Dren).

Do you celebrate Vasilica, like other Roma?

SM: Yes. On Vasilica eve we'd light candles, and we'd sing - Muhadjeri* and Gurbeti together.

(*Muhadjeri - Roma from Pristina)

Muhadjeri are also Roma?

SM: Yes, they are Roma, and they celebrate Vasilica very strongly.

Why they are called Muhadjeri?

SM: I think because they came from some other place. Like us; we came from Pristina, and now we live in Gracanica.

(On Vasilica) we slaughter a goose, and from its meat we make polenta*.

(* Polenta - a mush usually made of chestnut meal, cornmeal, semolina and farina.)

Why do you sacrifice the goose?

SM: Tradition. It's the same thing Roma do on Antanasia, but we celebrate Antanasia only when someone in the family is sick.

The day after Vasilica, a visitor comes with corn and gold, and he strikes the family members lightly on the head. He does that to insure a better new year. The family waits for him, and serves him coffee.

What religion do you follow?

SM: Most Roma are Muslims; in our Mahala (Moravska- Pristina), everyone was Muslim. Our great-grandfathers were Muslims, and we are still Muslims.

Were you in Gracanica during the 1999 war?

SM: Yes, but we left after the bombing - after the NATO soldiers entered Kosovo.

During the bombing, where did you shelter?

SM: I was at home, with my family. I have 4 rooms, and many Roma people from our Mahala stayed in my home because it was very strong. We stayed in the first floor; there were 50-60 people in my home. One room was for children, another for women, and another for men. We put blankets over the windows; we sat there. A lot of us smoked; we were very scared. [LINK to Sabedin speaking](#)

Did any bombs fall in Gracanica?

SM: The first bombs, I think they fell in Gracanica. It was like an earthquake. We could hear planes, flying high above us. Many Roma slept in shelters, and there they had safety, but I slept in my home. We were six or seven families, all sitting inside. All those days we stayed together, and everyone was okay.

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“Roma here wouldn’t talk about Roma problems. They didn’t believe in themselves; they were fearful to speak about individual problems and community problems. The situation is now different, and people who didn’t talk before now talk freely; they do things for their community.”

“Now the Gracanica Roma community is ready to speak - as a community.”

Gazmend Salijević
[Gracanica](#)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of Gazmend's engagement celebration (1).
Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of Gazmend's engagement celebration (2).

We interviewed Gazmend four days before his wedding; we were invited to the wedding as well. The women, in their finest clothes, danced for hours to traditional music while we sat with a few hundred other guests, Serbs, Roma and internationals, wolfing down sausages and cabbage and kačkaval cheese and drinking rakija.

The Roma cut loose; outside the wedding tent in Gazmend’s family compound, they had no jobs, no security, and few economic prospects. But inside, blinded by light and cigarette smoke, they were *a community*, celebrating the marriage of one of their own, rejoicing along with him and his family for his future, and his future children.

Gazmend married a Plemetina girl he met on the job. He’d picked her up that day. Her family would ride a chartered bus into Gracanica the next morning; but this night was for Gracanica alone.

Gazmend is a translator for KFOR. He works 24 hour shifts; he speaks Romanes, English, Serbian, and passable Albanian. Gazmend worked for several international Non-Governmental Organizations after the 1999 war ended. Children’s Aid Direct, a now-defunct English group, gave him his first job; he delivered sacks of food on behalf of the UN’s World Food Program to isolated and endangered Roma & Serb enclaves throughout central Kosovo.

Besides his translator work with KFOR, Gazmend works for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; he also writes articles for youth papers, and co-founded his own Roma advocacy NGO- the Eyes of the Future

GS: I am 22 years old.

You are a Roma activist. What activities do you conduct?

GS: My first activities were before 1999. In 1996 I worked as an amateur actor at the theatre in Pristina. We shared Roma culture through stage dramas and comedies.

Did you conduct any shows around in Kosovo?

GS: My first show was in Gnjilane in 1998, with many other performers from around Yugoslavia. Back then I began to write songs and poetry.

In Romanes?

GS: Yes, in Romanes. My teacher told me to write in Romanes, because I already wrote well in Serbian. So I started, and I wanted to write a book of poetry.

[LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

After 1999, what types of activities did you have for Roma?

GS: First I'll tell you an eastern saying- "In something bad there is something good, in something good there is something bad." This war was a step forward for us. For my friends and I who work for Roma, this war built our capacity to work.

[LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

GS: After the war, we began to work very actively in December 1999. I worked with my friends to develop greater awareness of Roma culture for those Roma who were still here. Roma were massively discriminated against by the (Kosovo) majority. We tried, through culture and language activities, to keep them* here. [LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

(* GS later expanded on this by talking about his efforts at community stabilization; getting the Roma left behind in Kosovo to not flee, like so many others. Many Roma communities across Kosovo, once thriving, have completely disappeared because of the war.)

Did your work have good results?

GS: Yes, because we were the first ones to start these activities, and I think that we had a big influence on Roma. We were the first Roma youth who took this responsibility in our hands.

Between your childhood and now, do you see much difference in Gracanica's Roma?

GS: Yes. (Before) Roma here wouldn't talk about Roma problems. They didn't believe in themselves; they were fearful to speak about individual problems and community problems. The situation is now different, and people who didn't talk before now talk freely; they do things for their community. Now the Gracanica Roma community is ready to speak as a community. [LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

Is there Roma representation in the media here?

GS: Yes, it's very good in the Pristina region. Before 1999 in Pristina there was only one radio station and one TV station: Radio Television Pristina. Now we have four or five radio stations in this region, in the Roma language; they broadcast programs twice a week in Romanes. We don't yet have a television program, but RTK* is planning to do something in Romanes. This is very positive. There are around 25 Roma journalists in Kosovo now.

(*RTK: Radio Television Kosova)

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Did the cultural activities you developed change after 1999?

GS: Yes, things changed after 1999, especially in this region. Myself, my friend Adem and two others started everything, and I'm very proud of our work. After 1999 many people began to think, and work, on things that can develop the rights of Roma.

Does your work influence younger Roma?

GS: Some very young children emulate us. When we performed Romeo and Juliet in Gracanica, the kids were acting out the scenes in the streets. They wanted to be like us, which I very much liked.

There are children here who want to do something with their lives.

[LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

Are you going to continue your work?

GS: I don't know, but I believe I'm going to continue in politics. I may form a Kosovo youth democratic association; we'll see.

Did you cooperate with Serbs and Albanians in these activities?

GS: Yes, it was good sometimes; almost normal. We had some misunderstandings which are common in work, but no one ever attacked me. We try, with diplomacy and words, to solve the problems we have. [LINK to Gazmend speaking](#)

We have very good cooperation with Albanian NGOs and their activities. I have good contacts with one (Albanian) politician, Adem Demaçi.* And we have good contacts with the Serbs- their NGOs and political associations.

(* Adem Demaçi is the founder of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (<http://www.albanian.com/kmdlj/>), a Pristina-based Human Rights monitoring group. Demaçi spent nearly three decades in Yugoslav, and later Serbian, jails, due to his separatist activities. Demaçi was later one of the spokesmen for the Kosovo Liberation Army.)



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Selim Ljatifi - [Gracanica](#)
Mr. Ljatifi is an IDP from [Pristina](#).

“(In Pristina) Roma made horseshoes, and Roma made bricks from mud. Other Roma made charcoal. They went into the forest and chopped down trees; they buried the logs in earth and started fires over them.”

“Roma people always worked for themselves, with only their ten fingers; they never robbed anyone, and they trusted people.”

Selim Ljatifi refused to let us take his photograph, or videotape this interview. He’s an angry man - out of work, out of patience, and out of the neighborhood he grew up in and lived his life in until June of 1999. Like so many other Roma, he fled Pristina; Selim is now a blacksmith with no tools, in a village full of Roma men with the same trade. He’s a city Roma, and he cannot compete with Gracanica’s Roma blacksmiths; the village Roma had the benefit of not having their homes and equipment looted and burned four years before.

SL: My father and grandfather were both born in Pristina. My father’s grandfather was a blacksmith; he came to Pristina in the time of the Turks, and he stayed there.

There was a quarter of Pristina where the Turks lived; Roma lived there as well. We grew up with the Turks and went to their school. [LINK to Selim speaking](#) I remember that Roma never had problems with the Turks. They were nice to us. We had good communication.

What was your father’s name?

SL: My father’s name was Shukri. After he died I went to live with my mother’s father. He was a very rich man; he had a lot of land. He worked for no one else; he worked his own land, and I helped him.

My father didn’t have a proper job, but he worked for himself. He made bricks from mud and sold them to others, to build their homes with. This was the way we survived. [LINK to Selim speaking](#)

My family had a nice life, a very good life, because we never had troubles with anyone, and no one gave us trouble.

What kind of stories did your parents tell you as a child?

SL: A man once had a dream. He did not know where to go and say the dream he had; that man decided he’s tell this dream to the king. The king’s court did not wish to give him an audience with the king; they said his dream, whatever it was, was unimportant. One member of the court finally requested for the man an audience with the king. The king agreed to hear the man’s dream.

The man entered the king's court and said unto him:

Your highness, I dreamt that your kingdom is cursed, because you do not look to God.

The enraged king had the man jailed, and the man with the dream of the curse was quickly forgotten. He rotted there.

And from his cell, he dug, every night, until he came upon a rock barrier and he broke through, and found himself in a wing of the palace. The man walked through dark halls until he came across a beautiful room and saw a rich table, piled with food and drink, and his hunger overcame him. He gorged himself on someone else's feast. The man then left through the hole he had dug and returned to his cell.

The room belonged to the king's daughter; she discovered that someone had eaten her meal, and she called together her servants and slaves and demanded, which among you has done this? None answered.

The next night, after the king's daughter had fallen asleep, the prisoner quietly returned and ate again. The following night the king's daughter sliced open her finger; the pain would not let her sleep. She watched the prisoner quietly walk to the table, take his seat and eat again. When the prisoner stood to fetch some water, he walked close to the daughter's bed, and she flew awake and grabbed his hand.

"Please don't have me killed," the prisoner asked. "Your father has imprisoned me, and he has just as quickly forgotten me. I have no food there."

"But my father does not have any prisoners," the king's daughter said.

"He has me, and others," the prisoner replied.

The king's daughter kept the prisoner's secret. He returned every night to share her meals.

The king soon decided to marry his daughter. He put out a riddle for her suitors to answer. In a fenced field he placed three horses. The king asked the prospective princes: which horse is the mother, which is the daughter, and which is the daughter's son?

The suitors of the king's daughter were confused and nervous. They had no way to tell who was who, and they knew their chances of guessing successfully were small.

That night, the prisoner and the king's daughter had their meal. The prisoner noticed the girl's unease; he asked her gently what vexed her and eventually she told him her father's riddle.

"The solution is simple," the prisoner said. "When the horses are startled, the mother will run first, the daughter will follow second, and her son will follow last."

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The daughter's suitors all guessed, and failed to win her hand. And the king's daughter told the king about one man who knew the answer.

"Your prisoner knows," she said.

The king had the prisoner brought before him, and he put the question to the man. The prisoner gave his answer, and it was proven correct.

The king had the prisoner's manacles struck from him. And he married his daughter to the prisoner he had forgotten about, and secured for him another wife as well; the daughter of a far-away king.

And the man told the king about another dream he had had before he was imprisoned:

"Your daughter was my right hand, and the daughter of that far-away king was my left."

What is your profession?

SL: I knew many different trades because my father built bricks, and houses, and I learned his trades from him. Later I learned to forge iron; that's what I did in Pristina, for a long time. In the Mahala there were many skilled Roma - Roma with trades. If the Roma returned there, don't you think they would do the same things? They'll be there again. The iron-makers, the blacksmiths.

I want to say that I stopped forging iron for some time, but I did not forget how; because I knew that I would start my work again after the bombing. This saved me.

[LINK to Selim speaking](#) Roma don't forget their trades.

There were many Roma making things in the Pristina Mahala. Many different trades. There were at least ten families of nothing but blacksmiths.

There were Roma making horseshoes, and many Roma made mud bricks. Other Roma made charcoal. They went into the forest and chopped down trees; they buried the logs in earth and started fires over them. Roma people always worked for themselves, with only their ten fingers; they never robbed anyone, and they trusted people.

[LINK to Selim speaking](#)

Some Roma in Pristina worked for others, not themselves, but most of them were cleaners.

What about Ashkalija and Egyptians? Did you know about them before the war?

SL: There were Ashkalija before. We (Roma) didn't really deal with them; they knew how to speak Romanes but they would not use it with us. They wanted to be Albanians. There are many groups - Arlija, Gurbeti, Ashkalija, Bugurdjije - but they are all Roma. The only difference is their dialects. [LINK to Selim speaking](#)

Roma around Kosovo speak differently.

Can you tell us something about Roma history?

SL: Most people say that Roma are from India. I don't think so. I think Roma came from Arabia; they traveled in past years and they went to many cities, and that's why Roma are everywhere. Just because we have similar words to Indian doesn't mean anything; Serbs have many Russian words, but Serbs don't say they're from Russia because of this. You can also say this for (Kosovo) Egyptians - how can they be Egyptian? Egyptian people are from Egypt, and a person who speaks Albanian cannot be Egyptian.

What kind of Roma are you?

I'm Arlija. The only difference (between Arlija and other Roma groupings) is dialect. We understand other dialects; Arlija understand Gurbetija.

What about your religion?

SL: I'm a Muslim, and all the Roma in Kosovo are Muslim. We celebrate the Muslim holidays. We always have. I'm proud of myself because I'm Roma and Muslim.

Which holidays do you celebrate?

SL: Roma celebrate all the holidays that happen in Kosovo, from Herdeljez to Bajram, Vasilica to Christmas. We celebrate everything. I should let you know, though, that I don't pay too much attention to the details. I celebrate because others do.

What about Roma traditions regarding marriage?

SL: Before, Roma parents would never ask their daughter if she wanted to get married. A girl's father would not even speak to her about it; he would simply choose a man for her.

Regarding a groom, a girl's parents would ask around - what kind of people are the groom's family? Is the groom a good man, is his father a good man? And so on. And of course there's the main tradition - where the groom's family buys his bride from her family.

Did you finish school?

SL: No. I went to school for only 6 years. By then I had the skills and trades that would help me out in life. [LINK to Selim speaking](#)

Do you remember World War II?

SL: Roma were in a very good position during the Second World War *. There weren't too many problems. Roma had good relationships with everybody.

(SL seems unaware of Reich policies regarding Roma, and the extermination of them in other areas of Europe. Kosovo Roma were not targets of this policy; eventually, they would have been.)

Can you tell us something about Roma life under communism?

SL: When Tito was alive, the Turks left this place. They sold their houses to the Albanians, and now the Serbs are doing the same. [LINK to Selim speaking](#)

But there were not any problems then between Roma and Albanians, Albanians and Serbians, everything was just okay.

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Can you tell us about the bombing in 1999? What was your experience?

SL: We were very afraid. We never had these problems in Tito's time. [LINK to Selim speaking](#) Everything was okay then; we never heard even the shooting of guns. My daughter is still crippled because of the fear in those days. It was terrible; I won't talk about it.

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Mrs. Mevljida is an IDP from Pristina.

“‘This is my home,’ I told him. ‘I never did anything bad to anyone. If you want, come inside and see if I’ve stolen anything.’

‘I didn’t come to see who stole what,’ he said. ‘I came to tell you - you’d better leave this place. When we were driven from our homes, you stayed. Now it’s your turn.’”

Mevlide Mevljida
[Gracanica](#)

Mrs. Mevljida helps care for the bed-ridden wife of another interviewee - Isat Fetahi. She’s known the Fetahis for decades, first in Pristina, and now in Gracanica. They were neighbors who abandoned their neighborhood together. Every day they sit and talk, often about the past; a Serb woman joins them. She fled Pristina as well, and when she had nowhere to go, the Fetahis put her up. We asked her for an interview.

“I have nothing to say,’ she said, and that was all. She was a Serb, cared for by Roma who loved her. They provided for her when her own family wouldn’t.

MM: My name is Mevlida. I am from Pristina; now I live in Gracanica. In Pristina we had a good life, good living. Someone took all of the things that I had before. Now I have nothing.

MM: My father’s name was Fadilj; my mother’s, Fetija. My father had eight children. He worked very hard to give us a good life. He worked as a cleaner in a Pristina school.

[LINK to Mevlide speaking](#)

What kind of Roma are you?

MM: We are Arlije.

Can you tell me about Saint Vasilica, what are you doing on that day?

MM: When I became married, my husband celebrated this day. We baked special bread and cooked a rich dinner. We invited all our friends and relatives; we drank and had fun.

In the early morning no one could enter our home. Our family wished each other a happy holiday and sang the song of Saint Vasilija. My mother sang that song very, very well. [LINK to Mevlide speaking](#)

Do you also celebrate Herdeljez?

MM: On Herdeljez we would wake up before dawn and walk to the Turbe* (in Gazi Mestan - Obilić municipality) to sacrifice sheep.

On Herdeljez morning, our children, with new clothes, would meet together and go from house to house in the Mahala. The neighbors would give them *Para** and candy.

(* Para: in old Yugoslav currency, 1 Para = 100 Dinars. Para is slang, across Kosovo, for cash)

And on Herdeljez evening we'd have a large dinner with all the members of my family, and that's that.

Do you celebrate Christmas?

MM: On Christmas we bake cookies. We don't pay too much attention to Christmas.

Do you know many Ashkalija?

MM: Yes, I knew about Ashkalija before.

And Egyptians?

MM: No, I never heard of Egyptians before, but Ashkalija have many things in common with us. The difference is that they speak Albanian. [LINK to Mevlide speaking](#)

Were you born in Pristina?

MM: Yes.

How was Roma life in Pristina before the war?

MM: My family was okay - we had a home, and we had work. After the war we all got worse. We are all in a different way now.

(After the war) I went to Pristina, to see my home again. And when I saw it, I had a feeling - it's better to die now than to live. There were no houses left: they destroyed everything. They seized the house of my husband's brother, and they kept his two cars. Soon after, I became sick, and was in hospital because of high blood pressure.

It's very sad for Roma - because we never had problems before, even with Albanians. I had Albanian neighbors, but we never had problems with them until recently - these problems that began to exist between us.

What about your brothers? Did they have problems with Albanians?

MM: No. We always cooperated with them.

I'll tell you the truth - when the Albanians told me I had to leave my home, they didn't make too many problems. An Albanian saw me standing in front of my home and he asked me, 'Which house is yours?'

'This is my home,' I told him. 'I never did anything bad to anyone. If you want, come inside and see if I've stolen anything.'

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'I didn't come to see who stole what,' he said. 'I came to tell you - you'd better leave this place. When we were driven from our homes, you got to stay. Now it's your turn.'

I called to him, 'Why are you doing this? Why did you take things from my mother's home?'

He told me again, 'you stayed here and now you must go. We'll show you who rules this place. [LINK to Mevlide speaking](#) It's better for you to go - I won't do anything bad to you, but worse men will come. You'd better leave.'

We talked about it with our neighbors. And we left the Mahala.

Where did you go after you left Pristina?

MM: I moved to Gračanica. I'm still here. I don't know what the future will bring. [LINK to Mevlide speaking](#)

Did you go to school in Pristina?

MM: Yes. I went to primary school for four years. That was okay for me, because with four years of primary school I could find a good job. [LINK to Mevlide speaking](#)

My brothers - they all went to school, some of them for eight years and some of them for six; it was okay for us.



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Ismail Butić

[Livadje](#)

*"What did you think during the bombing?
Did you leave Kosovo?"*

*"No, we didn't leave. Of course we were afraid,
but we didn't leave this place."*

"And that is now the past."

*"Roma are very good, very hard workers; they stayed in any place
where there was a place to sleep, food to eat and work to do. My
grandfather built a house in the center of Livadje; he worked very
hard, and he built the house that became his home."*

After the end of the 1999 NATO campaign, Ismail Butić found himself utterly cut off from the world he once knew. He was unemployed; to venture into areas where he could find work was to risk death.

Ismail decided that this was the perfect time to do something he'd meant to do for years; build a new home for his family. Before, he'd never had time because of work that had taken him all over the former Yugoslavia, and as far away as the Czech Republic and Germany.

Ismail got the equipment, laid the foundations, and set to work with his sons. His new home is complete now. "I want to work; I need to. But there's nothing here, nothing in Livadje now, and I can't go into the Albanian areas to find a job," Ismail told us over coffee while he played with his young grandchild. "It's too dangerous."

Ismail has applied to international organizations for a small loan, to buy equipment for blacksmithing; his family trade. He's waiting for a reply as I write.

IB: I'm 43 years old

Where are you from?

IB: I'm from Livadje. My father was born here, and his father as well.

What kind of Roma are you?

IB: We are Bugurdjije.

Where did the Bugurdjije come from?

IB: Smithing was their trade. My father told me they had to survive somehow; my father told me that his father first did this work in Skulanevo*. The work got slow, and he moved to Dobrotin*. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

There are a lot of Roma left in Dobrotin, and many of them are my relatives.

(*Skulanevo- 5 kilometers northwest of Lipljan/ Lipjan town.)

(* Dobrotin lies roughly 10 kilometers south of Livadje, in Lipljan/Lipjan Municipality.)

IB: Lots of Roma live in Livadje; my grandfather came to work here. The Serbs of Livadje gave him a small place to work, and they made a deal; he could stay here only if he worked for the Serbs for free. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

And he worked cheap for the Roma.

Roma are very good, very hard workers; they stayed in any place where there was a place to sleep, food to eat and work to do. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

My grandfather built a house in the center of Livadje; he worked very hard, and he built the house that became his home.

He built his house after he worked for awhile in the mines, in Kišnica*. He retired there, and got a pension. But the traditional trade that my family followed was smithing. I also finished technical secondary school.

(* Kišnica lies several kilometers east of Gracanica, on the Gjilan/ Gnjilane road. The mines there have been worked since Roman times.)

Where did you attend school?

IB: I finished school in Lipljan. After school I went to Belgrade and worked as a technician; I stayed there for ten years. I returned to Pristina to work in a factory.

Did your parents tell you any stories about your family when you were a child?

IB: I don't really remember. My father was in World War II though; he was with the Partisans. I know that he had a brother, but they were not together. My father was a prisoner in Beć*, and after the war he returned home. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

(* Beć is the Serbian name for Vienna, Austria.)

My father's name was Pulji and mother's name was Sevdja; she was from Pristina.

On weddings:

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IB: When I go to a girl's father, to ask her hand for my son, I bring a nice bottle, wrapped in flowers, and filled with sugar water. If the girl's father accepts the bottle, his daughter will marry my son. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

Do you pay a dowry for the bride?

IB: Our people - Bugurdjije - ask for money, but not too much. I'll ask for money (for my daughter), just so the custom won't be forgotten. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

Do other Roma ask for more money?

IB: some Roma - Gurbeti* - ask for a lot of money when someone marries their daughters. They give a lot of money as well. There are big differences between Gurbeti and Bugurdjije regarding marriage. For example, in my family no son was married until he finished his military service. And no daughter will marry until she's finished secondary school. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

But Gurbeti Roma - their daughters don't attend school, and their sons marry too early.

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

(*Gurbeti Roma inhabit Kosovo's southeast, and are mainly found in Gnjilane/Gjilan municipality. The Roma areas of Gjilan town are almost exclusively Gurbeti.)

On Ashkalija and Egyptians:

IB: I know about Ashkalija; they live in Albanian areas, and they speak Albanian, but they are Roma too.

I didn't know about them (Egyptians) before. They came into existence recently. They don't want to call themselves Ashkalija, and they don't want to call themselves Roma, so they call themselves Egyptians. But everyone knows that they are Roma.

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

What religion are you?

IB: I'm Muslim.

Are most Roma Muslims?

IB: Yes. In general, yes.

What customs do you follow (in Livadje)?

IB: Vasilica - January 14th - is a day of great importance to us. Then comes Herdeljez (Serbian: Djurdjevdan - Saint George's day), on the 6th of May. And Saint Arangel*, on June 26th. We also celebrate the Muslim Bajrams.

(Saint Michael Archangel - *Arangel* - occurs on November 21. Below IB states that Saint Michael the Archangel is celebrated twice, and the second time falls in November. I can find no other reference for the June date IB describes.)

What are your customs on Vasilica?

We wake up at midnight and prepare ourselves, and we make the sacrifices. We bake coins in the bread; whoever finds a coin in their piece will have luck and happiness for

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the next year. But if no one finds a coin, that means that the home and family will all have that luck. On the second day our wives make the traditional meal - Sarma*.

(* Sarma is a traditional Balkan meal of ground meat and rice, wrapped in cabbage leaves.)

When we prepare Sarma, the woman will stay awake all night, watching the Sarma as it cooks, to insure that no one else comes to steal it. When the guests come the next day, to eat the meal, the woman that cooked the Sarma 'sells' it to the guests. 'How much does it cost?' the guest will ask the cook. She'll name a price. 'It's too high,' the guest will say. 'Can I pay you in the summer?' The cook will agree to this, and everyone will eat. We sing many special songs on this day.

Do you know the songs?

IB: Yes, there is one special one sung on this day;

Here is Vasi*

Here is Vasi

For my little son

Please, Lord

Give him everything he wants

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

And the son will then sing for the entire family.

(* Vasi is the diminutive form of Vasilija)

And on Djurdjevdan? What customs do you follow on this day?

IB: On the 5th of May we have already cleaned up our homes for our guests and visitors. We buy sheep for the sacrifice; the more money you have, the more sheep you can sacrifice.

There is a place in the hills, on the way to Sušica, where we walk to drink the water and collect Kukubreg and Dren. So that our children may be as healthy as the Dren we find. We mix the Kukubreg and Dren in water and bathe in it; our women bake special bread, in the shape of sheep.

We also collect Debeljica for the children who are very weak, that they can become strong.

Then we sacrifice the sheep we've bought, and have a roast. On the first day of Djurdjevdan we have no guests; everyone celebrates in their own home. On the following day many visitors come.

Do you celebrate Christmas?

IB: Yes, but we don't pay as much attention to Christmas as the Serbs. We buy fruit for our children.

I remember when I was a child; my father brought home hay on Christmas that we would sleep on. The main reason why we celebrate Christmas is because of our children;

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we don't want to divide them from the Serbian people. There is not any really special reason why we celebrate.

And Arangel*, on the 26th of June, can you tell us something about that?

We celebrate this firstly because we live in a Serbian area. And also, because on the 26th of June* once something terrible happened to my ancestor, but they recovered. This same holiday is also celebrated in the wintertime - on November 21st.*

(*IB refers to, on November 21st, the day of Saint Michael Archangel. This is a Serbian patron saint's day, or *slava*.)

On June 26th we simply invite our relatives and friends over, to have dinner.

You finished high school in Lipljan. What about primary school?

IB: Four years in Livadje and the rest in Donja Gušterica*.

(*Donja Gušterica lies several kilometers south of Livadje.)

(In school) did you have friends of different ethnicities? Albanian, Serbian, Turk...

IB: In secondary school we only had Serbs and Croat from Janjevo.* Albanian children had their own, separate schools. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

(*Janjevo is a predominantly Catholic town in Lipljan/ Lipjan municipality. Janjevo's population is Croatian, Roma, Ashkalija and Albanian; the few Serbs there fled after 1999.)

How was the relationship between (Kosovo's) ethnicities before?

IB: When I was in Belgrade, I worked in different places. I met many different nationalities, and I didn't have problems with any of them.

Did you have any dreams for the future, after you finished high school?

IB: After I finished high school, I went straight to university. I completed the first year. My family and parents were then evicted from their home; we couldn't find another place to live, so we moved away. I had to leave University. It was wintertime; I couldn't stay. My father had no work then, so it was very hard to continue.

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

Some time later, I had the opportunity to continue my education, but my father could not afford it. That was my last chance. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

After everything passed, I served my time in the army. After the army I was married.

How old were you when you were married?

IB: I was married in 1980. I was 21 years old.

Where did you complete your military service?

IB: In Macedonia. I was a driver.

I'm married and I have three children; one daughter and two sons. My eldest son is married and he has a baby boy. My daughter is in the third year of medical secondary school, and my other son is in primary school - the 8th year.

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For their future - I want my children to finish school and continue with their education.

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

All my brothers attended school; some of them even finished University. Education is of the utmost importance; the conditions are good for it.

The one problem that really scares me is the (economic) situation. People have no work. My son finished electrotechnical secondary school, and he cannot find a job*.

[LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

(*Many *educated* Kosovo Roma parents do not send their children to school for precisely this reason. They believe that education did not help them, and is therefore a waste of time for their children.)

How was the situation in this village during the 1999 war?

IB: A bomb came down one KM from Livadje. There was a Yugoslav Army encampment nearby; NATO bombed that place all the time.

What did you think during the bombing? Did you leave Kosovo?

IB: No, we didn't leave. Of course we were afraid, but we didn't leave this place.

And that is now the past. [LINK to Ismail speaking](#)

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Radomir Ivanović
[Gracanica](#)

Mrs. Ivanović is an ethnic Serb.

*“Roma didn’t have good jobs;
they didn’t have the same rights as Serbs and Albanians.
They were one step under them.”*

RI: I’ve lived in Gracanica for 45 years with the Roma; I was born here. If we’re talking about Roma from Gracanica, they are good people and good neighbors.

[LINK to Radomir speaking](#)

Roma always worked with Serbs together, for example, in making bricks. Roma didn’t have good jobs; they didn’t have the same rights as Serbs and Albanians. They were one step under them. [LINK to Radomir speaking](#)

Do you know the reason why? Perhaps education?

RI: Education. When Roma children wanted to go to school, they couldn’t. This was because of Albanians; they were the majority, and they didn’t want Roma to be educated.*

(* This is a heated and partially untrue comment. RI’s statement does not take into account that Roma faced as much discrimination in Serbian schools - including Gracanica’s own Kralj Milutin school - as they did in Albanian schools.)

Roma here celebrate Djurdjevdan and Vasilica. Have they always celebrated these (Serbian) holidays?

RI: Those are *their* days; they’ve celebrated them for a long time. On those holidays we visit them and drink with them; they drink and dance and so on.

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*“There was no traffic;
there were many soldiers,
and they were drunk all the time.
I was with my friend,
and a soldier aimed his gun at us.
We were lucky; his friend disarmed him.
Otherwise he’d have shot us.”*



Adem Osmani

[Gracanica](#)

In September of 2001, my office was burgled; two laptops were stolen. As two Filipino technicians dusted the windowsill for fingerprints, I provided the names of my office staff to the Swedish investigating official, so that their fingerprints would not bring them under the suspicion of the police. I provided my fingerprints as well.

The local police immediately fixated on the two Roma on my payroll.

“We’ve got Gypsy suspects,” one of them said.

Adem was one of my summer camp counselors. He was too intelligent and driven to stay in that position for long. He was a Roma activist; he was about to encounter the state racism he’d only heard others speak of.

The police picked him up without my knowledge. They held him for 10 hours. They told him that if he didn’t talk, they’d go to his school and tell his classmates and teachers that he was a thief. The new lead investigator - a Romanian woman who told me that Roma were responsible for all of Romania’s crimes - acquiesced to this.

I found out about Adem’s detention after he was released. I went to visit him. He was in shock - a secondary medical school student who’d never even thought of stealing anything in his life. He was embarrassed, and angry at me. His mother looked as though she wanted to kill me.

Two days later the Romanian ordered Adem to be picked up again. His thumbprint had shown up on my desk. No matter that he sat at that desk for hours every day. The fact that he worked in my office meant nothing to them. They wanted to bust a gypsy, and they had one, and that was that.

My colleagues and I secured his release. ‘We don’t give a shit who did this,’ we said. ‘Leave this kid alone.’

I didn’t know what to say to him. I’d assured him, after the first detention, that it wouldn’t happen again. And it did. ‘If something happens to my son, I’ll die,’ Adem’s mother told me. I didn’t doubt her. It took awhile for Adem to calm down. He got nervous whenever a car stopped in front of his home. Adem’s a respected young man -

respected by all. The soldiers and teachers and internationals that know him sing his praises. In a village with no work, he's worked since the age of 12, helping his older brothers and his father repair their home. He worked for NGOs when he was still in high school. He talks about studying theology in Sarajevo, and he will, one day. He will leave this place on the strength of his will, passion and intelligence.

But to the police, and the lead international investigator, he was nothing but a number, a gypsy, a suspect.

AO: I am 21 years old.

Can you tell us about the last days before the bombing?

AO: In the days before the bombing, I sat and watched television. I didn't watch the news, but my older brother, my uncle and other older people watched. We listened to the radio, to try and figure out what would happen, or if there would be a solution. There were negotiations between the nationalities here, but it didn't work in Rambouillet, and no solution came.



What about Roma? What was their reaction?

AO: Some Roma would say, 'Well, we'll have a war then.' They didn't understand politics, but they saw the situation in Kosovo. Other Roma said, 'There are Russian soldiers* (near) here, so we won't have problems. Let's talk about May 24th; the radio stations issued warnings. I remember it like it happened today. People started to prepare themselves.

They opened their windows wide and prepared clothes, soap, and towels, in case something happened quickly, and they needed to flee.

(* AO may be referring to the presence of Russian troops in Bijeljina, NE Bosnia - roughly 280 KM from Pristina. Before the war, the Serbs believed that that Russians would intervene - at first, diplomatically, and later, if needed, militarily - to 'save' them. The Russians did do both of these things; in the beginning they actively opposed the coming campaign through the few diplomatic means at their disposal, and later, near the end of the NATO campaign, the Russian contingent in Bijeljina disappeared and only turned up again when they seized Pristina's Slatina Airport and paraded themselves through Pristina, where they were greeted as heroes by the Serbs who remained behind. These were symbolic gestures at best, and not what the Serbs had fervently wished for.)

What was your opinion of all this?

AO: My attitude was common - only because of what may pass if the bombing came. What would happen to people here? I didn't consider that the bombing would happen. I

thought that it was impossible, but my uncle and my family told me that the bombing would come - either that evening or the next day. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)
 On that day I was going out - walking around town. This was exactly four years ago.

What was the reaction of the youth?

AO: Everything was normal. We spent a lot of time playing football. We made jokes about the coming bombing - "yea, they'll blow up this and that -" but we didn't think about the consequences, how it was going to be when the bombs came. We didn't take it seriously.



That day (the first day of the NATO campaign) everything was normal. People talked all the time about the bombing, but everything was the same. Shops were open, other institutions (schools, government offices) as well. The traffic was normal, and people went to work. At 7 O'clock that evening saw on the news that the (NATO) planes were waiting and armed. They had targets; they were warming up. Then I realized it was really going to happen. Soon the windows in my home shattered.

We heard some large explosions far away from Gracanica - probably some military installation. We couldn't hear it very well. The morning after we heard air-raid sirens; my family decided not to sleep at home that night, and we went to the shelters. It was full of people. On the first night there were 4 families there. On the second night - March 25th - my family made the decision to flee to the Vojvodina* [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

(*Vojvodina is an ethnic Hungarian section of Northern Serbia, roughly 320 KM from Gracanica)

Why did your family think it would be better in the Vojvodina?

AO: Because NATO wasn't dropping so many bombs there. It would be safer, because it wasn't a real war, like in Kosovo. Albanians fought Serbs here from 1995 onward; a guerilla war, like the Partisans. We took the train to Belgrade, and then ended up in Vladimirovac.

(*Vladimirovac - a small village 50 kilometers from Belgrade.)



What was the situation there?

AO: It was fine. I only remember one night of bombing, and that was very far away from Vladimirovac. The place was full of Serbs, and it was nice, but we couldn't stay longer. We missed our home. It was really difficult for me to leave my home. I thought we would never come back, and I'd never see my friends again in my life. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

What did the other Roma here do?

AO: At the start of the war, many Roma families went to Serbia; some went to Italy. We couldn't leave the country; we stayed in Vladimirovac for 17 days.

We returned to Gracanica on the 24th of April. It was a disaster. My home had been looted. Everything - all the valuables - were gone. I didn't know what to do; I went to say hello to my friends. That was it. (REFERENCE: They and I) We saw many soldiers that we'd never seen before; some were from Kosovo, but many were from Serbia. There were a lot of army trucks, and a lot of guns. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

All the shops were closed. Everything was expensive; one kilo of rice was 200 Yugoslav Dinars. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

What did you do when you came back?

AO: There was no traffic; there were many soldiers, and they were drunk all the time. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

I was with my friend, and a soldier aimed his gun at us. We were lucky; his friend disarmed him. Otherwise he'd have shot us.

Why did he do that?

AO: Because he was drunk. He didn't care about anything; it was all a joke to him. The bombing went on for 78 days.

Can you read us an excerpt from the diary you kept then?

June 9th - they (the Serbs) have signed the agreement. People (in Gracanica) are celebrating, shooting guns into the air. The television says the war is over; we can't talk about the end of war, because everyone that was in this war has lost it.



The bombing stopped in a few hours.

June 11th - The Serbian army has pulled back to its prewar positions. On the 10th of June, at midnight, NATO came into Kosovo; the Russians took Slatina (the airport). The next day others arrived - Germans, Americans and French.

When did you write this down?

AO: As it happened - when NATO took over Kosovo. On June 21st Albanians began to return to their prewar homes. They returned to Pristina - and the Roma there fled. Some of them came to Gracanica, and others headed to Serbia proper.

On June 21st, those Pristina Roma fled to Gracanica - because they were told, if you don't leave, you'll have problems. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

So Albanians forced the Roma out?

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AO: Yes. They had to leave if they wanted to avoid problems with the (returning) Albanians. Too many Albanian homes were burned and destroyed.

Gracanica emptied immediately .We'd left during the bombing, but after it ended, we didn't want to go anywhere. People were leaving, and Gracanica had only five or six Roma families left. My friends were gone; I was alone. [LINK to Adem speaking](#) Albanians provoked us; Pristina was cut off from us.

Did any incidents take place in Gracanica?

AO: Albanians kidnapped one man here, but two days later he escaped; he had to walk from Pristina to Čaglavica. He was lucky. Two other men were kidnapped in Preoce; they were killed. A few years later their bodies were found.* Three or four months after (the Preoce kidnappings) a bomb was detonated at the market in Gracanica. After that the Serbs stopped Albanian cars*. We just played football. [LINK to Adem speaking](#)

(*Gafo Fazljija (Male, aged 23), and Ismet Celovic (Male, aged 52) - last seen alive on July 3, 1999 in Pristina's Ulpijana district.

The following eyewitness accounts of their abduction were compiled by the Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade <http://www.hlc.org.yu/indexeng.htm>

Fazljija, his brother F.G., Ismet Celovic and his brother C.A. were hired by a Serb trucker, Slavko Zdravkovic, to move an elderly Serb woman from her apartment in Priština (entrance 11, seventh floor, green building, Kicma (Kurriz) district)) on 3 July. F.G. and C.A. recounted that Zdravkovic came to Preoce at 9.40 a.m. and drove them to the building. The elevator was out of order so they carried the furniture and belongings down the stairs. A group of Albanians gathered on the steps outside the building and threatened and insulted them. Zdravkovic, who was upstairs, called KFOR. A patrol arrived shortly and dispersed the Albanians, and they continued loading the truck. Half an hour later, the same Albanians came back, resumed abusing them and said the belongings they were taking out of the apartment had been stolen by the elderly Serb woman. The Serb woman called KFOR and the Albanians were again dispersed.

The loading was finished at 3.30 p.m. Zdravkovic told the Roma he could not drive them back to Preoce as he had promised, and they walked to the bus stop near the market in the Ulpijana district. They noticed that they were being followed by four men, three of whom were about 23 or 24 and the fourth about 30. The older man was tall, of strong build and going bald. The younger men were shorter and thinner, two had streaked hair, and one curly hair. The witnesses recognized them as being in the group of Albanians who had abused them while they were loading the truck. At the post office, the men separated, two turning to the left at the market and two going in the opposite direction.

As they neared the bus stop, a white Zastava 101 with four men inside stopped in front of them. One of these men was the curly-haired man who had been following them. Then a blue Lada car drove up, with the remaining three men in it. The Roma started running: F.G. and C.A. toward the market and Fazljija and Celovic down Vidovdanska to the ring road. Two men got out of the Zastava and chased after F.G. and C.A. When they reached the Kontra Restaurant, F.G. and C.A. looked back and saw that no one was

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following them any more. A KFOR patrol with a young Albanian woman interpreter came by and they tried to report the incident. The woman at first refused to translate what they were saying but then said something to the KFOR members. The witnesses believe that she did not translate their words as a KFOR member merely gave them a piece of paper with a telephone number to call if they needed an escort. The woman told F.G. and C.A. that they were safe and would not be harmed.

F.G. and C.A. walked on and then sat on a bench where they were approached by two young women who had overheard them talking about the incident. They said they were Serb and offered to take F.G. and C.A. to the apartment of a friend who spoke English and could help them report to KFOR what had happened. They agreed, went to fetch the young man who spoke English and went with him to a KFOR post. The KFOR members there heard them out, said they could not leave their post and gave them the address and telephone number of the KFOR headquarters in Priština. Afraid of being caught in the streets, they returned to the young man's apartment and tried to call the KFOR headquarters but the line was constantly busy.

A Serb neighbor of the young man offered to drive them to their village, for which they paid him Ten Deutschmarks. They never learned what happened to Fazljija and Celovic.)

(*Gracanica's Serbs block the main road between Pristina and Gnjilane/ Gjilan after major security incidents or attacks against them. The reason is partly their own security, and partly to draw attention to their current plight.)

AO: The Roma fought with Albanians on that day; there were Roma in the market the Albanians had bombed. Some Albanians were injured.

How is the situation now?

AO: The situation is different. Everyone is looking for work. Many organizations* came to Kosovo; if we want money, we have to work with them. In Gracanica now we can speak in any language,* but everyone still hates one another, and that's that.

[LINK to Adem's Diaries.](#)

(*AO refers to International Non-Governmental Organizations, KFOR and the United Nations, who offer the highest wages. Drivers and security guards for these organizations make more than university professors and judges.)

(*AO's primary language is Albanian; his father is Ashkalija.)

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“We had many Roma here, but as I said, they’ve gone, they’ve left their homes. Some went to Serbia and some went to Europe. Those who could find a solution, a way to live here - they stayed. And those who couldn’t, left to other places.”

Esat Fetahi
[Gracanica](#)

Mr. Fetahi is an IDP from Pristina.

Esat lives near the top of the Gracanica Mahala. Every morning he walks down the Mahala’s single dirt road. In the spring that road is deep mud. He stops and talks to his friends; some days he pulls up a chair with them. They sit in the sun and sometimes they have a rakija or a coffee. And Esat then takes his leave and walks back to his home, his groceries banging against his right knee.

Esat jokes. The life of your mother! Is his favorite expression. Esat likes to drink a bit of beer while he says odd things about Roma and Albanians and Serbs and his bedridden wife and guests laugh. He’s retired, with a miniscule pension, and a home 13 km away that was taken from him. He feels it’s his job to laugh, to put the humor into bad things, so that others may relax. Esat may not believe his own jokes, but others do.

EF: I was born in Pristina; I lived in Gracanica for almost 20 years. I then lived in Pristina, but now I am here again, a refugee. I’m 60 years old.



What were your parent’s names?

EF: My father’s name was Haljilj, and my mother’s name was Bedrija.

What did your father do?

EF: He worked in Pristina. He had a lovely shop; he sold brandies, cakes, chocolates... and my mother worked in Albanian and Serbian homes, to give us everything we needed. After that, she found work in an ambulanta.*

(*Ambulanta - a medical clinic.)

She was beautiful; you couldn’t tell that she was a Roma. [LINK to Esat speaking](#)

What kind of work did Pristina’s Roma traditionally have?

EF: Some Roma gathered wood in the forests. They sold the wood to the blacksmiths.

Before it was better, because everyone helped one another. [LINK to Esat speaking](#)

What kind of Roma are you?

EF: I am Muhadjeri*, but there are many other types. As I said, now everything is different, and people have changed.

What is the difference between your dialect and others?

EF: The only difference between our language and other Roma dialects is pronunciation. We still understand one another. We say *maro**, others say *mandro**.

Can you tell us about the holidays you celebrate?

EF: We celebrate everything. First, as Muslims, we celebrate Bajram. We also celebrate Djurdjevdan and Veljigdan. On Veljigdan we color eggs for the children, so they'll not be jealous of others. We also celebrate the first of May.

If we have money to spend, we spend it; we don't think about tomorrow.

On Djurdjevdan:

EF: Last year I bought three lambs, and we killed them. One lamb, we baked; that morning some neighbors came to my house. We drank coffee and ate the lamb's kidneys. The next morning, we ate lamb for breakfast, with all our family. And every year we wait for the visitors.

On Vasilica:

EF: We have to kill geese, turkeys and chickens. In the morning, one invited guest will come. Others bake special breads.

Do you know any Egyptians or Ashkalija?

EF: The Egyptians didn't exist before. Ashkalija? In their homes, they speak Albanian. I've only heard of Egyptians in the past four years.

What's the difference between Roma and Ashkalija?

EF: The Egyptians side with the Albanians.

How old were you when you were married?

EF: I was 14 years old. I still live with my wife; I love her, and I married her.

[LINK to Esat speaking](#)



Tell us about your wedding.

EF: My father visited her family. Her father heard that we were in love with one another. I had to pay 2000 Deutschmarks for her; she escaped from her family home, and now I have children and grandchildren.

Have many children do you have?

EF: I have five children and twelve grandchildren.

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Do you remember the Second World War? Did your father or grandfather tell you any stories from that time?

EF: I was a baby when the Germans were here. They left me in the forest, I stayed there. They forgot me. And when my parents came back to get me, they thought they'd find me dead. I was born in 1943.

Where were you during the last war?

EF: I was here. We were scared; we hid in the shelters with many others. The first night was frightening, because many windows were broken.

What did you think then?

EF: I thought the bombing would not happen. But when I saw that it would, I was scared. Many people died during the bombing.

My wife is paralyzed because of the bombing. When NATO soldiers came here, the Albanians took Kosovo in their hands. Everyone left the Mahala; everyone left Kosovo. [LINK to Esat speaking](#)



(Esat Fetahi's wife suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Her condition is a direct result of the bombing, and her PTSD has aggravated Mrs. Fetahi's preexisting medical conditions. She is bedridden; her bed is placed in the Fetahi's visiting room, so that she won't be lonely during the day.)

EF: We had many Roma here, but as I said, they've gone, they've left their homes. Some went to Serbia and some went to Europe. Those who could find a solution, a way to live here - they stayed. And those who couldn't, left to other places. [LINK to Esat speaking](#)
Now some Roma have come back, and some are still there.

What do you know of Roma history?

EF: I heard that we are from India. The people of India said that we should return, but Tito wouldn't let us do that. When Tito was alive, we didn't have problems; we had jobs. We didn't have war, like now.

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“When I got married, I had to work for two years to pay the dowry, but in my opinion, the money’s not important. The important thing is the life of the couple, and that is what we should care about.”

Redjep Ćurkoli
[Kosovo Polje](#)

RC: I used to live in Pristina. I moved to Kosovo Polje 14 years ago; I was born in a village.

Do you remember your grandfather?

RC: No. I don’t remember.

Are you Ashkalija?

RC: Yes. My father and grandfather were Ashkalija. Before, we could not prove that we were Ashkalija.

We were poor: but we had freedom. [LINK to Redjep speaking](#)

What work did your father do?

RC: He worked in the fields. We had to work in the fields, to pay for our weddings.

How were you married? What customs did you follow?

RC: We could not go to our bride’s home, because the bride’s family would kill us. We sent elders to do our talking, and if they want to give their daughter for marriage, then we have to talk about the money.

When I was betrothed, my wife and I lived in different Mahalas. If I saw her, I would have to leave and go my way via a different road. We weren’t allowed to see each other (before the wedding) - that would have been a great shame for us.

We had to do that; if my father were to see us together, he would kill us

[LINK to Redjep speaking](#)

And we weren't allowed to say that we didn't wish to be married. Now it is different, and for us, it is a different feeling, because new parents don't know what they are doing. Before, our parents knew about everything. The most important thing, though, is the same; the boy and girl must be healthy.

When your fiancé came to your house for the first time, did you meet her, or did you have to leave?

RC: I hid myself. That tradition was for good reasons; that's what we believe.

Did you pay the dowry?

RC: Yes, we had to pay for the girl.

Did you pay a lot?

RC: I'll tell you this: (REFERENCE: A lot of people) Many Roma have left the country to work; they have lots of money, and we don't. For them, the price is bigger. When I got married, I had to work for two years to pay the dowry, but in my opinion, the money's not important. The important thing is the life of the couple, and that is what we should care about. [LINK to Redjep speaking](#)

What are the origins of the Ashkalija?

RC: I don't know. We know only that we are Ashkalija, and we are Muslims.

Do you know any Egyptians?

RC: Before, the Egyptians didn't exist.

What holidays do you celebrate here?

RC: We celebrate Bajram and Ramazan.

(Ramazan - Turkish/ Romanes for Ramadan)

Do you celebrate Djurdjevdan?

RC: No, we don't celebrate Djurdjevdan. We shouldn't have this holiday. The people that celebrate Djurdjevdan: we say that they're Roma. On the first day of Djurdjevdan, the Serbs buy the biggest lambs, and that day they don't do anything.

[LINK to Redjep speaking](#)

Did you attend school?

RC: I never went to school. We were poor; we had to work. There were many different schools then; Muslim schools, Albanian schools, and Serb schools.

(The Muslim schools RC refers to are Medressas - Islamic schools where students learn to read and write Arabic and memorize the Koran.)

What did you think of Tito?

RC: That was a good period. Everyone who wanted work had the opportunity to work. We worked for 20 years, and that was a great time. [LINK to Redjep speaking](#)

Where were you during the NATO campaign?

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RC: We stayed here. We had some problems.

Do you remember the Second World War?

RC: Yes, I remember that time. My brother was a soldier.

Did Roma have many problems then?

RC: No, we didn't have problems.

(Roma were not targeted for extermination in Kosovo, as they were in the other German-occupied areas of Europe.)

Did you have enough food to eat?

RC: Yes, we had enough. We had enough to eat, and it was better then than now.

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“Some Albanians broke our windows; they said terrible things about us. But other Albanians would protect us, because they knew what kind of people we were. They even got into fights because of us.”

Shaha Beriša, [Plemetina Village](#)

Mrs. Beriša is an IDP from [Obilić/ Obiliq Town](#)

LINK to [Video of Interview](#)

Mrs. Beriša may be evicted soon; her landlord, a Roma who fled to Serbia after 1999, has declared his intention to sell her rented house from under her.

It's a bluff; he's asking 15,000 Euro. He'd be lucky to get 5,000 in a good market. Mrs. Beriša's from the city, and so is her husband; they've got to have money somewhere. This attitude is common, especially in a village, and it makes Mrs. Beriša's life hard.

The one great hope is that she can reclaim the apartment her family owned in Obilić town. Her family could get out of Plemetina, and return to the city, where there's more opportunity, more things to do, more open minds.

Obilić, however, is not a place for open minds. The Ashkalija have returned to the Azotiku neighborhood there, and have settled in with few security threats. But the danger is always there - especially if you're a minority, and too many people find out about you that don't care for your presence. A Serb family that refused to flee Obilić after 1999 held out until June of 2003, when they were all beaten to death in their beds in the middle of the night. Their home was then burned.

So maybe she'll get the apartment back, and then sell it, and move on - maybe out of Kosovo, maybe not. She's negotiating with the man who took over her apartment after she ran from it. He'll move, as long as he gets a 5,000 Euro 'upkeep' fee. This is the unofficial fee for all apartments seized in Kosovo after the war. If you pay, you have no problems. If you don't, and the UN evicts the people that stole your place, they'll return soon and set it on fire. Count your blessings; at least you weren't beaten to death.

SB: My name is Shaha, and my surname is Beriša. I came from Obilić; I am a refugee. I'm here with my four children; three daughters and one son.

Did you know your husband before you married him?

SB: I knew he would be my husband. I had a relationship with him, and I told my father that I loved him. I was 18 years



Shaha Berisa

old, and my husband understood me. [LINK to Shaha speaking](#)

First I told my mother this, and my mother told my father. And soon, my husband's family came to ask for my hand.

When I was married, I wore a white dress. I had everything I needed in life, because my father was a blacksmith. We had money. Now, everything is different.

You lived in Obilić before the war?

SB: We had many neighbors there - Albanians and Serbs - and we never had problems with them. We were together then, all the time, and there were no differences between the people. [LINK to Shaha speaking](#)



Shaha's husband

What problems arose after the war?

SB: Some Albanians broke our window; they said terrible things about us. But other Albanians would protect us, because they knew what kind of people we were. They even got into fights because of us. [LINK to Shaha speaking](#)

What about KFOR? Did they help you with the harassment you received?

SB: As I said; some Albanians broke our windows. The whole neighborhood heard the noise. KFOR was near, but they didn't show up; we went out to find them, and when we did, they came with us.

How long has your family been in Plemetina?

SB: We came here four years ago.

Is it better here?

SB: It's not easy to live in a house that isn't yours. Our landlord came to tell us that he will sell the place we live in. We are worried about our home, our children, everything.



Berisa family

Did you attend school?

SB: I finished primary school, but I had to stop after that. The secondary school was too far from my home, and I had no transport. I wasn't the only one who had to stop going to school; many Serbian girls didn't finish school either. Only those who had transportation could go to school in Uroševac.

(Uroševac/ Ferizaj lies 36 kilometers south of Obilić/ Obiliq.)

Can you tell us about the holidays that you celebrate?

SB: We celebrate Bajram, Djurdjevdan, everything.

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Berisa_family_1950s

On Vasilica I saw, from the elders, what they do, and we do the same things. On Vasilica we bake bread with a coin in it; all the members of the family will get a piece. The person that finds the coin will have a lot of money, and they'll need to carry the coin in their pocket for the entire year. [LINK to Shaha speaking](#)
Before, the old custom was to sell Sarma, but we don't follow this.

On Bajram, we celebrate better, because we are Muslims. There are two Bajrams - big and small. On the big Bajram we bake cakes; on the small Bajram every family with money must buy a lamb and give it to a poorer family. [LINK to Shaha speaking](#)

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“I wouldn’t sleep; while my children slept, I kept guard. I knew that I couldn’t help them, and I couldn’t stand it. I could not sit in one place. I wanted to save them, but I didn’t know how.”

Ferki Emini
[Priluzje](#)

FE: First I’d like to introduce myself. My name is Ferki Emini, and my nickname is Beco. I am the leader of Priluzje’s Roma. I was born on October 15, 1960, so that means I’m around 43 or 44 years old. I was born in Priluzje.

Are you employed?

FE: Right now I’m the leader* of Priluzje’s Roma. I had a regular job (before June of 1999), but I don’t work anymore. Most other Roma are in the same situation as me. I work *privat*.*.

(*A Roma leader represents a sole community, and many divided Roma communities have competing leaders. The position is elected, by general consensus; leadership can be revoked at any time by a group vote of all the Roma men in a community.

(**Privat* is a general Roma term for manual/ contract labor, and means anything from recycling to digging trenches to more sophisticated trades, like carpentry.)

What is your trade?

FE: I am Bugurdjije, but I don’t have so much work as I had before the war. I have to keep working; I want to earn money for my children. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

Was your father a blacksmith?

FE: Blacksmithing goes *s kolena na koleno* (family to family). My grandfather was a blacksmith; he taught my father, and my father taught me. And I teach my children.

Blacksmithing, work, is something very important. Roma are all poor. My family are blacksmiths; I started this work when I was 12 years old and now I can say that I am a professional. I work with my brothers and my sons.

How many children do you have?

FE: I have six children – three sons and three daughters. My daughters are all married, and one has a son. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

Can you speak about your mother and father's early lives? How they lived, the stories they told you, the problems they had?

FE: We were so young... I would like to thank to my mother and father now - because they helped us children a lot. (Without them) we could never be what we are now.

They fought for us. They didn't have proper work; my father worked private to earn money for us - to educate us.

Now we are in the same position as them; now we have to help our children. My parents raised me, and now it's my turn to care about my family. And that's that.

[LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

How old were you when you were married?

FE: I was 17 years old.

Why did you marry so early?

FE: My father wanted me to be married; my mother was against this, but my father was persistent. My oldest sister was already married; I was the second one to go, and my father told me I'd be married. I did not know my wife; my father investigated. He went to my bride's home, to see what type of people they were. After he approved it, I met them, and the arrangements were made.

Did you have any problems with your bride, considering that you didn't know one another before the marriage?

FE: Listen: I've been married for 23-24 years, and I've never hit my wife*. We never had any big problems; we respect each other, and we teach each other. There are always some little problems, but thanks to me, everything is fine. All of my children are good; they respect us, but we respect them; we respect their decisions as well. Everything is fine. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

(* Please note that spousal abuse is not a readily recognized concept in Kosovo.)

What kind of Roma are you?

FE: We are proper Roma - Bugurdijje. And we speak Romanes.

Do you know where Roma originated?

FE: I once read a book on Romani history. We came from India; this is what the older Roma also told me. There are many shared words between Romanes and the Indian languages*. An example is *pani* - water. We cannot be Egyptians; we are from India.

(*Romanes bears distinct similarities to the Indo-European Panjabi, Dardic and Gujarati languages of northern India.)

On Roma holidays:

FE: As my mother told it, we celebrate Djurdjevdan, Vasilica, Božić (Christmas) and Veljigdan (Easter).

On Djurdjevdan, Roma begin their preparations a month before. In their homes they paint and clean up;* when the day arrives, we buy a lamb, and our children help us kill it.

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(*This is serious cleaning. The women of a Roma household will empty the entire home, stack the goods and furniture outside, and clean absolutely every centimeter of the house.)

On Djurdjevdan we cannot kill any other animal; it must be a lamb, and it must be that because it is a very special day.

On Vasilica:

FE: We'll kill chickens, or geese; that is the custom. If you have, say, five sons, then you must kill five geese; three sons, three geese. But people cannot do this any longer (because of the cost). We celebrate with our families; the women have some additional work in the home, but that's not for us; it's for them. They must make Sarma that night. And Sarma has to boil all night, and be ready at eight in the morning; we'll be awake the whole night with them, watching it.

That morning, my family will go to visit my uncle and sister at my mother's home. But they have to buy the Sarma.

The youngest daughter-in-law will be the one to cook the Sarma; my mother can cook it well, but she no longer has to. The cook will name the price that must be paid for the Sarma.

With Deutschmarks... actually, Euro now, DM are no longer... we will make a deal with the cook over the Sarma, and before the negotiations are complete, no one can begin eating. The head of the house will give the money for the feast. We will light a candle, and place it near the bread, and that is the custom of Vasilica.

Do you sing songs on Vasilica?

FE: Roma are always making music.

Are there any special songs sung on Vasilica?

FE: There are some special songs, but we usually just listen to the radio.

What about Djurdjevdan?

FE: There is one special song for Djurdjevdan. On that day, as I said, we kill a lamb, and celebrate for three days. In our village we have one musician. We'll have other parties, and sometimes we invite Roma from Plemetina - especially the youth - to join us. The Serbs will join us as well.

What about Christmas?

FE: Christmas is for the Serbs, but we celebrate this day as well. We buy fruits, for the children, and the eldest member of my family has to go out to bring hay in our home; he scatters it on the floors, and we lay blankets over it and sit in a circle.

We all chant *pile, pile, pile** - which means we'll have many new animals in the coming year. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

And after that we share the fruit among our family; nuts, apples and others.

(*Pile - Serbian for chicken)

On Christmas morning, the old Roma custom is to visit our neighbors, very early, and bring wood as a gift. We wish them a merry Christmas, and they invite us in for coffee and meat.

Where were you during the NATO bombing?

FE: I was working on the day the bombing began. When I returned to work, for the second shift, an Albanian friend told me that NATO would begin bombing all military installations at 8 PM. I don't know how he knew, but it was the truth; at exactly 8 the bombing started. It was terrifying, because our village had a military aerial (radio tower). I thought NATO would bomb *us*. We were very afraid.

The sound of the alarms was really bad. We couldn't bear the sound. We had to leave home, and we'd think, now they're going to bomb us. Now they're going to kill our children.

I wouldn't sleep; while my children slept, I kept guard. I knew that I couldn't help them, and I couldn't stand it. I could not sit in one place. I wanted to save them, but I didn't know how. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

As Priluzje's Roma leader, can you tell us what problems Roma here deal with?

FE: To be honest, I try, and I do my best, to help Roma here. And some of them are grateful. But Roma are Roma; if the result is not very big, if the quantity of help isn't huge, then they are not grateful. I watch television, and I saw the war in Iraq; I know that we do not have a lot of help here, but they (*Internationals), are doing their best to bring us help, especially in our village. In other villages, the situation is worse. Twenty days ago an American organization came here. They brought us food, clothes, shoes and school supplies. Thanks to one soldier's friend we received that help. But again, we need aid. [LINK to Ferki speaking](#)

Thank you for coming to visit.

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“My father was Ashkalija; my mother was Roma. But all of us are like shit from a cow; when the cow steps in it, it flies everywhere. We are all the same; we are all from India.”

Azem Beriša
[Kosovo Polje](#)

This interview was conducted in the Albanian language.

“This is a very hard thing for Roma; they don't know where to go. They are in the middle; not Albanian and not Serbian.”

AB: I am from Pristina; I've lived in Kosovo Polje for 40 years.

How old are you?

AB: I was born in 1935, so I'm around 68 years old. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

I lived through three wars. I remember when the Germans came and destroyed the Serbian people after they built a palace for King Peter (sic - Aleksandar); when he died his wife and son stayed alone, and his cousin* sold Yugoslavia to the Germans*. Albanians helped the Germans well* when they entered Kosovo. The Germans ruled us for three years. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

(*King Aleksandar Karageorgevic was assassinated in Marseilles, France in 1934; a Macedonian in the pay of the Croatian Ustaša threw a bomb into his motorcade, killing him and the French foreign minister. Ante Pavelić, a Croat fascist living in exile in Mussolini's Italy, organized the murder. Pavelić later became the puppet ruler of Croatia after the German invasion of Yugoslavia in June of 1941; he was executed by the communists in 1946.)

(*Prince Paul, the dead king's cousin, was appointed Regent of the throne until Aleksandar's young son, Peter II, became old enough to rule. Paul was pressured into signing a treaty with the Third Reich allowing for the Germans to transport troops across Yugoslav territory and into Greece, in order to aid the beleaguered Italian invaders there. When news of the treaty became public, protests spread throughout the country. *Bolje Grob nego Rob*, their banners read: better a grave than a slave. Paul was removed in a coup d'état; Peter II was declared king, and the Germans invaded 10 days later.)

(Reference: after three years**)

After some time one grandmother mentioned to me that there was a very nice man who was ready to hit the Germans; he was going to be our new ruler. After a long time Tito became our president, and everything was very good. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

How was the Tito's era for Roma?

AB: For Roma, he was very good; thank God that Tito was a nice man. Roma never had problems with anyone. We worked together here; everything was good. After Tito died, Roma began to suffer.

This is a very hard thing for Roma; they don't know where to go. They are in the middle; not Albanian and not Serbian. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

What kind of work did Roma do in Tito's time?

AB: Tito gave everyone the same rights; Roma had the same rights as Albanians. There was no difference (between the two).

In Tito's time I had a job, and after that I even got a pension. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

What kind of work did you have?

AB: I built homes. My job was great. I worked well with Albanians; everything was just okay. We always cooperated well with Albanians.

What about now? Do you still have good relationships with Albanians and Serbs?

AB: It's okay; but not like before.

How old were you during the Second World War?

AB: I was 7 years old. I remember once when we ran from the Germans; there was water in front of me. The Germans began to shoot but I jumped in the water. Roma then were hiding in the forests, crying; someone would kill them. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)
This happened sometime in 1942, the war went from 1941 to 1945 here.

There was a huge battle between the Partisans and Germans in Trst (English: Trieste, Italy). My brother was in the army in Trst; he told me that the Italian (communists) and Russians will help the Serbs take Trst. The Americans came and stopped it; Trst isn't ours now. In 1944 my brother came back home and in 1945 the war ended.

[LINK to Azem speaking](#)

(*Trst - Trieste - lies in Northern Italy, a few miles from the Slovene border. Tito's partisans claimed the city as theirs after the war and briefly occupied it before being driven back by English and American threats.)

Was there famine then, because of the war?

AB: In 1947 we had problems finding food; we worked all day and still couldn't afford food for everyone. I went around asking people for flour; that's how I got food for my family. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

During Tito's regime, did the Roma situation change for the better?

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AB: It was very good during Tito's time. We were very good friends with all the different nationalities, but after that everything got worse.

What kind of Roma are you?

AB: We are Muhadjeri. My father and mother, the same.

Tell us about Muhadjeri - do they have same customs as other Roma?

AB: We don't pay much attention to customs like Vasilica or Djurdjevdan because we're Muslim. Muslims aren't allowed to celebrate these things. I know Roma from Kolibarska (a Roma Mahala in Pristina) who celebrated these things, and this was not proper.

Did you attend school?

AB: No. I have, maybe, a year of school. During the second year my father died; my stepfather removed me from school. I had to work for him. I became a shepherd when I was nine years old. I was a shepherd until I was 15, and then I married.

[LINK to Azem speaking](#)

Why do Roma get married so early?

AB: I can tell you why I was married early: my first son was married when he was 14 years old, and my two elder sons were married when they were 24 years old. I married young because my mother was very old, and she could no longer provide for us- the cooking, washing...

I had a nice girlfriend; it was very hard to convince her to marry me. One Herdeljez I bought a sheep and brought it home. My mother was waiting outside our house, and she asked me, 'What did you do to that girl?'

'What girl are you talking about?' I asked her.

My girlfriend soon came to my house; she had run away from her father. I went and bought one more sheep - to prepare for the wedding. My stepfather asked me why I bought another sheep. I told him 'don't ask, just go and try to make an agreement with her family, and I will take care of the wedding.' My stepfather went to her stepfather and spoke to him; everything was okay because we had many things in common. She was without a father, and I as well. On that day we killed two sheep, and I had a big wedding. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)



Azem's wife

Is there a difference between Roma, Ashkalija and Egyptians? Are you Ashkalija?

AB: My father was Ashkalija; my mother was Roma. But all of us are like shit from a cow; when the cow steps in it, it flies everywhere. We are all the same; we are all from India. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

There is a story about one prophet in the Koran who God punished. God told this prophet, don't be afraid of war, and don't leave your home. You must stay in the place

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where you are from. And I'm afraid that we are actually descended from that kind of people. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

I know that there was some war, and the Roma fled from it. We scattered to many different places; some Roma ended up in Egypt and, of course, they lived in Egypt for a long time and forgot the Roma language. The Egyptians expelled them, and they came to Kosovo. They still called themselves Egyptian, but the only reason they did that was because they forgot the Roma language. When they arrived in Kosovo, they moved to Albanian areas and learned that language.

There was a Roma man that went to an Albanian village to ask the hand of a girl for his son. The girl was Egyptian; she spoke Albanian, and the Roma talked to her in that language. They married; so what is the Roma husband? Roma or Egyptian?

People like that began to call themselves Ashkalija. They think they're descended from some king whose name was Ashk*, and that's how they got the name. But we are all Roma, from India; the Roma language is the same there. We changed our language because of where we are.

(*This is a fanciful tale. Please refer to the Roma clans and groups section of this CD-ROM)

Roma speak Turkish, Albanian and Serbian; it depends on the environment we find ourselves in. Everybody needs to speak the language used where they live.

Where were you during the 1999 war?

AB: In that time I stayed in my place, my home. We were very afraid, and we didn't go out. I put plastic sheeting around my house so that smoke couldn't enter inside. We were very afraid; we couldn't sleep most nights.

My son was killed. He was 44 years old, and now his wife is a widow with three children. He was murdered by the Serb military; they thought that he was someone else, and they shot him. My other son found him, and when he saw him he collapsed. Three times. It was terrible for us. [LINK to Azem speaking](#)

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“When I was married, my father asked for 4 Napoleons. That’s about 400 Euros now.”



Hazbije Vičkolari
[Prizren](#)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (1)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (2)

HV: My name is Hazbije Vičkolari. I come from Prizren; I was born in Prizren. I’m 74 years old.

What was life like for you before?

HV: Before it was very good. Yes, there many poor people, but there was also happiness. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#) We were good to our neighbors, and we celebrated together on Bajram and Herdeljez; those were very good days. We bought sheep and new clothes for the children; we dyed eggs in water. It symbolized health.

What about Vasilica?

HV: On that day we baked bread and made a nice dinner; all the family sat together and ate.

Do you have a trade?

HV: My father was Hamali.* My mother’s name was Huro.

(*Hamali/ Amalija/ Hamaldjija. Serbian: Nosač. English: porter. Hamaldjija is from the Turkish word Hamal; Hamal is also a Turkish insult.)

Can you tell us about World War II?

HV: The Roma from Mitrovica all fled from that town, because of the Bulgarian and Italian soldiers. Twenty-five homes worth of Roma came to Prizren.

[LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

My mother worked for the Partisans in Dušanovo; she made their bread and washed their clothes. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

(Dušanovo lies in Prizren municipality.)

What kind of Roma are you? And what dialect do you speak?

HV: I speak Arlijski (Arlija dialect); Roma from Prizren speak this.

Do you know any Ashkalija and Egyptians?

HV: No. There should not be that kind of division. We are all the same, we are all Roma. I cannot ever, ever be Albanian or Serbian. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

How old were you when you were married?

HV: I was 15 years old.

Did your father arrange the marriage?

HV: My father was the one who chose a man for me; that is the custom. I'd never seen the man before. He was from the villages, and I was from the city.

What is the marriage custom here?

HV: One man (appointed by the groom's family) will go to ask the (potential bride's) family if they would give their daughter for marriage. They will tell him, 'no, she's too young for that.' The appointed man will ask again, a second time (at a later date). They'll say no again. (The potential bride's) family won't give the answer because they are collecting information (on the potential groom's family), asking around, 'what kind of people are they?'

If the family decides to give their daughter's hand in marriage, then the appointed man from the groom's family will receive gifts.

One week before the wedding, there is a special, small wedding, but only for the women. The next one is for everyone.

The women put henna in the bride's hair and hands, and the bride will cry for everyone.* [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#) The women with the bride will wash her hair; the bride's mother, father and brothers are not allowed to see her. Especially the father, who will not see his betrothed daughter until the last day, when her two brothers will cover her with a veil and lead her from her family's home (If she has no brothers, cousins play this role). They'll escort her to a horse-drawn cart*.

(*The bride will approach each woman she knows and softly ululate, to say goodbye.)

(*Mercedes or BMWs have since replaced carts and covered wagons.)

The bride will climb onto the cart; bystanders will throw paper and shredded tissue at the cart as it rides away (to the groom's house). The children will chase the cart, to see who may catch it first. Other guests will move around the Mahala, crying *Hazirala, Hazirala*, to let people know that they must be ready because the bride has arrived in the Mahala.

What would you wear (to the wedding)?

HV: Different shoes, nice skirts and a lot of gold.

Tell us about the dowry.

HV: When I was married my father asked for 4 Napoleons.* It's now around 400 Euros. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

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(* Napoleons are French gold coins, minted in the 19th century in denominations from 20 Francs up to 100.)

What happens if a boy is in love with a girl, but is too poor to pay her father, especially if the father's asking for too much? [LINK to interviewer speaking](#)

HV: So what? I wouldn't let him marry my daughter. It cannot be his way; it has to be my way.

[LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

What happens if the daughter loves him?

[LINK to interviewer speaking](#)

HV: I don't care. She can die. But I'll not allow them to be married. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

Did the Turks have this custom?

HV: The Turks don't do this. (Roma wedding customs) are more similar to Albanians. Albanians also ask for the payment.

What is the reason for the dowry?

HV: How can I make a wedding for my daughter? They pay you, because you are doing everything. But - if the daughter doesn't obey them, then the entire dowry should be returned no matter what.

Would it be better to dispose of the dowry in the future?

HV: No - it's better to ask for the dowry, because the groom didn't work hard to raise and care for my daughter. I did that. To pay the dowry is much better because they (the bride's family) have worked hard. You'll sell your house to be able to marry your son. They'll keep and respect the girl more; she'll be part of their home. Again, though, if the bride does not obey them then the dowry should be returned.

We flew Serbian (Yugoslav) flags during the wedding (procession). The man that carried it had to be someone that everyone respects.

In the mornings the bride will wake earlier than others. She heats water for her father-in-law and everyone else; she'll wash their hands and feet, every morning and every evening. When I married my son, his wife washed my feet and prepared my bed... [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

Why does the bride do that?



Vickolari's son



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HV: Because they are my children; she has to respect me. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

When does the bride visit her own family?

HV: Two weeks (after the wedding), the girl visits her family. She must go on foot, so everyone knows that she's going to visit her family*. She'll wear her best clothes.

(*And, so that everyone will know that she is following the customs.)

When does the groom visit the bride's family?

HV: That's the best. Because everyone (in the bride's family) will play practical jokes on him. They'll put eggs in his shoes. They'll put salt in his tea. Lots of different jokes, and it will make him feel good, and accepted by them. [LINK to Hazbije speaking](#)

I remember games we played - girls only. Everybody put in what money they had, and we'd buy food. We'd eat and sing and play games, all night.

One game - at night every girl would put something in a pot: clothes, jewelry, whatever. In the early morning each girl would take something out of the pot, without looking, and keep it. We'd sing a song, in Turkish;

What we put in
Is ours no longer.

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"I worked as a servant in the homes of Serbs and Albanians. We never had problems when we worked in those homes. I worked as a servant for six years. In the homes we worked in, we were like members of the family; we all ate from the same bowl."

Arif Alija
[Plemetina Village](#)



"We never think about the next day. If we have enough to eat for only one day, for the next day we say, 'God will provide.'"

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview

AA: My name is Arif Alija. My father's name was Demo, and my mother's name was Fata. I live in Plemetina; I was born in Priluzje.

Did your family have a trade?

AA: My grandfather was a blacksmith. We Roma – Bugurdjije - are blacksmiths. I went to school for two years, and in that two years I learned six or seven trades.

First I worked as a servant in the homes of Serbs and Albanians. We never had problems when we worked in those homes. I worked as a servant for six years. In the homes we worked in, we were like members of the family; we all ate from the same bowl.

We never think about the next day. If we have enough to eat for only one day, for the next day we say, 'God will provide.' [LINK to Arif speaking](#)

What holidays do you celebrate?

AA: Good Muslims should only celebrate Bajram - the big and the small.

We Roma should only celebrate Bajram, but we celebrate Djurdjevdan as well - because it was winter time, and Roma didn't have enough to eat. When the spring came for the poor people, it was a treasure. [LINK to Arif speaking](#) But Djurdjevdan is a Serbian holiday.

Do you think that Roma shouldn't celebrate Djurdjevdan?

AA: I tell you - that is a Serb holiday. The Roma also celebrate Vasilica.



Why do you think some Roma call themselves Egyptians?

AA: If someone says I'm an Egyptian, maybe I'll believe them. Maybe some of them came from Egypt, but lost their language. Regarding Ashkalija, I say they're Roma. But it depends on where they lived, and if they accepted the language from that area. If we live in a Serb area, we must know Serbian, but if we live in an Albanian area, then we must learn Albanian.

Did your father tell you any stories from the Second World War?

AA: I'll tell you something that my father told me: he said that when the German soldiers came here, it was not a big war like we have now. But German soldiers were here; they bombed Belgrade*, and many died.

(*The Germans began the June 1941 invasion of Yugoslavia with a Luftwaffe bombardment of Belgrade.)

AA retells a story he heard as a boy:

A Muslim man married an Orthodox Christian (Serb) woman. He wanted her to convert to Islam, but she would not convert. Instead, he became a Christian. They lived well together, and loved each other. They drank rakija; they went to Serbian celebrations and weddings.

After a long time, the man grew sick, and soon he died. His widow called an Orthodox priest, to pray for his soul.

'What is your husband's name?' the priest asked.

'Asan,' the widow said.

'That's a Muslim name,' the priest replied. 'You'll have to call a Hodja.'

(*Hodja/ Hoxha - a Muslim cleric.)

She called the hodja. He came immediately, and asked her;

'What was your husband's name?'

'Asan,' the widow said.

'And are you Muslim, or did you convert him to Christianity?' the Hodja asked.

'He was a Christian,' the widow said.

The Hodja asked her many questions.

'Did you bring him to Serbian weddings?'

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'Yes.'

'Did he attend Orthodox masses?'

'Yes.'

'Did he drink Rakija?'

'Yes.'

'This isn't my job,' the Hodja said. 'You'll have to call someone else.'

The widow didn't know what to do. She called the police; she broke down and told them everything that had happened with the priest and the hodja.

A policeman called the priest and the hodja, and ordered them to meet him at the widow's house.

The priest demanded that the hodja start the service, and vice versa, but neither would begin. The policeman got angry.

'If you two don't do your jobs, I'm going to drag you both to jail, and then I'll call some other hodja and some other priest.'

The Serbian priest began to sing:

God, help us
God, please help us
He's not one of ours.



Alija Arif and his neighbors - 1960s

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"We don't have anything that is our own. All that we had was taken by other nations."

"Education, education, education - I don't know how many times I can say that, I cannot say it enough."

Ibrahim Eljshani
[Prizren](#)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview

IE: My name is Ibrahim Eljshani; I am a professor. I worked for 40 years, teaching pedagogy and psychology. I finished primary and secondary school in Prizren, and I completed university in Belgrade. I studied at the Faculty of Philosophy; there I concentrated on psychology and pedagogy. I taught for 40 years; I am 66 years old.



Ibrahim Elshani

Do you know of any schools that taught Roma in their own language?

IE: Before, we had no schools* for Roma. A problem this resulted in was that Roma children, when they begin to attend school, did not know their language of instruction. Many Roma children aren't interested in school; they don't want to learn, and they are taught in a language they don't know well. These are the main problems. (Roma) parents must talk to their children about school; they must tell them that school is what their future will be based upon. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

(*IE does not mention the Roma school that existed in Pristina, Kosovo until June of 1999, when it was destroyed. The Pristina school was the first school in Kosovo to educate Romani children in their own language. Several Non-Governmental Organizations (Including UNICEF, Balkan Sunflowers, the International Rescue Committee and others) have begun remedial education classes in Roma communities throughout Kosovo, but these classes emphasize the use of Serbian or Albanian language. Currently there is only one school in Kosovo that educates in the Romanes language: the 'Blue Door School' in Gnjilane/ Gjilan town's Roma Mahala. This school was initially denied recognition by UNMIK, which later reversed its stance. Unfortunately secondary-school education is not available in Romanes; nor is there any university option. From an integration and viability standpoint, the 'Blue Door' school's suitability must be judged primarily on the veracity of its Albanian or Serbian language instruction.)



Which world languages are most similar to Romanes?

IE: Everyone knows that we are from India. Philology, anthropology... every field of study points to us being from India. We have also absorbed many, many words from Greek, Serb and Turkish.

In every place the Roma lived, we absorbed the words. Our language was poor, and we had to bring in more words.

Roma came to the Balkans, together with the Turks. They came with the Turks; they were the blacksmiths and the musicians, and when the Turks came here, the Roma followed. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#) There were a miniscule number of Roma in the Balkans before the

Turks arrived.

Many Roma call themselves Egyptians and Ashkalija. First, the Ashkalija- how and why did they adopt this identity?

IE: Let's place the Ashkalija and Egyptians in one group. They cannot be in Albanian, Turkish or Serbian groups; they are in our group. We are too near to them, too connected to them. And we keep connecting through marriage.

All of the Roma, in Kosovo and out of Kosovo, and here in Prizren, do not marry the members of other nationalities. But Ashkalija, Egyptians, and Roma marry one another all the time.

But the question you asked is different; it is a political one, and the politics of our time brought us to this question. We must honestly say that they are trying to distance themselves from us. Roma are all on a low level. Those Roma who have a little bit more are trying to separate themselves from us.



Roma absorb the languages around them. We adopt one another's languages; Albanian, Turkish and Serbian - because we live so near to one another. But some Roma groups, like Ashkalija and Egyptians, assimilated so much that they forgot their original language. Roma that speak only Albanian call themselves Ashkalija.

We are creating a magazine here (for Roma), and our content will deal with these issues and others. What's an Ashkalija? What's an Egyptian? And others.

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Roma are below others. That's why we find ourselves here. Egyptians are connecting themselves with Egypt, and I suppose there is a small number of Roma that may have come from Egypt, or North Africa, to the Balkans.

We were Hindus, from India, but we do not call ourselves Hindus. We've changed so much in our culture, language, history, music, clothes and customs; we cannot call ourselves Hindus, although our origins are Indian.



There are some names that other people gave us, but the final one is Roma.

Where does the word Ashkalija originate?

IE: The name Ashkalija has its roots in Turkish. It comes from the root word *As*, or *Has*; this was the name for Roma who were not nomadic or sedentary, but who actually lived in one place, year-round. Because they lived in one place, they became more stable, and earned more than the nomadic Roma. They were connected to other nationalities; usually they became blacksmiths.

Do many Roma names come from Turkish or Arabian?

IE: Our (REFERENCE: wearing) traditional clothes aren't ours. We adopted this dress from the Turks. We took our names and our music from the places we lived. In Kosovo, we Roma have Albanian music, Turkish music, and Turkish dress; it's not our own. The old folklore that describes our dress - this is what we once wore. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

The religion that we have now (Islam) is not ours. We absorbed it. All that we have now was not originally ours. In Kosovo we took our religion from the Turks, and our names come from Arabic. Look at our common names: Ibrahim, Abaz, Mustafa, Bajram, Hajdar.

If we wish to show where we came from, then we should use the names from our place of origin. We can move back to Indian music, and our clothes, real gypsy clothes.



I named my daughter Indira. In Prizren we use the Indian names Mohandas and Gandhi. Our origin is Indian, and we should display some elements that reflect that origin; names, music, dress. Philologists have demonstrated where we are from.

Are the Roma holidays - Djurdjevdan, Vasilica, Bajram, and Ramazan (Ramadan) - also absorbed from other nations, like our music and dress?

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IE: Djurdjevdan - we call it Herdeljez. Herdeljez is a Turkish word for two Islamic prophets. Serbs use the name Djurdjevdan, and Albanians use the name Shingjergj. This holiday is a tradition that was first celebrated a long, long time ago, before these other religions came to the people. This is a pagan holiday. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

The word pagan means villager. Everyone here celebrates this day; a miniscule number do not. Many outside of Kosovo celebrate this day. It's a holiday for all the people, and it comes from the time before they had religion.



Some Roma call this day Djurdjevdan, and some call it Herdeljez, but the Serbs claim it's their holiday. What do you think?

IE: There is a difference between the names; as I said, the word Herdeljez comes from Turkish, Djurdjevdan from Serbian, and so on. Many claim that this is simply a Roma holiday, but they are mistaken. This same holiday was celebrated in Germany, France, Holland, Denmark and others, but it is not celebrated now; they forgot about it. We in the Balkans, however, still celebrate this day. The others developed faster than us, and they forgot this day.

Do Roma have any holidays that only they celebrate?

IE: There was Bibi, but this is a Turkish word as well. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

About this holiday, I can say that it is not likely our holiday.

We don't have anything that is our own. All that we had was taken by other nations. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

In this time we need to focus on education. Education is the most important thing for us.

I thank you for this day, for this conversation, because this will be something that we can show ourselves with. Education, Education, Education - I don't know how many times I can say that, I cannot say it enough. [LINK to Ibrahim speaking](#)

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*“Some people say that Roma are thieves,
but nothing like this ever
happened to me.”*

Slobodan Vasić
[Gracanica](#)

Mr. Vasić is an ethnic Serb.

How long you have lived (in Gracanica)?

SV: 30 years.

Do you have much contact with Roma in Gracanica?

SV: I worked with Roma in Pristina; I was a driver, and we worked together there. Here we have good Roma neighbors, and we've never had problems.

Some people say that Roma are thieves, but nothing like this ever happened to me.

[LINK to Slobodan speaking](#)

Where I worked in Pristina, with the Roma - when we called them Cigani* they called us brother, but if we called them Roma they called us godfather*.

[LINK to Slobodan speaking](#)

(* Cigani is a Serbian pejorative term for Roma.)

(* Serbian: Kum)

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Afrim Osmani - A day off, spent building the porch.

[Gracanica](#)

“I watched the Roma children tie multicolored ribbons to the trees. I don’t know why they did this; maybe they hoped for their wishes to come true. Some turned rocks, especially those who had no luck in their marriages; they kissed Sultan Murat’s grave.”

Afrim Osmani worked privately for years; he dug ditches and wells, repaired roofs, laid gravel and patched holes in dirt roads. His work habits come from his father, who has worked construction in Italy for the past decade in order to support his large family in Gracanica.

Afrim is also a hodja for the Muslim community in Gracanica. He prepares the dead for burial, and prays over their graves. At 27 years of age, he is one of the most well-known, well-liked and respected Roma in central Kosovo. He never takes money for his services to the Muslim Roma community.

Afrim is also a prison guard at the UN’s juvenile detention facility in Lipljan/ Lipjan municipality. He can’t seem to ever stop working; on his days off, he builds a front porch for his family home. He re-shingles his roof, repairs the fences around his home, gardens and plays with his two young children. A third is on the way.

AO: Besides the Islamic faith, Christianity has a large influence on Roma. Roma culture even has some elements of Buddhism; this is all normal for Roma, but Islam is a habit. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#) I see it as a habit, but a weak one.*

(*AO clarified this later by stating that Roma do not follow the pillars of Islam; their religious identity is tied into their ethnic one. A Roma will simply say 'I'm Muslim,' without clear knowledge of what Islam is. Better stated, a Roma Muslim doesn't tend to pray, and he drinks liquor and eats pork.)



Afrim Osmani class picture

Roma in Gracanica have developed better connections with Islam, starting in the 1980s. Before, it was weak. I only saw Islam in Roma before in ritual things. For example; when a Roma died, the Roma would bring in a Muslim Hodja. Roma don't have their own priests; they don't have their own religion. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#) A miniscule number of Roma now celebrate Bajram and fast during Ramadan, but earlier, none did.

Roma originated in places with no Islam; since the Ottomans came they adopted the customs. But (with the weakness of the faith) I am mainly speaking of Gracanica; in other areas of Kosovo Roma were and are very connected to Islam - the customs, holy days, rituals and celebrations. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#) There is also better education regarding Islam. These places - Mitrovica, some in Pristina, Uroševac (Albanian: Ferizaj), Prizren and others, were always Islamic, and kept their religious traditions. Gracanica and the villages - because of their positions*, it wasn't very important to them. An Islamic holiday or a Christian one - Roma celebrate them all. Every holiday that can be celebrated, Roma will celebrate; it doesn't matter if it's Muslim or Christian. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#)

(* By positions, AO refers to geographical location. Gracanica and the villages - Preoce, Livadje and others - are Serb majority areas, and therefore Serbian Orthodox areas.)

Roma celebrate the Christian holy days more than the Muslim ones - like Christmas and Easter. These holidays have existed for a longer time among Roma. Roma pay much attention to Djurdjevdan - Herdeljez - but they don't know why they celebrate this, and they don't know where Djurdjevdan originated. There are many ideas (among Roma) about the origins of Herdeljez, as it's their biggest holiday. It's simply tradition. Roma Elders point to the fact that we were always a very poor group that lived hard in the winters*; we didn't have enough wood or food. Roma lived tough lives during the winter.

(* Herdeljez signifies the end of winter)

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Other Christian holy days - such as Sveti Ilija, Sveti Sava and Sveti Nikola - are celebrated by Roma here. As I said, Roma celebrate everything they can. And Roma, especially the older generations, drink a lot of alcohol. They drink, sing and dance, and they find many excuses to do this - they found reason to celebrate in the Orthodox holy days. Many Roma follow pagan rites; when Roma have problems as a whole, or just a Roma family has a problem, they look towards destiny and predetermination. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#). But visiting the Turbe* (See the Herdeljez description in the Roma Holidays section); that's Islamic influence.



I went there (to the Turbe) when I was young, just for fun, and I watched Roma children tie multicolored ribbons to the trees*. I don't know why; maybe they hoped for their wishes to come true. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#) Some turned rocks*, especially those who had no luck in their marriages; they kissed Sultan Murat's* grave.

(* this practice can be found throughout the Turkish, and even Turkic, world; the Turbe of Islamic scholars, leaders and Osmanlis from Uzbekistan to Kosovo have this tradition, and pilgrims tie these ribbons in order that their prayers may be remembered and answered. This tradition, and others, likely pre-date Islam.)

(*Sultan Murat, ruler of the Ottoman Empire as it expanded through the Balkans, was slain during the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. His tomb lies in Obilić municipality, on the road to Mitrovica. Only his entrails are buried there; the rest of his body was transported back to Constantinople when the Ottoman army withdrew.)



When you were there as a child, did you perform the same rituals that others did?

AO: No, I was there just for fun. When someone turned the rocks we laughed, and when they finished we would clap.

Where are the Turbe?

AO: Gazi Mestan - near the main road to Pristina/ Mitrovica.

In what period are these rituals at the Turbe performed?



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AO: Usually May 5th - the day before Herdeljez. People traveled to the Turbe from all over Kosovo.

(*Roma no longer make this pilgrimage because of the current security situation.)

How was this influenced by Islam?

AO: It was badly, wrongly influenced. Islam doesn't have these types of rituals. In Islam, only God helps you.

You mentioned before that Islam in Gracanica and the villages developed starting in the 1980s; Roma began to pay more attention to Islam. How did this happen?

AO: As I said, Islam was weak here. During the 1980s Gracanica had more contact with Islam because many Pristina Roma moved here. They were educated (about religion), and Gracanica's Roma weren't. Pristina Roma saw the need for Islamic education here; they brought in a Hodja (an Islamic cleric) named Muhammad, from Mitrovica. Once a week he came to Gracanica; he and the local Roma would gather in homes, as there was no mosque here. He conducted classes; he taught Islam, the pillars, the obligations. In the beginning, Gracanica Roma - especially those born here - were against these teachings. They saw that Islam forbade their everyday habits. [LINK to Afrim speaking](#)

Islam prohibited many holidays that Roma celebrated. Islam prohibited alcohol; many Roma without alcohol would be in a bad situation. Roma celebrating the holidays had a good excuse to drink. But Islamic education didn't stop. Some Roma in Gracanica learned about Islam, and an Islamic life, day by day. Some began to properly celebrate the Muslim holy days; some stopped a few of the Christian ones. But most still celebrate Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez. The Christian holidays took on less importance.



More Roma went to school; they could read and write. A very small number of Roma, though, finished primary school, less for secondary school, and concerning university - hardly anyone. One or two Roma in Kosovo (completed university), but none from Gracanica ever did. Now it's almost 23 years since Gracanica Roma began to learn about Islam. And every Roma in Kosovo now knows Gracanica for its knowledge of Islam.

Many Roma in Gracanica that stopped celebrating Christian Holy Days created new holy days in Islam. Elita is one; a small number celebrate on that day. Many of Gracanica's Roma don't accept Islam, and many of the Muslims have since left here. Islam in Gracanica is, again, very weak; but the main reasons for this are Kosovo's problems, the war and the Roma who have left. But those who left still have influence here.

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“The funny thing is that nobody asked me if I wanted to get married. If my father saw a good woman he would do everything he could to marry me to her. He never even asked me; I just found out that I was to be married.”

Hačim Minuši
[Prizren](#)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview

HM: I'm 75 years old.

Do you remember World War II? How was it for Roma then?

HM: Roma were punished by all sides. We were slaves to everyone - Serbs, Albanians and Germans. They hated Roma here.

That time was difficult for us. I think that this is also a difficult time for Roma. Roma always had trouble, in any case. And Roma often have no rights. We are a people that like to be very happy, to celebrate. Herdeljez is a Holy day for the Serbs, but we celebrate it too; it's God's day.



Roma celebrate too many different holidays - Bajram, Djurdjevdan - and those are now Roma holidays.

What about the Roma situation before?

HM: When Tito lived, we were under pressure. Roma needed to feed their children, and the only way to do that was to join the Partisans.* We didn't want be Partisans, but we needed to get bread. We needed work, which we could not have, because if you're not a Partisan, no one will give you work. [LINK to Hačim speaking](#)

(* Minuši uses the word *Partizan* (Partisan) instead of *Communist*.)

HM: As I said, Roma are slaves to everyone. But Roma have the trades, the skills to do different things, and this makes life easier. We are Blacksmiths, Amalija* and musicians. [LINK to Hačim speaking](#)

(*Hamali/ Amalija/ Hamaldjija. Serbian: Nosač. English: porter. Hamaldjija is from the Turkish word Hamal; Hamal is also a Turkish insult.)

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HM: To be honest, there are too many Roma that like to get drunk and listen to music. Roma wives work all day long; the husband comes home and asks her if she has earned any money. If she has, he'll take it and drink it all away.
[LINK to Haćim speaking](#)



How old were you when you were married?

HM: I married in 1948. I was 22 years old.

We sent a family member to arrange it. The funny thing is that nobody asked me if I wanted to get married. If my father saw a good woman he would do everything he could to marry me to her. He never even asked me; I just found out that I was to be married.

Weddings - I can only say that Roma will give their last money for music. We don't care for tomorrow; it is important to be happy now.

What other customs do you follow?

HM: Many holidays. The sixth of May - Herdeljez - is one we really like. We sacrifice for the health of our family.
[LINK to Haćim speaking](#) The children are happy as well - they receive new clothes. It is terrible for the poor children whose parents can't afford sheep. Roma celebrate Herdeljez because their children love it.

Not having money for sheep is a big problem for a family. Roma will sell everything from their home to get the money to buy it. The main reason, again, is our children; they'll see other children whose parents have bought sheep.



Do you celebrate Vasilica?

HM: My father, on that day, would wake up very early and walk to his best apple tree with an axe in his hand. My mother would speak for the tree.

'Are you going to give me lots of apples this year? If not, I'll cut you down,' he'd threaten.

My mother would answer -

'I'll give you all the apples you want.'

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And we sang this song on Vasilica -

The day of Herdeljez came
No one is giving them (Roma) bread
A king saw them and took them to Belgrade
To the government
The Roma sang to the government, we have no
bread to eat

This is half of the song. I don't remember the
rest. [LINK to Haćim speaking](#)



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Besim Djoka
[Podujevo](#)

Mr. Djoka is an ethnic Albanian.

*“When I was a child, it was different.
I remember when our Roma neighbors came to dinner,
they had a child that I played with.
They are not there anymore.”*

Adem Osmani hitched a ride to Pristina in an international organization’s Land Cruiser; he had this project’s sound recording equipment with him, and he decided to interview the Albanian who sat next to him in the backseat.

BD: I’m from Sibovce, Podujevo municipality. I’m 28 years old.

Were there many Roma in Sibovce? When you were young?

BD: There were Roma, but we don’t have them anymore. [LINK to Besim speaking](#)

So there are no Roma left?

BD: Exactly, but I don’t know why. My father told me they moved around a lot. In 1980, when Tito died, we had Roma and Serb families; the Serbs began selling their homes around 1980.

Did you have dealings with Roma before now?

BD: Yes, up until 1999 we had contact with them.

Do you know much about Roma here, and their current conditions?

BD: Concerning Roma conditions, these things didn’t change too much between then and now. About relationships (between Roma and the majority), they were better before.

Roma don’t live in Albanian areas anymore. [LINK to Besim speaking](#) I’m speaking about my village; but if you ask me about (our) relationships with Roma and Ashkalija families, that’s a different thing. A democratic way of living started here. For 1999 and after, I can’t say - that was a terrible time.

When I was a child, it was different. I remember when our (Roma) neighbors came to dinner, they had a child that I played with. They are not there anymore. [LINK to Besim speaking](#)

Did you know any Ashkalija or Egyptians?

BD: I’ve known about them only since 1999. I knew only Roma before. I don’t want to sound racist, but Albanians would call them Maxhup.* I went to secondary school in Pristina, and there I saw Roma, but no Ashkalija or Egyptians.

(*Maxhup - an Albanian pejorative term for Roma)

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What do you think about ethnic relations between Roma, Albanians and Serbs?

BD: (reference*: I'm gone say that) The relations between these communities aren't so good after what has passed here. It was something good. We all have to work and move on. We are all parents, and we need to think about a more positive future.

[LINK to Besim speaking](#)

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Bajram Hadji
[Gracanica](#)

Young men in Yugoslavia have always gone abroad to seek their fortunes, working construction in western Europe and as far afield as the Middle East. This is especially true of Kosovo, where most local incomes are still primarily remittances from abroad. Every Kosovo family can name at least one family member waiting tables in Switzerland, roofing in Vienna or building skyscrapers in Berlin. In a land where initiative tends not to be rewarded, the Gastarbeiter tradition in Yugoslavia runs deep.

The political situation makes things harder. In the 1960's, Yugoslav laborers were encouraged by the west to immigrate. They did the jobs no one else wanted to do. The Yugoslav wars changed the perception; refugees registered for the social services. A minority turned to robberies and burglaries. The west wasn't opportunity to them; it was prey. Croat boys fought and shot and stabbed each other in expat Zurich nightclubs. Albanians jumped out Serbs in Berlin; Serbs kicked the hell out of Albanians in Frankfurt.

The end of the Yugoslav wars eliminated the ability of many to plead political asylum. This was especially true of Kosovo, where Albanians were not deported when they turned up illegally in Germany and Switzerland. They were treated with leniency by governments that understood the situation in their homes.

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This changed after 1996; Kosovos and others were viewed as economic refugees instead of political ones. A few high-profile criminals poisoned the perception of Yugoslavs abroad. They were deported in handcuffs. These despondent young men were a major recruiting pool for the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Bajram, a Gracanica Rom, was one of the young men who left. He made his fortune in Germany, in the construction business, but he never forgot where he was from. Bajram donated enough money for the Gracanica Roma community to build its own mosque.

Construction is underway- at the fork of a dirt road on the hill the Gracanica Mahala rests on. The mosque is utterly without outside ornamentation; from the street it is simply another unfinished building.

This is a smart precaution. Gracanica is 95% Serbian, and therefore 95% Eastern Orthodox. If minarets were one day visible on the hills above Gracanica, some of the more radical and nationalist Serbs in the village would ensure that they didn't remain upright for long.

Bajram has had many meeting with Serbs in Gracanica. He's received bomb threats. He's kept the community relaxed, but he can't easily remove their suspicions; too many Serbs believed the lies told ad nauseum about the Balkan wars. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia. Osama Bin Laden in Kosovo. These wars were political and ethnic. They were never religious.

Bajram never meant for the mosque to be perceived as a threat. Kosovo's Roma are Muslim, but over time they have forgotten their religion. Bajram wants to return it to them, should they show interest.

Bajram works on the mosque, every day, with volunteers. He quietly moves about, pushing a wheelbarrow or swinging a shovel, totally inconspicuous from the other men putting work in.

You'd never know that the mosque owes itself totally to his wallet.

BH: I'm from Gracanica; I'm 54 years old.

We'll talk about the new mosque, but first - was there ever a mosque in Gracanica?

BH: No, never. (Roma) Youth didn't understand their faith and religion before, and the time has come to build this mosque in Gracanica. Young people are coming to learn, but the mosque is still being built.



Before, did people come to Gracanica to teach Roma (about Islam)?

BH: Before 1999 some Turks* and Gorani* came to teach the young Roma Islam. They came from Pristina. [LINK to Bajram speaking](#)

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(*In the Yugoslav 1991 census, Turks were 0.8% of the Kosovo population. The majority of them have since left; Prizren alone retains a large and organized Turkish community.

The Kosovo Turks may emigrate, but Turkish businesses are beginning to invest in the province. Efes, Turkey's biggest brewery, recently bought Birrë ë Pejës, Kosovo's largest and best brewery. For more information on past Yugoslav censuses, please refer to Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.)

(*Gorani are Slavic Muslims. They live in the southernmost areas of Kosovo - Dragaš and southern Prizren Municipality. The Gorani region is characterized by high mountains that are snow-capped as late as June; Gorani are traditionally shepherds. The Gorani spoke their own language, a close relative to Bulgarian and Macedonian, but this tongue has since been Serbianized.)

Where were these classes held?

BH: In our homes. In Afrim's* home, my home and others.

(* Afrim Osmani - [LINK TO INTERVIEW](#))

Who first taught you about Islam?

BH: His name was Selim. I thank him; he taught us a lot. He told us how to pray and what words to say when we prayed. (He taught us) the proper way.

Did many Roma youth come to these lessons?

BH: They learned the basic knowledge, and later they began to learn on their own.

Do you think this mosque will change something in Roma?

BH: If God wishes, yes. But we need to work, and to explain these things to Roma; I think things will change.

Did you have any problems with Serbs (due to the mosque construction)?

BH: In the beginning, yes. Many wanted to destroy it, and so on, but now everything is better.

You won't stop building?

BH: If God wants, yes. [LINK to Bajram speaking](#)

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“I think that now it’s better for the youth; they have boyfriends and girlfriends, and they know who they’ll marry. We didn’t know; our parents made the decisions that we should have made. I think that it’s better now - because you can marry the one that you love.”

Niza Mesret
[Prizren](#)

This interview was conducted in the Albanian language.

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (1)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (2)

NM: I was born in 1942. I have five children; four sons and one daughter. My husband is from Podujevo, but we have lived in Prizren for 35 years, always in this Mahala-Podrimska. We are Roma but we are Albanian; I attended a Serbian school because my father lived in Belgrade after 1942. I finished primary school. My father is from Prizren; my mother as well.

What kind of work did your father have?

NM: My father worked in a factory; he fixed cars there.

Which holidays do you celebrate?

NM: We celebrate holidays similar to Albanians, but we are Roma; the night of Bibi we don’t celebrate, but we do celebrate Herdeljez. That’s a good day; my great-grandfather celebrated Herdeljez. Winter has ended; the summer will come soon. [LINK to Niza speaking](#) Our mother would bake cookies; we’d buy a sheep.



NM: We would all get together, girls *and* boys, but we had no boyfriends like girls do now; everything is different now. We’d dance, sing, and on this day we’d go to the Turbe*. We’d pick flowers, and some of the girls would sing while we went there. [LINK to Niza speaking](#) Our mother would wash us in the early morning with a red egg.

(*Please refer to the Herdeljez description under Roma Holidays.)

Why a red egg?

NM: So we'd be healthy like a red egg.

How old were you when you were married?

NM: My husband was still in school. Some people came to my father, to ask about me; I didn't even know who this guy that I'm supposed to marry was. My parents decided all that.

Was that good for you or not?

NM: I think that now it's better for the youth; they have boyfriends and girlfriends, and they know who they'll marry. [LINK to Niza speaking](#) We didn't know; our parents made the decisions that we should have made. I think that it's better now - because you can marry the one that you love. [LINK to Niza speaking](#)

What customs did you follow for the wedding?

NM: My parents agreed to my betrothal; I was engaged for six months. Before I went (to my husband's family), they gave me nice clothes and gold. I didn't have a wedding dress.

How did they (the groom's family) come to take you from your home?

NM: They brought musicians and a busload of guests (to pick me up). When I got off the bus from Gjakovë (Serbian: Djakovica), my new father-in-law took me by the hand and escorted me to the door. When I entered the home, my mother-in-law gave me sweetened water, and I placed my hand in that water and placed my hand on the door. [LINK to Niza speaking](#)

What did the sweet water symbolize?

NM: It symbolizes a good relationship with my new family; things will go in a sweet way. [LINK to Niza speaking](#)

And your mother-in-law will then eat from your hand?

NM: Yes. To show that there won't be problems between us in her house.

When are you then allowed to visit your family?

NM: After two weeks.

What is the custom when your husband first visits your family?

NM: (My family) will prepare a good dinner. They'll play many jokes on him; they'll make him eat a lot and then he'll have to go outside to chop wood. (When he's outside) they'll yell, 'watch out for the dogs! No, wait, those are wolves!' [LINK to Niza speaking](#)



Niza Mesret's grandchild

Did the Turks have this tradition?

NM: Yes. The Turks and Albanians follow this tradition.

What else does the family do to the son-in-law?

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NM: When he (the husband) is ready to leave, he'll find that someone's put things in his shoes; usually eggs. The wife will try to prevent many of these things. They (the bride's family) will give gifts to the son-in-law, for his family. After another two weeks, the (bride's) mother will visit her son-in-law's family. They'll have a good dinner and the mother will bring gold jewelry for her daughter.

Why does she (the bride's mother) bring the jewelry?

NM: Out of respect.

And on Herdeljez the children would have that symbolic bath with red egg, like I said, and all the unmarried girls would come together and place things in a pot, and an engaged girl will come forward and we will swathe her in a red cloth, all the unmarried girls will be there, sitting in the streets of the Mahala, and we will place the pot in front of her. The betrothed girl, covered in red, will remove an item from this pot, and we will sing poetry; the poem will depend on what the girl has removed.

And it's a shame to ask, "Is it my future husband?"

We'd recite these poems in Turkish. [LINK to Niza speaking](#)

We'd sing these songs in Turkish, because we lived among them. [LINK to Niza speaking](#)

Thank you.

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Dragomir Ivanović
[Gracanica](#)

Mr. Ivanović is an ethnic Serb.

*“Many Roma work like the Serbs work -
the ones who finished school do.
But Roma mostly do physical labor.”*

DI: I've lived with Roma here in Gracanica for around 45 years. Roma have been here awhile; we have good relationships with them. No problem.

[LINK to Dragomir speaking](#)

Are there differences between Gracanica Roma and other Roma?

DI: There are some differences; I don't know why. Perhaps because Roma, say, from Pristina, well that's a city and they learned trades there. Roma from Gracanica always work with our Serbs, in the fields. When (other Roma) came here, the Gracanica Roma began to work in the markets. There are still differences between them.

Are many Roma, working privately, employed by Serbs?

DI: Many Roma work like the Serbs work - the ones who finished school do. But Roma mostly do physical labor. [LINK to Dragomir speaking](#)

Roma here celebrate your Serbian holidays - Djurdjevdan and Vasilica (the Serbian new year). How long have they celebrated these days?

DI: Yes, on those days I celebrated with the Roma, and on those days they called me godfather. They (Roma) have always celebrated these days; they didn't start recently.

[LINK to Dragomir speaking](#)

Roma call Serbs (males only) godfather (Serbian - Kum). Why is this?

DI: I think we are godfathers to the Roma; that's why they do this.

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“I came to ask your daughter’s hand for my son; they love each other. I don’t have any money to give; I’m not rich. The only person who’s really rich is God.”

Fatima Mehmeti
[Gracanica](#)

FM: I don’t know many things (about marriage traditions), but I can tell you that we were in a very poor situation - worse than now. [LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

In my time - when I was teenager - Roma parents would arrange these things.

They (the parents) would go to arrange marriages with another family. Later, If the bride’s family lived far away, they’d travel by horse, with blankets thrown over the horse, and the bride would ride in the cart the horses pulled. We’d bring nice clothes for the new bride, to show the groom’s parents that we provided for her; we’d bring the clothes in a wooden chest. It’s different now.

Did the groom’s parents always pay a dowry?

FM: In some places, yes; in some places, no. It depends on the family; if they are very rich, they’ll ask for, and give, lots of money.

A long time ago, Roma didn’t have money to give; so they gave something else. A cow, a horse or a sheep... [LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

What will happen if a Roma boy loves a Roma girl, and they want to marry, but her father’s bride-price is too high?

FM: Then they’d need to make an arrangement with the girl’s parents. If parents want to give their daughter away for free, then okay. There are some Roma that will really understand when the boy’s father says,

I came to ask your daughter’s hand for my son; they love each other. I don’t have any money to give; I’m not rich. The only person who’s really rich is God.

[LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

But there are people that don't care about any of this; they don't care for anything. Then it becomes hard.

What about the boy and girl? What will they do?

FM: The only solution - the girl will flee her home and go to the boy that she loves. She loves him; that's the most important thing.

[LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

Will her parents be against that?

FM: Some parents are against it; some don't care.

What kind of Roma are you?

FM: I am Muslim; I am Gurbeti,* and my husband is Arlija*.

(*Gurbeti/ Gurbets - Roma from Gnjilane/ Gjilan. FM's testimony disputes what some other interviewees have claimed about Gurbeti.)



Can you see a difference between your childhood, and childhood now?

FM: It's very different. We were very poor, and we lived in terrible conditions. One of the things that we never achieved was getting a good education.

[LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

Did you finish school?

FM: No, because my father had seven children. We couldn't dress well, we couldn't eat - we couldn't really do anything.

When you were young, did you know any Ashkalija or Egyptians?

FM: There were Ashkalija - and we were very good together, eating and working. They also spoke good Romanes.

What about Egyptians?

FM: No, I've never heard about them. All I know is Ashkalija.

How long were you in school?

FM: Eight years, but now that doesn't mean nothing. [LINK to Fatima speaking](#)

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"The dead - his good or bad works will stay with him, and some say that tomorrow he will be judged."

Sead Demiri
[Gracanica](#)

Sead's family welcomed us with Orange soda, coffee and unfiltered cigarettes; his father sat on his front steps, his eyes closed as the sun warmed him on the first real day of spring. He politely declined an interview; he had things to do, plants and soil to poke around in, and a chair to repair. The Demiris live on the outskirts of the Mahala, in a house so pretty and well-kept that some of the Roma neighbors joke that Serbs actually live there.

Sead just welcomed his first child; his wife gave birth in the Serbian hospital in North Mitrovica, and Sead got the news just before we showed up. Gracanica's Roma travel there to give birth; Albanian hospitals have only recently begun treating Roma again, after 3 ½ years of refusal of services. Roma still don't trust them. There are too many stories about Roma lying in the waiting room with untreated knife and gunshot wounds for the Roma to simply walk in when a doctor says they can finally, after years, expect treatment.

Sead, like Afrim Osmani, prepares the Muslim dead for burial. He is responsible for the ablution of washing the deceased.

SD: I am from Gracanica.

How do you properly prepare the dead for burial, and what customs do you follow during the burial?

SD: For example: if my father died, the elders would prepare his body and place him in a waddle* of straw. That night, when someone dies, everyone goes there, and they will sit all night. [LINK to Sead speaking](#)

(SD is referring to a deviation of the traditional Islamic rite - the Takfeen. A deceased Muslim is traditionally wrapped in a Kafan - a white sheet. Males are wrapped in three; women are wrapped in one. These sheets are precisely measured.)

Now they simply cover the body with a blanket. From the next morning until afternoon, the family and cousins of the dead will come; all the relatives of the dead will visit. And

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in the afternoon the Hodja (an Islamic cleric) will come to wash his body, and prepare him for his grave. All the funeral guests will walk together with the Hodja to the graveyard. [LINK to Sead speaking](#)

The Roma graveyard lies above our community. When we arrive, we place the dead on a large stone. We will turn him to the right side and pray in front of him, and after we pray we will bury him. [LINK to Sead speaking](#) Someone from the dead person's family will have gone earlier, to dig the grave, so everything will be ready.

(The deceased will be buried on his side, with his face towards Mecca.)

What prayers do you say?

SD: We go there to pray; that's a rule. We pray for Allah to forgive the dead and save him. Our holy Koran says we must do this. [LINK to Sead speaking](#)

Do you bury the dead with his covering?

SD: With the covering around him. The Hodja will then read the Talkin*. It answers questions about the next life, and other things from the Koran.

(*Talkin is, in Arabic, Takbeer; it is recited, usually by an Imam, four times. In Arabic, the burial ceremony is know as the Salat ul Janazah.)

The dead - his good or bad works will stay with him, and some say that tomorrow he will be judged.

Is that all that you do for him?

SD: Seven days after the funeral, the dead person's friends and relatives will gather to pray and eat dinner. Others also do this after 52 days, others again after six months. Others will gather a year later, but some do nothing at all.

What do they do during the gatherings?

Those days are Sadaka - the family will invite guests and feed them.

(Sadaka - a Turkish word. Usually Sadaka refers to alms, or charity.)

Is the Hodja paid for his services?

SD: We don't pay. Before we needed a Hodja from Pristina. He was Albanian, so we paid him 100-200 Deutschmarks. But now we know how to do these things, and we do it ourselves. [LINK to Sead speaking](#)

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“It was very difficult. After school (my husband) worked, but we could only buy one liter of oil and one kilogram of sugar. We also needed wood, but with wood it was a question of whether we could afford it or not.”

Adilje Osmani
[Gracanica](#)



This interview was conducted in the Albanian language

All of Adilje’s boys have completed secondary school. None of her daughters have. Convention stated that it was enough for girls to have a few years of primary school before they were pulled out, to learn the ways of the home. For Roma women this is enough work to complete a PhD-level dissertation. Their days go from five AM to midnight; it gets worse when they are first married. They leave their family homes forever, and in the groom’s family, his mother runs the show. They have to prove what they know. They do laundry until their hands crack open and their skin bleeds. They wash their stepmother’s feet every morning. They run and fetch, they work until a westerner would break down and cry, and then they keep going.

Adilje treats her son’s wife with uncommon kindness. Adilje’s daughters have all been married off, and they’ve gone to Kosovo Polje, Belgrade, or just down the road; but they come back often. Every evening Adilje’s home is full of visitors from the Mahala; they smoke and drink coffee and small, strong, sugary cups of ruski čaj - Russian tea. Adilje often sits off to the side, ignoring them all as she talks to her husband on the phone. He works in Italy; he’s been there for a decade. He’s tried to come back; economics won’t allow him to stay long, and he always ends up across the Adriatic, separated from his wife and children and grandchildren. It was harder during the war; he panicked in Italy while the bombs fell on them, and the phone lines were dead.

Where you were born?

AO: Gracanica. I’m 46 years old.

My father came here from somewhere around Ferizaj.
(Serbian: Uroševac)

How old was your father when he died?

AO: He was 77 years old.

And your mother?

AO: My mother died when she was 60 years old. She died 20 years ago.

What was the first language you learned?

AO: Romanes.

Did you attend school?

AO: Yes - until the 4th year of primary school. We were so poor, that we didn't have shoes. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

How many children were in your family?

AO: We were many; I had five sisters and four brothers. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

Did all of you attend school?

AO: Yes, but only until the fourth year of primary school. Only my younger brother finished eight years of primary school.

How old were you when you were married?

AO: I was 15 years old - 30 or 31 years ago.

Did everyone marry so young back then?

AO: Just about everybody.

Did you know your husband before you married him?

AO: Yes, because he was from Gracanica.

How many children do you have?

AO: I have nine children; five sons and four daughters. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

How was your wedding?

AO: We had music - like now.

Did you wear nice clothes for the wedding?

AO: It wasn't like now; it was without wedding clothes. Just simple clothes. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

Did your father ask for a dowry?

AO: Yes, either 300 or 3000 Yugoslav Dinars. I can't remember exactly. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

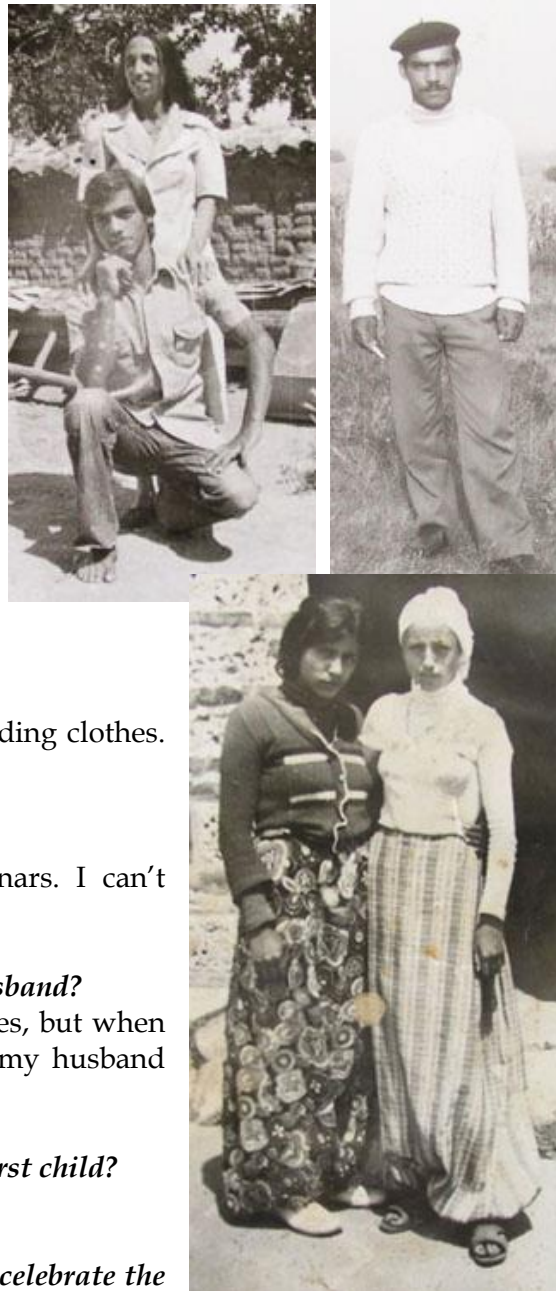
Which language did you speak with your husband?

AO: In my father's family we spoke Romanes, but when first married I learned to speak Albanian; my husband was Ashkalija. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

How old you were you when you had your first child?

AO: I was only 16 years old.

Did your family and your husband's family celebrate the same holidays?



AO: No, my father's family celebrated Christmas, Vasilica, Herdeljez and Bajram. In my husband's family we celebrated only Herdeljez and Bajram.

Why did your family celebrate Vasilica?

AO: I don't know. Because our great-grandfathers celebrated it, we did also.

[LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

What customs did your family follow on that day?

AO: On Vasilica we bought a goose to kill; the day before, we baked four or five different types of bread, and we shaped the bread and drew on it.

On Vasilica morning we prepared the goose; we baked more bread, with one Yugoslav Dinar hidden in it. Whoever finds it will have luck. We'd break the bread into as many pieces as there were members in the family; 11 pieces. Then there'd be drinking and singing - the song of Sveti Vasilija.

Avel Vasi*

Avel Vasi...

Ki Adilja...

Vasi is coming

Vasi is coming

to Adilja

[LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

(*Vasi is the diminutive form of Vasilija)

So we sang the song, and sang all of our names. We'd have candles as well, [LINK to Adilje speaking](#) and after midnight the visitors arrived.

Every family knows who their visitors will be. When the visitors come, we feed them goose; they'll stay until morning, drinking with the family. And the next day people visit each other and congratulate each other for the holiday.

Did your family celebrate Christmas?

AO: On Christmas my family made pastries and bought apples, nuts, pears and other fruits. In the evening, after dinner, we gave the fruits to the children. The day after Christmas, people visited one another's homes.

What about Herdeljez?

AO: Herdeljez is the 6th of May. Roma buy sheep and new clothes. On that day they'll drink a lot. On the 5th of May, all of them have collected Kukubreg and Dren*. With those flowers, they decorate their homes.

When the 6th of May begins, at midnight, all the Roma families will wake up and bathe in water (with Kukubreg and Dren). They'll build fires and wait for the butcher to arrive.

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When the butcher comes, we make him coffee, and he kills and prepares the sheep. Some people will cook the sheep outside, over a fire.

What religion is your husband's family?

AO: Muslim.

And your father's religion?

AO: Muslim.

Did your husband work when you married him?

AO: No. He was still in school. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

How old was he when he married you?

AO: He was 14 years old. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

When you had a child, he was still in school?

AO: Yes. It was very difficult. After school he worked, but we could only afford to buy one liter of oil and one kilogram of sugar. We also needed wood, but with wood it was a question of whether we could afford it or not. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

Did you go into the forest to collect wood?

AO: All summer, from March until October.

Did many Roma from Gracanica do that?

AO: Everybody did it. The forest was very near.

Where were you during the 1999 war?

AO: For the first two weeks of the bombing we stayed here; we slept in the shelters. Then we left, to Belgrade; we stayed there for only two weeks before we returned.



Below, Adilje relates three stories that she heard from her family when she was a child:

A relative of my father's died; they buried him. On the way home from the graveyard, the dead man returned and appeared in front of the funeral procession. He beat a drum, and followed them home. The children told him -

'Go home. Go to your new place. If the others see you, they'll be very afraid. We just buried you - and yet you appear before us.'

The dead man disappeared, but later, when our family rested at home, the dead man appeared on the roof; he began to beat his drum.

'Ooo, Ajet,' the family called. 'Stop, the children are frightened.'

But he kept playing his drum, and he played other instruments as well. He played all night; the family had no sleep.

He was from Gracanica - my father's family. And his name was Ajet.

Second story

AO: My aunt told this story to my father.

When my father's mother died, she went to Pristina, and nobody knew that. She went to my father's aunt, in the form of a dog.

'I saw that the dog had opened my door,' my aunt said. 'The dog had a beautiful, bright little chain.'

My aunt tried to take the chain from the dog. The dog ran; she tried to catch him, but could not. She ran and ran, but lost her way, and was far from home. The dog appeared in front of her, and led her to her home. The dog led her until morning.

Third story

AO: My mother told me this story.

A Serbian woman died in Pristina. She had five children; two daughters and three sons. She was my uncle's wife; she died after a long illness. And when she passed, the family buried her, but her spirit returned to my uncle and entered his body. She almost stopped his breathing. When the people heard about this, they commented,

'She was a Serbian, but we buried her in the Muslim graveyard.'

She returned, every night. [LINK to Adilje speaking](#) One night she took a donkey from my family, and all night she rode it. In the early morning, around 4 or 5 o'clock, she took the donkey and tied him to a tree and left him there.

Other Roma found the donkey, but they didn't know who owned it. After awhile, they knew. And every morning they returned it to my family. That donkey was very tired.

This continued for six weeks. She did many bad things; she climbed on the roofs of our homes.

One day her husband asked her, 'Why don't you return to your place?'

She replied - 'I can't. Because your graveyard won't have me. You should have buried me in a Serb graveyard.' [LINK to Adilje speaking](#)

A long time after, some people saw her in another town. They recognized her and called to her, but she ran away from them. She boarded a train and left. No one ever saw her again.



A cigarette break: Adilje and son.

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“Sometimes we thought that we should go to Serbia as well, but most of the time we thought we should stay here. Two or three days passed; more people left. It was sad to see them abandon their homes.”



Sebastian Šerifović
[Gracanica](#)

Sebastian exiled himself to his bedroom in the summer of 2000 with two English-language instruction books. Within two months he'd memorized them both. At the age of 17, with no formal English language education, he became a freelance translator for NGO researchers and other internationals. He dove into NGO work, becoming a sexual health teacher for Children's Aid Direct and a camp counselor for Balkan Sunflowers. He later spearheaded Roma educational programs for that group; he taught himself Albanian in his spare time. Sebastian now operates the OSCE-funded Roma resource center in Gracanica.

Sebastian just celebrated his first child's birth; soon after, he celebrated his 19th birthday. Plenty of Roma and Serbs don't like him; he has two jobs in a place where most people never had one.

Do you remember the first night of the bombing?

SS: The 24th of March, Wednesday, 8 PM.

Where were you that night?

SS: I was 16 years old. My father worked that night; the television news said that the bombing would begin that evening, but I didn't think about it. It was all a joke for me.

I couldn't believe it was going to happen, but I still felt a bit scared, so I asked my mother if I could go sleep at my aunt's* for just one night. All the youth joked about what was coming, because they didn't quite believe it either. But there was fear there. No one knew what would happen. It was all that people talked about.

(* SS's aunt lived in Preoce, several kilometers west of Gracanica.)



Were you at home when the bombing began?

SS: I was still at home. Like I said, I wanted to go to my aunt's, and my mother agreed. While we walked there, the power cut off, at exactly 8 PM.* It was still a joke; I didn't know what was happening.

(* NATO's first action of the war was to disable Kosovo's electrical supply. The *Korporata Energjetike e Kosovës* Kosovo A and B electrical plants - in Obilić

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municipality, near Plemetina - were the first targets. This bomb disabled the plants, but purposely did not destroy them. The strike served as a general introduction to the bombing that followed, roughly half an hour later.)

Did any bombs fall near Gracanica that night?

SS: Yes. That first night we heard one massive explosion. They dropped the first bombs on the military bases outside of Pristina*.

(* Gracanica lies 9 KM directly south of Pristina.)

A Serb, Oliver Vujovic, who slept that night down the road from SS's family, stated:

"That first night I'd left Pristina, where I lived, and came to Gracanica to stay with my wife's family. I was scared for my daughter. Several of us sat outside, talking, and after the power died we stayed there. The first bomb was a huge one, and the whole sky lit up from it. The windows in my wife's family home blew inward. We walked onto the road, and there were dozens of people standing there, just watching, not saying anything. And then everyone seemed to realize, at the same time, that this was real, that it was finally happening, and everyone ran.")



Did you sleep that night?

SS: No. We stayed awake the whole night. The next day, people started to leave Gracanica for Serbia. For that, they were smart; Sometimes we thought that we should go to Serbia as well, but most of the time we thought we should stay here. Two or three days passed; more people left. It was sad to see them abandon their homes. I thought that the bombing wouldn't last much longer.

Did you use the bomb shelters?

SS: For almost one month people stayed there. My family stayed there only one week; we couldn't stand that kind of life. Almost 11 families were down there; the place was full of smoke.

It was really cold in the shelters; no one could sleep. They all waited for the morning, to return to their homes. In those days plenty of bombs fell; you could see the smoke around.

What about the Albanians? What happened to them?

SS: I didn't know, and I didn't ask. In that time the most important thing for me was for my family to stay alive. But I heard they were being driven out, into Albania and Macedonia.

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They were forced out during the bombing, but what happened after?

SS: Many people said that the Albanians were coming back, along with NATO - as soon as the bombing stopped. More Albanians returned, and more Serbs left.

(* In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, Serbs began to flee Pristina, Ajvalja and other areas en masse, and many of them ended up in Gracanica)



Could you go to Pristina after the war?

SS: it was impossible to go there (after the bombing). A lot of time has passed, so now we can go, but we're still scared. There are always some good people, and some bad.

Were the shops open during the bombing?

SS: Some of the shops worked during the bombing; lots of people lost interest in working though. There were always shops where you could buy necessities.

When the bombing finished, which soldiers entered Kosovo?

SS: I saw plenty of them: Russians, French, Swedes, English. In Gracanica the first soldiers were English.

You said that the Albanians were coming back, and the Serbs were leaving. What happened to the Roma?

SS: All of Pristina's Roma fled. Some went to Serbia, and some even left Yugoslavia.

The Gracanica Mahala emptied out. One day I saw the last family besides us leave. I felt terrible.

*Did you have any problems with the Albanians driving through Gracanica?**

SS: Some Albanians provoked us. An Albanian would see a Roma and say 'What are you still doing here? You still live here?'

(* After the war, there were several instances of attempted kidnappings and grenade attacks in Gracanica, all from Albanians transiting the village's main road. Now, Serbs and Albanians on Gracanica's main road simply exchange tough looks and insults.)



SS: Albanians kidnapped two Roma from Preoce, and they killed them. Two or three years later they found the bodies*.

(* See Adem Osmani's interview for more details.)

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After the bombing, was your situation better or worse?

SS: We had problems before, but in many cases the situation was worse – kidnappings, provocations and so on. The situation stayed the same for about two years. Now it's getting better.

How is it now?

SS: There are some (Albanian) areas where we can go and not have problems. We talk with Albanians and they talk with us; as I said, there are both good and bad people.

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Djezida Emini
[Priluzje](#)

"We lived in a house built from mud, and my parents had to labor for Serbs - ten days and ten nights. Now it's better; people have salaries these days. My parents didn't have shoes growing up, and my grandfather had shoes made from pig skin."

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview

Where were you born?

DE: Crkvena Vodica*.

(*Crkvena Vodica - CeeVee to the internationals who cannot properly pronounce it - was a mixed area outside of Obilić town where Serbs, Albanians and Roma lived together. Since the war's end, many of the Serbs, and all of the Roma, have left. At this project's beginning there were two Roma families left; they fled a month later. Djezida was lucky to have family in Priluzje to put her up. Most Roma didn't; families all live in the same area, and they all flee together. Generations of families ended up in refugee camps in Macedonia and the northern municipalities.)

My father's name was Rifat, and my mother's, Bahta. I'm 45 years old, and I have five children.

What do you know of your parent's lives?

DE: My family were blacksmiths, and my grandfather was a blacksmith as well. They were poor and uneducated. We lived in a house built from mud, and my parents had to labor for Serbs - ten days and ten nights. Now it's better; people have salaries these days. (REFERENCE: Also they) My parents didn't have shoes growing up, and my grandfather had shoes made from pig skin. [LINK to Djezida speaking](#)



What was the situation in Crkvena Vodica during the war?

DE: People fled; their homes burned and their things were stolen. Only one Roma family stayed; they thought they could live with the Serbs and Albanians.

[LINK to Djezida speaking](#)

Before the bombing started, I thought everyone was kidding.

How did you feel after it began?

DE: When the first bomb fell, we said, 'look. A mushroom fell!' Our windows broke. During the bombings, we stayed out in the open; we feared that our homes would collapse on our heads. We had no sleep those nights.

How was the relationship between Roma and Albanians before the campaign?

DE: An Albanian family lived behind our home, and we would speak to them all the time. They knew some Romanes, and we spoke Albanian as well.

How old were you when you were married?

DE: I was 19 years old.

Did your father marry you, or did you have a hand in the decision? What was the custom your husband followed when they came for you?

DE: Before we had Roma fairs, and there we would meet many families.* If someone comes to ask for your hand, they must pay around 500 Euro now. When my husband's family came for me, they brought me clothes and rings.

(* These fairs are leftovers from the time when southeastern Europe's Roma were still nomadic. Once a year Roma would meet at pre-determined areas to sell products, trade horses, and arrange marriages. This tradition still exists in Romania.)



They will come with a bottle of brandy as a gift. Then we'll have a feast; his family must bring half the food, and mine brings the other half. We'll cook meat and cakes, and prepare Burek.*

(*Burek: a traditional Balkan pastry filled with salted sheep's cheese)

They'll pay the dowry, both families will drink the brandy, and soon I'll put the ring on.

On Vasilica:

DE: We stay awake for the whole night. We have to put out water for the goose to drink, before we kill it in the morning. We bake bread during the day, and in the evening we prepare the Sarma; it must be finished by the morning. We dress up before our guests arrive, and we sell them the Sarma. All the food will be piled on the table, and different types of bread. We'll place the Sarma on the plates and state the price: 15 Lire.

On Djurdjevdan:

DE: We wake early to bathe with Kukubreg and Dren; we must collect the water from three rivers. Then we slaughter the lamb. [LINK to Djezida speaking](#) We invite all our friends, to eat, and we'll have many visitors that day.

Djezida Emini relates a story told to her by her mother, when she was a girl:

Hear [the entire story](#) in the Romanes language.

DE: Once there lived a rich man who sired one beautiful daughter.

One day he asked his wife: 'What should I do; should I eat this lovely apple, or I should give it to someone else to enjoy?'

His wife answered, 'If you like the apple, you should give it to another.'

The man sought the opinions of his elders. He visited a monk and put the same question to him; 'Should I eat this lovely apple, or should I give it to another? The monk told him he should eat the apple, if it will make him happy.'

The man walked home. On the way there, he asked other elders. They told him something different; they told him that, for his daughter's wedding, he should stage the most beautiful wedding that anyone could imagine; and he should marry his own daughter. The man told his wife what the elders had told him.

His wife grew distressed; she couldn't sleep that night. She asked herself, over and over - 'how can this be?'

The man tried to reassure her; 'this is what the elders have said.'

A week passed; the wedding preparations were well underway.

The man's wife hatched a plan. She called all the servants of the house together and told them to go and find a tailor, to stitch leather clothes for her daughter. She ordered her daughter not to bathe. For the leather outfit, she paid the tailor many Liras. The wife built a huge bonfire and cast a sheep into it while it raged. She dressed her daughter in the leather and told her,

'Flee from here, because the wedding your father plans is for you and him.'

The daughter understood; she ran into the night.

The smell from the fire was terrible. The man asked his wife, 'What is that stench?' as he approached the fire. His wife told him that their daughter found out who she was to marry and, despairing, she cast herself into the fire; there she burned.

Their daughter fled far from the house. Late that night, she saw three men and a pack of dogs. She became frightened; she hid herself. One of the men had seen her from the distance; he approached her.

'Who goes there?' he yelled.

'I'm scared of your dogs,' she called to him. 'My name is Leskeca.' She emerged from hiding, and the man brought her to his home.

'Why do you bring this dirty girl to us?' The man's family asked.

'Please, just feed me some bread, and I will sleep in the corner,' Leskeca replied.

The family then welcomed her. Soon they heard that a beautiful wedding would be held nearby, and they made preparations to attend. Their youngest son left first, on horseback. When the rest of the family departed to the wedding, Leskeca changed her clothes, cleaned herself, and walked to the wedding as well.

Leskeca was blindingly beautiful. The young man on horseback was dumbstruck.

'Who is this girl? Where is she from?' the young man asked. He had never laid eyes on her before. The young man tried to follow her, but she disappeared before he could do so.

Leskeca raced back to the house. She put her leather outfit on, dirtied herself again, and when the family returned they saw the same old dirty guest.

The family returned home; Leskeca begged them for something to drink, and they scolded her.

'Why are you mad?' Leskeca asked.

'Our son saw the most beautiful girl,' they answered. 'But she vanished.'

Soon another wedding was announced, and the family prepared to attend. Leskeca cleaned herself and changed after their departure, and followed them to the wedding. The young man saw her and, smitten, followed her on his horse. She handed out sweets, and when the boy approached, she gave him kokrlja. As he looked at it, she disappeared again.

The young man grew sad. He vowed that, somehow, he would find this beautiful girl that eluded him.

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That evening his mother baked him bread. When she left the kitchen, Leskeca snuck into the kitchen. In the bread she hid her ring, and a note:

Your luck is at home, it read.

The next morning, the young man left with the bread. He walked until he ran into a miller, with whom he fell into conversation. The young man was hungry, and he began to eat as they talked. And when he found the ring and read the note, he suddenly raced home.

He showed his mother the note. His mother turned to Leskeca, thought for a moment, and ordered her to change from her leather and clean herself. She did; she blinded them with her beauty.

[BACK to LIST OF INTERVIEWEES](#)



“Five hundred years ago, many people lived here, and the Roma always worked for them. That’s why Roma know so many languages. I speak Albanian perfectly, because I worked with them for so long. This is also why I speak Serbian, and Turkish.”

Isak Avdo
Prizren

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (1)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview (2)

“They can call themselves whatever they want: but when Albanians call them, they don’t say ‘Hey, Ashkalija,’ or ‘Hey, Egyptian, come here.’ They say ‘Hey, Gypsy, come here.’”

IA: I’m 66 years old, and from Prizren; I was born here. My grandfather and my father were born here as well. I am Arlija Rom, from the Terzi Mahala. Our Mahala bears this name because one Terzi - an Albanian holy man - built a mosque here once, and our Mahala bears his name.

How many Roma Mahalas are in Prizren?

IA: There’s our Terzi Mahala, Jeki Mahala, Dušanova Mahala, and Durmish Aslanu mahala. Durmish Aslanu has both Roma and Ashkalija, and Terzi has both Roma and Albanians.

What kind of Roma are you?

IA: I am Roma, and Muslim. We are not Gurbeti* here.
(*Gurbeti/ Gurbets - Gnjilane/ Gjilan Roma)

Did you go to school?

IA: What can I say? I finished four years of primary school, but my wife actually finished primary school.

Have many children do you have?

IA: I have five daughters and one son; they are all married. My son lives in Denmark, two daughters are in Germany, and another daughter is in Belgrade. Here we’re just two - my wife and I.



Why have so many older Roma not finished school?

IA: We didn't attend school because we were too poor. Our whole family were blacksmiths; they forged many things. For us, it was not possible to attend school, and many did not go because they were scared of Albanians.

What were your parent's names?

IA: My mother's name was Hido Isaka, and my father's name was Ismirko.

Do you know about their lives?

IA: My mother was a musician. She played the Defi*. And my father was a blacksmith. He was a blacksmith for a long time, but he stopped and went to work in Belgrade* and Novi Pazar* for the Serbs.

[LINK to Isak speaking](#)

(* Defi (Greek) is a small hand drum.)

(*Belgrade lies 289 kilometers north of Prizren.)

(*Novi Pazar lies 104 kilometers north of Prizren. NP is a textile town with a predominantly Slavic Muslim population.)



Isak Avdo's wife

Did your parents attend school?

IA: No, they didn't finish school. They went to the other kind of school*.

(*IA refers to Islamic schools, or Medressas*, where students memorized the Koran and learned to write Arabic.)

What were the names of your grandparents?*

IA: My grandfather's name was Semsedin; my grandmother's name was Melja.

(* When asked this question, every Roma interviewee named only two grandparents; always the parents of the father.)

On Djurdjevdan:

IA: We stay awake the whole night, and we place willows on the doors of our homes. And then, two weeks after Djurdjevdan, we have Hedenebiri*: this Mahala calls this celebration Hedenebiri, but in other Mahalas they call it Shinkol-hedenebiri*.

What is Hedenebiri?

IA: This is our flag; it is 600 years old. We celebrate for the whole night. We kill lambs, and after, we parade through the Mahala. [LINK to Isak speaking](#) We also celebrate Bajram and Ramazan*.

(*Ramazan - Turkish/ Romanes for Ramadan)



What do you do on those days?

IA: (On Bajram) Our women prepare baklava. On the first day of Bajram, no one visits another; this day is reserved for the families to celebrate, on their own. On the second day, however, we will go to visit all of our neighbors. The Mahala children will kiss our hands and ask for money.

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On Ramazan we will rise at 2 or 3 AM to feast - *sifire* (Sehri). Then we fast for the day. When the night comes, we eat again - *Iftari*. Then we go to the mosque. Here we are Albanian-Roma; we have the same traditions as Albanians.

Where were your grandparents from?

IA: They came from here.

How was it growing up here? Are there many differences between then and now?

IA: We were poor before. When Tito was alive, everything was much better. Our children found work, and we lived better lives. [LINK to Isak speaking](#)

IA: (REFERENCE: Because) Roma had work then. They got credit. They had better salaries. And at the end of the month, we could afford to buy sugar and oil.

[LINK to Isak speaking](#)

How old were you when you were married?

IA: I have been married now for 40 years; I was 22 years old when I got married.

On Weddings:

IA: Families spoke. If the groom's family is good, then the groom will be good. But if that boy's not a good person - if he drinks alcohol - then nothing will happen at all. At the wedding, all of the women will dance, and the music will be great.

Do you know any Ashkalija or Egyptians in Prizren?

IA: No. Before, I had never heard of Ashkalija or Egyptians. They didn't exist; but they (Roma) lived in Albanian areas, and they were afraid to speak Romanes; if anyone asked if they were Roma they'd say 'No - we're Ashkalija.'

[LINK to Isak speaking](#)



This is terrible for the Roma people - because everyone has to be who they are. If I am Roma, then I am Roma, and I cannot be anything more. [LINK to Isak speaking](#)

They (Ashkalija) are the same people as us, but they don't want to be us. They can call themselves whatever they want: but when Albanians call them, they don't say 'Hey, Ashkalija,' or 'Hey, Egyptian, come here.' They say 'Hey, Madjup,* come here.'

[LINK to Isak speaking](#)

(*Madjup is the Romanes spelling for Maxhup - an Albanian pejorative term for Roma.)

IA tells a Roma fable he heard when he was a boy:

[LISTEN to entire story](#)

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IA: I know a few stories, stories I heard from the older Roma; in their time, there was no electricity, so they told many stories.

Once there were three sisters; they were without parents and very poor. The three built themselves a small home to live in.

A rich man passed their home, and he noticed a star over the door. He immediately asked if any of the three sisters would have him as their husband.

One sister asked: 'What would you offer us, were one of us to marry you?'

'Gold and money and a beautiful home,' he said, and the three declined his offer.

The next day, another man saw the star, approached the home, and asked the same question. Another sister asked, 'What would you offer us, were one of us to marry you?'

'I have many riches, and I will share them with you,' he said.

'We're not interested in your riches,' the sisters said.

One sister said, 'If you were to marry me, we would have two children. A boy and a girl.'

'And I would marry you for that,' the man said, 'For without children, one has nothing.'

So the man and the sister were married, and soon they had a son and a daughter. Both of the children were very beautiful, and stars graced their foreheads.

The other two sisters became extremely jealous. They kidnapped their sister's son and daughter; they nailed them into a coffin and threw them into a river.

A fisherman downstream spied the box, dragged and wrestled it from the water, and pried it open. Before him, scared, sat two beautiful children with stars on their heads. The fisherman brought the children home to his wife, who became very, very happy, for the couple was childless.

'These children are now ours,' she cried.

'And at last I am a mother.'

The woman was very old, and she could produce no milk to feed her new children. But the couple had a female horse that produced milk, and the children fed from the horse. The mother horse gave them life.

The children grew up; they both wished to leave the fisherman's village, because it was too small, and there were few people. They moved to their cousin's home.

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The mother horse brought them to an old house, and before she left, the horse told the children to not open the door for anyone. The horse told them of their aunts, and how they had nailed them into their coffin and thrown them to the water. And how, of the children, the aunts hated the boy most of all, and would return to deal with him.

Soon the aunt came to the door of the children's home.

'Open the door,' the aunt cried, 'I only wish to see you.'

And the girl did, 'Look at your hair,' the aunt said. 'It's not combed well. When will your brother arrive at home? When he does arrive here, you must tell him to travel to the nearest large mountain, and there he will find an old woman who will give him a special comb for you.'

The aunt knew of this old woman; she was a sorceress, and anyone who approached her would be turned into stone. The girl knew nothing of this, and she told her brother of his new task.

The boy set out to the mountain, and when he finally arrived he found the old sorceress and asked her for the comb. She attempted to turn him to stone, but could not; the star that graced his forehead protected him. The boy returned with the comb.

Soon the aunt returned to the children's home.

'Let me enter,' the aunt asked the girl through the gated door. 'I only wish to gaze upon you.'

Inside the house, the aunt uttered another command. 'You must tell your brother that he is to return to the old woman on the mountain. She has something else for him.'

And the sister commanded this to her brother, who again set out to the mountain on his horse. The sorceress tried to turn him to stone again, but the star upon his forehead protected him still.

'What do you want from me?' the Sorceress asked. 'What do you seek here?'

'I seek nothing,' the brother said. 'What do you want from me? You must come with me,' the brother commanded, and the sorceress followed him to his home. She fashioned herself a home next to his. And the sorceress stitched the brother new clothes. She placed them on him and revealed that she knew who his real father was, and more, she knew the tea house where he bided his time.

'Go there,' the Sorceress said. 'Sit near him, and wait for only ten minutes. After that, take your leave.'

The boy went to the teahouse, and sat near his father; the father watched him, but did not recognize his own son; too much time had passed, and the boy had concealed the star upon his forehead.

The boy returned home. 'Tell me,' the Sorceress asked. Did one speak to you in the tea house?'

'Yes,' the boy said. 'My father spoke to me.'

'He asked me where I was from.'

'Return to the teahouse tomorrow,' the Sorceress said. 'And stay twice as long. If your father speaks to you, tell him where you live and invite him for dinner.'

The boy did as she said, and the father, not knowing who the boy was, came to dinner. It was a large, well prepared feast, and at the end of it the sorceress slipped a silver spoon in the guest's pocket.

Soon she made a fuss; she realized that the spoon was missing. And eventually the guest realized that the spoon was in his pocket, and he revealed it to those who had invited him to eat.

'I'm no thief,' the man said, 'and I shall prove this to you.'

The man then led them to a place in the fields where the horses slept. And there they found the grave of a woman.

'Speak to her,' the man said.

'Why?' the brother and sister asked.

'This woman promised me that she would bear me a son and a daughter. Her sister changed my children into animals; one dog, and one cat. Raise this woman from the ground; she is not guilty of her sister's acts.'

'Let us call her sisters, and they shall tell us what happened,' the man said.

'These are your children,' the sorceress said. 'All that this woman in the ground promised you became true. And I am your sister-in-law.'

That's the story. We are here and they are there.

Do you remember World War II?

IA: I was around 5 years old; I was born in 1937. There was no bombing, but we ran away, and we hid in the grape fields. The older people hid their children; they thought, 'if we are killed, our children shall live.' [LINK to Isak speaking](#)

My father also told me that when the first Serbians came down here, around 1937, he worked with them, and that during the war he saved some of them.

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Five hundred years ago, many people lived here, and the Roma always worked for them. That's why Roma know so many languages. I speak Albanian perfectly, because I worked with them for so long. This is also why I speak Serbian, and Turkish.

Where did your father tell you the Roma were from?

IA: Where did the Roma come from? India. Many people speak about these origins.

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*“Before we couldn’t attend school,
because no one respected us;
they didn’t care if we knew
anything at all.”*



Ilijas Čuljandji
[Prizren](#)

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of this interview.

A note on Ilijas’s surname, Čuljandji: this word, in Turkish, means of peasant origin, and is a pejorative term, likely assigned by a Turkish official. Please refer to Orhan Galjus’s Roma of Kosovo: the Forgotten Victims. Published in the Patrin Web Journal: <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/>

IC: My name is Čuljandji- Ilijas. I’m 68 years old. I was born in Prizren. All my family is from here - my grandfather, everyone. We are all from the same street - Fatatarde.



Ilijas and his grandfather, a Roma dervish

Fatatarde means blacksmith street. In this Mahala, in the front of every home there was a shop, and all worked as blacksmiths. [LINK to Ilijas speaking](#)

My father died when I was a child - in 1942. But I finished school.

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I finished school as a teacher of *Privreda**. But it was very difficult, because I had to travel to Mitrovica* to sit for my exams. I had no money to get there, so I kept working as a blacksmith. I made knives. I'm one of the more active Roma; I started my first job in 1969.

(*Privreda - Serbian - Agriculture.)

(*Mitrovica lies 77 Kilometers north of Prizren - a three hour bus ride.)



When we bought our flag,* my daughter's husband was here. His name was Nisret Sehiri, and there was another one; his name was Slobodan Veberski. They were in England in 1969; there, they could say whatever they wanted.

(* IC refers here to the Hedenebiri - the Roma national flag.)



I had a friend, and we both worked together. We still work. When I began work as a blacksmith, I liked working with the Albanians, because I learned a lot from them. They were interested in us.

After Djurdjevdan, the most important thing for Roma is the day of the flag. We have the flag of our religion*, which is 640 years old, and we have a newer flag* for us (for Roma), which is only 64 years old. I'm sorry to say it, but I don't know much about the new flag.

(* This holiday - flag day, or Hedenebiri - seems exclusive to the Roma of Prizren, though other Roma throughout Kosovo openly display the younger flag IC refers to in their weddings, festivals and parties. Other Roma in Kosovo do not recognize or celebrate a holiday for this flag.)

(* The older (640 years) flag IC refers to is a simple green flag with Koranic calligraphy; this flag was introduced by the Ottomans and was absorbed by Prizren's Roma.)

I have four sons and two daughters; I have 14 grandchildren. Before we couldn't attend school, because no one respected us; they didn't care if we knew anything at all.

On Roma Origins:

IC: As far as I know, the Roma came from India. Roma were Indians, but they had troubles; they had to escape. They moved around, from place to place, and when some Roma wished to return to India, the Indians would not have them.

There are Roma all around the world: in Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Egypt and other places. There are Roma in Turkey... and we all have the same traditions.

I've heard some say that we are from Egypt. One day on television I saw Ibrahim Tatlas.* He asked a Roma - Where are the Roma from? And the Roma said: we are from India. But when we worked in the fields of cotton, people would tell us that we were Egyptians. [LINK to Ilijas speaking](#)

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(*Ibrahim Tatlas is one of the most popular musicians in Turkey.)

We know exactly where our language is from. And we are still searching, trying to discover more about our language. We have many words that the Albanians took*.

(*This is an unsubstantiated claim. While Kosovo Roma have many words borrowed from the Serbian and Albanian languages, there are very few Roma words, if any, that were borrowed by Serbian and Albanian. The words IC refers to may be originally Turkish; Romanes, Albanian and Serbian are rich with Turkish loan-words from the 500-year Turkish occupation of southeastern Europe.)

I am Muslim; we celebrate two Bajrams, Ramazan* and nothing more.

(*Ramazan - Turkish/ Romanes for Ramadan)

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Aferdita and her baby son, Kujtim, April 2003

Aferdita Miftari

[Kosovo Polje](#)

This interview was conducted in the Albanian language.

Everyone in Aferdita's home talked about the Šutka refugee camp, outside of Skopje, Macedonia. Aferdita left the camp two years ago, to return to Kosovo Polje; and now the camp was back in the news. UNHCR announced that the camp would be closed; the remaining refugees, all Roma or Ashkali from communities across Kosovo, would either be accommodated in Šutka town or be returned to Kosovo. UNHCR stated that the camp was, after four years, unlivable, due to sewage and water issues. The camp would be closed; no one would be allowed to remain.

Some of the Roma went back to Kosovo. Some protested in front of the UN and OSCE offices in Skopje. A large number didn't. With the last of their money, they chartered buses and headed to Greece.

They had no documents, no passports and no visas; the Greeks would not let them in. They settled down in the no-man's-land between the two countries, and they waited to be let in while the temperature climbed and the ground around them turned to mud. It was their intention to draw attention to their plight, and it worked; the press paid attention for a day or two. For all I know, there may still be Roma camped out there.

It's easy to blame UNHCR or other groups; Aferdita doesn't mention blame, but she does mention her friends in that camp. The camp's fate had more to do with the camp's political leadership. Their leaders convinced the camp refugees - desperate and scared to

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the last man, woman and child - that if they held out, if they refused to return to Kosovo, if they refused to learn Macedonian, if they made things difficult - they'd eventually get out. They'd get to Western Europe. They'd get to America. The lucky fates of very few Roma convinced them.

But it never happened. Their leaders gambled and convinced them that they'd fixed the game, but they hadn't.

How old are you?

AO: I am 27 years old.

Are you married?

AO: Yes.

Do you have any children?

AO: Yes. Three.

What happened to you during the 1999 war?

AO: First we were at home, and then we fled, and stayed in the tents*. [LINK to Aferdita speaking](#) It was very bad. We had nowhere else to stay; we were afraid to stay in our homes. It was raining; it was cold. [LINK to Aferdita speaking](#)

(* The tents that AO refers to were temporary tent shelters established on the grounds of a Serbian primary/secondary school in Kosovo Polje. At its maximum, in mid July of 1999, Roma seeking shelter there numbered 6,000 +. The Roma were eventually relocated en masse to the Plemetina camp, while other Roma fled abroad.)

Who brought those tents?

AO: Somebody brought them; I don't know who. There weren't many tents - around 20. Some had them, and some had none. There were a lot of people. We were camped in a schoolyard, and some stayed in the school.

Was there enough food?

Did anyone provide you with food?

AO: Some organization brought food, but there wasn't enough. We brought food from our homes.

How long did you stay there?

AO: We stayed there for two weeks.

Were there Albanians in the tents?

AO: No. (Reference: then we*) Soon we fled - to Macedonia. First we stayed in people's homes, and then in tents again - at a place called Stenkovec*. Later we went to Probistip*, and lastly to Šutka.* When we returned home, some people gave us blankets. [LINK to Aferdita speaking](#)

(* Stenkovec 1 camp was a temporary refugee camp established by the UNHCR near Skopje, Macedonia. The camp population - 40,000 at its highest point - was mainly Albanian, but with some Roma and Ashkalija. Many of the Roma who went through Stenkovec were forced by Albanian refugees to register as



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Albanians with UNHCR, to bolster the number of Albanians who had been expelled. Roma in the camp were subjected to threats, taunts, and physical assaults.

The attempted lynching of three Roma males by Albanians ended the Roma presence in the camp; one of the Roma was randomly identified as a 'war criminal' by an Albanian refugee from Podujevo. Several aid workers rescued the three, and took them to a different building in the camp; the building was later besieged by 5000 Albanians who threatened to kill the Roma. The personal intervention of Chris Hill, the American Ambassador to Macedonia, calmed the situation; all of Stenkovec's Roma were then removed, for their own safety. For more information, please refer to Roma in the Kosovo Conflict, published by the European Roma Rights Center <http://www.errc.org>



(* Šutka is the nickname for Šuto Orizari, Macedonia. Šutka, with a population of almost 40,000, is the largest concentration of Roma in Europe, if not the world.)

Did you have any problems with Macedonians?

AO: No.

And what about (Macedonian) Roma?

AO: Everything was okay; we didn't have any problems with them. Roma from Skopje (Shutka) lived separately from us.

How long did you stay in Macedonia?

AO: We were there for roughly two years. From those tents in Macedonia, they* constructed camp houses for us. It was cleaner; we had a bathroom and a bedroom. It was nice. Later we heard that the situation in Kosovo had improved, so we returned.

[LINK to Aferdita speaking](#)

(* UNHCR established the Šutka camp; the camp was managed by the American Red Cross.)

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Ferida Hasani
[Preoce](#)

“My grandfather told me about my uncle. During World War II he sat through all the night, alone, keeping guard. My grandmother prepared food and brought it to him; he was sleeping in the train station. She searched and searched, and finally found him. And when she did, she said; ‘my son, you may sleep, and I will stand guard.’”

FH: My name is Ferida; everybody calls me Fida.

What were your parent’s names?

FH: My mother’s name was Hava, and my father’s, Bajram.

What kind of Roma are you?

FH: we are Kovači.*

(* FH uses the Serbian word for Bugurdjije - Blacksmiths.)

Do you know about your parent’s childhoods?

Their childhoods happened in wartime. They were very poor; they were shepherds. They went from village to village, working privately, and after they married they had nine children - five daughters and four sons. My older sister died; then we were eight.

[LINK to Ferida speaking](#)



When you were born?

FH: February 12, 1952.

On marriage:

FH: Firstly, somebody from the groom’s family will go to ask someone from the bride’s family if they will give their daughter for marriage. A representative from the bride’s family will visit the groom’s house, to investigate where and how the girl will live. Those to be married didn’t get to see each other before. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

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The groom's representative and other relatives will go, with a bottle of liquor, to the bride's family, and they'll make an agreement on the wedding. Before it was good, but today it's better. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

Many Roma pay a bride-price (Dowry). Is this true? [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

FH: Yes, that's true, but our sort of Roma (Bugurdjije) pay almost nothing.
[LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

What were your grandmother's and grandfather's names?

FH: My grandfather was Halil, and my grandmother, Duda.

Do you know about their lives? Were they educated?

FH: They never went to school; they were also shepherds.

How old were you when you were married?

FH: When I was married, I will tell you - I lived in Pristina then, and I cared for two children. I needed to work; we were very poor.

Where are you born?

FH: I was born in Lipljan.

How long have you lived in Preoce?

FH: 36 or 37 years.

On Herdeljez:

FH: How many males we have, that's how many sheep we buy. After the sacrifice of the sheep, we take the blood of the sheep and put it on our children's foreheads, that they may be happy and live for many, many years. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)



I also celebrate Saint Alija.

Can you tell us something about that?

FH: The Saint Alija approaches his sister every day. He asks; 'is today my day?'
[LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

Were she to say, 'Yes, Alija - today is your day,' Saint Alija would burn us all. Alija's sister is very patient; she never tells him when his day is. She tells him:

[LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

'No, my brother. It's still too early for your day.' And when the day passes, Saint Alija realizes that his day was today; he grows very angry. The storms will appear in the sky.

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'Why, my sister, did you not tell me my day arrived?' His sister will answer that she did not know. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

My father and mother told me this story, this custom; many celebrate this day. I celebrated before I was married, and later my husband celebrated this day as well. Saint Alija's sister is very kind to always lie to him.

And then there is Vasilica.

On this day we sacrifice goats and chickens.

We wake very early, to prepare for this day; we bake cookies and prepare food. We make Sarma, and we stay awake all night and sing the song of Saint Vasilija.

On Christmas:

FH: There is much sharing among us. We prepare a good meal, and all in the family must come to the table.

We catch birds, sacrifice them and dry them out so that we may share the meat among the children - so that they may fly through their lives.

My grandfather told me about my uncle. During World War II he sat through all the night, alone, keeping guard. My grandmother prepared food and brought it to him; he was sleeping in the train station. She searched and searched, and finally found him. And when she did, she said;

'My son, you may sleep, and I will stand guard.' [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

How were their lives then? [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

FH: Very bad. Roma were always slaves. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

How was the Roma relationship with Albanians and Serbs?

FH: They were cursed by both sides. Roma are always suffering, feeling bad, because of others.

Roma never wanted to be rich; they always searched for happiness in any place, and this is all. [LINK to Ferida speaking](#)

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“The customs are the same. The only difference is that our families didn’t have to spend a lot for the bride price, like today. In the past a bride cost only one or two horses.”

Djemilje Emini
[Priluzje](#)



DE: I am 67 years old.

How many children do you have?

DE: I have two daughters and three sons.

Can you tell us about your life? How was it before, and how is it now?

ED: Before it was much better. Every (Herdeljez) we’d go out to pick flowers and willows*. The next morning we’d go to the river,* to swim and sing. We’d bake; we’d slaughter lambs. We always place willows in the lamb’s mouth; we bake fresh willows and nettles in the bread.

We’d all bathe in water with the willows and flowers we picked.

(*Kukubreg and Dren are mixed with water in a cauldron and boiled over a fire; members of the family ceremonially wash themselves in this.)

(* the river ED refers to is the Sitnice. This river now lies in an Albanian area, and is off-limits to Roma.)



The next holiday we’d celebrate is Veljigdan (Easter).

What do you do on Veljigdan?

ED: We’d paint eggs, for the children. We bake bread and slaughter a Čuran (turkey); we bathe the children. On Vasilica we have to stay awake the whole night to prepare Sarma*; it must be ready for the morning feast.

(*Sarma is a traditional Balkan meal; cabbage leaves stuffed with ground meat and rice.)

And you sell the Sarma*?

ED: Yes - we sell Sarma and we take a lot of gold (money) for it.

(*The guests that arrive at a family's home on Vasilica ceremonially pay the host for the Sarma; the poor guests are given it for free.)



How do you sell it?

ED: The guest asks the host to name the price. 'How much money do you wish to give?' I'll ask. They say a price and if it's high, I tell them that we'll take half that amount. If they agree to the price, we begin the meal.

About your wedding - did you meet your husband before, or even know him?

ED: No, we didn't know each other. I lived so near to him, but I didn't know that I was betrothed to him. My mother gave me to him; I am still here, with him.

[LINK to Djemilje speaking](#)

My father-in-law was a soldier; he came, on behalf of his son, to ask for my hand. I was engaged for ten days. We married when he (the father-in-law) could return for the wedding.

Could you us about the wedding customs you followed?

ED: The customs are the same. The only difference is that our families didn't have to spend a lot for the bride price, like today. In the past a bride cost only one or two horses.

[LINK to Djemilje speaking](#)

Did you finish school?

ED: No. Back then we didn't have schools.

What was the name of your mother?

ED: My mother's name was Raba; my father's, Ljatos.

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Miza Emini
[Priluzje](#)

*“Some Serbs were killed, because they were soldiers
- but they were so young.”*

*“I swear on my children, (my husband) was going to work so far
away - in Zagreb, in Vučitrn - and now, we still live in hardship.
What did we get out of it? What did we get?”*

Where were you born?

ME: Livadje. I am 65 years old.

How was your childhood in Livadje? We spoke with the Butić family there.

ME: They are my brothers. Livadje - it was really hard to live there before. My father worked in the fields to earn some money. It was very hard.

Your father was a blacksmith. How did he become one?

ME: He made a lot of different tools.

On Vasilica:

ME: We wake early in the morning - at 3 O'clock, to give the goose some water. After, we kill it. Then we make Sarma.

Do you sing special songs on Vasilica?

ME: No, we don't. We are real Roma - Bugurdjije.

How many children do you have?

ME: I have eight children - three sons and five daughters.

Did you attend school?

ME: No, I didn't.

Can you tell us about your wedding?

ME: My father-in-law came to pick me up with a horse and a donkey. And when I came here, I saw cars for the first time. [LINK to Miza speaking](#)

Did you know your future husband?

ME: I knew my husband. Yes, I knew my husband, otherwise I would never have married him. [LINK to Miza speaking](#) My husband's family came to pick me up with a horse and wagon. I had one brother, and he was a teacher; he was from Livadje as well. He became very angry because of the wagon; he said they were supposed to bring some other wagon. My brother put blankets and clothes in the wagon for me (they hadn't brought any), and so I came to this village.

What work did your husband have?

ME: I swear on my children, he was going to work so far away - in Zagreb, in Vučitrn (Albanian: Vushtrri) - and now, we still live in hardship. What did we get out of it? What did we get? [LINK to Miza speaking](#)

When you first came to Priluzhje, were there many Roma here?

There were four houses when I first came here; now there are around 50.

Can you tell us about the 1999 war? Did you know it would happen?

ME: Some people knew, and some didn't. We were so afraid. During the bombing, my daughters came to my home. My husband told them not to be frightened; he said he would stay awake the whole night. The next morning he was still awake, and his eyes were so red. 'I swear on my children, you'll die if you do this,' and I was right; he died that evening. [LINK to Miza speaking](#)

Did you eventually flee?

ME: No. We stayed here.

Did you sleep in the shelters?

ME: No, thanks to God, we stayed here. NATO passed here, but they did nothing here. They were always going somewhere else. Some Serbs were killed, because they were soldiers - but they were so young. [LINK to Miza speaking](#)

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“During the last war, I stayed here, with my wife. The whole Mahala was empty. We were here - just us and the dogs.”



Danuš Dubovići
[Kosovo Polje](#)

LINK to [Video of Interview](#)

DD: My name is Danuš Dubovići; I am from Kosovo Polje. We lived in Bresje*, for 45 years, and then we moved here.

(* Bresje is a Serb/ Roma enclave one kilometer south of Kosovo Polje.)

My father's name was Dilji; He was also from Bresje. We are Roma Bugurdjije, and we are blacksmiths.

Did you attend school?

DD: In the past, we would finish only four or five years of primary school. My grandchildren attend Albanian schools. Before, we led difficult lives.

Tell us about your wedding. Did you know your wife before the marriage?

DD: Before (the wedding), we didn't know each other. My father told me I was to be married, with some girl, and I had to do that. But now, it's so much better, because the boy and girl know each other.

Where did the Bugurdjije originate?

DD: We are simply blacksmiths. I am Muslim.

How many children do you have?

DD: I have seven children.

During the last war, I stayed here, with my wife. The whole Mahala was empty. We were here; just us and the dogs. [LINK to Danuš speaking](#)

We celebrate Djurdjevdan. But to be honest, I don't celebrate it anymore. If my children would like to celebrate Vasilica, that would be nice.

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“Let me tell you about myself. I got married, and I had no idea who my husband was. We had never met one another. His family came to my home, to ask for my hand.”



Kadiše Curkoli
[Kosovo Polje](#)

LINK to [Video of Interview](#)

Where are you from?

KC: I was born in Pristina, and I lived there with my family for a long time. My family comes from there.

How old are you?

KC: I'm 74 years old. I have nine children: six daughters and three sons.

Let me tell you about myself. I got married, and I had no idea who my husband was. We had never met one another. His family came to my home, to ask for my hand. My father said to me:

'Come out to meet some Roma from the village. They've asked about you, for their son.'

He said that because we were from the city. They were from Slovinje* Village.

(* Slovinje lies 20 kilometers south of Pristina, in Lipljan/ Lipjan municipality.)

Soon another family came to ask about me, for their son. I didn't know anything about them. My father told them to return soon, and they would make arrangements for the marriage.

When I heard everything, I began to cry; I was too young to be married.

[LINK to Kadiše speaking](#)

How old you were when you were married?

KC: I was 14 years old. I had six brothers; my mother died during the Second World War. But I'll tell you about that later.

After the family came to ask my father for me, my cousin came to my home, and my father told him about the decision he made. My cousin said that he would find a good place to hold the wedding.

Two weeks later, my husband's family officially asked for my hand. I was engaged for two years, and one day my husband's family came to pick me up. They paid my dowry with Albanian money.*

(* Kosovo was under Italian military control during the Second World War; the borders the Italians set corresponded with the Albanian idea of a 'Greater Albania-' the equivalent of the Greek 'Megali Idea.' The Italian fascists encouraged Albanian nationalism as a counterbalance to the Slavs and Greeks; they allowed the Albanians their own currency.)



My wedding happened during the Second World War, and we encountered many problems on the roads, but we always solved those problems.

I have been married now for sixty years, and I've never had any big problems with my husband.

A bride must cry. The next day - a Friday - at midnight, she will color her hair with henna, and on Sunday the bride's parents-in-law will give her new clothes, and gold jewelry.

We didn't wear a white dress, like today; we wore *dimije**. When the bride first approaches her new home, her new mother-in-law will hold for her a pot full of sugared water. The bride will place her hand in the water, and then place her hand on the door.

(*Dimije are traditional baggy trousers for Muslim women. This dress was introduced by the Ottoman Turks.)

What does that signify?

KC: We believe that, if the bride does this, she will not have any problems with her new family, and her husband.

On World War II:

KC: My father fought in the war - in a place called Lapatica*. He was there for only six weeks. A bomb fell near him, but he was very lucky; the bomb simply buried itself in the ground. Two years after the war ended, he died.

(*Donja Lapatica, Podujevo Municipality)

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We were very frightened (of the Germans). All the children cried. I saw my mother, dead, on the street. But we didn't have problems with the Germans for long; my father was a rich man.

We stayed in Pristina for the entire war, but we were the only ones there; the Mahala was empty.

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*"All I remember is that
we didn't have any bread to eat.
As you see, we have this war now, but we
also have food to eat and clothes to wear.
Before, we had nothing."*



Djafer Čuljandji
[Prizren](#)

A note on Djafer's surname, Čuljandji: this word, in Turkish, means of peasant origin, and is a pejorative term, likely assigned by a Turkish official. Please refer to Orhan Galjus's Roma of Kosovo: the Forgotten Victims. Published in the Patrin Web Journal: <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/>

*"Roma celebrate Djurdjevdan,
because we have always been very poor.
The winters were hard; it was very cold,
and we didn't have wood to burn, like now.
Even those working as blacksmiths were poor.
So Roma celebrated Djurdjevdan because
it meant that the spring was finally here."*

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview.

How old are you?

DC: I am 68 years old.

What was your father's name?

DC: Salji.

And your grandfather's name?

DC: Sadri

Were your grandfather and father from Prizren?

DC: Yes; they came from Prizren.

Can you tell us about their lives?

DC: What can I tell you? They told me many things about their lives. They were blacksmiths. In this Mahala - Terzi Mahala - we had a lot of blacksmiths.

In the past, all the people were poor. We had 65 blacksmiths in Terzi. They made knives, door knockers, door handles and other pieces. The best blacksmiths were Arlija,* and they made axes. Their work was very professional, and we called them big blacksmiths. Prizren's Roma are usually small blacksmiths, because they make such small things.
[LINK to Djafer speaking](#)



Did you become a blacksmith?

DC: No. I worked as a blacksmith under my father, but when my father died I began to make windows. I was in Pula (Istria, in Croatia). I stayed there for ten years, and there I finished primary school. I had one older brother, and he told me I should get married, and I did that. I told my brother: 'Okay.'

I was 22 years old when I was married.

Did you know your future wife?

DC: I knew her, but I'd never spoken with her. Our tradition is that the older people in the family will visit the girl, because they know all the families - their reputations as well. They ask the question. I sent an older cousin to her house.

What was their answer?



DC: They agreed with the match, because our family had a good reputation.

What was the bride-price?

DC: We still had to pay... and with that money, we could have bought a nice home in Terzi Mahala.

Tell us about when you went to pick up your bride.

DC: In the past, we had a carriage and horses. The carriage was covered. When a man went to pick up his bride, everyone - uncles and aunts - came with him. When my family went, we had a limousine.

All the Roma in Prizren speak Romanes; we also have Ashkalija here, but they are also Roma. They come from the villages, from Albanian villages, and in those places they had to speak Albanian. They understand Romanes, but they cannot speak it.

On holidays:

DC: We are Muslims here; we celebrate Bajram and Djurdjevdan.

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Roma celebrate Djurdjevdan, because we have always been very poor. The winters were hard; it was very cold, and we didn't have wood to burn, like now. Even those working as blacksmiths were poor. So Roma celebrated Djurdjevdan because it meant that the spring was finally here. We sacrifice a lamb; that is our tradition.

Do you collect Kukubreg and Dren, like the Roma do in other places?

DC: Yes, we do that. We have one place (a Turbe) where the women draw water. If a woman has no children (due to infertility), then she must go there. The other women will mix the flowers with the water for her. [LINK to Djafer speaking](#) They would go there at 3 or 4 O'clock. The Turbe will bring you good health.

In Gracanica, some Roma celebrate Vasilica. Do you celebrate Vasilica here?

DC: We didn't celebrate Vasilica before; no one did. But my neighbors began to celebrate Vasilica, and so I started to celebrate as well. But we don't have to.

Do you know about Roma history?

DC: Listen: Roma are from India. Everyone in this Mahala comes from India, and from India they went to Turkey.

Do you remember the Second World War?

DC: I cannot remember any bombing, any violence. All I remember is that we didn't have any bread to eat. As you see, we have this war now, but we also have food to eat and clothes to wear. Before, we had nothing.

Did you have problems with Serbs before?*

DC: No, we had no problems with the Serbs.

(* The Serbian population of Prizren town has almost entirely fled. The Serbian quarter of the city, immediately south of the Prizren Bistrica River and overlooking the town from Shadërvan, was entirely looted and burned soon after the war ended in June of 1999. German KFOR assisted in a mass evacuation of the town's remaining Serbs in July of 1999; the evacuation was led by the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije.



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DC: When Tito was alive, everyone worked. We had many Roma in school.

What did you think about the last war?

DC: It was a really bad situation to be in.

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*“All the Roma left.
In Pristina we had 3,000 Roma,
but now,
not one family remains.”*

Redjo Skenderi
[Plemetina Village](#)



Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview.

Redjo laid on his son’s couch for the winter, buried in wool blankets. The past few seasons have passed like this. His breathing is labored; he says his heart is weak. Redjo’s son, Medo, cares for him; Medo also cares for several children in Plemetina. He is their father now.

Some of the children are orphaned; some have parents who are too poor to feed or clothe them. In a place where social assistance does not exist, communities care for their youngest members. This tradition once existed in America and Western Europe; in some pockets of the east, communities continue to fill in the blanks the state has left. They usually do it better than the government.

RS: My father’s name was Demalj.

I was five years old when he died. I worked as a servant in the homes of Serbs and Albanians. We had to work; we were poor, and we had to earn money for food. Some Roma worked as blacksmiths. My mother was 25 years old when my father died.

[LINK to Redjo speaking](#)

Before, we didn’t now who we would be married to. If you went to ask for a girl’s hand, you were not allowed to see so much as her little finger. If a boy’s father and mother liked a girl, then the boy has to like her too.

Have long have you lived in Plemetina?

RS: I was born here.

Where were you during the NATO campaign?

RS: All the Roma left. In Pristina we had 3,000 Roma, but now, not one family remains. Many have left; some to Serbia, and some to Germany. [LINK to Redjo speaking](#)

Can you tell us about Ashkalija and Egyptians?

RS: We were all blacksmiths. Egyptians didn’t exist before. As for Ashkalija, they learned Albanian, and no longer wished to speak Romanes.

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How old are you?

RS: I am 75 years old.

Do you remember the Second World War?

RS: It was different then. For one soldier, the Germans would kill an entire village. But Roma could go everywhere; now, if we go somewhere, the Albanians make things difficult for us.

[LINK to Redjo speaking](#)

Tito gave us all our rights. The right to everything.

How old were you when you were married?

RS: When I was married, I was too young.

[LINK to Redjo speaking](#)



**A communist flag, a case of beer and a sacrificial ram:
Islam, Yugoslav-style. The Bajram, Plemetina, 1960s.**

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"We Roma are not a people who desire our own country. When we talk, we talk only about how are rights are imperiled."

"I cannot imagine these parents who don't allow their children to attend school."

Hamit Šerifovic
[Gracanica](#)

Where are you from?

HS: Gracanica. I am 46 years old; I'm Gracanica's Roma leader. I became the leader here after the 1999 war.

Between the 1999 conflict and now, has the Roma situation here changed?

HS: There are some differences. Before the 1999 war, Roma leaders would not discuss the problems of their communities, and most importantly, the problems of their youth.

Now, this has changed. I communicate with the Serbian Government about our conditions in Kosovo.

In Prizren there's a local Roma NGO, but they support only one Roma leader: Hadji Zulfa*. Hadji Zulfa is a well-known man, but he needs to understand that there are many more Roma people than the Roma communities in Prizren. There are Roma in Preoce, Laplje Selo... there are many communities, and we must help our youth.



Roma here aren't very educated when it comes to politics.

(*Hadji Zulfa calls himself 'the leader of Kosovo's Roma.' Outside of Prizren, few know of his existence. Zulfa acts as a political mouthpiece for various Albanian political parties; Prizren Roma joke about his previous trade - driving a taxi.)

Is there a big difference in the way Roma regard education, between the 1999 war and now?

HS: Before the war I completed primary school at Kralj Milutin,* and my children attend the same school. The biggest problem is that too many Roma are unemployed. No money; can you imagine that your child has an ice-cream in his hand, and my son has none? He'd just look at your child. [LINK to Hamit speaking](#)

(* Kralj Milutin is a primary/ secondary Serbian school in Gracanica.)

I cannot imagine these parents who don't allow their children to attend school. Many Roma children would like to attend school, [LINK to Hamit speaking](#) but their parents cannot afford it*. Our government has to assist us with everything. We Roma are not a people who desire our own country. When we talk, we talk only about how are rights are imperiled.

(* HS does not refer to school fees; instead, he is referring to more basic issues, such as the cost of books, book bags, pens and other needed school equipment. Clothing is also an important issue; many Roma families are too poor to afford good clothes for their children, and as a consequence the children are ridiculed.



Hygiene is also an issue that HS does not touch upon - because he and his family have an indoor toilet. Many Roma families have only outside water taps; in the winter, it is impossible to keep adequately clean. Racist teachers use the hygiene issue as a way to exclude Roma children from school - 'they're dirty, and that means that they may have lice...' and racism takes on the guise of a public health issue. A Roma remedial education center in northern Kosovo brilliantly removed this issue by installing showers for any Roma child that wished to use them.)

What do you mean when you say that our rights are imperiled?

HS: We don't have the right to work.

How many Roma in Gracanica are unemployed?

HS: About 85 homes.

How many Roma refugees live in Gracanica?

HS: We have ten refugee families here. They came from Pristina. Gracanica had 200 Roma homes, but only 68 Roma homes remain. In 65 Roma homes, Serbs live there. Those Roma left, but the Serbs are now paying them rent for their homes. Those Roma won't come back.

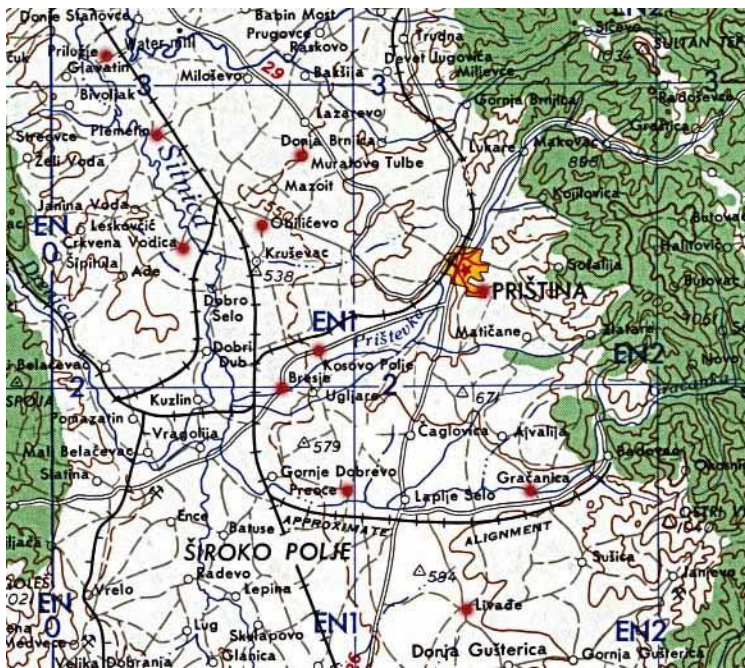
What is your opinion of the Roma situation now?

HS: It's not good, and I'm talking about finances - the economy.

What's your opinion of the relationship between Roma and Albanians?

HS: If we speak of Kosovo youth, there is the possibility of working together. But the older people, those who worked before 1999 want nothing to do with us.

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Henry Shikluna

[Pristina](#)

“Whenever I’ve gone to settlements and spoken to women, I got more, better advice, a better view on the situation than from the men. Because they spoke about real things: about health, about education, about the children, they spoke about the reality of the situation. The men tend to think in terms of power.”

Mr. Shikluna was interviewed in downtown Pristina, during a roundtable discussion on Roma human rights issues.

HS: Up until a few months ago I was still working with the Council of Europe (CoE). I am now retired and am working for the same organization but as a volunteer: as a coordinator for Roma activities. My work is making sure there is a certain amount of coordination in the CoE, between certain sectors that are working on these issues, and also to keep contact with... Roma NGOs in order to promote the interests of the Roma population.

How do you find the ideas to do this work?

HS: Well I don’t find the ideas, the idea was a decision taken by the CoE already a number of years ago, to appoint... there were a lot of sectors within the organization dealing with Roma issues, and then there was a lot of new organizations like the OSCE that were dealing with it, the European Union, that got suddenly interested in Roma

affairs because of the enlargement (the EU will soon admit as member states Eastern European countries with significant Roma populations) Obviously the enlargement meant a very big Roma population, in central and eastern Europe, in countries that were going to become members, so the secretary-general of the organization thought that it would be a very good thing to have a person whose job would be to insure a coordination in all these activities...

One important point, I think, is relations with Roma NGOs because it is they who today are mostly doing the work to promote the interests of Roma. For example, I am very much in contact with the Roma International Congress, with the International Romany Union, and also with a lot of national NGOs, I know personally many of the people that run national NGOs, for example now when we go to Macedonia I will be meeting people I know there from national NGOs in Macedonia. That is my work.

In all your work, tell us what the main Roma problems are, if you could tell us something about that -

HS: I don't think that there is one... well the one big problem is obviously that this is a population which is totally marginalized by society. The result is that they have very poor living conditions, very poor education, high unemployment, very bad reporting in the media, so in actual fact it is not one problem but a whole mass of problems, they are all resulting from one thing and that is that they are a population that is looked at with great contempt and great suspicion, and I mean for a lot of people they do not know the Roma at all. [LINK to Henry speaking](#)

I mean even the sight of a Roma raises suspicion that they are going to be assaulted; they are going to be stolen (robbed) and all these sorts of things. What is, first of all, needed, is a very big change in the mentality of what we call the majority and vis a vis the Roma so that the majority can start seeing them as ordinary human beings so that they can actually live together with them.

There is, of course, one point that has to be made and that is that the Roma, as well, have got certain habits which they have to change. Because it is not simply a question of contempt on the part of the society, but also a certain part of the suspicion of the Roma themselves vis a vis the society, which is quite justified.

I can understand why people who have been marginalized for so long, I mean in some countries they were used as slaves, in Romania they were slaves, and in other countries they were a sort of semi-slaves, serfs, they were used as serfs in Russia for example, so obviously these people have grown up to be suspicious of all of the rest of society, and also they became rather dependent.

Today, in many Roma settlements, children grow up believing that they will never, never get a job. So obviously they grow up without education and without a job, and then the rest of society says, look at them, we have to pay for them, because they receive social services because they are unemployed. But the reason they are unemployed is the fault of society in the first place.

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This conference (this interview took place at an OSCE/ UNHCR Roma discussion panel) was a whole series of workshops to discuss the human rights issues, and also the problems of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians... there is, in regard to this population, a different problem to that of other countries; in other countries Roma are disliked just because they are Roma, here it is not simply that, it is also because there are a lot of suspicions between the Kosovo population and the Roma population in regard to their (Roma) behavior during the war. I mean they are all uniquely suspicious, but when you have a population that is already suspected, the minute the conflict starts they are the first ones to be blamed.

It was important to carry out these workshops on the question of human rights, on the question of tolerance, on the question of different ethnic groups living together, in order to be able to make a new future instead of remaining constantly in conflict, constantly in conflict with each other. And it was important that this was done not just in the capital city, but that they were done in various towns because these problems exist at the local level. It is important that the people who are influenced are the local mayors, the local population, it is useless that, well not useless, alright, but you can influence the prime minister, you can influence the ministers, but it is more important to influence the mayors of the towns and villages and the population of the towns and villages, the various authorities of the towns and villages, because that is where the conflicts are, where the population, the discrimination arises, and that is where the Roma are living.

In the end, I would like to ask you, what is your recommendation? What is your recommendation for Roma?

HS: If I were to make just one recommendation, and I'm talking to Roma in general, throughout Europe, is that they need to realize that they have a role to play in society. There are between ten to twelve million Roma in Europe alone. This makes a big population. It's the population of quite a sizeable country. They've got their own culture, they've got their own traditions, and I think that they have every right to maintain them, but they have to come out of this tradition of dependency, and of course they have been held to dependency, but they must get out of that dependency, they must start using initiative to get out of the situation in which they are in.

(Roma) must, they really must educate their children, so that you get a new Roma population that is educated, and once they are educated... and if I might finish with something that I hold very important, they should in their structures give a bigger role to women. Because the Roma population is a very male-centered population and this is not a good thing. Because women have a lot of practical sense, and whenever I've gone to settlements and spoken to women, I got more, better advice, a better view on the situation than from the men. Because they spoke about real things: about health, about education, about the children, they spoke about the reality of the situation. The men tend to think in terms of power, [LINK to Henry speaking](#) and so on. So I think that this, in itself, would be one very big and important change in their communities.

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“When I was nine years old, my father bought me an accordion. I could have continued with school, but I liked my accordion very much.”

Čazim Jašari
[Bostan- Novo Brdo](#)

CJ: I was born here. I’m 49 years old. My father was born in Komarevci,* but my grandfather came from the Drenica*. My grandfather’s name was Ilijaz; during the Second World War, in 1942, he bought this house.

Many died then because they didn’t have enough to eat. My uncle told me this. Some members of our family moved to Kosovo Polje, some moved to Pristina, and some are abroad. [LINK to Čazim speaking](#)

(*Komarevci is Komorane, Glogovac/ Glogoc Municipality)

(*The Drenica - a region in central Kosovo comprised of the following municipalities: Srbica/ Skenderaj, Glogovac/ Glogoc, Klinë/ Klinë, and Mališevo/ Malishevë. The Drenica is almost entirely Albanian, and is considered to be the historical heartland of Kosovo Albanian nationalism; the Kosovo Liberation Army’s founders are all from the region.)



When your family moved to Bostan, were there other Roma here?

CJ: In our Mahala (in Bostan), there were some Bugurdjije Roma, but they left.

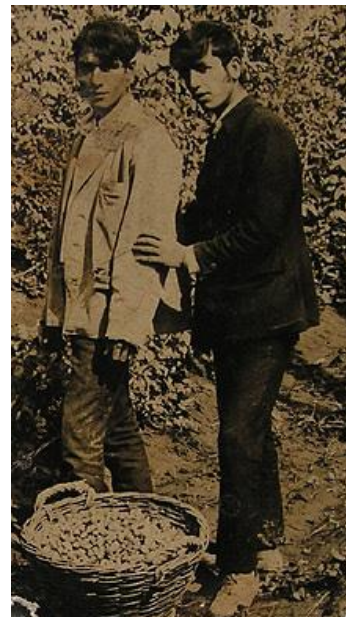
We are Ashkalija; my father and my grandfather as well. We married Roma girls, and now we speak Romanes. Before, I knew no Romanes.

Do you know any Egyptians?

CJ: I don’t know anything about Egyptians, but many people have told us that we are Egyptians.

What is the difference between Roma and Ashkalija?

CJ: I think there aren’t any big differences - we are all Roma. The only difference is the language. My father spoke perfect Albanian.



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Did you attend school?

CJ: I finished only four years of primary school. When I was nine years old, my father bought me an accordion. I could have continued with school, but I liked my accordion very much. [LINK to Čazim speaking](#)

How old were you when you were married?

CJ: I was 17 years old.

We celebrate Djurdjevdan and Bajram here; for Vasilica, some of us celebrate it, and some don't. On Djurdjevdan, we ceremonially bathe on that day, because we believe it will make us healthy. And we will kill a lamb that day, very early in the morning.

Why do you celebrate Djurdjevdan?

CJ: As I heard, many people died on that day, and for that we celebrate it.



Cazim plays the accordion for his fellow soldiers: 1960s

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*“We fled, and spent three or four months
in the tents in Kosovo Polje.
Forty people lived in a single tent.”*

*“It would be better for us to die
than to live like that again.”*

Vaide Bajrami
[Plemetina Camp](#)



**Mrs. Bajrami currently lives in the Plemetina IDP camp,
down the road from Plemetina village.**

LINK to [Video of Interview](#)

VB: I am 32 years old.

Are you from Plemetina?

VB: Yes.

What kind of Roma are you?

VB: We are Egyptians.

What is the difference between Egyptians and Roma?

VB: We are the same as Roma. We celebrate the same holidays; the only difference is that we are Egyptian.

Was your father Egyptian?

VB: My father's grandfather was Egyptian, and my mother's grandmother was Ashkalija.

Which holidays do Egyptians celebrate?

VB: We celebrate Djurdjevdan, Božić (Christmas), Vasilica and others.

VB: On Djurdjevdan we take water from the river, and we collect willows, nettles, and flowers.* We make a bath from the water and the willows. That evening we'll feast, and the next morning we'll kill a lamb.

(*Kukubreg and Dren)

On Vasilica:

VB: We rise very early: at 3 AM or so. We kill the geese and we prepare the Sarma.* The Sarma must be ready before the first visitors arrive; the Sarma will be placed on each plate on the table, and then we shall sell it.

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(* Sarma is a traditional Balkan dish - meat and rice wrapped in cabbage leaves.)

The bread we have baked will also be on the table, and hidden in that bread is a coin.

My mother will sell the Sarma to my father, and the guests. One thousand Dinars, she'll say; my father may say that the price is too high, and if that's so then she'll say, 'Fine. I'll sell it to another.'

The head of the home will start to eat, and someone will soon find the coin. They will be very happy; very lucky soon. After the meal, we'll visit our neighbors.

Do you know the songs sung on Vasilica?

VB: The older people knew; but now we don't know. I know only one song:

Vasilice, vasilice
You brought us
Geese, Geese
Turkey, Turkey
Every Gypsy cried
For the geese they killed
[LINK to Vaide speaking](#)

Do you have children?

VB: I have one girl and one boy, but I am divorced.*

(* By this, VB means that her husband has custody of her children. Roma males, according to tradition, will always assume control of the children in the event of divorce; the children will then be raised by his mother and the females of his household.)

Can you tell us about the customs of your weddings?

VB: First, the boy's mother and father will come to ask for the girl's hand - for example, mine. They will visit me, and if they like me, they invite their son to meet me as well. If we like each other, I will tell the boy's parents and mine that I agree with the match. And soon they will have to bring the dowry, and new clothes.

What is the average bride-price (here)?

VB: We Egyptians have the same prices (as Roma) - around 1500 Euro along with new clothes and gold.

What happens if you go to ask for someone's hand, but you don't have enough for the bride-price?

VB: If we - the bride and groom - like and love each other, then we girls will escape to the boy's house.

I did that as well. [LINK to Vaide speaking](#)

I lived at home: and I loved one boy. We were together (dating*) for one year, and his parents came to ask for my hand, but my father refused them.



One day I told him what time he should come to my home to get me. And I moved into his home*.

(* 'Dating' is carried out in secret among Roma youth. It does not involve western ideas of dating; there are no public displays of affection. Shame, or the potential for shame, defines Roma dating, and to a lesser extent, Albanian dating, though more in the villages than the cities. This is partly explained by the male-centeredness of both cultures; a man can theoretically date as many women as he likes, and still be viewed as a man, whereas a woman can only date one - her husband. After that, many in the community will view her as spoiled, or used.

VB is a divorcee; she found herself in a situation that she wished to extricate herself from, and she did. The rarity of this must be emphasized; for most Roma women, divorce is absolutely not an option. In cases of divorce, the culture and traditions dictate that the man will retain custody of the children - and they will be raised by his mother. More and more Roma women, however, are divorcing.)

Did your parents agree to this?

VB: Not in the beginning!

Did you attend school?

VB: I finished four years of primary school.

Why didn't you finish school?

VB: I went to an Albanian school. The situation was the same then as it is now.

We couldn't finish school. It was not possible.

Can you tell us about Plemetina during the last war?

VB: We fled, and spent three or four months in the tents* in Kosovo Polje*. Forty people lived in a single tent.

(* The tents that VB refers to was a temporary tent shelter established at a Serbian primary/ secondary school in Kosovo Polje. At its maximum, in mid July of 1999, Roma seeking shelter there numbered 6,000 +. The Roma were eventually relocated en masse to the Plemetina camp, while other Roma fled abroad. Many, like interviewee Aferdita Osmani, ended up in Šuto Orizari, Macedonia.)

VB: It would be better for us to die than to live like that again. After Kosovo Polje we were forced to move to Bresje,* where we stayed for another year. After that a humanitarian organization brought us here, to the Plemetina camp.

(* Bresje is a Roma/ Serb area one kilometer south of Kosovo Polje.)

I still live in the camp, and everything is fine there; we don't have any problems.

My mother's name is Fekrusa Hajrizi, and my father's name is Sevceti Bajrami.

My mother was ten years old when she was married; my father was twenty. My parents worked in the fields.

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**Beharica Jašari –
[Bostan- Novo Brdo](#)**

BJ: I was born in Janjevo*.

(*Janjevo is a predominantly Catholic town in Lipljan/ Lipjan municipality. Janjevo's population is Croatian, Roma, Ashkalija and Albanian; the Serbs fled after 1999.)

Have old were you when you were married?

BJ: I was 16 years old.

Did your father tell you to get married, or did you decide?

BJ: My father ordered me to get married.

We celebrated Vasilica in the home of my father, but we don't celebrate it here.

How did you celebrate Vasilica in your father's home?

BJ: We'd kill 9 Kurban. We'd prepare enough food for three days.

Do you have children?

BJ: Yes, I have.

Have many children do you have?

BJ: Some of my daughters are married, and some of them still live here.



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*“Did you have to pay
a large dowry?”*

*“No, I didn’t have to pay a lot.
I only had to bring
a case of beer.”*

Bajram Beriša
[Plemetina Village](#)

Mr. Beriša is an IDP from Crkvena Vodica.

BB: My name is Bajram; I come from Crkvena Vodica.

How old are you?

BB: I’m 36 years old.

I was born in Crkvena Vodica; we were there for 45 years. My father was born there, and my grandfather as well. But because of this war*, we had to come to Plemetina.

(* BB refers to the war in the present tense, not the past. With his situation - his freedom of movement, his security, and his status as an Internally Displaced Person - the 1999 war continues.

What kind of Roma are you?

BB: I am a Muslim.

We celebrate Božić, Bajram, the New Year (Vasilica) and Djurdjevdan. On Djurdjevdan we must buy a lamb. In the morning, the women and children go to the fields to collect willows and flowers; they sing Roma songs and Serbian songs. After the noon passes they must go to collect more willows.

On Vasilica we’ll rise early to kill the turkey, and a goose; then we’ll make the Sarma and bread. The visitors will come in the morning; we’ll have meat, and beer or tea. Then we’ll sell the Sarma at the next morning’s feast. The guests must ask me: what is the price? If I name a big price, and they are poor, then the Sarma must be cheaper.

Did you attend school?

BB: I finished five years of primary school. After that I had to work privately*, because my father became ill.

(* Private indicates manual/ day labor.)

How old you were you when you were married?

BB: I was 21 years old.

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Did you have to pay a large dowry?

BB: No, I didn't have to pay a lot. I only had to bring a case of beer. That was all they (the bride's family) wanted.

Where were you during the 1999 war?

BB: During the bombing we stayed in Crkvena Vodica.

Did you know that the war would happen?

BB: We knew. We stayed at home the whole time. We covered the windows with blankets; we thought the explosions would be big. [LINK to Bajram speaking](#)

When did you flee your home?

BB: When Albanians came back. We had to come here.



LINK to [Video of interview](#)

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“We have music, and if somebody doesn’t have music, then they’re nothing.”

Šelja Bajrami
[Plemetina Village](#)

Video [link to interview](#)

Where were you born?

SB: I was born here.

What kind of Roma are you?

SB: I am Egyptian.

We have music, and if somebody doesn’t have music, then they’re nothing.

Life here is terrible. No one can celebrate any holidays, because no one has any money.

What kind of Roma live here?

SB: Every kind of Roma.



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“My father wanted me only to work, and I worked all day long. He told me, ‘If you don’t like it, go get married.’”

Fatime Jašari
[Bostan- Novo Brdo](#)

FJ: I used to live in Gušterica,* in my grandmother’s home. I then lived in Pristina, and after I came to this village. My mother’s name was Fiza.

(*Gušterica lies 18 km east of Bostan.)

When I was young, (REFERENCE: We had one) we lived in an old brick house. We had no blankets; we had plates made from old, dry pumpkins, and we didn’t have enough to eat. We slept on the ground. [LINK to Fatime speaking](#)

Why do Roma girls get married so young?

FJ: What can we do? They (a bride’s parents) accepted my brother. My daughter finished school, and then she escaped*. [LINK to Fatime speaking](#)

(* FJ’s daughter did not accept the marriage her parents arranged for her, and ran away from home.)

What were the wedding customs you followed?

FJ: Customs here? We had a cart, pulled by horses, with a rug in it, and the girls all wore *dimije*.*

(*Dimije are traditional baggy Muslim women’s trousers. They were imported by the Ottomans, and are still worn in Southeastern Europe.)

Where were you during the 1999 war?

FJ: I knew it would happen. I stayed in my home the first night. I couldn’t sleep; none of us could. After that, I had to go (hide) in the forest.

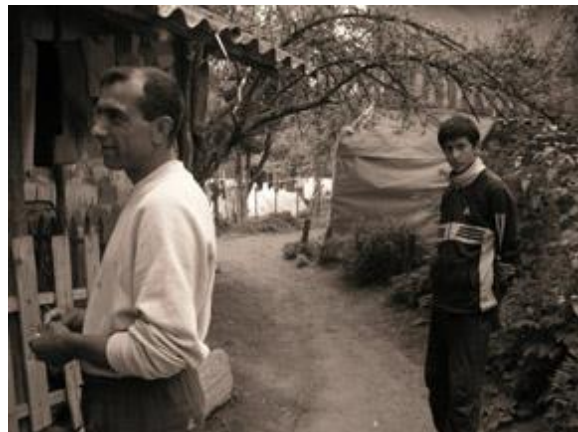
Why did you go to the forest?

FJ: We had to go into the forest because we were frightened.

[LINK to Fatime speaking](#)

What kind of Roma are you?

FJ: We are Ashkalija.



What is the difference between Roma and Ashkalija?

INTERVIEWS

FJ: My daughter married some Roma guy, and she forgot the Albanian language. But I couldn't give her to an Albanian.

Was your mother an Ashkalija?

FJ: Yes, she was an Ashkalija. And my father came from Slovinje*.

(*Slovinje lies 20 kilometers south of Pristina, in Lipljan/Lipjan municipality.)



Did you attend school?

FJ: No.

Why didn't you go to school?

FJ: My father wanted me only to work, and I worked all day long. He told me, 'If you don't like it, go get married. [LINK to Fatime speaking](#) I had to earn money; my mother was already dead.

Did your father attend school?

FJ: No, he didn't, but my daughter finished school.



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Naza Beriša
[Plemetina Village](#)

Naza Beriša is an IDP from Obilić/ Obiliq town.

NB: My name is Naza; my surname is Beriša. I am 64 years old; I was born in Nerodimlje*, and I was married in Belačevac*. I lived in Belačevac for 50, and after we received an apartment. We lived in Obilić, but after the last war we came here. It was nice to live in Obilić. [LINK to Naza speaking](#)

(*Donje and Gornje Nerodimlje are in Uroševac/ Ferizaj municipality)

(*Belačevac is a massive coal-mining complex in Obilic municipality.)

How old were you when you were married?

NB: I was 16 years old when I was married. I didn't know the man, but when he came, he was able to pay a lot for me. I was visiting my uncle, and one day my father came to my uncle's home to tell me.

When a girl gets married, she must color her hair one night, and she has to cry.

Why do they have to cry?

NB: That is our custom. They have to cry.

And she will carry bread into her new home; this means she'll be bringing good things. And the new family will throw sugar on her. Before the dowry didn't cost as much as it does now, and we didn't have to buy a lot of gold.

Why you have to pay a dowry?

NB: I don't know. Everyone has to pay, and we must as well.

INTERVIEWS

We celebrate Djurdjevdan, Bajram and Vasilica; we are Muslims, but every Roma celebrates these days, so we celebrate along with them. For Bajram we bake pies and baklava; on Vasilica we kill a goose, and then we prepare Sarma. We stay up the whole night because we believe an old man will come to steal the food we've made. But that's not real; no one's going to come and take the Sarma.

Tell us about your life in Nerodimlje.

NB: We lived better, because we were rich. We had everything we needed.

Have many children do you have?

NB: I have six children.

Belačevac was an Albanian area. Did you have any problems there before?

NB: No, we had no problems there.

What about Obilić town?

NB: We had no problems there, but after this war everything changed.

Where were you during the NATO campaign?

NB: I was in my apartment in Obilić. We had a shelter there; we stayed there every night, with the Serbs*, until the morning.

(* Albanians were generally prohibited by Serb forces from using community bomb shelters during the NATO campaign; the Serb attitude was that they wanted the bombing, and they'd have to deal with it without benefit of shelter.)



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"They have many children. And why not? Thank God! But if you don't have the necessary things, it's tragic."

Svestenik Emil
[Bostan- Novo Brdo](#)

Svestenik= priest. Emil did not give his last name.

Bostan's Roma call Emil Srpski Cigani - a Serbian Gypsy. Some say it because it's simply a name they've heard others use. Others say it with anger. Emil is an Orthodox priest who cares for the now depleted Orthodox flock of Bostan and the surrounding villages; many Serb houses here have been destroyed or occupied. Bostan's Roma are Muslim; there aren't enough Serbs left to make a congregation. So the Svestenik acts as a caretaker for an old church whose front gates are covered with dried, smashed eggs. Some locals regard the church as a leftover from an earlier regime. Their children vandalize it.

Emil cut this interview short. He became annoyed by the interviewer's use of the phrase *we Roma*, us, plural. He stated that he was not Roma; his children said that they were.

SE: You can call me priest Emil of Bostan.

Where are you from?

SE: I'm from the Vojvodina*. I came here eight years ago.

(* The Vojvodina is the northernmost area of Serbia - a predominantly Hungarian region.)

Did you attend school?

SE: I finished school in Sremski Karlovci, and later I worked in the Vojvodina. I now work here, as a priest.

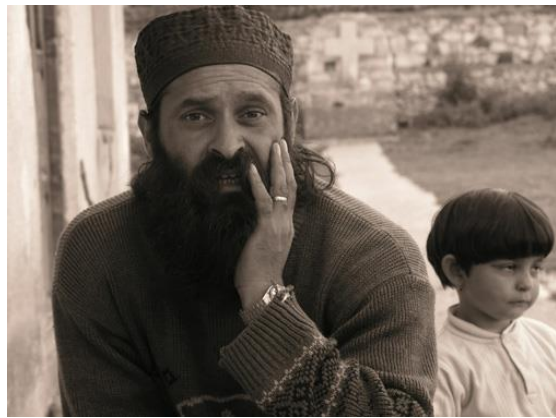
Do you know many Roma here?

SE: Of course. I have Roma friends. Roma are mainly Muslim; they have their own religion, different from the Orthodox. But that is not important; the most important thing is that we're all people.

Everyone has their own religion, but as I said, we are people. Some Roma are really smart, and they live better. But too many Roma are uneducated. That's a kind of bad religion. Seventy or eighty percent of Roma are uneducated; they don't care about school. Many of them don't have regular jobs.

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They have many children. And why not? Thank God! But if you don't have the necessary things, it's tragic. This is a big problem in Serbia.



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*“I knew those songs once,
but I’ve forgotten them.”*

Mihrije Lugović
[Kosovo Polje](#)



How old are you?

ML: I am 67 years old. My father’s name was Demo, and my mother’s name was Azemina.

Where are you from?

ML: We used to live in Gjilan*.
(*Gnjilane/ Gjilan - 36.5 kilometers
southeast of Kosovo Polje)

In the past, on Djurdjevdan, we would go out early in the morning and we would swim in the river; before, it was better than now.

My father would sing many songs about Saint Vasilija*. I knew those songs once, but I’ve forgotten them.



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“Our neighbors; we never had problems with our neighbors.”

Mikra Kurta
[Plemetina Village](#)

Mrs. Kurta is an IDP from Crkvena Vodica.

Watch a [Video](#) excerpt of the interview.

Mikra Kurta and her family fled Crkvena Vodica; they squatted in an abandoned home in the Plemetina Mahala. The previous tenants had fled abroad in 1999.



The owners returned from Germany in 2003. Mikra and a dozen others were evicted with a few day’s notice. They moved into a roofless, gutted home on the Mahala’s edge; several locals stretched a tarp over the place where the roof used to sit.

How old are you?

MK: I’m 75 years old.

Where are you from?

MK: I used to live in Crkvena Vodica, but now we live here. We owned six properties (in Crkvena Vodica), but the Albanians burned and destroyed them. Albanians burned all the homes there - not just my homes.



How long did you live in Crkvena Vodica?

MK: I lived there for 45 years.

Did you have many Serbian and Albanian neighbors in Crkvena Vodica?

INTERVIEWS



MK: Yes, we lived with Serbs and Albanians there. Our neighbors; we never had problems with our neighbors.

How old were you when you were married?

MK: I was very young when I was married.

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INTERVIEWS



Children's Interviews
[Gracnica](#)



Eljveda

What's your name?

EV: Eljveda.

How old are you?

EV: I'm ten years old.

Are you in school?

EV: No.

Are you planning to go to school?

EV: Yes. [LINK to Eljveda speaking](#)



Niaz Beriša

Where are you from?

NB: Gracanica.

How old are you?

NB: I'm seven.

Are you in school?

NB: Yes.

What grade?

NB: First.

Do you like school?

NB: Yes.

What do you like to do in school?

NB: I like to play.

INTERVIEWS

Niaz, what do you want to be when you grow up? A doctor?

NB: Yes, a doctor. [LINK to Niaz speaking](#)



Ramiz

Where are you from?

RZ: I'm from Gracania.

How old are you?

RZ: Seven.

Ramiz, are you in school?

RZ: No.

Are you planning to go to school?

RZ: Yes.

What do you want to be when you grow up? A doctor?

RZ: Nope.

Vebi

Where are you from?

VB: Gracania.

INTERVIEWS

How old are you?

VB: Eight.

Do you like school?

VB: Yes.

What do you like to do in school?

VB: Play.

Do want to be an important person when you grow up?

VB: Yes.

What do you want to be?

VB: A doctor!

Djema

How old are you?

DJ: Four.

Have you been to school?

DJ: Yes.

Do you like school?

DJ: Yes.

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**Castes and Clans:
Roma, Ashkalija, Egyptians and sub-classifications**

“My father was Ashkalija; my mother was Roma. But all of us are like shit from a cow; when the cow steps in it, it flies everywhere. We are all the same; we are all from India.”

- Azem Beriša
Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë
Kosovo

European Roma can be classified into three main groups: Kalderash, Manush and Gitanos. Other scholars claim four main groups: Kalderash, Machavaya, Lovari and Churari. Sub-classifications (based on specific geographic location and trade specialty) and clan allegiances spiral Roma categories into the hundreds.

Romanes languages can be classified into three groups: Domari (Middle East and Eastern Europe), Lomavren (Central Europe) and Romani (Western Europe).

KOSOVO



“They can call themselves whatever they want: but when Albanians call them, they don’t say ‘Hey, Ashkalija,’ or ‘Hey, Egyptian, come here.’ They say ‘Hey, Gypsy, come here.’”

- Isak Avdo
Prizren

Kosovo’s Roma can be classified into three groups; Roma, Ashkalija and Egyptians. Roma are further distinguished by sub-classifications: ** The differences between Roma, Ashkalija and Egyptians have taken greater meaning, and greater shape, since the end of the 1999 war. Ashkalija and Egyptians, once categories for Roma, have emerged as ethnic groups.

CASTES AND CLANS

Pre-war population estimates of all three groups in Kosovo ranged from 100,000 to 150,000.* The issue of ethnic mimicry - consensual or coerced - altered Roma demographic figures in every census ever conducted in Kosovo.

(* Figures from OSCE and Save the Children.)

While all these groups claim ethnic differences between them, the most obvious proof that they are not is found in the frequency in which they intermarry. Roma weddings to non-Roma - Gadje, or outsiders - is extremely rare. Egyptians, Roma and Ashkalija do not consider one another Gadje.



Roma Children on Djurdjevdan, Plemetina (Photo credit: Kieran D'Arcy)

Ashkalija (also Ashkaelia/ Ashkalia/ Ashkali)

Ashkalija are native Albanian speakers; most lived in Albanian communities. The name Ashkalija comes from the Turkish root-word *As*, or *Has*; it was applied to sedentary Kosovo Roma that settled in Albanian areas during Ottoman times. The Ashkalija speak Albanian as their first language; they lost Romanes generations ago. Ashkalija were often blacksmiths, or manual laborers on Ottoman estates. Ashkalija are found mainly in eastern and central Kosovo.

Ashkalija are more known and accepted among Roma; their classification goes back centuries. They, like Roma, discount the claims of Egyptians; the Roma say they're Roma, and the Ashkalija say they're Ashkalija. Many Ashkalija and Roma lived in the same communities.

Ashkalija promoted themselves as an ethnicity after the end of the 1999 war, in an attempt to extricate themselves from the violent situation they found themselves in,

along with the Roma. During the Kosovo conflict, some Ashkalija, like the Roma, found themselves compelled to support the Serbs; other Ashkalija joined the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Many Ashkalija were forced to flee into Serbian/ Roma areas after the conflict.

Egyptians

“We are from India. But when we worked in the fields of cotton, people would tell us that we were Egyptians.”

-Ilijas Čuljandji
Prizren, Kosovo

The medieval Ragusan official who recorded two Roma petitioners as Egyptiorum is cited by modern-day Roma-Egyptian scholars to justify their claims of origin.

Egyptians live in Western Kosovo - mostly in Djakovica/ Gjakovë, Peć/ Pejë, and Dečani/ Dečan. New Egyptians are essentially Roma with more skills, who have sought to distance themselves from the ‘Gypsy image’ by declaring themselves ethnically different as well as economically different.

The Egyptian origin of Roma was accepted until the 18th century, when the new science of linguistics connected them with northern India. The Egyptian ethnicity was ‘created’, first in Macedonia, and later, in Kosovo, by Albanized Roma who sought to distinguish themselves from Albanians and assert their own identity. In 1990 an Egyptian association was formed in Ohrid, Macedonia; this was followed by a Kosovo association, and later, a Yugoslav-wide group. By 1995, 15,000 Roma registered themselves as members. Milošević supported Egyptian claims; in past censuses, Egyptians had registered as Albanians. In 1991, the new census allowed for Egyptian as an ethnicity. Egyptians claim that Ashkalija are ignorant Egyptians.

After the 1999 war, many more Albanized Roma - and some who could not even speak Albanian - reclassified themselves as Egyptians, to distance themselves from Roma.

Many Egyptians were forced to flee into Serbian/ Roma areas after the conflict. Those that fled into the Serb northern municipalities have been assaulted and threatened due to their use of the Albanian language.

Amnesty International puts the current Kosovo Egyptian population at 5,000.

Roma Subgroups

Many argue that Gurbeti may be a subgroup of Arlija, and vice-versa. These classifications are presented simply as how Roma class themselves.

CASTES AND CLANS

The main difference between Roma subgroups is not found in tradition, but in geographic locale and dialect. The Arlija word for dog is Djukel; the Gurbeti word is Djucel; and the Bugurdjije word is Rukuno.

Arlija (alternate: Arlia/ Arlije) - are found throughout Kosovo, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria; some Kosovo Roma still identify themselves as such - mainly in Prizren. Arlija are traditionally blacksmiths; besides a Roma subgroup, Arlija can be considered an interchangeable term with most Kosovo Roma, for those who still identify themselves as Roma.

Gurbeti (alternate: Gurbets/ Gurbetija/ Gurbetja) - are found throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. In Kosovo their population is centered in Gnjilane/ Gjilan and Kamenica/ Kamenicë, southeastern Kosovo.

Bugurdjije - are traditionally Blacksmiths. Bugurdjije live in central Kosovo, including Gracanica, Plemetina, Priluzje, Obilić/ Obiliq and Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë

Muhadjeri/ (alternate: Muhadjerja) - were found in Pristina. Muhadjeri are blacksmiths and brick-makers.

Divanjoldjije - were identified by interviewee Sabedin Musliu. Divanjoldjije lived in Pristina, and spoke Turkish as their first language.

Srpski Cigani - Serbian Gypsies. These Arlija became sedentary, settled in Serbian areas, converted to Serbian Orthodoxy, and have intermarried with Serbs. A significant number of Srpski Cigani are found in Gracanica, across town from the Muslim Roma Mahalla. The two communities disparage one another; the Srpski Cigani are better educated, and have higher rates of employment.

Examples of dialectical differences:

Roma Clan:	<i>Arlija</i>	<i>Gurbeti</i>	<i>Muhadjeri</i>	<i>Bugurdjije</i>
How are you?	<i>So kere?</i>	<i>So Ceren?</i>	<i>So cerena?</i>	<i>So kerna?</i>
Where are you from?	<i>Kotar hinen?</i>	<i>Katar sen?</i>	<i>Kotar sijen?</i>	<i>Kotar sen?</i>
What's your name?	<i>Sar I to anav?</i>	<i>Sar si co alav?</i>	<i>Sar vicinejatu?</i>	<i>Sar si to alav?</i>

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Roma Politics

“Whenever I’ve gone to settlements and spoken to women, I got more, better advice, a better view on the situation than from the men. Because they spoke about real things: about health, about education, about the children, they spoke about the reality of the situation. The men tend to think in terms of power.”

- Henry Shikluna
CoE Coordinator for Roma Activities
Pristina, Kosovo

“Roma here aren’t very educated when it comes to politics.”

- Hamit Šerifović
Roma Leader
Gracanica

Roma politicians and community leaders have the same goals; full rights as a recognized nationality; guaranteed civil rights; schools with Romanes as the language of instruction; affirmative action policies and positive discrimination (in employment and education) as an equalizer; subsidized income generation activities for Roma communities; and broadcasts in Romanes on television and radio. Roma political fragmentation makes these goals impossible to achieve.

Roma political and community leadership in Kosovo is a wasteland of personal ambition. The Roma of the former Yugoslavia learned about politics by rote; their instructors were dictators like Tito and quasi dictators like Slobodan Milošević. The lessons were not about policy; they were classes in the quashing of rivals, the enrichment of friends and family, the amassing of power and the accrument of courts of rule filled with sycophants.



The Roma Flag

Most Roma leaders - with the exception of a few honest and hardworking individuals in Priluzhje, Gracanica and other areas - view a leadership position as nothing more than a post of power and personal enrichment. Rival community leaders often emerge; as in the

case of Plemetina, their extended families and a few allied families agitate for them and make things as difficult as possible for the community until, in some future vote, they have curried enough favor to win the position.

Plemetina is a perfect example of this political fragmentation. A 1999 Roma leader stole material aid and food donations destined for the entire Mahala. He was voted out at the next Roma meeting, but refused to relinquish the post; he continued to represent himself as the Roma community leader to unsuspecting NGOs. Balkan Sunflowers was under the impression that he was the Roma community leader until his deception was revealed; after BSF refused to deal with him, he made things as difficult for them as possible, including trying to have them expelled from the community.

Plemetina is split in two. Some support the real community leader; others support the former, disgraced one. Families are forced to take sides in every issue. These community leaders often care nothing for their community; they want to get rich. Roma leaders are not usually respected; in the case of some, they are not even known of in the community they suppose to speak for. Roma leaders pick fights with other potential leaders, or the leaders of other community; their policies regard eating away at the power bases of rivals while strengthening their own.

Kosovo's Roma suffer from severe divisions that are self-imposed. These divisions can be a matter of clan classification - Gurbeti, Arlija, Egyptian, Ashkalija and so on - but often personality clashes are what divisions are based on. Economic levels play a part; the difference between Roma, Ashkalija and Egyptians are presented as ethnic or linguistic differences but are often simply differences in employment, education and earning power.

Roma political parties are the parties of specific individuals and their supporters. And Roma interests and needs, while paid lip service to, are often disregarded. Because of these issues, an all-Roma movement, as opposed to a political party, will not come about in Kosovo for some time. Roma speak with too many small voices; they would do well to pay attention to the structure of the LDK, which initially mobilized the Albanian majority into a coherent and malleable unit, united in purpose and goal that drew attention to their plight under the Serbs from 1989 to 1999.

Roma political parties outside of Kosovo are greater in number. These parties are larger examples of the same internal problems that affect Kosovo Roma. No Roma political party has yet existed that had any kind of effect on state policy, or even had general respect from the Roma the party claims to represent.

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Roma Education

“The rich Roma families - their children actually finished primary school (eight years). But people like us finished only four years. We could work as cleaners, or physical laborers; we didn’t think a lot about school.”

-- Sabedin Musliu
Gracanica, Kosovo

“Many Roma children aren’t interested in school; they don’t want to learn, and they are taught in a language they don’t know well. These are the main problems. (Roma) parents must talk to their children about school; they must tell them that school is what their future will be based on.”

- Ibrahim Eljšani
Prizren, Kosovo

“More Roma went to school; they could read and write. A very small number of Roma, though, finished primary school, less for secondary school, and concerning University - hardly anyone. One or Two Roma in Kosovo (finished University), but none from Gracanica ever did.”

- Afrim Osmani
Gracanica, Kosovo



Serb and Roma schoolchildren in Gracanica, circa 1960s

The majority of Kosovo Roma children speak minimal Serbian. There is little tradition of school attendance. Gracanica's Roma parents, and children as well, are resistant to the idea of school because of both the way they are treated by the community-at-large and by earlier, half-hearted attempts to integrate them without taking into account their circumstance and the majority community's perception of them. Attempts to integrate Roma children into Serbian schools have consistently failed because no special remedial programs were created to help them catch up to the level of their peers before they were enrolled, nor were Roma teachers included. Roma children were enrolled in school and were made fun of because of their ethnicity and appearance. They could not speak the language of instruction and therefore could not learn. They failed and withdrew, continuing the same cycle of poverty and marginalization as their parents.

Roma parents do not enroll their children in school because they frankly do not appreciate education or understand its value. Despite Tito-era assimilation policies in regard to schooling, a minority of Roma actually benefited from these policies. The majority of Roma have been generationally excluded from education; a common attitude among Roma is that learning is 'not for us.' During the interviews conducted in this course of this project, when asked if they attended school, many old Roma said 'there weren't schools for us back then,' or 'they didn't want to teach us.'

Parents cannot expect to have any appreciation of education when they, their grandparents, and so on were excluded. When uneducated parents do enroll their children in school, those children often face hostility from majority-ethnicity children, whether they be Serbs or Roma; Roma children are ridiculed because of their dark skin (lighter-skinned Roma children face less hostility), lack of hygiene, the condition of their clothes, their lack of money for books and supplies, and their inability to communicate effectively in the language of instruction. This makes them a target for their classmates

and an object of frustration for their teachers, who have no idea what these children face when first introduced to the classroom. A teacher will not say, 'this child has no indoor plumbing, and it's minus two Celsius' - a teacher will simply say, 'the kid's dirty.' Another problem with Roma children is caused by infrequent attendance. A Roma child may be 'employed' already - in collecting cans and bottles for recycling, or in caring for the younger children in the home. They will miss school days because of this; and because a child may not have a raincoat, they will not attend school on rainy days either. These circumstances are not taken into account.

These children come home crying; their parents, because of the lack of understanding and traditional exclusion, often simply shrug their shoulders. It's up to the child; the child won't go back.

The traditional marginalization of Roma - and their stereotypical status as ditchdiggers, menial laborers, unemployables or illiterates - continues. Kosovo's educational system has no understanding of Roma.

Another issue regarding school enrollment concerns 'school fees' - basic costs such as the cost of books, book bags, pens and other needed school equipment. Clothing is also an important issue; many Roma families are too poor to afford good clothes for their children, and as a consequence the children are ridiculed.

Hygiene is another issue. Many Roma families have only outside water taps; in the winter, it is impossible to keep adequately clean. Racist teachers use the hygiene issue as a way to exclude Roma children from school - 'they're dirty, and that means that they may have lice...' and racism takes on the guise of a public health issue. A Roma remedial education center in northern Kosovo brilliantly removed this issue by installing showers for any Roma child that wished to use them.

Educating Roma children in Romanes is an idea slow to take hold in Eastern Europe, and not simply for racist reasons. Roma must be fluent in the language of the majority to succeed in whatever country they reside in. In Kosovo, this is problematic; Roma living in Serb enclaves learn Serbian - the language of a people that are even more endangered than them. Roma children must learn Albanian to have any future in Kosovo. So, for that matter, should Serb children.

Romanes-language education occurs in several remedial programs in Kosovo, including those instituted by UNMIK (the Blue Door School, Gnjilane/ Gjilan Mahala), Balkan Sunflowers (Plemetina, Gracanica, the Gnjilane/ Gjilan Roma Resource Center, and the Žitkovac IDP camp), Caritas (Čezmin Lug, Mitrovica) and the International Rescue Committee (Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë and Lipljan/ Lipjan). Most of these programs prepare children for an eventual education in Serbian - not Albanian.

Two schools in the Vojvodina (Northern Serbia) and one primary school in Obrenovac (near Belgrade) offer elective Romanes classes.

Statistics regarding Roma education in Gracanica, Kosovo:

ROMA EDUCATION

- ~350 Roma individuals from 72 families live in Gracanica
- 89 are under the age of 18
- The majority (~80%) of these 89 are not in school
- Many do not speak Serbian
- Many Roma adults can only read and write the Serbian language with difficulty

Statistics regarding Roma education in Plemetina, Kosovo:

- ~410 Roma individuals from 87 families live in Plemetina's two Mahalas. 100 are under age 10, and 120 are aged 11-20
- 70 Roma children attend school
- At least 17 Roma children attending school cannot speak adequate Serbian
- At least 25 Roma children aged 7-10 have never attended school, and speak no Serbian
- The majority of Plemetina's Roma adults are functionally illiterate

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Roma Holidays

“Life here is terrible. No one can celebrate any holidays, because no one has any money.”

- Šelja Bajrami
Plemetina, Kosovo

These interviews overly concern themselves with Roma holidays. Our interviewees would move past the harder, sadder questions and concentrate on the smaller questions we'd inserted with a mind to making the interviews less tense. Roma spoke lovingly of their traditions on Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez, Veljigdan, Vasilica and Božić. They told us of the way their mothers and grandfathers used to do things. They talked of the food they'd eat, the sheep they'd sacrifice, the ornate preparations, visits to holy places, and the songs they would sing. They talked of visiting their neighbors in years past, of sharing, and of gifts given in a time when there were more gifts to give.



Roma live for holidays; in hard and insecure times, these celebrations are the one thing that Roma look forward to. On holidays, as in weddings, they are a community, caring for one another and wishing one another good fortune that many of them won't get. The rest of the year is desultory; it's struggle, it's day-to-day, it's about sick kids and no jobs and cold.

A Rom will sell what's in his home to buy a sheep to kill on Djurdjevdan; a Rom will sell his home to save the dowry for his son. These traditions are the ones the Roma managed

ROMA HOLIDAYS

to preserve through years of forced assimilation and flight. It's them; it's a celebration of them. And when the holidays aren't here yet, they're being planned for, just as the ones past are reminisced about on the nights when there's no music and no guests.

Observed Holidays:

Djurdjevdan (Saint George's day), also known as **Herdeljez** (Turkish: Hidirellez. Alternate spellings: Herdelez, Herdelezi).

May 6th



St. George - Djurdj - is a patron saint of many Serbs; his day is an important Slava (celebration) for the Orthodox. Djurdjevdan is celebrated in many eastern European countries; it was an important holiday in the west, but observances there have faded.

Herdeljez is a Muslim holiday; it can be assumed that Herdeljez and Djurdjevdan have the same root. This holiday may have been brought to Southeastern Europe during the time of the Ottomans, and was absorbed by the Serbs and Roma. That some scholars believe Saint George may have been a Turk lends weight to this.

The word Herdeljez is a combination of the names of two Muslim prophets: Hizir & Ilyas. Legend states that both drank the water of eternal life. At midnight on May 5th they meet, every year, to welcome the end of winter. Hizir is the guardian of plants, and provides for the poor; Ilyas is the guardian of water and animals.

Djurdjevdan, 2003: watch [Video](#) of Roma collecting Kukureg & Dren.

Djurdjevdan, 2003: watch [Video](#) of a fast Gracanica interview.

“When the spring came for the poor people, it was a treasure.”

- Arif Alija
Plemetina, Kosovo

Roma consider this an important holiday because it signifies the end of winter; the beginning of life. Djurdjevdan marks the end of cold nights and little food.

Roma begin preparations for Djurdjevdan weeks before the event. They empty and clean every corner of their homes.



Roma, Serbs, and some Albanians celebrate this by going to the fields in the early morning to collect the plants Kukubreg and Dren, along with water from the nearest river (or rivers: in Plemetina and other areas water must be gathered from 3 rivers). Members of a family will ceremonially bath in the water, heated with the plants. Other Roma decorate their homes with the plants.

One Plemetina Roma stated that Dren is a strong plant; the bath will help the children become as strong as Dren.

Before the 1999 war, many Roma celebrated Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez at the two Turbe on Gazi Mestan, Kosovo Polje. Both are Ottoman graves from the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. The first Turbe Roma visited and sacrificed at is on Gazi Mestan, at the tomb of Sultan Murat's standard-bearer; his name is now the sites'. The tomb was built at the spot where he was slain by Serb forces under Prince Lazar. Gazi Mestan's grave is a small dome, with two green-painted cement coffins on the inside.



In Black Lamb, Grey Falcon, Rebecca West wrote of encountering the 16th generation descendant of Gazi Mestan's servant at his tomb; he was the site's caretaker. The servant's obligation to care for Gazi Mestan extended nearly 500 years after he died. These descendants have long since left, and the site is abandoned, locked down and decaying, surrounded by trash.

ROMA HOLIDAYS

The second Turbe - Sultan Murat's - lies a few kilometers north of the standard-bearer's, on the road to Mitrovica. This Turbe is a large, domed building, built with stone bricks. Murat's coffin is the centerpiece; only his entrails are buried there. The rest of him was preserved and transported back to Constantinople when the Ottoman army withdrew.

The Turkish government pays for the upkeep of the site. The grounds are enclosed by a high wall; inside are trees, graves and the multicolored ribbons that Afrim Osmani mentions in his interview. The site is cared for by a middle-aged Slavic Muslim woman from Novi Pazar; her family has tended the site for generations.

Murat, like the Serb King Lazar, was also slain during the battle; legend states that a Serbian prince, Miloš Kobilić (since changed to Obilić), was accused of plotting treachery against Lazar and sought to disprove this by claiming to join the Turkish side. He was brought before the Sultan, and when he bent to kiss his hand, he removed a dagger secreted within his robes and stabbed the Sultan to death before being promptly cut down by the Sultan's bodyguards. For more information on the truths and myths of the 1389 battle, please refer to Noel Malcolm's Kosovo: a Short History - the definitive historical treatise on the area.

Roma consider these Turbe to be blessed; they sacrifice sheep there for the health of their families and luck in the coming year. Some Turbe have special attributes; one may be better for luck and wealth, while another may be renowned for the health of one's family or to cure a couple's infertility.



The most important tradition for Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez is the sacrificing of a sheep. Roma are shamed if they cannot do this. Some Roma claim that only a sheep can be sacrificed on this day; others kill chickens as well. Other traditions include buying new clothes for one's children; in Prizren, the children will go door-to-door for change and candies. Roma women will bake special bread, and the first night will be a large feast. In some areas, no-family guests are invited; in others, no guests are allowed until the second night.

Many Roma that adhere to Islam condemn Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez - especially in Kosovo Polje and Prizren.

A Gracanica Rom stated that celebrating Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez outside will make the next winter less hard.

Vasilica (Saint Vasilija's Day - the Serbian New Year on the Julian calendar)

January 14th

“Why did your family celebrate Vasilica?”

“I don’t know. Because our great-grandfathers celebrated it.”

- Adilje Osmani
Gracanica, Kosovo

Vasilica eve is marked by the lighting of candles and the sacrificing of geese. Some Roma say that, for every son you have, you must kill a goose. In some areas tradition states that a guest will arrive, bearing corn and gold. He will strike each family member on the head, to insure a better year.

Roma will bake a coin into bread; each member of the family will receive a piece, and whoever finds the coin will have luck in the coming year. But the coin’s discoverer must carry this coin for the entire year for it to work.



The preparation for the Vasilica day’s meal begins on Vasilica eve. A Roma family will stay up for the entire night; the men will drink and the women will prepare the Sarma (meat and rice wrapped in cabbage leaves) for the next morning. Legend states that the Sarma must be guarded from thieves.

The Sarma will be ready to eat by the next morning. Guests will arrive; the Sarma will be ceremonially ‘sold’ to them by the Romni woman that prepared it.

Veljigdan (Orthodox Easter)

Children are given painted eggs by their parents; a Turkey or a chicken is slaughtered, and special breads are baked.

Božić (Orthodox Christmas)

January 7th

Roma will buy fruits and nuts for their children; they’ll visit their Serb neighbors. Some Roma families will spread hay on the inside of their homes. The significance of this is unknown; one Kosovo Polje Rom stated that this had something to do with replicating the manger Jesus was born in; he could not elaborate.

Hedenebiri (alternate: Shinkol-hedenebiri - Roma Flag Day)

May 20th

Hedenebiri, or Shikol-hedenebiri, is claimed by some Prizren Roma to be second only to Djurdjevdan/ Herdeljez in importance. In Prizren, two flags are displayed; one is the Roma national flag (a red wagon-wheel on a blue and green background ** PICTURE). The other flag - inherited from the Ottomans - is a simple green flag with embroidered Koranic quotes.



This holiday seems exclusive to the Roma of Prizren, though other Roma throughout Kosovo openly display the national flag in their weddings, festivals and parties. Many Kosovo Roma do not recognize or celebrate a holiday for this flag.

World Roma Day

April 8th

This holiday is not connected to Orthodoxy or Islam; it is a celebration of history and culture. In Kosovo, April 8th is celebrated in secure Roma areas by dances, traditional music, and more untraditional events, such as Roma hip-hop bands and fashion shows.

Ramazan (Ramadan)

December (dates vary, and are set year-to-year).

Some Roma will fast for the entire month; less observant Roma will fast on one day. Ramazan, for proper adherents, is marked by waking at 2-3 AM to feast - *sehri* (although this was referred to as *sifire* by a Prizren interviewee). The rest of the day is for fasting; young children, pregnant women and the sick are exempted. Night is marked by a second feast - *Iftari*. - followed by a visit to the mosque.

A miniscule number of Roma now celebrate Bajram and fast, but earlier, none did.

Bajram (sacrifice)

February 11 (Kosovo). A 3-4 day festival.

Turkish: Kurban Bayrami (February 10-14). Other Turkish areas (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan): Gurban Bayram (February 22). Arabic: Eid Al-Fitr.

Bajram traditionally falls on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Hajj.

In Kosovo, Bosnia, and Albania this is known as the big, or great, Bajram. Bajram is based upon Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son, Isaac (Ishmael in the Islamic world).

ROMA HOLIDAYS

The Bajram festival is a time to visit friends and family, help the poor, and recall relatives that have passed away. Roma women will prepare cakes and baklava. On the first day of Bajram, no one visits another; this day is reserved for the families to celebrate, on their own. On the second day, neighbors are visited.

A sheep will be sacrificed: 1/3rd of the meat will be given away to the poor, 1/3rd will be given to neighbors, and 1/3rd will be kept for the family. In some Roma areas, this tradition simply translates into buying a sheep for a family too poor to do so.



In Prizren, Mahala children will kiss the hands of adults and ask for Parachange. A stepmother will buy gifts for her daughter-in-law; a wife will buy gifts for her husband.

Bajram (others)

In Kosovo, Bajram has become a general term for a holiday. Bajrams occur during the month of Ramazan/ Ramadan and at other times of the year. Some K-Albanians call their Flag Day a Bajram; others celebrate the March 5th anniversary of the deaths of the Jashari clan in Prekaz, Srbica/ Skenderaj as a Bajram (The Jasharis - co-founders of the KLA - were killed in a three-day shootout with Serb forces on March 5th, 1998).

Antanasia -

is celebrated by Roma only when a member of the family is ill.

Bibi -

Bibi was a 'saint' of the Serbian Roma.

Slavas - are, in Serbian Orthodoxy, the celebration day of one's patron saint. This is a unique religious celebration to the Serbian Orthodox church. Many Serbs do not celebrate their actual birthdays; instead, that celebration comes on the day of their patron saint.

Many Roma - including Muslims - have this tradition.

The most popular Saint's days are:

Sveti Nikola (Saint Nicholas) - December 19th

Saint John the Baptist - January 20th

Sveti Sava (Saint Sava) - January 27th

Sveti Djurdj (Saint George) - May 6th

Sveti Arhandjeo (Saint Michael the Archangel) - November 21st

Vidovdan (Saint Vitus's Day) - June 28th (June 15th in the Julian calendar).

Roma in Serb areas celebrate this. June 28th is the anniversary of the 1389 battle between mixed Christian forces commanded by Prince Lazar and Ottoman Turkish forces under Murat. Vidovdan is also the anniversary of the 1914 assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ferdinand was murdered by a Bosnian Serb student, Gavrilo Princip.

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Roma Music



*"We have music, and if somebody doesn't have music,
then they're nothing."*

- Šelja Bajrami
Plemetina

Gracanica, 2003: watch a [Video](#) of the Gracanica Roma Children's Choir performing Dzelem Dzelem.

Gracanica, 2003: download [extended footage](#) (Zip file) of the World Roma Day celebrations in Gracanica, Kosovo, including traditional music and dances.

Plemetina, 2003: watch a [Video](#) of dancing and music at interviewee Gazmend Salijevec's engagement party (1).

Plemetina, 2003: watch a [Video](#) of dancing and music at interviewee Gazmend Salijevec's engagement party (2).

Priluzje, 2003: watch a [Video](#) of a traditional Roma dance.

Dzelem Dzelem, to many Roma in the former Yugoslavia, functions as their national anthem. Two versions of Dzelem Dzelem are bundled into this CD-ROM; one version is performed by Muzo Bizlim, and the other is performed by Adem Osmani's Gracanica Roma children's choir.

The English lyrics of all songs are written below. Dzelem Dzelem lyrics are additionally translated into Serbian, Albanian, and the original Romanes.

Dzelem Dzelem, Hajde Hajde Fato, Beshli I chai tele, and Bistergjan Bachtiar are all performed by Muzo Bizlim, known on the streets of Šuto Orizari, Macedonia as "O Phuro," or the old man. Bizlim is one of the last true composers and performers of classical Roma folk music.

Bizlim's music was recorded by Gregory Scarborough, a young American musician who has dedicated years of his life to work in Šuto Orizari, Macedonia. Scarborough

ROMA MUSIC

produced The Shutka Music Project; Heartsongs from the Gypsies of Shutka, Macedonia, as well as a compilation of folksongs from Turkish Kurdistan. These CDs are both available for purchase. To buy a CD, or to obtain more information on Scarborough's past work, current projects and the music of Bizlim and other Roma performers, please contact Gregory Scarborough at gscar01@hotmail.com or write him at:

Gregory Scarborough
Music That Matters
2960 Coles Way
Atlanta, Georgia 30350 USA

Play the Music

- [Dzelem Dzelem \(Muzo Bizlim\)](#)
- [Dzelem Dzelem \(The Gracanica Roma Children's Choir\)](#)
- [Hajde Hajde Fato \(Muzo Bizlim\)](#)
- [Beshli I chai tele \(Muzo Bizlim\)](#)
- [Bistergian Bachtiar \(Muzo Bizlim\)](#)

All Bizlim's Songs © 2000 Music That Matters

Dzelem Dzelem - English

I went, I went

I went, I went, far away on a long road
And I met happy Roma people
Ah Roma, where did you come from
With your children happy Roma people

Ah! Roma
Ah! Roma

I had a big family too
But the black legionnaires killed them

Ah! Roma
Ah! Roma

Open dear lord your black gates
So that I can see where my people are
Their black faces and black eyes I love them like two black grapes

Ah! Roma
Ah! Roma

O lord! I know that there is more time

Stand up Roma
Again I will go far away a long road
And I will walk with happy Roma people

Ah! Roma
Ah! Roma

Dzelem Dzelem - Romanes

Dzelem, Dzelem

Dzelem, Dzelem lungone dromencar
Maladiljem bahtale romencar
Ah romaljen kotar tumen aven
E chorolencar bahtale chavencar

Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen
Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen

Sasa vi man bari familjija
Mudardasla I kalji legija
Sare chindas vi romen vi romnjen
Mashkar ljende vi cikne chavore

Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen
Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen

Putar devla te kalje udara
Te shaj dikav kas si me manusha
Paljen ka djav lungone dromencar
Taj ka pirav bahtale romencar

Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen
Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen

O pre devla isi vahj si akana
Ushten sare sundaleske roma
O kalo muj e kalje jaka
Kamavaljen sar e kalje draka

Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen
Aaaj Romaljen, Aaaj cavaljen

Dzelem Dzelem - Serbian

Otišao Sam, Otišao Sam

Otišao Sam, Otišao Sam dalekim putevima
I sreo sam Srećne Rome
Ah Romi odakle ste vi došli
Sa svojom decom srećnom Romskom decom

Aj! Romi
Aj! Romi

Imao sam I ja srećnu porodicu
Ali ubila je crna legija

Aj! Romi
Aj! Romi

Otvori bože svoje crne kapije
Da bi mogao da vidim gde je moj narod
Crno lice I crne oci volim ih kao crveno grozdje

Aj! Romi
Aj! Romi

Bože ima još vremena
Ustajte svi Romi
Opet ću ići dugim putevima I sresću se sa
Srećnim Romima

Aj! Romi
Aj! Romi

Dzelem Dzelem - Albanian

Kam shku, Kam shku

Kam shku, Kam shku udhët të ljarg
Dhë I takova Rom të lumtur
Ah jo Rom prej kajt jeni tuj ardh
Me vorfun dhë urritur fëmije

Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije
Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije

E kam pas familjen a madhë
I ka vra legija e zez
Krejt I kan pre me bura dhë gra
Dhë ndërmjet, dhë fëmijet të vogëlj

Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije
Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije

O Zot hapu (open), dyr të tua
Cë mund mej pa ku jan njerz të mi
Dhë halja kume shku udhët të ljarg
Dhë kume hec (Walk) me Rom të lumtur

Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije
Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije

Zot ka koh
Cuheni krejt Romt
Ftur e zez dhe syt të zy
I dashuroj si rushin e zy

Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije
Aaaj Rom Aaaj Fëmije

Beshli I chai tele (A girl is sitting down)

A girl is sitting down
Praying to God
Praying to God
Which man to take

She runs from the thief
She does not want him
She does not want him
Because he steals

Get away from the rich man
He is selfish
He is filled with tricks and lies
He doesn't stay at home

The man who looks for women
They are hungry for women
They don't stay with one girl
Always winking their eyes
The drunk man
Walks the streets
Walks the streets
More hungry than usual

My daughter go take
For you a poor Roma
He will love you much
You'll be filled with children

Hajde Hajde Fato (Come on, Come on, Fato)

Come on, Come on Fato
You must go to your parents
Your Parents, Fato, whom
You haven't seen is such a long time

Okay, uncle, wait, I'll put on my clothes
Uncle, I'll put on my clothes
I'll dress and comb my hair
Uncle, I'll comb my hair

Don't dress, Fato, don't comb
You don't need to
Fato, your mother is dead
Fato, your mother, my sister, is dead

Bistergian Bachtiar (You forgot, o Bachtiar)

Don't hold your head high
Beautiful Bachtiar
You are big-eared (too proud)
You lift your ears so high
With money you sharpen them

Do you remember, Bachtiar hamaldji
A hungry worker
In your poverty,
You might have hung yourself
Because of your children's hunger

Refrain

You forgot, Bachtiar, your broken shoes
Now that you've become a little rich
When you drink a little, outside like a rooster
You neglect your neighbors
We're not speaking harsh words
Only a poor man thinks highly of himself when he's rich

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Roma Weddings

“My girlfriend came to my house; she had run away from her father. I went and bought one more sheep - to prepare for the wedding. My stepfather asked me why I bought another sheep. I told him ‘don’t ask, just go and try to make an agreement with her family, and I will take care of the wedding.’ My stepfather went to her father and spoke to them; everything was okay because we had many things in common. She was without a father, and I as well. On that day we killed two sheep, and I had a big wedding.”

- Azem Beriša
Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë
Kosovo

Q: Would it be better to dispose of the dowry in the future?

“No - it’s better to ask for the dowry, because the groom didn’t work hard to raise and care for my daughter. I did that. To pay the dowry is much better because (the bride’s family) has worked hard. You’ll sell your house to be able to marry your son. They’ll keep and respect the girl more; she’ll be part of their home.”

- Hazbije Vičkolari
Prizren, Kosovo

Weddings, like holidays, are dwelled upon by Kosovo Roma. When they’re not being celebrated, they’re being talked about, plotted, potential matches discussed and discounted in the living rooms of every mahala in Kosovo.

Weddings are a cultural point of distinguishment between Roma and others. To Roma and non-Roma, weddings set them apart; their communities come together to celebrate the marriage bond, and with it comes the camaraderie, the drinking, food and music, the women dancing (and now, the men joining them) in a circle around the other guests as the groom’s family looks on with pride at the match they’ve made and the bride stands silent, eyes downcast, making slow, deliberate movements with her hands - no longer in simple clothes, but in a western wedding dress.



Salijevic Gazmend wedding

Great weddings are great celebrations. A groom's family will sell and borrow to make a memorable one. It brings honor upon them and lends itself to a happy marriage.

All Roma are expected to marry. The notion of shame protects dignity and reputation so this may happen - a good match will be made. The head of household will arrange a marriage for his son not according to love, but strength, attitude and reputation of the bride and her family. Hard work in the home is valued, for the parents of a groom, more than physical beauty. A family's reputation is just as important. Are the groom's people honest? Trustworthy? Are they respected in the community?

Kosovo Roma engagements and marriages follow the traditions of Roma throughout the world. There are slight variations, and traditions absorbed from the Turks, Serbs and Albanians - along with an infusion of western dress and activity.

Rules regarding marriage are codified by the *marimé*. Kosovo Roma tend to marry members of their own group, be they Gurbeti, Bugurdjije, Muhadjeri, Ashkalija or Egyptians. This is not strict; intermarriage takes place. Marriage between Gadge (outsiders) and Roma are almost unheard of. A non-Roma woman may marry a Rom

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man, and outside of the initial stigma attached to them, if the woman adapts to Roma ways then they will be accepted into the community. Not so for a Roma woman marrying a Gadge male. She will no longer be accepted in her own community, and he never will. The financial considerations of a Roma woman marrying a westerner are new problems for Roma communities, especially in the new Kosovo, with its infusion of highly paid NGO and UNMIK/ KFOR staff. A few cases have occurred where a Roma woman marries a westerner with the full blessing of the family, though not with the blessing of the community.

Before marriage, Roma women must follow strict rules regarding dating and any type of sexual activity; they must avoid both. Roma men are supposedly under the same rules; these rules are not honored, and male deviations are often regarded with a wink or a shrug of the shoulders. Elder Roma detailed rules of behavior in the recent past that have fallen by the wayside. There are instances of dating among Roma youth, but this puts the female at much greater risk of censure than the male. A woman is expected to be a virgin when she is married.

The ages of marriage for bride and groom among Kosovo Roma are changing. Before, it was normal for a girl to be considered marriage-age by 9. This is no longer acceptable to Roma. Marriages of 14-year-old girls are not uncommon. Our interviewees were usually married before the age of 15 - both men and women.



Engagements

In other areas of Europe, Roma men and women do their own courting. In Kosovo this is rare, but is slowly becoming more common. The standard Kosovo marriage arrangement is made by parents; the bride's family has primary decision-making power. Parents view this arrangement as one of their most important duties. The opinions of those to be married may be solicited, but do not count as much as parental judgment; often those to be married never meet one another before their fates are connected.

The rejection of parental arrangement is uncommon, but known; institutions and patterns regarding this have developed, involving symbolic 'kidnappings.' The encroachment of western ideas has led many more Roma youth to reject the institution of arranged marriage. They secretly find their own mates, and if the parents do not agree, the bride will simply meet her groom one night and head to his house. Eventually, the bride's parents are forced to accept the choice; sometimes a dowry will still be paid.

The darro - dowry, or bride-price, is a fundamental institution of Roma marriage in Kosovo. Some Albanians practice this; no Serbs do. The groom's family must pay an agreed-upon amount of cash and gold to the bride's family; this monetary exchange is not a simply purchase, as many claim. The bride-price is compensation for the loss of the daughter - a household worker - and the price of raising her to be the woman she has become. Another element of the dowry is to ensure that the bride will be respected and treated fairly by her new family.

Engagement begins with the groom's family. They go through likely matches and pick the best match for their son; attractiveness may be a plus, but is considered behind the girl's character, work ethic, household skills, manners and demeanor.

An elder male in the groom's family - a father or an uncle - will make the initial approach to the bride's family. His first approach will be rejected, usually with a polite 'no, she's too young'; this is the norm. The bride's parents need time to investigate the groom and his family as well. Are they trustworthy and respected? Are they hard workers? Do they drink too much?

An agreement in principle that the match is a good one opens a new round of formalities, including negotiations over the dowry. Often the groom's family will agree to the initial offer. It is a delicate matter to try and lower the price; poverty must be pled, or the groom's family's regard for the potential bride will be quickly called into question.

If the price is accepted, the groom's father will go to the bride's home with a bottle of rakija. He and the male members of the bride's family will drink to the future union. Some Muslim Roma bring a bottle of sugar water and a bouquet instead.

A celebration will occur in the following weeks, at the bride's home; musicians will play while the families and guests eat and dance. Before, only the women danced; now, everyone does. Alcohol will be prevalent at this celebration, as well as at the wedding, which will follow the first celebration by another few weeks.

On the wedding night, the bride will ceremonially cry before all the female members of her own family. The groom's family will arrive to transport her, and her things, to her new home with the groom's family. Before she enters the home for the first time, she will place her hand in a bowl of sugared water, and place it on the door of the home, signifying that she will only bring sweetness into the groom's home.

The wedding is a western-oriented celebration with little Roma-specific cultural significance. Wedding gifts - usually cash - will be given. The bride and groom will usually wear western-style dress; the wedding will begin in the early evening and continue late into the night. But to Roma, the marriage happened when the terms were

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agreed to. Everything is a celebration of the union that has already passed. The wedding is sometimes reserved for the groom's family and friends; the bride's family will attend a smaller celebration the following day.

Some Muslim Roma women will be ceremonially veiled upon their wedding days, by their stepmothers; others are veiled by their brothers before the ceremonial transport to the groom's home. No man but their husbands (and children or family members) will ever see their hair again.

Two weeks after the marriage, the bride will return to her family home, for a visit. She will walk, so that everyone can see that she is following the proper customs.

Soon after this visit, the bride and groom will ceremonially pay a visit to the bride's family. They will play numerous practical jokes on their daughter's husband. Popular ones are eggs placed in his shoes and salt in his coffee. A huge feast accompanies this.

In another few weeks the bride's mother will visit her daughter's new family. She will bring gifts - usually gold jewelry - to her daughter.

Marriage is the transition from child to adult in the Roma community. The man's new role is acceptance by his elders - especially if children follow the marriage soon. For the woman, the transition is more difficult; she enters her new home as a junior member of her husband's family, and for years she will work to prove herself to them. She will assume many of her mother-in-law's duties. She will rise first in the morning and sleep last at night.

Divorces grow more common in Kosovo's Roma community, but are still rare because of the consequences and disgrace directed at the woman. Repercussions usually fall on the woman's shoulders; infidelity may result in banishment. Should a Roma woman divorce her husband, he will keep and raise the children. Civil laws regarding divorce are absolutely overshadowed by Roma laws. Further, a divorced woman's value will be lowered in the community. Should she marry again, it may be to an older man or a man of 'low' character. The dowry will be repaid by her family. Should a bride find herself abused in any way, her father may reclaim her.

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Interviewee Area Profiles

Interviewee areas are profiled. Other illustrative areas are included. Demographic information is compiled from UNHCR, OSCE and our own field notes, unless otherwise noted. Contending figures are listed with notes.

Southwestern Pristina municipality - Gracanica, Preoce, Livadje, Laplje Selo & Čaglavica

Location

Gracanica is the economic and cultural focal point of central Kosovo's Roma and Serb communities. The village lies nine kilometers south of Pristina - 13 kilometers by road. Laplje Selo lies roughly 5 kilometers west of Gracanica, connected by a badly - maintained asphalt track. Čaglavica lies a further two kilometers north of Laplje Selo. Livadje lies several kilometers south of Laplje Selo on a little-used road that eventually leads to Donja Gušterica and Janjevo. Preoce is situated two kilometers further west of Laplje Selo, on the other side of the Pristina - Skopje 'highway'; this road functions as an exclusionary barrier, and is evident in Preoce's economic condition. Preoce, however, is directly assessable to Kosovo Polje - namely the minority areas of Bresje and Ugljare - via a road constructed by KFOR in 2000.

A remote-controlled mine killed the first two Serbs that used this road - on the day it opened.

Security & Transportation

Southwestern Pristina municipality's population lives under constant guard and constant threat from surrounding Albanian communities. The security situation has calmed; attacks against minorities have become less frequent - and more organized. Following the 1999 war's end, farmers had their animals mutilated, their equipment stolen, and their haystacks burned. Others were shot down in their fields - most notably the massacre of 14 Serb farmers in nearby Staro Gracko, Lipljan/ Lipjan in August of 1999. UNHCR (now UNMIK) minority-transport buses were repeatedly stoned (and sometimes worse, in the forms of gunshots and RPGs) en route from one minority area to another.

Near Livadje lies Skulanevo; a few days from the time of this writing, a Serb resident went fishing and caught a bullet in the mouth.

Ashkalija in this region have fewer security issues due to language. 15 Ashkalija families recently returned to the Vranjevac neighborhood of Pristina city.

Security within these interconnected villages is now stable, as is access to minority-owned agricultural land. Swedish KFOR provides security, and is popular with the community - much more so than the British, who initially secured this area in June of

1999.* The British marked their arrival with late-night home raids in search of weapons. Few were found.

Serbs and Roma present in these villages cannot leave the area. Freedom of movement for Roma has slightly improved; for Serbs, it has not. The Swedes have disabled the checkpoints that monitored traffic through Gracanica, on the Pristina - Gnjilane/ Gjilan 'highway'; no serious security incidents have occurred since.

KFOR provides escorts for monthly convoys from Gracanica to Brezovica (Štrpce municipality) and Velika Hoća (Orahovac/ Rahovec municipality). KFOR also provides biweekly escorts from Gracanica to the Serbian border - Gate 3/ Medare (Podujevo Municipality). KFOR and UNMIK police provide medical escorts from Gracanica and outlying areas to the Gracanica ambulanta, Gracanica's Simonieda hospital, the Russian hospital in Kosovo Polje, and primary facilities in North Mitrovica. Serbs and Roma do not have access to majority community health facilities in Pristina.

Economy & Infrastructure

Many area residents garden small plots of land and own a few chickens, goats or pigs. The luckier ones own cows. This area's economic mainstays are agriculture, livestock, and the western NGO/ UNMIK/ KFOR presence. Internationals tired of living in Pristina have moved en masse to the Serb areas south of the town, where the rents are cheaper. Pork - not found in many restaurants in Pristina - draws many internationals to Gracanica's new restaurants. Before 1999, this area functioned as a Pristina suburb; those not involved with agriculture in the immediate area generally worked there. The area also made money from the religious tourism generated by Gracanica's monastery.

The populations of Gracanica, Laplje Selo, Livadje and Caglavica were either farmers or worked in Pristina before June of 1999. Since then the unemployment rate has exploded due to Pristina's sudden inaccessibility, the loss of agricultural markets, and the inability of many farmers to work their fields due to the security situation in outlying areas. The influx of Serb and Roma IDPs from all over Kosovo add to this problem. Without a city the suburbs die; this population is cut off from employment opportunities and everything from cinemas and concerts to cultural events. They lack both the means to earn a living and the institutions to enjoy it.

Gracanica, Laplje Selo, Livadje, Preoce and Caglavica pay no utilities. Electricity, water and telephones have been free, albeit intermittent, since June of 1999. Kosovo utility companies have repeatedly tried to shut down services; KFOR and UNMIK force restoration.

The situation, as explained to me by a Serb IDP from Pristina who has been trapped in Gracanica for four years:

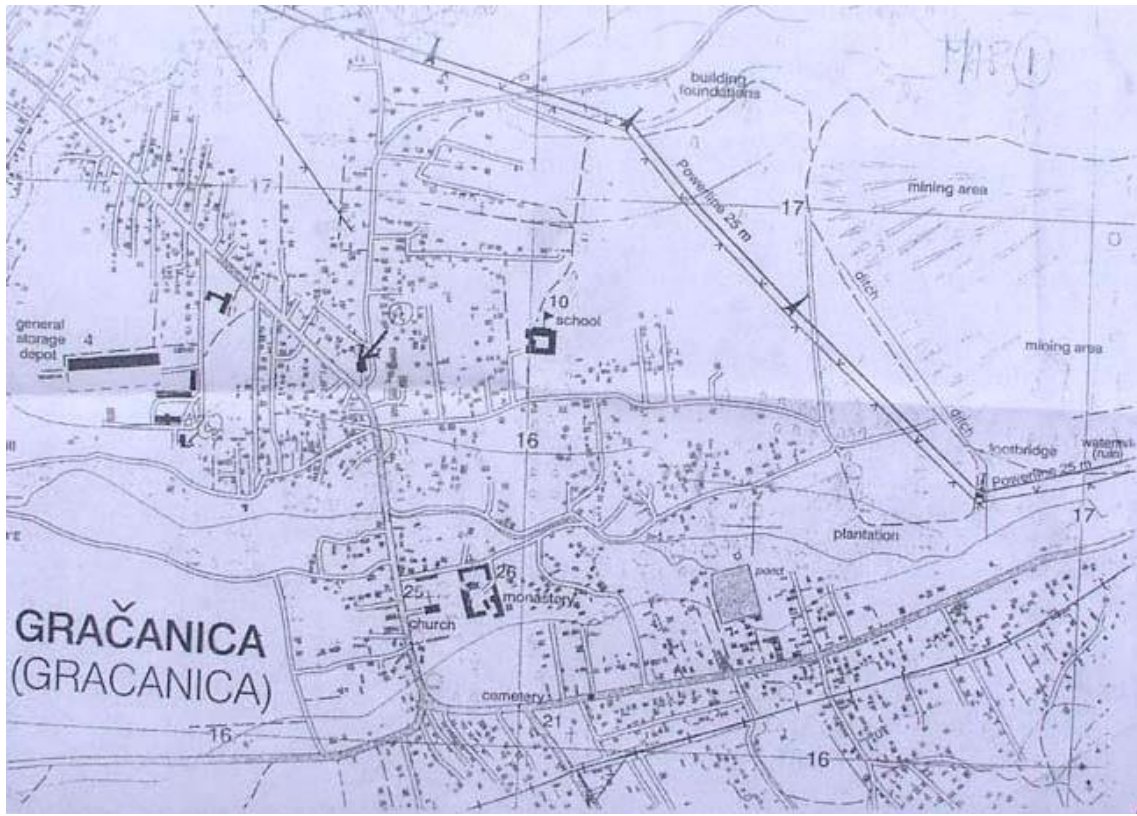
"I'll pay for my electricity, and my phone, and my water. Just give me back my apartment in Pristina, and make it safe enough for me to work there, and they can have all the money they want."

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

95% of the area's Serbs are unemployed; 98-99% of Roma are. Those that produce goods can only sell those goods in the immediate area. There is little trade with Albanians outside of a few Pristina distributors that transport bulk goods to the area's small shops for sale.

Education

Gracanica has an electro-technical secondary school, a medical secondary school and a pedagogic secondary school. Serbs from the YU complex in Pristina are transported to schools in Gracanica every weekday. In addition, primary schools are located in all interviewee areas, and secondary schools are located in Caglavica and Laplje Selo. Livadje students attend school in Gušterica, Laplje Selo or Gracanica. University students attend school either via correspondence, in North Mitrovica or in Serbia proper. This acts as an effective barrier against higher education, due to transport concerns and increased costs. The University of Pristina has been off-limits to non-Albanian students since June of 1999.



Gracanica

Gracanica (pop. 5076*) is the largest Serbian & Roma enclave within Pristina municipality. The village lies 13 KM south of Pristina on the Pristina - Gnjilane 'highway,' and is approximately 40 KM from Gnjilane/ Gjilan. Gracanica is the most survivable and sustainable Serb/ Roma area within the municipality due to its established population and its status as a minority-busing transit point. However, the town's population has dwindled significantly since the events following the June 1999 cessation of hostilities between FRY and NATO.

Security & Transportation

The security situation inside Gracanica is stable, but there have been grenade attacks carried out against Serbs within Gracanica in recent years. Mortar shells have been fired from the nearby Albanian community of Ajvalja. The February, 2001 'Niš express' bus bombing in Medare (Podujevo municipality) was destined for Gracanica; many of the killed and wounded were from the village. The Serbs targeted in the April 18th, 2001 car bombing in Pristina all resided in Gracanica. Random assaults and attempted kidnappings have occurred; Albanians transiting through the town have been assaulted and have had their vehicles defaced, especially after security incidents and attacks against Serbs in other areas of Kosovo.

Gracanica, along with North Mitrovica, acts as a protest focal point for the remnants of Kosovo's Serb community. They cut off one of Kosovo's main roads - the Pristina-Gnjilane/ Gjilan road - on a regular basis, to protest either specific attacks or their general situation.

KFOR provides escorts for monthly convoys from Gracanica to Brezovica (Štrpce municipality) and Velika Hoća (Orahovac/ Rahovec municipality). KFOR also provides biweekly escorts from Gracanica to the Serbian border - Gate 3/ Medare (Podujevo Municipality). KFOR and UNMIK police provide medical escorts from Gracanica and outlying areas to the Gracanica ambulanta, Gracanica's Simonieda hospital, the Russian hospital in Kosovo Polje, and primary facilities in North Mitrovica. Serbs and Roma do not have access to majority community health facilities in Pristina.

Economy & Infrastructure

Gracanica's single main road is lined with shops, cafes, restaurants, bars and car washes. A minimal amount of the population - almost all of them Serbs - benefit from this trade. Gracanica's position as a minority-busing 'hub' has made it the focal point of commerce for communities in harsher circumstances throughout Kosovo. Serbs and Roma come to the village to sell what they've produced and buy what they cannot find in their own areas. Clothing stores are found in abundance; these clothes are purchased from Slavic Muslims in the textile town of Novi Pazar and re-sold.

The one successful bakery in Gracanica is owned by Albanians. They have no security problems; one can hear them speak Albanian to one another while they wait on Serbs.

Economic connections between Gracanica and Pristina are slowly being re-established. Bulk distributors from Pristina do business with Gracanica stores. Albanian products are slowly finding a niche in the community. Not so for Serbian products in the Albanian community, although Gracanica, for some reason, is famed for the eggs its chickens produce.

Education

Gracanica has an electro-technical secondary school, a medical secondary school and a pedagogic secondary school. Serbs from the YU complex in Pristina are transported to schools in Gracanica every weekday. In addition, Gracanica has a primary school and a Serb kindergarten.

Roma

Gracanica’s Roma live in two separate Mahalas, on opposite sides of the village. The first Mahala - a side-street about 500 meters north of the Gracanica Cultural Center- is populated entirely by ‘Srpski Cigani’ - Serbian Roma. They are Orthodox Christians, speak Serbian as a first language, and many have lost the use of Romanes. Many of these Roma intermarry with Serbs; many of them deny that they are Roma. Srpski Cigani are almost all educated, and are in a higher economic stratum than Gracanica’s other Roma.

The main Mahala lies a few KM southeast of the Serbian Roma Mahala, on the main road. The Mahala extends south on one main dirt track that branches into sub-roads. The Mahala also extends north from the main road for a kilometer or so. The main Mahala is almost entirely Muslim; the Roma there speak Romanes as a first language, and the children do not begin to learn Serbian until the age of 6 or so. A few mixed Roma-Ashkalija families speak Albanian as a first language.

Almost the entire Mahala is unemployed. Many Roma engage in manual labor for Serbs in the fields, while others chop wood or recycle. A few blacksmiths ply their trade in Gracanica, while some other Roma work for UNMIK.

The Roma community leader is Hamit Šerifović.

Most Roma children attend primary school; very few go on to secondary school, and none of Gracanica’s Muslim Roma have completed university.

The OSCE funds a Roma community center in Gracanica; the center acts as an information dissemination center for Roma, and is also the site of an informal kindergarten where Serbian and English are taught. Balkan Sunflowers acts as consultants and advisers to the center as subcontractors to the OSCE. BSF has been active in the Roma community since early 2001, and has organized remedial education programs, summer camps, and computer classes. Business seminars for the community have taken place in the center. In addition, there are two active Roma NGOs in the community: Po Lacho Drom (On the good path) and Eyes of the Future.

Gracanica’s population is 98% Serb and 2% Roma.

Gracanica’s Roma Population:

	Families	Individuals
Pre-war	~196	~980
2001	~72	~350
2002	~80	~400
IDPs	~17	~85

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

Returns 2000-1	2	10
Returns 2002	3	5

*UNHCR figures differ, and state that 61 Roma families live in Gracanica.

Roma under 18 (2001): ~89

Roma under 18 (2002): ~120

Roma 18-60: ~200

Roma over 60: ~80

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Figures provided by Sebastian Šerifović (OSCE Roma Center Manager) and Hamit Šerifović (Roma Community Leader).



Preoce

Preoce is the poorest interviewee area in southwestern Pristina municipality. They have much less freedom of movement and economic/ educational opportunity than other residents of the area due to their location. Preoce lies on the other side of the Pristina-Skopje 'highway.' Preoce lies roughly 9 KM south of Pristina.

Security & Transportation

Preoce's freedom of movement is limited to the Serb/ Roma areas of Bresje and Ugljare (Kosovo Polje) via the KFOR road. Preoce residents can access Čaglavica, Laplje Selo and Gracanica by crossing the main Pristina-Skopje 'highway,' but the road continues to act

as a psychological barrier, as well as an economic one. Preoce's residents must access Gracanica for further travel options.

Economy & Infrastructure

Preoce's farmers can access most of their agricultural land. A few corrugated metal shacks function as shops that are overpriced in comparison to Gracanica. They are little-used. Preoce's electricity is intermittent at best due to the age of the transformer unit. Preoce's phone lines are disabled.

Preoce is 98% unemployed. A few families receive social assistance from UNMIK. There is little NGO activity.

Education

Preoce has one primary school - a satellite school of Gracanica's Kralj Milutin School. Children must attend secondary school in either Gracanica or Laplje Selo; UNMIK provides transportation.

Roma

Preoce's Roma Mahala is on the northern end of the village, at the edge of arable land. The Mahala streets are unpaved; there is no functioning sewage system.

Preoce's Roma, compared to undue attention focused on other, more visible Kosovo Mahalas, are neglected by the international community. Preoce's Roma benefit from little NGO activity, with the exception of ineffective cultural celebrations that last a day or two and then end. This is partly due to the aggression of the local Roma leadership. They refuse to cooperate with other NGOs; Preoce's Roma leaders were offered funding to carry out programs in conjunction with the Gracanica Roma NGO Eyes of the Future. The leaders refused to work with the Gracanica group, and they received nothing. Po Lacho Drom also approached Preoce's Roma leaders without success. Balkan Sunflowers carried out research in the area in February of 2003; they were accused of various untoward activities. This project was supposed to conduct a dozen interviews in Preoce, but could not operate in the village due to local leaders. This costs Preoce's Roma potentially beneficial programs. The now-defunct NGO Children's Aid Direct delivered food in Preoce as implementers to UNHCR and the UN's World Food Program, but these deliveries have since been discontinued.

Preoce's Roma

	Families	Individuals
Pre-war	~25	~370
2002	~25	~370

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Livadje

Livadje is one of the more physically isolated minority areas of Kosovo, a small village surrounded by hills and farmland. The village lies several kilometers south of Laplje Selo on a little-used road that eventually leads to Donja Gušterica and Janjevo.

Security & Transportation

Livadje has had no security incidents since the war's end. Transportation is the predominant issue, due to the isolation of the site. Private combis drive to Gracanica and Gušterica a few times a day. All further travel must be sought in Gracanica.

Economy & Infrastructure

Serbs own all arable land. The Roma own little. Farmers sell their produce in Gracanica or Gušterica. A few small shops exist; there are no cafes or restaurants. There is no sewage system, the water quality is poor, and power is intermittent; Livadje's transformer is decrepit and often breaks down. Children's Aid Direct delivered World Food Program parcels in Livadje until Spring of 2002. Livadje, outside of farming, has no economic opportunity.

Education

Livadje has a small primary school. Secondary school students must travel to Gušterica, Gracanica or Laplje Selo. UNMIK provides transport.

Roma

Most Roma in the village are related to one another. Their Mahala is indistinguishable from the rest of the village. All of the adults have completed primary school; one attended, but did not complete, university. Several Roma children are enrolled in secondary school. All Livadje's Roma are officially unemployed. Some work as manual labors for Serb farmers; others carry out small-scale smithing work.

Livadje's Roma

	Families	Individuals
Pre-war	~5	~40
2002	~5	~42
IDPs	~0	~0
Returns 2000-1	NA	NA
Returns 2002	NA	NA

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Obilic/Obiliq & Vučitrn/ Vushtrri Municipality: Plemetina Village, Plemetina Camp, Crkvena Vodica and Priluzje

Location

Obilić was the economic center of this area until June of 1999, when it became off-limits to the surrounding minority communities.

Plemetina Camp lies 2 KM Northwest of Obilić town; Plemetina Village is a further 1-2 KM further north. Priluzje is 4-5 KM north of Plemetina Village. Crkvena Vodica lies 1 KM west of Obilić town.

Security & Transportation

Norwegian KFOR is responsible for area security. They are well-regarded by the communities here. A small French KFOR group is stationed in Priluzje.

A Serbian family in Obilić town was beaten to death, in their beds, in June of 2003. Since then several potential witnesses - also Serbs - have had grenades thrown at their homes in an effort to intimidate them. Two Ashkalija and a Serb from Plemetina Camp were assaulted by KEK security guards in 2002; the case was misfiled and no police actions were taken. All IDP returns to Obilić have subsequently halted; most Obilić Serbs have now stated their intention to leave. An elderly Serb woman in Obilić was shot to death in December of 2001 while walking with her husband. Minorities (in majority areas) are constant targets of stone-throwing, verbal abuse and physical assaults. One Serb continued to run a pizzeria in Obilić town until spring of 2002; in that time his restaurant was attacked 29 times, with automatic weapons fire, hand grenades, homemade explosive devices and rocks. He eventually sold the business and moved to Serbia.

Minorities in majority areas are under immense pressure to sell their homes. Polite requests to buy a home, when declined, are followed by verbal threats, harassing telephone calls, and eventually, gunshots.

The Ashkalija in this area have some freedom of movement, due to their fluency in Albanian. For Serbs and Roma, freedom of movement is severely restricted, especially in Obilić Town and Crkvena Vodica. Only minorities with private cars can move.

Plemetina Camp, Plemetina Village, and Priluzje are all interconnected; Serbs and Roma move freely throughout this area. UNMIK offers a minorities shuttle several times per week, from Priluzje to Gracanica, via Plemetina Village, Plemetina Camp, Crkvena Vodica and Obilić town.

The Kosovo Polje- Mitrovica/ Zvečan train runs twice a day; it stops in Obilić town and Plemetina Village. From Zvečan, connections are made to Serbia proper and Belgrade. The train's path through Albanian areas is a dangerous one; the train is regularly stoned, and sometimes shot at. The Albanian National Army attempted to blow up a Zvečan railway trestle, but its bombers proved incompetent. The train is protected by KFOR soldiers on board. Some Albanians utilize the train.

Economy & Infrastructure

Many area minorities worked in Obilić town before June of 1999; since then, the area is too dangerous to travel to. *Korporata Energjetike e Kosovës* (KEK hereafter) - Kosovo's electrical company, with its main plants, Kosovo A & B dominating the skyline, was the main regional employer. All Serbs and Roma working for KEK in 1999 were summarily fired and have not been reinstated, despite UNMIK judicial orders to do so.

Priluzje and Plemetina Village are agriculture/ livestock areas. Access to fields is good. Other villages - Babin Most and Miloševo - have had their livestock stolen and their land seized.

Education

Priluzje has a primary school and a medical secondary school; Plemetina Village has a primary school and a pedagogic secondary school. Enfants Du Monde ran a kindergarten that has since closed; Balkan Sunflowers runs a Roma resource center that has remedial education programs for Roma children. IRC ran remedial school programs in Plemetina Camp. Several younger camp children attend Balkan Sunflowers programs in Plemetina Village. Several Ashkalija from Plemetina camp attend an Albanian school in Obilić town; the children are well-integrated. Serb and Roma students living in Obilić town are transported to other minority areas to attend school.

There are no opportunities for higher education in the area. University students attend school via correspondence, in North Mitrovica or in Serbia proper.

Plemetina village

Plemetina lies 3 KM north of Obilić town.



Security & Transportation

Serbs and Roma lack freedom of movement beyond Plemetina and the immediate minority areas. Security incidents in the village are few, although recently an Albanian, himself insulted by Serbs in the village center, returned later and opened fire with a handgun. There were no injuries. A few Serb and Roma homes were burned after the war.

Serbs and Roma must travel to Obilić town to cash their UNMIK social assistance checks. They have been threatened, and two Roma were threatened by an Albanian with a knife in May 2003. Balkan Sunflowers provides automobile transport and protective accompaniment duties once a month. Other than these morning transports, Obilić town is off-limits to Plemetina

Serbs. Those Roma who speak Serbian have less problems, and Ashkalija have returned to the Azotiku neighborhood with few incidents.

Norwegian KFOR dismantled the roadblocks leading to Plemetina Camp & Village in 2002. No serious security incidents within the village/ camp environs have occurred since. The Norwegians implemented mobile checkpoints immediately after the last Serb murders in Obilić town.

UNMIK offers bus transports several times per week from Plemetina to Gracanica.

The Kosovo Polje- Mitrovica/ Zvečan train runs twice a day; it stops in Plemetina Village. From Zvečan, connections are made to Serbia proper and Belgrade. The train is protected by KFOR soldiers on board.

Economy & Infrastructure

Before the war, the Plemetina workforce either worked for KEK or worked the fields. Since 1999 all the KEK employees have been fired and local farmers have lost access to 40-50% of their land. KFOR provided security for farmers to work land near Albanian areas. Many Albanians are illegally cultivating Serb land as their own. Livestock has been stolen from outlying homes. Non-retired KEK employees receive pittances from Serbia, as do KEK pensioners.

Plemetina has one café/ bar (Speedy's), two large mini-markets, and several prefab metal shacks that sell beer, cigarettes, snacks, and bootleg music. Most goods are purchased in Gracanica for resale. A Rom male cuts hair in his backyard for 30 Dinars a head; he tried to secure a shop in the village's center but was threatened by the Serbs. A few dozen Roma, and a few Serbs, receive social assistance from UNMIK. A few internationals rent rooms in the village.

Electricity is terrible. When the power is on, it is usually too weak to power larger appliances. Water quality is also poor. Phone service must be paid for. UNMIK ordered PTK to reduce overdue bills by half. The majority of Plemetina's villagers have no phone service, nor can they afford to have it restored.

Many Serb and Roma homes in outlying areas were destroyed after the NATO war's end. For those that did not actually flee Kosovo after the cessation of hostilities, receiving grants for reconstruction has proven difficult.

Due to the pollution caused by KEK's Kosovo A & B plants, health problems abound in the immediate population. The snow turns grey after a few hours. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders are common among older residents. Children are born with breathing problems.

Education

Plemetina Village has one primary and one secondary school. Albanian students have been banned by the school director; Albanian children attend school in prefabricated shacks provided by KFOR, on the edge of the school grounds.

Roma

Plemetina Village's Roma reside in two Mahalas. The primary Mahala in Plemetina extends from just beyond the village center to the eastern edge. The Mahala is accessible by two wrecked dirt roads. Many Roma homes have only outdoor water access and toilets.

Plemetina’s Roma are a fractured lot, with competing community leaders and the families that support them. One supposed leader attempted to expel Balkan Sunflowers when they refused to hire him as a manager. This same leader tried to have the OSCE remove an advocate because he did not approve of her family. He has also threatened to burn down the homes of those who attempt to utilize the Pax Christie fund.

Most Roma have completed primary school; a minority have completed secondary school. Several Roma are employed by the OSCE, Balkan Sunflowers and other groups. An uncharacteristically high percentage of Plemetina Roma children attend school. Many of them have difficulties in the Serbian language. At least 25 school-age children have never attended school.

Plemetina’s Serbs and Roma used to receive WFP parcels from Children’s Aid Direct. None now do. Other groups have reduced firewood distribution and other winterization policies. The OSCE has appointed local Roma community advocates to represent Plemetina Village and Camp; Balkan Sunflowers runs a Roma resource center that offers remedial education, homework and language assistance, computer classes and other programs; the group formed a boy scout troop and offered Tai Chi classes. A Belgian Group, Pax Christie, has created a community reconstruction fund for Serbs and Roma.

Demographic Information

Approximately 186 Serb families (about 990 individuals; 220 children under 15 years old) and 10 Serb IDP families live in Plemetina

There are between 15 and 20 Albanian families in the village.

Plemetina Village Roma:

	Families	Individuals
Pre-war		
2001	~87	~395
2003	~91	~410
IDPs		~40
Returns 2000-1		
Returns 2002		

Roma under 18 (2001): ~220

Roma under 18 (2002): ~229

Roma over 18 (2002): ~181

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Plemetina Camp



Plemetina Camp was established in July of 1999, to replace the refugee areas around the Serbian school in Kosovo Polje. Thousands of Ashkalija, and some Roma, congregated at the school in June of 1999. The site was overwhelmed by those fleeing the Kosovo Polje Mahalas; there was not enough security, accommodation or food. Plemetina was established 1-2 KM from Obilić town, in the shadow of the KEK cooling tower.

Security and Transportation

Two Ashkalija and one Serb were recently assaulted by KEK security guards. Occasional violence in the camp occurs due to KPS attempts to arrest a resident. The camp population has blocked the road to Plemetina Village/ Priluzje to protest their conditions.

On a positive note, 21 Ashkalija families from the camp recently returned to the Azotiku neighborhood of Obilić town with no significant problems.

Plemetina camp's inhabitants can access train services from Plemetina Village or Obilić town. Weekly bus transports connect the camp to other minority areas. Most IDPs here, with the exception of Serbs and Roma, speak Albanian fluently, adding to their safety in majority areas.

Economy & Infrastructure

The camp population is unemployed and unemployable, due to the camp location and the ethnicity of its residents. A few Ashkalija are members of the Kosovo Protection Corps - the demilitarized version of the Kosovo Liberation Army. KPS was forced by UNMIK to demographically reflect Kosovo's ethnic breakdown. The rest of the camp is solely reliant upon international aid.

This aid impedes return to the point-of-origin communities of camp residents. Camp residents, should they return to Kosovo Polje, would lose a significant amount of food aid and free firewood. Camp residents received better quality food, and more cubic meters of firewood, than did other minority areas. This aid makes the camp residents an object of scorn to many Plemetina Village Roma.

Plemetina Camp was established by UNHCR; the camp has been run by the Italian Consortium of Solidarity, Children's Aid Direct, and now the Albanian Mother Teresa Society. The camp was absolutely overloaded with NGOs carrying out job training and educational programs. At one time a dozen international organizations carried out programs there. Now the camp has faded in programming popularity; the NGOs have essentially left them. Food aid and NGO activity has acted as an economic impediment

to return; especially because the Kosovo Polje Ashkalija are now accepted within KP town.

Education

No primary or secondary schools exist in the camp.

The International Rescue Committee has carried out numerous educational programs for camp children and teens, with lasting effects. IRC’s ultimate goal was to integrate Ashkalija children into Albanian-language Obilić schools; they have done this with nearly 90 children.

As of late 2002, a kindergarten was operating in the camp.

Plemetina Camp - Roma & Ashkalija

	Families	Individuals
(Roma) 2002		44
(Ashkalija) 2002		655

A few Serb refugees, expelled from Croatia (the Krajina and other areas) and Bosnia in the early 1990’s, now reside in the Plemetina camp.

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Priluzhje

Priluzhje lies in Vuçitrn/ Vushtrri Municipality, 2 KM from the Obilić/ Obiliq municipal border. The village lies 3 KM north of Plemetina Village.

Security & Transportation

Priluzhje’s population has complete freedom of movement as far south as the Plemetina Camp. After, they have none. The secondary road through Priluzhje that leads to Mitrovica cannot be safely used past northern Priluzhje.

The Kosovo Polje - Mitrovica/ Zvecan train runs through Priluzhje twice a day. UNMIK buses run several times a week to Plemetina, Obilić town and Gracanica.

Economy & Infrastructure

Priluzhje has one restaurant (that often runs out of food) and a few private homes that have been converted into cafes/ bars. There are a few hairdressers’ salons, a ill-stocked pharmacy, and several shack-shops that sell beer, cigarettes, coffee and other items. Produce is produced and sold locally. Priluzhje also has a cultural center and radio station.

Priluzhje hosts a non-operating textile mill. Most of Priluzhje's inhabitants worked for KEK before June of 1999. After, they were all fired.

Priluzhje is 80-90% unemployed. The Roma are almost all unemployed.

Telephone service has been disconnected by PTK for non-payment. Like Plemetina, Priluzhje is not within Mobtel's mobile coverage reach. Alcatel phone numbers and credits are too expensive for most villagers.

Electricity is better in Priluzhje than Plemetina Village; Priluzhje is on the grid that powers Vucitrn. Electricity is still, like most of Kosovo, weak and intermittent. Water quality is better than Plemetina, but is still poor.

Education

Priluzhje has a primary and secondary school. A medical secondary school has many students from Plemetina. Most Serbs have completed secondary school.

Roma

Priluzhje's Mahalla lies northwest of the town center. The Mahala is almost entirely unemployed. Most Roma are Bugurdjije; many have completed primary school, but few have completed secondary. No Priluzhje Roma have attended university. A few Roma males work as blacksmiths or manual laborers for the Serbs. Children engage in recycling/ manual labor activities.

The Priluzhje Roma leader is Ferki 'Beco' Emini.

Demographic Information

ROMA	Families	Individuals
Pre-war	~35	~200
2002	~35	~200
IDPs	0	0

Priluzhje has between 3000-3300 Serbs. Roughly 500 are IDPs.

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Crkvena Vodica

Crkvena Vodica is 2 KM west of Obilic town.

Security & Transportation

The minorities remaining in Crkvena Vodica are completely isolated. Before the war, Crkvena Vodica was a multiethnic area. Now, most Serbs and all Roma have fled. Children’s Aid Direct attempted to create a multiethnic youth center; this endeavor failed. Six resident Serbs have been murdered since June of 1999 and nearly 30 wounded. The school has been attacked with hand grenades. Half of Crkvena Vodica’s Serbs and all of its prewar Roma population have fled.

Economy & Infrastructure

None. Before June of 1999 most of Crkvena Vodica’s Serbs and Roma worked for KEK. Some worked in the mines at Belacevac. All were fired. Some Serbs cultivated land; all of the land has been seized since war’s end.

PTK cut telephone service in June of 1999. Electricity is weak. Water quality is poor; half of the village has no water because of low pressure. There is no sewage system.

Children’s Aid Direct delivered WFP parcels to Crkvena Vodica but stopped in Spring of 2002. Several Crkvena Vodica residents benefit from UNMIK social assistance.

Education

A primary school for remaining Serbs still exists.

Roma

The last two Roma families fled Crkvena Vodica in March of 2003. They now live in dilapidated, abandoned homes in the Plemetina Village Mahala. Since 1999 65 Roma homes were burned. The entire Roma population was driven out by a systematic campaign of terror and intimidation.

Demographic Information

Roma	Families	Individuals
Pre-war	~70	
2003	0	0

Before 1999, 800 Serbs lived in Crkvena Vodica. As of June 2001, 308 remained. There are no IDPs from other areas of Kosovo. Crkvena Vodica is beyond what most internationals consider to be the point of no return for a community.

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Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë

Kosovo Polje includes the areas of Bresje, Ugljare, Batuse, Kuzmin, Kosovo Polje town, and several contained Roma/ Ashkalija Mahalas. Kosovo Polje also hosts a number of IDP containment areas.

Kosovo Polje lies 7 KM southwest of Pristina City. Bresje is 1 KM south of Kosovo Polje Town; Ugljare is 1 KM east of Bresje and 1.5 KM southeast of Kosovo Polje Town. Kuzmin lies 2 KM west of Bresje. Batuse is roughly 5 KM southwest of Kosovo Polje Town.

Security & Transportation

Ashkalija have limited impediments to their freedom of movement due to their use of Albanian. Roma and Serbs have more difficulty, although they shop in the Albanian areas of Kosovo Polje town. Insecurity results in them shopping in the mornings, and in groups. Roma and Serbs are subject to harassment and verbal abuse; immediately after the 1999 war's end, minority areas were subject to shootings and grenade attacks. One attack injured 40 when a Serb market was bombed. A few Albanians were assaulted when they were mistaken for Serbs.

The Serb graveyard in Bresje was burned on August 13, 2003.

The infamous murder of three Ashkalija heads of family and one teenager in the Drenica in November of 2000 occurred when they, as IDPs in Kosovo Polje, sought to return and rebuild their destroyed homes. They were all shot on the first night.

Roma and Serbs have access to Preoce, Gracanica and the other minority areas of southwestern Pristina municipality via the KFOR roads that run through Bresje and Ugljare.

Several kidnappings and murders occurred when Kosovo Polje residents ventured into Pristina. Minorities have increased their security precautions accordingly and no longer go to Pristina.

Economy & Infrastructure

Before 1999, KEK employed thousands of Kosovo Polje Serbs and hundreds of Roma/Ashkalija. The Kosovo Polje train station and Ramizadak Construction Company were also primary employers of minorities. All were fired after the war. Outside of a few token Ashkalija hires, none have gotten their jobs back. UNMIK employs many Serbs, Ashkalija and Roma in the civil service sector.

There are no shops or businesses in Kosovo Polje's Mahalas. Unemployment is close to 100%. Serb areas are economically characterized by shops selling beer and cigarettes, a few cafes, and locally grown produce sold in front yards.

Outlying areas were cultivated by Serbs. Many of these fields can no longer be safely utilized.

Electricity is intermittent. Kosovo Polje has a severe water shortage.

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

Almost 400 minorities received UNMIK social assistance. Many Ashkalija & Roma families were entirely dependent on these payments.

Many NGOs were initially involved in the municipality, providing food aid, reconstruction & winterization assistance and education/ children's programs. The NGO presence in Kosovo is currently waning.

Education

The minority areas of KP are laces with primary and secondary schools, often underfunded and understaffed. IDPs reside in some schools. Theoretically, Ashkalija have access to Albanian schools; in reality parents fear for their children's safety there, and many children are kept at home because of harassment- sometimes in school, and sometimes on the route the children must travel to get there. Poverty and its manifestation in poor clothes and hygiene keep many Ashkalija and Roma children at home.

The International Rescue Committee conducted remedial education programs for Ashkalija, and vocational/ technical training for Ashkalija teens and young adults.

Demographic Information - Roma & Ashkalija

	Roma	Ashkalija
Pre-war	300	2500
Current	300	3000

43 Roma families and 477 Ashkalija families live in Kosovo Polje town. 23% are IDPs. Lismir is a return site for Ashkalija who fled the village in 1999.

Roughly 3500 Serbs live in Kosovo Polje and its environs, from a pre-war population of 8240. Currently 38,000 Albanians live in the municipality. 22 Ashkalija houses have been reconstructed, while 150 Serb families are waiting for housing.

The Roma/ Ashkalija population is unstable. Numbers have increased in already overpopulated Mahalas due to the influx of IDPs from less-secure areas of Kosovo. Many IDPs reside in collective centers - the Viaduct Barracks, Klanica Barracks and the Sveti Sava School. Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia reside in these centers.

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The Northern Municipalities - South Mitrovica, Čezmin Lug (North Mitrovica), Žitkovac (Zvečan) and the Warehouse (Leposavić)

The Roma/ Ashkalija/ Egyptian IDP camps of the northern municipalities lie in Leposavić, Mitrovica and Zvečan. Žitkovac lies a few kilometers north of Zvečan town,

near to the now-closed Trepca mining complex (and its landscape of slag heaps); Čezmin Lug is to the east of North Mitrovica town; and the Warehouse lies in Leposavić town.

The history of the camps

Most Roma IDP camp dwellers originated in Mitrovica south, which hosted one of the largest Mahalas in Kosovo before June of 1999. Between 6000-7000 Roma lived there. The primary southern Mahalla - on the banks of the Ibar River - is now a gutted ruin. With 650 destroyed homes, it is the largest still-destroyed residential area in Kosovo. 354 Roma have filed property claims for their burned residences there with the UN's Housing and Property Directorate.

The South Mitrovica Municipal Government seeks to bulldoze the area and either build new homes or create a park. This will ensure that displaced Roma and Ashkalija will never return to the south. The municipality's determination to see this plan occur is being blocked by UNMIK. Mitrovica passed a self-serving 'declaration' affirming the right of return, and then declared they would build apartments but with no preferential allocation to the Roma who actually own the property, and have been rotting in prefab camps across the river for the past four years.

Other camp IDPs originated in the villages of Stari Trg and Prvi Tunel. Many Roma who fled abroad have returned to find themselves in secondary displacement in one of the camps. KFOR halted a mass-return attempt to the South Mitrovica Mahala in 2000; this move averted what would have resulted in heavy bloodshed, especially in light of the volatile Mitrovica environment in 2000.

Security & Transportation

Although the majority of these IDPs are Roma, their primary language is often Albanian - making them targets of abuse and harassment from Serb radicals in the north. In Žitkovac, several Roma were beaten and threatened with guns in early 2003. A Roma family was assaulted; the mother was urinated upon. In Čezmin Lug, gangs of Serb youths have assaulted Roma. These incidents are rarely reported to the police; the Roma fear retaliation. The Warehouse inhabitants have less security concerns; still, UNHCR notes that Serbs call the police when Roma partake in their own public religious events, including funerals.

Those that speak Serbian can move about with little concern. Again, language defines ethnicity as opposed to simple appearance: it shows 'whose side you're on.' Before the war's end, many North Mitrovica were driven from their homes by Serbs.

Camp residents cannot cross to south Mitrovica without serious risk. South Mitrovica is radical; a Bosniak in south Mitrovica was recently beaten to death when he was overheard speaking Serbian. The last 20 Serbs in south Mitrovica live in the Orthodox Church, under 24-hour guard.

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

32 Roma families remain in Sitničko Naselje; the remains of this Mahala's Roma homes are occupied by Albanians. Two Roma families live elsewhere in town. Roma there are subject to less abuse, but are still threatened. Their children attend Albanian schools, and they have access to shopping areas and Mitrovica's health care facilities.

Economy & Infrastructure

A few Roma in these camps are employed by NGOs - often as cleaners. Roma males engage in private manual labor; some children recycle. There are no shops or trades practiced in the camps. Norwegian Church Aid attempted to start a 'Roma car wash' in Čezmin Lug; the attempt failed.

90% of camp Roma receive social assistance from UNMIK.

Education

Albanian-speaking Roma children in the camps are cut off from Albanian-language education. Those with the requisite language skills attend Serbian schools. Česmin Lug children attend the Branko Radićević School in North Mitrovica. Žitkovac children were banned from the nearest school, in Zvečan; 32 Roma children are bussed to Branko Radićević. Many of the children are in segregated classes. Some have been picked on or struck by Serb children for speaking Albanian to one another.

Balkan Sunflowers provided remedial education to Žitkovac children until June of 2002. Belgian Caritas provides the same service in Leposavić. Similar programs occur in Čezmin Lug.

Demographic Information

	Families	Individuals	Under 16
Žitkovac 2001		175	78
Žitkovac 2003		186	
Česmin Lug 2001	~55	256	107
Cesmin Lug 2003	~60	282	~140
Warehouse 2003		200	
South Mitrovica	~34		

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Gnjilane/ Gjilan

Gnjilane/ Gjilan lies 34 KM southeast of Pristina. The Roma population of Gnjilane resides in three enclaves: the Mahala (Lole Ribara), Abdullah Presheva and a small area near Marshal Tito/ Skanderbeg.

Security & Transportation

Many Roma areas in Gnjilane/ Gjilan town were completely depopulated after June of 1999. Several Roma were assaulted and killed. Others had their homes burned or were intimidated into leaving the town; Gjilan Roma IDPs live throughout Serb areas of Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia.

In May 2001 homes were burnt in the mahala in anticipation of the return of two Roma families. More homes have been burned since. A woman was assaulted outside the OSCE election registration center in the mahala, and a Rom male was murdered in October 2001; the victim was slated to testify against two Albanians that had assaulted him earlier. His throat was cut instead. Houses were consistently burned in the Abdullah Presheva area. Assaults against Roma men, women & children were commonplace until early 2002. These extreme examples, coupled with consistent minor acts of violence against the Roma community, created an intense atmosphere of fear, tension, and mistrust. Roma are reluctant to report instances of harassment to police; few actions have been taken by police on behalf of Gnjilane's Roma in the recent past. Roma still contend with taunts and the occasional stoning; Roma women have reported being sexually harassed by Albanian males.

Roma can access areas of Gnjilane town. They often do so in groups. There is no regular transport in or out of the Mahala. Albanian-speaking Roma move about with ease; some even travel to Pristina.

Economy & Infrastructure

Before 1999, Roma worked as manual laborers and recyclers. Several Roma worked as blacksmiths and auto mechanics.

A few Roma men are employed by UNMIK as welders; a few women work as cleaners. The Soros foundation trained several Mahala women to cut hair. They do not have the means to work at this trade. Most families survive by social welfare, money from family members residing abroad, or short-term menial labor.

Unemployment within the Roma community is over 95%.

The majority of Gnjilane's Roma benefit from UNMIK social assistance. The World Food Program halted food distribution in Gnjilane in spring of 2002.

Electricity is intermittent. Water is of poor quality. The Mahala's telephones still function. Mobile phone coverage is limited to Alcatel; too expensive for most Roma.

Gnjilane contains 150 uninhabitable Roma homes, and 400 damaged homes. The American Refugee Committee has repaired six of these domiciles. Over 300 Roma homes are occupied by Albanians.

Gnjilane minorities have benefited from an immense amount of NGO activity in the area. Income generation products have been run by Soros, the IRC, ARC and UMCOR.

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

Balkan Sunflowers created a Roma Resource Center in 2000; it still functions. A kindergarten is on the second floor, and the basement is now an exercise room, constructed by the ARC. IRC has also provided reconstruction grants.

Education

About half of Gnjilane's Roma have completed primary school. Few went on to secondary school- most of them males.

Roma attended Serb schools before June of 1999. After, they were cut off from all educational opportunities.

In 2000 UNMIK established a remedial education program with the intent to integrate Roma children into the Thimi Mitko Albanian primary school in Gnjilane. Tefik Agushi, the then-community leader, countered this by claiming that the children would be in danger. UNMIK countered by arranging transportation to the nearest Serbian school, in the village of Gornje Kusce.

Agushi independently decided that the Roma remedial program would become a Romanes school. UNMIK's integration effort lost community support, and UNMIK Department of Education, Science and Technology's refusal to recognize the establishment of parallel education systems, (and Agushi's off-times "lack of transparency" in regard to finances), ensured that the new Roma school - the 'Blue Door School' - received no funding or recognition.

The school has now been recognized by UNMIK. Classes are now conducted by two Serbian teachers and untrained Roma volunteers. 65 children, aged 7-17, are enrolled. The school fosters isolation; there is no option of continued education.

Other students attend school in the Serb village of Gornje Kusce. UNMIK provides transportation.

Additionally, Balkan Sunflowers runs a kindergarten in the Mahala. They also offer homework assistance, computer and foreign language instruction. The Soros Foundation instituted an adult literacy program.

Demographic Information

	Families	Individuals	Under 18
Prewar	595	4670	NA
Roma 2001	104	354	129
Roma 2002	120	~492	NA
Roma 2003	119	385	NA

The Gnjilane Roma claim that 7000 Roma lived in Gnjilane before 1999.
~15 Roma IDPs from Pristina and Uroševac/ Ferizaj live in the Mahalas.

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Novo Brdo - Bostan, Gnjilane/ Gjilan

Novo Brdo lies 22 KM southeast of Pristina. The municipality is the smallest, least populated in Kosovo. Bostan lies 1 KM from the town.

Security & Transportation

Some homes were burned in 1999 - Albanian and Serbian. Due to Novo Brdo's ethnic balance, there are few security concerns for minorities. Bostan residents have free access to Novo Brdo town. Transportation outside the area is problematic due to the area's isolation, infrequent public transport and the ethnicities of passengers. Novo Brdo minorities can travel, without danger, as far south as Gornje Kusce (Gnjilane/ Gjilan Municipality) and as far east as Slivovo.

Municipality officials are considering the establishment of a bus line connecting Novo Brdo and Gracanica.

Economy & Infrastructure

Some land is cultivated. Novo Brdo was the greatest mining area in SE Europe until the mines ran dry in the late-medieval age. Small-scale mining still exists; most facilities operate with a skeleton crew.

Some residents benefit from UNMIK social assistance. Novo Brdo has benefited from the IRC's Village infrastructure programs.

Education

Bostan has a youth center and a primary school. Children attend secondary school in Novo Brdo town.

Demographic Information

Bostan is home to 44 Roma and 240 Serbs.

Bostan has no effective Roma leader.

Before 1999, 5000 Serbs lived in the municipality. Roughly 1200 remain. Many of those left due to economic, and not ethnic, circumstances; Novo Brdo has no industry to speak of.

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Prizren

Prizren lies 62 KM southwest of Pristina.

Security & Transportation

After June of 1999, Albanians burned the Serb quarter of town. Prizren's Serbs fled en masse in July of 1999. A considerable amount of violence was directed at Prizren's Roma by the KLA; detention centers were created where minorities and Albanians considered to be collaborators were tortured, and often killed.

Prizren minorities now face the least amount of security and movement restrictions in Kosovo - with the exception of resident Serbs. All languages, including Serbian, are spoken freely in Prizren's streets. Serbs who identify themselves as Bosniaks or Gorani can move freely, as long as they are not recognized. Prizren's Roma, Turks, Gorani, and Bosniaks have freedom of movement within Prizren municipality, including usage of public transportation. Minorities also travel freely to Macedonia. This freedom of movement ends when one leaves Prizren municipality; minorities are wary of traveling further except with a private car.

Economy & Infrastructure

Prizren has a well-developed middle class; it is a city built on commerce. In Prizren's Roma Mahalas, Roma own shops and cafes. This is a rare occurrence outside of Prizren. Many Roma work as blacksmiths; many also work as manual laborers. Some Roma children beg in the old town's center.

Education

Roma attend Albanian primary and secondary schools in Prizren town and rural areas. Other Roma attend Bosniak or Turkish schools, not due to security, but to cultural affinity. Most Roma speak Albanian, Serbian, Romanes and Turkish; the cultured language of the town.

Roma

Prizren's Roma identify as Roma; no one distinguishes between Roma, Ashkalija or Egyptian. In rural areas, however, some identify themselves as Egyptian or Ashkalija for security reasons.

The Prizren Roma leader is Hadji Zulfa.

Demographic Information

Prizren has only lost 10% of its Roma population since June of 1999.

Roughly 5000 Roma live in Prizren Municipality. The majority - ~4500 Roma - live in the following Prizren town Mahalas:

INTERVIEWEE AREA PROFILES

Terzi Mahala; Durmish Aslanu; Jeta e Re; Cyrt Mahala; Bazhdarana; Ortakoll-Ulqinit; Arbana; 2 Koriki (with sub-areas Kurill and Zares); and Jeni Mahala.

~17 Roma IDP families from rural Prizren live in the town. Other Roma live outside of Mahalas, in mixed neighborhoods.

Roughly 500 Roma live in the following rural villages:

Atmadja/ Hatmaxhë; Grazdanik/ Grazhdanik; Landovica/ Landovicë; Mamusa/ Mamushë; Medvece/ Medvec; Zojic/ Zojz; Pirane/ Piranë; Donja Srbica/ Serbicë e Poshtme; Serbicë e Epërme; Spinadija/ Shpinadi; Vlasnja/ Vlashnje; and Caparce/ Caparc.

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Excerpts from Adem Osmani's diary, March-June 1999

March 24 1999- Wednesday

Early morning - everything's okay, the same. People were in the street; kids played in the Mahalla.

We talked about the bombing; it's supposed to start tonight. We were still joking.

At 8 PM sirens went off and the power died. I guess they started to bomb Serbia first; political reasons.

The first bomb nearby was loud. We were at home, like normal. We still weren't sure, before, that the bombs would come here. The target was some army place, but it was only one kilometer from the village. A lot of windows broke here because of the explosion.

That night, three more bombs fell on the same site. We didn't sleep. It was a long night.

March 25 1999- Thursday

Day two of the bombing. We went to the shelters. Everyone else went as well. We were four large families in one basement; it was tight. Too many children, too many voices, some panic - everything.

At 8 PM the power went off. Same as last night. We waited for the bombs to come, and a few minutes after 8 it started. Sometimes they were close; sometimes not.

This night I won't forget. I didn't sleep because of the bombs, and the children that cried near me.

Sometimes my friends and I went outside, to see what was happening. We couldn't see anything, but we could hear, and feel, the explosions nearby.

One old man said - 'Nights at war are the longest nights.'

March 26 1999- Friday

Day three. We left the shelters at 5:30 AM and went home. I slept for a few hours. I wanted to go out, but my mother was scared; she thought something bad would happen. The streets are full of Serb soldiers.

I went out anyway, and found a few of my friends. We talked about what we'd seen in the past few nights.

My sister, I, and a few others from my family went back to the shelter that day, and tried to clean it up a bit. We laughed and cleaned, knowing that we'll be back that evening when the bombing starts again.

One of my family told another family that they couldn't return to the shelter that night. There were too many people in there. I was upset about this, but they found another shelter that would take them, so I felt better. They were very poor.

When we finished the cleaning, we went out and sat on the grass, talking. Two planes came in low. I felt fear for a second before I saw the Yugoslav markings on the planes.

That night in the shelter, there was a little bit more room, because of the absent family. It was easier; we expected the bombs by now. Tonight they all landed very far from us.

This is my third day of war, and my second day of sleeping in a shelter.

March 27 1999- Saturday

Early morning - came back home, hung out there, went outside, back to the shelter to clean up, back home, gather the goods we need for the coming night in the shelter.

The streets are full of soldiers, and a lot of them are drunk. The shops are empty, but they still have liquor and beer.

This feels normal for us. A day at home, and a night in the shelter. We got there at 7 PM.

Same time, 8 PM, the power went out. The bombing started, but this time it was really close - nearby villages and towns. It was difficult - sometimes we slept for a bit, but not always. There wasn't room enough for sleeping.

We understood this now, because it was war. The exhaustion, the crying, cramped in a room full of stink and burning tobacco as the walls shake - it makes sense.

March 28 1999- Sunday

It was a holiday but we forgot to celebrate. This morning I went into town to find yogurt, milk, and eggs.

Behind our Mahalla, in Kišnica, were many Albanian homes. Today I saw them burn. It hurt. So their homes burned; I couldn't see the houses, just the black smoke. I hope the people from those homes got out

Again in the shelters this evening. A difficult night; lots of planes in the sky and bombs falling around the village. No sleep.

March 29, 1999- Monday

Day six. The shelter was cold; the children were shivering. They're getting sick. We felt sick too. This could be a problem; this morning I went to the ambulanta, for some medicine.

My friend walked with me. At the ambulanta, we saw people running out, and we followed them to the police station.

The police had three Albanians, two men and a young boy, spread-eagled on the ground. A crowd surrounded them, watching. We got our medicine and left.

Those Albanians were only simple people; there was no reason for them to be laid down like that by the police. That's what I think; or maybe, maybe, there were reasons.

Same pattern that night. In the shelter, listening to the bombs, and no sleep at all.

March 30 1999- Tuesday

Day seven. Same morning as before.

A lot of solders in our village, in shops started to not have enough food; we could buy only milk and yogurt.

I rested at home through the day; the bombing only begins at night, so we feel safe.

7 PM, in the shelter, we wait again for the bombing. Tonight I thought that it would be wonderful if this were only a dream. Lots of bombs fell near the village. If we could see the flashes, the fires, if we were outside to witness it, I'm sure we'd all cry, but inside, wed don't. I'm trying to forget things before they even happen.

March 31 1999- Wednesday

Day eight. My father is in Italy; he is trying to send money to us, but this is hard considering that there's war here. We still have some money for food.

My teacher was working with others today, handing out relief supplies - all food. Lots of people waited for it. My older brother and I waited on line as well.

I thought, 'this is my teacher. Surely he'll give me something.'

He didn't even see me. He was drunk. After awhile, they began to give the food to Roma, not just to Serbs. They didn't do it in a normal way; they just threw the food into the crowds.

Tonight in the shelter there were 23 people - three families. Not too many bombs outside.

April 1 1999- Thursday

Day nine. Everybody's talking about leaving - going of to somewhere else. I said that it was too late - we're already nine days into this war. My family still talked about going - up to Belgrade, or near it. But why? There's bombing up there too. Maybe more than here.

My grandfather ordered us to leave. He has a relative up there, in some village called Vladimirovac. But he didn't really decide yet.

Tonight I went to a different shelter, with a friend. He told me there was a place to stretch out and sleep there. So I did; I slept all night. I didn't hear a single bomb.

April 2 1999- Friday

Nothing special happened today.

Some of my friends left, with their families. We speak more about leaving, my mother doesn't agree. We don't know yet.

April 3, 1999- Saturday

Today we decided to leave. It wasn't my decision. We'll go to Vladimirovac, 50 kilometers from Belgrade.

When I heard this, I went through the Mahalla, to say goodbye to my friends. I didn't want to go and do this. This was not my wish. My grandfather decided this.

Tonight we didn't sleep in the shelters; we slept at home. There were no planes, and no bombs, or at least we didn't hear any. We all slept through the night.

April 4 1999- Sunday

We woke early and packed. We went out and waited in front of the bus stop - right in front of our home.

It's a hard feeling - leaving the place where I was born, leaving the place of my childhood, my best memories in the world. I was the last one to leave the house.

First we traveled to the Pristina bus station; then we headed to Kosovo Polje. At the Pristina station, columns of Albanians waited. They'd been forced out of their homes.

In Kosovo Polje we stayed at my sister's home. We waited until 3 PM; that was when the bus left to Belgrade.

The road to Belgrade - lots of burning homes and dead animals. A real war atmosphere.

When we crossed into Serbia, everything was different - nothing was destroyed. They weren't in a war like Kosovo's, because there weren't Albanians there.

The ride took 11 hours. We waited in the Belgrade train station until 6 AM, then went to the bus station, to catch a ride to Vladimirovac. We arrived there at 9 AM. Our cousin waited for us; he took us to his home.

We stayed for 17 days. Not a lot of bombs falling in the Vojvodina, where Vladimirovac sits. My father wired us money; the post still worked up there.

April 21, 1999

The bus back to Kosovo. When we arrived we saw how the bus station was totally destroyed. Pristina was quiet, empty, no one was on the streets. We couldn't find transportation to Gracanica; no more buses. We sat on our things for a long time, trying to figure out where to go?

We thought to go and find a shelter, but my mother remembered an old Roma friend she knew in the city. We walked to her home; we hoped she was still there. She was, and she welcomed us and fed us. We all slept well. We were lucky.

April 22, 1999

Home - to Gracanica. We caught a single bus running to Gnjilane. The stop was in front of our home, and from the front of our house everything looked normal. But when we got closer we saw that it wasn't too normal; the front door was broken, and inside, everything had been smashed up and looted. All our things were gone.

For the rest of the day we worked to fix our home, to clean it, to make it normal again. I could not even look at my mother, look into her eyes.

I asked around, to see who did this to us, but I couldn't find out.

No one was sleeping in the shelters any longer. People worked in their gardens; none of them paid attention.

Food is so expensive now. It's hard to even find food. We don't have much money left, and my father cannot send us any here. So we'll fight, and we'll stay alive.

May 1-2 1999

Bombs in Gracanica. Big ones. There's a military base here, or at least there was.

May 7 1999

The Pristina - Gnjilane bus was bombed today, in Gracanica. Three Serbs from Gracanica died.

June 9, 1999

The bombing stops. We had political negotiations since early June, and something was finally agreed upon.

Lots of parties. People singing, drinking, just having fun.

June 10 1999

No more soldiers in Gracanica. The Serbian army has left Kosovo.

June 11 1999

1:30 PM - Russian soldiers enter Pristina.

And some Pristina Roma waited for them, to welcome them. There was a Roma band. They played good Roma music. The Serbs were out in the streets, kissing them.

The welcome the Russians because they know what may happen to them next. They're going to have to leave like the Albanians had to leave. Their Mahala will be gone.

They're so happy to see the Russians, to see their faces, they think the Russians will save them, and they'll get to stay in their homes.

Adem's last entry:

The Russians left soon, and the Serbs and the Roma left with them.

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Roma Human Rights Reports excerpts

Excerpts on the Roma condition, from the United States State Department's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - Country Report on Human Rights Practices. March 4, 2002

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/>

On Police Abuses in Serbia Proper:

On May 7, in Ravno Selo, police arrested two Roma men and beat them with clubs in an attempt to force them to confess to stealing. The Humanitarian Law Center filed a complaint with the Municipal Prosecutor's Office in Backa Topola, Vojvodina; however, on May 25, the prosecutor's office dismissed the complaint. On May 11, in Backa Palanka, three police officers beat a Roma man. On May 25, unidentified police officers beat Nenad Filipovic in Kragujevac, first in the presence of his children and then at the local police station. Filipovic, an asthmatic, was detained for 5 hours and suffered an intense asthma attack but was forbidden to use his inhaler. In July police arrested an 11-year-old Romani boy and beat him on the palms and struck him with a nightstick during questioning; he later was released. On August 23, a police officer struck and threatened a 17-year-old Gorani boy in the open air market in central Belgrade. In late August, police beat a Rom, Dusan Jovanovic, reportedly because he touched their police car. In September police in Novi Sad broke the arm of a 14-year-old Roma boy and beat some of his friends.

In one instance, in May the County Court in Nis found two Serbian policemen guilty of incitement to racial hatred for attacking Dragisa Ajdarevic, a Roma boy, and the policemen were sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment.

There were incidents of official discrimination against the Romani population, and skinheads and police occasionally violently attacked Roma (see Section 1.c.). There also was societal violence against Roma. The European Roma Rights Center reported that on January 6, a Serb attacked and shot at a group of boys, believing that they were Roma. On February 2, unknown assailants beat a Roma boy, Cuci Nikolic, and put him in a makeshift jail. On March 1, a group of skinheads attacked a group of Roma in Belgrade with baseball bats, sticks and rocks. In June a Roma judge in Stara Pazova in Vojvodina received death threats and a swastika was drawn on the walls of his home. Also in June, two men attacked two Roma from Leskovac with a gun, hitting them in the head with it. On October 4, local youths broke into a night school in Belgrade and beat several Roma students. In November in Belgrade, local youths punched and threatened two Romani boys, aged 7 and 11. According to the HLC, police officers in the Zvezdara municipality station refused to take any action against the assailants and told the Romani family that the children had "asked for it."

Societal discrimination against Roma was widespread. For example, in Sabac, in western Serbia, Roma were barred from using a municipal swimming pool that is owned by the president of the local branch of the Serbian Radical Party. In July in Surdulica, unknown vandals wrote swastikas and slurs against Roma on buildings in the town. On October

10, a group of men threw stones at Romani houses, breaking some windows, in the Cukaricka Padina settlement in Belgrade. Local authorities often ignore or condone societal intimidation of the Romani community.

There were reports by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights that Roma women and children also were trafficked to Italy, where women and girls were required to work in the sex industry and the boys were required to beg and steal.

On Kosovar Roma IDP conditions in Serbia Proper:

There are an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 displaced Roma living in the country. Roma faced a dilemma during the Kosovo conflict, as many Kosovo Roma were perceived as Serb collaborators. Living conditions for Roma in Serbia were, on the whole, extremely poor. Local municipalities often were reluctant to accommodate them, hoping that if they failed to provide shelter, the Roma would not remain in the community (see Section 5). If they did settle, it was most often in official collective centers with a minimum of amenities or, more often, in makeshift camps on the periphery of major cities or towns. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was in the process of identifying municipalities willing to cooperate in a program for resettling the Roma in more adequate living quarters.

On the Roma condition in Kosovo:

Of the more than 200,000 members of ethnic communities (including approximately 170,000 Serbs and 25,000 Roma) displaced after June 1999, few returned to Kosovo due to security concerns, although international agencies and NGO's initiated some small-scale organized returns projects. Violence, including rape and domestic violence, and discrimination against women remained serious problems. Religious tension and violence persisted, but at significantly diminished levels.

On April 29, a 12-year-old Romani boy was reported abducted in Uroševac/Ferizaj; no update was available at year's end.

Approximately 100,000 Serbs, 30,000 Roma, and 67,000 other minorities remained in Kosovo. Most of the Serbs and about 25,000 Roma who fled when Yugoslav forces withdrew did not return, except in individual cases, due to fears of ethnic violence and a to lack of economic opportunity, housing, and other basic services.

Although the number of murders and reported attacks on other minorities decreased, there were numerous incidents of violence against Roma and Ashkalija, including murder, disappearance, and beatings. For example, in an August 7 grenade attack in Stimlje/ Shtime on a Romani family, five persons were injured; reportedly the family recently had returned from refuge in Macedonia. In July Serbs in Zvecan reportedly attacked and beat a group of some 40 Ashkalija returning from Serbia to live in Kosovo Polje/Fushë Kosovë. Between February and June, at least six Romani houses were set on fire. Many of the remaining Roma in Kosovo were settled in enclaves and encampments and were almost wholly dependent on humanitarian aid to survive; others lived outside enclaves (see Section 2.d.). In Kosovo Polje/Fushë Kosovë, Podujevo, Lipljan/Lipjan,

and Gnjilane/Gjilan, there was some degree of harassment by neighboring Albanians, especially in the latter two towns. However, there were areas, notably around Uroševac/Ferizaj, Djakovica/Gjakovë and Janjevo, where Roma, Egyptians, and Albanians reportedly lived together without major incidents. The UNHCR reported that Albanian Kosovar hospital workers discriminated against Roma.

Although there were some efforts to resettle Roma, Ashkalija and Egyptians in their prior homes, security concerns persisted (see Section 2.d.). For example, in November 2000, four displaced Ashkalija were killed after they returned to their village of Dosevac/Dashevc near Srbica/Skenderaj to rebuild their houses, which were destroyed during the war.

Excerpts on the Roma condition from "Prisoners in our Own Homes": Amnesty International's Concerns for the Human Rights of Minorities in Kosovo/Kosova. 29 April, 2003.

<http://www.amnesty.org>

The Roma were particularly targeted for attacks on life and property in 1999 – including killings and repeated cases of abduction – allegedly carried out by members of the KLA, who claimed that the Roma had participated in the mass violations of human rights against Albanians committed by Serb forces. Although Amnesty International has received reports that some Roma did take part in looting, and – often under duress – in the transport and burial of Albanian bodies killed by the Serb forces, Roma also appear to have been targeted because they had often worked in Serb-owned industries or as agricultural laborers for Serb employers.

Throughout Kosovo, Roma continue to face violent attacks and discrimination, and now often live alongside Serbs in enclaves like Gračanica/ Ulpjana - where they are marginalized by the Serb community - or in mono-ethnic enclaves protected by KFOR. Roma also face institutional discrimination in access to basic social and economic rights, and often survive on money from family members abroad or short-term manual work, small-scale agriculture and rubbish collection. Many of those who fled their homes in 1999 are displaced in Kosovo, while an estimated 45,000 are displaced in Serbia or Montenegro, or live as refugees in Macedonia or elsewhere.

During 2000, some 254 individuals were reported murdered, 26 per cent of whom were Serbs and 19 per cent from other minority groups. In 2001, of 136 individuals killed 92 (68 per cent) were ethnic Albanians, 30 (22 per cent) Serbs, six (4.5 per cent) Roma, one Bosniak and seven persons of unknown or other ethnicity. For 2002, UNMIK reported a total of 68 murders, in which 60 (88 per cent) of the victims were Albanian, six were Serbs and two were of other minority ethnicities.

Amnesty International considers that the lack of progress in investigating such cases fuels the fear of repeated violence within minority communities, as does the failure of the authorities to accurately monitor investigations and the outcomes of such proceedings which have taken place. In February 2002, for example, UNMIK Police were unable to provide Amnesty International with any figures on the number of recorded crimes – believed to be ethnically motivated - which had resulted in the identification

and arrest of a suspect, the indictment of any suspect, and the outcome of any criminal proceedings in such cases. Only relatively few reports of successful prosecutions, reported in the media or in UNMIK Police Press Briefings, provide concrete evidence that criminal proceedings have been completed.

In April 2002, the house of an Ashkalija family who had returned to Vucitrn/ Vushtrri was targeted in a grenade attack; in June a Roma house in Optrusa/ Optrushë was set alight in a revenge attack after the head of the family had shot an Albanian in self-defense – the family fled, and their house was subsequently burned. On 14 June 2002, a Roma man reported to UNMIK police that men unknown to him had broken the door and some windows of his house and assaulted his wife, blinded her and then threatened to kill her if she didn't leave her home.

In August 2002, the house of a Roma returnee was set alight after the Albanian who had been occupying the house was evicted, and in September two attacks on Roma houses in Gjilan/ Gnjilane took place, causing minor damage and, on 11 September injuring one person, Ferka Avdullahu, whose family had returned to Gjilan/ Gnjilane on 5 September 2002. In September too, an Ashkalija from Uroševac/ Ferizaj was assaulted in Obilic/ Obiliq – reportedly in revenge for acts that had taken place during the war. Three displaced Ashkalija and one Serb who had been fishing in a nearby river were also beaten by security guards at the KEK power plant near Obilic/ Obiliq for no apparent reason on 14 September.

Ramadan Halilaj, Xhevdet Çufaj and Vehbi Maliqi are all Roma men in their early 20s who lived in the village of Brekovac/ Brekovc, two or three kilometers southwest of Djakovica/ Gjakovë. Before the NATO bombing Ramadan Halilaj – who was married with five children – and Vehbi Maliqi had worked as day-laborers for local Albanians, while Xhevdet Çufaj – who was married with four children – worked as a herdsman for local Serbs.

In June 1999, while Ramadan Halilaj and his family were eating lunch, six uniformed men, wearing KLA insignia and armed with automatic weapons, came to Ramadan Halilaj's house. According to Afrim Halilaj, Ramadan Halilaj and his five children, his three brothers - including Afrim Halilaj – and his father were present. The armed men took Ramadan Halilaj away for questioning, saying that he would return later. Ramadan Halilaj has not been seen since. His brother has no idea why he was taken, but thinks that it may be because he was the eldest brother.

Two days later, another group of uniformed men came to the house, threatened the family and ordered them to leave within half an hour. They demanded that the family hand over the arms which they claimed had been supplied to them by the Serbs; Afrim Halilaj claims that they had no such weapons. The men beat Afrim Halilaj's cousin, Xhevdet Çufaj, breaking his right arm. Afrim Halilaj believes that Xhevdet Çufaj may have been singled out because he had worked for Serbs as a herdsman.

As soon as the men left, the family gathered together and the 20 men, women and children headed towards Montenegro, avoiding the main road by traveling through the mountains. When the group stopped to rest, armed men in civilian clothes suddenly

appeared, and took four men away - including Xhevdet Çufaj and Vehbi Maliqi. Afrim Halilaj's children began to cry, and this is why he thinks they did not take him too.

Soon after, they heard the sound of shots, but were too frightened to go and investigate. Afrim Halilaj believes that these armed men - one of whom he recognized - had followed them from their home.

Afrim Halilaj has not been able to find out what happened to Ramadan Halilaj, Xhevdet Çufaj and Vehbi Maliqi. Amnesty International is not aware that any investigation has been opened into their case.

In Gjilan/Gnjilane and Orahovac/Rahovec, Roma and Ashkali women told Amnesty International delegates that they were repeatedly subjected to verbal abuse - "Go back to Serbia", "Madjup" - if they ventured into the Albanian part of the town. Women reported being spat at, of men miming that their throats would be cut, and various other, often gendered forms of abuse, directed at them by groups of young Albanian men aged 15 to 25. Other forms of harassment reported to Amnesty International included, for example, Albanians emptying their rubbish into an area near a Serb flat in Priština/Prishtinë; the shooting of a dog belonging to a Serb family in Prizren; swastikas spray-painted onto the walls of Roma houses in Gjilan/Gnjilane.

S., a 27-year old Roma business-woman living in Rahovec/Orahovac, is a founder member of a Romani women's group in the Kosova Women's Network (KWN), involved in the identification and development of income generation initiatives for Romani women who have been denied access to their pre-war employment. She lives with her older sister, C., and grandmother in the *mahala*, and they are able to survive relatively well on money sent by four brothers and a sister working abroad. The sisters told Amnesty International how members of the Albanian community had responded in 2001, when 14 Romani women went - for the first time since the end of the war - down into Rahovec to the *Dom Kulturi* for a performance connected with a Kosovo-wide campaign against violence against women. "The [Albanian] women [in the *Dom Kulturi*] said, Oh no! It is those who massacred us! They are here! We said, if we had massacred you, then you wouldn't be here. We have just come to see the play." After the performance insults were thrown again. According to the sisters, the women who insulted them were not people they had known in the town before.

Since then C. has seldom visited the town, afraid that Albanians will "throw words" again, although S. reported that freedom of movement for their community had improved since 2001. "It is much easier if we go to Gjakovë or Prizren, then no-one looks at us," C. added. S. confirmed that freedom of movement was much better for Roma in Prizren, where she was able to sell bed-linen, made by the Roma women's group.

A Roma woman informed Amnesty International that when she had taken her daughter to the hospital in Gjilan/Gnjilane, the doctors had only spoken to her in Albanian, which she had not understood, and had failed to provide her daughter with any treatment. She refused to attend the hospital again. Another interviewee reported that she had only been able to receive treatment at the same hospital after KFOR troops escorting her had threatened the doctor at gun-point to provide treatment.

H.B. is a 58-year-old Ashkalija male, forcibly evicted from his home in Obilic/q in June 1999, who now lives at the Plemetina collective centre, located in the shadow of the *Korporata Energjetike e Kosovës* (KEK) electricity power station. Some 7,000-10,000 personnel were formerly employed at KEK, the majority of whom were Serbs and Roma. H.B. had worked at KEK for 28 years until 18 June 1999, when the new Albanian management had told him – and other Roma and Ashkalija workers – not to come back. He has been unable to find any other employment since then. Neither did he believe that he would now be entitled to a full pension.

Other Serbs and Roma formerly employed by KEK have lodged appeals against their dismissal, several of which have been taken up by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). On 3 April 2001, Gani Bajrami, a Roma from Orlan/e, applied to return to his job at KEK. He had worked for KEK as a security guard at the Batlava hydroelectric dam from 1995 until June 1999, when he left work because of concerns for his personal security. He was informed on 19 April 2001 that, as he had not reapplied for his job before 1 July 2000 – up to which date former employees had been entitled to return to work – he could not be reinstated. On 21 December 2001, the Priština/Prishtinë Municipal Court (as a civil court of the first instance) nullified the KEK decision as illegal, and instructed KEK to return the plaintiff to work and to his previous duties within a period of eight days "under the threat of forced compliance". KEK appealed against the decision; at the end of February 2003 the appeal was still pending at Priština/Prishtinë District Court.

To date, the Norwegian Refugee Council – a small international NGO – is the only organization to have actively advocated in employment cases on behalf of minority communities. Throughout Kosovo, few former employees have been returned to their former positions: in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Roma community leaders submitted a list of employees to each of the companies which had formerly employed them, asking for restitution to their former jobs. No replies were ever received, and as far as Amnesty International is aware, no further actions were taken by the Roma community leaders.

Despite the human rights violations and abuses suffered by Roma and Ashkalija living in Serbia, and an increase in forcible returns from third countries, few of the pre-war population had returned to Kosovo by the end of 2002. In 2000, some 700 RAE had returned spontaneously, mainly from Montenegro, and in 2001, a further 286 – including the organized return of 127 individuals from Macedonia – had returned. But by 2002, although numbers remained relatively low, the rate of returns had almost doubled on the previous two years, with 362 Roma and 861 Ashkalija and Egyptian returning during the year.

Despite a number of successful returns, many spontaneous returns have been frustrated, or prevented, by continuing attacks. In Gjilan/Gnjilane in March 2002, Amnesty International delegates met a man whose brother's family had planned to return to two houses within the Roma *mahala*. He was salvaging what he could from the wreckage of one of the properties, both of which had been burned a few weeks after his brother had announced his intention to return, despite 24-hour KFOR patrols and floodlighting of

the area introduced after two other houses had been burned following the house-holders' expressed intentions to return.

When Amnesty International met L.M. – a 50-year-old Roma woman – she had returned to Gjilan/Gnjilane three months previously, and by March 2002 was almost at the point of leaving again. In her 50s, with five adult children who also wished to return, L.M. had lived in Gjilan/Gnjilane for 29 years before she had "left her city with a broken heart" in March 1999. After the bombing, she returned, believing that, as an Albanian-speaking Roma, "I would be free", but within a few months, "because of all the problems" she left again, moving to Bujanovac in southern Serbia. Assisted by an international NGO, she was now trying to return to her home. She reported how Albanians had moved into her property, demolished the house, and the adjoining two houses and reused the materials - "from three houses they have built a new house". Because the HPD do not accept claims relating to destroyed property, she was attempting to locate her former neighbors so that, despite the absence of any applicable process, they might make a joint claim for the restitution of their three properties. She told Amnesty International how she had been intimidated by local Albanians at a meeting with municipal officials, and that when she had visited the site of her house during a "go and see visit" - accompanied by 15 international staff and municipal officials - a group of Albanians had threatened the group with verbal abuse, one of them allegedly wielding an axe. Unable to regain her job as a nurse at the local hospital, LM was resigned to leaving again, "Because I have no life here."

Along with domiciled Roma, the displaced Roma and Ashkalija community suffer from frequent ill-treatment and harassment by Serbian police, including repeated evictions from their temporary settlements, and suffer from racist attacks by non-state actors, who are very rarely brought to justice. They also face both practical problems and active discrimination when seeking IDP registration or acquiring legal identity cards, without which they are unable to gain access to health and social welfare services. Even where they gain access they then face routine discrimination. Roma children are also discriminated against in gaining access to education in both Serbia and Montenegro.

The return of Roma to overcrowded enclaves in Kosovo, where the majority of returnees live with relatives, and where communities are already dependent on an overstretched social welfare system, would place unbearable strain on public services unable to cope with existing demands, and where, without freedom of movement, Roma are unable to resume their pre-war occupations.

Excerpts on the Roma condition in Kosovo from the March-June 1999 overview of abuses against Kosovar Minorities, Human Rights Watch.

<http://www.hrw.org>

The province's Serb and Roma minorities - who many ethnic Albanians collectively regarded as active or complicit in atrocities by government forces - were immediately targeted for revenge. Thousands had already departed with the government's forces. Those who remained were forced to leave the province or concentrated in enclaves after widespread and systematic arson of Serb and Roma homes, beatings, detentions, and

murders. As of July 2001, an estimated 1,000 Kosovo Serbs and Roma were missing and unaccounted for.¹

The willingness of almost all Kosovar Albanians to remain silent about such attacks, either from fear of speaking out or because of a belief in the collective guilt of Serbs and Roma, has created a permissive environment for violence against minorities. Human Rights Watch interviews with Kosovar Albanians from all walks of life suggest a widespread acceptance of the view that wartime atrocities now mean that Serbs have forfeited the right to remain in Kosovo and to retain their property and goods, irrespective of their involvement in abuses. On the other hand, many of the same respondents privately expressed their revulsion at the violence perpetrated against minorities.

Generally unidentified groups of armed ethnic Albanians have carried out abductions of Serbs and Roma throughout Kosovo since early June 1999. In some cases, these forces have detained, questioned, beaten, and then released those abducted. However, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as of April 2001, approximately more than 500 of those abducted remain unaccounted for.

The rape of women from minorities has also been reported since June 1999. Roma women have suffered in particular. The European Roma Rights Center has documented three incidents of rape of Roma women by persons in KLA uniform. The center interviewed an eyewitness who reported that his sister and wife had been raped by four uniformed men in Djakovica on June 29, 1999. They also interviewed the relative of a woman from Kosovska Mitrovica who had been raped on June 20, 1999 by six men in KLA uniforms.

The OSCE recorded the rape of a Roma woman in Prizren in October 1999 by several Albanian men.²⁴ One of the perpetrators, who was subsequently arrested by KFOR, had allegedly raped another Roma woman in the area. The February Task Force on Minorities report also documented the rape of a pregnant Ashkalija woman in Uroševac in November 1999, and the rape and attempted rape of several Roma women that same month in the Djakovica area.²⁵

Two Roma teenage boys aged seventeen and eighteen and a forty-eight-year-old Roma woman were also found shot dead in Pec on the same day.

Excerpts detailing abuses against Roma immediately following the end of the 1999 war, from the Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade.

<http://www.hlc.org>

According to information collected by the HLC, 63 Serbs and Roma disappeared in Djakovica within a period of two and a half months. Fourteen were released by the KLA after being questioned for a few hours or several days, two were able to escape, the remains of four taken from their homes were found, and the fate of 41 is unknown.

Tafaj (first name unknown), (F, under 18), Roma, from Djakovica - held in the KLA prison at the Paštrik Hotel from where she was taken to an unknown destination on 18 June 1999.

A witness who was also held at the hotel stated that the Roma girl was taken away by a KLA man known by the nickname "Džifa" (Xhifa). A Roma woman, Afijete Zeciri (Afijete Zeqiri), 10 Roma men and an Albanian man were among those imprisoned at the hotel. Four of the Roma men were shot while the remaining six were released.
Source: HLC, witness statement

T.F. (M, 27), Rom, from Djakovica - abducted before 6 July 1999.
Friends of T.F. saw when a group of KLA members stopped him in the town center and took him away to an unknown destination.
Source: The Current Situation of Roma in Kosovo, KOSOVO DAILY NEWS, 12 September 1999

Gunga, Arif (M, 27), Rom, from Djakovica - detained for two days at the KLA headquarters in the Paštrik Hotel in Djakovica, questioned and beaten. Gunga was questioned about Roma crimes against Albanians and cooperation with Serb forces. He was beaten and sustained serious injuries to his head and body. He fled Kosovo after the incident to Montenegro.
Source: HLC, witness statement

B.S. (M, 21), Rom, from Velika Slatina, Kosovo Polje Municipality - abducted on 20 June, held in a KLA prison at an unknown location for 10 days and released. B.S. recounted that he was in Priština on 20 June with another Roma man, helping to move a Serb woman to Lipljan. As they were loading the truck, B.S. noticed a young man in KLA uniform watching them from a window in the same building. The KLA man came down and said to B.S., "You, come with me. I see you're a good worker. I only need some information." B.S. refused, the KLA man left and shortly afterwards came back with an automatic gun. At that moment, an armored personnel carrier pulled up beside them, 16 KLA members surrounded B.S., forced him into the personnel carrier and drove him away. One hour later, they stopped outside a building with the number 25 and led B.S. into apartment number 3. A KLA man of about 40 asked B.S. if he had been in the Serbian army and he replied he had only dug trenches as a civilian. Five minutes later, KLA men led him out of the apartment, pulled a bag over his head, put him in a car and drove away. B.S. recalls that there were seven KLA members in the car with him and that the drive was a long one.

"When they got me out of the car, I saw we were in front of some building, like an abandoned army barracks. Two women of about 30 in KLA uniforms were waiting. The KLA took me into a room and started beating me. There were 10 of them. One punched me in the back; others kicked me and hit me with their hands. They beat me day and night, taking turns. I was alone in the room. There were always about 10 of them. I never left the room. I don't remember sleeping or eating anything. For nine days I was beaten. On the tenth day, they brought a Serb into the room, about 30 he was. He was all bloody from being beaten, his hands and feet were tied and he had a wide piece of tape stuck over his mouth. They took us both to the basement. There was a bread oven down there.

They put the man in the oven and he screamed when they turned it on. Eight Albanians and I stood there while he burned, in front of our eyes. He screamed for a long time. He burned for two hours. They took me back upstairs where a woman in KLA uniform was waiting. I recognized her, her name is Aferdita and she's from Drenica. There were another two women with her. They stripped me, put me naked on a bed with wheels, stuck some wires to my body and covered me with a lid-like glass thing. Then they turned on the electricity. The jolts bounced me off the bed several time and then I blacked out. When I came to again, Aferdita dressed me and said, 'We're going to KFOR.' They drove me there."

Before leaving him outside the KFOR building, Aferdita threatened to kill B.S. if she saw him again and said he had to move out of Kosovo. After he made a statement, KFOR members drove him to Caglavica, a Serb village near Priština. B.S. does not know the location where he was handed over to KFOR and remembers only it was 6 a.m. when he was brought to Caglavica.

B.K., a Gracanica Serb who had hired B.S. and T.S. (M, 21) described the abduction to the HLC:

"We had the moving of a Serb woman to Bujanovac scheduled at 7 a.m. on 20 June 1999. We were loading her things onto the truck when an Albanian came out of the neighboring yellow multi-story building next to the Zeta-Trans company and the bookstore. He went up to B.S. and pulled him aside so that we wouldn't hear what they were saying. They spoke quietly, in Albanian, but I heard the Albanian ask him his father's name and address. The Albanian knew B.S. from Velika Slatina. After a while, he went back into the building. We finished the loading at 9.30 and planned to go to Bujanovac together. Then the same Albanian came out of the building again, with another six or seven Albanians, all in black. The one who had talked earlier with B.S. ordered him to go with them to answer some questions. Then he turned to me, said the Roma in Velika Slatina had committed many crimes against Albanians and that he had to check whether B.S. was involved. I told him B.S. was my worker, that we all had to leave together and that I was responsible for him. He replied that we would all have to go with them then. The other Albanians said nothing. S.B. got out of the truck and we left. The two of them stood talking in the street so that I wasn't able to see in which direction B.S. was taken. I informed his parents as soon as I reached Gracanica and reported the incident to KFOR the next day. A few days later, B.S.'s father came to my store in Gracanica and said his son had been released and was all right."

Source: HLC, witness statements

Z.P. (M, 19), Rom, from Kosovo Polje - abducted on 21 June 1999 in Priština and released in the evening. Z.P. was in Priština to check up on the damaged house of a relative. He was outside the house when a group of Albanians seized him, pushed him into an Opel Astra car and drove him to the Roma cemetery where they beat him and threatened to kill him. Somewhat later, they took him to the KLA headquarters in a private house where he was held for seven hours. He was beaten and asked to identify Serbs who had committed crimes against Albanians. They released him in the evening and threatened him with death if he reported them to KFOR.

Source: Roma from Kosovo Testify, KOSOVO DAILY NEWS, 12 September 1999

Š.K. (M), Rom, from Priština (15 Kolubarska St.) - abducted by the KLA on the night of 20/21 June 1999; released on 21 June 1999 after his family paid ransom. Š.K.'s uncle recounted that four KLA men came to their house that night. They beat up Š.K. and took him to the KLA headquarters, telling the family he would be released if they paid 500 deutsche marks. The family paid the ransom and Š.K. was let go the same day. The KLA then torched the house of Š.K.'s family and gave them five minutes to leave Priština. The family fled to Montenegro.

Source: HLC, witness statement

F.F. (M, 23), Rom - abducted by the KLA on 21 June 1999 in Priština and released several hours later. F.F. was stopped by KLA members in a street near his home and taken by force to their base in the Dragodan district of Priština. He was physically abused, questioned and ordered to name persons who had committed crimes against Albanians. He was released later that day.

Source: Abuses against Serbs and Roma in the New Kosovo, HRW, August 1999

Caca, Abdulah (M, 50); his son Caca, Abedin (26), Roma, from Prizren (14 Podrimska St.) - abducted on 18 July 1999. Mrs. Caca recounted that her husband and son left home in the morning of 18 July for the nearby village of Dušanovo (Dushanovë) where they had a metalworking shop. They did not return and she went to Dušanovo the next day to look for them. The shop had been looted. Some children playing outside told her four men, two of whom in KLA uniforms and wearing glasses, had come in a jeep the previous day about 11 a.m., entered the shop and ordered her husband and son to get in their Renault 4 car and follow the jeep. The two vehicles drove off in the direction of the Djakovica road.

Mrs. Caca then went to the KLA headquarters in the Culhan (Qulhan) neighborhood of Prizren where she spoke with a KLA commander called Baša (Basha). He told her he had no knowledge of her husband and son and that the KLA was not responsible for their abduction. Baša added that KLA uniforms were often abused, that the abductors might have been Serbs or criminals from neighboring Albania, and promised to let her know if he heard anything.

After some time, Mrs. Caca went to the KLA headquarters again. This time she spoke with one Osman, who also said the KLA had no reason to abduct her husband and son. Osman explained to her that the manner of their abduction differed from that of the KLA who, he said, would have also torched the Caca house and taken her as well. In the event she received a ransom demand, he said she should immediately report this to the KLA headquarters and refrain from handing over the money.

Mrs. Caca reported the disappearance of her husband and son to KFOR and the International Red Cross.

Source: HLC, witness statement

Bens, Afrim (M), Rom, from Prizren - abducted by the KLA after 20 July 1999.

Source: HLC, witness statement

G.S. (M, 22), Rom, from Prizren - abducted on 14 June 1999 and held in a KLA prison for over 24 hours. G.S. was stopped in the street by KLA members on 14 June and taken to the former police station. About a dozen other KLA men were there, four of whom led G.S. into a room in which there was another Roma man of unknown identity. G.S. was beaten and threatened with death unless he admitted to looting Albanian homes. The KLA demanded that G.S. tell them the whereabouts of Luan Koka, a Rom who was on the Serbian delegation at the Rambouillet talks. They told him that Roma and Serbs together looted and torched Albanians homes and that he would be expelled to Serbia just as Kosovo Albanians had been expelled to neighboring Albania.

The next morning, a KLA man came with a list containing the names of 10 to 15 local Roma, including G.S., and demanded that he point out those who were "Serbian spies." When G.S. said he knew none of the names, the beating continued. He was then made to clean up the building and, when he finished about 10.30 p.m., was told he could go. The KLA threatened to kill him if he went to the hospital or reported them to KFOR.

Source: Roma from Kosovo Testify, ERRC, 2 August 1999

B.T. (M, 21), Roma, from Prizren - abducted by the KLA in morning of 18 June 1999, held for five days and released. B.T. was taken to the building of the former police station, beaten on the way and accused of stealing and killing Albanians. He shouted to draw the attention of people in the street, none of whom reacted. He was held for five days, physically abused and questioned about persons who allegedly committed crimes against Albanian civilians. Asked how he had acquired the 9,700 Dinars he had on him, B.T. replied that he sold cigarettes. Claiming that he must have stolen the money, the KLA men took it. Before releasing him, they threatened to kill him if he reported them to KFOR.

Source: Roma from Kosovo Testify, ERRC, 2 August 1999

M.T. (M, 24), Rom, from Prizren (Terzi Mahala (Mahalla e Terzive) neighborhood)) - abducted by the KLA on 27 June 1999, beaten and questioned for several hours before being released.

M.T. recounted that KLA members came to his home on 27 June and ordered him to go with them because their commander wanted to see him. When he refused, one of the men put his pistol to the head of M.T.'s wife and said he would shoot her unless he agreed to go with them. Before leaving with M.T., they told his wife her children's throats would be slit if she told anyone about her husband being taken.

M.T. was taken to the basement of the school for deaf-mute children where another Rom, P.L. was being beaten and questioned about his son. The KLA gave P.L. three hours to come back with his son and let him go. Then they began to beat M.T. and question him about weapons in his neighborhood, if he had killed any Albanians or raped Albanian women. They demanded that he write down the names of Roma who had looted Albanian houses and asked if he knew where the Roma leader Luan Koka

was. Before being released about 5 p.m., M.T. was threatened with death if he told anyone what had happened.

Source: Roma from Kosovo Testify, ERRC, 2 August 1999

M.L. (M, 19), Rom, from Prizren (Dušanovo neighborhood) - abducted by the KLA on 27 June 1999 and released after several hours of questioning and physical abuse. M.L. stated that three KLA members came to his home on 27 June and ordered him to go with them to the KLA headquarters to be questioned. They drove him to the school for deaf-mute children where they beat him and demanded that he tell them where he had concealed an automatic rifle. They asked how many people he had killed, how many houses he had torched and where the Roma leader Luan Koka was, threatening to kill him unless he told them everything he knew. M.A. was beaten for four hours and, before being released, threatened with death if he told anyone what had happened. Before he left, the KLA members told him there was no place in Kosovo for Roma.

Source: Roma from Kosovo Testify, ERRC, 2 August 1999

Z.G. (18), Rom, from Uroševac (25 Maja St.) - abducted in late June 1999, held in the house of a KLA member for one day and set free by an elderly Albanian woman. Z.G. stated that he was in an Uroševac cafe with his brother when six KLA members came up to them: Becar, Feta and four known locally as "Kozanci." All were in uniform and armed with pistols and knives. Z.G.'s brother was able to get away while Z.G. was taken to Becar's house. He described what happened there:

"They demanded that I give them the names of people I had killed, what I stole and everything else I did. I said I hadn't been mixed up in anything like that. They tied me to a chair and hit me with baseball bats. First they hit me on my right ankle, then in the stomach. They demanded the names of Serbs and Roma who did such things. I didn't know what to do so I gave them the names of people who lived abroad or had already moved out. Then they left. An old Albanian woman came, untied the ropes and said, 'Son, I know you're feeling poorly. You saved my son so run now- and good luck to you.' I ran to the Serb cemetery and from there to the railway station where the Serbs were staying."

Z.G. fled Kosovo to Serbia four days later.

Source: HLC, witness statement

According to information collected by the HLC, 63 Serbs and Roma disappeared in Djakovica within a period of two and a half months. Fourteen were released by the KLA after being questioned for a few hours or several days, two were able to escape, the remains of four taken from their homes were found, and the fate of 41 is unknown.

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Acknowledgments

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Adem Osmani was born and raised in Gracanica's Roma Mahala. He has worked for Balkan Sunflowers, Children's Aid Direct, and Medecins Du Monde.

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Bobby Anderson created and managed the project. He carried out all relevant writing, editing and research. He was the only one that knew how to drive; that's what he did most of all.

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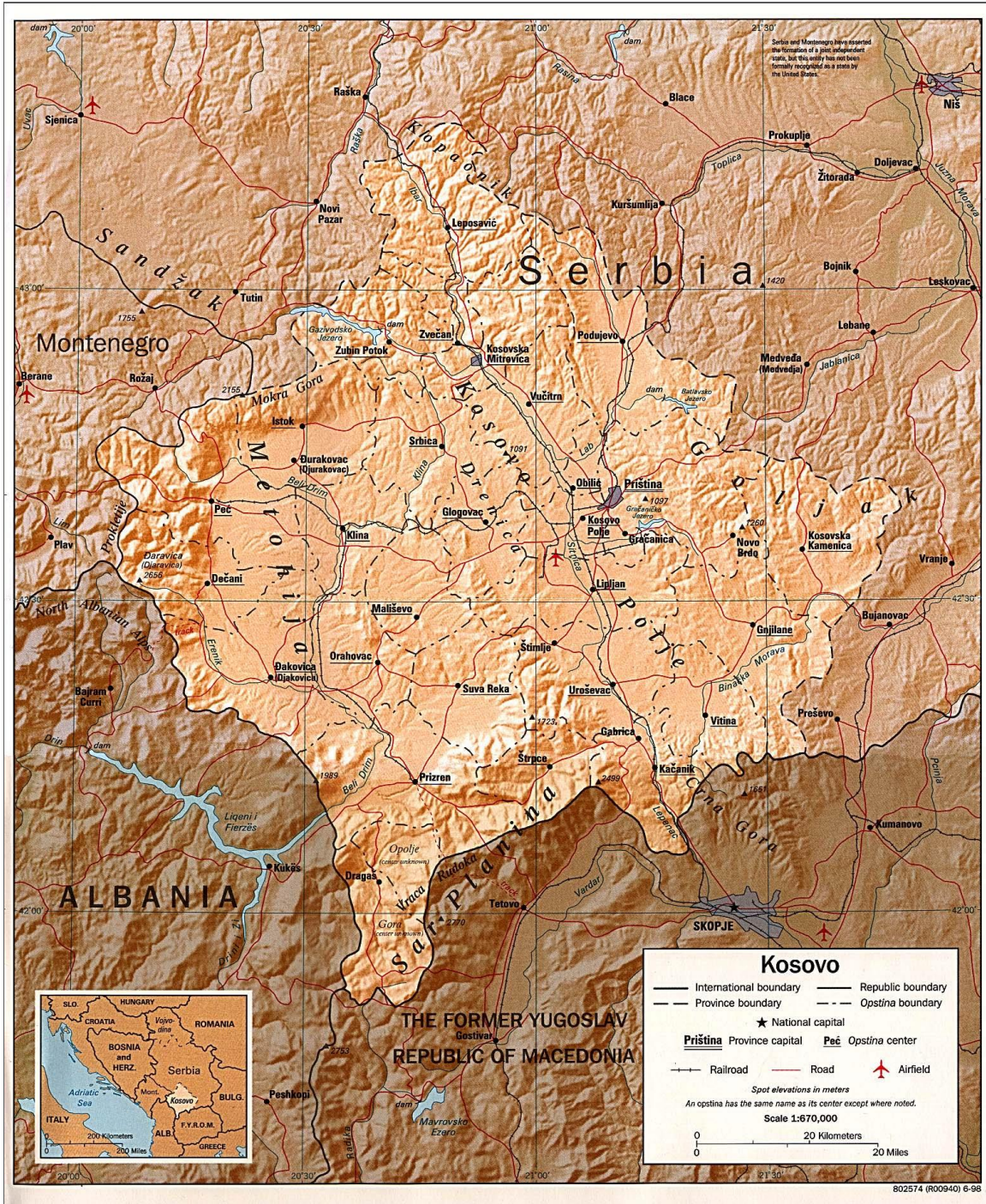
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Maps



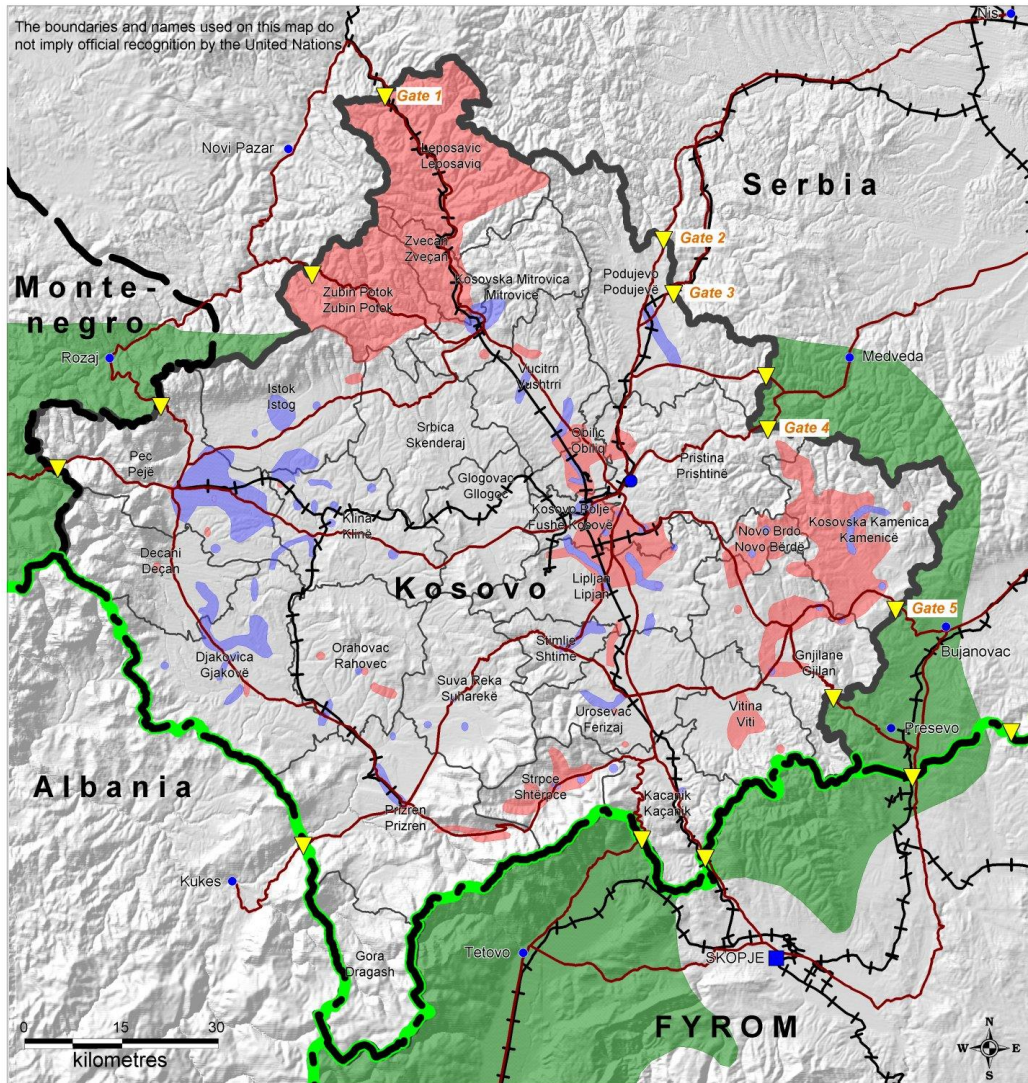
Kosovo Topographical Map (United States State Department)

21-Mar-00



Kosovo: Minorities

Minority communities in and around Kosovo



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Sources: NIMA, UNHCR, KFOR



Ethnic Minorities in and around Kosovo (HCIC)

Ethnic Majorities 1991



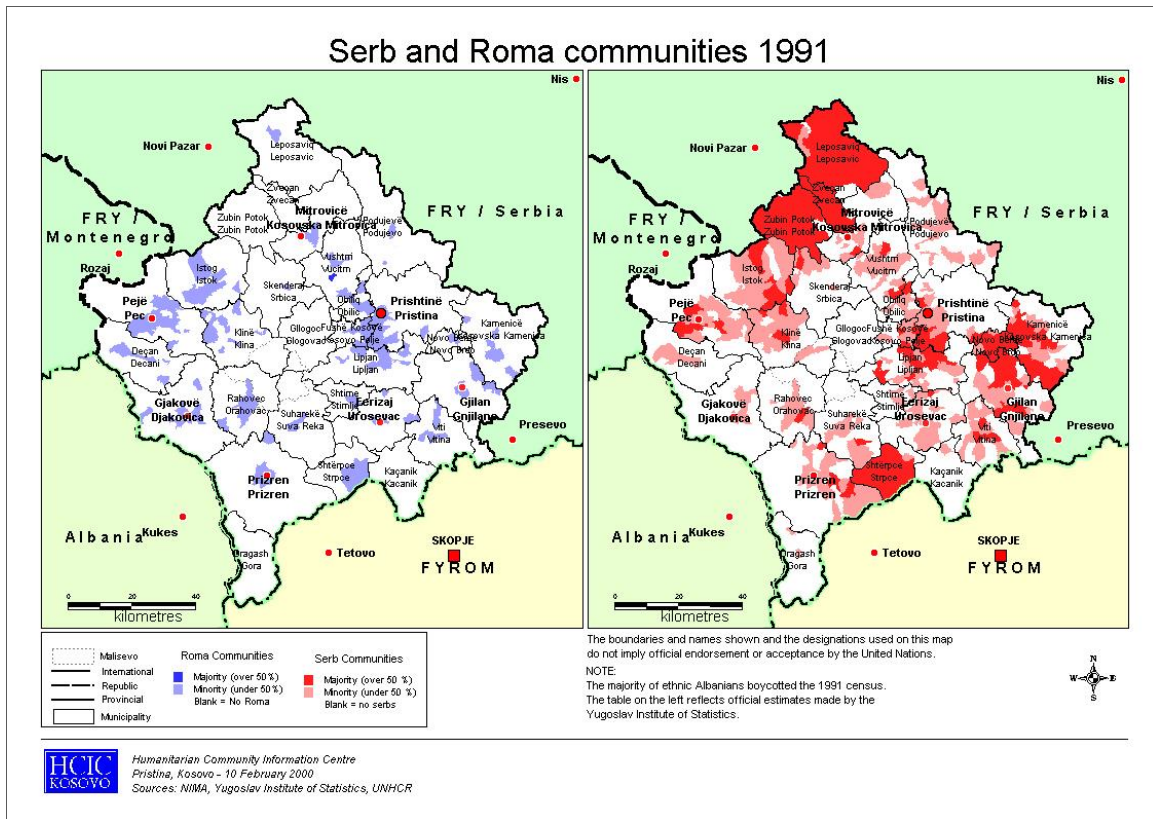
Yugoslav Census (1991)		
Albanian	1,596,072	81.6%
Serbian	194,190	9.9%
Muslim	66,189	3.4%
Roma	45,745	2.3%
Other	53,989	2.8%
Total	1,956,185	

NOTE
The majority of ethnic Albanians boycotted the 1991 census. The table on the left reflects official estimates made by the Yugoslav Institute of Statistics.



Humanitarian Community Information Centre
Pristina, Kosovo - 10 February 2000
Sources: NIMA, Yugoslav Institute of Statistics, UNHCR

Kosovo: Minorities According to the 1991 Census (HCIC)



Kosovo: Serb and Roma Minorities According to the 1991 Census (HCIC)

[Kosovo USAID Map](#)

United States Agency for International Development
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[Kosovo Atlas](#)

HCIC
 19 MB Zip file

[Gazeteer to Accompany Kosovo Atlas](#)

HCIC
 190 KB Adobe Acrobat Reader file

[Map of Atrocities Committed against K-Albanians & Massgrave Locations](#)

150 KB Adobe Acrobat Reader File















[Kosovo Population Estimates by Municipality](#)

UN World Food Program
 232 KB Adobe Acrobat Reader File

[Refugees in the Balkans](#)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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MAPS

 <p>Kosovo and the Presevo Valley (HCIC)</p>	 <p>Kosovo Mines and KFOR Routes (NATO) - 2.15 MB</p>	 <p>Kosovo: 3D Map (HCIC)</p>	 <p>Kosovo Topographical Map (United States State Department) - 887 KB</p>
 <p>Kosovo: Map of Pristina (DOD 1995) - 669 KB</p>	 <p>Kosovo: Map of Pristina Numbered Features Guide (DOD 1995) - 436 KB</p>	 <p>Kosovo: Map of Pristina Street Index (DOD 1995) - 577 KB</p>	 <p>Kosovo: Serb Operations (and Massacres) conducted against K-Albanians, 1998-1999 - 51.9 KB</p>
 <p>Kosovo: Northern Regions - 1.37 MB</p>	 <p>Kosovo: KFOR regions of responsibility</p>	 <p>Roma in Eastern Europe</p>	 <p>Ottoman Kosovo - Pristina</p>
 <p>Kosovo: Central Regions - 1.19 MB</p>			 <p>Ottoman Kosovo</p>

ENDNOTES

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- ² Crowe, 1995: p. 196; Fraser, 1992.
- ³ Denied a Future: Save the Children Kosovo Report, London: Save the Children Press, 2001
- ⁴ Interview with Henry Shikluna, Council of Europe coordinator for Roma activities
- ⁵ Galjus, Orhan: Roma of Kosovo; the Forgotten Victims, Patrin Web Journal April 1999
- ⁶ Fraser, 1992: p. 26
- ⁷ Malcolm, 1998: p. 205
- ⁸ Malcolm, 1998: p. 206
- ⁹ Crowe, 1995: p. 198
- ¹⁰ Malcolm, 1998: p. 206
- ¹¹ Crowe, 1995: 209
- ¹² Roma and the Holocaust, Mary Pottanat & Nadia Khan, <http://www.learn.org>
- ¹³ Crowe, 1995: p. 219
- ¹⁴ B92, Sept. 10 2002 <http://www.b92.net>
- ¹⁵ Crowe, 1995: p. 213
- ¹⁶ Figures from UNHCR
- ¹⁷ Figures from UNHCR
- ¹⁸ Kosovo 'Disaster Response Service' Stands Accused of Murder and Torture: March 12, 2000, The Observer, London
- ¹⁹ Rule of Law Is Elusive in Kosovo; UN, NATO Criticized For Inaction on Violence: July 29, 2001, Washington Post)
- ²⁰ For more information, please refer to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia's website - <http://www.icty.org>
- ²¹ United States State Department - Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Yugoslavia: March 4, 2002
- ²² Beta News Agency, Aug. 8, 2003 <http://www.beta-press.com>

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