

A ROOM FULL OF LIGHT

BY THE RUGOVA MOUNTAINS

Kosovo Mediation Project 2009 – 2012

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THE MONKS OF DECANI

The monastery of Decani stands in a lush valley surrounded by forest covered low hills. The air is invigorating. A source bubbles from a fountain in the monastery courtyard and runs in a stream down the valley past orchards and cultivated fields.

Monks in the old days knew where to site their monasteries, in the most fertile and beautiful spots, protected by nature, places where the communities could be self-sufficient and independent.

The fundamental anomaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, long before the country declared independence from Serbia, is that its heartland, its pride and inspiration, flourished in a region where Serbs have for centuries been a minority.

Kosovo Albanians have always populated this region: mostly as shepherds and farmers. Before the Ottoman invasion converted the majority to Islam, the people practiced Catholicism and their own form of Christianity with pagan elements. After a series of skirmishes with the Ottomans, including the celebrated Turkish victory on the field of blackbirds, the Battle of Kosovo, defeated Serbs were not completely driven out, and those who remained lived separately in their own villages, refusing to be converted and remaining Orthodox Christians. The communities rarely mixed, each speaking separate and unrelated languages.

The Serbian Orthodox Church achieved its prime in the late Middle Ages, a century or so before the Ottoman invasions. King Stefan, one of Serbia's most enlightened rulers during this golden age of its history, established several monastic foundations in Kosovo. The King lavished the places with wealth and commissioned the leading artists then working in Eastern Europe to create a cluster of jewel like buildings which

would represent the spiritual, intellectual and cultural centre not only of Serb Orthodoxy, but of Serb identity.

Even after the Serbs were defeated and the centre of Serb power moved north, away from Kosovo, the monastic foundations established by King Stefan survived. Despite wars and struggles for dominion in the region, they flourished, protected not only by the remaining Serbs, the monks and abbots, nuns and mother superiors, but also by local Kosovo Albanians who respected their cultural significance. This tradition of protection from both sides continued unbroken till the last year of the twentieth century when politics led to war, ethnic cleansing, foreign intervention and the present independence of Kosovo. For the first time in their history these centres of Serb Orthodoxy and culture, designated world heritage sites in recognition of their extraordinary beauty and historical importance, feel themselves vulnerable to attack and annihilation.

Two traumatic events caused the present stand-off between the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. The first happened in 1999 when President Milosevic ordered the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. The world witnessed on news bulletins lines of frightened Kosovo Albanian refugees crowding the border with Macedonia, and reports came of massacres and destruction of villages. NATO airstrikes against Belgrade shocked Serbs who were not aware of the full extent of their president's catastrophic policies, but the strikes had the desired effect of facing down Milosevic who withdrew his troops when NATO threatened a ground invasion. Serbs, ignorant or indifferent to ethnic cleansing, could not forgive NATO for the bombing of Belgrade. Young people had stood on the bridges over the Rivers Danube and Sava with bulls-eyes printed on their t-shirts, daring the low-flying stealth bombers to strike them. People

in the countryside around Belgrade were terrified of these sinister black fighter planes flying low over villages.

In 2000, on my first visit to Serbia, I witnessed the dismal lines of Serb refugees, that time from Kosovo, waiting abjectly and shame-facedly for assistance in the streets around the Patriarchate in Belgrade. They had tried to oust their Kosovo Albanian neighbours, and now were themselves driven out, but not made welcome by their Serb brothers and sisters. I visited refugee camps established in difficult to access areas well outside Belgrade in order that the city inhabitants need not see and be reminded of what had happened. These refugees, unlike Kosovo Albanian refugees in Macedonia, were ignored by the world media.

The second traumatic event had a profound effect on all Serbs, obliterating in their memory the causes for their suffering. After individual attacks and isolated burning of churches and monasteries immediately after NATO had driven Serb troops out of the region, in 2004 the Kosovo Liberation Front, impatient for independence and furious at Belgrade's refusal, attacked Serb communities, killing people, burning houses and destroying Serb churches, convents and monasteries. It was revenge for what happened in 1999, but Serbs had difficulty acknowledging the connection between the two traumatic events. The Serbian Orthodox Church commissioned books and films to record the destruction and violation. Patriarch Pavle, who had previously been a bishop in Kosovo, wandered through the ruins. Photographs of the frail saintly-looking man stepping over rubble incensed Serbia. 'They are destroying our culture!' The fact that Serbia had attempted to ethnically cleanse the region five years earlier was forgotten or dismissed.

Both communities now live with the trauma of violence, homelessness and loss.

In the films made about the destroyed churches and monasteries only the monks of Decani acknowledge Albanian suffering. During the 1999 ethnic cleansing they even protected Kosovo Albanian children from Serb attack. However, after the war, extreme factions of the Kosovo Liberation Army threatened to destroy this monastery, as well as the Patriarchate of Pec and the monastery at Gracanica, and it was only the intervention of the Italian contingents from KFOR that protected the buildings, monks and nuns. The Italians told KLA soldiers: 'If you attack these monasteries we will shoot you.'

Only a few years ago people could visit the monasteries and churches freely. Parties of children were taken there regularly to admire the art and way of life. They camped in the fields near the monastery at Decani and young people would help the monks run the farm. These were festive occasions, holidays to remember. Open to all, of whatever faith or ethnic group, the monks who took their stewardship seriously were respected; the monasteries represented the region's heart and soul for everyone.

On our first visit to Decani Monastery armoured vehicles, ramps and signs obstructed the road. Italian soldiers, boys from the countryside and the suburbs of Milan and Rome, encased in chunky camouflage jackets packed with ammunition, wielded heavy rifles in the last of several sentry posts leading to the entrance where the paraphernalia of arms, netted barracks and signs instructing everyone in the use of guns made the monastery seem under siege.

Outside the monastery gates the Italian boy soldiers grinned at us, eyes sparkling with curiosity because, while our passports were being confiscated and scrutinized, we took an interest and quizzed them about how they felt being there. At first the boys indicated icily they were not allowed to talk with us, but quickly melted and enjoyed trying to speak in broken English and sign language.

Through the gates I could see a young tall bearded monk unloading provisions from a van. Dressed in a black cassock and heavy black shoes with long hair tied at the nape of the neck he looked different and intimidating. To the Kosovar Albanians living round about he must seem to be from another planet.

The monastery is separated from the outside world by an ancient wall, from a time when the region suffered one invasion after the other. A large heavy wooden door opens onto a cobbled courtyard leading to a modest looking church in pale stone, with a few animal carvings on the eaves. It stood on a green carpet of freshly mown lawn. Living quarters for the monks and guests, a refectory and workshops surround the courtyard. Outside the entrance to the abbot's quarters a spring bubbles up through a carved stone fountain, the splash of water emphasising the tranquillity of this holy place. The stream has bubbled for centuries and will continue until the world dries.

The serenely uncluttered exterior of the church does not prepare the visitor for the explosion of colour and images inside. Angels, saints and warriors crowd the walls with extravagant gestures, elongated bodies, lithe athletic limbs contorted in spiritual and martial ecstasy, swords flourished in the air, all protecting and praising the figure of Christ Pantocrator, whose severe yet tender face looms large over the whole building. No inch of wall is left unpainted, every pillar, every surface ablaze with animation and colour. Lack of light intensifies the mystery. The gesticulating figures and wildly staring faces, dimly lit from small windows and a few candles seem to emerge from a mist, suggestive of half-remembered dreams, like intimations of inward and outward struggles, desires and passions, all reaching upwards, floating to the ceiling where they disappear into darkness, ultimately embraced by the universal creator.

But before we entered the church for the first time we were taken to sit round a table on a broad wooden balcony where monks strode in their heavy boots to and fro from their rooms, making the boards creak loudly, and we began to surrender to the calm of the place, like a hand stroking our brows. A teenage novice from Australia served us herbal tea and sat talking to us in the softest of voices, just a few wisps where soon a bushy beard would grow. As with every monk we met, despite their busy schedule of prayer and work, he did not rush the meetings, staying with us until we were ready to leave, never being the first to go. This unique quality of consideration and welcome contributed to the tranquillity and feeling of timelessness. All guests were treated the same. A motherly woman carrying oranges as a gift, sat with another monk at the next table.

The calm was suddenly shattered by the aggressive clatter of a klappele, wooden boards struck violently together by a monk striding round the courtyard to announce the evening service. During their occupation of the region, the Ottomans had forbidden the pealing of bells in the Orthodox Church, so only the loud clap of wood on wood was allowed. The tradition of the klappele continued in Kosovo, although bells now rang from Orthodox churches over the fields and hillsides throughout Bosnia.

The monks, mostly young men in their twenties and thirties, gathered for evening service in the darkening church, standing in pews separated from the rest of the church by a wooden screen. Candles were used only to illuminate the texts of chants, which several monks took turns intoning, moving from one lectern to another, carrying a candle with them. The service became animated towards the end with a sudden dash to kiss the icons, the tall lean and muscular men swishing their robes, genuflecting athletically and hurrying round the building from corner to corner. The

main object of their adoration was the tomb of their founder King Stefan, in the centre of the church. They kissed the elaborately embroidered cloth cover repeatedly, bowing deep, crossing themselves. This part of the service felt like a rush of wind. The rest of the time the gentle chanting had the effect of a drug: perpetually repeated allelullias and amens floating mellifluously from well-trained throats around the interior spaces, along with clouds of narcotic incense and blurred images of angels and warriors soaring into the murky heights.

During communal mealtimes the testosterone heaved from this tight-knit band of masculinity, no one speaking, the only sound being the reading from the Gospels by one of the monks who on finishing hurried over to the abbot for a blessing. Everyone ate rapidly with intensity, deep in thought; occasionally they looked at us strangers and smiled, or stared as though from another world on which we had trespassed.

The monks surprised me. I had expected either the shy modesty of those I had met elsewhere: withdrawn and otherworldly; or the truculent defiance of nationalist Orthodox Serbs, keeping the flag flying in a land they consider still belonged to Serbia. The monks at Decani turned out to be neither shy nor truculent. Well educated, intelligent, serious and sensitive, these young men had devoted themselves with passionate commitment to their calling, hard working and faithful to the traditions of their monastery and religion. They reminded me of the cream of students at Cambridge where as an undergraduate I felt, then as now, intimidated and in awe of people with far superior intelligence, knowledge and self confidence. These young men had made significant life decisions with no doubts about their calling.

I also expected them to be suspicious of us and hostile. They knew the purpose of our project: to help integrate them in the new country of Kosovo which their own Church and Serbia refused to recognize. But they welcomed us not only warmly and

enthusiastically, and took time off their arduous daily tasks to keep us company, talk and tell us everything we needed and wanted to know.

A number of places were laid just for us in the refectory: a tureen of soup, platters of smoked tuna and bowls of various salads, prepared by the monks, who for some reason were not eating with us.

Just as we were looking at the spread, surrounded by empty places in a large room that had hosted monks and guests for many centuries, an ebullient monk entered in a rush, smiled broadly, arms outstretched and rushed over to join us. He explained that the bishop had been delayed en route and would be arriving too late that night to see us. The monk then sat next to us at the table, explaining various dishes and declaring how happy he was with our project. We had not expected such immediate enthusiasm which turned out to be tempered with grave misgivings about our success, as he emphasised the depth of mistrust between the Serb Orthodox and Albanian Muslim communities. His jovial manner could not hide the unwavering sadness, anger and fear in his eyes.

Another monk arrived, equally welcoming and friendly, but who seemed more optimistic and accepting of the present political situation in Kosovo. Handsome, tall and fit, he did not match any expectation of someone devoted to a life of celibacy and prayer. Expressing the most conciliatory opinions, he had taken the trouble to learn Albanian, something we found few Serbs living there, including our Serb translator, had bothered to do. (All the Albanians we met spoke Serbian.) He described a recent experience of walking in the streets of Prizren, a predominantly Muslim city with a potent Catholic presence to the south of Kosovo, where people had not been hostile. Some had even come up to him expressing friendly curiosity about his garb, beard, long hair and black cassock. This monk did not feel threatened by Albanians, and had

not felt the need to go anywhere with armed protection. If there were more monks like him we felt the project had a chance of moving the situation from one of dangerous mistrust to at least the beginning of dialogue.

Both monks talked about the importance of preserving the monastery. Bishop Teodosije was apparently looking forward to meeting us, and we had the feeling that far from being antagonistic to our project and insisting on the monastery remaining a part of Serbia, they welcomed our presence and the prospect of help in alleviating their anxieties, and reaching a positive relationship with the local municipality.

However they warned us of the gangsters controlling the region, keeping the local mayors in their pockets. 'We need more soldiers to protect us,' they both said. Extreme Albanian nationalist groups allied to the gangsters were involved in drug smuggling, particularly heroin. We remembered the road to Montenegro from Mitrovica where we had been the day before. Our Albanian driver told us no one goes there - just people involved in criminal activities. It is dangerous for anyone else. But those were Serb gangsters controlling that region. So each side feared the criminal elements in the other. Meanwhile the bosses pulling political strings in both Serbia and Kosovo benefited from the mutual mistrust and probably had dealings with each other to preserve the status quo. Meanwhile the monks were besieged and isolated.

We had met the mayor of Decani before visiting the monastery. He had spoken to us about the difficult relations between the municipality and the monastery; how people needed work in the region where unemployment blighted everyone's lives and that the monastery appeared to be resisting plans to bring labour and tourism to the area, preventing roads and industries being built that might encroach on its property, although the municipality admitted a readiness to compromise on the site of such new developments. We found nothing in the discussions with both mayors and monks that

could not be sorted out amicably and with benefit to all, so deeper issues neither side was willing to discuss were creating a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the communities. As outsiders we could perhaps identify these mostly psychological, political and social issues clearer than the monks and the mayors, but would need all the help we could find to understand and deal with them.

The mayor of Decani probably did what his gangster bosses told him, and eventually we would have to beard these lions in their dens. Our thoughts however were still hopeful, surprisingly, given the depth of mistrust and antagonism between the communities. We felt that it could not be in even the most hard-nosed gangster's interest to harm the monasteries, the glory of Kosovo and major tourist magnets in the future. The days of retribution for Serb atrocities in 1999 had passed, having burnt itself out in the destructive spree in 2004, and any further significant vandalism would incur international wrath, something the new state of Kosovo could ill afford.

However, recent memories of war, murders, destruction of churches and mosques, mutual suspicion after decades and even centuries of two totally different cultures co-habiting in the same small piece of land (described in painstaking detail in Noel Malcolm's *Kosovo*) and a de facto independence, against the wishes of Serbia, meant that the psychological traumas, expressed in mutual paranoia, would require great effort, time and sensitive care to heal.

That night, sleeping in one of a row of guest rooms on a long wooden veranda where guests could dry their clothes, and two middle aged women and their husbands murmured long into the warm dark night, I had a dream of killing and carnage, then woke up with a vivid memory of a Korean film about a wise old monk raising a small child on a floating house in the middle of a lake.

In brief, the film *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring*, tells of the boy's growth from a child thoughtlessly tormenting animals, through callow adolescence and sex with a disturbed girl brought to the monastery for help and healing, flight from his home into an alien urban world beyond the surrounding hills and woods, and a subsequent act of murder. The young man, crazed by despair, returns fearfully home having no where else to go. The old monk forces on him the beginning of an arduous series of tasks to expiate his guilt and restore balance to his mind and soul. Police take the murderer away; the old monk dies. After punishment and years in prison, the man, no longer young, returns to his former home now fallen into neglect. The man continues his period of atonement through harsh self discipline and performing back breaking tasks, a mirror of the torments he had once inflicted on animals, becoming the monk his teacher intended. Eventually, and this is the insightful lesson of a film which packs a powerful punch, the young man turns into his teacher. The final part of the film sees him as the same wise old man raising another young boy....

The film – an amalgam of Dostoevsky plumbing the limitless depths of man's propensity for cruelty and depravity, and Buddha aiming for transcendence of the human condition - addresses the issue of how hard it is to be a good person given the psychological, political and social pressures that determine our lives. These influences the film alludes to without showing, the whole story set entirely on the floating house, the lake and its immediate idyllic surroundings, an Eden whose ecological balance we are perpetually and thoughtlessly despoiling.

BISHOP TEODOSIJE

The meltingly warm gaze, soft voice and thoughtful kindly manner of Bishop Teodosije clothed a steely courage and determination, intelligence and authority. He reminded me of Bishop Porphyry at Kovilje Monastery near Novi Sad who had welcomed us equally warmly nine years earlier on our first visit to Serbia. Both possessed the self-confidence that comes from total acceptance of their life task, combined with natural social skills and openness to others. On each occasion I understood why young men at a turning point in their lives, dedicated, sensitive and intelligent would be drawn to this kind of monastic life. If I had been raised in Serbia, suffered under the strictures of communism and had to endure what followed: war, political hubris and social corruption, I would certainly have found myself in the queue of those wishing to enter these monasteries, inspired by the personality of people like Teodosije and Porphyry. This was not simply an escape from the intolerable ferocity of life in post-communism Balkans, but one of the few alternatives available to those who could not join in blood-letting, crime and the daily grind of subsistence. The rest of the European Union and America made it hard for anyone to follow the option of leaving the country, unless they were a refugee.

Teodosije needed all his skill and intelligence to deal with a crisis in the Orthodox Church in Kosovo. His superior, Bishop Artemije, had recently tried to expel him from the Church, because Teodosije did not follow a hard-line policy of total rejection of Kosovo independence. His conciliatory manner infuriated Artemije who called him a traitor to Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church. A few months earlier Artemije arrived at the Decani Monastery to formally divest Teodosije of his authority, 'excommunicating' him, and a scuffle broke out between the monks. Artemije looked behind him only to see his retinue run away and his chaplain 'thrown on the floor like a bag'.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is run on strictly hierarchical lines. Nothing can be decided or done without authority from a superior, leading to the top in the Patriarchate at Belgrade. However the Patriarchate supported Teodosije over his superior Artemije, and this had created a crisis in Kosovo. Artemije was being perpetually over-ruled, undermining his authority. The Patriarchate were far from happy about Kosovan independence, but the priests there understood the necessity of finding a compromise to protect the Serbian Orthodox Churches and monasteries in Kosovo. Artemije's aggressive resistance to compromise or any form of dialogue with Kosovo Albanians exacerbated an already insecure situation. But he remained the chief bishop in Kosovo.

The monks in Decani declared to us that Artemije had suffered a nervous breakdown after the destruction of churches and war in Kosovo. A normally kind and deeply spiritual man he had lost his bearings and because of his position of authority which set him apart from colleagues no one could offer him help. It reminded me of Chehov's famous short story, *The Bishop*, in which no one, not even his own mother, know how to help him in the suffering of his dying moments – so remote and holy has he become to them.

Donald visited Belgrade before we went to Kosovo and met the Metropolitan Amfilohje, acting as Patriarch because Pavle, whom we had met several times in the past, was old, dying and no longer able to carry out his duties. We needed the support and agreement of the Patriarchate before embarking on this project of bringing Serbs and Albanians together in Kosovo made more delicate by the rift in the Serb Orthodox community there. The Metropolitan gave his blessing with a smile. It became clear that the Patriarchate itself did not know how to solve the crisis in the Church in

Kosovo. Supporting Teodosije over Artemije only rubbed salt into the wound.

Perhaps outsiders with Donald's experience could help.

Bishop Artemije did not welcome foreigners, especially from other branches of the Christian faith. He would consider Donald an apostate. Although we insisted on visiting his monastery at Gracanica outside Pristina, in order to pay our respects, leave a gift and hope for a meeting, he was not there. Eventually we would need to have a discussion with him. In order to prepare the ground we spent time with one of his monks who treated us politely, because he had no choice as we turned up with presents on the monastery doorstep, but he remained suspicious and a little hostile. He could not refuse to see us, and hopefully our talk, including significant quotes from the Sermon on the Mount, might persuade him to permit a more substantial meeting with the bishop himself on our next visit to Kosovo.

Meanwhile Bishop Teodisije became our most important ally in the project.

'It is a holy idea,' he told us. 'I respect your efforts, age and energy. Feelings inside are important, what is in your heart. We need this process you are offering.'

He gave us a history and analysis of the situation, raising issues which would have to be dealt with as the project proceeded.

The first and probably most important issue emerged when he indicated that the surrounding Albanians were simple people, extreme and violent in their attitudes. This could be said of any community where a minority of hotheads' noisy clamour can always make it seem as though they represent the majority. Our encounters with Kosovo Albanians in Pec, Decani and elsewhere did not support his judgement, but that is how he and the monks saw them – uncouth and aggressively hostile to the monastery. The highly educated and self-confident monks saw themselves superior to the people who happened to be their neighbours. It wasn't just a matter of different

ethnicity, although the implied racism of mutual attitudes made the issue more toxic, it had to do with different attitudes and cultures, each community seeming to despise the other. The fact that both sides never met and talked in any substantial way meant that these attitudes hardened.

Before leaving we insisted on bringing our Albanian driver and project manager with us into the monastery for our final meeting with Bishop Teodosije, and whereas the bishop greeted them with particular friendliness and warmth, even preparing special gifts for them, when we went for lunch at the refectory some of the monks looked at us with dismay and outrage, as though we had betrayed their trust. The presence of Albanians polluted their sanctuary and was cause for alarm. Kreshnik, our robust project manager, normally behaved with confidence, in charge of every situation, speaking as an equal with politicians and managers; but he and Feha our driver suddenly looked frightened and small, like mice trying to hide. This encounter between Albanian and Serb told me emphatically about the huge psychological problems we would have to overcome in order to make headway with our project.

Bishop Teodosije, looking serene and above all conflict, was determined to protect the monastery and all it stood for, despite threats from local Albanians, describing the town of Decani as being a small poor community with badly educated children. During the troubles of 2004 a rocket grenade damaged the monastery walls. ‘They see the monastery as a problem,’ the bishop told us. ‘They want it to be a museum and we have to resist this. Ten years ago they wanted to destroy us, but now they have changed tactics and regard the monastery as a national treasure, even saying it was built by Albanians and doesn’t belong to Serbs. The municipality now keep repeating this lie. They even put a picture of Decani on a postage stamp, and on the Kosovo

web site there is no mention of King Stefan commissioning the building of the monastery.’

Several issues that would animate our project emerged from this conversation, some of them familiar from our work in Bosnia, specifically with the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, and the exact nature of the killing camp in Omarska. Firstly: the rewriting of history by the majority group. When we first visited Banja Luka in the year 2000 the Serbs were trying to erase all mention of Islamic influence there from the school text books and tourist guides. Having destroyed the mosques during the Bosnia War, they could now simply insist they never existed. Now in Kosovo the Albanians were excising Serb influence. For Serbs this represented an attack on identity and confirmation of ethnic cleansing. In the case of Decani, Pec and Gracanica, and other churches and monasteries, if they had been initially Albanian, then why destroy them? Quibbling can lead to destructive inter-racial tensions. No doubt Albanian artisans and craftsmen were involved in the building of these great monuments, just as Serbs had been drafted in to help build the great mosques in Bosnia. Nonetheless, the Serbian Orthodox Church maintained these properties over centuries, just as the Muslim Ryaset in Bosnia kept the mosques going. At least the mosques in Bosnia were in that country. Suddenly, because of the declaration of independence, the Serb Orthodox monasteries found themselves in another country, predominantly Kosovo Albanian and Muslim. The bishop and his monks were painfully aware of this dilemma, were they Serb Serbs, or Kosovo Serbs now? Whereas Bishop Artemije refused to accept the political situation, and insisted on treating the monasteries as being sacrosanct parts of Serbia unwillingly finding themselves in a foreign land he did not recognize, Bishop Teodosije and his monks

understood that eventually some kind of compromise had to be reached - and for that they needed help.

This explained why we were being welcomed so warmly and with such hope mixed still with acute apprehension, as we observed when Kreshnik and Feha joined them for lunch.

A second issue concerned education. In Bosnia each ethnic community taught its own history, regardless of how the others might perceive and understand it, so leading to our suggestion, eagerly taken up by young Serbs, Muslims and Croats working with us that they should collaborate on a theatre piece examining a part of history from three standpoints so disproving the paradoxical notion put forward by extreme nationalists that Bosnia has three different histories (there is in fact only one history, but it has an infinite number of interpretations). Similarly in Kosovo the Serbs and Albanians see their history differently, more radically even than in Bosnia, because of the completely unrelated languages spoken. At least in Bosnia the language was shared, and inter-marriage over generations had blended the communities to an extent that the Bosnia War had tried bloodily but failed to undo. For centuries Kosovo had been a minority part of Serbia, and the monasteries represented the educated Serb elite keeping the Kosovo Albanians oppressed, considered little more than peasants, although a few did manage to rise in the ranks, but turning more to Tirana in Albania rather than Belgrade. The bishop's remarks about the badly educated locals shocked us. In England and most of Europe there would be a sense of shame about such a fact. Donald responded immediately by asking why the monastery could not offer teaching opportunities to the local children. The observation went unnoticed because there were so many issues frothing all at once to the surface, but given the skills so evident

among the monks, Donald's gut reaction hit the nail on the head, and would need to become an important proposal as the project developed.

The bishop understandably, given the trauma of the Kosovo war, the reprisals of 2004 and now Kosovo independence, could only focus on the issue of identity. He reminded us of the negotiations in Vienna led by the Finnish diplomat Martti Ahtissari in which Annex 5 protected Serb property and residents in the newly independent Kosovo, and property could not be confiscated. The bishop said that the Albanian negotiators had accepted this proposal but were already breaking the agreement by refusing to call the monasteries Serb, and describing them as the Orthodox Church in Kosovo when it is in fact the Serbian Orthodox Church. The bishop kept telling them not to do this: 'We are not a danger, we have been here for centuries – don't take our identity away. The biggest threat now is to our identity. Children are being brainwashed so they consider us as aliens.'

Bishop Artemije responded to this threat by digging his heels in and forbidding all contact with Albanians, even refusing to move into a new building because Albanians had been involved in the work, saying: 'The place is probably sabotaged and the roof will fall in.' However Decani Monastery, under the bishop's guidance, was already forging links with the local community, not only helping with irrigation schemes in villages near to the monastery, but also inviting Kosovo Albanian students to visit the monks. The monks hosted them and although the students arrived in fear they soon relaxed because two of the monks, including the one we met the previous evening, had learned Albanian and put the students at their ease. 'We are not enemies,' declared the bishop.

Apart from Serb identity, the issue causing immediate anxiety was about the monastery itself, and what would become of it under a new regime in Kosovo. The

bishop wanted to preserve this world heritage site and unique place exactly as it always had been, a haven of peace, of work and creativity, of holiness and inspiration. He feared that local authorities would allow rich Albanian businessmen to build factories and a holiday resort in Decani so destroying the spirit of the place for ever.

We had spoken with the mayor of Decani before coming to the monastery, and he had concentrated on this issue, but making it clear that the municipality was prepared to compromise. On the one hand the region needed to be developed to give jobs to the unemployed and bring prosperity, but the mayor understood that the monastery should not be vandalised in the process. It became immediately clear to us that the Soul of Europe could help bring both sides together and provide a safe space for discussion.

Bishop Teodosije spoke about municipal plans to build a road connecting Decani with Montenegro, the intention being to exploit the region, bring industry and tourism. ‘We would lose everything,’ he sighed, ‘peace and character. We are not against local businesses, authorities or the people. We just want to preserve the place for the world as it is and has always been. But they blame the monastery for stunting economic growth.’

He told us in detail about an irrigation scheme proposed by the monastery to help local villages, raising money from Norway and the United States, the local authorities giving nothing, and how the mayor tried to delay the operation, so angering the locals, who were grateful to the monks for what the monastery were doing for them. We heard about the mayor’s links with one of Albania’s leading businessman and fixer, Ranush, a Godfather figure about whom the English ambassador had already advised us, that we would not make progress in our project without talking with him. Ranush sounded like the Serb Mayor of Prijedor, also the Godfather of his region. We had to

work hard to get that mayor to agree to the Omarska Memorial, and although we failed, the project gained enough momentum for him to have to be involved, while he made sure the memorial never happened. According to the bishop, Ranush had recently razed an Orthodox church to the ground and built a car park over it.

‘Our job is to stabilize and protect the monastery,’ the bishop went on. ‘We want to have a positive influence on the surrounding country. It is the only way to survive here, and to be seen as friends. We protected Albanians in the war. Now we are hostages to politics. The Kosovo government threaten us, saying: if you don’t obey our laws, we will not obey Annex 5. And we also have a problem with the Patriarchate in Belgrade. We want to be above politics. But now we are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.’ Annex 5 provided a framework for protecting Serb properties, churches and monasteries in the newly independent Kosovo.

Donald’s conversations at the Patriarchate had indicated no problems, only support for the bishop, but Bishop Teodosije may have been referring obliquely to his superior, Bishop Artemije, whose intransigence was certainly exacerbating the situation between the Orthodox Church in Kosovo and the Albanians.

When attitudes harden and become extreme, peace mediators employ a tactic which helped our process in Bosnia: relaying back to the speaker the gist of what had just been spoken. So, for instance, when the Bosnian Serb miners at the Omarska killing camp told us the place had been a holiday for the Muslims held there, we reflected this interpretation of events back to them. Immediately the majority saw the offensive absurdity of what had been avowed, and began the process of revising their opinions which eventually led to acknowledgement of what really took place there, and those

few hardliners who had no problem with murdering Muslims were no longer steering the discussion and so became sidelined.

Bishop Teodosije was no hard liner, and his understanding of the situation in Kosovo would not have been as extreme as that of his superior, Bishop Artemije. Nonetheless Teodosije's description of Kosovo Albanian intransigence needed to be examined.

'So Albanian tactics ten years after the war have changed?' Donald asked. 'Not quite,' admitted the bishop. 'But calling us the Orthodox Church in Kosovo is the first step, cutting us off from our base in Serbia.' Donald pressed for more clarity: 'So Albanians are deleting the identity of the Serbian Orthodox Church here?' The bishop acknowledged that educating people about his Church would help acceptance.

Donald then returned the conversation to the monastery being 'squeezed' with roads, factories, tourism and profit so destroying the 'holiness' of the place; and talked about projects that helped the local community in a co-operative manner, such as the irrigation schemes that benefited neighbouring villages. It turned out the mayor had paid an official visit to the monastery, but failed to mention or condemn the grenade attacks. 'Why don't you invite him for coffee?' suggested Donald. Relations needed to be less formal, so both sides could talk freely about their fears and misgivings.

The monastery would always require protection, and therefore had to build a strong relationship with the local community, avoiding politics and being friends to everyone. However, according to the bishop, the Kosovo government's attitude boiled down to: 'Recognize us or we won't help you.' 'We do not ignore the reality,' the bishop told us, 'But now they say there is a new reality: an independent Kosovo.'

The issue for him focused on the destruction of identity: the Kosovo government should not exert this pressure on the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The Church's fraught relationship with the Kosovo government was now complicated by the split between Teodosije and Artemije, just at a time when the minority Serb community in Kosovo needed to stand together. Did this mean that Teodosije had to defer to Belgrade, bypassing his senior bishop?

'Bishop Artemije leads the life of the Church in Kosovo through the synod rather than the sabor,' explained Teodosije, expressing nothing but praise and admiration for the man who had tried to depose him recently. The synod represented administrative government of the Church; the sabor represented the parliament of all bishops from round the world. The sabor instructed the synod to appoint Teodosije its representative, and Artemije could not interfere with this decision. Yet, as part of Artemije's diocese, the monastery of Decani, as distinct from Bishop Teodosije personally, had to submit to him. However all problems went through the synod in Belgrade, and when the synod authorized Teodosije, Teodosije did not need to defer any more to Artemije. Teodosije was now the link between Belgrade and Kosovo.

So who did the monastery defer to? How did Bishop Artemije feel about the ambiguity of his position, the senior bishop in Kosovo, and yet his inferior wielding influence at the synod and sabor? 'Time can heal,' Teodosije said softly.

This issue would no doubt become a constant in the project, like a ciphering pipe on an organ, when it continues to sound independently and discordantly as the rest of the instrument plays a given tune and harmony.

Meanwhile a more urgent issue exercising the bishop, and needing immediate attention as the project started, focused on the matter of land ownership around the monastery, about twenty hectares. Despite international agreement, signed also by the Kosovo government, this issue should have been solved, but the local mayor, following orders from Ranush, had become an obstacle. Teodosije implied that we

need not be involved in the disagreement between bishops, but that he would value our help in sorting out relationship between the monastery and the municipality.

There followed some delicate negotiating about our role in helping sort out the disagreements within the Orthodox community in Kosovo, Bishop Teodosije being careful not to be seen as hostile to his superior, and hinting that this issue should be left to the Patriarchate in Belgrade. Donald talked about his visit to the Pec Patriarchate where we were concerned about the nuns there, mostly elderly and living as in a prison, surrounded by high walls capped with coils of barbed wire, the entrance guarded by a group of heavily armed soldiers and tanks patrolling constantly.

As our conversation continued it turned out that the Pec Patriarchate would be a convenient base for meetings with representatives of the various communities, because, unlike Decani, it did not come under the jurisdiction of Bishop Artemije. Being a particularly significant place in the Serbian Orthodox Church, the equivalent of Canterbury Cathedral for the Anglican Church, the Pec Patriarchate dealt directly with the Patriarchate in Belgrade. Teodosije seized on our proposal to set up meetings there, rather than in Decani, to avoid difficulties with Artemije.

THE NUNS OF PEC

Our project now began to look promising. Apart from finding a solution to enabling the process to continue while working on support from Bishop Artemije, we were also bringing the monks of Decani over to the beleaguered nuns at Pec to be present with them, encourage and support them. The two places were only a few miles apart but seemed to be different worlds. The monks ran Decani as a flourishing centre of worship, art and farming, the place tidy, expanding with new buildings, workshops and guest centres being constructed. Meanwhile Pec looked neglected and in need of

more hands to keep the buildings and gardens tidy. Belgrade sent a priest regularly there to perform the liturgy for the nuns who did their best to manage the great historic building consisting of three sumptuously decorated chapels, and a large acreage of land.

Entering both places became a lengthy ordeal of passport checks, intimidating interrogation and waiting. Eventually we drove into the Pec Patriarchate, the long drive skirting another wall to another gate leading to a spacious courtyard and the great church itself. There the mainly military worshippers in army fatigues were just leaving the morning service and looking in respect and awe at the magnificent paintings that, as in Decani, covered every inch of the interior walls.

The elderly abbess in a black wimple covering a crown was leaving the church and making her way along a path edged with roses to the convent alongside. She noticed us arrive and inclined her head in welcome, her fingers counting long strings of prayer beads hanging from her black robes. She walked slowly and with dignity, her face kindly and sorrowful. The image was timeless. In dress and manner she could have been moving between the church and the convent several times each day for centuries. I could imagine her in a pre-Raphaelite painting, a solemn presence surrounded by meticulously painted roses against the background of an ancient wall, the stones weathered and all seeming like a dream.

Before being allowed to talk to the abbess we had to deal with a Cerberus in the shape of Sister Dobrila. Although not strictly a nun, she had been stationed there from Belgrade to look after the Mother Superior. A facsimile of Mother Theresa at her most determined she gave us a lecture on the present situation, jabbing her finger and talking in a high loud voice, more in defiance than sorrow.

As with Decani, the problems around the Patriarchate focused on property and land. Now that Kosovo had declared independence from Serbia, the monasteries, churches and convents were disputing land which the Kosovo Albanians were now claiming. Until these pockets of Serbia became integrated in their new country, such arguments over possession would continue for years. The Patriarchate also owned premises in the town of Pec, and since independence, the present owners were not paying rent. Issues of justice and unresolved problems preoccupied Sister Dobrila and the abbess; but whereas Dobrila approached them with pugilistic vehemence, ready to take on the municipal authorities, the Reverend Mother looked resigned.

An issue shared with other monasteries and churches had to do with history, and who actually built and owned these historic sites. The tragic futility of these arguments will sour relationships between the ethnic groups for generations to come. When King Stefan ordered their construction, workers, artists and builders from all over the region took part, including Albanians, painters and architects coming from Byzantium. The churches glorify the Serbian Orthodox Church, but many different peoples were involved in their creation. Since the triumph of the various nationalist movements throughout the former Yugoslavia, leading to separation and conflict over land, language, culture and history, politicians continue to divide and claim. People on the ground simply want to get on with their lives and make the once prosperous region flourish again. Parents trying to work, to raise their children and lead relatively peaceful lives don't have time or interest in making distinctions between race and culture. If neighbours don't interfere with each other, they are happy to work together. In the past they even intermarried and blurred ethnic boundaries. In Kosovo less than other parts of the Balkans, because of the complete difference of language and culture, but the groups coexisted and worked together.

‘Pec belongs to the world,’ the Reverent Mother said smiling, referring to its significance on many levels, not just for the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Sister Dobrila spoke about the current falsification of history: Albanians claiming the Patriarchate had actually been built on the site of a mosque, which could not have happened because the construction took place before the Ottoman invasions.

‘We are a prison open to eternity,’ she said mystifyingly. ‘Serb people must return to the way of St Sava. We need protection. The present general in charge of Kosovo will leave this year, but we only had one meeting with him from 2002 and 2009. Christian groups must do something together.’

Sister Dobrila then urged us to make contact with Catholics in the region, who, unlike in Bosnia, had a long history of cooperation with the Orthodox in Kosovo. The Catholic bishop of Przren was friendly to both sides, Albanian and Orthodox. He might help in the process of mediation.

The four main issues focussed on land and property, returnees (‘without them there can be no Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo’), bringing Christian communities together, especially Catholics and Orthodox, and also the politicians. We should start straight away with the mayors, who were the mouthpieces of politicians and shadowy figures who now controlled the country.

The Catholic bishop of Przren, the mayor of Pec and Bishop Teodosije were the three leaders important to the nuns. Most of all the nuns appreciated the Italian military police guarding them. ‘They bring us food; they do errands and take care of us.’

Later we met the mayor of Pec and members of his cabinet. Smartly dressed and surrounded by members of his cabinet, who looked more like a friendly posse of bodyguards than an elected group of municipal authorities, he listened with surprise

and interest to our plans and proposals, nothing like this having been discussed before. It seemed, for all the international discussions about the future of Kosovo, everyone had assumed that the two communities would always be daggers drawn, and no dialogue possible or to be expected. The mayor gave the impression of being his own man in contrast to his counterpart at Decani, a timid man who seemed to be following orders from somewhere else, an impression emphasised by the portrait of a fearsome medieval warrior glaring down at him from the wall behind his desk. Knowing the enormity of our task, even to initiate dialogue, we proposed a modest start. The mayor of Pec had no problem with this and even expressed delight at the suggestion he welcome the nuns for tea at his office.

The nuns too were pleased with this idea. For all its simplicity we would still have to prepare the ground carefully for such a modest event. How would they get there? Would they be accompanied by military escort? Who would drive them? Could they walk unmolested down the street to the mayor's office?

After a lengthy discussion with the Reverend Mother and Sister Dobrila we were invited to a simple but plentiful lunch of clear soup, curd cheese pie and salad, during which several nuns peered at us with childlike curiosity through a hatch from the kitchen. The Reverend Mother constantly urged us to eat, reminding me of my grandmother, always piling more food on to my plate long after I was full. The Reverend Mother had removed the crown from under her wimple, and with the expertise of years, she gracefully manoeuvred morsels of bread past the folds of cloth into her lips. Sister Dobrila meanwhile continued to worry about the threats of violence, the importance of high walls, barbed wire and the need for more soldiers. One side of the wall ran along a main road from which terrorists and murderers could easily jump over and attack the nuns. Despite the provocation of foreign soldiers

guarding an isolated community turning its back on the locals, we could not imagine why anyone, however criminal, would want to harm these elderly women, or even drive them from their home. But the destruction of churches and monasteries and unwillingness to speak about what Serbia had done in the Kosovo War, meant that paranoia continued to grow unchecked.

We left the nuns imprisoned in their pre-Raphaelite haven of ancient stones and roses, un-mown lawns and gardens that needed cultivation. Every day they prayed surrounded by walls covered in the most beautiful paintings to be found anywhere in the world. Beyond the walls lurked menace. Were the walls high enough to deter attack from ferocious Albanians? Like the monks at Decani, the nuns lived in perpetual fear of an unknown and unseen enemy.

Several tanks roared up to the main entrance of the Patriarchate while we waited to retrieve passports. Military police presence announced loudly and clearly to the region that the nuns were being protected, and that this place did not belong to the locals – it was foreign territory. The military presence isolated the nuns of Pec, and the monks of Decani, completely. Guns tend to discourage and prevent dialogue. The peace-keepers had therefore to become part of our project. The soldiers smiled but their orders came from somewhere else, and they were not even allowed to talk to us.

The Patriarchate of Pec stands at the entrance to the Rugova Valley, one of the most spectacular places in Kosovo. Mountains rear up beyond. For all the beauty the place now felt hemmed in, the nuns trapped with no where to flee, even if they needed to leave. This place was their home.

THE BRIDGE AT MITROVICA

A statue of Mother Theresa, looking not unlike Sister Dobrila, stood in a small park where children played football and near a café where mostly soldiers and military police drank coffee. A few yards northward the road emptied of traffic and became the now famous bridge over the River Ibar. This is the unofficial border between Albanian Kosovo and Serbian Kosovo, though a familiar flag fluttering on the other side marked the border between Kosovo and Serbia. Few people were walking over the bridge, scarcely anyone from the Albanian side, and just several Serbs who felt no threat coming south. Kreshnik, our project manager, and Feha, our driver, had no wish to cross, and Dulan, our first and main contact there, went with trepidation, knowing he would be harassed and threatened. Serb spies spent all day in cafés on the other side of the bridge, watching and checking everyone moving to and fro. Serbs who crossed regularly from North to South, like our translator Bojan, would be left in peace, but unknown people and all Albanians who came north would be at risk.

When Donald asked the British ambassador, Andy Sparkes, why a Serb flag was allowed to fly, Kosovo being recognized by most of the international community as an independent sovereign country, and policed by an international force, the ambassador replied: 'If you tried to move it you would be shot. And a new flag would replace it within minutes.'

Dulan worked for an NGO tracing missing persons. We had been communicating with him for months before going to Kosovo. He found Kreshnik, our project manager, for us and made two important observations. One that Kosovo consisted of two parallel universes: on the one hand politicians pushing their agendas with internationals, who had their own agendas as well, and on the other hand people carrying on with their lives on the ground unconnected to decisions being made on

high. Secondly he warned us of the dangers focusing on inter-religious dialogue. It had not been a religious war, and it was not over yet. Group identities were more important than religion. Inter-faith discussions were not only a distraction, they could exacerbate divisions. Though religion played only a small part in our project at the Omarska killing camp, ethnic divisions were indeed the catalyst for violence. In Bosnia religion had been used to inflame nationalism on all sides; even Franjo Komarica, the irenic Catholic bishop of Banja Luka, who remained our closest friend and supporter among the religious leaders, warned us to keep religion out of our projects, for the same reasons as Dulan gave us in Mitrovica.

The sun shone brightly on the bridge over the Ibar while we sauntered to the middle, our Kosovo Albanian friends unwilling to go further, and as always in situations of conflict, the peacefulness of the scene made it hard to imagine this place to be one of the most dangerous flash points in Europe. Tolstoy made the same observation describing the pastoral beauty of Borodino, site of the Russian defeat of Napoleon outside Moscow, where the landscape appeared idyllic, even while the puffs of cannon smoke rising silently in the distance indicated the bloody battle had begun. I experienced this eerie calm in 2003. From an ancient monastery and madrasa on a hill overlooking the border between Turkey and Iraq at the beginning of the war waged by Americans and their British allies to drive out Saddam Hussein, we contemplated the desert stretching to Mosul in the distance. The view was pristine, unchanged in millennia, since the day Abraham set out on his wanderings, but we knew warplanes were flying low just beyond the horizon, bombing and killing.

Here in Mitrovica in Kosovo the groups of United Nations military police sitting in cafés, strolling along the streets and occasionally driving by on armoured personnel carriers gave the lie to the peace surrounding the bridge over the Ibar. Meanwhile the

waters of the Ibar gushed beneath our feet and the hills all around gave an attractive frame to the town.

Paradoxically it was in this most conflicted part of Kosovo that we came across a convent, quite unguarded and open to everyone. The ancient convent of Sokolica could only be reached along rough and stony roads climbing high into the hills, reminding me of scenes from Byron's *Childe Harold*. Again I was struck by how monks and nuns tended to chose the most spectacular and beautiful places to settle. The entrancing view reminded me of Assisi in Italy. The convent looked across a valley where Kosovo Albanian villages farmed and herded. Fruit trees were in blossom. A sign on a gate by the entrance to the convent prohibited animals, which made Kreshnik and Feha laughingly wonder aloud whether this referred to cattle or to Albanians. However Albanian children were roaming around, going in and out of the convent where we found the elderly abbess, Mother Makarija, sitting cross-legged on a scaffold slowly and meticulously painting saints on a high wall of a chapel. She allowed us to watch and gaze at the medieval paintings in the older parts of the small building. We wandered around the scrupulously tended monastery gardens, where a nun was preoccupied with seedlings and tying vines. I now understood the injunction about keeping cattle out of the grounds: to protect the plants. No one seemed to be afraid of attack. Mother Makarija had a good reputation among the Kosovo Albanians in the villages around Sokolica, and seemed to be fearless and welcoming to all visitors. Perhaps the fact of the convent being isolated and very close to the borders with Serbia deterred Albanians from causing trouble.

Sokolica adjoined the site commemorating Isa Boletin, a Kosovan national activist living at the turn of the 19th century. His modest house, a miniature castle, had become a memorial surrounded by apple trees that were in full bloom, like snow drifts

in Spring. The convent is home to the Sokolica Virgin, a carving from the Middle Ages which became, according to the Bradt Guide on Kosovo, ‘a venerated object of folk belief’ so also accounting for why the convent did not need protection from locals. This reminded me of the desecrated Muslim graveyards in Banja Luka where the tombs of imams and muftis, holy men regarded with superstitious reverence, remained untouched. Not even Serb nationalists dared destroy them.

The young people Dulan had summoned to meet us, from whom we would form a reference group for our project, smiled enthusiastically and seemed in good spirits despite the grimness of the situation. Aferdita had even been told her NGO would be closed down – work for peace and collaboration between ethnic groups in Kosovo no longer considered an important priority. Yet she welcomed us cheerfully, hosting the meeting in her office where the balcony looked out towards the bridge over the Ibar. Gazmir and other NGO leaders present looked more solemn, because they worked too hard, constantly and sometimes through the night. Simply trying to keep the NGOs financed took most of their time and effort.

Igor, a Serb doctor from the north side of Mitrovica, greeted us ebulliently, laughing and dominating proceedings with his outsize presence and sharp intelligence. Of course he expressed doubts about the success of our project: too many internationals had been and left on similar missions, all without achieving anything. But he had heard good reports about us from Bojan our translator, and bonded immediately with Donald, another outsize presence with acute intelligence.

‘Your project goes to the heart of the Kosovo problem,’ Igor declared.

We had come to intuit this in just the few days we had spent in the country. We also shared his scepticism about the possible success of what we were trying to achieve.

Meetings with internationals, professional politicians and administrators from

elsewhere in Europe, proved to us that as far as these people were concerned the country could sink or swim, there were too few incentives for foreign governments to invest in ethnic harmony, no oil or other substantial material treasures. The officials we met seemed more interested in preserving their security and superiority, and all spoke about their future careers elsewhere, Kosovo being a tick on their CV.

As with Bosnia the cynicism and rapacity of international interests, disguised as realpolitik and ‘we know better’, represented the most serious obstacles to progress, and actually encouraged ethnic separation, the age-old policy of divide and rule. Bishop Artemije became a convenient scapegoat, someone to blame for lack of harmony, along with the gangsters and shady community leaders who could also be held responsible for the catastrophic state of politics and economy. The international community’s control of the purse strings confirmed sceptics like Igor that projects to bring ethnic groups together were bound to fail. It was not in the interests of more powerful countries to have a strong and united Kosovo. No international would feel the need to deny or confirm. So long as these small countries remained subservient with lack of money and poor work prospects, it didn’t matter to outside interests that tensions still existed.

In contrast to the cynicism and narcissism of fastidiously-groomed and well-paid officials at the International Civilian Office, controlling Kosovo, sitting in a tower block overlooking the city of Pristina, separated from the outside world by blanket security, the tenacity and devotion of the young people in Mitrovica, desperately searching for money to fund their organizations and survive from day to day, could only be marvelled at. When the ICO representative on an upper floor of the tower block told us our project, which they refused to fund, would actually be helping them, because they had no skills in this area of mediation, his patronising manner struck us

as being offensive not only to us but especially to the young people who were trying to improve community relations without assistance from an organization set up precisely to facilitate such work.

MEMORIES AND MECHANISMS

The politician and elder statesman who came closest to the thinking and ambitions of the younger men and women we met in Mitrovica turned out to be Skender Boshtraka, the former Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Looking like an aging rock star, his thin rangy body topped by a face heavily lined from years of hard living and framed with long straggling strands of greying hair, Skender slowly, patiently and at length explained to us the complex political, social and cultural changes that had taken place in Kosovo since the 1990s.

The war and collapse of socialism had created problems around property rights and issues about tradition which now created discord between communities where none had existed previously. He gave a lyrical description of how it used to be at Decani where children from all over the former Yugoslavia, of every ethnicity and religion, even Muslims, came to spend summer holidays, playing, relaxing, making music together and helping the monks with farm work. It had been paradise then. Even Kreshnik and Feha remembered these visits, and being in awe of the great artwork in the monastery church. In those days people did not need permission to visit. Now the monastery and the municipality argued about land and property ownership. Clearly the monastery belonged to the monks, and the municipality had no claim on it, but the acres of land around were being disputed. The present issue focused on tradition, what the monastery meant for Kosovo, its purpose and significance. Should privatization be allowed to alter a tradition that went back centuries?

‘We do not start from zero,’ Skender told us, ‘memories still exist here. Not all of us can stay calm after what happened. Something happened in the 1990s and we cannot go back without dealing with it. But the tradition is still there. Wake it up again! Use it as much as possible to awake memories and mechanisms and create new memories.’

He spoke of himself as a child wide eyed watching the religious ceremonies, kissing stones, grandmothers performing strange rituals. ‘The past is active,’ he said, ‘it is not the past; it is part of daily life. Only the conflict part of the past is being considered. But we have to re-integrate again. This is something unique in Europe, you will not find a place like Decani anywhere in the world.’

He described the hundreds of tents pitched in the meadows around the monastery, young people staying the whole summer, holidaying and working there, and also in the neighbouring towns of Peja/Pec and Djakova. A Muslim family, named the Vojevode clan (vojevodes being traditionally community leaders, landowners and governors throughout Eastern Europe) had protected the monastery from generation to generation and were respected. Everyone knew who they were.

Now issues of ownership and spirituality were causing friction between the monastery and the local municipality. ‘Of course all churches have some ownership. The Vatican owns parts but not all of Rome, Italy and Europe. This will remain a problem because neither the monastery nor the municipality will give up. There is no solution here. We have to open Pandora’s box and create mechanisms to resolve conflict, to negotiate. We have to use this conflict to communicate, and not to pretend to be solving it, by giving rights to one side or the other, which will only make matters worse.’

While he spoke, Skender constantly sketched diagrams on a piece of note paper in front of him. The diagrams showed the splits between the monastery and the municipality, real ownership and pretended relationships with at its centre the monastery, protected and isolated, people not allowed to use this heritage, being frustrated by lack of access, creating claustrophobia. The diagrams also indicated the destroyed infrastructure of traditions, the youth camps, the close relationship between the monastery and the multi cultural communities all round.

Skender's vision for Decani tried to bridge the aims of both the monastery and the municipality. He criticized international conferences lasting just a few days and everyone leaving with documents and declarations but nothing changing.

We had to help create mechanisms for integration, and celebrate the complete history and tradition of the place, not censoring, and then creating a new history, giving space for stories not yet told. The new road planned to Montenegro would help in opening communication. The reviving of old traditions of youth and children's facilities could curtail the privatization processes, which Skender considered a hundred per cent stupid: he seemed to be critical of both the monks attempting to turn their monastery into a community closed to the outside world, and also of the municipality wanting to build industries and leisure complexes to attract business and tourists. The church must not isolate itself. It could not exist alone.

'Once we have the new map we can start talking about reintegration,' Skender went on patiently and doggedly. 'The new map with a strong economic framework can be good for both business and tourism. But we need new concepts. Local arts and crafts will help. The monastery is demonized, and these can benefit both the monks and the locals. Now we only have soldiers protecting people who fear being killed. The frustration could explode any day, and no one is managing this issue, although the

tradition still functions. Politicization on the one hand, due to KFOR's presence, and paranoia on the part of the monks now cloud the perception of all who visit.'

He ended his lengthy speech with a sly observation about the monks at Decani. 'Are some of them actually soldiers?'

Donald's immediate response could only be superficial, but nevertheless focused on some of the central issues: guilt, wrong-doing, victimization and demonization.

Conversation had to happen along the lines of the Omarska project in Bosnia, bringing people on board from both sides one by one, introducing new perspectives and creating a forum.

Skender couldn't commit himself to accepting that women might be the best advisers, as they had turned out to be for us on the Omarska project.

'Risky,' he said. 'The situation is too contaminated for them. The monasteries are tired, so many million pressures isolating them. They are like prisons now. But carry on, you have my support a hundred per cent. And be prepared for surprises. From both sides!'

A WARNING FOR US

Sometimes connections have little to do with peace mediation. Like serendipity, when people and events come out of the blue and turn out to be significant in bringing about results, so memories, dreams and past expressions of the imagination, in all the arts, feed the process.

For instance: visiting Decani and appreciating the beauty of the place and its surroundings brought back a memory from our first visit to Bosnia, described in one of the most lyrical passages in our book *A Tender Bridge*. This particular encounter,

so idyllic and apparently full of hope, turned into a bitter experience which taught us to be careful in our relations with people and places.

We had been taken by our Serb translator to the monastery of Martin Brod on the banks of the River Una to the south of Bihac in Western Bosnia, another place of striking natural beauty with hills, waterfalls and spectacular views. The bishop and several monks greeted us with exceptional warmth, but the extraordinary generosity of their welcome, with a feast of fishes and cakes that they could ill afford, should have warned us of an agenda we had not grasped. Not speaking the language, and trusting a translator we had not properly vetted, in this case turned out to be a dangerous mistake.

Much later, in the next years of our travels in Bosnia, we learned that, without telling us, our Serb translator had informed the monks and the bishop we had come with money to help rebuild the destroyed Orthodox Cathedral in Bihac. The translator later tried to excuse himself by explaining that without such a promise we would probably not have gained an audience with the monks and the bishop. It is true that Orthodox bishops are difficult to meet on a personal level, and it requires patience and much diplomacy at the level of the Patriarchate before such encounters can take place, but we managed this usually without the need to give false promises. At the time I observed the translator having intense private discussions with the monks, but not telling us their substance. This should have alerted us to danger.

Having regaled us with a feast and a tour of the surrounding natural beauty spots, it came as a shock and deep disappointment to the monks and the bishop that after our visit we did not send the expected money for the rebuilding of the cathedral. On a following visit to the bishop we were surprised at his iciness and even hostility. We had arrived unannounced at his quarters, a church and house on the Republika Srpska

side of the border with the Federation of Bosnia. He emerged angry and flustered. After whisking away some menacing looking policemen he offered us more modest hospitality. He then explained as politely as he could, but with a sharpness we were meant to notice, that though as an Orthodox bishop he was required to be hospitable, he wanted us to know that he disapproved of our work. In stead of helping him rebuild his cathedral in Bihac, he now knew that we were in fact rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, a town that Orthodox Serbs had tried to cleanse of Muslims and all traces of Islam. He was warning us now that he had become our enemy, and would not support any of our mediation projects. Our mistake could have led to the disruption of our work in Bosnia, particularly as our Serb translator had managed to antagonize the muftis of Banja Luka and Bihac by telling them, again without our knowledge, that they had exaggerated the suffering of Muslims in Bosnia. The translator on our first visit to Bosnia almost managed to scupper our relations with both sides even before we had started. It required all our skills and efforts to repair the broken bridge with the Islamic community, and it took even longer to gain the trust of the Orthodox bishop of Banja Luka, though we knew we could never recapture the support of the bishop of Bihac.

The bishop and monks of Decani had also welcomed us warmly and with exceptional generosity. However they knew precisely the nature of our work; and for once we were helping the Orthodox in the same way we helped the beleaguered Islamic community in Banja Luka.

Nevertheless we needed to be on our guard.

FOOLS AND ANGELS

CROSSING THE BRIDGE AT MITROVICA

Driving to Kosovo from Belgrade the road enters the valley of the River Ibar and the landscape gets wilder and less inhabited. For over fifty miles there is hardly a village let alone a town, and as the steep bare mountains, blocking out the sky, loom above gloomy gorges, the foaming waters of the Ibar far below gush over boulders and rocks. The desolation of the region made me think of history and myths.

Along this road almost seven hundred years ago, Serbs were forced to flee their homeland in Kosovo, where over the previous centuries they had ruled and built magnificent monasteries and churches. The Muslim Ottomans drove them out and the Serbs eventually established their capital Belgrade where the region's largest river, the Sava, flows into the Danube at its mightiest. From what they considered to be an impregnable site they continued to resist the Ottoman invasion.

In Childe Harold, Byron describes the stark landscape of this part of the Balkans vividly from first-hand experience. It inspired a generation of artists attracted to the remoteness, an untamed world beyond control of governments, a place outside civilized limits, home to bandits, where travellers had to deal with extreme dangers, and face their inner as well as outer demons. By the poet's time the Ottomans had ruled for centuries, so the Muslim influence made South Eastern Europe even more exotic and in marked contrast to the rest of the continent. Here the mysterious orient encroached.

Two celebrated and almost identical nineteenth-century paintings depict the flight of Serbs. The first can be seen in the Patriarchate in Belgrade, and shows the dust and chaos of this traumatic event in their history, horses and people exhausted, animals

scattering. This painting upset patriotic nationalist sensibilities, because it portrayed the flight as a defeat too realistically, and the artist had to re-paint the historic event, this time in an atmosphere of dignified order, emphasising heroism and victory, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church leading his people to a glorious and defiant future. The myth of Serb resilience and martyrdom was sown in the bleak landscape of the Ibar Gorge.

The closer we came to the border with Kosovo, ruined ancient castles perched on the highest precipices, the more subdued our Serb driver became. He had brought a friend for the ride and to keep him company on his night-time return to Belgrade. For the first half of the ride the friend spoke to us incessantly in English, sitting uncomfortably on the passenger seat, twisting his body to face us. In the six hours the journey took all I could remember was his comment about the cabbages, like outsize green cannon balls heaped in large mounds being sold by the roadside. Milos the driver occasionally managed to squeeze a word in edgewise and gave information about the towns and villages we passed through, then for most of the last miles before the border and all the way to Mitrovica, both kept silent.

Guards at the Serb border-crossing scrutinized our passports and noted the Kosovo stamps from our previous visit. These had been crossed out by the control at Belgrade airport on our arrival several days earlier: 'Kosovo!' the airport passport control official had muttered contemptuously before taking the offending document to another office and returning with a line drawn through the stamp. We expected some punishment, because Serbia considers such an entry illegal, and although visitors can travel relatively easily from Serbia to Kosovo, the other way round is difficult, and we would have had to take the longer route through Macedonia and Skopje, meaning a several hour detour.

The no-man's land between Serbia and Kosovo stretches for several miles through the continuing rugged inhospitable landscape, a road far longer than between most countries we had ever visited. Milos and his friend could not tell us whether Kosovo Albanians would be manning the other border-crossing, but said the villages there were fiercely Serb nationalist strongholds, as we would soon see from the multitude of Serb flags flying from many houses. It seemed unlikely that any Kosovo Albanians would dare to step in this territory. The guards at the border-crossing turned out to be from one of the many international organizations now controlling the country, specifically here the European Union's Rule of Law Mission, EULEX, whose job was to police and prevent further outbreak of war. They barely glanced at our United Kingdom passports, but scrutinized those of Milos and his friend carefully.

A pall of neglect and poverty lay over the villages we passed on the way to Mitrovica. The occasional garishly lit gas-station and night-club reminded us of the road from the Croatian border into Northern Bosnia, where over a dozen similar funky buildings lined the few miles to Banja Luka. Milos would not consider filling up at these stations, the gas known to be diluted. They existed for the sole purpose of laundering profits of smuggling by the two gangster families who controlled this Serb part of Kosovo and stood like poisonous toadstools flashing scarlet warning in a dark wood. The Institute of Democracy and Co-operation, IDC, based in Paris and reporting on the present political situation in Kosovo to mark the anniversary of Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, summed up the country as living two realities, each unacceptable: the virtual reality of the international community in charge, which satisfies itself 'presenting a calm situation to the outside world', whereas the reality as experienced by the people living there is 'a calm guaranteed by

the Mafia and its clans'. The report reaches the bitter conclusion: 'the European and international leaders who have been in power in Kosovo for ten years are supporting with their ideology precisely the very social breakdown which they say they are fighting against.'

The IDC report also describes the economic paralysis of Kosovo. On the way to Mitrovica we passed a gigantic derelict coal mine with acres of weed, rusting girders and machinery, crumbling chimneys, broken windows, and mounds of coal and waste. It reminded us of similar industrial dinosaurs decomposing throughout Bosnia and was a melancholy sign of the region's economic collapse. After ten years of the presence of international organizations in the country, at huge expense mostly spent on staffing and paying for the organizations themselves, the IDC report concludes that Kosovo remains the poorest country in Europe, poorer even than Moldova, with unemployment figures varying from the most optimistic at 40% to what is nearer the truth at 60%, and where up to half the population earn just one euro a day. The report is a devastating indictment of the international community, begging the question: how come after ten years of massive expenditure and the overwhelming presence of wealthy organizations whose task has been to care for the country, the situation is worse than before the Kosovo war? The only response of the international community to this criticism is the fatuous justification: 'Well, at least they're not killing each other.' The crushing presence of so much armed foreign occupation is meant to keep a lid on the violence which simmers perpetually between the communities. But what will happen when the foreigners leave? Or are they intended to be there indefinitely? Whatever decision comes to be made, and at the moment there is talk of scaling down and withdrawal, the toxic mixture of persistent poverty, unemployment and envy of the ostentatiously wealthy foreign presence feeds

resentment which will one day certainly explode. As the IDC report points out, in all the years of foreign occupation no one has attempted to make peace between the communities. On the contrary, the internationally brokered ghettoising deal for Kosovo's independence, even in its weak and unworkable form still not recognized by many major powers, laid the foundations for future trouble by creating numerous Serb enclaves throughout the country, each needing to be perpetually guarded. For all its independence Kosovo cannot function as a country. In the same way as international meddling split Bosnia into two entities, now on the verge of total separation as the Republika Srpska prepares for its independence, so the poisoned chalice of the Ahtissari plan, which facilitated Kosovo's independence in 2008, militates against an integrated Kosovo able to govern itself and protect all minorities.

Driving into Mitrovica, we were astonished by the town's dinginess and air of neglect. It provided an example of Kosovo's poverty. Despite patriotic ties with Serbia, the town's sense of abandonment indicated Belgrade's inability to control the town politically and resource it materially. Had Serbia lost interest?

As night fell we arrived at the River Ibar, and Milos parked the car so he could leave us to cross the bridge alone on foot. In the rapidly gathering darkness some children were lighting noisy fire crackers on a small square where photographs of three young men with only their Christian names were pinned to a modest memorial. Had they been killed by Kosovo Albanians or by Nato bombs? Rubbish blew along the quiet streets. A tank crossed the otherwise empty bridge, followed by a few cars, all belonging to representatives of international peace-keeping missions, part of whose job while stationed in Kosovo was to prevent violence in this particular flash-point. A solitary policeman stood guard. The cafés, where Serb 'watchers' were known to

monitor people crossing the bridge, looked deserted. We could just detect a few shadowy figures sitting behind darkened glass.

Milos walked us up and down the street but declined to cross the bridge. He wondered ruefully what it might be like on the other side. His attitude echoed that of Feha our Kosovo Albanian minder who we hoped would be waiting for us there. Feha had also expressed fear about crossing and expressed curiosity about life on the Serb side. During all the drives together on our previous visit his mobile would ring constantly: parents and siblings making sure he did not stray over the border.

The bridge represents a border unlike any in Bosnia or indeed anywhere else we had been to on our many travels. Two completely different ethnic groups live on either side, and speak languages that have no relationship one with the other. Yet Kosovo Albanians were not invaders. They had occupied the region as long as the Serbs and suffered equally under the Ottomans. A statue of Mother Theresa in a park near the bridge reminds visitors that Albanians host a strong Christian Catholic presence. As in Bosnia, conversion by Ottoman invaders turned a large proportion Muslim, either by forceful persuasion or choice.

However unlike Bosnia, where ethnicity, traditions and language are shared, and where even during the war each side could not be sure who was the enemy, in Kosovo the ethnic groups are markedly distinct. The border on the River Ibar separates two peoples and cultures. During our project to build a memorial for survivors of the killing camp at Omarska in Northern Bosnia, we managed to engineer meetings between Serbs and Muslims, and eventually the mayor of Prijedor, a Serb who had helped orchestrate the ethnic cleansing during the Bosnia War, attended a Bajram celebration, joining in the jokes and singing with the very people he had once persecuted. The occasion illustrated how Bosnians are one people, despite differences

of religion. Albanian Feha and Serb Milos, as rational and friendly representatives of their separate communities, might happily meet and share a meal, but like foreigners, they would need translation or have to speak another language. They certainly would not be able to sing together.

In 1999 the Serbs were the bad guys, and NATO attacked Belgrade until Milosevic stopped ethnically cleansing Kosovo of its Albanian population. Then in 2004 the Kosovo Liberation Army, impatient for Kosovo independence, became the bad guys, carrying out revenge attacks on Serbs, killing them and destroying churches. The Serbs noted that NATO did not attack Pristina and felt aggrieved that their suffering went unremarked. It seemed that the Albanians were being favoured. Western-backed independence confirmed these suspicions.

The IDC report put together by two Russians, who traditionally tend to be pro-Serb, and an Englishman, tries to be even-handed, but nonetheless lays especial blame on the Kosovo Liberation Army and Kosovo Albanian politicians, as well as the cynical and self-serving international organizations. Selective memory skews any understanding of the situation in Kosovo. The attacks from the KLA in 2004, however reprehensible, had cause, and both sides as well as the international community have to know and accept the full history. In fact the majority of Kosovans, just wanting to get on with their lives and build up their country, were upset by the mayhem and criticized the murders and destruction committed in their name as the work of a minority of hotheads. The violence was also an expression of frustration at the slow pace of political separation from Serbia. Since the declaration of independence it is now in no Kosovo Albanian's interest to continue the violence and retribution for past crimes. They want to be recognized by the whole world as a country fit to govern

itself, tolerant of minorities. At the time of this visit sixty-two countries have recognized Kosovo.

As in every conflict there are no clear divisions between good and bad guys, apart from those, in their own eyes, doing the fighting and killing. Serbs in Kosovo were not all anti-Albanian. The monks of Decani recognized their then Serb government's attempt to ethnically cleanse Kosovo in the last months of the twentieth century and resisted: monks protecting fleeing children and looking after sick and wounded Albanians. Apart from extreme elements in the KLA, most Albanians have no problem living next to Serbs. It is these facts and the desire within a minority of Serbs, who acknowledge the present reality of Kosovo, to work and live in peace with their Albanian neighbours, which will help the process of mediation.

RETURN TO BELGRADE

In the winter of 2000, ten years ago as I write this, we paid our first visit to Belgrade, then a grey rusting city, ringed by severe concrete high-rise flats and in the grip of a former socialist then nationalist President Milosevic, behaving like a dictator, a place intimidated by a lethal network of violent gangsters and corrupt politicians. We noted the mournful procession of shame-faced Serb refugees from Kosovo gathered in the streets and squares around the Patriarchate, waiting to be looked after. The scruffy appearance, confusion and passivity of these abandoned losers illustrated defeat, stagnation and despair throughout Serbia.

On that first visit Patriarch Pavle had given us a friendly audience and at our prompting invited the religious leaders for a meeting filmed by Sky News to show the world Serbia had no problem with ethnic and religious diversity. (This event is

described in my first Balkan book, *A Tender Bridge*.) He then sent us to Bosnia, in his judgment the region in need of the most urgent healing in the Balkans.

We met Patriarch Pavle several times more, his slight physique wasted further by age but still robust, expressing himself with vigour, words high-pitched and clear, his watchful and darkly intense eyes flashing above a wispy white beard. At the time he was engaged in verbal skirmishes with President Milosevic, whom he blamed for Serbia's pariah status in Europe. He also needed to deal with the destruction of his beloved Kosovo where he had been bishop for many years. Meanwhile, unwillingly but unavoidably, he had to face uncomfortable truths about the recent past: a war during which he and fellow bishops had blessed Serb tanks and soldiers who then went on a killing spree, laying waste town and countryside.

We saw him last at a ceremony to bless the rebuilding of the Zitomislice church and monastery near Mostar in Southern Bosnia, a place where the Serb Orthodox were an oppressed minority, in 2005. Patriarch Pavle had visibly succumbed to age and illness and was no longer in complete charge, being carried and escorted by phalanxes of fiercely protective bishops and priests, a number of them aggressively nationalist. The event took on a political rather than religious significance. Federation, and therefore Muslim, police controlled the Serbian Orthodox crowds. These booed the Bosnian Muslim President Tihic who attended the ceremony in a gesture of peace and tolerance. The patriarch haltingly managed to get through the service and was then whisked away before we managed to speak with him.

After two years of hospitalization, during which Metropolitan Amfilohje acted as caretaker to the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Pavle died a few days before we had booked to fly to Belgrade.

Despite the possibility of not being able to visit the Patriarchate while the Serbian Orthodox Church mourned his passing and prepared to appoint a new patriarch, we took the risk of going anyway. Several allies in our project were expecting us including most importantly Vladimir Bozovic, a young high-flying Serb lawyer and would-be politician, a future president maybe, who had already helped Donald meet Metropolitan Amfilohje and this ensured a welcome at the monasteries in Kosovo.

We also wanted to establish a working relationship with Transconflict, an NGO based in Belgrade, which had expressed an interest in helping us with our mediation work with the monks and local communities at Decani and Pec. Transconflict consisted of Ian Bancroft, a young Englishman who had left working with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) to run his own NGO, and Mirjana Kovic, a young Serb translator from Banja Luka. Together they initiated mediation projects across Serbia and wanted to include Kosovo in their operations, hence their interest in us. Ian contributes regular carefully considered and fair-minded articles to the English media about the political and social situation in the Balkans.

Belgrade looked much the same as on our first visit ten years earlier, but the atmosphere felt less paranoid. Gone were the long doleful processions of scruffy refugees and rubbish blowing along otherwise empty pavements. The once conspicuous thugs in black jackets and dark glasses were now off the busier streets; probably sitting in smartened-up office blocks.

Belgrade still had the same tangy individual character with scowling dark-eyed people prowling its grand and elegant Hapsburg Empire boulevards decorated in the Ottoman style. In those days the city felt it could erupt at any minute, as happened when crowds gathered on Parliament Square and overthrew Milosevic. Serbia had always prided itself on standing defiantly on its own, fists against the rest of the

disapproving world. Now attitudes had mellowed, and most people, become more docile and weary of constantly waging war and being pariahs, reluctantly but pragmatically prepared to join the European Union. Instead of refugees blocking the streets, a small and good-humoured student demonstration marched to Parliament Square protesting about lack of grants.

On this visit we found ourselves snagged on the barbed wire stretched between two realities: the reality of the international community consisting of foreign organizations and diplomats, and the reality of the people trying to survive, all of them, from the poorest to those who appeared to be governing but were in fact powerless because the foreign organizations made all the decisions that mattered.

Basically the international community congratulated itself on successfully keeping the peace and steering the region towards the European Union. The situation was improving and our work did not seem necessary. Cocooned by police protection, large salaries and expense accounts, these foreigners remained unaware and sometimes indifferent to the issues of survival felt by the people they were there to protect and help: issues of unemployment, no money or freedom of movement, and the choking grip of corruption perpetuating economic, judicial and social stagnation, not only in government and the market among local politicians and businessmen, but also within the international organizations themselves, as recent scandals uncovered about drug running and prostitution by representatives of the United Nations in the Balkans, and world wide, have proved.

Ian and Mirjana accompanied us to most of the organizations from whom we hoped to find funding, and kept us informed of hidden agendas. The two of them also provided moral support as most meetings foundered on indifference and excuses, despite everyone seeming to agree on the importance of what we were trying to do.

Disillusioned with the ineffectuality and cynical apathy of the large international organizations determining the fate of the Balkans, Ian took a risk leaving the security of OSCE to form his own NGO with all the attendant worries of fund-raising, establishing projects and not being sidelined or ignored. Serious-minded, quietly spoken and fastidiously thoughtful about every situation, he had an ideal colleague in Mirjana with her linguistic skills, mercurial temperament, sharp intuitive insights and tireless enthusiasm. She seemed to burn heat at a high metabolic rate, slim and full of energy, whereas Ian moved slower, circumspectly: a mutually beneficial productive partnership.

NGOs cover a wide range of interests and concerns, from charitable educational or cultural activities, to challenging governments on political, environmental and other contentious issues. In Serbia we noted that people set up NGOs as a way of making money, putting the word 'peace' in the name in the hope of attracting backers. Pale and unfit young men in their twenties sat in rented offices, token maps on the wall with sometimes a photo of someone being helped in the third world, and looked hopefully across the table at us, waiting for us to become partners and share our funding. In Bosnia we discovered that a number of NGOs, with 'youth' or 'sport' in their names, were a kind of jobs-for-the boys, maybe fronts for criminal activities, funded by the government as thanks, pay-off or salary for those who had supported political leaders in the past, especially during the war. These ex-military did not even make a show of working. Wearing black leather or denim they sat in bars drinking rakija and smoking, waiting to be called to action again.

NGOs like Transconflict, focussing on areas where governments don't want or fear to go, are ignored as a nuisance or even a threat in the Balkans as they are in other places around the world unfamiliar with the mechanics of democracy. Such NGOs

also tend to be patronized by the big international organizations like the OSCE and the UN, who reckon they do a better job. These institutions are seen by the locals as aloof and exclusive, places for lucky successful applicants (just a few out of thousands) to earn reasonable salaries. In Bosnia the OSCE set out at first to help and advise us, perhaps to monitor our activities and learn something from us. But as our projects threatened to upset the authorities, often corrupt, on whom the OSCE relied for goodwill, it withdrew support. The offices were staffed with local interpreters and researchers, mostly young people, who saw our activity as a threat to their jobs and eyed us with hatred before turning their backs and refusing even to acknowledge our polite greetings.

The complexities and contradictions that create the issues around justice, economy and politics are not considered part of the brief of these large institutions, except as an academic exercise or an excuse for a top-level conference to show that lip service is being paid to peace and fairness. Money can always be found for these shindigs, usually in grand venues with lavishly expensive catering, a feather in everyone's cap. Fine words are spoken and even agreements signed in a blinding crackle of flash lights. Then the good and the famous return to their homes and high positions in distant lands, leaving the situation on the ground unchanged. The subsequent sense of deflation and disappointment means that wherever they establish a foothold these top-heavy organizations exacerbate rather than solve the issues. The generally smart OSCE and UN buildings show up the dilapidation and poverty around them. They appear to be self-serving and uninterested in anything beyond their own well-being.

Meanwhile small, independent and despised NGOs struggle with the issues on the ground, while lack of funding hinders any positive progress.

World media and general opinion assumes the OSCE and the UN, and their affiliates, are doing a good job, despite the odd scandal. Their ideals and purpose are heroic and necessary, especially when their workers come under fire in the most dangerous places. However they represent one reality, defined by expectations and obligations from their head offices. The people they have been sent to help experience a different reality which bears no relation to the salaries, expenses and seemingly remote and irrelevant activities of these foreign presences.

In all my writing over the last ten years I have had to avoid comment on these powerful organizations, as well as international politicians and especially global companies for fear of crippling libel action. In this way their behaviour escapes censure.

However the main lesson of these ten years is that they were the greatest obstacle to progress and on our last visit to Kosovo and Serbia we experienced the selfishness, indifference and pretence of the international presence to a degree greater than at any time before.

Ten years ago the face of Milosevic stared from billboards, signs of his inescapable and malevolent presence. Now Ceca covered hoardings on every street. A star of the turbo-folk scene, featuring songs about unrequited love or jealousy performed to an electronic rock beat and accompanied by wavy arm movements and wiggling hips in slit dresses, Ceca (pronounced Tsetsa) was popular across the Balkans, among Serbs, Croats and Muslims alike, despite her nationalist sympathies, being the widow of Arkan, one of the most notorious Serb warlords during the Bosnia War. Shortly after the war, rival gangster leaders shot him dead as he entered the Inter Continental Hotel. Ceca brought back memories of those dark times. At least political leaders had

changed, some dead, shot, at the Hague Tribunal or in hiding. But Ceca remained, indestructible.

Nostalgia for the past hung over the bar in the Hotel Balkan, where men with no work idled hours away in small groups seated on large black leather sofas and armchairs, drank espressos and puffed cigarette after cigarette. Smoke billowed up to the black chandeliers and on a wall with numerous old black-and-white photographs of Belgrade stretched a gigantic advertisement for the Orient Express dating back a hundred years and exuding a whiff of *The Lady Vanishes*, *From Russia With Love* and other atmospheric film thrillers from an age long gone, in which plucky Brits outwitted and defeated sinister and lethal foreigners generally in this part of Europe always considered mysterious, lawless and dangerous, a 'Wild East' of the continent.

Because of its space and quiet we chose this bar to talk with Ian and Mirjana, and plan the day's agenda. The first day began with a meeting typical of what would happen throughout our visit.

Two severe-looking women greeted us at the Konrad Adenauer Institute next door to the Patriarchate, and turned out to be secretaries standing in for their boss, a Mrs Crawford, who could not be present. They listened dutifully to our presentation, then proceeded to give us a list of reasons why they couldn't support us: they already had projects in process, further projects had already been approved for the year, they might consider us next September but couldn't guarantee finance for the whole period, and most important of all, the absent Mrs Crawford would have to approve. There had been no point to the meeting, which was certainly not worth a journey from England. We had sent them all details and proposals in advance so they must have known whether they might be interested and could simply have put us off.

The secretaries then proceeded to tell us what we already knew about divisions in the Orthodox Church in Kosovo, and that the death of Pavle meant the unlikelihood of us meeting anyone at the Patriarchate because of the forty-day period of mourning. As an intended coup de grace they announced with especially grim demeanour that without getting Bishop Artemije on side, our project had no chance of success, as though we needed reminding. This warning however seemed to be their excuse for not helping us: get him onside, or forget your project.

Triumphantly one of the secretaries found the name of an English-speaking priest at the Patriarchate who might be of help to us. But both women must have known as well as we did that only an invitation from a bishop or top administrator there would allow us entry. They seemed to be both mocking and rejecting us.

We hung around the entrance of the Patriarchate wondering what to do next, whether to enter and hand in our condolences, or leave a message with the priest. Fleets of black Audis parked outside indicated the presence of many bishops. We recognized a monk driver from Decani who may or may not have noticed us and studiously avoided our gaze, and saw Bishop Teodosije peering nervously through a window. He may also have seen us and disappeared.

Suddenly a tall well-groomed bishop emerged from the Patriarchate with several guests who were leaving and Donald approached boldly, introducing himself and immediately outlining our project.

The bishop spoke fluent English, since he came from America, and turned out to be Bishop Irene, the recently appointed Orthodox Bishop of Australia who not only knew about the situation with the monks in Kosovo but had already organized a high-level meeting of religious leaders and diplomats at Pec to begin to sort out the problems. They had not been able to follow up this conference with action so he

expressed relief and delight at meeting us, took us inside and gave us full attention, promised his unstinting support, found several names of Orthodox organizations whom we should contact and whom he would personally urge to support us financially and in every way they could.

This serendipitous encounter contrasted sharply with our previous meeting at the Konrad Adenauer Institute. The bishop introduced us to Father Vranic, the priest recommended by the secretaries there, and he turned out to be a pleasant, friendly young man, also from America and therefore fluent in English as well as Serbian, who promised to be our go-between in the future. Father Vranic worked in the department of External Relations for the Serbian Orthodox Church, but without the bishop's introduction, it is unlikely he would have been able to do anything for us.

The issue of Artemije came up again. It seemed as though the bishop, already traumatized by the events of 2004 when so many churches in his diocese had been destroyed and his monks and nuns attacked, had now become everybody's whipping boy, seen on all sides as the sole obstacle to any progress.

Bishop Irene sighed but could not say anything disparaging about a respected colleague. The Serbian Orthodox Church did not know how to deal with the situation. So he recommended we pay a visit to Russia and meet Bishop Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church, apparently a person admired and respected by Artemije.

The more we heard about Artemije, including his extraordinary decision to block electricity and energy supplies to the churches and monasteries in Kosovo, because they were being provided by a government he refused to recognize, we reckoned that given time he would become more increasingly side-lined by his own people, who found it difficult enough to survive even without the drastic cancellation of basic

amenities, just at the start of winter too. There had to come a time, probably sooner than later, when his own community would protest at and ignore him.

The Serb Unity Congress, an organization in a grand building in the centre of Belgrade, turned out to be another Konrad Adenauer Institute experience, except that the director herself greeted us. Polite but severe, she also listened to our presentation before making her excuses. To her undisguised irritation however, an American woman representing donors from the States insisted on sitting in on the meeting, and expressed huge enthusiasm for our proposals, saying it was the most important project she had heard of, more important than any of the work the organization was doing. The director winced and became icier by the second. Noticing this hostility, the American woman deferred to the director, saying 'I know you are in charge,' but hinted darkly that donors might also have a say in deciding what projects should be encouraged.

It made a pleasant change for us to be witnessing a difference of opinion among the people who were interviewing us for funding consideration. However the director did not take kindly to being contradicted. As far as she was concerned, however important our work, it did not come under her guidelines. Eventually she lost patience, stood up, indicating that we should leave, shook our hands politely at the door and we passed luxurious offices packed with secretaries before descending a marble staircase to the ground floor which looked like the entrance to a major bank.

The director reminded me of some of the most imperious Serb women we had met on our travels (including Svetlana Cenic, a politician in Banja Luka) people it is wise never to cross. Even the intimidating dictatorial conductor Arturo Toscanini met his match in a great Serb soprano, Zinka Milanov, then star diva of the Metropolitan

Opera in New York. Usually singers quaked under his baton, but confronted by her formidable ice-wall he would apparently lower his head, stare at her generous smooth white bosom, shake his head and sigh in submission.

Fortunately the next Serb woman we met turned out to be friendly and amenable. Biljana Mihailovic ran the Belgrade office of the International Orthodox Church Council, IOCC, funded like the Serb Unity Congress from America but in striking contrast crammed into a tiny office in an old draughty building off the main road rather than palatial on a high street in the city centre.

We scarcely needed to give our presentation because she understood the significance of our project and the support of Bishop Irene was sufficient to guarantee her support. She told us of the many projects in Serbia, mostly to do with giving money for small buildings and micro-businesses, donating cows to farmers, repairing shed roofs. Either the IOCC was a rare example of an organization that spent every penny in its budget on projects, as little as possible on itself - hence the modest furnishings of the Belgrade office; or it handled such small sums it could not afford anything better. From that point of view we were doubtful about chances of funding from this source, but Biljana Mihailovic seemed so upbeat, even discussing budgets and future meetings, that we felt hopeful.

Our fourth meeting with a powerful woman, this time the British deputy to the Ambassador who was 'out of the country', indicated how our work no longer concerned or interested embassies. At least in Belgrade we met the deputy; in Kosovo we would be fobbed off with the third secretary.

The educated smartly groomed deputy greeted us with the traditional polite stoop and slightly crooked smile below cold watchful eyes of someone who had been warned to keep us at arm's length. After the usual precautions at the entrance with

overbearing local staff enjoying their task of making visitors feel uneasy, and being kept waiting, a slim fastidious Serb liaison officer, perpetually smiling and unctuous, took us across a courtyard to the inner sanctum, upstairs to a bleak hall, flags along one wall and with long tables and dozens of chairs rather than to a comfortable office. While the man prepared mugs of instant coffee for us the deputy listened to our presentation and became defensive when challenged about international apathy regarding peace mediation. She outlined several important projects the embassy hosted in parts of Serbia with minority issues. These involved successful and productive meetings of representatives from different ethnic groups, talking and signing pledges.

As with all our meetings with internationals, including embassies, it felt as though our work had become redundant now: they reckoned everything was in order, progressing nicely with improvements visible on all sides. Then why were the monks in Decani and the nuns in Pec still frightened to leave the safety of their monasteries and needing armed guards day and night? What would happen when the soldiers left? These internationals policed the region, keeping a lid on violence, congratulated themselves on their good work and did not think about the future and the issues that remained unresolved.

We learned that embassy funding policy had changed radically from our first visits ten years before. Then the ambassador had discretionary budgets to help small projects he or she might want to support, and could also recommend funding from the Foreign Office and DIFID. Now funding went directly to the big organizations like the UN and the OSCE with specific briefs, policies and their own administration – no questions asked, despite massive running costs and rumours of corruption.

This directive from the government via the Foreign Office freed embassies from obligations that had once allowed them discretion to use an allocation of funding to help NGOs they approved of. It now restricted the ambassador and his deputies to doing the basic job of representing their governments and pushing their countries' business interests. Cultural and educational projects, like teaching English, were never necessarily part of an embassy's brief, this being the business of the British Council, but embassies and the British Council used to work together and ambassadors would attend any big cultural event. Now, for lack of funding, the British Council had wound down its activities to teaching English for fees. Cultural and humanitarian work became the responsibility of individuals acting on their own initiative, like NGOs. If the embassies had any concern about us at all, it was to monitor that we weren't working against their interests, and this job could be done by any deputy or secretary who happened to be free. Now they did not even bother to respond to emails or queries. 'You're on your own,' sounded the unspoken message.

We left the embassy in Belgrade feeling deflated and redundant, but after talking with Mirjana and Ian in a nearby café we were once again reminded of the parallel universes existing in places like Serbia and Kosovo: the universe of the international community, usually well protected and avoiding direct involvement with local concerns, and the universe of people who had to find ways of surviving and dealing with whatever these concerns might be.

V
VLADIMIR, VUK, MILOVAN, THE METROPOLITAN AND THE CHIEF OF
THE SECRET POLICE

When Vladimir entered a room he took possession of it, towering over everyone, moving around welcoming, stroking and leaving no one out, his large dark eyes

homing in on the next person, meanwhile constantly speaking into his Blackberry, sometimes a mobile at the same time fixed in his other ear. The room belonged to him as did the restaurant where he took us for supper, and also the Hotel InterContinental, where not so many years ago the warlord Arkan had been shot dead in the entrance and where Vladimir invited us to an extravagant fund-raising banquet he was hosting to raise funds for a new Orthodox Church in Montenegro. Belgrade belonged to Vladimir, as he walked along the streets taking us to meet Vuk Draskovic, a friend, novelist and star politician. Vladimir greeted dozens of people on the way while conducting an important conversation with Donald, shepherding him across busy boulevards and squares, shaking hands on the way, patting people on the back, waving at them, all the time his eyes steadily watchful not seeming to blink. Eventually Serbia would be Vladimir's fiefdom. When Donald asked him whether he planned to be prime minister or president of Serbia one day, Vladimir replied immediately: 'Of course!'

A force of nature, photographs made him look slightly overweight and puffy, but in reality Vladimir was a classically tall, dark and handsome man. The women he employed or went out with put film stars in the shade: his secretary a petite voluptuous blonde with submissive eyes and tender manner; his dark haired girlfriend, tall, long-limbed and graceful, a fellow lawyer, well-educated and travelled, fluent in several languages – a model spouse for a future president.

The girlfriend joined us only briefly for our first supper together with Vladimir at the celebrated Writers Restaurant where a large table had been prepared for us in a discreet corner away from the crowds. She talked animatedly with us about her desire to visit Vienna, hoping Vladimir would take her one day. I remembered there had always been a large and vibrant Serb community in that city, long before the break up

of the Soviet Union. As a boy in the decades after the Second World War, visiting my grandparents every summer, I used to stare fascinated at Serb menus in the many cafés on narrow streets radiating around Stephans Platz, the great gothic cathedral rising above them. In those days Vienna was tucked away in the furthest corner of Europe where Western Europe hit against the Iron Curtain along the Eastern part of the divided continent. Isolated, Vienna felt quieter then. Its links with countries from the former Hapsburg Empire meant that sizable minorities of Hungarians, Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats kept their traditional cultures alive, in the way Russians, Italians, Jews, Chinese and many other ethnic and national communities do in the United States, preserving their essence as it were in aspic, full of sentiment, more 'ethnic' than in the countries of their origin. So the yearning of Vladimir's girlfriend reminded me that Vienna had for centuries attracted the cleverest, most ambitious and creative people from the distant provinces of its empire. My grandmother migrated from Lvov, now in the Ukraine, but then part of Poland, to better herself, study at its university, and become a successful pharmacist. Perhaps the girlfriend felt the attraction of Vienna, making Belgrade seem provincial, in the same way as my grandmother, over a century ago. In those days the heavy hand of the Imperial Police and army oppressed the political life of countries demanding independence, hence the assassination in Sarajevo in 1914, leading to the first of the wars which disfigured and altered Europe as well as the world throughout the 20th century to such traumatic effect that we are still reeling. Yet at the same time ethnic tolerance meant opportunity for all within the borders of the empire, and Vienna thrived and flourished culturally as well as materially. Nostalgia for those days remains undiminished.

The owner of the Writers Restaurant, a small elderly man who had built up the place's reputation over decades, beamed with pride at his high-flying customers.

Vladimir had also invited Milovan, a TV star talk-show host, handsome and friendly, stylishly under-dressed, with the unresponsive gaze of a man used to being stared at and avoiding eye contact. Vladimir introduced the last guest, a greying and unremarkable looking civil servant in brown corduroy trousers and old jacket with an ironic smile perpetually flitting under sparkling watchful eyes as 'Chief of the Secret Police'. We laughed at the joke, but it turned out this really was his job, and had been for many years. So he must have worked under Milosevic, and judging from his age possibly even under communism, but we did not dare ask.

We could not guess the purpose of meeting these people, apart from enjoying a convivial evening with people in Vladimir's circle. Vladimir was welcoming us to Belgrade, his world. The Chief of Secret Police abstained from food but drank several glasses of brandy. Large platters of traditional Balkan food, slabs of cheese pie, pepper mousse, stuffed cabbage leaves and chunks of boiled and roast lamb were placed in the middle of the table and we helped ourselves, Donald and I picking tentatively at the unfamiliar dishes, Milovan with polite modesty and Vladimir with enthusiasm, eating twice as much as everyone else, his appetite growing as the evening progressed, all washed down with several wines and many glasses of rakija. We talked a little about the project, but for most of the time the three men joked and shouted at each other in Serbian. I tried out my Russian on the Chief of the Secret Police, but he started correcting my mistakes, and I became too inhibited to continue, wanting to ask so many questions and not knowing how. His smile far from encouraging me, seemed to deter interrogation from my side. If any one did the questioning, it would be only him.

Suddenly Vladimir stood up and announced that the three of them had to attend another meeting elsewhere, paid the bill and left, but not before making several dates

with us, one at his office next day from where he would take us to Vuk Draskovic, and the other at the Hotel Inter Continental where he would make sure Donald spoke with Metropolitan Amfilohje.

People congratulate us on our work, and worry about our safety. For us it is always a privilege and joy, even dealing with difficult situations. The peaks of our travel experiences are the beauty of the countries we visit, whether the deserts of Libya, the mountains and rivers of Bosnia, the bracing atmosphere of Belgrade, the fountains and tiny shopping booths of Sarajevo, the plateaus of Kosovo, monasteries ablaze with astonishing paintings or the sun-baked ancient towns of South Eastern Turkey – and above all the people. How can anyone resist the larger-than-life characters we encountered everywhere? I am writing about them in my book *Dust*: great souls like Bishop Komarica in Banja Luka and Mirsad Duratovic in Prijedor, intense Orthodox monks and priests with beautiful voices singing traditional liturgies, feisty nuns like Sister Mirna and survivors of war and ethnic cleansing like Emsuda Mugahic, outspoken rough hewn fighters like Mufti Camdzic, devoted friends who risked helping us including the icon-specialist Lazar, who almost scuppered the Soul of Europe before its work began, to faithful drivers, translators, advisors and project managers, Adnan, Zoran, Anel, Misha and Emir, not to mention the gallery of roguish gangsters, mayors, and politicians, often the same, whom not even Dickens could have invented. However bad the people we encountered, and several had much blood on their hands, nevertheless none matched the evil of the coolly indifferent, smart and cynical representatives of the international community who manipulated and decided the fate of the countries they were sent for brief periods to govern from the security of hermetically sealed and heavily guarded offices, helicopters and four-

wheel drives, before returning to glittering careers, Bosnia providing a prized medal for their CV, the choice of expensive homes and private schools for their children.

Vladimir was worth the visit to Belgrade on his own, a man to sweep you off your feet, physically and mentally dominating, bustling with ideas, contacts and business, a human dynamo, and inevitably a future leader. He leapt from the pages of a Dostoevsky novel, like Dmitri in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Only once did Vladimir falter and seem to sleep. This happened during our visit to Vuk Draskovic. The Serb political leader talked with us so long and enthusiastically, Vladimir could rest, and his eyelids flickered momentarily.

We stayed on the outskirts of the city centre in a small pleasant family guesthouse, the Hotel Marija, run by a young couple. The friendly husband did the welcoming and ensured everyone's comfort, ready to chat, responding to every joke with a high pitched giggle. The dour wife ran the kitchen and managed the place. On telling her we would be meeting Vuk Draskovic, a popular novelist and one of the most famous political leaders in Serbia since the war, she responded unimpressed with a shrug of the shoulders: 'He should have stayed a writer!'

Charismatically handsome, lean with unruly white locks, large warm eyes and heavily lined face, Vuk Draskovic treated Donald respectfully as he would his own father and began the meeting with a lecture on Jesus and, reminding us of his literary profession, Dostoevsky, quoting *The Brothers Karamazov*. This book seemed to be haunting me throughout our visit to Belgrade, and indeed it seemed to be the most relevant text for Serbia, as it remains for places where the crimes people commit, responsibility, guilt and restitution are the burning issues: in other words, everywhere.

Vuk declared Moses to be 'a perfect believer,' Mohammed 'a perfect warrior' and Jesus 'a perfect man'. Vuk quoted Mohammed describing Jesus, Issay, as 'less than

God but more than a prophet'. Vuk concluded that 'People of different faiths can only come together as human beings'.

In the aftermath of the Bosnia War Vuk Draskovic had mounted the barricades against the corrupt government of Milosevic, and had subsequently survived several assassination attempts. I remembered him from news bulletins as being a fiery nationalist, prowling Belgrade in a permanent rage. Now he seemed to have changed, calmer and smiling more and saying that 'multi-ethnicity is in my soul'. However, while acknowledging the present political reality of Serbia and Kosovo, he declared that multi-ethnicity could only be accepted after ethnic independence. Did this imply a separation of ethnic groups or a support for Kosovo independence? 'We are not there yet,' he declared. 'Ninety per cent of Kosovo hates Serbia, but Kosovo is the spiritual heart of Serbia.' He then confirmed our intuition that the political issue of Kosovo independence from Serbia was moving in a positive direction: 'We have a reality we cannot change,' Vuk announced simply. We had reached this conclusion already during our first visit to Kosovo and were preparing the ground for our project by talking to everyone about this new reality. Vuk, a Serb political figure of substance and influence, a former nationalist, though one with no chance of taking power, unprompted hit the nail squarely on the head: Kosovo was an independent country; Serbia would not regain it without another war - inconceivable.

The conversation proceeded with confusing non-sequiturs: Vuk describing two Serbias as resembling the relationship between China and Taiwan, 'protected seas of Christianity in a Muslim State'. This seemed to imply that places like Decani and Pec were isolated Serb Christian enclaves: independent islands in Kosovo. However our project aimed to improve and change this situation, to integrate these communities with Kosovo in such a manner that they would not lose their character and traditions.

Pec and Decani could not be compared to the island of Taiwan, completely separated from mainland China and surrounded by the South China Sea.

If I understood Vuk correctly he also seemed to want Serbia to take Kosovo into the European Union, quoting Ivan from *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘I wish I could believe!’ I had difficulty following his line of thought. Donald introduced his own relevant quotations, this time from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Love those who persecute you’, then informing Vuk that the EU was not a union of minorities, despite what it said in its Charter, and that the EU did not recognize the rights of religious institutions, despite Europe’s Christian roots. However, whatever the atheistic politicians might say, Europe’s heritage of Christian spiritual values including the change of thinking and priorities during the Enlightenment, went back centuries. As with the theory of evolution, the future is always on the side of the minority it judges to be wiser.

The conversation continued in this mystifying manner, miring itself in further quotations and maxims more suited to a wine and rakija-soaked dinner than a discussion intended to help our work in Kosovo. No wonder Vladimir’s attention waned and his eyelids began to close. However the main substance had been expressed clearly: Serbs beginning to acknowledge the new reality of Kosovo, whatever they might think and feel. Politicians would need to steer public opinion carefully in a direction of acceptance and future cooperation. This represented a considerable change of attitude from even half a year ago.

Before our final meeting with Vladimir we enjoyed an interlude with Crown Prince Alexander, the King of Yugoslavia, who welcomed us graciously, treating us like important foreign dignitaries, inviting us to stand for formal photographs and then sit

on hand-carved upholstered chairs for an elaborate ceremony when a procession of maids served tea from silver pots and exquisite small sandwiches and cakes on silver platters. The King did not have to give us such treatment, but he remembered with delight and interest our previous visit, several years earlier, when he and his wife entertained us for several hours, talking about our projects in Bosnia, sharing their histories and hopes for the future, then showing us round the palace, giving a personal guided tour of the treasures, and the secret history of Tito and Milosevic. We photographed ourselves sitting at the same desk from which these leaders gave televised announcements.

This time he gave us names and organizations we should contact on his behalf to help with our work in Kosovo, including an introduction to Bishop Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church whom he knew personally, and who could help bring Bishop Artemije on side. The King talked in familiar terms about our Queen Elizabeth, so we felt all part of this exclusive family. She had been present at his christening in Westminster Abbey. It reminded me of a time before the First World War when all the royal families of Europe were inter-related by blood or marriage, and despite these close bonds, perhaps because of them sadly, guided the continent into two devastating wars which pulled the rest of the world into their vortex of destruction and the murder of millions.

Serbia, having welcomed the King's return at the collapse of Communism, seemed to be ignoring and sidelining him, but from the perpetual stream of diplomatic calls of ambassadors, international politicians and world leaders to the palace, the King was establishing a template of constitutional monarchy, along the lines of the UK. Slowly national politicians were acknowledging the significance of his presence, though they still did not defer to him.

He entertained us with the story of an extraordinary moment when an elderly man with a bushy white beard wanted to shake his hand after a service at the Orthodox Cathedral. The man pushed through the crowd of well-wishers but the King had no idea who he was until several weeks later the papers had the man's face plastered over all front pages: Radovan Karadjic arrested!

The King seemed dismissive of the current politicians, including Vuk Draskovic, Vladimir Bozovic and the rest. He raised his eyebrows when we asked his opinion, and made no comment apart from describing them all as 'remnants of the communist monarchy.' This attitude gave us a different perspective on the political leaders we had met throughout Bosnia and Serbia ever since we started working there, many of them communist bureaucrats who turned into nationalists when times changed in order to hold on to their power base. Kings had ruled the region for centuries, the revolutionary leaders in the former Yugoslavia, barely half a century. These figures were a blip in history as far as the King was concerned, not to be taken seriously: people who had emerged from war and the overturning of the old order to take advantage of power and wealth but without legitimacy or any particular qualities. Perhaps Tito had been a leader to reckon with, but the rest were mostly ill-educated gangsters and opportunists.

In the middle of our conversation the retiring representative of the United Nations in Serbia arrived for a meeting with the King. We had over-run our time, but the King was in no hurry to let us go, as though postponing an unpleasant encounter. The man entered, looking grotesquely fat and shapeless, wheezing scornfully, dribble forming on his heavy lower lip. Not even the Guardian cartoonist Steve Bell could have created a more hideous figure. Giving us precedence the King told the man to wait, and the monster sloped off to the back of the room with an impatient grunt.

On our way out Donald approached and challenged him about the record of the UN in the Balkans, asserting that we were doing his work for him. Enraged at being kept waiting, and now being criticized as well, the man cracked a withering but lame joke about peace-makers being 'pace-makers'. Mirjana later reminded us of the scandal of UN workers in the Balkans being involved in prostitution and drug trafficking, and all that corruption seemed to be distilled in the figure of this one man: epitome of the cynicism and indifference that marked the international community's presence in the Balkans. This encounter confirmed a suspicion that had been growing in the back of my mind as the years of our work passed that however bad the people we met throughout our travels in South Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, none matched the evil of representatives from the West who purported to be humanitarian and 'doing good', 'keeping the peace', but were in fact following their own agendas, sometimes criminal, and looking after themselves. They pocketed high salaries and took advantage of limitless expense accounts, while treating the countries and people they had been sent to help with contempt.

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Orthodox priests and bishops had taken over the Inter Continental Hotel in Belgrade. Monks in black robes and tall black hats welcomed guests and donors outside the grand entrance where not so many years before rival gangsters had shot dead the warlord Arkan. The monks lined the grand reception lobby and ushered us into a large hall where bishops in full regalia, including Metropolitan Amfilohje, stood in small groups around a large model of a new Orthodox church with several gold domes and tall bell towers. On one side of the room an exhibition of photographs and films was being displayed; on the other side a huge banquet lay spread on long tables. Vladimir had organized this fund-raising event and was hosting it, finding the time and energy

to talk to everyone, flitting from one to the other, putting one arm round shoulders, the other juggling mobile and Blackberry against his ear.

The hall filled with guests and donors: ferocious loud business men accompanied by submissive and chicly dressed attractive wives smiling with adoration at the bishops. Then a group of monks started to sing with full-throated intensity, and the skin prickled on my neck. Everyone had to listen, but when a chorus of girls followed the monks in a more delicate style, the donors talked ever louder, drowning their voices.

After speeches from bishops and the Metropolitan, the guests crowded round the banquet and two teenagers in Montenegrin costume carried a large basket festooned with ribbons around the room for donors to place their cheques. By the end of the evening they had collected forty thousand euros.

Among the architects were three elderly sculptors who showed me pictures of their work: memorials around the former Yugoslavia commemorating the sacrifices and suffering of the Second World War, terrifying monuments, gigantic abstract shapes in white concrete, looming suddenly out of the landscape, all too solid monstrosities that sent chills down the spines of unprepared visitors. On the bleak fields of Jasenovac, the concentration camp from the Second World War on the border of Serbia and Croatia where hundreds of thousands of mostly Serbs were tortured and killed by Nazis and Croat Ustashe, the size and mysterious form of one such memorial monument never failed to fill me with dread. At last I met the sculptor who created it, a frail friendly old man with intensely sparkling eyes and pleasant manner. He and his two fellow sculptors formed part of a co-operative of artists who had survived the war, then the years under communism celebrating Tito, and now enjoyed working for the Orthodox Church.

Eventually Vladimir brought Donald to Metropolitan Amfilohje, and after a long discussion encouraged us to tuck in to the banquet while the girls carried on singing in the background, and the monks occasionally silenced the donors with more skin-prickling chants. Vladimir introduced us to colleagues, students who said they were financiers, specializing in investment. At a time when few people in England dared to admit they were bankers we raised our eyebrows at the audacity of these young Serbs, who did not seem to be aware of how low the reputation of their profession had fallen in the West. One of them told us proudly, in broken English, that he intended to come to London and continue his trade there.

The guests gradually dispersed. Not understanding anything most people were saying to us, we thanked Vladimir and said good bye. Suddenly he became intensely serious, seizing Donald by the arm, not wanting to let him go. With tears in his eyes Vladimir said: 'Pray for me!' It was as though all the contradictions of his life, his work, his connections, his women and his piety had come together at this moment. He helped us out of the generosity of his big heart. But he also needed absolution.

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DANCING IN PRISTINA

As at Omarska our only support and ballast came from the young people, Orthodox and Muslim, who understood the purpose of our project. No international organization wanted to see us, and even the British Embassy fobbed us off with the third secretary, a woman so obese that she could barely fit the staircase leading up to her office.

Given how thin almost all Kosovans were, she must have stuck out embarrassingly on the streets of Pristina, and it struck me as an act of cruelty to send her there. She wrote everything down politely, but her silence to our questions made it clear that the

ambassador wanted nothing to do with us anymore. We wrote to him several times after and received no reply.

We left Kosovo feeling abandoned by those who should have been encouraging us, but relieved that at least Kreshnik and his friends at Pro Peace were committed to the work. They were among the minority fortunately employed but prepared to give their time when the project started, meanwhile searching for funding themselves. The European Union had turned down their recent application on a technicality; just one box in the form had not been filled in correctly, and that because Pro Peace had not understood the question. Given the significance of the project, this seemed a mean-spirited response. We visited the office that had rejected us to find out what we had done wrong, and the staff member only agreed to talk to us grudgingly: 'I am not supposed to talk to anyone who submits an application; I don't have to speak to you.' But since we had flown from England he felt obliged to at least give us a minute of his time. He remained adamant that any applications which failed to fill all boxes correctly were rejected on principle and saw us out of the door.

We could not be in Kosovo without visiting the monks of Decani. Our chief contact there, fluent-English-speaking Father Sava, left messages that he had gone down with a bad cold, but Donald insisted on going there and received a warm welcome from Bishop Teodosije as well as another monk who could translate. The meeting covered familiar ground, with the good news that more of the monks were learning Albanian, and walked about the town in their robes without attracting hostility. In fact people approached them with friendly curiosity. However, despite these promising signs of acceptance, the situation at the monastery remained dangerous and it still had to be guarded by Italian police. The bishop and his monks expressed enthusiasm for what

we were trying to do and were happy to cooperate with us. Father Sava later sent a text message underlining their gratitude and goodwill.

While Donald met with the bishop I walked round Pec with Kreshnik and Feha to meet Kosovo Albanians in order to find out what they thought about the situation. It seemed as though most people had no interest in the monasteries, being more concerned about their own situation, unemployed, wondering how they could survive and look after their families. I noticed a few young men sitting outside a café that looked on to the road to Decani, checking who was coming and going. Kreshnik and Feha spoke for the people of Kosovo, mostly indifferent to the Serbian Orthodox Church there, though valuing the cultural heritage. But the fact of these heavily guarded enclaves in the heart of their country remained a provocation.

A curious small incident underlined this ambivalence. While we waited for Donald to emerge from the monastery a young man with a backpack strode past us, a walker who seemed to be on a long hike. He looked at us, at Donald in his cassock talking to a monk outside the monastery entrance, and then greeted us loudly and firmly in Serbian. Kreshnik, normally relaxed and tolerant, bristled noticeably and eyed the man angrily. Why did the man greet us in Serbian? Was this a provocation too?

After this courtesy call, Feha and Kreshnik drove us to the attractive city of Prizren to the south of Kosovo, a tourist magnet with cobbled streets, clusters of mosques, hills and streams, reminiscent of Travnik in Bosnia. We saw a large Orthodox church being restored in the city centre, and spent a few minutes with its caretaker, a monk from Decani living on his own, looking exhausted and cold, his feet wrapped in heavy ragged socks. Looking at us with suspicion about our motives for the visit, he informed us of the eighty or so Orthodox worshippers, and we wondered why they needed such a huge church, when next to it stood a small intimate chapel with

beautiful ancient wall paintings and icons. The signs outside the main church indicated that several international organizations had given large donations for the rebuilding. This struck us as ironic: they were prepared to give money for bricks and mortar, but not for people and solving issues. All that mattered to the donors was that Przren could have a large Orthodox church, reconstructed with foreign aid, but hardly anyone to worship in it. The church would remain empty.

The Catholic cathedral up the street looked in a better state, and a friendly nun showed us round, indicating that although Catholics were more numerous than Serb Orthodox, the city was now mostly Muslim, and the communities didn't mix.

Przren swarmed with Albanian Kosovars, mostly young people and families, milling across bridges and squares and sitting in Parisian style cafés. We could see a deserted Orthodox monastery on a hillside overlooking the city. Patriarch Pavle used to live there as Bishop of Kosovo before being elected head of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Feha and Kreshnik drove us into the National Park, an area of foaming rivers and craggy mountains beyond the city and bordering Macedonia. We passed another Orthodox monastery, guarded with look-out towers, masses of barbed wire curled on top of its ancient walls, soldiers and armoured personnel carriers crowding the entrance.

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Given that no internationals wanted to see us, we spent most of the time in Kosovo with Kreshnik, Feha, Dreni and Gazmir from Pro Peace to discuss strategy and describe to them the situation in Serbia, our meetings with TransConflict, Crown Prince Alexander and Vladimir, as well as those not prepared to help.

Dreni and Gazmir explained to us the parallel universes existing in Kosovo: that of the comfortable international community, pleased with itself and controlling the

country while perpetuating the pretence of a democratically elected government being in charge, and reckoning that since no one shot each other the place must be at peace, problems all being sorted; and the universe of the Kosovo people, mostly living on one euro a day, since only a minority were fully employed, all feeling powerless and at the mercy of foreigners. More money had been pumped into the country by the European Union than into any other conflicted area, yet the people of Kosovo saw little of it. Most of the cash propped up the organizations which squatted there like cuckoos. The people only managed to survive because of money being sent from family members lucky enough to have found work elsewhere in the world. For example, Feha's brother, a refugee, had settled in England and built up a construction business in Hemel Hempstead. A resourceful and ambitious young man, he had made a success of the business and married an Englishwoman. A fan of Eastenders, Sky Plus and X Factor, he intended to stay. Now Feha's parents depended on the money he sent.

The Kosovo politicians could only play at being in charge. What they wanted or decided did not count. More powerful representatives of governments with their own agendas from other parts of Europe made decisions and controlled the purse strings.

While Donald stayed in the Hotel Afa writing a blistering report in the form of a satirical play about our meetings in Belgrade, Kreshnik took me on a walk through Pristina. We talked about personal matters, home, family and his new wife Qendresa (pronounced Chendresa). He told me more about his father who had written a detailed diary during the Kosovo War, recording the events in tiny handwriting on whatever paper he could find. He believed this unique document should be kept in a museum, and published, as a record of what happened in a war where already the facts were being disputed, both sides declaring themselves to be the victims, to the extent that

despite the filmed evidence of Serb atrocities and long processions of refugees, Serbs only spoke about the revenge attacks of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Kreshnik came from an educated family, and his brother had become a world-famous artist, invited to stage an exhibition in London the next year. Kreshnik pointed out the headquarters of one of the very few rich Albanian Kosovars, Beghjet Paccoli, a millionaire businessman who lived mostly on Lake Garda in Switzerland when not travelling from one business venture to another, in Africa and Russia, where amongst other high-profile projects he refurbished the Kremlin. Paccoli had initially been interested in supporting our project, but dropped us suddenly without reason, probably because he feared being branded pro-Serb at a time when he hoped to gain political influence in Kosovo. His party polled badly in the last elections, but he still planned a comeback from his political headquarters in Pristina, a glistening modern office block standing out from the surrounding shabby and neglected buildings. The only other cleaned up offices in the city belonged to international organizations, such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Kreshnik lead me down Mother Theresa Square in the centre of Pristina, where large numbers of people were celebrating the centenary of the founding of Kosovo as a republic: patriotic music blaring from loudspeakers. Then Kosovo remained a part of Serbia, but the flags indicated that the region considered itself separate long before it claimed and received political independence, two years before.

Kreshnik hailed one friend after another, and introduced me to a member of the Kosovan parliament, Driton Tali, who spoke fluent English having studied in London before the Kosovo War. He had then returned to his home country as soon as the conflict started and joined the Kosovo Liberation Army. A popular MP, charming and talkative, he wanted to know more about our work and also to explain to me the

deceptive nature of Kosovo's independence. Arm in arm we strolled past the braziers with mounds of roasted pumpkin seeds and meat pies, and tables serving beer, wine and local spirits, which we drank out of plastic cups until I became too dizzy to think.

Constantly being greeted by smiling supporters, Driton introduced me first to Albin Kurti, a charismatic leader of a pressure group trying to persuade the internationals to leave Kosovo and allow the country to govern itself; formerly he had been a student activist imprisoned by the Serbs during the Kosovo War. Albin Kurti sat outside a café with friends and greeted me warmly, interested in our work. After dispiriting experiences with the international organizations in Serbia and Kosovo, it came as a relief to meet someone who not only criticized them the way they deserved, but was determined to get rid of them. We would certainly need his advice and he seemed happy to help, despite the fact that we were foreigners too. The support of Driton and Kreshnik may have persuaded him he could trust us.

Stalls on Mother Theresa Square were displaying what looked like piles of second-hand clothes and cleaning materials. But every fifth stall sold honey. Kosovo seemed to be a country of beekeepers, and I wanted to buy a jar to take home. The lean and grizzled man behind one such stall hailed Driton Tali as an old friend. The beekeeper turned out to have been a captain in the Kosovo Liberation Army fighting alongside Driton, but was now retired and eking a living from a few hives in his village home.

The former captain seemed to be asking what all the fighting had been for, arms gesticulating heavenwards, and Driton seemed to be replying that he was trying his best. As he later explained at one of Pristina's best restaurants, Te Pishat, pointing at the mostly international clientele, the place being unaffordable to locals, he might be a popularly elected MP by name but could only criticize and heckle from the sidelines. Brussels crippled the government's power to make decisions. Prime Minister Thaci,

by chance one of Feha's cousins, constantly had to bow to pressure from the Council of Europe and follow its agenda. Independence had been bestowed like a favour, but in effect Kosovo remained a colony, this time of Europe rather than Serbia.

Driton beamed at us encouragingly, clapped our backs, and hearing about our run-in with Beghjet Paccoli immediately phoned from his mobile and demanded the millionaire support our project. We did not hear the response but Driton remained positive. 'I'll make him help you, don't worry,' he declared ordering another round of brandy, and pointing out a representative of an international cultural organization eating at the next table. The man looked barely out of his teens, a college graduate, and Driton shook his head, smiling ironically at me, implying: 'This is the kind of greenhorn, without experience or knowledge, they send to decide our future!'

One poignant scene stuck in my mind from the crowds and hectic conversation on Mother Theresa Square, as I strolled up and down with Driton and Kreshnik. A young woman wanted to dance to the folk music blaring from large loudspeakers, and beckoned a group of youths which formed an open circle, so others could join in. Holding hands high they began to move gracefully in a kolo, a traditional Balkan folk dance loved by Serbs and Albanians. The young men followed her and executed the complicated steps in perfect unison. Kreshnik noticed them too, moved as I was by the seraphic look on the woman's face and the earnest concentration of the young men, swaying, stepping and moving slowly round and round, a dance without end.

A POISONED CHALICE

Visit to Kosovo: November 2010

PARALLEL UNIVERSES

Two men sit facing each other. One of them is begging for help, maybe a loan or a gift. Perhaps he is asking for leniency about a debt. He is poor, whining and desperate. The other is prosperous and omnipotent and refuses to help, laying down the laws of business, giving advice but remaining impervious to entreaty. The scene is one of the *Pictures from an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky. The music illustrates the poor man's timorous repetitive requests, talking quickly, trying to persuade; appealing for sympathy: please! In response the rich man is expressed in self-righteous tones of implacable resolve: No! This is the world and how it is. Like Alan Sugar, the prosperous and successful know their wealth and subsequent power gives them the authority to pontificate and decide: you are fired! Charity does not make the giver rich. The poor will therefore always be needy.

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Towards the end of our last visit to Kosovo we met with Anna Jackson, the British chargé d'affaires. She accepted our invitation to supper, taking time off in the evening to see us. The talk was ostensibly about our work, and the degree to which the embassy could support us – basically not at all. But behind the polite and inconsequential discussion lay another agenda: to do with our driver Feha.

Two years before our first visit to Kosovo, Feha met us several times in England to advise and give us a picture of the problems in his country. In those days he worked for the United Nations organization, UNMIK* (see Glossary at the end for this and other acronyms and explanations), and earned enough money to fund regular visits to

visit his brother in England who had fled here after the war and established a business for himself as a builder. When UNMIK reduced its offices in Kosovo Feha lost his job. He could not find another, becoming one of the 60% plus unemployed in his own country. Since then his brother became the sole breadwinner of the family, sending money via Western Union to keep the family alive.

We employed Feha as our driver and he helped us on each of our visits, fixing accommodation, translating, giving his own helpful interpretation of what happened at meetings. Several times we invited him to England, and each time the Embassy refused to issue a visa, because they suspected he wanted to emigrate. Feha has a wife and daughter. He would at most visit his brother and work for a while with him, earn enough to return home and care for the family.

The last refusal broke Feha's spirit. We talked on MSN and he sobbed in desperation saying that suicide was his only option now. So we decided to try once more. We hoped Anna Jackson would put in a good word for him, and made a point of introducing them to each other. However we already knew that the visa department functioned separately from the embassy. During the meal she made it clear that the Soul of Europe could not expect any material or practical help or support from the embassy. Her job was restricted to being a diplomat and offering limited advice and assistance.

After shaking Feha's hand she sat at the table and ordered a light soup, nothing else. Immaculately groomed and exquisitely slender she batted every question and challenge deftly with a smile, casting charming sideways glances past her smoothly combed hair. A woman of her brilliance and ease of manner would go far in the Foreign Service: her career mapped out as effortlessly as her repartee.

Sitting opposite, Feha, looking frightened and beaten, ordered a full meal, his tense emaciated body needing every ounce of sustenance. He did not know when an opportunity to eat like this would happen again. The ambassador chose to be abstemious because she had the choice.

The ambassador had no connection to Feha or his life. Why should his situation matter to her? Two people, representatives of parallel universes in the same city, sat face to face across a supper table, one a desperate Kosovan trying to stay alive, the other a high-flying foreigner occupying a well-paid post in his country and looking forward to an even brighter future elsewhere.

When we first thought of establishing a project in Kosovo to help the embattled Serbian Orthodox Church there, Graham Day, the then former Bosnian Deputy High Representative and Head of Office in the Republika Srpska warned us that we were taking on ‘a poisoned chalice’.

His words came back to haunt us after this our latest visit when suddenly headlines shocked the world with allegations that Hashim Thaçi, the re-elected Prime Minister of Kosovo, had been a Mafia boss trading illegally in arms, people, drugs, and most gruesomely, in human body parts harvested from murdered Serb victims during the final days of the Kosovo War, under the watch of Nato. Bad enough that these revelations, even as allegations, threatened to scupper upcoming political negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia, and that our work would have to stop until matters sorted themselves; far worse was the complicity of the International Community in supporting Hashim Thaçi, because the United States and the United Kingdom considered him the best leader and turned a blind eye to his dealings. What did this

say about the agenda of the International Community in Kosovo? And why were we not warned by our ambassador?

Our process is fuelled with a deliberate blend of naivety and knowledge, and we try to be as 'innocent as lambs' and 'wise as serpents'. But we could not be expected to imagine duplicity and wrongness on this grotesquely exaggerated scale.

It took us ten years to appreciate the extent of outside influence on the affairs of lesser countries, and how the private interests of the most powerful nations, organizations and businesses, hindered our work. Our discussion with the most popular and trusted Kosovan politician, Albin Kurti, focused on the toxic relationship between Kosovo and the International Community, which he said is intent only on preserving the status quo, regardless of keeping the people poor and by its crushing presence, preventing them from changing the situation for themselves.

We have always found it difficult arranging meetings with leading representatives of the International Community, ambassadors and heads of organizations, such privileges being granted with reluctance and a sense that we were being done a special favour. Even then we got used to being fobbed off with secretaries and local employees who, for the sake of keeping their jobs, protected their bosses from embarrassment and the burden of unwelcome requests and refused to offer us help in any way.

The American embassies were particularly hard to penetrate. We did once manage a private audience with the American ambassador in Sarajevo years ago at the start of our work, and even then had to negotiate several body searches, and be let through one bullet-proof door after the other. Finally we were escorted into the holy of holies and the ambassador prowled like a caged tiger throughout our meeting. Now due to the sophistication of communication technology not only do we fail to penetrate even

the first entrance to an embassy, it is impossible to reach anyone there by phone. A firewall has been erected between it and the outside world. If they need to they can reach us ordinary people on our mobile phones, but trying to phone them to arrange a meeting, we found our calls being simply blanked, not even a ringtone. This degree of paranoia made me think of desperate measures of self-preservation that signal the end of empires, a total lack of transparency due to suspicion of everybody and no protection too extreme because 'enemies are everywhere'.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Soul of Europe group

Donald Reeves, instigator and main force behind this project, having spent hours each day for the last three to four years researching and learning about the situation in Kosovo, and travelled several times to Belgrade, Kosovo and Brussels at his own expense to make our work possible and achieve results. He made sure the Patriarchate agreed to the project, the monasteries would welcome us and that the Kosovar Albanian leaders, mayors and politicians, were equally keen on our process and aims.

Myself, Peter Pelz, raconteur, someone who reports as many words as are possible (translators thankfully delay each section of the conversation) and who helps with reflection, keeping the four parts of the process in even balance: analysis, reflection, identifying issues and action. I came away feeling clearer about the situation but quite depressed about how much worse things had become since our first visit.

Raymond Hylton, patron of the Soul of Europe and benefactor with a lifetime's experience of this kind of work in Northern Ireland, Moldova as well as Iraq, Bosnia and now Kosovo. Kosovo and Bosnia are a picnic for him. He asked pertinent questions and came to sensible conclusions about the issues. As an outsider he could see the wood for the trees. He has encouraged and supported our work for several years, and spoken about the work of the Soul of Europe three times in the House of Lords.

Motherlode

Directors Ross Ashcroft and Megan Campbell, a team of film-makers interested to follow and record our process, but also to bring their thinking and concerns to bear on each meeting and situation. They were shocked and moved by the extent of the pain in Kosovo. We were inspired by their presence and input. Two years earlier Ross had heard Donald speak on Radio 4 about his autobiography, and decided to make contact. He included Donald as one of several talking heads in a film about the present global political, economic, and social crisis: *The Four Horsemen*.

The Kosovo Team

Ajkuna Morina, our translator and fixer of meetings. She took over from Kreshnik who helped establish the project on our first two visits, then, because we ran out of funds, had to accept the offer of a job and could not give us any more of his time. With a positive, friendly and calm manner, she is an intelligent and pro-active member of several NGOs based in Pristina and Mitrovica concerned with issues among the young on both sides, bringing Serbs and Albanians together under conditions made more difficult by strictures imposed by the International Community, which discourages fraternizing between Serbs and Albanians. Such groups are kept

divided and separated by the international. When Ajkuna tried to cross the bridge at Mitrovica to meet a Serb colleague on the other side to make arrangements for a concert which many young people on both sides of the river wanted to attend, Eulex* police prevented her, saying her life might be at risk. She used another bridge, unguarded, and the concert went ahead. Her work catalogues a perpetual list of such complications and obstacles, placed there 'for her own security.'

The two drivers: Feha and Kujtim. Both trying to earn a living and grateful for any job that would keep their families and children fed. Their opinions mattered most because those surviving at the bottom, on the ground, have a sharper sense of the unfairness and ineptitude of those who govern them, the people who granted us meetings.

This might have turned out to be our final visit to Kosovo on this particular project, for reasons that the report tries to explain.

It is not just a matter of lack of funds, which could still be made available for us, but because the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Kosovo Albanians are now further apart than ever. The suspicions about the Prime Minister, even if they turn out to be slanders, make it difficult for Serbia now to do business with him. But we intended to have at least initiated a process that could carry on when the situation improves.

So we invited Raymond Hylton and two interested young people: a possibly final chance to observe our process first hand.

It turned out that Raymond Hylton took an active part in the process, as did Ross and Megan. They recorded many conversations and encounters. They would edit them and produce a short film to place on You Tube.

http://www.youtube.com/motherlodestudios#p/u/0/_D_o-kGbS0

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GENERATIONAL AND WORLD ISSUES

My generation brought up in the post-war years, and tagged as the baby-boomers, witnessed and a few of us took part in the liberation movements of the 60's and 70's. We protested against the rampant materialism of a Europe that had yet to come to terms with the holocaust of two wars it had unleashed all over the world and a subsequent paranoia about national security that persisted for decades under the threat of nuclear annihilation. We tried to change the world. We now face the criticism of our children, the next generation castigating us for leaving them a political, economic, social and ecological mess to clear up.

What happened? Why did we fail on such a massive scale? And how can the next generation of protesters and world-changers learn from our mistakes?

These questions and challenges in conversations with Ross and Megan threaded their way insistently though the meetings and journeys in Kosovo.

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Along with the Bradt Guide to Kosovo, I took as usual my by now frayed copy of the collected Grimm's Fairy Tales – the classical ones collected as spoken in dialect. I find these folk myths, in all their distilled simplicity, consistently helpful on all my journeys, shedding light on the issues we came across. They deal with life and death challenges. No horror is too great to be censored; one of the most popular is about a woman who cooks and eats children. This time the pages kept opening on a series of related tales about enchantment in the middle of a thick forest where a witch turns people to stone or into caged birds. What is the significance of the thick forest where children or lovers get lost? Why does the witch choose to live there, and where does she come from? At first these stories didn't seem to have anything to do with my visit

to Kosovo, unlike the time in Serbia where Bearskin a variant and inspiration for Stravinsky's A Soldier's Tale had particular resonance. Then I came across others about the idiot third son whom the parents try to get rid of, but who always manages to do better than his older and cleverer brothers. I could immediately indentify with the fool, mocked by the more worldly wise cunning siblings who cheat and lie while he naively lets things happen to him. His good heart wins him all that the others fail to achieve. The stories imply that to be a fool can be a way of overcoming problems. By being vulnerable and kindly, rather than aggressive and underhand, we can make enemies our friends: problems resolve themselves. The conclusions to these tales may be as unrealistic as their premises, but they certainly give hope. But what about the dark forces at work in the forest, the place where people get lost and can't find a way out?

Reading the stories in my hotel room, grandly spacious, with large heavily framed metallic black and white oil paintings of a nightmarish chilly Venice looming over wide beds big enough for whole families, made me think of our visit to Germany, a month earlier, when we travelled to the industrial region on the Rhine where Donald had the month previously received an award for his peace work from a Muslim organization, the Soest Forum of Religions and Cultures. The event and the outcome of several meetings there became a turning point for the Soul of Europe, opening doors to new objectives and new projects. We observed the significant and professionally organized rise of far-right political movements across Europe. There seemed to be no attempt on a matching scale to stop them.

In Germany we met people of our generation, in their sixties and seventies, former activists retired and disillusioned by failure of vision, also people in their forties exhausted by work and the need to balance the demands of bureaucracy with family

life, and committed social workers in their twenties and thirties not yet ground down by life's demands, their idealism still undimmed.

One of these, a community worker for the Lutheran Church, met us in his office situated in the inner city area of Marl, a once prosperous town next to Gelsenkirchen, Marl's industry also in decline, and inhabited by equal numbers of Turkish immigrants and local German working class families some of whom hung German flags from their windows, racist slogans sprayed on walls. He served coffee and biscuits and told us how he needed not only to keep the peace between both communities, each suffering high levels of unemployment and lack of prospects, but being called on to mediate in domestic issues within the families, such as violence against women and children.

Our other significant meeting took place in one of the local mosques in the same town where we talked with a group of teenage girls. Born in Germany and feeling themselves to be German first and then Muslim, these intelligent, friendly and attractive girls, all dressed simply and fashionably, not one with a veil, spoke confidently about the future, their hopes and ambitions, to be doctors, teachers, journalists and philosophers.

They did not foresee conflict within their community or with families or the mosque. They had been raised as German citizens, considered they had the same rights as everyone else, and just happened to be Muslim who worshipped regularly at the mosque. We were surprised by their liberal attitudes and wondered how modern ambitious young women like themselves could feel at ease with the allegedly oppressive demands of traditional Islam.

We understood this more clearly later when we sat with our host, Hartmut Dreier, a retired pastor in the town of Marl, who chose to continue living there because he felt

at home in the community he had served all his working life. He spoke sadly about the contrast between Christian and Muslim communities. Few people attended Sunday worship at his church, just the faithful mostly elderly, but on Fridays he would look with envy at the overflowing mosques, the surrounding car parks full, whole families milling about on the pavement. The mosque provided more than a place of worship. It was the community's social centre. The imams believed in good relations with other faith groups. Donald received the prize for his work not from the Christians in Germany, but the Muslims. These were not pockets of extremism and resistance, closed to the surrounding city, but places which welcomed everybody, strangers like us especially.

The girls' ambition and new ways of thinking about themselves were accepted and not seen as a challenge. However, when we asked what their parents might think if they decided to marry a non-Muslim, they laughed and said nothing. My own feeling was that these girls would make their own decisions, and for the time being, boys and marriage were far down their list of priorities.

The images of racist slogans, German flags and the eager open faces of these bright confident Muslim girls, who would outstrip their contemporaries in education and job prospects, stayed in the forefront of my mind throughout the Kosovo visit. Given the rise of far-right politics across Europe, here was an issue not going to disappear.

Already in Marl people were becoming aware that something had to happen, so when we mooted a conference to strengthen the liberal voices and support the Muslims the local paper excitedly jumped the gun, and made it headline news. As with our decision in the year 2000 to help rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, suddenly we were compelled to accept a new commitment.

The issue is not exclusively European. In the last few weeks of writing this report Christian churches and communities have been burnt, destroyed and people killed in large numbers across the Muslim world; religious intolerance is worldwide. One feeds the other, so someone has to break the vicious circle.

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Meanwhile young people protested in London, limbering up for more serious confrontations when the cuts bite in the coming months, and the media controlled by their parents' generation predictably slapped the students down as stupid timewasters and trouble makers.

Perhaps this is the meaning behind those fairytales about witches in dark forests turning young people into stone, or birds, or into supper. Young people have to beware of what grown-ups want to do with them. Each generation has to vanquish the exploitation by their elders.

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Because there were six of us in Kosovo we used two cars. Donald accompanied Raymond Hylton and Ajkuna. I went with Ross and Megan. These journeys and especially the conversations on the way became for me important elements of the visit. I had expected to be the teacher, instructing them, informing about the situation in Kosovo, the Balkans, and explaining the process. It turned out that they were the ones doing the teaching, opening my eyes. These two highly intelligent, experienced and energetic people had already slain dragons, travelled across the world, made films, were running a business, designing websites. They were the children I would have been proud to have and seen grow up into the kind people to take over and do better than me. They both knew their stuff and understood the political, economic and social world situation, as shown in their film, *The Four Horsemen*, a documentary

examining these issues with a mixture of carefully researched facts and film footage, sharp interviews and witty animation. Its blistering attack on current values would never make it easy to find distribution, but the film had been made, could not be improved and would do the rounds on the net, and by word of mouth.

Ross reminded me of Wagner's Siegfried. Having dispatched a greedy, miserly dragon and a deceitful exploitative stepfather, the hero follows a songbird up a mountain to discover some promising but as yet unknown destiny. On the way he meets his grandfather blocking the path with an aggressive spear. This formidable figure has been so weakened by corrupt business affairs, lies and destructive power games that the naïve but strong and determined young man easily smashes the spear and pushes the old man out of his way. Siegfried's stepfather had been an irritation but the main inter-generational conflict turns out to be between the grandfather and grandson. The old god has made a mess of his dealings and wants the boy to clear everything up; the God had manipulated his own children to create this super-hero. The story is complex but politically resonant, about the strategies people use to preserve power and control, at the expense of family and relationships. The god is full of remorse and has asked Mother Earth to help him find a way out of his dilemmas. Mother Earth rejects his pleas, because the god has already caused too much harm. He stands in wait for Siegfried, hoping to establish a mutually beneficial relationship, but makes the crucial mistake, characteristic in failing gods, of patronising the young man. It is the old man's tone that infuriates the boy. There can be no peaceful outcome.

Ross and Megan could handle being patronised. They too knew how to smash worthless spears. However, they found the selfishness of their parent's generation, the 'baby-boomers', harder to take. As though having failed to halt ecological

catastrophe and perpetual warfare in other people's countries were not enough shame, this product of post-war Western affluence, mostly at the expense of the steadily impoverished Third World, these baby-boomers mollicoddled by the state and superior earning power, had got accustomed to having everything they wanted and were not willing to hand on their accumulated wealth to their children. Ross loves to ski, and his tall athletic graceful figure proves his prowess. So he in particular resented the hi-jacking by his parents' generation of the verb 'to ski' to mean 'spending the kid's inheritance'.

Not having children of my own, but having benefited from my grandmother's and father's generosity over the decades, the former having saved from the day of my birth to leave me enough to start my own business, I am shocked by the heartlessness of my contemporaries, and remembered how indifferent so many of them had always been about the future, taking advantage of state benefits, using the world as a perpetually stocked larder, claiming rights and entitlements without concern for others: 'après moi la deluge'. How else can we treat the world and what we manage to achieve in and on it, but leaving it better, more peaceful and more productive for our children?

Artists have acknowledged the creative relationship between man and nature from the days of cave paintings, expressing a sense of awe, gratitude and awareness of the fine balance which needs to be learnt to ensure a healthier, safer more productive future for our children and their children. Before the written word, images celebrated the accumulated wisdoms and learned experiences of generations concerning survival and interdependence.

Could it really have been the justified terror and expectation of nuclear annihilation which persuaded baby boomers to lose interest in what might follow? Since we could

all die within a day, seconds even, and the known world be reduced to a desert, was there any point in preparing for a future?

Or might the traumas of two world wars which unleashed such a frenzy of violence, barbarism and destruction across all societies have bred apathy, cynicism and collapse of all human values?

We have unprecedented access to so much knowledge and accumulated wisdom of centuries and civilizations, yet we have brought the earth to the brink of annihilation.

While we discussed world affairs and inter-generational conflict, our driver Feha tried to cope with the demands of family, begging for euros to help buy materials needed by his daughter at school, blank-faced politicians told us what they thought we wanted to hear, leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army met us to pass on warnings, and representatives of the international community kept us at bay. Ross and Megan followed us around with their camera perched on one or other shoulder, using the cumbersome-looking but surprisingly light machine like I use my sable hairs or fine-nib pen, painting with the lens, brushing across faces, landscapes, walls, posters, background scenes and at one serendipitous moment catching a callow soldier accidentally dropping his gun.

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Never in all our projects until this visit to Kosovo did the motto of the Soul of Europe based on Nelson Mandela's injunction to make peace, not by talking to ones friends, but to one's enemies, become more relevant.

We were disappointed at how much worse the situation had become. Each side's position had hardened and those who needed most to engage with 'the enemy' living next door, refused point blank.

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We arrived in Pristina during an election campaign. Anna Jackson had warned us that this might not be a good time to visit, but we had already fixed the dates, and felt that at least the politicians might be keen to meet and talk, especially with a film camera pointing at them. We would hunt them down at their various hustings if necessary. However we remembered from previous visits that the politicians had little clout or influence while the European Union still pulled the strings. Donald had spent time with the Serbian Orthodox Church, monks and the bishop as well as the Patriarchate in Belgrade, won their trust and gained their support. Now we needed to attend to the other side: Kosovo politicians, representatives and especially those considered by the monks as their enemy, the KLA who resented the political status of the monasteries. These normally elusive extremists who decided to meet who they wanted in their own time had expressed a willingness to talk with us. So we could not re-arrange the visit.

As with the Israeli Palestinian conflict, especially the Palestinians, the sides suffered from division. Like the Palestinians the Kosovo Albanians had two camps. The ones in power, the main party politicians, existed in subservience to the international community, following decrees from outside and accepting hand-outs. Non-politicians and those who were in opposition to the ruling elite resented this servility and lack of independence, pushing not only for autonomy, but for the freedom to ally itself and perhaps to become part of Albania.

The meetings with the main politicians were tediously predictable, with the added sharpness of anti-Serb sentiments: a direct appeal to voters.

On our arrival we learned that no politician had time to meet us, so we decided to turn up at the various party headquarters – first, at the offices of Isa Mustafa the mayor of Pristina and leader of the second largest party: the Democratic League of

Kosovo. The secretaries, drivers and assistants prevaricated and shrugged their shoulders, but as we were about to leave, the mayor himself turned up in a motorcade, weary after a day electioneering. The presence of a cine camera and Raymond Hylton as well as Donald's usual persistence meant he had no choice but to give us time and within minutes we were seated around a large table across which Ross draped himself to film the meeting.

The mayor's campaign manager, an academic, Dr Enver Hamiti, dominated the meeting and responded to our questions gruffly. Isa Mustafa himself sat quietly with a blandly serious expression which implied that his minder could do the rough talking while he himself would give a more benign prime-ministerial impression.

For the first time on our visits we met with a stone wall, a truculence and impatience with the monasteries and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The mayor and his campaign manager gave us the line we would hear from all Kosovo politicians: these cultural sites should not be embroiled in politics.

After they had repeated the now familiar history of the monasteries and good relations between Albanians and Serbs over the centuries, Donald asked:

'Would you like to meet the monks?'

Dr Hamiti: 'Why?'

Donald: 'The monks are scared.'

Dr Hamiti: 'That's their fault.'

Donald: 'Let the monks meet you and you can tell them that all will be OK, and they have nothing to fear.'

Dr Hamiti: 'I will be involved in no way with any religion. There is always the danger that religions turn into political centres. Not just Orthodox; Catholic also.'

They should stay spiritual centres. If they stay religious, Albanians will not touch them.'

Donald: 'Who should own the land?'

Dr Hamiti: 'Look at the ownership documents. They belong to Kosovo.'

The mayor, Isa Mustafa: 'They are Ottoman documents.'

Donald described our work over ten years in Bosnia as a form of mediation, emphasising that the mayors there invited us to do this work.

Dr Hamiti: 'Politics. All politics.'

Donald wanted to hear from the mayor himself, who had been sitting mostly silent but nodding in approval at Donald's words, as though distancing himself from the more aggressive expression of his minder's views.

The mayor: 'Bring down the wall; demonizing must end, heal psychological wounds. They should not feel fear. It takes time.'

Donald: 'You should say this publicly and help the process.'

Afterwards Mr Hamiti seemed angry at the intrusion of a cine camera : 'Next time you must get permission!' he told us sharply, but in private chat with Ross and Megan he stopped grandstanding and talked sadly about the stresses of campaigning in a weak political situation.

ALBIN KURTI AND VETEVENDOSIJE/SELF DETERMINATION

Albin Kurti could only see us after supper late in the evening, in between returning from a public meeting at Mitrovice, an hour's drive away, and discussions with his team before bed.

The leader of the Vetevendosije party was the only politician who took the trouble to take time off his campaign to talk with us at the Afa Hotel. Vetevendosije stands for

self-determination. The party is sternly critical of internationals controlling and making decisions for Kosovo, and demands that all international organizations exercising power leave the country and let the people of Kosovo make their own decisions. Albin Kurti is an advocate of ‘active nonviolent resistance’, despite violent clashes with the authorities at demonstrations, during the last of which police shot dead two of the protestors and injured eighty others with plastic and rubber bullets. Albin Kurti’s own brand of action limited itself to daubing the posh jeeps belonging to Eulex with paint and slogans, a protest at the corruption of the occupying internationals, whose collusion and turning a blind eye to crime such as drugs and people trafficking is now reported all over the world. The four by four was the most visibly obvious symbol of unfairness and division in Kosovo between wealthy foreigners making decisions for the much poorer natives.

Talking with politicians gave us an insight into the extent of international influence and interference. Europe and America were calling the shots in Kosovo, so the mayor and his campaign manager kept quiet about them, but Albin Kurti had no hesitation in attacking these collaborating self-interested leaders and also warned us about the Russian octopus’s tentacles reaching in every corner of Serbian affairs: ‘a Trojan horse in Serbia.’ He informed us that Russia was pumping considerable amounts of money into the monasteries, for new buildings and constructing walls.

Albin Kurti looked like a graduate despite being in his late thirties, a perpetual student, self-possessed and articulate. We later discovered that the Serbs were particularly worried about him and his influence in Kosovo, describing him as a Nazi style demagogue, pushing to unite Kosovo with Albania.

A tall, slim, quietly spoken, polite man, he modestly declined food, ordered a bottle of water and without haranguing us as all the other politicians did, conversed for a

couple of hours about the political situation, history, and his ideals and plans for the future.

I had met him once before on Mother Theresa Square, a year earlier, on Independence Day, when Kreshnik introduced me to one of his politician friends, then in opposition. This member of parliament who had once been a visiting student in the UK and returned home in 1999 to join the fighting against Serbs, took me for a walk up and down the square that had been converted into a farmer's market with folk-music blaring from loudspeakers and people dancing. On the way he talked to former co-fighters, KLA soldiers who had become bee-keepers selling honey on the square, and explained to me the pointless game of being a Kosovo politician, especially an opposition spokesman, in a government which had little influence. 'This is a man you should meet,' he said when he spied Albin Kurti sitting in a cafe with a couple of young friends. 'You want to meet him?' he asked rhetorically. Everyone wanted to meet this celebrated activist who had been imprisoned for years by Serbs. Albin Kurti greeted me graciously and expressed interest in our mediation project with the monasteries. His chances of election then and now remained slight. But the influence of his ideas and courage had become an inspiration to the young especially. So the Serbs and the international community regarded him with suspicion and fear.

'The EU says Kosovo is in crisis,' said Albin, now joining us round a table in the Afa Hotel dining room with his English translator, a post-graduate student from London. 'Even Hilary Clinton compared Kosovo to Ruanda.' After ten years of occupation by the international community which was meant to stabilise and make Kosovo prosper. what had the UN, the EU and other generously endowed organizations been doing all that time? Where had all the billions of euros gone?

‘We have to move forward,’ declared Albin, who then described what he does: calling meetings in villages, creating councils to deal with local issues, encouraging self-determination to build economic growth from the grass-roots. Given his fearsome reputation as a state terrorist and violent revolutionary this description of his work reminded us of the story about another charismatic revolutionary, Che Guevara, who when accused of inciting insurrection, going into villages, burning the houses and killing the peasants, responded by saying: ‘what we actually did was to go into villages and gather the people around to tell their stories’.

‘Infiltrations are a problem, along with egotistical issues,’ Albin Kurti went on, describing the tendency of people to concentrate on making long speeches, what we call: liking the sound of their own voices.

‘On news programs issues are the news. But when people discuss these issues, it becomes empowerment. It brings people together and out of general interest comes hope, which is why literature is more productive than science because there is no morality without ideals.’ He meant the imagination and was referring to the fact that war had engendered so much corruption that idealism and hope had been stifled.

He told us more about Rugova, the founding father of Kosovo independence, a student of Roland Barthes, a spiritual rather than political leader, more into religion than politics, whose philosophy became the ‘glue’ in the new community of independent Kosovo.

‘Now we are a macchiato society,’ Albin said dismissively. ‘We like to mask our differences. Kosovo is not a nation state, we are a country in transit,’ and made cryptic reference to ‘a metropolis controlling traffic, like Amsterdam or San Francisco. We are a rural metropolis.’

He implied that there were dangers in hurrying this process. Countries with no transition change too quickly from socialism to neo-liberal capitalism. Neglect of history, issues of ethnicity and tradition exacerbate the dangers.

‘We have to walk with the same step. Together it is possible. Ideas must therefore be translated into a language everyone understands. Otherwise however right you are, however great the truth, if people don’t understand, nothing can change. We have to learn to talk the people’s language; have some kind of school for such training, two or three days a week for three years.’ He was happy to invite the Soul of Europe, with its years of experience, to help with the training.

Kosovo still received electricity from Serbia, so cuts at important events were to be expected. Albin had just come from a meeting in Mitrovica which had to take place by candlelight. He spoke of ‘indiscriminate love’, a plea for tolerance as well as self-determination, then took a call on his mobile and left us quickly for a campaign meeting. The clock showed well past eleven at night, so the rest of us went to bed.

DANCING TO THE INTERNATIONAL TUNE

After Albin Kurti all the politicians we met were hollow men.

The manager of the billionaire Beghjet Pacolli’s party happened to be a friend of Feha, and therefore gave us a few moments of his time in a breathless interview before rushing back to the campaign. It was painful to hear him and politicians from the other main stream parties bend over backwards to please the international community while trying to capture votes from people who resented its interference and had other more pressing demands for justice and jobs. He reassured us that of course all the parties favoured integration of minorities and respecting the rights of the Orthodox Church. Pacolli’s party manager even went so far as to say the

protected zones should be maintained, as the price of international recognition. This meant tolerating the presence of small enclaves of Serbia throughout Kosovo, each one under constant armed guard, and all of them answerable to Serbian and not Kosovan authorities, a situation too complicated and bizarre to contemplate: like churches and small communities in Kent, Norfolk and even Cumbria surrounded by walls and razor wire, bristling with police and answerable only to France.

‘Kosovo police now protect Gracanica,’ he said, rather half-heartedly, referring to another world heritage monastery close to Pristina, knowing that this was not acceptable to the Serbs living there, where the former Bishop Artemije had compared their situation to Jews in Auschwitz. The bishop had been removed from his position and defrocked because of financial corruption, some of his priests having stolen thousands of euros from Church funds and fled to Greece. His hard line position, on Kosovo being forever part of Serbia, went against the Patriarchate’s position of being open to negotiation and accepting the present reality while maintaining a similarly hard-line stance. I will say more about this further complication within the Serbian Orthodox Church when describing our visit to Decani.

We pressed Pacolli’s manager on attitudes to the international community’s continuing interference, but apart from criticising the Council of Europe for concentrating on the rights of Serbs, saying it ignored other minorities, he would not be pushed, not even when provoked by Donald airing a proposal being discussed by all sides to turn North Kosovo into a free-market area.

However his final remark, made in desperation, acknowledged the impotence of his country’s politicians and the inhibiting presence of the international community:

‘We need legitimacy to talk.’ But he might just have meant that he shouldn’t be discussing this with us.

A painting of a car-crash hung over the blocked fire-place in the smart offices of the LDD another political party, names interchangeable with various ordering of the words ‘democratic’, ‘social’, ‘national’ or ‘liberal’.

National flags cluttered the smartly furnished cramped room which served as a council chamber with a long table surrounded by leather chairs and at one end as a sitting room with well upholstered armchairs for entertaining guests. Money had been spent on the place and the party leader and university professor, Nexhat Daci, greeted us in a relaxed fashion, smiling perpetually, his eyes watchful and with the demeanour of someone who knew it didn’t really matter what he said. He would shortly after our departure be given an eighteen month suspended jail sentence for using party funds to buy glasses and have dental surgery.

‘The internationals are in charge,’ Daci told us early in the interview after giving the by now expected line on the monasteries which should be protected as part of Kosovo’s cultural heritage but that no one must forget Serb atrocities in the war, burning five hundred mosques. ‘Kosovo is 95% Albanian, but churches and mosques should be equally respected. Churches should not be politicised and turned into embassies.’ He also repeated the history of Albanians guarding monasteries and churches over the centuries. In World War Two, churches were protected and saved by Albanians.

Daci continued: ‘The Serbian Orthodox Church should do more: politics and the Church are too close in Belgrade. Serbs have a history of property in Kosovo but Belgrade must forget claims to ownership.’

‘Who owns the monasteries?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Would you like to meet the monks?’

‘Anytime.’

He spoke about the status of the Catholic Church in Kosovo, supported by the government and the fame of Mother Theresa, explaining: ‘We are not a free country; we are not educated in Democracy. 50% are unemployed and 20% live in extreme poverty.’

He did not approve of Albin Kurti whom he described as a demagogue, and for the first time in the meeting became angry: ‘People look for this kind of solution. But ask Andy Sparkes about the reasons for poverty: politics. We have a strong international presence which carries out bad non-development politics. We have such good human resources, young, well educated, and we also have good natural resources, lead, zinc and gold. So why are we so poor? If Europe wanted we could solve all these issues.’

THE ENEMY

We had tried many times on our previous visits to meet with leaders of the KLA, but they had remained aloof and inaccessible. Andy Sparkes, while he was our ambassador in Kosovo, had told us we would need to talk to them. Finally we sat in their Pristina office. Ajkuna had either charmed them into letting us visit them; or they wanted to meet with us anyway.

As I am writing this, issues around a perceived and specifically Muslim inability/unwillingness to integrate into European nation states along with a rise of well organized neo-fascist movements wanting ultimately to remove Islam from Europe are unsettling our continent. By declaring categorically that multiculturalism

has failed, governments encourage these movements and the lack of organized resistance allows their more extreme elements to grow unhindered. So the conversations we had with activists and social workers in Germany at the end of 2010 are becoming more urgently relevant. Given the economic downturn across Europe, these anti-Islamic attitudes will harden and violence against unwelcome minorities will grow.

At the same time, movements of 'self-determination' are agitating across North Africa, starting in Tunisia, then Egypt and eventually Libya. Western responses are ambiguous, because the protests are as much against autocratic rulers, who through corruption and a sense of entitlement amassed obscenely huge fortunes at the expense of their countries, as against international powers which supported them for reasons of expediency and self-interest. America and its allies are mainly interested in controlling other countries to guarantee the flow of resources at affordable rates. When demands for fairness, democracy and challenging corruption interfere with these interests, responses tend to be mealy-mouthed and muted. Friendly and amenable autocrats, however corrupt and brutal, are preferable to democracies which might threaten such interests.

Sometimes a revolution is backed to prevent genocide, as was the case with Western support of the Kosovo Liberation Army against Milosevic and the Serbs during the Kosovo War. But once the objectives have been met, the interests of the liberated countries themselves tend to be ignored, particularly if those at the sharp end of the revolution, now perceived as extremists, become sidelined - with destructive consequences. The Western presence turns into control and interference. Support for the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan, during their successful struggle to oust the Russians, led directly to the Taliban taking control of the country and as the war games shifted

after the Cold War from tackling the enemy of communism to the enemy of extreme Islamic extremism, Al Qaeda emerged as the chief enemy.

Something similar happened in Kosovo. During the struggle to drive invading Serbs out of mainly Muslim Kosovo, Nato supported KLA fighters who could be seen on newsreels sitting next to American commanders at meetings. The KLA sent representatives to Rambouillet to negotiate the end of the war and were the main force driving Kosovo's independence. Now they remained a crucial influence in the country, and Western powers treated them with caution and suspicion.

The monks at Decani perceived the KLA as their chief enemy. At last we were allowed to meet the KLA and our main question was: why now? It turned out after our second meeting that they wanted to send a strong message through us to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

First we talked to Muharrem Xhemajli, president of the Veterans Association, the KLA's organization and centre of operations. Nothing veteran about them, they were young enthusiastic soldiers lead by commanders in the prime of life who had fought in the war that had ended only ten years earlier.

'There are twenty five thousand veterans,' he told us, 'Two thousand three hundred families of martyrs and two thousand seven hundred injured and invalided, to be cared for by the organization. We work at the local, municipal and central levels with the central office here in Pristina.'

When we described our work as following Nelson Mandela's injunction to talk to our enemies rather than our friends to make peace, alert and watchful Muharrem Xhemajli heaved a telling sigh.

A man in his forties, with the body of someone used to hard work, muscular, hard as iron, he leaned forward and stared at us disconcertingly. Those eyes were used to

searching for mortal danger and taking aim. Now they examined us unblinkingly, intent on winking out any hidden agenda, and finding out how far we could be trusted. Initially I felt nervous; this was not a man to meet as an enemy.

In retrospect he may have tired of conversations with internationals coming to give advice or to negotiate, resulting only in disappointment and minimum sign of progress for his country. He may have been intrigued by our persistence; and we were not the kind of political and self-interested internationals he usually met.

‘America and England have our respect,’ he said. ‘We thank them for assistance in the war. As head of the KLA army we were involved at Rambouillet. I know the issue of the monasteries.’

He gave us a potted history of the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Kosovo from the Albanian perspective; so now we learned that the monasteries used years before the Ottoman invasion. He ignored the fact that Serbian Orthodox King Stephan had commissioned the building and decorating of these architectural jewels. Then Muharrem described how, after their defeat by the Ottomans, the Serbs had turned the churches into monasteries, but Albanians continued to protect them throughout Ottoman times and beyond. Then the monasteries supported Milosevic’s genocide. ‘Never will you find humanitarian spirit in the Serbian Orthodox Church. They took the land incorrectly and build protection walls like castles in Ottoman times. Albanians hate them because Serbs built the walls and took the land. Serbs are lying: the people living on the land speak Albanian. Albanians fought with Serbs against the Ottomans, but even when the Turks left, Serbs continued the war against Albanians, supported by Europe. So we hated Europe too. If Europe wanted we could solve all these issues.’

‘Kosovo declared independence in 1911,’ he continued, ‘but the Serbs carried on killing Albanians to stop independence. We have to create some kind of liberty. Our aim is to share a state with Albania.’

‘Albin Curti came late on to the political scene and didn’t have a special role. He was still a student during the war. But we share the aim of the unity of Albanian land. People want this unity. This goes back to the 10th June 1878 when Albanians gathered at the League of Prizren.’

‘The official KLA view of the monasteries is that there is no interest in destroying them. Even in 2004 despite UNMIK’s injustices when many KLA soldiers were put in jail for alleged damage to churches and monasteries, we didn’t touch them.’

This was his interpretation of events. The Italian soldiers from NATO guarding the monasteries told us that they had warned the KLA that if they attacked the places, they would be shot.

He continued: ‘UNMIK presented the case for Kosovo badly in the US and everywhere. UNMIK behaved unprofessionally. It didn’t have good relations with the KLA, so independence was postponed, though the Paris 1244 resolution left a possibility of independence. UNMIK was therefore considered our second enemy. Protesters from Serbs and the churches whipped up hate against Albanians. We tried to stop protests against Serbs. Serbs play the role of victim. We are used to being beaten by Serbs. We could not even be heard. Now Serbs are not used to this happening to them. Serbs used to make up 5% of the population in Kosovo, but they ran the place. Now they lost this privilege. They will never get the chance to be in power here again.’

‘The Serb foreign minister, Vuk Jeremic, is lying when he tells the UN Security Council that there is a bad situation for Serbs in Kosovo. Serbs can move freely

wherever they want. And they don't have to carry Kosovo registration. They are not attacked. We don't even give them traffic tickets. No one will hurt old ladies in Peja. But when they want something from Europe, they always complain about us. IMF. EU, NATO... all were fooled by Serb politicians; and therefore we lose out economically because of the troubles in Mitrovica.'

He then told us to meet the KLA veterans in Peja/Pec*. They would confirm his description of the present situation.

'I am not complaining about you; I do not expect you to solve this situation.'

We asked his opinion about the upcoming talks between Kosovo and Serbia in 2011, and the negotiations over North Kosovo, possibly seceding to Serbia or being a separate independent entity.

'The Kosovo delegation will not accept any deal about North Kosovo,' he declared. 'Seventy two countries now recognize us. Serbia has no rights over this issue. Serbs should integrate. They complain about travel restrictions, missing persons, recognition of minority rights. They are foxes, so the talks will be difficult. Politicians need to do it, not the KLA. So we must have faith in our state.'

He warned us not to trust the mayors of either Peja/Pec or Decan/Decani because they would only tell us what they thought we wanted to hear. 'They are in no position to speak for the people. We wanted to stop the wall being built around Decan monastery and asked the mayors to set up dialogue between Serbs and the Kosovo veterans. The mayors refused, saying they could not find translators. Serbs have returned to their villages and have not been attacked. So there is no dialogue or cooperation. During the war all Serbian families had police protection and their crimes against Albanians were not reported.'

Again he advised us to meet the KLA in Peja/Pec; he would alert them to our visit and get them to cooperate with us.

‘We owe Blair everything all our life,’ he declared, and attacked Italy and Russia for not supporting him. ‘Serbia needed to be stopped, because it was a genocide.’

‘We are Illyrian, not Slav,’ he explained to us, going back two thousand years to the time of the Roman Empire.

He concluded by saying that only a merging of Kosovo with Albania would fix the situation: creating one country with one government.

‘We can’t live with borders between Albanians or with two separate constitutions. Bigger nations decide the fate of smaller ones. So we have to be united. Together we will be strong.’

He did not allow us to film the meeting and we left.

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Before driving to Peja/Pec for our second meeting with the KLA we learned two things from the Kosovo Institute of Policy Research and Development, KIPRED: that the property rights concerning issues of land and ownership of the monasteries could be found in the Serbian city of Nis, and that it was important to speak with the KLA.

A locally run think tank with international funding, KIPRED made checks on government spending, reviewed the security sector, trained people in the media and dealt with issues of decentralization, explaining documents, lobbying and providing recommendations concerning the rule of law and state-building.

We sat in a brightly lit well organized smart office round a large polished table at the head of which sat the director, an efficient, articulate and well qualified woman, and talked about the extra-territorial status of the monasteries, their importance as cultural

heritage and property rights, and particularly about the issue of land ownership and the possibilities for these specific places to belong to everyone.

We talked most of the time about funding problems for projects. KIPRED seemed to be in a strong position, with firm EU backing, but the director implied they had perpetually to fight for it. Think tanks had become less of a priority, as well as Kosovo itself. The director pricked up her ears at the chance of doing research for us, but then we told her we were failing to get any support from the EU. The present stand-off between the monasteries and the KLA made this conversation academic. I switched off, my head drooped and the pen kept falling from my hand.

We left the smart office of KIPRED, an organization run by bright Kosovo graduates enjoying the privilege of being well-funded - for the time being – and set off for Decani and Pec and meetings with the mayors and the KLA.

Feha arrived late to fetch us from the Hotel Afa. Ground down and locked into his problems he could not focus on our needs and despite driving too fast in order to catch up with Donald and Lord Hylton, we didn't arrive on time. He left us in a car park outside the municipality offices and disappeared to drown his sorrows in a late breakfast. We could not find the mayor's office and missed being present at a positive and useful meeting.

Despite being dismissed by the KLA as an unimportant political figure, the mayor, Donald reported, expressed a readiness to meet with the monks and help them and the monasteries integrate with the region. He had invited the monks to meetings, but they had not replied. When we met the monks later we were told that they had received no invitations. This is how things are in the Balkans and we were used to these games.

Avdyl Mushkulaj, head of the KLA Veterans in Decani, and, with Muharrem Xhemajli, one of the most significant players in Kosovo, a super-fit man in his 30s greeted us warmly in the War Veterans offices in Decani. Two teenagers hovered in the background and stared at us with a mixture of puzzlement and defensiveness: what were these old men from England doing here, and why were Ross and Megan making a film about us? Flags, military posters and photographs of war heroes filled the room. The boys were probably used to other military types visiting these offices, not civilians who looked as though they hadn't seen a fire-arm let alone carried one in their lives.

Avdyl Mushkulaj raised his eyes to the ceiling when we started talking about the monks, and then proceeded to give us his version of history.

'People are not divided by religion,' he told us. 'We never had problems before. The problem with the monasteries started in the 1990s. Some of the people there were not religious. During the war Serb forces were billeted at the monastery and received blessing to start massacres. We have photos to prove this. Father Sava blessed the solders.'

He found a photograph showing a monk standing in the middle of a row of Serb soldiers, all smiling proudly. It might or might not have been Father Sava, whom we met later and who did not look like the monk on the picture. It could have come from anywhere, from a different, earlier war.

Mushkulaj continued: 'Then, after the war, the soldiers disappeared from the monastery. Throughout their history the monasteries never cultivated religion, only ethnic hatred. It was the monasteries in Kosovo who brought Milosevic to power. Since the end of the war there has always been meeting between the monks and the municipality,' he continued. 'But they always refuse to integrate.'

We were surprised to hear that these meetings had taken place, both sides telling us they had received no invitations.

‘The monks never consider themselves part of the municipality. They take orders from Belgrade only. As a result it is easier to cross borders in Europe than to get to my land on the other side of Decan. I have to endure a two hour wait at the KFOR post,’ he told us, adding sarcastically: ‘A present from the monastery!’

‘Now they are doing other bad things. They take over Albanian land, and built a high wall. The monastery doesn’t look like a house of God anymore, but more like Alcatraz.’

While he talked I pondered the fact that since the Berlin Wall came down, other walls have been raised round the world, not just in Kosovo, also in Israel, and in each case the wall involves taking someone else’s land.

Mushkulaj continued: ‘But the worst thing they are doing is interrupting the development of Decan in that area. The land has so much potential, but the Albanians are not allowed to do anything there. There were plans for a ski-centre, but the materials are now rotting in the yard.’

‘So you see relations are bad. During the two world wars, and even the last war, no one damaged the monasteries. Albanians have protected the places for centuries, particularly one family from Decan. The family keep a special seal given to them by the monastery. The problems now are with people inside the monastery. They are not seen to be religious like monks but part of the war that happened, blood on their hands. And because of their guilt they build walls.’

‘There is no need for mediators. Just tell them to integrate, not close themselves up. They can walk freely wherever they want. No harm will come to them. Ten or twenty

monks are no threat to us. Forget about Serbia and become honest citizens of Kosovo. Release property and allow Decan to develop.’

We told Mushkulaj that we didn’t take sides and he reassured us: ‘We trust you and don’t believe you will take only the side of the monasteries. We have the facts. This is history. Whether they are bad or good people they must integrate. Your work is with the monastery. Tell them we hold our hands out to them and invite them to become part of the municipality.’

Now we had come to the crux of our meetings with the KLA. We understood why two of their main leaders had taken time to talk with us.

We asked when he had last visited the monastery.

‘I was fourteen years old,’ said Mushkulaj and added sadly: ‘Now I am not allowed. We cannot go there. I would love to.’

We asked about the purpose of the soldiers sent by NATO to guard the monastery and Mushkulaj responded with the authoritative tones of a commander in the field: ‘It is we who keep the monastery secure, not NATO. What power does NATO have to protect this place from the sixty thousand people who live around it? All discussions are about politics. This is another burnt card they will use. The biggest problem NATO have is with the priests themselves. They are in conflict with each other.’

Maybe he was referring to the troubles in the Serbian Orthodox Church with Bishop Artemije.

We explained the tricky process, learnt by us in Bosnia, of getting all parties together to discuss unavoidable issues. Talking about the monasteries representing bits of Serbia in another sovereign county, Mushkulaj knuckled down to the nitty-gritty of land and property rights.

He sketched a rough drawing of the land around the monastery to explain the history of the property and showed where in the grounds, now claimed by the monastery, there used to be a public swimming pool, no longer open. Also two houses where Roma used to stay. 'They were destroyed two to three years ago. What will happen when the Roma return? Everything is now enclosed by the wall. This is politics taking over land.'

There used to be a bee farm where over a hundred local Albanians worked. 'It too is fenced in by the wall. Since there is no work left they might as well build a wall round the whole of Decan.'

Mushkulaj now gave a warning, something he evidently wanted us to convey to the monks: 'If they want to integrate they should take down the wall. Or,' and he spoke with special emphasis. 'They must leave. We don't want them. They are taking advantage of Kosovo being a young nation state to appropriate things illegally. It is an issue of justice.'

For all Mushkulaj's previous assertions that mediation was not necessary, it now became clear that without our mediation the situation would only deteriorate: both sides digging in and violent confrontations a distinct prospect.

Donald needed to make sure he had heard Mushkulaj correctly. It is an important part of the mediation process that when contentious issues are stated then our understanding of what specifically each side means by them needs to be reflected back, to make sure we hear correctly and there are no misinterpretations and mistakes made.

So, he asked Mushkulaj to listen to a repetition of what the KLA leader had told us:

Firstly the history and consequences of the war, and the need for justice on all sides: the monks had a choice of integrating or leaving Kosovo. Secondly, Decan/Decani needed to be developed economically. Thirdly, the road to Montenegro should not be stopped because the monastery would be disturbed by the noise of cars, but it could be constructed further away. Mushkuloj nodded.

Raymond Hylton asked whether the solution of local Kosovo police guarding the monastery at Gracanica couldn't apply to Decani and Pec.

'It is not the same situation,' Mushkulaj responded quickly. 'Gracanica is a Serb place. Kosovo police should guard the monasteries here.'

Ross homed in on the land issue: 'Would a solution make the monks better liked by the people?'

'The problem is that monks will not accept any relations with Albanians.'

Mushkulaj told us and pointed out that: 'Even when they talk they act differently from what they say. The monks have to give up their land they have taken illegally and confine themselves to the land given by the Albanians originally. They must remove the wall and open doors to all the citizens who live here.'

'Could there be an oblique approach?' Ross suggested. 'The monks could be charged a rent, and the money used to refloat the local economy. This addresses the land issue. They will have to put the land to productive use to pay the rent. The swimming pool could be opened to the public again. When they do this there is less time and cause for fighting.'

This proposal did not impress Mushkulaj, who seethed at the injustice of what he considered to be theft: 'The problem is that the land is not theirs, it's my land and I want to use it. Serbia wants to buy up the whole region, and this is the way they are doing it.'

‘The issue about land is important,’ Ross explained, ‘But you are not giving or selling them your land, you will be renting it out to the monks.’

Mushkulaj would have none of this, and made clear why he had agreed to meet us and what he wanted us to tell the monks: ‘Internationals exacerbate the situation by supporting the building of the wall and the taking of land. We issue a warning to Father Sava and the monks: If you put another brick in this wall of yours we will destroy the whole wall. We can do this. The decision is yours: either integrate or leave Kosovo.’

He then told us his history: ‘I had to leave Kosovo and live in Switzerland for twenty years. Three times the Serbs put me in prison before that. All Albanians lived in a prison in those days, but I was in a real one. I then joined the KLA when the war started and became a soldier for Ranush. Later I became commander of a regional elite unit and for two years was in the Kosovo Probation Force. I did not follow demands made by the internationals. Then I was elected President of the War Veterans. Now I manage the Decan unit.’

He allowed us to film him, shook our hands warmly and we left, reeling from the force of the meeting. But only after our conversation with Father Sava the next day did our mission become clear: that the two sides had to meet and talk, and that our kind of mediation would be crucial to a successful outcome, despite Mushkulaj’s insistence that it was not necessary.

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The mayor of Peja/Pec sat on his own opposite us at a long polished table, as though hosting a delegation, and intoned the familiar declarations about the situation improving, Albanians and Serbs living in cooperation, good communications, relations better than ever, Muslim and Orthodox communities getting on well, visits

on both sides and just a few technical issues needing to be fine-tuned. It seemed as though we were redundant in Kosovo. As he droned on I was about to fall asleep when Donald interrupted the flow and weighed straight in:

‘Why were you not at the Patriarchate for the celebration to enthrone the patriarch?’

Donald was putting his finger on the main issue behind our visit to Kosovo: to break the ice between the municipality and the Serbian Orthodox Church. We had tried to persuade the EU in Brussels of the importance of inviting and making sure the mayors of Decani and Pec attended the ceremony, as a sign of mutual welcome and cooperation: a big step in the mediation process. We were prepared to spend time helping to bring the two sides together at this important event, a unique opportunity. The EU responded by saying these religious events were not significant, and that the international community had everything under control. So an opportunity had been squandered, and the ceremony took place with no Albanians present, leading to protests and some stone-throwing, defacing of posters and ill-will between Albanians and Serbs.

The mayor didn’t bat an eyelid, sitting opposite us impassive, polite and not giving anything away: ‘I was invited, but could not attend because no Kosovo governmental institutions were invited, only those from Montenegro and Serbia. But in spite of that we helped make the event a success.’ He echoed the EU line that politics should not be involved in a religious ceremony, hence the absence of Kosovo politicians like himself, though Serb politicians were present. In fact the speeches made by the patriarch before and at the ceremony couldn’t help but politicize the event, and Serbs as well as Kosovo Albanians saw it this way.

Donald agreed that the event had been well policed, but remembered the protests:

‘What about the defaced posters calling the patriarch a war criminal?’

‘That was not a big issue,’ the major said. ‘Two weeks before the ceremony the patriarch had made a declaration against Kosovo, and that upset a few people.’

‘Stones were thrown at the buses,’ Donald reminded him. ‘I was in one of them.’

‘People listened to his words at the ceremony but waited in vain for some positive statements; they only heard negative ones for Kosovo. So, a few small radical groups caused trouble.’

‘Is there any positive contribution we can give?’ Donald asked, realizing we were not getting anywhere at this meeting.

‘Every initiative that brings people together is good and important,’ responded the mayor, remaining stony-faced, polite and unenthusiastic.

He then continued to give a less forceful version of Mushkulaj’s demands: ‘Tourism would benefit from the Patriarchate, as well as the Rugova mountains. It is a religious and cultural heritage. It should open its doors to the people and tourism will help improve conditions and relations. There was never any need for KFOR to guard the monastery. The nuns were always safe, even in the worst times of war. When KFOR leave, then the local police will protect the monastery.’

‘But the nuns are afraid to walk in the streets,’ Donald commented.

‘They can move freely. Nothing will happen to them,’ said the mayor.

‘Are the monasteries at Pec and Decani treated separately or together?’ asked Raymond Hylton.

‘We treat them as equals,’ the mayor responded. ‘But the territories are described as being different in the Ahtisari Proposals.’

‘But they are not equal,’ said Raymond Hylton. ‘The problems surrounding them are different.’

‘There is a need to do something,’ the mayor countered, ‘until people are convinced there are no problems. All stakeholders should assist in improving the situation – people who can be trusted.’ We could not work out who or what he meant by this vague proposal – what stakeholders? Who were the trusted people?

‘All parties should be represented and be allowed to take part: you yourself said so,’ suggested Raymond Hylton, ‘but that can’t happen at high level talks. Clearly the veterans of the KLA have to be involved, and are not invited.’

‘All levels should be part of the discussion,’ agreed the mayor, wanting to bring the meeting to an end, and knowing that any KLA representation at the upcoming high level talks between Kosovo and Serbia would at present be out of the question. The Serbs would refuse to attend.

‘Both monasteries must be treated separately,’ he continued, seeming to contradict what he had previously said about them being treated the same, probably not having given this point much thought before. ‘The key players are different in each place, and all have influence.’

Donald reminded him of the invitation to the nuns for tea at the mayor’s office.

‘The invitation for tea is always open,’ the mayor said with a slight smile, knowing this to be a safe thing to say. As we discovered shortly, no such invitation had ever been received.

He reassured us of his support for the project and involvement in the process.

He mentioned something about the mayor of Decan/Decani visiting the monastery and promising to visit his office, but not turning up. When we pressed him about the issue of land and property rights he told us that Milosevic had taken the title deeds and no one knew where they were, possibly in Nis, in Serbia.

On a previous visit to Peja/Pec we had met with this same mayor and his cabinet. They had welcomed us warmly, if surprised to hear of our plans, and had been enthusiastic and positive about our project, ready to help, invite the nuns for tea, etc. We were hoping to take the process further, bringing the nuns and the municipality together. But the mayor had now chilled, and this meeting discouraged us.

RETURN TO THE PATRIARCHATE

Summer sun had warmed our first visit to the Patriarchate at Pec two years ago in a glow of nostalgia with roses and climbers on ancient walls, the nuns existing in a timeless and eternal space.

This time winter rains lashed us as we arrived in the late afternoon. We ran the gauntlet of Italian soldiers before being allowed to pass through the barrier which cut the monastery off from the surrounding country. We walked down the wide empty road to the monastery past three dogs chasing furiously, two large ones tormenting and overpowering a small one which could only lie on its back and plead for mercy, paws waving in submission.

We walked past the Rugova River, gushing in pale-brown foaming torrents down from the mountains and saw the frail form of Sister Dobrila, feisty and indomitable as ever, wrapped in a heavy cloak, mobile phone clutched firmly in her gnarled hands, waiting for us outside the gate in the monastery wall. Sister Dobrila was responsible for public relations.

She bonded quickly with Raymond Hylton who charmed her with his questions and solicitude. While he engaged her in deep conversation about the history of the place, we roamed around the three magnificent churches of the Patriarchate, a privilege and opportunity experienced by so few, given their situation and present politics.

I am always overwhelmed by this cornucopia of pictorial skill and imagination, colours and forms, variety of detail and visionary intensity. No one can fail to be amazed. As the daylight faded Ross and Megan wandered silently from room to room staring at the walls, columns and ceilings, every inch covered with sumptuous frescos teeming with action and characters. The armies of soldiers brandishing swords, bodies in constant animation leaping into aggressive action, made it hard to sense any spirituality here, apart from the compassionate gaze of the giant looming Christ Pantocrator, the Saviour, that stared down from the high cupolas and also, just above eye level, the benign expressions of elderly saints standing in rows to bless us. The disturbing contrasts of belligerence and benediction reminded us of the history of this place that for centuries represented the front line of the battle between Christianity and Islam.

Before we adjourned to where the nuns lived to discuss their situation and future, we were able to take advantage of a rare opportunity to remind ourselves of the unique significance of this place, one of the highest artistic achievements in Europe. On the one hand the Patriarchate represented a spectacular cultural heritage of Kosovo and Serbia. On the other hand this was a place where nuns prayed, worked and lived, not just custodians, but as a way of life.

Dusk had fallen and the rains lashed with even more vigour, a storm raging down from the mountains, as we bowed heads and ran from the church to the nun's quarters.

The Reverend Mother joined us at the guest table looking concerned and even frightened. At our first visit two years earlier she had expressed a serene acceptance

of her difficult situation, suggesting that though she and her nuns might be captives here below, their faith and souls could not be prevented from soaring freely to the heavens above. Now they felt trapped and helpless.

The place smelt of an old people's home and had the melancholy sense of uncertainty and fearfulness, of people waiting for something to happen, to change, be restored and made better.

A young nun served us coffee, tea and home-made almond biscuits. We asked her to join us, and she knelt beside the elderly Reverend Mother, translating and exuding a calm appreciation of their situation, not aggressive or challenging, in contrast to Sister Dobrila whose purpose in life seemed defined by being the Patriarchate's fierce guardian.

The discussion centred on the mayor's invitation to the nuns for tea at his offices.

'The invitation must come directly from the mayor,' Sister Dobrila insisted, repeating this several times. 'It cannot come through an intermediary, and must have a date.'

It seemed as though the nuns had not received an invitation from him, although the mayor had invited himself to the Patriarchate, wanting to come with forty people. This sounded intimidating, a far greater number of visitors than there were nuns in the monastery, and the Reverend Mother insisted he should only come with six. The stale-mate this situation implied made the atmosphere even more depressing.

We asked what we could for them.

'Bring back returnees,' said the Reverend Mother, reminding us of what she had told us the first time, that without worshippers and parishioners the community of sisters would die out.

‘Solve the dispute over land and property,’ she went on, ‘Serbs cannot return when their homes have now been occupied by Albanians. And even if they could return, there are no jobs for them, no schools for their children...’

We learned that they had invited Albanian children to visit the Patriarchate, and this had gone well, but Sister Dobrila felt that there had been too many.

The longer the nuns remained isolated, protected, guarded and remote from their neighbours, the bleaker the future for the community, on both sides. They huddled together, accepted the situation but felt lonelier and more vulnerable than ever.

We went out into the storm and returned to the soldiers at the barrier. Donald could not find his security card so I returned with Kujtim, our second driver, who had never been inside the Patriarchate before. Excited and deeply moved to be there he looked around in the darkness and sensed the unique beauty of place despite not being able to see anything. The nuns welcomed us, searched for the card but couldn’t find it. Donald had it all along, in his coat pocket, but it gave our Albanian driver a rare chance to see a place he had only read about, and never imagine he could visit.

Then we left, passing a young armed Italian soldier keeping solitary guard by the gate in the wall. He ran out in the rain to lock the gate behind us and call the nuns on a phone to check they were OK.

The rooms in our hotel in Peja/Pec were monastic cells with basic amenities and the breakfast consisted of a cup of coffee and croissant but we were charged the same rates as the far superior Afa in Pristina with its palatial quarters and lavish buffet brunch. This meant that the owner of the Peja/Pec hotel was either ripping off foreigners or, as with the gas stations along roads in the Republika Srpska, a local gangster had set it up as a business-front with funds from criminal activities, and

couldn't be bothered to run it as a hotel. Just one young man seemed to be in charge, and he spent most of his time manning the dimly lit bar on his own and smiling at us.

A local NGO director, well-educated, enthusiastic and eager to tell us about his work as an advocate, talked with us for over an hour in the semi-darkness of the bar area as evening turned to night.

Tired, planning for the next day with the monks at Decani, thinking about the nuns at the Patriarchate, and the desperate situation of Feha, who had driven home in the storm to be with his wife and daughter, I could not concentrate on this meeting and remember nothing the director said but appreciated his persuasive verbal skills which were essential to keep this NGO funded, even though it wasn't clear what it actually did.

DECANI: POLITICS AND ENEMIES

Next morning we ran the gauntlet of soldiers once again and entered the monastery of Decani to find the courtyard and living quarters almost deserted. Two workers were sweeping the path and apart from Father Sava the only monks we saw were two silent ones who served us coffee and then disappeared. Either the community was busy with the farm or on the building site beyond the northern wall of the courtyard which had formerly been an icon-painting studio and now teemed with activity. Lorries drove in and out, and construction workers swarmed around half-raised walls. Or the monks had been ordered to keep away from us. There didn't seem to be any of them on the site which we assumed was where the funds from Russia were being spent.

The atmosphere at the monastery had changed since our previous two visits when we were greeted enthusiastically, given a generous welcome, invited to stay, shared meals and talked with several highly articulate, educated and committed young men. Now it

felt chilly and secretive. Before settling down to the meeting, Father Sava showed us round the church, giving us the history of King Stefan, took us to the room where the absent bishop had talked to us before, then to the farm shop where he kindly presented us with two jars of monastery honey before we left.

Because of his gift with languages and especially fluent English, Father Sava had been appointed the monastery representative to liaise with internationals and entrusted with the task of greeting foreign dignitaries. Presidents and vice-presidents, generals and ambassadors all spoke highly of him, a man you could do business with.

We had enjoyed a lengthy, amicable and informative correspondence with him over the last few years, failing to meet him on our last visits because of his absence on two occasions and once because he had fallen ill. So we looked forward in particular to our talk; certain that we had found a staunch ally in our process of mediation.

Tall and expansive, friendly and polite but with watchful unsmiling eyes, Father Sava sat in the bishop's chair and after we had been served coffee and brandy by the two silent monks, began to lecture us on the situation from the Serbian perspective.

The meeting began friendly enough; he too had looked forward to talking with us, but gradually the walls rose up and we realized that the monastery had decided to close itself off from the surrounding situation.

Beforehand, our discussions with Bishop Teodosije in particular, had always built on the premise of the fundamental need to improve relations with the local community and municipality, while preserving Serbian Orthodox Church integrity and monastic traditions, not Kosovo or Albanian Orthodox or just cultural heritage. The bishop had enthusiastically approved our plan to set up a meeting with the mayors and main players in the region; he would have liked it to happen immediately.

But with Father Sava the discussion focused on protecting the monastery as an independent Serb entity in Kosovo; increasing the number of soldiers, and completing the wall in order to safeguard its property and ensuring that the international community respected their demands and interests.

When it came to our proposal to set up a meeting with the municipality, Father Sava emphatically ruled out any encounter with the KLA.

What became clear to me on this last visit was the way in which all sides had become more extreme. The KLA threatened to drive the monks out of Kosovo. The monks resisted becoming part of Kosovo and were building a fortress around them.

Meanwhile we were being told by politicians, trying to please the European Union which funded them, and other leaders from the International Community that the situation between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the municipalities had been stabilised, and that Serbs and Albanians lived peacefully side by side. To quote Schiller's *Don Carlos*, this was the 'peace of the graveyard', and reminded me of our times in Libya before the present uprising against Colonel Gaddafi. When we visited between the years 2000 and 2004 we witnessed a Libya where quiet, sweet-natured and friendly people, went about their daily business and took care what they said to us. Fear hung like a pall over the cities and sinister minders lurked at meetings – we could identify them by their attitude: alert and menacing. A situation may appear stable to an outsider, but where repression and injustice decide issues of ethnicity and unfair distribution of power, there is the constant danger of rebellion and violence: the worse the repression, the more cataclysmic the eventual blow-out. Below a calm surface passions seethe and once unleashed, the rebellion is hard to contain.

Father Sava seemed to have understood this at a time when Milosevic instigated the wars in the former Yugoslavia: 'Bishop Artemije and myself criticized the violence

and Artemije warned Milosevic of the dangers of embarking on this conflict. But once Pandora's box is opened.....'

Pandora's box had been shut for the time being, as Marshall Tito managed to do after the Second World War, jamming the lid on divisions between Serbs, Croats and Muslims that the German Nazis had manipulated for their own ends, so bequeathing a toxic mixture of resentments and unsettled scores that seethed below a deceptively calm surface throughout the decades of communist oppression. Because no one had attended to these political, social and religious issues, they flared up into violent nationalism during the chaos of the collapse of communism and were manipulated by an astute and ruthless new dictator. Then, after the Bosnia War, a necessary but hastily-considered peace imposed by the international community meant repression of the same issues, and once again the need to deal with them was ignored.

I am a historian by education, and the maxim that the world needs to 'learn from history' is close to my heart. This is why I consistently refer to the past when writing my reports.

Father Sava seemed to recognize the need to consider the consequences of past wars, but in stead of analysing and clarifying the political impasse between Kosovo and Serbia, he began to muddy the waters:

'We have a peculiar situation,' he shrugged with a smile and a sigh. 'Kosovo is a recognized country, but the UN, the EU and Nato don't have a unified opinion. The political reality cannot be ignored.'

He implied that disagreement about the status of Kosovo hampered any resolution about the status of the monasteries and the Serbian Orthodox Church in this part of what used to be Serbia.

He at first agreed with us that the ceremonies around the coronation of the patriarch, and the upcoming installation of Teodisije as the new Bishop of Kosovo, provided good opportunities for inviting local Albanian politicians, but he expressed caution about who should be allowed to attend. He considered the Serbs to be in a strong bargaining position. Our meetings with the KLA had revealed this point of view to be a delusion.

The walls steadily rose throughout the meeting and we needed to remind ourselves of the Soul of Europe's motto: to make peace you have to speak not with your friends but with your enemies.

Donald described his recent visit to Brussels where people at the top were making decisions unilaterally, and not listening to those on the ground who knew more about the situation. Father Sava however wanted the Ahtisaari Proposals, specifically Annex 5, to be taken more seriously. Annex 5 specified that the monasteries should be treated not just as cultural heritage, but as communities of Serbs who had to be protected and guarded by police and the army.

'We liked this paper,' Father Sava told us in a tone that declared there could be no discussion, no compromise on the Proposals. 'Institutional protection is important for Serbia. These are not just national monuments; so we like the idea of being part of an international protectorate. Neither Kosovo nor Serbia would have control of holy places. Technical issues linked to the political essence of the document mean the issues cannot be solved bilaterally. However we have an experienced diplomat, Moschopoulos, taking good care of the situation.'

Technical issues probably referred to the land and property: who owned it – the monks, the Serbian Orthodox Church or the Kosovo government? As the KLA made clear to us they considered the monasteries to be part of Kosovo.

Moschopoulos represented the EU, and had been appointed to deal with religious affairs.

‘Is he a spiritual man?’ asked Raymond Hylton, wondering whether a civil servant could understand the deeper issues of the status of the monasteries.

‘He can articulate our aims,’ said Father Sava. ‘We have been making attempts to change the Kosovo constitution ever since independence was declared.’

He then mentioned Albin Kurti: ‘A dangerous man, some kind of neo-Nazi, who organized protests with locals against the monasteries.’

We kept quiet about our meeting with Albin Kurti, as we did about our discussions with the KLA.

But Donald told Father Sava about positive responses from the mayors, especially the mayor of Decan/Decani. Donald emphasised the importance of involving mayors in the process, as we did in Omarska. He reminded Father Sava that Bishop Teodosije had been keen to talk with the mayor of Decan/Decani, and that the Reverend Mother at the Patriarchate was also positive about such meetings.

‘There is great affection for the monasteries by most Albanians,’ he told Father Sava, who looked blank. ‘The mayors want the monasteries to be integrated into the local communities. They feel a nostalgia for Decani as it used to be, open to everybody. They want to help create healthy community relations where the townspeople could feel welcome here.’

We then broached a topic new to our thinking in this process, that of land, how it perpetually becomes a source of contention, conflict and ultimately war, but can also be a means of healing rifts between people and communities.

‘Imagine a new paradigm of land use,’ Donald went on: ‘sharing resources so problems dissipate. It is a new and difficult way of thinking. Conversations will take time.’

This idea did not appeal to Father Sava who went off on a different tangent: ‘Although we are segregated, we are not strangers to each other in Decani. The present mayor is open to dialogue and we should be able to reach a level of understanding.’

He then explained the clan systems that ran Kosovo society. ‘Families run politics. The KLA is now the most powerful family, Ranush the leader. The mayor may head the municipality, but he can’t make crucial strategic decisions. The monastery is not a tourist attraction. The wall will prevent theft of animals etc, and also give the monks privacy.’

Father Sava accepted that the wall around the monastery had become a thorny issue so he needed to defend it: ‘Walls are traditional. Monasteries are private places. We do receive guests, but we are not a museum.’

He then interpreted the implication of the Ahtisaari Proposal that the territories occupied by the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo should become like embassies, parts of Serbia within a different country. ‘Walls are not unusual. Embassies have walls. We are the Serbian Orthodox Church community. Ahtisaari’s plan protects our identity and history. Local history tends to keep this monastery separate. One hundred and fifty churches were destroyed after the war,’ he told us, emphasising the word ‘after’, and went on: ‘This constituted a systematic destruction of sites. Why? Kosovo Albanians see the Serbian Orthodox Church as too strong a symbol of Serbian authority. But there is an imperative: these are holy sites, not political sites. The churches should preferably not be part of Serb policy, but we are Serbs not

Kosovans. We are not here for ethnic identity, but need to preserve our identity.

Locals tell us we can be integrated, but we must not lose our identity. Beware modern myths of ethnic identity.'

He did not clarify what he meant by 'myths' of ethnic identity, and disturbed us by the deliberate use of the word: Kosovan. He could have said: 'not Albanian', but he specifically declared 'not Kosovan' which implied the monks still refused to acknowledge Kosovo as their own country along with other ethnic groups, as is happening in nation states over the rest of Europe, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, regardless of what Far Right Nationalist movements and leading politicians sympathetic to their cause might be saying.

Donald insisted on leading the conversation back to the issue of land: 'The fruits of the land can be used to unify partnerships and encourage business sharing. Here we have a unique opportunity. Decani could be an example to the world. We can help with this process, developing business operations to benefit all communities here.'

Donald's words recalled a speech he had been invited to make nine years earlier at the National Assembly, the parliamentary body of the Republika Srpska in Banja Luka, where he surprised a gathering of hard line Serb nationalists with the vision of their city, then despised across Europe as a centre of ethnic cleansing in the Bosnia War. He described to this array of mostly grizzled warriors a resurrection of the city's past traditions of tolerance and equal sharing with all ethnic groups: the celebrated Sinan Ferhadija Mosque standing alongside the modern Catholic and traditional Orthodox cathedrals, all three providing a shining example of how Christians and Muslims could live in harmony. The politicians, used to being criticised and harangued by international leaders, welcomed this description, no one having ever spoken to them in such glowing terms about their city, and they then invited our co-

director Ros Tennyson from the International Business Leaders Forum to lecture them about cross sector business partnerships.

Father Sava had to respond and immediately identified obstacles: ‘The issue of land is complicated. Before World War Two the monastery consisted of eight hundred hectares. But the communists took most of our land and opened a school of politics on it. Land is now important for us. The farm supports us, cows, sheep and bees. Just before the Kosovo War, Milosevic allowed us to retrieve some of the land, and the locals objected. We have used the land ever since. The local municipality made a fuss and fiddled the facts. UNMIK found this out and told us we should raise the issue with the courts. They have a special chamber that recognizes our property is sacrosanct. This is a matter of our future. We are resolving this. We are prepared to compromise. For instance we will make no claims over our town-centre property.’

He realized that in the current climate of building walls around the monastery, locals could protest and cause trouble over the town property, and hoped this compromise might dampen negative local feelings.

‘The court will make a decision soon, but representatives for the monks and the Albanians have already agreed. The problem is: how to implement this decision locally? There are differing voices sounding locally. ‘

He was referring to the KLA, whom he believed wanted to drive the monks from the monastery and then appropriate the property.

‘The monastery itself, its farm and culture, will be an asset,’ he said, seeming to concede that the monastery belonged to Kosovo; then added emphatically: ‘But we cannot share the property. There can be no compromise on this issue. And the Albanians need to allow Serb families return to their homes.’

He then talked specifically about the enemy: ‘The KLA are responsible for armed attacks against the monastery. They are making problems. The internationals can help the locals understand the rights of the monasteries. They should have respect for those who rightfully claim their land. In return we agreed some years ago that some monastery land in the town could be used to make a roundabout for the benefit of the community. After all we cannot use these parcels of land in the town centre. But resolution of the issue is important as is developing friendly relations. People complain about our wall, but most monasteries have walls. What does the mayor think of this issue?’

Raymond Hylton spoke up and told him: ‘The mayor offers to repair the road and construct a bye-pass so as not to disturb the footpaths along the river by the monastery.’

‘The river should not be turned into a channel,’ said Father Sava. ‘It must not be urbanized. An asphalt road can go up to the monastery, but beyond is just for walking. We don’t want roads. A street is not acceptable, but a compromise is possible. There is a background to this story of the bye-pass. It would be more expensive to build it through Albanian properties; that’s why they want to put it near the monastery. But we can compromise on this, and get them to build it further away. Other construction projects the municipality planned were prevented by regulations that were meant to preserve the natural and cultural surroundings of the monastery. But saying no, no! is negative and spoiling. However, when people visit, they want to see a monastery, not factories and motorways. They want to develop tourism, but we can’t build Las Vegas here. Kosovo has potential for village tourism, an escape from urban stress. Kosovo can provide this. And we ourselves have to understand our potentials, go step by step; make the monastery more open.’

He spoke about Kosovo as though it were a foreign land, not somewhere he happened to be living. Having criticised the local plans for turning the area into a holiday resort he needed to explain the construction work going on around the monastery as we spoke: ‘We are building new accommodation so the living quarters for the monks will be removed from the historical part which can then be open for visitors and guests.’

‘Does the municipality know about this?’ Raymond Hylton asked, catching Father Sava slightly off guard. We knew that the money had come from Russia, and that the authorities would interpret this generosity as being part of a plan to make the wall stronger and protect the monastery from the local community

‘They have been several times and know,’ answered Father Sava, surprising us with the information that the local authorities were allowed to visit and inspect the work.

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Well, they might like to know this is your plan.’

Father Sava hedged round this sensitive subject: ‘We can’t freely associate with politicians because Kosovo has not been generally recognized.’

‘They will ignore the issue, but will negotiate the practicalities,’ said Donald.

‘We cannot ignore the reality,’ said Father Sava.

‘Remove the monasteries from politics,’ said Raymond Hylton, remembering our conversation with the KLA earlier and making it clear to Father Sava that we knew this was an important issue for the locals.

‘They only see us as a cultural monument,’ responded Father Sava, side-stepping again. ‘Kosovans can only enter here with an injunction, and not without permission from the monastery.’ Again he used the word ‘Kosovan’, rather than ‘Albanian’, and in case we still had not got the message added: ‘We cannot fly an Albanian flag from

our monastery.’ The question as to whether the monastery would fly the flag of Serbia hung unasked in the following pause.

We seemed now to have reached stalemate.

While Donald considered how to avoid checkmate, Ross, observing Father Sava’s pallid expression, asked a personal question, but put generally so as not to cause offence, as though he were addressing the state of all the monks at Decani:

‘Is chronic fatigue an issue?’

Father Sava understood immediately: ‘We are under perpetual stress.’ He told us about an attack on the monastery walls in 2004.

Ross talked about the beauty of the place, human nature, compromise, spreading energy and dissipation of stress.

Father Sava reminded us of how the monastery welcomed Albanian refugees as well as local Serbs during the war, though probably not simultaneously because at the time the Serbs were trying to drive the Albanians out of Kosovo. ‘We do open our hands to local people. It was a sad conflict, but we helped people. We have no negative feelings. We are ready to build a common future, but not at the expense of our identity and property.’

‘Land is the main issue,’ said Ross, bringing us back to the main substance of our discussion.

‘The Church is an institution not of this world,’ responded Father Sava. It felt like walking on shifting sands. ‘But we are in this world. While we are here, we have to preserve our identity and place of worship.’

Ross gave an eloquent exposition on the sacredness of land, its role in matters of war and peace.

‘We were the first Serbs to speak about crimes,’ Father Sava said defensively. ‘I remember a meeting in the town hall and speaking about the suffering of the Albanian population during the war. But the population is now blind to the suffering of Serbs after the war. We have been threatened by local extremists. Internationals visit here as to a confessional box. They know who the real leaders in Kosovo are. Ordinary people have no problems with us and our land, but the extremists don’t want to be seen as compromising.’

‘What is your vision of the future?’ asked Ross, trying to move the conversation in a more positive and creative direction.

‘Eternity – beyond politics,’ said Father Sava. ‘I want to see the monastery as a safe place to continue our mission.’

Donald entered the discussion again and asked whether the monastery could open up to the community, teach local children about Serbian Orthodoxy and invite Albanian representatives to the enthronement of the new bishop, maybe also to a Christmas reception.

‘We should have inter-religious dialogue again. We intend to be seen more in public,’ Father Sava said in a more conciliatory tone. ‘Make ourselves heard. We want to be part of society, but we must be respected. We want to be part of modern European society. We cannot avoid politicization entirely... a bit is important because we need protection. This is an issue for the future of Kosovo, so Kosovo can enter Europe. It is a matter of human rights, such as the preservation of cemeteries. There are many desecrated graves. We must encourage Serb returnees. But we cannot rush into an embrace. We do not say this is Serbia; we don’t provoke. But,’ and Father Sava laid big emphasis on this ‘but’, wanting us to be in no doubt about his attitude: ‘We cannot recognize Kosovo as an independent state. We realize we have no say in

this. So we look to international agreement to protect us. There are no easy options. This is our home. It would be great to walk in the streets of Decani, but am warned it would be dangerous for me.'

It amazed us that for years he had not walked in the town, less than a mile from the monastery, and that he still feared the locals. We discussed the possibility of a meeting with the KLA and Father Sava was adamant about not being prepared to do this: 'I will not sit in the same room as Mushkulaj; he has blood on his hands,' he said firmly, and added: 'Milosevic was the main problem... but not the only one.' He had shifted the blame for the problems of the monasteries in Kosovo from Milosevic to the KLA.

On this note we left the monastery feeling disheartened. 'That was a waste of time,' declared Donald adding in despair that we might as well have not bothered coming, that the whole journey to Kosovo had no purpose. Sometimes a negative meeting like this can create a momentary sense of failure. We tried to fix a meeting with the elusive Bishop Teodosije who would have been more positive than Father Sava, and most certainly would not have ruled out a meeting with 'the enemy'. But the bishop could not be reached by phone, and no one knew where he was.

After some weeks' reflection we realized the process could continue, and that the hardening of attitudes on both sides actually made such a meeting a necessity.

We did meet one other Serb cleric, a priest who materialized outside the church of Gracanica as we arrived to look for some representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church there who would be prepared to talk with us. The last incumbent, Bishop

Artemije, had been sacked by the Patriarchate in Belgrade for allowing embezzlement of funds and for refusing to tow a more conciliatory line on relations between Kosovo Serbia.

A poor local woman approached the priest for advice and help, and held out her hand to us also for alms. The priest seized a rare opportunity to talk with visitors from abroad, abandoned the woman and gave us a detailed tour of the church where the soot-grimed interior frescos looked in need of care and cleaning, the fading colours peeling in large flakes along the lower edges of the damp stone walls. It surprised me that a cultural site of such significance should have been allowed to deteriorate, unlike at Pec and Decani where the paintings were in fine condition. The place felt neglected; its soul and purpose ripped out. Two elderly women who were lighting candles by an icon suddenly broke into a noisy row screeching at each other about protocol or a rota. The futile shouting and fury about a minor matter made the place seem even more redundant and abandoned.

Then the priest, beaming, friendly and excited at our presence, invited us to his house where a dutiful poker-faced son, used to these visits, served us all coffee and home-distilled rakija, then covered the kitchen table with a Manhattan of bottles filled with the same brandy. Some had a replica of an Orthodox church stuck inside the bottle, and we joked about how they had managed to get it there, apparently by pushing it after a thorough soaking through the narrow neck. Reeling from the throat ripping intensity of the liquid, and grateful for his warm and generous hospitality, we could not refuse to buy several bottles, realizing this had been the purpose of his invitation. 'I need to pay for my son's education,' the priest explained, smiling broadly and eyes widening in anticipation of a good morning's business.

We did not ask about his wife; maybe she had left or had died or was visiting somewhere else. The cluttered cold house smelt of sweat and unwashed clothes, but these problems seemed of less importance to the priest and his son than staying alive and covering expenses.

We gleaned little information about the whereabouts of Bishop Artemije, and the conversation kept to generalities about the hardness of life for the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and the need for everyone to live peacefully together.

We began our latest visit to Kosovo on a positive note with Albin Kurti and finished with an equally upbeat meeting at the Community Building in Mitrovica where Ajkuna managed several NGOs together with twelve core staff, mostly women, highly educated and motivated despite having to contend with the repressive international presence, lack of funding and a deterioration in the political situation. Forty volunteers helped out.

We had wanted to show Ross and Megan the bridge over the River Ibar which divided the town, the Serb flag fluttering on the other side, the guards and the occasional Eulex vehicle crossing. Not expecting to have a productive or interesting meeting with probably demoralized NGOs, we left heartened by the sense of purpose and resilience of people who were dedicated to the work, had nowhere else to go but were not giving up.

‘Young people from both sides of the river are interested in our activities,’ said Ajkuna’s colleague, a young woman prematurely aging with the stress of work and responsibilities, talking softly but firmly. ‘We deal with the media sector, monetary matters, human rights with youth and women, culture. Mitrovica is known as the first city in Kosovo for rock music, so we use this as a means of unifying. We have one

rule: agree to disagree (about politics), but agree on social and economic problems, working on them together. English is our common language, although now there is enough confidence to speak both our languages. So we are establishing a Rock School. At our Centre for Resources and Media, CRAM, we train young people to deal with critical issues, and problems of infrastructure, power cuts and water pipes. We have a few lectures. At a centre for older women Serb and Albanian children play together, so this helps to reduce ethnic conflict. But we face opposition all the time. We started in 2001 and are still here. All our support comes from the Netherlands, but they reduced funds.'

Donald spoke about the 'onion', the process we used in Bosnia where the people, the silent majority around the basic issues of peace and justice at the centre, work with the adjacent ring of NGOs, then the outer rings of national politicians and internationals, all sharing in and contributing to the same task.

'Once you educate the woman you educate the family,' said Ajkuna's colleague. 'Civil society, not the institution, has to have a quota for gender balance. Kurti gives a correct picture about internationals. Even with Eulex and EU there is no rule of law, especially not in the North of Kosovo. On the whole, people see the international community as being a hindrance to progress. When it comes to business and crime there are no problems between the groups, but when it comes to improving the situation: no chance! Initiatives need to be brought from the ground up, not imposed from above.'

FINAL MEETING WITH OUR KOSOVO MANAGEMENT TEAM

Kujtim: I enjoyed being with you. You try to touch sensitive points.
(our second driver)

- Ajkuna: Glad you see the truth, unlike internationals in general. You have good intentions. It is hard to reach some groups, but important to do so, people like Mushkulaj. These are the people with the power.
- Raymond Hylton: Land issue is important. Also the influence of international institutions over the elected government, so there is a question over where real power lies. And there are unresolved issues of industry, manufacturing and agriculture; and missing people...
- Ajkuna: This is the biggest problem, and could be key to opening relations. 'We are forgiving; they are not apologizing.'
- Megan: It has been a rollercoaster. Where does change come from? Working on easy stuff then getting to the hard stuff? It is a vicious circle; a frozen crisis. It is necessary to hold on to big issues.
- Ross: It has been exasperating. The solution is simple – but too hard to get there. There is a lack of moral courage, on the part of the internationals, and a lack of education. The third sector becomes an intolerable mess of internal politics.
- Feha: I think everyone, including the monks, is involved in politics. But once Serbia talks with Kosovo, next year will see changes.
- Donald: I am fed up and angry. Sometimes it seems the Serbian Orthodox Church is just a sick organization hiding behind beautiful music and paintings. Father Sava is an issue. Who does he represent?

Raymond Hylton: We will need to prepare two reports, one for the Patriarchate; one for the international community.

Ajkuna: The French KFOR stopped me meeting a Serb colleague on the Mitrovica Bridge, saying it was not safe for me. I wanted to ask: why are you here? Then I phoned my colleague, went and crossed another bridge and had my meeting in another part of town.

Raymond Hylton: We need to look at the positive points Father Sava made, and attend to the issue of labelling. He did agree to an open invitation to the enthronement. He was ready to compromise on plots of land in the town and being open to ordinary people. It is a fact they are building new accommodation for the monks and opening the place to the public. I will discuss the chance of inviting him to visit London. Father Sava also invited Donald to the Christmas festivities.

Donald had proposed this last invitation to Father Sava who could not in all politeness refuse, but the invitation did not come. As to opening the monastery to ordinary people, Father Sava himself had told us they did not let everyone in. It was rare for Albanians to enter, impossible for known members of the KLA, and definitely not for the leaders such as Mushkuloj.

The main issue remained: the monks had to meet with the KLA. Donald would write to Bishop Theodosije and propose a meeting between the leaders.

Donald would also draft a letter to the EU, proposing a process of dealing with important societal issues in Kosovo: starting with individuals, then moving towards the national, European and global dimensions, by positive ripple effect.

We decided the land issue was crucial, but it needed to be raised in theological language: 'natural' law.

We should inform the EU that KFOR was not protecting anything. If the Albanians decided to destroy the monks, they could. In fact the KLA reckoned they were the ones protecting the monasteries. It was a cross-faith issue.

Ross saw the land issue being the key sticking point. Our meeting with Anna Jackson had been 'genial' and 'robust', he thought, but said: 'She is also wearing a mask, playing a game with us'. We had asked her to help us by sending a letter to the EU to encourage them to support our work and she had agreed only on condition that we were able to show a written and signed letter of invitation for us to do this work from Bishop Teodosije. Ross's response was: 'Just do it. Stop horse trading.' But he agreed that we needed 'stakeholder' endorsement anyway.

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Snow at Gatwick delayed our return to England by a day. Torrential rain in Kosovo almost prevented us leaving. When we arrived home, Ajkuna sent a message to say how lucky we were. Pristina Airport closed down immediately after our flight had left because the roads approaching the airport and also the runways were flooded.

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Since then we decided to make it a priority to contact Bishop Teodosije and secure his agreement to a meeting with the KLA. The next stages in our Kosovo project depended on what would then happen.

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At the end of March we will travel to Dusseldorf in Germany for a discussion with Hartmut Dreier and the Soest Forum about how Europe can organize itself to resist the Far Right.

As I wrote the report on this visit Libya was in the middle of a civil war and the world watched. A defeat for the rebels would be a blow to the mostly young Arab cause for freedom and democracy. As it turned out the rebels won. Although most people in Libya remain happy about the victory, the world considers Libya to be inadequately and corruptly governed, riven by tribal factions and, since the assassination of the US ambassador, dangerously in hock to terrorist forces. Now as I edit this book it is Syria in the grip of a civil war, in which the world is avoiding involvement though Russia and China continue to arm the government, and the country's cities are being systematically destroyed. If the Syrian President Assad survives, the world faces a dilemma: how do we relate to dictators? How long before world leaders line up to shake their blood-soaked hands again in the hope of material gain? The present situation has proved the complete collapse of ethical foreign policy in a world that has become a global village of interdependent communities, and demands a rethink of how nations relate to one another in the future.

Never has the declaration by a prominent professor from an ivy-league university that 'we have reached the end of history' sounded so fatuous.

It is not magic or good luck, or unlikely coincidence or any kind of special virtue that defeats the ogres in those fairy tale forests, far from home and places of mortal danger. It is the pitting together of resources, joint action and trust in each other. According to folklore even a naïve failure of a sibling can manage this.

WHAT OUR GRANDFATHERS KNEW

THE KOSOVO PRESENTATION OCTOBER 3RD 2012

Nine doves circled the sky at dawn over Pristina on October 1st. First there were eight; then a ninth joined in. They flew in ever increasing arcs, the moon paling behind them as the sun rose. Occasionally another bird intruded but was seen off viciously. Like bees in a hive that is a single organism, every cell contributing, foraging, acting solely for the good of the whole, the movement of these birds swooping and spiralling together with a precision and expertise beyond the skills of even the best synchronized divers, indicated that they had always been a single organism for millions of years, way before each individual birth.

The doves soared over the city for several minutes then sank downwards in decreasing slowing circles, landed and perched together on one of the many red-tiled roofs. They shook their wings, unruffled feathers and settled down after the dawn exercise.

The pale moon began to disappear and the distant mountains floated on a morning mist.

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There seemed to be little or no chance of any success with our plans to improve relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and the Muslim Albanian municipalities. On each visit the bitterness of hostility and mistrust between both sides increased to the extent that when we spoke to the acting head of the Decani Monastery, where Bishop Teodosije before becoming Bishop of Kosovo had initially at least been prepared to consider being cooperative and friendly, Father Sava firmly rejected any proposal of a meeting between the two sides. The Serbian Orthodox

Church would never accept that Kosovo no longer belonged to Serbia. Father Sava, Bishop Teodosije and other monks constantly spoke about 'Kosovo and Metohija' with particular emphasis on Metohija in a way that made us think they were two distinct regions when in fact Metohija means: 'the lands belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church', lands which covered large tracts of Kosovo, and not just the grounds round the monasteries. The implication of Metohija was that for as long as the Serbian Orthodox Church had a foothold in Kosovo, the lands comprising most of the country belonged to the Church, and therefore to Serbia. Father Sava and the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church could not foresee a time when the Patriarchate or the great monasteries of Decani and Gracanica would function or exist separately from Serbia.

But the Kosovo Liberation Army told us they would have no compunction in driving the monks out of Kosovo if they continued to claim that Kosovo was part of Serbia. The Kosovo Liberation Army would then take over the monasteries and either shut them down or turn them into museums.

The bizarre but talked-of alternative for the Serbian Orthodox Church would be to dismantle these world heritage sites, and transport them to Serbia stone by stone.

The Kosovo Liberation Army appeared to be biding its time, secure in the knowledge they had the upper hand, and when their patience ran out could enter the monasteries with little resistance from the NATO soldiers and drive the nuns and monks out.

The monasteries meanwhile enjoy the support of the Russian Orthodox Church. Collaborating with UNESCO the Russian government has contributed two million roubles for building work, restoration and conservation. Russia, along with China and all countries with regions which threatened secession, refuses to recognize the

independence of Kosovo. Slovenian soldiers replaced the Italians at Decani with the benefit that they spoke the same language as the nuns and monks.

Smaller and less famous monasteries throughout Kosovo managed to function in safety without protection, indicating the political nature of this impasse and that Albanian locals had no problems with the presence of these Serb religious communities.

As far as the major centres were concerned, the Patriarchate of Pec and the monastery of Decani, a political and security stalemate persisted. They remained Serb enclaves in a foreign country, a perpetual challenge and provocation to the government and municipal authorities of independent Kosovo.

I had always doubted the viability of our task there, more problematic even than in Bosnia, where at least the different communities spoke the same language and could understand each other. After four years of steadily cooling relations with both the monasteries and the municipalities both bishops and mayors could barely disguise their impatience with us and their lack of interest. On Donald's last visit the formerly friendly Bishop Teodosije ignored Donald's offers of help, preferring to bend the ear of the British ambassador about some matter irritating the Serbs. While crossing the grounds of Gracanica to attend this meeting with the bishop, Donald fell over in the dark and for a moment wondered what on earth he was doing in Kosovo. It felt like the end of our project. We were not welcome and communication ground to a halt. While Father Sava and Bishop Teodosije now told us they were managing, secure in support from Russia, they continued to post complaints on the internet about worsening relations with Albanian communities around the monasteries, reporting physical attacks and abuse on the streets, damage to their property and endless legal

wrangles. They constantly expressed fear about the future if the NATO soldiers guarding them were to be removed, demanding a permanent armed presence and saying that if the soldiers left, the monks and nuns would be murdered. This was precisely why we were in Kosovo, to help ease their fears and the situation, to improve communication between the monasteries and the municipalities. But both Father Sava and the bishop indicated they did not want our help.

It seemed pointless to visit Kosovo again, but Donald persisted in his usual fashion. Obstacles and a threat of defeat only made him more resolute. A report on the situation between the monasteries and the municipalities had been prepared by our team of NGOs in Kosovo, made up equally of Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. This report combined the perspectives of both communities in Peja/Pec, site of the Patriarchate, the only place where we felt there was a chance of achieving some progress. Whatever the resistance from the bishop and the mayor, we were going to present this report at a formal gathering in the town and do our best to make sure the mayor and the bishop would be present, even if no one else attended.

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Serendipity is an important feature of mediation work. There is a skill in recognizing when it happens, and then seizing and making it work for the project.

Serendipity played a most significant role on this occasion. It ensured our first substantial success in eleven years since the Coventry Consultation in 2001.

First we were lucky to gain the active support of a new British ambassador to Kosovo. Ian Cliff had been crucially encouraging to us in Bosnia during the few years after the Coventry Consultation, helping consolidate several projects. He had arranged a top-level meeting between the Republika Srpska Serb nationalist government and the head of the Islamic community in Bosnia. This meeting secured a promise of state

entity funds to start rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque the nationalists had destroyed in the war. Apart from Ian Cliff, his predecessor Graham Hand and Roy Wilson, their Head of Office in Banja Luka, all other ambassadors and their assistants in the Balkans who subsequently met us were discouraging and apathetic. Initially friendly and seeming to be supportive, they fobbed us off on secretaries who were in no position to help. The message came loud and clear: 'You are on your own.'

In welcome contrast to these officials Ian Cliff now responded with interest to our report, which he liked, and offered to help with the presentation. He recognized a practical opportunity for improving relations between Albanians and Serbs.

He arranged the best venue in Peja/Pec for the presentation of the report, used his position to ensure the mayor of Peja/Pec would be there and invited influential people to meet us for supper at his residence in Pristina. This vote of confidence in our project helped us to be positive about what we were trying to do, so we flew to Kosovo feeling hopeful.

However a second piece of serendipity set the seal on the presentation, and its successful outcome. Bishop Jovan, newly appointed to take charge of the Patriarchate, was unlike any Serbian Orthodox bishop we had met. Not as elusive as all other representatives of the Orthodox Church we were used to dealing with in the past he answered emails, apologizing for any delay, and even called Donald on the phone for long useful conversations. He not only expressed enthusiasm for the presentation and gratitude for our assistance in improving relations between the Church and the municipality, he wanted to involve Donald in plans for the Patriarchate.

The Serbian Orthodox Church had come to realize that the community of nuns could not cope with the demands of running the Patriarchate. Most of the nuns were elderly and dying. Bishop Jovan was appointed to oversee the transition of the Patriarchate to

a new kind of monastic community, with monks gradually replacing the nuns, and to revitalize it. In the prime of life, energetic and resourceful, Bishop Jovan was an intelligent choice. He wasted no time in establishing communication with the mayor, so implementation of our plans for improving working relations between the Patriarchate and the municipality had already begun.

Without Bishop Jovan it is unlikely that our presentation would have achieved anything.

Ambassador Cliff looked only a little greyer and as ethereally thin, like the actor Ben Whishaw, as when I last saw him ten years earlier. He had arranged to meet us at Gatwick Airport where we would be on the same plane to Kosovo. Dressed informally in a casual jacket and red jersey he waved both his arms in delight the moment he saw us. With several other people demanding his attention, he had no time for small talk. In between taking lengthy calls he told us about arrangements for the presentation. This would take place at the Dukagjini hotel in Peja/Pec recently refurbished in a five-star style by its owner, Ekrem Lluka, one of Kosovo's richest businessmen. Ian Cliff had invited him to the annual reception celebrating the Queen's birthday in Pristina. Ekrem Lluka offered his hotel as the venue for the presentation at a reduced rate. The British Embassy planned to host a reception as well as a private lunch for the main speakers, underlining the importance the embassy gave to the event. He hoped a number of international representatives would attend the presentation as well as one of the deputy Foreign Ministers, a young ambitious politician called Petrit Selimi.

Petrit Selimi was the main guest at the supper Ian Cliff gave for the Soul of Europe at the ambassador's residence. Well-educated and widely travelled, fluent in several languages including English, charming, trim and youthful, Petrit Selimi represented a new generation of politicians in the Balkans, a welcome antidote to those we were used to meeting who turned out to be either yes-men eager to butter up deep-pocketed internationals or were grizzled former warlords and gangsters scheming against outside interference in their nationalist and corrupt affairs.

Petrit Selimi regaled the guests at the ambassador's residence with stories of trying to enter the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem accompanied by his girlfriend, now his wife, whose mini-skirts were marginally briefer than his shorts and only being allowed in because the girlfriend could recite a sura from the Koran, and then on condition they both wore veils. The image of Petrit Selimi in tight shorts and a woman's veil haunted me, not unpleasantly, throughout the rest of our visit.

More seriously he made the point that Serb intransigence concerning the status of their monasteries in Kosovo had to do with politics: they wanted to provoke a situation where any attack on them would prove Kosovo to be a failed state. He observed that even the Serbs could not continue playing the victim indefinitely, especially when the other side wanted reconciliation.

The ambassador's housekeeper and her assistant served a supper of Kosovo dishes including fragrant home-made corn bread. Everyone crowded into the kitchen afterwards to thank and congratulate her. The matriarchal cook looked used to this praise, and it was a relief to think of perpetually busy Ian Cliff, as wispy as a Giacometti sculpture, being well looked after now that he lived mostly alone, working long hours. His wife worked in Vienna and his children were at university. I remember the secretary at the Sarajevo Embassy being sometimes exasperated at the

quantity of tasks he took on, a load she had to share. The embassy in Pristina respected him, declaring him to be the best ambassador they ever worked for.

Petrit Selimi had met and taken a liking to Donald when they attended a conference on inter-religious dialogue organized by the American University in Pristina earlier in the year. As usual Donald had created a stir there with a forthright speech, in contrast to the other worthy but mostly platitudinous contributions. Clearly delighted to see him again Petrit patted Donald's knee to show everyone they were friends and after supper drove us back to the Hotel Afa. His chauffeur got lost in the maze of unlit narrow winding streets off the city centre, cruising up and down hills, expertly avoiding parked cars and being gestured in different directions by shadowy figures and courting couples.

Before supper we spent several hours with the three project assistants who had prepared the report. Ajkuna, a Kosovo Albanian from Prizren, and Gorica, a Kosovo Serb from Gracanica, a Serb enclave and suburb of Pristina, were already employed by other international agencies which did not take kindly to staff moonlighting, so both wanted to keep a low profile, afraid even to be photographed or filmed at the presentation. Kujtim from Prizren had not only driven Ajkuna to meetings in Peja/Pec but also helped with interviews and fact-finding. He used to drive Donald and Raymond Hylton on previous visits. On one occasion during a dark stormy evening after a visit to the Patriarchate Donald lost the security card issued by the Italian soldiers guarding the entrance, and I took Kujtim, who had not been allowed past the barrier, back with me to see if the nuns had found it. On his first ever visit to this special place in Kosovo he was deeply touched by the experience, saying he had never dared or been allowed to enter the Patriarchate. The rain lashed, the wind roared

down from the mountains around the Rugova Valley and he could hardly see anything, but just setting foot inside the place brought tears to his eyes.

Ajkuna, even-tempered, diligent and resourceful, never showing stress, did most preparation for the report, and in her spare time because she appreciated its importance, enlisting the help of both Albanian and Serb NGOs. Among Kosovo NGOs Albanians and Serbs cooperated with no difficulty. Security-sensitive NATO and fearful controlling international agencies, like the UN and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, constantly found and created problems. On one occasion KFOR prevented Ajkuna crossing the bridge at Mitrovica to meet a Serb colleague, telling her it was too dangerous, so she had to take a long detour and cross another bridge for the meeting.

We had encountered Gorica on our first visit to Kosovo at the International Civilian Office where she worked as secretary to Andrea Battista, then deputy head of the Community Affairs Unit. Brushing dust off his elegant Armani suit while talking about his next career move, he dismissed our project. Gorica remembered that we took an interest in her after this chilly depressing meeting. While she accompanied us downstairs to the heavily guarded exit we had asked how she felt working at the International Civilian Office, particularly for a man like Andrea Battista, who seemed only concerned about his own future, and whether she faced problems travelling to and fro between the Serb enclave of Gracanica and the Muslim-dominated Pristina. This memory encouraged her to send us an email out of the blue two years later, but until she reminded me of the meeting I could not recognize or place her.

Being Serb she gained access to Bishop Jovan and this provided us with an opportunity to take the project further.

The report became a synthesis of two narratives about the situation in Kosovo, one from the Albanian and the other from the Serb perspective. Both stories existed side by side in parallel universes, which made the report unique and provocative. We edited it to a certain extent, aware of sensitivities on both sides, our main purpose being to persuade the mayor of Peja/Pec and the bishop at the Patriarchate to meet and talk about the issues dividing them. The Serb narrative omitted mention of Milosevic and Serbia's attempt to ethnically cleanse Kosovo of Albanians, so this part of the report implied that Serbs suffered most and were the chief victims, particularly in the aftermath of NATO's intervention which made national heroes of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton in Kosovo, streets being named after them, and statues raised in their honour. The Albanian narrative significantly made little mention of the Serb attempts at ethnic cleansing, destruction of many mosques, and mass murders in villages where journalists filmed evidence of piles of corpses. This section of the report concentrated on Albanian desire to improve relations with the Serbian Orthodox monasteries, and be able to visit freely places of cultural heritage they considered part of Kosovo.

Despite their different perspectives on recent history, Ajkuna and Gorica got on well, two Kosovo women who were collaborating on a project important to them both, but whereas I noticed Ajkuna spoke fluently to Gorica in Serbian, Gorica knew no Albanian. She did however acknowledge this imbalance. Like some of the monks we met in Decani who were learning this difficult new language, she realized the necessity if Serbs were to integrate fully and accept there could be no return to Kosovo being once again part of Serbia. Language remained a painful issue.

Ajkuna and Gorica had well-paid jobs but their contracts were only for a year, and both women knew they would be unemployed again and have to trawl international agencies for more short-term work. Unemployed Kujtim in his late thirties was

married with three children, and a father dying of lung cancer. Despite these burdens he remained cheerful and positive, and so excited about the presentation that he admitted to losing sleep with anxiety about its progress and success.

At the Hotel Afa in Pristina German economic advisers and businessmen sat at neighbouring tables, tapping at open laptops discussing opportunities in Kosovo. Earnest women created spreadsheets and examined figures, occasionally smiling with satisfaction. Bullish men spread their legs and pontificated. The few Kosovars present were either interpreters or representatives of organizations looking for contracts. They sat silently and listened to these successful people who acted as their superiors and held the keys to their country's future.

Ajkuna, Gorica and Kujtim found themselves in a position not dissimilar to the nervous interpreters, hoping for further work and a secure salary which we were not providing.

Powerful and wealthy foreigners bring a promise of future affluence, but for whom? Their demeanour creates dependence. These foreigners are not benefactors. Only the prospect of profit lures them to this new nation.

The Kosovars knew this, but needing any help they could find, sat silently not wanting to put a foot wrong and frighten away these investors and advisors.

They reminded me of my visit to Krakow in Poland shortly after the collapse of communism where I noticed the invasion of businessmen from the West, advising and bullying shamefaced but cunning Polish businessman who had got their hands on former state-owned assets. These encounters were like grotesque dances in which self-interest determined every move.

The process of mediation has to be aware of the dynamics in the relationships between foreigners like us and those people who need help. Avoid being patronizing

- those people know their situation better than we do. Advice and criticism should only be offered when asked for; be sure to settle financial matters at the start.

Anxieties about cash flow dissipate energy needed for the task in hand; always make sure they have enough to enable them to function. Respect everyone, especially those who find themselves in a position of dependency. This gives them the power to extricate themselves from what can become a vicious circle and subsequently take ownership, this being an important part of the mediation process.

Ajkuna, Gorica and Kujtim seemed to be relaxed, hiding their nerves about an event they had prepared and which could either be the start of a bigger project or might fizzle out.

Gorica focused on the spelling of place names in the report. These things matter in regions of contested ownership. After the Bosnia War and the ratification of the Dayton Accord in 1995 which split the country in half between the Bosnian Serbs in the north and east, and the Bosnian Muslims and Croats in the rest, the Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska wasted no time in converting the names of towns and villages from Bosnian into Serbian, a split from the Ottoman past as emphatic as Russia changing Leningrad back to St Petersburg after the collapse of communism. In Kosovo where Albanians were re-establishing their heritage after centuries of Serbian control, names became bilingualised: Peja/Pec, Decan/Decani.

Kujtim arrived shortly before we left for the ambassador's supper having spent the day holding his father's hand in hospital during chemotherapy. While Ajkuna exuded calm and optimism, I worried whether the mayor and bishop would attend the event. Years of experience in the Balkans taught us that people promised one thing and did another. We had a whole day in Peja/Pec to do whatever it took to persuade them.

The ambassador persuaded Raymond Hylton and Donald to take the train to Peja/Pec while Kujtim drove Ajkuna and myself. Simultaneous translators would bring Gorica for the presentation itself. Raymond Hylton, who accompanied us on our previous visit which I wrote about under the title *A Poisoned Chalice*, is patron of our project in Kosovo and as a cross bencher in the House of Lords has on three occasions raised questions about the security of the monasteries.

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When we returned from the ambassador's supper late in the evening the German businessmen were drinking beer and schnapps while the women advisers continued to stare at laptop screens with expressions of satisfaction at work well done, clicking and tapping adjustments to spreadsheets.

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THE DAY OF PREPARATION IN PEJA/PEC

THE PATRIARCHATE AND BISHOP JOVAN

The bishop's reputation as a keen skydiver led me to expect an athletic young man, and only his greying hair indicated that he might be older than he looked. Far from being a remote and inaccessible 'holiness' like all the other Orthodox bishops we met, he was the proverbial life and soul of the party, cracking jokes, talking fast and eloquently in fluent English while his eyes sparkled with passion and mischief, a complete contrast to Bishop Jefrem whom we got to know in Banja Luka during our projects in Bosnia.

Bishop Jovan was born and raised in Banja Luka so he must have known Jefrem, but he made no mention of him, telling us instead of an idyllic childhood there, stealing cherries as an eight-year-old and by chance meeting one of Gavriilo Princip's collaborators in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that sparked the First

World War. Bishop Jovan remembered thinking: ‘This man killed someone!’ The anecdote with its resonance of history reminded me of the Catholic archbishop of Serbia in 2000 who stood in the entrance hall of his residence in Belgrade and told us how on that very spot a delayed communication from the Russian ambassador came too late to stop the declaration of war. The bishop told us: ‘Had he come a few minutes earlier there wouldn’t have been war.’ The triggers for the major conflicts involving Europe in the twentieth century were forged here in the Balkans.

Bishop Jovan reminded us that this year was the centenary of the 1912 Balkan Wars which preceded the First World War and explained that the ‘enclosed’ nature of the Balkans caused the violence which persisted up to and continued throughout the Bosnia War when the Middle East became part of the story. Presumably he was referring to the influx of Mujahedin fighting alongside Bosnian Muslims. While he conjured up images of ruthless Islamic warriors, terrorists reminiscent of the Mameluks who crushed the last Christian Crusaders over seven hundred years earlier, the face of Patriarch Pavle looked down on us from the wall behind the bishop, angry eyes burning with menace, quite unlike the mild-mannered frail little man we had met and come to know in Belgrade. Kosovo Albanians would, however, have recognized this portrait as the man they considered an enemy who urged Serbs on in ethnic cleansing.

Donald hurried to the main issue for discussion, not wanting to beat about the bush. Before he had finished his opening sentence about the need for the mayor and the bishop to be seen together in public, Bishop Jovan broke in to say that not only would there be no problem about this, but he and the mayor had met several times before and were cooperating in a friendly manner.

The bishop also seemed to be in a hurry to reassure us, and for the next minutes they discussed ways of deepening cooperation. The bishop had employed Albanians to make bookcases for a large library and archive on the history of Kosovo he wanted to establish at the Patriarchate. They agreed that Kosovo must accept that the Patriarchate was an important centre of Serbian Orthodoxy, not Kosovo Orthodoxy.

When Donald suggested that in the future, coachloads of visitors would come to the Patriarchate, the bishop said: 'They will be welcome.' This pillar of western civilization benefited the municipality because visitors need accommodation and food in Peja/Pec. The Patriarchate and the municipality would find 'mutual fulfilment', in the bishop's words.

Donald moved on to the next issue for discussion, the main recommendation in the report, about establishing a community council to strengthen the relations between the Patriarchate and the municipality, taking the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of the mayor and the bishop who were busy men needing to attend to large constituencies.

He raised the contentious issue of Serbian and Kosovo Orthodoxy but the bishop brushed it aside, declaring: 'It is Serbian but belongs to everyone. The monastery is not just for Serbs.'

The bishop then described the problems being faced by the sisterhood. The Patriarchate is a working monastery, not 'intellectual', as he put it; the elderly nuns worked hard in the orchards and dairy and were worn out. The mother abbess was now ninety-one years old having lived at the Patriarchate for over sixty years. 'We help them with care and their battles with inner peace,' he explained. 'The younger ones are not ready to participate.' Did he mean that they were too young to come to the presentation or would take no part in his re-organization of the monastery?

We remembered the charisma of the mother abbess and were convinced her presence would make a difference. Noticing that we did not understand the reality of the nuns' situation the bishop invited us for supper so we could see for ourselves, meet and explain the presentation. While talking about the sisterhood a shadow fell across the bishop's face. He realized that the changes he brought to the Patriarchate caused upheaval in their lives, especially those of the older ones who were used to being in charge and had now to fall in line behind their new master.

The bishop quoted Dostoevsky, acknowledging the writer's ambivalent attitude towards the Orthodox Church, but taking inspiration from his vision of a 'future-orientated general responsibility' shared by 'all', in contrast to Richard Holbrooke's Dayton Accord in Bosnia, 'an icon of the worst possible approach'. That settlement imposed at the highest levels ended the killing but made no provision to stop the war which continued beneath the surface with no sign of ending the hatreds and resentments, no justice and no programs of mediation in which 'all' take part.

'You must own what happens in the future,' observed Raymond Hylton.

'Outside help can be useful,' said Donald, commenting on our involvement.

At this point Bishop Jovan turned to Ajkuna and Kujtim who were sitting silently trying to get used to being in this place that had until now been closed to them. They agreed to make a date for coffee in Przren on the bishop's next visit there. Kujtim was determined to make this happen, as he kept repeating to me.

Having agreed the order of the next day's presentation the bishop spoke with even more enthusiasm about his plans for a research centre at the Patriarchate, to be established in the Hunter's Lodge further up the Rugova Valley. The communists had confiscated the property from the Patriarchate in 1948 and now UNMIK (the United Nations Mission in Kosovo) had decided to give it back as a centre for postgraduate

studies. The bishop insisted that students from Kosovo should come from all ethnic backgrounds: ‘We work with everybody.’

He took us on a tour of his residence, a small house attached to the Patriarchate that had been used to accommodate visiting bishops, priests and dignitaries. The walls were covered in fine oil-colour landscapes as well as photographs of former patriarchs, and the bookshelves were filling up with archive material, including gifts of books and documents from the mayor of Peja/Pec. The bishop wanted to preserve the history of Kosovo as experienced on all sides, Albanian as well as Serb and minorities. I thought of the diary Kreshnik, our previous translator, had shown us, written by his father during the seventy-eight day war in Kosovo in 1999, cataloguing the persecution and crimes of Serb militias, and wondered whether it would be welcome and made safe in this archive at the Patriarchate – perhaps not yet.

The bishop then took us upstairs and for a while we stood on the veranda of his living room and looked up the forested Rugova Valley, with the river cascading down from the craggy mountains and flowing through the monastery grounds. The sun glittered on the torrent. The scent of the forests and a feeling of timelessness reminded me once again of the Orthodox Church’s knack for finding the most beautiful regions to build monasteries. The bishop made every effort to make his Albanian guests feel welcome, showing them the elegantly carved chair reserved for visiting patriarchs and pointing out in particular the key to the Patriarchate once owned by the Albanian family guarding the place and now in a frame above the chair.

Later Ajkuna relayed to me a conversation with the bishop’s young chaplain, Father Ignatie Ilic, about the Serbian Orthodox Church’s claim to the lands of Metohija, which included her home town, and he declared that they would one day belong to the

Church again. 'What about my house?' she asked him. 'You cannot throw me out. I will never leave. It is my home.' 'We will see about that in the future,' said the priest.

For all the bishop's words of welcome and reconciliation, significant issues affecting lives and property remained. But the bishop understood the intent of the presentation: to establish firm foundations for dialogue and regular communication without which there was not even a shred of hope for resolution of these issues.

MEETING THE MAYOR OF PEJA/PEC

The mayor, Ali Berisha, looked severe. It was our fourth meeting with him. After greeting us with chilly formality at his office he announced: 'We already have good relations with the bishop, even if we have different opinions.' He then criticised the report. 'The report shouldn't deal with history, especially some parts which will rouse anger in some people. You probably know that institutions try to gloss over history, but this report tackles memories which are still painful.'

Our hearts sank. In contrast to the friendly and cooperative bishop, the mayor seemed to be hostile. We wondered how we could persuade him to attend the meeting. However Ajkuna, doing the translating, looked positive and cheerful. She read a different attitude in the mayor's brusque manner. Perhaps she heard a tone in the Albanian he spoke which indicated a willingness to cooperate, while needing to castigate us on parts of the report he did not like.

The report included two different interpretations of history, the Albanian and the Serbian. The bishop had decided not to say anything about the former; the mayor seized on the second to express disapproval. We should have expected this, the point of the report being that these two parallel histories needed to be challenged and mutual understanding encouraged in the process. In Bosnia we had pushed

enthusiastically for young people to create a drama to be performed publically all over the country in which three parallel versions of an episode in history, Serb Orthodox, Croat Catholic and Bosniak Muslim, would be performed in the same piece highlighting the stark differences of perspective. It never happened. This report represented the closest we came to illuminating the absurdity and tragedy of hermetically sealed partisan interpretations of history.

The mayor explained: 'Take the part of the report about the burning of the Patriarchate. Any government would have punished that crime. So I believe that this delicate history needs to be carefully analysed and verified, especially in a report which is intended to bring people together.' He reminded us of the war in Kosovo: 'In 1998 and 1999 people sheltered in churches. We know exactly what happened. We know that in the Patriarchate the Orthodox Church blessed the war. But we don't blame the people who are there now, not even the people who were there at the time. All communities agree that the Patriarchate is an important monument. So we must protect it, as though it is our own. Jovan and the nuns are cooperative. We have to treat them well, so we should all engage in a joint effort to protect the Patriarchate for Serbs and all communities. We must convince people that it is another faith institution and should not be attacked. Returnees must be encouraged. Your report does not state that the situation is improving. We have cooperation between the community, the municipality and the Patriarchate. All must contribute to this process. Going back in history is not helpful.' He raised the issue of land and property: 'Claims all the way up to Nis in Serbia go back two hundred, three hundred years. We have overcome a painful period. All are welcome now. We help minorities with positive discrimination and try to give positive messages to people who come to talk to us, people like Jovan, so they can pass this on to their own communities. If we focus only on the negative

then it is discouraging. But the municipality is ready to promote any process that aims to establish positive results, fostering integration and minorities - proactively with the Patriarchate especially. All positive recommendations in the report we are ready to support.'

Looking at what the mayor said as I write this, we need not have been nervous about his intentions, but at the time we focused only on his criticism fearing that it meant he did not want to take part in the process. Years of negative experience showed us that these small disagreements could scupper a project, and the mayor might be trying to find a way of not cooperating.

Raymond Hylton immediately responded to the criticism and asked who had the report, and whether it could be edited before being widely distributed.

Donald reassured the mayor that the report was work in progress. It could be edited. It had however already been widely distributed, though we could not be sure by whom; it is impossible to keep a report like this out of the public domain in the age of the internet.

Donald then launched quickly into plans for the presentation, making the assumption that the mayor would be present, describing protocol, agenda, order of speeches, reception, the media and announcing the presence of the British ambassador, Petrit Selimi coming as deputy foreign minister with possibly representatives from the major international institutions in Kosovo.

Donald ended by saying: 'You may not want us back.' At which for the first time the mayor smiled broadly, eyes twinkling, then leant forward and patted Donald's knee. 'Of course we want you back. We need you.'

'The Patriarchate is of value not only for Kosovo but everywhere,' said the mayor. 'For this reason the Patriarchate has survived for centuries undisturbed, guarded by

people who live here.’ He was referring to the generations of one Albanian family famous for protecting the monastery.

Donald and the mayor spoke for a while about the people living in the Patriarchate, the elderly nuns and the influx of monks along with the bishop.

‘I totally agree with the report and its recommendations, except for the historical parts,’ the mayor said, looking severe again. ‘People have contacted me about the report. Maybe it is too late to change something. I want Serb leaders to focus on positive things. Negative things however small can damage the process. I express my opinion before the event, so it all goes smoothly.’

‘What should be done about the report?’ asked Donald

‘When you talk about it at the presentation emphasise the positive. Leave the history. Focus on the recommendations. Reports about Kosovo are welcome from the UK, because you supported Kosovo. I’m afraid that at the meeting there will be people who ask about things in the report which should not have been included. When it comes to proposals from the outside, people here hesitate to upset internationals, so bad feelings don’t go away and are not dealt with. Tomorrow I will do my best to put the positive and avoid the negative.’

Donald suddenly leaned forward. ‘If I was you tomorrow,’ he said with a mischievous glint in his eye to lighten the atmosphere, ‘I would say: these guys did a good job, they got their history wrong but the recommendations are good.’

The mayor gave a long loud laugh, clasped Donald’s hands and said: ‘You helped me a lot!’

As we left he praised Bishop Jovan: ‘He loves the people here more than others do. We don’t need nationalisms!’

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Ajkuna and Gorica had asked the two NGOs, one Serb and the other Albanian, who had helped prepare the report, to give a brief statement of no longer than five minutes about their contribution. The young men met us on the terrace of the Dukagjini Hotel to discuss their part in the presentation.

Sasha, fluent in English, and Darko came from the small Serb town of Gorazdevac a few miles outside Peja/Pec. The community had not recovered from the murder of a nineteen-year-old teenager, Ivan Jovic, and a twelve-year-old boy, Pantlija Dakic, in August 2003. They were shot dead with four other children badly wounded while swimming in the River Bistrica on the edge of town. The investigation had been shut down for political reasons. Lack of evidence and justice exacerbated an already painful situation. Despite looking haunted, drained and burdened the two men spoke enthusiastically about their work as an experimental studio group, among other things providing an alternative TV channel and radio station for Serbs in Kosovo.

In contrast to the Serbs, who brought a strong whiff of poverty and stress to the table, Naser representing Syri I Viziu, Eye of Vision, an Albanian NGO whose aim was to help strengthen civil society, looked fresh, alert, well groomed and smartly dressed, without seeming to have any worries.

For most of the meeting both groups appeared not to be relating to each other. The Serbs talked among themselves and Naser to Ajkuna and Kujtim while the other NGO discussed its contribution to the presentation.

At first this disconcerted me. It seemed as though the parallel universes existing in Kosovo also existed round the table. The reason dawned on me: the Serbs spoke no Albanian. Most Serbs we met on this visit, including Gorica, did acknowledge that fact and promised to learn the new language. In fact the NGOs were friends, knew each other well and had collaborated many times before on a variety of projects.

We still had no idea how the presentation might play out, and even whether anyone would turn up, including the main players: the bishop and the mayor. Ajkuna kept reassuring us that the mayor would definitely be there, but we were used to being let down at the last moment in Bosnia, particularly by mayors and Orthodox bishops. So the presence of these two NGOs became a symbolic necessity if the presentation was to have any significance: the pairing of opposite sides being evidence of ongoing collaboration. If our Omarska assignment in Bosnia had any success, however limited, it came down to the good relations between Serb Zoran and Muslim Anel, the project managers. This lasted beyond our work there. Zoran asked Anel to be best man at his wedding. Even if we achieved nothing concrete or substantial at Omarska, we at least laid a seed for the future. This experience explained our determination to have both NGOs prominent at the presentation.

Sasha however alarmed us suddenly by saying he might not be able to come, because of work commitments and a demanding boss, but reassured us that Darko would take his place and speak about the report.

We felt familiar butterflies in our stomachs!

Dapper Naser, being part of the majority running Peja/Pec, had no qualms about the presentation, but the Serbs may have been feeling fearful and intimidated.

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As night fell we drove to the Patriarchate for supper with the nuns. The Slovenian soldiers peered suspiciously at us in the darkness, holding their rifles in readiness and one hovered by the entrance as though expecting an assault from marauding Albanians.

We were shocked by the appearance of the nuns. For a moment I did not even recognize the Reverend Mother. She seemed smaller, looking sad and defeated,

shrinking into her black robe, just one among the other elderly sisters who crept around the long dining table before taking their seats. The bishop now sat at the head of the table, and the Reverend Mother had to accept her lesser role. Only while Donald spoke about the next day's presentation and she suddenly smiled at me wistfully across the table, remembering our previous visits and conversations, did I recognize the gentle but also determined nature of the powerful woman we had met on previous visits.

As in the bittersweet final act of Chehov's *The Cherry Orchard* a whole way of life was ending, passing and giving way to another. Up to now the Patriarchate had been the domain of women. They ran the monastery, tended the gardens, kept the church clean and hosted the visits of eminent people. The matriarchal reverend mother watched over the other sisters and kept order with calm authority. I can never forget my first sight of her three years before: she walked slowly in a dignified manner from the church to her quarters, counting prayer beads, and watched us approach. Nodding in welcome she smiled as now across the table, gently but with penetration as though seeing into our minds and hearts. The walls of the church behind her and roses blooming all around in the gardens created the atmosphere of a painting that captures an instant in time, and yet expresses eternity.

Now hyperactive Bishop Jovan with his chaplains and monks injected an overpowering dose of testosterone into the Patriarchate. Even Sister Dobrila, who for years had been the unofficial spokesperson for the Patriarchate, looked diminished. Suffering from cancer she now spent less time there, travelling to France for treatment, and looked gaunt and frail, no longer able to guide visitors round the church and wag her finger about the dangers outside. The bishop told us that her inability to cope with the demands of overseeing the administration – she mislaid

some important property documents – had eventually compelled the Serbian Orthodox Church authorities to appoint him to take charge of the Patriarchate’s affairs.

The nuns were now servants, and judging by the way they served the supper, slamming pans of soup and bowls of home-made yoghurt, plates of curd pies and mashed aubergines down on the long table, the lid on their resentment at the changes seemed to be rattling. But it may just have been that they were exhausted and wanting to get the job done efficiently and quickly.

Donald did not recognize the Reverend Mother at all, asking me afterwards whether she had even been present. The other nuns looked older and smaller too, moving round the table like beetles in their black habits, their dark eyes flashing, and all of them focusing on the meal, serving it and consuming it, the food soft and easy to chew and digest. The atmosphere was of an old people’s home. The bishop had told us earlier of plans to bring in nurses and furnish the place with equipment to look after the sisters in their declining years.

There were a few younger nuns, but they looked even more exhausted than the older ones, because they probably had to take on extra tasks that the others could no longer perform. They barely looked at us and seemed wrapped up in their own lives and predicament, obedient to the bishop and taking on the burden of changes with unsmiling stoicism.

‘Welcome to our modest supper,’ the bishop said to us apologetically, after reciting a prayer and blessing the yoghurt and pies. Again a shadow passed over his normally cheerful and animated features. He could see what we were thinking and understood the effect of the upheaval he brought on these women. His heart must also have gone out to the sisterhood. They had spent most of their long lives here, and now needed to

deal not only with the pain and approaching helplessness of age, but also with radical change in the place that had been their domain for so long.

After our first encounter with the bishop Donald had wondered about this, correctly as it turned out, saying to me: 'The sisters can't know if they're coming or going!'

The bishop seized the opportunity to leave the stressed atmosphere of the Patriarchate and insisted on accompanying us the quarter of a mile along the unlit road to the Patriarchate's entrance gates. Tapping his pastoral staff vigorously in the pitch blackness, his robes rustling in the wind he talked animatedly all the way, promising to ask the nuns if any would be prepared to come to the presentation. By now our opinion had changed. The younger nuns were the ones most likely to come, but they looked withdrawn, exhausted and uninterested. We no longer expected the Reverend Mother or any of the older nuns to appear.

Then, assuring anxious Donald that he would definitely be at the presentation, Bishop Jovan, once again in high spirits, stood for a while with the Slovenian soldiers, chatting and joking with them in Serbian, while we waited for Kujtim and Ajkuna.

BRANDY AND MEMORIES

While Donald left to prepare for the next day, the rest of us walked through the town centre looking for a quiet place to drink and chat. The cafés and streets were full of young people shouting, staring, throwing insults and laughing, music blaring everywhere. Eventually Ajkuna led us across a park where some teenagers passing by looked at very tall Lord Hylton in his long white trimmed beard and shouted: 'You are so cute!' We found an empty café where the lights were dim and the music not so loud and ordered local brandy.

Kujtim had announced his birthday; next day he would be thirty-seven years old and so he insisted on buying a selection of nuts, salted almonds and peanuts which he spread on the table for everyone to share.

Only Ajkuna seemed to be nerveless and upbeat. Kujtim admitted to sleepless nights. I worried about the mayor not coming, but Ajkuna reassured us that from his words and the tone of his voice there would be no doubt about his attending the presentation.

Then we began talking about the past. Raymond Hylton wanted to know how they survived the war and this opened the floodgates of memories, fears and traumas that they could now speak about as from a safe distance.

Persecution of Albanians had been endemic in Kosovo long before Milosevic invaded the region to ethnically cleanse it, and to redress the defeat suffered by Serbs on the Field of Blackbirds over six centuries before. Every year Serb nationalists travel to the site of the Battle of Kosovo, a strange gathering of dignified Serbian Orthodox bishops in full regalia and aggressively chanting tattooed skinheads.

In the years after the collapse of communism, which had managed to keep a lid on the ethnic tensions in the former Yugoslavia, and especially during the months leading to Milosevic's invasion, Kosovo Albanians experienced discrimination, not dissimilar to that suffered by black South Africans under apartheid. Serbs took precedence for employment and Albanians had to find alternative education and healthcare. Ajkuna remembers being taught in homes or makeshift schools, sitting on the floor and being ready to flee attack. This became a way of life for them and like other oppressed peoples they did not question the injustice and unfairness. They adapted. Of course there were protests, and these were manipulated by Milosevic in his famous speech in Kosovo when he reassured the Serbs attending his rally 'you

will not be beaten anymore’, as though it were the Serbs who suffered apartheid in Kosovo. He engineered some stone-throwing at the back of the crowd to prove his point and Serbs outside Kosovo, like the rest of the world, believed him, judging Kosovo Albanians to be dangerous, untrustworthy. The country was viewed by the rest of the world as predominantly Muslim, and therefore not European. Milosevic could depend on sympathy and support from the rest of the continent. This prepared the way for his invasion of the region. It came as a shock to him and all Serbs when NATO decided to put a swift halt to the ethnic cleansing. The Serbs immediately declared themselves to be the victims. To this day there is a feeling of suspicion throughout Europe against the Muslims in Kosovo, expressed in ambivalence towards the Kosovo Liberation Army, viewed as a proto-terrorist organization even while NATO was lending armed support, and a sense that Serbia had been unfairly treated.

The parallel history of the Kosovo conflict has two different years, each significant, one for Albanians, the other for Serbs. For the Albanians the war that destroyed hundreds of mosques and drove families from their homes as well as witnessing massacres of whole villages, happened in 1999. For the Serbs the war that destroyed their churches and forced many to flee, a time of revenge attacks by Kosovo Albanians, happened in 2004. Those attacks by Albanians were also pressure for independence which Kosovo achieved four years later. Serbs ignore the shame of 1999, blaming Milosevic for his failed attack on the region, and only speak about what they suffered in 2004, in the same way as the Serbs in Bosnia when they talk about ‘the war’ are referring to the Second World War in which they suffered hugely, not the Bosnia War in which they mostly inflicted suffering.

Such points are significant, because like the linguistic gulf between the communities in Kosovo, these interpretations of history determine politics and relationships

between people in conflict. If these points are not addressed, war continues, simmering under the surface of everyday life. Random acts of violence continue in Kosovo on both sides; murders and attacks, as well as protests such as the blocking of bridges and perpetual threats and harassment: unfinished business.

Kujtim remembered being beaten up regularly as a boy by Serbs. Once when he and his friends dared to use a public playground for an impromptu football match he was chased and beaten by a group of soldiers, 'Arkan's Tigers'. He arrived home covered in blood. Not wanting to worry his mother he had to make up a story about being in a school fight. Arkan's Tigers were notorious for killing Muslims.

By the time Milosevic began ethnic cleansing, Kujtim had married. His wife was expecting their first child when they joined the procession of refugees to Macedonia and ran the gauntlet of Serb snipers on both sides of the road who were picking off people at random and occasionally taking some victims to windowless vans for torture before killing. Focus on survival suppressed fear.

Yet despite this trauma which the world witnessed on the news, as soon as NATO attacks drove Milosevic's troops out of Kosovo, Kujtim and Ajkuna returned home. Foreign aid began to flood the region with programmes for rebuilding and helping victims, which now included Serbs, those who had not managed to flee.

I remember queues of Serb refugees crowding wretchedly outside the Patriarchate in Belgrade waiting to be housed in settlements outside the city. Their faces expressed both sorrow and defiance. They had tried to drive their Albanian neighbours out and suddenly found themselves suffering the same treatment. I described this in my first book *A Tender Bridge*.

Those Serbs who stayed in Kosovo feared revenge attacks, which did indeed take place.

As soon as they returned home Ajkuna and Kujtim worked with the NGOs that cared for these new victims.

Raymond Hylton was astounded not only at their bravery, surviving persecution and expulsion, but also at their ability to forgive, and to help those who had previously been their enemies. Ajkuna put it simply: 'I understood how they felt. I knew what it was like to be scared. They looked at us expecting the worst. I just had to help them.'

THE DAY

Dukagjini is the Albanian name for Metohija, the region around the main monasteries in Kosovo which the Serbian Orthodox Church claims to own.

The Dukagjini Hotel had been recently refurbished. The price of accommodation, though less than in hotels of similar quality across the rest of Europe, was so far beyond what people in Kosovo could afford that the only people to be seen in it, apart from ourselves and the reception staff who had little to do, were locals drinking outside.

The room for the presentation had been organized with two long tables at right-angles to a third one in front of a balcony, the doors wide open. Light and fresh air flooded into the room as the sun rose high behind the Rugova Valley mountain range, the Kosovo Alps, which could be seen through the windows in all their majesty.

Because the ambassador had taken charge of the setting for the presentation, sending his project manager to work with the hotel-owner's assistant, there was nothing for us to do but wait while staff arranged an elaborate buffet in the next room.

To our relief Bishop Jovan and his chaplain arrived first, but without any nuns. ' Later he explained to us that after a discussion which lasted most of the evening, the

nuns had decided not to come. For a moment he looked nervous. He hesitated on the steps going up to the hotel entrance and asked: ‘where do I go?’

Cars drove up and disgorged members of the international community, heads of OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe, but no sign of the mayor. It looked as though all the people we invited and Ajkuna had assiduously pressured to attend, had indeed accepted and turned up.

Naser from the Albanian NGO Syri I Visiuit, Eye of Vision, arrived early. Gorica who arrived with the translators kept sending texts to Sasha to make sure he came.

Just when the presentation was scheduled to start the mayor arrived marching ahead of his personal assistant, having walked from his office. He looked severe as usual, but at least he and the bishop were in the same building. At the same time Sasha and Darko slipped into the hotel with their boss who insisted on giving a speech.

The only person missing turned out to be Petrit Selimi, the deputy foreign minister, who sent texts about being delayed by traffic on the way from Pristina and told us to start without him.

Just the fact that everyone came calmed nerves. Whatever happened and would be said mattered less than the attendance of the main players, the mayor and the bishop. The presentation itself became a formality, celebrating months and years of preparation. The presence of senior representatives from the international community gave the meeting special significance.

Donald chaired the meeting, but left most of the talking to the mayor, the bishop and the two NGOs, so the international community understood this was something home-grown, independent and being run by the people themselves. Gordana Ajanin from the OSCE tried to provoke Donald into explaining how he planned to carry forward the main recommendation in the report concerning the community council. Donald

politely refused to answer, saying this had to be up to the people themselves, indicating that her question in itself highlighted the failure of past initiatives where internationals felt the need to control projects and processes.

The mayor opened the proceedings, repeating what he had told us the day before, emphasising that he and the bishop were already talking regularly, and also pointing out historical inaccuracies in the report, in the way we had suggested.

He quickly moved on to the recommendations in the report which focused on the future rather than the past, and backed them.

The community council would improve relations between the Patriarchate and the municipality to benefit all communities.

A forum would allow space for the public discussion of local problems.

An interfaith conference initiated in 2006 should be followed up.

The council must educate the municipality on religious matters, the nature of Orthodoxy in particular, given the importance to the region of the Patriarchate.

The forum would also broach sensitive issues, such as the question of Serbian and Kosovo Orthodoxy.

Sasha then spoke for the Serb NGO and challenged those present to support and implement the recommendations.

Naser gave an equally challenging speech on behalf of the Albanian NGO in support of the report. He asked the bishop to open the Patriarchate to non-Orthodox visitors, Muslims as well as Catholics, saying that Albanians were 'afraid' to enter the place, a place forbidden to them. The Patriarchate was not only a monastery but a cultural heritage site which should be accessible for all, regardless of ethnic and language barriers.

The bishop responded positively and after inviting everybody present to visit the Patriarchate after the presentation he announced an inter-religious conference would take place there focusing on the experience of women in the Orthodox Church. The subject promised to stir controversy. I wondered how the nuns would cope. The bishop was implying radical changes which included a welcome to other faiths, and opening the place up to all comers.

He then spoke of the need to inform everyone about Serbian Orthodoxy, raising the issue of protecting its heritage and preserving the peace of monastic life. He described the distracting noise of children playing football on a patch of ground near the monastery. He promised that the Church would organize and pay for a proper playground for them, a bit further away. He understood the need to educate people about Orthodoxy and the monastic life. Donald had mentioned this in his exposition of the recommendations, saying that Islam did not share the same traditions of monasticism as Christianity. The bishop disagreed, citing Islamic Sufi dervishes with centres in the Balkans including a place called Djokova in Kosovo with a long tradition of Sufi monasticism.

The bishop then, surprisingly, tackled one of the most contentious issues about names: should it be called the Serbian or the Kosovo Orthodox Church? He reminded everyone of a historic fact, that the Patriarchate of Pec existed long before the Church became known as the specifically Serbian Orthodox Church, explaining: ‘This was an unwelcome nationalist addition dating from the 19th century.’

He then capped this conciliatory gesture by announcing an open day at the Patriarchate on the 14th October to start this process of welcoming Albanians to visit. This happened to be a feast day and also the beginning of an international conference

on the Middle East. The nuns might not know if they were coming or going, but Naser would be able to visit this once forbidden territory.

Bishop Jovan prefaced these welcome statements with an observation which struck a chord in me: 'We are learning now what our grandfathers already knew.' These resonant words reminded me of the way we encourage people to remember life before conflict when, despite differences and normal strains of human relationships, communities in the past knew better how to live together.

Wrapping up the presentation before questions, the mayor picked up on this memory of the past, admitting that the report for all its errors would contribute to improved communication between the Patriarchate and the municipality, and said: 'The intention of the report is to create relations between people, dialogue between people. Going back in history does not contribute to the process. However the Patriarchate is already doing much to develop these good relations. The report misses out on this, but is more relevant in its recommendations. More positive things should have been mentioned. More should have been said about the importance of the Patriarchate for all religions. The report should have stressed the good relations that are already taking place between me and Bishop Jovan. Remember, it was the people who protected the Patriarchate in the past, not the army, not KFOR. Albanians sacrificed themselves for it. The Patriarchate is important for everyone and should be respected. As to the issue of the football pitch, we will work on this. The Patriarchate should be guarded by the town itself. Six Slovenians can't do this. There have been difficulties, but the municipality regards the Patriarchate as being part of Peja. Jovan loves and contributes to the people and also to Peja. When people come to Peja the first place they visit should always be the Patriarchate. We are already initiating the processes as described by the recommendations in the report. These are acceptable. With good

organization we can cooperate. I need to emphasise that the Patriarchate and Serbs are welcome and valued here.’

While he was speaking Petrit Selimi, the deputy foreign minister, arrived, slipping into his seat next to the mayor. Petrit immediately thanked Donald and went on to say: ‘Peja is nothing without the Patriarchate. There is no place for religious discrimination. Kosovo must be part of Europe. The whole of our heritage is European heritage. In fact all people must visit the Patriarchate. Wounds are still fresh from war. We can’t avoid them, but we must embrace the subject of tradition and culture etc. Diversity was always part of Kosovo’s identity.’

We expected some hard questions, picking at scabs of recent history and challenging the mayor on his demand to ignore unpleasant history, in the way Serb mayors in the Republika Srpska constantly exhorted us to forget about what happened in the Bosnia War ‘because it only stirred up bad feeling’. But everyone at the presentation was so enthused by the good will expressed by both the mayor and the bishop that no one uttered a word of criticism.

Nexhmije Mavraj, the director for social welfare in Peja/Pec, declared that there would be good cooperation between all communities, Serbs included, saying: ‘We will help the nuns.’

Norman Spitzegger, head of the OSCE office in Peja/Pec, described the presentation as a ‘very important event’, observing while pointing out the mufti of Peja sitting two chairs down from the bishop: ‘This is the first time that representatives of all religions are at one table. We are ready to help the process.’

Tim Cartwright, head of the office of the Council of Europe in Pristina, said he was ‘hugely encouraged’ by this meeting, ‘so positive and forward-looking’ and agreed with Bishop Jovan that ‘our grandfathers understood each other better than we do

now.’ Commenting on how the secularization of society makes outreach difficult for the Patriarchate and other religions, he backed the idea of a community council which could address such issues. He turned to Donald and said: ‘Congratulations to the Soul of Europe for this initiative. I feel uplifted. This happens very rarely in Kosovo.’

Musli Arifaj, the mufti of Peja, joined in the approval, calling the meeting fruitful, though issues still needed to be resolved. However he did not want to spoil the ‘very positive’ meeting. ‘We should continue with these initiatives and thank all the people who have developed this process for all their activity and hard work. There should be no prejudice about churches in a secular world. It is important not to disturb their peace.’

‘What matters is not what you feel, think or say, but what you do,’ Donald commented before handing over finally to Bishop Jovan and the mayor to end the presentation.

The bishop spoke again about grandfathers but also gave an illustration of bad political influences in the past, particularly under Nazism and communism. He and the mayor agreed about the report not highlighting enough the ‘enriching’ processes taking place between the Patriarchate and the municipality. The recommendations were already ongoing, but the mayor thanked the report for being a good addition to this process, saying: ‘We will continue in dealing with problems we inherited but which we did not initiate.’

The mayor then concluded: ‘We close the event. Everyone supports the initiative and all agree to support the process. We are more than willing for the Soul of Europe to continue this work. There will be challenges, but Jovan and I will help to continue the process. We agree that to be fully engaged the community council must show that it can reach conclusions.’

Not since the Coventry Consultation eleven years ago had we experienced the rarefied atmosphere, as if on top of an Alpine mountain, when everything we were trying to do actually came together in a way that gave real hope and impetus for change. As with the Coventry Consultation, this did not mean that anything changed substantially, but people who took part went away with a new awareness of possibilities. It was up to them whether and how they took it further. My book *Dust* deals with the events leading up to the Coventry Consultation and the years after when some things were achieved, for instance the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, but not in the way we envisaged, and how a number of projects fizzled out; I analyse the reasons, personal, political and cultural for why that happened. Sometimes, as with the Omarska Memorial project, we had to make do with a handshake and acknowledge failure in what we had set out to do. The criticism levelled against us in his book *The War is Dead, Long Live the War: Bosnia – The Reckoning* by the distinguished Observer journalist Ed Vulliamy, who had bravely told the world about the killing camps and in so doing saved countless lives, is justified. No one is more aware of our failings than we are. But he gets one significant fact wrong: he omits mention of the people themselves, those who had the courage to take part in our process, those who had been in the killing camp, had suffered rape and torture and survived by the skin of their teeth. By saying that we did not include these people in the project to build a memorial he does not acknowledge the crucial part these victims and survivors played in developing and creating the process of mediation, even if nothing more than a handshake resulted. But as Bishop Desmond Tutu once said: ‘Never underestimate the importance of a handshake.’

In Kosovo, as well as in Omarska and at the Coventry Consultation, it is the people themselves not us who matter in the process, a process which belongs entirely to

them; and for that reason Donald has learned to leave the floor open exclusively to the participants. We can only come when consulted, and then invited to bring whatever skills and knowledge we have gathered over the years to help them.

What happens next in Kosovo after this presentation depends on the people; they will establish the community council, and engage with the big organizations who attended the presentation in order to elicit practical and financial support.

Any euphoria about the evident success of the presentation was put into perspective by a visit to the Serb town of Gorazdevac, from which Sasha and Darko ran their NGO.

The head of this impoverished and persecuted community, Slobodan Petrovic, white-haired, tanned, fearless and muscular, had attended the presentation, gave a speech about justice for Serbs and seized the opportunity to persuade the British ambassador and ourselves to be his guests at Gorazdevac before returning to Pristina.

Everywhere there was evidence of poverty and neglect: the streets pot-holed and houses in need of repair. Serb nationalist graffiti alongside crude gigantic penises spurting semen covered every wall and a pall of grey despair hung over all. It reminded me of our visit in 2000 to the Serb village of Krneuscia near Bihac in North West Bosnia, where the once triumphant followers of Radovan Karadjic had been driven eastward by the newly armed Bosnian Muslim forces intent on regaining their country, a state of affairs rapidly brought to an end by the Dayton Accord, which negotiated an end to hostilities and divided the country into two equal parts, separated along ethnic lines. A sense of shame and despair also pervaded that village, a place rejected by all sides, the Serbs not wanting to admit failure, the Muslims looking for

revenge and the international community not knowing what to do apart from sending in a few aid agencies.

The ambassador found himself literally cornered in Slobodan Petrovic's cramped office in Gorazdevac. Unable to escape and squeezed on either side by his driver and a Serb translator who conveyed the litany of complaints and horrors in a sustained loud shout, Ambassador Cliff gave an exemplary display of diplomatic patience and interest, listening with solemnity and asking pertinent questions, but constantly looking for an opportunity to extricate himself without causing offence.

Slobodan Petrovic told us that Serbs out of range of KFOR protection lived in perpetual danger, in fear of their lives and at the mercy of thieves. Discrimination could be proved only with difficulty, although Serbs applying for work were constantly refused in favour of Albanians. Most of the people in Gorazdevac were unemployed. 'Only the international community can solve this problem,' he declared. He had developed the skill of speaking uninterrupted by breathing in the middle of each sentence, before a crucial point, so that he could run straight into the next sentence before anyone could stop his flow.

He talked about the murder of the two Serb boys, the trauma suffered by the community and the lack of justice, the regular theft of cows, again without recompense, Albanians from neighbouring villages chopping down their orchards and woods, and a constant battle with the municipality about property issues and widespread fraud. This took the form of Albanians claiming rights to Serb properties by forging signatures of past owners, people who were dead and whose names could be seen on gravestones in the churchyard.

Suddenly remembering the rules of hospitality Slobodan Petrovic took out a large bottle of lethal-looking yellow raki from his filing cabinet and began to pour it into tumblers.

At that moment Ian Cliff's mobile rang, reminding him of a meeting he needed to attend in Pristina, and before Slobodan Petrovic could draw breath for the next stage of his own presentation, the ambassador had said his thanks and goodbyes, climbed into the embassy car and was being driven off at speed.

Sasha insisted on taking us to the outskirts of Gorazdevac to see an ancient Serbian Orthodox church. Dating from long before the Ottoman invasion in the fifteenth century this squat building, with a door too small for us to enter and the still sturdy timber walls blackened with age, stood in a graveyard shaded by equally ancient oak trees. Surviving intact in the middle of this broken-spirited settlement, this piece of history and precious heritage spoke of indestructibility and the centuries-old generations of believers. For the first time Sasha smiled. This place was his sanctuary.

On the way back into the centre of Gorazdevac Sasha pointed out a large modern building in a field. This turned out to be a health centre and gym donated by European charity. Because it lacked equipment no one had any interest in using it, so it remained empty.

Before our visit to Gorazdevac the Albanians at the presentation accepted Bishop Jovan's invitation to visit the Patriarchate.

The Slovenian soldiers raised the barrier and let everyone pass through without checking passports. It felt for the first time like a normal visit to any place of interest, people driving in convoy or walking in procession to the gates of the Patriarchate. The

bishop's chaplain ushered everyone into the bishop's house and served tea and brandy. Confident and cool Naser from the Albanian NGO looked over-awed for the first time, unable to speak, staring at the paintings and the bishop, whose eyes sparkled as he ebulliently relaxed the atmosphere, cracking jokes and ensuring a warm welcome to people who had never been inside 'this forbidden place' before. Later, after guiding the visitors round the church, the bishop's chaplain asked Ajkuna: 'What about the one who said he was afraid to visit the Patriarchate? Did he come?' 'I am here!' said Naser standing right next to him, with a big smile on his face.

The bishop repeated what he had told us the day before about the Patriarchate becoming a research institute where all people in Kosovo would be welcome to study, and showed everyone around the residence so they could appreciate the beauty of the surroundings and check out his small but expanding library of archive material.

Several women from the mayor's office had brought a gift for the nuns, which they had intended to hand over at the presentation. The chaplain fetched two nuns who curtsied in embarrassment, looked to the bishop for approval, took the present and rushed away.

When the brandy had been passed round Donald announced Kujtim's birthday, and made everyone realize what a special moment this was: Albanians sitting inside the Patriarchate and feeling welcome. Everyone including the bishop raised their glasses and joined in three cheers for Kujtim who sat too overwhelmed to say a word.

Officers from KFOR then arrived to discuss security matters with the bishop and everyone had to leave.

Ajkuna had been relaxed and positive throughout our visit, but Kujtim like me could neither eat nor sleep for fear that the presentation would be a damp squib. By the time

we returned to the Afa Hotel both of us suddenly had a healthy appetite and ordered a feast to celebrate not only his birthday but what seemed to be the successful end of this stage of the project. We just wished all our supporters and friends could have been there also. In high spirits I ordered a large plate of starters, smoked meats, salads and my favourite Kosovo dish, peppers cooked in soured cream. For once we toasted a success, which still felt like a dream. I had the sensation of walking on air, of things happening of their own accord and not needing impetus or encouragement from me.

For once my embarrassing inability to control emotion fitted the occasion. This was in marked contrast to one of my more shameful moments when after the final presentation of the Omarska memorial project a Swiss journalist, pouring cold water on what we had achieved after months of stressful effort as described in my book *The White House – From Fear to a Handshake*, provoked me into an uncontrolled angry tirade about the cynicism of foreigners and of herself in particular. She bridled at my attack and said: ‘I don’t like the tone of your voice.’ She had every right to criticize me, and as it turned out her scepticism was also justified. I make efforts to keep my feelings at bay, but at times the pent-up emotion that people doing our kind of work have to keep under tight control gets the better of me, usually at the end of a process when I allow myself to relax.

This time no one could criticize us. Slightly drunk after several glasses of rakija I insisted on making a speech thanking everyone round the table, clinking glasses at each opportunity, and told Ajkuna and Kujtim forcefully: ‘Strike while the iron’s hot!’ I was thinking of their work prospects as well as the project. These talented people had to worry perpetually about future employment. I hoped they would seize the opportunity to take the community council further, visit the mayor and the bishop by themselves, and make sure the international organizations present at the

presentation kept their promises to support the council, and of course employ Ajkuna, Gorica and Kujtim to continue the work they had accomplished with such evident and resounding success.

Taking the initiative in these matters does not come easily to people who have been used all their lives to following orders, and to being patronised and infantilised by the international community, which is why I made a point of encouraging them. Ajkuna understood, saying there was an Albanian version of ‘striking while the iron’s hot’.

ENDS AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Peja and its surroundings were among the worst affected parts of Kosovo during the Kosovo War. The centre of the town was virtually destroyed, with its mosques, the historic Turkish baths and most of its old Albanian kullas (ancient stone tower-residences).... Unfortunately not a single Islamic religious building in Peja was spared devastation. All thirty-four mosques, the offices and archives of the Islamic Community Council, one medresa, two mesjids, the historic Turkish baths and nine mektebs were burned down and destroyed. A tekke (Sufi dervish lodge) in Peja was also destroyed.... The religious buildings that suffered the most were those that had been designated for ‘state protection’ as monuments of culture, such as the Bazaar Mosque (1587), the Hamam Mosque (1587), the Kurshumli Mosque (1577), the Red Mosque (1755), the Mosque of Vermica (1539), the Mosque of Sverka e Gashit (1740) and the Mosque of Isnig (1630), all of which were burned down and destroyed. The same happened to twenty-four shops, endowment property (vakuf) of the ICC in Peja, which were set on fire and the ruins razed to the ground.... Three imams were killed:

Bequir Krasniqi, imam of the village of Lebusha, Shaban Gashi, imam of the village of Vermica, and Sulejman Ahmetaj, the imam of the village of Novosella.

This made for grim reading the next morning while we waited for a meeting with Petrit Selimi at his office in the government building in Pristina.

His intern assistant, Geneva Garland, a lively forceful American, came to fetch us from the Hotel Afa where at breakfast large unkempt sprawling foreigners talked loudly about the ‘sustainability of democratization’, mobiles rang with urgent messages and female advisers, smiling with a sense of doing good, eagerly tapped away on laptops. A few local entrepreneurs discussed business quietly over hurried breakfasts; a Chinese businessman sat by himself, probably come to test the ground for investment from the world’s dominant growing economy.

Geneva Garland had been at the presentation and enthused about what was achieved as she walked us to the government building. Petite, attractive and dressed casually, she attracted predatory stares from many of the men we passed. We admired her pluck, and she admitted to some unpleasant moments, but brushed them off by joking: ‘Sometimes it helps not to understand what people are saying!’ She reminded me of past intrepid women explorers who involved themselves in politics far from home, and I imagined her maturing into a formidable operator with years of experience.

While Petrit Selimi finished a meeting we sat in his office and read the book about the destruction of Islamic heritage in the Kosovo War, and were astounded at the amount of damage inflicted in what had been a relatively brief conflict, damage that we hear little about, due in no small part to the Serbian Orthodox Church hogging the limelight with horror stories of the destruction of their own heritage.

Our ignorance depressed us most. We had spent two days in Peja focusing on the Patriarchate without knowing that as many as thirty-four mosques, a number of them

heritage sites, all the mosques in Peja, had been totally destroyed. We were constantly being reminded of Serbs being killed and did not know about the murdered imams.

Petrit Selimi was one of the book's editors and as soon as he could extricate himself from the meeting he returned in high spirits to his office like a fresh breeze. He could only give us a few minutes before dashing off to another meeting but in that time managed to initiate another project. Impressed by our presentation and what we had achieved in Peja, and in response to our question as to what use we could be to him in the future, he asked us to organize the next Milvian Bridge conference in May 2013.

The conference takes its name from a battle in the fourth century AD when Emperor Constantine, born in Serbia, attributed his victory to the sign of a cross appearing over the sun. That victory signalled the acceptance of Christianity as a state-protected religion: a relationship which has raised issues ever since, and these are the focus of the annual conference. Petrit Selimi had met Donald at the previous conference and wanted the next one to raise Kosovo's profile internationally. All he required from us was a concept and a list of names. He and his department, including Geneva Garland, would do all the administration.

Not only were we trying to get used to the unfamiliar sensation of bringing a project, or the first stage of it, to a seemingly successful conclusion, but we now also had to catch our breath with the offer of another one for which we did not have to make a bid, and where the financial and administrative aspects would be taken care of.

Donald immediately started to think of a concept: one that explored the issue of nationalism and sacred spaces. Delighted with our positive response Petrit Selimi rushed off to his next meeting, but not before pressing the book about the destruction of Islamic heritage into our hands, and stipulating that we let him know the concept and a list of names by the end of the month. He left us to discuss details with Geneva

Garland, who clasped her hands with relief. She had hoped for this outcome and we spent a long lunch discussing the concept and drawing up lists including names such as Mary Robinson, Aung San Suu Kyi, Bill Clinton, Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, the Dalai Llama and even, with a shudder, Tony Blair and the Pope. There was more chance of getting the Queen or God to turn up in person, but on the other hand we needed to think big, and could depend on Petrit Selimi's considerable charm of persuasion.

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At our final meeting with Kujtim, Ajkuna and Gorica, we were able to reassure them that Petrit Selimi's invitation to us meant that we would return to Kosovo, and so be able to help them with setting up the community council in Peja, but that they should take the initiative and raise funds for themselves from the OSCE and the Council of Europe whose representatives at the presentation had supported this recommendation and even said publicly: 'What can we do? They must 'strike while the iron's hot'.

We expected critical press coverage of the event, but according to Ajkuna, and later the ambassador's office, the media were universally positive in their reporting. In Bosnia we were used to getting attacked by one side or the other, and bloggers on our website perpetually scorn our efforts.

When Donald began the project in Kosovo I must admit to doubting the chance of any success. How far the presentation makes any difference remains to be seen, but it seems as though the people there are hopeful.

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HOLD THE MEMORY

ENDS AND BEGINNINGS

Presentations and consultations are not only climactic events which gather all the threads of the mediation process together, bringing people from all sides into the same space, they are also celebrations. They can be compared to the end of a Bach fugue when after discordant arguments, tricky knots where the fingers have difficulty sorting out positions and key modulations, as well as after brief periods of running together, all the voices finally join in harmony, often moving from minor to blazing major in the final bar. This harmonic shift in a Bach fugue achieves a unique effect. It could be described as an example of 'dafke', the Jewish word for defiant hope: that in spite of the worst trauma, everything the world, the cosmos and human beings can throw at you, you remain hopeful. In the same way the Soul of Europe's presentations and consultations become celebrations. Our experience shows that by the time these events take place the main work has been done, but they are no less important for that. In spite of the slim chance of success or progress, these celebrations shake a fist at possible failure and disappointment.

For me they provide vivid memories that will never fade, whatever happens after. The kind of mediation we have done over the last twelve years and continue to engage in rarely meets with success. Hopes are nevertheless raised that we cannot allow to be extinguished.

From the Coventry Consultation of 2001 I hold on to memories: such as at the final celebratory meal the belligerent mufti of Banja Luka sharing a joke with his arch-enemy, a future prime minister of the Republika Srpska; and Svetlana Cenic, the intimidating vice-president's Serb economics advisor, who had once been assistant to Radovan Karadjic, posing for a photo with Adnan Jabucar, our Muslim project manager from Sarajevo, standing together, arms round each other, smiling at the camera. There is another photograph, taken on the spur of the moment, which

gathered all the participants and remains a record of an event that everyone agreed had been significant, pointing the way towards reconciliation in Banja Luka. Each person in that photo told a story from all sides of the Bosnia War, including the young Muslim refugees who came to help with translation, the persecuted Catholic teacher about whom a book was written, the mufti who survived the killing camp of Omarska, and the three religious leaders who represented their separate communities.

Twelve years later it is difficult to say that the consultation made any difference, and in some respects the situation in Bosnia is worse than it was at any time since the war ended. My book *Dust* deals with this issue, analysing the reasons by painting portraits in words, telling people's stories and recording our adventures not just in Bosnia but across the rest of Europe and beyond because all places are related.

Nevertheless the Coventry Consultation happened. Former enemies gathered in the cathedral's Centre for Reconciliation and were able to talk together, discuss past and present, plan futures and sign agreements however unlikely it was that they would be kept. Most importantly they celebrated together, and shared meals at which former enemies could acknowledge their shared humanity and then unite in a public presentation showing that they could cooperate, despite difference and conflict. Hold onto that memory.

Our Omarska Memorial Project never achieved a memorial, but the final presentation after a year's frequently agonizing meetings, again brought enemies together in a joint celebration. Memories include Rezak Hukanovic who survived the killing camp by the skin of his teeth and continues to live with death threats for his work on a local Muslim radio station in a predominantly Serb nationalist region, sharing a drink with a group of young Serbs all listening intently to his story, and then laughing with him at his jokes. The presentation did not heal wounds but both sides

were keen to reassure us, pressing our hands and saying 'it will be OK'. I remember Mirsad Duratevic - who had survived torture in the white house and like Rezak escaped, also by the skin of his teeth - sprawled exhausted on a chair, face drenched with emotion, not just sadness but also relief and an awareness of the long painful process yet to come. He sent me a text afterwards to say his friends could scarcely believe what the presentation had achieved. The Serbs reassured us that despite our misgivings, despite the fact that everyone knew the work to build a memorial had yet to begin, and had small chance of success, a justified fear, the gathering in itself was an achievement – not on our part, but their part. Then to round off the presentation, after everyone went together to the notorious killing camp and visited the white house, the man who had been its manager during the time of the tortures, rapes and murders went up to one of the rape victims, thanking her for allowing him to take part in the presentation, and asking to shake her hand. Hold onto that memory.

We never got to organize a presentation of the civic forum in Banja Luka because the commissioners at the European Union refused to fund it. The rug had been pulled (*out*) from under our feet before the people involved could be given a chance to establish the forum. That absence of a celebration meant there are no memories to hold on to.

We cannot know whether the presentation in Peja/Pec on (*the*) 3rd October 2012 will bring changes to improve relations between former enemies. But I have a memory, as will all those who were there. I remember the room with light. Someone else pointed that out to Donald. The windows on two sides of the room looked out on the magnificent range of mountains, the Kosovo Alps. The sun shone directly behind everyone, so all the people were bathed in light. Everyone, Serb Orthodox, Albanian

Muslim, the NGOs, the representatives from the international community - all were united in light.

Then the mayor smiled. Most of the time his face was a severe and impenetrable mask, but during the ambassador's lunch the mayor did not stop smiling, his face creased with delight and eyes sparkling.

The bishop also smiled, beaming with excitement as he welcomed the Albanian guests to the Patriarchate. When Father Ignatie Ilic had served everyone home-made brandy, the bishop joined in a toast to wish Muslim Kujtim happy birthday.

I remember the sad smile of Sasha outside the ancient Serbian Orthodox church in Gorazdevac. As with Mirsad Duratevic the smile spoke of a difficult, if not impossible task ahead. These celebrations are not endings, they are beginnings. But their celebratory nature gives impetus to the process.

I remember the smiles of Ajkuna, Kujtim and Naser when I took a picture of them as they stood together outside the entrance to the Patriarchate after their first unforgettable visit to a place that had once been closed to them. They were able to see the breathtaking beauty of the painted church interiors. Hold onto that memory.

GLOSSARY

EULEX	European Union of Law Commission in Kosovo
KFOR	NATO Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
PEJA/PEC	Albanians call this town Peja. Serbs call it Pec.
DECAN/DECANI	Albanians call it Decan. Serbs call it Decani.
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
ICO	International Civilian office
COE	Council of Europe

APPENDIX: DONALD'S REPORTS

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread

REPORT OF VISIT TO BELGRADE, PRISTINA AND DECANI

2009 November 23 – 30



Donald with Metropolitan Amfilohje
and Mirjana in Belgrade

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE – AN OFFICE IN SOME ORGANIZATION

DR, PP, our partners in Belgrade/Pristina and a Spokesperson: third secretary/researcher/assistant at embassy/major foundation/European Commission

S: Thank you for coming in (*indicating we should sit opposite at a spacious empty table. Sometimes someone in the corner is poised to take notes*).

DR: (*Looking around disappointed to see if the director/ambassador or first or even second secretary is available.*) Thank you for seeing us.

DR gives a by now well-honed, persuasive and lucid presentation of the Monasteries Project, explaining how we intend to normalize relations between the Serb Orthodox monastic communities, now protected in their enclaves by heavily armed Italian soldiers, and the surrounding mainly Kosovo Albanian municipalities; and concludes by asking if the spokesperson has ever visited Decani or Pec.

S: (*Only slightly embarrassed*) No unfortunately I have not. But thank you for your presentation. This is a most necessary and important project. Something should happen. (*Pause*) Your valiant work of peace is admirable. I am very sorry our Director/Ambassador is not here. He/She is travelling (*even though we fixed a date some time ago and we were promised a meeting*). Unfortunately we are not able to offer funding since our funds are already allocated for the next twelve months.

DR Could I ask why you cannot help us, if this work is, in your words, so important and necessary, and no one has ever tried to do this before?

S (*defensively*) We must tell you that we are already supporting many people who work in this field.

DR: Really? Please tell us about them! We would love to meet and learn from them.

Embarrassed pause

S: Your project is very difficult, and....

DR (*interrupting*) Isn't that just why this work is necessary?

S (*looking uncomfortable and defensive*) Well, we don't fund religious projects, much as we would like to...

DR Of course there is an inter-faith aspect to our work. I am an Anglican and we will be bringing together Muslims and Orthodox Serbs. But there is more to it than this. This is a project about:

Democratization – people taking charge of their situation

Security – ensuring the protection of minorities

Human Rights – freedom of movement (*the Spokesperson shows more attention, we are on more familiar ground*)

Public Relations – good for Albanians and Serbs, and the chance of long-term Economic Development for pilgrims and tourists

S: Yes, that is very interesting. (*The secretary writes something*)

DR: And of course we shall look out for allies and spoilers.

Donald then explains the mapping exercise in which allies and spoilers will be identified and brought into the project. The spokesperson looks non-plussed.

Pause

S: I have to go now. Do keep in touch. We have much to learn from you.

The secretary stops writing and stares at us blankly.

The spokesperson stands up from behind the table. We shake hands and leave.

S: Good luck.

SCENE TWO – THE PATRIARCHATE IN BELGRADE

We had been told by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, next to the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church – the Patriarchate – that it would be impossible to meet with anyone there because everyone was in forty days mourning for the recently deceased Patriarch Pavle. The two spokeswomen at the Foundation, in a meeting identical to Scene One, gave us this information with a mixture of pity, knowing we

had come all the way from the UK to make contact with the Patriarchate, and triumph, thinking our failure would finally get rid of us.

However, as we hovered by the Patriarchate, thinking at least to offer our condolences in person to whoever might be there, for instance the cleaner who was noisily hoovering the entrance hall, the door opened and a tall imposing Orthodox bishop came out onto the road with two priests.

D: Do you speak English?

Bp: Yes I do, can I help?

Donald explains briefly our proposal for Decani and Pec. The Bishop is not only attentive but enthusiastic.

Bp: I am Bishop Irenej, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church in Australia and New Zealand. I am just packing to return home but have five minutes and would be delighted to hear more.

It seemed that business was carrying on as usual in the Patriarchate, contrary to what we had been told next door and despite the mourning. Forty minutes later we were still inside the Patriarchate. After giving our presentation the Bishop, fully engaged, responded to our chief problem: getting the permission from Bishop Artemije of the Kosovo Diocese, who discouraged all communication between Serb Orthodox and Kosovo Albanians, to begin the process. Bishop Irenej had organized an inter-faith conference of all religious leaders in Kosovo at the Pec Patriarchate, which by its nature as equal to the Belgrade Patriarchate, was beyond the jurisdiction of Bishop Artemije. The conference promised to improve the situation in Kosovo, but Bishop Artemije stopped any development and Bishop Irenej as an outsider could do nothing about it.

After sharing our frustration Bishop Irenej hit on the idea of persuading us to visit Archbishop Hillarion, President of the External Affairs Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church, whom Bishop Artemije held in great respect. Hillarion might soften up Artemije. This meant a possible visit to Moscow, but Bishop Irenej felt this would help the project. He and his fellow bishops had no way of influencing Artemije.

The meeting ended with an exchange of details and most importantly contact with several Serb Orthodox organizations, which could help fund the project. His recommendation would open doors, and this turned out to be the case. Mention of his name immediately roused interest and encouraged support, even with talk about budgets.

SCENE THREE - THE ROYAL PALACE, BELGRADE

Crown Prince Alexander, who does not use the title of King of Yugoslavia, gave us a warm welcome. Despite having only half an hour before his next meeting, he had official photographs taken and settled us down to afternoon tea with savouries and cakes, elegantly served by a fleet of waitresses. He listened attentively and

enthusiastically to our presentation and proposal to bring the monks of Decani to sing at Westminster Abbey on the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

PA: Ah! I was baptised there. The Queen is my godmother!

We had already over-run our time, but Prince Alexander plainly enjoyed our company and kept his next guest, the outgoing director of the United Nations in Belgrade, waiting. The director harrumphed in the background, pacing impatiently, not used to being treated in this way, while the Prince continued talking delightedly with us. Telling him I planned to give a concert of Bach's Leipzig Chorale Preludes in the Catholic Cathedral to raise funds for the project, the Prince became even more animated, promising to come and help make the occasion a success.

PA: Please make sure I know about this. I want to be there!

Informing us that he knew the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church personally, he also offered to write a letter of introduction, and help set up a meeting with Archbishop Hillarion. He also offered to lend his name to our project and so encourage the various Serb Orthodox organizations, suggested by Bishop Irenej as possible sources of funding, to support us, and gave us some more names to contact.

SCENE FOUR - A RECEPTION AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL, BELGRADE

At a fund raising event for a new Orthodox church in Montenegro one of our chief and most influential supporters in Serbia, Vladimir Bozovic, made sure we met with Metropolitan Amfilohje, acting head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, again. Vladimir gets on well with Donald. A successful and ambitious lawyer he is also generous with his friendship and time. He is also adept at using a mobile phone and Blackberry simultaneously, and incessantly. Following my productive encounter with the Metropolitan in May this year, Vladimir wanted me to have further conversation and confirm the Metropolitan's support for our tricky project. Since we had, and still have difficulties securing sufficient funding for the main part of the process, we needed to apologize to everyone for the delay in getting started. No one minded, all sympathetic.



Donald with Metropolitan Amfilohje, Vladimir Bozovic, Mirjana and Ian

These four scenes give a flavour of our work. The most positive aspect of our four days in Belgrade was discovering a new much younger partner for our project: Transconflict (www.transconflict.com). We share the same objectives and are planning to see how we can work together. Ian Bancroft, from the Isle of Man, and Mirijana Kosic from Banja Luka, fixed up our meetings and came to them all. It is so helpful for the Soul of Europe to have a firm link in Belgrade. I hope we can be of use to them also.

INTERVAL

See Peter's second chapter *Fools and Angels* on the journey from Belgrade to South Serbia and into Kosovo, crossing no-man's land and into North Mitrovica. There we walked across the feared and notorious bridge that separates the Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo.

ACT TWO

We spent the weekend in Kosovo to strengthen our links with our Kosovo Albanian project manager there, Kreshnik Suleymani. He will have a key role in the project, working closely with our Belgrade partner and ourselves. We were thrilled to find that he is still utterly committed to the peace process, even though it will mean leaving his job, once we find the funding.



Kreshnik, Donald and Feha in Prizren, near Decani

SCENE ONE – DECANI MONASTERY

A warm sunny day - leaves turning. Having 'registered' with the Italian guards the church and monastery beckoned me, and I enter alone. Peter and Kreshnik leave with our driver Feha to sit in cafés in Pec and Decani and do a Vox Pop about local attitudes to the monasteries.

I ask for Father Sava who is the official representative for meeting international organizations. He is bilingual, fluent in English, and I have been told how sympathetic and enthusiastic he is about our process. A monk appears.

Monk: Father Sava is ill in bed and cannot see anyone.

He shows me into a reception area where the Abbott, Bishop Teodosije is waiting for me. We already met in May to confirm his support for the project. In his late 40s he looks unusually exhausted, obviously unwell and should have been in bed also. I give him a gift of chocolates and make a short presentation.

Bp Teodosije: Thank you for coming. I really appreciate what you are doing for us. But we have a problem with Bishop Artemije. He does not like us cooperating with international people. And we are so tired of these conflicts within the Serbian Orthodox Church. So tired... tired of church politics. Perhaps you could help us develop informal links with 'ordinary' citizens.

I tell him of the possibility of a visit to Archbishop Hillarion in Moscow to intervene with Bishop Artemije. I tell Bishop Teodosije about my plans for a concert in Belgrade to raise money for the project. For a moment he cheers up.

Bp Teodosije: Please let us know when this will be! We shall all want to be there!

He is also pleased with the invitation to bring his monks to Westminster Abbey, together with representatives of the Kosovo Albanian community.

Brother Peter translates. He is a deacon monk in his mid-thirties, by profession an accountant. That is his main task at the monastery.

As he walks me to the car he looks downcast and becomes even more so as I describe to him how Decani could yet be a beautiful witness to Orthodoxy, to all of Christianity and to all faith communities in Europe. He is on the verge of tears.

Br Peter: When Bishop Artemije last visited us he was so rude. He spoke rudely. It was terrible.

Later that day I received a text message from Father Sava, still on his sick bed:

‘I am sorry myself for being so weak to see you today. Bishop Teodosije told me you have had a good meeting, and that you understand our situation very well. Let’s hope you can help us strengthen our moderate approach, as in the long run we can only have more damage from this isolationist policy. We are deeply saddened that in the present circumstances and limits there is not much we can do. Hope to see you the next time you come. With the best Nativity wishes. Father Sava.’

(For those of you puzzled by the above I should explain: Bishop Artemije is the Diocesan Bishop of Kosovo. He is therefore in charge of all the monasteries, including Decani, with the exception of Pec, which is the ancient seat of the Patriarchate and therefore remains under Belgrade’s jurisdiction. Bishop Artemije can and has on three occasions been over-ruled by the Holy Synod in Belgrade. Bishop Artemije supported by a small coterie of monks and ‘civilians’ represents the extreme nationalist Serb position. He does not recognize the independence of Kosovo, so he dislikes any connection with Kosovo Albanians or even representatives from the International Community who recognize Kosovo – which accounts for his respect for Archbishop Hillarion of the Russian Orthodox Church, because Russia does not recognize Kosovo. While we were in Kosovo he issued a press statement that he had cut electricity supplies to twenty monasteries and churches, who had now been without power for two months, just as the coldest season of the year started. His explanation: to enter into a contract with the Kosovo Electricity Company would mean recognizing Kosovo. As a result of this extreme measure, the monks and nuns in Kosovo are suffering more.)



Donald and Bishop Teodosije at Decani in May

DONALD'S REPORT ON VISIT TO KOSOVO MAY 2010

I am sending this report to those who encourage the Soul of Europe, and to those who generously support us.

I have just returned from a short visit to Pristina. The object of the visit was to take the Monasteries Project further, as a result of my letter to Cathy Ashton, the foreign affairs minister.

Bits of this report are confidential so it will not be appearing on our website.

The most important meeting was with Renzo Daviddi. He is head of the European Liason office in Kosovo. He had already seen my letter to Cathy Ashton, and was well disposed to meet me. He reminded me that we had met before when he was part of Paddy Ashdown's team in Bosnia.

I presented the Monasteries Project, stressing it was particularly urgent given the intention of the International community to withdraw the Italian guards from Decani and Pec, and replace them with local Kosovo police. As Bishop Teodosije, the Abbot of Decani said: 'How can we trust those who tried to destroy us?' Therefore our peace building process is timely. Then in the autumn around forty bishops from the Serbian Orthodox Church will arrive in Pec to complete the enthronement ceremonies of the new Patriarch. This will be understood by the Albanians as 'political' and as a friend in Eulex (the EU mission of some three thousand people whose objects are to assist the local police in exercising the rule of law, etc) told me this will be a security nightmare. Our project should be well in place then to allay the fears of the Albanians.

I told Renzo Daviddi that no one had attempted this peace building process in the eleven years since the war, although from time to time various diplomats had intervened.

I spoke with as much clarity and authority as I could. I said that I thought that the European Union should commission us to undertake this work. To my surprise he reacted positively to this direct request. He asked me how much this project would cost. I said that it would be about one hundred thousand euros. He indicated that he didn't think this was excessive. He is therefore writing to his bosses in Brussels supporting this proposal. I have said I will go to Brussels to meet them, and that this work needs to begin. He will write to them, and copy me his message to them.

I told him of my intention to invite the Heads of State to London with a balanced programme of intercultural, inter-religious activities - I said I hoped he and others in Brussels would advise me on the strategy to 'deliver' the two Presidents. He knew of our success with the Coventry Consultation.

I also met with Dmitris Moschopoulos. He is the Greek Ambassador to Kosovo, and has special authority to protect the cultural heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He described himself as a mixture of lawyer and ombudsman, and he was in the middle of a debate with the Kosovo government about the Orthodox Church. The government want to refer to the Orthodox Church **in Kosovo**; the Serbs are adamant that it should be the **Serbian** Orthodox Church. We already had a conversation with the Minister of Culture about this last year. To us in the UK this may seem a trifling matter but for Serbs it is really important - they seek to preserve their identity. He supported our proposal, and asked if we would employ the same process for the other monasteries in Kosovo. I said let's get Pec and Decani sorted first. .

Through the positive intervention of Nemjanja Jovanovic - the political officer at the British Embassy in Pristina, we also met Sasa Rasic, the Minister for Community and Returns. He had also been well briefed, and offered to write a Memorandum of

Understanding: pledging the support of the Kosovo government. This I will take to Brussels.

As well as these meetings, I had time to get to know our new project manager, who heads up Pro Peace Platform. Ajkuna Morina has taken the place of Kreshnik who is now working elsewhere. She will certainly be able to take responsibility for the mapping exercise, and will be able to relate better than us to the nuns at Pec. We will need now to find the very best Serb who will be the link with us and the monasteries. There are plenty available - in a country with over 70% under thirty unemployed.

Meetings don't always convey the feel of a visit. They were set up by Ajkuna, and we were driven from one to another by our good friend Feha who managed with enormous dexterity and skill to weave his way through the permanent traffic jams which is what driving is like in Pristina - occasionally in exasperation taking his hands off the steering wheel, and shrugging his shoulders. Ajkuna was surprised at my energy given my age, and she seemed more tired than me by the time we had finished.

'Still in the Balkans!' said Nick Hawton. We met at the Grand Hotel in the middle of Pristina - a cavern of an almost hotel, belonging to the communist past of former Yugoslavia. Ajkuna said the coffee is no good there. He is now working for Eulex - designing websites, etc. He used to be the BBC correspondent for the Balkans, and had made a short film for BBC World News about our work at Omarska. He will certainly be a useful ally, and as I write this is in Brussels on Eulex business but he will be putting in a good word for us.

DIVERSION. As you know I am planning to give a recital of Bach's organ music in the Catholic Cathedral in Belgrade. I would like to do the same in Pristina; there are about sixty thousand Catholics in Kosovo - an enormous cathedral is being

constructed in Pristina in honour of Mother Teresa. In a palatial, grandiose residence next to the cathedral I met Father Lush - an Albanian priest, and friend of Bishop Komarica whom he had just seen last week. The cathedral had a marble floor and the sole decoration in the vast reception hall: a terra cotta crucifixion surrounded by banks of artificial flowers. I wanted to find out if there was a pipe organ in Pristina. He directed us to the Catholic church. It was locked. The presbytery was locked. Everything was locked. After a lot of banging on doors, the priest emerged – aged about forty. He showed us in to his house where a decorated Christmas tree still stood in the hall. We went over to the church filled with more artificial flowers and where the white altar frontal was swathed in plastic. There is a pipe organ - with half a pedal board, and three stops of which only two were working. The priest was more keen to show us the 'keyboard' instrument.

There were a number of other encounters - one with Andy Sparkes, the British ambassador. It is important to keep him in the loop, but we expect very little from our government; they have no funds for this sort of work in the Balkans. Of all the offices we visited the embassy was easily the most protected. No bigger than a four bedroomed house it took three checks before we were let in. The ambassador told me about a pipe organ in the Basilica at Letnice near the Macedonian border. Letnice has a festival on the 15th August each year where different religions turn up - to worship a black Madonna. If I can be sure the organ is working it might be worth considering, although the priest in Pristina warned me 'that the people are very simple'.

I feel comfortable in Pristina - a dishevelled, chaotic and lived-in town. Ajkuna suggested an 'exclusive' restaurant for lunch (the prices were the same in all the restaurants). We sat outside and watched the people go by; summer had just arrived. Opposite was a park, and a children's playground. Next to the restaurant stood a small

museum: Independence House. In one corner is a Mosque, shops and flats: very different from our city centres. I don't mind about the cars parked, or left just where any space can be found.

This visit was useful. I did not go to the monasteries; they had asked us to come either at either end of this month or in June. There is a lot of trouble in the Diocese of Kosovo - the bishop has now been 'retired'. He was a spoiler. The way is cleared for our work.

DONALD'S REPORT ON VISIT TO SERBIA 24.5.10

Following my visit to Kosovo, I went to Belgrade.

I am really grateful to Transconflict (www.transconflict.com) who arranged my visits. Over three days I had twelve meetings, a dinner and several important conversations.

This is not an account of all the meetings, but a summary, and at the end I write a few personal reflections.

The purpose of the visit was to strengthen our Serbian contacts, to look out for funding possibilities, and to prepare the organ concert which I am giving in Belgrade Catholic Cathedral.

The EU. By far the most important meeting I had was with Thomas Gnocchi. He is the Head of the Political Section of the delegation of the EU. I told him I thought the European Commission should authorise and fund the Monasteries project; I told him this was greeted with interest by the head of the EU liaison office in Pristina. Since then I have contacted all the key people concerned with Kosovo in the EU. And I am proposing that I am invited to Brussels to get this fixed. Of course this is not the way

the EU funds conflict resolution and mediation activities - there is a cumbersome application process which I know only too well. I wanted to discover from Thomas Gnocchi if my proposal for the Soul of Europe to be appointed is possible. He said it is not usual but there could be ways round it.

I had a further meeting with a member of a small EU unit which is trying to create informal links between the Serbian and Kosovo governments. Ben Crampton made an interesting point: the Serbs are not really interested in the Serbs in Kosovo. For Serbia, Kosovo has great symbolic importance but that is all. This was certainly borne out by some of the Serbs I met. When I launched into my presentation about the Abbess of Pec describing life in the Monastery as 'like living in a prison', this did not seem to interest them.

Ministry for Kosovo. I had a spirited meeting with Kruna Petkovic - the Assistant Minister from the Ministry for Kosovo. I described the project. She had studied our website in some detail - and was critical. She said: How can you talk of a peace building process when Serbs can't safely return to their homes? This is a good point and it reminded me of how public websites are; best to talk about normalising relations between the monasteries and the communities. I don't think she understood we will be catalysts - we are not banging heads together and telling people what to do. I am not very patient with diplomatic niceties and usually say what I think. Trevor Huddleston was particularly good at that!

This misunderstanding was reinforced by a meeting with the foreign ministers advisor Danjan Mishiovic - a tough American Serb who thought the project was 'too early', that we only had one chance for success, and that my intention of having a media black out during the process was laughable. Everyone will know what you are doing he said - there are real criminals in Decani, with guns he said. He did not

really understand the way we function. And as for too early - even after eleven years! We were often told in Bosnia that it was too early, etc. I asked Danjan Mishiovic when he was last in Decani. He said during the week before Easter. Of course when he travels, he goes with the president or foreign minister in a helicopter, dripping with guns and massive troop presence. However I prefer to listen to Bishop Teodosije the abbot of the monastery who has a slightly different take on the situation. However Danjan was interested in the idea of Heads of State of Kosovo and Serbia meeting in London. He asked when I thought of this happening, and I said in about eighteen months. He was interested, and said by then this could be possible.

October 3rd. On this day the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church together with anything between forty and sixty bishops will travel to Pec to complete the enthronement ceremonies. Pec is the ancient seat of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Catholic and Anglican delegations will be invited. The Serbs see this as a religious event; the EU and the Albanians see it as political. The event will require massive security, and there are real problems getting everyone in and out of Pec on that day. In our proposal to the EU we said that this visit should be dovetailed into the project since we can use it as an opportunity for reconciliation - difficult but not impossible.

My last visit was to the Patriarchate in Belgrade. The patriarch was away, but I was greeted warmly, and I left a copy of Diarmaid MacCullough's *History of Christianity* for the Patriarch who I will meet next time. The clergy at the patriarch were eager to show me their museum. As I was looking at icons and other memorabilia - mostly from the eighteenth century, I was reminded of my visit to Mount Athos with Robert Runcie. We visited every museum attached to the monasteries. Marvelling at the

quality of his attention, I asked him how he managed it. Well, he said, I have had a lot of practice.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES IN BELGRADE

I have been invited by Professor Radovan Bigovic of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade to give some lectures on Anglican theology. We first met him in Banja Luka in 2000.

I also visited the British Council who have invited me to give a lecture on 'Peacebuilding and Music' - really as a prelude to my organ recital in the cathedral in Belgrade. The British Council also invited me to lead a workshop on a course for young people they are organising on Active Citizenship.

On a visit to the British Embassy I suggested that the ambassador might like to give a reception after the Organ Recital which I hope will be attended by the Patriarch. I will give the recital in aid of a project in Kosovo yet to be identified.

The British Council and the Faculty of theology will I hope cover the Soul of Europe's expenses.

Once the date for the recital is fixed we will let you know in case you would like to come to Belgrade for the occasion.

Vladimir Bozovic who is a well known lawyer and politician, and a friend of the Soul of Europe has promised to give a fundraising dinner for us.

REFLECTIONS

This is really for another occasion. It was cold for the first two days and then summer returned and the cafes on the pavements were busy. Difficult to imagine many of the young people being much interested in Kosovo. And of course with the

recession, there is much anxiety about jobs, etc. I like Belgrade; Zagreb is dull in comparison. Vienna is really geared for visitors. Belgrade is a handsome city in the centre, where people still live as well as shop and work. There is a healthy alternative cultural life - there was no time to visit the Centre for Cultural Decontamination or the Women in Black who recently demonstrated in front of the Parliament in the centre of Belgrade at the insipid apology the Government made about the massacre at Srebrenica.

Financial constraints made it impossible for Peter to come with me. He certainly should have done, since he is an expert on helping to reflect on the meetings and to ensure that I don't miss anything.

DONALD'S REPORT ON VISIT TO PRISTINA AND PEC

April 26 - 30 2012

The purpose of my visit to Kosovo was to bring together the team who will undertake the 'mapping ' that is to create a portrait of Pec to see if is possible for the Patriarchate Church together with its twenty nuns to be integrated into the life of the Kosovo Albanian Municipality. The Soul of Europe has been invited to explore the possibility of establishing healthy community relations between what has been declared by the EU to be one of the most sacred sites in the world - alongside Mecca, Jerusalem, the Vatican and Mount Athos.

As my previous reports have shown there is almost no relationship between the Kosovo Albanians and the Patriarchate. And in Pec there are no more than ten Serbs although there are small Serb villages roundabout.

The visit was most successful. We now have a team of three who will undertake the mapping. Gorica who works for EULEX - the EU organisation committed to ensuring Kosovo observes the rule of law. She is a Serb and lived for one year in Pec. She knows just about everybody who matters in Pec and has access to the nuns. She speaks excellent English and wrote to me some months ago about the situation in Decani (about which more in a moment). Ajkuna is a Kosovo Albanian and has set up meetings etc. for us for these past three years. She has considerable experience in peace-building in Kosovo and knows all about 'mapping'. Kujtim is also a Kosovo Albanian. He is the driver for us, but has also worked for OSCE and international organisations. The two women said it was important to have a man as part of the team. The relationship between the three is excellent. They will work as a team. They are very committed to this difficult and important project - not attempted by any other organisation. They are the Soul of Europe representative in Kosovo.

They have agreed to complete the mapping in six weeks, sending me weekly reports. I will also send them weekly reports of my activities. Time will then be spent producing a report in Albanian, Serbian and English. It will be publicly presented sometime during the week of July 1st in Pec (after Simon Robinson's ordination, which I will be attending). The report will include recommendations for Next Steps. We shall then go on to Belgrade having been invited by the Patriarch to present the report to him. Peter will be coming with me for the Presentation.

The work will be undertaken by the Soul of Europe team in Kosovo. We shall not be returning to Kosovo until the week of July - except that I have been invited to make a presentation at a major interfaith conference at the American University in Kosovo. All my expenses will be met. .

Once the report has been published and after our visit in July, the Soul of Europe in UK will have completed its work in Pec, unless we are invited to return to assist with any work which might have developed as a result of the 'mapping'.

Decani. The situation in the Decani Monastery some ten miles from Pec has deteriorated in the last two weeks. Decani is under the jurisdiction of the local Bishop, whereas Pec is directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch in Belgrade. At Decani, graffiti has been daubed on the walls of the monastery. Visitors are taunted by young Kosovo Albanians; Fr Sava, the head monk, was in Decani and approached by a group of Kosovo Albanians who indicated they were going to slit his throat. From something the mayor of Decani said publicly, Fr Sava said relationships between the monastery and the municipality have been 'put back' three years.

Fr Sava believes that the monastery cannot progress with the sort of proposals we have made until issues around property and the possibility of building a new road on the edge of the monastery have been resolved. These problems have been going on now for eleven years. For us at least it seems that they are avoiding the difficult prospect of talks with the veterans of the Kosovo Liberation Army who together with the Albanian mafia hold the power.

Meeting with Ambassador Cliff. Ian Cliff, the UK Ambassador in Kosovo, called a meeting for me to present the Pec Proposals (mapping etc.) It was attended by the Swiss ambassador and the First Secretary, the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo and the Deputy International Civilian Rep. We discussed the situation in Decani in some depth, and also our proposals for Pec.

I agreed with the advice given to me that at the moment it is better to concentrate on Pec, which may be easier. If we do a good job there then Decani might take notice. Meanwhile I guess that at these two monasteries NATO will strengthen its presence.

This will quite certainly be seen as a provocation. Agreement has now been reached that NATO will continue to provide guards at Pec and Decani for at least one year. Most other monasteries and cultural heritage sites are now guarded by local police.

Budisavci Monastery. We visited this monastery - an outpost of the Pec Patriarchate. Three nuns in their seventies live there. The entrance was dominated by rows of sandbags ready to support machine guns and small arms. Until last week it was guarded by NATO. Now there was a new cabin with a local policeman guarding it. We could tell he was pleased to be doing the job! The monastery and grounds are neglected and the whole place seems unkempt. The church built in the 14th century was musty and damp. It's only used on Sundays and holy days - that is if they can find a priest. The monastery's future is uncertain. During the disturbances of 2004, a monk from the monastery was kidnapped. No one knows what happened to him.

Draganic Monastery. Gorica had suggested we visited this monastery - some thirty miles from Macedonia, and forty miles from Serbia. The monastery built in the 14th century stands at the end of a valley in the middle of a forest. It is unguarded because there are Serb villages and hamlets near by. There are four monks and two novices. Peter and I had met the chief monk Father Hilarion on our first visit to Decani, where he made a good impression. He has now been transferred to Draganic. Hilarion speaks fluent Albanian - much to the delight of our Kosovo Albanian colleagues, as well as English. He was an actor at the Belgrade National Theatre before becoming a monk. Our conversation was rich - too long to report in a brief paper. But one matter emerged which I will take further: The Serbian Orthodox Church is having difficulties in attracting men and women to the novitiate. The situation is the same in the UK - except in the UK there are attempts to try and commend the monastic life - through visits to monasteries, etc. Worth Abbey and Malling Abbey come to mind. I will see

if there is any mileage in inviting Serbian monks and nuns to the UK with a return visit. Hilarion was pleased with this proposal.

Albin Kurti. I had a ninety minute meeting with Albin Kurti - the leader of the Movement for Self Determination. I have met him before. He is one of the few educated Kosovo politicians. I am particularly interested in the work he does at the grass roots and neighbourhood level. He said 'there is no learning without discussion' and 'no discussion without learning'. I like that. He has asked me to make a presentation at one of his meetings when I am in Pristina for the conference. I will bring him Tony Judt's last book *Ill Fares the Land*.

My next task as far as the Pec project is concerned is to work out a detailed budget, and if necessary try and raise the shortfall.

THE ROOM IS FULL OF LIGHT

DONALD'S REPORT ON THE PEJA/PEC PRESENTATION 3.10.12

The Soul of Europe's Report 'Time for Reconciliation' was presented at the Hotel Dukagjini. Fifty seven people attended, including Mayor Ali Berisha and Bishop Jovan appointed by the Patriarch of Belgrade to be in charge of the Patriarchate. Others included the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Petrit Selimi (see below), the mufti of Peja/Pec, members of the Islamic community, Kosovo Serb and Albanian NGOs, officials from the municipality, and international representatives. I chaired the meeting discreetly making a point of letting the bishop and the mayor take charge.

The recommendations in our report *Time for Reconciliation* were enthusiastically endorsed. Not least the need to establish the Community Council as the forum where relationships between the Patriarchate and municipality can be strengthened. It was

noted that there are now well established working relationships between the mayor and Bishop Jovan.

There are three reasons why this meeting, described as 'uplifting' by an international observer, was successful.

Firstly, Bishop Jovan has transformed the relationship between the Patriarchate and municipality. He made the point frequently that everyone is welcome at the Patriarchate. He was particularly welcoming to the Soul of Europe's Kosovo Albanian colleagues, neither of whom had been allowed in the grounds of the monastery. It was touching, symbolic and felt right to raise a glass of rakija in the bishop's house, former residence of the patriarch, to Kujtim our Muslim driver on his thirty seventh birthday. No one could have been more welcoming than Bishop Jovan. (It reminded me of my early days at St James, Piccadilly when I went out of my way to welcome everybody).

Secondly, Mayor Ali Berisha. This was the fourth time we had met. He was at pains to emphasise the good relations between himself and the Bishop. He recognised that as visitor numbers increased so this would benefit the local economy.

Thirdly, the active support of Ian Cliff, and his colleagues. Ian is the UK ambassador. He is well plugged into the situation in Peja/Pec, and he used his considerable influence to ensure the presentation was a success by securing the hotel as the venue, arranging for national and local media to be present and hosting a reception.

The Nuns. None of them attended the presentation. We had supper with them the night before. Bishop Jovan said: 'They are completely worn out.' Many of them are in their eighties, and the few younger ones looked weary having to care for the older

sisters. Bishop Jovan said: 'We are now in a transition stage'. Our sense is that a new community will eventually emerge.

Plans for the Patriarchate. Bishop Jovan had already written to me to ask if I could find academic partners for an Archive Centre he is planning to create. This has already started. I have agreed to help him. He was also pleased to welcome groups from Europe and elsewhere to visit the Patriarchate. And he said 'please let me have more ideas.' I have not met an Orthodox Bishop like him in the Balkans before.

Security. At the presentation it was pointed out that formerly local families guarded the Patriarchate and that it was not necessary to have NATO guarding it. Certainly if the emphasis on welcome is to continue then questions will be raised about this presence. The Slovenian soldiers looked rather bemused as groups of Kosovo Albanians trooped in and out along with Serbs without being frisked and interrogated.

The role of the Soul of Europe. We have been initiators and catalysts. We had prepared the report *Time for Reconciliation* carefully. I made the point during the presentation that it was now up to everyone to take forward the recommendations in the report. If they wanted us to return we would do so, but it is now up to them!

Destruction of Islamic heritage. In the preparations for the report no one mentioned the destruction of some thirty eight mosques, and other Islamic buildings in Peja/Pec. The oldest was a mosque constructed in 1462.

They were destroyed by Serbs during the seventy eight day war. This destruction will not be forgotten, and in the new and welcome openness to visitors to the Patriarchate there may well be those who will take advantage.

Meanwhile, we are pleased that the presentation generated so much hope and possibilities. As someone said to me after the presentation was over: 'This room is full of light'.