Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Tuzla of My Youth – The Miraculous World of Old Tuzla

Vera Mujbegović

Unique and unparalleled, diversified and unusual, the world of old Tuzla was certainly the result of the historical context that generated it, during the succession of different empires. The common Old Slavic descent of the original state of Bosnia was followed by the specific circumstances in the Turkish Empire and the spread of Islam, which left a special mark on Bosnia, with its mosques, mahallas and distinctive Islamo-Slavic mentality. By relocating people from different parts, the Austro-Hungarian government later brought the Poles, Rusyns, Czechs, Slovenians, Italians, and Germans to Bosnia. To these should be added numerous groups of Jews, both Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and finally the latest settlers – the Russian emigrants. A conglomerate was thus created of various national and religious groups, as well as their impacts – from the local Serbo-Croato-Muslim mixture, to the Central European and Eastern European influence. Since early childhood, we could hear different languages and dialects. Moreover, since the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was a strictly centralised state, the civil servants of all kinds and professions used to be relocated from one part of the country to the other, from Maribor to Djevdjelija, so our fellow townsmen were Montenegrins, Macedonians, Dalmatians, Slovenians, Serbians, and others. It was a privilege to grow up in such an environment, which I became aware of only many years later. When at a young age one gets used to coexistence with people different from oneself, one will hardly opt for extremism and national intolerance, which does not mean there were no nationalists and chauvinists among us. Even back then they were noisy and loud, although few, and they foreshadowed the Evil that would come. Unfortunately, people do not recognise Evil in its inception; they do so only when it grows big enough, and becomes a threat.

Maybe it sounds unusual, but one could say that Tuzla was in a way a true Central European place at the time, because of its inhabitants of diverse origin, especially those coming from Czechia, Poland, Russia, Austria and Italy. Only later, when we left Tuzla and got to know other cities and surroundings, did we realise how precious it was living in a mixed environment.

It was observed quite a long time ago that “diversity carries with it a great driving force, while uniformity leads to a spiritual ghetto and provincial stagnation”. The opportunity to experience the world in more ways than one was given to us by life in Bosnia itself, in our spiritual homeland. Whoever has, even for a short time, lived in Bosnia in peaceful times and experienced it in its diversity and multifacetedness, has

held on for good to the notion of togetherness, respect for differences and patriarchal tolerance.

I spent my childhood in that environment, and it left an indelible mark and impression on my child spirit. Wherever I went, I longed to return to that foggy town, marked by the smell of sulphur, coal and salt. In that atmosphere of an established order of things, based largely on patriarchal honesty and honour, and surrounded by my parents who lived for a future, more just world, I was growing up free from religious and national prejudices – and that with no effort on my side – my parents paved my way, and I fully trusted them.

Bosnia was all around us, the people were the Bosnians, and we all spoke "in Bosnian". Serbia was far away, across the Drina, Croatia was across the Sava, Slovenia was infinitely far away, and the seaside even further. We were somewhere in the middle of the country, as if in its geographical centre.

It was a time when anyone, regardless of their religion and nation, but coming from Bosnia, would become "a Bosnian" once outside Bosnia. People call them that, and they feel likewise, with reason. The term "Bosnian" designates, both for men and women, the homeland of a person, and not their religious or national being. Is there anything more noble and enduring than one's homeland as a lifelong determinant? In the word "Bosnian", there is not even a trace of mockery, no offensive tone but, quite on the contrary, it is a word that is dear to everyone. There is authenticity to it, even some slight humor. It is simply something that does not exist anywhere else but in Bosnia: the fact that people of many religions and customs belong to one country, one language, and one geographical location. Being a Bosnian was a valuable heritage in our lives, which made us different from the others; it was a bond and devotion to that beautiful and unique country called Bosnia. Emphasizing the differences among the people of Bosnia and confronting them against each other – the old and tested instrument of great powers – brought separation, division and bad blood, which is the greatest loss and the saddest consequence of the 1991-1995 war.

In those days, Tuzla was the regional centre, like many others in the old Yugoslavia… The town becomes important because of the institutions that can be found in it; in Tuzla there was the Regional Court, beside the District Court, then the Regional Chief, beside the District Chief, the Regional Prison, Military District, the Grammar School (at that time, there were only two of them in North-Eastern Bosnia – in Tuzla and in Bijeljina). Then, the Forestry Department, the Civil Engineering Section for the Tuzla-Zvornik railroad construction, the Social Security Administration, Madrasah, Orthodox Patriarchate, the National Health Centre that operated even across the borders of the district of Tuzla, and many other important institutions.

At that time, our fellow citizens were not differentiated according to their nationality or ethnicity – that category was nowhere in use, neither in a professional, nor private life. The main element of distinction was religion. Just as religious education was ranked first in school, so was "religion" in official circulation. If you were to ask a countryman back then "What is your nationality?", he would stare at you in surprise. People mostly considered themselves as Bosnians or Herzegovinians, and they were distinguished only by religion. However, the question "What is your religion?" would

be readily answered. It was precisely socialism that forcefully introduced the category of nationality or national preference, driven by the desire to publicly and fully express the sentiment recognised as a national feeling. Even earlier there existed the concept of national awareness, typically expressed through different associations, including the political ones. Of course, the people had been Serbs or Croats before, too, yet that had not been loudly expressed, but rather silently, more in the sphere of private life. There had been societies with national emblems, as well as political parties, but that kind of enumeration had not existed, nor any national quota system. One's religious identity had been the base from which a national feeling originated, except with Muslims who had been in most cases unspecified regarding their nationality (only few of them had identified themselves as Serbs or Croats). As an omen and dark warning, some extreme national organisations had acted, as "Četnici", or "Križari"; they were in constant confrontation, but they comprised a modest minority that would only gain its full criminal momentum once the darkness and fascist occupation set in.

The contemptuous undertone that followed the words like "Šokac" [1], "Vlah" [2], or Turk, or even worse "Balija" [3]– these were the words which could be heard at every step in the vocabulary of common people. They often did not carry any weight, but were uttered by habit, and sometimes they bore a malicious weight that anticipated accumulated, inexplicable hatred. Father used to say: "In Bosnia a Serb is greater than in Serbia, a Croat greater than in Croatia, and a Turk greater than in Turkey", which I had not completely understood then, but much later when I saw at work the consequences of this aspect.
All of us in Eastern Bosnia had our surnames ending in "ić", with no distinction among Serbs, Croats, nor Muslims- which represented their mutual, or better said, identical origin.

Out of the 5590 Serbian surnames in Bosnia and 72 slavas (Patron Saint's Days), as listed by Djordje Janjatović in his book "The Surnames of Serbs in Bosnia" (Sombor, 1993), around two hundred – I counted them myself – were found among us in Tuzla between the two World Wars. In Eastern Bosnia, including Tuzla, Serbs had standard surnames, ending in "ić", as a rule. Yet, even without counting, we could say that Jovanović, Babić, Simić, Ristić, Savić, Petrović, Gavrić, Pantić, Popić, Djukić, Ilić, Todić, Antić, Vasić, Djurić were most widespread – then, Trifković, Stanković, Knežević, Stjepanović, Djordjić, Vasiljević, Maksimović, Janković, Mićić, Blagojević, Mitrović, Jovičić, Milanović, Novaković, Jakšić, Djerić, Stojanović, Sekulić, Erić, Stakić, Božić, and others.

Many Serbian-Orthodox surnames could be found among the Catholic population, and the other way around, like Marković, Perić, Tomić, Stojić, Pavlović, Lukić, Radić, Marić, Andrić, Grbić, Vidović, Batinić, Mandić, and many others. On the other hand, some Muslim surnames were present among Christians, like Basara, Pandža, Pašić, Drljević, Čolaković, Delibašić, Žunić, Pašalić, Ponjavić, Selesković, Kurt, while Kovačević, Filipović, Kapetanović, Arnautović, Begović, Brkić, Begić, Žilić, Terzić and others could be found among all three Bosnian religions. The most notable bey family from Tuzla, the Tuzlić family, had a surname which was also commonly found among Orthodox Christians. Among Muslims the most common surnames were Muharemagić, Azabagić, Pašić, Hadžiefendić, Mujezinović, Selimović, Hasić, Sijerčić, Mehmedagić,

Zaimović, Delibegović, Fazlić. The surnames which were not derived from personal names were less common: Zonić, Čamdžić, Kulović, Kunosić, Tuzlić, Čokić, Terzić. Just to mention that Janjatović had not included in his list some of the surnames I have been familiar with, for example, Crnogorčević, the surname of a respectable Serbian family, nor are there Strahinjić, Poljašević, Mileusnić, Lemezović, Toljević, Besarović, and Babunović.

Among our Serbian families in Tuzla, there were some more unusual surnames, like Magarašević, Stokanović, Dramušić, Lemezović, Magazinović, Vokić, Serafijanović. Some of the surnames not ending in "ić" sounded particularly strange and amusing to us children, both at school and in town: Tuco, Cimeša, Glušac, Soldo, Koruga, Popara, Kalanj, Jajčanin, Grubor, Kozomara, Njegovan, Batalo, Pelemiš, Kamenko, Semiz, Zec, Padjen, Rogulja, Peleš, Šipka. In most cases, these were newcomers from other regions, primarily from Lika, Herzegovina or Bosnian Krajina.

Dragiša Trifković in his "The Time Machine", Book II, listed around 40 different associations in Tuzla, of which I have remembered just a few. All those societies acted under the auspices of various religious, national or church communities, and included the term "cultural-educational" as a mandatory part of their name. They organised their annual assembly meetings, they were the donors in different charitable campaigns, and, most pleasant of all, they hosted "parties" once or twice a year, typically in wintertime. The Croatian associations "Majevica", "Napredak" ("Progress"), "Hrvatska žena" ("Croatian Woman") organised their parties in the nice building of "Hrvatski dom" ("Croatian Home"); "Kolo srpskih sestara" ("The Circle of Serbian Sisters"), "Prosvjeta" ("Education"), and the singing society "Njegoš", gathered at Sokolski [4] dom (Falcons' Home), and the Muslim societies "Gajret" ("Zeal") and "Uzdanica" ("Leading Light") at various places. The working-class society "Sloboda" ("Freedom") had its Workers' Home in the building facing the square, towards the former Market. The workers of the Kreka Coal Mine also had a nice, spacious Workers' Home, where parties and dancing evenings were organised regularly, as well.

The so-called "outdoor parties" were popular in the garden of the Officers' Home, at the "Bristol" garden, or in some sheltered spot. In wintertime, balls took place at the Falcons' or Officers' Home, and there was the famous St. Sava Ball, for which girls used to sew special evening dresses. The balls were reserved only for Tuzla's social elite of those days, and those according to religions – for the St. Sava Ball, it was mostly Serbian girls who made dresses, for the "Green-White Masked Ball" – it was Croatian girls, and for the "Gajret" and "Uzdanica" balls, it was done by Muslim girls. The Officers' balls were particularly elegant, organised in the pleasant spaces of the Officers' Home, and featuring outstanding military music. There were performances at the Falcons' Home; some of them were named "live pictures". In 1939, the "Zulumćar" ("Oppressor") performance was organised by "Gajret", and there were others, too.

Carnivals and masked balls came to Tuzla with the Austrian-Hungarian occupation. The cultural societies organised these balls for adults and for children separately in the month of February. In February 1938, I attended the masked ball dressed as a "Dutch girl" (there is a photo in "The Time Machine", Book II, by Dragiša Trifković). Cecile Kulović sewed me a traditional Dutch female dress, and a carpenter made a

pair of wooden clogs for me.

All four religions or churches that were with us had their religious heads, whose presence was more or less noticeable, but who added to the vibrancy and diversity of our town, each in his own way.

It seemed that the majority of them were Orthodox priests, or these could be seen most often in the streets, standing out in their black cassocks. Besides, they were family people who were quite integrated into social life through their children. The oldest among them, and the most pleasant in my view, was Father Magarašević. He lived with his family in the church building across from the Church. His daughters Andja and Smilja attended the Tuzla Grammar School, and the school his son went to was somewhere outside Tuzla. Father Magarašević was in the first group of arrested and killed Serbs in summer 1941. I hardly remember the old priest Jovanović, whose children had been already grown up and married. I only recall their house on the way to the Spa – a flat, old-fashioned Bosnian house with a black roof. His sons were the priest Djordjo, the legendary Tuzla priest-partisan; then Drago – the photographer, married to Mara, a Croatian girl—he died in the National Liberation War; Boro, the engineer at the Kreka Coal Mine with his wife Janja, who taught us German at the Grammar School; the youngest Tošo, a law student who died in late 1944 as a commissar of the Tuzla squad, and two more sons who died in the National Liberation Army. His daughter Seja, a graduate in law, later married teacher Slavko Mićanović.

I knew Father Babunović only by sight – his daughter Radmila and son Radenko were pupils of the Grammar School, and daughters Mira and Velinka attended the Vocational School – they survived the genocide. Father Pajkanović had two good-looking sons. Milan was killed by Ustashe already in the summer of 1941, and Dejan was exiled with his parents to Serbia. Finally, the oldest and the most respected was archpriest Matija Popović, who had already retired, but was also a senator. He lived with his daughter in the house above the Grammar School. He was dignified and had an appealing face, with white hair and beard.

In the thirties, Father Vaso Šipka held services in Tuzla. With his wife and three daughters, he lived in a tall two-storey house above the bookstore of Risto Sekulić. Nada, Ljubica and Vera attended the Grammar School, and I was friends with Vera, the youngest one. Their mother, a corpulent, grey-haired woman, radiated kindness and hospitality. Father Šipka was exceptional among the other priests for many reasons. First, he had studied at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb as a part-time student and obtained a doctor’s degree there. With his friend Sadik Hafizović, he used to study every day – at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, as a rule, Sadik would come and they would sit together to learn. Since priest Vaso wanted to continue his education, they had moved to Belgrade some years before the war, where he graduated at the Faculty of Theology, and then he left for Vienna. There he graduated at the Evangelical Academy and obtained a doctorate, the third in a row. He remained in Vienna after the war, teaching philosophy of law at the Faculty of Law, but he passed away soon.

At the top of the ladder was Bishop Nektarije Krulj. He lived in the Bishop’s Palace, which really was a palace – a beautiful, massive one-storey building across the Church. Bishop Nektarije was a man of modest height, solid and bulky, with his eyes

extremely dark, and his hair and beard grey. He wore glasses and leaned on his stick while walking along the main street. Once I was strolling with my friends, when the bishop passed by. My friends approached him and kissed his hand, while I was standing aside. “Whose child is that?”, he asked loudly. When he heard the answer, he did not pay any attention to me any longer. I could not kiss his hand, and standing aside was unpleasant.

The only conversation I had with bishop Nektarije took place in the house of teacher Stojanović, who taught me mathematics in his old-fashioned one-storey Bosnian house across from the Falcons’ Home, where the stairs swung a bit while you walked.

I cannot precisely determine when it was, during the war or afterwards. The only thing I know is that it was after my father was killed at Majevica. The Bishop came at the end of the class and started a painful and unpleasant conversation about Chetniks and their righteous battle. Teacher Stanojević, a well-mannered and refined person, with one leg and one eye, was trying to redirect the talk, but the Bishop was persistent in his defense of Chetniks, which I was silently opposing. We parted and I have never seen him again.

I did not directly know the Muslim religious heads – they did not visit our house and they moved along their own familiar routes. The most noticeable was mufti Muhamed Kurt, a tall, good-looking old man with white hair and beard, and with an ahmedija turban around his fez. Elegant and noble, he moved among us like an Oriental Sheik. His grandeur came to prominence when he confronted publicly the atrocities of Ustashe against the Serbian people in the autumn of 1941. The sons of mufti Kurt, Asim and Enver, were killed while serving as soldiers in the National Liberation War. Qadi (judge) Mehmedbašić was dignified and nice-looking, his sons were students, and his daughter Sadeta was married to forestry engineer Kudović. The closest to us was qadi Berbić, living almost next door. He lived with his family in a nice, two-storey building above the merchant Jovan Simić’s store. His son, who was a lawyer, a red-haired-blond man with pleasing looks, got married just before the war to Hasija Hadžiefendić. The qadi’s daughter Hiba, a grown-up girl, was, like me, often at the window observing the Corso. I knew all of them only by sight, but they remained in my memory as part of our local atmosphere.

I was least in contact with the Catholic priests. I knew two chaplains who taught religious education at the Kloster during my time at elementary school there – Tvrtković and Slišković. Both of them wore dark-brown cassocks, and they expressed themselves well. I do not know about their fate.
Jews had their rabbis, but I had little knowledge of them. I remember only rabbi Fingerhut, a nice, small man, who greeted ladies by taking off his hat, and when he was in a good mood, he addressed them in the following way: “I am on your hand”, because “Fingerhut” means “thimble” in German. We all recognised the voice of the rabbi’s son, the well-known announcer on Radio Belgrade. His pleasant voice echoed in the houses where the radio was listened to, and Father would always mention: “This is our countryman.” He died during the war of April 1941.

Pleasant fellow townsmen of foreign origin were Tuzla’s Czech people. They were citizens of Czechoslovakia, but they were Yugoslav patriots, too. Some of them were

members of the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia). Almost all of them were Falcons, and they gathered at the Falcons' Home. Every year they organised the "Czech Word" (it stopped in 1948), and also hosted parties for the general public. They had their chamber music group, too. They collaborated with the association "Mladost" ("Youth"). The Vančura, Dušek, Kraupner and Linhart, Stoklasa, Stuhli, Samek, Schuster, Landa, Richter, Balzar, Ryčka and other families were well-known in town through their children who attended school together with us, and in time some of them became "Bosnians" by marriage, although they never disowned their Czech origin.

Mirko Dušek, the son of the cake shop owner Karlo Dušek, told me that in 1924 Karlo had come from Czechoslovakia, first to Sarajevo, and then to Tuzla, Belgrade and Zagreb. In 1927, he married Štefa, whose birthplace was Brno, and they came together to Tuzla, and opened the shop in the Blat house in the main street. In 1936, he bought a house in Konjanička (Horseman) Street from Tadić, with help from tanner Landa, his fellow countryman. The shop was in a yard. Dušek was fair-haired, baldish, with pleasing facial features, always smiling, of moderate height. Štefa, with curly fair hair, which many women envied, corpulent, a bit taller than Dušek, had three children – Mirko, Dagmar and Marcela. Dagmar died at the end of the war as a young partisan – she was buried in Šabac.

Dušek had brought from Czechoslovakia his younger sister, a slim blonde, who married a Cerić, and he had also a brother Bogumil, who was a communist. He opened a cake shop in Zenica. The brother of Dušek's son-in-law Zvonko Cerić, a veterinary student, would often drop by the cake shop in the main street. When he was going as a military volunteer to the Spanish Civil War according to the words of Mirko Dušek, all of them went to the station to see him off. Zvonko did not come back from Spain, but he sent a couple of letters to his family. He died a hero, as described by the Spanish fighters, his comrades. The Cerić family had a big house near Bukinje, on the hill to Husino.

Dušek's cake shop, which was located diagonally from the "Bristol Hotel" and next to the "Zvijezda" ("Star") drugstore, was a sanctuary of enjoyment and heavenly pleasure. In summertime, I liked the ice cream the most. We would sit at a smaller table, with a marble top, and eat our portions of 3-4 scoops. Otherwise, the cakes were of first class quality, products of the Czech school, which Karlo and Štefa had attended. Dušek lived quite far away from the shop, as far as Konjanička Street, so he used to bring us his sweet products on a cart that was covered by a white sheet, ridden by their children, or just by the two of them. The cakes were stored in glass partitions, and they were thoughtfully selected: Bohemia, Cremeschnitte, Dobos torte, Ishler cakes. Being not so fond of sweets, the one I liked most was Bohemia, mainly because of the hazelnut that lay in the middle, on a smooth chocolate surface. I was drawn to that hazelnut more than to the cake itself, and I would immediately take it and eat it, while struggling with the rest of the cake. The price was two dinars per piece, and not only did we go there often to treat ourselves, but Mother also used to buy a larger quantity on cardboard trays when our relatives or guests came for a visit. Dušek was just one of a few cake shop owners in the town – there was old Jakub, and famous Bajram at the Gate, where male young people used to gather.

Back then, we had also “our” Havels – Emil Havel and his wife Malčika could be seen in the picture of the singing society “Majevica” (the book “The Time Machine”). Jan Lešan – a Czech – served for years as Town Inspector in Tuzla during the Austro-Hungarian rule, and imposed the strictest order, the effects of which were felt in the time that followed, like taking out the garbage and the like.

Apart from the Germans, Czechs and Slovenians, during the time of Austria-Hungary Italians from Tyrol, mainly from the towns of Bolzano and Primiero, came as construction workers, and put down roots in Tuzla. A few of them, the Mott, Banker, Fontane, Gojo, Candotti and Piccolotti families, were well-known in town and the surrounding area. They left a lasting mark on many beautiful buildings that testified to their skill and artistry. Of course, they were Catholics, but some of them inclined to the left wing of the working-class movement, such as the Motts and Bankers. With his wife Ljubica, Leonard Banker had three children: Vesna, Bruno and Rinaldo-Braco. When he was arrested and sentenced in the so-called Tuzla process in 1933, the family was deported from the country and with the support of Banker’s friends, they found themselves in Paris, in exile. Beaten up by the police, Banker died in Belgrade in 1937. Vesna came back to Tuzla before the war after marrying Hasan Odobašić, but she died during childbirth amid the 1941 April war, leaving a baby girl behind her. As a participant in the French Resistance, Bruno died during the liberation of Paris, and Ljubica received the highest honour on behalf of him and his merits – the Legion of Honour.

We should not forget quite a numerous Austro-German minority, which was not much noticeable, and which inhabited mainly the working and industrial centres. Certainly, most of them were at the Kreka Coal Mine, but also in Lukavac, Bukinje and elsewhere. The families Hoge, Cuder, Koko, and Mayer, and also the Millers and Kolbs, were in Lukavac. “The Soda masters” – Schmidt, Messing and the others, were well integrated with our people through marriage. Yet, they – though not all – if I remember it well, even before 1941, grouped and organised a German association “Kulturbund”, which was the exponent of the Nazi regime in many countries. They became particularly loud following the arrival of the German occupiers in the spring of 1941, when suddenly groups of boys and girls appeared in the streets, well-dressed in a kind of uniform, dark-blue skirts and white blouses. Our surprise was even greater when we noticed among them some girls with our surnames, who had either a Croatian or Serbian father, but their mothers were Germans, so they wanted to confirm their origin. With the progress of the war, this euphoria was gradually subsiding, so that in autumn 1942 most of these families emigrated in a major emigration wave. The cause of their departure from the environment in which they had been living for decades was probably a big and unrealistic promise of the German authorities, but maybe also the fear of revenge by potential liberators.

That colourful, interesting, intertwined world of old Tuzla would not have been complete and well understandable in its profusion should we not mention a kind of “Russian Colony”, i.e. the group of Russian immigrants, the émigrés from Soviet Russia. Even though of different background and age, the Russians, and their families, were similar among themselves in their behaviour, manners and bad pronunciation of our language. Our language, so akin to theirs, but also utterly different, harsh for them (“tvjord”), unlike their soft language (“mjahki”), was never completely learnt by

them. Their children, born in our country, spoke clearly and correctly, yet, with a mild accent that emerged from the depth of their speech. Their parents, on the contrary, mangled our language, which was charming to listen to, and to us, children, it was funny and unusual. As a rule, the Russian children attended the Grammar school, but some of them went to Bela Crkva, to the Cadet Corps.

Unlike our local Orthodox people, who attended Church services on holidays and Sundays for the sake of custom and tradition, the Russians did it out of deep faith, devotedly and without exception. They did not form many acquaintances among the local people, but the ones they accepted, they respected and loved. They nourished their friendship with attention and delicateness, and they differed from our people in many ways, primarily in their good manners.
In that vibrancy of our Tuzla, we had also one American. A man of unusual looks, Chop carried out oil drilling for the “Shell Oil” company in the direction of Požarnica. When they discovered some oil, they transported a barrel of it around Tuzla on a truck. He lived at the “Bristol”, and he would often sit in front of the Ristić tavern and drink the Bosnian šljivovica (plum brandy). Chop was a middle-aged man, he wore light-coloured suits, a sports cap on his head and smoked a pipe. People say that he is mentioned in the book “A Secret War for Petroleum”.

The vibrant liveliness of our town was evident in the streets. People, dressed in completely different styles, were passing by each other – women wearing veils over their faces and headscarves, then slightly more modern ones, who wore just headscarves without veils, men and women dressed in European styles, women regularly appearing in their black-and-white traditional costumes on Fridays, as well as the country Muslim women in dark-blue feredžas (hijabs) wrapped in white scarves over their heads and faces. Men, many with fezzes on their heads, others wearing hats or sports caps, some with berets or school caps, and a few always bare-headed, like my father.

Due to the diversity in attire, not even the strangest clothing could provoke any wonder or surprise. The president of The Circle of Serbian Sisters, Savka Petrović, an elderly woman, the mother of Kristina Andrić, whose three children attended the Tuzla Grammar school, was seen in nothing else but traditional, old-fashioned Serbian national costume – a long black skirt, a libade short jacket and a tepeluk hat decoration on her head. The Montenegrin women, the wife of teacher Jovan Djurišić, and the wife of colonel Ilija Pavićević, would pass through the streets of Tuzla in the Montenegrin national costume. The Krivokapić brothers, pupils of the Tuzla Grammar school, wore male Montenegrin caps.

The national and religious diversity resulted in a variety of ways to greet people in the street. Apart from the common greetings “Hello”, “Good afternoon” and “Goodbye”, one could often hear “Merhaba” and “Alahimanet”; more courteous townsmen greeted ladies with “I offer you my bow” and “Accept my bow”, and we, children, used to say “I kiss your hand” when meeting older people. The workers of the Kreka Coal Mine had “Good luck” as a greeting, and the nuns of the Kloster – “Praise Jesus”. Therefore, our greetings already faithfully reflected our diversity and origins. At the same time, there was no confusion about the addressees – a Muslim would have never said “Merhaba ” to someone who was not a Muslim, nor a nun could have greeted

somebody by “Praise Jesus”, had he not been a Catholic. A special study could be written about the different nuances and variety of greetings and farewells within our environment.

In the time I remember, there were few, if any, people who could recall the “Turkish times”. My grandmother, Father’s mother, who seemed to me older than anyone else, used to say that she had been born “two years before the Austrians came to Bosnia”- i.e. 1878. There were people even more elderly, but I did not know any of them.

There were no Turkish families among us, or at least none that I knew, aside from a few rare individuals who held Turkish citizenship, for example, pharmacist Mašo who worked in the Eisenstein pharmacy. Mašo was a smaller, partially bald man, immensely nice, wearing a short black pharmacy suit, refined when addressing people and always with a slight smile. Otherwise, he wore a hat and he was fully emancipated in the European sense. Sometime before the war, Mašo left Tuzla and never came back. However, the only authentic Turkish lady I met as a child was old Mrs. Kadić, the mother of lawyer Bahrija Kadić, whose family doctor was my father, and whom we often visited. For the patriarchal native Bosnian Muslims, a Turkish man was a stranger, a foreigner named “Turkuša”, and they did not let their daughters marry the Turks.

Every human settlement, be it a town or a village, has some central square where many roads cross. In the same manner, our Tuzla had several of these centres. To me, the nearest one was the Gate, the place where an old gate had once stood. The name remained and we used to “cross the Gate” every day. There, from the main street, one turned to the market, which had three narrow, well-preserved streets, with plenty of shops, one beside the other. The owners would usually sit in front of their shops, some of them cross-legged, while some would stand behind the counter. While some of the shops were arranged in an old-fashioned way, others started modernising, displaying their goods in shop windows with fresh brands painted in vivid colours on them. I would often cross the Gate, whenever I went to my father’s at the National Health Home, or to visit my friend Saša Bauman.

At the front corner, there was Fadil Šeremet with his kiosk, where my father sent me to buy some cigarettes for him. Šeremet was disabled, with one glass eye, a corpulent man with dark hair and distinct facial features. Later, a shop “Ljubo Miš”, selling newspapers and tobacco, was opened in front of our house, and I could easily run across the street and buy the “Drina” cigarettes and newspapers for my father. From the Gate, a path led to the market, the central square in Tuzla, where the Market was held on Fridays. The Friday market was not every day, but only once a week. Then the square was vibrant and full of many peasants from the surrounding area who brought their products. Many placed their eggs, vegetables, fruits, and other goods directly on the ground, while some used mobile stands. Grocers and fruit sellers had a designated area set aside with registered stands, with awnings. There we could see the sellers from Srem, especially in watermelon season, who used to bring enormous watermelons that did not exist in our local area, and in autumn they would bring grapes, which didn’t grow in our region either. Their carts were big and they stayed at the market until the goods were sold. At the upper end of the square or market, a nice, spacious and modern looking municipal building was erected a few years before the

war. Bogdan Djukić, an engineer from Tuzla, had designed it in a contemporary way, with flat roof and, in a way, it became one of the symbols of the town. In the autumn of 1943, when the whole of Europe was in utter darkness, a Yugoslav flag flattered for forty days on it.

Friday was the market day, and people got so much used to it that Friday became a synonym for the market and purchase. The Tuzla town crier, whose duty was to inform people at a few town squares about different municipal decisions, once shouted: “For the people to know, Friday will not be on Friday, but on Saturday, because the Municipality has changed the market day for some reason!”

The surrounding villages were inhabited by our three peoples – Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim people so, in a way, this made villages distinct, too. There were many Catholic villages in the direction of Majevica: Dokanj, Brežke, Grabovica, Kolovrat, so it seemed to me that the Catholic women were the most well represented at the market. Their traditional black-and- white costume prevailed at the market stands. At the same stands one could see women in hijabs originating from the Muslim villages, and Serbian peasant women from the neighbouring village of Požarnice in a similar black-and-white costume with fewer ducats on their foreheads.

Some years before the war an exemplary gardener appeared at our market whom we named Lazar or Lazo the Bulgarian, since he was originally from Bulgaria. He lived with the Popadićes, a family close to us, and his garden was in the fields near the little Solina river. He had his stand at the market, he always wore a blue or black apron and, in my mother’s opinion, he was the best gardener in our region.

Manda, our local Catholic woman, used to come to us once a week, on Fridays for sure, and sometimes even twice, to bring kaymak and cheese. Her dresses were snow white, and her hands and the whole of her figure impeccably clean. On her hands, there were small tattooed crosses, or as they called them – križići. Her husband was Marjan, and she often mentioned both him and her children, whose names I have forgotten.

The so-called male Turkish costume was worn until the end of the 19th century. Everyone wore the same Bosnian national costume, and Christians also wore the fez, but with a larger tassel. Except for the difference in fez, the traditional costume was the same for all three religions; the only people who wore “alla franca” clothing were foreigners. With the arrival of Austria-Hungary, our people also began wearing “alla franca” clothing. The last ones who wore the old traditional Bosnian costume and insisted on being buried in it, were the Croats, Hadji-Marjan Divković and Hadji-Ivo Ribičić. The Bosnian national costume was worn by Muslims a bit longer, but even they adopted “alla franca” clothing at the beginning of the century.

The Serbian and Muslim populations were akin and close in many ways, traditionally – they exchanged visits on the occasion of Patron Saints’ Days, Bairam and Christmas, they were friends and comrades, but they did not mix by blood, nor did they intermarry, although there were a few such cases. Similarity was evident in both their speech and home life, especially in the kitchen. In fact, there were other holidays that Serbs and Muslims celebrated together, for example, almost everyone would rise early

for St. George's Day, which has likely persisted since pagan times. My grandmother used to say "around George's Day", when referring to events close to the 6th May, e.g. Father's birthday.

In the Muslim female world, there were women and girls who were well known as excellent, exceptional embroiderers. There were certainly more of them in Tuzla, but I only knew of two sisters, the daughters of butcher Pepić, who lived in a small street behind the back of the Poljska Mosque. They would sit beside the open window on the ground floor and do the embroidery. Both of them were true beauties, with completely pale complexions, dark brown eyes and long hair tied in braids. Mum ordered various pieces of embroidery from them that were beautiful and long-lasting, done with great neatness, making it difficult to tell the front from the back. The table linens, small lace tablecloths, and different sets that were embroidered by the Pepić sisters, have been preserved in our household, despite all the wartime destructions and migrations. Mother would always find a way of storing those handiworks in a safe place. During World War II, when I found myself on the liberated territory around Teslić, I met one of the sisters in Teslić itself, who had been married there, so we evoked our mutual memories, as well as discussed the news from Tuzla that was still under the occupation between two liberations.

The symbol of Tuzla, that famous goat that the entire town milked in order to drink milk, followed everyone from Tuzla once they left the town. When meeting new people, it was not possible to avoid the question, i.e. the statement: "Really, all of Tuzla?" I do not remember meeting anyone outside Tuzla who would not mention that famous goat. People would laugh at that remark, as if it had been something natural and unavoidable, the destiny of Tuzla and its people, to mention that famous goat. Someone remarked in a humourous way that it was not the goat and its milk that fed Tuzla, but it was salt, the white gold that both fed and sustained Tuzla, and which, at the same time, caused its sinking and destruction.

But the famous goat is not Tuzla's alone. I was surprised to read in a book that people from Livno in western Bosnia tease nearby Guber by saying: "At Guber, that wealthy spot, nine houses milk one goat, they then cross the line and boast about how well they dine."
In the writings of many, including some great people, there was sometimes a mention of family life being monotonous, and the people in the surroundings being boring and dull. In the gallery of faces from my childhood, there were various people, yet incredibly, almost none of them were boring, dull, or without imagination. Everyone had some specific feature, their own colour, speech and accent, and the way they addressed people. Many unusual and original individuals passed through our streets and lived among us.

One of the rarities of old, pre-war Tuzla was our mayor. Hadji Hasanaga Pašić, the long-time president of the Tuzla municipality, short in stature, with a yellow ahmedija around his fez, had two or three wives and, as people said, more than twenty children. Although Sharia law allowed a man to have two or more wives, such a situation was rare in Bosnia. It seems that Bosnians have practiced monogamy since ancient times, and not even Sharia law changed this. This Hasanaga Pašić, riding in a horse-drawn cab, used to visit remote quartiers and make various pre-election promises, but he

kept them, too. He was an unusual person and supposedly was the only man in Tuzla with two wives at the same time.

His brother Hadji-Ago owned a large shop selling iron goods at the beginning of the market, near the Šarena česma (Colourful Watertap), and he looked the part of an old-fashioned Bosnian merchant. Another Hadji, nicknamed "Kalesija", bearing the surname Fazlić, held a nice-looking shop on the road to the Health Home, arranged in a modern way. Mother and me often visited his shop, and I sometimes went there alone to buy something for her. They had some gorgeous fabrics, such as calico, silk and broadcloth, and especially before the war, they sold various types of wool yarns for knitting. Hadji "Kalesija" sat by the counter in the corner, his legs crossed "alla turca", supervising the work from a good vantage point, ensuring he did not miss anything. His sons worked for him, but the one deserving the most praise for such a well-arranged shop was his co-worker Esad Kevčić. He was a modern man, happy to serve, with excellent manners, and he effortlessly attracted customers to the shop. Handsome, wearing a fez on his head, with black eyes and a moustache, he often talked to me. He loved children, and he himself was a father of five children. To my great sorrow, that good-hearted man died as the quartermaster of the Tuzla unit during the Seventh Offensive, almost at the end of the war.

One of the sons of old Kalesija was Kadro Fazlić, a hauler and bus operator who had run bus lines to Brčko, Zvornik, and Bijeljina until the 1941 war. He was extremely crimson in the face, with a fez on his head, always in a good mood and smiling, married to a beautiful woman. What he did and how he became involved in politics is beyond my knowledge, the fact was that, after the war, Kadro was sentenced to death and shot in a court case related to "Young Muslims".

Every day during the winter, in the dim morning light, the salep seller's voice echoed, and the clatter of his cart could be heard from afar. "Salep, hot salep!" Mother would always rejoice at the sound and invitation, and she would send the maid or me to go down and bring two to three glasses of salep. She kept repeating the same story: "When we were children, our brother Duško would prepare salep for us in the winter, and we greatly enjoyed drinking it."

Almost at the same time early in the morning, before school – both in winter and summer – the bell would ring. It meant that the garbage man was passing by with his van, stopping briefly at each house. Hearing the bell, someone would run out of the house to take out the garbage. In those days, there were no containers, nor any plastic packaging – everything was reduced to leftovers wrapped in paper or paper bags.

Apart from the garbage men, there were also street sweepers who gathered refuse with birch brooms in the town streets. The best of all was the large cart with the tin reservoir used to flush the main streets in summer. In fact, water sprinkled on the streets, collected the dust and brought freshness before the evening, after the day's heat. The cart was pulled by two horses, and a group of barefoot boys would always run after it, cooling off and playing. Watching them from my window, I envied their harmless game that was not banned by anyone. After the cart passed by, some freshness would reign, and the smell of wet soil would reach our windows.

As described in the book “The Bosnian Counterpoint” by Borka Jovanović, the baker who owned the bakery across from our flat (it was the same house in which the Jovanović family had lived before) was corpulent and of medium height, always wearing his black shalvar trousers rolled up, rattling in his nanulas (clogs). He used a long, wooden shovel to place flatbread in and take it out from the heated stove. His assistants, also wearing wooden nanulas, were always in a hurry and worked without pause. Apart from him, in the immediate vicinity, there was the Gregorić bakery, a well-organised European steam bakery, where we used to buy bread and buns.

A special chapter in marking and naming unusual people or characteristics of theirs was nicknames, which were very popular in the provincial community. People got their nicknames, sometimes funny, at other times appealing, mostly based on their workplaces or occupations. If somebody was a manager in a shop, or if he sold shoes at the “Bata” store, he was called “Bata”. In the “Peko” store, a friendly shop-assistant worked; he wore a fez, and everyone called him “Peko”, while his wife was called “Pekinica”. Even the cobbler Ago Prcić, Father’s friend, who helped us during the war, received the nickname “Bata”, because he worked with shoes. If someone wore glasses at that time, which was not very common, they received an appropriate nickname. For example, our friend Abdulah Mujezinović, who wore glasses, was known as Kadija (Islamic judge); few people knew his real name. People with glasses were often nicknamed “doctors”. The tall cab driver, who often drove us on excursions, was known as “Doctor” – I do not know his name, but his glasses were decisive in the choice of his nickname. Even many years later, after the war, our long-term mayor Mehmedalija Džambić was still known as “Doctor”, because of his glasses. Certain nicknames were quite peculiar and unusual and, in fact, no one knew their origin. Our fellow citizen Jovo Stefanović, the brother of merchant Ljubo Šljuka and of Risto Stefanović (a co-founder of the CPY or Communist Party of Yugoslavia), received the nickname “Iberhaupt” after the German word “Überhaupt” – which means “generally”. The story goes that even before World War I, a German was present when some children were swimming in the Solina River. Jovo jumped skillfully from the branch into the little river, and the German, for some reason, kept repeating “Iberhaupt”, a word that stayed with Jovo for his entire life. He was the only man in Tuzla who publicly expressed his protest against the police before the war, and against the Ustashe during the NDH (Independent State of Croatia), openly scolding them, yet he was not killed.

I believe that there was not a single person in Tuzla who, at least from a distance, did not know the unusual loud man called Jovče. Who Jovče was and what his mental state was, I do not know, but in my childhood, he provoked fear in me and I would hurriedly run past his house, hoping he would not appear. Rather tall in height, with long hair and a beard, wearing a linen shirt both in summer and winter, he constantly discussed matters with his invisible enemies, threatening, cursing and fiercely quarrelling with them. The one-storey house where he lived was unusual, and a tall tree with a large crown was protruding through its roof. Behind the fenced yard, there was an empty area where people coming from the countryside on market day used to park their horses and carts.

In our vibrant and diverse community, professionals and workers from different parts of our country added a special “spice”; they stayed for longer or shorter periods in our

town. The mining engineers at the Kreka Coal Mine and Bukinje came from Serbia; then there were the forestry engineers from the Forestry Department, the civil engineers from the Civil Engineering Department, engineers Miljević, Petrović, Todorović, Rajica Djekić, Bojanić, Budimir, and Spasić. Teachers, officers, and other state employees would come “by professional transfer” and would also leave.

The image of our town in the past would not be complete without acknowledging the significance and value of the Jewish community in pre-war Tuzla until 1941, which will be described separately.

The languages, nations, minorities, foreigners-newcomers with their surnames, names and language, everything was merrily mingled on our salty soil, creating both a national and social mixture. From the organised workers in the labour colonies of Kreka and Bukinje to the highest-paid members of the so-called Working aristocracy at Lukavac; from the Lumpenproletariat from the slopes of Ilinčica, Mosnik, Crvene njive (Red Fields), poor and destitute people living in hovels, whose children carried basketfuls of brown coal collected from the pits, to the settled and cultured class of employees with their various religions and nationalities; from merchants with primitive stores to those with modern shops that featured European looks and service; from small inns and taverns to the splendid modern Bristol Hotel. All of them lived in different ways, but in most cases, they understood each other well.

If one day a talented artist wanted to create an “Amarcord” of Tuzla, as in Fellini’s film, a ring of people could form at the end, a huge, infinitely colourful ring dance, led by cheerful Hadji Pašić with his twenty children and the mandatory goat, followed by our noblemen, merchants, priests, Russians, Germans, Czechs, Italians, miners and salt workers, as well as the coalmen who sold the stolen coal in baskets at the Gate, along with loud Jovče, town criers, tavernkeepers, and bakers. Above their heads a red flag would flutter, the one that liberated Tuzla in 1943, when Europe was still in the darkness of Nazism, and it would be carried by Jure Kerošević, the hero of the 1920 miners’ strike. I sometimes envision that imaginary ring during my idle hours, and every time I remember someone else who should be included in the “Tuzla Ring”. Such was Tuzla between the two wars, and such is the Tuzla to which one should always return.

Translated by Ana Stanović Obradović and Mirjana Savić-Obradović.

From **Vera Mujbegovic: TUZLA MOJE MLADOSTI**

Note: Vera Mujbegović, the daughter of dr Mustafa Mujbegović, was born in Zagreb, 1927. Until 1947, she lived in Tuzla, where she attended her elementary and grammar school. Vera studied philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade from 1947 until 1951, and defended her PhD thesis in Ljubljana, 1965, in the area of modern German history. She worked at the Institute for International Labour Movement in Belgrade until 1980.

Notes

1. Derogatory name for Croats at the time ↩
2. Derogatory name for Serbs at the time ↩
3. Derogatory name for Muslims at the time ↩
4. ‘Sokol’ was the name of a gymnastics and physical-training organization that started in the Czech lands and was popular until World War II ↩