

The Prespa Code

Story of the "Lost Road"

Monograph





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PREFACE

Fraternity - a culture of connection

Ljupcho S. Risteski

The manuscript "The Code of Prespa," which contains several interviews discussing the fraternities between individuals and families of different ethnic and religious origins nurtured for generations in Prespa and recognized today as a special value of the area's culture, is indeed the "Prespa specific code." The editor of the publication, journalist Borjan Jovanovski, whose family originates from Prespa, recognized the value of fraternity as a social institution in the cultural and historical life of the area. He conducted several interviews with members of the fraternity for generations to highlight this phenomenon as one of the supporting pillars of the culture of educating the younger generations with examples from the past and the way of living of Prespanci as a basis for good coexistence and mutual respect.

Fraternity as a social institution has probably existed as long as humans have existed. In anthropology, it has been observed in a vast number of traditional and archaic communities worldwide. Usually, fraternity is established within smaller and more closed communities where social stratification is still organized and structured based on kinship relationships. It can be safely said that the social *institution of fraternity*, in societies where social stratification is based on kinship relationships and concepts, correlates with mutual interdependence of the interactions of individuals and communities. Hence, the term interdependence includes face-to-face social symbolic interactions, in which subjects influence each other, communicating multilaterally, and thereby utilizing virtually all knowledge related to the actions taken. Mutual interdependence or calling to each other also refers to more permanent social relations based on social norms, rules, and sanctions between participants who fulfill social roles in certain social positions. Some of these interactions can be intense, and some of them are more formalized and have a strong symbolic meaning (Slavyanskije drevnosti 2009: s.v. fraternity, 79; Dictionary 2000: s.v. fraternity, 320–322).

The concept of interdependence in anthropology is suitable for describing not only the involvement of people in interactions and social connections but also for describing and analyzing all human actions related to the possible restraint or avoidance of cooperation and building social relations. Here *the social and cultural boundaries* come to the fore (Lubash 2021: 90–95).

In the context of considering social interdependencies, the institution of fraternity/sorority in ethnology and anthropology is seen as an opportunity for realizing interactions between social actors, as long as the set symbolic boundaries allow or justify it.

In the Balkans, fraternity and sorority have been, and in some regions still are, a social phenomenon that provides a certain stability, peace, and security to communities that live and share a common cultural space.

In ethnological and anthropological literature, *fraternity* is considered one of the most significant social institutions for social hierarchization and kinship connection. Fraternity is a category of ritual spiritual kinship on the same level as blood kinship, and it is recognized as a culture of connection, especially in living conditions where communities with different ethnic and religious affiliations have opportunities for developing animosity, mutual impatience, or unequal competition. Fraternity represents a regular social institution in such cases through which individuals, families, entire generations, and wider communities ensure solid relations, mutual respect, and nurture the culture of good neighborliness and coexistence. Besides enabling the stability of relations between fraternal individuals, families, and communities, fraternity also provides real grounds for communion between members of ethnic/religious differences without crossing lines that may lead to conflict. Therefore, many social researchers highlight the role of fraternity as a cohesive factor in societies where differences might have differentiating roles.

The spirit of fraternity

The tradition of fraternization in the Balkans is long-lasting, and they bear witness to it the written, but much more the ethnographic and folklore materials preserved through the forms of oral transmission. Ritual forms of fraternization were different, mostly very simple, but with extremely strong symbolism. Often, people who fraternized exchanged only a handful of land, because the earth had the greatest meaning for people, it is the giver of life. The earth also has the symbolism of the oath and the given word of both fraternizing parties.

The fraternization could also be done by exchanging one's own hats, but it was usually done by mixing blood, or rather drinking blood ("brother, drink blood" – Tanoviš 1927: 277). The blood mixing was done by siblings pricking or cutting the hand, sucking in the mouth and kissing each other or by drinking (Tanoviš 1927: 276–277). Due to mixing of blood, fraternity was considered equal in strength and value to blood kinship. The fraternization was done on the hearth, on the threshold of the house, by the river, in the holy place (church, mosque) and in other places (Radul 2013: 32–36).

Fraternity and reconciliation

Fraternity played an extremely significant role in reconciling two "blooded" families. In order to "reconcile the blood," a ceremony of fraternization (drinking blood) was organized between the families. Article 140 of "The Canon of Lek Dukagjini" states:

"988. After the hearts of the house of the slain and the house of the murderer are calmed, they will drink each other's blood.

989. They take two small glasses, fill them halfway with water or brandy; one of the friends gets up, ties their two little fingers, pricks them with a needle, letting a drop of blood into the two cups.

990. After mixing the blood and mixing it well, they exchange glasses and, crossing their hands, drink the other's blood. Accompanied by thousands of congratulations, they shoot guns and become new brothers as from one father and one mother." (The Canon of Lek Dukagjini 1994: art. 140, p. 188)

Fraternity, adversity, and mutual aid

Ethnology mentions that one of the reasons for twinning is adversity. In cases of difficult socio-economic and military conditions, families often found themselves in different situations, some in bad and others in slightly better ones. Solidarity and a helping hand in such conditions meant a lot. Such are the examples that are mentioned as motives for the twinning of the Popovci family from Dolno Dupeni and the Sherifi family from Nakolec.

"The motive is first of all solidarity in the face of misfortune. For example, Nakole is being relocated, a decision of the then authorities because it is threatened by artillery fire. And then families call and call them: 'Come to us.' And those good relations probably existed before. /.../ No, but they existed deeper in life as mutual - mutual respect, friendship, and simply friends call them here..."

"Our fraternity, of our Popovci family, with the Sherifi family from Nakolec, has been strengthened and concretized to the extent that it is realized today, so to speak, during the First World War. The vilage of Nakolec in World War I was mainly displaced because it was on the trajectory of the artillery clash between the two opposing sides. /.../ In that sense, the family, a part of the family of... Sherifi, above all the family of Shukri Sherifi, with sons Beche and Zaljo and daughter Kadime are connected with Popovci. That is, the Popovci are their hosts who welcome them into their home. They settle in the houses of Popovci and live together with Popovci for 5 years. /.../ Since then, that family, in particular, was the core of a great friendship between Popovci and Sherifovci as a whole..."

Fraternity as a social institution implies obligations and responsibilities between fraternal and fraternal families and communities. According to common law, siblings, as close relatives, are obliged to help individuals or the entire sibling family in case of need. Such cases were observed in conversations about fraternal families between Macedonians and Albanians in Prespa.

“Because we’re small communities, we rely on each other more. In a big city, you might not even know your neighbors, but here we need each other. When times were tough, we helped each other out with things like oxen and donkeys. It was a poor time, but we stuck together. And that creates a bond. You know that if someone helps you once, you should be willing to help them in return. It’s just the right thing to do.”

Fraternities and religious and ethnic endogamy

In the history of coexistence in the territory of Macedonia, the principle of religious and ethnic endogamy was generally practiced. This means that although there were some examples of marriages between members of different religious or ethnic communities, they were not frequent, nor were they socially considered acceptable. Religious and ethnic endogamy could be seen as a social boundary that was difficult to cross. In many cases, the institution of fraternity supported and demarcated such a border, and in that sense, fraternity, as much as it connects, maintains the boundaries and distance between different communities. Twinning prohibits the possibility of possible marriage of individuals from both sides, who are now relatives.

In “The Canon of Lek Dukagjini”, it is stated that “fraternization that occurs by drinking blood, intermarriage between twin brothers, their houses, and hearths is forever prohibited” (“The Canon of Lek Dukagjini” 1995: art. 103, p. 150).

From the field materials and conversations published in the book, it can be noted that great importance is still attached to fraternity in Prespa. First of all, it is seen as a valuable tradition that is nurtured and supported to this day, although, at least from the available materials, it is not known whether new fraternities are created in Prespa or only the old existing ones are maintained. However, fraternity, together with migrant work, is perceived as a specific characteristic, social arrangement, and culture of living, and as special values of Prespa. They are the *modus vivendi* of Prespa, despite the fact that the area, like many others, has remained on the margins and without people for decades. Profiteering is no longer Prespa's way of life, but emigration. Emigration and globalization are most likely the reasons why fraternization is no longer a current social doctrine of maintaining and supporting stability, solidarity, and well-being between individuals and communities. Today, if there are any, they are mutually connected and dependent on other socio-political factors and actors, who, without taking into account the traditional forms of social hierarchization and establishing balance and stability, try to import "new" forms of multiculturalism and mutual respect.

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The Code of Prespa

I know Prespa almost as well as I know myself. Every time I walk towards Prespa and reach the village of Slivnica, where the so-called Dolna Prespa begins, I am overjoyed by the unique beauty that I describe in my works as a tamed wilderness. It is wilderness because it lies at the foothills of Baba Planina and Galichica and has been abandoned, for better or worse, by the chaotic institutional regime of the state to which it belongs. And tamed because I experience it and remember it in an atmosphere of peace and pronounced mystical calm.

It is not by chance that this region contains layers of chronologically arranged artifacts that bear witness to an exceptional civilizational dynamic from antiquity to the present, which testify to the presence and coexistence of different cultures.

In just a few villages with no more than 500 inhabitants, which represent the last remaining population due to mass migration resulting from extremely unfavorable socio-economic conditions, you can find Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, and Roma, all with family roots deeply embedded in Prespa over the centuries. Clarinetist Nazmija is Roma and has lived for a century. Together with Zizo and Zaim, as a band, they have a vast repertoire of Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, and Romani songs with which they have played at all weddings and village celebrations in the past. When I met Nazmija alive and well at 100 years old and he told me about the past and his Prespa origins, he remembered that his grandfather, born in the village of Nakolec, died at exactly 100 years old when Nazmija was very young. Nazmija is living proof of the Roma community's presence in Prespa for at least three centuries. The presence of Macedonians, Albanians, and Turks, Christians and Muslims, speaks to artifacts from the Middle Ages, which were left to the mercy of nature and forgotten by institutions.



To return to my understanding of Prespa as a serene wilderness, let me begin by stating that I have been living parallel lives in Prespa and Skopje for the past 56 years. In the 1980s, the emergence of Milosevic's aggressive nationalism into Macedonia and the ugly Albanian- and Islamophobic rhetoric that quickly swept the capital left me feeling confused. Skopje was filled with hatred, but Prespa remained calm and peaceful as always. Macedonians, Albanians... live in peace and togetherness. They celebrate together at weddings, funerals, and other occasions. My Macedonian peers speak Albanian, and the Albanians, on the other hand, speak Macedonian in the full glory of that dialect which is at the root of the Macedonian literary language. In that sense, I lived in two parallel worlds.

Over time, many events took place in recent history that shed a lot of blood in the Balkans due to primitive nationalisms. The wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, and in our country in 2001 were bloody episodes that were rejected by Prespa as if she were hermetically protected under a glass bell. In the midst of the deafening noise of arms all over the Balkans, not one bad word was said about each other in Prespa. Everything went on as it should, peacefully and calmly, in a life regulated by some unwritten or signed Ohrid agreement that everyone unconditionally respects, carefully guarding its essence as something sacred.

As a journalist, I have followed all the significant events in the development of Macedonia's independence, including the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which, even after 20 years of its signing, is perceived by a large part of Macedonian society as something imposed from the outside, as something foreign, like a foreign body that needs to be thrown out. One of the authors of that agreement is professor Vlado Popovski, born in the village of Dolno Dupeni. In a long conversation with him, as between two people from Prespa, we talked about that unnatural resistance to the norms of the Ohrid Agreement that regulate the coexistence of diversities in Macedonia. As the professor knows quietly and calmly with his great knowledge of history and his Prespa life experience, he explained to me like this:

"The definitions that it was imposed, that it fell from the sky and that it has nothing to do with the continuity of Macedonian history and legal thought and Macedonian constitutions, are completely incorrect. Unfortunately, my colleague Svetomir Škarić also mentioned a definition that was imposed by the USA, but that is far from the truth. The Ohrid Agreement is a return to the forgotten path of Macedonians' struggle for their own state and in that sense it is a correction of the neglected path of the development of the Macedonian state. The first term refers to the struggle of the Macedonians for their own state until the Second World War when they did not have their own state, and the second term refers to the development of the Macedonian state from 1944 to 1991. The argument for the first claim, during the 19th century, was made by the first generation that raised the question of Macedonia as a separate political unit in the Balkans. That generation incorporated the concept of the Ohrid Agreement into the idea of creating a Macedonian state. It is about the Macedonian League from 1880 and its Constitution, the Constitution for the future constitutional arrangement of the Macedonian state adopted by the Macedonian League in 1880.

It is an act submitted to the European Commission after the Treaty of Berlin and legitimized on the basis of Article 23 of that treaty. The act stated that all areas that do not receive a special solution will be reformed as self-governing areas within the Turkish Empire, in accordance with the Cretan Statute of 1868. This constitution aimed to create equality, both political and legal, for all peoples living in a province. Macedonia has always been a multi-ethnic society, and has never been mono-ethnic. The Macedonian generation was aware of the fact that Macedonian Slavs and Albanians, Vlachs, Greeks, Turks, and other peoples lived in Macedonia, interpenetrated

with each other. They conceived the Macedonian state as a common one, not only as a homeland and society, but also as a common state.

According to the Constitution offered by the Macedonian League to the European Commission, the number of deputies in the national assembly, the division of ministries, and the joint collective presidency were foreseen according to the number of the various groups. The presidency would be headed by a representative of the majority community, and there would also be representatives from all the communities in that presidency as the supreme state body. The state would guarantee equality to all individuals regardless of their origin. In the area of special national interests, such as language and religion, the state would respect the decisions of the so-called ecclesiastical municipalities and bodies. When a law had to be passed to resolve these collective rights, there was no principle of overvoting. If someone was outvoted, then the collective presidential institute would finally decide on these issues. In 1988, a national assembly and a government were formed, including Macedonians, Albanians, Vlachs, Greeks, and other groups according to their presence. That Constitution, unfortunately, was not accepted, and the Macedonian movement was defeated, but the first generation left that document as a signature of the profile of the Macedonian state, which naturally stems from the profile of the society. That is why it is freely said that the Ohrid Agreement is a return to the forgotten path”¹

¹ <https://novatv.mk/intervju-so-profesor-vlado-popovski-ohridskiot-dogovor-e-vrakane-na-zaboraveniot-pat-na-makedonskata-drzhavnost/>



professor Vlado Popovski

The "forgotten path" was a definition that aroused curiosity to search for the ingredients of that forgotten Macedonian substance. Professor Vlado Popovski's family, the Popovci from Dolno Dupeni, is just one of those families that have nurtured fraternity from time immemorial until today. The Popovci family is fraternal with the Sherifi family from Nakolec.

"During World War I, the village of Nakolec was mainly displaced because it was on the trajectory of the artillery clash between the two opposing sides. The family of Shukri Sharifi, including his sons Beche and Zaljo, and daughter Kadime, are connected with Popovci. The Popovci family welcomed them into their home, where they lived together for five years. Some fields were divided from Popovci so that the Sherifi family could produce their own agricultural products such as corn, pumpkins, grain, etc. The children of both families grazed the cattle together. After living together for five years, Zaljo shared with Professor Popovski that they grew up with the children of Popovci. Since then, that family in particular was the core of a great friendship between Popovci and Sherifovci as a whole. The respect that the members of these two families have for each other to this day is difficult to describe, and their deeply human relationship should be experienced in their mutual conversation."



Otherwise, Professor Popovski documented significant episodes of Macedonian-Albanian relations since the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, which unfortunately are little known in the Macedonian educational system. Popovski is the author of the book "The Albanian National Movement (1830-1912)".

"In the Eastern crisis, when the Turkish army was on the offensive, the Albanian League gave an order not to participate in the military campaigns against the Macedonians who had raised an uprising. The Rázlovec Uprising lasted a little, however, the Kresna Uprising from October 5, 1878, to May 2, 1879, lasted longer than the Ilinden Uprising. It covered 36 districts. The order of the Albanian League was not to take part against the insurgents, and later, there were joint agreements between them. It is elaborated in the work of Katerina Todorovska, an Albanologist, who specifically investigates the issue of Macedonian-Albanian relations," Vlado Popovski tells us in our conversation lasting several hours, in which there are many more details that speak about what he defines with extraordinary precision as the "forgotten way."

The fraternity of Zdravko and Malik

In search of the traces of the "forgotten way" pointed out to me by the professor, I reached Zdravko Dzajkovski and Malik Alimi, the former from the village of Ljubojno, the latter from the village of Nakolec. I found them sitting at a tasting of the new brandy in Zdravko's yard, in front of which the view of Prespa Lake stretched. "Where are you, brothers?" I called out to them. They were surprised, wondering how I had learned about their fraternity. I told them the story of my interest, and the conversation quickly began.

MALIK: Our families became fraternal even in Turkish times. Fourth or fifth generation, I might say. And my brother and I still keep that tradition.

ZDRAVKO: And we will continue to keep it.

MALIK: And we will treat each other like people... normal people. How else?...

Their fraternity began a long time ago. They say that they are fourth-generation siblings. The fraternity was started by their great-grandfathers, and that relationship of theirs has played a fateful role for the Prespa villages, which this fraternity has saved from being burned.



Zdravko Dzajkovski

MALIK: My grandfather used to say it. His grandfather was an officer in the Turkish army. The barracks were in Nakolec at that time, and Nakolec was also a municipality. They were friends, brothers, before the event happened, the murder of the bimbash in Ljubojno. And then the army became alarmed, and they gathered the cousins, lovers here in the field to shoot them all and burn the villages. That's when my great-grandfather, Alim, who was a colonel in the Turkish army then, shouted to the general to wait and not rush because they didn't know if the people who killed the bimbash were from there. They decided not to burn the villages and shoot all the

men, which was their initial decision. Zdravka's great-grandfather called my great-grandfather Alim and said, "Brothers, it's not our fault what's happening here," and he called to the general to stop. Thanks to them, Brajcino and Ljubočno were saved from being burned.

When the Turks left, the Serbs came to the villages. A new government that liquidated everyone who was close to the Ottomans.

MALIK: My great-grandfather Alim took his great-grandfather, they hid him in Brajcino for two weeks. Was that right?

ZDRAVKO: Yes, yes.

MALIK: At home with them.

ZDRAVKO: He hid him because... They should have killed his grandfather.

BORJAN: Who should kill him?

MALIK: The Serbs who came.

ZDRAVKO: When the Serbs came after that.

MALIK: They were looking for Alima.

MALIK: And they hid it.

ZDRAVKO: And they took him home and kept him, like family, like blood, like their own.



Malik Alimi

Since then, that fraternity has been passed down from generation to generation. Malik remembers the words of his now deceased mother and father.

MALIK: Both my father and mother said: "You should have that family as a family, as part of your house, as your family." They kept saying that.

And now it's like a part of my house, a part of my family. That... How... I don't know how to explain.

ZDRAVKO: It is a nice feeling when you have an old friend, you feel good deep down.

MALIK: It's been for generations, it's been nurtured.

ZDRAVKO: My father told me about his grandfather Veko. Do you understand me? And so...

BORJAN: And what legacy did they leave you?

ZDRAVKO: As soon as someone in the house says good words to you, you will hear well, you will understand well and you will behave well and respect... you understand how?...

Our conversation continued with the memories of Zdravko and Malik about how they helped each other.

MALIK: We do not share. Well, in Nakolec, whether it was a wedding or a funeral, for better or for worse, we all went. God forbid, everything has been destroyed, a barn, someone's house has burned down. Everyone gets up to help.

ZDRAVKO: Everyone will help.

MALIK: ... Help.

MALIK: We renovated the mosque maybe 25 years ago, maybe 30 years ago, every Macedonian came with a car...

ZDRAVKO: I cleaned the installation, the electricity...

MALIK: Well. A truckload of stone, or sand, or... The Church of St. Nicholas below, what is it, it was about to collapse...

ZDRAVKO: Uncle made it for you.

MALIK: Yes, my uncle Ljako...

ZDRAVKO: He organized it.

MALIK: Organized and collected money in the United States, renovated it, I don't know if you went...

ZDRAVKO: Borjan knows where Saint Nicholas is.

Furthermore, we inevitably reached the episode of 2001, when those military clashes took place in Macedonia that threatened the entire territory of the country. Prespa, I also remember, there was no episode that would disturb the harmony of coexistence. I also asked Malik and Zdravko who, however, know better than me as residents of those villages.

ZDRAVKO: We didn't have a chicken missing in our house. Nor a man...

MALIK: We didn't witness any insults or fights...

ZDRAVKO: Sin from God... Sin from God to say that someone hurt someone or said bad words to them.

MALIK: Well, that's what coexistence is, which you said earlier.

ZDRAVKO: And culture. Our mentality is a little different. A little more... much tamer, much more advanced.

MALIK: That's why we are proud of the coexistence we have here.

I was intrigued by this self-praise of Zdravko that they are, as he says, "tame", so I asked what it is that separates them from others. And Malik seemed to be waiting for me with the question.

MALIK: Prespanians, whether Albanians or Macedonians, started working in labor 200 years ago.

ZDRAVKO: In the year of '36, my grandfather Trajko came to Brajcino with a Ford. The road was made for him, you know? Everywhere the road is washed down by the bridge... for the Ford to drive.

MALIK: And he has done something else. Let this be more civilized, more... closer between people...

ZDRAVKO: Well, it's different for you when you see the world.

MALIK: Because in America you have people from all over the world, your neighbor can be from China, from Afghanistan, from Pakistan, from you don't know where. And you have to live with your neighbor. Here in America, where we lived, our closest neighbors were Italians, on the other side were Germans and you get closer, you don't see who is who. And there is something here... logic, it is true, that I call you Prespanci... They brought another culture with them.

And so, from one story to another, it got dark in Zdravko's yard. There was also the conversation about the knowledge of languages and my fascination with the fact that many Macedonians, and among them many children, speak Albanian, while in Skopje, on what is called the political scene, there is no courage to even open the topic of the need for Macedonian children to learn I am looking for an optional Albanian language so that they can be closer to their fellow ethnic Albanians.

MALIK: Well, in Nakolec, all the Macedonians...

ZDRAVKO: They talk more, more beautifully than him. This one forgot Albanian.

MALIK: If I called my younger brother Caneta today, and talked in Albanian with him, you wouldn't feel it. Not only Cane, all of him.

ZDRAVKO: Hey everyone, what about Vasil...

MALIK: Everyone, everyone.

ZDRAVKO: What about all of them, these Purdevci more, all but one.

MALIK: Everyone is Albanian here.

ZDRAVKO: And they grew up together.

MALIK: We grew up together.

Before the end of this long session of ours in Zdravko's yard, politics inevitably came up, as is the order here... Jokingly, but very important for my story, Zdravko, otherwise a vocal supporter of a party, tells me : "And this fraternity also exists in politics.

ZDRAVKO: My brother came to ask me, I voted, for his sake...

MALIK: Yes, that's right... I convinced him.

ZDRAVKO: Shaw, convince me? I saw him as the sun at home.

MALIK: I came with Caneta.

ZDRAVKO: He came home and... I can't say no to him.

MALIK: I call to Caneta: "Let's go to Jaika's place, the younger brother." "Ah, no," he shouts, "for nothing", he shouts, "he's been with since '91." "Come on," I said, "get in the car with me." We came, it was autumn, there were apple trees here picking. Was that so?

ZDRAVKO: Yes, I had...

MALIK: And we enter the courtyard. "Well," he says, "brother, welcome." "I found you well." And we entered with Caneta. He offered us coffee, brandy. We sat here. And I said to him: "Brother, I came to ask you something." "I know," he said. I know, as soon as Caneta saw him, because Caneta is one of the others. "I know why you came," he said. And he calls out to Caneta... What did he say to him?

ZDRAVKO: How? You tell him. Tell him.

MALIK: He shouted to him: "I would drive you out, but this one I can't," he said.

ZDRAVKO: You are my family, he is my friend. We grew up with him, he is my family, I can't say "no" to him. Well, see...

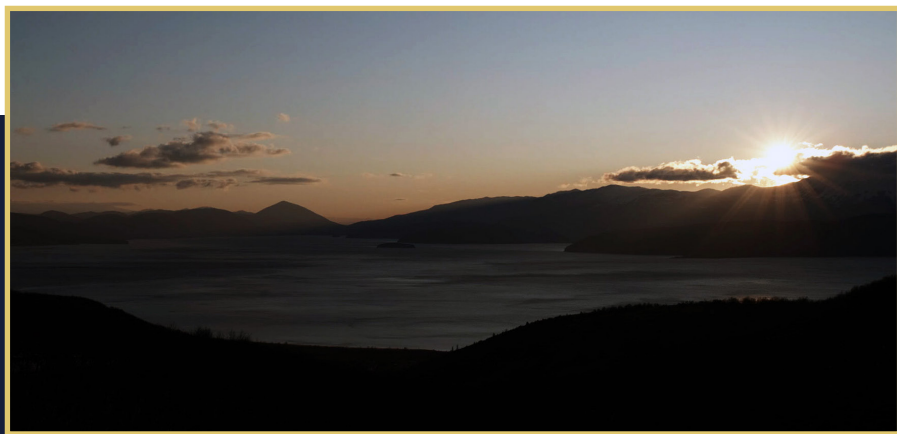
MALIK: That was the conversation, it's true.

And so we drove with Zdravko, known as Jayo, and with Malik to one hundred and one and back. A nice afternoon, from which I am passing on to you only a small part of the numerous episodes of this unforgettable session.

The fraternity of Gazim and Boris

Prespa is something like a huge open-air museum, in a huge open area where there are remains of different periods, each with its own drama. I remember that in my grandfather's house I would often come across old wires and parts of military radio stations, pieces of grenades (I keep my pencils and pens in one of these today) and piles of other objects that my father had collected on the mountain as a child. A radio station from the French army, a grenade from the Serbian army, some boxes from the Italian army and not to mention... in every house in Prespa there are all kinds of objects that testify to the presence of numerous armies that fought or passed through the region. As some went and others came, everyone had their favorite in parts of the local population - Macedonians, Albanians, Turks or Roma. Everyone tried to use the heterogeneity of Prespa's ethnic structure in terms of that famous maxim "divide and rule". But if somewhere these tactics have proven to be successful, it is certainly not the case with Prespa.

When the Bulgarians come to the region, for example, there are tendencies to portray the Albanian population as hostile and to put them in antagonism with the Macedonians. But instead of the expected effect of the Bulgarian strategy, the local population reacts by strengthening the fraternities. This is the case with Boris and Gazim. One from Dolno Dupeni, the other from Nakolec.



BORIS: The fraternity started from my grandfather, Pavle was called, and from Gazia's grandfather, Nefija. And it continued to develop after that... The fraternity started in Bulgarian ruling, because from Nakolec many families came to Dolno Dupeni, they hid from the Bulgarians. And Gazima's grandfather, Nefija, had two children, Medija and Jemalj. Is your name Jemalj?

GAZIM: Jemalj, yes, Jemalj.

BORIS: And they were small, and Nefija... Uncle Nefija's wife died. And here they sat for five to sixteen days with us and then they returned to Nakolec.

BORJAN: And why did they come? Did they run away?

BORIS: They were hiding from the Bulgarians.

GAZIM: There was a phase in Nakolec, a moment when the spy said something, there was a group from Nakolec and Crani. The Bulgarians of... I don't know, in some way they accused them of some deed that happened... And they took and went to houses, they demanded grain and things, but also people... they killed.

And naturally, families who had the opportunity to... run away, hide somewhere... My grandfather came here to Uncle Pavle, Boris's father.

They were good friends, brothers and sisters, but after that it became a fraternity, so... Grandma, blood for blood, how do you say that? And let's respect each other, that is, housemates, since my grandfather, his grandfather. So the first house that was mentioned was here... It was for a wedding, for this, for that, so... This house was talked about, then about our aunts and other relatives in Nakolec. These were the closest to us here.

The armed conflict that occurred in 2001, among other things, put this fraternity to the test. In our conversation, Boris recalled an episode, or a conversation that happened between siblings.



Gzim Suleimani

BORIS: 2001? Gazim's father shouted to me like this: "Boris, if there was a war here in Prespa and there was, would you shoot at me?" "No, how could I?" I said. "At you?" How could I, for....", he said, "even if they would kill me, I wouldn't shoot." And that's why she told him, he can't start a war there, because no Albanian from Nakolec shoots at a Macedonian, but a Macedonian from Dupeni, in Nakolec, shoots at an Albanian. And that's why it's impossible for war to come.



Boris Jovanovski

And that's how that traumatic year 2001 passed in Prespa without a word being said that would be remembered badly or that would in any way threaten the harmony of coexistence, which is already part of the local culture and the Prespa identity, which, over the centuries, defied many provocations. Left to itself, this tradition and culture contains within itself the magical substance for the success of multiculturalism, which as a civilizational value everywhere in the world is exposed to the onslaught of nationalisms and populism.

Unfortunately, this culture in Prespa, along with the water in the lake, is slowly disappearing. With it, all the unwritten codes that hide the recipe for the future, not only of Macedonia but also of the entire Balkans in its multicultural splendor, are leaving.

