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June 2017

Foreword

The program “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers” has been developed by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. The project aims at renewing old ties and creating new ones among young people, academic and artistic circles, media outlets and civil society organizations from Belgrade and Pristina, thus contributing to dialogue, reconciliation and normalization between the two societies. We are after breathing life into intercultural dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo so as to:

- Support implementation of Belgrade-Pristina Agreement;
- Promote joint, cross-border activities by young people, academic circles, the media and civil society organizations;
- Break down stereotypes on both sides through art, culture, debate and youth exchanges;
- Ensure quality media coverage of Kosovo-Serbia reconciliation and normalization processes that are crucial to the two country's accession to the EU.

With support of different partner organizations and donors we initiate and organize different activities such are seminars/study tours for young artists from Serbia and Kosovo; cultural activities such are festivals “A Month of Pristina in Belgrade” and “A Month of Belgrade in Pristina” with young artists presenting their art works to the public in Serbia/Kosovo; joint cross border campaigns; and many other actions.

This booklet is designed by young artists from Serbia and Kosovo who have participated in study tour held in November 2016 and art colony in March 2017 within the program “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers”. They spent ten creative and working days in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Prishtina and Prizren, making friends and exchanging experiences and knowledge about their societies and cultures. During the art colony in Fruska Gora they have created joint animated film, and have summarized some of their impressions in this booklet. Hope you will enjoy it!

On behalf of our organizational team,

Jelena Dzombic,

Program Coordinator, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Kushtrim Asllani

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of the 'Other'

There are millions of responses to this topic in my head, yet none of them are definitive, nor are they the answer that will once and for all put an end to this problem.

I would like, as an artist, to describe the difficult road which I took, in order to give myself a different comprehensive outlook about "the other". First of all, I have tried myself to be "the other". I live with my family in southern Serbia, in a small town called Bujanovac (Bujanoc). Earlier, as a child, I used to live in village Veliki Trnovac (Tërnoc i Madh) in the same municipality. I know this does not have any special significance, but I am insisting on presenting all the flaws of being "the other".

When I lived in the village I often heard term "malok" (bumpkin). This was pejorative term used to describe all the others who were not from my village, while people from other villages used to call us "pirrovine". Although at first I did not give much importance to these terms, it was later that I realized how much they stimulated hatred among society. In 7th grade of elementary school I moved with my family to Bujanovac where I continued my education. Beginning at the new school was horrible for me because this new society did not welcome me in. For them, I was a "pirrovine", whilst they were "malok" (bumpkins) for me. Although these terms are disappearing, the problem that induces such hatreds in society still remains.

But this was not the only problem for me. There were many types of „the other“ in our society.

This has made me very curious. In a quarter of the town where the majority of the inhabitants are Roma people, there was another big "other" — they were „maxhup“ (gypsies) for us, we were „qillobano“ (pejorative term in Roma language for Albanian people) for them.

Another problem of being „the other“ existed between people of Serbian and Albanian nationality.

Our generation emerged in the time of war. We have heard a lot about the war, crimes, imprisonments, political persecutions.

Until I was slightly older I had never had a contact with anyone of Serbian nationality. For me they were „shkije“ - and they were all bad. Fortunately, there were some non-governmental organizations in the city that aimed to create multiethnic groups and tackle uscbh perceptions of the „other“. When we did the project of joint drawing it was the first time that my idea of „the other“ fell apart, because all those kids were just like me. We were only victims.

Today I think we are guilty because we delay acting in different artistic ways, in order to teach children to think differently and not to let them be the hostages of history. The very history that did not allow us to meet each other, but has rather left us with empty spaces that only fill with hatred over time.

My name is Kushtrim Asllani, I was born in the fall of 1991, and my birthplace is between two countries with high political tensions. For many years in this place hatred has been set up, and I grew up while trying not to infect myself with hatred for the other - whom we don't know. I have finished elementary and secondary school in Bujanovac (a town in the south of Serbia), while I have also studied in Prishtina (capital city of Kosovo), where I finished acting at the public university of Kosovo.

During my life, my biggest problem was that in Kosovo, I was being looked at as a Serb, and in Serbia, I was being looked at as an Albanian. I have always continued thinking that this is a wrong opinion, and today I am happy that with many friends I met in this project, I broke the big barrier called hatred. I think this is a long road, but it is possible for new generations will meet each other as friends, and not enemies.

Sonja Sokolov

Transformation of adopted images about culture of the 'Other' through encounter and exchange with the 'Other'

The best way to deconstruct and change prejudices and images that we have about the “Other” is to meet people who comes from that “Other” countries. All of us have prejudices and thoughts about other people especially ones that come from different countries and have a different culture than us, but when you meet those people you can change your way of thinking. I had a chance to meet people from Kosovo in seminar “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers”. That wasn’t the first time that I have met people from this country. Of course I had some thoughts about them but I gave myself a chance to get to know them to see are we that different as the media says? Is it possible that we cannot find a common language and discuss what is bothering us and about all the tension that hanging over our heads? Yes, it is possible! During the day we were hanging out and getting to know each other, but the workshops helped us to see what is behind the closed doors, what is it that that we keep for ourselves or only for some people. This was emotional and stressful, but also made for a relieving and eye opening situation. Such an activity helped us not only to make our bonds stronger, but to use this experience as a tool to make a difference, to make a change. For people who have not enjoyed or witnessed this kind of experience, it can be very easy for them to say “oh, let’s just forget about everything like never happened”. We should not forget what happened so we do not let it happen again. We, the youngsters, have the future in our hands now and we need to prevent hatred and work on a positive atmosphere. In order to make this atmosphere and keep it positive, we need to be optimistic and help each other for a better tomorrow. It will be difficult, but I know we can make it, I believe we can. The ideas that we have and making them come true will show what we want to accomplish and that will be the first step of making a new, better, and more positive reality.

Sonja Sokolov was born in 1991, in Serbia. She finished her Master studies of Art History at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade in 2016. She has participated in many Erasmus projects allowing her to gain vast experience and help alter her current reality. She has big volunteering experience behind her and continues to do volunteer work. At present she is working towards becoming an art teacher in the future.

Aulona Selmani

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of the “other”

Why exactly art? Because it gives life to everything by walking along the paths of the soul, and through the soul is the best way to get to know a person. When an artist creates art, he relies on his own vision, not on the vision that others imposed on him. He creates a whole new world on his own -a whole new picture. The universe has only one language, and we all as children of the earth, speak that language - but not everyone understands it. It's the language of the soul. Art. It's what we truly are. It shows that we are beings filled with love and different colors. We are souls in a body. We are not bodies that possess a soul. But in this material world, people are so lost that they have even forgotten their origins. They have left themselves behind while focusing on the body, which will turn to ash one day. They only ask, beg, take, but are not ready to give. Art constantly gives. Every piece of art is a piece of an artist's soul. If we take away religion, nationality, hatred, greed, and egoism from ourselves, we would see that we are just spiritual beings, trying to find a place on the earth in which to survive. Art is a place where we take away these shields that we have put onto the soul, where we let others see us. When we take the shields away, we realize that we are the same, that we are created by a universal blend. We all belong to this world, we all have one language and one creator. Would not it be wonderful if the eyes could only see the soul instead of the body! That way even our ideals of beauty would be very different. In this sense even the prejudices of the others would disappear if we could just realize that we are the same.

I am a 19 year old girl and I live in Ferizaj, Kosovo. I was born in Switzerland and lived there for quite some years. After this I returned in Kosovo to my father's village, where I continued to live for some years before moving to Ferizaj, which is where my actual address now.

I am a second year filmmaking student. I am also a writer, a photographer and a poet.

Time after time I perform at poetry events, where I try to touch human souls in the way only poetry can.

Till now I have made three movies, two of them have been part of some international festivals and the third is still on its way to being finished. Last year I made my first documentary for a festival where I participated as an artist, and this year I had my first exhibition of photography.

Izabela Mašić

Transformation of adopted images about culture of the 'Other' through encounter and exchange with the 'Other'

Culture, religion, language, arts, dishes, customs, are amongst others some of the keywords which characterise and make this diverse pallet called society. Differences and similarities are found everywhere, different ways of thinking and behaving help to construct millions of microcosms that function for themselves and with others. Every country and every society has beauty, is unique in some way, and provokes a variety of emotions from admiration and understanding to hate and misunderstanding. The human mind is very interesting and complex, it is the only one capable of maintaining peace and order but conversely it can also be the most destructive weapon - capable of doing terrible and controversial things in the name of freedom and peace. Where does destruction stop and where does peace begin? Even if it sounds obvious, there's only a thin line separating the two of them, with history being the best proof of this.

As an individual living in modern society, I have experienced both the warmth and a tendency for doing good deeds as well as its potential for cruelty. As someone who has partly been an outsider, I was raised as a child of a mixed nationality marriage, I spoke different languages to that of my surrounding, I had different habits and customs, all of this combined to make me insecure at times. However, after some time I became aware that my problem is not in fact only mine - it is global. This is a problem not only for individuals but also societies as a whole, and sometimes they are able to get through this situation with misunderstandings ending positively, yet sometimes they can bring about destruction and misery. During my short lifetime of two decades, I have lived through two wars. Born at the Serbian border to Croatia, I remember the war among us very well. Although I was very young at the time, I still remember with profound vividness the faces of my family members reflecting fear, worry and restlessness.

I could never understand this rising hate and why people talked badly about the Croatians. Even after I heard the accusations, I just could not tie bad emotions to them. The same happened a few years later when the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo began. Kosovo was quite an enigma for me personally. Positioned in the far south of the country and having no ties to me, I had a baffling feeling toward it - I didn't know what to feel about it. Again, hate rose all around me. It was the same wave of anger, anxiety and fear as with Croatia a few years earlier. Growing up, I was continuously exposed to negative emotions, comments and media about our "enemies". I started to question myself and why my thoughts were so different from the others. How can neighbouring countries do such horrible things to each other, shouldn't it be vice versa, shouldn't they instead of having a conflict, maintain a peaceful relationship?

People who are part of one society usually have a tendency to devote themselves to that same society blindly or worse, with wilful blindness. Acting toward the 'other' violently and inhumanely, knowing that their own deeds are wrong; just to prove a point and support the will of a handful of powerful men, cynically ruling over them and fulfilling their own selfish wishes whilst publicly promising that it is for a greater cause. Desperation and fear make people turn on each other in order to protect their own, turning a blind eye to tragedy and crime as long as it does not happen to them personally. Growing up in a society like that I also developed fear of the 'other', avoiding any contact, denying its existence or simply not giving it any thought. It would have been easy to continue like that, to live on in this conformist way - but it felt wrong. As years passed I became more aware of this unnatural knot within myself, I was able to see it clearly polluting my mind, and slowing me down in my development and in my process of becoming who I wanted to be. In order to free myself from prejudices towards other societies, religions and countries I decided to confront myself with my so-called fears from the unknown, from the "others".

I started to search for multicultural environments, projects and other ways to meet people, getting to know them, their culture and religion, and slowly I began untying the knot that had come to exist in me over the years. Now after I have met people from different nationalities, I felt exhilarated and proud about my decision, yet I also felt ashamed. How could I let myself get so polluted by the thoughts of others? How could I accept those thoughts as my own? How could I let go of my first and original belief and accept what I saw and heard in the media without giving it a second thought? Nothing is as it seems, we cannot and should not always believe our ears and eyes, we are rational beings, capable of thought, making an impact and we should use that power to make a change, raise awareness and primarily use it for good.

To conclude and sum up my thoughts on this topic I would like to quote a line out of Charlie Chaplin's speech in "The great dictator": "Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost...."

Izabela Mašić was born in 1994, in Apatin, Serbia. She has graduated from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad with a bachelor degree in Painting, June 2017. She has been active in the field of fine arts ever since 2014. In this period she has participated in many group exhibitions, projects, seminars and artist in residency programs. Aside from painting, her fields of interest also include photography, digital art, animation, psychology, literature, philosophy and languages.

Florent Kurtalani

Art as a platform for the deconstruction of the existing image of 'Other'

I am the other of the other
We each are the other for the other
I may seem black to the other
or black may seem the other to me
even though we think of ourselves as white.
The other a mirror for the other should be:
When I take a look
Indeed, it's myself that I see
Not the other: so to think.
If two others were mirrors to each other
and if they looked into the other
They would see an endless view:
other in the other, the other in the other.
The depth of themselves they would find
Just like wholly they did try
themselves in Edip or Electra to discover.
Art is, the ancients said, imitation
The immanence of the mirror is imitation
Art is a mirror
That introduces us to ourselves
And we introduce us to the others.

I am Florent Kurtalani, I was born in Prishtina in 1996. As a child I was always curious about the world and nature, but this did not last for too long for many reasons, and gradually I started to change my field of interests. I have started to focus more on humans and societies. I went to Philological Pymnasium- 'Eqrem Çabej', and after I finished high-school, I decided to go to the Faculty of Dramatic Arts at 'Hasan Prishtina' University and studied dramaturgy.

Dejan Krstić

After summing up my impressions - I can say that participating in "Intercultural Icebreakers" has resulted in a radical change to my understanding and acceptance of the relations between two different cultures. The whole concept of the project during which I was exposed to direct interaction and discussions about common ideas and problems, did contribute greatly to the very essence of interpersonal bonding and understanding "on the other side of the border". The experience I gained during the seminar through interaction with colleagues from Kosovo. In addition we enjoyed a creative, fair and diverse mix of lectures on the impact of such interaction between two cultures. This awoke a desire for the further development and nourishment of the connection between two seemingly different worlds. I was satisfied with the flexibility and accessibility of the program because it enabled us absolute freedom and the right to further nourish and transform the knowledge we gained by means of organizing art colonies and projects of joint cooperation - even months after the end of the seminar. What delighted me the most about the project was its artistic focus which impregnated the whole experience. It is only through a universal, yet provocative contribution to getting a different perspective on a situation that we can reach the ultimate transformation - that is the impression we have to tolerance and respect. Art, as something that has the power to connect, educate, and has no limits of expression, is therefore an ideal medium for deconstructing fixed negative stereotypes and attitudes of society which demand a long time interval to be changed. We often say "We leave the world to the young", in that case, I am glad that we are making young people truly see the world that is surrounding them and see the cultures that are a part of it. With full respect and knowledge of the past, we strive to make space for new, more contemporary ideas and visions that are being taught from lessons learnt of the past, this will result in something we can refer to as "better".

Dejan Krstić was born in 1994, Serbia. After finishing high school, he began his studies at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, where he graduated with a bachelor degree in 2017. His main interests are based around the visual arts including; drawing, painting, photography and design. Beside these he is taking part in many charity and governmental or non-governmental activities- such as this one. As a result of his concepts and the basic practices which he follows Dejan is mostly interested in the art of portraiture and the idea of identity and understanding of diversity. Outside of this, he is also takes a keen interest in psychology and philosophy.

Rade Obradovic

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of the 'Other'
"Art which does not serve a people is just a pastime of the idle." (Vladimir Majakovski)

Is one to consider and make conclusions about an individual or a people based on their past? Do we have the right to judge ourselves and to perceive ourselves on the basis of past events, relationships and acts? Are those who refuse to give up on the past able to find delight in the present? Is it possible to create a piece of art which serves a people without taking into account only one perspective, only one period – the past, that which does not exist anymore?

I started to speak retroactively, because the impressions are many and my thoughts are not organized. I believe I have a lot to say and communicate. After every exchange, seminar or camp, you are richer for the experience. We are not even aware what changes these experiences bring about in ourselves and we do not know how these changes work, but we simply feel them. You are more open to others, you are approaching people with greater ease, you are more compassionate and have knowledge of a new culture, new art - although this art comes from a group of individuals who are not necessarily representative of their people. The magic is reflected in the fact that during only eight days, you establish a strong bond with these people, who are the best of their kind. By the time you have to leave, you do not want to leave. You have the need to stay at least one more month with them, to learn something new, to affect others and to be affected.

This seminar is interesting and important because we connect, what may seem to "the average neoliberal ox", two cultures which cannot be connected, two nations which left ruins, dust, incomplete utterances, and fear behind them. The past which haunts us (see the first paragraph) has to be revealed, clarified, defined and elaborated on as a philosophical concept. Furthermore, I think about the present and the future which inevitably become a part of us, creating a new perspective on one's own identity and the identity of others. These give us an opportunity to create art, hence reaching a high level of consciousness, and a possibility to transfer the message to Serbs and Kosovars as well.

I believe art has to be clean, with a clear message of criticism, negation or the message which will encourage problem solving and which will enrich and open the human spirit in such a way so one understands that there is a possibility for one to think critically, to actively participate in deconstruction of the prejudices which are the source of fear and ignorance. We point fingers at others and judge even though we were not a part of the context. We know stories because we heard them from others.

All we know comes to us through retelling and it is this content which builds our perceptions and beliefs, which are often distorted. What to do next with these perceptions and beliefs? Are we to live a life marked? Are we to not let go of rage or can we at least try to sublime it? Perhaps transfer it into acts which will be remembered as the foundation blocks of the present and the future defined through peace and compromise? I believe an artist is capable of creating just that, an artist that lies in all of us.

Skezen Maliqi is an intellectual and the author of the book titled “Kosovo and the disintegration of Yugoslavia”. He lived in Belgrade for 16 years, moving back to Kosovo later on. He talks about the monuments of culture and churches which are Serbian, and which remain under the protection of Albanian governors. Maliqi states that we have to be on watch for the extreme attitudes such as those that these churches and monuments have to be burnt down to prevent Serbs from coming back. Politicization of heritage is very dangerous and serves no good.

Alban Muja – a contemporary artist. “Some of the works of Muja analyze a special type of otherness – the wrong side of the mirror, as Lakan would argue, which is necessary to understand the complete identity of the self with all of the inner turmoil and conflicts.” Although works of Muja ask universal questions regarding the engagement of art which can be applied to any political system, he confronts these questions with his personal, intimate stories about relationships, places he lives or visits, and personal problems which he reveals...

Baushtelle: Balkan Temple – Three years ago Tobias organized the project titled “Prishtine-mon amour” with Astrit Ismaili. Their primary intention was to find a reasonable solution for the building of Center for sport, social, cultural and economic issues in Pristina which in a way represents the symbol of Albanian and Serbian friendship in Pristina.

What stays behind these projects are experiences, relationships, new ideas and possibilities, in mind as well as in the “real” world.

The aforementioned artists from Kosovo and Albania acknowledged that visits to the office where DOKU festival is organized, various galleries, museums, art centers and time spent with the students from Kosovo are the first step towards creating joint products, that are free of bigotry and prejudices. This will send a clear message to people that art has to be valued because it asks questions, gives possibilities and provides a breakaway from lethargy and routine. Our relationship, work and socializing with the students from Kosovo is based on the works of the aforementioned authors and that makes me immensely happy. During the seminar I kept in touch with my friends and told them about the experiences and the people with whom I am cooperating and sharing the roof over my head. I could tell my friends were surprised and in disbelief, but I continued telling them about my positive impressions - because I truly believe that the students from Kosovo taught us many things. Once again I would like to express my gratitude to Demir, Jelena and translators, as well as the lecturers and students from Kosovo.

Intercultural Icebreakers

The second module of the seminar, of creative process, of resistance, of success

It is only in the moment when you are in connection with your own self that you create art.

Some of the things which affected me most were the workshops with Demir, as from the beginning of the seminar one could talk only if one looked sincerely into their heart. I was lucky enough to meet good people on my way to this seminar, and was able to live a moment which affected me in such a way so as to end up at Vrdnička Kula. Reliving old memories, which were buried by our affective system, was a cathartic moment for me after which I could barely sit in my chair waiting for my rich portion of food.

You either connect with some people or not, this is conditioned by the circumstances you find yourself in. The impression I got is that all of us managed to bond to that extent to be able to initiate a fusion of ideas ourselves and to create something together later on. I cannot say that any person who participated in the seminar was bad or strange in a negative sense of that world. I welcomed everyone's energy and took in what I thought would help me in my work and in creating bonds with people.

We had the necessary conditions for creative work: open space, freedom and a huge support network from Jelena, Demir and Nebojša - from whom we learnt a lot about animated movies. Through participating in my part of the performance with Izabela, an artist from Novi Sad, I went through all of the phases of creative process (the initial enthusiasm, the decline of life energy, artist's block, being thrilled, the explosion of ideas, presenting final product).

I tested my own limits through comprehending the process of animation. I found it therapeutic and liberating to be outside, almost completely naked, and to rely on your own hands and legs in creating the story about holdfasts. The story of influences which you have to abandon in order to be your own self and to release your creative potential. The lack of time, about which we complained, taught us a lesson that sometimes you can do amazing things in just half an hour. This half an hour we turned into hours of work, during which we were able to create magic with the leaders of this process. Nebojša will turn this magic into a story and show that we are made of fear, yearning, and suffering - the skin that makes us all equal, whether we are talking about friends from Kosovo or Azerbaijan.

The progress and process of creating is not easy. It takes a lot of time to put the pieces of a puzzle together and even though it might seem that you cannot put the pieces of a broken iceberg together, you should be aware that you can still use it to make life-giving water which makes 3/4ths of our planet. I realized that if you are given a sour lemon and you do not manage to make lemonade, you made no step forward. I think that this was our collective achievement.

My name is Rade Obradović and I am a student in the final year of Pedagogy in Belgrade, Serbia. I am 26 years old and until now I have played in a physical theater Mimart. I have also finished the Small Academy of nonverbal, expressive and processuall theater. I played in many group and solo performances. My obsession is dance, modern movement and in this project I have included all my previous knowledge and experience. The process was so hard, but for me also very apocalyptic. I created a picture of myself and the young people from Kosovo, changed, destroyed, and finally made it possible to connect us with the same problems, the same situations that we need to communicate with, and we did it through a new project.





Trëndelina Halili

The problem of intercultural interaction usually lies in the negative manner of interpretation - when transmitting a message. Lack of knowledge or information about a culture of another country can put us into an embarrassing situation, as a result of the abovementioned problem, but it can also lead us onto a dangerous path.

This is a problem that is happening between two neighboring countries, Kosovo and Serbia. In my opinion, knowing the culture of a nation is a truth that some people are afraid to discover, and for various political reasons they try to hide from it, by creating walls.

I think that Intercultural Icebreakers has demolished these walls by joining these two societies with different cultures to interact with each other, allowing us into a more peaceful situation.

Cultural communication between these two countries has been quite distant, that is why I think the seminar has been very effective, in creating progress in cultural integration between the two groups.

Traveling to Serbia and meeting with a young generation who was ready for an intercultural interaction broke the prejudices, which were created through wrong broadcasts. That was a very exciting part during this seminar for me personally.

Visits to various institutions in Belgrade and Novi Sad, such as the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Galleries, Museums, Theaters, Festivals, etc., awoke in me a great love for this country alongside a very broad and open culture for interaction.

The workshops held by Demir Mekić were the most exciting and emotional part of this seminar, during which each of the participants shared personal stories from their own life experiences with everyone in the group, as well as new ideas and new information regarding their country's culture.

Trëndelina Halili was born in Prishtina where she studied Mass Communication in AAB collage and graduated in 2012. Currently she is studying Film and Television at the University of Prishtina. In 2013and until the present day she started working as a video editor in Klan Kosova Television.

Transformation of adopted images about culture of the 'Other' through encounter and exchange with the 'Other'

There are 519 kilometers between Belgrade and Prishtina. Some people consider these two cities to be part of one country, and some people consider them to be in two separate countries. Whoever these people are, the truth is that they know very little about one another. This is why this seminar and project was so important for us, it allowed us the chance to get to know each other better.

When it first started I was not sure whether we would really connect as often happens at other seminars and gatherings, and indeed, for me it felt like we had a wall between us – we were all nice to each other and there were no problems, but we just weren't close. Fortunately, after a while we did connect on a workshop in Prishtina. During this workshop we were tasked with describing our life decisions and the events that led us to that point. We started talking and before long we were all crying and really feeling each other's stories. We immediately felt closer. This moment will forever be a part of me, as well as this group of people who wanted to learn and escape their comfort zone - with whom I connected on such a deep level. Hearing the story of young women and men who I am supposed to consider „enemies“ made me feel cathartic. Hearing them, seeing them tear apart as they told their own story, made me realize we really all are the same. We may have different beginnings, different stories, different backgrounds, but we do feel the same emotions. We cry the same. We love the same.

I feel inspired and moved by this group of people, and I have only love for them. I know that I will always remember them whenever I hear something bad in the media – and I hope they will remember me. Whenever you hear something negative about the 'other' side, I hope you will remember that moment when we were all connected and how we did no harm to each other. I hope you will remember me every time you hear what mainstream media says – a girl who fell in love with your language. I am excited to see what kind of magic we will do together. Because magic happens when we unite.

Milena Beran was born in Serbia in 1993, and is a student of Albanian Language and Literature at the University of Belgrade, and is attending her final year of bachelor studies. She has also graduated from the Faculty of Culture and Media, where she studied Communication and Journalism. She is a feminist activist, and is taking part in many projects involving Albanians and Serbs. She currently teaches Modern Greek language, as a part of her student engagement.

Nikolina Spasić

Transformation of adopted images about culture of the 'Other' through encounter and exchange with the 'Other'

One of the latest social studies about young people shows that nowadays their number one interest is gaining experiences through meeting new people and other cultures - different from their own. Everybody I know feels like this. But then it struck me: yes, I am very keen on getting to know 'other' or different cultures, but how funny is the fact that I know so little of the culture of our neighbours. Although, many of us like to think of ourselves as open-to-anything, curious and eager to discover culture and art; the usual reality is that we know very little, even about our own culture or those that are so close to us physically, that we take them for granted. Whose fault is that? Yes, I should have been more curious about culture in Kosovo, but even if I was would I have enough sources in Serbia to find out about current art forms and artists from Kosovo? This seminar and visit to Kosovo allowed me to realise how alive, vivid and developed art in Kosovo really is - it is so clear to me that it is very poorly represented in Serbia. So I ask myself when will we get to the point when Art originating from Kosovo will be as prominent in Serbia as Art coming from any other country. Consequently, becoming more available to common people and not just to certain artistic cliques. Of course, this works both ways with the same question about Serbian Art being also relevant in Kosovo. I must add that there are some positive projects that are undertaken with the aim of bridge building between the two cultures, which is significant, but there should be so many more. I see this particular project as a very healthy starting point for this aim and purpose, and I am aware of the fact that sometimes it takes a great deal of time to make certain changes, but even if changes do not come soon I am glad to be part of the generation that will most certainly witness the start of these changes.

Perhaps the most significant experience for me during this seminar was staying in Pristina and interacting with not only other participants of the seminar, but random people too. All the fear and cautiousness that I had melted away in a very short period, because I was surprised and touched by the warmth of the people and the fact that they were so open. Talking to people about various things including, life in general and common issues made me realise that we share the same problems with very similar life conditions and struggles. This was especially prominent from the platform of young artist looking for personal space to grow and in which to make progress. The fact is that sharing the same problems brings people closer, therefore seeing as we have similar problems it can only be a good thing that our goal is to overcome and improve poor connections between the two cultures. Also, as Art itself overcomes anything and should be put above all misunderstandings, if these 'two sides' create Art together we can eventually make conditions for work far better in both countries. My new idea is that I want to fight for, is to make it possible for Kosovo artists to perform in Serbia and Serbian artists to perform in Kosovo freely - as well as creating potential co-productions.

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