

Halim a Thousand Times: "Make a School like a Home"

*By Lindita Tahiri, Kosova
with contribution from Dukagjin Pupovci*

Today is Monday, September the first. During the past weekend, I lined up the new books, pencils, and notebooks and new school clothes for my boys, and learned the names of their new teachers. *My* new school year is just beginning. My nightmare is the same old one: my little boys will complain of boring textbooks and the droning voices of the harsh teachers forcing them to learn their lessons by heart. Then the boys will skip homework and run to the nearest Internet club to play some horrid electronic game, something with an even more horrid name: "Counterstrike." (I just read on the Internet that this kind of game is forbidden even in the United States.) Then, at home in the evenings, they will ask me how well I remember those same boring lessons—they haven't changed since I was in school—and how much I've applied them in my own life. (I try to reread these lessons as I scurry back and forth between the pot boiling on the stove and the dishes in the sink.)

During my lunch break, I rush to catch a glimpse of my boys in class. At the entrance to their school, the guard asks me long suspicious questions before he lets me in. I walk down the hallway and knock on one of the hospital-white doors. A teacher rises from behind the desk and smiles, and, as I walk in, the pupils stand up like an army platoon and salute me with a chorus-like "Good Morning." The air around them is palpably dull.

I glance quickly at my younger boy. He used to cry so much when his older brother—only a year separates them—went to school first; the younger one forced his way into school, abruptly leaving his childhood behind. Next to him stands his brother, solemn and tidy, and he winks at me. I know he is cheating, only pretending to join the class in shouting responses to the teacher. "This new generation is hard to deal with," the teacher says. "They lack discipline and good manners." Then he forces a

grin. “Organizations like yours sometimes make this worse by stressing only the rights of the child. Some of them only understand the stick, you know, unlike children from well-educated families like yours.” I mumble some sort of good-bye and rush out and down the corridor, feeling a big lump in my chest. (How many more blows for them, damn you, they are my babies.) Then there is a burst of wild laughter: “You parents could not walk around up and down the stairs like this in the old times when I was almost the principal.” It is the school guard. He gloomily closes the doors behind me.

With average school space of approximately 1.1 square meters per pupil, most of the Kosova’s 550 primary and 80 secondary schools work in two to four shifts in order to meet the needs of the local young people. Due to massive displacements of Kosova’s rural population to urban areas, there is a general shortage of school space in towns. Some schools work in four shifts, with forty to forty-five pupils in a classroom and school classes lasting only twenty-five to thirty minutes. The *Gjon Serreçi* primary school in Ferizaj, for example, has about 3,800 pupils.

It was so nice and cozy. I used to take turns with my boys. Each of us would be the sun, and the others, the planets, would run around and around in orbits. There were different worlds we could endlessly visit, all of them, without exception, had rabbits, ice cream and electricity. One of us would jump and declare that we had fallen into a black hole and then end up on some other planet. “You just pretend you’re teaching them astronomy,” my mother, a former teacher, once yelled when visiting me in Albania. We stayed there for five years after losing our jobs in Kosova. “You must not decide so quickly to stay home and raise kids,” my mother would say, over and over.

During our game, one of the boys would inevitably say: “Can we jump home now?” This home he was referring to was a place they had only heard about. The boys had been born in Skopje, in Macedonia, across the border from Kosova. (“You even gave birth to them in a decent place, a real hospital, unlike your friends back there,” my mother would go on, very much like a teacher. “You need to go back to work. You don’t want to become a common housewife.”) But I was sure that, far away from our real home, far from everything I had thought would

belong to me forever, my boys needed me and I needed them. I was certain of this.

"Is that home?" one of the boys asked, startled, watching TV. The screen showed refugees at Bllace, a place on the Kosova-Macedonian border; they were fighting for a loaf of bread. The boys pointed their little fingers toward a mass of people, fighting for survival, massed together in complete meaninglessness and lack of power. "No," I said. "Home is strong. Now turn off the TV and let's jump home." We turned around and around and around in endless circles. (I wondered: How many more blows for them?)

"There is a powerful allure to being chosen for KEC training," says Halim, my officemate at the Kosova Education Center, a local NGO that works on training programs for teachers. KEC is located within the Faculty of Philology, where I had spent more than ten years of my life. There was a flood of foreign NGOs into post-war Kosova; though many of them only appeared on publications lists. I was very much relieved that KEC really existed, that it was home-grown, and that it resided in the building of the institution that made me grow up.

Halim, an elder pedagogue, says, "It may be postwar enthusiasm as well as accumulated frustration with the parallel school system. Whatever it is, it is our duty to match the strong will to change, to actually make changes, and we can do this faster than anyone can with some official decree, like the recent one about piloting the ninth grade all over Kosova. I doubt that this hasty proclamation will have any meaningful effect in the classroom." Halim shakes his head in disagreement. "You know, I am fascinated with one particular accomplishment of ours: when I visit a school, teachers who went through our training tell me that the pupils who used to be the best, the 'spoiled' ones, are not dominating any more. Those who used to be quiet, who were standing aside, are now expressing themselves. The teachers say they are even outperforming the A students." Halim sparkles. "I am sure that, one day, all of Kosova will be one big school, where all of us will be learning and learning." No matter how he begins his monologues, Halim inevitably ends them with this metaphor. He has repeated it a thousand times over the past two years. And it is strange that no matter how many times he has said that Kosova will be one big school, it has not become a dead metaphor for me. Every

time I hear it, I always envisage people who are living every moment, fulfilling their deep desire to learn and to know.

Halim is feeding a big dream with more fuel than the legions of foreign aid workers with their hundreds of white jeeps with international plates that jam the streets of Prishtina. Halim would never find a job in any of the international offices. None of the rapidly growing local institutions would hire him either because he doesn't speak English. I am happy he is with KEC. ("Do you want to throw all of us in the garbage," my mother, the elder school teacher, yells. "What about people who went to study in Belgrade, in Zagreb, even in Slovenia? Those milky faces shaking their ID cards around their necks have learned English cooking hamburgers.")

In June 1999, when the armed conflict in Kosova ended, more than 800,000 Albanian refugees started to come home. The new authorities decided to make up the lost second academic semester, which would delay the start of the 1999–2000 school year. The ravages of war had left no books for some 400,000 pupils in primary and secondary schools. A consortium of donors provided 3.2 million copies of about two hundred textbook titles.

At that time, Kosova was awash with international governmental agencies and NGOs seeking to promote programs in education. An initiative known as DESK (Developing the Education System in Kosova) was launched at the end of 1999 as an advisory body. It provided a forum for Kosovars and internationals to discuss education issues. Later on, this process was officially abandoned and replaced by the lead agency concept, which made international donor agencies responsible for the development of certain education sectors.

"Did your American friend Susan send these planes?" my children ask, shouting and applauding the NATO forces flying over Tirana on their way Kosova. Susan, worrying for me and my family in Tirana, had sent a package with water and hard biscuits. "Ma, tell us please how strong are the Americans? And don't just say they are frank and friendly, very frank and friendly, too frank and friendly. This is all you ever say." In 1984, at

the University of Chicago of all places, I was the one who was too frank and friendly when I told a student gathering: "I belong by faith to the Muslim religion, and by belief to the communist party." Though formally true, this unsavory frankness led to a lot of loneliness; but, in due course, I made some lifelong friends. And during the Kosova war they sent sparks into the big black hole in which I was living. (My mother again: "I can't believe you have found friends like this. One sends you water. Another sends you a swatch of her wedding dress, so that you can somehow partake in her wedding. And a third sends you a Bahai prayer book to save all of Kosova. Glad you didn't stay in Chicago. Maybe you would have completed a Ph.D. and become even stranger than you are now.")

My son chimes in, comparing the American and Albanian flags. "Ma, I want a flag with stars shining up in the sky. I think the eagle is ugly and wild. And it eats rabbits."

I ask Halim which schools have teachers trained in Step by Step and in Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking. On his list, the Ismail Qemali School catches my attention. "The stylish iron lady" is how they call the school's principal, Valbona. She always intrigued me. Entering the grounds of the freshly painted school, I pass a modern tennis court, a rarity in Prishtina. Muddy footprints follow me down the shiny floor of the corridor. Valbona's high-heels are clean. Her blue suit matches the curtain and carpet in her office. "Here you are. I have been waiting. You are ten minutes late," Valbona says. We shake hands. Sticks prop up the stems of the potted plants set before two big windows. Her suit and high heels are part of a statement. "I look good. I am smart and tough. I will show you the way." I try to squirrel my muddy shoes under the chair. "Let's go," she says. "Classes have just started." She rushes me out. "In a little while it will be three. I need my midday coffee." She stays at school for all three shifts, each one in high heels.

We enter a class of first graders working on cards for Mother's Day. "Oh, here is the director," declares a little girl, giving us a smile before going on with her work. I tell the teacher, Ymrane, that I would like my children to make me such a card. I know Ymrane from Skopje. We went to school together. She tells me how she felt an urge to do something new, to work differently with her pupils. "I knew all the time that I

needed to shape up. The kids should not be like us any more. They should enjoy school. The training made this far easier for me and I now have to sprint to implement new ideas.”

“Working together in groups strengthens the sense of solidarity,” she says. “We seem to have become so money-oriented and selfish, as if we forgot the war.”

“When we started applying interactive teaching methods we ran into problems. Parents wanted to enroll their kids in the classes where these methods are used. This year, two out of three first-grade teachers apply those methods. I am seeking another teacher who is trained either in Step-by-Step or in Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking to avoid conflict with parents who reject teachers who apply traditional methods.”

A primary school director from Gjakova

Ymrane and I kiss each other good-bye.

“Do not worry, ma, the number seventeen is lucky,” comments my little boy, climbing from one package to another. “I am sure we will have our own home after this,” he says. We are moving into our fourth apartment in Prishtina, which makes a total of seventeen in the three countries where we’ve lived and had similar experiences with landlords. “Ma,” he adds, “prices are high because of the Americans living here, and they are our friends, don’t you think so? You don’t want us leaving again, do you? I am doing okay at school, didn’t the principal say so?” (“I love your son’s humor,” the principal once told me, with a strong odor of brandy on his breath. My boy had to go through an interview in order to skip a grade and join his older brother. “You’d better take Skenderbeg down from the wall,” he told the principal, referring to an Albanian hero, a Turk-fighter from the fifteenth century. “Turks think he was a bastard, and you do want them to help us, don’t you? This school doesn’t even have a gym.”) I told my son, “You were lucky he was drunk, even though he is most of the time. And you are not to use that kind of language for national heroes.” I try to rationalize it all, confused and exhausted. “My dear

patriot with batteries," he says, mimicking a sentence he heard on a popular local TV comedy.

"I prefer to keep a distance from my colleagues. About 95 percent of us are women, and if we start hugging, gossiping comes next, and no time for work is left. "This is Valbona giving me a hint while we drink real Turkish coffee in smart porcelain cups. I blush like a schoolgirl and tell her that I have known Ymrane for more than twenty years. "I didn't mean this kind of hugging," Valbona answered. "Absolutely not. I simply meant that we have to work a lot. We have to work to catch up with all that has been lost, work a lot to change our schools. I am going to stay here all day every day until I see that school is not a torture for children. I want them coming out happy." Her voice is both self-assured and enchanting.

(Halim: "We have had cases where, in spite of investing a lot in teachers, principals without good managerial skills let it all go to waste. An individual matters, a dedicated individual who becomes part of the school life by identifying with the interests of everyone. This is neither easy nor simple to describe and furthermore no recipe for it exists." Halim would say this often to me during the training for management and administration.)

The Kosova Education Center (KEC) was founded in early 2000 by the Kosova Foundation for Open Society (KFOS). KEC has since become the most prominent education NGO in Kosova. It operates a number of education programs and donor-funded projects. In four years, KEC training programs reached more than one-third of the 23,000 educators in Kosova.

Valbona points to a file on her orderly desk: "Here are the ninth graders' opinions of children's rights. I worked with them as soon as I came out from KEC's training on children's rights." Then she added discretely, "The ninth-grade teachers were appointed from above without even consulting me. I use every opportunity to improve matters." Her anxious and also delightful voice goes on. "I am sure the students appreciate the new sports facilities. At their age sports activities mean so

much. Next to the tennis court there will be a swimming pool, for which I am raising funds. Have you already seen my gym-room?" Valbona goes on, tirelessly, until she walks me out, bids me good-bye, and turns back into the building. The tac-tac-tac of her high heels, in perfect rhythm, fades down the foot-printed corridor.

"Ma, you tell your friend Isuf that Dardi and Banny are now shouting more than the entire class. I bet they will become silly like us soon," exclaims my younger son coming out of school. His elder brother blushes when he sees Isuf smiling next to me. "Maybe you're right. Give me five," Isuf says. He has been in Kosova for a month now, back from New York after twenty years, to bring his sons and his American-Albanian wife to this Kosova he dreamed of for so long. "I gave them ancient Illyrian names, Dardan and Alban, and now the kids are shortening them just like they do in the U.S.," he complained to me during the first week they joined my kids at school. "They are telling me how children get up, stand straight, and declaim their names loudly with separate syllables. I had no idea you still do this," he said. His perplexed wife kept telling me she couldn't cook because of the unpredictable electricity restrictions.

At least the children are adapting, we say with amusement, the three of us, old friends from school, having lunch together for the first time in many, many years. The three of us—Isuf, Idriz, and I—were the best of friends. We loved literature. But Isuf and Idriz went away to the United States after the student demonstrations in the early eighties. "We were away, unlike you. Then why do you seem so disheartened, almost as we do. You were lucky to be able to stay home."

"Pupils have realized that the teacher is not the dominant person. He or she is rather a coordinator for them. Pupils like the fact that their life experiences are valuable for school. For social science, it is important. Pupils are not just learning abstract things. They can link everyday life with school."

A teacher in Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking

"Listen, you guys," I say, "you know how briefly our revolutionary attitude lasted, our enthusiasm to view literature away from the lens of

traditionalism. It all became a dimwitted extravagance to me with everything else that was going on. I managed to motivate myself to analyze the internal monologue in prose and that is what I hate most now." We chuckle. "I hate internal monologue. It is chasing me everywhere. Sometimes I wish it did not exist, don't you?"

Students cannot write a single sentence properly. The classrooms are cold. It is hard to find chalk much less computers, I grumble to my father, telling him about the University of Prishtina, where I returned after an eight-year absence. I wish we had your conditions, I keep complaining. My father teaches at the South-East University in Tetovo in Macedonia. "How do you have the nerve to be so unthankful?" my mother lets loose. "I heated my best room for your students, because you would not even dare go to private houses like everyone else." (During the academic year 1993–94, I taught linguistics at my parents' house to students in the English department. I was pregnant with my second child, and I got so upset when I first saw my assigned classroom: no windows, no doors, broken chairs, logs on the floor for students to sit. I worried constantly that the police would carry out an "inspection." What would happen if I got frightened, what would happen to my baby? I kept worrying. The students were in the fourth year. There were only a few. We started to meet in my parents' home, where at least I didn't have to freeze and be frightened. We drank coffee and chatted, which I guess added up to what people insist on nowadays—the interactive methodology—but I kept wishing so much they could have access to a real library, or at least books.)

"As for asking for computers, you should start cleaning the toilets first, if you want to call yourself a university," my mother concluded. "And you make sure you do it yourself."

It is 7:30 on a rainy Monday morning. I am going to see the Elena Gjika Elementary School and its new principal. The former principal was extremely supportive of teacher training programs and has recently been replaced. How were the teachers doing nowadays in this "pilot school"?

Children are streaming through the narrow streets of the cramped neighborhood, passing occasionally in front of big white jeeps jerking and bouncing over the potholes. The principal, bundled in his winter coat, waits for Dugi and me at the school's steps. We pass through the corridor, its walls crowded with children's artwork, and climb the stairs to the principal's office. Both the computer and TV set are on. "The new methodology is great," he says. "It makes all pupils active and we

have had a 12-percent rise in final evaluation scores compared with last year's. Parents are very cooperative. They even collected funds for two Step-by-Step classrooms furnished just like the three you have provided for us. They are anxious to include their children in the program, and they are eager to put them in our special French and German classes. Although the school works in three shifts and still has crowded classes, our pupils achieved the best results in this year's municipal competitions. They have a very active children's club for children's rights. I want to maintain these results, and I hope there will be more support for my teachers."

We find Nysrete (Ceti) ringed by six-year-olds, kneeling on colorful cushions spread over a clean carpet with amusement-park patterns covering half the classroom. The other half of the class has chairs grouped around four tables. Children's photos, with names, birthdays, and personal information, are placed along the top of a wall, next to the white board, where it says Monday February 10, in bright red writing. At the other side of the table, the wall is covered with a list of school rules. A bouncy girl with a ponytail gets out of the circle to make room for us next to a table. I fall in love with her, and with her name, Mjellma. It means "swan." She removes her bag from a chair, pulls out another chair, gives us a smile and returns to her pillow, with her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. The teacher introduces us: "This is Uncle Dugi, who teaches math, and Aunt Lindita, who teaches English."

Seeing her, I feel entranced. I go back, years and years, to when I was studying with her niece, Lili, whose parents would let us throw a party any time we wanted. They often suggested we visit "Aunt Ceti." She was my mother's friend, and came from her hometown, Dibra, in Macedonia. Nysrete was the daughter of the best known teacher in the Dibra area. I had heard my mother's stories about Nysrete's parents and about how their home was always open for all children. "The father was put in prison for some time," my mother told me. "The day he came out, his pockets were full of candies, and he walked down the street throwing them to us and singing happily. The father, the famous teacher Esad Mezelxhiu, was always kind to us. And his wife," at this point in her story my mom would always sink into a homesick and longing tone, "always had a flower in her hair. There was always some kind of flower, and it made her look so caring and cute." My mother would go on and on. I understand, with the wisdom of age, that this is the deepest expression of care, like the true face of love. Nysrete's

parents must have given her a lot just as she has a lot to give now. "Children, if today is Monday, February 10, what was yesterday? And what will tomorrow be?"

Some of the children are play-acting. "I love math," declares a little boy, sitting in a small chair opposite a little girl. "I think I know it best. I am the smartest." He gets the giggles from Mjellma, who tosses her ponytail around. The two kids in the center are acting as if they are sick. Their teacher had been ill and missed a day of classes. They are finding out what one does when someone is ill. "Shall I prepare you some tea?" asks the little boy, concerned. "Yes, but I would like chamomile," answers the little girl in a hoarse voice.

The little swan whispers to me, "What a taste!" I ask her wickedly, "Don't you want to go home? Don't you want to be with your mom now?" "No way," she answers. "The teacher was ill. We had another teacher all day. I missed her."

"What grade should we give our actors?" asks Nysrete. "An A," everyone shouts. She then sticks papers with words, written clearly and colorfully, all around the walls of the room and has the children use them to construct sentences. Nysrete goes to her desk in a corner of the classroom and comes back with a folder of tests. Each of the test sheets has an attractive drawing that Nysrete has made herself, just like the vibrant words on the walls. The children keep reconstructing sentences, and then reading them all together. I look through the tests and see that each of them has a good grade and warm words from the teacher: "This is nice." "How wonderful." "This is so clever." A tiny girl approaches me. "Do you like reading? I love it a lot. I also write. I am Anda." Then she goes back to her cushion.

Someone knocks on the door. An elderly woman brings in a large basket with bread rolls and sets it on a table. One by one, the children pick up the rolls and say thank you. They sit around the cornered tables and chat as they eat their breakfast. I go to speak to Nysrete, who has rolled up her sleeves. Suddenly a boy tugs on her slacks: "I want the cube. I want the cube." "Eat your roll first. I promise it will be the first thing we do next," she says. Nysrete takes a hardcover notebook from her desk. "See, I have written here that he is an only child. He is a bit impatient, a bit spoiled, but he will get over it. I have all my notes for them in the diary I keep each night. I have kept all the ones I've written during the 36 years of my career. Luckily they were not burnt during the war." "I want one more," another boy asks. "Let's see the basket, my

dear, here are a couple more, take one.” Nysrete turns to me. “He lost his father in the war and still wants a bit more attention.”

After making a tour around the room, Nysrete goes on. “You must love the children and the work you do with them. You must enter their souls every day. When I meet them after a long time, my memory of them as pupils comes back vividly to me.”

“I was the first generation to go through KEC’s training for Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking. It changed everything. School was always my life. It was my father’s last wish for me, his only child, to become a teacher. The training gave me all the tools I knew I lacked, so that I can pass on to these children the passion for learning more, for knowing more, for being always curious. I appreciate every opportunity there is to know and learn more.”

“And how is Lili?” I can finally express my desire to hear about her niece, my old friend. She went abroad with her husband a long time ago. Nysrete turns to the impatient boy. “Just a little bit more honey, then you can start working in your corner.”

“Her husband got a Ph.D. at MIT,” she says. “They will eventually come back home one day.”

A pilot school achieves its status through its potential for innovation and reform. There is not necessarily a pre-existing model for a pilot school, which can be applied, a kind of blueprint, which is taken for granted. Rather a pilot school is a concept, which should evolve into a reality, forged in collaboration with all those involved in the school and its life. Actors include the school director, the teachers, parents, the community, and the children themselves. The definition of the pilot school is thereby created by the actors themselves, on a school-by-school basis, rather than a generic “one size fits all” approach. Pilot schools are to be the testing grounds for reform of education in Kosovo. Each intervention in each school will be subject to extensive research, monitoring, and evaluation, from the very start of the project. The idea is to promote dynamics and processes that can produce new knowledge and outcomes in the field of education where the subjects of change become the protagonists of reform.

The Pilot School Concept

Lili was a talented writer. "What does she do?" I ask. "Does she still write?"

"She left me her poems. I use this one for Mother's Day. I have been using it since she left. Children love it, in particular the part that says 'Mother's Day is when her eyes spark.' You know, honey, there is a lot of heavy poetry in these textbooks, I don't want children to just parrot the words as if they were robots." She looks through the papers and pulls out another poem. "This one I use when we separate and they go on to the fifth grade. Lili wrote it about Dad. Maybe some of them will become teachers one day."

Seeing my cheerless face, she turns to the class. "This is such a rainy day. Do you feel like singing?"

Going out of the school, I can hear their voices.

"This is a great idea, Lindita," Halim says. I tell him how I've started an activity with my children and their best friends. There are five of them, all lively, all bored at school, all thrilled by Counterstrike and other games. "Ma, it is not their fault, all their bad grades. They do not know how to learn. They never read with their minds really in the book," my Valdrin announces after I tell him the language teacher had complained at the parents' meeting. "Maybe I can bring them over to read our books? I would like to show them my house, now that it's all ours."

So I did it. And once I had, one of the mothers called me and told me she wanted to do math with them. She is an architect. And in a couple of weeks, another mother wanted to do civic education, because she finds it important. Our five kids love it. We cook their favorite dishes and bake lots of cookies. They can play and jump around the house. I read *Spiderman* and *Winnie the Pooh* with them, to explain to them how grammar works. They look doubtfully at these books: "Is this a good enough book for school?" Then the kids with the bad grades comment about how passive verbs do not necessarily show lack of activity and give me cute philosophical comments. Then they run down the list of the figures of speech.

"Maybe your teacher was a little confused," I say. "Just look carefully, figures of speech are not decoration. Language is never decoration. It is in your heads and it is you. What about Harry Potter then? What is his magic wand, don't we all want one?"

“Hurray,” they shout, when I announce that a University of Magic had recently opened in Austria, just like Hogwarts. (I made sure my husband and my mother were outside of earshot.) We all decide we’ll someday become magicians. Until then, we’ll read Potter.

Halim listens carefully. “This kind of initiative may be introduced into the schools. We advise our trainees to cooperate with the community and in particular with the families. In the meantime, be careful. You should let them be a little free at first. Step by step, let them be independent. You have been obsessed and even possessive with your children and I know why. Don’t worry, I understand.” Halim did understand. He knew home schooling. His Pedagogical Institute had been the soul of Kosova’s parallel school system during the 1990s. “It was all about survival,” Halim said. “Yes, it was strength, camaraderie, courage, work, hope, rebirth, but not a real school. You cannot learn without being free. It was self-protection and you can only become a hedgehog when you focus on self-defense. You can easily become the same kind of burden for your children that school is, if you insist on inflicting your escape into this fantasy. Administer it in careful doses. You get free of it yourself, and let children get free of it. We need free leaders for our future.”

“The Step-by-Step training made me change my attitude. Now, my approach to children is different, and I try to help them gain new knowledge independently rather than serve it to them readymade. Teaching and learning with this program are so different that I envy those kids who have had an opportunity to be part of it.”

A Step-by-Step Trained Teacher

“Approach our teachers carefully, my dear,” Halim cautioned. “You keep complaining like a spoiled child about them. Don’t forget that in an instant they went from being heroes to beggars. They were not ready for their new role, for the bare truth after decades of being the ‘backbone of the nation.’ They have to make it all up while struggling, like everyone else, with the demands of everyday life, with a far worse social status. If they lost someone in the war, they have to carry on, and help others. Do you ever think who in the hell thinks about their needs, about the needs of those who raise a whole society? Do we want to become a mob? If not, their wounds need healing.” Breathing hard then, Halim slows down. “It is not only Western teaching techniques we are presenting in our training.

We owe this to them who believe in us, who have entrusted us with these reforms, rather than to some official institution. Training could even be a therapy, a cure from fear of absolute authority that has been inside us for decades and centuries. We have to be everything, trainers, social workers, psychologists, so that they become everything for the children at school. Isn't this your passion? Soon, Kosova will be a big home of learning where all of us will be." I hear his conclusion and listen. Never, not ever, has it sounded like an empty slogan to me.