

# Eby Mozafari

## Local Business Owner Breaks Cultural Barriers in Small Ways

ANI MINASIAN | CONTRIBUTOR

You just never know who you will meet in Florence. All kinds of people with all manner of stories end up here, and once in a while you come across an extraordinary person in an unexpected place. I accidentally met such a person one late night, coming off Via de Oriuolo into Eby's Latin Bar, looking for a warm drink and an open seat. There, behind the bar, I saw an unassuming, kind, and slightly-built man who looked like a cross between Einstein and Carlos Santana. I watched as he picked leaves off live herb plants in his showcase and crushed them in a glass to make drinks for some students at the bar. Then he made me a cinnamon-infused tea with so much artistry, I felt like I was drinking champagne.

I was immediately intrigued. Who was this man who made his drinks like Michelangelo sculpting his David? Perhaps he was an artist, making a living as a bartender. Or maybe these drinks were specialties made only in his home village. My friend and I took bets on whether he was South American or Iranian, as he had the features of both.

It turns out his name is Eby Mozafari and he is the proprietor of both the bar and a cafeteria-type establishment across the street. His ethnic background is a mix of El Salvadoran and Kurdish Iranian. He is technically an immigrant to this country but he considers himself a Florentine and speaks Italian fluently. He works behind the bar but rarely if ever drinks alcohol himself. And although his place serves crepes, empanadas and fresh-squeezed fruit juices, it also comes with a printed "manifesto" on cultural diversity while the business card bears the slogan: "Il mondo è diversamente uguale!"

I ran a search on Google, but found only a couple of anecdotes about Mozafari. One was about how he and neighboring business owners had taken up a collection to help a brand-new business on their block make it through a tough economic time; Mozafari was quoted as saying he felt responsible for the newly migrated man whose new business was vulnerable to closure. (He had invited me to an open community meeting at his bar for the neighborhood association which he presided over, so I assumed this was part of their activities.) The other was about how he installed a coin machine at the restroom door in his establishment after the city passed a law saying that business owners had to make their bathrooms available to all tourists, not just paying customers; this time he was quoted as saying he did not feel he had to offer for free a service that actually cost him sixty-five cents.

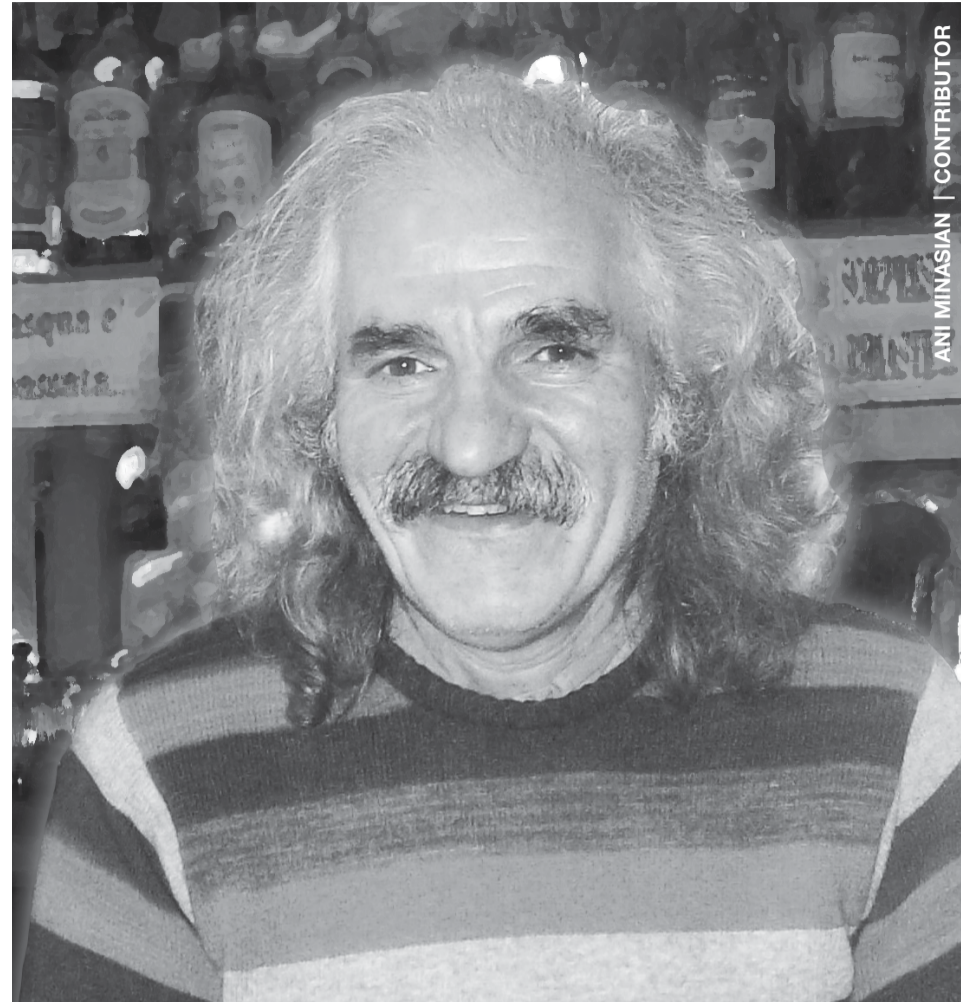
So now he was a community leader, a philosopher, and a shrewd businessman? Deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole... We met twice for long talks about his past and his philosophies, and still there was more to discuss. He is the consummate storyteller, using metaphors as well as

the tableware to illustrate his ideas; the quiet, unassuming man instantly becomes a passionate, articulate and charismatic orator—I am surprised he is not running for office.

In spite of his artistry behind the bar, Mozafari never attended a culinary or fine arts school. Instead he studied medicine with the intention of providing much needed medical care to Kurdish villages like the one in which he was born and raised. When he realized that mending the body was not enough to end the suffering of his people, he quit medical school and instead focused on political activism for the independence of Kurdistan. He was so devoted to this cause that even after escaping the political turmoil in his country, he donated most of his meagre income as an immigrant working laborious jobs in France and Italy to clothe Kurdish villagers and support their struggle for independence from Iranian domination.

Eventually, however, Mozafari became disillusioned with this movement when he realized that independence from Iran would only mean a new government, a different set of individuals, dominating and presiding over the people. He adamantly believed, then as well as now, in the equality of all human beings, that each of us should have a say in our own destiny. In his ideal world, people would come together to find solutions that work for everyone because as he put it: you cannot expect to live happily on an island when the waters around it are agitated; eventually the waves will crash over it and wash it and its inhabitants away.

His idealism has been challenged by the unwillingness of people of different cultures, religions and even genders to relate to each other, with each group believing they are right and that anyone who thinks or acts differently is wrong. This dynamic has become especially



**Technically an immigrant**, Eby considers himself a Florentine and speaks Italian fluently. His gestures of outreach and community involvement bring neighborhood residents and business owners together.

evident in Florence, where natives are being increasingly confronted by the diverse cultures of immigrants flooding the country from Pakistan, Albania, Algeria and other countries. He feels it has become more important than ever to find a way to bring down the barriers between cultures. He also knows instinctively that, in order to be embraced by another culture, one must respect that culture first.

One way he strives to break down these barriers and inspire unity is through the community association which brings residents and business owners in the neighborhood together to discuss current events and local issues. Anyone is welcome, and the members include residents and business owners from different cultural backgrounds. They meet weekly to discuss current issues straight out of the daily newspaper that impact the local community. Currently, they are working on the reconstruction, beautification, and revitalization of the

historical neighborhood where Mozafari's establishments are located.

His other strategy for creating tolerance is through the multi-cultural menu he has created for his bar and for his restaurant. In addition to serving up Latin dishes such as empanadas and burritos, the establishments also put their own twist on local traditional dishes such as trippa and lampredotto, occasionally adding ethnic spices and preparations from other cuisines. The idea is to open natives up to different cuisines and the cultures they represent.

And the public has indeed embraced what Mozafari is serving up. Eby's Latin Bar has become a gathering place for locals, tourists, immigrants and foreign students alike, a place for trying new things and meeting new people. Mozafari's own kind face is a welcome mat that brings people from different backgrounds together with inspiring results.

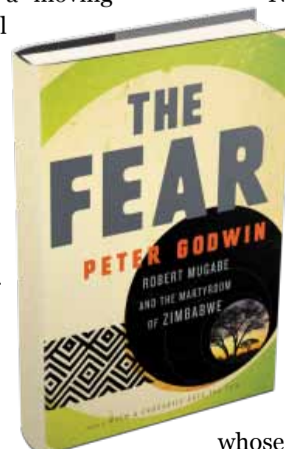
Perhaps he should be running for office.

### BOOK REVIEW

## Peter Godwin's *The Fear*

S.A. SALENIUS | STAFF WRITER

Peter Godwin has created a moving memoir of his personal experience of Zimbabwe under Mugabe's rule. In "The Fear," he journeys through the African nation where he grew up, mixing fond memories of his childhood Zimbabwe with the darkness it was enveloped in during mid-2008. The 84-year-old Robert Mugabe had just lost the election, but kept stubbornly refusing to admit his loss of power. Instead, he launched on a nightmarish campaign of torture and terror. Mugabe's supporters hunted down his opposers only



to brutally terrorize and slaughter them. Native Zimbabweans called the period simply "the Fear."

"The Fear" describes the violence and corruption that prevailed in the darkness of Africa under Mugabe's tyranny. Journalist Peter Godwin was one of the very few who was able to travel through the devastating scenes of brutality. "The Fear" is a rare testimony of the horrors inflicted upon innocuous Zimbabweans whose only crime was their desire for a brighter future and their continued fight for justice. Godwin's eye-witness

report includes the testimonies of many natives who survived rape and torture. At his personal risk, Godwin toured the burned villages and torture bases, visited the opposition leaders and some of the few remaining white farmers and talked to the diplomats who, risking their own lives, tried to contribute in the exposure of the massacre. It is heartbreaking to realize that the touchingly written story of desperate African lives is their everyday reality.

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