

## INTERVIEW WITH SHUKRIJE GASHIN

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Duration: 388 minutes

### Present:

1. Shukrije Gashi (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer/Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() - emotional communication*

*{ } - the speaker explains something using gestures*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names, or expressions*

## Childhood

**Shukrije Gashi:** My name is Shukrije Gashi, I was born on 22 May 1960 in the city of Pristina in a neighborhood at the time called Lagjja e Bihaqit, Bihaqi Street, now I remember that is named Maliq Pashë Gjinolli. I grew up in a relatively large family, we were and we still are eight children: five girls and three boys. My parents have died. Almost all of us are married, with the exception of myself and one of the brothers, who lives in the Netherlands. I finished primary, secondary and higher education in Pristina. I am a lawyer by profession and currently I work at the Center for Conflict Management-Partners Kosova as the executive director.

It was difficult to have a normal life in Kosovo, to have a comfortable life like the majority of citizens in the former Federation of Yugoslavia. Perhaps not everyone, but in some republics citizens had a better life, for example in... more distinctively, the Republic of Slovenia, Croatia but the Republic of Serbia as well. Whereas Kosovo, Macedonia and other places had no economic nor social equality and let's not even talk about national equality in Kosovo specifically.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Before we get there Shuki, what kind of a child were you?

**Shukrije Gashi:** I can say, I was more of a curious than a rebellious child, I started rebelling later. I grew up in a family that was known for its national and educational activity, a family with an average economic income, with a father who, with great efforts, managed to provide us with food, education and everything else a family needs. We used to have our own carpentry shop. He was also a carpenter, this means he made it himself, he manufactured furniture that were mostly carved by hand, they were handmade. My mother was a housewife. This was also due to the fact that the family didn't want to be part of the system in former Yugoslavia, because from the early beginning almost all of our family was persecuted.

My grandfather [Hysen Gashi] was also known for his involvement in national movements from early on, let's say from the 1920s and later, he even had friends at the Conference of Bujan.<sup>1</sup> He was a good friend and comrade with the Albanian Franciscan priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi,<sup>2</sup> who gave my grandfather

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference of Bujan (31 December 1943 – 1-2 January 1944) was a meeting of Yugoslav partisans in which a resolution was passed that promised to let the people of Kosovo decide democratically whether they wished to be part of Albania or of Yugoslavia after the war.

<sup>2</sup> Shtjefën Konstantin Gjeçovi-Kryeziu (1874 – 1929) was an Albanian Catholic priest, ethnologist and folklorist. He is known for being the father of Albanians' folklore studies. He compiled a written collection of the Kanun

the first primer in the Albanian language at the time. And in this spirit I was naturally able to get nourished and shaped with pure national and educational sentiments.

Grandmother [Zahide], is also known in the region of Anamorava<sup>3</sup> for her activity as a traditional mediator. You know, she enjoyed great acknowledgement and respect amongst the men who at the time were mediators of blood feud reconciliations. And despite not being educated, she was very informed, both when it comes to the national awareness and as it regards school information. She used to watch the news in Albanian and in Serbian, all the events on radio, television, you know, all the media that were available at the time.

As a child it often happened that I heard her sing, in fact I remember once, while I was drawing something, as I've inherited an artistic talent from the family. While I was drawing something on a white paper, I was only six years old, I heard her singing at my paternal uncle's terrace,<sup>4</sup> which was very close to us. I mean, only a wall separated us, she was singing a song about Mic Sokoli.<sup>4</sup> And of course I was impressed, I went out to the window, trying not to disturb her. At some point, she noticed that I was there, so she felt my presence and she interrupted the song and looked at me with wonder. "Go on," she said, "continue what you were doing, why... why did you come to the window?" "Yes, I was impressed," I said, "Who is this Mic Sokoli?" I said. And I left what I was doing, I mean the drawing, I left the paper and the pen and I ran through the small door, small doors, a small door on the other side. I ran up the stairs and I sat down and then asked her. "Why are you bothering with this, why do you need this?" she asked. "I wasn't going to ask, but you started singing and it made an impression on me," I said. She started telling me that this guy Mic Sokoli was a national hero, who offered his chest to the cannonball, to protect the Albanians from the Ottoman enemy back then, the Turks.

And like this, thus not only I caught grandmother but also my mother singing, I happened to see her crying sometimes too, and I didn't know why was she crying back then. I remember once, I remembered this recently. I saw her while she was cutting trees, she was cutting it, in colloquial speech we say *shkurtonte dru* [shortened trees], in the yard... twice in a row she raised her hand {pretends to wipe her forehead} and she wiped the sweat and tears with the back of her hand. I was thinking whether to ask her or not why was she crying, and then decided not to. Later on I understood that she had a difficult life as a child, because she also came from a family that was involved in national and human liberation efforts. She told me that... later, when I was mature enough, that when she was two and half years old, let's say nearly three, the Serbian gendarmerie killed her father in front of her. And later in a brutal way with a large dagger, which at the time they called *kacaturra*,<sup>5</sup> I am not sure, it probably must have been a bayonet, they slaughtered them like animals. And so she grew up as an orphan and she says, "I tried to get closer to see my father while he was on his last moments, at some point, he turned his head towards me and looked, and he said to my mother,

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(Kanuni I Lekë Dukagjinit, 1933). He was murdered in an ambush in his parish of Zym, a Catholic village of the Has region.

<sup>3</sup> Southeastern region of Kosovo, including Gjilan.

<sup>4</sup> Mic Sokoli (1839–1881) was an Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter.

<sup>5</sup> Alb. *kacaturra* - a type of bayonet.

‘Hanife, please take this girl away so she doesn’t see me like this’. And then she says, “This ugly sight has followed me my whole life.”

So, it’s not that Kosovo experienced the last war in the year 1999, but Kosovo was in perpetual slavery during its whole existence, and Albanian people constantly battled and went through tough times up till the last war. I mean, this happened generation after generation. And the Serbian regime did not stop with the persecution of families that were marked by the regime as dangerous families, because those were aware of what was happening in Kosovo, why the rights of the Albanian majority were being violated and what had happened throughout history. I mean, during the entire history the same families have been systematically persecuted, they were unable to have access to equal education, access to equal employment and freedoms and other benefits, which were enjoyed by the remainder of the population, as well as Albanians who happened to have close ties to the regime.

Under these circumstances, I can say that although my family was under constant surveillance, under constant supervision by the state, I was surrounded by great family warmth and love from both my father and my mother, as well as my grandmother, to whom I was very close. I remember once in a while, when middle aged men and the elderly, with long mustache and *qeleshe*,<sup>6</sup> came to consult her on how to solve various disputes, disputes about land, and other matters... I remember with how much enthusiasm she used to talk to them, how they should do the impossible to solve and reconcile these cases so Albanians would get more unified and connect more to each other, because she said that despite the problems [we had] with each other, we should concentrate on our mutual enemy, the Serbian regime, because only this way we can hope one day to achieve liberation and live equally to other nations.

It is interesting that she always, always made a clear distinction between the regime and the people, the citizens, she always stressed that out, because she said that there are no white or black nations. There are black regimes and good regimes. And then, this thing has always been fixed in my mind and that she was right, because things should be seen that way. Unfortunately, and for the misfortune of the Albanian community, the Albanian population, but also the Serbian side, the Serbian regimes, throughout their very existence in this region, have continuously been fascist regimes and have caused and provoked wars in the Balkans. And then, for as long as this was sown, it also required time to eradicate it, to uproot it, and it surely created, so to say, a psychological wall beyond which it is difficult even for the Serbian people to see clearly what happened with other nations throughout history, as well as all the changes and the appropriation of historical events in the Balkans.

The things I told you about my grandmother helped me a lot then in my [life] journey, as Shukrije individually, but also as an intellectual, to be clear in my approach towards the majority and the minority, in other words, not to confuse the people with the regimes. I remember the case of one man who came to ask for her help - to go from the house to somewhere else with the goal of reconciling one situation, I mean, some fight -, and I tried to go with her. “I don’t know,” she said, “Why aren’t you like all your other peers? Why are you interested in playing and learning, but always insist on being

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<sup>6</sup> Traditional white felt conic cap, it differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

always behind my back?” She did this {points to her back}. I said, “But grandma, I will do nothing but stay here, I will not open my mouth nor say anything, just let me see what these men say. Why do these men come here and want to talk with you, they want to talk to you.” “But this is not for children! Why can’t you understand that this is not for children.” I said, “I know it is not for children, but I am experiencing that...I am like the other girlfriends, but I have not seen men with the grandmas of my friends... they never mention that men come and ask a woman, how shall I do this job?” “Eh, for heaven’s sake, let’s go” (smiles).

So, then we started the conversation, the man who was in trouble told her that he doesn’t know how to act, “I am hesitating to tell you, ‘Come!’ because I won’t be able to bring you back afterwards.” Grandmother told him, “Listen, the best thing is that first I get the information from you on the situation, what it is about. And then, after I am done with you, I will inform them through someone else.” Because that is how it happened back then, when they sent men from one village to another, or to a village to speak to parties one by one, because the mediators were afraid that in case you brought them together immediately, they, both parties, would confront each other again. And since it was about a land boundary, because there was an injury, I mean, that’s how it’s called, they shot at each other but nothing worse has happened, such as people dying. However, many years had passed and the party that had caused the wound did not have any access to work, to the land, and was living in isolation with their entire family.

After she listened carefully, she told him, I mean, she addressed him and promised him that she would send someone to meet the other party too. I was impressed that the whole time she was talking to the man, grandmother paused time after time and left him with enough room to talk, she never interrupted him during the conversation. She never interrupted him and naturally I did ask her later why it was like that. And so she answered, “But in order to understand the troubles of the other well, you should focus on what the other party is saying, not on what you intend to tell them.” I mean, the details, which... later when I got trained on issues of basic and advanced mediation, I understood that despite the fact that activists for blood feud reconciliation and traditional Albanian mediators did not go through the modern contemporary training, the process was almost the same, only that it did not have the names of [different] phases. However, the same applies in modern mediation.

There were also other cases, and it also made an impression that grandmother never talked about herself, about her horrible experience as a child and as an adult as well, I have to say, to repeat myself, all because of the regime. She had a bitter experience when one of her brothers left home when only nine years old to escape the persecution and then didn’t turn up for a long time. And she said that, grandmother told us that her mother, her mother died because she suffered for him her whole life. Time after time, someone from the *rreth*<sup>7</sup> told them that in some sort of a hill, they kept him in a sack with a cat in it, where gendarmerie held him hanging on a rope while torturing him in such a way that the suffering was greater, and most probably that was also how he died.

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<sup>7</sup> *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is incontact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one’s reputation.

She also told me that by accident she happened to be in the vicinity of a place called *strelište*,<sup>8</sup> or the place where a great number of Albanians were shot, today's Taukbahçe,<sup>9</sup> and she said that the next day the blood was running like river from that side. She was also a witness to other great events, the numerous arrests and killings that Aleksandar Ranković<sup>10</sup> had committed, by forcing Albanians to buy a gun, and then forcing them to sell that gun dozens of times, and in the meantime they get killed and persecuted and beaten to death.

A story my grandmother told when someone from the neighborhood or the family *rreth*, she told us that our family used to have the first primer as I mentioned earlier on. And back then we used to have an inn, a guesthouse. My grandfather was a merchant, meaning he traded in textile and food. And then, one day, a man told my grandfather, he told him, "Look Hysen, you should get someone to run fast to the house and let them know that the gendarmerie is ready, and they are coming to search the inn and the house." And grandfather found someone, because he had many friends, he sent someone who could get there fast to inform my grandmother, and my grandmother out of confusion and stress that they would arrive any minute, you know, the gendarmerie, it seemed to her that the shortest path was the fire, and so she threw the primer in the fire, I mean in the fireplace. It ended up like that, the ABC she talked about her entire life was burned. Every time she spoke about the primer, she always cried.

While, as I told earlier, she told me that grandfather got that primer from the Albanian priest Shtefjan Gjeçov, who operated in the region of Prizren, in Has and Zym. He served in other places too and he was one of the greatest intellectuals and patriots of the Albanian nation. He wasn't just a common priest. My childhood was full of stories like that, which, I can freely say, enriched my life, because apart from the possibility to go out and play with my peers in the yard of our house which was big, and we had a garden, a backyard with various trees...that garden was attractive to me, because there was always a horse or some other animal tied up there, which ended up there due to peasants travelling from far away, who felt safe and free to leave their animals there, as well as to help themselves with water and food and other stuff they needed. This was happening particularly during market days, on Tuesdays, and due to the fact that the street where we lived was near the main market, the green market. And so I have seen various events, various episodes.

In fact, as a child I happened to be present even when there was a murder, which was a very heavy experience, I was very saddened. While I was standing next to the entrance doors, I saw a young boy, who surely could have been, I would say around 23-24 years old, with curly hair, it seemed so. He was running in the direction of the market but I didn't know why. And like that, all terrified and scared, as he was running, I saw an elderly man, who had a problem with his leg but who was holding a gun in his hand, a pistol and who meanwhile fired a couple of times and killed the boy. Since the market street

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<sup>8</sup> Serb. Shooting range.

<sup>9</sup> Neighborhood in Pristina.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

was near, a lot of people gathered and my paternal uncle who also was working in our manufacturing shop, the carpentry shop, went out and kindly asked people to leave. The boy, now lying down almost dead, was asking for help, was asking for water, he [uncle] went inside the yard, fetched a glass of tap water and gave it to him, and then the boy died. It was my experience, my first encounter with such situation, while the man who committed this cruel act asked to come inside our place. My uncle told him, "As you wish, but it is better if you turn yourself in, because there is nowhere you can go." And then I learned later that he turned himself in to the police. So it was a crossroad, where the chances of seeing such details, good and bad experiences, were great.

In the same street, I also remember the events of the year 1968, the demonstrations of that year when I saw many young people run and they were also injured. And one of the injured was the son of my oldest paternal uncle and the son of my aunt, who after the demonstration in the evening came for shelter to our place. One day before the demonstration, in fact even few days earlier, I was hearing a kind of fragments of conversations that were going on between my grandmother, my uncles, my uncles' sons and my sisters, that something alike was about to happen, I mean that a great demonstration will take place in Pristina and Kosovo. Furthermore, I saw my father prepare flagpoles and although I was eight years old, I had a great interest in taking part in this event myself, even though it still wasn't clear to me what is it about, what it means to protest, what demonstrations are.

And as I said, being curious as I was, I always had the freedom to ask my grandmother. I asked her, "I don't know, grandmother, what is the thing with these men coming here every morning and every evening. And I don't know, I have seen father and some of his friends who were carving some sticks." I didn't know that they called them poles, so [I called them] sticks. "I told you that God doesn't let you stick to your own work, you are young, you should take care of your lessons and go out with your peers and have fun and enjoy life. This is not a thing for you." I said, "Yes, I know but then why, I want to know why it is happening." "Why is this happening, you will find out when you grow up," she replied.

And one evening before it happened, you know, the demonstration, they all gathered there again, four uncles and my father, my uncles' sons and the sisters, and women and girls who were older talking about getting organized so they could be on a standby to help the others too. And again I didn't go to sleep, but I sneaked behind the bed, the couch, to follow the conversation (laughs). And that is where I fell asleep because I was interested in knowing what was going on. Certainly later on, when they left, my sister, the one who is older than I am [Bahrije], the second one, picked me up from there and when I woke up I asked her where the others are, and she said, "Where are you? Why didn't you go to bed as you were told by everyone?" "I didn't go because I was interested in knowing why these men and women have gathered here, what is going on." "It is none of your business, go, because everything will be fine. Look after your own chores, it is important that you learn, school is important, you should finish school. Leave these things, they're not for you."

Out of desire to know what was going on, I couldn't fall asleep, I didn't continue the sleep. The next day at six o'clock the bell rang, I ran down the stairs before grandmother did (laughs), to see who it was. And so I saw that many men had come and they were carrying flags with poles. Later they started shouting [slogans] and I heard them run to join the demonstrations. As I said, time after time you

could hear the gunfire, and we've seen it, not only I but my sisters as well. And they weren't much older than I was, with the exception of my oldest and the second sister. Although we were young, we made attempts to join them but my mother and grandmother didn't allow us. They looked out the window in the direction of the front door [house]. They saw how one or two persons helped a third one who struggled or was injured during the demonstration. We also could hear the shouts [slogans].

It is known that the demonstration of '68 was dedicated more to the right to hold the national flag, to use it. So sometime, close to evening time, as I said earlier, boys and other adults who were back from the demonstration started coming in one by one. And at a certain point, I saw that my second sister was trying to help one of my uncle's son, who was carrying on his shoulder, with his hand around his neck, the son of the oldest aunt who was wounded or injured and was wiping the blood that was spilling, dripping from the head across the face, with a handkerchief. And in the meantime, I understood that this thing with the demonstration was not some understandable, nor good activity for my age at the time, because I thought, it is paid with blood and torture. And so later on I tried to find out what is it about because the whole family, the whole family was distressed. Everyone was discussing this issue, I understood that Albanians were demonstrating for greater freedoms and rights, including in particular the use of the national flag on holidays, various state events and so forth.

I grew up with this not nice experience for the Albanian people, and to tell you the truth, since I was very curious, I started reading more, including books that were prohibited at the time and which came to Kosovo from abroad, hand to hand, and which we had to read as fast as possible. Often there were requests to read them by the next day, to finish reading during the night, and so then the same book goes to someone else in order that people are aware of what is happening in Kosovo: why Albanians should be more vigilant, more unified; why Albanians should get more education; why did national and civil inequality in Kosovo exist, economic inequality and other things, so, this is how I started... I don't want to exaggerate, ever since I was nine years old, [I began] to be intensively interested in every event. While my boyfriends and girlfriends, my peers, used to play in the school yard, I either read or listened attentively to Radio Kukës, to the shows for Albanians in the Diaspora, Tirana, news in Albanian and Serbian.

It was then that I learned the Serbian language because my grandmother and father and mother used to watch [the news] a lot so they could be updated, informed, to watch out for what was being prepared for Kosovo as, how to put it, their next endeavor to repress Albanians. And so like this, I was focusing on historic events, on the events, all the way to extending my contacts with other people, who were outside Pristina and in the villages. Even when I went to my uncles' in the village, I always spoke to them on what happened there, why was grandfather killed, why did the other uncle get killed, two uncles, why did one of the uncles join *Balli Kombëtar*,<sup>11</sup> and similar things that left an

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<sup>11</sup> *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands. After a failed attempt to join forces with the partisans in 1943, *Balli Kombëtar* continued to fight both the occupiers and the Communist resistance.



impression on them. “Why is this girl like this?” They always told mother, “Why is Shuki this way, why is she interested in these things? She is not like other children, who go out to play with other children.” Perhaps I can say, this was also, I don’t know... also some kind of experience, because I was very close to her and she gave priority to these kind of conversations, always dealing with these issues. Furthermore, as a child I had, I also had an affinity for writing poetry and stories...

## Youth

**Shukrije Gashi:** I’ve started doing journalism at a very young age. In those circumstances due to... since my family was targeted by the regime, as I said it was considered a nationalist family, the chances for employment for us were few. Knowing this, sometimes I didn’t even think I should apply because I knew in advance that I will not be employed. In spite [of that] I did write and I did publish in, you know, weekly magazines, biweekly and others, such as *Zëri*, *Bota e Re*, *Kosovarja*, and many others, often with an alias because or they wouldn’t get published.

Later, as a student, I joined demonstrations, at the time together with a friend who now lives in Switzerland, a famous activist for the national cause, Saime Isufi. She is the sister of the Deputy of Alliance for Future of Kosovo, Ahmet Isufi. Since she was a friend of my sister, Nafije, she often came to our family’s, and stayed for many nights in a row. We had often discussions about the need for the Kosovo youth, women, girls and men, all of us, to organize and make efforts to come out of slavery, because Kosovo was in fact under slavery.

Even if the Constitution of the year ‘74 brought changes and had its advantages, Kosovo was still not treated as an element, back then it was called a constitutive element of the Federation. And the persecution of Albanians by the regime continued further. Unfortunately, even with this Constitution, and the opportunities created for it to become, to develop a cooperation with the homeland, with Albania, a number of the [Kosovo] Albanian officials, who cooperated and served in the Serbian government, these same ones, never forgot the families under target. On the contrary, the repression, at times on the surface, and at times not, was continuously present.

As a student, now, also due to greater awareness, and luckily because I knew English language from an early age...not because I was given an opportunity to go abroad and learn it elsewhere, but I was interested in it on my own, thanks to my father who did a lot so we were prepared in terms of education. Of course he worked and as I said our living standard was not that bad, because carpentry offered great opportunities. He was also shortly employed in a factory that was at the time called Kosovo Drvo, and dealt with manufacturing of furniture. However, because of his stand against the Yugoslavian and Serbian politics at the time, he was forced to quit his job. And, later I have learnt that, you know, this was the reason why although he received a good salary, he decided not to continue working because he would then be forced to perform “other services.”

However, since we were eight children, it was not easy to provide comforts to all of us. But he always told us that, “On matters of education never hesitate to ask for my help.” And this is how he made it possible that, you know, I take some English lessons, but perhaps I also had more literature and dictionaries than others had. Also because my interest was greater, so I remember that even as a child I used to translate my poems into English, ever since. Naturally, it wasn’t always the same as having the opportunity to go abroad and learn the language directly. However, with great commitment I managed to become a solid speaker of the English language.

Writing poetry and prose, and namely art, is a family heritage. I was the winner of the first place for three times in a row, not only within Kosovo, but in an art, art works competition with competitors from former Yugoslavia. Almost everyone had this gift, my brothers and sisters. Even up to this day, some took it further and some not. One of my brothers, as I told you Bajram, Lami, who lives in Holland, he practices it further. I mean, he graduated in Fine Arts. While the others, the rest of us, did it more like a hobby.

Oftentimes, I wanted to simply not choose law, but art, but it was my father who told me that, “You can have that as a second hobby, so as a second interest, but I wouldn’t say to choose art, to look at it as an opportunity you can live off in the future. Because, this is a place where no importance is given to art. And there will be no benefits from art. As a desire yes, for certain, but as an employment opportunity I don’t believe it will offer you many possibilities to survive, especially in Kosovo.”

And so I listened to him, and that’s how it happened. So, I studied law and as a student I didn’t miss a chance when there were either students or young people in large numbers to engage in speaking about the violation of human rights, the historic circumstances, the unequal social and economic development of Albanians, with a constant focus on gender issues. My focus or concentration was aimed at women. I always knew that, also because of the experience I received from my family, especially grandmother, who always said, “Albanian women, girls should get educated in order to create their own space, for their rights. Otherwise they will remain housewives and always under their husband’s foot.” And this was stuck in my head and through let’s say the national framework of action, I have attempted to raise awareness among men and women, but mostly among men, that without the other half of population, which are women, there will be no substantial and sustainable change of the Kosovo situation.

And I have continuously told women and girls that initially it is not good to refer to women’s rights since it will create a void against men, upon whom these rights depend. But in the name of the initiatives, the commitment to the national cause, we also created space for the cause of gender. And naturally this came out to be the right idea, as little by little with our multiple engagements, we managed to create... to change the opinion, the opinion of men, that women are only useful at home, they can do the housework and here and there some professions that are not very difficult. And especially not, you know, deal with great causes, such as political organizations, demonstrations, participation at decision making level, and alike situations.

So, gradually, they saw it, they began to understand that women are dedicated and sometimes can even do more than men. Knowing that women’s actions, apart from the government that tried by all

means to stop us from being active in the national cause, at the same time, we had difficulties as women even when it came to the traditional mentality of men. And, to be honest, the actions, the activism that we carried out, was done carefully, with extra caution so that it wouldn't happen, in case we missed out on something, that then men would have the reason to say, "Well, see, it is known that women are weak and cannot deal with these issues."

The year 1974, following the adoption of the Constitution of Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo at the time, started to give its first fruits which significantly reflected upon the improvement of human, but also gender and national rights. Particularly important was the issue of the opening of borders for cooperation between Kosovo and Albania. As a result of this, the opportunity to exchange experiences in the elementary and secondary education came about, but also to create better practices for Kosovo, and then at the cultural level and so forth. But also the possibility for Kosovo's history and the repression that existed in Kosovo because of the very existence of the Serbian regime in this region, you know, was also greater.

At the same time, the awareness of Albanians, I mean of both men and women, opened up the horizon for the possibility to start thinking about changes in terms of the content of Kosovo status, to open up the possibility of the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo. However, there still was hesitation among the citizens, due to the great repression and due to convictions. I said it that back then, under those circumstances, class and social differences existed. And these class and social differences made it possible for the existence of a gap between these categories and no immediate readiness for reaction, for citizen protests, for civic activism. However, that happened more in small groups and more among families who were known and had a conviction established much earlier.

Still, that part of politically aware citizenry, the young people, especially Kosovo students and professors took it upon themselves to unify the existing political awareness that was scattered among classes and social categories and to communicate it to others. This happened in various forms. You know, through distribution of materials such as pamphlets, releases, then various journals such as, *Zëri i Kosovës*, *Zëri i Lirisë* and other journals that... *Lajmëtari i Lirisë* and others, that were getting published outside of Kosovo, in Switzerland and other countries, and then brought to Kosovo and distributed to the public, in order to start preparations for an eventual reaction, in order to attempt to change the situation in Kosovo, be at the political level, be at the social or economic level.

Beside violation of political rights, you know, we, as youth, were also interested to learn more and to find out information about Kosovo's resources. And we naturally understood that had it been a republic, with the natural resources available Kosovo would have been able to be self-sustainable and equal to the other republics, furthermore to sell its own products outside of Kosovo, meaning in the region and in Europe. And then this knowledge started to turn into a concern and from a concern into a need for reaction. And this way, by disseminating this information, we started to gradually create the circle, to expand our ranks, as we called them, so as many young girls and boys through groups joined a national movement, the Movement for the Establishment of the Republic of Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation. Certainly this was followed by great consequences. It started with the

improvement of the conditions in students' dormitories and turned into an opportunity to spark a reaction through big demonstrations.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** I want to ask a question here, since you mentioned it.

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What, what... what ideological line did it pursue?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And the other question is, how was this movement funded... because it was an illegal movement and how did it get funded? If propaganda material was published for example in Switzerland, then there should have been some sort of fund, and how did that happen? Because I have the impression that young people do not have any information regarding how...

**Shukrije Gashi:** You're right.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did that movement happen, how was it motivated?

**Shukrije Gashi:** But as I said, you know... Albanians, the Albanians of Kosovo, of Macedonia and the Albanian population across Yugoslavia... considering there was great economic inequality between Kosovo and the rest of Yugoslavia, great part of healthy active men were forced to leave Kosovo, and Macedonia, Montenegro and go to various Western countries, in Europe and further in order to support their families financially.

At the same time, these Albanians, seeing that life abroad was different and getting into contact with civilized realities in the countries where they lived, started simultaneously to get educated and their anxiety grew about why Kosovo was enslaved and what was to be done so that Kosovo becomes equal to other republics of former Yugoslavia. Then they started to get interested in organizing political groups, in other words, consolidating, channeling their concerns, addressing them to an organization and this way the first cells of an organization, at the time so called trios, started to emerge.

Allow me to explain something here because an impression was often created among the people that trios and political movements back then, ideologically had a communist character. In fact, these trios and all other actions did not have the intention of disseminating a Marxist-Leninist ideology, but their aim was to help the organization of a general national movement, which would help, you know, the liberation of Kosovo and the other lands, which used to be part of Albania.

Why was this chosen, why was this type of action chosen? This, for the part that thinks soundly, happened because Yugoslavia was a socialist communist country. Albania was a socialist communist country. Their neighboring countries were socialist, thus activists of the early national movements, and of groups, be those Marxist-Leninist ones, knew that had they labeled themselves and the group Democratic Movement, would have been doomed to fail from the very start, because they wouldn't have found support neither in Yugoslavia nor in the motherland.

Always, when we, including myself here, spoke to friends from the group and the Movement, we never focused on ideological aspects. To us, the establishment of these groups was only a pretext to gather people, moreover, calling them Marxist-Leninist was a defense, it was a pretext for our protection, because the state was socialist, communist, the motherland was also socialist and communist. We thought that at least in this regard they could not find a reason to accuse us to create groups that were against the existing system in the country where you lived and acted.

In fact, the reason was that we get together and unite around the national cause. This had nothing to do with Lenin, or Marx, or the others. The point and the aim was entirely for the Albanians to get consolidated, politically organized. Furthermore, I can freely say that even back then in those times there was a critical thinking among girls, boys, women and men who were part of the Movement. And this helped a lot. What I said, the establishment of a national platform where girls and women, besides the possibility of contributing at the level of national liberation, created the space for their gender action. And believe it or not, those boys and men at the time had a very kind and correct attitude, furthermore they were even supportive of women and girls and men themselves, in respect to the possibility of attaining gender equality. Something which has later degraded, unfortunately.

Another fact that helped this unification, this unity between the two sexes was the religious aspect, which was very insignificant back then. Nobody was interested in religious matters and we have never had that concern. Among those boys and girls who were committed to contributing to the improvement of the political, economic and social conditions in Kosovo, you had members of all confessions. So Albanians by affiliation, but of Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic faith. And we never, never saw each other as Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim, but as Albanians. Because the purpose of us being there was the national cause.

And always in this regard, the Serbian regime tried everything in order to create divisions. They achieved this aim up to a point in Macedonia, where the influence of religion was greater, because it was a society that was more traditional and education opportunities were fewer. There were more mosques than schools. Whereas, as I said earlier, fortunately, despite Albania being socialist, the opening of the border made it possible for Kosovo to advance in the field of, especially in the field of education. While inputs from Albania, the exchanges between Albania and Kosovo, had quite a positive impact, especially in improving the quality of education, culture and science.

At the same time, this served as inspiration and also made it easier for the masses to get mobilized against explicit tendencies of the Serbian regime, whereas exactly during the '80s great changes were being made, particularly under the leadership of the Yugoslav army of the time, by removing from the decision making structures all the others apart from you know...Serbs. Therefore, the political leadership of the time, the internal military leadership, consisted up to seventy percent of Serbian members. This was then felt to a large extent even in Kosovo, particularly the year 1979 was decisive when for the last time *stafeta*,<sup>12</sup> a symbolic baton that was carried through the entire Yugoslavia, was handed over to the leader, the president of the Yugoslav Federation back then, so of Yugoslavia,

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<sup>12</sup> *Stafeta e Rinise*, or the Relay of Youth, was a symbolic relay race held in Yugoslavia every year. The relay carried a baton with a birthday pledge to Josip Broz Tito.

President Tito. When this organization has to supposedly pass through Kosovo there were great dilemmas, because Albanians were no longer those of the early years, when anything could be sold to them in the name of equality, brotherhood and unity and other slogans that were being used to preserve Serbian domination in Kosovo.

The first clashes between the government and Albanian citizens, as I said earlier, the year '81 was decisive, started with... so with the pressure due to vast arrests among the students. They were dissatisfied with the harsh conditions at the dormitories, with the impossibility for Albanians to study abroad, with inequality within the University, with the lack of quality education, lacking necessary books, with the lack of scholarships which were allocated to, entitled to other citizens in former Yugoslavia but not Albanians. Although Kosovo had great resources, there was Trepça, the Electrical Energy Combinat, and many other resources, despite having all these resources, Kosovo always remained poor and Albanians suffered for the lack of jobs and sound social and economic conditions. All this then made the citizens frustrated, and mobilize to and... one day even rise up against the existing regime.

In those circumstances, so the demonstrations of March 11, 1981... some friends and I, as well as family members, following what happened in the dormitories, undertook to get organized, mobilized because an organization already existed. I was connected to Ahmet Isufi, Saime Isufi, Nuhi Berisha who later got killed together with Rexhep Mala. We started to think seriously about organizing a national movement. And we started with drafting or writing notices, pamphlets, and overnight we managed to write 2000 pieces by hand, over 2000 pieces, with a pen, handwritten, in order for them to be distributed on April 26, if I remember correctly. And so we managed to distribute them.

Besides the distribution of these pamphlets, the participation in the demonstration, we held meetings with citizens in order to unite, to create, to multiply our supporters and make people aware, to bridge the gap that existed between social classes. Because as I said earlier, the class, the political elite of the time stood far from people's needs and looked at them with a different eye. Them and us, us and them. That's how it was talked about back then. So, those of us who conducted activities to mobilize supporters for getting organized against the regime of the time, the Albanians who were in power, in power back then, were considered enemies of the state and the government.

And naturally I and some of my family members and friends who were born and grew up in the city of Pristina, and knew each other well, we knew well all social classes, we tried gradually, tactfully to infiltrate into these families, to raise national awareness. And I can say that we succeeded in this. Depending on the family, that's how we used the tactic. So, it needed activation. And it is perhaps surprising how a number of citizens with tradition, with a city tradition I'd say, generation after generation, who lived in the city of Pristina, did not show, or greatly hesitated to show willingness to get involved in such movement. I often thought why was it like this. So it was the regime that made sure that this class gets rich, and kept it close in order, through denationalization, to succeed in instrumentalizing and causing dissent between classes of citizens. And at times it achieved this.

However, despite the consequences and dangers, we knew what our goal was and in every meeting we continuously emphasized that, "Our goal is not the continuation of class differentiation but

multiplying supporters, never considering the ideological aspect of the movement as essential, but referring to the national cause.” And we constantly provided the explanations that, “We are using this, how to call it, a pretext, this type of labeling because we will not be acceptable with any other attribute - as I said, the Democratic Groups - neither by the Yugoslav state nor the Albanian state.” What has been rumored later, that’s an issue of the viewpoint of those who were close to the Yugoslav regime, in order to cause divisions among people and at the same time to defend themselves for the actions they undertook against the population while they were in power.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** One question. In what form did you get organized? We might clarify this, and then we can take a break. You spoke for an hour, or more. Let’s have a break, then we can get to the demonstration of ‘81 and your imprisonment and the ‘80s.

**Shukrije Gashi:** But I already said it...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did you know whom to approach? It was very dangerous back then...

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes, it was.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** People went to prison for... because they had a book in their bag which perhaps wasn’t... didn’t agree ideologically with the Yugoslav mentality.

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes, the number of... so, families that were persecuted because of their activities, their nationalist action against the Serbian regime, was not small. Those families continued their activity because they had sworn to be engaged for their entire life, until the accomplishment of the goals of Albanian patriots and martyrs who fell throughout various historic periods.

For example, in the case of my family, myself, my sisters, brothers, all of us had friends with whom we were freer to share, exchange our views around political and national developments in Kosovo at the time, the malicious actions of the Serbian regime. Who were the ones who collaborated with the regime for example? We knew that, we had the information and then we tried to get to those families one by one, to get to the family members, to socialize with them, and bring them to our families, then engage them in the group, gradually unfold our goals, our ideas and so like this raise the awareness of the masses even on an individual basis. Because there was no other way. And so these family members could then go back to their families, unfold in the same way, you know, the information, the ideas, the purpose of the organization. This way ‘81 was organized, the demonstrations of ‘81. And an organization of students, girls and boys and professors, young people, turned into a popular movement, into a large people’s demonstration, of a great scale, which then ended up with massive sentencing of Albanians.

The organization of these demonstrations came, or derived as a consequence of the awakening of national awareness, particularly due to the possibilities created by the cooperation between Kosovo and Albania at different levels, at the level of education, you know, then cultural, then the music festivals that were organized in Kosovo, the various groups that came from Albania and organized concerts in Kosovo. The raising of awareness started on a large scale also among those social categories in Kosovo that were close or worked directly with the regime of the time in Kosovo, which

was supervised largely by Serbia. And then they saw closely what it means to cooperate and share with the other part of your nation that was separated from Kosovo only by a border.

This influence inspired large masses even among students, especially due to the content of the songs that were sung by Albanian ensembles that organized concerts in Kosovo time after time. Being influenced by singers from Albania, Kosovo singers too started to make songs with similar content dedicating, you know, songs to heroes, and to the early activists of the years, the year of '68 and who later sacrificed for the Kosovo cause and for changing the status of Albanians in former Yugoslavia. All of these gradually influenced the rise of interest, the growth of the interest of the Albanians in making changes in society.

On the other hand, while there was a flourish of the Albanian culture, of Albanian education, the improvement of the quality of education, meanwhile, on the other side the Serbs experienced this as a degradation or an escalation of the situation in Kosovo and as violation of rights of Serbs in Kosovo, although up until then on a large scale the representatives at the central administration... of the political organization, were from the Serbian community. Some of them, due to the impatience in regard to developments in Kosovo, not because they were under pressure from Albanians, but simply for the fact that Albanians started to unite more through the exchange of experiences with Albania in education and culture, they [the Serbs] experienced this as type of opportunity for Kosovo to slip off their hands. And without having any direct pressure, they started to leave, some of them, Kosovo.

In the meantime, the Serbian regime, especially the elite that led the Yugoslav army started to heavily increase the repression and pressure over the Albanian community that was serving in the Yugoslav army. Even more, staged murders started, as well as staged political scenarios, internal arrests, you know, within the Yugoslav army. The arrests of Albanians in the Yugoslav army, their murders based upon a political conspiracy affected Albanians a lot, [enough] to get them irritated by the government's actions and incidentally mobilize further, to get protected from the greater evil that was being prepared for Kosovo and Albanians.

This aggressive approach towards the Albanian soldiers then started to expand even at the level of factories, big companies, through the political establishment of the time, which was, as I said earlier, close to the regime, when Albanians were replaced, so the managing structures in big companies were replaced either by Serbs, or Albanians who were loyal to such actions of the regime.

Although some of the loyal Albanians accepted these posts, with time they started to notice that the Serbian regime wouldn't stop there with such actions, but the violence would continue and gradually they started to resign too, but at the same time to also raise their voice, because a national awakening was happening in Kosovo. And this national awakening started to largely affect all classes. Especially the arrest of those people or cadres who used to serve in the Serbian regime, once and for all enabled the raise of awareness among Albanians, since there were no good Albanians for the Serbian regime. And this made Albanians unite and realize national unification.

In those years another activity started then, although not on a large scale. The awakening of the national awareness happened also because of the large number of people who got arrested. Almost half of the Albanian population was in prison. And this increased the revolt, at the same time



influenced people's unity. Now Albanians were aware that there was no other road, for them, apart from getting organized, to take the destiny into their hands and to think about national liberation. Initially the Movement for the Albanian Republic in Yugoslavia was established, therefore the groups merged, the trios. I remember the conversations I had back then with Nuhi Berisha, with Ahmet Isufi, with Saime and other friends... Gafurr Elshani and many others whom I cannot remember at the moment. With my friends, Suzanë Zakuti, with my cousin from my father's side Emine Gashi, Shemsije, with the other cousin from my father's side Hedije, with my sister Hilmije, with my sisters Nafije, Bahrije and all the rest, with my sister's daughters, Tima, etc., though they were very young, with my brothers, my paternal uncle's sons and all the girls and boys, my peers in the family, that in fact we should do everything to expand our ranks and require the change of Kosovo status, from province to Republic.

We always kept ties with... today, you know, national martyrs, Jusuf Gërvalla,<sup>13</sup> Bardhosh Gërvalla, Kadri Zeka, and others, who at the time lived in Switzerland. A friend of mine and my sister's, Nafija, Saime Isufi, a devoted activist, devoted to the national cause, was forced to leave Kosovo, due to her involvement in activities. And during the time she was in Switzerland, you know, it was the year 1982, Jusuf, Kadri and Bardhosh were murdered. And at that time there were talks to merge the groups, the merging of groups into a national movement, as I said, for the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo.

And while this happened there, meantime we continued our activities, disseminating this idea which was considered as a necessity, for other reasons too, so once and for all to remove the conviction that prevailed, to some extent, among people, that these groups were organized on ideological basis and so that citizens, without hesitation or reservation, join the national liberation movement. So, through the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo, naturally we always aspired to the unification with Albania, but initially, as a first stage, the first step was the creation of the Republic of Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation.

We managed to conduct our work, you know, once again through reading of materials which... leaflets, various journals, books. At the same time, we worked towards raising national awareness with a need to create space for gender equality, by continuously emphasizing that a woman who is not equal to a man in education, will not be useful to give a qualitative contribution to society. And it is very interesting that this was endorsed with great affection by the other half, by the male gender, by men, and was much appreciated. And it was also much supported, and was also propagated at large on their behalf. And this then made it easier for us to expand our ranks.

Also, the women's involvement in the movement helped, that many actions were carried out more easily, because it did not cross the mind of the regime that women would get involved in such issues. Because, as we all know, at the time these actions were reserved for men only. And the distribution of leaflets, of other materials was easier when done by women, because they were not under much

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<sup>13</sup> Jusuf Gërvalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and also a nationalist activist killed in Germany together with his brother and a third person. All these killings have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

surveillance, compared to men who were under surveillance much more, either by the undercover spies, or Yugoslav UDB<sup>14</sup> agents. And so, we managed to resume our activities and continue with the demonstrations in the year 1982, as well as to create a network of people, of the movement's members, to stretch it out all over Kosovo and outside.

I remember the anniversary of the 1982 demonstrations, the anniversary of March 11. My late grandmother, Zahide, on the occasion of Mother's Day, March 8, a night before, gathered everyone from the family, so girls and women and said, 'I have an idea, instead of celebrating March 8 with some turkeys here, and going to visit each other and buy jewelry and gifts, better yet let's get together and go in front of the prison and ask for our girls and boys who are now imprisoned.' And that's how it happened. Hence, on March 8, on March 11, the anniversary of '81, the demonstration was repeated, with demands such as the release of prisoners of conscience, that is how they were called, and the other being the Republic of Kosovo.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What, what does it mean of conscience?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Hmm, of conscience...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Prisoners of conscience...

**Shukrije Gashi:** of political conscience (smile), you know...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Are you able to explain this concept?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes, I can break it down... as per our understanding, political conscience was a political awareness. Whereas people are politically conscious, aware of the situation Kosovo was going through, and of what should be undertaken in order so that Kosovo gets liberated from slavery and socio-economic conditions are improved, that Kosovo becomes a Republic from province. Those were the activists with political conscience.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Was this a term that was used internally?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Hmm...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Or is it a term that was developed later on?

**Shukrije Gashi:** No, this was a term that was in use for the reasons I mentioned earlier. Because, if there were some other vocabulary used, that wasn't familiar, or not familiar to citizens, members who showed interest in joining in... it would have been difficult for a new vocabulary to be invented right away. Gradually, we then started to abandon such forms of expression and created new expressions that were simplified and easier to use, to create or awaken a national conscience among Albanians.

The involvement in these activities was a useful method for women to gain trust and get engaged and for women to hijack, invade a space for action and feel equal in all political activities. Moreover, I can say with great consideration that all those girls and women who were arrested used to have a very

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<sup>14</sup> UDBA - *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

stoic attitude towards the regime and that there are very rare cases when they revealed who their friends were. There was an oath between women, that we should stay stronger than men, so we do convince the other half that we are capable of succeeding and that we deserve the rights which we are fighting for.

This was acknowledged by men themselves and if you happen to speak to men, you shall understand that it rarely happened that young girls or women were weakened because of the violence exercised on them in prison. Almost never. They were willing to die rather than spit a word from their mouth about their female or male friends. It was a political oath to create a solid and sustainable foundation for the next step, so that later on, through dedication and funds, we could fight for gender equality. This was, you know, women's strategy for taking back the space... And women from this time were and still continue to be like that. I feel very sorry for all the changes, our society's neglectfulness towards them. Some of them have been forced to leave the country and some have remained... have been marginalized.

## Prison

**Shukrije Gashi:** I was arrested in the 1983... at the same time, there were arrests in Gjilan, in the city of Gjilan. At the time, Nuhi Berisha, who apart from being a member of the Movement and my fellow activist back then, was also my boyfriend, had informed me that arrests have started in Gjilan, and there is the possibility... there is the possibility that we might get arrested too. And I begged him... since Nuhi was also one of the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army and he, you know, his main goal was to establish the Army, I begged him, and we talked about him leaving Kosovo, because in this regard he was more prepared than others. And then it was decided that he leaves.

One early morning, an April morning, I went to the house where he lived to talk to him about what should I do then, as a member of the Movement. Before I left, the phone rang in my house and I spoke to the father of Ahmet Isufi, and he told me that Ahmet had been arrested. Naturally, back then we referred to each other with pseudonyms, because phone tapping, you know, was happening a great deal. I got the information early, and I went to share this information with Nuhi, because I knew that he was already in danger. We talked to him, which materials should be totally destroyed, and which ones possibly preserved, and whom to send it to. I had a wide circle of friends... including those ones with whom I was studying. I decided to share some of the materials with a friend of mine, so she could find ways to save them, to hide them somewhere, since the regime suspected my family more than hers. And that's how it was decided.

Once we talked about the tasks, I knew that Nuhi leaving could mean the last time we saw each other, because my fate was uncertain, and his too. I was very certain that the police and the UDBa were watching our every step. And that it will happen that I get arrested for sure! And after I took those materials for distribution... they had to be hidden, I went out in the street. I said farewell to Nuhi, and while I continued walking, I stopped for a while, I turned around once again. And that was the last time I saw him, so, in April of the year 1983. At the beginning of the neighborhood, actually at the end, I saw

two agents waiting. And then I had to divert from my path, enter a new street, so that through small doors, from house to house, I came to the street where I lived, in order to avoid the danger.

I remained with a great worry, because now I wasn't sure whether the same agents managed to track whether Nuhi was still there or not. When I arrived at the bridge of the river Prishtevka, which no longer exist because it has been covered, I saw there another agent who was looking for, and waiting for someone. And he was certainly waiting for me, because there was no one else to wait for! And instead of going back to the street heading home, I entered the market without having to, only so I could avoid the probability of getting arrested or being seen by him. And I observed him from afar. I waited there, I waited for a long time until dawn, I didn't go home. When I arrived home, I spoke to my paternal uncle's daughter, who was also active, Emine Gashi, now Rexha, who is married in Dibër. We were of the same generation. And I told her, I said, "I have to...I have to do something by any means, because UDBa is after us. I saw the agents today, Ahmet has been arrested, it means all signs point out that we are in danger, so I have to do something to... either leave for some time, or leave the country, so I don't fall in the hands of the police."

The next day, early in the morning, we went to buy shoes. I made sure they were comfortable shoes, so I could run easily (laughs) to avoid the danger. While... back then it was called Boro Ramiz, Sports Center today, it was called Boro Ramiz at the time... as I was going through different shops to find comfortable shoes, my uncle's daughter had spotted, had noticed an agent who was following us. Besides, not only my uncle's daughter, but also the shop assistant at the shop had noticed this movement and he asked me to get in the dressing room... inside, where... in one quarter of the shop, and stay there until the agent leaves. I was positively impressed, and at the same time it was surprising, how come the shop assistant knew whom was the agent following? But the shop assistant knew that he was one of the notorious agents of, you know, UDBa, and he went to the front of the shop himself to make sure that he was leaving. The moment he saw he had left, he called me and told me, "Fast please, get out through the upper part of the building!" Out of the upper entrance, and that's what we did. Then from there, we started running and again from afar, my uncle's daughter saw some other agents who were on the move. And so this way we managed to get home through side streets. At that point we agreed that the danger was now imminent and we should do something to avoid arrest (sighs).

While we were talking to each other, all worried, my mother had noticed that something was wrong. And she asked us, "What is going on with you two? Why are you distressed?" She addressed me, "Why there was a phone call this early? Where have you been? What is happening? Why are you keeping secrets from us? What is going on?" I replied, "Nothing! This is normal, times are bad, there are arrests everywhere..." I told her that Ahmet had been arrested, and then she said, "This is not a good thing at all! So, soon it will be you!" "Yes..." I said, "it is not unexpected, it can happen that... don't be surprised by this, it's better to know."

Naturally, there were numerous [political] materials at home, those we had drafted to distribute, but at the same time the influence, the inspiration from these materials had gone so far that even my

brothers, who were much younger than I was, had written in their school notebooks, written, you know... you could find scribbling such as, "Kosovo Republic," "Kosovo..." "Unification of Kosovo and Albania," etc. a,

"Kosovo is ours," and so on, "Trepça is ours," so, slogans that were shouted and spoken of even during the demonstrations of '81. Then, [you could find] some drawings with national content, drawings and mocking of politicians of the time, also Albanian ones, with sketches where they were presented according to their characteristics, portraying them as various animals, and so on. And for the others, you know, for those that... the mocking of politicians, I was not much aware of it, because it didn't occur to me that they were dealing with these issues (laughs).

However, I decided to go to my uncle's, at Emine's father and my cousin's house. I point this out intentionally, because in the year '81, Njazi Gashi was sentenced to nine years in prison. I went to their family, so I could escape from home. That evening, I cannot exactly remember, but someone was getting engaged, whether at my uncle's, where I was staying, or at another uncle's, who lived in the house attached to the house of Emine's father, I don't know, but I know that such event was taking place. While they were singing there, because of the engagement, the police had already surrounded my house and had gone to my house, and the house of my other uncle, where my grandmother was living. At that moment, I don't know why, perhaps an intuition, it seemed as if I heard from the outside the trunk of the police cars, and all of a sudden I jumped on my feet, like this {jumps off her seat}, distressed. I said, "Oh God! Probably the police!" I said to my uncle's daughter, "I..." I said, "should get away from here."

And it turned out to be like that. Then, those heavy knocks started on the door of the house, knocks by the police and UDBa agents. I ran to the attic, the roof of the house, I ran out of there, jumped over the wall, and went to my uncle's neighbors. The police turned up. They arrested my uncle's daughter there, the one who was the same age as I was, Emine. At the same time, they arrested my youngest sister, Hilmije [Higi]. My father was arrested too, and the son of my eldest uncle... all of them were taken to the police station and were held there. The daughter... my uncle's wife, who was also my aunt, was very distressed and so in the early morning, you know, I went back, I left the neighbor's house, and returned to my uncle's, and we decided to leave Pristina.

And we headed for my aunt's village, to go to my maternal uncle's place. We walked eight hours. My uncle's wife advised me to put on a raincoat, you know, a women's coat, and a pair of... back then we called them *dimija*, *kule*, where *kule* were smaller than *dimija*. She said, "Because you camouflage like this and don't get noticed." Although I didn't feel comfortable at all, first of all, especially because it was against my nature and I didn't want to identify myself with such outfit, however, I agreed to it. When we

got to the village, and we had to walk through the hills and so it was very difficult, I had to take the *kule* off, because I couldn't take it anymore (laughs). Looking at the sky, I saw that the police was coming with a helicopter {nods her head}. And then, together with uncle Fehmi, we went in the direction of the forest, no hills anymore, but the forest, in order to avoid the chase. And we got deep into a thick forest. You know, we stayed there till dark and we couldn't see.

When it got dark, we arrived at my uncle's and because of... a great pressure, and due to the fact that they were... simply targeted by the regime, we discussed the possibility to stay or not. I always... my uncle and I, we always insisted that in case they don't feel comfortable with my presence there, I shouldn't stay

there. Because I was aware that wherever I went, each family would be jeopardized by my presence.

Some of them were of the opinion that I should stay, naturally not all of them, because not all people share the same opinion, and I was, I understood this. I decided, together with two of my uncles, uncle Fazli and uncle Dalip, who were also members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, while uncle Dalip was killed during the last war in Kosovo, he was also a participant in all the demonstrations that occurred in Kosovo, we decided to take the mountains again. So I was... staying there, but had to stay in the forest, near

where the old cemetery was, because we thought that the police would not come to the cemetery.

I remember a case... so, in every circumstance there are moments of humor. And I didn't know, as it was dark, and in the moonlight I couldn't notice that it was a cemetery, I didn't know where we were and I sat on a grave, without knowing where I was (laughs). And looking around {looks around}, I saw some sparks going on in the moonlight. They both knew, but they thought that if they told me I would be frightened. And so I asked, "What, *more*, what is happening? I don't understand! What are these candles, sparks that are being spread in the air?" They looked at each other, and started to laugh. And they told me, "Hmm, very good! You, who aspire to fight for human rights, you are violating the rights of someone who is right now lying underneath you." And I looked around, still not understanding the point of this sentence. And then they started laughing. I said, "*More* men, tell me what are you talking about because I don't understand what is happening here, with these candles." I said, "Because I don't care! Whoever it is, speak up! What is this thing?" Then, uncle Dalip said, "Look..." he said, "we are at the cemetery." He said, "Because you can't be safer anywhere but here" (laughs). I understood then that I was sitting on top of a grave (laughs). So, like this! {Shakes her head.}

However we then knew that the police, the agents... we got the information that they continued to be interested, they interrogated even my father, my sister, and others, and we decided that I should leave somewhere much farther than my uncle's' place. The organization started. I managed that, through the help of uncle Dalip, my uncle, now both deceased, Fehmi, and a friend of my uncle's wife's brother whose name was Rama. He was a man from Majanc, Majanc, the village of Majanc, which is in Llap. When he found out the reason why I want to go underground, to leave, he then took his truck, and with his truck, together with his friend Jahir, who was the brother of my uncle's wife, and with my uncle Dalip, he took me to Ferizaj, to get shelter at another family's.

I stayed for week with that family. It was the Lekiqi family, and the head of the house's wife was a cousin of mine, but we did not know each other. From there, we decided that I move on, so I change my location, and move to Prizren, to another family's, in order to avoid the possibility of being caught by the police. Then I stayed in Prizren for three weeks, or less. I am not certain about the time. And to avoid the danger, I spent the nights at the town's old cemetery. So, I spent almost every evening there,

until the early morning hours. The head of the house was a brave man, who had lost one eye in the war, as a member of *Balli Kombëtar*, a passionate patriot, who used to tell me, “Feel comfortable! Only because you insist on going to the cemetery, whereas for my family and me, you could freely stay here. Do you see this gun hanging? I will protect you till the last bullet!” However, despite all his commitment, I didn’t want to endanger the family, hence I decided, so in the evenings I go to the old cemetery of the town of Prizren.

After some time, I received the information that I should meet with some of Nuhi’s friends, and from there cross [the border] together with my uncle’s son, who was also being persecuted at the same time, Muhamet... by the police, so we do pass through Slovenia, and then continue for Switzerland, to meet up with Nuhi and others. Unfortunately, the group that... that was supposed to meet us, to organize our journey to Slovenia, had been found by the police. And, when my uncle’s son arrived at the place where they should have met, he didn’t see anyone. Later, it was known that some of them had been arrested and this was the reason for not holding the meeting.

Afterwards, the oldest brother of my uncle’s son, and the uncle, and all of us decided to... it was decided, though against my will, simply put, that we had to... we had to go back home, and for me it was very difficult to surrender. And so, when I got back home, I always thought that we should find another solution, not surrender. We spoke to my uncle’s son, and a friend of theirs had told them that, “Escaping from such a lawsuit, such accusation, will make it much more difficult, because once the authorities are informed about your escape, and catch you afterwards, if they catch you, the punishment will be much greater. Whereas, if the escape doesn’t happen, it will be easier.” And it was decided so. After all that time in the underground, I returned home. During the whole time I was supposed to stay in the attic of my uncle’s house, an old house.

My father, as I said earlier, was a very open minded, very liberal man, he had his viewpoints... liberal views, and he knew I was in a relationship with Nuhi. One day he came to me in the attic where I was, and told me, “Shuki, you are my daughter, please let’s speak openly! Feel free to tell me whether you have slept with Nuhi. Because I am a parent myself, and you know very well that it might happen that you get arrested. And eventually any... if a pregnancy happens, it will be very difficult for you in prison.” I told him not to worry, not to get concerned because this hasn’t happened. And he asked me a few more times, “Please, feel free! You know very well that we spoke openly about everything even in the past. You remember that since you were 18 years old... and when you got your first period, so just before turning 13, we talked. It was you and I when we talked about it. These are normal things. Feel free to talk to me about all of this!” I reassured him that it didn’t happen and it won’t happen, the pregnancy, and then he felt at ease about this issue. “I...” he said, “my daughter, I never interfered in your life. Do as you think is best for you. Let it be your decision whether you want to stay, or leave, and you want to continue or not in your path. It is difficult, but if you think of falling into the hands of the police, think it well, do not take others with you.” Then I swore to him that even if it cost me my life, I would not spit a word from my mouth. I would speak for myself, but not about others.

And one day, obviously early in the morning, we heard a heavy knocking on the door. I was...not sleeping, but staying idle in bed, because I could not sleep. When you know that any moment you wait for something to happen, such as getting arrested, you cannot even sleep. Some days had passed from when I left, you know, my shelter, which was in my uncle's attic, because the decision has been taken that I should surrender. And when... knocks on the door and the bell were heard, my mother came to the door and said, "Shuki, come out..." she said, "because they have arrived!" Because it was hard for her to say, the police, UBDA, and she said it like that, "Get out because they have arrived!" And while I was getting prepared to go out, they were climbing up the stairs. And they did! There were three of them. Lutfi Ajazi was the main one. Then there was Zoran, a Serb, and someone else whose name I can't recall at the moment. He was a Berisha. He is from the city of Peja. He is, even to this day... currently employed. All of them came, they bid farewell to me and my mother. My mother offered them some coffee. They sat to drink the coffee and told me, "Get ready! Because, you should come with us!" I went directly to the bathroom to freshen up and one of them told me, "Don't be late! Because we don't have time!" I said, "Without washing my face and brushing my teeth, I won't come!"

As soon as I got ready, I prepared to go out... I did not take my jacket with me. One of them told my mother, "Fetch..." he said, "bring her the jacket, because you never know." Mother turned towards him and said, "My daughter..." she said, "did nothing wrong!" He said, "I am telling you *loke*, better speak with a softer tone, than the way you are behaving," he said, "Because I am telling you now, your daughter's head is under the scissors." "My daughter..." she said, "there is no reason to be upset. Whatever she did, she fought for the rights that belong to her." And nothing... mother was very *burrëneshtë*. "Hold on! Do not let go! Be strong! They cannot do anything to us." "You don't..." she said, "have to have your head under the scissors. You have committed no crime! It is not a crime to ask for your rights." "Come on..." she said, "for mother's sake, they cannot do anything to you." And to tell you the truth, then I found some sort of motivation and energy, I acquired confidence through my mother's support. And I wanted to turn around and hug her, "*Hajt...*" she said, "because this is short term! Phiii! If nothing else, you will be here in the evening!" {punches the table}. "*Hajt...*" she said, "because... poor Albanians! And you call yourselves Albanians!" My mother! She said this to them.

I took off down the stairs... naturally my sister and brothers, some of them were there, some weren't because it was a school time. And going down the stairs, I turned back once more. She did not come downstairs, because she didn't want to make me feel weak, but from the above... I lifted my head and saw her {lifts her head up} She looked at me and smiled with... it was a bitter smile. "I told you..." she said, "once. Hold on! Because you haven't done anything! You have no reason to be upset about anything!" And I went out. When I got out, so, in front of the entrance door, the neighbors had gathered on both sides of the vehicle. I felt saddened, not for the fact that the police had come, but for the fact that among the neighbors there were those who collaborated with the police.

This is how the arrest happened, and from there I was sent to the Secretariat of the Interior in Pristina. And there, I was harassed by the same inspectors for hours and hours. A female inspector too... she was also a guard. Zyra, Zyra, Zyra... I cannot remember the surname. She was from the region of Deçan. From that region somewhere, Zyra. Then there was Bashkim Kursani. He was one of the main



inspectors in my case and the other members'. Then there was Lutfi Ajazi, whom I mentioned, and this inspector who was from Peja, Berisha, and other inspectors who came in and out, and who behaved in strange ways, different ways. So it was a coordinated behavior. While one of them acted supposedly in a civilized manner, as soon as the other came in, he acted differently. He acted brutally, in a very brutal manner.

While I was being interrogated by Bashkim Kursani, inspector Zyra acted and made a gesture, a strange gesture, even offensive! Not for me, but for her. She lifted her skirt, the skirt she was wearing and she sat on the lap of Bashkim Kursani. And then she threw her arm around his neck. And she told me, "You *moj* fool!" Like that. "Who do you think you are? Instead of enjoying life, you decided to waste it away and end up in prison." She didn't know that more than my imprisonment and perhaps my wasting away in prison, in those moments, I was touched and greatly hurt by her offensive behavior. Because I wanted to believe throughout all those years... though I was quite young, I was only 21, of my [political] involvement and conviction, that women, when educated, because she was employed, would behave differently. I saw that she wasn't at all aware and didn't even fall into that category. On the contrary, she created the impression for the rest, that girls and women don't know better than what she was doing. And I only looked at her with pain. I felt sorry. I didn't say anything more than, "I feel sorry that you are like this" (hushes).

And then, there, with various provocations of course, "Why did you undertake your activity? Who are the other members you are in contact with? Who are the main organizers? Where have you stayed? Why did you undertake this activity? Why didn't you want to become a member of the Yugoslav Youth Party?" the youth organization that existed back then. "What do you need Albania for? Why should Kosovo be a Republic when it already is? This is a Republic! What do you want more, you have your own Republic, Serbia. Only with your body you are in Kosovo but with your head [you are] in Albania! We will send you to the border of Kosovo and Albania, chop your head off and leave you there, and the head over here..." and similar threats to incite, to drive me to speak. And I had decided to remain silent.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Were the tortures only verbal, or was there also physical torture?

**Shukrije Gashi:** There were beatings, normally the physical ones were part of their game {drops her head}. I never mentioned this while my parents were alive. I didn't want to hurt them (sighs). Then Zoran stepped in. From what I heard, I am not sure if it is true, he got killed during the war. He was smoking a cigarette and since I didn't speak, he took the cigarette and stubbed it {touches the forehead} ... he stubbed it on the eyebrow, on the forehead, so I would speak. And then I fainted from the pain. But as I said, I decided not to talk, because we had pledged an oath as women, that we would rather die than talk. Because there was also another side [to our movement], which was to make them understand that we were as strong as the men. And then, after I came to my senses, they started to... with questions again. Fortunately, I have low blood pressure, and this helped me to get weak quickly, so they couldn't... I [did] not get the chance to continue. To extract words from me

about the organization, about friends, those who were members, the purpose of our activities, the network of people, and everything, they even used a stimulating injection.

And later I spoke to...I researched together with other people, that this stimulating injection had a weakening effect on people with low blood pressure. And as soon as I got the injection, I totally collapsed. Due to that, I wasn't able to continue the conversation further. From there, I was taken to the prison of Mitrovica. I had no clue about myself, because I was without consciousness. I didn't know what had happened until I got... they got me to a big room, the room number three. I saw, I understood then that I am in prison, based on... you know, the sight, beds and blankets, I realized I was in prison. Out of weakness, you know, faintness, and because I was without food, and maltreated, I couldn't stand on my feet. I fell down.

Then, a few women who happened to be there, they happened to be there, approached me. I didn't know who they were, and they poured water on my face. After a while I regained my consciousness and they asked, "Do you know where you are?" I said, "No, I don't know. I don't know whether it is a prison, a hospital!" "No, not a hospital!" said one of them, "It is a prison!" "Okay." "What is it..." They continued, "with you? Why?" I said, "I don't know what is happening, but I am continuously attacked by animals." Because it was the effect of the injection. Not a tiger, not a lion, wild animals. That was my impression. It induced hallucinations and I was in a very bad state. And they took me, put me in... in a bed on the first floor, as they called them, because it was a bunk bed, the beds. However, I couldn't regain strength. I fell again under the same effect, at some point I started to see other sights that were very terrifying. And it started... just like a thinking disorder, because those... that injection's effect was very heavy (sighs).

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What kind of disorder?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Snakes... as I said. Attacked by snakes... by animals. Then these too... what can I say, characters from horror movies, things like that. And they called the doctor. I don't know what kind of tranquilizer they gave me, I just know that my head got very heavy, and I fell asleep. Certainly it was... according to those women... sometime around four o'clock in the morning I fell asleep.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How many people were in the room?

**Shukrije Gashi:** At the time they were...five, including myself.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Were they political activists too?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Initially not. They were in for murder. There were maniacs and other types but... later on also political [prisoners]. Actually no, one of them was [charged] on political grounds! Now, from a village in Suhareka.

Even the next day, I had problems for the whole day. I started to get cramps in my hands and legs. I had so much pain as a reaction, that if somebody hadn't helped me {touches elbows and arms with her hands} I was ready to break my fingers, hands. The reaction of the injection was very severe. A guard who was not Albanian, I don't know her nationality, because she spoke both Albanian and other, I saw that her eyes were full of tears. And she asked me, "Why?" She said, "Is it an illness?" I said, "No, this is not an illness of mine!" I said, "I got this here!" Then they called in the doctor. They started with therapy. I don't know, they probably spoke with those interrogators. But I was in that kind of state for a long time.

And so like this, those tortures started. A terrible life in the prison of Mitrovica, where every day, besides the tension, fear and terror of waiting for the interrogation, which happened every second or third day, the day was heavy also for the fact that men were getting severely beaten. They got beaten up terribly, in a terrible way! Their screaming was heard the entire day, dreadfully. And, day after day, we decided to protest. The pavilion of... the women's, the girl's floor. One day it was awful! Awful! {Shakes the head.} The house rule was that every morning we go out for five minutes, the whole room, for a walk that resembled a well, a fountain, with high walls. God knows, certainly... I will try to describe how high it was approximately. It was certainly around four to five meters high, the wall. And at the top, so, by the end of the wall, there was a barrack, like a hen house, with a policeman standing, a guard who oversaw the walk.

While we were walking through the promenade, I saw a light up in a prison cell, out of a very small window, which I reckoned was no more than the size of a lighter, so, that light. And I was dressed in red. Not intentionally! Because I never had that kind of wish to... and I still don't have it up to this day, to present myself in those national colors, but for me, the national is the inner you, the action, not the colors and the image, and so forth. He put... someone put his hand out of that small window and shouted loudly, "Oo, bless you red!" And the guard, who was also the watch guard you know, turned his head in the direction from which the voice was coming, and swore at him between his teeth, I don't know what. While we were walking, the intervention already started there, and we could hear the screaming because of the violence they exercised on him. And for a moment, someone threw... I don't know a piece of paper, at the promenade. I pretended I am tying laces of my sneakers and picked up the paper. I put it in the sneakers. Fortunately, I got away with it because he didn't see me. And the female guard approached me, even though I was under pressure because there, you know, you were never sure what is going to happen next, something unexpected. They could strip search you. And she asked, "What is with you? Why are you so pale?" I said, "Nothing! I am tired. The breakfast was not that good. This is the reason. I don't have..." "Why..." she said, "aren't you taking care of yourself? Do you see how much weight you've lost?" I said, "What can I do! No big deal!" I said, "It's alright."

I couldn't wait to enter the room and see what is it about. When we entered the room, there was an old lady there who was working for the UDBa service, and she was there supposedly for some crime, however the purpose was to spy on us. And eventually I read the letter. It was saying that... it wrote, "On this date, this person shall be executed," had the whole name in it, "and be informed that the

execution will happen at the prison's promenade." It was about an Albanian guy called Tafili, I can't recall his full name as it was a long time ago. And the sign of execution was the siren, the bell that woke us up. However, its duration was short, whereas on the day of the execution it lasted longer. And it happened sometime late in the evening. It rang a long time. We were told that the siren broke down, and that is when Tafil got executed.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Was it legal to have a death sentence in Yugoslavia at the time?

**Shukrije Gashi:** No, no.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did they justify the cases when people were executed?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Yes, they constructed it as an accident. Eh! They did not take us for a walk that day. After... very interesting! And two days later, you know, there were blood stains on the wall. Also the others spotted it. While I was waiting in the queue behind the bars to meet my family, the handover of Tafil's clothes took place. And to me, this was a great shock, because probably as it was communicated before to the family, it was said to them again, that he died of illness, that the coffin should not be opened because the illness was contagious.

The visits happened on a monthly basis and they lasted only five minutes. The visits happened behind bars. You couldn't touch your family either... not even touch hands, let alone something else. The visits happened under a strict watch by the police, such as, you know, two prison guards and an interrogator, in order to make it impossible even with body language, gestures, to exchange messages that would have been useful to us.

Naturally, I was considerably underweight. Back then, I was only 44 kilograms, exactly. Even my hair had grown enormously, because the hygiene was poor. There were a lot of lice and insects in the rooms. I didn't know, they called them *stenica* [bedbugs] back then. Probably it was from the wall, as I presumed that *stena*, *stenica*, derived from the Serbian language. And we went on, with candles in our hands, chasing these *stenica*, insects, almost the entire evening.

Then the food was very poor. Often, the meat in the food they brought us had worms. And of course we wouldn't eat that, and if you don't eat you lose weight. The amount of the food that was allowed to be brought in monthly was limited. You were allowed only four kilograms per month. Four kilograms... some of us with a better living standard always shared it with others. All of those who were inside, with the exception of those whom the regime put in to eavesdrop on us, had very difficult economic conditions. Therefore we shared with them, with each other, all the food we had.

Besides economic conditions, you know, sleeping conditions, an accommodation that was very inhuman, the most difficult thing for us was the presence of persons who worked for the UDBa service. Because the whole time you were under pressure. During the entire time, you had to overthink every word you uttered. To say it, or not to say it? And what should you say? However, for the sake of our

ideals... certainly it was the ideal that kept us going and one of the motives for being there. We continued the resistance even in prison. One day, when they had severely beaten up the boys, we decided to protest, we started to hit, you know, to bang very hard on the doors in all rooms, the prison doors, in order for them to stop their act, their action upon men. And that happened. They stopped. Naturally those were screaming out of the great pain that they may have gone through, their screaming went on.

And, when they went in... the guards entered the floor where we were... you know, as I began, it was a heavy day for women and girls who were in that pavilion, because even that day, the guards undertook the action of beating men from the very morning. We didn't know the reason why. And we were going mad! They continued nonstop during the whole time. We decided to protest. And we did that. We protested. We started with the banging on the doors. Our doors were made of steel. And the knocking sounded loud, was heard... it was a huge noise. The reason was the following, to make a huge noise in order to attract the attention of the guards and so the beating of men and boys would stop. They rushed furiously to the floor where women and girls were, and what a sight. It was a dreadful sight. All across the face and hands of... with rolled-up sleeves... all in blood, because of the violence they exercised on Albanian men and boys. To our surprise, the majority of them [the guards] were Albanians.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** The ones who practiced torture?

**Shukrije Gashi:** Those who tortured. At the time I wasn't, you know, in the room number three, which was the first room I stayed in once in prison, but it was the room at the beginning of the hall. And as far as I can remember, it was number four, because the numbering was intentionally random. They opened the door using very untypical expressions and swearing at us, calling us, "Bitches and whores, what is wrong with you that you make this noise? Who are you?" And so on... "Get out, whores!" and then, I decided that another girl and I, who were in for political reasons, don't go out of the room. Because according to the regulation, guards had no right to enter the room and stay there, but if they had the strength to drag you out, then they could do everything to you in the hall. Even though I was quite weak, weak health-wise due to the conditions that... the poor [conditions] we used to have in prison, I strongly held to the bed which was of steel, and despite great efforts by two guards to drag me out, they couldn't make it (smiles.) I managed to resist! The other one, they dragged her out and beat her. They didn't manage to drag out Shyqerije Bytyqi and me.

They started to open the doors one by one and thus maltreat, beat those whom they managed to drag out of the room. So this was the worse day I had experienced since I got in prison. Besides the violence being exercised on women and men, the fact that they were Albanians and that they still weren't aware of whom they were serving, hurt me more. And naturally, we didn't spare them. We called them with

different names, as they deserved it, criminals and *satrap* and, *UDBash* and all kinds of name, without any fear. Now, we decided that if needed, we would die, because if they killed those boys, why not kill us too? We entered there for the same cause, for the same ideals, and the sacrifice should be equal.

And for another reason that I mentioned a few times, for we took an oath because... we should stand strong because the other party should be convinced that we are capable to carry out all actions, despite being women. And this motive, and the solidarity for the sake of the cause, continued during the whole day. At some point, the guards stopped, because they saw that they couldn't win over women who were determined to resist till death. They gave up and left.

Later on a female guard came, an Albanian, who was a bright lady, polite and patriotic, Emine Osaj. She was very distressed. Moreover, I can say she almost cried, as her eyes were full of tears. And as soon as she opened the door of the room and saw us, she expressed that. She couldn't refrain from it. "Eh!" She acted like this, she said, "How did it come to this, Albanians fighting against each other?" She wanted to continue, but as I said earlier, there was fear from people in the room, those *UDBashes*. And then she changed topic, "How are you doing, any concern? Take care of yourself! You know what the house rules are. And, how was the food today? Be careful!" and so on. I don't know, probably she reacted concerning the boys, because in the meantime a supervisor came and he behaved very badly with them, which made us think that she has certainly reacted during the time the men got severely beaten. She was even threatened, and few days later she left the job for good. How... as much as I felt bad that she left, because she gave moral support to us prisoners, at the same time I felt good and proud of her dignified stand, particularly because she was a woman. At a certain moment, I remembered her, her dignified stand, and then Zyra, the inspector. What a difference between the two! Still, I thought that there was a reason for more hope, because even in institutions such as prisons, there are people, there are especially women, who are able to tell the truth, who can be dignified and protect human rights.

It wasn't easy, absolutely. You were in prison together with criminals, together with criminals, together with prostitutes. And such mixing was done intentionally, so that politically imprisoned girls and women would not communicate freely. I remember a woman who was there in the room with us for a criminal offence, a murder, from the village Kranidell of Kamenica, during the whole time she asked for the reasons... why, what are the reasons for being in prison, for what offence. And often various inspectors came and visited her. She had a marvelous life. Even her food differed from our food. And in the meantime, day after day, since I noticed that she was like that, I decided not to speak ever, about the deeds... about why I was in prison. She strongly insisted. She called me with the pseudonym I had during the time in prison, *Beteja* [Battle].

And at some point I asked her, "What deed are you here for? Why are you in prison?" She said, "I am here unjustly. Because my daughter in law has accused me of a deed I haven't committed." In fact she had... together with her son they had killed the daughter in law. They killed her because she didn't allow the Serbian police and UDBa agents to step over the eagle she had embroidered herself. The husband and the mother in law, both were in the service of UDBa. UDBa used to organize parties at her family's, at her house. And she came from a poor family, without support, but she never accepted to succumb to such family regime. Hence she was killed and hanged. She was hanged. After they killed her, they also hang her. Both of them.

Shamelessly, she told us how he, the husband, tied her up by the hair with a rope, and kept her hanging, she said, "Because she was stubborn," said the old lady. She wouldn't tell the reason why, but would only utter, "She was stubborn." And supposedly one day, since they had plenty of lambs, sheep, the husband, wanting to pull out the *Manzera* [Mauser] from his shoulder, by accident, he touched... how do they call it, the part where you shoot, and killed the woman. Whereas, other girls who were from that region told me that she was killed in a gruesome manner, very peculiar, torture-like. After they tortured her well, they tied her up by the hair, and hung the rope to the ceiling. Then she stood like that until she died... they put her there, and she was hanging like that until she died. And you can imagine, being in the same room with such a criminal!

Another one who was also [in prison] for an offence I am not certain what, was mentally disturbed. And another named Lutfije and who was... if I remember well from Bujanovc or Presevo, from that part of Kosovo, yet I don't know the offence she was in for... she was also mentally ill. However UDBa used her as well. So, I say it intentionally, for people to understand what kind of severe violations were committed by the Yugoslav regime, which used even mentally ill people to elicit or disclose information about... as they called them, dangerous [people] for the social order. Luftija's actions immediately made you assume that you were dealing with a person with mental disorders. When she had her periods... she used the press, newspapers, for her period's needs, and then threw those pieces of newspapers around the room. She scattered them around the room. Or without it and without underwear, blood would then spill around the room. And she said that she was in prison on political grounds.

Her speaking was incoherent. But she was also taken out of the room time after time and tortured. Once, I remember, she was terribly tortured, she was beaten until she was bleeding, because she resisted cleaning up the hall. She complained of headache, and despite all our insistence, you know, mine and some other girl's, that we clean up the hall, the guards did not allow it. They took her by force and beat her up to death. Then they called us in, and despite being in poor health, we managed to get her inside and cure her with onions for months in a row.

She and others who were getting beaten for various acts, were also used for... were misused for other purposes. This speaks a lot about the lack of socialization and education found in the social system established in Yugoslav prisons, especially in Kosovo. I mean, it couldn't have been a rehabilitating system, when even mentally ill people were used for surveillance purposes and other services. Not to speak of political prisoners, prisoners of conscience as they were called, on whom they exercised nonstop violence.

The press, the daily press came regularly. It was free of charge. And it was carefully selected. The tortures continued every day. I remember another case. While I was being taken to continue the interrogation procedure, so, the interrogation phase, I saw many drops of blood, on the floor, going through the hall. And when I lifted my head up, I saw a man, a young guy, who was bleeding and standing behind the bars in his room. And he was shouting... I don't know...He uttered some

inarticulate sentences. And the female guard who was escorting me drew my attention, “Mind your own business, and look down at the floor as you walk! Don’t look around!” And of course the hands... it was a rule that you kept them tied like this, behind. {Puts her hands behind the back.} I don’t know how long it lasted... so our walk lasted pretty long until we arrived to an office where the interrogation session was held. But while going there, I came across two more cases (sighs). I saw tortured men who could hardly stand on their feet, who were being held by the guards. Probably it was those who had finished the investigatory inquiries, the so-called informative talks. One of them was tortured so severely, that it seemed that his eye had moved out of place, it was hanging down. And his whole body was covered in blood. And while I was getting ready to enter...to pass the doorsill, to enter inside, next to that room, in the other room, another man was screaming horribly, due to the violence.

And I walked in. Normally, naturally... it is humanly to be disturbed, greatly disturbed. I couldn’t concentrate on anything anymore. The inspector, at the time chief of UDBa, Mehmet Lumi, said, “Well Shukrije, what were you thinking? You thought that prison is like going to a wedding? If you were smart, you would have helped yourself and us. Isn’t it a pity that instead of continuing your studies you...because I have a daughter your age... waste your life away in dark prison cells and are terrified because of another’s deeds?” Because he naturally wouldn’t tell what has happened to the man over there, who was getting beaten on the other side. And I said this to him, “I am very aware that I haven’t done anything to anyone. I haven’t committed any criminal offence. I have committed no crime. All I have done is to ask that Kosovo is made equal to other Republics.” He said, “You think we haven’t asked for the Republic before you did?” “I don’t know,” I said, “it could be!” “I am telling you to give up your silence and start collaborating with us. And to tell us who got you into a road with no return, to be cooperative, because we want you to understand that you have all fallen into a trap, and that all this is organized by Serbia. Everything you say to us, shall remain here and no one will find out.” And I found his attempt to break me so low and offensive, that I reacted as he deserved it. I said, “C’mon *more* mister! Do what you intend to do, because I have no intention to say anything! Because I have nothing to say!” (silence).

Then his attempt started again in some other form as in, “I have no intention to do anything else to you, but persuade you that you are wrong. We are a state with educational, rehabilitative measures. Nobody dares to lay hands on you! We don’t do things that happen elsewhere, to insert a stick into a vagina...so, such behaviors...of women and girls, because I have a daughter myself. My goal is for you to repent, to return to school, to your studies. You are young! You don’t need this. It only takes this much, only tell us who got you into this path, into this blind alley? Do tell us who are those people, who do you cooperate with? I give you my word that nothing is going to happen to you, to them either!”

I already had decided to not talk. Whatever he said, I continued to keep silent. “Do you know...” he said, “what lies ahead for you? Since you don’t want to cooperate!” “No ...” I said, “I don’t know! I know nothing, because I have done nothing! Even what you’re saying now is a threat. It’s not cooperation. I can only speak for myself and nobody else.” “Why...” he said, “are you with Nuhi



Berisha? Why did you collaborate with him?" "Nuhi Berisha?" I said, "Everybody has a right to have... every girl a boy, a boyfriend. Why," I said, "is it a crime to love someone?" He said, "Don't avoid my questions! Respond to my question!" "I gave my answer." "You helped Nuhi Berisha! How did you help him?" I asked, "How did I help him? I prepared food for him. What else is there to be done?" He said, "No, you have done something else!" "I have done nothing else!"

He then started to read the Criminal Code of Yugoslavia and the other Kosovo law on criminal procedures, Article 136 and so forth, to frighten me. He said, "What do you think as a future lawyer? You know, more than you, nobody else in your room should worry more than you." "But look..." I said, "I will repeat it once more. Whatever you intend to do, do it! Because I am not bothered by that. Whatever punishment there might be, I have nothing to say." "But what do you have to say about this evidence?" "{Takes the letter in her hand and points it toward the camera}" "Do you want me to read the testimony?" I said, "No!" "Why not?" "No..." I said, "I don't need to read the testimony because I have already revealed what I had to reveal about myself. I haven't done anything else, besides asking for equal rights." "I am asking you about the actions, the organization. I didn't ask what you demanded, but the action." "There is no..." I said, "action. This is the action." "Take it..." he said, "read it!" He took it and scarcely covered the upper part where the name of the testimony was. Those were provocations, they always did them. I said, "No!" "Then..." he said, "I will read it to you, since you don't want to." And he started reading. I don't know who had talked. "We were in place X, in *pijetore* [bar]..." they called them back then, not coffee bars and so on, they started calling them coffee bars later on. He said, "You drank Jupi," that used to be a refreshment drink, "someone else and so forth..." Those details were on purpose, to persuade me that this person really knows about the case. And he did have information, it was very true! He said, "Here! Oh Gosh! Your mind and your head are like a *qyski!*" I don't know how much you know, it is... it is used in colloquial speech. He said, "See, you don't talk, but this guy, this guy X has talked." He said, "You only have to quietly admit that you have collaborated with this guy, and then state it, you don't have to... and you will be going home." I grabbed that statement and tore it in shreds and threw it [imitates the tearing of the letter]. And of course, mistreatment followed.

And so like this you know... because it is a long story. It was continuously like this, but some of us who were a bit more mature in a way... because there were younger ones who were 14 and 16 years old. When we got back in our room, we didn't speak about what we had experienced, never, because we didn't want to frighten the others. And, I decided to... to insist, you know, on the issue that I only sent food to Nuhi. And this was it! There was no other explanation. Even though I had elements that... normally... and I don't judge those who, when tortured extremely, might have talked, because the beating does its thing. And even if for example, I said anything, I talked on my behalf, for nobody else's! I thought to myself, "Let it end with me, there is no further." The aim was to break the chain, so it cannot continue bringing other people to prison.

Humiliations, let's not speak about it! The language used [swearing]... that was a standard treatment. Absolutely, they didn't spare you from the lowest forms of swearing. I had often confronted them as much as I had strength, especially when they used swearing addressed at my mother. And then, when

it came to my mother, they were careful not to... I had told them, "I'll do everything, but I won't allow swearing at my mother!" And they called me with different names, "mischief," and all kinds of ways, "Why are you resisting so persistently?" using insulting names, and so forth.

It is interesting that women's solidarity in prison, even among those who were in for criminal offence... a few of them showed solidarity with political prisoners, on healthcare, and food sharing, and in addition when the protests happened. Solidarity for strikes! But this came also as a result of our behavior towards them. We never, never, not only I, but also the other girls who were political prisoners, it never happened that we insulted or underestimated women who committed other crimes. Because we always said that, "We should have reservations. We don't know the truth! But even if we know the truth, we have no right to humiliate others." And the purpose was once again to make it possible to expand our influence, and educate them. So, that the cause for which we are staying here is just and the purpose of it is not to hate and incite hate towards the others, but its only goal is to become equal with others in Kosovo, and in Yugoslavia. And believe it, even the Serbs, gradually, even the Serbs started to comprehend, those who were... what can I say more... more schooled, more educated, emancipated...[started] to understand!

I know a case, I remember... while I was in room number three. There was Feride Zeneli, who came from a village in Suhareka. I cannot remember the name of the village right now. And another one named Mahije Zeka, who was also from Istog, from a village in Istog perhaps, I'm not certain. They were very young, and they, although I attempted few times to persuade them not to sing loudly, because it is a prison here, it obstructs the house order, and they are watched by the guards, surveillance, anyhow, because they were young, they didn't refrain [from singing]. They climbed up the window, climbed to the top of the door, and started to sing. A few times I warned them that I seemed to notice the guard's shadow... although the door was... it reflected underneath the door. I told them, "Get down because someone is at the door!" And eventually... abruptly you know, a female guard loudly opened the door. And they jumped from where they were, stepped down. Then... It was also Florije Hajrullahu, I almost forgot her! who was... Florija was very stubborn. They beat her. She was badly beaten. They asked who did... we... I didn't admit it either, to give others away. Nobody talked about who started what and why. At some point, a former prisoner, a Serbian woman who was there, on charges of economic misuse, debt, loss, did tell on them. And then these girls were beaten up. Badly

However, it was I who started to talk to her [the Serbian prisoner] again. And she cried because she could not anticipate, she could not believe that although being so young, they would be beaten up so badly by the guards. And then she swore on her children that, "I could never believe it. I thought that they only wanted to rebuke them! Nothing else!" And from that moment on, every day, we opened-up to each other gradually, and like this, she began to understand, she even said to me, "I sincerely feel sorry that I looked differently at Albanian girls and men and everyone, who is involved in these actions. I never anticipated that an Albanian girl... these girls are so polite, and have taken so much care of me, and have washed my laundry and everything and, and behaved..." Furthermore, when she got out of the prison, she went to meet with my family and she told them that I am fine, and so on...

She told me, “I will accomplish an obligation. On the other hand, I can never forgive myself for doing that.”

What I want to say with this is that women show more solidarity, though the opposite is always told in public. Women always make attempts and take actions for the universal wellbeing. They are not individualistic, while with men it is the opposite. They do it more for their career and power. They have no compassion for the collective compared to women. Perhaps it was because of social, economic reasons, besides the motherly [feeling], that women are driven to act and feel this way. So, they are more empathetic to others.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** When were you tried? When did you appear before the court?

**Shukrije Gashi:** We appeared before the court in Pristina. I was at the District Court in Pristina, to say the least, after a long period of investigation. If I remember correctly, that was... April...December, and so on. We were taken to court. Even in court there was a discriminatory approach, because they didn't allow us to say hello to our family. My lawyer at the court was Avni Gjakova, who had a very constructive approach towards the prisoners, and he defended us as well as he could. It was exactly, you know, his argued defense, well-argued [defense], that influenced that on the second instance, due to the lack of evidence, a two years sentence was decreased by few months and in total I served over 16 months.

Then, the other part. I served in the prison of Lipjan, where conditions were much better, because it was a semi-open treatment, whereas in Mitrovica it was a closed treatment. Nevertheless, I say it again, political prisoners used to have a different treatment everywhere. Anyhow, the woman director of the prison of Lipjan used to be very supportive of the girls who were political prisoners, and she was very careful that they don't get abused. Still, the system was such that it was pretty difficult to even act that way. This director was Shpresa Kuçi. Regarding her, I speak for myself, I have consideration, because she made attempts that the service gets sophisticated, gets improved, that you have access to the library, have more spare time, and you had the freedom of communicating with her differently. Naturally, as in every system where prisons are under strict surveillance, there were limitations.

There were difficulties too, absolutely, because I remember it was terrible and absurd for me to sew, because it is not in my nature and I had nothing to do with this type of trade, to sew with a machine. What's worse, we had to deal with machines dedicated for specific parts only. That was yet... very difficult, because you had to use the machinery which you never used before. For example, there was one more condition for me, the first day I was brought to the workshop from morning till one o'clock, you had to

sew 13 collars, they were collars for army shirts. And for me it was absurd, because I didn't even have basic skills in sewing, let alone those complicated machines for specific parts. And I then asked the boss, “Excuse me, but I don't know how to sew!” “Well, well,” he said, “you don't know how to sew, shut up! Sit there and start sewing!” How to start sewing if you don't know how? He said, “If you don't finish 13 collars by one o'clock, you will go to solitary [confinement].” I started looking around, I didn't

have the slightest clue about what to do. What to do with that machine? And so I tried a little bit to... sort of spying around, to see how those machines are used. A woman in there, who was there for a long time, sewed and moved the arm intentionally so I could see her... so I could see her sewing. And I did try, like that. I started to sew, but it didn't work because I didn't know. And he came, "You know what? I am telling you to concentrate here! On your machine! Because if you don't finish those 13, you will go to solitary." I tried, I tried, I started to get around it, even though it was very difficult. And I pierced my finger badly, because of lack of experience. Instead of feeling sorry that I got hurt, he repeated the same thing again, that I will go to solitary.

Fortunately, before the working hours ended, the director came. She walked in, greeted us, like that. She asked, "How are you doing? How are you girls?" I don't know why I felt free, perhaps it was an impression, and I told her, "Unfortunately, I don't understand entirely, why should someone behave so badly with us!" She said, "Why..." she said, "what happened?" And I showed her the finger pierced by the needle. Then, like that... how to say, disturbed, "Why..." she said, "why did this have to happen? What happened here?" "I don't know!" I said. "I explained a few times that I cannot sew. And these are not the type of machines as the ones at home for example, my sister's. I didn't use that either, but this one even less." "What have you done *more*, man? What is the matter with you? Why does she have to get hurt?" He said, "Because she is stubborn, and breaks the rules. She didn't want to sit and sew." And... that was a lie. "And I told her that she will get 13 days in solitary!" She took him with her... I don't know what did they talk about after that. And after a while, he returned. I saw that he was... he was nervous. He didn't say anything else. I didn't go to solitary. I survived! (Laughs.)

But often, when I stop and think, why should you go to solitary just because you couldn't use a machine you have no experience of? So, the prison system was not rehabilitative. Not in practice. On paper, in writing, Yugoslavia perhaps did have the best laws, compared to the countries that were part of the Socialist Bloc, as they were called back then. However, the practice was very rigorous, and greatly misused, especially when it came to Albanians.

So, you know. It... it was torturing. Initially staying in quarantine, which left deep wounds of a bad experience for me, which I will never forget. An entire month, in a dark room, with another girl, a Serb, where the doors got closed from the outside, and opened from the outside. You couldn't open the door, nor close it, nor turn on the light whenever you wanted to, because it was on the outside. And the food was brought in there.

One evening I had a dream that... very bizarre. I dreamt that together with my paternal uncle's daughter, with Emine, we were protesting in town. And there was a large mass of protesters and of demonstrators who were trying to find a way, one part trying to join the group, the other party looking for a street to escape, because there were shotguns, tear-gas, and these rubber, rubber bullets, so the police was continuously shooting. As we were trying to find a way to avoid this, I slipped and fell on the ground. At that moment, my purse opened up, and things that were inside the purse fell out, including those... so make up, the make up bag. It fell out in the streets.

For a moment, as I was looking around, I saw Nuhi appear, Nuhi Berisha, my boyfriend and member of the Movement for Republic of Kosovo, at the same time the founder of the Kosovo Liberation Army. My first reaction was feeling disturbed, because I saw he was holding crutches and the legs... both legs were limping. And I screamed, even though I was like... I screamed, "Oh God! What happened to you?" Then my uncle's daughter, she turned her head too and saw it was Nuhi. We ran to help him, so he could get on his feet, though he was insisting that we leave. At a certain moment, he sat down, he looked at the things that fell from the purse, from my purse.

I don't know if I emphasized that earlier, you know the heavy atmosphere in the prison, the conditions, the pressure from the investigators and random inspectors, afterwards the burden of what could happen to the family, what is happening with my brothers and sisters, with my father, with others, with Nuhi, who was abroad at the time. It happened that one night I had a very unusual dream, which for me carried a very important message and it was spot on. I dreamt that I was in... I was in town together with my uncle's daughter, Emine, who is my age and we were, you know... we studied in the same building, although she studied Economics and I studied Law. But we both knew Nuhi and Emine was a fellow activist, together with Nuhi and me, and Ahmet Isufi. While we were trying to find a way out... and as I was talking to my uncle's daughter, to find a way out, to move away from the mass because there, people at the time pushed each other due to the fear of bullets and teargas that was shot by the police. For a moment, while walking, my foot slipped and I fell down. I dreamt that as I was falling, everything that was inside the purse fell out, including the make up.

And, while I was trying to see what to take and how to collect them, I saw Nuhi coming. His arrival was unusual because I knew that Nuhi was in good health, whereas in this apparition his legs were limping and he was walking with crutches. And I said, "Oh God, what did happen to Nuhi?" This shouting of mine drew the attention of my uncle's daughter, and she turned her head and saw Nuhi walking on crutches. We both ran to help him join us, although he couldn't even stand on crutches and fell down. He sat on the ground. With difficulty he approached the things that fell out of the purse and to our wonder, he took the *kuq të buzëve* [lipstick] first, as we called it at the time. They call it *karmin* now. And he said, "This one, Emine, you take it!" He addressed Emine. "Take this, because you will become a bride." Meanwhile, among many things that got dispersed there, he took a pen, and he pointed the pen to me {takes a pen in her hand}. He said, "You, Shukrije, you take the pen, because you have to continue your road with a pen also, to continue writing about everything that happened! And now, run! Run, leave me because this is how things are. It makes no sense for the police to come and take you too. Leave me because there is no...no problem! I will find my way!" We knew that this... was impossible, because he couldn't even move. And I was holding him by the hand like this {stretches her hand}. I didn't let go! And in the meantime, the police was continuously gathering and shooting in the air, with guns. And all of a sudden, you know, I woke up, and I realized I was in prison.

It was difficult because in those circumstances, you weren't safe to share this information with anyone. I did share it with two friends in my room, especially Shyqerije Bytyçi. I said, "Oh god, I hope that dream doesn't come true." And she asked, "Why?" I told her the dream, I shared it with her and I told her that, "The message of this dream is not good. Something will happen to Nuhi most certainly."

“No, *moj...*” she said, “You just have created this impression since you live with these problems and dreams are nothing but a reflection of what we talk of during the day.” I said, “But no, we haven’t talked at all about this issue during the day.” And while we were talking, two guards came. They appeared at the door, and as it was in their habit, not calling you with, let’s say, a normal voice but, {raises her voice} “Gashi, Shukrije, c’mon! *Poseta* [Visit]!” And I stepped out. I thought to myself, “What kind of visit?” [The guard] said, “No, no. It’s not a family visit, but the investigators are here. And, put some clothes on! Take a sweater with you.” When they said that to me, one of them, I could only imagine that they were probably talking about an extraordinary session. I took a black color sweater, which was only a coincidence, and after taking a long road along the prison alleys, which lasted forever, we arrived at some corridor, and meanwhile I saw two persons passing by. Beaten to death. Also, while I was passing the doorsill, I happened to hear some terrible screams again, from the room next to the room where the session was going on. This happened almost in every session I was. Experiences like that!

And when I went in, I saw seven people there, seven inspectors. “Hëë...” then they started to get ironic with expressions, approaches such as, “Ëë, how... so you did find out. You do know what happened. Condolences!” And some others, some this, some that. For example another said, “We are sorry, he killed himself. God killed him, because he killed himself!” And so on. And I, normally I couldn’t keep my mouth shut, so I told them, “He wasn’t someone that would kill himself. So probably it was you who killed him! May God kill you!” Afterwards the reaction was fierce. One of them even punched me. He threw me against the wall and I started bleeding, I fell on the ground. While I was staying there, my mind was on the dream. I realized that the message from a dream became a reality. They continued with their tune, such as, “You surely knew! Who told you that Nuhi died? Who told you that Nuhi committed suicide?” I told them that, “I absolutely have no idea what is going on, because I am confined inside four walls, and no bird flew in, let alone people. But don’t play with me, tell me, what happened? Whatever might have happened, I don’t intend to be weak, and I am very certain that Nuhi did not kill himself, but in case he died, you have killed him!” Then, as always they started with tactics. One of them attacked you in harsh language, the other teased, using a softer language, “Don’t listen to what he says, because he is a creep,” and other such words. Like, “What to do now, it happened. There are other boys. Be smart, find a way how to get out of here. But you cannot get out of here if you don’t cooperate with us!” And to tell you the truth, whatever might have happened, it was the same for me. My mind was with Nuhi. I didn’t care anymore! Whether they beat me up, or whatever they did, because during the whole time the dream was spinning around my head.

One of the UDBa agents was there too, the one who had a daughter that was, as I said before, my age, Mehmet Lumi. The same words again, like in other sessions. In fact, he told me, “I feel sorry! Condolences! Nuhi killed himself. But you, stay strong, try to concentrate on cooperating with us, on our cooperation, and on getting out of here as soon as possible to continue your studies. Live your life! Life is long. You are young. Why spend years and years in prison in vain, when you can enjoy life like all your peers.” I decided not to respond. And so did I. I didn’t answer to any word, to any question of theirs, nor to those provocations about statements supposedly by someone from the group, nor to

insults, because it was useless. Even if you answered, or made attempts to communicate normally with them, their attitude was very harsh, and very offensive.

I returned to the room, and I tried to understand why was the road from the investigatory office to my room so long. And this happened because the prison building, the basement was connected to the court building. And it was... they were detached. Over ground, they didn't connect, but indoors yes. Then I tried to understand... I asked one of the guards, I told her, "I don't understand what this is. Why so far? Is this prison that big?" She carefully told me that they were separate buildings over ground, but underground, they were attached. According to what I learnt and heard while I was in prison, this prison, and this model, this construction, was done by an Austrian.

When I went back to the room, I told friends what happened. During the session, the investigatory session, they already got the news that Nuhi had been killed. But they contacted all the girls so that I didn't believe the information was genuine. The way to communicate from room to room back then, was through

yogurt cups, like this one. Fetch it, if you want me to demonstrate it, yes... {takes the cup and puts it on the wall}. A cup like this, is placed on the wall, you open the hole here, and this is how it was distributed. And that's how they made a deal, so I didn't receive the information about what happened to Nuhi, about Nuhi and Rexhep Mala being killed

By the way, the girl that behaved... the friend from my room, the roommate... although my heart didn't accept it, didn't agree, I had a hunch that whatever happened was true. What I saw in my dream, but also from the reaction of inspectors, should be true! And I asked her, I said, "Shyqyrije, did you get the papers today? Did you hear any news or did you read it?" She said, "No! Interesting, they didn't bring the papers today..." that's how she, "Why?" "Well, I don't know!" I said, "Strange..." I said, "at the session, they even expressed condolences to me, and the reactions were very strange, 'Aha! She already knows that Nuhi is dead! Nuhi killed himself. She is dressed in black'." She had the same reaction, she said, "Damn them, because we know that Nuhi is not a type of guy who would kill himself. Yes certainly, and even if it happened, they are capable of killing our boys." And I was looking around, in case I would find any reaction, get it from the others, from those in the room. But no, none! Or they avoided looking at you straight in the eyes... I said, "Please, if you heard something, do tell! I can't do anything now. I am in prison. I cannot get out of here. And the killing of our boys and girls is expected." And then there was silence. Nobody, nothing. I knew that now, the lunchtime was over and... although it wasn't in my habit I started to call in the girls by name to ask whether they had any information. They were organized so well, that none of them spoke, "No, no! I don't know! No, *moj!* What are you talking about, dreams are just dreams, they don't mean anything." My aim was to protect myself from such a stress, at least during the time I stayed in Mitrovica, in order not to face another heavy blow, in addition to the blows I had to go through almost every day, almost every day at the investigatory sessions. Yet, the whole time I had the feeling that it had happened.

Furthermore, when after his death I met my family for the first time, I tried to find out something. And I looked at my father in the eye, my uncle, my mother, so I could find out something. However, they had

surely made a deal with each other not to speak about it. And father said... when I asked him, because at the time we spoke with pseudonyms, I said, "How is Beqa?" "Well Shuki..." he said, "what can I say? For God's sake, take care of your own health! Boys, when you get out, there are plenty of boys. He minded his own businesses. There is nothing there! You deal with yourself, take care of your health." He said, "Look, you have become all skin and bones. Nothing is left of you. Let go of that! *Hajt*, because you can deal with these things when you are released. First take care of your health." And then I looked at my mother in the eye, I tried to inspect, to get information out of them, but... nothing. Since they didn't show any sign, neither did I... I couldn't do anything!

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What happened in court then?

**Shukrije Gashi:** In fact, I apologize, because the court hearing was before that (sighs). At the court hearing, as I said earlier, normally back then, they sent us to the court with those special vehicles made for prisoners, with handcuffs. And before we left, before the court hearing... I will say this too... Considering that the visits happened very rarely, and I didn't have new clothes, you know, to appear in court, I asked the guard to help me, at least call my family on the phone and ask for new clothes. Even though she was very strict, concerning a few things she was very correct. "You are..." she said, "very mature," because I tried not to act in a childish manner, or be lame, aha! what do I know, to climb up the door, to make noise, and get in a mess with the guards without reason, without any particular cause. She said, "I promise you that I will call your family and they will bring those, clothes." And so it happened. And she brought the clothes. And I didn't wish that my parents see me in that awful state, because I had lost weight and I was very weak health-wise. I got dressed and left. I saw them from a distance (smiles), because you were not given the opportunity to say hello to them, to the family.

Back then, I was sentenced, on the allegation of having provided assistance to the perpetrator of a criminal act... offering assistance after the criminal act, it was called something like this, Article 137, in conjunction to Article 136. My lawyer was a former law professor, Avni Gjakova, who had extraordinary communication and professional skills. And he stated, so at... in front of the court that, "These children have committed that much wrong, deserving only a spank, and go home. Because they haven't done anything!" But nothing like that happened, you know. Regardless, I was sentenced to two years in prison and naturally I continued for some time the sentence in Mitrovica prison. Then from there, the other half sentence in the prison of Lipjan, which was a prison with a semi-open treatment.

And when... the day I left the prison of Mitrovica, I experienced my release with a very heavy [heart], because I left behind many friends, who were living in very heavy conditions. In particular, for the fact that on the floors where men lived, stayed, they got maltreated every day. And that was like a broken record, which stands still and doesn't move on to the next track. Carrying this heavy feeling, I left. Furthermore, it might sound unbelievable to you, but for me it was like that, where I insisted further to remain in the prison of Mitrovica for the sake of my friends. However, it was a final order and procedure.



**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** When did you get out of prison afterwards? When were you set free? What time period, what year?

**Shukrije Gashi:** When I got out of prison it was July of the year 1984, or '85, I forgot (smiles). Yes, we were just finishing the work shift and returning to the building where we lived at the time, as prisoners, when one of the guards told me that I have to stop, not to go in my room, and have a word with her. So I thought they will for certain transfer me to Pozharevc, or to some other place, where they would usually transfer you. And she told me, "I have to tell you something, but you have to keep it to yourself." I said, "What do I have to keep it to myself? Tell me what it is! If they transfer me, they will transfer me. Now, I have nothing to hide here." She said, "Shuki, do return to your room, get your belongings, you are going home!" "No..." I said, "I won't go home!" "What are you talking about?" I said, "What am I hearing! Never..." I said, "I will not go home! What do you think? Me, going home, and leaving my friends here?" She said, "But you, cannot stay here any longer. This is the decision brought by the second instance, and there is no alternative," she said.

And at a distance, let's say of something like two meters perhaps... my friends stood. Because we always had empathy for each other, but also readiness to defend each other. And then, out of fear that there was some threat, they wouldn't go to their rooms. And one of them told me, from a distance, "Shukrije what is happening with you, sister?" "Nothing..." I said, "unusual, but nothing good either." She said, "Why?" I said, "Because they think that I will agree to go home, and leave you here." Out of joy they started to cry (smiles) and to congratulate me, "Wow how nice! Very nice! C'mon, hey God, how nice!" When they acted like that... and really, instead of being happy, I started to cry, because it seemed very heavy. And again, the guard, Ms. Nexhmije, she was a good woman, she said, "Shukrije, for the others too... don't be sad, the day will come when they will get released. These things are not decided by you and me, but by the state, by politics. I am quite certain that you will never forget them." I looked around once, and I stopped next to the young girls. They were... especially the one in my room, she was very attached to me. Perhaps I was more like a sister to her, a mother. I said, "How *moj* guard, how to leave Shahadije?" "Yes Shuki..." she said, "Shahadije... Why do you say how to leave Shahadije? There are others here. All of them are nice. The day will come and Shahadije gets released, and she goes home just like you! It's good..." she said, "that you are getting out, and then..." she couldn't say it and so continues... she said, "you continue your studies" (sighs).

I went to collect the clothes... all the girls came to the room. And they helped me to quickly pack, but I left almost all the items, I left them. I scattered them among friends. And I left... it was a rule not to give back the shoelaces. And it was pretty difficult to walk without laces... another thing that left an impression on me was that I didn't know how... they didn't provide information on how to commute from prison to the city, for example. And at the exit, I bid farewell to the girls. I didn't turn around to look at them again, because it was very heavy. I don't know why I felt guilty! Because I am getting out, and they are staying behind. I went out to the main street in front of the prison doors, and I was now thinking out loud, "How will I go? Which way to go?" Because even when I was free, in the past I hadn't visited that part of the country. Perhaps I passed by, but I didn't know where the prison is, and where... And I was stuck like... I looked around, I tried to understand where I am. Puzzled, I thought of

continuing in the direction of the center of town, somewhere about, because I didn't know well that region of Lipjan, because it wasn't in the city, but in the suburbs.

So I began to walk slowly, dragging my legs, because I was without laces. And I was looking at the vehicles, the cars that were passing by... let's say after... I am not very sure... perhaps after two, three hundred meters, a car stopped by. And he told me, "Get in fast! Fast, fast, fast!" I thought it is the Secretariat, the Security. When I got inside, it was the prison doctor. He was a very nice man (smiles). And I made attempts, back then, to find him once again, to find out that man's whereabouts, Abdullah Hoti. I got inside the car, and he suggested me to lie down, because he wasn't allowed to even offer this service. I had my release document. I lied down you know at the back seat, and we continued like that, all the way to Pristina. I wanted to see along, but knowing the danger, I decided to do as I was told.

When we arrived at the entrance of Pristina, at Veternik, he said, "I am sorry, it is better for you and for me that from here onwards you continue on foot." Because he was afraid, I am more than certain, that someone is following him and there could be consequences. Perhaps it might sound a bit unusual, but when I got out of the car, I started to cry out loud to myself. My mind was with the girls in the prison. And I imagined them, inside, surrounded by a very high wall and the tortures they experienced, be they psychological, by the chief of the sewing workshop, every day, every morning, or the surveillance by the guards, because there were guards who were very strict, and the hard labor they did every day. Then, the evenings in that building were very grim, because the rumor was that the prison was built on a cemetery. I had a very gruesome experience while I was in quarantine. Someone might have seen only in horror movies what we experienced during a month in quarantine. All of this kept going through my mind, and I couldn't come to terms with the fact that I was out and they were not.

And so I continued the road. Sometimes, I would look at my shoes. I thought, "I will never manage to get home!" When I arrived in front of the District Court, I don't know why, but I stopped instinctively. For a moment, I recalled the whole court trial and the sight of the police who were outside the building. It seemed as if I was going around for the second time to the trial. I stopped, I looked around, and I was trying to find the road home. It wasn't very far from there, but still, you know, the court thing came up and I couldn't remember where my house is. Then, a man who passed by shook me by the arm {touches her shoulder} and told me, "Please, who... I think you are looking for something, you cannot find... which way, where do you want to go?" It seemed unusual to ask him about my house. If I tell him the truth, I thought, I will certainly waste time, and it will cause concern to the old man. I didn't say anything, apart from asking him, "Where is Bihaqi street?" He said, "It is nearby. Here, this way!" He directed me with his hand.

I continued then, I entered the neighborhood. I don't know why, I didn't want to look around, or perhaps it was the experience forcefully induced in prison, where we weren't allowed to look aside. And when I approached the house, I didn't notice that many neighbors looked surprised, "Why doesn't she speak to us?" I entered, I rang the bell, and I went inside the hallway. When I entered, I saw a small child, with blue eyes, who was Granit, my nephew, who was sucking his thumb. And he was looking at

me that way. Perhaps he was two, three years old, he wasn't older than that. He looked at me surprised, "Who is this?!" I picked him up, I hugged him. He was very small when I left him and I wasn't sure if he was Granit. Then my third sister, Granit's mother, on the stairs...She probably came for her son. It took her by surprise, it was unexpected to her. She screamed, terrified, "Ooo, Shuki is here!" And she fainted. Then my mother came, my father, and my paternal aunt's daughter or... I don't remember who, and the others. And as usual, my mother was very strong, because it was life that shaped her through much suffering. And she didn't cry, oddly! She swallowed her tears. "I told you..." she said, "that you will come back. You see, you did come back?" Whereas my father couldn't hold back the tears. He was always more sensitive. And he showed it. "Ee..." he said, "do you see? Every downfall has its up fall!"

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was it like in those years afterwards?

**Shukrije Gashi:** (Sighs).

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** [inc.]

**Shukrije Gashi:** It was very difficult for me to continue with life, and especially my studies, because the manner how the Serbian regime acted was very peculiar - to commit acts, but to not leave traces. The first thing I needed to do is to turn up at the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, to request for the *index* and other things from them. Because everything was confiscated, you know. And I went. I met with the same inspectors again, whom I had dealings with often in the past. And their attitude had not changed, [they asked] again that I get involved in collaboration, offering me jobs and concessions, supposedly concessions to finish my studies. Once and for all, I made it clear that, "I have no intention to cooperate with you! I have come to request the *index* and other documents, the photographs you have taken and everything else. And there is no collaboration with you! Forget it!" And I received the threatening answer that, "You will never finish university! Forget it! You will get the documents, but you will never finish your studies." I took them and went out. And it did turn out like that! I applied many times for a passport, and a passport was never given to me. I started my studies again, I attended the lectures, because when I went to prison, I was an undergraduate, but I gained nothing from attending the lectures. There were a number of professors, who allowed me to enter the room where the exams were held, but not to respond to exam questions.

And seeing this trend, I decided to talk again to the lawyer, and to explain the situation as it is. He showed great care towards me. He was there few times and talked to the professors. The commissions were established, so I could pass the exams. Still two of the exams got prolonged, way too long. They made me lose nearly five years in vain, not accepting me to answer [questions], as I said, at the exams. I completed the whole procedure, the submission of the exam, but when the time came to answer, it didn't happen. And at some point, I requested the help of one of the professors. I am talking about Fatmir Sejdiu. I explained the situation to him, and indeed, at that time, Fatmir helped me a lot. He suggested me to not turn up at the exam in the presence of the professor, but of the assistant, so I

could avoid the possibility of missing another deadline, and many more deadlines. And so it happened. After many attempts, with great efforts, I finished university.

## Activism

**Shukrije Gashi:** I don't know for how many job positions I applied and wasn't accepted. There was never any explanation.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** When did you get employed for the first time?

**Shukrije Gashi:** I was employed for the first time in the year 1994, whereas meanwhile, as an external associate, I mean as a freelance journalist, I was active since 1979. I didn't ask anyone. And I sent my articles you know, I did publish them, but most as an alias. Then also *Fjala*,<sup>15</sup> which was a journal on culture and education, *Shkëndija*<sup>16</sup> and others, published my articles and papers, sometimes signed, sometimes not. Milazim Krasniqi at the time helped me a lot in publishing my poems. Occasionally he gave me some work, for example, to sort articles, various books such as Kadare's or others', which were published in the journal *Fjala*. The same happened with other journals and magazines, daily newspapers, until the year 1994, as I told you.

Regardless, I found other ways [of publishing] as well, since in those times I was collaborating with the foreign press. Fortunately, I had a solid knowledge of English and this helped me enormously. And I did that with great effort and dedication. I would never have done it, without the help of my father.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And after that comes the year 1989...

**Shukrije Gashi:** Later on, we have the year 1989. Due to my desire, my willingness to continuously be at the cutting edge, although I was not working, I always visited students, I was among the students. I always used opportunities when there were young people around, regardless whether I knew them or not, to speak about the need to organize, about the need for a change in Kosovo, about the Republic of Kosovo, even in public. I was not worried, although I was always under surveillance by the regime. So, as I said, I didn't manage to obtain a passport...

Then came the year '90. In the year 1990, it was the beginning, I mean when Adem Demaçi,<sup>17</sup> with some other friends, came to visit me - with Salih Sefa, Nuhi Ahmeti and some others whom I don't remember, and asked me to become a member of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and

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<sup>15</sup> *Fjala* was a magazine published within the framework of Rilindja.

<sup>16</sup> *Shkëndija* was a magazine published within the framework of *Rilindja*

<sup>17</sup> Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

Freedoms.<sup>18</sup> So, it was only the beginning of the establishment of this organization and I was a co-founder, together with Adem Demaçi back then. I worked for free, as a volunteer, for seven years. Work started at seven in the morning and often I stayed on until one o'clock after midnight, or two o'clock. And in very difficult conditions since we didn't even have telephones, nor...

Later on we got a telephone, a fax, and a computer. Then a journalist from Great Britain taught us how to use the computer. Back then we would send out written reports, you know, via fax. Later on, via internet too, and this is how I went on for years and years, until the beginning of the year 1989... pardon, '98. As I had lots of commitments, not only [my work] at the daily *Rilindja*<sup>19</sup> but also the cooperation I had with various foreign agencies, foreign journalists, I decided to leave the job at the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms which was already consolidated by now, and had extra staff, although spiritually I never left and continued to send information, even after I left the Council - information from the field on the violence of the regime that continued at large and was growing all over Kosovo..

During the time I stayed with the Council, I created a new network of people. That was where I met many activists, other women activists, such as for example Sevdije Ahmeti, Vjosa Dobruna, Lirije Osmani, Nekibe Kelmendi, Naxhije Buçinca, Xheraldina Vuçinca-Vula, Zahrije Podrimqaku, Shahadije Neziri. Whereas my mates from prison, most of them, were abroad.

I have known the majority of civil society women who are still active since then. Then Luljeta Pula, she too... she is also my friend and I hung out with her for a long time. I can freely say that she was one of the few women who had a dignified approach, characteristic, unusual for the time. Because even when it got tough, she gave them a lesson in Belgrade on how to take a stand on the national cause. I have great respect for her and I feel sorry that today, since the war and onwards, she has not been active in politics. There, I have met other women who gave an enormous contribution even during the war... and in particular I would emphasize the contribution of Zahrije Podrimqaku, who was back then a member of the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms together with Shaban Shala and many others, who greatly helped the liberation war of Kosovo.

During those years, we are talking about the years '93, '91, '97, '98, I was present in the field a lot. I used to have frequent contacts with the movements that were happening on the ground, with KLA activities, and that is how I got to know girls and women who helped the war and were active in the war. A special moment for me was when I entered a house in Prekaz,<sup>20</sup> I saw ... surely there were more than 30 people, all dressed in KLA uniforms. And out of excitement I stopped in the middle of the room. I could not sit anymore. As a child I dreamt of a soldier whom I pictured at the Kosovo-Albania border and at that border, in that part, a soldier who guarded both borders, between the two borders. And thinking out loud, I said, "Well, this must be freedom!" Then one of the soldiers who was much

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<sup>18</sup> The full name of this organization is Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedom. KMLDNJ is the Albanian acronym.

<sup>19</sup> *Rilindja* was the main Kosovo newspaper in Albanian language, founded after the Second World War

<sup>20</sup> Prekaz is the home of the Jashari family, which is celebrated as the first nucleus of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Twenty members of this family were killed by Serbian forces in March 1998 during a three-day siege which turned into a shootout. The Jashari massacre is considered the most powerful symbol of national resistance.

older shook me by the shoulder, and told me, “Sit, sit sister.” And they sat me in the most important place of the room.<sup>21</sup>

I always noticed that Serbia, the Serbian regime, Serbian politics, tried to present Albanians as traditionalist people, as people who exercise gender violence, as people who don't have respect for women. In fact, I have pointed out many times, and I shall point it out even now, always, any time I went to an Albanian *oda*, I was always given the most important place in the *oda*. What I am trying to say is that respect for gender is not something that was discovered by others, because this is clear for those who read the *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini. In the chapter dedicated to mediation it is written, among other things, “Whether a man or a woman, whether a boy or a girl, all have equal rights to exercise the role of the mediator, to mediate.” I did paraphrase this as I can't say it literally, you might as well read it. I mean, [the *Kanun*] considers a girl equal to a boy, a man, a priest, which speaks for social equality, gender equality ... and I always use this document and refer to it, so that the world understands that Albanians had a constitution that addresses gender equality in a document that dates way before the United Nations document,<sup>22</sup> the *Magna Charta Libertatum*, two hundred years prior to this document.

And I am sorry that while such a summary exists and it is codified in writing, it is being neglected today, it is not applied in practice. Albanians used to have and still have many values which they, part of them, have no knowledge of, whereas I have carried them with me all my youth. Even today, when I give lectures, not only during the training that I do hold here and abroad, in various countries in Europe and the world, but also the lectures I give to foreign students at the American University of Kosovo, so they understand that it's not that Albanians do not know culture, education, or certain issues, especially respect for human rights. They are even ahead of other nations in the world.

So, you know, my involvement on many levels, has given me space that even beyond, I mean, even after the 90s, enabled me to be active up till the war broke out and after the war, and until today. In the early beginning, as I said earlier, I felt a moral, national and human duty to gather evidence of human rights violation, but at the same time to address and find information on what was happening in the field, in particular to women and girls. And I have also done this by supporting the work of organizations dealing with these issues, such as the Center for the protection of Women and Children,<sup>23</sup> the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, and [another] association, at the time so-called Motrat Qiriazhi,<sup>24</sup> and others. Then you had “The Education Initiators and Veterans Group,” and many others, whom I do not recall now as they were plenty, so I could spread the spirit of the national cause among the young generations, but the elderly too, in order for us to unify, to become unified around the national cause.

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<sup>21</sup> Seats in the *oda*, or men's room, are distributed according to a precise order. The most important person, usually the eldest, sits in the most important place, which is by the fireplace.

<sup>22</sup> Unclear why the speaker is making a connection between the UN and the *Magna Charta*.

<sup>23</sup> NGO founded in 1993 by Sevdije Ahmeti and Vjosa Dobruna.

<sup>24</sup> NGO founded by Igballe and Safete Rugova in the 1990s to promote women's and girls' education. It was named after the sisters Qiriazhi, who founded the first school for girls in Korça (Albania) in 1892

Then I was also very active in the campaign for the reconciliation of blood feuds,<sup>25</sup> together with many students and professors, where the main purpose wasn't just reconciliation amongst Albanians and the forgiveness of blood feuds, but simultaneously the purpose was to unify Albanians and to focus] on the common enemy, which was the Serbian regime. It was there where other activities were conducted to help the KLA in the field and then I had the chance and honor to meet Adem Jashari<sup>26</sup> often, and Hamëz Jashari.<sup>27</sup> They were friends of Nuhi Berisha<sup>28</sup> ... even when I met them for the first time, it left a great impression on me, since back then I didn't know that they knew Nuhi.

And when the teacher Halit Geci<sup>29</sup> came onto the scene, if you ever have a chance to see the film of that event, I was the only one who was with a recorder at the scene to record the event. Despite the appeal not to record anything, I still did it in order to have that event [on tape]. And we didn't know that the KLA will appear on the stage that day, although it was not a novelty for me since I had met those people a few times [already].<sup>30</sup> And in a split second three guys came and I was behind them. I recorded the whole speech and after this event, my former colleagues of *Rilindja* asked me to take them to Adem Jashari, to the Jashari family in Prekaz and I went together with them.

One of my colleagues wished to stay overnight there, but the head of the household, *baca*<sup>31</sup> Shaban, Shaban Jashari, told us, "I apologize, I am very sorry, I really wish to have you here as my guests tonight, but I would not suggest it since I'm afraid I will be dishonored. The police and the army might come any time to attack my family and something might happen to you as well. I would kindly ask you to leave." While my colleague Evliana Berani said, "But why, *baca* Shaban, we can wear *kule*<sup>32</sup> and..." "No," he said, "this is not a matter of *kule*, it is a matter of safety. I cannot assure you that nothing will happen to you and it is a great dishonor for me if something happens to you in the midst of my family." And that is how we left. While leaving, Hamëz Jashari, "Shukrije, I would kindly ask you

<sup>25</sup> In 1991 a mass movement for the forgiveness of blood feuds (*pajtimi i gjakut*), was launched among the Albanian population of Kosovo. It was initiated by a group of students, former political prisoners, who approached folklore scholar Anton Çetta and others senior figures in academia to lead the process. The movement reconciled thousands of cases, and it became a movement for national unity.

<sup>26</sup> Adem Jashari, also known as "the Legendary Commander," was a founder of the KLA celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty - half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

<sup>27</sup> Hamëz is Adem Jashari's brother. He was also killed in the March 1998 siege.

<sup>28</sup> Nuhi Berisha (1961-1984) was born in Svirçë, municipality of Kamenica. During his student years Berisha joined Rexhep Mala's organization The Student Committee, that operated within the so-called Revolutionary Group. This platform, later on, became the basis for the group The Movement for National Liberation. In 1973, together with Mala, he published *Zëri i Kosovës*, a political magazine. Both Mala and Berisha were killed in 1984, during an armed confrontation with the Serbian police forces in Pristina

<sup>29</sup> Halit Geci (1945-1997) was a teacher from Llaushë, Skënderaj. On November 28, 1997, when KLA and Serbian forces were battling each other, Serbian forces started shooting in the direction of the school where Geci was teaching, leaving him dead.

<sup>30</sup> The KLA made its first public appearance and call to arms during the funeral of Halit Geci

<sup>31</sup> *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

<sup>32</sup> Billowing pants, Turkish style.

that..." a certain journalist, whose name I will not mention here, I will talk in colloquial speech, as spoken by him, "tell him that he cannot set foot here anymore, since he brought a Belgrade spy into the headquarters by presenting her as a journalist from Reuters by the name Victoria." And I indeed did convey his message when I returned from the field.

The activism does not end here, you know, such cases and experiences in the field were many. My goal was always the inclusion of women, their active participation, be that in political activities, in war, humanitarian activities, in order to establish a tradition, an experience in this regard, so that a woman gets acknowledged, gains ownership of these processes... to acknowledge her ownership in Kosovo processes.

## War

When the bombing started in 1999, I was in Kosovo. And as I was always watched by the government, the inspectors, the agents began immediately to move on the third day. One morning, a neighbors came around ten o'clock and rang the house bell and informed father that two agents had stopped by and asked about Shuki. "Bac Ahmet, I felt obliged to tell you that they came by and asked about her." Then father told me that I should leave, "Go somewhere else, find a way somewhere else, don't stay at home because we expect them to come back." And that's what I did, I moved from one place to another, I never stayed in the same place. Whereas, police actions took a rough turn, the persecution started and the deportation, by expelling people from their houses.

So I had to move completely from the neighborhood where my father's house is today, and settle in Dardania. In Dardania I got together with my paternal uncle's son and we went to an Albanian Christian family. I stayed there for a few nights and we saw from the window that paramilitary groups were harassing whomever they found in the streets, even all the movements of the old lady, the landlady, such as going to buy bread and grocery, so, such actions for basic needs. She told us that there were many paramilitary groups under Kurriz, and in the street too. And among other things she advised us to run away, to leave the country, to move because even if we wanted to go with her to Croatia, we could not due to our names, and we risked being exterminated, going missing. And we decided to do so.

We took the road that led to the train station. In that street I experienced a huge terror, because I was queuing in the middle of... perhaps there were 2000 people who had taken this road. The line stretched from Dardania, where the clock is today up to the train station. While we were walking, a light green vehicle approached, with four-five people in it. Some of them were in uniforms, others in plainclothes. They got a young man, a young man of 36-37 years old out of the line, he was with his spouse and two children. They took him to the other side, so on the right hand side of the street, pushed him against the wall and shot him.

In that moment, I felt lost, it was something... [it was] not unusual because Serbs have killed, I mean the Serbian regime, the police, used to do such acts. However, the way that man was taken in silence without exchanging any words, was very peculiar. He didn't say anything to his wife either, to anyone.



In fact it was suggested to us not to speak, to continue the road. "*Marsh tamo! Nastavite!*" [March over there! Go on!].

My cousin held one of his children in his arms. I took the other one, while his spouse was numb from... and she didn't know what to do at that moment. She continued without turning her head to see what happened on the other side.

Then we continued the road to the train, a huge crowd of people was there who were pushing, whoever could get faster on the train. While I was watching the crowd, I remembered a saying by a German who was my colleague when I worked at the International World Vision, who had told me, "The biggest curse in life is to be a refugee." In the midst of that crowd, I managed to get inside the train together with my uncle's son and a professor from the high school. When we got in the train, someplace after a long trip, paramilitary groups stopped the train and started getting in the train and pulling out by force the men in the train for execution. In order to save my uncle's son, together with a professor, we decided that he should lie down in... how do they call this part... floor, and we threw a blanket on top of him and we sat on him, because we didn't have any other choice.

Three paramilitaries got in and looked around, besides sitting on top of him, we placed the suitcases and some boxes so we could camouflage him. For some... I hardly know myself for how long did he stay like that. Then, when they left, only then, he stood up and we continued the road together. It is important to emphasize one detail, during this action by the police, while the paramilitaries and the police were getting onto the train, one of the paramilitaries...a child [...] was calling someone out the window, probably he had someone who was left behind, a parent or a sister or what do I know, it was a child of five and he had his hand outside the window. The paramilitary forcefully pulled down the window and caught his hand, and was persistent in cutting off his hand with the window, with the glass. One of the policemen didn't allow that.

I don't know what has happened to all those men who were taken violently off the train and so we continued the road to Macedonia. Although back then we had no idea of where this train is taking us. During the whole trip, I was constantly looking out the window. During the whole road I saw groups and groups, many masked paramilitaries who were entering houses, looting, demolishing. I have seen them pulling men and women by their hair forcefully. And these horrible sights went on until we arrived in Macedonia.

We went to a camp that reminded me of the Nazi concentration camps, surrounded by the Macedonian police and the army that didn't stay far, they didn't differ much from the German and fascist soldiers back in the time, because the swearing and insults, did not stop on their side. There I understood that everyone was equal, there were no privileges for anyone, whether you had or hadn't money. Amidst others I saw a woman, who when the migration of families from Drenica started due to the force and pressure by the regime - one day while in Pristina, I call it conditional peace since it was a false one - I saw a woman with three children who was begging a lady to accept them in her home. And since I was always curious to know what is going on with my people, with our women, I stopped and asked her, in particular, because I knew that lady from Pristina, and then I understood that the

woman with three children was asking for help. Whereas, that other lady was telling her that she cannot take her in. I told her, "How come, how come you cannot accept her, for what reason?" "I cannot," she said, "I don't have a place to put her, I don't..." What do I know, place her inside, down there in the basement where there is no heating, and that sight touched me a lot. "How come *moj* you have no place to put her? She can stay too in the house where you stay." So, she just shrugged and didn't let them in.

Since I was rushing to get to work, I told that woman to wait for me for a while because I will come back. I went to work, I spoke to my boss at the time and I explained him the situation. Despite her unfortunately not being very generous towards... Albanians, she still gave me permission. I went back and accommodated her in a house, and I went back to work again. When I arrived in the camp at Bllace, I met that lady again and she stood up crying out loud. She said, "I feel ashamed for how I acted back then because here it is hell for everyone. Now here with both feet in the mud, I have understood that here you are nobody. And I would love to meet once more that woman with children to beg forgiveness, as I never believed this day would come."

And while I was there at the camp, I tried as possible to communicate with the majority of citizens, to visit them, to see what was their state, going from one family to another. At a certain moment a former work colleague, to put it like this because she was my boss, but she didn't want me to call her boss, Madame Karmit Zysman, who spent a long time in Kosovo, so she was here from 1997 up till the time we are speaking of, she was all the time in the field with people and helped a lot. She saw me from a distance and asked me to leave the camp, and then with the help of some Albanian activists, human rights activists, I managed to break out from the siege.

However, I wasn't happy because in there I left all that mass of people including my own family, my brother and his wife, with children. And then one case that I will never forget, when I helped a girl of eight who was sick to death, was vomiting and was very weak. While I was asking to get her out of the camp to send her for a medical check, I got hit many times by a Macedonian policeman. And out of anger because I didn't stand a chance as I fell down in the mud along with the small girl and while I was getting back on my feet, I fetched a fist of stones and started to hit him, I said to myself, at least like this.

He continued hitting me again and cut off the badge hanging around my neck, and threw it in the mud. Everyone who was there saw this scene. At some point an International Red Cross representative intervened, and stopped him from hitting me, took me and the girl out of there. We managed to get her to an improvised clinic there, and after I was assured that the girl got her strength back and started to breathe freely, I continued my road to Macedonia, all the time concerned of what is going to happen with those people, what should I do to help them.

Then, in Macedonia I continued with activities of reuniting families by opening a radio channel in Dibra through which I made an appeal on behalf of those who had no information about their family's whereabouts. I mean, I never ceased to perform the duty of the mission that I set as a goal to myself through my entire life. So, protection of citizens from the violations committed to them by the regime,

human rights violations regardless of national identity or something else. And while there, I always spoke about the need for women and men to be treated equally, about women education as very important for the society. Because without the participation of women, no change could happen in Macedonia because the same thing experienced by us was awaiting the Albanian population in Macedonia, we went through it due to the Serbian regime. So activities like this.

Then, later on with the help of the organization Kvinna Til Kvinna I went, then I later went in... with the help of my organization, actually of this lady, Karmit Zysman, I got in touch with the International World Vision organization in Albania, that is where a large number of office staff who worked in Pristina got transferred. I continued the work at the refugee camps in Albania, over there I had created a big *rreth*, I mean social [circle]. I had spoken a lot about the experience in Kosovo, about the violence that was exercised by the Serbian regime in Kosovo, about the need to speak of this issue, for this to be published in the Albanian press, for people to help each other mutually, to get connected more, to have a quality education so the Albanians are equal to the rest of the civilized world.

Then, after a while I returned to Kosovo, I also insisted to immediately return to Kosovo with NATO troops. However, the suggestions of one of my bosses who had friends among NATO officials was that I don't return because there was still great danger. However, I insisted and it wasn't long before the entrance of NATO that I returned to Kosovo. Then I continued working on women's empowerment at all levels including politics. The first day I arrived, after 24 hours of travelling, as soon as I arrived at the hotel

Grand, I was just stepping out of the truck because I came in a truck, to my surprise there he was, waiting for me, the former secretary of the Association of Trade Unions of Kosovo [ATUK], Mr Mustafë... I don't remember the surname, the secretary of professor Hajrullah Gorani, the Chair of ATUK, professor at the Faculty of Economy and I was impressed how he found me. He said, "Shuki, I don't know where you are coming from and why you are here, but we need a translator and it was our luck to find you. The professor is asking for you because there is a Russian who speaks English and we need a translator." "But *more* man, I have just arrived after 24 hours of traveling, I need to go home." "No, home" he said. We know that you will do this job for us." And I had to... I spent three hours there as a translator and after the translation I went on, I went home to find there my father and my little sister whom I had no clue about, nobody knew whether she was alive or dead.

## Professional life

With regards to postwar Kosovo, I can freely say that the beginnings were very difficult. There was no major change compared to the war period. Due to the war, in particular due to my engagement as a human rights activist, as I pointed out earlier, one day I had to leave Kosovo and head to Macedonia, and later on settle in Albania.

There, in Albania, for the most part I worked with refugees, almost across the entire Albania. Once the war in Kosovo was over, I strongly insisted to return as I thought that in those peculiar circumstances

people would need support, whether humanitarian, or in terms of human rights, or of rehabilitation... Because during the time that I stayed in Albania, I worked, I was involved in rehabilitation, psychosocial programs, and I figured that I would be of use. Nevertheless, due to the insistence of the organization World Vision International, I remained [in Albania] a bit longer.

However, I still went back to Kosovo. My wish was to at least return with NATO representatives, at the time there was this possibility to do so by helicopter, but as I said, I wasn't allowed for safety reasons. The journey from Albania to Pristina, in an old truck, lasted about twenty hours. The road was heavily damaged and I can say that by the time I reached the Grand Hotel, I stepped out of the truck, and without barely touching the ground, someone from behind tapped me on the shoulder and called me by name. I was impressed, [it was] in Albanian. I turned back and I saw the secretary of... what was it called... the Kosovo Trade Union. It left a big impression on me and I said, "How come?" "It's very good," he said, "that I found you. I saw you..." He said, "I came down because professor Hajrullah Gorani is inside the Grand with an international representative..." At the time he was certainly the first emissary of the United Nations Organization in Kosovo... "So you can help us by translating for him." I told him, "Take it easy man, as I've traveled for over twenty hours. I am extremely tired. Perhaps I might not be able to concentrate." "Well, you should find your concentration, as you always did. You have to help us! Definitely." Despite the fatigue, I had to go. And I probably spend over three hours there assisting professor Gorani in sending his message regarding the events in Kosovo, the situation, to the other side - why were 120 thousand Albanians forced to abandon their jobs at the time, and other gruesome issues as a consequence of having Milošević in power.

In such a state of play... and by the time I went out of... you know, the meeting, I looked around and in those circumstances, my eyes caught two individuals who used to be some sort of Arkan's<sup>33</sup> guards so to speak, and I was much saddened. I thought out loud, "What has happened, so Arkan's people did not withdraw..." And I went out... out of the Grand, very upset. I went out to the street, you know, the main one, I looked around. It was still... Pristina was in a difficult state, miserable, very few people in the streets, small movement, and I felt very disquieted. During the entire time, I asked myself, how come it is possible they told us that Kosovo has been liberated, when such people still dare hang out in public places...since we all know that the Grand back then was used by media for a long time, for press conferences, and others... and then, with the same truck, I reached home. During the whole time I looked around, there were a lot of destroyed houses, but very few people in the street.

At home, naturally they simply did not have any information that I was on my way, since possibilities for communication were limited... And I rang the bell. I wasn't aware that my youngest sister was in Pristina since at the time we didn't have any information on her whereabouts. And she appeared at the window of the second floor. She was very afraid that I would not be able to reach home, she did not expect it. Then she came downstairs together with dad and for me it was a... simply, a huge shock

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<sup>33</sup> Željko Ražnatović aka Arkan (1952 – 15 January 2000), was a Serbian commander of a paramilitary force in the Yugoslav wars, the Serb Volunteer Guard. He was on the Interpol's most wanted list in the 1970s and 1980s for robberies and murders committed in a number of countries across Europe, and was later indicted by the UN for crimes against humanity for his role during the wars. Ražnatović was up until his death the most powerful militia leader in the Balkans. He was assassinated in 2000 in Belgrade, before his trial.

since I thought that I would not find anyone besides dad there. So, this was the first trauma, my contact with the family. The second trauma was when I met my second sister. She was in Kosovo the whole time and I noticed that the way she moved, she walked, was like a robot's due to traumas, because her two sons were involved in the war and the police together with the paramilitaries raided their apartment many times to search for them. And because of their rough behavior, of... especially of the paramilitaries, she was very traumatized. And for her, this way of moving lasted for many months... This was the second trauma.

Then, the lack of information on the whereabouts of other family members as well as of information on the killing of people close to me, friends, people I used to know and those I did not know well. Despite all, you know, I experienced great spiritual hurt from the bitter reality [of the war]. I was still clinging to the hope that things would be better in Kosovo and for this reason I rushed into finding a job, not entirely for the financial aspect, but more so I could be on track, with things which provided me with the opportunity to establish contacts with people. So, I got a job. It was a short period, two weeks, I am not very sure, at an organization that dealt with disclosing war crimes back then. To be honest, I didn't like it much and so I left that job, very early on.

Then I was employed at another organization of the United Nations, an agency on human settlements, UN Habitat, and then I started working seriously, primarily on redrafting laws... Initially collecting the existing laws on various issues in Kosovo, on property issues, on land, then on apartments, houses, and so on. Initially to check how many such laws were there, how functional they were, how compatible could they be, and then I started dealing with... concrete cases of apartments, which were either sold, or occupied, or which would be resold, and similar things. I had a greater interest in the cadastral registry as the cadastre is the proof that puts a stamp on the property for the first owner.

Then, during the research I realized that those cadastral records, or cadastral books, were sent to Serbia, also other records, you know, for other sectors too. Knowing that these were very important issues and incidentally very sensitive, since property cannot be altered and is considered sacred, I worked with great dedication in this job for two years and more. In this organization there were few other programs besides the one on housing property issues, where I was carrying out the task of expert and coordinator, as well as training [on certain] issues, and then informing citizens. In both cases... but also having a long working experience as a journalist, during the entire time I made great efforts at work, besides the work I did in the organizations which I mentioned, I was also interested in obtaining information on what was happening in the field with the returnees. Do they have accommodation, do they have shelter, what are their economic conditions, is there anyone who takes care of them?

I remember a case, I will use it only for illustration purposes because there were many like that. While I was working at the Agency for Housing Property Issues, a woman with two orphans came by. You know, they were war orphans. And the woman did not have shelter. Before she came to my office, she had previously talked to a lady who was a legal expert in the organization at the time, about the possibility to use as shelter one of the apartments which were under the administration of Habitat - Habitat which was, you know, a United Nations agency. And the same expert hesitated to allocate it for this use with the justification that those children were of people, of fathers who had been killed on

the side of the KLA. Which for me was an absurd attitude, since none of us has the right to limit the right to shelter of a child, of whoever, of somebody's spouse, for the very fact that it belonged to a certain party during an unequal war. And I felt very bad when I realized that there was such an attitude.

I approached that lady, and I said, "I don't understand someone like yourself who works in a United Nations Organization... in a United Nations agency and has such an extreme and biased attitude. What importance does it have ...it is a family, children belong to a man who was killed on the side of... supposedly the defending party's or the oppressor's side. They need a shelter. They have no support whatsoever. You know very well that currently there are yet no laws in power, which are applicable. And we, on a voluntary, human basis, out of human empathy at least, should treat people equally. Especially we, who aspire to deal with human rights." And so, you know, after insisting for a long time, I was given the opportunity to help. However, that lady expert never mentioned the case...

And such things, such cases unfortunately were handled in a biased manner. As soon as it was understood that the claiming party was Albanian, the investigation of the case was ten times more detailed. When it came to some other party, I mean [the property] belonged to some other nationality, the reaction was immediately positive and the shelter was provided right away. It is something that I noticed not only during the work I did in this organization, but also in other organizations, unfortunately, during the whole time up to this day. This discriminatory approach was one more incentive for me as a local, as a member of the Kosovo community, as a Kosovar, as a Kosovo Albanian, to show more interest and to make the most so that such discriminatory, biased approaches, would not be repeated, and possibly... even be eradicated.

And then, I started, I mean I continued my commitment to drafting laws, my concrete work at the Joint Council as it was called back then, of the United Nations Administration, where you had a lot of renowned local lawyers. Even though my work as an expert and a translator wasn't very satisfactory, I did it with the aim to show that the work of the locals appeared as sustainable and as professionally acceptable as possible, since it is known that in such postwar circumstances, it was very difficult to find a translator who would simultaneously have translation skills, master those skills, but also have legal background. I had both fortunately. I also closely cooperated with professor Kabashi, who is a translator, so there were a number of laws, I cannot recall all of them now as there are many, that I have translated.

I was at the time a co-drafter of the Housing Property Issues Directorate Regulation, 1999/60 or 2000/60, I cannot remember since it is now a long time ago, which made sure that issues are handled with equality. Even then I insisted that mediation methodology, you know, alternative solutions, be included in this agency, however I did not find any support from...the bosses back then. And it was concluded that the agency would have its own regulation and the work would be done according to that regulation.

Each time I was given a moment, I mean the chance, I always insisted that citizens, regardless of ethnic, religious or racial identity... have equal access, have a balanced access, are not discriminated. However, I constantly observed that the rights of the Albanian majority were always violated. It was an

unacceptable absurdity for me that the same lady insisted that Albanians should accept a registration form for their deceased in the Serbian language, moreover in the Cyrillic alphabet. And I, I refused it. Of course I refused it. Then even later, the insistence to continue with forms in Serbian and in this alphabet, as well as the insistence that Kosovo be referred to as Kosovo and Metohija... I never accepted that and I don't think that I will ever accept that.

So, I noticed that... although the United Nations organization abides to respect human rights, the insistence informed by dominant international political interest made it possible that one party was always discriminated. I have gone far for example, in my impartiality, or the principle of impartiality, so that all parties... I was open to all parties. Besides the work that I directly conducted for them, in terms of drafting laws, regulations for the functionalization of the Housing Property Issues Directorate, I also carried out proofreading of translations, whether in Albanian, Serbian or English, and so on, always being open, you know, with an open approach towards everyone, where everyone is welcomed, in equal manner, to express their viewpoints, opinions, why they think it should be like this, or otherwise... So that people feel that they truly have ownership of the process. They are part of Kosovo equally, have equal rights.

And, in all this mosaic with lots of problems, what hurt me the most, the whole time, was the position of the Albanian women and all other women, but especially because when they are a majority their influence is more visible. There was a great will of women to be active in politics, to be equal participants, to provide equal contribution. Perhaps not in terms of action at first, but in the actions that followed. When it came to the issues [that invited] decision making, it was immediately evident that they had no influence, there was no space to be a participant in the decision making [process]. I have done as much as I could, whenever I found myself in particular circumstances - be at an event attended by all representatives of political parties, or officials at the central or local level - I never hesitated to openly express my objections, "Why isn't there an equal space for women?"

I am not the only one, there are many women and ladies who never hesitated to do this, however, Albanian women don't have the sufficient space yet to feel that they are equal participants in the [political] processes. Often, the approach towards them, even to this day, in the name of equal rights... they are placed in a certain position for the sake of decoration, not for the sake of commitment or the mindset that women can equally contribute, the same as men. What is worse, even at the times when I worked at the United Nations, even though the work I did was many times harder and I often happened to be kept till early mornings in the office, my colleague who did a similar, but less time-consuming job, had a much greater salary than I did.

Which means, though we tend to think that the world has moved forward, human rights are supported by conventions, besides the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and additional conventions, including Resolution 1325 and other resolutions, CEDAW,<sup>34</sup> yet the issue of equal justice worldwide, of equal access for women, [of equality] even in the budget, of salaries, and of merits, does not exist. It does not exist in practice. And this hurts a lot, especially in Kosovo, for the fact that Kosovo was a

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<sup>34</sup> 1979 Treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly: *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.

good opportunity, since there you had representatives from almost the entire international community, to carry out tests, [to carry out] a good experiment so that things take a nice turn, to put issues into order from the beginning and so women take the role that belongs to them in all decision making processes, as well as in the equal treatment related to human resources and other issues.

However, this did not happen. Why it did not happen, is a question that requires an answer of a multidimensional nature. First of all, even those who came as experts from the international community, unfortunately did not research much who are the individuals with whom you should interact in Kosovo, but even worse, they did more research on how to find collaborators with whom they could enjoy mutual benefits, material ones. And this made the process unable ... the [state] building process, neither the process of the emergency phase nor the later process of transition and the one of moving towards a democracy... we did not walk in the path, in the right path, but neglected it and thus we ended up in a degraded situation.

And today we have a government that is not balanced, there are no women who are true representatives, not all of them, but there is no balance in representation either. Unfortunately, for the time being it is even worse compared to the previous government, the one before the last. All of this is the mutual fault of the international community, government officials, and local politicians.

However, I have to say that the fault of local politicians, even though it is primary, is not of an equal measure [to the internationals], since they did have the opportunity to make decisions. Reasons are aplenty, the first being corruption. Then there is the right not to act as a reflection of regional policies. All of these have contributed to women remaining in the margins. Since the postwar period up until today little has been done, almost nothing, especially on the issue of women victims of war, raped women, who are left without a name and a surname today, without a right to have a say, to share their concerns. Their [case] has been handled in a disorganized manner, with an unstructured process, not a multi-dimensional one, not a process of empathy, where they would be given the deserved mental, psychological, health and employment treatment. You know, there was no continuous program which would enable a step-by-step healing, first of all psychological and then provide them with the opportunity of being treated and feel equal and a useful part of this society.

And then, even with the support of the legal framework, with a flawed law even to this day, because as it stands it is not implementable and few are those women who exercise their right to social assistance... even worse, even to this day, the existing government has not made concrete steps, despite the great will by civil society to open this issue in order to elaborate the law, so those women can be paid in a fair manner. In fact, the opposite happens. They are still marginalized, left behind, without respect, without ownership of the process. You know, this issue is dragging on since the aftermath of the war.

Unfortunately, things happened like this because even back then there was no consensus or agreement amongst Albanians to have an equal division of power. Because had there been consensus



back then, I am quite certain that Kosovo wouldn't have needed the Ahtisaari's package,<sup>35</sup> which in someone's point of view, mindset, and under some other circumstances might have been a marvelous approach, as I am absolutely in favor of having a positive approach towards minority communities. I never wished for a minority community to go through the same thing that happened to the majority community in Kosovo.

Yet, I am also against selective treatment, dealing with only one minority and marginalize other minorities, or neglect them. Kosovo is small, with a small population, and a relatively low number of minorities. I am quite certain that even the international community, which insists that different standards are applied in Kosovo, knows that in many other cases in the world and the region, there are minorities that are higher in percentage compared to the majority community in Kosovo, the Serbian community. And standards are not required... or the same standards as Kosovo's standards are not applied.

I am for the principle of positive discrimination, if this principle were applied in equal measure towards all minorities and towards the Albanian minority in those regions, in those countries where other members, other ethnicities are the majority. And in this case, such a discriminatory approach is exercised towards the entire minority group of women. Because, since women are not participating in the decision making processes, they are treated as a minority. I mean, the lack of knowledge, the fight for... how shall I put it, [the fight] for power and other negative ambitions, has turned Kosovo into a laboratory for experiments, appetites and wish-list of everyone. It has been transformed into a fountain of wishes. And, in fact, in practice, proposals have almost no... political proposals, the foundations and other proposals for building a sound democracy, have not functioned.

Let's take the issue of transitional justice now. There are many elements, we have to make efforts - and we are doing so as an inter-ministerial group, I mean civil society and ministries, representatives of ministries and the Office of the Prime Minister - to do something in terms of modeling our process. In this process, exactly due to some considerations, due to their political reservations, there is still a lack of participation of Kosovo minorities, the minority communities. I am more than certain that with the approach that the international community has today, putting pressure on one party, and putting no pressure on the other party, we will never have a democratic process, an integrated Kosovo, a balanced one. I don't believe that there will be one.

We are witnesses of this time, in which Kosovo and Serbia cannot reach a reconciliation which would prove sustainable. Reconciliation cannot happen if it isn't preceded by other steps that open the paths for a sustainable reconciliation. If there was first an apology, which is very normal, it is human, for all those victims in Kosovo, and then other steps with genuine political representatives from all sides. I am not aware that there is a place in the world with two conflicting parties, where one party does not accept the creation of a new state and this very party chooses as minister, or ministers,

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<sup>35</sup> The [Ahtisaari Plan](#), formally the *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (CSP)*, is a status settlement proposal covering a wide range of issues related to the [Kosovo status process](#) for Kosovo.

individuals who belong to the previous establishment, such as the one of Milosevic for Kosovo, they have them elected as ministers for Kosovo. And this same one, uses derogatory language and morally insults women, the Albanian mothers in this case, and these habits continue with the same ministers. I don't know what kind of... what kind of political and public ethics can we talk about here, and where does such processes lead.

In this entirely dispersed economic and social mosaic, and with great lack of justice due to a corrupted judiciary, perhaps not to blame everybody, as I am very certain that there are judges, and lawyers, and administrators, honest people who work justly... However, [corruption is] certainly due to an interconnected political chain, including the judiciary, local representatives in cooperation with the international community, and the United Nations Organization mission and also EULEX. All of them made it possible for Kosovo to be where it is today. All of them would have done a great work, apart from the general aspect, I mean for the population in general, in particular for the improvement of women's position, their engagement, equal access to justice, had there been space, a foundation, the foundations upon which this kind of Kosovo is built, had a platform been established on time, properly established and with women as direct participants.

During all these years women have been treated as if they were needed on paper, so they could be part of the processes for the sake of gender quota.<sup>36</sup> I am for gender quota because nowhere, even elsewhere in the world there is no treatment of women's rights, and in Kosovo especially, that is the one deserved. Nevertheless, even within gender quota, especially if it is moved forward, initiated by women so it comes from the women who have information, knowledge, experience and who are true fighters on supporting gender equality processes... This did not happen in Kosovo. So, it is difficult to see the postwar period as separate from the fact that processes, as I said, developed in a disjointed manner, and not in an organized manner.

And it is not that the international community was very interested in the approach to be structured. It was a bizarre approach and I can say simply inadequate because during the whole time, during these fifteen years, while the process developed, various experiments were also conducted. All kind of experiments. We were never given the opportunity as a population, as Kosovo, to have projects of a local character, to start off as a local initiative and then have it elaborated with the international community and apply those ideas and projects which would totally be in the interest of a stable Kosovo, of sustainable solutions. Yet, they always came with ready-made projects, read them for quickly, without a debate, and they must be implemented.

Therefore, today we have an unstable Kosovo. How many years have passed and the political elite in Kosovo was not able, even to this day is still not able to expand the governance in Mitrovica, in the North, moreover they are afraid even when it comes to other parts of Kosovo that are populated by a majority Serbian population. This is happening frequently due to the neglectfulness of locals. I don't know, I mean, if these local politicians feel that they don't have the power to influence, neither professionally, nor morally, nor politically, it would have been much more honest if they came up with a political statement that they cannot do this. To explain the reasons and leave space to someone

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<sup>36</sup> Kosovo has a gender quota: by law, 30% of candidates in the political parties list must be women.

else.

At the same time, double moral standards are applied even in the civil society, and it is the civil society's fault. So, since the postwar period, up till today, processes were neglected for the fact that civil society members have often viewed Kosovo through, let's say, the lense of personal interest, personal gain and not as a process that belongs to the society. And then, their frequent moves from civil society to political parties, from political parties back to civil society again... This has made Kosovo turn into a place where anyone who wishes... whoever wishes can enter and exit whenever they want, bring whatever they want and carry out actions which would not be allowed in any circumstance elsewhere.

Also, an example, I mean, a simple illustration. How did it happen that the country's political elite did not even send at least a protest note to Belgrade and other decision making centers outside Belgrade against the abusive actions of Serbian politicians, the representatives of Serbian government who enter Kosovo whenever they want to, without any permission. Even worse, they insult you as a population and on a gender basis, as it did happen. And the political elite keeps quiet. I don't understand why does the political elite keep quiet. Along with their silence, the population is silent too. More should have been done to mobilize people, because this population is tired of protesting, of movements, of street actions... and I consider that the segment which, let's say is the conscience of Kosovo... perhaps it is the last moment to move, to awaken from the sleep of national oblivion. Men and women, both sides, so they can take matters in their hands, shaken the elephant of patience in Kosovo, from the 90s onwards, and make efforts so that Kosovo comes out of the existing fog and becomes part of a democratic development, just like other places in Europe, by taking the decision-making right in their hands. And by using the presence of the international community, of uncorrupted experts, to improve the current picture, the image or mosaic of Kosovo. And to show that Kosovo is a state and Kosovo cannot be represented by footnotes.<sup>37</sup>

Relying on my impression and long experience, namely as a human rights activist and a journalist, I consider that this type of feeling that... or this kind of growing tendency in Kosovo has occurred time after time in various periods throughout history for the fact that Kosovo according to... let's say according to the Census conducted in the '70s... at least officially it has never officially experienced any type of economic change before this period.

Changes began only in the '70s. And just because of lack of material goods, economic, social development, equal treatment with other former Republics of Yugoslavia, out of fear of always being mistreated, our population started looking for other ways. And in today's situation in Kosovo, as we speak, in this field where the state does not function in a balanced manner in all links of the chain, there has been possibility then of the infiltration or the arrival of foreign organizations with either political, or economic, or even religious influence, why not? all of this adds up for Kosovo to become a suitable ground. Particularly due to the poverty rate, which I do not consider to be forty-five percent

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<sup>37</sup> In February 2012 an internationally-brokered agreement between Serbia and Kosovo reached a compromise: Serbia would refrain from vetoing the presence of Kosovo in international meetings if the name of the country did not include Republic but was accompanied by a footnote referring to UNSC Res. 1244.

as they try to represent or present, but somewhere around sixty for sure. And, in this serious economic situation for Kosovo, it is not difficult to find citizens, people who are in great need and fear, who can be manipulated and line up in a queue in ways which are damaging for themselves and Kosovo.

As it concerns to the aspect of the growing tendency of radical political movements, as told earlier, this is some sort of legacy from the past. And these movements usually are of a socialist character which would not pose a great threat if it did not contain the aspect of radicalism. The issue of leftist politics in Kosovo, in the elaboration which has certainly happened for a certain group, but not for everyone, as not all people understand issues equally, and if elaborated in a useful manner without the baggage of the political aspect, would not be harmful, I believe. However, the trends that emerged in Kosovo, the way actions are carried out... the manner in which these movements carry out their actions has not always proven useful.

Radicalism, in a time when not everything and almost nothing is dependent on Kosovo itself, I consider it does damage the process of building stability in Kosovo instead of helping Kosovo move forward with steady steps. Regional, international policies are projects not to be decided by one country only. On this occasion, not by Kosovo. We all know that unfortunately Kosovo has been built with the assistance of the international community. And, when someone helps you through such a huge enterprise, through a state building and when someone else erects the construction, the foundations, the political platform of state building, then the chances of acting outside of this framework without mutual consent are slim.

The other aspect of such leftist movements, which contribute to the degradation of the process, is the ensurance of funding. It is very important who funds such a movement. In case there is a crack within these movements, where these movements are financed by radical groups from the outside, be those with a religious character in particular... since Kosovo never was a religious population... and so they use the opportunity to infiltrate Kosovo through religious spirit, even those ones are damaging because they cause division among people and impair the possibility of communication between left and right parties. And all of this leaves a small population such as Kosovo population without a sound and sustainable development. In this fog, in this turmoil as people call it, Kosovo citizens are found at a crossroad, where they don't know how to queue, nor whom to address. They are persecuted from all parties.

We are living witnesses, namely of the flight, the fleeing process of citizens, who are leaving Kosovo. There are various points of view that those citizens who are leaving are those who used to work in international organizations for large salaries and those have now ceased their mission. Then, some others because of difficult conditions, because of business. Personally, I don't think these are the reasons. I happened to chat with people whom I know closely, a family of thirteen members with no one employed. Out of thirteen members, none employed. And, what do they have left? A house and nothing else. Naturally, being a human being you cannot say to those people stay here, if you are not able to offer them any employment opportunity. This is very clear. It might be otherwise, which I am not aware of, you know... also international policies, their interests. So this might be a process of... what do I know, a constructed one. However, I am not inclined to believe in such scenarios.

Still, at a time when Serbia, which has executed a genocide, I say it rightly and I am fully convinced of what I say, in Kosovo and Bosnia, and in other countries in former Yugoslavia, there are Sisyphean attempts to create possibilities for them to enter the European Union, also with political representatives who were direct participants in discriminatory and genocidal acts by Milosevic, to have talks with them, to negotiate in the name of reaching a peaceful agreement, whereas at the same time Kosovo is denied the right to visa liberalization, then I don't know what kind of justice we are talking about today. Where is justice, what is the moral of international organizations, moreover of the United Nations, to speak about equal rights and peaceful process in Kosovo? Please.

In this country, to put it better, in this laboratory of experiments by those who have money and power, poor citizens will suffer the consequences the most. Because they, not having life opportunities, not finding support for essential, basic living, they shall queue in line. Or in these radical left movements, because there is nothing wrong with the social left. However, the radical left, in a population with the trend to reduce in number up to one million and eight hundred thousand while Albanians make up to six million certainly, including those in the Diaspora. Nevertheless, in this situation they will be forced for the sake of survival to join the radical religious groups, even political ones. Then also corrupted businesses which are a link of politicians' chain. Politicians who, until yesterday, perhaps even today surely, through underground channels, their political business, for the sake of material gain, have done business even with Serbia, with Montenegro, and with an entire region, and further.

And naturally, in this topsy-turvy situation, citizens do not have other possibilities. It was not provided for them. If the international community, Europe, was in charge, as it does loudly trumpet, why did it not act the opposite way? If it was invested a lot in Kosovo, as told, why wasn't there any in-depth analysis, so that this investment doesn't go in vain... Or perhaps something else happened. Perhaps that money came in, and it went back again into the same pockets it came from. Back to the countries it came from. All these issues wouldn't remain open, if only we, Kosovo citizens, in particular the political elite, had opened our eyes. Because the political elite is the one who decides. Citizens are there to be active, but in circumstances under which the Kosovo state has been built, where is not clear who is the lord of this place, who is the lord of this house, the possibilities to have a structured, supervised process, did not exist.

Our grandmothers, or great-grandmothers have made superhuman attempts to eradicate the darkness of the veil and turn into or be seen as equal to European and worldwide civilization. In those years, being also, joining the national liberation movements, because national liberation movements are always considered as the national framework where women can extend their impact on gender benefits, gender equality, by being part of national movements. The same has happened even in the past with... you know the fight of Shote Galica. Then, later in the Second World War where we have many women who fell like heroines, and they were participants, and the issue was that they simply created the space for women in the political processes. Even in the later movements, in the '60s, '80s, '90s and so forth.

Unfortunately, instead for the opposite to happen in the postwar Kosovo, and more women be aware of the movements that flourished around the world, the democratic movements for women, for

substantial, stable equality, for their participation in the political processes, there was a slip. And, some of them, surely due to economic poverty, chose the wrong path. You know, the one of darkness of the veil and psychological and intellectual and social darkness and development of democracy under the influence of the men of their family, but also, naturally, under the influence of the society. Because they remain again without a space to act upon and follow. I remember the phenomenon of the veil, it was present... Its genesis is in fact in the '90s. What we see today, this bitter reality begins in the '90s.

Back then I was the manager of a regional office in Pristina at the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms and our office was sharing its premises with the Kosovo Islamic Community. And one day, I happen to see three girls with a veil, which was something quite unusual for me. Young girls! I found out from one of them, I learned, that they were getting prepared, 15-16 of them would be taken to [Saudi] Arabia to be educated, to receive a religious education.

Later on I got interested on what had happened. For years in a row, I did not get any information on what happened to those girls. And it [women's religious education] started later on, here – there, it multiplied like mushrooms after the rain. Instead of the state providing space for them and at least give them alternative schooling, since we know that not all of them have the opportunity - they lack the financial support to have a genuine education and be part of the process -, at least the state should make the effort to provide an alternative [education]. This vacant space, or this gap was used by the Islamic clergy who got instrumentalized by radical religious groups, mainly from Arabian and Asian countries, and settled in Kosovo. By settling here, some of their policies also settled here through education.

I remember some of them very well. I asked young girls, “Why do you cover your head, where are you heading, what is the motive?” “Yes, there is a motive, I could not afford school, so now I attend this course, the lectures of some *hoxha*,<sup>38</sup> and I am learning about religion. It is better to attend these than nothing. Then they organize English lessons, computer lessons...” What does religion want with language and so forth, and other things, when there is the possibility for the state to do this in an organized way, officially, by providing opportunities for these interested girls to receive schooling, education from local professors, as there are plenty of those. However, lack of interest, neglectfulness by... by the state for this very important part of the society, the youth, make these young ones, “take fate in their hands.” I say it conditionally, in quotation marks, in their hands, by getting involved somewhere in which they do not belong. And where they will not find a paradise which they think it exists, but they will soon see that it was a delusion and they will gain nothing but darkness.

Normally, this is why, I mean, I call the veil “darkness,” because I feel sorry for all those women and girls which will find out one day that all they have invested, whether in terms of time but also in terms of efforts and lectures, was only a delusion and nothing else. Naturally, there is information that payments were made to those girls who attend those lessons, that they have received from 200 to 500 Euro and surely this can be the case because they have no material support. There are no jobs for them. We can see for example, if the unemployment rate in Kosovo is around sixty percent, out of that

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<sup>38</sup> Muslim local priests.

it might be that roughly, since I cannot remember now the exact figures, the [un]employment of women and girls makes up to twenty percent.

Under these circumstances of no stability, where there is no organization, where there is no social commitment, there is no interest of the government, of the political elite, for a genuine social mobilization for youth employment, for opening factories, for building factories besides petrol and gas stations, construction of hotels and restaurants, we cannot expect miracles. We cannot expect that young people will stay idle and will not take the streets and [join] movements which are harmful for Kosovo and for them. A large number of Albanian youth joining radical groups in Syria and elsewhere, is the worse example and the worst experience that Kosovo can go through, in a short run, also knowing that Kosovo still doesn't have a stable army, an organized one.

Even if it had [an army], due to regional and international processes now, it is known that they shall be a representative and active ratio of the population. You know, depending on the number of the population that is how... it will be the participation of armies in the framework of NATO actions, and this a good thing if it was balanced. However, in Kosovo circumstances where nothing functions properly, the chances of harmful actions, of the manipulation of young boys and girls are plenty. These women and girls are not aware of what is awaiting them in the short or long run. It might happen as it happened to many others in other places around the world, where they turn into slaves of radical representatives, of ISIS, and other radical organizations.

The theories, the media statements of political representatives in Kosovo do not speak about anything substantial, nor about stable actions against such occurrences. In practice, I don't know whether it happened to you, but I remember that such individuals are arrested, *hoxha* who have inspired and educated young people in a radical spirit but only held for one to two months, and then set free. What kind of deserved or punishing justice are we talking about in these situations? The same ones, as soon as they are set free will continue their activities. And this... this wrong and harmful phenomenon in Kosovo is not likely to stop even in future years. I feel sorry for all of them you know, both young boys and girls, but naturally way more for girls and women because this is a part of population that has been always under bigger attack and it has been damaged multiple times. And instead of having national, national and human and educational, especially educational, awakening, what is happening today is the opposite. And so, apart from blaming the political elite, a lot is to be blamed on civil society. Well, it often happened that civil society members said, "I wish to deal with this issue and to treat this phenomena, but I am afraid that we will face violence by the members of these radical groups." Exactly because we aspire to be intellectuals, we should be aware of the consequences.

An active intellectual class everywhere in the world deals with consequences. And these consequences, if we truly believe in our mission, we have to take them as necessary. Especially in a place where law and order do not function. And to speak about morality and to act immorally, because a-morality and immoral behavior by everyone, to put it better, is also considered inaction. Civil society, with all its worthy actions, has its flaws too, because exactly in a situation when their consolidated voice is mostly needed, to speak with one voice, they are being inactive. And as I said earlier, individuals shift from civil society to political parties and vice versa for the sake of material interests. And with this type of behavior very little leverage is left for civil society to accuse political

parties, politicians and governments.

### **Dreams**

I have to say unfortunately, my dreams, or my dream remained a dream. I have tried and I have hoped that through my engagement and the commitment of other girls and women we will create a different Kosovo. A Kosovo where in the first place us women, girls together we will find the will and satisfaction because they are cooperating sincerely and because they can achieve to create a safe space that through a consensus, through a mutual consent we will take decisions to support each other in decision-making positions. This was my dream, because only by being compact in lines, well connected to each other, we can then confront the other or better said, confront men and create a safe space for ourselves to act as women.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. At the surface you know from the aspect of image, perhaps there were sort of daily actions, depending on the situation, it seemed that it has that image, it has such nuance. However, processes have later gone astray, have been scattered due to material and personal interests, because prior to being a sexual and gender identity, we are humans. And, people have their egos, they are prone to meet demands of their ego instead of those we are called upon to contribute based on our actions. This has happened in Kosovo. I don't want to sound very pessimistic, there are improvements, there are improvements, but once again, these are not links to a chain of a machine that operates linearly and in a balanced manner in all segments.

My dream still continues to remain a dream. I wish that young girls like you, and young generations, your dreams do not remain dreams, but they are accomplished in practice, that girls and women of your generation have, take back the space. To obtain space in decision-making centers, and they are those that have a say when it comes to the government decisions and other decision-making centers around the world.