

INTERVIEW WITH KUJTIM PAÇAKU

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Duration: 100 minutes

Present:

1. Kujtim Paçaku (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer/Camera)

Symbols used about the comments in the transcript to support non-verbal communication

() – Emotional communication

{ } – The interviewee explains through gestures

Other symbols in the transcript:

[] – Additional symbol in the text to ease the understanding

Footnotes are editorial additions to give information about place, names and expressions.

Childhood

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his childhood and family.]

Kujtim Paçaku: I am the fourth son, the one before the last in the Paçaku family, my father is Durmish and my mother Seime. My father educated all five of us, say, with the salary he earned at that time. All five of us are university graduates. It is rare to find such an example in the Roma community, but thanks to God and to my father, who was a good telephone operator and had a main focus, and always gave all his money for books and notebooks for us. My brother graduated in chemistry-physics, my second, late sister studied economy, my other sister Hamide graduated in engineering, then there is me, and my other late sister, graduated in English. I mean, now we are two brothers and one sister.

My childhood was sensational, an elementary school student, a student who ran after the musicians in the street, wherever we found weddings (smiles). I was a child who always ran after the ball, or in front of the ball, waiting for the ball. When I say I waited for the ball then, I thought that when the time would come I could stand in front of the ball and catch it. It was not easy at all to be integrated in the school system then, because at home we spoke Romani, while in school, at 11 am, we got ready to speak this other language, Albanian (smiles). It wasn't easy at all for the children of my community, when they always spoke Romani at home for six or seven years, then in school they had to speak Albanian. It was a rare occurrence, but there were some children of my community and my generation who spoke Albanian at home, went to an Albanian language school, and there was no problem, or spoke Turkish at home and attended school in the Turkish language, so for us it was somehow specific to create the basis, the foundation of elementary education, because first one had to speak Albanian in school.

The good thing was that growing up, when we talked, my late mother would say, "I didn't raise you to be selfish." I would say, "Why selfish?" She would then say, "It's a good child's philosophy that when he drinks milk from his mother's breast, it is very selfish if he only drinks his mother's milk." We also drank the language (smiles), and so I mean, I think we performed two parallel acts, drinking milk at the same time as the mother tongue, I say, drinking the mother tongue while hearing her songs, listening to her syllables until we fell asleep with her song, while we performed two parallel acts. This is the *de facto* politics of the Roma community, never to become selfish, because the children of the Roma community become selfish if they drink only their mother's milk and nothing else. The milk can run somewhere down here {points to his cheek} so the mother can wipe it, and that phase passes. No! We have to drink also the mother tongue at the same time, I mean, the Roma language.

Thus, a phase passed, while mastering the language. Later, the first steps of mastering the second language, Albanian, began, because you had to be educated in Albanian. Using, at age three or four,

“Good day,” “Good morning,” was not enough. Now, step out and knock again on the door and say, [in Albanian] “Good day,” this what my brother and my mother and my older sisters did, and we learned Albanian.

It is good that during my education I knew how to have self-confidence to say, “Yes, I am Roma” (smiles), because the majority at that time, during 1965, or 1966... when I was only seven years old, then, I was not afraid to say I was Roma. The economic situation of other Roma was very difficult. I remember my teacher, “Distribute donations!” I don’t know what donations he meant. So he asked, “Do you need help?” “No, no, we don’t need help, we are rich. We have a radio in our house.” We did have a radio in the house, and at the parents meeting, the teacher showed my father, he said: “Look, we have some donations from the Red Cross, I think they gave sugar, oil...” I was so upset when the teacher said that in front of my friends, “Kujtim, do you also get donations?” I said, “No, no, we have a radio in the house, we are not poor.”

My radio was a Melodia, my father then had ... or a Toplica, I don’t know if it was a Melodia or a Toplica. It was very round like a compass, in the afternoon we listened to extraordinarily good songs, very few Romani songs, but Nexhmija sang. We had to listen to Nexhmija Pagarusha, or some Turkish music or thanks God some Roma songs, wherever we could find them. It was always like a wedding inside our house, where there was music at five in the afternoon, but we listened to greetings and congratulations, where the voice of the radio echoed (smiles), so, not good.

I went to elementary school. I was good, I was active enough also during free time. When I was nine or ten years old, I appeared on television for the first time. In my free activities I wore ... Albanian clothes, costumes, but I sang in Serbian. Back then, I sang a song by a Serbian singer in the program *Shkëndija* [Spark]. I saw myself singing on television, it was a competition among elementary schools. I remember I won first place, I remember then a politician, Fadil Hoxha gave me a gift, but the gift didn’t end in my hands, but it remained in the school. Later I didn’t return a ball to the school after the physical education period. I said, “They gave me a gift, now I take the ball because neither the director nor the teacher sang. I sang, I should keep the gift. The school didn’t sing, I sang.” Because I never got the gift. But I know that once, I remember, I sang a song at the Cultural Center, where elementary schools students then sang a few songs. I know I was awarded, but I only saw when Fadil Hoxha gave me that gift, for me it was ... But I never saw that gift. So I too, after the physical education period, did not return the ball to the school. No one ever asked for the ball, all the kids in my neighborhood played with that ball. “This is a gift,” I told them.

Since then I started to write some poems about school, or the teacher, in my notebooks. My teacher was very pleased ... “Yes, yes, continue, Mehdi Cufi will become somebody...” This was an interesting elementary school system, where poor students, who performed poorly during the day, had to stay an extra hour to repeat the lessons of the day. So often it was I who had to teach these additional hours for the students, where in my class there were others, many older than I, who repeated the class, I was born in 1959, while they were certainly born in 1950. Hamza was a very good clarinetist who often...played the role of teacher in fourth or fifth grade. “Don’t ask me,” he said in Romani, he felt bad (smiles). The teacher made me teach additional math and language lessons for one or two additional hours.

Soccer was an important part, we couldn’t wait for Saturday, and on Sunday the soccer game was unavoidable, I mean, we were even ready to prepare the food to take with us and so it became a soccer

celebration. I remember our picnic in first or second grade, when we used to go out of Prizren, we used to go to the City Park which was at the entrance of Prizren, now there are many buildings there. I was set apart from my friends that my grandmother sometimes embarrassed me, because we went walking far two-by-two, singing “Spring has come, spring has come to the gardens with other flowers, the violet has just bloomed, and the nightingale is coming out.” I was the last in the line, while my late grandmother Raza carried me on her back. She came (smiles) to carry me on her back, I was the last, so the teacher said, “Why are you coming grandma, to carry Kujtim on your back?” “No, no, my boy will get tired and that’s why I have to carry him on my back. But tell me when you get back.” The teacher said, “Sometimes around four.” Grandmother would return home, finish her house chores, then she waited for me at the edge of the park, where we went back and again I was on grandmother’s back. Thus, when we went for a walk (smiles), I was always ashamed in front of my friends because all the other friends walked and sang, but I also sang on the back of my grandmother. Sometimes I said, “Grandma, do you also know how to sing sometimes?” She would say, “I don’t need to sing, I will carry you.” She even carried the food we had. Both going and coming back I was on my grandmother’s back, I hugged her with my two arms, this is how I remember my childhood, it was very interesting.

My sisters and my brother always supported me ... I spent very little time in the street, this is a characteristic among Roma, because they have a corner somewhere in the streets where they stay, I was not allowed to stay there. My brother didn’t speak, he only talked with his head {moves his head}, he moved his head, I had to go home and study. But you couldn’t learn in school. “Study!” I am now understanding... Where could you learn in school? “Come and see I am studying, I can stay in my room for four or five hours, or six months, sleep, but come on...” study, study, study! I was good in elementary school.

Youth

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his youth.]

Kujtim Paçaku: What happened then? The director of the Medical School accepted me in the Medical School. This was a spectacle for everyone, Kujtim will become a doctor. I said, “What, will I do as a doctor?” But my grandmother knew how to make more than 30 types of natural homemade medicines. I looked at my grandmother, she healed people, I was also going to heal them, but how? She was healing women, the neighborhood children, with some medicines, some drugs, some flowers. I continued for one week or ten days in the Medical School, I changed my mind, I said, “This is not for me.” I headed down this street behind us [the street behind the building where the interview is taking place] to the music school. Music was medicine for me, it was a medicine that made me feel relaxed, I went back to listen to the radio. I said, “Music comes from here, from this radio. These people here make music.”

Music school is a very specific school where individual and group teaching takes place. I thank the staff, that at that time were extraordinarily good, they supported me a lot with concerts and chorale singing. Music school required much work because I didn’t have a piano at home. In the morning I attended regular classes, in the afternoon individual classes, and it was a big struggle to get a big classroom with the piano in order to practice. We helped aunt Liza who used to clean the school, I used to help a lot, cleaning first the space or the offices where the piano was, she would go home, I stayed at the piano till ten, or eleven in the evening. I closed the door, every time I threw the keys through the door, over the wall into the backyard, she found them in the morning, she came back again and continued her work, so this

way no one ever knew (smiles). Professors supported me a lot because they knew that I didn't lack talent. I worked with exceptional seriousness. It was my luck that my parents at home didn't know any music notes, because I was the first musician at home, so they didn't know what to ask me about counterpoint, or harmony, or solfeggio, or anything and so on...(laughs). "Yes, it is good, just explain this through singing..." and so on, I didn't want to stop for any reason.

I also started music studies at the Music Academy, the Academy that was divided in two parts, the first two years were the first level, then you had to take entry examinations for the second level, four years with 56-57 exams. There I met extraordinary good musicians, such as Nezafete Shala, Jasmina Omeragic, Lejla Pula Haxhiu. They were extraordinarily good, the precursors of today's musicians ...such as Venera Mehmetagaj. We also performed folk music, and it was a celebration when the professor sometimes said, "Yes, today we will not hold classes, but we will listen to a group, a quartet or quintet." We arranged Beethoven's works, or Liszt's or Chardash's, in idiotic manner and we turned them somehow into folk music.

Everyday was a celebration in our music school, everyday I was waiting to play music with extraordinary singers. During my studies, I was a member of the Collegium Cantorum, which was led by the late Mark Kacinari. It was a great privilege to be first tenor amongst one hundred singers, for me to sing with Ljeda Mjeda, Gani Myftari or with Shaban Kelmendi, who not only studied voice, they were opera singers. Later, the orchestra Students Ensemble was formed under the leadership of Fahri Beqiri. These were interesting times, when you matured like the bread dough being baked in the oven. For two-or three years I was a member of the Collegium, of the student orchestra under the leadership of professor Kacinari, we won first place in chorale singing in Dubrovnik two-three times. We were exceptionally good, so I began the first compositions in *Akordet e Kosovës*.

By now the music begins to spread its first cells in me, also because different festivals were organized in Prizren. Gitariada was a rock festival where I sang in Romani. I was known through cultural associations even while I was a student, I was a member of the Cultural Artistic Society Agimi, I sang under the direction of Professor Dashnor Xërxa. Later, I was a member of the Turkish Cultural Artistic Society Dogrioll. I played the clavier in the orchestra, also when we did the first recordings of Turkish music, I think a big part. I was part of Dogrioll for two-three years while I was a student.

{Prays when the call to prayer is heard}. Any time I hear the call to prayer, I stop and say this prayer (laughs). What came later...? For me *Akordet e Kosovës* was a temptation, I would say. But for me, as a student, I attempted to write. It is very interesting, I will tell you now, because I never had the chance to say it, for example, Emine Asimi's, "*Takime te burimi*," that is my song. I never had a chance to spend time with Emine Asimi, even though I was the composer of that song, not even during rehearsal, never...Then the next festival came, "*Kemi dasëm në malësi*," a song sang by Nazmie Dushollovci, I have never met Nazmije either.

The successes were good, for example when Emine Asimi sang the song "*Takime te burimi*," and there was a competition for the best song among the central radio of Pristina and local radio stations. Twenty songs were competing, when Bashkim Paçuku won first place with "*20 vitet e festivalit*" by Musa Pjarku. Every radio station gave votes from one to ten. I ranked fifth. I don't want to mention some singers who ranked sixth place according to the votes, I got fifth place. I never met any singers, we never spent time nor ever had coffee even with Nazmije or Emine Asimi. Yes, anyway...

It was a great satisfaction for me to continue my work during my studies, not to interrupt my studies, at all, and so I finished the Music Academy. The unrest started. The socio-economic situation became tenser, because by now in my family there were five students. My mother also had to start working so I could finish my studies. So began... the bad times, I lost my younger sister to cancer of the legs at age 28.

Something didn't go well. Later, it took a long time because I couldn't accept that reality.

I began to write. While I was a student in Pristina, I also wrote poetry in Romani, I was a member of the Roma Cultural Artistic Society ROM in Pristina. I founded an octet, an octet and also a sort of a choir, bigger than an octet, and we sang songs in Romani in Pristina, we also performed while I was a student. At that time a festival of Roma gatherings from former Yugoslavia was held in Pristina. During the fifth festival, I had the role of artistic director of that festival. In the meantime, we organized the first cells through a poetry newsletter. This way we presented Roma folklore and poetry.

I remember as a student I was really involved in the Turkish associations in Pristina. The winters were exceptionally cold. When everyone came home, I had to stay in Pristina. The students went back home during the weekend. I had to stay in Pristina, I couldn't stand the dirt ...uhh (smiles). The train station was somewhere by 21 [TV 21], a bit further. I remember many times when we headed to the bus station carrying our bags, "Today there isn't a single bus for Prizren. There are no seats. Buy a ticket for another weekend." I had to go back again or my parents came to visit. I also had a scholarship, my father bought me a coat here. I got my scholarship money, I didn't tell them that I got the money, and I bought a coat. He came to visit me carrying a coat, and I [had] another coat. Anyway, I returned that coat.

I would often go to Belgrade to see a concert or to Zagreb to see a concert. We were a group of students who would go to other cities, be it Skopje to attend the opera *Giselle* by Berlioz, or some other performance. We had this, but we didn't miss some sports events, usually soccer. At that time it was like that, we followed when Pristina played in Belgrade, or we went to support Pristina when they played with Zagreb, because for us it was... Or for example, what was then Liria, I was always present at soccer matches, especially when they played in Pristina because my father was the one who made the telephone contacts so there would be a telephonic transmission. I often sat near Veli Vraniqi who was a commentator, or Azem Brovina, who was a radio commentator, and who commented the game. It was always a great feast for me to sit near Azem Brovina. There I also began to say, "Ah, how nice it is to be a journalist."

I wrote a few articles, this small article in *Rilindja*, "Ah, I said, how nice it is to be a journalist."

And every day I understood journalism better and I said to myself, "But, is this a craft?" This is a craft, a skill. If you know how to work well...It requires creativity. I have a lot of memories about Pristina, because I contributed enough also with my writings. The period of the National Yugoslav Army (VJ), where I served for a year and a half, passed. There, I created a choir group too, it was in the fifth military center in Croatia. I served in Varaždin, I won first place in the competition, and all the time I said, there is an article in the paper, "The Soldier like Herbert Von Karajan." In the military we conducted [choir music], and we rehearsed with the school Division 32nd, which was the name of Varaždin's High School, from which we borrowed students, and I had soldiers who sang in the choir. For me this was an extraordinarily good experience in music. Later, poems began to flow in my head...

Eh, now there is the period of 1986, when it seems to me that it was the year I opened my windows to art, to poetry. The first international Roma school was held in Belgrade, where all university graduates gathered and talked about how to create the first groups for the re-socialization of the communities within the framework of education, although I forgot to tell you earlier that I was a member of the Roma Association from the age of ten. In 1986, in Belgrade, the intellectuals of that time gathered in the Roma International School, where for the first time I had the opportunity to meet all the Roma intellectuals from Europe. In the school there were ten days of intensive study of Romani standard language, culture, tradition and history.

My first interviews, the first poetry started rolling... Because from that first meeting, also the first anthologies appeared. I had notes in my notebooks with me, they liked some of them, others not. It wasn't my goal to be in an anthology, my goal was to tell them something about Kosovo that I had worked on, because since my childhood I was a member of the Durmish Aslano Association in Prizren - this was a Cultural Artistic Society. Durmish Aslano was a Roma hero of that time, and the association inherited his name. I was the violinist in the orchestra of the Roma Society Durmish Aslano, where I always demanded to have three-four-five violins in the orchestra, or it wouldn't be an orchestra. For some of my colleagues this was incomprehensible, you know...three-four-five violins...I always sought a good standard for the orchestra, the same with which I was used to in school.

Two or three of my poems were published in an anthology, and this was a great push for me to start writing. I met a professor who in the future would become my great supporter, the supporter of the entire Roma population in Europe in general, Marcel Courtiade, who saw in me a future poet, he saw in me a future intellectual. Then, later on, a caravan of poets began from year to year through different cities of Europe, whether in Poland, Slovakia, Prague, Germany, Paris, and so on in every country there was an interest in holding Roma summer schools. This is how I earned the rank of ethnomusicologist also of Romani standard language.

Activism

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his activism.]

Kujtim Paçaku: In 1991 I started working even more powerfully for the emancipation of the Roma community. I am a member of the fifth Roma Congress, which was held in Warsaw in Poland, where the standardization of the Romani language was discussed. This is followed by other Congresses. Day by day I gathered literature, different newspapers, and I followed activities, other Roma activities were promoted in Kosovo. As we approached the years 1998-1999, it became apparent that the circle was closing for us too, with fewer concerts, fewer activities, it was obvious somehow. I don't know how much should I talk about a period of years, which people have little desire to talk about.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: How were the 1990s for the Roma community?

Kujtim Paçaku: In the 1990s the circle began to close for us too, because although we were active in cultural activities, in activities where we had our music, poetry, prose, etc., it was obvious that the circle was closing, especially the circle of financial means for the development of Roma activities, and for the meetings of Roma people. Meanwhile, other Roma people began to hold more lively activities outside then former Yugoslavia. It is important to mention that Prizren at that time, Prizren, was a seed plot for

intellectuals. During the year 1990 we had 28 Roma people holding university degrees, only four or five were in my own house (smiles). We had prosecutors, professors, doctors, engineers, judges and so on. Out of this we come to the conclusion that in European countries, one cannot imagine any European country, not having at least one Roma from Prizren. For example, when we met at the 7th Congress, not far, it was held in Zagreb, at the meeting we were five of us from Prizren. One represented Croatia, another one the Netherlands, another Belgium, another Germany and another Kosovo. Yes, well... to be three from the same street is even more interesting now. It was obvious that Roma from Prizren, let's say mostly from Kosovo, today and then, always held high positions in Roma associations.

Whether in the political, economic, social and cultural aspect, we were usually shaped, we were shaped by the very good relationships we had with a professor, a teacher, a friend, the language... because Prizren has given much to the language. Once, during a meeting with eminent people at the Sorbonne, during our conversation, the Rector of the university, who had two children, one 12 and another 18 years old, and we were talking about his younger child, asked, "How old is your son?" "Mine is 12 years old and yours?" "Mine is 12 years old too." I said, "How many languages does your son speak?" He said, "Only French." I said, "Mine speaks four languages." This is what Prizren gives, because we speak Romani, we are educated in Albanian, in the meantime we learn Serbian or Bosnian very quickly. To live in Prizren and not to know Turkish (laughs), it is a bit unavoidable.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What fuelled the emancipation of Roma in Kosovo? What was it, what stimulated it?

Kujtim Paçaku: National awareness! In the year 1969, there was a cultural revolution in Kosovo. The first cultural organizations are established, as the one we mentioned the Roma associations Durmish Aslano in Prizren, Nerudimka in Ferizaj, one in Peja, and so on. It was in 1986 that I am the first to open the doors of the radio station, this was unavoidable in Radio Prizren. So the first show in Romani begins, maybe it was even the first in Europe. Without a block in front of me, in the first show I said *Lacho dive romalen me se e Durmishesko chavo o Kujtimi, ka kerva i emisija pi rromani chib!* "Good day people, I am Kujtim Paçaku, Durmish's son, and we will begin the show in Romani."

In 1986, it was July 7th, the first show was broadcast, but some Roma in Prizren, or somewhere else, turned on the radio on a very low volume so the other neighbor wouldn't know that he was Roma (smiles). In 1986 there were people who had a [6:24 incomprehensible] before them, they were whiter than I, richer than I, and they couldn't afford to show themselves as Roma, but I did this because I was an academic and the editor of four editorial boards, I was a music editor.

What happened earlier? In 1986 I was a teacher, I was a teacher with a diploma at the elementary school Abdullah Shabani in Duhel and Bllace. Every day I travelled twice for 28 kilometers to lecture, to teach music lessons, and physical education, and some additional geography lessons. At that time I applied for an open call for the job and was accepted as a teacher, I mean, as recent graduate and as a teacher in the elementary school Abdullah Shabani. I worked as a teacher, I taught every day, I created a school choir, I was first involved in the cultural activities in school where I created an orchestra of *çifteli* and *sharki* all the instrument were included in this students orchestra. We sang songs in English with the children, sometimes we won first place in the municipal competition of Suhareka.

I saw that part of the school's land was a corn field, and on Sundays we organized meetings with volunteer students with axes, swords, and so on, we also had pick axes, whatever we had,

and we made a sports field. We had the problem of the columns. Hajrush was then in charge of the forest around Duhel and Bllace, he didn't allow us to make the columns, to cut three-four trees, and build columns. Then we got very drunk at some cafe, we drank well. Once I drank a glass with water and said, "Come on, cheers." He had a glass of alcohol, I had a glass of water, until we got him so drunk, then I sent the students to the forest. They got the wood without him ever knowing it, because all the time I kept him there, "Hajrush, please, make it possible for the school!" negotiating, "Please, help us get the wood, build columns." "Not possible," he said, "it belongs to the government, it's not my personal property. If it was mine I would let you take it, but you cannot take it from the government." Anyway, we made those columns, the next day we sent them to build columns.

We organized the first activities, the first soccer tournaments between four parallel schools in Duhel, Bllace, Javor [Incompre.] and Grajçevc, I think... and we began the first sport activities in Duhel and Bllace, these five years were the best years of my youth, when I worked as a teacher there, runs, cross-country runs in the spring, runs ...the girls knew that during the period of physical education they had to have sneakers, let's not talk about the men, for the boys of the seventh or eighth grade, they had to have their track suits, white tee-shirts, black shorts, and play soccer. Otherwise, there were only a few of them. And very good talents in soccer emerged, along that, I was very happy that we created a cultural association in Bllace called Avni Rustemi on my own initiative. And extraordinarily good singers started to appear, Sale Bekteshi, whom I took by hand in fourth grade. I remember, "You will sing!" "I am shy." "You will sing!" "I am shy." Sale Bekteshi, Sehije Hoxha and Violeta Suka, all the singers who had promises and have their recording, they sang.

I was almost a part of those villages where we travelled daily, did activities, stayed there for two-three nights without returning home. I had a place at my friends where I slept because other activities were waiting, municipal competitions and so on... We organized extraordinarily good activities. Even now to this day, when I travel in the old route Suhareka-Duhel, on the left side I see the field that we built, also the volleyball and soccer field. Often my photos are my best memories of the students during the free activities.

Now let's go back to this period of the radio until the year 1998 or mid-1997, I did 999 live shows on the radio. Not a single show was prepared or edited earlier. I wanted to make these shows, so I started with a 15 minutes on 11:15, the show was called Lago Di Vero [The True Lake], *Malen* [11:51 inc.] that meant, Good Day Roma. Later, longer shows, once a week for 30 minutes, until we made it every day 60 minutes of show.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What did you deal with in these shows?

Kujtim Paçaku: The themes of the shows were history, culture, Roma language, we gave more emphasis to the block where we taught Roma language. We used games, a prize-winning game, where we would give four or five unknown Roma words to the population, they had to create sentences. Then that veil, the barrier that Roma people had, that veil began to fade and they began to express themselves as Roma. The missionary character [of the shows] was mainly educational-literacy. The purpose of the shows was to elevate the feeling and awareness of the Roma community and of their identity, that they would not fear their color, not fear the prejudices and so on...

We wanted to focus more on each shows in which the biggest part was verbal, with a little music because music was in our soul, in our homes, it was everywhere, we had music in our pocket all the time. The purpose was to raise the intellectual level of Roma people, to invite people with as little as high school education, or university students, to promote students who had some kind of good background in educational-literacy, to have poetry, to showcase the singers, to showcase and so on...But after the period of 1999, it was emphasized even more where we should focus, if we could even in that part. This was what we worked on...I also worked in the Roma desk, and in parallel for the Albanian desk, because the number of journalists was small and I would bring information also in Albanian language for the board. I started then in 2002-2003 to work in other media such as the Turkish television Yenidonem, in the radio and television. At the a lot of people left it, they started with one or two hours daily shows. The night shows were held from 12 midnight until 6 in the morning, and something happened... a quite interesting when in the night I had... I kept the evidence, it was a call-in show... until 6 in the morning I had 180 listeners through the phone. I kept the evidence, we were two-three, we knew how many they called us. The next day the OSCE Director invited the director for a talk.

Before my director went to talk with the OSCE director, he called me on the phone and said, "What did you do last night? Did you do something?" I said, "No." He said, "Who was that boy who kept me up until 6 in the morning?" (laughs) because we made the shows in six languages, Roman, Bosnian, Albanian, French, English, whoever called in, we had many donors, until the bakery then...I don't remember the name of that bakery, they brought us *topli* [baked rolls] for breakfast as a gift, they remembered us because even the bakers listened to our shows. Our shows were extraordinary listened to for greetings and congratulations. With ceremonies...different ceremonies, such as circumcisions, or weddings, or engagements, both before and after the war, the Roma edition held almost the highest record for [transmitting] wishes.

We also procrastinated news when we had ... no news because people got married and a man would come with ten greetings, 15 greetings. We needed to extend three-four-five times more the periods that we planned for greetings and congratulations, so our listeners would be happy. Television came Balkan TV, Yenidönem, then we started to produce exceptionally good programs also in television, with news and daily information, ignoring the news system of copy-paste. We didn't like them ever, we always went straight into the system to get the information that interested Roma.

Another occurrence in television...we happened to be in front of cameras, it is magic! We had a teleprompter with big letters from which the journalist or the TV anchor read, and the public didn't know that they were reading. Our news lasted 15-20 minutes. A technical mistake happened in the command room, I am ready, I enter the show, fix my tie, wait for the program credits and cast, the program credits and cast appeared, then the credits and the cast end and I see the entire program on the teleprompter with titles in Albanian. It was the Albanian daily news, of the Albanian news program. What to do now? (Laughs) Can you believe me that maybe with [only] two mistakes, I was looking at [words] in the Albanian language, I spoke in Roma, and the director, the editors all the time through headphones, "Are you able to continue?" Yes, I said {nods his head}... I gave some signal, we had a signal when we held the pen in the hand, we understood our colleague, moving the pen meant, "It's ok!" The footage was completely from the Albanian editorial board, we managed that the voice I had recorded with the scene would be ignored...but I talked over the scene. In journalism we have to be prepared for everything. And the program ended and he said, "Is it possible?" Having taken in all the languages of the place I live in at the same time helped me, because anything could happen.

Then my tutoring began in Europe in 2002, we were many [times] in Europe. The first time after the war....I want to tell you this too. I finished with the accelerated Academy for acting and directing with professor Faruk Begolli right here in Prizren. Then I met Jeton Neziraj when we did the first play, *Voyage to Unmikistan*. I was at the same time the author of the part in Roma language. I informed Jeton Neziraj now director of Multimedia, then he was the director of the National Theater in Pristina, and he said, "Have you been to Pristina?" I said, "No." "Do you plan to come?" (Smiles) Then I said, "Why I should come to Pristina? What's there?" He said, "You have to come! You're afraid." "I don't fear coming." "You are afraid." "I am not afraid."..." He said, "Come!" I "No!"

One day I had to go, I took a bus and sat on the seat in the back of the bus, I bought four-five newspapers. My first encounter was with the conductor when he asked me for the money for the ticket, I paid for the ticket, and for one and a half or two hours I was reading the newspaper so no one saw my face. I opened the newspaper with a wrong prejudice, but also with a dose of fear because in 2003 it wasn't easy for a Roma person to travel, black plus traveling to Pristina.

It was then that Jeton met me in Pristina, we walked on Mother Theresa Street, "Lift your head because Pristina is also yours." "Lift your head," this is how professor Begolli used to say then, also Jeton and Enver Petrovci... I started to make exceptional friends, to break that barrier, the ice in the relationship Prizren-Pristina and vice versa.

Professional Life

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his professional life.]

Kujtim Paçaku: I headed to Paris where I also finished Romani studies at the Sorbonne. Till today I have been an adjunct assistant at the department of Romani studies, where in this academic year the 14th generation works towards a bachelor degree, and the third generation works towards the Master's degree in Romani studies. We had students from all over Europe, it's worth mentioning Masako, a student from Japan who spoke Romani perfectly. We had students from France, we had them from Albania, Kosovo and other countries, where they learned Romani together with another language, the same as I when I was there in 2002, I finished the course of French Civilization, *Cours de Civilizations*, in order to have a chance to work and study. If you didn't have this course you couldn't work because to live in Paris, France, in other states, first you had to follow French procedures, through which you had to know French culture, language and traditions very well.

After the six-month-course we then could focus on our studies or work. So this enabled me to stay there for two years, to work regularly. Even before the period before and after the war, I was a correspondent for many European newspapers and media of almost all countries, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Paris, Albania. Then, I began to publish the poetry that I had written in my notebook. My main preoccupation was always how to avoid color. Many community members... When I conducted research for some projects, for example in Prizren and 18 villages, 12 villages of Prizren, focusing on children in 18 focus groups - "Why don't you go to school?" "What is problem in school?" "A Roma child in the street." "A Roma child in the police station." "A Roma child in the hospital." "A Roma child at the doctor's office." - 18

focus groups, from which I gathered a lot of material, first we acknowledged that we had self-prejudices that created a big problem, then the prejudices about us that they had without knowing any of us.

The first publications started, [and have continued] until today. If we talk about poetry, I have works where I am also a co-author of books, whether the preschool texts for Roma children, or school texts and individual books as a poet. I am a co-author of texts, for example *Klyshi i vogël shkon në shkollë. Ku është klyshi ynë?* [Little Puppy Goes to School. Where is Our Little Puppy?] There was a group of authors and so on for preschool children, whose texts are bilingual, in French, or English and Romani. Later, I worked on *Përrallat rome* [Romani Tales], with Mina Çiriçi from Albania, where I was his translator from Albanian to Romani. There are other texts where I did the Romani dialect-methodology part through poems that were published in an anthology, today I am concentrated on working on students' works. Eh, when I taught my first class to my students in Paris... something interesting always happens to me (laughs). Believe me, it was uncanny that day the theme of the lesson was, "Kujtim Paçaku, writer." None of the students recognized me in the classroom where I held my first class.

I explained the show, I introduced the show..."As professor Kortia Dechia told you, I too today...yesterday we learned about Papusza, she is a writer from Poland, today about a writer from Kosovo..." I didn't even tell them where I was from, I left this as a surprise, had I added that I was from Kosovo, they would have known. So what happened a bit later? I wrote Kujtim Paçakuborn in Duhel, then a question mark, who knows when this man would die (smiles). And I told them about my works and so on, and so on, and so on...After the class ended, one of the students asked me, "But you didn't tell us who you are, where are you from" (laughs). "I am the one about whose work we learned today for two full hours." He said, "When I will take your test, I would like very much to get a question about you, because you gave a detailed explanation, there were no such details for Papusza, or the Dudarova Sisters or Ali Krasniqi, or Orhan Galushi, or Santino Spinelli, or other writers who write." I gave details because it wasn't difficult at all for me to tell them whose son Kujtim was, what did he do in elementary school, when he wrote...I mean, these details were much easier for me. That was a very interesting first class.

Afterwards, the awakening of my poetry began in Paris, to contact a Roma poet, to talk to him, to look him straight in the eyes...the poetry of that poet will pose some elements, freedom, fire, water, sun, and failed love, these are what a poet knows to mourn, a failed love. A good Roma poet knows how to exhumate failed love from the grave and restore it to life. He knows how to sing to the sun, knows how to sing to the stars, he knows how to sing to his identity, these are elements that we can rarely or maybe never find... very rarely does a Roma poet sing for his country, for his war, for his flag that is placed somewhere in the Himalaya, and says, "Up to here, it is mine!" A poet is always generous, because we don't have a place where we could say, "Aha! This is my place, it is my country now...slow down a little." We adjust very fast to the environment we live in.

To go back to Paris, there I published a book in French-Romani. There was an expansion, a great expansion,, a book in the publishing house L'Harmattan, where through the Slovenian Embassy we held the French-Romani poetry evenings, visiting embassies. We started at the Polish Embassy and finished in the Chilean or the Brazilian Embassy. We had poetry evenings anywhere, whether in closed spaces like here, or outdoors, or, when we ran out of money, together with my friend Jean Philippe Raymond, a good actor of the Châtelet Theater, we sang in front of the cathedral...the cathedrals of Paris and we earned money. He recited poetry in Romani, better saying he sang in Romani...I sang in Romani, he did it in French, but we both performed. After our twenty minutes ended, he would pull out, for example {shows

with his hands how they collected money with their hat} everyone gave money. This is what we did for ten-fifteen poetry evenings in different cultural centers.

During my stay in Paris, documentary films started, I hosted a show in Romani for the Macedonian Radio Shutka. I worked in Radio Protestant where weekly shows....

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Which years were these?

Kujtim Paçaku: These are the years after the war, at the Radio Protestante, when the director asked that we have exclusively poetry in Romani and French. I mean, I was a part of Radio Protestant, of Roma Radio...Then different Biennales started in Paris. I returned to Kosovo, I went to the South of France, to a Poetry Festival, returned to Kosovo, went to Paris, went to Italy. In 1994-1997, I forgot to tell you, I was a champion... (Laughs) I won first place, to say it better, I won first place for poetry. This was the Roma International festival in Lanciano in Chieti, Italy, close to Pescara, 18 categories of film, music and so on. Twice I won first place for poetry. Among them, the poem “Ngjyra” [Color] was unavoidable. Let me tell you that my poems were translated in twelve-thirteen world languages, even in Chinese. But “Ngjyra”...nobody has avoided “Ngjyra”. “Ngjyra” was liked because we thought...I thought that through the poem “Ngjyra” I would talk a little about prejudice. Black color, or?...that characterizes us (laughs). I will tell you, the prejudices and self-prejudices that I am black and I don’t dare meet with Jeta {refers to the interviewer), Jeta is whiter than I. Why not, when Jeta accepts me as a very good friend? And I could also try to return twice more perhaps what I take from Jeta, thus creating the human relations that we lack. Not only in the relationship between Jeta and me, it could be Jean Philippe Raymond and I, who is as dark as I am... He is colored. Yes, they don’t have the prejudice we have in the Balkans.

From the postwar period, I was an adviser to the former President of Kosovo, Professor Fatmir Sejdiu, during his two mandates. Whether you like dealing with politics or not, it will deal with you. We do politics even when we didn’t know that we were doing politics, even a child sometimes does politics with his father or vice versa. Believe me, this is politics too. But to be involved in the politics of a community, then it is an open political game, where you demand rights, integration, the implementation of laws that are proposed, of current laws, you demand the revival of your community like other communities, which have all their rights given to them through the law, nothing less, but also even if more is given, you say, “Thank you! I return this,” but not less.

Politics is when the Roma community is given the right to education in Romani, like other communities, and no one denies this to us. We may have the elementary school system, where I did the curriculum for the students of the Roma community as member of the curriculum team in the Ministry of Education. But we have few teachers who would commit...a small staff, who would get involved in teaching Romani to children so they would not get assimilated. This was a politics [I pursued] during [my time] as an adviser to professor Sejdiu. We established a quota for students to be admitted in the university, that was a very good thing. We couldn’t even fill those quotas because we didn’t have ten Roma community students every year to send to study medicine, or other fields, but as many as needed to, enough so the student would feel comfortable. During my Advisory position to President Sejdiu, we managed to negotiate with the Roma Education Fund in Bulgaria, where we established scholarships for candidates of the Roma community.

It is politics when you, as Roma, as an actor, do politics and so you say to Jeton Neziraj, “Yes!” Now you have to write something current about how Roma people are forcibly deported from Western countries,

where Jeton Neziraj with the pen in his hand, and in collaboration with me, creates this tragic-comic play that made a fuss in Europe, “Yue Madeleine Yue.” It tells the reality of Roma people, how they are discriminated in Western countries, discriminated like that, they bring them here to Kosovo, and here Roma people are discriminated twelve or fifteen times more, and it shows another reality. Lunacek, a politician of the European Council, meets with me in Vienna at the Volkstheater after the play and says...I say, “Did you like the play?” She says, “No, not all!” I said, “What?” She said, “I didn’t know that you were suffering so much,” and said, “I don’t know how could you stay one hour and ten-fifteen minutes on stage and endure all the turmoil that was going on,” the play’s turmoil, how could a father, because they blackmail your daughter, your son...Jeton Neziraj made a masterpiece to show others how this community is manipulated and discriminated.

My position as an adviser to Professor Sejdiu made me get involved in political elections. I didn’t like this profession, I don’t know how much others like it, but I thought culture was the main tool to hit the wrong politics on its head. I believe I have this material from [my] culture, I am known in every neighborhood of Kosovo. Every [Roma] neighborhood knows me as Kujtim Pacaku, let me say I am known even in the Balkans. I am known even in Bratislava, in the Roma Street, and in Tirana, for example in the neighborhood Nikua Avrami. It is a big neighborhood where in 2003 I worked on the first dictionary in six languages, while incorporating the Albanian language for the first time in the dictionary. I am known in the [Roma] neighborhood in Bulgaria, in Sofia all the children know me, they run after me, play music, I hang out with them, or in Paris, in the Roma neighborhood, or in Toulouse, Istanbul and so on.

I created a good reputation, I used culture every time as a weapon to hit the wrong politics on Roma or for Roma people. Now I am a member of the Parliament of Kosovo, I represent the Roma community, two years ago I got my Master’s in pedagogy of music. I am almost the first graduated Master. Sadly, I am waiting for my colleagues of my team to graduate, I am the only one for the moment who has graduated with ten, the highest grade. I worked seriously on my diploma, I hope to continue for a doctorate, I am negotiating with the Bulgarian University of Saints Cyril and Methodius, where I would like to obtain my doctorate in a very specific field of ethnomusicology, old Roma city music, along this I forgot to tell you that I have formed the first octet in Europe, an octet that performs *acapella* under my direction. We sing old Roma city songs that were sung in Kosovo three or four hundred years ago, because I forgot to tell you when the question was asked, “What did you work on in the shows from 1986?”

Now I remember, I always talked about rituals, traditions, Roma weddings, I always asked the elderly, “All right, did you sing any song ever?” It was for a good day, even though, for example, we talked about burial ceremonies. I say, “Come old lady, sing us one more song...” She sang the song, “Oh, oh, I will die. Oh, my mother, how am I going to go into the black soil?” I say, “Where did this song come from?” “Mother” [Old] Besa sang it for me, a woman who lived over one hundred years. She would say, “Ah, my grandmother taught me this song, my son.” “Is that so? And your grandmother, where did she learn it?” “From her grandmother.” When you had the hundred years old “mother” Besa in front of you in conversation, and her grandmother lived another hundred years, and her grandmother over two hundreds, it comes down that the song is about three-four hundred years old, that tells us that Roma people were in the Balkans for seven centuries, seven hundred years, since their migration from the Northern part of Upper India...now we are entering into history (laughs).

We brought much from India. When they become brides, our girls have the henna night. When they tie the strings... I know how to read some symbols that come out as figures through henna. These are symbols

that the Roma brought from India, there are 19 hieroglyphs brought here from India. We find those hieroglyphs in henna. There are hieroglyphs, for example, there is a zero with a dot in the middle of the circle, that says, "Don't drink water here!" or another hieroglyph, "Here there is no aid!" in order that the second group that comes to the village understands what is the situation in that village. They have engraved it into the stone, in the soil, in the wood, so that the other group who has come to that village, would know, would see the symbol, and say, "Ah, here they give aid. We are going to rest here." Or, "Here they don't help, they killed someone and it is not offered. I mean, there are 19 hieroglyphs. This is the local contribution of Roma from group to group.

When we speak about contribution, then we must definitely mention that culture has the biggest power to hit politics on its head, the wrong politics on its head! It is the Roma contribution to music and small businesses, especially in Prizren. Here an orchestra existed, called *Çergagjite e Prizrenit* [Wanderers of Prizren], formed by Roma, all Roma. In 1945, when the first radio station of Kosovo was established, it was Radio Prizren, and the general house of the television aired *Çergagjite e Prizrenit*. You have to understand that the opening of the program of an institution was done by Roma people every day. Furthermore, there are documents where the great Fan Noli explains Roma culture and music in a decisive manner. This is encountered very little in other writers.

"*Zotëri a doni qymyr?*" [Sir, do you want coal?] or "*Luli i vocërr*" [Little Luli], we all know, no one asked who is this Luli, how did he want to swallow the teacher with all his shoes, could he be Roma? Migjen didn't explain this. Or the contribution of Roma musicians, where their entire opus of musical subjects was the same, it contained approximately from twenty or thirty musical themes, Roma also made music. They shared that musical opus or performed it with Roma, the same with Albanians, the same with Serbs, the same with Turks (laughs). Look, the same music was performed by Roma musicians, but to many groups of other communities. Do you know what happened here? It happened that the folk dance *Shota*, was performed by Roma for Serbs, and Serbs danced *Shota*, do you know this? Look what an indirect, invisible contribution!

Roma were the main carriers of music, and through the music they connected communities, at the Turks, they danced Bulgarian dances that the Turkish community danced too. Do you know what is more interesting? Women also danced this. Roma also danced the same dances after. The same Roma danced also *Shota*. Look, Roma as orchestra, what wonderful carriers have they been of musical culture, where none of the communities said, "No, no, I don't want *Shota*!" no way. I mean, Roma were the main carriers. The second example, maybe your generation doesn't know that when men went to serve in the army, in the young people, the National Yugoslav Army at that time, not a single soldier went to the bus or train without music. It would have been astonishing for a soldier to go to the army without Roma music. Especially here in Prizren, usually it was very fashionable to go to the army accompanied by music...while heading towards the train station. There is another, another example that the Kosovo cultural institutions, whether before or after the war, not a single orchestra, nor any music association could exist without Roma, whether *Shota*, where two or three musicians were Roma, and also five professional musicians, whether the orchestra of Radio Pristina, or the association Agimi...

War

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his war experience.]

Kujtim Paçaku: The war a horror. It is so hard when you find yourself between two fires. We were part of that system. Wherever you turned, there [would be] a ball....you would be hit. It was very difficult for the Roma community, we must say that in reality the Roma community contribution was not small at all, helping Kosovo's population one way or another. When you are a minority, in a war... for us the war was something unwanted because you lost a friend, lost a neighbor, no matter his nationality.

In Prizren we lived together with all the communities, but it came to that, the war was unavoidable, then the majority of the population emigrated to other countries even before, during and after the war, also because the migration of Roma to other countries began in 1969, then Roma people migrated to other foreign countries legally through the Employment Office. They migrated and stayed there.

The period after the war was very difficult, to find work, to be happy about the freedom of Kosovo, we Roma were happy...I told Jeta...after everyone else. If all of Kosovo was happy in June 1999 for the liberation of Kosovo, we became happy three-four years later, because there were many partisans who did not give much contribution to the war of Kosovo. We know them very well, and you know them. We spoke with Jeta beforehand... We will speak about politics until we will place our hand on a stove burner. When our hand begins to burn (smiles), we will pull it away immediately.

What happened during the war, we must not forget. We have to remember those times looking forward in order to start developing Kosovo. I mean, we were the last to celebrate the freedom of Kosovo. The last because of the language, the wrong information taken *ad hoc* about Roma, who were they, were they Serbian collaborators, or weren't they Serbian collaborators. Even Serbs today never say that Roma were their collaborators. Not even Albanians speak about the Roma who have supported Albanians. We know them by names, many Roma have contributed to the Albanians in the war, but their contribution was promoted very little. Let us not speak about war....

Poetry

{Recites the poem "Ngjyra"}

Color

Why are you afraid, why do you hide?
Are you ashamed of the color of your skin?
O Man!
Also you, and me and all the others
God has created.

Listen!
Under the color of your skin
A rainbow is hiding,
Right inside your soul.
Thus, head high!

This was recited by Professor Petrovci in Romani. It was very interesting that I have managed to create an event about my poetry, and Mrs. Nexhmije Pagarusha and Professor Enver Petrovci and others recited it in

Romani, and I recited it in Albanian. Professor Enver Petrovci recites poetry exceptionally well in Romani. For the first time in Romani he recited my poem “Unë” [I] and said, {recites the poem}

I

Yes, yes, I am Roma!
I who now stand before you,
I am from the great-grandchildren of the Ganges
And the sons of Lumbardhi.
I sleep under the Himalaya or I sleep under Sharr,
Wherever I am.

It is a miracle
That I never was
White for whites,
Black enough for blacks.
I came only to treat you with some verses.
To get an applause in exchange,
And that’s enough for me to be happy with you!

From seven-eight titles, my last book was *Rreth zjarreve* [Around the Fires]. In that book we had a wedding party. When you asked me what does your poetry usually contain, with this poem I decided to have a wedding party (smiles). It is the birth of Roma, it is their development, it is the time of their marriage, their wedding. At the end, I left purposefully a poem, because we bid farewell to guests and we say, “Fund” [the end]

{recites the poem “Fund”}

Here then, this is our end.
We eat and drink as much as God gave us.
Come, and will see each other only for good.

This is how we greet guests, with as much as God gave us (laughs). It is a short one, but we bid farewell to the guests when they leave the wedding with an extraordinarily great message.

Dreams

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about his dreams.]

Kujtim Paçaku: Dream! From a philosophical perspective, it lasts three-four-five seconds until you are asleep...everything ends. That gives you the reason to seek its development, the dream that confronted you during your sleep. You were a weak runner in the dream, you were never able to make an extra step (laughs) because of someone else...You made love to someone, you woke up...so sad! It is not true. You dreamt of your mother who left you long ago and went to the seventh heaven, you got up, you don’t have her anymore.

Ah no! That belongs to sleep, while this one of reality, has no end for me. It has a beginning, because I was born. We have the tradition the when we are born, the mother or someone else recites a prayer from the Qu'ran and says a name in our ear (smiles). Different phases.... Even though life, according to me, let me talk like an intellectual, the five phases, birth, development, marriage, growing up, getting old and you say, "Good Bye." We say in Prizren, "Bagrem Bahce" [Acacia Garden] do you know...(laughs). But the dreams of a real intellectual, a writer, the dream of an artist never end, even in the last day when the body is covered with a shroud, and when the Imam sings over his head. It is unending, because he thinks that in his eternal life, he will continue his life with 72 beauties who are waiting for him with red wine. That continues in me still, because my biggest dream is to have something that others don't have...a lot of friends. Do you know what it means when you have a lot of friends, you are the richest man in the world. Money is zero point zero, zero, zero for the man who is healthy in his head, for the man who has the origin, the seeds of a healthy family. Money does not build a man! There are many who want to live in Paris, to live in Pristina, to live in Cambodia, to live in Italy, in Rome and so on and on. No, No!

They [dreams] can be realized, I want to have a lot of poetry. A part of my dreams was to leave two-three hundred poems behind, so when I die, I will never die. Definitely, when I start writing a poem for my very young friend, for Jeta, for you, or for someone else, we will go somewhere. We will not meet in this world, but someone will go to the library to open a book of poems and say, "But wait, this man...He is..." We know that Dostoyevsky is gone, Tagora is gone, Nehru is gone, the sisters Dudarova are gone, Ana Ahmatova is gone, Naim Frashëri yes, Migjeni yes... But look how alive they are with us. A person who leaves something immortal in this world is never dead!