

## INTERVIEW WITH NAZLIJE BALA

Pristina | Date: June 21 and July 3, 2012

Duration: 135 minutes

### Present:

1. Nazlije Bala (Speaker)
2. Zana Rudi (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Camera)
4. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
5. Sara Nicole Baxley
6. Fabiola Berdiel

*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

**Zana Rudi:** Nazlie, how do you remember your childhood?

**Nazlije Bala:** Well, as every childhood and as every child, memories, experiences and nostalgia are many for everyone. But I know that my childhood was exceptional, full of commitments, a childhood to which I often find myself going back.

There have been different experiences and events during my childhood - happy, angry, painful, teary or harmonious events - I would say, different. But I know I was an extraordinarily dynamic child, a child who would endeavor everything, a child who would achieve... how shall I say, maybe even the impossible. I know that as a child, how shall I say, I am describing my childhood from the early moments, before school, maybe even much earlier than school, a child who was interested in musical instruments, a child who was interested in different sports, a child who was always interested in going where her child's imagination took her, and I experienced the greater part of this imagination because I realized all that I dreamed of, how shall I say, in my everyday life. And if I go back and search once again my childhood I know that I overcame many difficult times, when a child wants a musical instrument I tell her that for eight years I practiced and played, and even today I play the clarinet, which is peculiar. (Smiles) Secondly, an unusual sport for me has been... a sport I practiced before first grade, I was very interested in chess and over time I became the Chess Junior Champion of Kosovo. As a child, if we watched different films, especially the ones with martial arts... how shall I say, I have succeeded and earned the blue belt. As a child, I tried, how shall I say, to play ball games and I played football and handball, but not basketball which was out of my range.

When I completed all those things as a child, I would say, all the things that were part of my imagination, I can freely say that in a way I have been a fighter for all that I imagined and dreamed. And in reality I would say all this has brought me an experience as a child that children nowadays might do not have.

As a child, I also spent a big part of my childhood in the country, usually during the summer vacation, how shall I say, automatically one dreamed to go somewhere and spend three months on vacation. We know how the life in a village is like, at least how it was at that time and how it is now, even though nowadays it is changing. As a child, I was interested in how one grows corn, wheat, barley, and oat and where all those goods, I mean, what the earth gives us, came from. Now it would not be a problem for me to grow corn, and harvest wheat, barley, oat, and the like, you know, there was diversity in the childhood I lived. Perhaps I am going to link all this to another aspect of my childhood that nowadays is very strange to talk about. As a child, I experienced the first illegal groups that were formed at that time, even though I did not really understand the mail I was

carrying, the document I had with me, and the contacts I had at that time. Therefore, essentially I did not understand the process and what we as a nation wanted to achieve. As a child I remember many times I was given a document, a letter, a bag and was told, for example, "Take this bag and go send it" or "Take person X." I mean, these were all experiences that I understood later, there were days at that time that kids, given their age and maturity, would be given a task or a responsibility to execute, and I mean, a task in the full sense of the word.

And keep in mind, this process went on within my family also, the family that my mother and my father created, how shall I say, eight children came from this family's harmony: five boys and three girls. I was the fifth child, and my three brothers came after me and I remember that as a child I had a kind of power, particularly over my younger brothers, that power of leadership that makes people look to you for support and protection. Besides the things in my imagination and the things that I experienced, which I told you about, how shall I say, one thing I felt, I felt both the spiritual strength and the physical strength I had, because I was also the leader of the *lagje*, a leader also... of boys..., and also of girls, how shall I say, without my approval absolutely no one could play in the neighborhood, without my approval no child had the right to play any game or what knows what. (Smiles) Particularly in the winter, even though every kid is happy about the first snow and the fun in the snow with a sled and all that, no kid dared to sled in the neighborhood if I wasn't there. I wasn't running a form of dictatorship, but it was then that I noticed that if you form a group and know how to manage it, then everyone will equally participate in the games - whether they are winter or summer games. If I may say so, at that time I got to experience my leadership skills as leader of a group and leader of children, where all of us had an equal world and imagination. As a child I knew how to take on duties and responsibilities, and in general, I was extraordinarily responsible for every request, first for the ones made by my family, but also for those made by my relatives and neighbors.

As a child, I learned what respect is, what honor is, and I learned what people think and worry about, as a child I heard different stories, particularly those told by my mother. And when she told stories about the persecution of her family immediately after World War II, when her whole family was killed, to me that world did not make sense and I could not fathom how a whole family could be executed, from a twelve year old to older ones. And for me it was incomprehensible because history at that time taught us that the partisans were very good, the partisans fought the liberation war, the partisans supported the people, when in fact it was absolutely and completely the opposite. Perhaps, as a child I could not understand why my parents told us this story in secret, not to build hatred, not to build a certain nationalism in us, but it was more like they were informing us children about what had happened to our family, another part of the family. Later, how shall I say, as I grew up and as I developed as a human being, I started to experience the divisions, and before that the first violations, and I experienced the regime, the domestic regime and perhaps I gained a more complete information. By information I mean that at that time different groups were active to spread information about what the regime was, spread information about what human right violations were, spread information about what it means to live under oppression, what it means to be a slave, and what it means to lack freedom in the full meaning of the word.

Another thing that made an impression on me as a child when I began first grade is that even though I was left handed, how shall I say, I am stronger on my left side and today I cannot understand why there was so much pressure, during first grade, I was forced to write with my right hand and they used such methods {moves her hands} that even today it terrifies me when I remember. At that time there used to be old desks, not chairs, and they took my left hand and tied it down {pretends to tie

hand with a rope} for the entire school day, the four or five hours of classes that we had, and all that pressure was a kind of psychological violence against a child, as I was a child who had just started school and I had to try to write with my right hand. As a child, I experienced a lot of things, and maybe I cannot choose which is the most interesting, but if I was asked whether I would go back to my childhood... I believe I would. I believe that I would probably follow the same steps I did and re-live most of my childhood, with the exception of few events.

**Zana Rudi:** Now I'm going to ask you a longer question, I would like to know more about your lifestyle, your family, your parents and what they did. You mentioned stories about your mother, your school, and the experience of going to the village for the summer.

**Nazlije Bala:** My mother was a housewife, may she rest in peace, because she is not with us anymore, while my father was a medical technician at that time. We were eight children, five boys and three girls, we had average living conditions, sometimes they were not average, but I am talking about a time when we all were at the same level {shows the level with her hands}. Maybe many times I had to run back home fast from school, empty my backpack and give it to my brother because he was going to school on the second shift. Maybe it happened that even my brother had to run back home after school to give the backpack to our other brother, so for a time we three went to school with one backpack to be on time for our classes.

As children, we dreamed a lot, maybe because of all those toys that we could not afford to buy. I remember playing with little girls... here and there {moves hands} there was a girl who had a doll. And my mother...my parents could not afford to buy us dolls, my mother took a big stick and broke it into two smaller sticks, and then put them together like a cross with a rag {demonstrates with her hands}, and put cloths around it and then sew it together, and when I held that doll in my hands I felt like I was in a magical world, like Alice in Wonderland, because I got a doll, as a token and gift from my mother.

I remember that we were very happy and excited about different holidays, particularly *Eid*<sup>1</sup>, because we got to wear new clothes, because we knew that our parents did everything they could...not that they did not all the time, but we knew that they did everything they could to buy us new clothes for *Eid*. I remember going door to door as a child...it was very interesting for a child, I mean, we went door to door to wish Happy *Eid*, and when we wished Happy *Bajram*<sup>2</sup>, at the time there were these coins - I think you do not remember them - these red coins that we got from neighbors and relatives and as children what did we do? Also because it is known that the *Eid* meal is one of the most fulfilling meals in every family, but as children we thought that going to a pastry shop and buying baklava and rice pudding was more delicious, and we poured the baklava juice over the rice pudding, even though we had eaten both of these at home, but baklava was very rare and made once a year.

Secondly, as child I remember the gifts we were given, also when gifts were given to us for the new year, I mean every family got gifts...the parents got the gifts. And as children we got many gifts, eight gifts, eight big sacks {shows the size of the sacks with her hands} and now, we would tease one

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<sup>1</sup> *Eid* is an important Muslim religious holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the month-long period of fasting from dawn to sundown. On the day of *Eid*, there is no fasting.

<sup>2</sup>*Bajram* is the Turkish word for festival. Albanians celebrate *Ramadan Bajram*, which is the same as *Eid*, and *Kurban Bajram*, which is the Day of Sacrifice, two months and ten days after *Ramadan Bajram*.

another with “I’m going to open my gift,” “No you won’t open the gift,” “You ate more,” “I ate more.” And the most interesting...today Coca-Cola is a common drink that can be found on any table, but at that time it was not. I mean, we drank Coca Cola once a year, on New Year’s Eve, Jupii [a brand of drinks] or Pepsi, Jupii does not exist any more, while we had Coca Cola on our table once a year.

One aspect of my childhood was that my immediate family was the only one living in Pristina, our extended family lived in villages. In almost every family, children’s first word when they come home is “bread,” (smiles) they ask for bread and now, when we, my three brothers and I, came back from school, the first word, the first question when we saw our mother was, “What do we eat the bread with?” And she answered with words that she used very often, and that remind us of that time, and her answer was, “With your teeth.” (Laughs) True, you have to bite the food with your teeth and then chew it, but she also never told us what she had prepared for lunch. Perhaps she had cooked lunch, sometimes we had guests and out of respect for them that lunch was reserved for them, as children we could not have that lunch out of respect for the guests. Another interesting thing is that nowadays you can find tomatoes and peppers during any season, they are there every season, but at that time, you could only find them in the first part of the summer, and when the peppers were being cooked, we could smell them from far away. And when you roasted the peppers at that time, the smell traveled far, and when you came home from school you got to smell the roasted peppers from a distance. It was very common at that time, and when you went inside and there were guests, as children you sat in the corner out of respect for the guests, you never sat with the guests during meals. You sat in the corner and for the all time the guests were there you watched them as they ate the peppers, I mean, with gusto, “I wish I was in her place.” At that time there were not plates for each person, today when you prepare the table there are plates for everyone, there were two or three plates for the entire family, today also the way of eating peppers, you kept looking at the guests and the way they were eating the pepper, taking it apart from the top, you did not stare at guests for the way they ate the peppers, but you envied them because you were not the one who ate that pepper, or that tomato, or whatever delicious thing they were eating. Another aspect, and I am always talking about my family, was the extraordinary respect.

Also because we were many children and our parents could not afford to buy new clothes for everyone or fulfill all our wishes, at that time our father twice a year...I mean, back then it was common to buy on credit with very low interest, one per cent, in particular in the winter he bought us clothes, jackets and coats for the winter. As a child, you did not think that you would wear that coat also the next winter, you thought that you wore that coat that winter and buy a new one in the following winter. And when our parents took us to the store, when there was the Vartek department store, near the Mall, where the administration, the Ministry of Transport are today, near the bookstore, my father took us to the department store to try on jackets. I was quite tiny in size. Our parents always thought of getting us clothes that would last for the next winter as well, while we children always thought they were for only one season. And when we were in the store to try the jackets, the sleeves got down to here {shows the length of the sleeves with her hands} they were big, and we said, “Dad, but the jacket is big,” he said, “Put your arms up.” And when you put your arms up, it shortened of course, and he said “Eh, it fits you perfectly.” And this was repeated until we were older and we didn’t have to use the same jacket for two or three years.

Another memory is from the village, notably when I spent time with my mother’s family in the village of Koliq, the same family that was persecuted and almost all the men executed after World War II. There was a kulla,<sup>4</sup> a grandiose one, big, it was a big family with great authority. Now, back then, my

mother's paternal uncle used to gather all the girls and today this is not usual to gather the girls. It was summer time, I worked in the field, which wasn't a problem and still isn't. I stirred the hay and the grass, I uncoiled the corn, I separated the grain from the cone. I made voza, which are those small pieces of dried grass dries used to feed the livestock during winter. At that time there was no rope, and the voza needed rope to be held together, and we made the rope from straws. This kind of rope was made from straws in the form of a braid called lektyrë, I mean, I made a lektyrë. Now, we made these all day long which made your skin peel because the straws were rough, but we did not feel tired. Or bringing water, if we, as kids, could not contribute in any way to the family we spent two months with, then we felt obligated a little, because water generally was very far and at that time we didn't have water supply, but only wells. The well was about four kilometers from the house, and the way we carried water...we took pots, it was easy when we were going to get the water and we had empty pots, but on our way back we would take a big piece of wood and put the pot on top of the wood, and then put the wood on our shoulders, usually, two or three people carried it, depending on how many pots we had. Or when it was time to eat, among other things I also often went out with the livestock, the cattle, the sheep to feed them. Or my mother's uncle had a lot of sheep, around one hundred and fifty of them. It is very interesting that when it was time to milk them, the sheep knew the order and they came on their own. The wife of my mother's uncle was in charge of the dairy products. Now, two, three people took their own pots to milk the cows, how shall I say, and because the cows, sheep and goats were waiting to be milked, they did it as fast as they could. So two or three people, with their pots between their legs, were milking them as fast as they could in order to then feed them and give them water. At that time there was no electricity in the village, I mean, we had a flashlight and you had to take care of everything and all the responsibilities, I mean, everything had to be taken care of before dark, because the moment it became dark it was very difficult to do anything. And in the evening, what did we do in the evening, we did not have beds, sofas, or mattresses. There was, how shall I say, one living space in the house for all, though I think the entire kulla<sup>3</sup> did not have only that space, it was a special kulla, it was twenty meters by ten meters wide. It had a special staircase, not inside the main entrance, but there were stairs outside the kulla.

Now, how shall I say, we played different games, we played with a tambourine, we played a game with five stones called guralec, I don't know whether you know how to play that game. So, you take five stones and you throw the fifth in the air and then it falls down, but you cannot look at the stones. However, without looking, looking only up, {looks up and pretends to catch stones} you are supposed to catch them while keeping your left hand this way {keeps fingers together and the palm up}; with the other hand you hold the stones and you get the stone with the other {she demonstrates}.

We sang various songs, particularly the ones for the herdsmen, I still know those songs by heart today. As a kid, there was a tradition that no longer exists in the villages..."sifting the bun." I don't know if you know what that is. When the herding season, how shall I say, the season of herding, is over in the country, all those who had worked in it had as a tradition that every house prepared a meal; however, we did not eat at home, but where the herd was, where the livestock were. It was an incredibly abundant lunch, followed with games, dancing, and songs and they would say, "Come join us, you city

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<sup>3</sup> Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

kids.” How shall I say, there were those who felt a division between the kids from villages and those from the cities... “Come join us, you city kids.” How shall I say, it was an extraordinarily great happiness, I still keep in touch with many of these people. A majority of them still live in the same villages where I used to stay, and how shall I say, every time we meet, we always have memories.

Another memory that may be gruesome but is true, in my paternal aunt’s village, a village called Keçekoll, which is in the municipality of Pristina... there is a mountain called Dubok, where you can still find weapons from World War II. If you go into the woods you can find rifles and grenades, and kids like going everywhere and checking out every corner. And once we children accidentally found a hand grenade and we took it and left the woods and went to the paved road that is at the border with Serbia. For four straight hours we tried to get the bomb to explode on the road (smiles)... we slammed it hard on the road, but it didn’t explode; we threw stones at it, but it didn’t explode, it did not explode. And in the end we decided to light a fire and throw the bomb in the fire. It was 8 p.m. when we lit the fire like the shepherds do and threw the bomb in it, we were 15- 20 kids who were waiting for the bomb to explode, not realizing that it could be fatal and that it could kill us all, but it didn’t explode. Now, we went back each to our home and when we entered the *oda*, there were *oda* at the time in villages, we started to eat dinner... the place where we were trying to get the bomb to explode was far from our home, like the distance from the hill of Germia to the one of Makovc, it was very far, and as we were having dinner, how shall I say, all us children by the *sofra* we heard a big explosion and there was a trembling.

How shall I say, that made the living room shake a lot and broke the glass of the windows. We, the kids, looked at one another knowing what had happened. The adults, like my aunts’ husband, her kids, her brother-in-law, who lived all together, started asking us whether we had done something bad, and we said no. The next day we went to see the place where the bomb had exploded and where we had stayed around a fire for hours waiting for it to explode. A hole, as big as this building, was created by the explosion. Now, when we remember that and we think about it, we realize that as kids we were not thinking at all.

In villages at that time there were no beds, no sofas, no foam, no mattresses, absolutely nothing. In the middle of a room there was a piece of wood [a platform], that wood was called *trapazan*, it was laid down, and then the rest of the room was covered with straws. Above that there were rough blankets, not the ones we have now, there were blankets made of rope at that time ...blankets and pillows made of straw, there were no pillows made of feathers, or cotton, or foam, only pillows literally stuffed with straws. That’s how we lived when we stayed at the village, we ate, played, sang, and danced there and when “Let’s go to sleep,” we just pulled out the pillow made of straw. How shall I say, I took it and put my head on it {points to the pillow near her} and we covered ourselves with blankets because there was a lot of poverty at that time. There were no comforters, the ones we had were created by putting together the different clothes we could find that were no longer used, they were sewn together to make comforters.

The way we made the bed in the morning is very interesting, we took the comforters and folded them, then took the blankets from the straw; and we had to take a sickle to stir and lift the straw, that all night...how shall I say, you had folded, packed the straw, how shall I say, it was put under the *trapazan*, which divided the sleeping from the living area. And then with the help of the sickle we had to take all the straw up and cover it with the blankets one by one. Also, one had to clean the *trapazan*, because there were no cleansers, so you had to clean with a cloth all day long.

And since there were no brushes, how shall I say, they did not exist, today one uses brushes to clean, at the time they did not exist, you took a glass and rubbed the *trapazan* with it, the *trapazan* was cleaned with glass, that's how it was done then, and as you rubbed it with the glass and put water on it, how shall I say, the water had a whitening effect, and you rubbed it. You also watered the ground and instead of brooms, which we did not have at that time, we used *rometa*, it was a kind of plant, it was planted, it was not used for anything else except to sweep the yard, the *oda*, the basement or cellar as we call it now, depending on the place where it was used.

And keep in mind that for my mother buying what was called state bread was a kind of luxury because if you could buy state bread you were considered as belonging to the highest level of society. How shall I say, my mother baked the bread in a baking pan, by hand, she made one kind of bread called *pogaçe*, twisted buns, that today do not exist anymore (smiles) and today *pogaçe* when you prepared it...the original *pogaçe*, without yogurt, or mineral water like they make it today, also with baking soda, how shall I say, without those things: she made *pogaçe* and before she put it in the oven, she put it on top of the stove. At that time we used the wood stoves a lot, because electricity was extremely expensive and also if a woman used the electric stove she was considered a woman without skills, how shall I say, a woman who could not manage the house well would use more electricity and water...this was the mentality then. And so our women could do no matter what, truly our standard of living was extremely low, now, my mother put the *pogaçe* on top of the stove to let it rise, and so the *pogaçe* had round marks created by the round iron on the top of the stove. Now, she let it grill on both sides, and then she put in a baking pan and in the oven and when the *pogaçe* came out it had a crust this big {shows size with her hands}, one centimeter, and she had to reduce the crust because otherwise it was impossible to eat it. So she would take a metal, this metal...this glass, and a pretty thick paper and started to trim the *pogaçe* all around. How shall I say, we ate that with *long* [local dish with peppers and cream], pickled peppers, *long* and cheese; if we didn't have *long*, nor cheese, we ate it with the juice from the pickled peppers. And when eating that, you did not care if you had chicken or potatoes or rice on the table, how shall I say, they weren't important because *pogaçe* gave us happiness, its smell, and the way it was made, and we couldn't wait for it to be baked and eat it while it was hot. Or when as shepherds, when we went to the country...my mother's uncle's wife would wake up in the very early morning and make small breads for each of us, not a quarter or half of that bread, but the whole bread, and she would fill it with cream, cheese and *long*. We drank water, because at that time there were no bottles to take with us, and once we were out, we drank water wherever we could find it, when we got thirsty we knew pretty much where we could find water and we would get down on our knees in front of a water spring, you put your hands in front and drank. And we never got sick or got a contagious disease. How shall I say, that is the period of my life that I truly remember with a lot of nostalgia and I miss it even now. I miss the smell of *pogaçe*, the smell of grass and cherries, the smell that came from cherries, and the smell of the mountains everywhere you went, how shall I say, I miss the smell of everyday life. Even today, I often go to these places with my nieces and nephews. I have 25 nieces and nephews in total and they are my sisters' and brothers' children and grandchildren and I go often to these places with them. And I give them detailed explanations about the place or tell them a story of that place and surprisingly, they find all this interesting. They say, "How is it possible that back then did you survive that kind of life and you were so happy, have so many memories, good memories, and feel so much nostalgia," while those things that they miss in their life are perhaps memories that I will never forget.



At that time one could not find detergent, how shall I say, detergent existed only in the cities, and did not get to rural areas, as the people in rural areas generally lived in extreme poverty. I wasn't a small child but neither a grown up when we went to the water springs, how shall I say, where every time we carried water. And we took that pipe where water came from, we filled a wooden basin, we filled it with water, we took the clothes and we put them there and in place of detergent we used ashes. Ashes are what remains from burned wood. They were put in the ashes, then we took a wash paddle and we washed the clothes with it. We really pounded the clothes with the paddle. We did not have a rope to hang them to dry, so, instead we put them on the fence around the house. And when we picked them up to fold them we would find many insects, many cockroaches; so we would first shake the insects off the clothes, then fold them and then take them to the house.

Another childhood memory are the stories that my grandfather told us. Every time we would argue with him and say "It's not that way" and "I don't agree" ...because as children we were indoctrinated with Marxism, Leninism, and Socialism. And if someone said something bad about the state or the partisans, how shall I say, we opposed them. That's the way we were taught, and I remember what my grandfather always used to say "Just wait and see! You don't know what a Serb is, he will caress you during the day, but think how to kill you at night." This was always his message for many reasons, how shall I say, now I know what happened and why he would always tell us that. He had been the ninth brother, his eight brothers and he ended up in different wars during World War I and they were always against the regimes of that time. Against the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenians during World War I and every time against the anti-fascist system that was...that was installed at that time. He was with the troops of Shaban Polluzha<sup>4</sup> and after the end of the war he spent almost five years in the mountains, and at that time any person who stayed in the mountains was called *kaçak*<sup>5</sup>. He stayed in the mountains and, how shall I say, he did not have the right to meet his family, and, how shall I say, he was in constant risk of being arrested, or executed, or put in prison for life in Goli Otok<sup>6</sup> and different parts of Idrizom in Macedonia, which were the most infamous prisons at that time. My grandfather was forced to sell all the family's property and leave Kosovo because of the Ranković<sup>7</sup> regime. At that time the Ranković regime revolved around Vaso Čubrilović<sup>8</sup> and Ivo Andrić's<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Regional Albanian leader of volunteer forces in Drenica. Shaban Polluzha joined the partisans, but in late 1944 disobeyed orders to go north to fight Germans in Serbia, having received news that nationalist Serbs and Montenegrins were attacking civilians in Drenica. He fought against partisan forces until early 1945, when he was killed.

<sup>5</sup> Outlaws, bandits, also known in other regions of the Balkans as *hajduk* or *uskok*, considered simple criminals by the state, but often proponents of a political agenda of national liberation.

<sup>6</sup> Island in the north of the Adriatic sea, from 1949 through 1956 a maximum security penal colony for Yugoslav political prisoners, where individuals accused of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, or other dissents, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

<sup>7</sup> Aleksandar Ranković 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.

<sup>8</sup> Vaso Čubrilović was a Bosnian Serb political activist and academic, a member of the conspiratorial group Young Bosnia, which executed the assassination of the Hapsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. He advocated the ethnic cleansing of minorities from Serbia, notably the Albanians of Kosovo, in a memorandum published in 1937 and entitled *Iseļjavanje Arnauta* (The Expulsion of the Albanians).

<sup>9</sup> Ivo Andrić was a Bosnian writer, the recipient of the 1961 Nobel Prize for Literature. From 1939 through 1941 he was the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Ambassador to the German Reich. In 1939 he wrote a nationalist pamphlet advocating the annexation of part of independent Albania to Serbia, "Draft on Albania."

notorious plan. The plan was a famous memorandum that was followed by every regime in Serbia, so my grandfather was forced to sell everything and go to Turkey. He sold his possession, and at that time, there were no cars or even horse drawn carriages, but carriages were attached to bulls. And so my grandfather took his mother and one of his sons and the things from the house that were left...some clothes, and he put it on the bull carriage and one part of the family went to Skopje. From Skopje they went to Thessaloniki by train and then from Thessaloniki to the big fields of Drenes in Turkey, then he came back to take the rest of the family, my father and my aunt, to Turkey. And as he got close to the Macedonian border, the border closed and they did not allow for a certain period, how shall I say, Albanians to go to Turkey. It was a kind of ethnic cleansing at that time, how shall I say, my grandfather's mother and his three year old son went to Turkey and for fifty years there was no contact with my uncle.

At that time the number of educated people was very low, only *bejlerësh*<sup>10</sup> families were able to get an education at that time. Ordinary people in Kosovo had no education. After fifty years my uncle came back to Kosovo as a tourist not knowing that his family was in Kosovo, and that it was a large family. And the big mosque in Pristina, generally, visitors from Turkey had the obligation to visit the big mosque. And he goes to the big mosque, he talks to people and tells them who he is and where he comes from. And one friend of my grandfather says, "It is impossible" - my grandfather's name was Sherif - and says, "Uncle Sherif just finished the Friday prayers about twenty minutes ago and left the mosque." Startled and overwhelmed, my uncle cannot believe that his father is alive after fifty years, so my grandfather's friend says, "I'll show you where he lives." Only my mother and I were at home when a middle-aged man, well built and handsome, arrived, he was wearing a *plis*<sup>11</sup>. The tradition was that Albanians who came from Turkey put the *plis* on their head when they entered the border of Kosovo as a way to identify themselves as Albanians. I was looking at the *plis* when my grandfather's friend asked, "Is uncle Sherif in?" Since my grandfather had come back and left right away to meet some of his other friends, I told him that he wasn't there and he said, "You have a guest from Turkey." My uncle was in tears, how shall I say, we could not even begin a conversation, I could not ask him who he was and where he came from, how shall I say, he was crying nonstop. I was very young, I was in seventh grade at the time, and I told him to please come in, that my mother was home. In the meantime, I also called my father on the phone and he came in, and my uncle told us who he was and cried, we didn't have any contact with our uncle for fifty years. Meanwhile my grandfather went back to the mosque and his friends told him, "Uncle Sherif, your son from Turkey is back," he was startled and said, "But which son, that I haven't known anything about him for fifty years!" "No" they said, "Your son arrived from Turkey." He was old at the time, he died when he was 98 years old...he was 98. Then he returns from the mosque and when he comes in, my uncle looks at him shocked, how shall I say, it was a very difficult moment, maybe because of the pain that he carried within for fifty years. May he rest in peace, as he died last year, my grandfather noticed that my uncle was so shocked that he could not make a sound. And so he turns to him literally, {raises her voice} "Come on, you donkey, what are you doing ...you are a man, why are you crying, give me a hug." Meanwhile, my grandfather did not shed a tear and did not show that also he, as a parent, had carried that spiritual pain.

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<sup>10</sup> Rich families, from *bey*, Turkish title for chieftain, or leaders of small administrative units of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>11</sup> Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

That he did not know anything about the rest of his family for fifty years, this was, how shall I say, a painful experience for the whole family. But reuniting with my uncle after fifty years was a great experience, how shall I say, ever since, we have kept in touch. My uncle has eight children as well, five boys and three girls, we didn't know, how shall I say, any aspect of his family, or how many children he had. All of them speak Albanian and bonded with us in Kosovo. How shall I say, that family experience was upsetting, but also delightful.

## Youth

*[Part cut out from the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about her youth.]*

During that time, the situation in Kosovo worsened, right after the war and after the death of Tito. I remember that every year we had to observe a minute of silence for... I can't remember the exact date in May...25 May, the schools observed a minute of silence. I was in seventh grade, and during a moment of silence sometimes it happens that kids smile or burst into laughter that they cannot stop. So that one time, I laughed during the minute of silence and the teachers convened a meeting to condemn me as a counter-revolutionary, a rebel, because I did not keep quiet during the minute of silence, and after that meeting I was expelled from school. I was expelled in fact because I laughed during the moment of silence. Then after that, they took action against my father who was the head technician of the Ramiz Sadiku health center. They demoted him to a simple technician, and the purge continued, targeting some other family members: my brother, who was the head of the firefighter unit in Pristina, was demoted; my sister who was on a scholarship given by the union of Ramiz Sadiku, lost her scholarship to the Faculty of Economics.

How shall I say, I experienced all these different things for the first time as a kid, I say a kid because that's what I was in seventh grade, when I experienced what they say with a word, the teeth of the regime, and also, that was the time when various night attacks started. In that period different meetings began to be organized including the organization of the demonstrations of 1981. I was active in every demonstration that was organized in Pristina, principally because I was young and short and carried around a lot of propaganda material, especially the calls to demonstrations that we posted on almost every door and every house. At that time, how shall I say, I knew a lot of different groups, they were called at the time Marxist- Leninist groups that were against the Serbian regime. They supported the declaration of Kosovo Republic with full rights in what is now former Yugoslavia. I will not mention names, but after 1981, 99% of them were arrested and convicted with draconian sentences, with 25 years of prison, some were 18, 17, or 20, and their families were persecuted too. Their family members were purged from their jobs. My maternal aunt's son was one of the political prisoners at the time; my aunt lived very close to us, our houses only had a wall in between. Then there were other parts of my family circle that after 1981 were subject to arrests, a wave of arrests, particularly the young people.

That was followed by purges in the education system and changes of curricula by the regime of Slobodan Milošević, even though, how shall I say, at that time it was the indirect regime of Milošević because the Communist Movement of Yugoslavia was reforming. However, any time the Republic of Serbia initiated its ultra nationalistic claims, its main focus was against Kosovo. Then the period of

firing people from their jobs started, not really firing, they were demoted, particularly if they had important positions. Albanians were fired from their positions and replaced with Serbs, particularly at the municipality level, in the courts, the executive councils, how shall I say, you could begin to detect the first signs of that political expansionism that Serbia held toward Kosovo and the people of Kosovo. Next it was in high school, with the division of the classes, as we always had the afternoon shift, while the Serbs had the morning shift. The Serbs in Serbia began complaining that “Kosovars, Albanians are raping us, they are beating us,” there was different anti-Albanian propaganda at that time. In my junior and senior year of high school the effects of this propaganda were felt further. We didn’t have field trips or proms, purges in the police force began, how shall I say, Albanian police were fired. It was not a direct discharge, but their job was conditioned upon whether or not they answered, “Do you accept the state of Serbia”? After that, it was the period of 1988<sup>12</sup>, when there were demonstrations and strikes organized all over Kosovo, like the famous strike of miners in Stari Trg, the student strike in the 1 Tetori hall, how shall I say, in which I participated because I was a student at that time. I was in the first year of my studies... the second year of my studies in the Faculty of Economics, and the period of 1989 came, when Kosovo’s autonomy was revoked and the persecutions towards Albanians in every aspect of our lives came as a result of the regime and policies of Serbia. In 1989, schools were closed for Albanians and I became directly involved in the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms. The council was formed at the time because there was no LDK<sup>13</sup> or Amnesty International in Kosovo, there was no Center of Information in Kosovo, absolutely nothing. That was the only institution that began to organize the parallel life and it was formed on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1989, on the eve of the anniversary of the the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is celebrated everywhere in the world.

During my youth, I went through different phases and maybe I experienced a transformation that we can identify as a youth or teenager phenomenon. At that time the hippie and punk movements had began worldwide. They were common in Kosovo too, and we identified with one or the other, whether a hippie or a punk. I was a kind of a punk girl. I wore jeans and tops that had words in different parts such as in the back or in the pockets. We also tore the jeans and the longer we did not wash our jeans, the more punk and “in” we were. How shall I say, this was a sort of form, a sort of way to wear whatever, different bracelets of woven threads, this was the phase I went through my first and second year at the university and it was a complete transformation. Maybe I was more impulsive, tougher, and more radical in different moments, maybe it was a refusal of injustice, which I showed by rebelling. It is a very delicate age, when one is very sensitive, how shall I say, and accepts absolutely nothing. There were times when I fought, literally, with different groups, even with boys, with boys in my school. There were times when I was the absolute leader of the class and that my classmates did what I wanted, not what they wanted, but I literally did anything I wanted in class. I walked out of classes, organized so that all my classmates would leave the class, I disrupted the class, got students out of the class using force... if I hated the professors. That was a form of rebellion that followed me

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<sup>12</sup> The strike of the Kosovo miners was in 1989

<sup>13</sup> *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

during my teenage years and it is who I am, nobody, you know, maybe it is not good to compare, but I felt like I was God on earth and that there was no one else. How shall I say, it was that period, the period of my youth and even with this transformation it is very interesting that I followed world trends and what happened in the world. I listened to Pink Floyd, Duran Duran, Bee-Gees, Abba. At that time they were very famous. Another period, how shall I say, a few clubs opened, like the one in the Salla e Kuqe [Red Hall] in Boro e Ramiz, the one in the basement of Hotel Grand, we went to clubs and were identified if we knew how to dance. I forgot to mention that I was a dancer, how shall I say, not the kind that goes on television, but I was a member of the cultural- artistic group Hivzi Sylejmani, which opened close to my house, in the local community. We used to practice for a certain period and then play Pink Floyd, Bee-Gees, Abba and danced until dawn. There I learned the first steps of Break Dance, Cha Cha Cha, Samba, and so on. How shall I say, this was a transformation that is a complete change from childhood. How shall I say, dancing, I haven't forgotten my steps and even now I'm known as an incredibly good dancer. I can dance any dance, from folk to pop, I am a capable dancer. Another characteristic is that, how shall I say, even at that time we had true differences among my friends.

Even though I was very skilled, I was “bad,” I was a problematic member of the group, but my studies were always a priority for me. From the first to the second year of high school, I never got a 4<sup>14</sup> in my report card. I always was an exemplary student, and students like me were always encouraged to go to the Sami Frashëri Gymnasium<sup>15</sup> in Pristina and the Xhevdet Doda Gymnasium, near Tre Sheshirat. But the only children allowed to attend these schools were the children whose parents held high positions, such as the children of directors, of leaders of the communist party, of the socialist party, whatever, who were the heads of the state. If you came from a middle class family, you were oriented towards other schools, which were also good, but this was an obvious division. If you went to the Gymnasium, how shall I say, there were only children, how shall I say, the “Buxhovane<sup>16</sup> children,”<sup>19</sup> who owned rich houses in Tasligje, Dragodan, Sunny Hill. These were children that had everything. If you weren't one of them, you were directed to the vocational high schools: the Normale, the Agriculture High School, the Economics High School, and the Technical High School, 19 Tetori. And you could see this real division within the city. And I won't even talk about the division between city and country, whose children for generations had no access to the best schools in Pristina. This situation in Pristina was the same almost all over Kosovo. Secondly, many times there were advantages depending on where you came from, if you came from Prizren or Gjakova, you had a lot of advantages. If you came from Podujevo, Vushtrri, or Mitrovica, you had very little advantages. Sometimes you could get in because they needed you to fill the quotas, so that they could maintain that they have students from other areas, how shall I say, in that regard everything I experienced as young person I experienced it in the Korzo<sup>17</sup> I don't know if you experienced what Korzo was, at the end of the school day, depending on the season, how shall I say, we used to go out from 18:00 until 22:00. We walked through what today is the Square, where the Korzo is, in four walking lines, how

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<sup>14</sup> Grade B on an A-F scale.

<sup>15</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

<sup>16</sup> Colloquialism for wealthy people, it could be used in a derogatory fashion.

<sup>17</sup> Main pedestrian street reserved for strolling, promenade.

shall I say, that were divided in two that went in separate directions, where today are some sort of sidewalks, and the middle of the Korzo, how shall I say, which began in the entrance of the Parliament and ended in front of Grand Hotel. We went out every night, and back then there were no coffee shops like now.

There were restaurants, however as a young person you could not go to a restaurant. It was considered immoral to go to a restaurant and drink something, a Coca-Cola or a coffee, it was called immoral. If you went to a restaurant to rest (laughs) which is a basic human need, how shall I say, it was considered immoral, if you went to a restaurant, how shall I say, you always had the fear that a relative saw you enter a restaurant by chance...this was the mentality and later a taboo. And what did you do in the Korzo, you bought some sunflower seeds and sat in what we call "the circle," which is where the Zahir Pajaziti statue is now. At that circle there were some benches, how shall I say, and my friends and I got together and sat on those benches and ate sunflower seeds. Now you can imagine, we were not even allowed to enter a restaurant to drink a glass of water, how shall I say, it was considered immoral, and I experienced those times. At that time, if you had long nails it was considered immoral, if you wore nail polish it was considered immoral, or if you put make up on, or lipstick, or an eyeliner, it was considered immoral. Dying your hair was considered inappropriate, "Why would a young girl dye her hair!?" How shall I say, all these were prejudice and stereotypes about us at that time and I experienced them personally. If you wore a mini-skirt, how shall I say, it was considered immoral. High heels were also considered immoral. For example, there were strict time periods when we were allowed to go out and others that we were not. We could go out until 19:00 and then come back home to watch cartoons, although we considered ourselves grown up and wanted to go out more. There were two or three coffee shops at that time, and especially Xheni café. It was a dream for all my peers at that time to sit there and drink a long espresso, but we only heard about it and never got to try the espresso. So these were some aspects of my youth, where it was a strict period and your family determined how you should act.

Meanwhile I also noticed transformations in the family, my oldest sister, who is not the oldest child, but the oldest of the girls, started going out with a boy. She met this boy, who is still with her, and they have been married for thirty-five years and they have grandchildren. However, I remember that my family was against their relationship because they had found one another by themselves, it was a total refusal, "We will not let you marry that boy," because he did not ask the family, how shall I say, the fact that the family opposed them was not peculiar to my family. But when my second sister found the man who is now her husband, my family was happy, even though they went out openly even though they were not engaged yet. He came to pick her up and we knew that she was going out with Jonuz, how shall I say, we knew him as family...how shall I say, you noticed the changes.

However, in that time, how shall I say, I had completely other interests. Also because my generation in my family, and now, my mother was sometimes put in an uncomfortable position because the daughter of my paternal uncle for example, and the daughter of my maternal aunt stayed home, wore long skirts, did wall rugs with crochet and all that...my interests were completely different from theirs. So in order to feel equal in the community where she lived and the people she had interaction with everyday, my mother would go to the market, at that time there were no stores, just the market, to buy wall rugs, to buy the threads for the wall rugs, she went to the market, and she bought the frame,

the fabric and the threads and she brought them home. She told me that as of that day I would crochet. I didn't even know how to do it, I didn't know anything. Or she would buy me different threads to make embroideries, the threads were white, cream, and various colors, and she would bring them home and she would tell me, "You have no choice but to learn how to crochet." Now I understand the reason why she pressured me, but I never showed interest in that. Now, I would take that knitting needles and that threads and go to my maternal aunt's daughter, the aunt who lived very near and with whom we only were a wall apart and say, "Take this and make some lines because I don't know," and "Make some lines so that when I go home I can tell my mother that I did some crochet." The moment I got home, I gave the news, how shall I say, the bombastic news for my mother, "Mother, I made some lines." And she took it to check whether I did it well or not. And I really had not done that work, however, how shall I say, it was every mother's mentality to prepare her daughter for a man, how shall I say, once the daughter was an adult, mature, at an age that she could take on responsibilities for her own family, she was gradually prepared for marriage.

To get ready for marriage meant to know how to clean, wash, iron, knit, cook and all the rest that a girl had to know how to do in the house... and only then she could be considered worthy to marry and be part of another family. These aspects related to marriage describe my youth in detail. I know how to play the tambourine and I sing very well, particularly the women's songs that we sang in kanagjegj,<sup>18</sup> which is also called the "Night of Kana" and where we sang the Kana.<sup>19</sup> I don't know, we do not follow those traditions anymore, but at that time it was very interesting, I know and remember everything in details. My mother, who was with me, was very proud on these events because I played the tambourine well and because of that, how shall I say, I was considered a worthy young woman in the house, because I knew how to play the tambourine, I knew how to sing, dance, be a good host and welcome people invited to the family parties, or wedding, or kanagjegj. How shall I say, these were the virtues that older generations wanted from girls, and these virtues meant that the girl was mature and prepared for marriage. Because I was not interested in any of those, many times I had conflicts with my mother; for my father, on the other hand, education was more important. How shall I say, many times I argued with my mother when I told her, "I cannot even imagine, for example, I cannot imagine myself being a bride in a household that has thirty people and always stand with a tray to serve tea!" how shall I say, that was an opposition. Or when I told her, "I cannot imagine myself with a wedding dress because that is not something I want or will do." So that way I would go against her and we would argue because she wanted to prepare my qeiz<sup>20</sup>, my paje.<sup>21</sup> But I did not show any interest in those crafts or pieces of cloth that were called qeiz: lace, klobodan,<sup>22</sup> mushna<sup>23</sup>, toled,<sup>24</sup> and all that... She made all of this for me, and I still have the qeiz, it is a memory of my mother. This is a memory and from time to time I take them out for airing purposes, I never lost any of them because they are a

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<sup>18</sup> Bridal shower.

<sup>19</sup> *Kana* is a hair color that lasts longer. Women dyed their hair with it when they got married. In some places it is also used for different drawings/tattoos on hands.

<sup>20</sup> Clothes and embroideries that fill up the bride's trousseau.

<sup>21</sup> Bride's trousseau.

<sup>22</sup> Set of pillow case and bed cover used on the day a woman gives birth, dialect from Llap region.

<sup>23</sup> Table cloth made by weaving loom, dialect from Llap region.

<sup>24</sup> Hand-made, embroidered table cloth, dialect from Llap region.

memory that I carry inside. Whenever I open those suitcases and I see all those memories, I remember my youth and my mother's efforts.

I am a sporty type, how shall I say, I wear jeans and trainers and my mother always tried to get me to build another image where I would wear skirts this long {shows the length below the knee}. How shall I say, young women wore skirts this long, no pants and no trainers, but I was the complete opposite of this type. At that time you didn't have stores where you could shop, how shall I say, my mother bought a piece of silk or something like that, and went to the tailor without taking my measurements, nothing. She asked the tailor to cut it the length she envisioned it, the way she wanted it, and the way she wanted me to wear it, how shall I say, in order to get ready to become a wife and a mother. But my interests always were at the opposite pole of that, youth, education and contacts with the outside world, because at that time, we only had Kosovo and could only move within it, in fact, we didn't even have access to Prizren, or Mitrovica, or Gjakova. We could only go to these places on a collective field trip, but not individually like now, "Come on, let's go to Prizren or let's go to Mitrovica because there's a good restaurant," or for fun, or for the weekend. At that time we didn't have that option because we couldn't afford it.

I remember, no, it is not a memory, it is a fact, among my relatives and the people I grew up with, I was the first woman to get a driver's license. I was always interested in cars. How many times I took my brother's car, I mean, his car keys, when he came back from work or he went to sleep, and I would literally steal his car keys and take the car out in the neighborhood because I did not dare to go to town by car... how to change the speed, when to stop, when to start the car, all these things happened like a miracle. I showed an interest, how shall I say, I was the first to get a driver's license, and once, it wasn't in my youth but it demonstrates what I am saying, I was in Skopje with the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] mission and we were waiting for a delegation. I had arrived from Austria and the bus driver from the OSCE, who was waiting, went to the cafeteria until the delegation arrived. But the bus was blocking part of the road in the Skopje Airport, so I opened the door from the outside, got inside the bus, which was an automatic bus. When I got in and started the bus, I mean, all the police and the other men turned to look at me. I was short and tiny and you can imagine the size of the bus compared to me and so I moved the bus from there...you know, even though a woman, I was always interested in cars. At times, I also drove motorcycles, a Kawasaki motorcycle, and I rode a bicycle when I was a kid. At that time we didn't have skis, but now, I knew how to ski. We used to take plastic beer boxes, and cut them, how shall I say, on the four corners {shows with her hands}, the plastic was clear. We took the knitting needles that our mothers used to make sweaters with, we heated them up and we used them to make holes in the plastic boxes and then put ropes through those holes. And then we tied that plastic to our feet and used them as skis. We would take very hot water and we would put the plastic in it until it got softer, and then rapidly we would fold the corners so that we would ski more smoothly. These were our skis at that time. We did not have a wooden sled, and we kids would beg our father to get us one. We were a lot of children. The wooden sleds were generally for two people, but we were five or six. So my father went to Ramiz Sadik, where there was a workshop, and he talked with the workers who built a steel sled that was the length from here to the door {points to the door of the room} they could barely carry it home. Five or six of us got on that sled and sled down the neighborhood. And there are infinite stories like this...



**Zana Rudi:** You talked about how you did not go along with what was asked from you, but you just briefly talked about what your interests were. I would like to know specifically what you did, what activities were you interested in, and what was the attitude of your family, given the circumstances.

**Nazlije Bala:** I will briefly tell you that in second grade I showed interest in musical instruments. First, I played the flute and then the clarinet, naturally, I had to practice the flute in order to move up to the clarinet. Our family lived in a place too small for me to practice my flute, the pentagram, the notes and all that...now, I would take the flute and the notebook on which I had written the pentagram, in the yard we had an old fruit tree, and I took the flute and the pentagram and climbed the tree. I practiced with my flute there, from which I was never asked to come down, even when perhaps I disturbed my family or when they didn't find it interesting that I was playing the flute, and every time they would say, "Book, books, go back to your books, do your homework." But I always learned all my lessons, and did the homework, I never went to school without doing my homework or being unprepared. But all the assignments that my teacher gave us were not enough for me. Maybe I was a hyperactive kid that always loved challenges...I never stopped playing the flute for twelve years, I played it all the time, and I can play both the flute and the clarinet even now.

Then sports...I never stopped playing sports. I took part in many marathons organized in Kosovo, whether it was in Pristina, or Gjilan, or Gjakova, or Prizren. I never stopped running until the situation deteriorated. Chess is still my hobby, I play it a lot with my family. Until now there's no relative of mine that has ever beaten me in chess. I love sports with a ball, how shall I say, and whenever we go on a picnic or just out in the country on a weekend, I like playing football, or passing the ball with hands, or bouncing the ball on your tiptoes, the name of which I can't remember.

It is very interesting that we had direct contact with livestock, whether the contact was with sheep, or cows, or the different poultry that we had in the family. Maybe because of that I like playing with animals, even today, horseback riding is a hobby of mine, and when I have free time or during the weekend, I go to Vali Ranch in Gjilan, this is not an advertisement for them, but I am just sharing that I go horseback riding in the country for four or five hours. Usually I see people along the way, and they look at me surprised that a woman is riding a horse, they do not understand and they wonder how a female can have those skills.

Shooting, how shall I say, is another skill of mine, but I never shot with a real gun, only with what we call air guns. Many times I took part in shooting competitions in the former Yugoslavia. How shall I say, these were my interests that didn't impress my family, they thought that I would not complete my studies, that I was sidetracked for a period of time. But with a lot of serious work and commitment, I managed to convince them that I never veered from the path that I set for myself. So these are some of my hobbies that I still love to do and I practice them.

Maybe the hardest period for me as a person, as Nazlije, not for my family, was when I started to be directly involved with the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms. I didn't have any obstacles from my family in terms of starting work, but they were worried because at that time many members of the Council got arrested and were sent to prison. Well, most of them were tortured by the police, which is something that I experienced too, in different ways. Maybe my family was worried

because I was a young woman and they were worried that I will be harmed and the consequences of this harm would be long lasting. But later they supported me, and they have been my main supporters in all these years of activism. The biggest support primarily came from my parents, and then from my brothers and sisters. I have tried and will continue to try to pass on to my nieces and nephews the spiritual independence that a person should have within, the personal path that they should build for themselves, and encourage them to have a goal in life and work to reach it. I am proud of them as they have specific paths and crystal clear goals for the way they are going to live their lives. I don't want either my nieces or my nephews to go through what I have gone through in different phases, I don't want that for the new generations of Kosovo, I always try to pass that on to them. Don't forget, it is also about collective forgetfulness, the way one lives in their families and the different events they experience are different for example for my parents and someone else's parents, and they explain different forms of lifestyles.

## Activism

*[Part cut out from the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about her years of activism.]*

I became a member of the Council for Human Rights soon after it was established in 1989 and a short time later I was a full-time activist of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms. The amount of work in the Council was colossal, which now is hard to understand. We had a lot of direct work in the field, with all the people whose rights were violated in one form or another by the regime of Milošević, until 1999, and the Council still works today. I was a field coordinator, however independently this position of field coordinator was, we did not look at the position and the duties of an activist, her role, her responsibilities. In fact, our focus and interest, our main focus, was always to get the information, to process it, to analyze it, and to write a report. Then we sent this report to various international agencies, embassies, and different governments, so that they could have complete and accurate information of the human rights violations of the Milošević regime.

There are some indescribable stories that I experienced as an activist on the Council. There is one story that is incredibly sad for me. How shall I say, when the wars in Bosnia and Croatia began, the colonization of Kosovo began, with the refugees from Knin and the refugees from Bosnia but most of refugees were from Croatia, Serbs from Croatia who were brought to Kosovo. They built camps in certain parts of Kosovo. There was a refugee camp close to Vushtrri with Serbs from Knin and other parts of Croatia, how shall I say, I mean, refugees who were very extremist. Many of them wore uniforms of the reserve police, how shall I say, they joined the police force of Kosovo. Many others started working as judges, lawyers, prosecutors, in various institutions because at that time Albanians had been completely expelled from the institutions. A thirteen-year-old kid was killed with a hand grenade by the refugee Serbs who had come from Knin, the villages were very close to one another. It was Bajram, Bajram i Madh.<sup>25</sup> It was a day off, but none of us ever took a day off, because we knew that we had to be on standby to go to the office, to get any kind of information ready, or go out to the field and take pictures, it depended on the case. There had been a group of children playing in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Eid*, see supra footnote.

field. They were playing in the fields that their family owned, how shall I say, literally... when a car with Serb refugees passes by and they simply took the grenade and threw it at the kids, and this thirteen-year-old kid died. Some others were injured, some had fractures, and others lost limbs. The next day we had a delegation, among whom was the former special rapporteur for human rights for the Balkans, Elizabeth Wren, and I had to prepare the complete dossier with all the material for the event that took place on Bajram; we added this to the other materials that we always gave every delegation in Kosovo. There was a vivid picture, among the photos, the weekly reports, the quarterly reports, the semiannual reports, and the annual reports. We always prepared dossiers that were based on facts and arguments. In this case we could not communicate by phone, the only information we had we heard it on the radio.

My colleagues at that time were Ibrahim Makolli, today the Minister of Diaspora, Mimoza Ahmetaj, today the Ambassador to Slovenia. There was Halime, who is now a Senior Official in the Ministry of Defense... Zina and Fisi, I cannot mention the entire team, how shall I say, the managing staff with uncle Adem<sup>26</sup>, Bajram Kelmendi<sup>27</sup>, Nekibe<sup>28</sup>, all the activists who at the time were in the Council. We all worked together and went to the place of the incident, took pictures, took statements from people, and then we went to get the pictures developed. And after the whole film was developed and we got all the pictures, we went back to the office, did an analysis, prepared the dossier, I mean, until eight in the morning, we worked as a team and without a break. At 10am, we had the meeting with the delegation and Elizabeth Wren, the UN delegation. Maybe there was a will, we all felt a sense of obligation, a great responsibility, how shall I say, to identify and prove to the world the kind of human rights violations that took place in Kosovo. Every human right that is recognized world-wide, in different conventions, which is the basis on which countries operate, was violated in Kosovo. I explained that one fundamental aspect of this was the will, the preparation, and the commitment to work. Maybe my family, how many times did they know that I was out until eight in the morning, but they didn't know if I would come back home alive. Every time we expected to be arrested, every time we expected to be beaten by the police, every time we expected to be kidnapped. Today, a former colleague of ours, Xhavit Shala, he was kidnapped in 1998 and we still don't know anything about him today. I am telling what we knew when we went to work: we left home at eight, but we never had any guarantee that we would go back to our families alive and healthy. We did a lot of work, today I am still proud of that.

For years I worked as a human rights activist in Kosovo. Besides this work, I also took part in other activities, but they were always linked to one another. I cooperated directly with Human Rights Watch, I cooperated directly with Amnesty International, I cooperated directly with many international

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<sup>26</sup> *Bac* Adem = *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful term for an older person. Adem is Adem Demaçi, an 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.

<sup>27</sup> Lawyer and human rights activist, he filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

<sup>28</sup> Wife of Ibrahim Kelmendi, also a lawyer and human right activist, after the war she was a member of Parliament for the LDK and served as Minister of Justice from 2008 through 2010. She died in 2011.

televisions such as CNN, BBC, Sky News, Euro News, how shall I say, every time we have been reporting directly on the situation in Kosovo. I joined later, in 1997, when the situation had already escalated, I joined the OSCE mission. How shall I say, for the period I was working with the Council I was also a member of Kosovo's Women Network. I was also a co-founder of the Center for the Protection of Women and Children of Kosovo, because women and children were always my priority, because men usually experience one kind of violence, while women experience three or four times as much within the family. I contributed to many different processes in Kosovo, such as the formation of the Association Nenë Tereza as a humanitarian association, how shall I say, I took part in the formation of the Emergency Council at the time, how shall I say, the formation of the League of Women, every time, how shall I say, in the movement, that every time I felt a responsibility to be part of these processes. I participated in many international conferences always with my specific focus, the presentation of the Kosovo side to the world.

I was honored with different awards, in 2000, I was honored with the Award for Peace, which was awarded by the French government for the first time in Europe. There was one, who now is the Nobel Prize laureate from Kenya, we two have been awarded that prize. And I have many other awards from different international and local organizations. I was also a co-organizer of many big protests for women in Kosovo that took place at that time. At that time it was myself, Igo, Sevdije Ahmeti, Aferdita Saraqini, Vjosa Dobruna, how shall I say, not a very big group, Naxhije Buçinca, I apologize for not mentioning other names but I cannot remember. So we were co-organizers of different protests such as: "Food for Drenica", "March for Drenica," in support of the KLA [Kosovo Liberation Army]. I also had direct contacts with the U.S. State Department, NATO, the European Union and other decision-making organizations. Later in 1997-1998, I joined the Verification Mission in Kosovo, which was with the OSCE and KDOM,<sup>29</sup> how shall I say, it was an American Mission, in fact, it was a military mission. My job at the OSCE, specifically in the Department of Human Rights, was monitoring and implementing the ceasefire agreement that was agreed between the KLA and the Milošević army, or regime. That agreement was never respected by the regime of Milošević, on the contrary, the violence in Kosovo increased three or four times.

## War

*[Part cut out from the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about the period od war.]*

Besides being surrounded by heavy artillery, that began at the time, how shall I say, different massacres began. I was directly involved in writing the report for the case of Raçak that happened in 1998<sup>30</sup>. It was a month-long struggle for the family members and the OSCE mission to get the bodies back. At that time, it was impossible to bring an investigative team of medical and legal forensic experts from the Hague Tribunal, led by Luisa Arbour. They were turned around at the border of Macedonia, then, they authorized five people within the OSCE to investigate the case. And I was the

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<sup>29</sup> Kosovo Diplomatic Mission, American military intelligence mission within the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission.

<sup>30</sup> The exact date of that massacre was January 15, 1999.

only Albanian to be a part of the investigation, and today my signature is in the report which was used to indict Milošević in the Hague Tribunal. I also did a lot of direct interviews with Albanian refugees, in Macedonia I did over 8,000 interviews on different things that people experienced.

But what has left a scar in my spirit, because we worked for others when we came back, was that for two years I led the process of opening mass graves in Kosovo. I personally participated in opening the graves and I never hesitated to get inside the grave until here {touches her chest, showing the depth of the grave} and directly confront the situation and the bodies, no matter their age, gender, or how hard it was. The hardest case for me was the case of the Maçastena and Bogujevci family, who were from the Podujevo-Llap region. The whole family was executed, it was a massacre against the Albanian population and it was very hard, how shall I say, to open that grave and start identifying the members of the Bogujevci and Maçastena family. Among the youngest members of the family, there was a one year old child. The moment we had the first contact with his body, he naturally did not have an identity card, a passport, or any other identifying documents, we only found some small cards that he held tight to his chest. The second body was a seven-year-old girl. She was holding on to a Barbie doll that she had with her because she didn't know what a war was. This way we identified the eighteen members of the Bogujevci and Maçastena family, one by one, we identify them and how shall I say, we reburied them. At the end, only one member of this family was still alive, how shall I say, and he asked me, "Nazlie, what now? And where to?" And in that moment, you can't find an answer or a comforting word for them. There are moments when you see him in front of the graves of his closest family members, his most sacred people - we as a nation are crazy about our families because we have extraordinary connection with our families - but at that moment you cannot find words to comfort them, and there is nothing you can say.

Other sad moments for me are the experiences of sexual violence of girls and women in Kosovo, these experiences are still in my memory, they are in my brain. I will never, ever, forget, not even for a moment, a thirteen-year-old from the Suhareka region who was raped in an orgy, how shall I say, they had an orgy with that girl. The tent where I stayed, where I worked, was close to the tent of her family from Suhareka, from a village in the surroundings of Suhareka. Her mother noticed that I was taking statements, but she was pressured by her father-in-law and didn't dare to seek help, because the oldest man in the family considered what had happened to that thirteen-year-old girl "shame for the family." He asked, how shall I say, every night, his son and his daughter-in-law to kill the girl, because what had happened was "shame for the family." And this thirteen-year-old was not well mentally, how shall I say, she was not like her peers. Meanwhile her mother contacted me and she told me the whole story. And naturally, I took the statement and, along with Igo and other activists, asked Save the Children, Oxfam and many other organizations to help us put up a big tent where we could bring together these girls, wherever we could find them in Qegran<sup>31</sup>. We wanted to create an environment for their re-socialization in refugee life... I was a refugee myself, how shall I say, and it didn't matter that I worked with the OSCE, I was equal with other refugees, I was a refugee with all the others.

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<sup>31</sup> Refugee camp in Macedonia.

And in the meantime, after the conversation with that girl and her mother, I remember that it was Igo who organized activities, the resocialization of the girls, when they sang, they clapped their hands...they weren't being themselves, we needed to not be ourselves. Maybe, that numbness that came from the war, the numbness that came from being outside our homes, the numbness that came from what had happened, we will go back there, or...there was no information about where the family was, we did not have information about who and where are located. And I talked to Igo, I told her, "Igo, here there is the case of a thirteen year old girl, she is not in a normal state, she has been raped; they had an orgy with her, but the family is putting another pressure on her." And Igo told me, "Please Nazlie bring her, but please don't tell me which one she is, because I can't restrain myself." And, I mean, after a certain time, I managed to get the girl out of the tent, she did it on her own will, she was not forced. We went to the tent, and we saw many girls her age, who were singing, and clapping hands, reciting verses...different activities. Usually girls sang with the tambourine, however, when we sat with them, Igo and I and all the other activists were with them...we had the need, really had the need to sing. And the girl comes and sits in the middle of all the other girls, I mean, for the first time she began to laugh. For the first time in two months she began to contact the outside world, she was isolated in the tent all the time. It was strange, It was amazing for me, it was something that gave me shivers even today when I remember {sighs}. And for the first time she looked for the tambourine, she asked for the tambourine and said, "Aunt Nazlie, are you singing?" "Yes, yes honey, sing, sing, and I will sing with you." Igo on the other hand could not stop crying, she turned her back {turns her back}. Even the other activists that knew the girl's story, and the song that she sang, two songs "A vritet pafajësia?" [Has innocence been killed?] and "Oj Kosovë, oj nana ime" [O Kosovo, my mother]. She sang non-stop, and I tried in different ways to hide from her, because I couldn't refrain myself, I couldn't stop the tears for one moment. These moments for me are the most precious moments, even though they are painful; I returned a thirteen-year-old to our company, where we worked as activists. We worked with different organizations, but we achieved to return a thirteen-year-old girl to the company of her friends, despite the family's pressure where she was considered as the "shame of the family." I was haunted by the lives of these girls for thirteen years, and they will haunt me until there is justice for them. So, the cases of rape are silenced, even though it is estimated that there are near twenty two thousand women and girls that were raped by paramilitaries, soldiers, and police, civilians and so.

However, they are not seen as war victims, even though rape is considered a tool of war by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and The Hague Tribunal and various International Conventions, rape is considered a tool of war. On the other hand, we have denied that these twenty two thousand victims are among us, they live with us; maybe we see them every day, and we don't know that they are victims who live a great injustice [cries]. If we have attained to rehabilitate all the war categories, may they be veterans, or families of martyrs, children of martyrs, disabled people because of the war...All the categories that the war considers deserving, we've done a great injustice to them, that as a society, we can never be forgiven for. So, we've done injustice, and those twenty two thousand victims still live with the greatest injustice that can exist. [Sighs].

**Zana Rudi:** Is there a specific moment, before or after the war, that stands out for you, maybe you could explain the situation in a different way, something that you talk about ... from your side?

**Nazlije Bala:** The stories are different from one moment to another. Each of them has a particular character. The very nature of my work for the Council was...we put our lives at risk many times. I would highlight a case in the district of Deçan, I don't recall exactly whether it was in the village of Shapej or Baballoq, a murder that was committed by Serbian colonists, they had come from Knin, refugees from Knin resettled in Kosovo. At that time they built houses for Serbian refugees in different places. A murder in the Cacaj family happened in that exact place. As the team of the Council, we went there to collect evidence about the case, to take pictures and all the rest with my colleagues.

The first characteristic of that case, how shall I say, what impressed me...at that time there was no chance to be exposed to different local traditions and cultures in Kosovo. The second thing that stuck with me was the way that the boy was murdered, he was a young man. The third thing was that his family immediately came from Switzerland, because they weren't present when he was murdered. And the fourth, that night we slept in the kulla, unable to return to Pristina because of the risk. And the dialogue, the debate with the old woman of the place. After we made all of the examinations, the arrival and preparation of the dead body, the first contact of the parents, especially of his mother, with the dead body and that way of mourning, how they hugged the dead body, everything. Now, comes the dilemma of whether to believe in the law of nature, or a physical process which the body makes. We were very close to the body, and suddenly we saw tears in the corpse. We saw the tears flow from the meeting of the mother with her young son who was murdered. Secondly, the form and the way of organizing the men separately from the women. Meanwhile I, as Nazlie, couldn't be removed from there, because I was on a mission, I had a special task, and at one moment they said {raises her voice} "No, no, this one is with us, she should not be removed from here." Only my work position would allow me to stay there, all other women weren't allowed.

In the evening, as all the ceremonies ended, with the old woman...they were big kulla, I said, "Let's go inside." We went inside and she said, "No, my dear, you know the rules...only men go in there" and I said "Yes, but I cannot leave because I must be with my colleagues," because we needed to conduct some interviews and continue the process. She said, "Do you know that no woman's foot has ever stepped into the oda of Baballoq?" I don't recall whether that was the exact name, then I asked, "Who did not step in?" She said, "Never. It is our tradition that women never go in the oda." I told her, "Whether they stepped in or they didn't, I will go in!" I went inside, there were all men there, and I was the only woman and exactly on that moment the oldest man of the house said, "Call the old lady!"...so the old woman would keep me company. As the conversations went on, I turned and told the old woman, "Grandma, say something, talk, tell us a story," which is in accordance with our traditions and customs. I will never forget what the old woman said, I still remember her words nowadays, and they serve as a lesson to me. She said, "What?... What do I have to say? When I was little they told me 'Be silent', when I grew up a little, and when I reached puberty, they said 'Be silent because it's shameful if you talk,' when I got married they told me, 'You as a woman of the fis<sup>32</sup> cannot talk,' when I got older they told me 'Be silent because you don't know anything, you're stupid.'" She described a process in which she had to be silent without being able to offer anything more.

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<sup>32</sup> *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that like the Latin *gens* includes individuals who share an ancestor.

Another moment that I remember, because you know, life is nothing but memories, were the murders in Qirez and Likoshan, especially the killings of the Ahmeti family. It is a chronology, a story that makes anyone who hears it shiver, one does not have to see it in a film, but can discuss it: the rape of the Ahmeti women and girls and the resistance of the Ahmeti family that we did not write absolutely anywhere that they were raped. They acknowledged the killing as killing, the macabre killing of more than twenty people who were massacred in their yard, but they resisted the acknowledgement of what was in fact part of the war, what had happened to the women and the girls. We continued to insist that it should be part of the statements they gave and part of history, that sexual violence should be highlighted, sexual violence should be recorded.

Another memory that stands out for me is my first meeting with the two daughters of the legendary commander, Adem Jashari<sup>33</sup>, it was in 1997<sup>34</sup>...the first attack on the family had happened in January of 1997, these two girls were injured in the attack. I will never forget the first time I saw Adem Jashari alive, he came to the kulla, visited us and wished us good work; the form and way of talking with him, the first direct contact with Hamëz<sup>35</sup>, Shaban<sup>36</sup> and other family members. You could never know that later that this family will lead us to freedom, to the liberation of Kosovo and the starting point of all this would be the name of this family. Another memory is the massacre of the entire family in January '98...It was March, not January, it was 5, 6, 7 March. The second time I went there was to identify the corpses, to photograph them to record the case, as a case. But I saw those two girls dead among the dead, I saw the legendary commander and his family dead among the dead.

Another case that I remember and would draw attention to, is the Raçak case, the so called “war for the bodies.” It is very well known that Raçak was a big turning point, however there was a one month long battle between the Kosovo Liberation Army and Serbian military forces for the bodies. Technically, the bodies were hostages of the Serbian forces. They did not allow either the burials or the performance of autopsies and all other troubles, I know, lasted for over a month. I have various memories of this story. Part of the work as an activist on the Council at the same time, I remember now there was a group, not too big, a very small group of women who organized marches and different protests in Kosovo. I'm talking about marches and protests that have rocked the world, shaken the world. We managed to bring together more than 300 women in Pristina to organize the march “For Drenica.” Obviously that march didn't succeed or reach its goal of really walking to Drenica because we were stopped on the road. But it succeeded in raising our voice, not self-awareness, but it really woke up the international community concerning the killings and massacres that were happening at that time in Kosovo.

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<sup>33</sup> Adem Jashari, also known as “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>34</sup> The exact date of the attack is January 22, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Brother of Adem Jashari, also killed in the same attack.

<sup>36</sup> Father of Adem Jashari, also killed in the same attack.



The chronology of many events has become part of me and wherever I go nowadays in the field, when I travel, there is no village or city of which I don't have a certain memory, or some story or event linked to a certain place. Those memories for me are bitter, though. Those people I've seen in the places where I have been, I have worked, are not with us anymore because they are not alive. There is always a memory, a story, wherever I have been or worked.

**Zana Rudi:** Nazlie, can you tell us a little about your dreams at that time, what was your vision at that time, and can you tell us whether something of that became true?

**Nazlije Bala:** There was a cause, an idea, which was always there, generation after generation, from the time we were kids and then later when we grew up, we were always engaged in this process. The vision and ideal that we all had...the liberation of Kosovo, to breathe freely, to be completely free, to develop our country, all those ideals for which people sacrificed themselves. Maybe for a flag, someone would get sentenced twenty to thirty years in jail. But in relation to the vision and the ideal, if you worked to free and develop this place in that form and way which...we all had dreams. But in relation to the current situation, to the life we live today, it seems to me that we have deviated from that vision and deviated from that ideal. You cannot find today the parameters and the framework we had in our heads.

I don't want to sound radical, because I am not radical at heart, but sometimes when I think about some moments where I was present, when the oath of the Kosovo Liberation Army fighter was made..."I will fight for this country, for this flag," I am transported back to that scene, where is this oath of the soldier, for which he sacrificed and sworn that he would give his life? I wonder whether we could have thirteen years after the war...truly, that vision of the people who have idealized freedom as freedom, justice as justice, did we realize only a little in practice?

I think we are very far from that vision, very far from that ideal, we live in an almost ad-hoc political situation which does not offer any vision whatsoever, doesn't offer any kind of ideal, because in order to be a patriot, a visionary, an idealist, you need to have something deep inside your heart, that occupies a soft spot in your heart, or the general concept of the state as a state. I don't know, I have not seen or experienced the good things of our state yet, the foundation of the state, that development of the state, that framework for which we all fought, and all that blood was shed. I would not like to delve into details because I do not have that vision and I don't want to sound pessimistic, because all of us can change a lot. We all can, it is not easy, but if we all sit down and think and really want what's best for this country, for these people and for this nation, for the honor of all those who have given their lives for the state and for freedom, we need to change ourselves to change the others. If we don't create that concept and that vision in our heads, I am afraid the current situation will last for many years and we will eventually lose that initial vision of how to create a state. There are many situations that really discourage me, it is not that you have to be engaged in politics to understand politics, I think that politics is in every day and every step we take, anywhere we work. When we look at reality and compare with the dreams we had, I think that we are really far from realizing them. If the Kosovo we dreamed of, I am saying conditionally, a "Second Switzerland"...we know how Switzerland is, we know its development, we know its capacities, then, where is that Kosovo that we have dreamed of? We had visions for Kosovo to be a state with great resources, with great sources of

natural wealth, that would have brought progress and development in the country. Today we face 45% unemployment, of this 60% are young people, our army. Where is that development and where are those resources which I have dreamed of for so long, for which I would sacrifice everything again from the beginning, of the Kosovo we dreamed of as a place with equality for all. We all have experienced discrimination, apartheid, segregation, and violations of basic human rights in a form or another. We are those same people who have fought and resisted, but we will bear the consequences on our shoulder if we allow something like that to happen nowadays in Kosovo again. I am not saying that there is segregation or apartheid in Kosovo, but there is extreme violation of human rights. Denial is a big value in our society. The scene is of people with no values governing the state, but I think that those people with no values will end one day, and the dreams of our youth where there is progress, development will come out to light, will appear later, that everyone will build her life in a form and in the way she knows.

**Zana Rudi:** I know that you have told us many stories, can you elaborate on something more personal?

**Nazlije Bala:** I want to tell you about a detail. After the war, maybe I mentioned this, with Igo we were trying to declare “Heroines”...women victims of sexual violence, we had meetings with the current Prime Minister of Kosovo. Thirteen years after that, today when you try to ask for the rights for those who suffered from the greatest injustice, even for the people who are the closest to us, we are only “victims of sexual violence” - this is a shame, if you have thought about war invalids, you have met their rights with a law and they are civilian victims of the war. The families of the martyrs are included in the law as civilian victims of the war, independently from the fact that they are victims or not. What are these 20,000 rape victims? Whose victims are they? We know they are victims of war, but what did you do as a state about this issue? If you have heard of many wars, I'm talking especially about the Bosnian war, we had direct contacts, we met with the victims, we had discussions and debates. When I start to compare, we had the same oppression, the same oppressor, we fought against the same people, in Kosovo, in Bosnia and in Croatia. They used the same methods of war, there was absolutely no difference in the methods and forms of war. Rapes happened there, they happened in Kosovo too, massacres there, massacres here, massacre in Kosovo. It seems like it was the same scenario, nobody could avoid the Serbian scenario. Thirteen years after, we asked for the rights of those victims of the greatest violation, of all women victims of sexual violence. For thirteen years we asked that these women be treated equally. Thirteen years are not little, and in thirteen years we could find that bit of justice in our institutions of which we have dreamed for so long, that one day we have our parliament, our government, our army, our police, our laws, our court, and our prosecutors that worked according to the rule of law. We have suffered and have been through a lot, and as a nation we suffered great injustice. Now you're asking something from your own government, something that is worthy, something that we should maintain in our collective memory, that none of us wishes should fall into collective oblivion. As a society, we shouldn't forget the victims of rape. Another thing that bothers me, because I have that anger deep inside of me, is that we didn't succeed in creating a monument, a symbol, even if it was as plain as two letters written somewhere on a wall, for the women of Kosovo.

When I remember what she [women] has done for society...her contribution was twice as big in the hard times that we faced. There is no symbol whatsoever of women, of their sacrifice, their ideal, to

praise or honor the contribution they have given to this country, and this is the base of the “anger” I have inside. It is not anger towards the institutions, definitely not, because after all, the institution as such is only a building, a construction, it is not against people, but I am criticizing their politics, and their approach towards what we as women activists never stopped asking for! Often I get angry at myself, “What did I work for all these years?” Twenty-three years are not little. I automatically connect this to the period after the war, when we built our own institutions, where we built our system of justice and I just do not want to believe that there exists great injustice in our Kosovo after the war, the country we dreamed of and now we have, when will our dreams become reality. I cannot believe and for me it is difficult to understand that if we knew how to organize a solidaristic society, we knew how to help each other in bad times, today I get cold shivers when I see scenes of the television show “I am Kosovo, too.” I cannot believe that poverty has gotten to that level, and that does not leave any impact on the institutions, the state, people working in these institutions. I don't know if they feel it is their obligation or responsibility towards the ones who actually worked and built those dreams and ideals. I simply cannot believe, and I never agree with the different things that happen in the institutions for which we fought and sacrificed. It happened to me several times that I went to the municipality and could never finish the stuff I went for, I went to a Ministry and faced millions of hierarchies and bureaucracies to obtain services that the state as a state is called to give to its citizens. I cannot believe that this institution which we claim must be very strong because it runs everything...We must create different pressures from the society for the state to work for certain social categories, for example single mothers, a category that I am very concerned about because they don't have the right to social assistance, they don't receive any benefits at all from the state. There is also the problem of the elderly, I meet elderly people every day, we have elderly people at home. My father worked more than forty years as a medical technician who had to work almost 24 hours a day. It is a shame that the old do not enjoy their elderly life as they should. We all have parents, and we want the best for them, forty years of work can't just be forgotten that easily. There are a lot of situations in which I feel a kind of anger, I don't feel radical or anything, I just feel anger. Everywhere in the world there are set dates by the state to commemorate and remember those who are missing, only in Kosovo we don't have a specific date when we could pause and remember those who are no longer among us, those we don't absolutely know where they are and whether they are alive, they have been killed or not, and if so, where are they buried? This is with no comment, no text. What do those institutions work for?

Another issue for which I don't blame only the institutions and the government is when a few days ago in front of the Parliament building a protest “For the Missing” was held, and we know the exact number of the missing, and surprisingly there was a very small number of participants in this protest to address the issue of the missing. There were people just passing by who only turned their heads, and had absolutely no particular reaction to the issue at the center of the protest, addressed by the protest. It seems that we have become totally different people than we were before, from the closeness and solidarity we had, from no patience for the different violations of the life of citizens. This is lacking now and I miss it too as Nazlie, because there is often a dose of general pessimism in our society, even though I try to offer courage, that we are the ones who need to make change happen, we are the ones who need to take initiatives to lead, to take action in this country. However, there is this general mentality of everyone for himself, and I will stay indifferent and won't care about anything

that happens around me. In regard to equality, we miss that essential part that sets the mechanisms, the direction, or that starts those machines that never stop. But I will not give up, how does the saying go, “Don’t leave any stone unturned,” don’t stop trying...to truly raise this self-awareness and leave this mentality behind that “If there is someone who works for me I will not work,” we must move forward together.

What is really sad and I absolutely don't want to brag, but I think the institutions need me very much. I see that they need me because I know what it takes to work there. I have applied to many job vacancies, to key positions, but the answers are...and I am saying this publicly, I always made it to the job interviews without recommendations, anything, in the job where I am. And the greatest anomaly in the answers that I get is, “Nazlie, we are very sorry, we know who you are, we how hard you work, we know your capacities, your will and energy, and all that, but there is a person from the party and we need to employ that person,” and then you stop and think about it. We know that the parties came to the scene, we know parties create power, we know parties govern the institutions, but do we dare to let these people, who have no critical thinking, no vision, no serious answer for the problems of society, do we dare to leave the institutions, really, in the hands of party members? It is very clear that for thirteen years the institutions have been led by party members. We have a perfect example, a case study, a case where party members consider the government a workplace, but not as a place where you make social changes and offer good policies to society.

But how many people are in the same position as I am, and have experienced the same situations millions of times...and yes we are those same people who didn't just let go. We never hesitated to change this form, this way of life in Kosovo...and we always believed that whoever serves this country has to serve where she must, where she belongs, and not for herself nor for a certain circle of people. We did not dream of this and we did not create this vision where the institutions serve only a certain group of people, because that is exactly what is happening in Kosovo. It is extremely depressing, often I felt depressed, because I have not dreamed of this. If we go deeper inside the family, we find the family is by itself an institution, and the state has a direct, diagonal relation with the family. And if unfortunately that family is not touched as an institution, what are the demands of that family, how do they live, what are the needs of that family? Do they need a better health system? Better education? Do they need better development? Is there need for improving its well-being? This is the diagonal link of the state and today I, as Nazlie, have never felt the impact of that state, where you feel the touch of someone that leaves a trace on your body. When I say that as Nazlie I live and do not feel safe in my place, I don't feel the hand of the state that protects me. I am guaranteed from the state in all forms which I mentioned earlier in the spheres of health, education, schooling, emancipation, progress, economy, or general well-being. I am talking as an individual...but where is the other part of society? And how does that dream from before the war coincide with the reality I am facing after the war, it is far from the reality of Kosovo...