

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SUZANA GËRVALLA

Pristina | Date: July 9, 2016

Duration: 90 minutes

Present:

1. Suzana Gërvalla (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Suzana Gërvalla: I am Suzana Gërvalla. I was born in Skopje on March 23, 1949.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us about your early memories, the family and *rreth*¹ you grew up in?

Suzana Gërvalla: I have a, a very interesting childhood. I will tell you about it. I had two pairs of parents, that is why I will tell you. My parents went to live to Plava, and you know at that time, Montenegrins put a lot of pressure on Albanians, Muslims and Albanians in general, at the time before the war... and they took their lands, they beat them, they wanted to forcibly change their religion and put them into churches and... change their names and everything. So, my parents were forced to leave Plava and everything there.

And they went to Gjakova, because the maternal uncles of my father, I mean, my grandmother was from Gjakova, and they went to Gjakova. And I will actually tell you. The paternal aunt of my father was the wife of *Hoxhë*² Nokshiq, that is, the mother of Esad Mekuli.³ I mean, Esad Mekuli is the son of my father's paternal aunt. When they went to Gjakova, they lived there for some years... that is where my father finished his school, because the Madrasa used to be a school back then, he finished his school there...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember the year? Which year?

¹ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

² Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

³ Esad Mekuli (1916-1993), was an Albanian poet and scholar. He was the first president of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo. Robert Elsie considered him the father of modern Albanian poetry in Yugoslavia, and his influence in Kosovo remains immense.

Suzana Gërvalla:... a long time, long time before the Second World War, long time before that. Then they left for Skopje, just as they would go to Turkey back then, they thought of going to Turkey, they settled in Skopje and didn't go to Turkey. They bought a house in Skopje where they lived. I mean, my grandfather, grandmother, my father with his brother and his two sisters lived there.

After the war, after the war, that house was rented by a couple from Istog. And they lived in that house together with them for 16 years. Since my mother was a *malësore*,⁴ she had a very big heart. When the lady who had come, her name was Ema, and Ahmet was her husband, they came from Istog, she failed one pregnancy and the doctor told her that she could never get pregnant again. In the meantime, my mother had a son and a daughter before me, and she was pregnant with me. But they were so close, they were like sisters, and my mother felt bad and told her, "No matter what my child's gender is, I will give it to you." And that's how it happened.

As long as she was breastfeeding me, she kept me in her room and when I was finished, she sent me to her [Ema's] room. They would eat and live all together. Until '63, when the Skopje earthquake happened, that is when the house got destroyed and they had to separate. In the meantime, I took the lastname of my father from Istog, Ahmet, and my last name is Shoshi. And then when we went to split the property, Ahmet and Ema took a flat together with me, while my father was given another house. That is where I started missing, I mean, I didn't miss my parents because I had very good parents, but I started missing my grandmother, whom I loved a lot, as well as my two sisters and my brother.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old were you back then?

Suzana Gërvalla: I was 14 years old when we separated. However, Ema, my second mother, would send me there everyday so that I wouldn't get sad. We would go and visit them after school. That is how my life was. Then in '63...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of education did you have at that time, or what kind of activities?

Suzana Gërvalla: Besides school, I attended a ballet school in Skopje as well. I attended the ballet school for six years until I broke a toe and my mother didn't allow me to go anymore (laughs). Skopje was very advanced at that time. I actually must say that there was... there was ice skating and everything in Skopje, while on the other hand, Kosovo and Albania were way more behind. Because we would often come to Kosovo, to Peja.

⁴ Feminine for literally, mountain people, but it can also be used to refer to people from *Malësia*, or *Malësi e Madhe* (literally Great Highlands), a region largely inhabited by Albanian speaking people, which lies to the East of Podgorica in modern day Montenegro, along the Lake of Shkodra in modern day Albania, next to Kosovo.

My father, father Ahmet who raised me and the paternal uncle of Jusuf who raised Jusuf, they were really good friends in Peja. They were in the army together and they were very close friends. So, we would often go to them in Peja and they would often come to us in Skopje. So, Jusuf and I met when we were children, we met, and of course we were friends. Because... I will tell you.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When you came to Kosovo, how was that... I mean, your final move to Kosovo?

Suzana Gërvalla: Then, when I turned 16, the relation with Jusuf changed. He started writing letters to me (laughs), another relationship, not just a friendship. We wrote letters to each other for two years. He would come sometimes, then he came to Pristina to study and would sometimes come to Skopje to visit me. When, when I turned 18, Jusuf was 21, I was 18 and we got married. I went to Pristina. Of course, my parents knew Jusuf, but they didn't want because they would say, "Finish school, both of you, and don't get married so young."

However, Jusuf decided that we had to get married, so did I... Jusuf came to Skopje to visit me. In the morning, when I woke up to go to school, he was still there. Because he wouldn't sleep there every night, but would return in the evening. He was waiting for me there and said, "I won't go without you" (laughs). And so, he took me with him. We got on the train. I sent a telegram to my mother telling her that, "I left with Jusuf, and we came to Pristina." But where would we go in Pristina? He was staying in the dormitory. So, he sent me to the women dormitory and he was staying at men dormitory.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When were you at the dormitories ?

Suzana Gërvalla: On February 27, 1990, no, in 1967, we got married. Some days later, the maternal uncle of Jusuf found out. He took us and we went to Peja. They organized me a small ceremony. My parents came, we reconciled. So, we continued. Yes, we returned to Pristina again. But where to stay? We stayed at [Jusuf's] maternal uncle's in Peja for three months. We took a flat. We suffered a lot. But we had a great love and that helped us get through.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us more details about that period?

Suzana Gërvalla: I will only tell you one fact. At that time, we changed ten flats in Pristina. Flats, they call them flats because they weren't so, we were.... For example, we had a flat where when the sun shone, because there were sticks, the sun would come inside, that's how big it was {explains with hands}...

At that time, Jusuf started singing in the choir of the Cantorum Collegium. I finished high school. I went and passed the exams at the School of Economics which I had cut in half when I left. And our son

was born in '68. Premton was born in May, 1968. We had no money to pay for rent so we changed the flats, once a flat, another time another because we couldn't make a living out of...He would sing some songs here and there and take honorary. Often it happened that Jusuf went out to beg for twenty banks, this is how that currency was called, to beg for twenty banks in order to buy half loaf of bread. But all their friends were just like him. They were students coming from other regions. And he would often return without that half loaf.

I lived, I grew up in a wealthy setting, in a family that always had everything, and that didn't affect me at all. His love, his presence, was enough for me. I would say, "Come, get the guitar." We would sing, sing and go to bed, even without eating (laughs). But when our son was born, we didn't even have a stove. He was born in May, but we didn't have it when fall came. Jusuf didn't want my parents to give us money in any way... he was very proud and didn't want it. We only had what I had brought with *qeiz*,⁵ as we call it, mattresses, blankets, carpets, curtains...that's what we had.

We didn't have. We didn't even have a sofa, we slept on a mattress for four years. But, when fall came, we had no stove. Fitim Domi, uncle Rama, they were friends. He came one day, because Jusuf wrote a song lyrics for him, and he came to our house once and saw that it was cold and our son was little. He said, "What about the stove? Where is your stove?" He said, "We don't have one." "Alright," he said, "I will get one with a loan," he said, "A stove," he said, "And you can pay me for it as soon as you make money." He brought us a stove, anyway.

There were times when we would get oil, and sometimes not. That is, we made it through somehow. And I, I got a burn in my lungs because of the cold and bad diet, I was also breastfeeding. And the wife of Fitim Domi, she was a Serb, she gave me her certificate. I took medical treatment with her certificate. I will never forget all the good that Fitim has done to us. When spring came and the weather got warmer, we had no chance to pay for the stove he bought for us, he was very, very good... he said, "Give me the stove back because I need it." He didn't need the stove for anything, he only did that to relieve Jusuf. So, I always mention that he is a great human being with a great soul.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of status did you hold here, since you didn't have any documents, I mean, since you didn't have any health insurance?

Suzana Gërvalla: No, we didn't have, because Jusuf wasn't working. Back then, they used social insurances. You couldn't... you had to be employed in order to receive free medical treatments. Back then, since I got a burn in my lungs, I had to take daily injections. I couldn't go there everyday, so I taught myself how to inject. I would take them and inject myself. At some point, I gave injections to my children as well. Because one learns through experience.

⁵ Clothes and embroideries that fill up the bride's trousseau.

Later, the son of his father's paternal aunt, Esad Mekuli, helped Jusuf and employed him in the Theater, as a singer for the Theater. He worked there for some time. He started getting a salary from there. We started recovering. We took a better flat in Dragodan. It was not that good, but it was okay.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Here, in the Theater of Pristina?

Suzana Gërvalla: In the Theater of Pristina, yes. Besides the position as a singer, Jusuf also took over the translation of drama. So, the current plays in the Theater, especially the old ones, are mostly Jusuf's translations. Because Jusuf used to translate the Yugoslav languages, Macedonian, Serbian, Slovenian, and French. He was a translator. Like this, the beginning, until we recovered a little.

Jusuf was also friends with Teki Dervishi.⁶ After being released from Goli Otok,⁷ Teki Dervishi went to Skopje to work on *Flakët* [Flames], *Flaka e Vllaznimit* [The Brotherhood Flame]. When he went to Skopje to work, he invited Jusuf. He said, "Come, work here as a translator in the beginning." So, we picked up and went to Skopje. There he worked as a translator for some time, then as a journalist, at *Flaka* [Flame]. But, at the same time, our daughter was born one year later in Skopje, in '71, and he was called to military service. He went to Monastir for military service.

The salary and everything else was cut (laughs), again.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do, I mean, how did you make a living?

Suzana Gërvalla: Of course, I went to live with my parents and I would embroider tapestries, I don't know whether you've seen them?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Suzana Gërvalla: Eh, those tapestries were very trendy at that time and I would sell them. I would embroider and sell them, and send [money] to Jusuf because he used to smoke. I also would send him money when he needed them to travel. And of course, my parents helped me as well. His brother Bardh was in the military service at the same time. They were in the military service at the same time. But he was in the coast, in Split or Rijeka? I guess he was in Rijeka. He was a marine there. And...

⁶ Teki Dervishi was born in 1943 in Gjakova was a writer, a publicist and a playwright. He was the editor-in- chief of the newspaper *Bota Sot*.

⁷ 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 dissenters, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did this last?

Suzana Gërvalla: {doesn't hear the question}.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: For how long was he in the military service?

Suzana Gërvalla: He was in the military service for one year. In the meantime, he would come to Pristina and pass the exams. He finished the faculty, because if he didn't finish the faculty, then he would need to go to military service for two years. So, from there, he would come to Pristina to pass the exams. He finished it. He also went to *Akordet*,⁸ because they would invite him to sing, he sang all the time.

...people would say, "Still, you are happy with him, you should keep that in mind."

So Teki Dervishi told me when a vacancy for a journalist was opened here in Pristina and I prepared his documents and handed them to *Rilindja*.⁹ He came. He applied and was accepted. When he returned from military service, we came to Pristina right away.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In which year?

Suzana Gërvalla: We returned in '71, in late '71. But I have to return to his family once again, to his mother Ajshe. Bardhosh Gërvalla, Jusuf's father was one who fought during the war and before, against *shkije*¹⁰ and Germans. He had his own *çeta*¹¹ and didn't allow any of them to enter his zone. He had one wife from Plav, I didn't know this at first, but we found out later that she was my cousin. He had only one daughter with his first wife. And, the girl was...since he was popular, there was no way he could be left only with one girl. Of course, because girls at that time...boys were...

So, he got married again. His own wife found mother Ajshe for him, my mother-in-law, 16 years old. He was 46 and she was 16. His own daughter was five years older than his new bride. Mother Ajshe had four, three sons with him, Hysen, Jusuf and Bardh. But since he was a *kaçak*,¹² they took his land and

⁸ Akordet e Kosovës (1669–1995) was and remains one of the most popular festivals Kosovo, even though the last one was held almost two decades ago. The festival was held in different cities of Kosovo throughout the years and the director of the festival was Kristë Lekaj (composer).

⁹ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

¹⁰ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

¹¹ The South Slavic *četa* is a loan word from Ottoman Turkish and it is derived from *çat*, *çet*, to hit, strike, steal. Comparably, see *çatmak* or its reciprocal form *çatışmak*, to provoke a conflict. It commonly means band of irregular fighters.

¹² 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.

gave it to Montenegrins who colonized it at that time, they gave them the land. There was the Šaljić family, Šaljić was their last name, they gave them his land.

He was forced to stay hidden all the time, he didn't dare to go out in public, otherwise they would imprison him. He got tuberculosis by staying in basements and isolated all the time, and he died, my father-in-law.

Mother Ajshe had three children at that time, and just as our tradition goes, they have a tradition there, she had to return to the family, to marry another man from the family in order not to leave her children children. You either had to leave your children or marry another man from the family in order to...in order to live there. So, she got married to the son of her brother-in-law who was five years younger than she. She had one son with him, Avdyl, so they became four sons. When her second husband went to military service, he saw that there were young single ladies there...and didn't return to mother Ajshe anymore. Mother Ajshe took the three sons, except Jusuf, whom she left at her brother's because he had no children...He had a wife from Dubrovnik, they lived a good life. He was a driver and she was a seamstress, they lived a good life. And they left Jusuf in Peja, she took the three other sons and went to Slovenia, to Jesenica. There, there was a *železara*, that is how they were called, the place where the iron was produced.

There she had the sons of her brothers-in-law, who had gone there earlier. She went there, when she went there, her husband left Slovenia and went to Sweden. She remained there. She worked as a housekeeper in the manufacture in order to raise her sons, and so, mother Ajshe lived in Slovenia for 16 years. She was there even after I got married.

When the boys grew up, Hysen, Bardh and Jusuf, they put pressure on the Montenegrins to give them back their land. So, he [Šaljić] was forced to sell the land, and he had to first sell it to those to whom it belonged. So, Jusuf took a loan, and he was working in the theater at that time, Jusuf took a loan and we bought that land. Our land. The Montenegrin had built a house in our land, the current house, the same where mother Ajshe lived later.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, this is how the whole family returned from Slovenia?

Suzana Gërvalla: Then they returned from Slovenia, and lived there, in....After some time, Jusuf, we returned from Skopje, Jusuf started working for *Rilindja*. We lived in a small flat in the *maxhup*¹³ neighborhood, there was a house. Later, they gave him an apartment. They gave us an apartment in Bregu i Diellit. When they gave us the apartment, we decided to have another child in the new apartment. So, we had another son, Ergon.

¹³ *Maxhupë*, derogatory term for Roma people.

Bardh and Avdyl, Jusuf's brothers lived with us at that time because they were students. They were studying English Language. At some point, a friend of Jusuf, Hida Halimi, made it possible for Bardh to go to Germany to work as a social worker. Bardh went to Stuttgart and worked in Ludwigsburg, he worked as a social worker. Avdyl stayed for a little while. Then, after finding out about Jusuf, they imprisoned Avdyl and Hysen as well, two of his brothers.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did Jusuf get involved...

Suzana Gërvalla: Jusuf got involved...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ...was he in the protests of '68?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, I was, I was. I was there with him.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you join? Can you tell us more?

Suzana Gërvalla: To be honest, I wasn't in the middle with him, but we went there together with some of his friends, a boy was killed when he was near there. He described it as very painful. The demonstration was very massive, but also too violent. Then...where was I? (laughs)

Erëmirë Krasniqi: About the protest and engagement...

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ... in the organization...

Suzana Gërvalla: Jusuf was engaged by Sabri Novosella together with Adem Demaçi.¹⁴ He got engaged very early. As soon as we arrived here, he was around 25 years old when he got engaged there. He had troubles in Peja too, he did...but he exactly got engaged when he was 25, around 24-25 years old, I don't exactly know how old he was. And he got involved in the *Lëvizja Nacional Çlirimtare e Kosovës për Bashkimin e Trojeve Shqiptare* [The Kosovo National Liberation Movement for the Unity of Albanian Lands]. Adem Demaçi led it at that time, and Jusuf directly collaborated with Sabri Novosella, he wrote the leaflets, that's what he did. We would write them at our house, and then they would spread them from there.

¹⁴ Adem Demaçi (1936-) is 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.

My son Premton was going to school. Sabri Novosella had a tailoring shop and we would fill Premton's, my son's school backpack, because the tailoring shop was near his school, and we would fill his backpack with leaflets and in the morning, he would go and handed them to him. And he would give him a candy or something because he [Premton] of course, didn't know what was in it. I was afraid that he would fall on the way or something would happen to him, so I would follow him from a distance, because he was a child, he was very little when he carried them. The son of my brother-in-law Hysen, he would come on weekends, he would come to Pristina on Saturdays. And we would give him the leaflets which he would then send to Deçan and Peja, that is how we would spread those things.

But, in 1990, no, in 1979 they found out about his activity in Dubrovnik, also in Deçan they found out that we were spreading leaflets... And they went to the house of Hysen and Avdyl, I mean to the house of my brother-in-law, they raided it and of course they found, they didn't... they didn't find anything at our place, there they found some leaflets, some things. They took the two brothers and imprisoned them. In the morning... that happened during the night... in the morning, at nine in the morning the doorbell rang. Jusuf went to work in *Rilindja*. When I opened the door, there were three men and one woman, and they said, "We are like this and that, we have an order to search the house."

They entered my house and searched it. They searched it from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon. The woman was a *shkinë*, there was a boy from Peja whom I knew, we knew him, the man who was working with them, and two other men. We had many books, a lot of them. They searched every book, not to talk about mattresses and everything, everything, everything. They demolished the whole house. They didn't find anything in our house. In the meantime, while they were there, the son of Jusuf's paternal uncle came to our door from Dubrovnik. When I went to the door, I saw him.

I said, "What's new?" "Uh," he said, "They were there," he said. I closed the door, "They were there," he said, "They imprisoned Hysen and Avdyl," he said, "I just came to let you know." I said, "Leave! Let them not see you." He went. They... Fortunately my mother came from Skopje with my maternal uncle that day. My maternal uncle had a car.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was Jusuf home?

Suzana Gërvalla: No, Jusuf was at work all the time. They came. They were going down, and at the same time, they [mother and uncle] were coming up. When they came, my mother stayed with the children. I told him, my maternal uncle, I said, "Let's go to *Rilindja* as soon as possible," I said, "Because I have to meet Jusuf." When I went to *Rilindja*, they had gone to *Rilindja*, yes. When I went, I told the doorman, I said, "I want," I said, "To immediately call Jusuf," I said, "Why?" He said, "These

dogs,” he said, “Have they come for Jusuf?” Because they loved Jusuf very much, he was very kind with people. They all loved him. “Yes,” I said.

Then he called him. Jusuf came down. Yes, Jusuf was famous as a singer, as a journalist, they didn’t dare and go take him directly to the office, but first they went to the editor-in-chief, in order to have permission to take Jusuf. I called him. He came down to the hall, to the buffet. I said, “This is what happened.” I told him everything that happened in Dubrovnik and there. I said, “Just so you know.”

They came in the meantime. They sat at another table and let us finish the conversation. And Kadri Rexha, a friend of Jusuf, came there at the same time. He sat with us. We finished our conversation. He said, “Go home,” he said, “Look after the children.” He said, “What have they taken?” I said, “Only the typewriter.” We would always take the typewriter, when Jusuf woke up to go to work, he would take it out of the house and send it to Sabri. That day we didn’t.... He woke up late, he was in a rush and didn’t take the typewriter. But they didn’t find any paper nor anything.

I said, “They have taken the typewriter.” “Alright,” he said, “It takes time to verify the typewriter.” He said, “Anything else?” “Nothing,” I said, “They haven’t taken anything else.” Yes, there was Jusuf’s journal, but when they came, I put it in my little son’s diaper, I hid it there. They would put their hands in the toilet after each time I went there, to check whether I left anything there. Such were they...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was this the first time that it happened to you?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, it was the first time for us. The man from Peja who knew me, as soon as they entered, he went to the work desk of Jusuf. He opened it and took everything. There were Jusuf’s and Teki’s passports and some other things, I don’t know. He took everything, looked at them and put them back inside. He said, “Bravo, you keep the house very clean,” the man said, “But the desk of your husband,” he said, “You never clean it.” I mean, he told me to take those things from there. I understood what he wanted to say.

They went to *Rilindja* and had a conversation with Jusuf, Jusuf came home. They released him since they didn’t find anything. He came home. But they came down our building with their cars. They stayed there. When it was eleven at night, we turned off the lights as if we were sleeping, as if there was no one, as if everything came to its end. We lived in Bregu i Diellit near the Xhambazi. We lived on the fifth floor, but the flat had windows on both sides. They had windows on both sides.

Fortunately, a window on the lower floor was broken. So, Jusuf went down crawling through those stairs at night and went out from that broken window, behind the building, he went and talked to Sabri...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The people from the organization?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, with people from the organization. They said that he had to escape because they knew too much and...I said goodbye to Jusuf because I thought they would capture and kill him! We didn't know, because the situation was very dangerous at that time. When he left, because he had to leave Kosovo and Yugoslavia, he went straight to Skender Blakaj. Skender Blakaj was Jusuf's best friend. He went and rang his doorbell. He said, "I have to leave because there is no other way." He explained it to him well and then they went to Peja. In Peja, there was Enver Kastrati, another friend of Jusuf. Jusuf had many friends, because they didn't dare to...

And since Enver had had the flu that day, he gave Jusuf his brother. He was Sali Kastrati, he was even a better driver. They went, they took Sali's car and sent him to Slovenia, they sent him to Jesenica. That is where the sons of his paternal uncles were living. He had to get connected to Bardh there, to take Bardh to Austria because there was a tunnel connecting Slovenia with Austria, he had to ask Bardh to wait for him in the other side of the tunnel.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To wait for him?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes. But, unfortunately Bardh has changed his apartment and the phone number, Jusuf couldn't find any way to connect with Bardh. He had to stay hidden in Slovenia for around one week. In the meantime, Skender Blakaj, the wife of Skender Blakaj, Igballe, called me, she said, "Go to the market." No, she went to my son's school and told him, "Tell your mother to go to the market at a certain time." I went to the market. She told me, "Jusuf couldn't make it," she said. While buying, we were acting like we were buying stuff...because in fact I was following her. And she said, "You have to find him the number, because the father of Bardh's wife is here." He had been here to visit, and he must have the number. The father of the Bardh's wife was from Glllogjan.

So, what to do, how to do it? My mother stayed there. I took the bus and went to Peja. I had a cousin in Peja, a cousin of father Ahmet who had nine sons. I went, knocked on their door and said, "*Baci*¹⁵ Sali, I want one boy," I said, "because I have to go to Dubovik. They have imprisoned [Jusuf]," I said. We told everyone that Jusuf was imprisoned because we didn't dare tell them that he had escaped. And he said, "Not one, but take the nine of them." "No," I said, "One is enough because I don't want to take the cab to the village alone." Women could not be alone at night.

So, I took the boy, we took a cab and went to Dubovik. But haven't you been to Dubovik? There was no street to our house back then. There was a main road, then there were some paths. The cab stopped on the main road, of course. And I told the boy, "You will go back," I said, "Together with the cab

¹⁵ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

driver.” “No, my father told me.” “You will return!” Because I would cause troubles to them... the house was besieged by the police. I didn’t want anyone to see him. So, I forced him to return, I forced the boy to return.

I stopped at my cousin’s at nine in the evening,, I am talking about a December night. I stopped at a Jusuf’s cousin’s whose house was closer. I said, “Give me your son,” I said, “Until there.” Because we have a river in front of our house. He said, “My son isn’t here.” The old man was afraid. His son came out. “Alright,” I said, “Give me a torch,” I said, “and keep the son.” I took the torch, but there were dogs in the village at that time, and they were very dangerous. Jusuf had told me before that, “Never be afraid of a dog,” he said, “When they come to you,” he said, “Sit down and look right in its eye,” he said, “And it won’t attack you.” That was true.

I took a pole out of the fence. I was holding it in one hand, and the torch in the other. Some dogs came there. I sat and stared for a while. They stared back and left. When I went near the river, it had risen so much that it had even taken the small wooden bridge away. It had taken it away. What to do? I was afraid it would take me away if I went in. I had to go. I got in the river. I passed it with the help of the pole. I went there. The dog of the house started barking, it wouldn’t let me get in. There were so many people there that the dog got very angry. I started running at some point. I talked to it, but it didn’t want... I ran, I ran... I knew that it doesn’t bite.

When I entered the house, there was mother Ajshe with her two daughters-in-law and their children. They were surprised to see me there at night in the evening. Then I entered, they took and dried me out because of course, I was wearing boots but I was wet. They dried out my boots and clothes. I went to sleep. When I went to sleep, I said, “Mother, I will sleep with Hysen’s wife, I will sleep with her tonight.” I said, “Tomorrow in the morning, I...” And what was the best, I forgot to tell you that when I went there, I said, “I want,” I said, “You to give me someone to go to the village of Glogjan for the phone number.” “No,” she said, “They have brought,” she said, “The phone number here.”

So, fortunately I didn’t have to go there that night, because I would have to walk to Glogjan. And I said, “We will wake up at six in the morning, mother, and we will go. You will escort me to Peja.” I went to sleep with the woman. I said, “Listen,” I said, “Jusuf, you don’t dare tell anyone, I will tell you so that when you go to visit Hysen in prison, you should tell him that Jusuf is escaping. He is escaping from them. That is it. Nobody else except you and I should know about this.”

And I woke up, we woke up in the morning, mother Ajshe and I. We took the way around to another bridge. We made it to the road. The bus would stand far away from the road, it didn’t stop near the Dubovik road, but instead you had to pass Krushec and then take the bus. I think there is still no bus... We walked there...Some cars would stop, but they didn’t dare take us because they knew mother.

People were afraid at that time. Then a small Volkswagen stopped. My mother said, “We might do you harm.” “Get in,” he said, “Mother, because I will drive you there.” And he drove us to the bus station.

Mother escorted me to the bus station. Then, her brother and sister were living there so she went to visit them. I got on the bus and came to the bus station. Station...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Here in Pristina?

Suzana Gërvalla: No, I got off the bus at the place where the University is currently located. When I got off there, I was afraid someone would follow me. Then I took another... because I was early, because we had set a meeting with the wife of Skender in the market. I took another bus and went to Fushë Kosovë. When I went to some point, I took the other bus and returned from Fushë Kosovë. When they closed the door, I put my foot in the door, when the door was closed. This is how it was closed {illustrates with hands}. I put my foot like this. When the bus wanted to take off, I just dragged it and jumped from the bus. And if someone was inside, they remained there.

I took the cab and went straight to the market. At that time there were paper tissues, I had written the number in a paper tissue and put it in the bag. When we went there, I gave her the number. She sneezed so that I would have to give her the tissue, and she took it. The number was inside. I said, “You have it inside.” Then they sent the number to Jusuf. And Jusuf passed. He passed through a tunnel, the tunnel that connected it was eight kilometers long. It was a train’s tunnel. And when a train would come, he would hide because there were some turns on the road.

He was all black when he passed to the other side of the tunnel, because trains were with steam at that time. He went there, Bardh was waiting for him. Then he sent him to Germany from there...I remained here with the children. I stayed here for one month after Jusuf. They took me to the police almost every day of that month.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Really? What would they say?

Suzana Gërvalla: Because they would say, “Where is Jusuf?” I would say to them, “Where is Jusuf? Where have you imprisoned him? He must be in prison.” “No,” they would say, “He is not. Where is he?” One day, I will never forget it, they had found Bardh’s number because Bardh was working as a social worker and it wasn’t hard to find his number. They called Bardh’s home number from the police and Jusuf picked up, they told me, “Talk to Jusuf and tell Jusuf to return.” I was at the police station.

And I said, “Jusuf, how are you, are you fine? What are you doing?” I said, “Jusuf,” I said, “Those here,” I said, “These here are telling you to return because nothing will happen to you.” He said, “I don’t care

what they say, there is no way I will return, because they are like that..." I said, "But, those here," I said, "These here, where I am." When I said, "These here, from where I am," they slapped me while talking on the phone with Jusuf. He started shouting, "Don't touch her, don't because..." he was shouting from the other side. Jusuf was very upset, "I will do this and that to you." I hung up the phone.

And, and other times when I went, there is nothing they didn't do to me! They beat me, they tortured me, they... At some point, Jusuf told them where he was so that they would stop torturing us. And they would pick me up even when he told them, they would say, "Convince him to return." I would say, "But I cannot convince him to return. How can I convince him to return? He doesn't listen to me."

When our little son was born, Jusuf didn't register him... he wasn't registered anywhere. I wanted to take a passport and leave, because, I worked with Jusuf as well, for example for the leaflets and so on. He would dictate and I would type. I constantly worked with him and I knew many things. And they told me, "You should leave." "How to leave?" My little son wasn't registered. I don't know how my father made it possible to register him as if he were born in Skopje.

Part Two

[The story continues from the first part of the interview.]

Suzana Gërvalla:...The identity card. I said, "I want to get employed. I have to live here. I can't...There is nothing I can do, he left, I have to live." Anyway, he gave me the identity card. A cousin of Jusuf worked there, Feriz Gërvalla, he is an attorney now. He was working there. I handed him the papers. I don't know what he did, but he made the passport. The passport only lacked the main stamp. He couldn't make it there. But, he said, "Try to pass without that stamp." Then my mother from Skopje came. I told them, "I want to go to Skopje for two-three days to rest at my parents." I said, "Then you will have to show up there." Because it was the same...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To show up at the police station?

Suzana Gërvalla: I had to show up at the police station, I had to do it every day. "Alright," I said, "I will show up there." In the meantime, my father had booked me a ticket, because there was a direct line from Skopje to Stuttgart. He would travel during the night, the train, there were day trains as well, but I took the night train. When I went there, that day, we took the train in the evening, my children and I. We took a whole compartment, to sleep. When we went to Slovenia, it was the time to pass the border, I was afraid they would see that my passport wasn't okay.

Then I told my children, “Act as if you are sleeping, I don’t want to hear any sound.” When the custom officer came inside, the police, I said, “Please don’t switch the light on because my children are sleeping and if you switch the light on they will wake up screaming and will wake the whole wagon up.” He said, “Alright, I won’t switch the light on.” He stamped it and I passed. I went to Stuttgart. Bardh was waiting for me there, because we agreed that Jusuf shouldn’t wait for me, because we were afraid someone would follow me. And Bardh picked me up. We went there. We went to Ludwigsburg, we lived in a basement together with Bardh.

Later we took the house in a village, Untergruppenbach, the place where they got killed. We took a house together with Bardh. We were given social aid, since we were political asylum seekers. Jusuf continued working. He organized demonstrations all the time. Made the *Lajmëtari i Lirisë* [The Freedom Herald], the organ of *Lëvizja* [The Movement]. They printed three issues. He would send up to 5000 copies to Kosovo through the boys who were working for us. There were around seven boys [young men] whom we kept, they were very close to him, young boys, Jusuf did everything with them. He didn’t trust the others, he only trusted these seven boys.

And they sent every copy illegally, through Italy, here and there, but they would make it to Kosovo, to deliver them. Then he wrote three issues of *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo], because they changed the name, from *Lajmëtari* to *Zëri i Kosovës*. He wrote three issues under that name, In the meantime, there were three organizations in Germany, our organization *Lëvizja Nacional Çlirimtare*, there were *Marksistë e Leninistët* [Marxists and Leninists], a member of which was Kadri Zeka, and there was the *Fronti i Kuq* [Red Front] Association, a member of which was Ibrahim Kelmendi.

They would issue some, every organ of theirs, I mean, they would issue some kind of brochures, photocopied papers and glued with...Then Jusuf told them, “Bring them to me, I will edit them and we will publish them in the right way. That is not how things should be done.” So Jusuf, even though he wasn’t part of their organization, we took and edited their magazines, the magazines of their organization. And the demonstrations that were organized, we went together with them. There was no separation. This was Jusuf’s big triumph, who managed to unite, not to unite the organizations but their activity.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You are talking about the demonstrations here, or the demonstrations that took place in exile?

Suzana Gërvalla: No, no. I am talking about while we were there. I am talking about Europe, around Europe, not here. Not here. Jusuf never returned here anymore. What do I tell you? Then later he had some problems with *Marksistë Leninista* and with this, because Ibrahim Kelmendi and Kadri Zeka got

together against Jusuf...Anyway, Jusuf continued with his work and they continued with theirs. I mean, from January 16, on January 16, we received a cassette with Albanian movies.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: 1979?

Suzana Gërvalla: I am talking about '60, '70, no, '81, but '82, '82. I am talking about [January] 16, '82. We received a cassette. And they gathered in one place, there were workers and others, they gathered in one place to watch the cassette. In the meantime, Kadri and Ibrahim Kelmendi, together with a relative of Ibrahim Kelmendi, some guy called Mustafa, they found out where they were and they went to the hall where they were. They watched the movie and came, came to our house after the movie. It was morning, then Jusuf could never stand Ibrahim Kelmendi, he chased him out of our house three times. Because Ibrahim was a spy, he was very dangerous and we always knew what he was working for, and he is still the same. And all our suspicions stand towards him, for example, for everything that happened. Jusuf...

That day, after they woke up late, Jusuf and Kadri, because our bedroom was on the third floor. Jusuf and Kadri stayed there that day. Almost during all day. Talking and trying to solve the problems, because they had many problems between each other. They had problems because they wanted to unite but Kadri changed his word and so, some things happened. And they wanted to reconcile, but Jusuf didn't allow Ibrahim to be part of it. Ibrahim stayed there until four in the afternoon that day. At four in the afternoon he left, and Kadri stayed home with Jusuf.

At ten, at nine at night they came down. I had prepared dinner. They ate and after dinner... Kadri had gotten married two weeks before and he said, "I have to notify my wife that I won't go home tonight." Jusuf said, "Don't do it, man," he said, "Because we are at war, don't teach her that, don't waste our night now trying to talk to her." Because we had no phone at home, because they would call us from everywhere, UDB¹⁶ and so on, and we removed the phone because of that. But no, no. He said, "No, I have..." There was no public phone in our village, but we had to go to another village. Bardh said, "Alright, I will drive you," he said, "To the phone."

As soon as they went to the door, Jusuf said, "I will come too." Because they wouldn't let Jusuf go out at night. His friends always took good care of Jusuf. They went. As soon as they went to the door...I was really angry at Jusuf for going out...but they went to the door. I was home with Bardh's wife...Bardh's wife went upstairs to put her children to sleep because she was also pregnant. She went

¹⁶ UDB, *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

to put her children to sleep. I remained there. I didn't hear anything. They went to the garage. They got in the car. They took off. That January day was ice cold. January 17.

My doorbell rang, When I went to open it, a German cousin, because we got along very well with our cousins, "Mrs. Gërvalla," she said, "Quickly," she said, "Because this is what happened," she said, "They are injured." I went out just as I was. I went quickly. When I reached the door, it was opened, not the one in Bardh's side, but the other one. And a body was on the ground, it was Kadri. Jusuf was in the back seat. Kadri has fallen to the ground. When I went, Jusuf was there, because of the crush, the first seat had fallen like that {illustrates the car seat with hands} and Jusuf was leaning like that. One of his hands was like this {shows how Jusuf was holding his hands}, and he was holding the other hand near his stomach. He was leaning on the other hand.

When I got close, I saw him because I didn't know who was where, I saw the body, I saw it was Kadri's. Jusuf said, because he always called me *çikë* [girl], because he met me as a girl, as a child, "*Çikë*," he said, "Here I am." When I got closer, he was leaning his forehead there. I took him. He said, "My hand is tire." Because he was leaning on it. I grabbed him. I said, "Ha, Jusuf, where is it?" He said, "In my stomach," and, "In my back." Because Jusuf was sitting on the back and was able to move. He said, "But look at Bardh," he said, "Is he alive," he said, "Because I cannot hear him." He said, "Brother!"

When I went to Bardh in the other side, the window was broken, I saw that Bardh had fallen just like this {explains how Bardh was laying}, as if he was sleeping. And he had two {points her cheeks}, glued, just like matches, too thin, two bullets, here. I saw and touched him. Cold. I put my hand here to touch him {shows the pulse in the neck}, nothing. I put my hand inside, he had a bullet in the heart and here. Bardh was already cold.

I returned to him and I said, "Jusuf," I said, "They shot him in the mouth," I said, "Here, he has it, in the mouth, and he cannot breathe well but he is moving." That is what I said, what was I supposed to tell him? That his brother had been killed...That was the time when my sister-in-law had heard and she came, Bardh's wife. Of course, she went straight to the driver, because Jusuf didn't drive. When she went there she saw him, "Ku-kuuuu,¹⁷ they killed Bardh." From here {explains how she gave her signals not to talk}, "They haven't killed him, don't you see he is moving?" I told her. And I told her, pointing my finger to Jusuf, she realized instantly what I meant. She went silent. She was crying near him. And, she went silent.

The emergency medical services and police didn't come for half an hour. I don't know why, but they didn't. I stayed there with Jusuf. She stayed near her husband and I stayed with Jusuf. Jusuf spoke all

¹⁷ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

the time, “Do it like this,” he left... because I worked together with Jusuf. He wrote and I printed every magazine that we worked on. He explained the next issue, we were ready to publish the next issue. “You will publish this issue like this.” I said, “Jusuf, did you see anyone?” He said, “Yes,” he said, “I saw,” he said, “But I didn’t know any of them.” He said, “Even though, *çikë*,” he said, “I hope they never capture them if they are Albanians,” he said, “Because they cannot wait to say that,” he said, “we are killing each other.” That was his message. And they really haven’t found them yet, 35 years later.

We talked and we talked, “Raise my children, educate them.” He left me all his messages. Then the emergency medical service came. When they came, I didn’t speak German so well, we lived there for two years but I hadn’t been to school, I was... I went there, I told them the way I could, “Take him because he is his brother, let him think that he is alive.” They did so. They took Bardh first, they sent him to the emergency car. They got him inside and acted as if they were treating him, as if they were giving him an infusion. When they took Jusuf, he said, he said, I said, “Do you see, he is still alive, they are giving him an infusion.” “Thank God!” Jusuf said. He was relieved for his brother.

The other one, Kadri was dead on the ground. They covered his corpse with a blanket and they took these two. Then they took Kadri to the hospital as well. I wanted to get in the emergency car but they didn’t allow me. But even if they allowed me, I would not leave my sister-in-law alone, her daughter was two years old and her son one year old, and she was also pregnant. I had three of my children. My son was twelve, my daughter ten and my little son was four years old. I couldn’t leave her alone...so I returned home. The police stayed with us until one thirty, all the time. At one and a half, a policeman came and said, “Jusuf had surgery, he is better,” he said.

We were happy. At least one of them. The police came and immediately locked the work room. Yes, they did so as soon as they came. So, I didn’t have anything, we had all the phone numbers there. At some point, I got reminded of the fact that Jusuf once gave me a business card of an employee of the Albanian Embassy in Austria, Engjëll Kolaneci. He told me, “Keep this, in case something happens, it will be at your clothes.” I got reminded of that. Then I went to our German neighbor. I called in the Embassy. I told them. He called someone else. And Misin Mavraj came from Munich at eight in the morning. We took the car with him and went to the hospital because we didn’t know anything else. The police left, everyone left.

They didn’t know anything about Jusuf. When we went there, we went inside to the wicket and asked, “Like this, we are looking for this person.” “Wait,” they said, “Wait for the doctor.” “Wait for the doctor,” they said, “Because he will come and explain it to you,” they said, “I don’t know.” Then, he called the doctor who had done the surgery, he had gotten another surgery at three thirty in the morning. When he came, a big guy, he did the asking more than I, I didn’t speak much German, but he spoke very well, “We are here to ask about Jusuf Gërvalla.” He immediately said, “He is dead,” he said, “He is dead.”

“No, no,” he said, “Three of them were here,” he said, “Two of them are dead while the other.” He raised three fingers, “The three of them are dead,” he said.

It felt like a bomb fell on us. We were so upset. They put us inside a very small room. He said, “Do you need any soother or something?” I said, “I don’t want any soother.” He was African, and in order to distract us, he asked, “What, where are you from?” I said, “From Kosovo.” “Where is Kosovo?” Because nobody knew where Kosovo was at that time. I said, “In Yugoslavia.” He said, “Good for you, because this doctor,” he said, “Is from Yugoslavia too.” When he told me that, it was like, I don’t know how to explain it... I quickly went out of the room, when I saw him enter another room. The corridors were long. I ran after him. I got inside the room and talked to him in *shkinisht*.¹⁸

I said, “You have killed Jusuf!” When I saw it here {points to the doctor’s label} it was written Vidić. “You killed him!” He was shocked, he didn’t say a word. He was very afraid. It is weird. If I had a gun at that moment, I would have killed him. One is able to kill another in such a situation...it was, it was shocking. They had a box with stickers there, I just took it and threw it on his face. They came there quickly, because they saw me running, they came very quickly. They notified the police. The police came. I said, “You will pay,” I said, “For this.”

We hired an attorney, then, in order to supervise the work of the attorney, I mean, of the doctor. The attorney didn’t do anything. We thought that the doctor had killed him during surgery, but that wasn’t true. Because my daughter had taken the file from the Germans. And in the file it is written that doctor Vidić who did the surgery of Jusuf was Croatian...And the declaration, because before going to surgery, Jusuf asked for journalists or someone he could tell that, “I have been killed by UDB,” and the doctor translated his declaration. I accused him for murder because I thought he killed Jusuf during surgery.

Anyway, they took us from there. I didn’t go home. Then, we wanted to bring them here, to Kosovo. They didn’t allow us to bring them to Kosovo. We waited for twenty days for an answer. They could not say, “Yes,” nor “No.” Because they knew that if they said, “Yes,” that it would become a big deal if we brought them to Kosovo. If they said, “No,” that would mean that they would admit their guilt. So, after twenty days, they told us, “No.” And we buried them there, in Stuttgart.

Then after we buried them there, because we held the three of them together, after we buried them there, I asked to go to Albania with my children. Because Jusuf had expressed his wish to educate our children in Albania. I made the request, they declined it. They responded negatively three times. They wouldn’t agreed to let me go there. The fourth time, I sent it to Turkey. There, some guy made it

¹⁸ *Shkinisht*, literally Serbian, comes from the derogatory term for Serb, *shka*, *shkinë*.

possible and they accepted me. Three months after the murder of Jusuf, I took my children and went to Athens through Austria, then from Athens to Tirana.

The children were little. The youngest one was four years old. We knew, from the propaganda, that Albania was different. When we went there, they sent us to an apartment in a neighborhood only inhabited by *maxhupë*. Very, very, very bad. I saw what was the deal but there was no turning back. I had to agree. In September, I enrolled in the faculty, because I had quit it here, I had quit when in the third year.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did they accommodate you there?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, they gave us an apartment, an apartment, but very, very... at the end of Tirana, very bad. They gave us scholarships. They gave me a university student's scholarship, and to my oldest son they gave a student's scholarship. I went, I graduated from the Faculty of History and Geography there. I enrolled from the beginning in order to kill time because there was nothing for me to do. I didn't have any relative there, no people, only strangers and my children. And I had to dedicate myself to the children, because there were all kinds of people there. I had to keep my children close. Then after some time, Kosovars started coming there as well...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Would you like to take a break?

Suzana Gërvalla: No. Kosovars from the West started coming as tourists with buses and...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In '91?

Suzana Gërvalla: No, I am talking about even before, they came as tourists even before '91. They would come by buses and of course when they were there, they would ask to come and visit the family of Jusuf Gërvalla because they knew I was always there. When they came and see that building.... The *maxhup* would gather around it. They would complain, saying that, "We didn't sent the family of Jusuf Gërvalla here to be treated like this." At some point, complaint after complaint, a woman came from Germany and made a request to build us a house. She said, "If you have no chance to give them a good apartment to settle in, then we will build a house for them, you just give us the land, we will build the house."

They were so good in propaganda.... Then they gave me a good apartment, they increased my salary and changed all my furniture. Then I got employed at the University and we started having a better life.... But everything was rationed, with coupons...You could buy nothing, only the things that

belonged to you according to the coupons. The shops were completely empty back then, there were no shelves.... And you had to take everything based on your rations.

The ration was very small. Because many people would divide boys and girls and appear as two families in order to take two rations, but I couldn't do it because my children were small. We hardly made it with a small rations. For example, for two years in a row my children didn't drink milk, they couldn't even touch it. Because, because you had to go at midnight and wait in the line, there were times there was no milk for us. I was a young woman back then, I was 32 years old and...So the children...

I, for a very long time, for almost two years, believe me, I ate bread, I would...the bread was, they called it the brick bread. When it was fresh, you could eat it, but when it stayed for one day, it would become black. I would pour some sugar on it, because sugar too...everything came in rations except bread, I would pour a little sugar on it and wet it. I would eat it like that in order to leave the rations for the children, in order for them not to feel it. I didn't receive any letter, or phone call nor anything from my people for seven years. I didn't know anything for seven years. My father died. I didn't even receive the telegram there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This is '83- '90?

Suzana Gërvalla: I am talking about '82 to '90, '90 but even after '90, I mean six years and a half.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Everything was controlled?

Suzana Gërvalla: Everything was. Then in the 90s, my people came and I saw them. I had the wedding of my son in the '90s and none from my relatives attended because they could come from the Western countries, but not through Yugoslavia. Nobody was allowed to come from Kosovo or Macedonia.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you experience the '90s political transition?

Suzana Gërvalla: Then, in the '90s, I worked at the University at that time. My son and daughter were students. Donika was in the High Arts Institute, because she finished studying the flute. My older son was studying Albanian and German Language at the Faculty of Foreign Languages. But Donika always was, Donika is like her father, she completely has her father's nature. She went on hunger strike with the artists from the High Arts Institute back in the '90s. Our family supported Sali Berisha. And my son, my older son Premton was part of the Youth Committee at that time, of the students, and he opposed it. As a family, we opposed the ruling power of...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Ramiz Alia?

Suzana Gërvalla: Enver Hoxha... because Ramiz Alia didn't lead, Enver's wife did. Nexhmije did all the harm, not even Enver did as much harm as she. She was exactly as they say, "the black snake." She was the one who did everything. Then, we had a lot of pressure from the communists because our apartment was among them back then... a lot at that time. Yes, Sali won. Anyway, Sali, I photographed Sali, Sali and Azem Hajdari would come to our house, and we were...

I was friends with Sali even before. He was a doctor, a cardiologist and I had problems. I had mental health problems and I was treated by him. So, we got along. The system changed. Children continued going to school. They finished them. I was working. Until '97. In '97 you know how they took arms in Albania. And the communists returned again. That is when they put an extraordinary pressure on us.

They even shot... in the office where I worked, a bullet was shot inside my office to my chair. I was eating at that time, I wasn't sitting on the chair, and I saved the bullet as a souvenir. It fell from the chair to the floor. My son was working at the Ministry of Justice, he was the director for foreign relations, because he speaks many languages. He had such a pressure that I called my children... Donika was in Germany, she was studying there, while I, together with two of my sons, my daughter-in-law and my nephew, I said, "We will escape because there is nothing left to do here."

We have no future here. First my older son with his wife was against it, but then they realized that... So, they wanted to take my younger son to military service, to send him to Vlora to fight against... I sent him to Skopje before... and we went illegally. Kosovars helped me and we managed, we went to Sweden. We settled down in Sweden.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You were issued political asylum?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, we were issued political asylum. We have Swedish passports. I have an apartment there, in Sweden. The state is paying for it. So, I live there and here now after retirement. My older son lives there, in Sweden. Donika is in Germany, in Bonn, while the youngest son has returned here four years and a half ago, and he lives here, in Kosovo. He works here. He is graduated in Informatics and works here.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you return?

Suzana Gërvalla: I forgot to tell you. Right after the war, I returned and I went, I stayed with mother Ajshe in Dubovik, because none of my sons returned. So, I went there. Because the house was very modest, it was very old. It had no toilet nor anything else, it had a toilet outside, just like they used to

be back then. Poor her, her hair would freeze when she took showers. But we rebuilt it. My daughter sent us the money and we rebuilt her house. I lived with her for some time. Later, she got sick from intestines cancer, and I stayed with her at the hospital.

Then, when they allowed her to go home, I notified her sons and daughters-in-law, then they all came. When they brought her home, I took an apartment, before mother Ajshe got sick, I took an apartment in Pristina. And I thought of taking her with me there. But she didn't want to go there at all. I took a driving license, I took my driving license when I was 55 years old (laughs). And I would say to my mother that, "I will take the driving license and we will go to places," she would be so pleased. When she died, I moved to Pristina.

I got employed at the Ministry of Local Government. I worked for so many years, ten years. I retired. (laughs) Now I am a grandmother, I have five grandchildren. My oldest son has a son, Drin, 21 years old, Donika has Redon, Jon and Nora. Redon is 20, Jon is 16 and Nora is 8, 9 years old. And my youngest son here in Pristina has a ten years old daughter, Ema. Ema is named after my mother, the one who raised me. So, I don't know what else you are interested in, I can...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Before finishing, I mean, can you tell us the biography of mother Ajshe. I mean, maybe tell us about the museum of the Gërvalla family that is under construction?

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, but what am I supposed to say about mother Ajshe? The biography, she is...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, I mean the role she had in society and that she was a brave woman and who received men [in the *oda*],¹⁹ I mean that she had an important social role...

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ...and she was a contact point, a kind of contact point for the Gërvalla family.

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, yes. After the boys were imprisoned, she remained with their wives. Avdyl was released soon, while Hysen stayed for two years. They even took his son for a while as well as his daughter.... But when they were released, Hysen together with Avdyl went to Switzerland. They escaped because they could not stay there any longer. At some point, they took their families as well and mother Ajshe remained alone in Dubovik. There was no way she would want to leave. They begged her, but she didn't want to leave the house and she remained there.

¹⁹ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

But the one in the second floor, the one that was rebuilt later, they had the men's *oda* there. The men's *oda*, which was kept by mother, it has a great history. Mother welcomed many people there, many of them. Mother went to every blood feud reconciliation. Mother, they would come and take her to every case. She played a very important role. A mother, a generous woman, a brave woman, and she has respect, she is respected by all the people, mother Ajshe.

Now will be build a museum in honor of mother Ajshe and Jusuf. It's been five years that I have been working, going to every office, knocking everywhere in order to build that museum. Minister after Minister, Mayor after Mayor... but I think I will make it happen at last. It will be built in the village where the house of mother Ajshe was. Now, that's our house. Everything is under Donika's ownership. That is Donika's house. And the museum will be built in that yard. A *kulla*²⁰ has been built, the copy of the *kulla* where Jusuf and Bardh were born.

The *kulla* has been built in the yard. Now, the *oda* of mother Ajshe is being renovated. And several museums will be merged into a complex, I mean, the museum of Jusuf as well as the *oda* of mother Ajshe. I will, I want to show every merit that mother Ajshe has, in her *oda* that we will build. The words are for it to be done on October 1, to open it on October 1. I have many materials to...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Exhibit.

Suzana Gërvalla: To exhibit, just like mother Ajshe's, like Jusuf's. And, I hope...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it difficult for you, the family, to take care of the documents?

Suzana Gërvalla: It was difficult. I have carried them all around, from a country to another. What to do? I carried Jusuf's writings as well. When I left from here, from Kosovo to Germany, my mother would often come there with her husband. And any time they came, I filled their bags and they sent them to Skopje. And when I left, I didn't take any clothes with me. I took all the photographs, all Jusuf's documents, all Jusuf's writings, everything...

I sent them to Skopje, from Skopje to Germany, from Germany to Albania, and from Albania I took them back here again. I have everything. And when I did the collection of Jusuf's pieces, which comes in four volumes, one is Jusuf's poems, the other is the novel and stories, and two others are Jusuf's works as a publicist, everything that Jusuf wrote during the '70s in journalism. I had all the material. Plus, I took some of them from the National Library. I worked so hard to collect the ones that I didn't have.

²⁰ Traditional, fortified Albanian house, tower.

I also have many, many photographs. For example, I have done exhibitions with the photographs of Jusuf, 160 photographs. I did it all around Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and everywhere, with Jusuf's stuff...Now we will exhibit all of them in the museum that will be built there, in the *kulla*, in the museum where we thought of making a hall for cultural meetings. One of them will have the projector and chairs...so, cultural events will take place there, in that hall on the first floor of the *kulla*.

Because Jusuf belongs to the culture, Jusuf was a writer, he was an artist. He was a writer, he was a singer, a composer, a painter. Jusuf was a completed artist. Jusuf has, I also have Jusuf's CD. I made it later. Even though it was very difficult for us to find Jusuf's songs, because they disappeared them from here after Jusuf left, his songs...especially from the Radio, you cannot find anything there. Rafet Rudi found some songs in *Radio Shkupi* [Radio Skopje]. And some recordings, very few, around four or five recordings here in the television. Although Jusuf had many recordings, but they don't seem to be able to find them.

I tried to reflect all the material that he had, not only as a patriot, because everyone knows about that, but I tried to show him as an artist, just like he was. Because we have many national heroes, but Jusuf is distinct because he was also an artist, he was a man of culture. That is why we have to...Jusuf's poems are special, very special. Those who have read them say that they are very rare. A composer, a Croatian singer and composer, Đelo Jusić, I don't know, because you are young, I don't know whether you have heard of him or not, he asked for the lyrics from Jusuf to turn them into a song for example. Because his lyrics were very good.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: It is very good that the museum will reflect this side of Jusuf as well.

Suzana Gërvalla: Yes, I hope it will be finished. Now I am dealing with the workers, you know how it is to deal with the workers. But, I have to so that they will do the work the right way.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I hope it will be finished.

Suzana Gërvalla: Otherwise, my children are very good. They are married with good people. They have their children, I am proud of them. I suffered a lot raising them, I raised them with many struggles, but they are paying me back. I am very proud, I am a very happy grandmother. I always say that getting old is very good, they say, "How come getting old is good?" It is good because you cannot become a grandmother without getting old (laughs), you don't feel the pleasure that is the greatest in life. Because their love is extraordinary. So...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much.

Suzana Gërvalla: Now I am, I have suffered for a long time when I was young, very much, very much, very much, but now I am happy with my children and my grandchildren. They have paid me back.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much for the interview.

Suzana Gërvalla: I believe, because I might've left something, but...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: It's fine.

Suzana Gërvalla: I believe that more or less...