

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SLAVICA JOVANOVIĆ

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Duration: 121 minutes

Present:

1. Slavica Jovanović (Speaker)
2. Marijana Toma (Interviewer)
3. Miroslav Ljepojević (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

Marijana Toma: Today it is July 16, 2017, an interview with Slavica Jovanović. Slavica, I would ask you to tell me more about the place you were born in, when you were born, about your childhood and your early family memories?

Slavica Jovanović: I was born in the village of Gušica, the municipality of Viti. This is how I usually refer to it, back then it used to be called the Viti of Kosovo. I am the second child among the four of us, a child of a farmer and a housewife from the village of Gušica, and among the first ones...The first day at school is among my first childhood memories. I mean, when I went to school, I remember how my maternal aunt and my mother dressed me in a blue skirt, I remember going to and coming back from school, this is my first memory in life. Of course, as in every childhood, the one in the village was rich with work, struggle and it was difficult. The childhood as well as youth and education were difficult, everything was difficult, but however, it was beautiful in its own way, as it is for everyone.

Marijana Toma: In what sense was it difficult? In the sense of the obligations you had?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes. I mean, we worked a lot, maybe this has to do with the fact that we lived in the village. All the children growing up in the village work a lot, but also our parents demanded this from us. I know that I worked heavy physical work as much as I could bear. If I could lift the water from the well, I would do it, if I could carry something, I don't know what, in the garden or around the house, I took care of the animals, the house, clothes, I did everything. I started washing clothes and cooking when I was twelve. Yes, yes (laughs).

Marijana Toma: So, these were your duties? How many brothers and sisters were you?

Slavica Jovanović: For some time, we were only three children, but then our parents had a fourth child, my brother who brought great luck for all of us. When our brother was born, my sister was studying, I was sixteen while my other brother was fourteen. It was really beautiful. Now he is around thirty and lives in America, so he provides support, he is a really good man, yes, he is.

Marijana Toma: And also the baby of the family?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, he is the baby of the family.

Marijana Toma: How is that, when you say that you had a lot of obligations during your childhood, you went to school and had work to do at home as well or how?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes.

Marijana Toma: What did one of your days look like?

Slavica Jovanović: My day, for example when I went to school I had to wake up at 5:30, for example, I am speaking about elementary school, from the fifth grade until the end of the high school I would wake up at 5:30 because the bus would arrive at 6:15, I mean, I went to school and returned at around 14:00 with the same bus which was the only means of transportation, it would leave at 5:30 and let's say at 13:00. And then I worked at home, no matter whether I had to study or not. I studied at night when I finished everything, this is how it was.

Marijana Toma: This is what it looked like?

Slavica Jovanović: It wasn't...Nobody asked you whether you had to study or not, studying was secondary.

Marijana Toma: Did your parents insist on you to...you have an older sister, did they insist on your education or was it just your own desire?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes, and this was a good thing because they insisted on us being good, becoming good students, they were happy when we finished university, they even bragged about it. But still, we didn't have that kind of support from them, like, "Aha, now it's the time for you to study so you don't have to work." There wasn't something like that, home obligations were the first and then studying, "You have time to study when we will be finished."

Marijana Toma: Alright. When you say that your father was a farmer, what did you cultivate?

Slavica Jovanović: We had around seven, eight hectares of land and besides that, there was a saw in our garden. We worked with the saw. Since then...even though my older sister and younger brother worked with it more, I didn't work with it that much, but this was one of our tasks, I know how to cut boards, wooden canteens and I also know the circular cutting of the wooden fences. I did that when I was thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, maybe ten.

Marijana Toma: With your father?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, with my father.

Marijana Toma: In which year were you born?

Slavica Jovanović: '67. That means that I turn fifty this year.

Marijana Toma: And now, what else do you remember from that time in elementary school, did you have friends?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, we would mainly get along with children from our village, I remember it that...my elementary school from the first to the fourth grade was in our neighboring village, and during that time, we went to school on foot, it was two-three kilometers away. We had a bad teacher, to be honest, who beat us so much. Yes, she was really bad, but everybody does their work in their

own way. This is what I remember from that time, and from the fifth to the eighth grade, respectively, until the end of the high school, the school was in Viti and we would go there by bus, even though every second or third day there would be no bus, or during the winter when there was a lot of snow and the weather was bad, the bus wouldn't come so we would walk those seven kilometers from the village to the city, to the school.

And I remember this, I remember the first book that we read as a task at school. It was Robinson Crusoe and somehow this awakened in me a special desire to read. I remember elementary and high school as well as university through reading. I adored reading. In the garden under our house, we had a walnut tree, otherwise, that village is very beautiful, everybody who came to visit spoke kind words about the nature, and I don't know, but I often remember the saying of Duška Radović, who says, "There is fear of places famous only for their nature, because there is nothing but good words to say about them." I mean, only nature, air, this was all for us. And I really read whatever I could. During the summer, during the summer vacations, it could be that I would read the same book for two-three times, only so I would read, I would have the lines in front of my eyes, and from the fifth grade on, I really read a lot. Now I am simply not capable of learning new things. What do I know, I am in such a phase where I don't read much, but before I did. And I did...There was nothing left unread by me in the library of the elementary school until the seventh grade.

Marijana Toma: Which book was your favorite?

Slavica Jovanović: My favorite book? No...

Marijana Toma: If you can...

Slavica Jovanović: I don't know if it exists today.

Marijana Toma: You cannot choose?

Slavica Jovanović: No, no, I really cannot choose, I cannot specify any of them except the first one that happened to be Robinson Crusoe. I really can't. Each book is good. Even if it is a bad book, you can somehow learn something from it, you can learn how not to write, or learn about the impossible. But later, since we didn't have books, there were no books or money to buy books at home, I would take them from the library and this gave me focus and when... I mean, this was in the sixth, seventh grade when I started, when I lived in the village with uneducated people who don't know...they only know how to hum and dig and live from what they take from the ground, somehow I realized that they don't know anything.

Somehow I realized this at that time and that was when I told myself that I want to know, I want to know and understand things, I don't want anybody to lie to me and when they try to do so, I want to be able to realize that. I realized that I cannot do such a thing without being educated, if I know how to read. During my education, if somebody's work was to educate me, be it a professor or teacher, whoever, I would give them the respective authority but deep inside me I knew that if this is their duty, they might do it in a good or bad way, and I knew whether I had to obey or not. Something in me was focused on this, to get educated and love this. No matter how much of that I managed to achieve. And about what you asked me about my parents, they liked the fact that we were good students, this is what they expected from us, but I am telling you, my sister was a good student too, for some time she was even a better student than me and my teachers would tell me, "Your sister know better than you, how come you don't know?" Because we had the same professors for some time, so, but we both

finished university. My brother finished machinery engineering in Pristina, one year, one year and a half, and then he went... (incomp.)

I couldn't imagine there would be a war, not in Kosovo, but in Yugoslavia in general. But he told me, I mean, I was convinced, after the plurality took place, I was convinced that there would be democracy, that it would be better, there would be more freedom and that everything would be better and he told me, "You know what, imagine..." the political parties were just being established and he said, "Can you imagine a Croat becoming a member of a Serbian party and vice-versa? This will never happen! How will they divide in political parties?" He said, "There will be political war, it is guaranteed." Unfortunately, he was right. In the next year, the war began in '91 and went on until '99.

So, he read less than I did but he was wiser, he would notice things while I wouldn't, I didn't notice it until it became so obvious that everybody knew. So, I am telling you that we were good students and good children, as we are today, and I am really proud of the fact that we still have good relations, we support each other whenever necessary, even though it can happen that we don't hear from each other for months, but when necessary, we are there for each other.

Marijana Toma: In which high school did you go, was it a professional high school or a gymnasium?¹

Slavica Jovanović: No, it was, I don't know if anybody knows about it. Of course, the generations of that time who went to that school must know, this was a specialized school. First two years were like a gymnasium, we would learn about everything, mathematics, Serbian-Croatian language, musical culture, painting, everything, and in the third and fourth year, you had to focus. And I, in fact, I wanted, if I could choose, I would choose medicine because I loved it for some time, even though my parents couldn't afford to have a child studying law and another one studying medicine, so I had to enroll in the faculty of law just like my sister, if I wanted to study. So, I found myself studying law because of her. But I don't feel bad, because I found myself very well at the faculty as well as at work, so I don't feel bad.

Marijana Toma: How was that, considering that at that time it was combined, the departments were combined? Albanians and Serbs went together, right?

Slavica Jovanović: No, they weren't. The departments were divided but we all went to school at the same time, there were Albanian classes reaching my classroom and on the other side there were classrooms, from one classroom to the other...but we went to school at the same time, it wasn't like it became later that we started going in the first shift and they in the second. But, there weren't friendships, we didn't get along, somehow we lived in parallel, I mean, we didn't live together, we lived in parallel. In our village, our first neighbors are Albanians but there was a wall between our house and theirs, a wall that was taller than our roof, I mean, it was three meters tall, surrounding the whole garden, around fifty meters. This is how we did it, we would greet each other, my father had the saw and Albanians would regularly come for that kind of service and we always had to make a coffee for whomever came there, to offer them lunch if they stayed longer and this was very good. But this was all work related, it was never on the human level. It was at the neighbor level, it was always like that, it was never...

¹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

My parents got along privately, later, this happened later, in the '90s, with a family, my father and their old man were friends and so on. And his son was married to a Serb from Bosnia, then my mother and she got along, they would come to us on holidays and this was a few years before that. But as far as school goes, I am saying, we travelled with the same buses, we went to the same school and back, but these were two different worlds, to say it like that.

Marijana Toma: What about going out, when you started to go out? I suppose that you were from the same village so...?

Slavica Jovanović: No, no.

Marijana Toma: To the city?

Slavica Jovanović: We didn't get along. There were some cases when one of the Albanians wanted to get along with a Serb or vice-versa, but this was a friendship around a story, music or something similar. There is an interesting story. An Albanian boy was in school with us, for some reason he went to school in Serbian and he really was an amazing boy and now is an amazing man, we are in touch via Facebook, he lives and works in Switzerland with his family. He got along with two of my female friends, he got along with Serbs, so he was pretty present in that setting. On the other side, he was even in love, this is a youth love, this year we marked the *matura*² anniversary and we decided to meet. I asked him, I begged him to come but he didn't want to. He told me that no, it's not the right moment. I convinced him that we create our moments in life, at that time we couldn't, now I decide whom I want to have coffee with, whom I want to sit with, but he didn't come. And I really feel bad that we didn't manage to overcome what happened.

Marijana Toma: You told me that you enrolled in the faculty of law because your sister was studying there as well? Did you enroll in Pristina?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, in Pristina.

Marijana Toma: What did the move look like, I suppose it was a shock for you?

Slavica Jovanović: No, this is what it looked like. My father and his sister built a house in Kosovo Polje and we lived there, we lived with my paternal aunt. We had our own space, so I didn't live in the students' dormitory and I remember my time at the university through my studying. Yes, through studying...this was very important to me, somehow I tell myself that I know it didn't have to be like that, it could be easier, but I thought that I cannot not pass an exam. This simply couldn't happen to me, and it didn't.

And for me it was really, I mean, the only things I remember from that time are studying and working in the village. Also the entertainment with two boys with whom I went out at that time...and this, for example, we had very good professors, that's what it seemed like to me at least. I never had trouble with my knowledge later after that. I mean, when I came to Belgrade to work with colleagues who had graduated from the University of Belgrade, I was at the same level as them, which was a very important thing for me. Before that, I was afraid of how I would find myself in that situation, working

² *Matura*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

here, there were moments when I doubted myself whether I could work with them or not, but thank God, I didn't lack anything.

Marijana Toma: What branch of the faculty of law were you interested mostly in at that time?

Slavica Jovanović: I was in the general department, in Pristina we only had general studies in law and there was no other department. So I really don't know. At that time, I was in a very difficult period of my life and I thought about it more, I worked more at some other things, it might be that it has to do with education, the village lifestyle, I am more aware that something needs to be done, and that I cannot choose whether to want or not to want, to like or not to like. I never attempted to say, "I like this so this is what I will be working on," I mean, I had to study and I did study, whatever it was. I studied...So, I really don't know, maybe when I learned about criminalistics, it was really interesting to me. When I learned about the history of the state and law, this was also interesting, but I never treated some subject in a more specific way.

Marijana Toma: What was the goal? What ambitions did you have at that time, what did you think that you would become, did you aim to become a judge or an attorney, what was your idea?

Slavica Jovanović: At that time, I wanted to stay in the faculty and become a professor's assistant. And there were some chances for it to happen but I didn't succeed due to some difficult situations, those goals didn't come true and then I simply wanted to get employed and become a jurist, which also happened a few years after I graduated, I came back home and I worked there, in Viti. I got employed at a trading company, it was called Gornja Morava, before they went bankrupt...I worked there for a few years and then I worked at the municipality as a child support clerk for a few months, then as a secretary at the public company *Klokot banja*, that's what it was called. I stayed there until the end in 2001 when I moved to Belgrade.

Marijana Toma: Tell me about the student days, did you go out in Pristina, where did you go out? This is a time when Pristina was a relatively safe place.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, we went out. We went to the cinema Omladina 1, 2 and there was a 3rd one as far as I know, but we mainly went there. And I went, we went out for sweets, and I go there even now each time I go to Pristina, now it is like a goal for me when I go to Pristina to go to Elida in the Boro and Ramizi trading center. Elida is the same place today. And there was a bowling club just in front of Elida, and there we would go out for drinks, time after time.

Marijana Toma: You would do this after faculty, right?

Slavica Jovanović: After the faculty, but we also had a kind of coffee shop inside our faculty, I don't know, let's call it like that, it was in the basement but we could drink coffee or juice and we usually met there. Now I remember that there were some tables in that basement, and we met, talked and had coffee there.

Marijana Toma: Were there Albanians during your studies?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, there were.

Marijana Toma: Did you have more contacts with them then?

Slavica Jovanović: No, no. I remember now, really, I am not sure, but I believe that's how it was. Even though, there were 150 or two hundred Serbs who had enrolled in the faculty in the 2000s, in 1985 but very few of them attended the classes. Really...But I adored the classes, I regularly attended them. There were several cases when I was the only one attending a class. There were more Albanians or they regularly attended lectures, but their classrooms were always full while ours were empty. I know one moment, this was in '86 or '87, there were words that Albanians had proposed to stop the faculty in Serbian since there are no students...I know this is not true but this is what was said among us. I remember this situation when our professors forced us to register in the party, at that time there was still the Communist League, excuse me...

Marijana Toma: Yes, the Communist League.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, but we...none of us wanted. Everything was foolishness for us. We weren't interested, our interests were absolutely different, faculty, music, friendship and what else, I remember one case when one professor, assistant professor was trying to force us and I said, "But we are apolitical." And he told me, "You know what, colleague? The apolitical stand is political." And this is what I remember from that time's lessons. Really, none of us became members of the party and we weren't politically active. But this was a little, not...When we are speaking about politics, I would like to begin from '81.

Marijana Toma: In fact, that's what I wanted to ask you about.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes, yes. I remember the day when the Albanian protests took place in '81, in my town, in Viti. And from that time, I believe that the roots in Kosovo are deep. Not in cities, in streets, this and that...so there was a state of semi-war in Kosovo since '81. We never went on excursions nor picnics from that day on. This is that, we lived like in a ghetto. At least that's how I perceive it. From that time, I mean, I know, I remember the policemen in the streets, the checks in the streets, the arrests of Albanians, beating of Albanians, everything, I saw everything and I remember everything. Maybe it would be better if I forgot, but that...

Marijana Toma: In which year did you move to Kosovo Polje because of your studies?

Slavica Jovanović: In '85, and I stayed there until '89, for four years.

Marijana Toma: How was Pristina in those years?

Slavica Jovanović: For me, Pristina was a city. I literally didn't know how to cross a street with a traffic light, you will laugh but that's how it was, it seemed too complicated to me. Now, I know how to cross when the green light shows, but what kind of green? For me it was much easier to cross the street somewhere where there was no traffic light and when no car was passing, I mean, it was much simpler for me. Of course, I handled all that and everything was alright, but I am telling you, this was one of the first moments. And the first colleague I met and with whom I got along was a Muslim from Plava. An amazing girl, unfortunately she gave up after the first year, but even looking at it closely, let me call it

that way, as it is seen from the Pristina people's perspective, the colleagues from Pristina didn't accept her so well, this is something already widely known.

And I started getting along with them in the second year, third year, when everybody asked me for explanations, to explain them the things that weren't clear. They became closer to me and I started getting along with them. But mainly we hung out at the faculty and after the lectures, but in general I didn't get along with my colleagues from the faculty, neither with Serbs nor Albanians....That's how life was organized there, simply, I went to the faculty, listened to lectures, returned, studied and so like this for ten days, then I would go to the village for a few days and there I would work and help my parents, then return for my studies and that was it. At that time I was getting along with a boy and this lasted until the third year, I would spend my free time with him and that was it.

Marijana Toma: What's his name?

Slavica Jovanović: His name is Miloš Stanković, I don't know if he will feel good that I am mentioning his name, but it doesn't matter...He lives in Paris now, he works there.

Marijana Toma: How was that, you were with him for two years?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, we were together from high school until the third year of faculty and then the relationship was over because, I guess I spent a lot of time studying and he got along with others...

Marijana Toma: ... Aha.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, that's why it was over. Yes...

Marijana Toma: And then when you finished your studies, you returned to Viti? How was this period of job hunting? This is a period when Yugoslavia was in an economic crisis?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes, yes. It was really boring, really. Back then there was an idea that whoever finishes university has to be employed. It doesn't matter how and where, they have to get employed, be it on the committee or wherever, my father went there and notified them that his daughter has finished university and for a moment they told him, "She can work for Gornja Morava." And I went there and for around six-seven months I literally never worked. Nothing. I remember that time because I read so many books...

Marijana Toma: At work?

Slavica Jovanović: At work. I had access to the library, it was nearby and this is a time when the salary was very bad, I was absolutely not happy, it was so boring. But they convinced me, so I read, when I think about it, I got some education from there too. And then in April '90, before the end of that year, I got married and my daughter was born nine or ten months later. And then I was on parental leave which I also remember for not being normal and being sad...But at that time I read Perl Bak, I mean, all the selected works. I also watched a TV series on the second channel on Japan. I remember that time with the desire to go back to work, I wanted to return, I was counting the days when my parental leave would be finished, and then I returned to that company, it had gone bankrupt and there was no

room for a jurist there anymore. I started working because there was no position for a jurist at the municipality, so I started working as a child support clerk, having finished law was one of the requirements, this was '92, maybe.

The refugees from Croatia had already come at that time, and the requirement for me to work there was for me to become the assistant to the commissioner for refugees, the commissioner from the municipality, and I accepted without saying a word, of course, I just wanted to work somewhere and have a salary. And I really worked hard there for seven months, I remember I issued thousands of decisions for people for child support. I received the director of the company, of the social organization, we met once in an office and he told me, "I have heard that you are a good jurist, would you like to work and become a secretary?" At that time they didn't have a secretary, so I was happy to accept the job, because it was a very good position with more work and more obligations. So, it was May, '93, if I remember it well, when I started working for them.

Part Two

Marijana Toma: You mentioned that you got married in the '90s.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes.

Marijana Toma: Can you tell me something about your husband?

Slavica Jovanović: My husband and I met in my office at Gornja Morava because his father had a market and would bring things to him. It wasn't love or anything, I don't know, the effect of my education or something, I am returning to that, I don't know whether I am right or not but whatever. At that time I thought that I had to get married, I had finished university, I was working and I had to get married. Secondly, it wasn't always good at my parents' house...because I was always disturbed by other work and so at that time I was with a third boy at that time, doesn't matter, that relationship was over because of some reason, while my husband was very insistent on flirting...too insistent.

So at a certain moment I started hanging out with him and after a few months it turned into marriage. He was a professor at the high school, he was the professor of my brother and my brother liked him as a professor, I got recommendations from him...But unfortunately, it wasn't a happy marriage. That marriage ended with his death in 2003 and it was the most terrible thing that happened, but if it wasn't for that, I believe we would have gotten divorced earlier. At that moment, I was ready to divorce, I had the support of my parents, but some things had to happen before that and then his illness came and I had to stay until the end, I remember that I told myself several times, after I realized what was about to happen, I told myself, "You will handle this even if it costs you your life." It was difficult but what can you do. Now I feel so bad that he died at such a young age, he was 44.

Marijana Toma: What did he die of?

Slavica Jovanović: He died of atrophic lateral sclerosis. Now my children don't have a father, but if he was a support for me in life, no, the contrary...that's how it was. Unfortunately, as much as I can and as

much as I care, when I look around myself, I can barely find a good marriage. All my colleagues are either not married because of these reasons or their husbands are more of a burden than a support. I don't know what is happening to this society in that respect, but unfortunately that's how it is.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, of course if it is not a problem, could you talk a bit more about your years together with your husband and your children?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes, we had children right after nine months and...he was in love with me, I was told this by a professor of mine who was also his colleague, he told me, "You should know that he loved you very much." I said, "I admit it. I don't question that." But love has to be cultivated in everyday life. And I often tell my children and other young people, love is important while people are spending time with each other, it is of course important, but the character of the person with whom you are going to live is very important for a marriage and a life together. How valuable they are, they have to work how much they want, to create, to make theirs and others' lives beautiful, how prepared they are to sacrifice for the other, I mean, for the person which they are living with, for their children. How prepared they are to sacrifice, to work for them. If this person is naturally lazy, they can love whomever they want but they cannot move to do something for them. This is very important for a marriage and a family.

So this was our problem, my husband simply didn't want to do anything for his family. I had to fight for a better salary, let's say, and for a place to live. First we lived with his family, where there were good living conditions if there were normal human interactions. However, waking up in the morning and listening to people fighting, I had never thought about that. I had to experience that when I was living at his family's and then I wanted to lead my own life and he didn't want that...Then we lived in that family house for around three years, later I got an apartment from *Klokot banja* [Klokot Water Spring] where I was working and we lived in that apartment, but there was always this, and I remember it, I don't know how to articulate it, there was always a kind of jealousy from his side, I don't know the meaning of it, it is really difficult for me to go back to that, but everything about me was disturbing him. He was disturbed even by the fact, "Who was in your office..."

It is funny for me to speak about this. Many times I had to excuse him from my office and say, "Man, go deal with your business and let me deal with mine." And this, so, it was in his favor to have a jurist and beautiful, relatively more beautiful wife and everything, but he didn't know what to do with her. He couldn't handle having such a woman near himself. This was his problem. One time he asked me why I had finished faculty and I said, "It is like this, I can even say that I haven't graduated but that is an unchangeable fact. I can also not work at all." For nights in a row we discussed our problems and how to solve them, this and that, until I realized that it was useless, that I was losing time I could dedicate to myself and my children, he was thirty something and it was useless for me to educate him, it was a waste of time.

But to be honest, he was disturbed by many things. Once when I had already realized that everything had gone to hell and there was no sense in fighting anymore, he told me, "Look, all the neighbors respect you, they all admire you." "They admire me. I respect and admire them as well. Why not? I am kind, I greet them. I make sweets and invite them, they invite me to. Why should they not respect me?" Really, for example, he was disturbed by this fact too. Unfortunately this was not the only case. There were other similar stories that I heard from him, but, my children know everything. I told them when

they were prepared to listen to all of this and trust me. Of course, they love their father, of course, and they look at this from a different angle and I absolutely accept it. And I say, if he were alive and we weren't together, I would love for each of us to live their own lives, instead of this happening. But we had to go through that.

Marijana Toma: In which year did he get sick?

Slavica Jovanović: In '97. 1997.

Marijana Toma: I would like to go back to that period, this is the period before you got married, when things began, when political troubles and everything else began, how did this reflect on you, on your life and your work?

Slavica Jovanović: I didn't allow that to become part of my personal life and my work, simply everything that was happening seemed stupid to me. But as far as politics go, there were regular meetings in Kosovo Polje, people would gather, do you remember? Do you remember or have you read about it after it happened? Small meetings, meetings about everything, meeting about this, meeting about that. Everybody would attend them, my paternal aunt was like, "Men and women are attending them." There is a meeting about something, nobody knows what for. I remember the meeting in Gazimestan, it was a great wonder. Of course I didn't go there, just so that we are clear, I despised all that kind of events. I am telling you, to me the society in which we lived while in Yugoslavia, Serbia, Kosovo, was good enough, I thought that we needed to develop it and become what we are expected to, so that it would become great and there would be no need to change it. They wanted to change it, these were strange to me. And primarily, somewhere deep inside me, I knew that this would not lead us to anything good, once the war is mentioned, we are like this, we are like that, we are smarter, what are we? We only look at ourselves. So, it seemed strange to me.

I started working on April 1, 1990. Back then, there were Albanians and Serbs working for that firm. And things started...this lasted...things started changing after one year, this was in '90. And I mentioned it that there was nothing in the first month, maybe in the first six months, some things started changing. I started working when things started changing because, after the then-secretary who was an old Albanian was expelled from his workplace, and I replaced him. My first task as far as this job position goes, was to sign the decision to expel Albanians from their workplaces. And I did it. I knew that it wasn't okay, I knew why they were being expelled but at that time I was already married and pregnant and I needed to make a living out of something and so I did that.

And I remember that situation, when some people were expelled, three-four Albanians who were in high positions, the financial director and the commercial director. I was in the seventh or eighth month of my pregnancy when I had to deliver the decisions to them. The then Serbian boss, was allegedly implementing the policies, of course I told him that it was illegal and that we should follow the procedures, that I have to prove that those people made mistakes and what kind of mistakes they made and that I couldn't expel them like that, sign the decision, lean on some article, read half of the article and write it, this was stupidity. Of course this didn't bring anything good, nothing!

It was me, a woman who had to do it and this was, according...And I am telling you, I had to prepare the decision and the next day I had to deliver those to them and at around eight in the morning, I asked the director, "Should I deliver these decisions to them?" "No, no, wait a little more." It was 9:00,

10:00, and at around 11:00, he invited me to his office and said, “You can deliver the decisions now.” At that time, around ten men, prominent Serbian men for the company and the surroundings, showed up. They were all armed, I realized this later, in order to protect the director from them. Of course they delegated me to deliver these decisions to these absolutely not guilty people and they accepted them and said, “We know that you are not part of this and we know that you do this because of some certain reasons, of course, we would do the same.” And they said, “OK,” and they signed the decisions and left the company.

Marijana Toma: How many people were expelled from their workplaces, do you remember?

Slavica Jovanović: Almost all of them, yes, yes, all of them. Because I remember that Albanians were the only ones who worked at that company. When I started working for *Klokot banja* after that, yes, it might be that thirty people continued working for that company, while every Albanian was expelled from other companies. This was the duty, or I don’t know, because Serbs thought that Albanians had to be absolutely expelled from society, which is something they also did.

I remember a similar situation, my office was on the left while the director’s office was on the right side and in the middle, there was the office of the secretary who worked there sometimes. I remember a conversation the director had with one person from DB, they were talking in the office in between and I listened to them from my office. They discussed how to do it, what to write in order to justify the expulsion from work of an Albanian. All was clear to me. And then there is the story that Albanians quit themselves, that’s not true! It was really difficult for me to see my colleagues, people who remained unemployed, and I knew that the same thing would happen to us at some point, I knew it back then, there was no doubt, it is just that some didn’t want to understand that.

Marijana Toma: Were there tensions during that time? You are speaking about that feeling and I don’t know, the insecurities of that time, what kind of atmosphere was it, people were losing their jobs, while for someone else life continued normally. What did this look like?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes. It looks ugly. I don’t know, I wasn’t affected by that, I don’t know, for example, I wasn’t afraid, I knew and I also told those people that it was something happening all around Kosovo, that it was wrong and that I felt bad for being part of it but I had to keep that job and do something. And they all understood it, “I would also work if I was in your place, I understand that it is not you, somebody else is doing this.” And I am telling you that in our company, all the people who received the decision left and never returned, but at other companies, I know that Albanians didn’t want to leave the workplace and armed policemen went to forcibly take them away. They took them away from their workplaces with arms. *Agro Morava* in Vitia, Kosovo.

Marijana Toma: They physically took them away from there?

Slavica Jovanović: They physically took them away, using rifles. Yes, this is definitely true. Of course, then the police station and the municipality, at that time I wasn’t really involved. Maybe my problem was that I was always interested in only some certain things, I mean, I never got out of my world, I didn’t want to pretend I was reading the newspaper and caring about what was happening in Kragujevac. No, I didn’t care. I was always limited to my own circle and obligations, I wanted to be as good as possible at that. Then the children came, this is a situation where you have to be ahead of

every situation even though I am telling you that I read whenever I could, I took information and created my own opinions, I always had my own opinions about everything. I mean, I am an intellectual and have to have opinions, but I thought that I didn't have to take sides, politically speaking, to say something or affect a situation. It wouldn't make much sense, even if I wanted. But, I always had my own opinion regarding that.

As far as that goes, I don't remember being afraid of Albanians, no, even though it was there, there were honestly situations to be afraid of, because I would return from the faculty at night and walk two kilometers to the village, anything could happen, from Albanians as well as from Serbs and everyone else. That was the situation, objectively speaking, but we had to be courageous in order to live and get an education there. So, I wasn't afraid of anyone, of anything, but I knew that this wasn't leading to anything good.

Marijana Toma: This is the period when the wars began, you mentioned it earlier that there were refugees coming from Croatia at some moment...

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, exactly. I only told you one situation. I remember when, maybe it was the time when I started working, maybe not. Yes, it was the time when the gathering at the Cankarjev³ dormitory.

Marijana Toma: These are the '90s?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, it was the '90s. My mother was watching the television and I was sleeping, this was late...and the next morning when I woke up, she said, "Slavica, there will be a war here." He added, "I heard something on the television last night," and she said, "There will be war in this land." I never watched that gathering, I never read anything about it, I just know that there were some statements, which I didn't care about either, I know that they were bad statements and that's it, I don't know.

As for the war, first in Croatia, I remember the ugly, pathetic TV reports, people with beards slicing bread, crucifying, I don't know, it was really ugly, I couldn't even watch it, let alone talk about participating in any way or thinking about it. Then I remember another report about the war in Croatia when all was fine in Bosnia, then they were interviewing some people in Bosnia and they were pretending, "We don't want this, there is brotherhood unity, we are great, we get along very well. The war won't happen here." It didn't take long and it was a catastrophe there, even worse.

Marijana Toma: The people who came from Croatia to Kosovo, the refugees, considering that you were working for the additions for children at that time, do you know how they were accommodated? What happened to them?

Slavica Jovanović: I know this very well. I was an assistant to the commissioner for refugees at that time, I would write the invitations for him as well as something in some meetings, we didn't even have

³ The meeting at the Cankarjev dormitory took place on February 27, 1989 as a sign of solidarity with the Trepça miners who had gone on strike. This gathering marked the first public conflict of the Slovenian administration with Slobodan Milošević.

paper and I knew I had to find ways to find paper, to print the invitations. Even though I was already working for *Klokot banja* in '95.

Marijana Toma: Excuse me, what did that company deal with?

Slavica Jovanović: It produced mineral water, fluids, and for some time there was the therapeutic bath, it cures rheumatic diseases mainly, and the mineral water was produced. So, I was already there in '95 and then the refugees from Croatia came at that time to Klllokot and Viti, I don't know, but this I know for sure. They were staying in one of the buildings of the company, at that time, it was a hotel, with some rooms, spaces and everything, and each of them was settled in those spaces with their families. And at my place, to say like that, a grandmother, and the maternal aunt of my sister-in-law from Croatia came. Grandmother Soka lived with us for ten days until we found a place for her in that hotel and she stayed there for a very short time, I believe she was the first who returned to Croatia. I also remember that my husband and I drove her to Pristina, when the first refugees returned and we left her in the Dardania neighborhood, or I don't know what it's called, and from there, there was transportation to Croatia.

And those people were so not welcomed by the people in Kosovo, even by Serbs. But, I guess that's how it is everywhere, really, there are no differences here, every setting has a hard time accepting foreigners. My children used to hang out with some girls but they were good children, well educated, they were human too, I mean, it happened what happened to them. Then my neighbors would judge me for why my children were hanging out with those children, because they have fleas. And I say, "What is the matter, our children have fleas too, it can happen that they get them. There are no children who haven't had fleas once in their lives." I mean, so what, honestly, they were trying to be so good and they were really good and all and a big part of them has gone to Australia. They went to Australia some years later, they stayed for some...older couples stayed there until '99. I would like to mention a grandmother who would visit me for coffee and with whom I was so happy to talk.

Looks like she started getting along with grandmother Soka, then grandmother Soka left and she remained here. She really knew how to tell amazing stories from Croatia, the life there and I remember, since my children were so little at that time, I ironed a lot of clothes... and I liked it when she spoke and I ironed, those afternoons were great. And they stayed here until the end, then I really don't know where they went after, eh, I remember one situation when she told me, we were on the street and it was just before the bombings, maybe one month before the bombings and she said, You know what, there will be a war here, be prepared to move, pack your stuff, the same thing that happened to us will happen to you too. This atmosphere, these events, everything."

Marijana Toma: How is it, what do you remember, when did the news about war start to spread, what was the first news about the war in Kosovo that you remember?

Slavica Jovanović: About the war, the one that started on March 24?

Marijana Toma: No, no, whichever.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, I remember them. I might still have the Albanian photographs down in the basement, where the photographs were published, I don't know whether it was Ferizaj or another one. My colleagues would bring these to work and I would read them together with them and then we would discuss them. When they went, during the bombings they didn't come to work anymore, so I found the newspapers and saved them, just to have them. Then I also saw those photographs at the Fund⁴ and I knew them.

Marijana Toma: Of the war?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, some stories about how Albanians were organizing into the KLA and that they were fighting somewhere. There were no such things on our side, there were no such things. I saw the first Albanian in a uniform after the war, after the bombings and I know that he was a person whom I often...He was the coffeemaker at the company where I worked at the *Klokot banja*, and I talked to him and he told me, "You know what Slavica, they speak to me as if I were the KLA. KLA is organizing this," he said, "And I don't even know what the KLA is, I don't know anyone in the KLA. I don't know whether it exists or not." He said, "I really don't know what the KLA is." He told me that.

Otherwise, we really...When I started working for the *Klokot banja*, I met an Albanian colleague who had worked there for a long time, he was a jurist with whom I collaborated very well. I was surprised by him, when I went there for the first time, when I met him for the first time, somehow he looked at me angrily, as if, "Look, another Serb who will pretend to act smart to us or something like that," but I said that after he got to know me better, he was good to me. He said, "I don't remember looking at you like that," but I noticed it.

So, he really did his job in the best way possible and there were a lot of difficult situations here which I think we overcame because of good collaboration because we didn't feel them. So, for me, I am saying, I was impressed by the opinion of Serbs like, "We can do whatever we want, no, they can't bomb us." I told them, "People can do that, they just need to decide. Of course they dare to do it, it is a matter of time. Why would you think they wouldn't dare to do it?" And I told them, "Why wouldn't they dare to do it? They just need to start. I don't know, Russia will make these rockets, they will make those rockets..." Of course, everything went to hell when it began.

Part Three

Marijana Toma: What did it look like at that time? What does that March and the bombings look like now?

Slavica Jovanović: Ah, what it looks like. I don't know. I remember that I looked at the bombings from my kitchen windows. Pristina was bombed and one could see the reflection of something. This was at around 10:00, 09:00, 10:00 In the evening, and now it was clear for everyone that bombings were taking place and we were strong, we had to protect ourselves...there was everything here, I don't know, but it made sense, everything was destroyed, everything was wrong. And the robbings of the

⁴The Humanitarian Law Center is an organization for Human Rights in Serbia, which deals with documentation of war atrocities and general data processing of people who lost their lives in the last war in Kosovo.

houses of Albanians started in the first days, the moving started on the first day, then fires were set on houses so people...

At some moment, while I was looking at the NATO bombing, they had taken some positions somewhere in the mountains where the NATO airplanes were flying from, and the Albanian village Radivojac was on fire and it was two kilometers from here, while Serbs from that village, from Klllokot were robbing the houses, they were taking stuff and setting them on fire, I don't know who was doing it. While Albanians had just abandoned the car queue that had left just two hours before this, it left for the border through Vitia, Ferizaj, Gërlica and so on. This was so ugly.

I said that this was the seventh circle of hell. I don't really know this, I have no explanation. So, I couldn't, people are eager, and I was surprised by this, by how people try to find explanations and justifications for every ugly gesture. They were saying, "We have heard that the airport will be exactly in Radivojac which they are robbing and putting on fire. This whole village will be destroyed and then the airport will be built there, and there is no other reason, everything will be destroyed and so let them use it somehow."

And so, I remember the war by that robbing, by that fire and by the movement of Albanians and by the livestock, I mean, we are speaking about a rural setting where most of the people had livestock and before leaving, as my parents did later, they set the livestock free so that they wouldn't suffer here. And they were walking around, it as springtime, a time when cows are not allowed to eat a kind of green grass, they can die if they eat it before it dries, and the livestock were dying on the street, on the field and at some point, those animals, the Serbian army collected those cows, as many of them as they could, and locked them in the stadium in Klllokot, and they stayed there hungry and thirsty for three-four nights or more.

And I mean, I remember this as the most difficult scene, they were screaming the whole night and this was fifty meters from the house where I was living with my children. It was terrible. They collected them with trucks, I guess, and sent them to a slaughterhouse, this was...I felt bad, of course, for the people as well as for the animals who were suffering there. I remember one scene when I went to Pristina for some work, I went to Pristina and in front of the street here there were animals from the surrounding villages, from the surroundings of Ferizaj, I remember one scene, there was a cow giving birth near the street, but I felt so bad to look at it. Yes.

Marijana Toma: What, were you afraid back then?

Slavica Jovanović: I don't even know. I thought that it was useless to be afraid. It doesn't make sense to be afraid. But, I believed that we had to survive in that situation the way we could and organize. But when I saw the queues of Albanians going towards Macedonia, I spoke to all of them, told them that it was a matter of days until we would also have to go towards the same direction. So, "When will our queues leave in this direction?" "No, this is over, we will make them move, we will cleanse Kosovo." And such things, these are the stupid things that I remember, they thought they would cleanse Kosovo.

This was the story among Serbs during the war time in Kosovo, that they would cleanse Kosovo of Albanians. And this was the goal, for Kosovo to be cleansed, that it would be amazing for us when

there were no longer Albanians in Kosovo. This was like when Radivojci was cleansed, now another village is being cleansed, Tërpeza, Novosella, I don't know. We knew what village was being cleansed every day. And what did it mean? It meant that people were packing, ordered to leave and go towards the border, this was it.

Marijana Toma: Now we are already speaking about '99 and this is two years after your husband got sick. Considering that he was suffering a difficult illness, what did your life with your children and the war look like. Your children were little at that time, they were nine and how old?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, yes, one of them was eight and the other was six years old in '99. His illness started kicking in very harmlessly. Once he told me, since he ran and worked with trading, he had exercised something and one day he told me, "You know what? I have noticed that my left is thinner than the right one and when I run, I cannot lean on my left side, my leg fails me." And he told me about this once or twice but I didn't trust him, I thought he was imagining stuff and that it just seemed to him like that. And the third time when he mentioned it, I still remember that scene, he was sitting on the sofa and I told him, "I will prove to you that what you say is not true." And I take, since I liked to tailor, this was a kind of hobby of mine at that time and I took the meter to do the measurements of two of his arms and I said, I was measuring his hands and one of his arms was four centimeters thinner.

Now we realized that something was wrong. Then he came here to Belgrade, to the Institute of Neurology and he spent ten days on examinations and when they excluded all the illnesses, I mean all of them, then what are the symptoms, they told him that it was a death sentence. At that time they told him that he could live for maybe five years, then he lived for six years after that. And when he came back from the hospital, he said, "I will commit suicide, I don't want to allow my children to see what I will become the way I have seen people in the hospital."

I spoke to him a lot and tried to convince him, you know how things happen, and back then there was a big discussion about DNA, I don't know, there was a moment in medicine, something was invented, I don't know, there was medicine for that illness and I spoke to him and thank God, I guess he wasn't that serious about that, but yes, he gave up that idea and he started taking medicine and the only medicine that slowed that process that was happening within him was produced in France and it cost 700-800 Deutsche Marks in France at that time, while here it cost 1200 Deutsche Marks. And we managed to stock up somehow, he used four-five boxes of that medicine, until the doctors said, "Now it is useless to take them, they no longer have their effect."

This is a slow but unstoppable illness, and for me, there is something that I still feel bad about is that I am afraid of the fact that it is a genetic disease. But a doctor once explained to me that it is inherited when the gene has a meeting point, from the father's side as well as from the mother's side, the atrofico-lateral sclerosis is hidden and it can be that it shows, it can be that it doesn't. So, just after his death, for some years I had a situation with my son when I was very afraid. He was little at that time, in the seventh or eighth grade, I had a panic attack that lasted for a week and I got out of it after a week. Then it lasted longer.

So, he had difficulties walking in '99. In the first years you could barely notice while he could hardly move in '99, but fortunately that was the best from the worst, that he didn't need to move and so on,

so he wasn't even part of that story. At his time, they offered him to become a spy for the State Security and he categorically turned it down. He was never part of politics, which is something I liked.

We agreed in a great way in this regard, not even on SPS⁵ or other things. So to say, the next year, in 2000 he was in a wheelchair. So, for one year, two that we lived "down"⁶ there he was paralyzed. For two years we had no electricity or water at home, it happened very often, so it was a torture, really, because he needed care and our children were little and that was it. Later I moved to a village, to a so-called neighborhood, thirty kilometers from Belgrade, which was great for me. Everybody was saying that it is so far from the city, that it is not good here, for me it was great, I have electricity, water, telephone, canalization...it was good for me. Yes, but I am saying, it was a terrible time, it was terrible.

Marijana Toma: When the war was over, you remained there and you...?

Slavica Jovanović: Eh, I will tell you about it now, this is where the interesting story begins, this is a different story from the others. The director who was here, he was a kind of a second political person in the Municipality, Vesko Pirić was the first one, he was the mayor, so he was the alpha and omega of that place at that time, he was the second. And he often spoke, my director Ilija Tasić often said, "While Slobodan Milošević⁷ is in Belgrade and Vesko Pirić in Vitia, I will be here," and it was exactly like that...

But it didn't last forever, the way he thought. And when he realized that...when the Kumanova Agreement⁸ was signed and when the army and police troops started withdrawing, first the distinguished citizens from Vitia left. And from the village, policemen and others who were I don't know what, I mean who did all the bad things, and it was like, I remember a speech by Vesko, I don't remember where it was, but I remember him speaking and saying, "You haven't done anything, KFOR will come now and you can stay here freely. Nothing will happen to you, the fact that you have stolen and so on, that somebody has taken something, it doesn't matter, this is a war, this and that...It doesn't matter, this will pass.

And just as humans are, the policemen were the first ones who left with their families, those who were smart knew that this wasn't good, they left. My people abandoned the village, they were in the village from June 10 to June 15-16, they were in the village when the neighbors had told them, "You know what, we wouldn't like you to leave, but we have heard that it is better if you leave." Then they packed their stuff and first went from the village to Vitia, and then from Vitia they left in the direction towards which everybody was leaving.

I would also like to tell you about another situation that seems interesting to me, I mean, it will seem interesting to other people. When all the Serbs left the village, only a cousin of mine remained, my

⁵ *Socijalistička partija Srbije* - The Socialist Party of Serbia, the ruling party in Serbia from 1990, led by Slobodan Milošević.

⁶ Down is a derogatory term referring to Kosovo, which considers Belgrade to be the center.

⁷Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

⁸The Military Technical Agreement between NATO (KFOR) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), commonly known as the Kumanovo Agreement, was the accord concluded on 9 June 1999 in Kumanovo that ended the NATO bombing campaign of FRY.

father's paternal aunt, a far grandmother, she remained alone while her son had left earlier to send some stuff to someone and she remained home. Otherwise, that woman had been married in that village in '61 and didn't leave it until '99, she hadn't gotten out of the village. She lived in her yard, her garden, her fields, she didn't go anywhere.

Her husband died soon after that, they had five-six years of marriage, maybe seven-eight, she stayed there with two children. Now her son and her daughter were grown up, her daughter was married and her son was older but however, he lived with her, but wasn't at home at that particular moment. I was in Kllokot at my workplace when a neighbor called me, "Slavica you..." I was in touch with people from KFOR, KFOR troops were at the company and she was like, "You know people from KFOR, you have to go to Ilinka and take her in the village." And I said, "How will I be able to do that, it is dangerous, where am I supposed to leave my children?" And she said, "Ask them, beg them, go and if you manage to take her out, you will bring a lot of luck to your children."

And I really had no solution, I asked the man from KFOR who was there, he was a kind of a commander for this region and we gathered from Kllokot to Gushica where my village is which is thirteen, fifteen kilometers from there, when we were passing by, the Serbian houses were burning in Gromova on both sides, all the houses were in flames and we were going through.

And when I went there, my people weren't there as I told you, we went there, I was looking for her around the house and I didn't know where she was, I thought that she would be in the garden, there was no other place where she could be. One night earlier, Albanians had burned the stables where there were animals, they had set the cows free but the pigs and chicken had remained inside. I think that a pig had been burned, and I saw her feeding another half-burned pig in that garden. I told her, "Grandmother Ilinka, you have to come with me, you cannot stay here." "I can't," she said, "Look, I cannot abandon this pig." I said, "You don't have to abandon it, just leave it here, you see there is grass, there is the water, it will feed itself. You have to come with me and you will return two-three days later after everything gets better."

And I finally managed to convince her, imagine a woman who hasn't left her village for thirty-forty years, and has to leave now. I convinced her because I told her we would return after two days and I told the man from KFOR, "She wants to return after two days." He said, "It is okay, we will bring her back the day after tomorrow." And she came, it was very difficult to accommodate her at my place. She didn't know how to use the tap and so on, however, she learned, it doesn't matter...and we came after two years and found her house had been robbed.

The first time when I went there and wanted to go inside, I wanted to take a vase from my house which I had bought during my studies and which I was attached to, but which I didn't want to take without buying another one for my mother, which means it was something important to me. It was also important for me not to take anything from the house without replacing it and so the time moved, and I never bought another vase so that I could take mine and at that moment I said, "Now it's the time to take it."

When I went to my house, my people had left the key with my neighbor, I had to look for my neighbor whom I found and he opened the door and I went inside the house and found it empty, they had taken everything. Everything. For me it was not clear, not that the vase wasn't there, but nothing was there.

My family were ordinary people, they had the simplest furniture, I don't know who needed that, but it looks like somebody did. There was nothing at home, I went inside and went out and I have to admit that it was very difficult for me when my neighbor opened the door for me. I don't know whether there was a need for my neighbor to allow me to enter my house or not, but I mean, it was a very difficult moment.

But it doesn't matter, people have suffered even worse things, but what I want to say is that such things hurt. And if somebody in the future wants to take the key to somebody else's house and thinks about allowing or not allowing them to enter their house, they have to think carefully about what they are doing, is it a good or a bad thing. However, we went back two days later, her house was robbed, destroyed, they had taken everything they could, and mind you, it was the house of a poor family, I mean, what did someone need her stuff for? Nothing. She collected her stuff and came back to my place, she realized that it didn't make sense anymore. After one week, her relatives, my husband and I drove her to Leskovac to her relatives and they picked her up. She died two years ago at her daughter's in Smederevo. Otherwise, I mean, the whole anger against politics and the way things were happening escalated at the moment this happened, the police troops and the others were leaving. Now that it is over, I will speak and tell everyone what I think about it.

The director called me to his office in order to ask me, to his office, and I told him, "What kind of a director are you? You cannot..." I said all that came to my mind, but I also spoke before that. And he pretended to be thinking all the time, we met, discussed and what we will be doing next. Some said, "Let's allow Albanians to return, those who have continued working and we will not allow those that we have expelled to return," and I said, "People, who is asking you what is allowed and what not. But let's think about what we can do to stay here because they are going to return. They have returned, this is what you are forgetting, but let's think of a way for us to stay here."

They didn't even understand it, "We cannot set conditions now." And I said, I invited my colleagues who had worked, the director of the company, the commercial director and I don't know who else, those who were holding the main positions, I invited them to the company and said, "You know what? It has been like this for us. My idea is for us to stay here, to stay here with dignity and continue living here until the conditions are good for us to live as humans, not to escape, not to leave our stuff behind."

I told them, "Do you know what would be best? For us to change the director and appoint another director." These were the three-four days when Serbs were leaving and Albanians had returned, I mean KFOR wasn't there yet. It was an empty middle space, and I told them, "I am the President of the board," and I really was the president of the board of directors, "I will sign the declaration that says that the director has changed and he no longer has access to the company. He can do something else, it doesn't matter. But tell me, which one of you wants to become the director. I would like to become the director, but I can't, I am the president of the board of directors and I cannot assign myself."

And there was a man who always wanted to become the director, but didn't want to at that particular moment. And for obvious reasons, my idea didn't move forward at all... They all left with time, nobody remained to become the director. And it happened that way that after three days we were like, "What are we going to do, whom are we going to contact?" And we realized that the time was to contact Albanians and see what we could do. Could we continue working and living and so on.

And I said, "Let's call Idriz first," my jurist colleague, "And I know that through him, it will be the easiest to approach people who would like to be among us, or the most important people, I don't know, and we will talk to them." And we sat in my office and talked, I saw Idriz and Berat Ahmeti who was later a director from my window. Berat was a director of the mineral water company until '90-'91 when Albanians were expelled from the workplace. When I saw them, the chair turned around, I turned around too, we were just talking about them and trying to find ways to call them and now they were coming on their own.

And they came to the office, and God knows how, "Hello! How are you? What's up? This and that..." It was summer, they were wearing T-shirts and I was just thinking about how armed they could be but they were dressed very normally, they walked slowly and came in. I noticed that they had no arms, their concern was just the same as ours, so they decided to come and ask what was happening. They came, God knows how we were talking, we made coffee, "What happened? How are you? Did anybody die?" And such things, and they were like, "You know what, it was what it was. We need to continue working." "Of course we will continue working, Let's see what we will do."

Slowly solving that, we started talking and people went home, the next day they came to the company the way they could, Albanians started working. But they didn't accept our people who were still there. KFOR came and there was a very good person working for them, I think he did a good job. And they started organizing meetings between Albanians and Serbs, which are...

And these meetings would be attended by our director, a woman who was the financial director and the commercial director, and four-five people from their side, from Albanians, there was Berat Ahmeti and later he became a director and a man from Mira, everybody was surprised when they saw him, who was he, I guess he was a representative from the KLA and another one from the KLA. And we organized meetings in which we tried to find a solution, who will work and who will not work. I mean, there were eight-nine of us, and there were just as many KFOR soldiers, who kept each of us under watch. I mean, the meeting was such, we were sitting at the table and they were staying around us, and I had the arm towards me like this {shows the distance with hands} time after time.

When I remember those scenes, it was really...we had to survive and experience that too. And we were pretending to talk, when this happened for the first time, the first meeting, my director had a big photograph of Slobodan Milošević in the office and when I went out, I noticed that the photograph was no longer there, and there was something else, a kind of memorial or something and he was told, "From today, there will be no nationalist symbols here or photographs of distinct people in that regard," and he had to accept that. It was his favorite photograph, and the spot remained empty on the wall.

And this lasted for like three-four meetings, and the Serbs were taking their time to think whether they wanted that system or not, up and down, while those from KFOR didn't move and they came to one of the meetings and said, "You know what? Those who want to work will continue working here, be it Serbs or Albanians, but the Serb will no longer be a director, the representative of Albanians as a nation will be a director." And then it was over. I remember that my director stood up in that meeting and said, "I am leaving!" "The financial director was sitting near me and she asked me, "Are we leaving?" I said, "I am not leaving, you can leave if you want." And she stayed. And then I didn't care

about how many Serbs remained there, I mean, whoever wanted to work... I knew those who didn't want to work would go somewhere where they would be unemployed, without food, without anything. Some days passed, and I was the only Serb going to work.

I remember a case, so in the middle of my building and that, and the station where the director's office was, where I usually went to meetings and other things, and once I, so there was a park, it really is a beautiful park, and now, it has only grown, I was in the middle of the park and I stopped and I was thinking, "My God, Slavica are you crazy? So you're the only Serb in Kosovo that is going to work, even though you're agreeing, you're negotiating with Albanians, like is that you?" And then I said, "No, nobody told me that I wasn't allowed to go to work. I am in my workplace and I will stay here because of my children, because of the salary." Because at that moment I could not earn money at any other place, whereas I needed the money. So, for my kids, for the sick person and for myself. No, so I went back to the office.

So, I experienced persecution by people, by the Serbians of that village. So, I sent my kids holding their hands, I walked the streets, I tried to behave as normally as I could. If I had to go to the store, I went to the store, nobody limited me in this way, I did not allow myself to be limited. But, walking the street while I was sending my kids holding their hands and I hear them yell behind me, "What are you doing *šiptarska*⁹ bitch?" And things like this.

However, this time came and went, and then we were reduced to around ten-fifteen continued working at the *banja* [water spring] with Albanians who came. They were very good when Albanians came to this company. Simply there was potential to work here and to earn money and for the employees to get a decent salary. It is just that the Serbians did not know until that moment.

I remember that my last salary while the Serbians were in power, to say, it was the salary of May, which was 150 marks at the time. My July salary, so the one I got in August when the Albanians were there, when they started working, it was 540 marks. These people simply produced, and immediately that summer, the station was packed. So if the war hadn't happened, I really don't know, some suffered, died, some apparently lived a normal life. So, they produced water and they sold it for cash [English], while ours sold it no matter whether it was expired or not, and would go to courts, to trails, and different things. They simply didn't know how to earn money from something that was clean money, you understand?

Marijana Toma: When did you leave Kosovo?

Slavica Jovanović: In 2001.

⁹ A derogatory term referring to Albanians from Kosovo, aiming to distinguish them from the Albanians from Albania, *Albanac/Albanci/Alбанка*.

Marijana Toma: What were the reasons that you left since you had a good life?

Slavica Jovanović: What happened is, yes, yes, for a long time, I thought that I had to leave Kosovo, because I would have to for my job, for my career, for something, to have something better somewhere else. without talking about my children's future, education and such. Although I talked about this to my husband also, this is one of the basic things we fought about, that we should leave, that we should not keep our children here where they do not have the basics, I mean the conditions for a normal life, education and such. And that this is not taking us anywhere. I mean, the fact that we are staying here. Although, we remained here and like this, it happened.

So in that month of June all my relatives were gone. My parents, my sister and the whole family, and we remained here, of twenty Serbian families who lived in that building, there were four families left. We were mainly, one [of the families] moved quickly because they had sold their apartment, while the other three families, we remained since we worked at the *Klokot banja* so us, from that department. While one person from that third family worked at the factory, he was a laboratory technician, the one who refined the water, the mineral water. And this lasted, we lived a normal life, so to say.

And I remember a party of ours, when we sat and we were talking, and Toma Kojić, he said to me, "Why should we leave here? Nobody came [to my door], or called me, or told me to leave, and here we are, working in normal conditions." He says, "We are getting a much better salary than we used to." And so, he says, "Why should we leave?" You know how those party stories are.

And it went on like this, so my kids went to school in the village, however in those two years I still didn't work or anything. So, simply there wasn't a place for me. At that time I had started to learn English, I knew I would need it one day. I got things together, I came to Belgrade and bought that with tapes, I don't know, I would stay in the office as if I were listening to something, I would write. And that's how I spent my time.

But, I have to admit that then it wasn't the same, I knew that among Albanians, someone would be bothered by a Serb, who could easily take a gun and kill me, which was what happened in the end. And I moved on, but this was it, I have to admit, I was scared, but I overcame it.

Otherwise, I have to say that then me and my husband never traveled through that traffic, we had a Jugo¹⁰ and every time we needed in a week, or ten days, whenever during the day, we sat in the car and went to Bujanovc, we bought stuff for ourselves and we would come back, we didn't notice what was happening around us. I did not allow this to affect how I organized my life. Can we pause, I think it's Anxhelina? [addresses the interviewer].

[Short pause]

¹⁰ Popular car in Yugoslavia, it was manufactured by Zastava in Kragujevac, Serbia.

Marijana Toma: Nothing, let's continue after the pause. You started talking about a period that convinced you to leave Kosovo.

Slavica Jovanović: Yes. It went on like that until the day when in my office, around 15:30 o'clock a person who cooked and cleaned in that department of the *Klokot banja* came and said, "Jao, Slavica, something horrible had happened. Come on, you have to go home." He said, "Toma was killed."

Marijana Toma: The neighbour?

Slavica Jovanović: Aha. While maybe a half an hour before that I was in the office with his wife and two other colleagues, hanging out and talking. And we saw him passing, he passed, we saw him from the window, since half an hour earlier he had come back from work. And I say, when he told me, "Toma was killed?" I imagine he was killed in his workplace at the factory. I had no idea where, I had already forgotten that we had seen him 15-20 minutes ago. And him, "Stupid people, what did they do? Why did they kill a person like that? This-that..." And he says, "Go home!" And I say, "Okay, I'll go." And it happened that they organized, celebrated something, decided, they let Serbs go earlier. And them, they couldn't wait to go home earlier, of course. We left, and there wasn't a single soul, and the building where we worked was near the building where we lived in, around 50 meters, maybe even a hundred. And I didn't see anyone, anywhere, so we arrived at the building and we saw a dead person.

Marijana Toma: In front of the building?

Slavica Jovanović: In front of the building, yes. The head of finance who was with me earlier was pregnant, in the fourth-fifth of pregnancy. And she starts yelling, "Jao Slavica, That is my Pegja, he is Pegja." "It isn't." I already know that it's him [Toma], but I don't dare tell them, not even Rada, his wife who was there, I didn't have the strength to tell them, "Toma was killed." And I knew ten minutes before this, before she found out, 15 minutes. And today I didn't tell her, even though we met a few times. And his wife, since they live in the other building she goes on the other side, so she passed by him, he was laid on his stomach, and she passed by him. Apparently from the terror, stress, who knows, she didn't look, she didn't notice he was there. She went to the fourth floor, their children were in the apartment. She asked her children, "Where's father?" And they said, "No, father is not back yet." And she said, "In those moments I realized that what I saw down there was Toma's dead body."

And she rushed, we were already in the building, in front of the building, since the entrances were closed, we couldn't go in our apartments, because it was closed. And here there was a coffee shop, improvised, the store also worked there and people passed by, neighbors. And I saw, it was April, I saw something red and cleaning brushes, some Albanian women were cleaning carpets. However, when it happened, they probably took the carpets, pipes and the cleaning brushes, what do I know, the buckets were still here, and the rest went to their homes.

So we are looking at him here dead, at that moment KFOR appeared, we were not allowed to go near, and a woman was wailing and we stood there for a while. Whereas my children went to school around half an hour, an hour before it happened. So on the same street where he walked by, where he was killed, they walked by. So, later I realized that my children walked by those people who killed Toma. And it happened, when the people from the village found out that he, they gathered, and they did not allow, there were fights and yelling, and I think a horrible situation, and then I said, "This is, this is the end. Simply, there is no life here." I was simply scared that they could kill my son. Because they could simply think that he does not belong here.

My husband was sick. So, during that hour that we could not go inside the building I did not know if he was alive, if they went to him, and killed him too. So, I decided like that, my husband was in a wheelchair, for a year he was almost paralyzed and we had to move. We had a few savings and my brother from America gave that much money, and we bought an apartment, the cheapest apartment in Belgrade's area. At the beginning when we moved from that apartment, we went to the village to, to an old family house, not where we lived, but to an old house where there was no water or anything. The requirements of medication of a sick person are big, people who have had experienced things like this understand this.

And we were here for two months and we saw that it would take us nowhere, and with that little money we had, and one morning I came to Belgrade, and I had that one day to buy an apartment. So I took those announcements, "Halo Oglas"¹¹ and I searched by price, I went around 11, 12:00 to that place, the first [apartment] that I went to and from some young people, around ten kilometers from Belgrade, Padinska Skela, in the neighborhood, twelve kilometers from Panska Skela through Zrenjanin, the place is called Vrbovski. I bought a small, one-floor house there, so to say. But for us that was super.

So after a few, I was alone there for around a week until I fixed it and we moved things out, or what we already had, and all of those things from the apartment that we had, after ten days I brought my husband, who was in Niš with my family during that time, the children stayed there to finish the school year, so when we moved in April, they finished the school year, they finished the school year in Niš where my family was and after that they came. But, there for us was, we lived there for three and a half years, but it was great for the kids, we were well accepted in that village. I know that people had different experiences, my sister in Prokuplje, as I mentioned the relation of Serbs with Croats, Croats, towards refugees from Croatia, so that relation was with us, when we were refugees from Kosovo.

But, I did not experience that. Really, these people were wonderful, they were happy that a family moved to a small village. The children were well accepted, they had wonderful friends, my son had

¹¹ *Halo Oglas*, literally Hello Announcement, announcements newspaper in Belgrade.

fun. I was scared of that, Danube was near, but he adored it, a canal, a mountain, they built cabins with wood all the time and they had it good. But, when they found out that they have to travel to school, after two-three years, they insisted on moving to the city, which thank God happened, so...

It was terribly hard. My husband died in September 2003. A few months before that he was in the hospital because he did not want to be at home in front of the children and immediately I allowed him to go, because we were scared of that situation and that trauma, he could die and I wouldn't be there, only the children. So, I remember that time as a period of lots, lots of work. I often mention this, I simply did not have time to eat, from all the obligations that I had. I traveled, so for six months I was unemployed and we had no money. So at that time. At that time I earned money, so I had left 50 marks at that time, with which I went to Pančevo, and at that time it was called *buvljak*¹² and I bought what I could, small things which were sold there and in that neighborhood that was near and I would earn as much as I did in Kosovo with the salary.

So as far as this was concerned, money wasn't lacking, but it was quite hard. Later, so, during all that time I applied, I searched for work in Belgrade, anywhere, in any form that I heard of. Yet, I couldn't, I was in a lot of lawyer's offices to talk and I have to say that when they heard that I am from Kosovo, it was over. I would not work...

And so it happened that I found out about a job advertisement in HBT, Habitat,¹³ just the same they were dealing with real estate of Serbs from Kosovo. So somewhere around 4:00 in the afternoon, but the elections were the next day, I think this was in Niš, in Niš, yes, I sat on the train, and at 6:00 in the morning I was at Niš, and at 8:00 I waited for, what do I know, I applied for that job and after a few months they called me to work. In December I started to work in Kraljevo. For three months I was there alone, since my mother was with us, and she took care of the children and my husband, later she went to my brother in America. And I had to organize the move in four days, the non enrollment of kids from school, all for Kraljevo. And we spent three months in Kraljevo and my office was transferred to Belgrade and I worked here for HBT for a year and a half.

So this was it, I remember that time, I worked with young people, with smart people and I really had it good. The salary was good. But, after a year they cut down the staff and there wasn't a place for me. I took that very hard, not very, but I had some savings, and I would make it to the next job. But I was lucky enough to get employed immediately, and while I was working there, I applied and searched for a job, and I was employed in the building of the city office of Belgrade. The salary wasn't good, but the people were really good. And I think that I started working there because a woman decided, her name is Branka Kadjević, who is an amazing person, really. Who was a refugee from Croatia and understood my story.

¹² Serb. *Buvljak*, refers to a second hand bazaar.

¹³ *Habitat for Humanity*, non-governmental humanitarian organization.

Luckily, I'm glad it is like that, they were happy with my work and I was happy that I had that opportunity to enter the society of the jurists of Belgrade and go forward after that, since I was working. And it was a really good circle, yet this was a state organization, and for some reason near dissolution. Yes.

Marijana Toma: And from that year, what year was this?

Slavica Jovanović: 2001. May 18, when I came for the first time with my stuff in Belgrade.

Marijana Toma: When did you permanently come to Belgrade from Kraljeva, when was this?

Slavica Jovanović: So this was, so this was in May, the end of May, the end of May of 2002. Yes.

Marijana Toma: And after this your husband died, right?

Slavica Jovanović: Yes, he died in September 2003. Yes.

Marijana Toma: Since then you're in Belgrade?

Slavica Jovanović: My children, yes, three years, so they would enroll in school in one place, the grade, they would start the school year in one place and finish it in another. They would start the school year in one place and finish it in another.

Marijana Toma: What do you work currently?

Slavica Jovanović: Now I am a public notary in Velika Gardište, near the Basic Court, and this is the second time that I am a public notary. I was named in 2014, in the first election of notaries, and I was a notary for more than a year in Mladenovac. But I had health problems, I don't know how much of what happened influenced it, at some moment I felt that I could not do that job well. I simply couldn't look at the documents, I couldn't talk to people, it came to that point and I quit, to say simply.

I submitted the request to quit, and after a month I worked at the Fund again and so it happens that this job had value in Kosovo's book¹⁴ and this story in which I went back to everything traumatic in my life and the fact that I went a couple of times in Kosovo and that I talked to people, I don't know, maybe I need to come back to my [country]. And that was a horrible year for me. I believe, I never went to the doctor, I did not have the strength, but for a year, a year and a half I was depressed. So, all I could do was to go to work and work, so to come home and be in bed.

¹⁴ Kosovo Memory Book, data on all the people who lost their lives in armed conflict in Kosovo, which was published by the Humanitarian Law Center.

So it happened that I didn't talk to my children for a whole week. I didn't have the strength, I couldn't talk. Almost during this time a colleague from the Fund, not almost, but when I went she said, "You're wonderful and amazing" and after we co-operated greatly and we were friendly during the end, but she said, "You used to make me so angry in the beginning, very angry. You would come in the office and you wouldn't even say 'Good afternoon!'" But, I couldn't say "Good afternoon!" that was all... But, when, after a year when I got better, when I went back, what I say to myself, I used to love this job and I still do, and this was, I always fantasized about having my job. So to work like that, and I would tell my colleagues, "Finally a job where only me and law can work." So nobody tells me, "This is how you will interpret this law, this is how you'll do this job." But, me being the mediator in this process, the way that I can and know how.

And I really feel bad, I experienced it as a huge personal failure and as weakness, the fact that I had to close that office. But, that's how it was and I couldn't do it differently. And the people at the Chamber of Commerce, I thank them for being so understanding, and the Ministry of Justice, they named me again and now I give my best to work that job the way it deserves to.

Marijana Toma: What do the kids do now?

Slavica Jovanović: The kids are, my daughter is in the fifth year of studies, almost finishing the fifth year in dentistry, while my son finished his electro technical studies immediately, that year, in the fourth year he won a scholarship for his doctoral studies in Canada. If I know how to say it right, he is doing his doctoral studies in biomedicine, in biomedical technology, and biomedical engineer. The first year went very well for him, he was, he was here for three weeks ten days ago. It has been ten days since he went Nina [talks to her daughter]? Yes, it has been ten days.

I'm often asked how I handled it when he went, it wasn't hard for me, really, I experienced it as a normal thing, because at some point he would leave the house. It doesn't matter where and how. A block down the street, or somewhere there, so it really wasn't hard for me, firstly because it is such a good place, with smart people, and he works something nice, so I'm delighted about that. I especially brag that he is not here [studying].

Marijana Toma: Slavica, I would end the interview here, if you don't have anything to add, I would thank you for sharing your story with us. And congratulate you.

Slavica Jovanović: Thank you, Marijana, it was a pleasure for me, I don't know how clear I was, but if somebody "down" there knows what I'm talking about, they will understand.

Marijana Toma: Thank you very much!

