

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SEVIM BAKI

Pristina | Date: January 13, 2019

Duration: 72 minutes

Present:

1. Sevim Baki (Speaker)
2. Ebru Süleyman (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (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

Sevim Baki: I am Sevim Baki, I was born in 1972 in Pristina. I am the third daughter of a Turkish family, my father is a writer and journalist [Enver Baki](#) and my mother is Remziye Baki from Vučitrn. I have a brother after me. As I said, we come from a Turkish family, we have always spoken Turkish, read Turkish, and in our later conversation, I slowly explained why I graduated from high school and university in different languages.

Ebru Süleyman: Yeah, if you want, can you tell us a little about your childhood? Where did you spend your childhood? In which neighborhood and district of Pristina have you lived?

Sevim Baki: Yeah, like I said, in my childhood, we were four children in the family. I know that our home was in Brotherhood and Unity Square, which is considered to be the center of Pristina, our home number was 37 (smiles), I know it very well. Most importantly, we had a house right next to the Pristevka Stream, which is unfortunately closed, and we had a house close to five, fifteen, twenty meters away from Meto Bajraktar Elementary School. Everything was close, whether it was a marketplace for my family, post office, health center, a school for children, we had luck because everything, everything was very close to our home. We had a very pleasant childhood, my age was very close to my sister's age. The first one was born in '69, and I was born in '72, so in four years, three girls. It was a good thing because we all grew up like friends, we shared the same belongings, games, we even had the same friends. When one of us was in first grade, the other one was in the second and the third one was in the third grade. Also, my brother was born in '73.

As much as I remember, I was a chubby, shy, quiet little child. When I look at the pictures, also my mother used to tell me that I was always fat and my skin was snow-white. Besides that, my mother was always making hairstyles such as a bun {explains with hands}. Because of my whiteness, I remember very well my grandfather Sadik gave me a nickname, *Pamuk* [Cotton] Sevim. In fact, in all my father's writings I am called *Pamuk* Sevim, never Sevim only. My father's aunt, Aunt Habibe, who lived in Skopje most of the time but would often come to visit us, my grandfather's sister Habibe always told me that calling me *Pamuk* Sevim was a memory of her brother's legacy.

As I said, our school was very close, for example, if our house is in the middle, there was a bridge on one side, a bridge on the other side, in other words, there were old bridges on our left and right for us to go to school. Pristevka Stream is just in front of us, a neighborhood in the mud, I remember most of the time my mother was always scolding, “Are we going to get rid of this mud, how many times a day do I have to wash the boots of the children...” and so on, but as you know, in those times, everybody had a neighborhood in the mud because of the stream. I remember very well the bridges, always run-down, even when the heavy vehicles passed through on them, we heard all the collapse sounds inside from our home. The neighborhood children would run and look, we saw fallen vans and heavy vehicles, which they could not get out of the stream.

After that, it is something difficult, why? Because days pass and the bridge can not be repaired, that's all from my childhood dream. In the middle of the stream, there were small boards that only small feet can walk from. Now it was really challenging, one can pass but one cannot, some of us would remain on the other side. I would always see the children playing on the street making a game out of it, passing with their hands like this {explains with her hands}. One day I wanted to try it to overcome my fear and to show off a little bit, my mother always recalls this story and we laugh... I fell, two, three steps after I fell.

Ebru Süleyman: Into the river?

Sevim Baki: I fell into the river, and the river was dirty. Rocky, all the blackwaters would pass from there but what can you do, I was a little child, I was very young I remember. I cried out loud, but my biggest fear was that the river was not too deep, sometimes it would be too deep, and sometimes it would be too shallow, but it was a dirty river. I remember, I was very scared because my mother always said to us that, “Jellyfish will take you if you go close to the river, do not look too closely!” So we would be more careful around it. That is how she tried to protect us, poor women. What can she do? As children, we played around in the street. That's when I went to my mother crying and weeping, she was not angry, she said things happen. As I said, our school was very close, we would come and go, if need be, two or three times a day, even only for changing the sweatshirt.

Ebru Süleyman: You went to Meto Bajraktar Elementary School, at that time there were also Turkish classes in Meto Bajraktar?

Sevim Baki: We studied at Meto Bajraktar. Yes, there were Turkish classes, also what we used to call Vuk Karadžić Elementary School, now it is called Elena Gjika, there were not many students. For example, there were seven or eight people in a classroom. I remember, in my class, there were more girls, three boys I guess. It was the same in the other classes, but it was... we had much closer friendships. So the biggest advantage to us, I am saying it is an advantage but also boring for us, that every day we had oral examinations because there were not many of us. Let me tell you, for example,

our neighborhood was very complicated before. Like I said, Brotherhood and Unity Square was the name of our neighborhood.

Ebru Süleyman: Brotherhood and Unity Square, where is it nowadays? Where is the location now?

Sevim Baki: The river is exactly {showing with hand} where, how can I tell, there are car mechanics, right behind Meto Bajraktar where Prishtevka passed, along that way was the road of the Brotherhood street, until the end.

Ebru Süleyman: There is now, they call it UÇK Street, it used to be called Divan Yoli, next to Meto Bajraktar, is it on the way to Tophane somewhere?

Sevim Baki: Tophane is a little bit in the back but it is the same road on which Prishtevka is passing, the neighborhood behind that street is Tophane.

Ebru Süleyman: Okay, so there were houses in that location?

Sevim Baki: Yes, even more houses, now the buildings have already taken place, my father left 15 years ago and moved to the new buildings here. The reason my father moved out of that place was a very different thing, my brother moved to Canada, we were already married, the three sisters, the house was very large and we had a courtyard, my parents were old, so they wanted to live in the apartment. The house was sold. The house stood until late, never fell apart, buildings were built in front of it, but as I know it is now, behind the house, there is a planned area, for that reason, the place is filled with high-rise buildings.

It is now completely changed, not even a trace, first of all, the mud is gone, there is no river, no bridges, shops... well I cannot say that many shops opened, maybe on the first floor of the owners' house, some work as dentists, as carpenters, we call it that way, but I think they are selling glass and doors now, more shops such as car mechanics. All work in their own stores, there are not many shops rented in that district. But what I wanted to say is that we have spoken three languages since childhood, sometimes I have learned Turkish, Albanian, Serbian, we grew up with no awareness of what we were learning, we have grown up with three languages.

So we speak Turkish at our home, we speak Turkish at our school, our first neighbor was Serbian, and our third neighbor is something I remember, they were three families in one courtyard. They were Ashkali, very meticulous, clean and Turkish-speaking people, they spoke both Turkish and Albanian, and the rest of our neighbors were Albanian. We had Albanian neighbors on our right. As soon as we passed Meto Bajraktar from our house, the Gypsy neighborhood was a well known area. We didn't like that neighborhood, their homes were ruined, and it was almost like forbidden to us to go to those places. We would go to school taking other paths.

Ebru Süleyman: Is it the road from Meto Bajraktar to the railway station?

Sevim Baki: Yes, to the train, also the whole neighborhood where the Meto Bajraktar school stands, that road, all were the Gypsy neighborhood, rundown houses, now you'll be surprised because there are no traces of them, there are all the new buildings there. Even now, when we pass from that neighborhood we feel like *ayy* {onomatopoeia} where we are walking but there are really nice buildings, even though they are unplanned, which is really bad but still high and nice. The main road connects to the Vuçitrn road, and many vehicles pass through this road.

Ebru Süleyman: So the Ashakli and Romanis lived differently from each other?

Sevim Baki: Romanis were all different, our Ashkali neighbors were very meticulous, very polite, sophisticated, respectful people. I remember very well that sometimes my mother used to say, "Can you go and ask Aunt Makbule to borrow a tray," or something, when she did not have the utensils for baklava or whatever... we would borrow anything without any hesitation.

Ebru Süleyman: In which language did they study at their schools?

Sevim Baki: Albanian or Serbian, or I don't know at all, I don't remember. There was a guy named Şenol, he went to school with my sister, most of them went to school to study in Turkish language, some of them moved to Germany and had kids there, they mostly spoke Albanian, but there was a woman in the third home who was from Gjakova, because in one courtyard, there were three brothers living, one of the wives was from Gjakova. As I try to retrace my memory now, I remember slowly, they sent the kids to Albanian schools. In the first home, they spoke Turkish and in the last one, but their kids all moved to Germany, only the elders lived there.

Ebru Süleyman: So in your courtyard there was only one home?

Sevim Baki: Just us living there, but when my father bought the house, or even before my grandfather bought it, our Serbian neighbors' home was divided from ours with just something like fences, we used to call it that, "Hop you broke the fences, easy on the fences, fences has fallen down, do not make the fences wet," it was made from wood. We had no trouble with them, waking up early in the morning, they greeted us "*Dobro jutro!*" [Good morning] they said to us, "Good morning!" (smiles). Even their daughters who were older than us, they really liked learning Turkish and they would invite us, "Come to us, let's hang out all day, so we can learn Turkish from you and you can learn Serbian from us." Even Uncle Mile the old man always spoke Turkish, old, it was obvious because, whether you are Serbian or Albanian, if you were from town, you always knew Turkish.

You would be surprised, the Serbian man, all of his children reading Turkish, all his family is Serbian,

but the man speaking Turkish easily, they would come to us for the Eid, we would go to them for Eid. Like I said, the only thing that separated us was that fence, which had a little door. We never had trouble with them, in fact, when the lady and gentleman passed away, we always telephoned each other.

Ebru Süleyman: I also remember my parents told me that Albanians and Serbians who lived in the town spoke Turkish very well just like us that you wouldn't recognize. So the Turkish you spoke in the house and in the school, were they different? How were they?

Sevim Baki: Of course, of course, now I don't know if it's because my father was a journalist and writer, he made an effort to make us to speak standard Turkish, for example, he would bring lovely colorful magazines from Turkey called *Ayşegül*,¹ I think someone who my father knew would bring the kids' magazines. In any case, he would encourage us to read, even when he wasn't home because journalism is a job that is always on the road, he said that "Please read, and when I come home, I want you to tell me what you have read."

Teachers at the school, for example, I can't even explain how children changed their dialect in just a second, I assume that you also lived the same thing, when kids talk to each other they are like, "*Napaysın, nasılsın?*" [How are you?] And when the teacher calls them, they continue to speak in standard Turkish. Also, there is one thing that is important in written language, while writing on the phone, I cannot use other Turkish, but standard Turkish. I use that one, and I believe that people should use that Turkish because you explain yourself better in writing.

Now it's on my mind so when I text on the phone, write an email or whether you dictate something to me, I will write in standard Turkish, but speaking can change, it's malleable. Why is it like this, I don't know, maybe because my mother is from Vuçitrn, I spoke Turkish differently. However, my mother always supported us speaking Turkish, reading Turkish, supporting everything but their Turkish was Vuçitrn Turkish.

Ebru Süleyman: Is there a big difference between Vuçitrn Turkish and Pristina Turkish?

Sevim Baki: As a matter of fact, I didn't realize it much, but when I got married, my husband's family used to laugh at my accent. My mother-in-law, father-in-law used to say that, "Ayy {onomatopoeia}, you talk somehow different, kind of brusque," I would take it personally. My husband is from Pristina, her mother is from Pristina, also his father is from Pristina, his father is Birvenik and his mother is

¹ With the original name Martin, *Ayşegül* is Turkey's version of a children's book series. *Ayşegül* is a fictional little girl and was created by the author Gilbert Delahaye and drawn by Marcel Marlier. The original country of the book series is Belgium and the language is French. Each country has a different name (Debbie in the USA, Christina in Italy, Steffi in Germany, Emma in England, Anita in Portugal). The first book of the series (*Martine Çiftlikte*) was published in French in 1954. After Gilbert Delahaye's death in 1997, *Ayşegül*'s adventures began to be written by Marcel Marlier's son Jean-Louis Marlier.

Ömer. They used to, I don't know how, but they could differentiate Pristina spoken language. Then, when they laughed, I started to notice because I think families were the reason, we would visit my aunt and uncles often, also they used to talk brusquely. Also, my aunt is in Vuçitrn, but she is from here, so I guess she didn't change her accent. For example, a lot of people call me Sevim but not Sevim, I cannot understand why it is so hard to say Sevim...

There are differences, as you know, in the accents of Kosovo. I wouldn't call it dialect because dialects can differentiate the language more, but we have only little additions, just a few words and different tones. Prizren's accent is different, it's influenced by Albanian, Serbian and Turkish together. Vuçitrn, as I said, rough, also, later on, I started to realize that Mitrovica has some different attachments like "*Tigana, ettim ga*" [Here you go, I've done it]. I've heard them from my friends. In Gjilan, I think they talk purely, like us, but slightly different tones. In Pristina, I don't know, I think family is a big factor. But believe me that today's children speak with our Turkish, but with their teacher in school they use standard Turkish.

Actually, when I was in university at the Turkology Department, we had literature professors from Turkey, and they would say, "Turkish is okay but we like your version of Turkish, preserve it, we need different dialects." So they would collect all the different kinds of Turkish in the world and create a branch of education from it. Now we are always bragging, laughing with friends, saying that we don't need to speak Turkish, we can speak our language because it's approved.

Ebru Süleyman: Besides I think that there is an effect of preserving it only orally, the Turkish that we use here was never standardized, so writing and reading with standard Turkish is easier, I guess.

Sevim Baki: When we talk about the action of talking, it was very different before, more families used to talk in Turkish, and now I work at the Ministry, as you know, after the war, there were a lot of people, I don't want to say migrated, but came from villages. They all studied here but they don't even know that Turks exist. Then they say, "What? Are there Turks here, I've never heard that." Especially the youth, maybe because Turks always lived in the center of Pristina and the ones living out of town may never heard it.

Ebru Süleyman: When did your interest in music and art start? Did you have any interest in your childhood? Tell us about your childhood, you were quiet and shy, but on the other hand, you also had an artistic personality, I guess.

Sevim Baki: Yes, I was very shy, I wouldn't talk too much because I had two sisters before me, not that I didn't have the right to speak, we never had any trouble between us, my mother didn't raise us as "The older one can talk!" We always had the right to speak, but I remember how embarrassed I was everywhere. I was embarrassed when someone asked me something, but I guess every child lives through the same things at that age. As far as I know myself, I was raised with music.

How? I don't know, but now my father always tells me about his uncle, uncle Şerif , who lived in the Katër Llulla neighborhood. My mother also tells that they always played tambourine and tomtom, always singing, when there was a gathering at home, daughters coming to visit their mother they would invite aunts and uncles, also she tells that my uncle was a really good singer. Now when we were kids, I think that we were impressed by them.

I remember that we were always with our parents at every concert and event organized here. They would take us everywhere. Someone came from Prizren, Skopje, whether it was a theater or community, we were there... Even when Emel Sayın² came here, we have pictures on the stage, how we sat and listened to her. I remember really well the stages, we participated there as a Turkish community. Besides, my father is one of the founders of *Tan* newspaper,³ radio and journalism, in every institution here, he was a person who made an effort and worked for it. For keeping it alive and promoting... So that is why at every event, they were the first family to participate. Perhaps I got influenced by them, but my sisters didn't.

When I was very young, there was a song by Emel Sayın, *Sevda sevmessen* [When you don't love, love]... It was called *Rüzgar* [Wind], I was very young and I used to imitate her very often. When my cousins would come to stay over, I would say, "Do you want me to imitate Emel Sayın?" I would sit down, put the pillows on the floor, my hair on one side {shows with her hands}, I would say, "Go get the hairdryer so my hair would look like it's blown by wind just like hers in the music video." They applauded me. When a guest would come to visit us, my father always used to say, "Come on, sing some songs." Now, when I think about it, I can say that these were the hints that I was going to be connected to music.

What could have been the greatest impact, at a very young age, my father sent us, four children, to the Gerçek [True] Culture and Fine Arts Association. "Go, be active!" He said. In fact, all the Turkish kids were sent there. All of us are active, whether in folklore, I started with folklore, then I started singing and humming on the road when our friends played with guitar, they would say, "Come on, Sevim, come on. You are already an artist and also you have a great musical ear," and encouraged me to sing. We always used to go to the last row of the bus and would sing and play guitars.

Then there was a band named Faks [Fax], a young light Turkish band. In Pristina's Gerçek Culture and Fine Arts Association, the first modern Faks band said, "Sevim, would you like to join our practices and let's have a band in Gerçek?" Then some of them went into the military. At the same time, my husband went into the military but we still didn't know each other, when he came back, they were saying "There is a guy who plays reed and oud," and so on. Okay, we started playing together, at the same

² Emel Sayın (1945) is a vocal artist and cinema actress. In 1998 the government of Turkey gave her the title of state artist.

³ Turk.: *Tan*, literally means dawn, is the first newspaper in the Turkish language in Kosovo that started its publishing life on May 1, 1969 and closed down in 1992.

time, there were concerts in Gerçek and Mr. Rasim would support the event by participating with his orchestra. He really liked us.

Ebru Süleyman: At that time, Rasim Salih was broadcasting for radio...

Sevim Baki: First time in '51, when all the institutions were established, radio, journalism, television channels, in the second episode, the Turkish orchestra was established as a professional orchestra, so at that time, Mr. Rasim gathers young musicians for his orchestra and encourages them. My husband was also chosen by him for the orchestra at that time. My husband was working on activities in Gerçek...

Ebru Süleyman: Where was the location of Gerçek at that time?

Sevim Baki: Same place where it is now. No! At that time... wrong... That time, how can I explain, same at this center road, at the end of that road, there is a library, the road behind it, not the Bölükbaş's road, but the other road, and there was a Turkish older man Mr. Recep, he would open and close the place, it was in his courtyard.

Ebru Süleyman: Is it on the way to the town hall road or in the Divan Yoli?

Sevim Bakin: On the way to Divan Yoli, immediately under the building where the tunnel gate now stands, right next to the Boxing Club, the entrance was off the center road. We would go there, in my opinion, it was the best period, most active and successful period of my life. Young... we couldn't wait to go there.

Ebru Süleyman: How old were you?

Sevim Baki: I was 14 years old, we three siblings started with folklore, actually Suna joined us later.

Ebru Süleyman: What activities were held in Gerçek besides music and folklore dancing?

Sevim Baki: There were a lot of activities in that period, theater rehearsals were held that year or maybe a year later. Also my sister played in the theater and later on joined folklore. When we were practicing folklore and playing music in the streets, they liked my voice and in '86 in Kaçanik, they said, "No, Sevim, you will get up on stage! What should we sing?" We liked folk songs back then, so I said, "*Size Selam ve Karanfil*" [Greetings and a red flower to you]. I got up on the stage, thanks to Mr. Şükrü and Zeynullah, I was really excited and they were there for me, he said, "Sevim, don't worry, everybody is nothing for you, you just look forward, don't make eye contact, look at their foreheads {shows with her hand} and sing your song, don't worry, everything will be just fine!" In fact, I was in my folklore outfits because I sang and danced folklore on the same stage.

After that radio broadcasting began, on the radio, I had nearly up to 90, 80 Turkish classical and light Turkish songs on record. I was very active. When I had my 18th birthday, the high school immediately made me... There is a story before this, Nesret Yakupovic from Prizren was responsible, he was the head of the Turkish orchestra at the Radio Pristina. She had an interest in me, she would say, "Sevim, please go to the Music middle school, you are really talented, whether you take up an instrument like the cello or you work on your vocal, please, the orchestra is in need." At that time, we were playing in the same band as my husband, he was young, and he said, "Sevim, if you like music, go to music school, besides you would have a profession."

Everything started just from singing one song, when I was dancing folklore, I would sing a song here and there. Then I registered at music school. When I went to register, I was speaking Albanian with the man, but I wanted to register in Serbian language. Why? Because, as I said, we had Serbian neighbors and friends, even in school, we had a Serbian subject as a local language.

Ebru Süleyman: Is this music school in front of Elena Gjika?

Sevim Baki: Back then, it was called Stefan Mokanjac, when I went to register, the man said, "You speak Albanian really good, the Serbian quota is already full but, if you want, we can accept you into the Albanian class." Because the Serbian quota accepted only a few students. I remember I said, "It doesn't matter at all, I don't know Serbian or Albanian well, I am a Turk." He said, "All right, we are registering you in Albanian classes because the quota isn't full yet."

I registered, I studied for four years, I started with cello but there was a lack of staff, my professor used to come from Macedonia, but after six months he wasn't able to come anymore, the old man was sick. So that is how I stayed in conservatory, I studied for four years and I played a little piano. As I said, at that time, finishing high school in a different language, it was my most active time of my life. I don't know if you can remember but there were significant festivals like *Kosova Akorlari*,⁴ *Prizren Zambaği*⁵ in Prizren, as a matter of fact, I got the biggest award that year... also Barış Manço was a guest from Turkey, that year I won the award from the audience as a Turk member. At *Kosova Akorlari*, I have always been awarded the second place, I got golden and silver microphone awards. I have always sung the local compositions, Şemsi Mecihan's compositions, we even worked together with Mr. Şemsi, he was a really good man and a composer. Thanks to him I have won places in competitions five or six times.

⁴ *Chords of Kosovo*, a music festival held in Pristina in Yugoslav times.

⁵ *Prizren Lily*, a music festival held in Prizren since 1986. Interrupted during the '90s, the festival resumed its editions in 2003.

Part Two

Ebru Süleyman: These events that you have talked about, they were festivals?

Sevim Baki: *Kosova Akorları* was a festival, yes, but *Prizren Zambaği* was held once a year, it was called Lily because Prizren was considered a cultural place and it has a river. On the other hand, *Kosova Akorları* were organized by our professional Pristina Radio, it was mandatory to have songs in three languages, there was always one or two songs in Serbian and Turkish. I preferred to take the stage in the light music section on the second night, but sometimes I also sang modern Turkish music on the first night. The first night was all about art music and the second night was light music, I participated in both with Mr. Şemsi's compositions.

I remember the offer from Tomor Berisha twice, he said, "Would you like to sing in Albanian, come on, you have to change your genre, everybody loves you, you are really famous." But I didn't accept the offer because the Turkish community didn't have an artist, that was why, if I would have thought about financial gain, perhaps I would have accepted it. But I said, "No. You already have a lot of artists, if I join you, what will Turkish community do?" And I didn't go.

Ebru Süleyman: Was this festival held in Pristina?

Sevim Baki: Yes, always, because the central radio was in the capital, it was always held in the Red Hall, they would make the hall even more beautiful than it was, all live TV would come there, it was a really precious and beautiful festival.

Ebru Süleyman: That time, this Red Hall, Boro Ramiz was really popular, right?

Sevim Baki: It was popular, really crowded, I remember and I also have pictures. There were a lot of people who wanted to attend the *Kosova Akorları* festival. Well, I was really lucky because I was always invited and also the first one to attend. After that I had a friend called Violeta Rexhepagiqi, Armend Rexhepagiqi, the siblings. They sang really modern and universal songs, they wanted to enter the Eurovision Song Contest in Belgrade. Then she also called Ivana Vitalić together with me, Sevim Baki, and we had a band named Vivien. She was the one who organized everything, she said, "Sevim, I wish for the three of you to sing a song in Albanian and Serbian and enter the Eurovision Song Contest." So, in the year '86-'87, we attended the Eurovision contest in Belgrade. We didn't have a place in the competition but at least we attended.

Ebru Süleyman: Can you share with us your experience about this journey?

Sevim Baki: It was really strange because I have changed a lot, she made us look like her. A haircut

and purple hair {showing with her hand} I don't know how much you know about her but she was a hippie. Everyone dressed how they preferred, but I tried to blend in, I had gloves, one of them short, the other one long, I tried to create a hippie look. It was good to be in a completely different environment.

Ebru Süleyman: Was it the first time that you did something together with a group?

Sevim Baki: Yes, it was the first time that we sang a song in three languages, but in the past, I had participated a lot in tours in Kosovo organized by Albanians. Someone would organize 15 days of tours in Kosovo, but it was a law that it had to be held in three languages. Now if there is a concert with five or six Albanian artists, there should be a Serbian and a Turkish artist at the same concert. Nowadays you can see that the amount of work you do depends on how many supporters and sponsors you have. For example, now RTK doesn't have any Turkish music program, before when there was a music program, there had to be musicians from other communities. But now there isn't anything.

When you watch TV, it's only in Albanian. RTK 2 is only Serbian, and there is only news left in Turkish language. Except that, there is a programme called Mozaik, but this last few years, even though I had a lot of activities, I didn't participate in that program. I don't know what could be the reason for this, but I think that they aren't doing their best because they are not inviting us, the Turkish community there. They are saying that they have a low budget, they don't have support? I don't know because I am not involved, but I can say that there is a difference between now and the past.

Ebru Süleyman: So there is a big difference in terms of activity and representation?

Sevim Baki: Yes, a lot, as I said, before it was an obligation to represent everywhere, "Brotherhood Unity, Brotherhood Unity..." If there was a program organized by state institutions, even if I was really busy, they said, "It is obligatory to have Turkish music, and we really want you to perform." So I would attend tours.

They would pay some of the expenses, if the road was long, we would have two concerts, for example, one in a village, one in a town, one in a village, one in town... If we were going to perform a concert in Gjakova, we would first perform in Klina, then Gjakova, if we were going to Prizren, we would first perform a concert in Suhareka at four, then at seven o'clock, in Prizren. At those times, all the halls were full of people, I can't deny that everybody absolutely adored me, I feel bad that I don't have any videos of that times just for the sake of memories, I have only a few pictures, the ones who organized these events, maybe they have pictures, I don't.

Ebru Süleyman: Which year was it?

Sevim Baki: All of them, from year '86, '87 until '88. Then school was over, I got married, I got a job. I

immediately started working as a music supervisor in Turkish archive programs. Besides being music supervisor, I worked as a presenter and we produced programs together with artists. At the same time, I would go to the radio department and decide on a certain week, so we could practice and make new records. Also, everybody knew about the New Year's Eve program, it was really hard, we would start to get ready from the ninth month. Now we have TV and radio, but not a trace from those programs.

Ebru Süleyman: If we talk about music style a little bit, you mentioned Turkish classical music, light music and modern music, can you describe the differences between them to people who may not know them? You can describe the technical details, as you wish.

Sevim Baki: Turkish classical music is a tune which contains a system of melody types, not everybody can sing Turkish classical music, you can be a really good listener and you can love it, but as I said, not everybody can sing it. If you look back in the old times, this type of music has started when the Ottoman Empire arrived in the Balkans, no, it's Rumelian Turks {doing the sign with her hand}, I'm sorry I got confused, it's Rumelian Turks. Because I wanted to distinguish between Turkish classical music and our Rumelian folk music. You can not use every instrument in Turkish classical music, even that it was influenced by the West, it evolved with different music arrangements and stuff. Also, I remember Mr. Rasim, he made us practice a lot.

In Turkish classical music, there was Muazzez Abacı,⁶ Zeki Müren,⁷ Ahmet Özhan⁸ and Zekai Tunca's⁹ songs, we used to listen to them, he used to say, "Listen to Hamiyet Yüceses and gain experience..." Even now when I listen to something, I always know what music is because I really have gained experience with all those cassettes and tapes, we really worked hard. Whether in Gerçek or in radio, I had a great repertoire.

I am pleased with that, there are a lot of songs, but I think that I know most of them, it's rare when there is a song that I don't know. Like I said, Turkish classical music can be sung only with instruments like violin, qanun, oud and frame drum. On the other hand, Rumelian folk music, which we used to sing a lot and like it a lot because it's local, it has started when the Ottoman Empire arrived in the Balkans and got influenced by them. It has differences because every region and language has its own writings, melodies and instruments.

Ebru Süleyman: So I guess Rumelian music is more based on community and folk, and Turkish

⁶ Muazzez Abacı (1947) is a Turkish singer trained in Turkish classical music. She has been active since 1973.

⁷ Zeki Müren (1931-1996) was a Turkish singer, composer, songwriter, actor and poet. Known by the nicknames "The Sun of Art" and "Pasha," he was one of the prominent figures of Turkish classical music. Due to his contributions to the art industry, in 1991, he received the title State Artist.

⁸ Ahmet Özhan (1950) is a prominent Turkish classical music singer, conductor, and actor. He started singing in Turkish clubs when he was about 18. He performed concerts all around Europe, the US, and the Middle East with his group.

⁹ Zekai Tunca (1944) is a Turkish classical music singer. In 1998, he received the title of State Artist given by the Ministry of Culture and still works as a soloist under the Ministry of Culture.

classical music is based on education?

Sevim Baki: It's based on education because every song has its own system of melody types and the melodies are really important, but unfortunately I couldn't find someone here that could teach me these melodies.

My husband knows that very well, why, because he plays an instrument, he is adept at learning melody types because he has worked with ambitus and scales. I have usually worked on my voice, that is why I couldn't understand much of these melody types. I guess here we always learned to listen with our ears, if I could have some singing lessons in Turkey, I would definitely learn these melody types. For example, here, sometimes I am scared that I will get so embarrassed in front of a Turkish artist because I don't know those melody type systems. But unfortunately there was no one here to teach me that.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you know how Rasim Salih got interested in music? How did he learn these melodies?

Sevim Baki: Well, I don't have any information about him. Now he is working on a program with his grandkids. As I understood, he is one of the first artists who came from Mitrovica, he overworked, established, gathered people and engorged them a lot. He had people with good music ears around him, as my husband told me, he just started working with notes in the last few years, before that, he just had a really good music ear.

Ebru Süleyman: I am curious about Rumelian music, which I guess was carried by people who migrate from one word to another, from one family to another, and from one generation to another. But Turkish classical music is based on education, so how and when was it formed in the Balkans?

Sevim Baki: No, I guess we listen to Turkish music because we see Turkey as our homeland. I remember we knew every Turkish artist here, you know, we bought all of their albums. I remember all the drawers were full of tapes, we would buy cassettes, not CDs or something, but a lot of cassettes. When we would visit Turkey, I couldn't stop myself from buying new 20 - 30 cassettes. But now there is no trace of them, I wish we could have saved them. We would give them to our friends, "Oh you have it, let me have this for a week." So they were left in some places, broken. Now I feel bad that there are none left.

I guess it can be it, because Kosovo - Turkey relations were always decent in every aspect, whether watching Turkish TV programmes or visiting Turkey, it was something that we did more often than now. Really, there were no cell phones, but I do remember everything, also with the Gerçek Association, we participated in a lot of festivals in Çorum, Silifke, İskenderun, Kastamonu.

Ebru Süleyman: Who was active in Gerçek in the '80s? I mean who taught folklore, who made the

rehearsals for theater, or who made organizations for music?

Sevim Baki: Well I can't remember who was responsible for rehearsals because it has changed a lot. I know there was Ercan Kasap, Mrs. Aliye, my father played in the theater for a little bit. My sister Senay also played. But who was the director, I cannot remember. For teaching folklore, the old dancers were there.

I also remember a guy named Kemal, we used to call him Kemo, he came here as a student then stayed here, discovered Gerçek, he knew folklore dancing, he was really into it. In Turkey, as you know, every kid either learns to play an instrument or dance folklore or goes to school choir, this is something that I adore. They promote culture and activities to the kids. He came here to spend his time teaching folklore, in that period, together with local dances, we started learning modern Turkish folklore. *Çepikli*,¹⁰ *halay*,¹¹ *efe*¹² are some of the dances that we learned.

Ebru Süleyman: You told us about the Geçek period, then music school, radio recordings and New Year's preparations, so you started working again in the Radio in the '80s or '90s ?

Sevim Baki: In the '90s, I got an offer immediately after I finished my school, "Sevim, after you finish school, we want you to come here because we are in need of a music supervisor." As an artist, I would go there to work on music recordings as a hobby. At any organization that state radio made, when they were in need of something for Turkish, they would call me.

I went to the professional classical choir for a while, I worked for three months, I liked the notes and I sang opera with notes two or three times. Actually I was looking forward to working there but it never happened. I couldn't finish university because, after high school, I immediately started working, I got married, then there was the war, I worked for nine years as a music supervisor. When I was in the third class, I dropped out of university, I guess I had kids. We were relieved, everything was just fine, I had work, a house, kids, I had some activities but not as busy as before.

I started to leave Gerçek behind. There were new generations. I only attended as an artist, to TV filmings and was only invited to special concerts. It was really a stable period because, as I said, I had kids, then the war, after the war, we didn't have our jobs.

But it wasn't a long period because I was active, my father also was really active, he knew everyone, private contact radio, multiethnic contact radio. They started Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish, Albanian, Romanian news and music programs, so they hired us there. My dad told me about this and then I started working there as a music supervisor. I saw a few of my Turkish friends working there, we

¹⁰ Fast pace folk dance of Gaziantep.

¹¹ Folk dance styles in central and southeastern Anatolia.

¹² Folk dance of Aegean Region.

worked there for 18 months, then it shut down again and I was unemployed again.

Ebru Süleyman: So this is right after the war?

Sevim Baki: Yes, just right after, right after working nine years, there was neither an orchestra left nor the artists. Also, our journalism program and news program never opened. Then, after one or two years, the news program continued with five or six people. Now I don't know how many people are there. There is some broadcasting, but I don't know the details.

There is no previous wealth left, there is no trace of old pieces. Because they are not using them often, instead, they are always relying on the old records. We the youth could only make a music record if we had sponsors. And what happens then? There is only one music clip on your CD, not even connected to any institution.

Then I realized, no matter where I go, I couldn't find a job with my music school diploma and Turkish language. "Music school? It's nothing." For the sake of doing something, I registered at the Turkology Department at the Philology Faculty. I was lucky that there was an opening in the Human Resources Department, they were searching for a minority. So in that period, I was in a rush. I was working as a civil servant at the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. This year I finished my 10th year here, and I am working with a really nice unit in the Human Resources Department. I have learned new things.

In the same period, I had many difficulties, three children and a family. Being a married woman trying to manage both university and work was quite difficult, but thanks to my family, they were always there for me. Sometimes I wasn't able to cook, sometimes I was sleepless because it was not easy to pass exams. But I graduated just in time, I didn't want to be a minority without a university diploma. Because they are looking forward to saying, "Look at these minorities who are always employed without a university degree." So that is why I made a promise and graduated. I am working here, as I said, but again, there were some choirs opened two or three times, I guess it was called *Tan* choir, Meliha Hüdaverdi and Sebiha Hüdaverdi were the organizers.

Ebru Süleyman: Is it after the war?

Sevim Baki: After the war, they started to establish choirs, I participated in some of them, but I didn't like the method they followed. Perhaps, when you have enough experience, when you are really into what you are doing, you realize all the missing aspects. If you want to be involved, it can backfire because you are young. They needed help, but when it came to something more professional, I was not allowed. I couldn't stand it, I tried one or two times but I couldn't do it.

Then some of my friends started to insist, "Why don't you organize something?" I said, "All right, but

how?” We don’t know how. I was always used to being invited but not the one who invites. Also, at that time, we didn’t have a proper location, there was the Gerçek Association, which I really wanted to work at, but unfortunately, in winter, it’s really cold, there is no kitchen, nothing, if you want to organize a concert, there isn’t any support, there is no budget.

Meanwhile, we really liked literature in university and started going to the Yunus Emre Institute, you know the cultural center related to the Turkish Embassy. I saw that they were interested in new projects, I consulted with professors, and they said, “Yes, we really would like that, you can work here and organize a choir here.” Now, there are almost 20 women who know the Turkish language in choir, maybe most of them are Albanian, they say that they are Albanian, but they speak Turkish very well. Also they really like Turkish music and they want to learn Turkish music.

From Rumelian music to articles, I am trying to pick something and create a repertoire of songs that they already know and are easy to sing. In order to teach Turkish music, we established this choir in 2015. We have built a really nice friendship there. Sometimes we are not rehearsing but we still have our friendship, even if we don’t do anything, our friendship will remain. They are putting their heart and soul into this work, because of that, I try to start new projects, dresses are made, we have a CD as support.

Now we are working on a video clip, but if we don’t have any supporters, only the song will be published. We had concerts, and I really want to thank the Yunus Emre Institution for their support and also the Ministry of Culture because they also open new projects once in a while and support us with a small budget that we can use on our organizations. I am really enthusiastic about this crew that I could gather. Everybody is working with their heart and soul without expecting something in return, just like a hobby, I hope that one day we can get the benefits of this labor that we have done.

Ebru Süleyman: In choir, are you trying to sustain local pieces that you have mentioned before? Şemsi Mecihan...

Sevim Baki: No, I am not using them. There are modernized records of them on the radio, I hope they still remain there. Although I transferred most of the records to CD, I wanted to have them in my own archive. But I couldn’t get them all, on paper, they claim that they have all the records but... I cannot say that there is anything exciting in the chords and compositions in front of the audience. They are quite nice but really modern.

The compositions that we sing are sometimes from Prizren folk music, Rumelian folk music and Turkish folk music, this time I am also teaching the melody type systems in Turkish classical music because my husband is also by my side with his instrument. For example, I am saying, “This time we

will sing from *nihavent*¹³ melody type, in the second part we will use *hicaz*¹⁴ and then *rast*¹⁵ melody type...” All the melody types have their own rhythm, some of them are really slow and some of them are fast. So I am working on that, but still it’s very exciting that they know all the compositions that we are working on. What I want to say is that they adore the songs, and I am trying to teach them some special things for special occasions.

For example, for Ramadan, we made a repertoire with one of the best chants. If there is a need, we would organize a program. Thanks to them, they published the repertoires into a book, there is everything, we use it often in our organizations. As you know, Rumelian songs are more preferred here, that’s why we want to change it and have more options.

Ebru Süleyman: Which hall did you use the most for your performances? Before and now.

Sevim Baki: In Pristina, I remember the Red Hall the most. Our Turkish community concerts and also the Choirs Festival was held there because it serves the needs, it has a nice stage, really good hall for the audience. I remember the Red Hall. I remember the theater less. I forgot everything, but I know the JNA Hall, *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* [Yugoslav National Army], Yugoslavia International National Hall, but it belonged to the Army at that time. After having that place from the UN, it belonged to the Army. I remember that city hall and Gerçek’s events were held there.

{While counting} There, Red Hall, there was an amphitheater in Boro Ramiz, really high and green {explains with her hands} it was really a special place, now there is Cambridge School in that place. Now that is out of order, not a lot of people know that place exists. Now when you step down from the stairs in the Red Hall, that was the way to the amphitheater. They have closed off that place now, there is Cambridge School. So you would step down and there was the Green Hall, the amphitheater just like a cinema, we used that place really rarely. There was also a hall of sports, really big, they call it *Bir Kasım* [sic.] [October 1] now right? That hall, {explains with her hands} it was used for grand concerts. I don’t remember if we ever visited there with Gerçek, but I sure did visit with grand concerts and tours. I can’t remember any other place.

Ebru Süleyman: If you want, you can tell where you spent your youth, where did Pristina youth hang out?

Sevim Baki: Well, what can I tell you about our youth, our place was the Gerçek Association. We made friends there. As I said, we were three sisters always hanging out together. If we wanted to go out, we would go out from Gerçek, “Come on, let’s go somewhere to drink coffee.”

¹³ Turkish melody type similar to G minor in Western music.

¹⁴ Turkish melody is similar to C sharp in Western music.

¹⁵ One of the main melody types of Turkish classical music.

There were our older friends, musicians, for example, people from my husband's band. We also met there with my husband. Those times when we were friends, they used to say, "Are you coming?" And they would take us to the Grand Hotel or Božur [Hotel] for a nice coffee. There was Restaurant Rugova, right there where the old Maxi was, they used to hang out there a lot. It was fine, not bad but we the younger ones didn't like these places, we would only go because our friends were there and it was warm in the winter...

Ebru Süleyman: I guess the cafe in the Grand Hotel was really popular back then?

Sevim Baki: Yes, it was a really popular thing to hang out at Grand. It was really odd for me because I was really young, what was I doing there? But, as I said, our friends used to go there, so that is why. Then in summer *korzo*¹⁶ was really popular. There was a group of friends always hanging out in the same place, we would mock them by saying, "What are you doing here? Are you protecting the trees?" Everybody knew their spot, our spot as a Turkish community was in front of Foto Nesha.

When we would go out at night, we would go to Xhani or Cannabis, I remember these two cafés. Xhani was on the corner of *Tri Šešira* [Three Hats], we would sit outside. It was always very crowded, there was music, so we would hang out there. Also there was Cannabis in the new district in Kičma [Spine], we would hang out there a lot. I will be honest, I didn't like these cafes, these kinds of music, disco. I don't like disco, nowadays, if you ask the youth "What kind of music do you like?" Everybody has their own taste of music, I never enjoyed English music. So like that, I would go out but I didn't enjoy it a lot, sometimes I wouldn't even go out. Like I said, in youth, there was a lot of work, also school and Gerçek, so we would return home early. Also our parents wouldn't allow us to stay out later than 9:00 - 10:00 PM. We had to return home, therefore I didn't have a disco life.

Ebru Süleyman: In these places, they used to play pop and modern songs right?

Sevim Baki: Yes and always English, rock, pop music, I didn't like these styles. That's why I cannot say much about it. But I remember these two cafes, we used to go there a lot, every time we were out, we would go there. If we go to Gerçek two times in a week to practice, after practices, we would go out. And then after school, when we were going out with my husband, we started hanging out in other places, not very popular, but in quiet cafes.

Ebru Süleyman: Your kids were born before the war, right?

Sevim Baki: Yes, I have two sons Mennan and Enes, they were born in '91 and '96. At that time, we had to get out of our house with them. We had luck because Kosovo was bombed when we arrived to Bulgaria. My parents stayed here, my father in-law was here. They didn't expect any of this, but it happened. We stayed in Istanbul in the Silivri area for almost two and a half months. Thanks to our

¹⁶ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

relatives, they opened their houses to us.

Ebru Süleyman: So I guess people here didn't want to believe that this could happen.

Sevim Baki: They were talking about war, but we didn't believe that it's going to ever happen. Until it really happened, we said, "It can never happen, they won't let this happen, Europe and America won't let this happen." We only heard people talking, how can I know about war? I was very young, 22 or 23 years old. But unfortunately, it happened, my parents have seen the war. Even one night, all the windows of the house were broken...

Ebru Süleyman: I guess they bombed the post office?

Sevim Baki: Yes, also, there was a car in our neighborhood that had exploded. My parents were terrified and stressed out, but they didn't see much of it. Even somebody tried to pillage the house... maybe the neighbors or I don't know, when they saw my parents, they ran away. Because they stayed there to protect the house and a lot of our relatives also stayed for the same reason. I remember my sister was pregnant, we took her in our car at the last minute, and she had her baby in Turkey.

After that, everything was okay, we sure had difficulties for two and a half months. We couldn't wait to return. I didn't experience anything bad in my house. There were some relatives of my husband in our home because they were kicked out of their house, they had searched for an empty place to stay inside. Even my father-in-law was there when they came, so he left them the house. Not even a needle was missing in our place, they didn't pillage or attack the house.

We dreamed that everything would be the same after the war, but unfortunately, we couldn't get our jobs back. I wouldn't believe it if I even dreamed it. Every door was closed in my face, they had no pity for anyone. I was working in the same institution with my husband, therefore, we both were unemployed. We had kids, every time I went to the radio where I was working as a music supervisor, they said, "It's over, there is nothing for you here, when everyone returns, then you can come!" We were waiting for an answer from the authorities, but nothing ever happened. Everything that was old was wiped, new units were open and new personnel were hired, five or six new people.

Ebru Süleyman: What happened to the work that you have done at the old radio?

Sevim Baki: Nothing. I have only managed to find the documents that I have worked for a few years ago. I have worked for nine years but only six years of it were registered. The benefit I got from all those years was only a day off. That is it, nothing more. Thanks to my husband we never were in a really bad condition, he always worked, he always worked somewhere, we even made gains. Maybe it was for the best, but to work at an institution and to represent a nation, it was something else, it was a privilege. Then you slowly realize that you have to get up and do something for yourself. If you want to do

something, you have to do a project, apply for funds and make it happen. Now this project may not have a lot of followers but we are trying to gradually achieve success.

Ebru Süleyman: You have to take initiative...

Sevim Baki: You take the initiative, but there is no support. It's hard to find support. We were used to getting support from the state back in our institution. But now we have our political party, I don't know where their budget comes from, but nobody is interested. Nobody cares, some values get lost because of disinterest. Everyone is trying to do something unique, everyone knows your job and tries to manage you, but unfortunately, my husband and I, we didn't allow something like this and I think that is why we couldn't make progress here.

Ebru Süleyman: So I think that stable support from the state is very important for art, to give them a proper place to perform their art, right?

Sevim Baki: Back in time, the state even made opening a place for art obligatory. If it's 80 percent Albanian, five percent or ten percent should be Serbian and Turkish. I think that it had to be like this at state institution radio and TV. But the funds are not being used for us, recently I realized that New Year programs became so monotone, that is why they canceled them, there will be no more New Year's programs held on the RTK channel. They invited us until last year. They asked us, "Is there something new?" And then I started to ask them, "What possibilities do you offer to us?" I mean, they don't provide us with anything, you need to have your own car for transportation, "We can't even provide a cup of coffee," they said. "Then why do you invite us?"

The studios are so simple, there is no make-up artist, no hairdresser. Which is essential, if you bring 20 women there, at least, a hairdresser should be there. The stages are awful, they have nothing to do with scenography. Compared with other Albanian programs on RTK, I don't think it's fair... they have the best quality in everything but minorities like Bosnians, Roma, Turks, they have bad conditions... So because of that, I hope they won't mind but I will not participate in any organization again, never again. If I want to do something, I will find my own sponsor and something that is worth doing because we don't have the proper conditions. I think it is not a must to organize new events.

We have people who manage us and rent good workspaces just to stand next to us. As a Turkish committee, they have to rush and do something on behalf of the Turkish community here. I think we have done a lot on behalf of Turks, but the values are nowhere to be found. I mean, you keep going on, but when no one opens a path for you or helps you then, where has your labor gone, what are you working for, you know what I mean?

Ebru Süleyman: So art has become something that you do only for yourself? It cannot reach society at large.

Sevim Baki: Yes, it cannot. I think I have already done something, especially in recent times. I have tried again and again, but we are still in the same place. I don't believe that I'll ever give up because of the women's support and desire, they are always encouraging me, so I'll always try to do something for their sake.

Ebru Süleyman: Thanks a lot for your time and stories.

Sevim Baki: I hope that we created a good program, I hope you can use these values.

Ebru Süleyman: We also hope that all of this will be recorded and passed down to history.

Sevim Baki: Inshallah, thank you.