

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH HALIT GASHI

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Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Halit Gashi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.

Other rules of transcription:

[] - addition to the text to help understand

Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.

Part One

Anita Susuri: Tell us about your childhood memories?

Halit Gashi: I had a more or less dynamic childhood, so my childhood memories are a little faded. They're faded and only important events remain in my memory. Then even childhood memories fade. But, what I remember from my childhood in Janjevo is that it was very lively. There were a lot of people, there were a lot of small businesses. Each family had its own business.

In a socialist system, Janjevo bloomed in a small capitalist system. Janjevo people were hard-working people, they managed to have a good life despite living in a mountainous place. In these conditions, without arable land, without any other activity, yet there were those crafts, even though few people disdained them, they brought income to Janjevo families. The large number of students in the school, that is, there were five or six classes for a year which means...

Anita Susuri: Which school did you go to?

Halit Gashi: It was called Vladimir Nazor before the war, in Janjevo. Now, when we separated from the system, the school was named Shtjefen Gjeçovi, where I worked. I was a secretary of the school for nine years. Then...

Anita Susuri: You were telling us how the classes were.

Halit Gashi: The classes had a large number of students, and the parallel classes had five or six within a year. So, each year there were five or six parallel classes. Sometimes the school would work in three shifts because it didn't have capacity to accommodate all the students. Because each family had at least ten children, the least, some even more. So, Janjevo had a lot of residents until 1989. In the last population census in... where Albanians took part also, the number of residents was up to six thousand. Now, in the 2012 population census Janjevo barely has two thousand residents.

Anita Susuri: What did your parents do? You are one of the oldest Janjevo residents. Do you remember that family life?

Halit Gashi: My father was a miner, my mother was a housewife. We are eight siblings. Our father raised us with the salary of a miner and he worked the land. We have some land and he worked it. So, in addition to his job, because he traveled by foot for an hour and ten minutes to go to Kishnica, to the mine of Kishnica, he also worked the land. He sent all eight of us to school with his miner's salary.

Anita Susuri: Can you describe the atmosphere in the center of Janjevo when you were a child?

Halit Gashi: I said that it was very lively. You have seen how the houses are destroyed by the lack of attendance. Janjevo started emptying since the '90s. They didn't see a perspective here. In the first place, the lack of water has forced people to leave Janjevo altogether, this good environment that Janjevo has.

Lack of drinking water is characteristic, there is an extraordinary lack of drinking water. Neither the people who used to be in power before, nor these that are now in power, have succeeded in making the water supply available for 24 hours, it is unfortunate, it is unfortunate that in this century we have reductions of water up to 20 hours. In five days there haven't been people from the water supply in Janjevo...

So these conditions, initially these conditions affected it, then also when Šešelj came from '91. He came to Janjevo twice and he threatened Croats that he will... he will kill one hundred Croats in Janjevo for a single Serb killed in Croatia. So they were forced to move away.

Anita Susuri: Before we continue with this I want to go back. So, you live here on *Saraj* Street.

Halit Gashi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What was the street like?

Halit Gashi: Janjevo is one of the oldest settlements in Kosovo. It has an ancient story, I am collecting material to write something, I still haven't done it. I am one of the founders of the meetings... there are Shtjefen Gjeçovi Meetings in Janjevo. From 2001 the Shtjefen Gjeçovi Meetings. I am one of the founders of those meetings.

In those meetings there is a lot of talk about the history of Shtjefen Gjeçovi who was born in Janjevo, lived in Janjevo for a short period of time, there is some talk about Janjevo. Janjevo is mentioned in many historical books and is widely mentioned in the books of the Ottoman Empire, but also in before of the books of the Ottoman Empire.

We also agreed to tell anecdotes. Americans invested in this street, *Saraj*¹ Street, they invested in it in 2002. And at the inauguration of this street I said something, I said something that made a lot of fuss, “When Paris and London were covered in mud, Janjevo was paved.”

Old Janjevo was a little higher than it is today. But, during the Ottoman Empire, this neighborhood had more beautiful houses compared to other neighborhoods, and because they look like *saraj*, that neighborhood was called *Saraj*. We didn’t change the name *Saraj* even during the communist government, and we didn’t change it even after the war. We did not change the name. This is the genesis of the name of the neighborhood where I live.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us about the impact of Turkish culture in Janjevo? So, the houses, the pavement.

Halit Gashi: I’m trying to give you accurate data, but if I’m wrong it’s because we haven’t researched as much as we should have, we haven’t researched. But there will be research. In old houses you can see the impact of Turkish culture, the houses with a special kind of kitchen, living room, towards the east where the house...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember your old house?

Halit Gashi: No, I don’t. I don’t remember because my father tore the house down when I was two years old, and unfortunately I don’t have any pictures of that house. Two or three houses that were just like I said were demolished. Some kind of mortar, what is it called? At that time they used mortar. They built... even the towers were built during the Ottoman Empire, maybe even before. It’s some kind of, what is the name of that material of mortar, I don’t remember right now.

Janjevo has many values. There was an initiative for it to be preserved. Once upon a time, the Municipality of Lipjan in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture had an idea for it to be preserved and be declared a museum settlement. But, it didn’t happen. Every day more and more old traces are being lost, old traces are being lost even by the abusers who for a few benefits are spoiling an artifact that could be very important.

Anita Susuri: The *Saraj* tower is near here, right? The Pasha Karadaku tower I think. Do you have any memories of that?

Halit Gashi: To tell you the truth, I passed by there on my way to school, but they demolished it out of envy, they did not allow anyone to go inside, so it looks... the way that tower looked when it was habitable. I only saw it after it was abandoned and then they damaged it a little. They damaged it, but every time we passed that tower we would get memories of some books we had read of battles that happened on those towers. And... Unfortunately, it should have been put under the protection of the Ministry of Culture at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, unfortunately. Maybe it is

¹ Saraj means palace in Turkish.

registered at the institute for the protection of these monuments, but it is being damaged day by day. And a little, they changed the interior, but on the outside it's the same, it's like that from the beginning.

Anita Susuri: For how many years did you go to school in Janjevo?

Halit Gashi: Yes, for eight years. From first grade to eighth grade. And on that note, Janjevo is known for its craftsmen. An anecdote still circulates, it has been passed on from person to person, there's nothing written of a sort, however... when Nastradin visited Janjevo, he had asked the people... in fact, before asking them what are they doing, he bragged about his garden, about the size of his cabbages, and that there are no carts to fit his cabbages.

Now the people of Janjevo remembered what he had said when he first visited. When he visited for the second time, they were working with their hammers, making noise. He asked one of them, "What are they working on?" "Oh, they are making that cart for your cabbage." So when he realized they have... he had cursed them, "May you never become neither a city nor a village." We tend to believe that because of the curse, Janjevo is neither a city nor a village.

Anita Susuri: Janjevo is also known as a place which had many kinds of fruits, vegetables, do you remember that?

Halit Gashi: Sometime after the Second World War, according to what I know, because my grandfather was a master of vines. I always remember these hills being vineyards. They're destroyed now, but all of these hills were filled with vineyards, and the grapes that were produced in Janjevo had an extraordinary taste that had no match. But from '85-'85 when the tent at Badovc Lake was built, it was started to damage the fruits and vegetables in Janjevo.

The evaporation of Badovc Lake has caused a lot of trouble in Janjevo. Since then the fruits in Janjevo were damaged. It's true that every kind of fruit that existed was found in Janjevo. You couldn't find it anywhere else in Kosovo. But from the '90s and on, people gave up, they especially gave up on vineyards. There are only two-three vineyards left from all of that. In addition to the agricultural cooperative, there used to be about 50 hectares of vineyards, but now they are deserted. The PAK [Privatization Agency of Kosovo] has sold it to someone and they have changed the activity.

Anita Susuri: While you were growing up in Janjevo, what were some of the most interesting places to you?

Halit Gashi: We had a cinema in Janjevo. My son, who is twenty years old, does not know what cinema is. We grew up with cinema. You know, I did not have the opportunity to offer that joy of watching a movie to my son or a theatre play at... because there wasn't one.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the times when you went?

Halit Gashi: When I went for the first time, I was a second grade pupil, and I feel like I am experiencing it right now. It is true, very true that it was a different experience then. Now, because of technological developments, we lost the excitement of watching a great movie or visiting an interesting place because the screens have made the world accessible.

We see the whole world on our phones and nothing seems interesting, but back then, the developments were slower and emotions were bigger. Due to slow and spontaneous developments, life was more spontaneous. We talked, for example, about marriage, about a cultural event, we talked about it two-three weeks before it happened. Now, people don't even talk about a cultural event for even an hour, or about a sport event, or even a wedding.

Anita Susuri: What movies did you watch?

Halit Gashi: There wasn't much of a choice, whatever we got from the Lipjan Cultural Center, that's what we watched. In general, they were movies with Indians, also Albanian... *Uka of the Cursed Mountains*, the first movie we watched in Albanian was *Uka of the Cursed Mountains*. Faruk Begolli played in it, he was one of the leads.

It was a pleasure of a special kind to hear Albanian at the cinema while watching *Uka of the Cursed Mountains*, it was a kind of... I can't describe how we felt when, for the first time, a movie in Albanian was screened at our cinema. Because, we screened the movies with subtitles, translated from Serbian. But in Albanian, to hear people talking in Albanian, it was *Uka of the Cursed Mountains*.

Anita Susuri: Who frequented this cultural and social life the most? Only Croats, or Albanians also?

Halit Gashi: In general, Croats were more organized. I say this, I said it everywhere, I'll even say in this interview, unfortunately they're not Croats. They're Albanians, because there are no Croats with the last name Mazerkić. They were called Marzekaj but the influence of the Croatian Catholic Church has taken its toll. With different privileges.

All last names of citizens of Kosovo and Macedonia until '58 were with the affix vić, vić, for example, my family's last name was Aliu, and it used to be Aliević up to '58. In general, we all had the affix vić. And, those of the Catholic faith were almost assimilated. They were assimilated from '58 and on. There were no Croats in Janjevo.

Some traveling Croats in the time of the Republic of Dubrovnik stayed there, stayed in Janjevo. But all of these are Albanians. You can never recognize, the Croat families had twelve, thirteen, fourteen kids. They all had fourteen, fifteen, sixteen kids...

Anita Susuri: Why did this assimilation happen?

Halit Gashi: The assimilation happened because of the privileges. The Croatian Catholic churches gave them privileges and so they were assimilated, they were assimilated. For example, they referred

to themselves as Croatian, but their fathers died with the white *plis*². The *plis* is not a relic, it isn't part of the Croat community, it is ours...

Anita Susuri: Did the church always have an impact on the Croat population when you were younger and...

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, yes. It continuously had an impact. It still does. Unfortunately it continues to have an impact, but what can we do. People should declare what they feel inside. You know, Croats...

Anita Susuri: You said you finished primary school in Janjevo, what happened after that?

Halit Gashi: I, I wanted to go... my father wanted me to become an imam, so I applied to the *Medrese*³, but unfortunately I did not get in. The circumstances were so that I was late to apply to become an imam. My late father's wish that I... I was one of the best students of Janjevo, and his wish was that, not to become an imam, but to finish *Medresa*. He didn't want me to become an imam by all means. He wanted me to gain knowledge about religion and then to decide what I want to study. He had progressive ideas, he lived a short life, but he loved school. He lived a short life, but he loved school. I'm almost the age he was when he died. Then, I went to high school. I went to law school, it was...

Anita Susuri: Before we continue, since we're talking about religion, the mosque in the bazaar, I think it doesn't have a name...

Halit Gashi: It does, Murat Bey Mosque.

Anita Susuri: Murat Bey. Do you have any memories of that mosque?

Halit Gashi: Yes, I have good memories of the mosque, also I was very little when my father took me there for the first time. When I went inside the mosque I had an even more powerful feeling than in the cinema. You asked about the cinema earlier, now I'm telling you about the feeling I had when I went to the mosque for the first time. It was damaged for a few years after the war, until 2014 when after many attempts it was restored by the Turkish government association TIKA. It invested and restored the building. This is the first building that was like that, but it was restored. Actually in the minaret only the mud was removed from the stones. The minaret was the same as today. They put some marble up there, because the minaret is the same as it was, so the mosque of Janjevo was built around 200 years ago, or maybe even more than 200 years ago.

Anita Susuri: How do you remember it? What did it look like back then?

² Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

³ Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

Halit Gashi: Well, it started, without supervision it started to get damaged, I don't remember the exterior very well. But, what was taught there... I have many good memories inside the mosque, and it's good they intervened on the outside.

Anita Susuri: Tell us about your memories if you can?

Halit Gashi: I'm trying even though I told you, Anita, that...

Anita Susuri: Did you go there with your friends? Was there a class that was taught by an imam?

Halit Gashi: I didn't go to school there, I only went there during Ramadan with my father for *Tarawih*⁴ and prayers. I started praying at a young age, I still do. But, because of some different interruptions, they tried to separate religion from school... practicing religion was limited.

Anita Susuri: During communism?

Halit Gashi: Yes, during the years of communism the public display of religious sentiments was reduced. You had to keep it for yourself and not show it. Luckily, now we can express them without any trouble.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember Janjevo, until what year were the streets cobblestone? What was that like?

Halit Gashi: No, the part of Janjevo that was in cobblestone doesn't exist, the old Janjevo. The archeologists should uncover that. There are many caves in Janjevo that were mined, but there is another anecdote that was not taken down by anyone, but also it wasn't proven. They say that a dog chasing a rabbit went through Gadime and came out in Janjevo. The cave of Gadime, there are some marble stones that were similar to the ones in Gadime, but they didn't explore that yet.

Anita Susuri: Have you ever visited those places?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, yes, I visited them. Actually after the war a citizen here discovered a mine that was used until before the Second World War, before the First World War. We went in there and there were two or three chronicles... but in the entrance of Janjevo there's a place called Gradina, as children we played in those caves. There were... some say that there is a settlement inside those stones, or a fortress that was used as an observation point. You can see everything from that point, and it was like an observation point, but we couldn't get through, or maybe someone got through and closed it on purpose, but there is a lot to explore in Janjevo. There is a lot to explore...

⁴ Tarawih refers to additional ritual prayers performed by Muslims at night after the Isha prayer during the holy month of Ramadan.

Anita Susuri: You were telling us about high school. Was that the first time you traveled out of Janjevo?

Halit Gashi: Yes, true, true. My [maternal] uncles lived near here, in the neighborhood. They used to live where I parked my car, so I didn't need to leave Janjevo. It was unfortunate because we didn't finish two years... that's how the education system was, the first two years were general, not orientated, we had general subjects. Then, the other two years were like now when they go to tenth grade. It was the third and fourth year for us. The first and second year we had general subjects, then in third and fourth year... we finished those first two years in a Serbian village because there was not enough space in Lipjan for us. It was a primary school building but we went to high school there at noon. In Gushterica e Poshtme. There are three Serbian villages here, we are linked to those three villages.

Anita Susuri: In Albanian or Serbian?

Halit Gashi: Albanian, Albanian. It was part of the Lipjan high school. Serbs also learned in some of those classrooms. They were taught in Serbian, we were taught in Albanian. No, no, no, luckily no.

Anita Susuri: What was that period like for you?

Halit Gashi: It was a very hard time, because both the economic situation wasn't good, and the transport was not properly organized. Janjevo continues to have trouble with transport. My kids have the same difficulties I had when I was in school with transport. Unfortunately, the same thing continues happening from '90 to 2019, there are transport difficulties in Janjevo. There were buses, but they were rare at noon, and the number of residents was big.

Anita Susuri: Were there times when you had no transport? How did you get there, or how did you come back?

Halit Gashi: We often came back by foot, it took us an hour, an hour and half to come back home, it happened often...

Anita Susuri: What was that like?

Halit Gashi: It was kind of fun because we were together, we were the same people so from first grade until the second year of high school. How we started... we were very close. We... it was really fun especially during summer and spring. It was a little harder during the winter, sometimes we would be stuck there at night and it would be harder, there were dogs and stuff, we were young. But in general, during summer and spring it was fun.

Anita Susuri: When you were young, we heard that Janjevo was known for its cafés and nightlife. Were you part of that?

Halit Gashi: No, no, never, I wasn't part of nightlife before or after war. I wasn't, I didn't... but there were Albanians that were part of that. For example, if there was a shop in Janjevo, there were nine cafés. The proportion was one to nine. There were many small cafés, but they were very visited and very crowded... because there were a lot of young people. I mean, everything they brought...

Friday was the market day in Janjevo, it is held also... now it is a relic of time. There is a farmers' market that lasts for an hour, people take a stroll and... but Friday used to be a celebration day in Janjevo. Also, not just because of the Friday prayer, but also because of the market. All Janjevo's surrounding villages... Janjevo, actually up to 1959 had the status of a municipality, it was a municipality. Twelve villages were part of the Janjevo Municipality. Since 1959, it has lost that status, we tried to get it back after the war, but we did not succeed, Ahtisaari did not want Janjevo to have the status of municipality.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: You told us about market day. Can you describe the atmosphere at that time?

Halit Gashi: Now I have to think back (laugh). It was fun, it's true, it was fun, it was lively, people get supplied, manufacturers and traders. Manufacturers were mostly the ones who brought their produce from villages like Banulla, Glogovc, Sllovi, Smallusha. They never took anything back, they sold everything.

Anita Susuri: What did they sell?

Halit Gashi: Well, vegetables, milk and dairy. All dairy products were sold...

Anita Susuri: Was there also plastic?

Halit Gashi: Products made out of plastic are Janjevo's. Those were made for sale, but they were not sold on the market day, but in other cities. Whenever a fair was organized, as they were called back in the day, you always had ten-fifteen businesses from Janjevo, whenever in former Yugoslavia.

Not only in Kosovo, but everywhere in former Yugoslavia. For example, I did my army service on a Yugoslav island, it was called Vis, it is in Croatia. Even there you had Janjevo Albanians, I mean Janjevo Croats. An island where no tourists were allowed... but even in the furthest point of Yugoslavia, you could find Janjevo people. But they supplied us with dairy products, vegetables and fruits, actually no, not fruits, we had fruits. But, vegetables didn't grow here because of the water, the lack of water and quarry soil. We were supplied with vegetables from the villages around.

Anita Susuri: Who mostly visited the cafés?

Halit Gashi: Well, Croats. Those who called themselves Croats. There were few Albanians, few Albanians. Two teahouses belonged to Albanians, not in the center where you were. They all belonged to Croats. The one you went in was called *Bash Çarshi* even before. The one who bought it, the Albanian, kept the same name, didn't change the name of the café. The others changed the names, but that is the only one... I don't remember when that café was opened.

Anita Susuri: That café, *Bash Çarshia*, do you remember, was it there when you were little?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, I told you. It was a little different, it was renovated, the last buyer renovated it a little, but I don't remember when it was built, that's how I always remember it, as a café. I am 53 years old, so that café has existed for at least half a century.

Anita Susuri: Can you describe it for us, because we heard that people sang there, drank, ate?

Halit Gashi: I told you that Janjevo is known as a residence that didn't have any interethnic conflicts for 800 years, even though today you go into a café and you can hear one person talking Turkish, another one Albanian, Roma, the other one Croatian, and you don't know who is Albanian, who is Croatian, who refers to themselves as Turkish or Roma.

There was nightlife in Janjevo. I told you I wasn't part of the nightlife, but my uncle lived further away from my house, so I passed by the center on my way to his house. There were around twelve, thirteen cafés in that small center. Twelve, thirteen cafés full of people, they were always crowded, and nightlife continued until late night, until morning.

Especially when there were any holidays, Easter and Saint George. Saint George of Roma, they, they actually kept the party going. They started playing music and stuff a day before Saint George. Now, there aren't celebrations like that.

Anita Susuri: What about a café in front of *Bash Çarshia*, was it open when you were younger, do you remember it?

Halit Gashi: Yes, in front of *Bash Çarshia*...

Anita Susuri: Yes, 1928.

Halit Gashi: It says 28 but that café had singers, it had live music. I never went in, but I have seen it at night from the outside, especially during the celebrations of Croatian holidays, there was live music and a great mood was created, it was... and they had a great income from those places. As I told you, Janjevo people for nine months earned a living outside of Janjevo, but they spent it all in Janjevo in three months. Those three months that they could not work during the winter, they spent them in Janjevo. They had a lot, all the cafés in Janjevo had a lot of work.

Anita Susuri: What else happened during high school? How did your life continue after that?

Halit Gashi: For me, unfortunately since high school until I finished university was a very hard period for me, extremely hard. I finished primary school in 1981, and when I was in eighth grade the demonstrations of '81⁵ happened in April and March, March and April, it was an extremely hard situation. Then, we were going to school in the Serbian village. Even in '83 when we went to Lipjan, we had to pass three Serbian villages, which didn't have a positive attitude towards us, they didn't. We didn't have any conflicts but we were never comfortable with each other. Every time I traveled out of Janjevo, then when I finished school and university, my mother, may she rest in peace, I always found her at the door waiting for me, thinking something might have happened to me since I had to pass by these three villages. It was a very hard period for people from Janjevo, Akllap, and Teqe. It was extremely hard.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the demonstrations of '81, did you take part?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, I did. We organized a demonstration in Janjevo as young people without any full awareness of what was happening.

Anita Susuri: How old were you?

Halit Gashi: I was 15 years old. Now I can't brag, I say I was fully aware of what I was doing, I did it because we were supposed to. I joined it even though I could not have known the cause. Now, I can easily say that I knew, but I didn't know the cause. But it was a date we remembered. I think it was April 4th or 5th when they tried to organize a demonstration in Janjevo, the police and organizers found out quickly, I don't know who organized it, but I was part of it.

Anita Susuri: Did everyone take part or...

Halit Gashi: No, a few, it was a small number of people. Croats didn't care about this, they didn't care about this.

Anita Susuri: After high school, did you continue your education, where...

Halit Gashi: I finished the Faculty of Law in Pristina. But as soon as we would finish high school we would get a call for military service.

Anita Susuri: What was that period of time like?

Halit Gashi: Military service was also extremely hard. After the '81 demonstrations they didn't have... any of the nations that lived in former Yugoslavia didn't have a positive attitude towards us because of

⁵ On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demands for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

the propaganda. They had aversion toward us without even knowing us. They didn't know us but they had aversion towards us. When you don't do anything to someone and they feel aversion towards you, it just shows their weakness, we didn't have anything against Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians, or even Serbians.

Throughout history they continuously tried to assimilate us. We don't have the feeling that... we didn't give life to anyone, and we don't have the right to take anyone's life. But it was hard. I was young and it was easier for me but for people who were 24-25 years old... there was a guy from Presevo, after he finished university he worked at the school library, he had extraordinary difficulties, they would take him to informative conversations. They didn't do that with us, because we were young and didn't achieve anything, but in general it was hard.

Everybody went through that, at least for those thirteen months that we served that army they would take each of us for informative conversations which were very hard, there was extraordinary psychological pressure.

Anita Susuri: Did you go to university in Pristina?

Halit Gashi: Yes, Pristina.

Anita Susuri: How did Pristina seem like to you back then?

Halit Gashi: I, if I ever move out of Janjevo, maybe I would live in Pristina. I would trade Janjevo with anything because my family's history is weird. Our ancestors moved from Pristina to Janjevo. My grandfather's father came to Janjevo. His wife was from Janjevo, he came to live with her and he stayed in Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: Why did he live in his wife's house?

Halit Gashi: They were nine sisters and didn't have a brother, and their parents decided that one of the girl's husbands would live there. And out of all their husbands, my ancestor was the most laid back, so he came to Janjevo from Prishtina. Now, I would only live in Pristina, nowhere else. Janjevo... Pristina, I had a very good time here, and now for some time I work in Pristina.

I spent the best times of my life. The best time of our lives is between 20 years old and 40 years old. I spent that time of my life in Pristina. I have very good memories, extraordinary. For example, I worked in Lipjan for eleven years, but nothing links to Lipjan, absolutely nothing.

Anita Susuri: What was Pristina like when you first went there?

Halit Gashi: Pristina has changed a lot, unfortunately, not in a good way...

Anita Susuri: What do you remember that has changed?

Halit Gashi: Pristina was a clean city, but I'll talk about its physiognomy. There were a few buildings, and it wasn't crowded. A quiet city, in general it was a quiet city. Students from all over Kosovo would make it lively, just like the high school in Lipjan... Lipjan is slowly becoming a lively city, but Pristina is lively thanks to students and cultural life.

I went to the theatre a lot. I enjoyed going to the theatre and watching the premieres. We tried very hard to get tickets for the premiere, because seeing reruns wasn't as interesting. I have good memories of Pristina, it was a quiet city. They liked creating, doing things, doing good things, give to Kosovo, people from Pristina had the chance to give a lot to Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: What kind of impression did you have of those premieres? Because they say people prepared in a special way when they went to premieres.

Halit Gashi: Anita [addresses the interviewer], it's hard now because you have to experience those moments and talk about them. It's easier for you. When Sabri Fejzullahu⁶ and his son sing I tell people that you have the means to record, record every emotion, you have the means to record every memory. We had trouble saving even these pictures that we took. But photographs say enough, there are a few... the flaw, the flaw of my generation, I'm saying generation, is that we didn't write, we didn't keep... I didn't keep a diary that would refresh those feelings. Because when you read something you remember it, but it's unfortunate that we didn't write.

Anita Susuri: Did you continuously travel from Janjevo when you were a student?

Halit Gashi: No, no. I only traveled the first year, after that I lived there. I lived in a private apartment for a year, and in the Student Center for two years. It was a poor but excellent life in the Student Center, a very dynamic life, a very likable life. Amazing friends, amazing. They...

Anita Susuri: What did you do with your friends? Did you go out?

Halit Gashi: Yes, we went out. As law students we had the advantage of not having to read a lot, to finish university we didn't have to read a lot. Now they don't read at all, but we studied for at least one or two hours, we didn't read, we studied. We really studied. We also went out a lot, we were a group of friends who went out a lot.

Anita Susuri: Which places did you visit?

Halit Gashi: Well, in general there were a few places. We mostly went to Germia. There were a few places, a few cafés, but we made the most out of them, we went to a different one every day. *Arabeska* was known...

⁶ Kosovan singer.

Anita Susuri: Where was it?

Halit Gashi: It was in front of Newborn.

Anita Susuri: So were you married while you were in university, or did you start working? When did you start working? Tell us a little about the period after university?

Halit Gashi: After the university, pluralism began in Kosovo. I graduated in 1990 and then it got ruined. In '90 the strikes of September 3rd happened and all the employees in social enterprises, in the administration were fired. People were fired even from the cooperative, the situation was extremely difficult. Then I came. In those years I started getting into politics. I was in the Democratic League⁷ for many years...

Anita Susuri: You started right after university?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, immediately after university. And I never...

Anita Susuri: How did you decide to get into politics?

Halit Gashi: It was spontaneous, it wasn't prepared. I'll tell you a fact about Janjevo. In Janjevo there were a few educated cadres, unfortunately there were just a few. Shtjefen Gjeçovi's Janjevo having such a small cadre? I am one of the few. Now, I had a good life in Pristina and I continued the same way. Even though I finished university, I didn't have a way of using the knowledge I had gotten from the law university, so I had to do something.

And this... I never thought that after my family invested in my education for 16 years that I would have an unsecure future. Maybe the only opportunity I had was to get into the politics of that time, organizing the plural life in Kosovo. And in '93 I started working as a secretary in the primary school. I worked as a school secretary until 2000 but...

Anita Susuri: Vladimir Nazor or...

Halit Gashi: Shtjefën Gjeçovi. It was called Vladimir Nazor until '90 then... Janjevo is a characteristic case, it is characteristic for many reasons. It's called *sui generis*, *sui generis*, a special case. From all over Kosovo, Janjevo and Lipjan are the only places where even primary school was prohibited. We taught students in warehouses and... I'll try to get a copy of that CD, I think a teacher of information technology has one, a video that we made in '95. Where students were sitting to follow classes, we turned *oda*⁸ into offices. Mine and the director's office was in a three-by-three-meter *oda*, we had a sofa, a table and a chair, and we used it as an office.

⁷ *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

⁸ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

This was, I'm sorry, I forgot I'm talking in front of the camera, I got a little emotional, you reminded me of that time. It took an extraordinary commitment to organize lessons for students. We didn't have desks, we improvised desks. I wasn't a handyman but I worked on some chairs for students. I didn't even know how to use nails, but I had to improvise and be a master of desks. Since I was the school secretary I had to prepare. In the first year they sat on bricks and crates. Then in the second year, in '95, we made some chairs. A businessman gave us some planks and we improvised chairs.

Anita Susuri: Where were these houses?

Halit Gashi: In our neighbourhood, a little further down.

Anita Susuri: The *Saraj* street, right?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, on *Saraj* street and Dardania, the main street. It was called Nene Tereza then, now it's called Dardania. Because they had to be near each other, so we wouldn't put students all over the place, students took their breaks on the streets because they didn't have... the buildings weren't in the same place. We had to have five-six warehouses like that to turn them into classrooms. It was hard.

The documentary that the information technology teacher has reflects this very well. He is very smart, he still hasn't retired, he is a good teacher in Lipjan, he teaches there. Now he is successful, he sent his students to compete in America, the school in Lipjan, Hajrit Rashiti. But he has that amazing documentary that is history and documentary.

There's another fact, it's said that some documents exist that say that the first Albanian school was opened in Janjevo, within the church of Janjevo. By a Franciscan order, the school was opened, it had 13 students who learned Albanian in 1625. No one from the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Albania has come forward to deny this...

Anita Susuri: Is it the building near the church, or was it somewhere else?

Halit Gashi: Now I can't really tell you if it was that building, or another building, because it's true that that building was used as a school after the Second World War. My older sisters have finished two or three classes in that building, then this old building was built, the one that was demolished, and left to the mercy of fate. The new one was built later on.

Anita Susuri: Why did this change happen?

Halit Gashi: Due to the large number of students. The old school did not have sanitary facilities inside, only outside, and then the citizens of Janjevo gave five percent of their family's income from '81 to '89 to build the school. They invested in it, they contributed to building the school. Also this new school

building is a contribution of Janjevo citizens, not the state. But we all gave five percent of our family's income for the new school building...

Anita Susuri: At the time when you were in the school, was it hard to manage it, I mean there were Albanian, Croats, Roma...

Halit Gashi: No, unfortunately I only worked in buildings outside of school. Actually, I worked from July '99 to December 2000. But the first year after war, the first year after war Croats were hesitant, they didn't come to school. Then in 2000, the end of 2000 I quit education, I never went back to it.

I generally worked in administration institutions and I don't know the feeling of having Serbian teachers, Albanian and Croat students and Albanian and Croat students in the same school. I don't know that feeling. But they all went to the same school, Croats, Roma, Albanians, and those declared as Turkish. But, I attended classes at that school.

Anita Susuri: You grew up in Janjevo and you still live here. How are these relationships between people? Are they friendly?

Halit Gashi: I said that for 800 years we have lived together and there was never any conflict. There might have been brothers who killed each other, but there were no ethnic conflicts, there were no individual or collective conflicts. Of course, children had small and spontaneous verbal conflicts, but in Janjevo there weren't conflicts such as killings among Albanians due to revenge or so. Among Albanians or anyone else. There was a little or no conflict at all in Janjevo. Luckily, it still is so.

Anita Susuri: When did you get married?

Halit Gashi: A long time ago (laughs). I got married in '93, September of '93.

Anita Susuri: What are the traditions of Janjevo like? Celebration or wedding traditions.

Halit Gashi: I told you that preparations for weddings started a year before. For example, when I got married, the preparations started two or three months before. Not like the others but... there was music in my house every day for two or three weeks. The neighbors came from afternoon until late night, or early morning, there was music all the time. We would drink tea, eat sweets, it was a nice atmosphere. That went on for three weeks.

Another difficulty for us, it was difficult for us because the fuel was expensive, gasoline and oil cost two or three marks, and we couldn't afford it. As education workers, our salary was 50 marks and paying for one liter of gasoline, three or four marks... But I am thankful to everyone who came to my wedding. There were 30 cars when I... I didn't go and get my wife myself, it wasn't like that then. I made a mistake by not going, I should have broken the taboo.

Me and my wife picked each other. 30 cars went to get her at a very hard time and the national flag was on the first car. They had troubles with Serbian here because of the flag, but luckily there were no problems at my wedding.

Anita Susuri: How did you meet your wife?

Halit Gashi: We met in Pristina, I knew her sister, she studied in Gjilan and we met accidentally through a friend and our relationship started.

Anita Susuri: Did your wife study?

Halit Gashi: No, she didn't, she didn't study. She finished high school in '90 when the system collapsed. She didn't study.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: Did Croats have special celebrations and wedding traditions in comparison to Albanians...

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, they did. It is a characteristic that confirms to me that they are Albanians. There are no *dimija*⁹ in the clothings of Croats from Croatia. They have great similarities to our traditional clothing. Those refer to themselves, who know themselves as Croats, their brides wore *dimija*. They were handmade, they still have them and...

Anita Susuri: Did they go out into the street with those clothes?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Did you go out into the street to look at them?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, yes. It was fun. They got married in church and all the wedding guests accompanied the couple to the church, they walked around Janjevo with live music, they gave out sweets, they gave out drinks. It was so much fun. They always had a fun mood during their weddings, they preserved those traditions.

They were located in two settlements. Near Zagreb, a place called Dubrava, that's where Croats mostly were located, and a Serbian village in the municipality of Kinin, it is called Kistanje. Those who did not have the financial means to build houses were placed in the homes of Croats in Kistanje. Even there, the traditions of there are being preserved, but the traditions of the Croats of Janjevo are not

⁹ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

well seen, because they are not the autochthonous traditions of the Croats, but traditions (laughs) of Albanians. And they invited each other to each other's weddings.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the '90s when they started to leave Janjevo?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What was it like?

Halit Gashi: That was done to hurry the process of Croats leaving Janjevo, those who referred to themselves as Croats. In addition to the economic difficulties that were created, there were also many political difficulties. One of them was killed, he was a soldier, he was a Croat, here in our neighborhood...

Anita Susuri: Where was he killed?

Halit Gashi: He was killed in Macedonia and they brought him back in a coffin, and that sped up the migration of people who referred to themselves as Croats in Janjevo. It is estimated that Janjevo once had about 500-600 Croatian homes and now it doesn't even have 30-40 homes. They were bought by some Albanians, both of the Muslim faith and of the Catholic faith bought their houses. There are two villages, Brus and Pashtesh in the Municipality of Lipjan, but they are further away, they are mostly of Catholic faith. They're Catholic but Albanians. Their last name is Gashi, their last name is Gashi, both of the Muslim and of the Catholic faith. They are, they mostly came to Janjevo and bought the houses of Croats, but they only bought a few. The houses of Croats are on the verge of collapsing, especially the old ones.

Anita Susuri: What was it like when they moved away...

Halit Gashi: Sad.

Anita Susuri: They mentioned the trucks on the streets...

Halit Gashi: No, no. They went individually, not in an organized way, but for example, every second day or third day a family would leave. But no, there were no organized trucks. Organized migration, so, it's not like ten families left at the same time, but they went individually, day by day... but it was hard, a hard situation.

Anita Susuri: What was it like for you?

Halit Gashi: It was twice as hard for us. My father's generation and older experienced what it's like to leave the country. For example, my family members went to Turkey. My father's cousins went to Turkey, we sometimes visit them, my father, may he rest in peace, never had the chance to visit them.

So my father, and their father, had it twice as hard. Fortunately, my father was not alive to see the Croats leaving, but he saw when his cousins and uncles migrated to Turkey.

Anita Susuri: Were you friends with any of the Croats that migrated?

Halit Gashi: No, I didn't have many Croat friends. My brother had more friends, I didn't because of the education I had, I didn't have many friends. I had a friend who went to school to become a priest, we meet from time to time. He lives somewhere in Italy, the Croat, his family lives in Croatia, but we had a good friendship.

It was very hard for me when he went to priest school because we were good friends. But others probably had, they had a wider circle. Migration has had a great impact on the economy and on interpersonal relations, as well as on society. Life was very lively and they brought income. They worked, they were hardworking people. There, they aren't the same as they were in Janjevo, not like in Janjevo. They have become a burden to the state and social assistance.

Anita Susuri: How has your development with politics continued since the '90s?

Halit Gashi: I, all the developments that have taken place for 20 years in the Municipality of Lipjan, from the 90s to the 2000s I have been part of those developments. But even ten years after, until 2010 I was very active in politics. From 2013 I took a break from politics. However, from the '90s to '99, we had additional motives. We were enslaved and it wasn't proper politics but we tried through politics to do something good for the nation, do something good, to remove the foreign yoke from Kosovo.

It was a different feeling, there was more willpower, more solidarity. This was after '99, 2000, it was the sense of state change and the sense of going crazy after material stuff, we care so much about material stuff. I hope God helps us and shows us the right way, because we care so much about material stuff, that's what I am saying. We have done so little about culture.

Our excuse is that internationals prevented us from doing good things. The internationals didn't have any influence on good education, on good culture. We had a cultural life. We should have good healthcare. These are the three pillars that have to be good, but they aren't. I was part of politics and I feel a part of the responsibility of them not being well done.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the period of war? How was it?

Halit Gashi: Of course I remember, I was at the best age when...

Anita Susuri: Were you in Janjevo?

Halit Gashi: Yes, I was in Janjevo all the time. Janjevo, no one left Janjevo. We had guests from many parts of the Municipality of Lipjan, mostly from the Municipality of Lipjan, the eastern part, they came from Vershevc to Krojmir and Shala. There were a few people, not many, but those who could come to

Janjevo. We tried to welcome with all we had and make them feel like home. They left everything behind, and we tried, we tried to converse with them. To try and make them forget, at least while they were with us. We tried to live with their pain.

Anita Susuri: Did the Croat community help you?

Halit Gashi: They didn't dare, they didn't dare. But they didn't stand in our way. The biggest help was that they did not stand in our way. There are individuals who helped, there are individual cases, but they are few.

Anita Susuri: Did you have any hard experiences during the war or something?

Halit Gashi: Personally I didn't, but our neighbor was killed. Janjevo has a war victim. He went to a village near here called Shashkovc, it is a village in the Municipality of Janjevo but it is near Janjevo, it is less than two kilometers away. He went there, he was from there, he was born in that village but at some point he came to live in Janjevo. He went there to check on his brother's house that was burned by soldiers and they shot him from far away and they killed him. It was very hard for us the day he was killed.

That was... then there was a little... an officer came and maltreated some citizens. They say that he died in a car accident, he was a military superior in the Yugoslav army, Serbian army, there was no Yugoslav army. He had an accident, but he maltreated citizens of Janjevo. Albanian and Roma in general, I don't know about Croats. They preserved Janjevo as their own nest because they fought all day then during the night they came to those cafés that the Croats had, they drank *raki*¹⁰ and ate meat, where Croats had to serve them. Albanians didn't have cafés at that time.

Anita Susuri: What did you do after the war?

Halit Gashi: I continued to work for the school, generally I tried to bring the right level of education to the school. We managed to get a donation to finish the new school which citizens contributed to. Got projects, then I also took responsibility at the municipality. I had some posts with responsibilities at the municipality and I tried...

Anita Susuri: Municipality of Lipjan, right?

Halit Gashi: Municipality of Lipjan. Yes, yes Municipality of Lipjan.

Anita Susuri: Was that period difficult for you and what was it like for you?

Halit Gashi: Having responsibilities and not being able to help when many villages were burned down, there was a great amount of demands but the capacity to help was limited. The municipal

¹⁰ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

budget was very small. There were donors who would sometimes listen to us, sometimes they wouldn't, sometimes those donations were misused. But we tried as much as we could to not send anyone back because it was a hard time, people lost everything they worked for for years, they lost it within the day. They lost their loved ones, that made the situation harder, but thank God it passed without bigger traumas. We're known in history as people who restore the situation quickly, we recover quickly, as a nation we recovered quickly compared to how we were. It was hard to manage institutions at that time.

Anita Susuri: How did your political activity continue?

Halit Gashi: Then after 2001-2004 was a very hard period of time, then after the events of 2004¹¹ happened, they also gave us a blow. Kosovo's development was hit. The events of 2004, of March 2004 are very bad memories for me. Not just for me, but to all of those who experienced that situation in 2004, it was a war, a mini revolution.

Anita Susuri: Where were you working back then?

Halit Gashi: I was still at the municipality. To this day there is no one who asks about who organized it. It didn't happen by itself. It was a very hard time, very hard, Albanian suffered more than anyone else. If it was organized by Albanians... I don't think it was, those are my suspicions. I can't say that it definitely is like that, but I am doubtful that it was organized by Albanians. Because if Albanians had organized it, Albanians wouldn't have been killed. Let's not get into conspiracies now.

Anita Susuri: How did life continue after that? You started working in Pristina...

Halit Gashi: When I finished my mandate in Lipjan, I went to work at the central level for three years and I came back once again. The three years in Pristina were good, I worked with an authority that was first created, the telecommunications authority. I was responsible for mobile telephony. A very respected institution, but in general Albanians don't know how to create good institutions. We failed at it, even though we had the opportunity to make it a good institution. Then I worked at the Ministry of Public Administration for about seven months. I came back to Lipjan in 2007, I worked at the Municipality of Lipjan for about seven years. Since 2016, I have been working at the Assembly of Kosovo and I think I will retire with the current job.

Anita Susuri: What do you do now?

Halit Gashi: I am part of the unit that supports the chairmanship of the assembly and the sessions. We prepare scenarios, reports, decisions. Every decision that is made... what you see being read by the

¹¹ In March 2004, riots broke in Kosovo following rumors that two Albanian children had been chased by Serbs into the river Ibar, where they drowned. While the only evidence alleging the attacks was the testimony of a surviving boy, fear and resentment spread quickly, mobilizing thousands against Serbian individuals and property. A subsequent UN investigation, led by the Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, recounts the events.

chairman of the assembly, whoever leads it, is part of our unit. We provide legal advice, legal advice on how to approve a bill, make an initiative law, all of these are part of that unit.

Anita Susuri: Is it a hard job?

Halit Gashi: No, it's not a hard job, it's a professional job, I'm very comfortable there.

Anita Susuri: What, for example... What do you spend the most time on these days? What do you do more? Do you have any hobbies or something, or is work something central in your life?

Halit Gashi: Up until last year I played basketball with my children and friends. Last year I stopped playing. Basketball is my passion. I garden when I can after work. I thought that when I get near retirement I would make some bees, deal with that. If I live that long, as they say.

Anita Susuri: Since we're talking about sports, I wanted to, as you, I know Janjevo used to have... so, there was sport development in Janjevo. Do you remember that?

Halit Gashi: Yes, Janjevo had two popular clubs. It had the football club funded by the Metallac Factory, it was a metal factory, of door locks and so, it was a very profitable factory in Janjevo before the war. The salary was good there. They had around 600-700 employees, they were mostly from Janjevo and from the Municipality of Lipjan. All income was good for the employees. They financed sports. I said two clubs, I mentioned the football club that was in the second league of Kosovo and the volleyball club also worked. In general we didn't have a place to express our talents. We had the school yard where they played volleyball and they had a miserable football field. But, even in those conditions there was...

Anita Susuri: That's where they trained or...

Halit Gashi: Yes, that's where they trained. But despite the poor conditions the results did not lack. It was also financed, it was financed by the Metallac factory, they had the means to finance both clubs, the volleyball club and the football club.

Anita Susuri: Did you go to these matches? Did you watch them?

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes, here in Janjevo, we didn't go further because...

Anita Susuri: Did a lot of people go to these events?

Halit Gashi: Yes, a lot of people did. Generally, when they went to Serbian settlements, they did not have a nice time, they fought with the Serbs. Serbs attacked Croats, too, not just Albanians.

Anita Susuri: Now you have children and you live here in Janjevo. Do they go to school here or...

Halit Gashi: Yes, my oldest daughter completed English language in the University of Prishtina, my second daughter is studying in Turkey, my third daughter studies Turkish literature, and my son studies physical education.

Anita Susuri: Do they live here or...

Halit Gashi: Yes, yes. They live here. My daughter...

Anita Susuri: Do they have any prospects for young people in Janjevo?

Halit Gashi: No, no.

Anita Susuri: Why?

Halit Gashi: Well life here is hard in general. It's good for as long as you only sleep in Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: Why? What has changed?

Halit Gashi: Well the possibility of creating material goods has narrowed. How some families live in a place where there is no water supply, I would leave during the night, not during the day, I would leave during the night. They live in extremely hard conditions. They carry water with horses, they wait for the buckets to fill for two or three hours. It's a hard life, it's a hard life. The possibility of making a living for your family is more difficult. You can't farm or craft, they have faded out. If you work in a hotel you get paid 150 to 200 euros a month, what can you do with that, it isn't even enough for one person. So, living in Janjevo is hard because of the poor material conditions.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the holidays for which Croats come back. What's the atmosphere like when they come?

Halit Gashi: Until a few years ago, until four or five years there used to be a fun atmosphere, but now it has faded away. Due to the poor financial conditions they have in Croatia, for example in 2003 the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the Croats was celebrated. It was a great celebration, there were a lot of guests. The 700th anniversary was marked when the first Croatian known to church books came to Janjevo during the time of the Republic of Dubrovnik. It was funded by the Croatian state. It was a good manifestation.

Anita Susuri: Were you there?

Halit Gashi: Yes, I was.

Anita Susuri: How was it?

Halit Gashi: Good, good, it was good in general. Bajram Rexhepi, the Prime Minister of Kosovo back then was the guest of honor. There were many participants, many participants who came from Croatia. There was an atmosphere...

Anita Susuri: What was special about that day?

Halit Gashi: It was special because people came back to Janjevo after many years. There were people, for example, who left Janjevo in '90 and never came back until 2003. When they came to Janjevo after thirteen years the feeling of meeting people they used to know, seeing how people have changed after thirteen or fourteen years, they changed a lot. And... am I touching the mike?

Anita Susuri: No, no, it's okay.

Halit Gashi: And the feeling of people getting together. The only flaw of that event was that the priest personalized it. The priest is the same generation as I am, he is two years older. He finished primary school in Janjevo, then he finished the ecclesiastical high school and university abroad, in Croatia and Italy, I think. He is a person who personalizes matters a lot. He wants to tie everything that happens in Janjevo to his job. That was the only flaw of that event. The other flaw is that if he had goodwill he could reestablish Janjevo. He could have reestablished it with development and investments, but he didn't want investments in Janjevo. I don't know why but he didn't like investments.

Anita Susuri: Do you have anything to add, something you might have forgotten?

Halit Gashi: I am talking in general, maybe I have forgotten to say a lot of things, but at this moment I can't think of anything to add.

Anita Susuri: Good, thank you.

Halit Gashi: Thank you.