

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH NAIME MAÇASTENA SHERIFI

Pristina | Date: March 4, 2022

Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Naime Maçastena Sherifi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (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

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Naime, if you could introduce yourself and tell us your birth date, place, and anything about your origin, your family?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** I am Naime Maçastena Sherifi, I was born on February 27, 1968. I was born in Istanbul, Turkey. In 1973, me, my parents and my two brothers returned from Turkey and settled in Pristina. I was four years old then. My parents were deported to Turkey. My mother's family was deported in 1912. And then my mother, everyone, my aunts and uncles were born there. They created their families there and they have lived in Turkey ever since. My father's family was deported in 1956 because they were persecuted by the regime.

Three of my father's uncles were executed back then by... on December 2, 1945. They were executed for participating in *Balli Kombëtar*.<sup>1</sup> The partisans executed them, the communists, in between the church and the mosque in Ferizaj and their bodies were never given to the family. We didn't know. The family members never knew where they were buried or where their bones were. And then in 1956 during Ranković's<sup>2</sup> era, they were under a lot of pressure and my grandfather was forced to take his wife and children and flee to Turkey.

There, they settled in a city which is located in the north-eastern part of Turkey, it's called Samsun, where a very big community of Albanians was centered. Otherwise, my grandfather was an imam and became the imam of a mosque in one of the villages where there were... because Samsun's area and Bafra was the part where most Albanians settled in Turkey, including those deported in 1912 as well. They were mainly sent to those areas, where the Armenians were. They deported the Armenians and placed mainly Albanians from Kosovo.

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<sup>1</sup> *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

After some time, my parents got married there of course. My mother was born in Turkey and after facing many obstacles as an immigrant family, a family with placement and integration problems, in 1964 or '65 they came from Samsun and settled in Istanbul, where I was born. We lived there for four more years and in 1973, my father ultimately decided to return to Kosovo because he never wanted to live there.

After the changes that happened in Kosovo, after Ranković's fall from power and the birth of a more liberal spirit... which was very short-lived and temporary because in the '80s you could see that it wasn't quite as it was being proclaimed. My father was convinced, not convinced, but he asked to return here. We stayed with some family members for some time. And then we mainly lived in difficult financial conditions because we weren't accepted by the state. We had no citizenship for nine years, so we lived with some documents which were for temporary stays. They continuously took my father in for questioning, "Why have you returned? You have to go back there again. You shouldn't stay here, you can't. You are a nationalist family, you're this, you're that. You have to go back there." But, he resisted, he didn't agree to go back.

He was very determined with his ideas, in his ideal to live his homeland. We were brought up in that spirit, in my parents' spirit. And of course there was a very big turn in 1981. The accumulated rancor of the people, of Albanians in Kosovo and former Yugoslavia in general about the injustices that were happening. In 1981, of course it blew up with an extraordinarily massive demonstration and I was very young, I mean around 14 years old when this happened. And I was an active participant in those big days, April 1, April 2, April 3, which gave life to 1981.

We were inspired by the movements that took place and the dissatisfaction we saw from our families in general, from what we heard, the teacher arrests, the work dismissals, the arrests of relatives. That influenced our generation while we were very young, we were 14-15 at the time. And with our ideology, with our desire to contribute, we created a group of young people who were all 14-15 years old, 16 years old, who constantly heard the discussions in our own families, we heard these stories. Our desire to do something different in order to create change, I mean in that direction. Maybe without being aware of the risks which we exposed ourselves to because we were very young.

And our group consisted of six-seven children, I was among them and there were also some classmates, and we organized to write slogans. Back then on the school walls, in the city, spreading various treatises, materials which contained propagandistic content as the regime said. Prohibited by the state, by the power, as being considered against "brotherhood-unity," irredentism, this and that. But we distributed them throughout the city, to our peers, different materials that had national content. And this is how we worked in *ilegale*<sup>3</sup> until the year, from '82, the end of '81 until '84. So, we did different activities. But of course that...

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<sup>3</sup> Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

**Anita Susuri:** You were very young when you got into *ilegale*...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Very.

**Anita Susuri:** 14-15 years old...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What was the beginning like? I think the work was done in small...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. We worked in small groups, so there was a big group and the members of this group each had their own smaller groups, consisting of three people and... for example, my friends didn't know my group of three people. That's how we worked, this was the system. My friend's group, for example, I didn't know those three people. This was done in order to keep it a secret, so if I fall, not everyone else would fall too. You understand? So I wouldn't have information and expose each-other in specific situations.

This was the system by which we worked back then, and it was a very interesting system and it resulted in less people going to prison. When we were imprisoned, for example, only a few others were as well, although they were activists, but they weren't uncovered. This was a defensive system we used to protect each-other. Practically, on the 20th, sometime in October of '84, I was arrested, so at that time almost our entire group was arrested. Among them, two friends we were connected to were arrested as well. Of course State Security followed us back then. Afterwards we found out about many things we didn't know, because there were infiltrated people within our groups and they followed us and our contacts through them.

When we were caught, Teuta Bekteshi was caught too, [Teuta Hadri](#) [as well]. So, as a consequence of being followed, we held meetings in secret. And they were interviewed really young, but under those circumstances, only me and Bujar Zeneli were arrested, he was a group friend. He was the leader, and they considered us as the most important, and according to them, the most dangerous. We really were tortured too much for our age. Although to be honest with you, I always said this and still do, back then Yugoslavia signed all these international conventions and treaties for human rights, for the protection of children's rights, but they didn't follow through.

Especially in the investigative procedures and the interrogation procedures, for example all the rules and laws were broken, because they... we were underage and they didn't have the right to beat us, or interrogate us, or abuse us mentally, nor physically. There had to be a parent present, or a guardian appointed by the Center for Social Services. The same still applies today. So, in the case of delinquent minors, the police absolutely can't interrogate them without the presence of a social worker, or a

parent, or a psychologist. So, none of these measures were considered in any of the cases where underage people were arrested due to political issues.

Of course the treatment [we received] was extremely terrible, so the investigation lasted around four-five months and during the whole time of the investigations, especially the first month was extremely difficult for us because we were treated very badly. I was held in Pristina for 72 hours, in Pristina's prison and then I was sent to Mitrovica's prison which was one of the toughest prisons in former Yugoslavia. During the investigations, until we went on trial, I was held in Mitrovica. Meanwhile, Bujar was held in Pristina. Pristina's prison didn't differ much from the one in Mitrovica. The conditions were extremely bad and the treatment was very bad.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to go back a bit before proceeding to the prison period. I wanted to ask you a little more about *ilegale*, these treatises, these...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Reading materials.

**Anita Susuri:** The slogans that were written, what did they say, what were the slogans? And how did you organize to write them down?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** All [we asked for], at the time, the thing we demanded the most was [to be] a republic. So, at the time we were focused on creating the seventh republic, of Albanians, in former Yugoslavia, because the idea to become an independent state was too far-sighted at the time. So, we didn't even... because we couldn't even imagine that changes of that sort could happen. Maybe, that 20 years later for a country with the name Kosovo to be created. For us, what has happened now is a miracle of its own.

It was about creating equality for the Albanian nation in former Yugoslavia. For it to be equal to all the other nations which had their own republics and had some kind of self-governing, a self-autonomy, a self-determination about themselves and what they could do. That was our ideal at the time. National unity and stuff, we saw these as later stages, not... at first we had to think about achieving what was possible to achieve, and then develop the other stages of history development. But, I mean, our focus was that.

The reading material we distributed at the time was... for example, one of the books, for example, that we distributed and read and shared from person to person was the book about Shotë Galica,<sup>4</sup> which

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<sup>4</sup> Shotë Galica (1895 - 1927), born as Qerimë Halil Radisheva, was an Albanian insurgent fighter and the wife of Azem Bejta, the leader of the *Kaçak* (outlaws) movement. Galica participated in dozens of attacks against Royal Yugoslav forces in the beginning of the 20th century and the *Kaçak* movement succeeded in putting under their control temporary free zones.

was prohibited at the time. The book about Idriz Seferi<sup>5</sup> was prohibited. And then there were some poems published in Switzerland by *ilegale* that would fall into our hands. There was that book *Kangtë e Lirisë* [Alb.: The Songs of Freedom]. Various books from Albania, novels, literary [book] that are considered normal now and you can find them at any bookshop. It's absurd that people were arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison because they read a book. So, it was very terrible, I mean, what happened. Or because they sang a song or wrote a slogan.

All we did, we would buy some [blank] banners which are nothing to people now, but for us it was extraordinary. On those banners we would write our slogans about unity, so, "Kosovo Republic," "Either death, or freedom," stuff like that. So, there wasn't... and we would distribute them to the youth, we would distribute them in schools, we would distribute them in, we would put them up in streets or we would write them in paint color, "Kosovo Republic," "Down with Yugoslavia," we had these slogans.

I remember once in Sami Frashëri gymnasium,<sup>6</sup> back then it was called Ivo Lola Ribar, we distributed some treatises like that and it became a very big deal, but they couldn't, they still hadn't figured us out. They didn't work it out yet, they didn't have arguments to arrest us. But, alright, despite that, we were active and managed to, for example, for three full years to work in *ilegale* which for our age, back then was pretty good. So it means...

**Anita Susuri:** How did you communicate with each-other? Where did you talk?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Well, we met. We were mainly students in the same class. So, we were in the same classroom and during the long break we settled at whose place we would hold the meetings. At home we would usually tell our families that we had an event, or a party or something, and we would have regular meetings at each-other's places. That's how we justified it. Because we didn't want to burden our families with information, because they would be at risk too. We didn't want our families to suffer because of our activities.

There were some measures, some safety measures that for our age, were very well thought and carried out. I remember that when I was arrested, there were eight State Security workers, so two civilian cars and the raid was done as soon as I came back from school. And they raided the whole house, they found whatever they could. They found some materials and took them. And then, while I was under investigation, they went and raided my house two more times.

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<sup>5</sup> Idriz Seferi (1847 - 1927) was an Albanian leader and guerrilla fighter. He was a member of the League of Prizren and League of Peja, he was the right-hand man of Isa Boletini, with whom he organized the 1910 Uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the Kosovo Vilayet.

<sup>6</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Being taken under investigation and the interrogations were very, I mean at the investigative [office], staying there, being interrogated every day, the physical abuse that was done to me, these were very difficult. I mean, they were pretty heavy for my age. Because... imagine, for example, I talked to Bujar after some time when we were released. He told me how they tortured him. They put cigarettes out on his body, they... I mean, they were terrible tortures. Mine were similar as well.

And then I talked to the other girls who I met in prison. Right after we were arrested, sometime in December, the Peja Group of Girls were arrested as well, [Hava Shala](#), [Myrvete Dreshaj](#), Zyrafete Muriqi, there was also Hidajete Krasniqi. A group of girls, around five or six girls who were very... Zoge Shala. A very good group of girls who were also very young, they were all 18-19 years old. So they told us about the horrors too, they told about the terrible way in which they were tortured and beaten during the investigations.

So there was no differentiation or amnesty when it came to this, if you were underage or young, that didn't carry any weight. And what was most painful for us, the heaviest thing was that we were tortured by Albanians, by Albanian speaking people. By people who were serving the power. So, I was never interrogated by a Serbian investigator, nor abused, they didn't deal with me at all. But, all of those who abused me were Albanian. So, that was the most painful.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you again about '81 and the demonstrations.<sup>7</sup> Do you maybe remember the organization? Were you present at any aspect of the organization?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, I was only a participant and a casual witness of the demonstrations. I can't say because I was only 14 years old when it happened. I didn't have an idea... I spoke a lot with my parents, with my late father. He was exceptionally open about these matters. He always let us know why we came back, what our family had experienced and he was a fairly big idealist. He had a group of friends who were almost all part of *ilegale*, so they were... these discussions were totally normal in my household, so they were...

But, no, I wasn't part of the organizing [body]. I was only a participant like all the other citizens. I remember that on March 26 [1981], when the most difficult student demonstrations took place at the square in Pristina, and after the demonstration took place, I went out in the city with my father and saw the square in a terrible condition. I mean, I saw people's hair on the ground, heels, people's belongings. They beat up any student they caught, they beat them up so badly that it was horrible just to think about it.

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<sup>7</sup> 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 demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

And then, during the April 1st demonstration at our school, I was a student of the Meto Bajraktari elementary school, so everyone in our group were students in the same class at the Meto Bajraktari school. They isolated our school that day, they said... we were in class. They said, "You shouldn't go out." And among other things, during our first class of the day, the students from the Emin Duraku school came with flags, they came in an organized manner shouting in the school yard and they called us too. So, they invited us to join the demonstrations.

Since our doors were locked and the teachers were supervising the halls, we found another way, we found a window on the first floor through which we all went out. So, we went out. And whoever wanted to go out and participate in the demonstrations, we all went and joined at that time. That group of children with the flags, mainly young 14-15-16 year old students, we then [together] joined a bigger group of demonstrators. And that was it, so the biggest turn in my life, the experience of a sort of pride, at the same time of pain, an experience that impacted me in all ways, I mean, not only me but our whole generation that experienced it.

And then on April 2 and 3, the situation was even more tragic. I mean, on April 2 and 3, people were killed. Right where the Health Ministry [building] is if I remember correctly, we were a group of children who would go to dormitories, and send stuff there, we would get blankets and give it to the demonstrators, we would take onions from home because of the tear gas they would throw. Scarfs, blankets, onions. There, at the Health Ministry where the crossroad is, the demonstrators, because part of the demonstrations were centered in that part, at the crossroad because of the Students' Canteen. Because [people from] the dorms and the Students' Canteen would come from that way and the '81 demonstrations were mainly started by the students, so by the youth.

They had brought, there was a van, I don't remember if it was a small bus which they had turned over at the crossroad and the demonstrators had climbed on top of it holding flags, speaking through a megaphone. In the meantime, that day, federal police army forces had come, not only from Serbia but the whole federation. And they came into the city with tanks. We were in the part where that bus was and there were many people. They went into the crowd of people and hit the bus, and all the people fell down. They pushed the bus and the people fell down.

Meanwhile, I saw it with my own eyes when an officer took out his gun from the tank and wounded a student. So, he shot and wounded a student. Some of us were there at that moment, among us there was also, she's a physician now, Dr. Teuta Bekteshi, she was a medical student too. Some of us took that young boy, there were seven-eight of us and we took him to a family house nearby and we took him to the basement. They tied his wound, and they forcibly stopped a car so they could take the student to the hospital so he wouldn't die because of the bleeding. So these are the experiences of a 14-15 year old teenager. And then the prison part when our friends would come back tortured and we would help each-other. They were, each of these [experiences] impacted us, they left behind bad memories. Very painful.



**Anita Susuri:** How did your arrest happen? Where did they come to take you? Were you doing some kind of activity?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, no, I was arrested at home. I mentioned it earlier, they waited for me to come back from school, they could have come and arrested me at school but they waited for me to come back. I would come back at around 12:30-1:00 PM, when class would finish, the morning shift and I was a student of the language-culture gymnasium, now it's the Eqrem Qabej gymnasium. Because education in my generation was called oriented learning. We finished the first couple of years in the Sami Frashëri gymnasium, Ivo Lola Ribar, as it was called. And then we had orientation, people divided, who wanted to continue with medicine, who wanted to continue with economy and I oriented in the culture-language department. There was, now it's Eqrem Qabej Gymnasium, at *Shkolla Normale*,<sup>8</sup> the building was behind the *Shkolla Normale*.

Of course, they could have arrested me at school, but they didn't because it would become a big deal. So, they avoided the fuss. They didn't want to either, because it wasn't that easy for them either, for example to take and arrest a child. They were careful in this aspect enough to save face for themselves. But, they couldn't hide the fact that we were arrested, that we were taken, because we were absent from school. And then the school expelled us. I was expelled. After I was released from prison, I received, of course with the order of State Security, the school of cultural studies then issued me a decision that I was expelled from school. They didn't even make it possible for me to continue the school year through a class exam, after I was released from prison.

I was arrested at home. They came to my house and raided it. They took me and sent me to State Security, they held me there for 72 hours. After 72 hours, they would question me, they asked for explanations that I didn't want to give and I never did. And because of that, they told me, "You either have to answer the questions we asked you or you will sign [the document which says] that we are sending you to Mitrovica, in Mitrovica's prison, and we will open investigations and there will be detention for you," and I signed it. They took me and sent me to Mitrovica's prison.

**Anita Susuri:** During those 72 hours, was there violence or only...?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes, yes. There was violence for a month. Not only 72 hours, but one month. So, there were cases when they came and took me from my jail cell at 12:00 AM and they interrogated me until the morning and they abused me. There were cases when I couldn't even dress, or put my shoes on, or... I was beaten a lot. I mean, the part that has to do with the children...I understood this later on when I saw other girls from other groups that were brought in. This wasn't

<sup>8</sup> The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

something, this was a work routine to them, that regardless of age, if it has something to do with politics, and according to them you broke the state law and that “brotherhood-unity,” they beat you up really bad. I mean, mercilessly. They were very merciless.

## Part Two

**Anita Susuri:** Was there some kind of tactic they used, I mean anything you could have noticed when others told you their experiences as well?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Of course they had tactics, it’s very true that they had tactics. For example, they had tactics to break you spiritually. I remember when one day they came and told me that my father died. My dad was ill, he had a heart attack. Although he died five months after I was released from prison, because he had a heart condition. And they told me, “Your father died.” And then they said, “Okay,” I didn’t react at all because they said, “We would take you,” they said, “to attend his funeral, but,” they said, “you’re not talking. If you talk, we will send you there.” And that’s when I was sure it was only a game. I said, “Okay, I will see my father’s grave when I leave here,” I said, “I don’t want you to take me there at all,” I mean, “I don’t want to attend my father’s funeral.”

And then they had a different tactic, during the time I was under investigation, my father had health issues and he was in the hospital. They went to the hospital and told him, “You have to come and speak to your daughter, convince her to talk.” When they took me from prison and sent me to the state security offices in Mitrovica, they told me, because it was Sunday and even they usually worked less on Sundays. When they came to get me, they said, “You have a visitor.” But, they didn’t take me to the visitation’s corridor, and it wasn’t visitation day either. I asked, “Where are you taking me?” They said, “We’re sending you to the office,” I asked, “What kind of visit happens in the office?” Because there was a specific place for visitations. And the visitors were separated by bars, you had your distance, so you could see your parents or family members from a distance of maybe two or three meters, and that was it. They said, “No, no, in the office.”

When I went to the office, I saw that they brought my father and he was in a very bad health condition, he was exhausted. I didn’t want him to see me like that, because I was beaten a lot. My face was full of hematomas, my hands were bruised from the baton, I couldn’t put my shoes on. So, I went there only wearing socks from Mitrovica’s prison, they took me in a car and I only had socks, I couldn’t put my shoes on, I wasn’t able to put my shoes on. And I said, “I don’t want,” I said, “to come like this. Why did you bring him here?” You know? Because I didn’t want him to see me like that. They said they would supposedly leave us alone to talk. There was the [State] Security worker that was killed, Ibush Klllokoqi and there was another one, Faik Nura. He said, “No,” he said, “you have to talk to your father,” I said, “Alright.”

As soon as he came I asked him, “Why did you call me?” “No,” he said, “I didn’t call you. I didn’t ask,” he said, “to come, they came and took me.” So, that whole thing was... I asked, “So what do they want?” And then there wasn’t, I don’t know if there were any listen-in tools, but they did. So, they listened in on the conversation and recorded it. They had some kind of suitcase bag, he left it open and went to the other side, and he let us talk. But I was very aware that they were recording and we had a totally ordinary conversation. Meanwhile, while my father was slowly leaving, he whispered in my ear, “Be careful because these people told on you.” So, he gave me the names of who talked. That’s where I got the information.

The moment I found out who talked, I also knew what they knew. You understand? It was very easy for me to defend myself. And then my parents would come visit from time to time, until we went to trial. In the court hearing, me and Bujar were sentenced to five years in prison, but on probation. If we do anything within five years, we would go back to prison. So, that was the sentence we got. While Teuta Hardi and Teuta Bekteshi were sentenced to one year in prison, which weren’t very long.

But, fortunately, in our court hearing our three defense attorneys were Avni Gjakova, the late Fazli Balaj and Fehmi Baftiu, he passed away too. They had an excellent defense, but they also focused [on] the fact that while we were on trial, Šešel<sup>9</sup> and Drašković<sup>10</sup> were arrested in Belgrade for nationalism. And they were released the week before, so they [the lawyers] used that fact, our defense attorneys. How are you sentencing two children and two young girls, while Šešel and Drašković were released from prison. So, the judge Qerim Meta then decided on a lighter sentence. Teuta Bekteshi and Teuta Hadri served one year in prison, while we were released, but on probation, being supervised.

**Anita Susuri:** Was this because you were underage, no?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** Otherwise your sentence would have been...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Otherwise we would have been sentenced [differently]. Otherwise we would have been sentenced [differently].

**Anita Susuri:** What were the prison conditions like? I am sure it was difficult, but if you could tell us about the food or the place?

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<sup>9</sup> Vojislav Šešelj (1954) is a Serbian politician, founder and president of the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Between 1998 and 2000, he served as Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia.

<sup>10</sup> Vuk Drašković (1946) is a Serbian writer and politician. He is the leader of the Movement for Serbian Renewal and served as deputy prime minister of the wartime Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 during the rule of Slobodan Milošević. And he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia from 2004 to 2007

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Absolutely. Now, I didn't experience the other prison, but I remember the 72 hours at Pristina's prison, the detention room was terribly bad. So, you can't even see it in horror movies. It was a small room separated by bars, it had a wooden bed, there was no blanket or anything. During the 72 hours which was extremely cold, the weather was very cold, they didn't even bring me a blanket. So I experienced horror because of the cold. And then the conditions in Mitrovica's prison were terribly bad. So, the quality of the food was bad, the prison was very difficult. It was a difficult investigative prison.

I would even count them from the entrance, because when they would interrogate me, they would send me to the building of State Security in Mitrovica and they would return me to my cell. From the main entrance to the cell where they would lock me, there were about ten doors. Imagine the type of prison, ten different doors while walking in the halls, open one and close another. I would count them, it was ten doors. So, the hygienic conditions were bad, the quality of the food was very bad. Everything was bad, there was nothing good there. The treatment was very bad. Twice a week, I mean they would allow us to shower once every two weeks. So, you could go to the toilet three times a day, you could go outside to breathe two times a day, and only for ten minutes. Sometimes they would take us out, sometimes they wouldn't. So, the treatment was very bad. Don't get me started on the food.

**Anita Susuri:** Your cellmates, were they all political prisoners?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, not all of them were political prisoners. During the time I was there, in my cell, number 3, there was a woman who had killed her husband's uncle in self-defense. And then, there was a Croatian-Slovenian woman, I don't know, she was involved in the gemstones affair and the Trepça case which was about gold and silver. Another one of them was in that silver group of Trepça, another woman there. And then in the room, actually these were in [room number] 4. When they took me to room 3, I had Trëndelina Labolishti there, Labënishti [I mean], she was a political prisoner. And then they brought other girls, they brought the Group [of Girls] from Peja. There were prisoners who came because of offenses, they sentenced them to 60 days for writing a slogan or if they sang a song. There were ones for offenses, but also for other acts.

**Anita Susuri:** In total, how long were you in prison for?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** In total, around five months.

**Anita Susuri:** As time passed by, I mean, did their approach change? Did the violence lessen?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** The beginning of the investigations was very difficult, the first month. And then when they considered the investigations to be finished, they only dealt with court procedures. There were hearings in front of the investigative judge, this and that, until there was a decision for a

main court hearing, until they finished their procedures I mean. But the first month, yes, it was very difficult. And then if you broke the rules in prison, they abused you.

**Anita Susuri:** What were the rules?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** There were rules, for example, you couldn't sleep during the day, you had to sit the whole time. You couldn't sit on the bed either, but there were some mattresses and you had to sit on the ground. If they caught you sleeping, they sent you to solitary confinement. It was prohibited to sing. We would sing, so we would break this rule because we would sing. We didn't care. They would come take us and send us to confinement.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like in confinement? How long did they keep you there for?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** That was a temporary punishment, an hour, two hours, and then they would bring you back. But it would be good not to break the rules. I tried to not give the guards a reason to beat me and send me to confinement unnecessarily, you know? Although I would sing. But, for example, when we sang we usually had some nice guard and we took advantage of their presence. For example, they were more liberal. They would turn a blind eye, a deaf ear and they would give us more freedom to communicate from cell to cell, to talk to each-other, and we would take advantage of those moments.

**Anita Susuri:** What kind of songs would you sing?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Many patriotic songs (laughs). I remember *Në Dardani bjen ni tupan* [Alb.: A drum beats in Dardania], that was one of the songs we would sing the most. There were many beautiful songs. We would sing *Kur na ra Kushtrimi në Kosovë* [Alb.: When Kushtril fell in Kosovo], I don't remember now, *Moj fusha e Korabit* [Alb.: *Moj*<sup>11</sup> Korba's field]. Beautiful songs.

**Anita Susuri:** So, patriotic songs?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know how you were feeling spiritually and what did you think would happen to you next? How did you think it would continue?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Well, maybe it had to do with age as well because I was very young. I don't know! Based on what I have experienced, I think people are prisoners only if they have a prison inside their minds. Otherwise, if your brain is free, so if you don't feel like you are enslaved, there isn't anything that could enslave you. You can't... I was very young, I did activities. For example, I planned

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<sup>11</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

many physical exercises, I made them do gymnastics, sing, and we read a lot. I tried to pass the time in the most productive way for myself. This was so that I could survive the mental pressure of being confined. I actually read a lot, I asked for books from the library all the time. There was a library there. Maybe what I was reading wasn't very important, but at least reading kept my brain active. And I solved crosswords.

We would order and pay them with the money our families would bring us, we would pay for *Rilindja*,<sup>12</sup> we would regularly get it. So, we would get magazines, we would read, we would solve crosswords. Although it was prohibited to have pens, we would fill them out with lighters [matches]. So we would wet the lighter [match], we would burn them and we used that as a pen. Or every now and then we would steal an ink chamber, we would hide it somewhere. Only the ink chamber because if they saw a pen, they would take it. But, we would only take the ink chamber of a pen and keep it there. Or from the newspapers, I remember me and Trëndelina put them together, there was, back then *Rilindja* would publish parts, eight pages of a novel and we would collect them every day. We had made a book with these parts.

I remember the novel *Vasha e dymbëdhjetë varreve* [Alb.: The girl of the twelve graves] by Emin Kabashi and I didn't get to finish putting together the book *Mehmet Imcaku* by Jasha Kemal, a Turkish writer. But we would read, there were books in the library there I mean. When we went to ask for books, they were obliged to send us to the library and then we would choose what we wanted to take and read.

**Anita Susuri:** Were there Albanian books as well?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** In Albanian?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** There were, there were.

**Anita Susuri:** When you were released from prison, what was that day like?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** We were released from prison immediately after the court hearing. Actually, when I went to the court hearing I didn't, I can't say that I was convinced that I would be released. I expected a big sentence. I mean, [I expected that we would] get a maximum five year sentence. But, I was spiritually prepared for such a thing and I didn't mind it. But, based on the way the hearing developed, because it was quite long that day, from the morning to around 3:00 PM when we

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<sup>12</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

were released. Because Bujar and I were immediately released that day. But it lasted very long, I mean the court hearing.

I am speaking for myself, I wasn't convinced that we would be released and I didn't even believe that we would be released. But then, that was a surprise, I mean the release and the light sentence. Because we had... I was personally really worried... okay, we were underage, you know, I would think they could sentence us to a maximum of five years. But, Teuta Hardi and Teuta Bekteshi were adults and they could get ten years in prison. I was worried about them as well, that they could sentence them [differently] because they were adults. But alright. That's how it went, so whether good or bad, that's how our hearing went. After I was released, they tried to contact the school and see what I could do.

When I went to school they told me, "No, you are expelled." And the State Security had something to do with it because they were involved. When they took someone, for example, to punish them, they punished them outside and beyond the law... they had no mercy in that aspect. So, I went there to ask for at least my documents so I could enroll in the next year at a different school, since they didn't make it possible for me to continue through class exams. When I went to ask for my documents they said, "They're not here," and I had to wait. At that point, my parents went and filed a complaint at the Committee, there was that department for education. They said, "She was released from prison, why? Where are her documents?" They [the Committee] sent an inspector at the School for Cultural Studies, as it was called back then, and they found the documents locked in a drawer, at the school secretary's office. He had hidden the documents.

And then my parents got the documents and I applied to most schools, medical school, economics. They didn't accept me at any of them even though I was an excellent student. At that point, I enrolled at the school of agriculture, fortunately my cousin was a professor there. He talked to the principal and they accepted me there. I continued the third and fourth year of high school at the school of agriculture, I ended up there. And that was it. And then after I finished school, I enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture. I got married after a year or so.

My husband is from Gjilan's side and they were a politically persecuted family as well. My two brother-in-law were sentenced, one of them to five years, the other six years. They were a persecuted family. The situation got really worse in '89, '90. I had obstacles in education either way, I mean I had obstacles in university. I had to pause for a bit after I got married, so I stopped it. I gave birth to my son and daughter and then I continued my education again in '92, my faculty. I studied literature and finished it.

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know after you were released from prison, you're saying that you had obstacles, but were there obstacles, for example of such nature that you were interrogated again about something that happened?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. They did interrogate me. Around two weeks after I was released, they immediately took me once again and kept me at the State Security in Pristina the whole day and interrogated me. But they didn't abuse me, only mentally but not physically. They questioned me about senseless things, banal things. But it was more a sort of mental pressure they exerted through that to let me know that they were still following me even though I was released from prison, I couldn't do whatever I wanted. You understand? But that feeling of being persecuted was present, I mean you could tell, I knew the whole time that they were listening in on my phone, our home phone I mean, and many other things.

And then, in October of '85, actually on October 10, '85, my father died. So that was a big blow for me, maybe even worse than prison. That experience was really hard, because he passed away really young at 45 years old and we remained in Kosovo with no close family members. I mean my mother, my two brothers and me. Meanwhile my [paternal] aunt, [maternal] uncle, [paternal] uncle, our whole family lives in Turkey. Except my father's uncle who came back [to Kosovo] after us, so all the others were there. And that distance, I mean the political situation that was developing in Kosovo, the inability to contact your family, and many other hardships that followed us during the entire time. That was it.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you stop your activity after prison?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, we met after Teuta Bektesi was released... not as a group, I mean we stopped our activity as a group of minors, because there was no *ilegale* anymore. Because it was already known that we were caught once and whoever got a sentence got sentenced, the others were released. So, we didn't want to risk it anymore and put the other... look, when we got out of prison there was that feeling that we always had to be careful, and people were afraid to look. They were afraid of greeting you in the city, because they knew that you were persecuted and that somebody was always following you. There was that phobia, the people's fear. And of course there were cases where you saw your school teacher and when they saw you, they turned their head the other way because they didn't dare to say hello.

So, these were the experiences we experienced heavily, I mean we remember them and they leave lifelong scars. It's not easy when people are afraid to talk to you because somebody could start following them the next day and they could end up like you. This was that kind of phobia the regime created, the fear they instilled in people about even communicating with each-other. The control and repression were so strong, that people were even scared to think. And that was the heavy regime we experienced. People would even be scared to think.

**Anita Susuri:** I remembered another detail, I know that there were pseudonyms in *ilegale*...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.



**Anita Susuri:** Was there...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes, yes. My pseudonym was Fato. That's what they called me. Bujar was called Sokol. Teuta was Flora, the other one was Lule. That was it.

**Anita Susuri:** This happened in order to...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, security confidentiality so we wouldn't be exposed. We tried to create security for ourselves, for others. It was a success to work in activities and not be caught. You understand? It was successful. But even getting caught wasn't extraordinary either, because we were very aware that the regime, the regime was very totalitarian and very bad. The moment people were caught, they exerted so much violence that it wasn't surprising if they gave a name. Because not everyone can endure beatings and it's totally normal. I personally never judged the ones who told on me and gave my name. I never judged them because they were children too just like me.

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know, were there, how to put it, any other ways in which you communicated? Through codes or anything?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. We had some methods we used, I mean communication methods between us, in our friend group, so the others wouldn't suspect we were up to something. We were in the same class and almost no one else besides our group knew what we were doing. I mean, we had those communication codes, times when we met, the way we took advantage of the situation, so, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What were the codes for example, if that's not a secret?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Well to be honest I can't remember now, for example we had a kind of greeting through which we told each-other when or where to meet, you know? That's how we did it so others wouldn't find out. We were in the same environment, in the same class, classmates.

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know about you, besides your active political life, did you find the time for a cultural and social life too for example? To hang out somewhere or go to the theater or cinema?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes, yes. I followed the National Theater in Pristina a lot. I mean, I saw almost all the shows that were played in the National Theater. I did go to the cinema, for example during the time of the films *Njeriu prej dheu* [Alb.: Man of Soil], *Rojet e mjegullës* [Alb.: Keepers of the Fog], there were shows, and various concerts. Yes, we participated.

**Anita Susuri:** How did the audience react to these? Albanian films?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Very well, very well. And there was a lot of interest at the time, there was especially a lot of interest in cinema. They would show, I remember before '81, we would get films from Albania, so they would be shown in Pristina's Cinema, mainly at Kino Rinia and we would usually go to see those films with our parents. For example, there was *Tingujt e luftës* [Alb.: War Sounds], and there were some other films, *Zoja nga qyteti* [Alb.: The Lady from the Town], they were shown in Pristina's Cinema. Of course all the citizens of Pristina had great interest to see those films. They were extraordinary events. When the National Ensemble of Albania came to Kosovo, I mean the concerts they held.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it hard to secure tickets for example?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, it was hard. In '84 before going to prison, the summer of '84 I went to Turkey with my brother, because I would usually spend my summer holiday there. After we got our citizenship, we got it in '80, so we didn't have citizenship for about nine years. And in '84 me and my second oldest brother went to Turkey for summer holiday, we went to our [paternal] uncle. In the meantime, my uncle told me, my uncle in Turkey, that he had great relations with the Embassy of Albania there and he said, "There is a National Ensemble of Albania concert in Istanbul," it was held at Istanbul's amphitheater. It's a very beautiful antique amphitheater.

I remember that our entire family went, I mean all the family members attended that concert. It was an exceptional concert back then and the famous Fatime Sokoli song *Rroftë Kosova Republikë* [Alb.: Long Live Kosovo Republic], and there were many Albanian people from Turkey and Turkish people who attended the concert. I remember that when we went there by car we waited for about three hours in line to go into the amphitheater. So, there was a lot of interest.

### Part Three

**Anita Susuri:** The '90s were very difficult years, but I am interested to know what they were like for you? What were you doing?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I think you started working with KMDLNJ<sup>13</sup> in '94.

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. I mentioned this earlier, I got married in '89 and after one year, I had my son Korab, then one year after that, I had my daughter, Kaltrina. And then I continued

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<sup>13</sup> KMDLNJ, *Këshilli për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave dhe Lirive të Njeriut* - Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms.

studying. And in '84, actually my brother-in-law was working at the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms and he was a former prisoner. They had to migrate to Switzerland and I saw it as an opportunity to start working there. I really wanted to work there because that seemed like the only credible institution at the time. The fact that it connected me to the contacts, to the former political prisoners, to all the activists, there was a spirit of flare, everything was flaring. It was a very difficult situation.

All the events that unfolded, the miners' strike, the '98 demonstrations, the killings, the mass arrests, and then the usurpation, the revocation of autonomy, firing people from their jobs, families' economic situation worsened, because people were left unemployed, people fleeing because of the lack of security, they couldn't make a living. The moment people were fired from their jobs, what could they do? You could see professors working at the market, working as illegal taxi drivers, so it was an exceptionally difficult situation for our people.

Of course we were part of that everyday life. I began my activity in '94, first I worked at KMDLNJ's department in Pristina. And then after a short period of time I moved to the central office of KMDLNJ. And I worked in the information sector, I mean, preparing weekly reports. KMDLNJ had daily information constantly. They had their weekly report which they published on the internet and shared it in the media, the report of events I mean. The report consisted of information gathered from the field about the violation of human rights by the regime and the power.

I worked in that field during the whole prewar time, preparing weekly reports. When it was needed, we went out and took people's statements regarding different events that would happen. There were cases when they would come and give their statements in the office, and there were cases when we had to go to their houses to interview them and ask them about what happened. We had an exceptionally large network of activists at the Council for the Protection of Human Rights. It's estimated that there were over three thousand members because all the cities, towns, and all the villages had a representative, a contact person with KMDLNJ. And we received information systematically from them, whether sent by fax, over the phone, or information that was written by hand.

We had application forms that they would fill out outside and they would bring them to us. It was a voluminous work of the citizens who were mainly either political activists or political prisoners, or teachers. People of different profiles. But what was important was that Kosovo citizens believed in the credibility of KMDLNJ's work. And as an institution, we had international credibility. Everyone who appreciated it, all the international contacts who came to different visits whether from internationally, or from different global organizations, it was impossible for them to come to Kosovo and not visit KMDLNJ. So, we did exceptionally great work, which I think has historical value, national value and it has to be said one day, for this national value to be systemized and preserved by the state.

Maybe regarding the period of the '80s and '90s, Kosovo's history is recorded in KMDLNJ. I mean, that was the work system, that everything that happened within 24 hours in Kosovo, we were informed. And they say that... I remember for example, one of our most known activists, Halil Barani in Mitrovica. He, for example, used to send us information by fax every 15 minutes. About everything that happened within the territory of Mitrovica's municipality. They were exceptional activists. And then a big part of them took part in the war, a part of them were arrested. There are some of them who, for example, there was one person from Pristina who was killed by the Serbian forces only because they found his KMDLNJ badge. I mean they executed him.

It was extraordinary work. I personally remember it as a time period of work which impacted Kosovo's history and its future very positively. Because there was a lot of work and we informed the whole world about the repression, violence, and crimes that were happening in Kosovo. So, we were a great information source to notify internationals about what was happening. I mean, to not... because these things historically happened in Kosovo during the last hundred years, but there was no system of information, with some exceptions. For example, in 1912 there was a, I don't know, a diplomat, or I don't know what he was, he wrote that book *Golgotha shqiptare* [Alb.: Albanian's Golgotha] where he wrote about the crimes and massacres on Skopje's and Kosovo's Albanians in 1912.

But, those are written by foreigners and there were no notes by Albanians. It was never exactly known how many people were killed, how many were killed, which was a genocide on its own. In the book, it says that for a very short period of time, 150 thousand people were executed by the Serbian forces. This was a big deal which simply determined the political developments in Kosovo later on.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember any specific case that happened or that you were present at during those years?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** I remember that during '89, during the time of '89 demonstrations, they came to my house two or three times looking to arrest me, because they would gather everyone they registered who were in prison before. But, fortunately I wasn't caught and at that point they gave up as well. While I worked at the council, I wasn't personally attacked, I didn't have anything like that happen to me I mean, but we knew we were continuously under surveillance. The State Security cars would constantly drive around the building where we were located.

We had offices at a hall in, where the Faculty of Islamic Religion is now, inside the *medrese* in Pristina and our office was public, it was open, it was registered as an office, as a nongovernmental organization. It was registered back then, as far as I know, you had to register it in Belgrade and we had very good contacts with all the activists. For some time while I was there, Adem Demaçi<sup>14</sup> was head,

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<sup>14</sup> Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

who I have a lot of respect for and is somehow my idol for the political aspect of Kosovo. And all the political prisoners were part of the work in KMDLNJ. The esteemed professor [Pajazit Nushi](#), Ymer Jaka and many other names who are public figures in Kosovo.

It was extraordinary work, I had amazingly good coworkers. At the time while I was there, there was Halime Morina, there was Violeta Hamiti, there was Arjeta Emra. She is now director of the British Council here in Pristina. There was Mimoza Ahmeti, Fahrije Qorraj later on, there was Ibrahim Makolli, Basri Berisha, there was [Nazlije Bala](#), there was, I mean a lot and most of them are public figures today. Bexhet Shala, he was the office secretary for a long time. But it was extraordinary work.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you participate in the demonstrations organized by women?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** With keys...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** With keys, with bread, with white papers, with, I remember the one on March 8 with white papers where we demanded peace, bread for Drenica, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What were they like?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Well they were exceptionally organized...

**Anita Susuri:** What do you remember?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** It was good, they were organized well. There were many various activities and this, I mean the '90s is when women's activism began. The first women's NGOs began to appear, the Qiriazzi Sisters, the association, Center for the Protection of Children and Women in Pistina, and then there was an association called Elena as far as I remember. That's how the first women's associations began, women's activism in Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** Were you here during the war period?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Until March 24, I was. On March 24, I went to Turkey with my children, my son was young, about one year old, and the other two were seven and eight. I resisted until the last day, I mean when the bombings began, I didn't want to leave at first. But, my family's insistence, both my husband's family and mine, to go and take shelter in Turkey was very strong. My husband remained in Kosovo with his parents, in Pristina, meanwhile I went with my brother's wife and her sisters, we went to Istanbul. The other part of my family was expecting me there.

We had a terrible journey on the bus. It was a terrible day for me, I had a very bad experience. It was a bad experience because first of all, I was forced to leave. I experienced intense fear, because we traveled by bus, we went through Gjilan, and then from Gjilan to Bujanovac and then we traveled through Serbia the day of the bombings, and it was like in horror movies. So we went from Bujanovac to a city around there, near Pirot where we crossed to Bulgaria. Niš and Leskovac and all these cities. We didn't get to see anyone on the street. We were waiting to be stopped and massacred.

We were the first and only bus that was allowed to travel, they turned all the others back because most of them were men. While our bus was mainly women and children, we only had four men with us on the bus. It was the two bus drivers and there were two other men. One was old, the other one was younger. The others were all women and children. There were 104 people on the bus with women and children. It was a terrible journey because until we reached Bujanovac, the police stopped us every two kilometers, the police checkpoints. They entered the bus with masks, without masks, with guns, the children would be terrified. We passed that too.

When we entered Serbia, there was the horror of mental fear, because you didn't see people on the streets. They were all, the blinds were up, there were no cars on the street, all streets were open. We passed the road and nobody stopped us. We arrived in Bulgaria. When we arrived in Bulgaria they said, "You are the only bus that was allowed to pass. They turned all the others back." So, they turned them back to Bujanovac. Actually, I remember one of the buses was of Selo Tours [company], they beat up all the travelers because they were all mainly men.

When we arrived in Macedonia, I mean in Bulgaria at around 8:00 PM, we stopped to eat dinner somewhere and we saw the bombings on Euro News. But the idea was that they wouldn't be able to resist and I went with the conviction that, okay we are going, but the war will end within the week, because we didn't believe they would resist 75 days of bombings, you know? When I went to Turkey, we arrived the next day, my family came to get me. My husband and brother, my second oldest brother, remained here [in Kosovo]. Although my older brother had gone there with his children earlier.

We stayed with our family members, the conditions were extraordinarily good. But I was worried about my husband who remained here, I didn't know what was happening with him. The next day, the old post [building] in Pristina was bombed and all the phone lines were cut out with that phone network, so I couldn't communicate with my husband anymore. And then I found out that they reached our neighborhood, but I couldn't understand anything more. Until a relative went after some time, my brother-in-law from Switzerland asked someone to go and they found out, they saw that they locked themselves in the house, but they were under total isolation and in a very bad state.

As soon as the war ended, of course, as soon as I found out that the NATO forces were entering Kosovo, the first opportunity I got to come back, I immediately came back with my children (laughs). And I came to Pristina, I came back to Pristina on June 27 [1999]. It was an extraordinary day for me. A

painful joy. Painful because when I came to Pristina, the situation was really bad. I mean, half of the city had emptied, more than half. You would see burnt houses here and there. Robbed houses, open doors, you know, it was like in horror movies. But then we slowly got back on our feet.

**Anita Susuri:** What about the place where you lived, what kind of state was that in?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Where?

**Anita Susuri:** Your house for example? Your apartment?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** We live in the Kacallar neighborhood, the one behind the City Park, it used to be called Morava street, it was populated mostly by Roma. So, about seven or eight houses, maximum ten houses who were Albanian and the street above was all Roma. And they committed a lot of atrocities back then. Roma people collaborated with the Serbian forces unfortunately, that part of the residents there. Not all Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in Kosovo, but that part of Roma people did a lot of bad things. They robbed a lot, they did a lot of bad things in the city. When I came back, I found them fleeing, so during the time we came back home, they were leaving in Serbian buses, they were going to Serbia.

Unfortunately, that part was painful too, because I saw women and children fleeing, leaving their houses which repeated the pain from all sides. I felt bad to see the situation they were in. But, the uncertainty, I mean, they created panic and uncertainty because of the acts they did, a part of them. So, they left. Otherwise, the military forces stole a lot in that neighborhood, I mean based on what my husband told me, terrible things happened there. They robbed the houses, they violently kicked people out of their houses, violently, they took stuff from their houses. So, it was a very terrible situation.

During the time of the bombings, for example they raided our house several times, I mean paramilitaries and the police and... They looked for my husband, but they never found him because he, at the time when they came... the house was positioned in a way that they couldn't directly go in. He always had the opportunity to secure himself, to hide, so he wouldn't be arrested. And the last time...

**Anita Susuri:** Did he stay in that house?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. The last time they went in the house, they beat up my father-in-law, and they took some things. There were a few family friends staying there too, so they had come from another city. And they arrested their son in our house. So they took their car and arrested their son. That was it. So, these experiences were... actually, the last time they went in... there was a building in front of our house, they had seen the [paramilitary] forces going in. There was a

family from Gjakova who didn't flee. And then they said that when the paramilitary forces went in, they knew something very bad would happen there, because they came in large numbers and the paramilitaries...

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know after the war, how did recovery begin in your family?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, after the war I immediately continued work in KMDLNJ. I worked there for two more years, so, '99 to 2001. At the beginning of 2001, I moved to the Center for the Protection of Women and Children. At that time I started to deal with women's issues more and I worked there until 2016. I was a director of that center for twelve years later on. We had a shelter for women who were victims of domestic violence, that center is still there and it works.

I then opened the shelter for domestic violence victims in Mitrovica. Later on that turned into its own center and then I opened one in Drenas, led by Kadire now. Me and Kadire opened the center together in Drenas. Later on, that one became independent from our center as well. In 2016, I quit it because it required a large budget and there was a lot of pressure. It required a lot of work and I simply didn't have the spiritual power to deal with that work pressure and I quit it. I rested for about a year and then I began working here.

**Anita Susuri:** Now you work in the commission...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** How is work going now?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Well, good, good. My work here is mainly about decisions about compensation and entering the data... because mainly, first of all there is a procedure here and the review procedures should pass by the commission and then for the documents to be complete, to enter them in the database and then make a decision for compensation from there. There is a list, it's taken to the ministry, so there are several procedures here.

**Anita Susuri:** About compensating former prisoners?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes. While at the Center for the Protection of Women and Children I worked a lot in the area of domestic violence and trafficking. I was part of all the working groups for drafting the law for the protection against domestic violence, the law about the protection of trafficking victims, the standard procedures for trafficking, the standard procedures for the functioning of shelters. Actually, I did the draft procedures about the functioning of shelters myself. For a long time, about eight years, I was head of the shelter coalition. But the work was so dynamic and dense that I simply got really tired at some point.



**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to go back and talk a bit about an earlier time. About your family's history in 1912. You mentioned that they were deported from Kosovo to Turkey, do you know anything more?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** All I know is the story I heard from my grandmother, from my mother's mother. She died at 102 years old and she had a very clear memory. She remembered a lot and she described the way they left Kosovo in a very interesting way. I mean, her story. Otherwise, I didn't have any other information. She told me that in 1912, when the [Serbian] forces entered Kosovo, they violently kicked a lot of Albanian families out of their houses. She would tell us, "They violently kicked us out and everything we had... we fled, on a horse carriage, the grown ups took everything they could find at the house that they thought was necessary. I was a child," she said, "and I remember that we traveled for several days," she said, "on a horse carriage." Until they arrived, most probably in Thessaloniki, because she described the ride with a train from then.

Actually, no. Not in Thessaloniki, but they rode on a horse carriage to Turkey. She said, "We were," she said, "probably about 30-35 family members," she said, "who traveled together," she said, "half of them died on the road," she said, "about 15 of us," she said, "arrived there," she said, "among those who survived," she said, "it was my grandmother," her grandmother who had an amount of *lira*,<sup>15</sup> money. [She had] gold *lira* with her. She said, "When they took us there in Bafra after we arrived in Turkey," she said, "they sent us to Bafra," she said, "there," she said, "they placed us in the houses of Armenians," because at that time there was the ethnic cleansing Turkey committed against the Armenians.

The Ottoman Empire killed Armenians, they displaced them from their homes, they executed them, they kicked them out of their houses and placed Albanians there. She said, "And then," she said, "they immediately took the men who were adults and sent them to war." So that was...

**Anita Susuri:** The First World War, right?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** The First World War. And she describes a horror, a horror they experienced regarding the way they were deported, the way they were placed there, the poverty they went through, the heavy work they had to do. And then, these communities couldn't integrate there for a long time, I mean still, my [maternal] uncle's family, when I went to Bafra for the last time as a child that I remember, they always spoke in Albanian. So, within that community, within that village, they all spoke to each-other in Albanian and they threw weddings in Albanian [traditions] and... my father also told me this, so they preserved the traditions a lot.

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<sup>15</sup> *Lira* is the name of several currency units. It is the current currency of Turkey and the name of the former currencies, including those of Italy, Malta and Israel. The term originates from the value of a Roman pound (Latin: *libra*, about 329g, 10.58 troy ounces) of high purity silver.

These communities were in rural areas, because the ones who were placed in urban areas assimilated quickly because they had to integrate. Whether they wanted to or not, they had to go to schools, to get jobs, to learn Turkish, to know Turkish well, to integrate in society there. So that contributed to assimilation a little more than the ones who were in rural areas.

**Anita Susuri:** From what place in Kosovo did they leave?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** My mother's family comes from a village called Jashanica of Klina, in between Peja and Klina. I mean, they were from that part. While my father's family originates from Llap, but they moved to Pristina very long ago, so they came to Pristina.

**Anita Susuri:** And then a part of your mother's family came back?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, no, no. They never came back.

**Anita Susuri:** They stayed there...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** They are there. I mean all of them are there, besides my mother who got married and came back with my father, the others are all there, they're all there. Despite the fact that my uncles and aunts were all born in Turkey, they speak Albanian. So, we communicate in Albanian with them. Their children always spoke to each-other in Albanian.

**Anita Susuri:** So, when your father moved...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** My father moved in '56.

**Anita Susuri:** So they met there?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** So, from Pristina.

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** From Pristina.

**Anita Susuri:** Now I am interested to know about something else too, in Ranković's era, were they forced to leave or did they...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** No, they were forced, they were forced. I talked about this part with my father more, but also my grandfather because he was alive as of late. I mean, after my father died, I actually got to spend a lot of time with my grandfather, because he was an imam. And he came to stay

with us for some time after my father died, because he was in Turkey as well, he passed away there. And so I talked to him about the details and stuff. And he told me how they were interrogated, how they physically abused him, how they kept him in rain barrels until the morning until the water in his yard froze. He said, “And when I went home,” he said, “my clothes were all frozen, all frozen.” He said, “At that point,” he said, “I realized that they simply want to kill me or I have to move.” And they made them sell their fortune.

They sold their fortune to the state and with that money they only managed to buy the train tickets and the proper documentation, I mean *vesika*,<sup>16</sup> a kind of visa guarantor that you had to pay for back then, and that’s it. He said, “All we took,” he said, “were the clothes we were wearing, 400 kilograms of books,” the ones my grandfather had, he had 400 kilograms of books, “I took them with me,” he said, “and the clothes we were wearing. We couldn’t take anything else, we left everything,” he said, “they took...” a part of their fortune was confiscated when my father’s uncles were executed, they took them, because we also had vineyards, we had a house, we had land. As a nationalist-*ballist* family, they were confiscated and then they were forced to leave at once.

**Anita Susuri:** So they were under pressure because of the uncles as well?

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** All right, Mrs. Naime, thanks a lot. If there is anything you would like to add or something you might’ve forgotten...

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** I believe I said everything, I don’t know (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Well then, thanks a lot!

**Naime Maçastena Sherifi:** You are welcome!

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<sup>16</sup> A document similar to a visa or residency permit which was needed in order to reside in Turkey.