Qefsere Nishevci

Journalist

In the photo: Qefsere Nishevci
From the personal archive of Qefsere Nishevci

I am Qefsere Nishevci, I am from Prishtina. I was born on January 27, 1957, meaning I belong to the past century. My family are Muhaxher, meaning my ancestors lived in Serbia and then moved to the village of Nishevc, which is part of the Prishtina municipality. From the village of Nishevc, they moved to Ballovc, where I was born. When I was six months old, I came to Prishtina, and I have lived in Prishtina, meaning I remember my childhood here as a Prishtina native. I completed my primary education at *Naim Frashëri*, secondary school, gymnasium at *Ivo Lola Ribar*,[1] and graduated in Albanian Language and Literature. Immediately after I completed my studies, in 1982, I was employed as a journalist at *Zëri i Rinisë*.

It was very interesting, my sister saw a letter announcing a job opening and I said, “Wow, this is my profession, I will apply,” and I had a certain confidence. I had completed Albanian Language and Literature, as I mentioned earlier, and I didn’t have experience in journalism, but of course, I loved books, I had read a lot, and I had a rich vocabulary, but that alone wasn’t enough for journalism. There was this saying, “Throw journalists into the water like that, and that’s how they learn to swim,” which was a bit challenging for us as journalists. However, the colleagues were always very kind, welcoming, and ready to help. So, we gradually developed as journalists, then

[1] *Now the school Sami Frashëri*

we also participated in courses, people came from Belgrade, gave lessons on different types of writing, on various writing styles, so we didn't have problems afterward.

I remember the first topic they gave me was interesting to me; it was "Oriented Secondary Education." I knew that this 'oriented secondary education' existed, as it was part of the phases of education reform, of the education system, and I couldn't understand how such anomalies were possible, I couldn't wrap my head around it as a journalist, I kept thinking, "Why, why?" and later, when I did an interview with a psychologist named Millien Kokara, I remember it very well, he explained it beautifully, saying that this change in the education system was a complete failure.

When I first started working, we used those old typewriter machines, you know, we didn't have computers. They were used for typing with that "Tap, tap" sound, and since I had no experience, I would type "Clack, clack," one letter here, one letter there, and there was someone, Arif, [*thinks*] Arif something, Qerim Arifi, I think, or… anyway. Maybe that's not important, but he was a writer. He leaned over and said, "Oh, do you need a police patrol to help you find the letters?", another interesting thing when I worked at *Zëri* was that I had heard of various writers, but I didn't know them, I would see some of them, say, "Hello, hello," greet them in the elevator and such, and only later I'd realize, "Oh, that's who he is? That's the writer?" [laughs]. Later on, I would connect the person with their face, with their personality, and it was interesting to work with intellectuals and people whose books or poems we had grown up with.

Our work was connected to the field and meetings, we conducted activities together, Serbs and Albanians, all of us participated in those meetings. That's where we developed, found colleagues, and exchanged ideas. Of course, you learn a profession from someone who has more experience, from those who have more experience. They were open with us, guiding us, saying, "Do this, do that, this problem exists, go there," so our work wasn't tied to the office. We would go to the office, write articles, sometimes hold meetings, like when *Zëri* was published, we would discuss which article was the best. Initially, we had a notebook and a pencil, taking notes. This was a bit tiring because sometimes people speak very well, and you can't manage to capture everything. But over time, we journalists developed the skill to write down the main points, which was very interesting, as it developed with the work we did.

Later, we used tape recorders, the small ones, but I found it difficult with the tape recorder, as it took too long, so I liked using both, writing and recording, because in writing, I would note down, for example, the key word, the one that interested me the most, but when I listened to the whole recording, it took more time. But one thing that needed to be done was writing immediately, because you couldn't wait, for instance, you couldn't wait as you might forget, you had it in your head, you knew what the person said, you had the notes, and that's how we typed, it was harder. Now that I think about it, when we wanted to prepare a presentation of a person or when we wanted to do an interview with someone, we had to go somewhere, to the archive, to see what kind of personality they were, what they had written, what they had done, and gather all that information, take notes, to be prepared when conducting the interview with someone. Because when you interview someone, you need to know about their life, what work they've

done, how long they've worked, what interviews they've given, so you have something to ask about. If you want to do a job well, you have to write the truth, you cannot write real topics from behind a desk. For example, when you want to write about a topic, let's say about students, I liked to do this section, I liked to hear the students' opinions, I can't write a comment about what students think about a certain issue without talking to them. So, you have to go out in the field, visit schools, and see what problems they have. For instance, for a while, it wasn't clear whether we had a mathematical gymnasium or not, and you had to go there, talk to the principal, with the students, and see the situation on the ground.

One topic I couldn't write about was a very painful one at the time, about the soldiers who were brought back to us dead, and when we would walk down the street and see photos of young people, and once, an editor asked me to write about one of them, and I did. But it was required to write with censorship, claiming that he had been a murderer, although it wasn't known whether he was a murderer, he had returned dead, but supposedly he had killed someone, and I didn't write that he was a murderer, and later, the editor revised it and told me I had to write it. I said, "No, because I don't know," and he replied, "I don't know either." I somehow wanted to make some kind of comment on these things, but it was a topic that couldn't be touched at the time because of the situation, so there was censorship back then, sometimes, when your heart aches over something, you want to write, to speak, to shout, to say, "Why are these things happening?" but sometimes it's not possible.

And then, during that time, there was a very interesting system, and the most interesting and painful events were the poisonings. We set off for Podujeva with a group, meaning the driver and the reporter, and we had heard that four students in one classroom had been poisoned, and it wasn't clear how.

<<<The working scene in the field during the school poisonings>>>

"To Not Be Forgotten: The Poisonings of March and April 1990"
From: Ilaz Bylykbashi's personal profile, posted on September 8, 2022
Photo taken by Ilaz Bylykbashi

And we set off, and on the way, cars were coming toward us at high speed [*imitates the sound of fast cars*], and the driver said, "Oh, I hope it's not what I think…" and we didn't need to comment, we said, "Oh, I hope it's not what we're thinking," but it was. They had put the students in cars, in trucks, and were rushing them to the hospital at very high speed. But the hospital doors were closed, students in white coats came out, trying to provide help, and we turned back, wanting to help too, and we thought of taking someone from that truck and putting them in our car. We didn't think that if you take a contaminated person who is poisoned, you might get contaminated too, and we took them. However, we weren't thinking about ourselves at that moment, and I remember very well, one of them was named Vjollca Gashi, and she said to me [whispers], "Can you pull my hair?" They were in so much pain that they were pulling their hair, but she couldn't do it herself and asked me, "Can you pull my hair out?" I said, "Oh God, have mercy!" The doors were open along the road, women, mothers crying, watching what was happening, it was, this was very horrifying.

At that time, since it was a period when I was there, it was the communist system, and then it changed. I also witnessed political pluralism, when people became freer to speak, here, we can observe some changes, for example, when we used to go to factories to ask workers during the communist era, "How's work going?" They would say, "Is this for the newspaper?" - "Very well, we're doing great." But there wasn't the freedom to speak openly, communism had brought this,

the double-faced nature, “You have to say this, you have to act like this, you have to present yourself this way.” However, later, when political pluralism came, and people started freeing themselves from the system of, “You have to do this, you have to say this.” They began to speak more sincerely. And this makes writing more beautiful, and everything in life, even art, is more beautiful when there is truth in it.

Personally, I didn’t like politics much because I was never a communist, I never had the red membership card. It was very interesting, as a student when they would say to me, “Come join...” because, for example, if you were an excellent student, or if you were an outstanding student at university, they would invite you to become a member of the Communist Party or the Communist League and so on. But I never wanted to because I felt their language was always limited, they had a particular perspective on things, and I didn’t like that, so I wasn’t interested. When I applied to *Zëri*, they didn’t even know that I had never participated in these communist associations or organizations, that I wasn’t an activist, they didn’t know. They didn’t ask me either, and I simply submitted the documents they had requested. I had graduated university with a very high average grade, and that was it for me.

Once, we happened to go to Belgrade. It was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of *Zëri ynë*, *Zëri i Rinisë*, and we went to Dedinje in Belgrade to honor Tito’s grave, or rather Tito’s legacy, to put it better, well, his legacy. We went there to lay flowers, as was the custom back then, and when I arrived there, at that time, Hashim Rexhepi, who you may not know, was someone involved in politics, and he had the opportunity to serve as the president of the League of Yugoslav Youth because at that time, presidents were chosen from different regions because, as you know, Yugoslavia was made up of six republics and two provinces, and presidents would be elected in turn from each province or republic to represent their people. That year, it was an Albanian, so we visited Dedinje, visited the place where Tito was born, and so on. And we happened to have a conversation, and when I told him, “I’m not a communist,” he said, “How is that possible? You’re not a communist? You work at *Zëri i Rinisë*, which is an organ of the Communist League, an organ of the Socialist Youth League,” and he added, “It’s impossible that you’re not.” I said, “No, I’m not, neither at heart, nor did I ever take the membership card.” “Why didn’t you take it?” I explained, “I have no interest in that card,” I said. “Some activists, trying to show they’re activists, proposed it to me, but I didn’t accept it.” And I never did. It was interesting because only I and a certain Nysret Metarapi, who was a photojournalist, now deceased, were like this, and sometimes we would whisper to each other: [whispers] “You know, we’re not communists, communism is not right…” [laughs].

And when the system changed, when Ibrahim Rugova went to America, and when people returned, when journalists came back, they would greet each other, saying, “God bless Kosovo,” meaning that they wanted to say, we are no longer communists. People started throwing those red membership cards on the ground because the Communist League was also tied to Serbia, implying that we were the same as them. So, we distanced ourselves from them, and people threw those red cards away, and Nysret Metarapi and I would say, “Oh, should we tell them, ‘You dropped something, you dropped something on the ground,’” [laughs].

And I haven't worked my whole life as a journalist, I worked as a journalist for twelve years, then I worked with UNMIK as a translator, and eventually, because I am now retired, I worked as a teacher of Albanian language and literature with students.

Back then, everyone used to say that journalism is a job that doesn't let you live long. I deny this because I don't like to accept it, but that's how it was, that's what they said, and it was considered a very stressful job. But, for example, it wasn't like the other jobs I did later, where we had a fixed schedule, and we often had fun in the field. We made different jokes, laughed a lot, and respected each other, we were a group that loved one another and still have love for each other, for instance, when I think of Valentina Sarçini, every time I see her, we hug, catch up, and care for each other, we had good relationships with one another. It's a bit like… it resembles school life a little, you know how there's a kind of love among each other. That's how it is…

What I have learned a lot about education is that the curriculum exists and must be implemented, but the person is what matters. For example, a student is a person, you can't treat them mechanically [imitates the sound of machines], like a mechanical thing, they are a person, surely with problems. They may have family problems, and then there are age-related problems, they may have various issues related to their age. You need to understand them as people and offer love as much as you can, because, for instance, you can't give someone next to you everything, but one obligation we have is to provide respect, acceptance, and love. Which cost nothing but can be very valuable.

This has helped me a lot since I've read extensively about students and their relationships with teachers, and I wanted to have these qualities, and I got along very well with the students. When I retired, I missed them, and I hugged them, some of them still write to me, and I have very good relationships with them.