Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SHAZIJE GËRGURI HASANGJEKAJ

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Present:

1. Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Latra Demaçi (Interviewer)
4. Ana Morina (Camera)

Symbols of comments in the transcript for non-verbal communication:
() - emotional communication
{} - the interviewee explains through gestures

Other symbols in the transcript:
[ ] - text added to facilitate understanding
Footnotes are editorial additions that provide information about places of residence, names, or expressions.

Part One

Anita Susuri: Ms. Shazije, could you please introduce yourself and tell us something about your family's history?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I am Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj, born in '45, daughter of Ajet Gërguri, who was a well-known political activist. He took part in the Drenica War, on the side of the *Balli Kombëtar*,[1] that's what they called them back then…

Anita Susuri: The Ballists.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: The Ballists (laughs). In 1947, he was executed. He had spent two years in the mountains, they fought, but in the end, they were captured along with Gjon Serreçi, Imer Berisha, Halim Spahiu, and many others who were executed in Taukbahçe.

Anita Susuri: You were two years old at the time, so you don't remember it, but you told me about your mother's account of how it all happened.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: After my father's execution, my mother was expelled from the house with three children. She took shelter with the Xhambaz family for a while… she was a seamstress, she bought a house where we lived and where my brother lives now. She taught both me and my brother the skill of sewing. My sister didn't want to continue high school.

Anita Susuri: You also told me, in more detail, where the house was and how you were removed from it?

[1] *Balli Kombëtar* was an Albanian nationalist and anti-communist movement formed during the Second World War. In Kosovo, it included armed groups that opposed both the occupying forces and the Yugoslav partisans. After the war, many of its members were persecuted or executed by the new communist regime.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: The house was in the center, across from the Assembly building. When they executed my father, they expelled us all from the house. We also had a hotel in Lipjan, which the state confiscated. My mother struggled, it's understandable when you have three children, not a single *dinar*,[2] no income except from her own work. She managed to educate us. The year I finished medical high school, I went to Belgrade and enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine. After a year, I returned because I had no scholarship, no support, just my mother financing me.

Anita Susuri: What generation was your father from? When was he born?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: My father was born in 1903, so he was 40 years old when he was executed.

Anita Susuri: So, 1903… you told me he also had connections with Naim Frashëri[3]…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: When he was 15, he had joined Azem Bejta's[4] guerrilla group. Naim Frashëri was in Albania, and he also worked in Tirana as… I can't remember now, an agronomist maybe, I don't know. But I know they wrote that he lived in Albania. He was born in Kosovo but lived… They were originally displaced from Toplica, from the village of Gërgur when they were expelled back then. My family was displaced three times. From my great-great-grandfather's time, they came to the village of Dubovc near Vushtrri. Then they went to Turkey in the year 2020, if I'm not mistaken…

Anita Susuri: 2020?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: 1920.

Anita Susuri: Right.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: 1920. Then they went to Turkey, and from Turkey they moved to Fier. They settled there, lived there. Later they returned to Prishtina in '43. They stayed until he was executed. He joined the Drenica uprisings, he was a leader in the Drenica War. He led the Lipovica

[2] *Dinar* was the official currency of Yugoslavia at the time. It continued to be used in Kosovo during the Yugoslav period until the late 1990s, when it was gradually replaced by the euro in everyday transactions.
[3] *Naim Frashëri* (1846–1900) was a prominent Albanian poet, writer, and one of the most important figures of the Albanian National Renaissance. He is known for his contributions to Albanian literature and national identity. Though he died before the speaker's grandfather was born, the statement likely refers to a symbolic or ideological connection rather than a personal one, or it may reflect a confusion in generational memory.
[4] Azem Bejta (1893–1924), also known as Azem Galica, was a prominent Albanian guerrilla leader who resisted Serbian and later Yugoslav rule in Kosovo during the early 20th century. Alongside his wife, Shota Galica, he led the *Kaçak* movement, which aimed to protect Albanian lands and fight for national liberation. He is considered a national hero in Albanian history.

Congress along with Gjon Serreçi, Imer Berisha, and many others I could name. He was also closely connected to the NDSH[5] organization in Skopje, he collaborated with them as well.

In one place I read that history is repeating itself now, that when it came time to divide Kosovo from Albania, supposedly the British and Americans helped, but they didn't intervene at all. They came, as I read somewhere, they came to Kosovo and asked the Albanians to rise up against the Germans, saying they would help. But in the end, when it came to the issue of separation, they didn't react at all. How true that is, I don't know, but that's what I read (laughs).

Anita Susuri: You said earlier that before your father got involved in these activities, I mean during the Second World War, your family was wealthier. What were they involved in?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: My father's [paternal] uncle was a trader, he himself was an agronomist. They had a lot of wealth, both in Lipjan and in Pristina. But all of those who went into the mountains to fight, almost none of them were uneducated, they had all gone to university. The principal of the gymnasium[6] Gjon Serreçi at the time, Halim Spahiu, was also a well-known trader. They were all people who contributed to the war, regardless of their economic status. They wanted a Greater Albania, which is why the other organizations continued on afterward.

Anita Susuri: How many children were you?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: One boy and two girls, three children.

Anita Susuri: You said that after your father's execution, you were expelled from your home and then your property was confiscated?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes. My brother Nuredin was in the gymnasium. After he finished high school, they imprisoned him and sentenced him to nine years. Out of those, he served five, and four were pardoned. When he got out of prison, he enrolled in the Faculty of Economics and completed it. Then he went to the military, and when he returned from the army, they imprisoned him again and gave him another five years. So my brother spent a total of nine years in prison. He was constantly surveilled. Whenever he went anywhere, wherever he came or left, he was followed – where he was going, what he was doing…

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[5] NDSH stands for *Lëvizja Nacional Demokratike Shqiptare* (Albanian National Democratic Movement), an underground anti-communist organization active in Kosovo and other Albanian-populated areas of Yugoslavia after World War II. Formed by Albanian nationalists, the movement sought the unification of Albanian territories and opposed the newly established Yugoslav communist regime. Many of its members were arrested, tortured, or executed in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

[6] Gymnasium refers to a type of secondary school common in many European countries, including Kosovo, that prepares students for university studies. It is equivalent to high school but typically has a more academically rigorous curriculum.

Anita Susuri: And how do you remember your childhood? I mean, you were…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, I experienced a lot, but I was young then and didn't register some things. Some of my rights were restricted. For example, I wasn't entitled to a monthly bus pass. In 1964, *Rilindja*[7] published an article against my father so that people would know whose daughter I was. For some, I was the daughter of a good man, for others, the daughter of a bad one. They wrote about it for a whole month, about how he became the leader of the *Ballists* in Kosovo. The *pejton*[8] ran in either March or April of '64, in both the Albanian and Serbo-Croatian languages.

Anita Susuri: Was it published daily?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Every day, every day for a whole month, the *pejton* lasted a month.

Anita Susuri: And what kind of content did that *pejton* have?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: What did you say?

Anita Susuri: What kind of content did it have? What did they say?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Ah, the newspapers?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: They wrote about how he was a commander, how he organized the Drenica Uprisings, and that he was against the Yugoslav state. They completely blamed him, saying he was the leader of the "band." But it wasn't a band, it was the NDSH organization. But to them, it was a band until they caught him. He had taken refuge in Drenica the whole time, and in the end, he was captured.

Anita Susuri: Did your mother ever tell you how he was captured?

[7] *Rilindja* was the first Albanian-language newspaper in Yugoslavia, established in 1945 and published in Pristina, Kosovo. It played a significant role in shaping public opinion and was widely read among Albanians in Kosovo and the region. During the communist era, it often reflected the official stance of the Yugoslav government, including political campaigns and propaganda against perceived enemies of the state.

[8] *Pejton* (from the French *feuilleton*, via Serbo-Croatian *fejton*) refers to a serialized article or commentary published over several days in newspapers. In socialist Yugoslavia, *pejtonët* were often used as ideological tools to publicly denounce individuals deemed enemies of the state, frequently portraying them in a negative light through political or biographical narratives.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: The newspaper wrote about how he was caught, apparently, he was in someone's house, being sheltered, and only the owner of the house knew. They hid him deep inside a pile of hay. The army came three or four times because someone had reported that he was there. Usually, someone reported it to those authorities, we don't know who. They were told, "He's in so-and-so's house, hiding." The military came and turned the place upside down but couldn't find him.

They returned to the same house three times, but on the third visit, one of the host's brothers didn't know he was inside. He said, "Go all the way to the bottom of the hay already, you've worn us out searching." He [my father] was ready, had a machine gun and everything. He could've killed them, maybe he even did kill someone, I don't know, from the army. But supposedly an old woman said, "For the sake of the breast your mother nursed you with, surrender so you don't get us all in trouble," and so he surrendered. These are things from the newspaper, how true they are, I don't know.

Anita Susuri: And as a child, you said that through your mother's work, your family managed to build a house somewhere?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, we managed, and she made sure we got an education. We never even felt the absence of our father. Back then, when my brother was getting an education, there were few boys going to school, even those with both parents. But we simply wanted to learn. Our mother really valued education. She sewed all the time, never took a break, just sewed and sewed. We never lacked anything, not food, not clothing, nothing. We bought that house. My mother never received social assistance or anything. "She's Ajet's wife, she shouldn't get anything," they'd say. We never felt the absence of our father because our mother worked so hard. We got an education. After I got married, I completed higher education in Zagreb. I got a job at the hospital.

Anita Susuri: In Pristina?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: In Pristina, yes. I worked for 45 years.

Anita Susuri: We'll talk about that too, but I'm also interested in your childhood a bit more…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: My childhood, when I was in high school, I joined an organization that advocated for national unification. There were many activists. I was not very open about who I was or where I went. I carried out all those activities through a friend, because I was constantly being followed too. If I went to meetings myself, I might have exposed the organization. Through a friend, I received information, [was assigned] tasks. We handed out pamphlets that said "Kosovo Republic!" and put up flags for November 28th.[9] Those were our activities.

[9] November 28 marks Albania's Independence Day, commemorating the declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. Known as Flag Day (*Dita e Flamurit*), it is a major national holiday for Albanians in Albania, Kosovo, and the diaspora, symbolizing national identity and unity.

Anita Susuri: First, I'd like to ask you…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: And I was, I think in '64, yes, in '64 I was imprisoned for two days. That was the day Adem, Adem Demaçi,[10] was sentenced. I went with some friends to attend the trial, and the next day I was arrested.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell me, let's go back a bit, to when you were in elementary school…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Ah, I don't remember much…

Anita Susuri: Because it was the period after the Second World War. I'm interested to know if you have any memories of what Pristina was like? What was the neighborhood where you grew up like?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: The neighborhood where we grew up was nice. Our neighborhood was known as Çeklik, but most people there emigrated to Turkey. In '53, they were demanding weapons, mistreating people, so many left for Turkey. It really was a very good neighborhood. Later, poor villagers who had fled from the countryside, from hardships, came and bought property because the neighborhood was very nice. But many left. Of the original families from Pristina who lived there, only a few houses remain. Of us, maybe ten houses or so. The Novosella family… Most of the others moved to Turkey.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember when they left? When did those families move?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I remember, I recall some of it.

Anita Susuri: What was it like, for example?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Oh, there was a lot of crying, people cried a lot because some of them lived quite well here but still had to leave. Some identified as Turks and wanted to leave. It was easier to say you were Turkish than Albanian. They had slightly more rights. That's how many ended up leaving. While I was in elementary school, I didn't notice anyone looking at me with hatred or anything. Later on…

Anita Susuri: And what was old Pristina like? How do you remember it?

[10] Adem Demaçi (1936–2018) was a prominent Albanian writer, political activist, and human rights advocate from Kosovo. Often referred to as the "Mandela of Kosovo," he spent a total of 28 years in Yugoslav prisons for his political beliefs and activism in support of Albanian rights and self-determination. He became a symbol of resistance against oppression and played a key role in the political landscape of Kosovo during the 20th century.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Old Prishtina was nice. There was a big water fountain there called Çeklik. It had very good water, everyone would come to fill up there. The area near Dodona Theater, it used to be something like a clinic at one point, they gave injections there. I think the streets didn't have lights, if I'm not mistaken. I've forgotten, it's been 60 years. But it was very nice. I love Pristina.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever go to the city center or that area?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes, yes. I don't remember clearly. I know there were movie posters across from the National Theater, and a little alley that led down where there were some shops. There was a bookstore in the center where people bought books, and a small alley going downhill. From the Grand Hotel onward, there was no development at all. There were butcher shops, you know, where they sold meat. Beyond the Grand, there were no houses.

Anita Susuri: They say that where the university campus is now, during the Second World War, there used to be something like a lager, do you remember that?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I don't remember, I really don't, I don't know. I know there was something near the theater, but I can't recall exactly what.

Anita Susuri: A mosque? Was there a mosque there too?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, but I really don't remember. We even talked about it once, but I couldn't recall it.

Anita Susuri: I don't know if you ever saw it yourself, I can't remember now which year that mosque was torn down. How do you remember family life as well? I mean, what were neighbor relations like?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Life, in terms of neighbors, was much better than today. Neighbors were really connected to each other. Even though our door was always under surveillance, who was going in and out, our relatives would still visit us. We had no issues, like being afraid to say, "We're coming over," or feeling unsafe. We got along very well with the neighbors. But that kind of life is gone now, which in my opinion was better. Today people are more preoccupied, they don't have time for these things (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Ms. Shazije, earlier you mentioned that in the year '64–'65, you went to Belgrade…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: I'm curious, as a young woman at that time, the number of girls who pursued education was limited, especially in Belgrade. What were the circumstances that led you to study there?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: After I finished medical high school in '64, I decided to study medicine in Belgrade. I applied for a scholarship, but I didn't receive one, the reason was known. I didn't have the same rights as other children. But my mother said, "If you really want to go, I'll support you financially." So I decided to go to Belgrade and study medicine. I enrolled without any issues, the school year started, and I lived in a student dormitory in Belgrade.

But after some time, we were in the biology lab, and during the session, there were maybe 100 of us, an assistant picked me out and asked, "Where does your father work?" I froze and said, "I don't have a father." From that day, I lost all motivation to stay in Belgrade. I thought, "If on the first day someone says something suspicious, they already know whose daughter I am, better not to take any risks."

So that September, I didn't even go to the exams. I had taken the June exams, but in September I didn't go. I never even picked up my diploma from medical high school, it's still there. I never went back to get it. I withdrew and didn't continue. I started going to meetings with the *Përpjekja* association. Even there, I was under surveillance. Some Albanians warned me, saying, "Be careful how you behave because you're being watched here." I thought, "If I'm going to spend five years in Belgrade constantly being followed, then I'd rather just return home."

Latra Demaçi: In that association, *Përpjekja*, did you get to witness much, do you remember any of it…?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: It was a cultural organization, but it also had a strong patriotic spirit. It was…

Anita Susuri: Was it formed in Belgrade?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, in Belgrade it existed as a cultural association. It wasn't about reciting poems or singing or anything like that, it had a very different kind of content. It was founded by Mustafë Cakaj, a very patriotic man. He formed it to bring Albanians together. Though, in some cases, you had to be more careful around Albanians than others, because you didn't know who was connected to whom. So it was a very charitable and supportive organization for Albanians. I don't know if it still exists today. But he maintained it for many years, *Përpjekja* lasted a long time.

Anita Susuri: I'm also interested in your impressions, when you traveled to Belgrade, was that your first time traveling that far?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, it was my first time going to Belgrade. No, I wasn't afraid. I went by train, I wasn't scared.

Anita Susuri: What was the whole trip like?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: It was good, good. Back then, there wasn't anything, or maybe I didn't even know how to be afraid. I went to the address where I had registered… ah, now I remember. The first time I went to register, I went with my mother. For the first time, I went to Belgrade with my mother. I left her waiting for me in the city center in front of the department store. I said, "I'm going to register," and I counted the bus stops to the Faculty of Medicine. I submitted my documents and came back the same way.

But on my way back, I had miscounted the stops. I couldn't find my mother. I started to panic. I thought, "She must've changed spots," and I began blaming her. The poor woman had been sitting in the same place the whole time. I was searching everywhere, "I've lost my mother, I've lost my mother, what do I do?" I kept going back and forth. Turns out, I had gotten off one stop too early. When I finally found her, I said, "Why did you change your spot?" And she said, "You left me right here, and here's where you found me." I wanted to blame her, but I had just miscounted the stops. After that, I went alone the next time.

Anita Susuri: And what was life like in Belgrade for you as a student?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: All my roommates were Serbian. They came from all over Yugoslavia. There were a lot of them. I even have a photo somewhere with all of us in the room, there were five of us. We studied in the dorm room. I mostly prepared [food] in the dorm on my own, it was cheaper. Sometimes I would go out to eat, but I avoided places that served pork. There was a sort of cafeteria for Muslims, mostly the Arab students, and that's where I ate. But most of the time, I cooked for myself.

Anita Susuri: At that time, as you mentioned, there were people from different places…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes, there were many. There were many Arab students.

Anita Susuri: And how was that for you, seeing different cultures in one place?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: It didn't seem strange to me at all (laughs). Not at all.

Anita Susuri: Did you have friends there? Did you go out? Were there any activities?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: There were, but I didn't really… I only went to *Përpjekja*. I went to the movies maybe once or twice, but otherwise I didn't go anywhere, just from the faculty to the dorm.

Anita Susuri: What year did you say you returned?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: '65. '64. I returned at the end of '65.

Anita Susuri: Then did you continue studying here, or did you start working?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I started working in '65–'66, and then in '67 I got married. But it bothered me to stop at just a high school education, so I went and completed higher education in Zagreb. I was already married and had children. I finished higher education in Zagreb, and then I started working in the same field I had studied.

Anita Susuri: What year did you go to Zagreb?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I think in '70, maybe '73, if I'm not mistaken. But we had a good time. We had a very successful job. Sometimes I say it was better than working as a doctor, because the results were visible. That kind of work is very fulfilling when you can see the results. We worked with children in the orthoptics cabinet. There were four of us, two from Prizren and four from Pristina.

Anita Susuri: And when you went to Zagreb, it was a different period…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, in Zagreb there wasn't…

Anita Susuri: But in '74, for example…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, it was different. [Aleksandar] Ranković[11] had already fallen by then… but it was different in Zagreb, and I wasn't afraid of anything. Even in Belgrade, I wasn't scared, we didn't know how to be afraid.

Anita Susuri: And in…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I just can't remember exactly, the time I was in prison, whether it was right after I finished high school. But it must've been after graduation, because how could I have gone to school afterward if they knew I had been in prison? That part I don't quite remember.

Anita Susuri: You said that at the end of '65 you returned from Belgrade to Kosovo and started working. But I'm curious, was that also the time when you started your activism?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, that was during high school.

[11] Aleksandar Ranković (1909–1983) was a high-ranking Yugoslav communist official and head of the Yugoslav secret police (UDBA) until 1966. He was known for his hardline centralist policies and was particularly unpopular among Albanians in Kosovo due to his role in repressing their political and cultural rights. His removal from power in 1966 marked a shift in Yugoslav policy, leading to a brief period of increased autonomy for Kosovo and greater cultural and educational rights for Albanians.

Anita Susuri: From high school?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: That's when I stopped. But I continued helping in an indirect way, especially with patients. Many people benefited from my help, especially in the 1990s, when most parents had lost their jobs and were without [health insurance] cards. We helped everyone. We'd say, "If someone has a [health] card, lend it to someone else and come." We knew the card didn't belong to them.

I remember one very interesting case, a child had borrowed someone else's health card. His mother told him, "Don't speak." We were examining children, since we were like teachers, doing group exercises. I asked him, "What's your name?" and he said, "Wait, I need to ask my mom" (laughs). Because he had someone else's health card. I told him, "No problem, don't ask your mom. What do they call you at home?" And that was that… a lot of people benefited from our help.

We never made anyone pay for anything. Because therapy practices took time. A child would come for at least a month. So no matter how much money someone might've had, there was no way to pay for that. We helped a lot, truly. In our clinic, no one ever said, "I can't get treated because I don't have a card." Honestly, that's why it was so important to educate Albanian professionals, so they could take their place in the workforce. So they wouldn't be pushed out, because you never know who you might end up needing. There are others who think differently, but there are many who helped a lot. We helped people a lot in those years when they didn't have health insurance cards.

Anita Susuri: I'd like to go back to activism, was your brother involved later on too?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, my brother wasn't. I was in sixth or seventh grade when my brother was imprisoned. He was a very active member, together with Adem [Demaçi], the Novosella family, and all of them. He was young, only 19 years old. He spent his entire youth in and out of prison. I mean… I can't even describe it, if someone else got slapped once, he'd be slapped three times, once for himself and twice for our father. Everyone else had it easier than my brother, because he was already marked. So we had to be extremely careful with certain things, to make sure no one saw what we were doing. He even admitted everything in court, "I did it…"

Anita Susuri: If you could describe those activities a bit more? Just like in our conversation [earlier].

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I was very careful not to be seen getting involved in these things, so that I wouldn't put the organization at risk. Through me, they could've easily uncovered it. Everything came through Elhame, she used to embroider flags, I believe. She'd send me instructions through someone else, "Do this, do that." Especially putting out pamphlets for November 28th, that was something we always made sure to do, so we wouldn't forget. We'd also hang flags on houses,

especially those we knew belonged to patriotic people. We'd put them up before dawn so no one would see us.

Then in late '64, or maybe '65, when Adem Demaçi was being sentenced, I took a few friends... I didn't take them to organize anything, I didn't have that kind of power, but I said, "Does anyone want to come with me? I'm going to listen to Adem's trial." I remember Elhame came with me. I can't recall exactly who else…

Anita Susuri: Maybe Mejreme Berisha?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Mejreme was involved too, but I don't know if she was with me that day. She was a major activist. The next morning, around 4:00 a.m., a police car pulled up in front of our house. *Boom, boom, boom* {onomatopoeia}, to be honest, I was terrified. Because we had trauma from what happened to my brother, they used to take him away. They would come and tear the house apart. Then they told me, "Get dressed and come with us." I froze. I couldn't think. But no one could have exposed me because barely anyone knew about my involvement.

I went. They put me in jail. I was held for two days. They released me without any document, without anything. I didn't even dare ask why I was taken. But as I was leaving, I thought, maybe they won't do anything, so I said, "Excuse me, why was I held here?" They said, "You wanted to organize a protest over Adem Demaçi's trial." They gave me a paper to sign, who dared read what they were signing? I signed it. Only God knows what I signed (laughs). They never called me again, but I was always under surveillance after that. What surprises me now is that I still decided to go study in Belgrade after that imprisonment. Now it amazes me that I had the courage.

Anita Susuri: And the imprisonment, were you held here in Pristina, or in the secretariat?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, the jail was in the city center, that's where they took me. I was in a cell with Elhame. Mejreme came that night too, but after that, whether they released her or what happened, I don't know anything. They took her out of the cell. Elhame and I stayed. I think she stayed about ten days, that's what she told me after I got out. Same room. There were some others too, Fazli Grajçevci, I think, but I don't know who else was there at the time. Elhame had more experience, she knew how things worked. She would knock on the wall and say, "There are Albanians on the other side." You could hear screaming, maybe from people who had just been brought in after being beaten, I don't know. I don't know the details.

Anita Susuri: And what were the conditions like?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: A small cell, oh God, I wouldn't wish it on anyone. A bucket in the corner. They handed us some bread and a bit of stew through the window, it was awful. I don't even remember if I ate or didn't eat, I remember nothing, nothing at all.

Anita Susuri: And when you were released, do you remember your mother's reaction or how worried she was?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Nothing… no, no one was waiting for me at the door. I left on my own. My mother didn't even know when I was coming back or anything. When they came, they just said, "Come out." They hadn't even brought me any clothes, I was still wearing what I had on at 4:00 in the morning when they took me. We went down to an office, and they gave me a paper to sign. I signed it without reading it.

It was a full sheet covered in writing, and I thought, "Should I ask why I was here or not?" Then I thought, maybe it's better if I don't, what if it makes things worse (laughs). So I asked, "What's the reason I was here?" They said, "You intended to organize a protest over Adem Demaçi's trial." I said, "I didn't know I was trying to organize anything, I just went to observe the trial, to see what was happening." I went home. I don't remember any more details after that. Nothing at all.

Anita Susuri: And about the flags you mentioned, how did that go?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: They were small flags, with a stick on the side. We'd hang them on houses where we knew the people were more patriotic. Just around the neighborhood, I didn't go further than that. Maybe someone else did, but not me.

Anita Susuri: Did you go out early in the morning, or…?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes. Around 5:00 in the morning, so no one would see you. If someone saw you… later our organization was exposed. That Rakovica Hyseni and all of them, they were good people, really. But when you look at the big picture, someone from within the Albanian community gave it away. Because it wasn't the Serbs attending the meetings to see what was going on. And that's really unfortunate.

Anita Susuri: Did you hold meetings?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: The others in the organization did, not me. They held meetings very often, they'd just tell me about them afterward. I never dared. I always thought someone might be following me… There were meetings, the organization was actually very large. Very large. They had meetings about what steps to take next, everything was focused on national unification. That was the goal… to create Greater Albania. People were killed, people even died for that.

I remember Fazli Grajçevci like it was today. They took him into custody, and he said, "I won't come back alive." Two days later, he was dead. They brought him to the hospital, I don't remember who they asked to sign off saying he died of an illness. One of the doctors, I don't know if it was Ali Sokoli or Doctor Deda, but they refused to sign that he died of a natural illness.

Anita Susuri: I think Ali Sokoli was…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Doctor Deda was also very patriotic, very, very much so. We had…

Anita Susuri: Do you remember what those leaflets you distributed said?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Nothing much, we only wrote "Kosovo Republic!" That's what we always had, "Kosovo Republic!" And look what we've done with the Republic of Kosovo now. That's what I feel bitter about. Not for anything, because I support all political parties, as long as someone works hard and is Albanian, that's what matters. But what hurts is this jealousy among ourselves, I'll say it publicly, it really bothers me. At a time when unity is most needed, we are divided. We need a common vision, and whatever someone else suggests, whether it's right or wrong, I don't know.

I'm not saying whether I'm right or wrong, but they [the politicians] don't care whether something is right or wrong, they just want things done their way. We all need to come together. I've always believed that whoever is capable should not be denied their role. Even if it's someone I personally dislike, if they deserve to lead, if they understand things, if they're talented, educated, truly knowledgeable, they should lead. Not all of us are highly knowledgeable, we can read and learn, but some things are innate. And there are people who, even just by reading, know how to analyze really well.

But I don't know what this jealousy of ours is all about. I'd say this publicly to all political parties: leave jealousy behind and focus on the state. Don't destroy the state for nothing. As far back as I remember, people were imprisoned for this "Kosovo Republic." Since I was a child, generation after generation has been imprisoned, has died in prison, for this cause… and now we don't even know how to preserve it. To me, everyone is good, I can't call anyone bad. Just let people show what they're capable of. Don't interfere with anyone.

In fact, my father's entire family is in Albania, and my father's cousin passed away a year ago. He was someone who helped Albanians a lot and held leadership positions in the Albania of Kosovo (sic) . He was like a chairman. He helped refugees tremendously. And when I'd say something like this, they'd say, "You're Ajet's daughter, how can you talk like that?" I'd say, "So what? It doesn't matter who comes into power, let them hold onto it" (laughs), "as long as they lead well."

Right now it's Albin [Kurti][12] in charge, why not help him and see whether we can get somewhere? Instead, they're attacking the guy left and right, who knows what they're thinking. Maybe they're right to criticize him, but we should also try to see the positive sides. No one can say for sure who's the best. It's easy to look good when conditions are normal, but this is hard now. We've come to the point where we're beating our chests against a wall. Can you break a wall with your chest? That's the situation we're in. I just hope everyone becomes more aware.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: We were going to return to the part about the article, the *feuilleton*, which you said was written intentionally to show what kind of family you came from…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes, that's true. In March 1964, I was on my way to school when I ran into a classmate, and he asked me, "Did you get the newspaper?" I said, "We don't buy newspapers. Why? Was there an article?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "Is it about your father?" He replied, "Not about mine, about yours." For a whole month, I was, I don't even know how to describe it, like a symbol of Pristina. When I walked down the street, some people looked at me with sympathy, the daughter of Ajet, and others with hatred,I'm talking about Albanians. That's how much attention I drew during those days.

For a month, *Rilindja* wrote about it: "How was Ajet Gërguri appointed leader of the Ballists of Kosovo?" Both *Večernje novosti* and *Rilindja*. A whole month. I'd actually love for a journalist to take the initiative to find and republish that *feuilleton* again. To run it for a month like they did back then. There was even someone from Albania who made a very good show about my father after the war, titled *I harruari* (The Forgotten One). Because few people know about him, and we're not the type of people to push ourselves forward, not like this or that. If someone else had my background, they'd say, "The daughter of Ajet should be an MP by now." But I'm not into that. Whoever deserves it should move forward. That *feuilleton* caused a big stir in '64.

Anita Susuri: Still, you said that you met your husband and…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Oh yes. We met in '66 and got married in '67. People asked him, "You want to get engaged to the daughter of Ajet Gërguri?" He was from Montenegro, how would he know who Ajet Gërguri was? He had finished teacher training school in Pristina and university in Belgrade, so he was outside of those events. He was into sports, politics didn't interest him much.

[12] Albin Kurti (b. 1975) is a Kosovar political activist and politician. He was a prominent student leader during the 1990s, known especially for organizing nonviolent protests against Serbian rule. He later founded the political movement *Vetëvendosje* (Self-Determination) and has served as the Prime Minister of Kosovo twice, first in 2020 and again from 2021 onward.

But he's a patriot, more than anyone else, and he said, "Precisely because she's the daughter of Ajet Gërguri, I want to marry her." We used to joke, "Look, the Kosovars didn't dare to marry you," and I said, "Even you, a lucky guy from Montenegro," and, "In '74 Ranković fell, everything changed." That *feuilleton* was written because, I'm telling you, it happened to come out at a time when we both were of marrying age.

Anita Susuri: And was your sister also involved in these activities?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, my sister only finished fifth grade and said, "I don't want to go to school anymore, I want to help mom with sewing," and she quit.

Anita Susuri: So she learned a skill.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And later, after you got married, it seems you didn't continue the activism anymore, or had you stopped earlier?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, after I got married, I didn't anymore. Once I got a job, I wasn't involved in activities anymore. I only helped in humanitarian ways when I could. When it comes to politics, honestly, even that little bit... In '90, I think, when the repressive measures[13] began and the principal from Belgrade was brought to Pristina. She was a very good professor who taught some of my friends. My friends had finished higher education in Belgrade, and I studied in Zagreb.

She was a very good professor, not politically charged. But they brought her in saying, "Things aren't going well over there, you need to fix the situation," and handed her the laws, like, "This and this needs to be done." She came to where we worked. We were writing [Serbian] in Latin script, and she said, "No, you need to write in Cyrillic, because that's what the law says."

And now, you know, when you're used to speaking up, everyone else went silent, but God didn't let me stay quiet. I said, "Well, professor, no problem. I'll be the first to write in Cyrillic. But the status of Kosovo needs to change, because the current law says, 'The language most widely spoken by the majority population must be written first.' Here, it's known that we Albanians outnumber the Serbs." That's what I replied to her. I said, "I'll be the first to write in Cyrillic, just let them change the law. Let them declare Cyrillic the official language of Kosovo." She said, "Irredentism has gotten into your head." I said, "Far from it," I said, "I don't engage in that stuff," I said, "I'm just speaking based on Kosovo's law."

[13] The imposed measures refers to the systematic removal of Albanian professionals and administrators from institutions in Kosovo during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as part of Serbia's revocation of Kosovo's autonomy.

I had read that truly, wherever Serbs or Albanians were the majority, the dominant language would be used first. We Albanians were the majority here, so we wrote in Latin script or Albanian. Then they ordered that medicine prescriptions be written in Cyrillic. Nowhere does it say that, it's written in Latin. But it wasn't really her fault, the directive came from above. Apparently, one of our own doctors went to Belgrade and said awful things about her, about how she was letting Albanians take the lead. So I know that everyone else went quiet, but I said to myself, "I'm not going to stay silent." I couldn't hold it in. I'm the stubborn type (laughs).

Anita Susuri: There's also another important event that happened in '68, the demonstrations[14] where, for the first time, there was...

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, in '68, yes, the Republic, yes. That's when I had just given birth to my daughter. I told my brother-in-law's son, whom I loved dearly, "Go out and join the demonstrations. Even if they fire you from work, I'll support you," I had a job. I said, "Go on, join the demonstrations." They did go out, and they were massive. The demonstrations at that time were something to be proud of, the whole population came out. No one was on the sidelines. Everyone joined in.

But I've always had a kind of fear. I've been a strange type, still am. For example, with all these movements, I always suspect that someone [who is] involved [might have ulterior motives]. That they're negative and are trying to get you to speak just to get you arrested. You know, I have that kind of mindset a lot. If I don't know a person well, if I don't trust them, who knows why you're speaking out, what your goal is. Because so many people were arrested at that time. So many. We were always scared, every time an organization would form, are all the people behind it really clean? Because people think one way but act another.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember that day, anything from those demonstrations?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Honestly, since I had an apartment across from the *soliter*,[15] I saw the youth running, the police beating them. They'd run wherever they could, trying to hide in people's homes. It wasn't far, they'd come back… They were beaten badly. Albanians have spent their entire lives being beaten.

Anita Susuri: And how did you feel when you heard about the imprisonments, for example, Adem Demaçi's arrest, or people being killed in prison? What was that like for you? Were they people you knew?

[14] The 1968 demonstrations in Kosovo were part of a wave of student-led protests across Yugoslavia. In Kosovo, Albanian students and citizens demanded greater rights, including the recognition of Kosovo as a republic within Yugoslavia. The protests were met with police violence and repression.

[15] *Soliter* is a borrowed word from Serbian, commonly used in Kosovo Albanian to refer to a tall apartment building or residential high-rise.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Honestly, yes. I actually knew Fazli Grajçevci very well. Poor guy, he was young. A boy from Drenica, a teacher. He had come to pursue his education, but he was a great patriot. He didn't say a single word in prison, that's why he died. He didn't want to give anyone up. It's hard when your son dies and comes back to you… and they didn't even allow his coffin to be opened.

Because when someone dies in prison, the soldiers don't let the coffin be opened, and also soldiers,[16] none of them died naturally. Either they were poisoned or killed. Not a single Albanian died of illness. Later on, they started poisoning Albanian officers too, those who were in places like Niš and elsewhere. It was a covert war. Many of our youth died in prison, but we don't even know their stories.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever attend any funerals, for example, of those who had been in prison?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no. I went to Adem's and the others where it was normal. I swear, when Adem was released from prison the first time, I think the whole of Kosovo went to see him. Regardless of the situation, and things weren't exactly calm back then, everyone went. I don't think anyone stayed home.

Anita Susuri: And you went too?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes. It was massive. And thank God, he lived a long life, lived until he was 80.

Anita Susuri: And we've been told earlier that even when people were released from prison, they were still followed, even those coming from…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: My brother, for example, was never able to go out without being followed. Constant surveillance… After he finished his prison sentence and his studies, when he was looking for work, the Janova family from Drenica helped us a lot, they had also sheltered our father many times. One of the Janova men, I don't know if he was a municipal chairman or had another position, told him, "Apply in Gllogoc and pretend I don't know who you are." That's where he got his first job after prison, as an economist. Later, he was transferred to Pristina.

He was very meticulous about work hours. Exactly at 07:00, by ten minutes before seven, he'd be at work reading the newspaper, and at 07:00 sharp he'd start working. I used to tell him, "Brother, they'll throw you in prison again." He was the last to leave work too. "Stop it…" because at the hospital nobody would leave at 15:00, at 15:10, We'd arrive at work at 7:10. "Don't go so early, they'll arrest you

[16] The reference is to Albanian conscripts who in the 1980s and '90s died in mysterious circumstances, all ruled suicide or illness.

again. They'll say, 'Why is he going so early and leaving so late?' Just relax, don't stick to the schedule so tightly."

Anita Susuri: Ms. Shazije, in the years '80–'81, you were certainly working…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Demonstrations happened then too, in the year…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, in '80–'81.[17]

Anita Susuri: How did you experience those events?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: That, I'm not sure, might've been later, when the children were poisoned.[18] That was a catastrophe too. Those [events] started, if I'm not mistaken, at the Student Canteen. That's where it all began… it had been planned, but they happened to get caught with the dishes, and that's how it kicked off… and the events of '81 pushed us, I think, toward the idea of the republic. They had some success. Those protests were very massive.

Anita Susuri: Where were you when it…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: At work, at work, at work.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember that day, how everything unfolded? What was the city like? What was the atmosphere?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: It was a disaster. A total disaster. People were running, others were opening their doors for whoever needed to take shelter, so they wouldn't get caught in the street. Because there were students from outside the city. At the time, I just remembered this now, thanks to you, there was one from Prizren, I think… or from the villages around Prizren, but who lived in Prizren.

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[17] The 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo began in March as student protests demanding better food and living conditions at the University of Pristina. They quickly escalated into large-scale political demonstrations, with widespread support from the Albanian population, calling for the recognition of Kosovo as a republic within the Yugoslav federation. The protests were met with violent suppression by the Yugoslav authorities, resulting in arrests, deaths, and a heavy police and military presence. These events marked a turning point in Kosovo's political history and intensified state repression in the years that followed.

[18] In the spring of 1990, thousands of Albanian schoolchildren across Kosovo suddenly fell ill, reporting symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, and fainting. The phenomenon, widely referred to as the "Kosovo poisonings," sparked mass panic and outrage. While many Albanian doctors and the local population believed the children had been intentionally poisoned, pointing to Serbian authorities, Yugoslav officials and some international observers dismissed the claims, labeling the event as mass hysteria or psychosomatic illness. The true cause was never officially confirmed, and the incident remains deeply controversial and politically charged.

My son brought him home, because my son was a student at the time. We took in students into our homes because the canteen and dormitories were shut down. I had completely forgotten that, now you reminded me. I took in one boy and kept him at our house for about a month. They had nowhere to go, since many people were housing students who weren't from Pristina.

Anita Susuri: Were they taken in because the dorms were closed or because it was dangerous?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, the dorms were closed. They had nowhere to eat, nothing, even the canteen was closed. There was this one boy from Prizren, I don't remember his name, he's in Germany now. He was a dentistry student, studying with my son, and I took him into our home.

Anita Susuri: Were there others who took…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Not in my building lobby but yes, people took them in, everywhere. They didn't leave the students on the streets. They opened their doors, especially those who lived in houses, they let them in. Our people are very generous in such cases. They even put themselves at risk and don't care about the consequences of taking someone in. They opened their doors a lot. That's where we shine, except when it comes to choosing positions, then we like to argue over who deserves it more. That's where the trouble starts, but otherwise, we're generous.

Anita Susuri: On April 1st and 2nd, there were the largest demonstrations, when the working-class people also joined, as they say...

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: You mean the miners?

Anita Susuri: I'm still talking about '81. Did you also go out [to protest]?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, just the kids, the boys. Not me. My oldest son went. But it's known how it was back then. It was clear, everyone… people were saying it openly and officially, "Kosovo Republic, either peacefully or through war!" That's what they chanted at the time. It was openly about demanding for Kosovo to become a republic.

Anita Susuri: How did things continue at work with your other colleagues after that? How was the cooperation? Did things get tense?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: We had some Serbs there. But look, this is just about my department, I'm speaking personally, ours was kind of a closed unit, we didn't really socialize with people from the rest of the pavilion. We had just one Serb from Prizren who spoke Albanian very well. She would speak Albanian with the children during the sessions. And she didn't even socialize with her fellow Serbs. The

four of us just stayed separate. The other Serbian women looked at her with hatred, but she didn't care at all. She didn't hang out with them. She stayed with us.

Back then, people were really divided, they formed groups, and were making their own plans for the future. But I think they [Serbs] were much more united than us in times of need, really. They fight, curse each other, everything bad, but when it comes time to make a decision, they all take the same stance. That's the difference.

Anita Susuri: And how did those following years go?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Those years… I'm not sure if it was that year or which year exactly, when the workers were removed from their jobs?

Anita Susuri: The '90s.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Oh, in the '90s then? Around the time they started removing people, yes. But in places where they hadn't done that yet, I was always saying, "Don't leave your jobs until they drag you out by the arm." I don't know if it was in the '90s that the union guy, Hajrullah Gorani,[19] was organizing…

Anita Susuri: About the marches or something?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no, it was about quitting the job, it was a strike organized by Hajrullah Gorani from the union. But I can't remember if it was in the '80s or the '90s. I would tell people, "Don't leave your jobs. What's the point?" For example, they would remove an Albanian director and people would say, "I don't want to listen to a Serbian director." And I'd say, "Listen to him, for the sake of the people, because all the patients are Albanian. There's not a single Serbian patient. Just stay to treat the people, even if it's only ten or twenty of you. Don't give up your positions. And if they drag you out by the arm, then fine. But until then…"

But those clever Serbs, they emptied out the surgery department because of the Albanians, not because they removed the Albanian director and brought in a Serb, they got up and left the job themselves. Surgery… gynecology too, where people needed care the most. Because internal medicine, ophthalmology, you can manage some of that at home. Not many left internal medicine, only a few who wanted to leave, but they were wrong to go, because unless you're dragged out by force… they wouldn't have been able to remove the entire department by force, maybe just two or three people.

[19] Hajrullah Gorani (1931–2020) was an activist, professor, Albanian trade unionist, and former political prisoner from Peja. He served as the head of the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo, one of the first trade union organizations in Kosovo at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990. He is also remembered as the leader of the major strike by Kosovar workers held on September 3, 1990.

They should have kept their job, because injured people were coming in, Albanians, injured people were coming in, women were coming to the gynecology department to give birth. That's why I'm not in favor of those who left their jobs. Because by doing so, you're handing someone a favor on a silver platter. That person's been waiting for you to get upset and leave your post. [They'd say,] "Oh, so you're working for the *shkije*?"[20] [And I'd say,] "I'm not working for the *shkije*, this isn't *shkije*'s land, it's Kosovo's." My daughter was working in internal medicine, and I told her, "If you listen to me, you won't leave." She said, "Are you crazy? Everyone's gone, just me left behind?" I said, "If I were in your place, I'd stay. Let them all go." Don't let it come to the point where no one's left…

I'll never forget this one woman, during the '90s, or maybe it was '99 when the war broke out, people were still on the streets, everything had emptied out in Kosovo. I was coming from Ulpiana to visit my mother here. I'll never forget that detail: a woman in a wheelchair, her son was pushing her to get her to dialysis at the hospital. God, I was shocked when I saw it. She asked me, "Do you have a sip of water?" From that day on, I've always carried water with me. I said, "I swear I don't." I said, "Where are you going, young man? If you even step into the hospital yard to get your mother to dialysis, they'll kill you." He said, "What else can I do?" He was cursing the doctors under his breath for handing dialysis over to the Serbs.

I said, "Look, where did she go?" I'll never forget it. I asked my daughter after the war, "A woman like this, this and that, I saw her," I described her to her. She said, "Yes, she's alive. She told us that she was on dialysis during the war." And I've never forgotten that woman. She died later, but it was that boy who broke my heart. He was 17, pushing his mother in a wheelchair all the way from Vranjevc. A trash cart, the kind used for garbage, that's what he used to take her to dialysis. And even once you get there, you have to wonder: will they give you proper dialysis or not? You have to consider everything. Because really… I hope not all Serbs are the same, God forbid you judge them all when illness is involved. That case has stuck with me.

Anita Susuri: And did you continue working?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I kept working almost until those things started happening, I continued practicing with the children. I only stopped when the children stopped coming. No one harassed me. In my department… we used to help some of the patients when they came from ophthalmology and didn't know where they were, we'd notify their parents, "They're here," and so on. I think it was before the '90s when they changed the directors and people started quitting surgery and gynecology. Or maybe it was during the '90s when people left their jobs en masse. When [Hajrullah] Gorani from the unions organized that, I don't remember the year. He had organized it, "Don't go to work," like a

[20] *Shkije* (sing. *shkja*) is a derogatory Albanian term historically used to refer to Serbs. In Kosovo, it has often been used in a negative or hostile context, especially during periods of ethnic tension.

protest. The Serbs took advantage of it, "You didn't come to work," and they had people hand in resignations. That was it.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the miners' marches,[21] when they began or afterward…?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I don't remember the exact year…

Anita Susuri: In '88.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: In '88, huh? Well...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember these events?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, I only saw them on the news, I didn't witness anything directly.

Anita Susuri: And the '90s in general, how were they for you? What was the atmosphere like?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I would sit on the balcony and start taking random notes. When I saw the Serbs going into houses and stealing, I was in my apartment. I started writing down license plate numbers, then I thought, "Who's even going to look at these numbers, have I gone mad?" We went near the Hasan Prishtina school, they had brought tons of packages, loads and loads of packages. Then they would come, pick them up, take them away… I'm talking about the Serbs. They filled the school with something, and then they would unload it. Paramilitary, paramilitary, paramilitary. Oh God, that was terrifying.

Anita Susuri: During the war, did you stay here or go somewhere else?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, here, here. My mother… not in my apartment, I didn't have this place until after the war. My mother stayed at my sister's place on the next street, she used to park there, it used to be called Morava Street. She said, "The paramilitaries are coming," and there were *magjup*[22] neighbors above them. She said… they were happy because they cooperated with the Serbs, "Daughter ," she said, she was lying down. I told her, "Get up, get up, the Serbs are coming," and she said, 'Well, let them come, what can they do to us?'" she said. And those *magjup* said, "These people are like Turks, don't bother them too much."

[21] The miners' marches refer to the peaceful protests led by Albanian miners from the Trepça mining complex in early 1989. The miners marched to Pristina to oppose the proposed constitutional changes by the Yugoslav government, which aimed to strip Kosovo of its autonomy.

[22] *Magjup* (pl. *magjupt*) is a derogatory term historically used to refer to members of the Roma community. While it was once commonly used in colloquial speech, it is now widely recognized as a racial slur and is offensive. The respectful and correct term is Roma.

When they came… we weren't "like Turks," but the neighbor said that to protect us. Her husband was a villager from Gllogjan. When he said, "Go inside." My mom slowly got up, and they said, "*Dobro jutro, baka* [Serbian: Good morning, grandma]," "*Dobro jutro*," she said, "What are you doing?" "Oh, I'm just lying here," she said. "Is anyone bothering you?" She said, "No, no one." "Alright, go back to sleep" (laughs). They came in, saying, "Get up, get up, they're coming," and she was like, "Let them come, what could they possibly do to us?" Because they had already harassed people. They didn't enter our apartment. In our building, only two homes had people in them, the rest had all fled.

Anita Susuri: Did they force you out of your apartment?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever have to move somewhere else?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: We stayed together with the Spahiu family from Prizren, not sure if you know them. With teacher Emine and the others, we all stayed together.

Anita Susuri: Somewhere in the center?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, in Ulpiana, right across from the Hasan Prishtina School. We'd sit there and watch. When the Russians came in[23] and started shooting nearby, I got scared, even though the others were with me. You know why? The war was basically over, and the children wanted to look out the window, not mine, but the other kids. I kept saying, "Stay back, they'll shoot you, the Russians are firing." I thought, "What's the point,after surviving the whole war, I'll die at the end." They still laugh at me: "She got scared when the Russians came in" (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Was it… I think there were problems just getting bread and so on…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes. Only us women went out, teacher Emine and I. We'd line up in Ulpiana for bread, we didn't let the men go out at all. For a month and a half they were shut in. The late Emine was a very capable woman, she had stocked the house with everything: pasta, rice, the kinds of things that last even without bread. Then we'd wait in line, get the bread, and come back.

Anita Susuri: Did anything happen while you were out, anything you saw?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: We would go out and… frankly, I resented some people from Vranjevc who came over begging for tea. They'd bring their kids, as if tea were the one thing missing, someone could have killed them on the way. Then some rumor spread, fake news , I think, telling people to go

[23] On June 13, 1999, when the war was over, Russian troops entered Pristina one day before the arrival of NATO troops.

register in a makeshift office at the park to "get numbers" or something. I told people, "Ignore that," but many were fooled and waited in line.

Whenever we queued for bread in Ulpiana, everyone was young. I kept thinking, "God, if they throw a single bomb, they'll wipe them out." I was over 60 at the time, and the queue was full of youth, mostly Albanians, with only a couple of Serbs here and there. I was always afraid that in that bread line, one burst of automatic fire could kill thirty Albanians. Parents often sent their children to buy bread, and they wouldn't sell you just one loaf, sometimes two, so two or three people from each household had to stand in line. I don't know what else to say, it was terrible for everyone.

Latra Demaçi: And you said your brother died in '99…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, in Germany.

Latra Demaçi: Do you remember the time when he got out of prison? How did you experience that? Did the persecution continue at that time?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes, he was continuously persecuted. And those prison authorities were like thieves: when they rob you and then come looking for something, they just grab everyone. Whenever a delegation came from Belgrade, they had the obligation to round up all the former prisoners and detain them. Then they would release them again. They just put them in prison to make sure they didn't do anything. That became like a routine, almost like a custom. All the politically imprisoned were gathered, detained for a night or two, until those visits were over…

Anita Susuri: Like a kind of isolation.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, they were taken in for isolation. They were the persecuted ones, the prisoners. My brother always said, "Every step I take, there's someone following me, and I'm sure he's Albanian." He was the type who didn't talk much. I deeply regret never being able to get him to tell me who that person was. Because he knew. Maybe now that guy presents himself as the greatest patriot. I believe those people should be exposed, even if it were my own son, why not?

Anita Susuri: And in '99, you said he passed away…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, he died in Germany. Because…

Anita Susuri: Was it during the war?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, he went to Germany before the war. When all the unrest started, he went there alone, his wife didn't go with him at first. They had one son. Later, his wife managed to get

there, crossing the mountains like everyone else. She stayed in a refugee camp somewhere, God, it was rough. When he died… he was born in Fier, so to avoid being buried in Germany, they sent him from Germany to Fier, and he was buried there, with his grandfather. Because there was no burial plot elsewhere. So that's where he was laid to rest. But the funeral ceremony in Albania was done very nicely. There was no way to bring him here.

Anita Susuri: What year was this?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: In '99, it was during the war when he died.

Anita Susuri: During the war, huh?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: You weren't able to go?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no. We didn't see him, we hadn't seen him for ten years. There were no phones back then like there are now. He died young, honestly, 63 years old.

Anita Susuri: Was he sick?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, he had liver cirrhosis. In Germany, they even tell you when you're going to die, the doctors. Whether you accept it or not. He was a real patriot. He didn't care about wealth, didn't care about anything. He only cared about the nation. Even when he was dying, he wasn't bitter. And he had suffered a lot in prison. God, the torture they had done to him in prison…

Anita Susuri: Which prisons was he in?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: In Niš. Because he served two sentences, one for our father and one for himself.

Anita Susuri: You said that in '99 you were constantly in Pristina, but also near the end of the war, you told me about an incident when you went out…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: That was the kind of incident where you could've lost your head for no reason. We went out because my husband hadn't gone out for a month and a half. "Let's go to the post office," we heard they had reopened the phone lines. When we entered, there were some people dressed in a certain way, now whether they were paramilitaries or something else, I don't know, but they were sitting down. Two counters were operating, one on the right, one on the left. My husband went to the left and said, "You go that way." I saw a man from Pristina over here, so I thought, "Let me

go to him." I didn't speak Serbian or Turkish, just Albanian. I said, "I heard the phone lines are back on, is that true?" Then the paramilitaries jumped up and cursed my mother and my father. They said, "This is Serbia, why are you speaking Albanian?" One of them looked like he was about to do something physical, but I heard another say, "Leave her." Because we were older, not young people.

Now I was afraid that the moment I stepped out of the building, they'd shoot at us outside. I thought, "What have we done? At the end of the war, we're going to die for no reason." When we got outside, I didn't even dare turn my head back to see what was happening. I walked up the stairs. When we got to the post office, at the top of the stairs, we stopped to talk with someone, and I said to myself, "Let me turn my head and see what's going on." No one had followed us. Then we went home, and I said, "Look at us, we were about to end up in two coffins for no reason."

Because my husband felt guilty the whole time about staying… he must've been around 65 then, about staying home. I told him, "Go fight! Who's stopping you?" He's very brave. "Go fight! Who's stopping you? I'll stay, I don't plan to leave Pristina." I was such a coward, but I ended up acting brave. I guess I toughen up when it's really necessary. I said, "Let's just do this, get it over with." He really felt guilty… and I seriously told him, "Go fight, I'll stay, nothing will happen."

My sons, my youngest son was in Austria, a student, the older one had just left as a refugee. And let me describe this to you, I'll never forget it. I escorted my son and my niece, because many were being drafted for the army. They were headed to Skopje to catch a plane to Slovenia. There was this plane ticket valid for one month to travel and stay like students. On the way there, police, police, police, I was freaking out. "They're going to stop us here, they're going to stop us here…"

We somehow made it to Skopje. Those youths were looking out the window, and I yelled, "Get your heads down!" When we got to Skopje, I'll never forget that moment, it's a pity I don't know how to write. There were Albanians, elders, bringing their kids to get them away from the army. You couldn't even take a step because of the crowd. Full, full, everyone trying to get their children out. What struck me most was an old man with a 15-year-old village boy, the poor kid didn't know anything. He was just taking his son to get him out of here. I asked, "Where are you taking him?" He said, "I don't know."

Now, these kids had a plane ticket, but the plane wasn't landing. What could I do, I had no money on me. You know how I was acting? Like a beggar. Whenever I saw a familiar face, I'd ask… just to buy a new ticket to go somewhere else. I asked people I knew and could pay back, "Do you have 500 euros?" 500 marks,[24] "No, I don't," "Please, my kids are stuck here." No one would give me money for a ticket to Switzerland or anywhere else. But they also had limited seats.

[24] Marks refers to the Deutsche Mark (DEM), the official currency of Germany until the introduction of the euro in 2002. During the 1990s, it was widely used and accepted in Kosovo, particularly during the economic collapse of Yugoslavia.

I said, "Stay in Skopje tonight, maybe tomorrow or the day after the plane will land." They spent one night in a hotel, and I was scared to leave them alone. We had some neighbors from Pristina whose daughter had married in Skopje, I called them, and they welcomed them really nicely. The son-in-law, I didn't even know who he was, said, "Don't worry, if there's no way to fly from Skopje, I'll take the kids to Sofia and get them on a plane from there. Don't worry, they'll get to where they need to go."

That's what happened. The kids left from Skopje. But that old man and that boy, those two never left my mind. Because our kids, at least, had already been out and educated and had traveled before. They knew how to manage. But that elderly man, the 15-year-old boy… There were moments where I had to cry, and I couldn't stop crying along the way, because I didn't know how to help.

Anita Susuri: Did they make it in the end?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, my sons made it, they went to Germany.

Anita Susuri: From Skopje?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, from Skopje. They traveled a lot. Left on their own, on the road, changing from one train to another. [My son] said, "One woman, she was some kind of manager at a factory, would avoid us when she saw us like that. But when she started talking to us and saw we weren't rebels, weren't thugs or anything, she offered us jobs at her factory," he said, "because she saw we weren't the type to be out stealing or wandering the streets," he said, "she offered us factory jobs," he said, "we must have made an impression," he said, "we hadn't washed in two or three days, traveling." There were a lot of hardships. It's not good to mourn over the past.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember when KFOR[25] arrived ? Did you see them?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, I didn't see them, just the Russians scared me a lot when they came in (laughs). But the kids were thrilled, the kids were thrilled. All of them at the windows, all of them, *kuku,*[26] what the children did! How old were you then?

Anita Susuri: Seven.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: So little. And what the children did out of happiness, so much, so much.

Anita Susuri: And how did life continue for you afterward? Did you return to work?

[25] KFOR (Kosovo Force) is a NATO-led international peacekeeping force that entered Kosovo on June 12, 1999, following the end of the Kosovo War. Its mission was to establish a secure environment, oversee the withdrawal of Serbian forces, and support the return of refugees and displaced persons.

[26] An Albanian interjection expressing strong emotion such as surprise, fear, pain, or dismay. Often used to convey emotional intensity or distress in everyday speech.

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: When did you return? Immediately?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: As soon as the war ended, as soon as KFOR came in, I mean, NATO that stabilized the situation, we immediately started working. The hospital functioned normally. Doctors who had left for Skopje and other places returned, and work resumed normally.

Anita Susuri: Until what year, when did you retire?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: I retired in 2009, I think. When did the student poisonings happen?
Anita Susuri: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: And during that time, the hospital was very busy. I personally wasn't directly involved, since I worked in a more separate unit, I told you, it was like a lab, but the wards and other departments were very active.

Anita Susuri: Did you witness any cases?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Yes, plenty, even my own son was poisoned. The one who lives upstairs. He was in the gymnasium at the time.

Anita Susuri: How did it all happen?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: It was a kind of fainting, like hysteria, some kind of aggressiveness . You couldn't tell whether it was real or… God knows what they were given, just so they wouldn't know what they were doing. They weren't aware of their actions. They screamed, made uncontrollable gestures. It seemed to affect the nervous system, that's what it looked like. Because when they disturb your mind, that's more effective, it's like giving you an illness. Your mind is everything. The children were in a really bad state.

Anita Susuri: And how did you find out that your son was affected? Did the school call you?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: No, no. He was in the hospital, and when he came back, he told me. I didn't let him go out for three or four days, you know, to isolate and mentally calm down. He was young, maybe in the second or third year of high school. But there were many cases. Around 100 a day came to the hospital. I don't know how the nurses managed to handle it all. Everyone was mobilized. Really, we are good people. In such cases, we don't care if it's our child or someone else's, we just try

to help. That's why we're an example to the world, but with other things, we still can't get along (laughs).

Anita Susuri: And how did your son describe it? Did he have any struggles or symptoms?

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: That, he said he felt unwell and had tremors. There was a lot of shaking. Also vomiting, and, "It felt like psychological distress," he said, "we were shaking." They put something in there. They did, because I've heard things from younger people… anyway, this isn't for recording, we'll talk later. These things aren't part of everyday conversation.

Anita Susuri: Alright, Ms. Shazije. If there's anything else you'd like to add at the end, or if you feel like you've forgotten something…

Shazije Gërguri Hasangjekaj: Thank you for coming, so the youth can also learn about the past and what people went through. I hope you have success, and greetings, may all the politicians unite.