

INTERVIEW WITH MEVLYDE MEZINI SARAÇI

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Duration: 196 minutes

Present:

1. Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Mevlyde, if you could introduce yourself, your date of birth and anything about your family and where you come from.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes, I am Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi. I was born on December 15, 1954, which is known as a very difficult year when even red snow had fallen. I am different from the other children in my family because out of eight children, I am the only one born at a hospital and after I was born, my family built their first home. So, it's two things that make me proud, but also kind of curious. Because my mother had so much pain and trouble during labor, she had to go to the hospital, while all her other deliveries were easier. As usual, back then in those difficult times, women gave birth at home with the help of other women who were nearby or relatives.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned red snow...

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: At that time, red snow had fallen, it was a very difficult winter, very heavy. There was lack of water, lack of food, and difficulty moving around. As I have been told, it was one of the most difficult winters. That's why my life continued with the same rhythm as when I was born during a difficult winter, and my whole life has been quite difficult during all seasons, but I think I managed to succeed so far.

My parents are Halim and Fatime, who everyone knew by the nickname Fatushe. Of course I will mostly be speaking about myself today because if I were to talk about my mother's story, perhaps there would be the need for a special interview about her life. Because she had the misfortune of losing her father at a very early age and at the time, women didn't usually work and they didn't have the financial means to raise their children independently. At that time, my mother had to go back to her grandmother's house. She grew up with her grandmother, my grandmother too but also hers.

When my mother was around five years old, my grandmother had to get married again in order to release her mother from a burden, because raising a child without any income was a burden. So, her step-father accepted my mother really well, he loved her as his own child. But, I always consider it unjust, because he changed her identity, and instead of her last name, Matoshi, he gave her his last

name in order to get the [governmental] aids for children, the rights of children. But it's like he also thought about it positively so my mother would be equal to the other children. However, I feel like I owe it to mention this part of the story.

It's fortunate that when my mother married my father during earlier times, they married out of love. It was a kind of a touching moment when I heard about this because back then it was difficult to marry someone out of love when marriages were arranged and forced. Therefore, besides the sacrifices life brought, not only to my mother but to all the women and men because it was a difficult time, [a time of] poverty, of occupation. As usual, as always, there was an occupant above us.

My parents had a good relationship. They did, they had a good marital relationship, they provided an education for all of us although we were eight children, fortunately all of us were healthy. Most of us received an education, including my sisters, my two oldest sisters only completed primary school, and my third sister, who is no longer alive, at that time there was a sort of burst for the education of Albanian girls and she was one of the first, avant-garde, not only educated... she started working at a library in Mitrovica, but she was a strong arm to help our family, to buy us books and other school supplies.

I speak generally, we were a very homogenous family, we didn't have much, but we also didn't miss out on anything. We were average, but our problem always was that my father was a *ballist*¹ and he took part in the war. Unfortunately this unwritten part of history is missing and I lack a lot of information, but I cherish the memories because of course I have to, because I've been brought up in that spirit. And I always continued my activity based on my father's activity, but of course, also his parents and the ones before because the branch should always follow the root. Whether you want to or not, when you're brought up in that spirit and experience all that inspiration and education, you must keep it going.

Anita Susuri: Did your father ever tell you about his experiences during the Second World War? I mean when he was a *ballist*.

Mevlyde Mezi Saraçi: My father was a *ballist* [even] before I was born and he continued it. But, as far as I remember, I know that we always had to leave our door unlocked so the police could come and arrest my father anytime they wanted, or especially before the national holiday of November 28.² The prior night, the police always knocked on our door so they could prevent my father from doing any activities.

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

² Albanian National Flag Day.

We sometimes locked the door late at night, when we listened to Radio Tirana because it was our only inspiration and a window of information about what was happening with our people across the border. And of course, there were people who collaborated with Serbs and they told them that we listen to Radio Tirana, and that we talk about our fatherland, about different activities.

We were always under some kind of pressure, like we were never at peace although we tried to maintain our spiritual peace, but it was very difficult. That's why as a child I always remember armed people who showed up at our door, hostile cops, terrible, and they always arrested my father. And then since they had no arguments, they later released him. But it left us with life-long trauma.

Anita Susuri: Did they abuse him? Do you remember?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: I painfully remember, I remember the days when my mother had to take care of us alone, when my father wasn't home. Unfortunately we don't have any records, because I thought of writing a monograph about the life and work of my father, but we don't have many records which were destroyed by the Serbian state. Besides destroying the people and the patriots, they also destroyed our history through their mechanisms. However, as a family, we continued the tradition and in a way...

There is no greater record than raising eight healthy, patriotic, sacrificing children who continued to contribute, I think the criminal Serbian state didn't manage to destroy that. I want to talk about my mother, she was a very modest lady, a very hard-working woman, and she did a lot of work. She didn't differentiate, she also carried heavy stuff. We didn't have a water supply like we do now inside our homes, not just us, but our whole neighborhood had one water supply where we got water to drink.

Meanwhile we met all our needs at the well. With a bucket, in a way that seemed like a sport to me. I did it as a sport while helping my mother because she was a very neat woman, she was very careful about our family. She washed our clothes by hand every day and we were among the cleanest children at the school. Of course we also had to help her in all those activities and engagements.

I had the fate of being the middle child, my three older sisters were already married and two of my brothers were going to school, me as well. But, it was a tradition before, girls did the house chores more, and so I felt the need to. And I began helping my mother and it became like a burden to me. But, always studying [at the same time], reading, making my family proud and making it seem like I wasn't tired since... in the end, it was a pleasure to finish everything together.

We were some of the most distinct children at the school. I even remember my first teacher, Mrs. Sadete Mujku-Haxhiu, who lives in Mitrovica and I send her my regards. For her, we were the first generation. Meanwhile I had the luck to begin my first grade at the new school. Back then it had a different name, but now it has changed and it's called Ismail Qemali. And as children, like all children

who look their teachers in the eyes and want to find wonders, I found it with teacher Sadete. The support, the love, the warmth, education, and her skills.

I, after all these years, at the age that I am, I feel like when I mention her, I feel her soft hand on my hair, on my shoulder and how she always called us, “My dear students!” She never called us by our names, we were all dear to her. And this isn’t something you forgot. That’s why we were inspired to study too.

Before going to school, I had already started writing and reading at four years old and that was an advantage of mine. Not any special affinity, but since I had older siblings and I was curious to see what they were writing and reading. At four years old, I learned the ABCs. When I started first grade, the alphabet wasn’t anything new, I knew all of it. This helped me to develop even further. But it was a special pride for my teacher as well, because we would converse like adults.

And I want to say that my inspiration to write began very early, I began writing short essays and poetic verses in the second or third grade. And at that time we learned penmanship. We couldn’t pass first grade without learning it, not only the alphabet and handwriting, but also penmanship. And these poems or literary writings I did, I wrote them on a special notebook and I used penmanship, and they were put on display every day for the school day at my school. Unfortunately, I didn’t keep them and they would be like a treasure to me, since for me they were moments I felt as a child, things that I don’t remember today. I remember the topics, but unfortunately not the content.

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Mevlyde, sorry for interrupting you. I wanted to talk about your memories of Mitrovica a bit, what was Mitrovica like at that time? We know that there was a bridge in Mitrovica, but I’ve heard that that bridge broke down often, and it was built again, it was wooden. How do you remember that?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: I remember Mitrovica’s bridge when it was actually like that, an old bridge, and I remember when the first iron bridge was built with those special nails, with those metallic constructions, and it [the bridge] was a symbol of Mitrovica. Mitrovica was identified with two or three objects at the time. It was the building, which at the time was called Jadrani, where the library was later, there was the center, the park at the center and the Iber Bridge which were visited by tourists from different places. I want to go back to the time when I was growing up.

Mitrovica was an industrial place, developed. It was progressive, it was a mini Europe, it was different from the other cities. At some point it even passed Pristina, because the economical development brings all these advantages. I want to say that I have really good memories at the bridge. As children, we used to bathe in the Iber, right at the city center. And at the time, not only me, but many children didn’t have shoes or sandals to use both at school and to walk around. And we took food with us in our backpacks from home and we walked barefoot in the city, and our feet were burning from the asphalt.

Because when the asphalt got hot it was difficult to walk on it barefoot. But, we were happy and we would spend the whole day bathing. During breaks of course, at the Iber Bridge.

We would count those metallic construction nails, those willow [trees], we would jump in the water, we would swim, we would make new friends, we would tell fairy tales and stories, different things that remain in my memory as a childhood flavor which always remain in my soul. But, unfortunately, that bridge went through many changes, because we always learned at school that bridges bring people together and we always went there with that idea that the bridge unites [people]. Actually both parts of the city because Mitrovica is a city divided in two by the river, Iber river.

But, unfortunately, recently these childhood dreams are fading away. I would cross the *Iber Bridge* for four years to go to the Technical High School, two to four times a day, I can't let that go. Now I go to Mitrovica and take pictures, I cry, my tears merge with the Iber river and I come back remembering those times which make me feel homesick.

Anita Susuri: Were you living in the north or the south?

Mevlyde Mezzini Saraçi: I lived in the southern part, in Bair near the Isamil Qemali school. But, I attended the Technical High School which was in the northern part. Since then as a child, when it became evening, I mean as high school students, our boulevards were separated unfortunately. On the northern side of the *Iber Bridge*, where the boulevards were better, Serbs were free to walk there. While our *korzo*³ was on the other [southern] side of the bridge. So, on the side where the city's square is now and on the road that takes you to the gymnasium⁴ which was called Çarshia e Madhe. There were all the craft shops, the nice shops, which have unfortunately all turned to coffee bars now, or they are unused.

Mitrovica had the image of an old and developed city. You could find both the past and the present. [Now] it's like a city that doesn't live, like it doesn't breathe. It still doesn't have a liberation day, it still doesn't celebrate. When all of Kosovo celebrates, we say that we are independent and that Mitrovica is free but Mitrovica is not free. Mitrovica doesn't even have a liberation day, there's nothing more to ask. However, people should try to continue, because Kosovo's sovereignty depends on Mitrovica's fate. If the Republic of Kosovo manages to keep its sovereignty, then the bridge that divides Mitrovica should be open because [in the current state] not only is Mitrovica closed, but all of Kosovo. What else is there to say about friends, about...

Anita Susuri: Were there any differences between the northern and the southern parts? Or for the people who lived there? Serbs? Albanian? There were also mixed...

³ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

⁴ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: No, the northern part was always different. The construction was better, Serbia invested more there, because there was always a fund set apart for Kosovo's underdeveloped places. But actually only the [northern] part above the *Iber Bridge* was developing. Back then, I didn't grasp why that was happening as a child. We saw the differences, but we couldn't grasp the extent to which Serbia had discriminating politics from early on. And the schools were newer, the university was in the north, the vocational technical school, the technical school, the elementary school. All the bigger buildings that began being constructed were on the northern part.

While on the other [southern] side of the *Iber Bridge*, there was only the blue building, as it was called before and it's still called like that, and there were no other taller buildings. So Serbia built all the important buildings... they had plans and unfortunately, we Albanians began to rise and see what we could do too late. They made their plans with the Academy, while our Academy woke up late, actually, it never fully woke up.

However, I believe the liberation of Kosovo is a big achievement. A miracle has happened with the last war, because Kosovo won its sovereignty based on the Constitution of 1974, but that should be developed. Not everything has ended, it's in development. Maybe my generation and yours should work on it so it can be finished for the next generations, because this history shouldn't be repeated. This should be a lesson for us.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned friends earlier, you wanted to talk about your friends, but at the same time I would like to talk about the gymnasium's part too, high school. Were there cultural activities, for example, that you went to, did you attend them? What was it like back then?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes, there were activities. I mentioned my father earlier who was my educator, my mother as well. There is something our father said to us children that I won't ever forget and I tell it to my children, and they tell it to their children, "The house is only for sleeping." And he advised us that there's no use in wasting time at home and he took us to all the activities. Fortunately, there were many activities. There was the city's literary group called Fan Noli. I was a member of that group, for some time in the leadership as well.

I participated in literary hours, it happened at a big hall near the Armata House. And then there was the Kej Lushta house, it was a palace of culture at that time, the corner of Lushta. It still functions, but there are only a few activities. And then, I was an activist at the Red Cross where we would compete a few times during the year. I was part of the school's choir, I was a member of the group of mandolins, I was part of the dance ensemble. Although I didn't manage to learn dancing that much, I was active there too. But, I mean to say, all these activities filled up my life and I saw life brightly and in motion.

My friends were very active as well, because some people from my friend group had an affinity for various [musical] instruments. Someone sang, someone danced. Everybody had their path and we joined our talents in order to be successful. I am very happy that I finished technical school with my peers and we're still remembered as the golden generation to this day, because over 90 percent of the students in my class have remarkable achievements in different fields.

And we meet every year in Mitrovica, except for last year because of the pandemic. We meet with our professors who are still alive, and unfortunately, there are fewer of them every year. However, we keep meeting, and evoking memories of the past. Because if we draw a parallel between the education system back then and now, there is really a great difference. [Back then] it was a big opportunity. When we finished one year of technical school, for us it was like one year of university.

We had to know about the subject in general only to get a passing grade and if we wanted to improve our grades, we had to know almost as much as the professor. We had to have discipline, tools, and work. I want to remember those precise technical drawings that we had, the designs of machine details, the practical work at the technical school. In the technical school's basement there were those, how to call them, laboratories and workshops in which we did manual work just like a worker would, to make an element which was an assignment of a specific subject.

Technical school, the machinery department, it was like a department for boys. And there were only three girls in that class, and in the other class there were four more. So, we are the first seven [girls] who finished the machinery department, because back then it was considered men's work.

Anita Susuri: How did you feel about being only a few girls? It means there were only seven of you in that department, what kind of feeling was that?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: It was a special feeling because at first they looked at us as girls, as a weaker gender and unable to get the job done. But, with our desire, affinity, and energy as young girls, we would do the work much better than the boys. But, our professors were young, all of them educated, meaning they had just finished university and got hired at the technical school. And our generations were the ones who began studying in Albanian, because years prior, studying was only done in Serbian, and we were lucky to have Albanian professors and they supported us, they encouraged and helped us.

I also have to mention that the practical work was mandatory during the summer at the Trepça mine. We spent 30 days at the Trepça mine. Three years earlier, of course until graduation, in order to complete the threshold for the following year, it was our duty to finish all those theoretical and practical parts. Going to the cavern, I can still remember the writing [on the wall] which read "Best of luck!" When we used to go in with those simple and dangerous elevators, we would look at the earth's layers as we were going down the levels. And then coming back out to light, we would nearly go blind

from the sun after that total darkness... participating in some machine rooms and workshops where we did the work, making bolts. Heavy work, always wearing safety gear, and our professors were there too, but also the leaders who were supervising us.

Anyway, we would work on an extensive material up to 50 pages with the one-month experience and then we defended it in order to pass to the next year. And this doesn't happen today because at the technical school, I had to carry with me for four years a board which was one meter and 80 centimeters and the ruler *Riga T*, as it was called, a T ruler, which we needed every day to make technical drawings in class. And then there were those circular rulers that we used, to draw different arches, work in color, work with precision. Those boards that had to be made in miniature and these... it's something that really is a wonder of its time, but I am sad to see the children who finish technical school today, actually students, don't have that satisfaction, that opportunity, that culture of work. And in many technical schools now, they only learn the theoretical part, not the practical. Simply, we had the opportunity back then.

The education [system] was on a decent level because Serbia couldn't stop education. Education was equal to all, while we were favored at the time. But unfortunately when it came to employment, Serbia took different steps. The people that Serbia favored were hired more, [people] whose parents were compliant, and participated in political institutions, in different socio-political leaderships. And in one way or another, we were discriminated against. However, we tried to break through, because Albanians supported persecuted families during every period. Even secretly. I mean, I managed to participate in all the activities and do all the work.

Anita Susuri: What did your father do?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: My father was a wall builder and he worked on many projects. Actually, he often would mention that the technical school was under his supervision while it was built. And I was fortunate to get an education in that building where I always felt like I saw my father's hands, his thoughts and his technique. But unfortunately, my father retired really early with a disability pension since he had a heart disease. He had a few heart attacks, he survived them but he was incapable of working. And that was a big disadvantage for us, because the income got lower, and instead of him taking care of us, we had to take care of... he had a little physical ability, but he simply couldn't stay long, to walk long. I mean, to carry the weight, we were forced to do these things ourselves. We took care of him and fortunately he lived [long], he lived through eight decades with my mother's care especially, but also all of [his] children's [care].

My mother was an autodidact. She knew three languages, Albanian, Turkish and Serbo-Croatian. She knew multiplying, adding, dividing, all of that. So, she led the family's economy. My mother and I also built bricks to build the house walls. Together with my mother and brothers we built the bricks, those wood shapes, we mixed the cement and the sand to build the house walls, because our house was

vertically built. In relation to the road, it has a height of about four meters and back then all the houses had a platform and so did ours later. Because it was a new house which was built later and it needed the walls. And we didn't have enough income to spend on that, because we were getting an education so all the children and my mother did manual labor to spare our father.

Meanwhile my father worked on the garden with the strength he had. It's interesting because we had a really beautiful garden and each of the children had one of the fruits, I mean the trees, apple, pear, quince, plums. Each of us had one. And then every morning, before going to school, we had a family obligation to wash our faces and teeth, and go out running at the stadium which is still there today, but I think a new school has been built now. There was a neighborhood stadium and we ran 500 meters. Every morning, all of my siblings. And then we got back, showered, ate breakfast and went to school.

Our school was near, we heard the bell ring at home, that was a privilege for us. But, there was a sort of education which I don't come across today. Every parent makes their children... when children stay on their phones all day, they don't have time to go out. That morning walk somehow stuck with me and I still do it today. These were some of my parents' duties and I think my parents did that to educate us as well, but maybe also because they had no other way to supervise us. Because raising eight children with little income, to manage them all day... then they found this way and sports are healthy, but it's also a time, a rhythm of life for which they further prepared us.

We went to school feeling fresh, we woke up about an hour and a half earlier. We didn't go there sleepy, unprepared, but prepared with everything. And then I want to remember my mother again, who would come to school during the long break and bring us those muffins she cooked by herself... at school so we wouldn't be hungry, because she would say, "An empty brain can't perform" (cries). I miss those days, but I also feel pain because my mother worked hard. Back then as children we had fun but we didn't understand the difficulties she went through. How long before us she had to wake up to prepare these things. However, we returned it with love, success, support, gratitude, and she was proud wherever she went with us.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: How did you feel that you had to go to high school in the northern part [of Mitrovica]? Was there any kind of prejudice or what was that time period like?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: There was no prejudice because all the people in Mitrovica reached a European culture in time. We lived in the same city, so equally. The discrimination lied in wealth. And there was no other prejudice, our clothes were almost the same. If there was something at the market, it was the same for everyone. In Mitrovica, there weren't many different things in the north and the

south. So, the clothes... but the uniform categorized us at school because I also want to mention the principal, Millan Perka who was a patriot, intellectual, a great professional who upheld discipline at a school with over four thousand students.

We couldn't go to class without wearing our uniforms. And our uniforms had a black apron with some buttons up to the waist and then on the bottom, no girl or boy could wear jeans in the technical school. Even the length of our skirts or dresses was decided and the apron and we also had shoes with the uniforms, although the shoes weren't obligatory to wear. But, it was some flat athletic shoes with ties and most of the girls had the same ones. I mean, back then, there was no makeup, hairstyles and stuff. We all looked simple because that's what the times were like, that's what the principal and the professors demanded. They didn't allow boys to have long hair, they didn't let us participate in the class without our tools, we couldn't skip classes and miss school. The parents were always notified.

There were some things, some rules. Maybe there were breaches back then too because a person can wear whatever they want, but at the time there was a discipline which we were familiar with and didn't know anything different, and we agreed with it. We have good memories of that time, because even our friends took care of us, I mean there was no bullying. We sometimes argued with [students from] other nationalities verbally, but rarely and we didn't fight because we were guided by the feeling that we would go back home and show we were careful, not that we did anything. Although there were moments like that.

We had Serbian classes close to ours and the only difference with us was that they came to class wearing makeup, Serb students. Whereas we looked simpler. That's the difference, otherwise, there was nothing else. I can say that even Serbian professors didn't differentiate between the students. Not that they didn't want to, but the school principal was Albanian, as I mentioned, and he had rules. There was no exception for any nationality with him, he was strict with all the professors, he was fair and took measures. That's why that [high school] passed like that.

Although when we went back home we had discussions with our parents, with our fathers, brothers, sisters, we talked about different things. About the lack of freedom, because the lack of freedom was present in every family. I don't know if there was an Albanian family during the time while I was growing up, or even earlier, that didn't face discrimination, and didn't have members who were persecuted or imprisoned. We simply had to stay silent in many cases, to keep the truth within, to be satisfied with one flag that we would draw inside the house, reading verses from forbidden writers and hiding the books.

I also remember a book by Enver Hoxha.⁵ Back then, we identified Albania with Enver Hoxha, which was a mistake, but we didn't know any better. When my brother would close the book and not allow us

⁵ Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

to read it, we were curious to know more about Enver Hoxha, and I didn't manage to learn much at the time because he would close the book out of fear that we would talk about it outside [the house] and my brother would be imprisoned.

Anita Susuri: How did you manage to get those books? Who brought them? How did they go around?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Well, communication was done in pairs of three. I also remember a cassette where I listened to a speech by Adem Demaçi,⁶ and at the time I had no idea who Adem Demaçi was, as a child. But my [maternal] uncle used to come and he was part of different activities with the groups of three, as they were known, a movement for liberating Kosovo. And he sent them secretly. And I still remember the words and voice of mister Demaçi, who has passed away now, a Kosovo hero. But, back then, I didn't know, I was inspired without knowing the history of that man who spent many years in prisons.

Later on, I had the luck of working together and living at the time of Demaçi, in a continuous effort for freedom and independence. So, there were movements, there were. We managed to have *Meshari*⁷ at home, but we got it from person to person. We managed to have different publishings and they were all very secretly acquired. I was also lucky to have my two older brothers who also had decent friends, inspiring and... but I should also mention the time when the '68 demonstrations⁸ broke out. My father took part in the demonstrations in Pristina.

And then there is the statue of Zahi Pajazit⁹ and the bus station was there. And my father wasn't one of the organizers, because I don't want to say he was something he was not. But, he was in Pristina, he happened to be there when the demonstration broke out and he joined it. He was beaten, but they didn't arrest him because he wasn't on their list of people [to arrest]. But, he took part in it and he couldn't go back to Mitrovica for one week. He stayed in Pristina at his sister's because everyone who took part in it was persecuted.

So, as he explained it back then and as I see it now through photos and documents and film recordings, I really feel as if I experienced these demonstrations when the buses were lit on fire, when

⁶ Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

⁷ *Meshari* (Albanian for "Missal") is the oldest published book in Albanian. The book was written by Gjon Buzuku, a Catholic cleric in 1555.

⁸ During October and November 1968, many demonstrations were organized by the Albanian population across Kosovo. The main demand was to recognize Kosovo's right to self-determination. The first and most massive demonstration was organized in Prizren on October 6, 1968. This demonstration ended in front of the League of Prizren, where for the first time the demand for the Kosovo Republic was publicly articulated.

⁹ Zahir Pajaziti (1962 – 1997) was an Albanian commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). He was the first Commander of the KLA, known as "First Gun of Freedom." He was killed on 31 January 1997 in a gunfight with Serbian forces.

the people were beaten, when they were wounded, and other things. And after that it was like there was freedom and we could breathe freely. And then I want to remember '74, when Kosovo's Constitution was approved as an equal, as a constituent part of the Federation [of Yugoslavia], and Kosovo has its basis in the Constitution of 1974.¹⁰ If it weren't for that Constitution, Kosovo would hardly... Although we had it hard, we gave a lot.

However, the basis which helped us internationally was the Constitution of '74. And I should also remember my professor Hajzer Hajzeri when he came to history class and explained the Constitution to us. That was the first time I heard the word Constitution and I understood what it was, with my memory as a student. But, he inspired us, he was a great patriot and told us that from today we are on our feet, we are stronger. So what happened next in my home?

Of course, my brothers were inspired by their professors at school and both of them got some colors before November 28, and I mentioned that our house was built on a platform, higher than the asphalt where the citizens walked by and our entrance had two columns, it was like an open part. And in one of the colors, 80 to 50 centimeters, they drew the [double-headed] eagle, like in the flag. I helped them, but I didn't understand what it was until it was finished because I became sleepy. I prepared the colors, I sent them to my brother, I helped him hold the chair, but I didn't see the finished drawing.

In the morning, early in the morning, the door knocked, and the Serbian police knocked the door down. I woke up and saw the cops' boots. They arrested my father and my brothers, they took them to the station for a few hours to interrogate them. While my father simply had nothing to do with the drawing that night, he did inspire [them] of course. And I won't forget that moment. But, it was important to us because hundreds of people from the neighborhood passed by while going to work and of course they were happy to see it [the drawing]. But of course there were also people who reported it. Because there was this sort of, if you didn't report something, you were also responsible. This applied to unstable people who didn't love their fatherland, didn't love their nation. But we experienced that too.

Every time I go to my childhood house, I feel like I see that drawing, that double-headed eagle with the red background and the drawing made by the golden hands of my brothers. And then, after that, we were constantly followed to by the Serbian and Albanian police. Because back then there were also Albanian inspectors, who later on were disqualified and left overlooked, although not sentenced, and they lived not only in my neighborhood but in the entire city.

Anita Susuri: What happened to the eagle drawing? Did they paint over it? Did they remove it?

¹⁰ The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution was the fourth and final constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It came into effect on 21 February 1974. Kosovo and Vojvodina, the two constituent provinces of Serbia, received substantially increased autonomy, including *de facto* veto power in the Serbian parliament.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: The eagle, they didn't paint over it, but they made my brothers scrape that part and create a new darker layer because the column was [painted in] white. After my brothers were released, they made them do it. The eagle was there during the entire time my brothers were locked up. This, this is a memory we discuss every time we meet, because now we all live far from each-other, life has separated us. And when we meet during the summer, we often discuss and experience these emotions like we used to.

Anita Susuri: You were in high school in '74? Right?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And then you continued [your education]?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: And then, I, there were two paths. I was at an age when I began loving two things, two different paths. Education, but also Agim (laughs). And it happened that they were difficult times and I couldn't do both at once because Agim lived in Gjakova. While I had to get an education in Pristina. And I decided to get married and go to Gjakova under the condition that I would still get an education in language and literature. Language and literature, [literary] creations were my desire, not my profession. But, I made it my profession because I tried to connect my two loves so I wouldn't hinder myself, since it was possible to take two paths at once.

The circumstances were of that nature, for a girl in love to either get married or get an education (laughs). I couldn't give up. And fortunately at the time in Gjakova, I finished the Higher Pedagogical School of Language and Literature and then moved on to faculty and I got the title of...

Anita Susuri: How did you meet your husband?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: I'll be honest with you, my husband's [maternal] uncle lived near my house, we were neighbors. We had really good relations with them, and of course he would come to visit every summer. I knew him for many years, I didn't even think that in the future, how to put it, he would become my husband and we would be together (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Together in life's journey.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Together in life's journey, but that was my fate.

Anita Susuri: Did you travel within Kosovo, for example, did you visit the other places? Because, for example, Mitrovica was more developed as a city, but Gjakova, it had its development but it was, I mean, less developed than Mitrovica as a city. How did you see that?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes, when I got married in Gjakova, first of all I had issues with two different cultures. I was brought up in a different spirit, in a very contemporary spirit in which women had advantages, like we have achieved now in different fields. Whereas in Gjakova, most women took care of the family. They did handcrafts, they didn't go out much, they were more limited in that sense. We actually joke a lot, saying you have to ask for the entire neighborhood's permission and wait for a decision in order to go somewhere. But I had the luck of joining a contemporary family, typical Albanian, not to say "typical from Gjakova" and to be confined, I always had an advantage.

Agim's family traveled to Mitrovica to visit his [maternal] uncle, because Agim's uncle participated in the National Liberation War and he remained in Mitrovica as an eminent figure, and they traveled often because they had a close relative there. This traveling had its effect, but also Agim's and his brothers' education made it easier for me in that family but also in the city. Because when I went out wearing the same kind of clothes that I did in Mitrovica, in Gjakova the outfits had to be less exposed. In the evening, men went out more, women did less often.

I was young because I got married young and I immediately started creating a family. I gave birth to my first, and my second child. And I went out on the *korzo* every night. I had all the elements that should belong to a person. And then I became employed immediately even though I was still in school, I got hired. It was a kind of independence. Because if you have nowhere to go in the morning, you're not independent enough to go out. And I had a task, and I brought income. Of course I used that to supply the home, to buy things, clothes. We traveled a lot.

I had the fate of moving, within Kosovo anyway. I also feel like I owe it to say that my childhood is characterized by growing up equally in Mitrovica and Pristina. Even so, when I see Pristina's square, it looked better back then than it does now. Now it looks ugly. It was cleaner, better taken care of. I have memories of a children's playground where the square is now. Where the cars move around, where it's unclean, where there's a lot of beggars, with kiosks, with traffickers, with whatever else. Maybe moving as a child helped me when I moved to Gjakova as well.

I loved Prizren and I still do today, it's a place that fills you with inspiration. I got a lot of different clothes in Prizren, there was a market which was extremely robust. And we also went to Peja often, for the beautiful climate as well, Peja's Rugova, but also the city of Peja. And then Peja had, it was known for its modern shoe markets, for good people, soft people, intellectuals. So, I found something in every city.

And then, I traveled across former Yugoslavia, because the circumstances were of that nature, there were no borders. If a person had income, they could travel, I visited Belgrade and Zagreb back then. We spent [summer] holidays in Ulqin, so in Montenegro, Ulqin was also [in] a different country. I went to Bosnia, I traveled a lot before but also after the war, because creatives somehow love traveling. And

I see it like this, if I visit a city, I get inspired for a long time, not only to write but also to live. Yes, I did travel.

I also want to mention something else, I was the first woman to wear jeans in Gjakova. And maybe many people had their hands over their mouths, but I had my family's support (smiles). And then I had a friend in Skopje, we didn't have phones to take pictures at the *korzo* in the evening but we would talk and tell each-other what we wore in the evening at *korzo*. Although I would always dress simply, but the simplicity is more beautiful than anything. And in the morning I would get comments from my friend in Skopje, who would say, "You shined at the *korzo* last night," "No *more*¹¹ I was inspired because I was with my husband and children," because I had my children with me everywhere I went. I never went to places where adults went and children didn't have the chance to have a good time. But, I stopped my own entertainment so I could live those beautiful moments together, that joy, those experiences with my children.

Behind the Palace of Culture there was a very beautiful park for which there are only photos because [it's] the same as Gjakova which has a park today and it's similar to Pristina's square. Although a new park is being built, I am talking about the old one. It had beautiful oases, decorative trees, and multi-colored flowers. And I would take my children under those trees, we would get a blanket and sit there and talk with them because Mitrovica was a little far and I couldn't go every day and I would tell my children, "We're going on a walk," which was 200-300 meters away from our house. But we experienced it as a beautiful walk, two-three beautiful hours. There was a kind of ice cream and it was a tradition in Gjakova to get one at Kurtishi family's small kiosk, [they had it for] almost eight generations, I mean eight decades and that was a simple characteristic [of Gjakova]. Didn't cost much, but it was a pleasure of the moment. This was what we did.

I was a good swimmer because as I mentioned we grew up in a city with a river and when your parents support you, you have the possibility to learn swimming. And when we went to swim at *Drini* [river] with my husband, I only saw men. But, I was accompanied by my husband. We would swim at *Drini's* [river] mouth and it was joyful. We would spend the entire day [there]. We would ride bikes, I would ride bikes for a long time. Even now, but my age and weight hinder me. So, I got a lot of work done with my bike, things that weren't acceptable for women at the time, but I got to experience them.

And what happened in Gjakova? In a span of ten years, a miracle happened. Women started going out at large, a beautiful movement began, the city changed, the culture changed. I mean Gjakova has good traditions which they preserve today, but a miracle happened for women. At that point I was breathing freely and I felt equal and it wasn't different from Mitrovica or Pristina, but it was a beautiful life where women undertook many initiative, many activities. They also got their driver's licenses, they would go on holidays often, women would swim at the *Drini*, there were more women than men. So, a very beautiful change happened. Of course economic development brought this.

¹¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

Anita Susuri: In what year did you get married?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: '75.

Anita Susuri: So in '75 in Gjakova, maybe there were women with veils, did they go out like that?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: I didn't necessarily see covered women, because they got rid of the veil earlier in Gjakova. They wore scarves but not because of religiously fanatic traditions. But, the younger ones weren't covered at that time. But, going out was somehow limited. And after that, it changed because women in Gjakova worked a lot. Even the ones who stayed at home worked hand crafts. But many women got employed in those factories in Gjakova, and the development grew.

For example, my mother-in-law was born in 1916 and my mother-in-law was a contemporary woman. She wore modern clothes, she went to work, she led a unit of workers, she had income, she traveled, she went on holidays, we went out in the evening. As I said, we visited other cities too. And I remember going to Prizren at the Stone Bridge with my mother-in-law (smiles), because she really liked to go there and take photos.

Back then we rarely took photos with those old cameras and what I remember... I remember the Stone Bridge with my mother-in-law. I want to say that my mother-in-law was an academic although an autodidact. She knew history and geography really well. She told me a lot about Gjakova, about the main figures. And then about those, I could say, small mistakes I made because I didn't know Gjakova's customs. She always assured me, "She is from Mitrovica and doesn't need to, she doesn't know them," and she always sat close to me, she was like a guardian angel to me. And that's how it was.

And then, Agim always was an understanding man, contemporary. I had a good time with his family. I didn't have any problems and I wasn't prevented from doing things. I traveled to Mitrovica, I traveled to different meetings, I was active in a lot of places. But the only thing I regret is that I couldn't publish books until the end of the war, because I was somehow still a target of the authority as Halim Mezini's daughter, even after getting married. And I somehow attempted to break through as much as I could without trying to go on the [public] scene.

But, I wasn't late, I don't think I was late. I wrote many poems, I raised my children with poetry, because if I ever got upset over a small mistake or the behavior of my children, I didn't punish them. I wrote some verses, I taught it to them and through those verses, they understood I was upset. And I kept and published these poems in my first book *Sytë e Pranverës* [Spring's Eyes], and *Kur jeta duhej jetuar* [When life had to be lived], my second. I included the poems I wrote years before in both books. And then moving on to the movement, activities, I have a lot to say. My life really was filled with

activities and I often begin and I don't know how to continue, because in every moment, in every season of life, I have something.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: When did you get employed? When did you begin, I mean, go on that path?

Mevlyde Meziñi Saraçi: Yes, I got employed right after getting married, because I got hired with my Technical High School diploma. And it was easier for me [to work] at an organization, because I wasn't persecuted. Although I was persecuted even [while working] there, because I was a destabilizing factor. But, I gained my independence immediately, because I was also a Trepça scholarship receiver. Back then we had advantages in education, because Trepça gave scholarships to all of us in the technical department, and every student that managed to successfully finish the year, continued.

Since I was seeking employment as a Trepça scholarship receiver, Trepça gave me the opportunity to work at their department in Gjakova. Back then it was the Fundolija factory. And then I managed to get employed as a language professor a little before the war because it was difficult. It was difficult to break through in education, because the education workers were analyzed under a different lens from that time's system. However, I got to experience the role of a professor, to work at the Gjergj Fishta school in Bishtazhin, to teach the students although from there, I ended up on a different path. Due to my activity, later on I was also imprisoned.

But I will talk about the organization where I worked. I was pregnant in '81. I was four months pregnant with my daughter, her name is Heroina. And the big demonstration¹² took place and at the time I helped with sheltering and feeding the demonstrators, and as soon as they left... my mother-in-law said, "Please Mevlyde, don't go to work on Monday because they have identified you, they reported you. You are pregnant now, your daughter is in the picture too, you have two other small children and I am old, what would I do," I said, "I will go out even if I don't go to work."

It was my fate, that day there was a gathering of the workers and a person from the committee, an Albanian, came with the newspaper *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo], in which Albania, the system of that time, had denounced the '81 demonstrations. And they told me, "You can read it," because of my affinities and my path, I said, "I can't read it because I have a sore throat," I refused. How could I read that text against the protestors?

¹² On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

And then one of the organizers of that meeting, so the employer said, “Well then, you have beautiful technical handwriting and you will record the meeting minutes,” I said, “I will not because I am pregnant and I don’t want to take the responsibility and mentally tire myself, I need calmness. I am here.” And they understood. And then there was a discussion and the workers started feeling partially inspired, some were pro the demonstrations, some were against, and I started speaking without thinking twice.

I forgot about myself because I always suffered so why would I spare myself that day. I stood up and said, “How are you not embarrassed, you speak Albanian and ask to denounce the demonstrations. You sir with the curly hair, can you blame us? No. They are right, they are all right. We should support them.” He stood up and got furious, he said, “What is your name ma’am?” I said, “Mevlyde Saraçi,” he asked, “Where do you live?” I said, “The same place I’ve always lived,” he said, “Give me your address,” I said, “Yes. Sadik Staliveci 122,” he said, “Give me your phone number too,” I said, “Here you go.” “Now,” he said, “stay at home, we will come get you in the afternoon, you will pay.”

Trust me, only a few minutes passed and the meeting ended. I went to my office, I was a senior referent for hygienic-technical protection, and I calmed down, I didn’t think about it further. I only thought about how my life would be in prison, how I would give birth to my child. At the time I didn’t know if the baby would be a girl or a boy, because back then we wouldn’t analyze the future of the baby. But, I was thinking about how I would protect myself, because I took on the responsibility anyway.

The work shift ended, and I went home. As soon as I went home, my mother-in-law said, “Why *moj*?”¹³ She heard about it, and what happened had spread around the whole city. After a while Agim came back from work too and said, “They told me about this...” I said, “They didn’t tell you all of it, but don’t worry. I will carry my child in prison and I will give birth in prison, the baby will be born. You take care of them. It’s two of you, one can take care of Diamand, and the other for Rrezarta, I will take care of the child that is in my womb. Even if they kill me, the baby will be born.”

But they knew each-other in Gjakova and of course there were humane people, patriots who even at the time worked at the [Police] Secretariat. When they made the decision to come to my house and arrest me, one of the leaders reacted. He said, “How are you not ashamed to arrest a pregnant woman when all the workers were against it, but you only want to arrest her. What did she say? That they [demonstrators] were right, what else?” [They replied] “Yes, but this is the third time she has shown interest in national causes, she did something else too.” And I waited and waited, they took me in for an informative talk only and I avoided prison that time. Although I was always persecuted.

And after that, there was ‘89 and the foundation of the nationwide movement, the Democratic League of Kosovo, where I registered as one of the first members. And then there was March 7, a decisive day when I continued, I am saying I continued an activity I had started earlier as a child but I started an

¹³ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

activity in a different form as a woman, as a mother, as a patriot, as a creative, with the foundation of the Women's Forum of the Democratic League of Kosovo. I am one of the 15 women who took it upon ourselves to lead the department in Gjakova and that day cost me because I was interrogated at the organization immediately the next day.

Anita Susuri: What were these informative talks like? How did they develop?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Informative talks were talks with mental weight, they offered you to collaborate with Serbia and give up on national interests, they offered you job positions, money, to move cities, to live somewhere else only so that... but, I didn't accept because I chose a different way of life. I had my hometown and the city where I lived in Gjakova. I had my house, my husband, my children and I didn't need more because I generated enough income to live comfortably with the work I did. Not some type of luxury, but we lived a normal life. Because something was born in me ever since I was a child and that grew, that burning desire for freedom, it couldn't be extinguished by any amount of money or luxury which they offered to me.

There were a lot of lies that a certain friend or a neighbor told them about what I did. "This person told us you bought a gun, this neighbor told us that you did this." So they would cut off our contacts with even our neighbors because they had the home addresses, but it wasn't true, our neighbors didn't do any of that, I was sure, and that's why I didn't believe them. But under those circumstances, it was enough that they kept us there for hours and that was the most tiring part. Because sometimes the physical part doesn't hurt as much as the spiritual and mental part. However, that passed too.

I continued my activity. So March 7 happened, the foundation day of the Forum. March 8 was the day when we thought of having a moment of silence to honor the boys killed in the military [service] which were being brought in coffins. And I hand wrote something quickly at the office and I called my closest friends and pleaded to them, I said, "I will stand up, and ask the people in the room to gather, all the women of the organization," because I received a duty from the Women's Forum once it was founded, "and we will have one moment of silence and discuss about what demands we will ask to the federation [of Yugoslavia] so they stop the crime against our Albanian boys," who were being killed for no reason, and other demands.

But, one of my friends accepted, "Alright, write something for me because I won't remember, and I will speak," [I said] "Very well." I went to the director, Bajram Morina, and told him, "Please director, allow me to use the conference room so I can gather a few women," there weren't many women in the organization, around 30-40, "and discuss." He started questioning me more than a cop and he connected the matter to the miners, and to different things which really made no sense. And I said, "Alright, no problem."

I met my friends and told them, “Look, at 11 AM at the big restaurant,” where 500-600 people would eat, “we will all sit at one side and I will start the meeting for one moment of silence, my friend will read that letter with the demands and we will applaud, we will leave the food, we will take it but we will leave it on the tray, we will boycott breakfast. And then we will return to our offices.” But, when we went there, the hall was full of people, there were many Serbs who are now on criminal lists. They were leaders at that time, especially the leaders of the *Metaliku* organization.

The moment that I stood up, we all took our food and left it on the table, and all of us stood up. I said, “Please stand up for a moment of silence in honor of our sons who are coming back in coffins and glory.” My friend didn’t take the letter to read it, because her brother was one of the leaders, he probably signaled her, and she put the letter in front of me. So I read it myself, no big deal! I was prepared for all the challenges. I started reading at that moment, I saw about 10-15 Albanian men who solidarized with us. While I saw Serbs who were throwing their food trays and they started insulting Albanian mothers, me and all my friends who were there. I thought everything ended there.

I went to my office, all of us did. And then my friend cried, she said, “I didn’t have the courage,” she didn’t tell me the truth, but I got it. She really wanted to, but she didn’t have the courage. These two don’t always match. Not much time passed, the centralist called me, Cylja Shehu, a great patriot who is still alive today and he said, “Mrs. Mevlyde, they are calling you but I will keep the line open and I will listen to the whole conversation on the phone. And then I will let all the other Democratic League circles know in case something happens to you, at least they will know why.”

The director called me and Cylja listened in. He told me, “You did this, they complained, Jovica and the others,” Serbian names, “Yes,” I said, “why should I care? I didn’t do anything to anybody. We boycotted the food that we paid for ourselves, we used our break time. You didn’t allow me the room so we could have this meeting in isolation. You gave this opportunity to me yourself.” So he called me to his office, and he made me go. I had to because he was my director and of course I had to. We had a bad fight in there, he kept me there for so long and gave me all sorts of [negative] qualifications. He told me I was against the state of Yugoslavia, that I was demolishing Yugoslavia, that Yugoslavia was placed on my table.

I said, “Sir, to each their own, this is who I am. They will do nothing more than kill me, what else?” I said, “My life doesn’t end here, I have my children at home and my life will go on.” And then, he kept me there for so long and the work shift was continuing. All my friends were organized by Mrs. Hajrie Shedati, who is still alive today, a hard working woman, an honest woman, a great patriot. She organized the women at the bus stop, because our organization was about two kilometers away from the city and she didn’t let the women go home until I left my meeting with the organization director.

I told the director, “You don’t have the right to keep me here after the work shift ends, because at that point you’re discriminating against me. You can question me during the work shift, but now the shift

ends,” and I demonstratively stood up and shut the door when I left. When I left, I was released of all the mental weight when I saw all the women applauding me, supporting me, hugging me, and I went home. When I went home, I told Agim, “Things are becoming more difficult, but I don’t plan on stopping. I don’t plan to, I will keep going. Prepare. You had the fate of having a wife who could end up in prison at any moment,” he said, “I will support you with all I can, my support will be here until the end. What will happen is not up to me, but don’t worry about the family, keep going! Keep going in your path, it’s our path.”

But, besides me, Agim worked ten times more than I did. Not only supporting me, but he was one of the biggest activists, in the local community, the humanitarian association, the city and everywhere. And I don’t know what to say because the days became more difficult at the time. My infamous director fired me from my job. He declared me as a technological surplus. The independent union, the head of the union changed and I didn’t go home, I forcibly stayed in the office, with no payment, to lead the union and organize different protests. There was a big protest in Gjakova where 60 thousand people protested in front of the Sports Hall Shani Nushi.

Anita Susuri: In what year? ‘90?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: ‘90, yes. And they said, “We are not washing machines, we are mothers, the enemy should get lost.” I remember that a Gjakova leader, he was a patriot too, he was the director of KBI Ereniku and he got close to me and grabbed my elbow {grabs her elbow} he said, “Please don’t give any names, insult all you want, but names...” He helped me. I didn’t mention them although I didn’t know the names of the communist in the federation’s leadership, but all the leaders... and I spoke so much without thinking what would happen next. Not much time passed and the armored vehicle came to suppress the protest, and we continued in the city from one part to the other. They followed us.

That is known as one of the biggest protests in Gjakova, where all the workers and citizens of Gjakova arose. And there I spent about seven-eight hours in the protests with everyone, with all the others, not alone. And we reached a part of the bridge, so the bridge near the museum which takes you to the Old *Çarshia*,¹⁴ I don’t even know how I escaped there. I jumped over the bridge wall, I can’t believe it when I see it now. I jumped to escape because I was close to being arrested but I escaped. From there, I went around the river, through people’s house yards and I ended up at the children’s daycare. Because I went to get my children from daycare. We planned when to get them with my husband.

As soon as I arrived at the daycare, they threw a tear gas bomb and in the moment I lost direction. A fellow citizen had come to pick his daughter up at the same daycare. At that point, when he saw what happened, he quickly got me into his car. He told me, “Get in the car while it’s foggy so they don’t see where you’re going.” We went to the daycare. He got both of my children and brought us to our house

¹⁴ Literally a small market, an old part of Gjakova.

and told me, “Don’t tell anyone who brought you.” I escaped that day as well. This was another moment, I’m fortunate that I escaped.

But there was another protest at the organization the next day. We stopped production for seven days. Again, a Head of the Union of one of the departments declared me as being against Yugoslavia. He pretends to be a patriot to this day. I don’t even want to smear my mouth and mention his name, let him live in his shame. And he made the union workers remove me from the office. At that point, I was stuck at home. But I wasn’t because I continued my activity and I had more time for activities in the field.

We set up the Women Forum’s sub departments in all the villages of Gjakova, we held weekly meetings in Pristina at the central leadership, and I took part in the electoral assembly. I was chosen as a member of the Women’s Forum leadership on a state level, I became a member of the Commission for Children’s Rights on a central level. In Gjakova, a member of the [Women’s Forum] department leadership. And then I was chosen as Head of the Municipal Council for Solidarity. And then with the founding of the Nënë Tereza department in Gjakova, I founded the first local community. Meetings, activities, aids, movements, letters, statements, interviews. But, I had my family’s support everywhere and so I kept going without sparing myself. With no personal income, no employment contract, nothing.

We were leading the parallel bodies of the municipality on a national level, and I asked to be employed in education. Since I had graduated, I got hired at the Gjergj Fishta school. I went through many difficulties. With amazing coworkers, amazing students, smart and skilled girls, and those well-behaved boys. Everything was beautiful, a good collective, but it was hard to travel every day. I had to travel seven kilometers and pass seven blocks. And I did it. But in the school yard there was the Agricultural Cooperative. Usually Serbia installed these segments before but we didn’t know.

In every school yard in the villages there was an Agricultural Cooperative, and Post [office], and there were always Serbian spies, of all nationalities, but spies who spied on specific people. And I was persecuted the whole time. One day while I was teaching a class, the school principal knocked on the door and said, “Teacher, could you please come to my office? At least let them arrest you at the office and not in front of the students, since the police are asking for you at the door,” I said, “No, principal, please close the door. I am in charge of the class while teaching. They don’t have the right even according to Serbia laws,” at that time, “nobody can’t enter the class. Class begins and the professor has the duty of explaining the subject and you don’t have the right,” he said, “They might be terrified,” I said, “Let them be terrified because my children are terrified every day. Let them understand reality as well.”

He didn’t have bad intentions, but I didn’t want to, because I was always stubborn. It was hard for someone to bend my decisions and it never served me good. But my decisions were right over 90

percent of the time. And the Serbian police waited until class finished. As soon as I got out, they took me in for questioning and sent me to the Cooperative, and they said, "Either quit this job or we will arrest you," I said, "No, I have a work contract and I don't want to quit my job. If you arrest me, you need to have a reason, I will keep filing complaints." And of course that passed too because they could tell I wasn't an easy bone to crack.

But my job had a contract. Back then, the Republic of Kosovo and its parallel institutions couldn't make permanent decisions with contracts. What happened? Before being imprisoned, when I applied [again] for the following year, I wasn't accepted. Not because the school didn't want to, but because they were forced by the leading institutions so I wouldn't be there because I was a source of encouragement. I want to mention a case in school. We had a class and I wrote, back then the Nationwide Movement was current and on the blackboard, I wrote "Ibrahim Rugova¹⁵ is president of the Republic of Kosovo." All the students wrote it too. They identified the subject, the predicate, and analyzed the sentence beautifully. The purpose wasn't only the grammar of the sentence, but it was for the children to gain inspiration because children oftentimes have an impact on their families.

But, one of the seventh grade students closed her notebook, put the pen away, lowered her head and started crying. And I got close to her and said, "My dear, why aren't you writing? Do you have a pen?" She said, "Yes, I do," I asked, "Well then, why?" She said, "I don't have the courage because Milutin Panšević comes to my father every day." Milutin Panšević was one a criminal of his own kind. He lived in my neighborhood and he committed many crimes in Gjakova and its district. And this girl understood because she probably heard my name mentioned in their house and she said, "He checks my notebooks, and then you will be arrested." I said, "Feel free to write it and when Milutin comes and reads it, tell him you're not to blame because your teacher made you." She didn't want to. She said, "No, I don't want to feel guilty," it was the seventh grade but she was prepared for life, she was a smart girl, an excellent student.

I will draw a parallel here, so, the parent was a collaborator, but the child refused to cooperate. Why? Because she didn't want to become part of the discrimination against me or my imprisonment through that sentence [in her notebook]. And I understood that every day was becoming more difficult. One day, I took *Meshari* with me to teach the students about it. I sat on the bus and about 3 kilometers further, the Serbian police got on the bus. What would I do? As soon as I got on the bus, *Meshari* was in my bag, what would I do? The police came. And the first thing they did was check bags. I took *Meshari* out and left it on the seat, and I sat on the seat across from it, it was fortunately empty. And the police didn't deal with the empty seat, *Meshari* stood there with pride (laughs). I sat and secretly watched it, and the police emptied my bag. They threw all the documents I had in the bag on the ground. I picked them back up and when I got off the bus at the school, I put *Meshari* in my bag. I taught my students about it, I told them.

¹⁵ Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

And then, a coworker of mine who was an art professor, I asked him to put it in his jetted pocket and bring it to my house, because it was impossible to not be frisked in both ways. They were difficult times, a difficult journey, a difficult experience, but I still have the satisfaction and pride of the time while I was working. Even now, when I get comments on social media from my former students who have achieved a lot in life, they have progressed. There's some of them who even come and visit me, some of them write me messages, and some found me after a long time. They're proud... with their comments. I feel like a queen, because they really were like that.

I don't know which municipality had a school that was better prepared than Gjergj Fishta [school]. I also had my colleague, Gaspër Karaçi, he's a martyr and he was one of the main figures in school, he was disciplined...

Anita Susuri: Yes, you were telling us about your students who feel proud of you...

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes, the students feel very proud and they even express it through visits, the comments on social media, phone calls, physical meetings, and I consider this a bright part of my life, because I managed to leave a footprint on a very important time of their development, not only formal education, but also informal education and patriotism. Therefore, this is a way in which not only me, but every professor should feel proud for leaving footprints during that time. Because it really was a difficult time and I was young and had a family, and I also wanted to sleep on silk but I couldn't. If another person didn't have food, how could my children and I be full? No, I couldn't.

I took my children's clothes and gave them away to other children their age. And these are really good things and what you are doing is a really humane mission, because there are things I have never mentioned in my life. They happened, they passed and I didn't have the opportunity, because life is so dynamic that people don't have the time to listen. It's a hectic time and everyone is fighting for existence. But, there was a war then, but there was more solidarity. At that point, as an educator and a creative, I had two options, two open doors where I could work. At that point I also knew all the residences in Gjakova from within. I knew what each family needed. Because the Women's Forum was very active in Gjakova.

I traveled once a week and I brought a lot of materials, testimonies, statements, photographs. But, we also moved around in Gjakova, we helped many families, we even organized in hilly terrains. We called the women who set aside their pickled vegetables [preparations] and their husbands helped them so they could come to the meetings, because each of them wanted to contribute something. That's why the Women's Forum is an organization that needs to be appreciated, a history which will never be erased, which gave contribution not only as women, but also political, humane, patriotic and there were great sacrifices.

The Women's Forum had the presence of women from all classes, from homemakers to PhD holders, but we were all equal, we all contributed something. There was no categorization there, "I am a professor and I won't go," but we went to the furthest points, we paid for all of it ourselves. How could I say that I was jobless and couldn't pay? I had family members abroad who were persecuted in '94, some of them in '92, and they had to flee the country. They couldn't directly contribute in Kosovo, they sent me help so I could survive, to be proud, and to have food for my family and so that I could travel for my activities.

And this was a positive side, I want to thank everyone and especially my sisters Fatmire and Vjollca, who gave so much for me. Who also shared their food together with their families, because it wasn't easy at the time for them as refugees to split half of their earnings so me and my family of seven could survive. Because I had five grown children who I had to provide for, clothes, food, everything. But, it was a pride. I could say about Gjakova, Gjakova as a municipality showed good solidarity, but it was a bit more prepared when it came to food. Because people from Gjakova are traditionally known as frugal, they save, but not to the point where they lack things. But they know how to manage finances even to this day, they're different from other municipalities. They are very frugal, but they always have everything.

The first moment when I was getting ready to visit Drenica, in Drenica, life had started becoming more difficult much earlier in the '90s and we organized as the Women's Forum to gather help and we sent them nightgowns for the birth hospital, the birth center in Skenderaj. We got the materials, the help from a store, while tailors made them [nightgowns] free of charge. So, it was volunteer work. And we, the women, went there by ourselves and visited the hospital and families and we sent them help by bus, we loaded both sides of the bus storage with big packages and every family took part in it.

We even organized an activity at the school, and the children ripped the middle pages of their notebook out and when they couldn't do more, they put two or three spoons worth of detergent and they brought them with love, for Drenica. Or bags, clothes which were always new, clean and ironed. We sent all of this, various medications as well, for the people of Drenica. And then we visited Adem Jashari's¹⁶ family after the first attack, we went to their family. Because the Women's Forum in collaboration with Seknderaj, with the Women's Forum [office in Skenderaj] led by Hajnishahe Shala-Halimi, who has passed away, a very hard working woman, with Shukrie, Çezibane and many other activists, I'm mentioning them so I'm not in their debt, but they're honored, even the ones who are alive and we always remember the ones who aren't.

But, the Women's Forum was one single body, there was no difference in which municipality we were in. When it was time to move, we went to where there was a need and we did statistics. We went to

¹⁶ Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as "legendary commander," was a founder of the KLA, celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty - half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

whatever municipality was more at risk, and we calculated which one had the capacity to help. But this wasn't done only by women, because the men supported us too. Not only the men of our families but also our colleagues at the Democratic League party. They were very coherent, very responsible. They accompanied us in every activity, because we were persecuted in every step we took.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know about the visit you mentioned, to see the Jashari family...

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What was that day like and what kind of family were they? How did you feel in their presence?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: It was a very important moment. The first time we went, we didn't go inside, while the second time when we sent help, we went to visit the family. Adem Jashari and Hamëz¹⁷ were mobilized in military activities and we didn't get to meet them. We met *bac*¹⁸ Hamëz and Mrs. Zahide. And nowadays I go and look at that living room we went to, a big living room with those traditional engravings. We, together with... we went there from Gjakova with the Women's Forum, while in Drenica we were joined by the members of the Democratic League's leadership and the Women's Forum. We were about 12-13 people. They welcomed us exceptionally well, they were glad.

Bac Shaban said, "You came from Gjakova? It's impossible," [We replied] "Yes, we came to visit you, to support you." At the time, they didn't need [material] help, they only needed moral support. We didn't send help there, but we only went to support them and to guarantee them that we were on the right path, and that we would work no matter the sacrifices. I feel like I am there now, when *bac* Shaban said, "Get up *fisnike*,"¹⁹ he said, "make lunch because the women activists of Gjakova have come to visit us," and she was about to prepare something with the other women. At that moment, we told them that we couldn't stay long because we had to go back to Gjakova while it was light, "If it becomes dark, they will vanish us," and we told her not to prepare anything.

But, I remember like it was today when one of the women who aren't among the living anymore, they're national martyrs, brought a tray with juice and cold water and she gave a toast. We had a discussion and mister Shaban said, "Freedom is not far away, just don't give up." Then I saw the children, they all went into the *oda*²⁰ because it was a great honor for them that we were there and the

¹⁷ Brother of Adem Jashari, also killed in the attack of March 1998.

¹⁸ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

¹⁹ Literally, *fisnik* translates as noble. In this context when the addressee is a woman, it takes the meaning of lady of the house.

²⁰ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

discussions were interesting. We saw those beautiful girls and boys, those shiny eyes. It's a moment one can only experience once, but unfortunately I would want to experience it again, to see them after the war too (cries).

We concluded our conversation, we told *bac* Shaban and Mrs. Zahide but also the women who hugged us tight, they wished us a safe trip, and we went to Uçë from there. In Uçë there were education workers killed while protecting the school Tre dëshmorët e Uçës [Alb.: Uçë's three martyrs], so we went there, and from Uçë we went to wait for the bus to Gjakova. It was an exceptional day in Uçë as well, there were about thousands of visitors at the event where they hosted guests who wanted to express condolences in a field. They served us coffee there and the delegation with whom we went there, had respect for me. I wasn't the oldest there, but I don't even know, they always honored me and they told me to say something in Uçë.

At the moment I saw the crowd of people from all over Kosovo in an occupied state, as if we were from Serbia, I couldn't speak, I couldn't, it shut, my words stopped, my throat shut, I couldn't and I almost fainted. At that moment, a person who was a coworker of my husband in Gjakova in the organization, rushed over, he was from Istog and I didn't know. He rushed over and brought me a glass of water and woke me up, and I couldn't speak. I just know I cried a lot, because that visit was important to me, the people's moral support, because people were getting killed and the lines of people weren't stopping and there was nobody that could stop freedom.

How did we go back to Gjakova? Only the people who were with me could explain. Through torture, the police stopped us at many points along the way. We arrived in Gjakova around 10:00 PM. But, that didn't stop us...

Anita Susuri: You were organized with buses?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: No, no...

Anita Susuri: On your own.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: We didn't dare to organize at the time, we only to got together with fellow citizens. But it was very difficult, because we were already targeted. The world already knew us. They got to know us, I mean, the world in the sense of persecuting us, we were eminent names but we survived, because we had nothing on us. We left the aids, we finished giving them, and on our way there we didn't deal with it but the bus driver and his helper did, it was like they weren't ours.

But, Drenica had exceptional collaboration with Gjakova, for whatever was needed, we were together. But not only Drenica, but the Democratic League had extraordinary reach. It worked both as a party and as a state. Regarding the continuation of the Women's Forum, I don't know what to say first, there

was so much work and activities that each of us who participated as members and other things, they all have something they could write and unfortunately these things weren't recorded. Because these things should've been part of history for the newer generations. Let's not forget about our difficult but glorious past, but be ready for the future without giving up.

But, of course, we are proud of our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, because all of us had spiritual and family ties with somebody. It was the time when schools in Albanian were closed. Three or four Serbs with dozens of Serbian professors in classes, while our children couldn't attend school. Edi Shukriu,²¹ Head of the Women's Forum gathered us in a big meeting at Landovica village, and the sub department of the Women's Forum in Landovica together with the leadership of the Women's Forum in Prizren had staged a pretend marriage of a girl so that we could get there.

At the entrance of the village, at the mosque, there was a police checkpoint, "Where are you going?" "A girl is getting married, we're going there," so we got away with it. An extraordinary meeting took place, a mobilization of women to act, because the schools had closed and the children were stuck at home, what could we do? We decided to have two classes a day. We were mobilized there to take it upon ourselves, the ones of us who were qualified as educators, but also our other colleagues who were fired from their jobs, from schools. That important meeting ended, we got our duties, we returned, and trust me, anybody could take pride that it was state-organized, but the foundation of the home-school²² institution was done by the Women's Forum of the Democratic League of Kosovo, a decision which was made in Landovica village. I don't remember the date at the moment, but I have it written somewhere.

And then we started gathering the children in different places where there was space, as many neighborhood children as we could, and then the main organizing continued on a state-level, the parallel state, and then the other organizations of home-schools with state segments happened. It's worth mentioning because it was the women's responsibility, the activists weren't paid, the teachers weren't paid, the house owners which hosted the students didn't get paid. So, it was all voluntary. Besides being a sacrifice because many teachers were imprisoned, I mean they were interrogated, [informative] talks, they were beaten, their family members were persecuted too, not only the women, things like that.

And then there was the big protest with white papers. We made the decision at the central leadership for all the municipalities to protest and take the streets holding white papers. So, the white paper represented peace. We were not at war, while Serbia had already prepared the terrain and they started war in different regions. That day, the activists did that in all parts of the city and I drove around with the Democratic League's driver, Fatos Efendija, and visited all the women who had white papers, I said

²¹ Edi Shukriu (1950 - 2023) was a Albanian-Kosovar political figure, archaeologist, and writer.

²² By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

hello, I encouraged them at all the points in the city, there was also attempts to suppress the protest in many ways. But, we got away with it that day. We sent our message.

Another one was a protest with multi-colored balloons. We organized a protest to send the students balloons, we organized it, although it was difficult to bring the children to the activity and send the balloons in the air as a message of peace. Besides doing this in different parts of the city, I also went to the Mustafa Bakija school where they were still having classes. Both the gymnasium and the elementary school. It was a facility in the hands of Albanians and I talked to a teacher of lower grade classes and I pleaded to her, I said, "I know it's hard for both of us, but let this message go through. The school has three thousand students and this message will go through the windows on the second floor and the balloons will fly high, the activity ends there."

As well as in the Zekiria Rexha school, but we did it in the backyard where there was an additional school facility. While in the entire city, not only in Gjakova, but all over Kosovo, but I can only speak about Gjakova, the multi-colored balloons flew in the sky from the hands of children as a message of peace. And that was an extraordinary activity. And then, there was... when Drenica was sieged, Drenica was in a crisis, it was counting the last of its food supplies. At that time, the Women's Forum, the Leadership of the Women's Forum together with other women's organizations, which began to organize at the time, [they organized the march] Bread for Drenica.

The delegation of the Women's Forum from Gjakova was suppressed from the start in Gjakova and wasn't allowed to continue to Pristina. But this activity took place and it was one of the activities that echoed exceptionally loud in the international press and international media. Because, the women were determined to arrive in Drenica by foot. This was a historic activity, brave...

Anita Susuri: So you organized in Gjakova? And started off from there?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: We were on our way because it was a central [meeting] point, to meet in Pristina and to leave for Drenica. And our start had to be from Pristina. We started, and they stopped us at Gjakova's exit. We were organized and had a car, and the police stopped us, they knew our moves and they got information about our march holding a loaf of bread. But, they couldn't stop us when we did activities in front of the embassy, the American Office at the time. When we were at the American Office, [I'm talking about] other activities. So, they tried to stop every activity that we did in an organized manner outside of Gjakova. But unfortunately none of us from Gjakova got to go to Drenica because they stopped us from the start.

And then we had some activities for the Gjakova hospital as well. We got active because they placed Serbian physicians in all the birth clinics and the stopped Albanian births. Their fight then was to obstruct Albanian births and natality, of course that was the main discrimination. Simply a genocide. Gjakova's hospital had Albanian physicians, the director was still an Albanian and they had mobilized

to expect pregnant women from all around Kosovo. Gjakova was a hosting point, mainly the Women's Forum, everyone but I am mentioning the Women's Forum as having more responsibility. But, my house was a hosting point too for pregnant women. I brought them to my house after they gave birth until their family members came to get them.

So, I used my house for all kinds of activities, because I couldn't tell somebody else, "Let's do this activity at your house because we can't at mine." I started everything at my house. My daughters mobilized, to the point where I would often talk to my oldest daughter, Rrezarta, who was a [university] student at that time, "Mom, another child came to our house," and that child is alive today, one of them, they still come to visit with their family. And she would take care of the child, and the pregnant woman, because I would continue my activities. Meanwhile, she would hold the book under her arm. She would read while taking care of them and she had exams, she would attend university and help the family [at the same time]. And she took care of children a lot, Rrezarta. All of them did, but she was the eldest and she had the burden.

And then, there were many women who were forced out of the war zones in Gjakova. The Women's Forum had the obligation, with the project, to identify all the pregnant women who had to go into labor and with the help of Nëna Terezë, the Nëna Terezë organization,²³ we prepared all the basic supplies for the newborns. We got 300 *marka*²⁴ from Kosovo institutions and sent them to each woman to bear the first days after the birth. Because there were many births in Gjakova that year, because many families were expelled, thousands of families, and at that point of course there were many women who were close to giving birth. And that was an important point of the activity.

But there was a lot of persecution, because they were in packages which Serbia recognized as LLC [*Low cost carrier*] and as soon as they saw us holding the packages, we always had cars, bikes or even walking on different terrains, they would hinder us, they would steal them. We would keep going. These were moments when the women didn't think about themselves, no woman did. No woman from the Women's Forum thought about their lives, they always thought about others and each of the activists did amazing things. And now, do they credit us? They don't, but it's not important. We worked for the time, for the needs of that time, to confront reality, because at the time we didn't even think about our lives let alone acknowledgement.

Anita Susuri: You were talking earlier about the part before getting imprisoned, '98, we could continue talking about that if you don't have anything more to add about the activities.

²³ Mother Teresa, the self-help organization that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled them from all state institutions and services.

²⁴ Albanian: *Marka*; German: *Deutsche Mark* was the basic monetary unit of West Germany from 1948 to 1990 and of reunited Germany from 1990 to 2001. It was used as a stable, non-official currency in various Yugoslav republics as a result of hyper-inflation of the *dinar*.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: There are many activities by the Women's Forum for which I tried as much as I could remember to write a book about, which I wrote in 2013, titled *Kur jeta duhej jetuar* [When life had to be lived], I included my activities in it, but always together with other people because I never worked alone. But it was difficult because it's 22 years, actually 32 years since the beginning, and 22 years since the end of the war. There's so many activities that I think there should be a call for all the women who are still alive and were active to write from their point of view and to create a history of the Women's Forum, of a very important era.

Now I want to go back to my activities as a woman in the Democratic League, because I had double duties at that point. From the Forum, I took part in the leadership of Democratic League as well, I was assigned other duties there. Then I had duties not only for women, but for all citizens. There, I was chosen Head of the Municipal Council for Solidarity. It was a great responsibility because we distributed help in municipalities, we distributed help for the Trepça miners, I carried a 50 kg bag in my arms. I didn't feel the weight. Together with my family, with different activists, we sent help to Suhareka, we sent them to different parts wherever they needed it. So, we did... besides sending the help, we also kept record of the families that were in need. We did activities, *Familja ndihmon familjen*,²⁵ and many others.

Now I will talk about '98 when war broke out in Likoshan, there was a harsh war, a confrontation where ten members of the Ahmetaj family were killed. At that time, we immediately organized the Women's Forum and we took part in expressing condolences. But, besides condolences, we also sent some clothes, because besides killing the men and their guests, their house was also burned down and they were left with nothing. We mobilized and sent as much as we could through the Women's Forum. After the visit, there was the burial in Likoshan, at that time I was Head of the Municipal Council for Solidarity. At that point, I had another duty. All the political parties gathered and raised five thousand *marka*. Five thousand *marka* to send as aid to the family members who had 24 victims. [I was thinking] where to put the money? I hid them underneath my clothes.

We were on our way to Likoshan, I was the only woman, they were all men, we went with two cars. As soon as we arrived at Klina's crossroad, the Serbian police stopped us, they would stop everyone, "You won't go to Likoshan." At that point, the people, the activists who were with me said, "You go back, we will walk from here," I said, "No. What do you have that I don't? I have a mission there that I have to complete." And we went to a house near us and pleaded to park our car in their yard, and the other car at another house and we walked through the field, and we passed by five villages while walking. We arrived at the turn to Likoshan so we could take part in the funeral and we arrived in time.

²⁵ In the beginning of the '90s there was a movement that started with Reconciliation of Blood Feuds, a Family Helps a Family. The miners' families were put in touch with another economically better standing family from another area, and they helped them through this hardship by offering a seasonal job or similar.

I am very proud that I managed to complete the mission, and not just take part. It was very important to add one more person, although there were many from all over Kosovo, but also to complete the mission, to give them the help dedicated by Gjakova. I managed to get the signature of the Head of the department, Rrecaj, who is still in the list of missing persons but also mister Rifat who led Skenderja's Solidarity Commission, I still have those documents to this day. I gave them [the help], I participated [in the burial]. The return from the funeral was terrible.

After the burial we were stopped at the turn near the Drin bridge, they stopped both of our cars there, because when we arrived at Klina's crossroad, we wanted to get the cars and get going to Gjakova. It was about 11 PM, we walked through the villages again to return. When we arrived there, the police stopped us and it was the same people who stopped us on our way there and they knew where we were. They frisked us and my bag as well, I knew that I had the letter with the signature and the evidence of help we sent, and I knew that they would kill me there. But, fortunately, they threw all my things on the ground and the letter couldn't be seen.

They put us against the vehicle with automatic guns pointed at our necks. The boys from the Youth Forum were in the first car, they took them and sent them to the police station and held them there for 24 hours. Meanwhile, they held us there for a few hours, stuck on the road, they wouldn't let us go. They would question us. They beat us and tortured us so much and left us on the road, they wouldn't let us walk, "You will die here." At that point, one of my activist colleagues said, "Do you have a God? Do you have a family? What do you want from us now? We are men, what more do you have? I have a God, I have a family, I have a nation," [Another said] "They will kill us now," [I said] "Let them kill us, at least I will have the privilege of becoming a national heroine." It was inspiring for me, because I knew I wouldn't actually become a heroine. Serbia didn't want to make me a heroine, they wanted to make us victims or collaborators.

They kept us there a long time and at some point they surely got the order to release us, we were beaten, tortured, and they gave us only twelve minutes to arrive in Gjakova, which was impossible. But as soon as we were close to Gjakova's entrance near the wine cellar, another police team expected us. That was a terrible moment, I don't know how we got away with it alive. They beat all of us...

Anita Susuri: Again?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Again, and they held us there, they would shoot their guns in the air. And we didn't know if the [bullet] shells would fall on us or if they would shoot directly at us. They scared us, we were terrified. Now I can't say that I was very brave. I stood tall, but I was scared of course, as any person would be in such a difficult moment. It wasn't about if I live or die. But, the activity was fading. Because if a leader gets killed, the activity fades for others, they wouldn't be motivated because nobody wanted death. And they held us there for about two hours, after two hours they received a

message which we could hear through their radio transceivers, “Release that group because we have another one. And this other group will be held hostage until we get another one.”

But, that didn’t happen. We were released. They had released the other group as well the next day, however, they followed our activities. I returned home at around 2:00 AM, because they held us for a long time. I thought I would find everybody asleep. I had my keys in my bag but I didn’t have them anymore, because when they emptied my bag and threw them away, my key was lost. But fortunately the door was opened and I entered the house slowly so I wouldn’t wake anyone up. When I entered the living room, my husband Agim and my daughter Rrezarta were waiting for me. And I didn’t say anything because I didn’t have the will to tell my children that I was beaten and tortured, and terrify them.

I told Agim, “It’s alright. I am very calm but I just need a painkiller, because I am tired, I walked the entire time.” I had pain from getting beaten. And then Agim asked me, “Do you want tea or coffee?” And I won’t forget that. That is support too. It wasn’t the time for tea or coffee, because after the terror in Likoshan and that journey back, it wasn’t important for me to quench my thirst with tea or coffee, the only important thing was my husband’s and children’s support. And I pleaded to Rrezarta for her to go to sleep, for her to calm down because I was okay, I didn’t have problems. At that point, we communicated with Agim through our eyes more, that the situation wasn’t good and anything could be expected. But, Agim never told me to cool off [my activism]. Although even if he told me to, I wouldn’t have stopped. But, I can only thank him because he supported me. The next day, I continued my routine of activities, and soon after, the attack on Prekaz happened.

Part Five

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: The day of the attack on Prekaz, I was on my way back from one of our activities that we did the day before in Pristina. And that night, me and another member of the Women’s Forum, actually the deputy head, Ganimete Shala, we slept over at my sister’s in Bregu i Diellit [neighborhood] because there was no transportation available in the late hours. In the morning, at the turn, the very same one, because there was a barricade, the turn which can send you to Klina, Peja or Gjakova, it’s a turn that connects three cities, the Serbian police stopped us.

We weren’t aware of what happened in Prekaz yet, we had no information. They frisked us wearing black gloves, they got us out of the bus, they beat the bus driver with a gun stock. But, they didn’t find anything because we took part in an activity and we had no documents with us. They barely released us to go to Gjakova. When we arrived in Gjakova, I noticed my husband and children were sad. He said, “Did you hear? There was an attack in Prekaz,” I said, “No, we didn’t hear about Prekaz. But, there was another attack on our bus and they obstructed our journey, they made us late.”

Then, I immediately went to the Democratic League's office and we mobilized the women, the people. I could see a general mobilization, but there was also panic. The stores started closing, and the Serbian police were already closing them down so they could persecute the store owners. People started buying food in bulk, the ones who could afford it. But the ones who couldn't, got out in the streets confused. Our duty as activists then was to go out in the field and calm them down, "There is no crisis, Gjakova has reserves, we are organized." And immediately after the attack, all the political parties and humanitarian associations organized and created the Municipal Council for Emergency Aid, with the initiative of the Republican Council for Emergency Advice.

That wasn't new to me, because I was Head of the Municipal Council for Solidarity and I only took it as an extra duty. But, the second one was a little more sensitive because it was my duty to help the Liberation Army²⁶ and to help shelter displaced people. Because when the war in Prekaz began, the Gjakova region was at war, people had dispersed, they were followed out of Koshare and they expelled people from all the other villages and they were in Gjakova. Now there were bigger duties, bigger obligations and until the dead bodies could be sent to their families, there became a big number of them and the Serbian army decided to bury them in a mass grave, and lose track.

They were working non-stop in Pristina. At that time, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, LDK's²⁷ president and the president of the Republic of Kosovo, in cooperation with Fehmi Agani²⁸ and Rexhep Gjergji had undertaken an action and they were asking us in Gjakova to secure the coffins, because Gjakova had a tradition of burying people in coffins from before. There were more craftsmen who made coffins, but also the Municipal Enterprise Çabrat. The first duty, the first call was for me. As Head [of the Municipal Council for Solidarity], an activist. During the conversation I had with professor Agani, he said, "We spoke to the International Red Cross. The International Red Cross has the obligation to follow you until the moment you deliver the coffins and on your way back," "Alright." At that point we didn't have time to think. The goal was to not lose track. It wasn't the time for pain or mourning but it was time for mobilization.

And then one of the activists, Hajdar Aga, his brother was a driver of a big truck and he called his brother, Qemail Hajdar Aga, who has passed away, and told him, "You have to go to Drenica and transport the coffins." Of course he accepted because it was a noble mission. I didn't secure the coffins by myself, but with the leadership of the Democratic league in cooperation with all the sub department Heads, with other political parties. Some did it by will, some by force, because some were

²⁶ Alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army, was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

²⁷ Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

²⁸ Fehmi Agani (1932 - 1999) was a sociologist and politician in Kosovo who was considered to be the leading thinker and political strategist of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in the 1990s. He represented the LDK in international negotiations prior to the 1998–1999 Kosovo War, but was murdered during the war.

scared to give the coffins. The police would follow around the people who made them, the craftsmen. But we managed to secure the right amount of coffins and to go to Drenica.

Before leaving Gjakova, a car from the Democratic League of Kosovo came to the Municipal Enterprise Çbrati's yard. Prof. Dr. Edi Shukriu was in that car, she was the Head of the Women's Forum, there was Prof. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu,²⁹ who was a LDK secretary at the time, there was Ramë Buja, a member of LDK's leadership and the driver, Imer Reçica. So they were all in the Democratic League of Kosovo's car. There was an International Red Cross car with them, with a representative of the Red Cross and there was a translator from Prizren who worked with the International Red Cross at the time.

We placed the coffins in the truck and we decided to get going, accompanied by the International Red Cross car, who made a humanitarian agreement with the Democratic League's car based on international conventions. Meanwhile, Qemail Hajdar Aga and I were in the truck. We were two people who met for the first time. I didn't see him before because he was an entrepreneur and he had other duties, but his brother was a distinguished activist. I pleaded to Qemail, I said, "I will light up a cigarette and we're going on a difficult journey, I would like to light up a cigarette" he said, "Light one up but open the window," he said, "I have heart problems," I said, "I will only light it up," I only inhaled it twice, it felt like it kept me company, and I threw the cigarette outside. And we didn't say a word to each-other after because we didn't know each-other, but there was also no space for words.

We went by a part of the road and when we arrived in Komoran, there was a horrible checkpoint on the Gjakova-Pristina road. The police barricades, sandbags, nets, tanks, paramilitaries, police. Terrible! They stopped the LDK and International Red Cross cars, and of course they stopped us as well. The Red Cross told them that we were going to finish a humanitarian action, we took permission from the superiors of former Yugoslavia and so on. But, the Serbian police told them, "The Serbian state is in charge up until here. From this moment on you take a left turn and go to Drenica, the organization of paramilitaries is in charge there. There are no commands. The Serbian army and police are not in charge in that area. So, it's up to you."

The International Red Cross representative got out of the car, he asked us to get out too, but the police didn't allow us to. He came close to the window, I mean the truck window and said, "I didn't come to die in Kosovo, I came here to get a job done and I have many other jobs to do. I accompanied you until here, there is no safety beyond this. I withdraw, you decide for yourselves." I said... Prof. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu and Edi Shukriu asked, "What will we do?" "We are going." And they were determined, "We are going." They stopped the LDK car and it went back. They asked us, "Will you keep going?" I said, "Yes, we will," there was no other way, we went there to complete a mission. And then, our truck started off...

²⁹ Fatmir Sejdiu (1951) is a Kosovar-Albanian politician. He was the leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and was the 1st President of the Republic of Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: It was only you and...

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Me and Qemail, yes. The car was on its way, while the LDK car went back because they found another path, there were paths as secondary or tertiary roads. And they joined us around eight or nine kilometers later, after we separated, through the villages and they joined us again. We went together to the place where they placed the bodies, to the shelter of Jashari family's friends, and Professor Zekirja Cana³⁰ waited for us at the door, and he kissed me and the driver Hajdar Aga on the forehead. He said, "May you always have good fate," it was like he was spiritually liberated.

We all met together. There weren't many people at that moment, because we would move and the Serbian police told us the minute we arrived, "You have 15 minutes to go back. Unload the coffins quickly." We all mobilized and unloaded the coffins. Professor Zekirja Cana told me and Edi, "We will pay homage." The biggest and most difficult part of my mission was the homage. Because I had seen all these people before when we visited the Jashari family. I had seen those children, how they welcomed us, they were alive, beautiful girls and boys with curly hair, with those beautiful eyes. And for me, it was terrible to be in front of those children who became martyrs for the freedom of Kosovo and pay homage. I could not find consolation, or words.

We continued to pay our respects until the end and I went back to the legendary commander Adem Jashari. I met him for the first time, I met Hamëz Jashari for the first time, because I had already met *bac* Shaban while he was alive. Adem Jashari was a giant, great, like he was still alive. His figure was undamaged because there were many rumors that they damaged this or that. His figure looked like he was alive, and he had a bullet here {points to her throat}. We didn't know anything more because we only saw their faces. But the image of those innocent children stuck with me, they were killed and they remained smiling. Their smile, I was hoping they would wake up, like they were asleep.

Those girls with the things they put on their head, to fix their hair, they were heart, strawberry and cherry shaped. They still had braided hair. But, I also saw burned bodies. There were two bags with burned body parts, unidentified bodies for which I am not sure if the examinations are completed to this day, they probably are. But, there was a... there was a smell from the burned bodies that was terrible, painful, saddening, there are no words to describe it. And then the activists started to think in which direction... we didn't have time, 15 minutes, we had to go back with the truck. Edi Shukriu pleaded to me, "Come with us to Pristina. Come because..." "I have completed my mission, I have to get back to Gjakova, I have other things to do." She was scared because the truck would then be in danger. But it was my obligation, I was a hostage of my duty. I had to finish that action until the end.

I went back with mister Qemail Hajdar Aga without saying a word. Neither of us had anything to say. We saw horror and I don't know if there is a bigger terror. I told the Head of Women's Forum, Edi

³⁰ Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian. Member of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, also leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign.

Shukriu, that I had to go back and of course I went back. Then our way back was uncertain, because Serbian criminals would take revenge on us after we completed our missions. We were on our way and near that turn in Dollc [village] which takes you to Gjakova, so we had around 25 more kilometers to arrive in Gjakova, the Serbian police stopped us. They got us out of the truck and they started questioning the driver, and they beat both of us with their gun stock. They asked us, "Where were you?" I had to tell the truth, because Dr. Fehmi Agani, the academic Fehmi Agani said, "We received permission through the International Red Cross and this mission is known globally. It has reached an international scale and we are safe." I said, "You know where we were, you know. We had the permission and..."

At that point, they couldn't stop us from going there so they took revenge on the two of us because we were caught as two victims. They beat us so much that the driver found it hard to keep driving the truck. We continued our way back without speaking. And the truck took me to the Democratic League offices so I could report that I finished the mission. But, unfortunately the doors were locked because it was late. They had to lock the doors because that neighborhood wasn't safe at night. But, through our physical mechanisms and calls, I let them know, and the news was received. And then there was an injustice because the news was announced that it was sent from Gjakova, Gjakova can't break news. Gjakova is a city consisting of citizens, buildings, and other parts, but there are individuals who can send messages. It's not good to hide the truth.

I was a public person, an activist, I was Head of the Women's Forum [department], member of the Women's Forum Kosovo leadership, I had all those duties and I was used to being interrogated. And I forgot the fear, not that I was brave but I didn't have time to fear. Through a couple of words, "Gjakova sent the coffins," it's not important that Gjakova sent them. But it was Mevlyde Saraçi and Qemail Hajdar Aga, and you have probably experienced it too, but there are others who hear lies every day. I feel bad for the Jashari family, I feel bad for all the family members that were killed and those who are alive today and I had to mention this. But, the truth remains true, it always has to be reminded. Until people deeply understand the truth. The Jashari family didn't pay for the coffins. If someone received any payment, they abused it. The coffins were paid for by the Municipal Council for Emergency Aid, together with the Financing Council, which worked as state institutions.

The coffins were sent by Mevlyde Saraçi and Qemail Hajdar Aga. As I mentioned, in the Democratic League's car, there was the Head of the forum, Edi Shukriu, Prof. Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu, there was Ramë Buja and Imer Reçica, and that is the truth. So now for people to be fed with untrue things, that's not alright, because it's not good for the Jashari family, the legendary commander, the women's heroism, the children, the men who fought an entire army. So, I feel it as a moral obligation to tell all the truths. I said that I didn't get to be part of the Bread for Drenica [march], they stopped us. But I can't say that I didn't send the coffins, because it's true. There are photographs, writings, testimonies.

Anita Susuri: There were 46 coffins, right?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: No, there were 86 coffins.

Anita Susuri: 86?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes. And we went back home, I mean that evening. They didn't have any information at home. Qemail Hajdar Aga went on his way, I remained at the LDK office. I barely arrived home because there was a 1500 meter distance and it was late, it was risky because they would arrest anyone they found outside, but I arrived at home. When I arrived at home, I saw my husband was awake, and upset. He said, "They buried the Jashari family." Belgrade had given the fake news that they were buried, and they actually tried to, they started to, but they were obstructed by the activists who were negotiating that they be buried the next day.

So, I sent those coffins on March 9 and the burial date was set on March 10 [1998]. I couldn't take part in the burial because they turned us back and there was no chance I would go there again. But, I at least completed my mission, the one that was assigned to me. I didn't have the courage to tell Agim that it was me who sent the coffins, because I feared that the police would follow me and they would come at our door and I would have to tell him the truth. But, at some point, I told him, "Agim, please don't listen to this news," he said, "But they are saying..." "I came from Drenica, the burial will happen tomorrow. If we can manage to go with the activists, we will, but if not, I did my part."

He somehow didn't believe me. He said, "You went to Drenica and came back," it was impossible to go and come back. I said, "Believe it or not," [He said] "It's not that I don't believe you but I don't believe my eyes," "Is it true? You came back alive." "Yes," I said, "we came back alive because they made us come back in 15 minutes." And now I'm not sure if I remember the names of all the activists I met there, I can't remember all the names although I feel like I can see them now. But, I have to mention Ajnishahe Shala Halimi, Bashkim Emini, his wife, I'm mentioning the people who were there, Anton Nokaj, there was Rexhep Gjergji, there were some other members of the leadership, but not as many as they claim today. So, on duty, by call, and with possibility.

I believe that the entire population of Kosovo wanted to be there, but it wasn't possible. At least the people who should've been there were present. But, I met the Malisheva delegation there, where there were two journalists, Cen Desku and Jusuf Bytyku and the Imam Fetah Bekolli. Imam Fetah Bekolli was present at the burial. There might have been others, but I can only mention the ones I saw. And he was very happy when me and Qemail Hajdar Aga arrived with the coffins, because I knew Fetah Bekolli through the activities. He used to be very active before. He was an imam in the municipality of Gjakova, in the village... in a village near Gjakova, in Rogovë of Has. But, he was a distinguished activist. Besides the religious rituals, he did all the other activities and he was mobilized in the Kosovo Liberation Army.

So Fetah stated the truth in a few cases as well. And he contributed a lot in the burial of the Jasahari family, but the people who participated as well. After I went back, my job was difficult, it was getting more difficult by the day. There was a need for food, shelter, clothes, medications, medical check ups, all for the families which up until I was imprisoned, reached 16 thousand, they were from different places, but from the region of Gjakova villages where there were fights. They all got apartments in 40 minutes. There were families who had no chance, we would wait at the outskirts of the city. There was an extraordinary mobilization.

There were two notebooks full of notes, one for income, the other with the families' reserves, food reserves. There were a countless number of cars who volunteered to transport the families. There were physicians; the Nëna Terezë ambulance was mobilized to receive visits. I don't know if there was anything missing, Gjakova was like a body, everything worked wonderfully and of course I was active without a schedule. We supplied Glllogjan, we supplied Jabllanica. I went to Jabllanica by myself, and we sent a whole truckload of food, where the war front was. From Rugova of Has, the deputy Head of the Women's Forum, Ganimete Shala, with other activists, sent [supplies] in Likoc where there was a location. We sent medication, food, and clothes to Reka e Keqe together with different activists. Whatever was needed. So, the Liberation Army didn't need aid but they needed supplies and we got that done. Meanwhile the citizens needed aid because they were displaced.

At that point there were more activities, the number of activists increased, I had more obligations, the scope of activities narrowed because I got discovered and I was being followed every step of the way. Outside my door, there was a Serbian with a checked jacket who stayed in front of a store that sold plastic products. He constantly recorded the place, every move, and the Serbian police had the information. But there were other collaborators whom I didn't know. And I went to Pristina on May 31, I came here and went to visit the International Red Cross office and asked for a few activists who were imprisoned in Gjakova before me to be released, I went as an official delegation. That day I had a meeting at the American office, where I met officials of that office and I asked for America to become sensitized because Gjakova was in chaos, the entire Kosovo, but my obligation was Gjakova.

That day we had another meeting with the leadership of the Women's Forum in Pristina, in LDK's office, where the museum is now, The President's [Independence's] House. The meeting ended and I told them that the Women's Forum in Gjakova decided that on June 1, on Children's Day, to have a big Gjakova women's protest, in front of the Gjakova police station with the slogan, "End the war, release the political prisoners." That was the last night and the next day, I would have to organize the protest. There were various international media outlets, because they had landed in Kosovo and I gave a statement to about five or six television companies and international agencies that, "Tomorrow at 11:00 AM there will be a protest in Gjakova." The information was spread and I went back that night.

When I went back that night I sort of had a bad feeling and I told my husband, "Agim," I said, "it would be better if they took you to prison instead of me," I said, "because I can already see the prison doors,"

he asked, “Why?” I said, “At this point, every moment takes me closer to imprisonment,” because I had done so many activities publicly without hiding and I was being followed everywhere. And he said, “Neither you, nor me. Don’t worry! They have people who are more important than you and me.” But I was already feeling that horror within myself. The next day I got going, I wore my field clothes. I wore a suit with belts, I wore some more athletic boots. I wore thicker clothes because I knew they would beat us. I would think, when they hit me, these clothes will shield me. But clothes can’t shield you, nothing can shield you from a beating.

I got to the door and I wanted to say bye to Rrezarta, my eldest daughter, and she asked, “Mom, where are you going like that? You have to look like a woman, why don’t you dress like a woman and lead that big protest? The entire Gjakova and the places around are mobilized, and you’re wearing this.” I was in a dilemma whether I should tell her. I was thinking she’d be terrified and feel weak, because every child feels pain for their mother. I said, “Alright, what should I wear today?” And she picked an elegant outfit for me, I mean, formal clothes and I wore some elegant shoes, not comfortable ones, and I looked like a woman. I really did look like a woman until I got going (laughs).

And then I wanted to go to the LDK office in Gjakova. And my daughter Valmira didn’t want to let me go, “I will accompany you.” “Why? I always went by myself.” “I will accompany you.” She accompanied me up to some point and I told her, “Go back!” She held me tight, and hugged me. Pranvera as well, my youngest, she was nine years old, I said bye to her too. Diamant had already gone to school and Heroina said bye at home.

Agim had gone out to finish some other business, because at the time he led the Emergency Council depository, a depository which supplied the Liberation Army. And he had his work to do. As soon as he left there, somebody on a bike stopped him and said, “Agim, they imprisoned your wife.” Actually as soon as I arrived at the LDK office. After a few moments a delegation from the sub department of Skivijan came to ask for aid for the families. Then I called some working organizations who sold flour and I told them to provide Skivijan with flour since they were closer and send it to them because the activists could be stopped and arrested.

While we were talking, two civilian cops came to the entrance of the Democratic League offices in Gjakova. At that moment the driver, Fatos Efendija, went there and they said, “Mevlyde Saraçi.” Fatos had turned pale and he came to the desk where we were speaking with the activists and said, “Mevlyde, they’re asking for you,” I said, “Alright,” I said, “I’ll leave my bag with you Fatos,” because there was a letter in my bag which contained 200 different things, medications, supply needs for the Liberation Army. I had just gotten it from Fehmi Vula to send it to Pristina and supply the war front. Fortunately, I remembered I had that list on four A4 papers and I left it with him. I said, “Please hide this bag and send it to Agim at the house,” he said, “Alright.”

I got my ID and got out. Their eyes were wide open, they were wearing civilian uniforms. One of them took a card out and said, "We are authorized to arrest you," I said, "No, I will come by myself, there is no need to arrest me," he said, "It's our obligation to take you." And they arrested me there, they put handcuffs on me. The handcuffs weren't my problem, nor the imprisonment, but what would I do about the protest that had mobilized all the women of Gjakova, and at that point the protest was suppressed from the start. I was imprisoned. They sent me to the police station in Gjakova to a dark and unclean room and the walls had blood stains. They brutally beat me with their gun stocks and kicked me with their combat boots. And then they would take me by elevator to an office on the fourth floor and ask me all kinds of questions. But, they would only ask the questions because I didn't tell them anything. But the whole time, I was thinking about what happened with the protest outside. I prayed to God that the other women wouldn't be imprisoned. But, it was my wish that the protest went ahead.

Unfortunately it hadn't because the fear won, but Serbia suppressed the protest because it was brave to protest in front of the police station. The police were criminals, and we would have our hands in our pockets. But, it was brave and determined. Fortunately, that day nobody else besides me was imprisoned. And then about the part when my kids were informed about me, that was terrible. They explained it themselves, they can speak better about that, but I can only speak about myself. I was broken spiritually more than I felt physical pain. Because, spiritually, they had interrupted my activism. I wanted to contribute a lot, not only my family and children missed me, but for me, Kosovo was my big family.

I was in a small room where the temperatures were minus 15 or 16 degrees, it was really cold. It was a bit cold outside too, but inside in those rooms, in those cells. I was wearing really thin socks and that formal outfit which felt like I was covered in a thin piece of paper. I was shivering, I had a fever, because I couldn't even tell what kind of weather there was because of the beatings.

Anita Susuri: It was June 1st, right?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: June 1st. And I had my shoes, my sister had sent them to me through the agencies before, and I would take one of the shoes off and sit on it as a chair. But my foot would go numb without a shoe on. Then when my right foot froze, I would wear it and take off the left one so I could sit on the other one. My hands would freeze. My jaw would freeze. It was cold. And then it would feel hot because they would come and drag me to the floors upstairs and beat me. They beat me there too.

Two cops and a commander put a grenade bomb on my head. And they brought me food to eat by force. I didn't accept the food. Death would be better for me at that time, why would I live? It was easier to die than to be tortured. And I had made a decision. And even by nature but also since I was born, I am the type of person that nobody can break my determination. They can take everything else

from me, even my life, but not my determination. And I didn't accept anything. I didn't tell them about the activists that cooperated with me, about the fields we worked at. I acted like a homemaker who cooked and took care of the family, but they had the information.

I was mercilessly beaten for four days and four nights in Gjakova. According to the rules, they only had the right to keep me for 72 hours, but they kept me for one more day. They didn't allow me to contact my family and they sent me to Lipjan's prison on the fourth day. I was in an armored vehicle but I knew...

Anita Susuri: Did you know where they were sending you? What was happening?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: No. I thought they were sending me to Serbia but that one was a Serbian prison as well so it was the same. If it was led by Serbs, it was the same, a prison of death, the most terrible investigative prison in Kosovo. And they sent me there. I heard them say, "She should be punished in prison," but nothing more. On my way there, I heard shots, the war was continuing in different places, and they had no way of sending me to Lipja, so they sent me to the prison in Prizren. The prison in Prizren is somewhere at the city's entrance, close by, you all know where Prizren's court is.

They wanted to leave me there because the Serbian police officials were at risk, their life was at risk from the Liberation Army. They weren't worried about me. But, Prizren didn't accept me because they said, "We don't have a women's prison." And they told these two cops, "She stays in the car and you have to send her there." I stayed there for two hours in the armored vehicle which had grilled windows, where other citizens would pass by, they were questioning them, but also random citizens. They would all look at me, of course they couldn't identify me, but they could tell someone was inside. While on the way to the prison they tied both my arms and my legs so I wouldn't run. But, I was an unarmed woman, beaten, exhausted, where could I run to.

However, I was thinking while I heard the gunshots, I wished to God some soldier would kill the two cops and I would join the Liberation Army. But based on the suggestions they got, the information from the base, they turned to a different direction and managed to take me to Lipjan's prison through secondary paths. I don't know which path they took, because I was confined inside and I couldn't see the road, but when I was at the prison's entrance with chains around my legs and arms, they left me to suffer at the door, and for the other prisoners to see how they were taking me in.

Part Six

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: The prison yard had some flowers, because they used the prisoners to work on the yard, so they could see something beautiful. This was a mask used by Serbia so they would

think there are flowers inside too. I thought so too, they brought me to a park, they were beating me and imprisoning me in a park. But, that only lasted for about two or three minutes until I arrived at the admission of the Women's Prison in Lipjan. I immediately faced those terrible Serbian guards, those criminals who carried their mission in the harshest of ways. But, there was an Albanian among them as well.

At that time I couldn't imagine that an Albanian would work as a guardian in prison, it didn't make sense to me. And she had to speak in Serbian so the other officials would understand, because it was the only official language back then. And I refused to answer her, I was stubborn. She pleaded with me, so she could take notes, and I could go to my cell and change my clothes. To get the prison outfit and to shower somehow, because I didn't eat or drink for four days in the other cell, I was only beaten. I refused everything. And after she sent me to my cell, she said a few words in Albanian. She said, "I am Sanije, I am Sanije Bytyçi," she said, "I have sacrificed myself and my family in order to help political prisoners. I am as imprisoned as you are, I am trying to contribute something." I looked at her resentfully and I couldn't grasp that at all and I refused. She insisted, "Please understand me, I am here for you."

A few days passed, I didn't want to communicate or anything, but later on I understood. She had informed the LDK leadership through her mechanisms, and the leadership informed my family that I was in the prison of Lipjan. Because my family didn't know where I was for 17 days, whether I was in Serbia, or in a cell in Gjakova, or if they killed me. That was the first information Sanije gave me. She said, "I have communicated with Naser Osmani. I told Naser and he told your family and they have sent their best regards." That was good. She also communicated through my sister in Pristina and when she brought me true information from my family, I then understood that Sanije is at the prison to help us, and she really did help us.

But, she couldn't stop the violence and the terror we experienced. A prison is a prison. Serbian prison, investigative prison, terrible prison. I was a former assembly MP, head of the Emergency [Council], head of the Women's Forum, head of the leadership. I had a hundred positions which didn't give you a name, but obligations and sacrifice. That's why I was the right person for them to catch and then those other tortures kept going. I also met three Prizren students in prison there, Behare Tafallari, Jehona Krasniqi and Leonora Morina. All three students had just started with UÇK, they took care of the medical part, first aid and they caught them doing that and they were in prison with me.

And then [Zahrije Pdrimqaku](#) was brought from Drenas and they also tortured her a lot. Fatmire Boshnjaku was brought a month after me, she was caught helping in the war. There was Gjyke, I don't remember her last name, she was Gjyke from Gjakova's region, she helped in the war as well. There were two other women whom I didn't get to know in prison, but there were a few of us political prisoners. They constantly tried to trap us, for us to attempt to escape so they could catch us escaping and kill us. We were careful, we helped each-other as much as we could.

Sanije Bytyçi was a heroine to me, because I did a hunger strike. I didn't eat the prison food for six months. But, I lost so much weight, I was so weak health wise, but I gave a duty to myself. I wouldn't eat prison food, I didn't want Serbian food. Freedom and activity was my food, not actual food. That's why, my family had to bring me food every two weeks, and I pushed through with the food my family brought me. They rejected the food many times, they threw it away. On so many occasions they made me eat all the food at once, which was impossible. But, so they wouldn't understand I wasn't eating prison food, Sanije would tell me, "Put the bread in the dish and then cover it in newspapers so it won't spill," they would bring us newspapers.

I read Serbian newspapers, I asked for Albanian ones, but they didn't let me, even the ones in Serbian were censored, they would cut out all the important news. Those newspapers were allowed so I would put the bread in the dish and then cover it in newspapers and throw it in the trash bin, so they wouldn't find out I wasn't eating it. But, they smelled it, where my food was ending up. Fortunately, I got away with that, but I didn't escape the other tortures. These were the most difficult moments in prison, where I wasn't allowed anything, not even to think in Albanian. There were cases where I had these provocations all day, their provocative behavior. They beat the prisoners, they beat Zahrije and Behare more, they also beat Fatime, the rest of us were mentally tortured every second.

We were at risk of death every second. I was assigned to one of the guards so she could catch me, because Sanije had heard that, "We are waiting to catch her at some point." I got out, I don't even know, I got near the window bars, it was prohibited. Not that you could see anything, through the bars, but I simply...

Anita Susuri: You got near the bars.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: They heard my voice and they quickly opened the door and they came straight to me. I was caught like that, I didn't even know why I was standing at the time when we had to stay seated. Because we were told what to do the whole day, whether to be inside the cell, or standing, or walking, everything. We had to obey their strict commands. I said, "Nothing," she asked, "Who did you talk to outside?" I said, "Who could I talk to outside? It's not communication. I am inside and I have nowhere to go beyond the prison." And she threatened me a lot and later on, Sanije found a moment and came to tell me, "Please just shut your mouth, don't speak. Save your bravery for outside, don't put yourself at risk here. Because they will find an opportunity here, they want to come."

And then they orchestrated different situations in order to kill us. They turned the lights off, they would shoot pointing downwards, I mean, there were gunshots, they would come and shut the doors, they raided our cells, they terrorized us at any time they wanted. It was also terrible to go through the day without using the toilet. We had five minutes to use the toilet in the morning, during the day before we ate lunch, and it ended at 6:00 in the evening. But, physiological needs don't have a schedule, and we

were compelled to use helping tools in an unhygienic environment. Because you can't complete your needs in the room, but these were the prison tortures.

We had visitations every two weeks. The most difficult moments were meeting with my family. It was painful, painful because my family would have to go through all those barriers on the way so they could come see me in prison. It was all of them, my children and my husband. They regularly came to visit. They switched [between each-other] however Peja's Court allowed them. They came to visit me and the visits took place in a room which looked good, like a living room. There was a desk in the middle, chairs on both ends, it didn't have a prison feel. That was an optical illusion for the families. At some point, my big sister from Mitrovica, Melihate, Agim, and Valmira, my daughter came to visit me, and my sister said, "This isn't a prison," I said, "No, it's not." I didn't have the courage to tell her if it was or wasn't a prison, but I didn't want to upset her either.

She said, "Now I will go back calmer, because it's a little better for you, it's just that you're isolated. Don't worry. Kosovo will be free and so will you." And Valmira burst into tears, because she saw the bars, she saw them and knew I was in prison, others explained it to her as well, she read about it. And she cried a lot, she said, "How is this not a prison?" Guardian Sanije happened to be there and told her, "What do you want?" Valmira said, "Shut up!" She said, "How dare you tell me to shut up, I am a cop," she said, "Big deal." At that point, since there were no other guards around, Sanije smiled and said, "I am a cop too, but you are more skilled than your mother." And we said goodbye while Valmira was crying. It was hard.

Other family members came to visit me as well, but they didn't allow Pranvera to visit me. Pranvera was my youngest and I forgot what she looked like. Because I would see my [other] children, I would see them every month and I would ask to see Pranvera. The Serbian police didn't allow her to come visit me out of spite. And I would think of her as a grown up sometimes, and sometimes as a child, or a baby, I could never think of remembering her as what she looked like when we said goodbye. And as soon as I opened my eyes, I would see Pranvera's eyes in the window, in the bars, but they would break out in thousands of pieces because that's how the bars were. And Pranvera's eyes kept me company during the whole day. I wrote a poem, *Pranvera's Eyes* (cries). I wrote it in my mind (cries).

Anita Susuri: Do you want to rest for a bit?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: No. In my mind. Because we weren't allowed pens and papers. I would suffer more because I had to repeat it in my mind so I wouldn't forget (cries). On the other hand, I missed Pranvera but I felt pain because why would I imprison her eyes. My prison wasn't enough, that's what it seemed like to me. During the whole time until I was released, Pranvera's eyes accompanied me in the prison bars. And then I fortunately managed to remember that poem. And as soon as I was released from prison I published my first book, *Pranvera's Eyes*, and it was somehow a way to make amends for her childhood.

I don't cry for my sufferings, but for my children. Not only mine, but also Kosovo's children. Maybe the Jashari family and many other families, thousands of children gave their lives. But my children contributed too, because they were at risk every second. Every time our house was raided, every time they took my husband, my son, me. In prison, in visitations, in activities, so all Kosovo children lived without a childhood. That's why, I feel happy as a mother that they got to understand me. Because on the first visit my daughter paid me, Rrezarta, she was the eldest and told me, "Mom, stay proud, all of Kosovo is supporting you. They appreciate your work in every organization and you have everyone's support. Don't worry."

Also, I had support from my three lawyers. One lawyer was ordered by Sevdije Ahmeti, she has passed away, she was Head of the association for the help of women, also organized by Lirie Osmani. Lirie Binishi Osani was one of the lawyers. Meanwhile, my husband secured a lawyer from Prizren, [Rexhep Hasani](#), as well as from Peja, Shefqet Deçani. Shefqet Deçani's father was a prisoner and he was imprisoned himself. That's why he had a lot of insight from inside and outside of prison, the lawyer from Prizren as well. So I had the possibility of having family visitations every two weeks and three visits from my lawyers. Those visits somehow kept me alive, but my request was, "I want to be released from prison, I don't care."

When Shefqet Deçani came on our last visit, "Mrs. Mevlyde, you can report the injustice, the violence they are inflicting, but releasing you is my job," he said, "I am only telling you that freedom isn't far away." He was brave. He said, "You stay strong," he said, "we are working for you. Don't think about freedom." Meanwhile, when Rexhep Hasani came from Prizren, I shed a tear and he became sad. He said, "I am powerless in stopping your tears, but I am not powerless in working for you. But, we are working for you inside and out. Don't worry." When Lirie Osmani would come, it was like a melody. The pavement stones outside of prison, I didn't know what it looked like, but I think they were as I felt them, I could hear her heels, her shoes. When it was visitation time I could hear her heels, I would then know that I would leave the cell and meet Lirie, I would get information.

Lirie Osmani would motivate us because she was both mine and Zahrije Podrimqaku's lawyer. And she would say, "Don't worry, the barriers are breaking," she couldn't tell me everything but, "the climate is improving, the roads are opening," and I would see freedom. She would tell me, "I will come here whenever you want, but I am also at risk." On one occasion I asked for Nekibe Kelmendi.³¹ Nekibe came but they interrupted her, they didn't let her visit me. Meanwhile the biggest joy for the prisoners at the time, because that was what we had, was the visit by the International Red Cross.

The day when the Red Cross came, they had permission for the state institutions of former Yugoslavia to visit us. And they sent us downstairs at the meeting hall, and I remember I was interviewed by the

³¹ Nekibe Kelmendi (1944-2011), lawyer and human right activist, after the war she was a member of Parliament for the LDK and served as Minister of Justice from 2008 through 2010.

Red Cross for six hours. Not that we talked for six hours, they let us free, our conversation extended so we would be free for a little. They gave us some membership cards there, where it was recorded that we were prisoners and that we were visited. But, I never saw that card again, they immediately took them from us. There was a translator there, the same one who was with me in Drenica when we were stopped in Komoran. He got very sad the moment he saw me, but he couldn't express it because of the International Red Cross representatives. He only told me, "Remember me, I am him. Good job on your activism!" At that moment, "I am him," I didn't know who he was. "I am him." I had... I couldn't connect the Red Cross to him, because I only saw him once.

But, thinking for days on end, day and night, I then connected the dots that the Red Cross translator was with me in Drenica. I ran into him once more after the war and I never saw him again. But he encouraged us and all the prisoners had the chance to meet with international representatives, to express our complaints, because the conditions were terrible, their behavior was terrible and every morning we anticipated being sent to Serbia. But, it was fate that international organizations coordinated and the three students were released a month before me through international appeals. Meanwhile, a lot of international organizations worked for my release, but they didn't work alone. Dr. Edi Shukriu worked with the Women's Forum, she sent letters to all international bodies, even to Kofi Annan.³² She also sent one to an international organization with headquarters in Italy, who sent Milošević³³ a letter and a condition that the international organizations would be present during my meeting.

I have all these documents, I kept them. And they helped me so there wouldn't be an indictment. I managed to be released through the mediation of international organizations, of course my lawyers' attempts too, but also the lack of evidence. Because I didn't accept any witnesses. I rejected all of Serbia's evidence. During prison there was some sort of rule, a law of former Yugoslavia which said that if an indictment can't be prepared in 180 days, they had to release you. I had the luck to have first served 30 days from the Municipal Court of Prizren. The second time they sent me to Pristina at the District Court of Danica Marinković, the head criminal who is still alive and she is still a typical criminal. She did the heaviest sentences and she's involved in crimes against Albanians, who didn't allow me to answer in Albanian, not even in the presence of the lawyers, but through tortures she made me give a statement.

But, again, I gave the statements that I did, and I didn't admit to any activity for anybody. And the third time, my detention was extended by the Supreme Court of Serbia and that was a terrible decision for me, because when the Supreme Court of Serbia deals with a case where I was [portrayed as] a terrorist who supplied and helped the Kosovo Liberation Army, a ten years to life in prison sentence was

³² Kofi Atta Annan (1938 – 2018) was a Ghanaian diplomat who served as the seventh secretary-general of the United Nations from 1997 to 2006. Annan and the UN were the co-recipients of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

³³ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

foreseen. But, I was sure that Kosovo wouldn't always be in prison. So, my freedom was conditioned on Kosovo's freedom.

When the last day ended, 180 days, my son Diamand waited near the prison bars during the whole day, as well as my husband Agim, my cousins, [Burhan Kavaja](#), Rasim Kavaja, Rexhep Kavaja, they all waited for me to be released so they could take me to Pristina. Because there was another risk after being released about where you would go, because I was in unknown territory. But, that didn't happen. The official shift ended and I lost all hope. When it was 4:00 PM, I knew I would remain in prison until all of Kosovo was be liberated and that there would be an indictment. But, international pressure made the courts, through my lawyers as well, the Court of Peja had to make the decision to release me, because they didn't manage to file the indictment within the legal time frame.

At the time, my husband was... the day when, I mean he talked to my lawyer, they told him that I would be released after the official work shift. Now my joy has died down. The head of the guards came, I don't remember her name, she had good manners but the soul of a criminal. But, to sugar coat it, to give a [good] impression, she said, "Ma'am, do you miss your family?" I said, "No," she asked, "Do you want to go home?" I said, "It's not my problem to go home, I will go when the time comes." And she had a folded piece of paper, size A4, around twelve pages. The prison decision. Meanwhile, there was only a copy for me. But she didn't give me any of the documents, she only told me. She said, "The document was just faxed to us. You are free, you will be out of the prison in five minutes." I didn't even know what the prison looked like, as soon as I arrived the day they took me in, I saw the flowers and nothing more...

She said, "Now the guard will accompany you, one of the guards and you have five minutes." Five minutes wouldn't be enough for me to even say goodbye to my cell mates or take anything with me. At that moment, I said to my friends, "You keep this piece of clothing, you keep that one, you the other one." I only took some plastic dishes which I used to eat with me. This was also a unique thing about my food, I ate with my own plastic spoon, on a plastic plate, I didn't want to use the prison dishes. And I took them with me, as well as my plastic mug. I actually used the mug as a healing tool when those small insects would bite us during the summer, it was a torture of its own. I would put water on my hands to avoid swelling from the insect [bites]. And I took that mug with me. I took very few personal things and I went to the prison door.

When I got out, I only had a bag, where would I go. I didn't even know where the prison was, or what way they brought me there. I didn't have money with me, or [a] transportation [vehicle], or anything. My family members who waited for me the whole day had gone home because the shift ended and it was late, [they released me] two hours after the official shift ended. There was a bar there, where the criminals [hung out]. And I went inside, I had no other way. And a waiter, who was a prisoner, said, "Ma'am what are you looking for?" I said, "A cup of coffee." [He asked] "Do you have the means to pay for it? No," he said, "we won't serve you," "Well, okay," I said, "can I stay for five minutes?" "Well," he

said, “what will you do for five minutes?” I said, “I don’t know. But I got released and I need to go home,” he said, “I am a prisoner, I serve here,” he said, “leave as soon as you can,” he said, “because here is the same prison.”

I then turned my back and headed for the door, but I felt two hands stopping me {taps her shoulders}. I thought the police came again and I thought to myself that it’s over for me, now I am in unsafe hands, in prison again, I was a prisoner in the register, there were witnesses. When I turned my head, I saw my cousin, Rexhep Kavaja. When my husband notified him that I was released, the lawyer told him about it, he [cousin] was on the way back and information after information, he came back with his car, there was heavy rain, terrible. He traveled mindlessly and we couldn’t talk, we only hugged. He hugged me, got me in his car, and we cried together the whole time. And he sent me straight to Burhan Kavaja’s apartment, at my cousin’s, because my [paternal] aunt was alive.

They had prepared lunch. But, before going up to the apartment, my other cousin, Rasim Kavaja, who we call Ramadan, had talked to a hairdresser who told him, “If you have access, I want to cut her hair after she’s released so she doesn’t go back home with that hair,” the irregular state I had it in prison, it was terrible, “So they won’t be terrified because it’s a terrifying look for the children to see her like that.” And he told me, “To the hairdresser,” I said, “No,” I was released from prison, I wasn’t thinking of the hairdresser, he said, “Not to style your hair, only to cut it a bit.” And they quickly took me there, they washed my hair, cut it and I went to my aunt, so, to Burhan. And I remember when he got on the phone, Burhan Kavaja notified Enver Malokun, who has passed away, and told him, “Enver, Mevlyde was released,” he said, “Put Mevlyde on the phone.” He was very happy and said, “Trust me, I am crying out of joy.”

Now I was thinking about how to go back to Gjakova, to my children, because they were waiting. But, my lawyers had a strategy which was positive for me. [They told] me not to travel that night, because Serbia released me outside of the work shift so somebody could catch me on the way and execute me. So the prison won’t be responsible. And I insisted the whole time, “I want to go back to Gjakova tonight,” “No.” My lawyer, Shefqet Deçani, came there too and Agim, my husband, and that night we slept over at my cousin’s. And the next morning, Rexhep, who came to get me from the prison of Lipjan with his car, sent me to Peja. And then, in order to lose track in Peja, we stopped at my lawyer’s house for a couple of hours which seemed like centuries to me because I wanted to see my children. And then, I got to Gjakova by bus.

The bus from Peja to Gjakova passes by my house. When we arrived I told them, “Stop here” (cries), the driver was confused. I said, “I was a prisoner, I was released.” And I forgot my bag with a few personal things. And the driver held his head, he saw me as a weak, tired, exhausted woman, and he went. When I got to my yard, a lot of people had come to welcome me, my children, and those terrible reunions. My neighbor’s daughter, Zana, had recorded it, she lives in Norway now and she had a big camera but...

Anita Susuri: An amateur camera.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Amateur, yes. And she recorded those first minutes of the reunion with my children at the yard entrance. It was a bittersweet moment, because I had left some friends in prison. I was released, but I wasn't totally released. And the torture continued. I only stayed at home for two days, I welcomed guests and from the third day after being released, I continued my activity, I didn't stop it. Although I was on parole and I have the document that says, "The investigation hasn't finished, the investigation continues." But, I continued my work and activity until Kosovo's liberation. And then there are other events when Serbia came to eliminate me on March 27, in the evening...

Anita Susuri: In '99, right?

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: Yes, in '99, yes. Because I continued my activity, until the NATO attacks began. Three days before the NATO attacks, we left the offices, because we were informed in Pristina by Fehmi Agani that, "The attacks are near, but keep your connections physically". But then the circumstances became more difficult. There were a lot of Serbs and Montenegrins living on my street, criminals who are still wanted today but weren't punished, nor faced judgment. They committed many crimes and they came to eliminate me on March 27, 1999, at 9:15 PM. But, our fate was that we escaped through our neighbor's yard and the other challenges continued. When seven members [of my family] divided into four parts, when I didn't know where my children were, when I was left on the street because many families were afraid of me [to shelter me], and they were right because every action should be thought through according to the time.

It's easy to accuse them today, but it was a different time. Because there were women and children everywhere, the men always hid, because at first they persecuted men. But, they persecuted me as an activist. And when I was on the streets, I was a witness of shootings, the attacks of April 2nd when the Vejse family was killed and many other families. At the neighborhood near the bus station, I was outside together with my husband Agim and with 30 boys and men of the neighborhood, we had nowhere to go. It was our fate to survive, because there was luck in unfortunate events too. I asked for death many times while I was left in the streets and I would tell my husband, "Let me go home to the stairs. I won't go in, let them come find me, eliminate me, at least the neighborhood will survive. Because the whole neighborhood was persecuted for days while they were looking for me.

But it was my fate that they didn't find me but the greatest misfortune is that there were more than 85 people killed in our neighborhood on the dates of April 1st, 2nd and 16th. They were people I knew, and worked with, they were children who were the same age as mine. They're crimes you can't forget, it's a genocide and no person was punished, although all the families gave testimonies with the names of the criminals. And then my activity continued in different forms, but in freedom. Every path was easier, but I tried all the time to do the people who were killed justice. I tried to commemorate them

every year on April 1st, 2nd and 16th. I organized memorials where thousands of people participated, and we paid homage every year.

But this year, I managed to make my project a reality, to write a book about the war crimes in 1999, I mean on April 1st and 2nd of '99, like a monograph dedicated to the martyrs, the first local community where I live, where I experienced those terrible events. I wrote the entire book myself in cooperation with family members and I collected my pension for one year and I published it with my own money, I gifted it to the family members on April 2nd. On April 2nd, I promoted it in Gjakova at the Palace of Culture Arsim Vokshi, in the presence of family members. It was a different kind of promotion, not promoting myself as a writer, but the promotion of the values of freedom, the promotion of martyrs and for the families, it was the greatest gift I could give them until now.

I am very proud I managed to do that, it was difficult to collect the means, because my pension is the same as other people's, I have no other income. But, my wish was to do something about the ones who are immortal and for myself as a mortal, I was obliged to do something and I did it. And then, the activity continues. I won't accuse different individuals for injustice, but the injustices for me continued even after the war from the people with narrow interests. There was a lack of support from the Democratic League as well, not for me, but for the women who contributed a lot for decades. Until Ibrahim Rugova's death, the historic president, we had support and offers and respect for our work. After the death of president Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, the Democratic League somehow took a downhill slide with narrow interests, there was even a lack of support for women by women, women were replaced with women as numbers. But, that didn't hinder my activity, because I worked voluntarily although I was unemployed as a professor of language and literature for 13 years.

And then I went to study masters in management of international emergencies to see if I knew how to manage emergencies on a national level during wartime, and I managed to work on a scientific paper. I did many seminars, but a diploma thesis is verified scientific work, it's a unique field, international relations and emergencies for which I didn't get to do a publication, of course in agreement with the Biznes College which is a co-owner of my material, because as students we are obliged to give them the rights, I mean to the college as an institution.

I would like to publish that as well. I write, I publish, I take part in humanitarian activities, I visit family members, I stay close to them as much as I can. I am active in different activities, in promotions, in organizations. I worked as head of the National Writers' Center Gjakova for a year, for the collection of testimonies for war crimes, which we deposited together with my other colleagues in the Special Prosecution for War Crimes. We cooperated with the police too. I continue working in everything that is good for the nation with no compensation, because Kosovo's freedom is compensation for me. My family is also my moral, intellectual and patriotic baggage towards the nation, towards the homeland and towards all good people.

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Mevlyde, if there is anything else that you have forgotten or think is worth mentioning, you can say it.

Mevlyde Mezini Saraçi: I think I have many important moments in my life which are hard to tell in one meeting or discussion. But I want to say I am grateful to you and your organization for unpacking our historical activities, because of course that not only me, but we are mortal as people, and our history, I mean our individual activity and contribution dies along with the person, so they will remain as unspoken or unwritten. Besides my way of unpacking it through my poetic writings, novels, and monographic books, it's really important to me, I am very grateful, very thankful that a young generation has so much interest and is working to document Kosovo. This is the base of Kosovo's history which you are transmitting to today's generations, but also future ones and you raise the awareness of our nation because written and recorded things remain in history and are a strong foundation to keep going. Thanks a lot.

Anita Susuri: Thanks a lot.